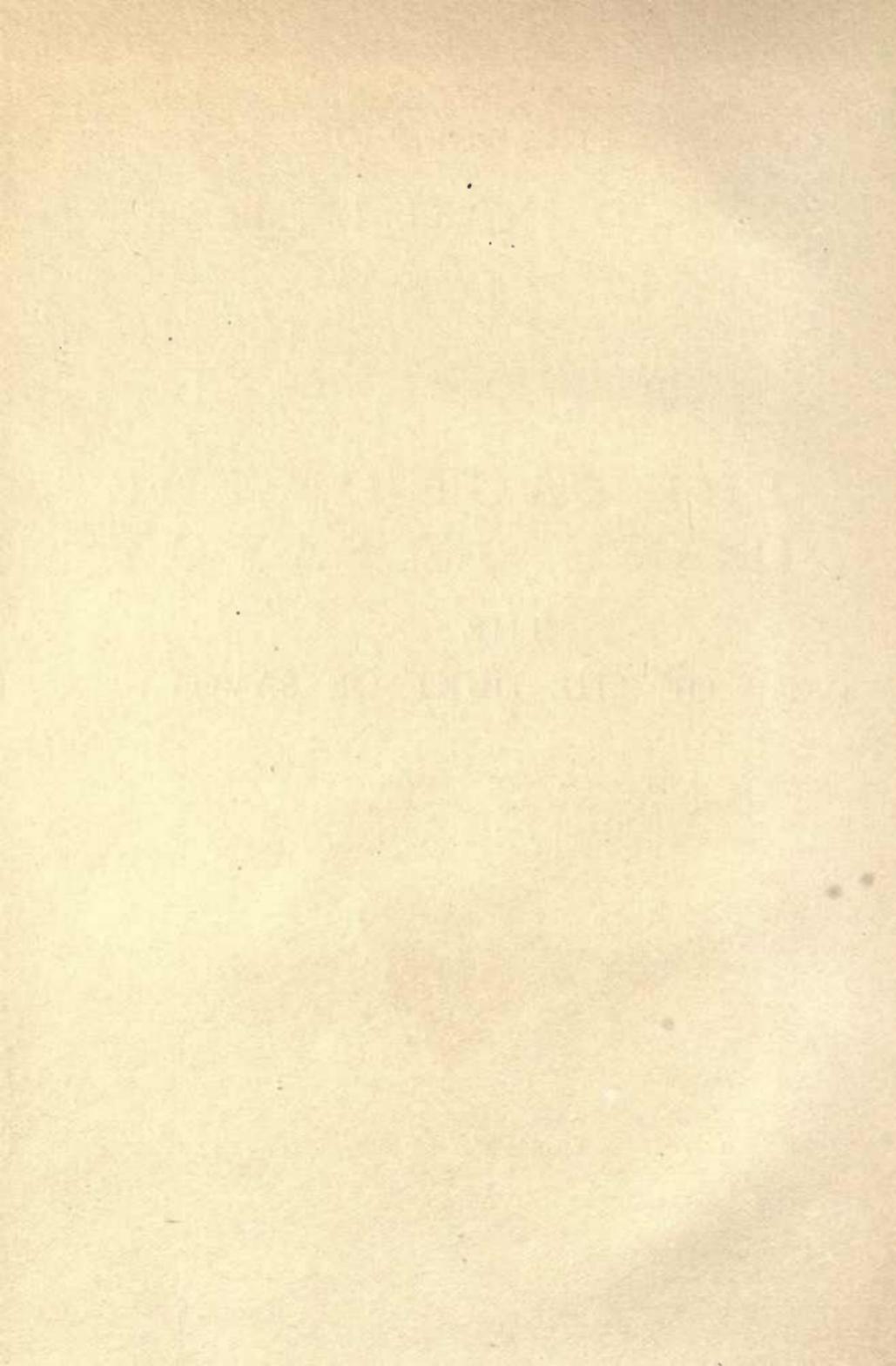


THE
PAGE OF THE DUKE OF SAVOY



THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES



THE PAGE OF THE
DUKE OF SAVOY

VOLUME TWO



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



NEW YORK
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THE WORK OF
ALEXANDER DUMAS
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THE PAGE OF THE DUKE OF SAVOY

THIRD PART

I

DOUBLE ADVANTAGE OF SPEAKING THE PICARD DIALECT

UNTIL now we have been entirely occupied with the besieged; it is time we spent a while under the tents of the besiegers, were it only to pay them a visit.

At the moment Coligny and that group of officers at present called the staff was making the tour of the walls in order to see what means of defence the city had, another group, not less important, was riding round it on the outside, in order to discover the best method of attack.

This group was composed of Emmanuel Philibert, Count Egmont, Count Horn, Count Schwartzburg, Count Mansfeld, and Dukes Eric and Ernest of Brunswick.

