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The Life and Exploits of the Scarlet Pimpernel

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Table of Contents

Introduction
1559-1766

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
The Laughing Cavalier

Table of Contents

1

Table of Contents

The first pages of this man’s book of life, whose name is chronicled in history in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, are almost blank. Whence