Among the other officers that formed a group behind the first, was our old friend Scianca-Ferro, troubling himself, as usual, about nothing except the life and honor of his beloved Emmanuel.

By the express order of Emmanuel, Leona had remained at Cambrai with the rest of the household of the duke.

The conclusion drawn from the examination was that the city, protected by miserable walls, and without either sufficient artillery or a sufficient garrison, could not hold out more than five or six days; such was the announcement made to Philip II., who had also remained at Cambrai, not by superior orders, but in obedience to the supreme dictates of prudence.

Six or seven leagues, for that matter, were all that sep-

arated the two cities; and if Emmanuel chose the abode of royalty for Leona, it was because, as he was obliged to communicate personally from time to time with Philip II. at Cambrai, the generalissimo of the Spanish army calculated that each of his journeys would give him an opportunity of seeing Leona.

Leona, on her side, had consented to this separation, first and above all, because in the life of devotion, love, and self-denial she had adopted, a wish of Emmanuel became for her a command; and next, because a distance of six or seven leagues, though it created a real absence, had no effect at all in parting her from her lover, since the young girl, whenever she had the slightest grounds for anxiety, could in an hour and a half be at the camp of Emmanuel Philibert, thanks to the freedom of action the ignorance of every one, except Scianca-Ferro, as to her sex gave her.

Moreover, whatever might be Emmanuel's joy at the renewal of hostilities—a renewal to which he had at least as much contributed by his attempts on Metz and Bordeaux as the admiral had by his attempt on Blois—he seemed to have grown ten years older. A young captain of hardly thirty-one years, he found himself at the head of an army charged with the invasion of France, commanding all those old leaders of Charles V. and staking his own fortune behind the fortune of Spain.

In fact, on the result of the campaign now undertaken would depend his future, not only as a great general, but as a sovereign prince; it was Piedmont which he was coming to conquer anew in France. Emmanuel Philibert, though he was commander-in-chief of the Spanish armies, was always, in truth, only a species of royal *condottiere*; now a man is really something in the balance of destiny only when he has the right of having men killed on his own account.

Nevertheless, he had not to complain; Philip II., obedient, at least in this, to the advice given him by his father Charles V. on descending from the throne, with regard to matters of peace and war, had bestowed full power on the

Duke of Savoy, and placed under his orders all that long list of princes and captains named by us when describing topographically the places occupied by each of them around the city.

All these thoughts, among which that of the responsibility weighing upon him was not the least, rendered Emmanuel Philibert as grave and as full of care as an old man.

He saw clearly that on the success of the siege of Saint-Quentin depended the success of the campaign. Saint-Quentin taken, there were only thirty leagues between that city and Paris, and Ham, La Fère and Soissons to be captured on the way; only it was necessary to carry Saint-Quentin speedily, in order not to give France time to collect one of those armies that almost always spring up from the earth for her, in virtue of a kind of enchantment, and which, as by a miracle, make of their breast a wall of flesh, to take the place of the walls of stone destroyed by the enemy.

And so we have seen with what persistent rapidity Emmanuel Philibert pressed forward the siege, and what a strict surveillance he had established around the city.

His first idea was that the weak side of Saint-Quentin was the Porte d'Isle, and that it would be there where, on the least opportunity offered by the imprudence of the besieged, he would carry the place.

Consequently, leaving all the other chiefs to pitch their tents in front of the Rémicourt wall, which, in case of a regular siege, offered the most favorable chance for a successful attack, as we have said already, he had his erected between a mill standing on the top of a little hill and the Somme.

From there he watched the river, over which he threw a bridge, and all that vast space extending from the Somme to the old causeway of Vermand—a space afterward to be filled by the camp of the English army, as soon as it joined the Spanish and Flemish army.

We have seen how the attempt to carry the faubourg by a surprise failed.

Emmanuel Philibert then decided to risk an escalade.

This escalade was to take place on the 7th or 8th of August during the night.

What motive had Emmanuel Philibert in selecting the night of the 7th or 8th of August for this enterprise rather than any other night? This is a question we intend to answer.

On the morning of the 6th, at the moment when he was listening to the reports made to him by the different officers of patrol, a peasant of the village of Savy was brought to him, who, moreover, expressed a wish to speak to him of his own accord.

Emmanuel, knowing that a military commander ought to disdain no information, had ordered that any one desiring to see him, no matter who, should be immediately introduced into his presence.

The peasant had only to wait, therefore, until the reports were finished.

He brought to the general of the Spanish army a letter which he had found in a military doublet.

As to the military doublet, he had found it under the bed of his wife.

This letter was a duplicate of the one written by the admiral to the constable.

This doublet was Maldent's.

Now, how came it that the doublet of Maldent was found under the bed of the village peasant's wife?

This is a circumstance which we feel bound to enter into fully, as the destinies of nations sometimes depend on these sorts of threads, lighter than the gossamers that fall from the distaff of the Virgin.

After Maldent had separated from Yvonnet, he pursued his journey.

On reaching Savy, he found himself at a corner of a street in presence of a night parol.

To fly was impossible; he had been seen. To fly would have at once created suspicion; besides, two or three horse-

men, by spurring their horses to a gallop, would easily have overtaken him.

He slipped into the doorway of a house.

"Who goes there?" cried a voice.

Maldent knew the customs of Picardy; he knew that the peasants very seldom bolted the doors of their houses. He pressed the latch; the latch gave way; the door opened.

"Is that you, my poor man?" asked a woman's voice.

"Yes; of course it is I," replied Maldent, who spoke the Picard *patois* in its purity, being a native of Noyon, one of the capitals of Picardy.

"Oh!" said the woman, "I thought you were dead!"

"Well," said Maldent, "you see I am not."

And, bolting the door, he approached the bed.

Quickly as Maldent had vanished into the house, a trooper had seen him, but without being able to tell exactly through what door he had disappeared.

Now as this man might be some spy following the patrol, the trooper, with three or four of his comrades, was already knocking at the neighboring door; and this diligence proved to Maldent that he had no time to lose.

But Maldent was badly acquainted with his surroundings. In his ignorance and flurry he fell violently against a table covered with pots and glasses.

"What's the matter?" asked the frightened wife.

"The matter is that I stumbled," said Maldent.

"You must be very old to be so stupid!" murmured the woman.

In spite of the little politeness of the observation, the adventurer contented himself with muttering a few words of tenderness between his teeth, and, while undressing, approached the bed.

He had no doubt they would soon knock at the door which had just opened for him, as they had done at the neighboring door, and he was determined that, if possible, they should not recognize him as a stranger in the house.

Now, the best way not to be recognized as a stranger in

the house was to occupy the place of the master of the house.

Maldent's experience in stripping others made it an easy thing for him to strip himself; in the turn of a hand, his garments were on the ground; he kicked them under the bed, raised the coverlet, and lay down.

But it was not enough for Maldent to be taken by strangers for the master of the house; it was further necessary that the shrewish female who had just rebuked him so sharply for his awkwardness should be convinced.

Maldent recommended his soul to God, and proceeded to convince his hostess that he was not dead, as she had believed, or rather pretended to believe.

It was a way of exhibiting his proofs, as M. d'Hosier would have said, which was very pleasing to the good dame; consequently, she was the first to complain of the annoyance when, after searching the neighboring house, occupied only by an old woman of sixty and a little girl of nine, the troopers, who were determined to find out the man of whom they had just got a glimpse, and who had been so prompt in disappearing, at last knocked at the house where Maldent had really entered.

"My God, Gosseu!" said the woman, "what's that?"

"Well," said Maldent to himself, "it seems my name is Gosseu. It is always good to learn."

Then to his hostess—

"What's that? Go and see for yourself."

"But, *zernidiu!* they will break in the door."

"Good! let them," replied Maldent.

And, without letting the soldiers trouble him, the adventurer continued the interrupted conversation; so that when the door gave way under the blows of the soldiers, nobody—and, for the time, the hostess less than any one—had the right of contesting with him the title of master of the house.

The soldiers entered swearing and cursing; but as they swore and cursed in Spanish and Maldent answered in Picard, the dialogue soon became so confused that the soldiers

judged it convenient to light a candle, in order that if they did not understand they might at least see one another.

It was the critical moment; so while the soldier was striking a light, Maldent judged it prudent to explain to his hostess in as few words as possible how matters stood.

It must be said to the honor of the latter that her first impulse was not to enter into the conspiracy.

"Ah," she cried, "you are not my poor Gosseu! Get out from here quickly, you big blackguard!"

"Good!" said Maldent; "I am Gosseu, since I am in his bed."

It seems the argument appeared conclusive to the hostess of Maldent, for she did not insist further; and, after having, by the glare of the candle which had just been lighted, cast a glance upon her improvised husband, she murmured—

"For every sin there is mercy! I must not wish the death of a sinner, as says the gospel of Our Lord!"

And she turned her nose toward the wall.

Maldent also took advantage of the light to cast a look around him.

He was in the house of a well-to-do peasant—oak table, walnut chest of drawers, serge curtains. On a chair was displayed a complete suit of Sunday clothes, all prepared, which the true Gosseu was to find on his return.

The soldiers, on their side, were looking on with eyes not less observant and quick; and as there was nothing to awaken their suspicions with respect to Maldent, they began to speak together in Spanish, but no longer threateningly—a fact which Maldent would have easily become cognizant of, even if he had not understood Spanish almost as well as he understood Picard.

The question discussed was the propriety of taking him for guide, the soldiers being afraid of going astray on the road between Savy and Dallon.

Seeing that he ran no other danger than this, and that this danger would even give him a splendid chance of escaping, Maldent took his share in the conversation.

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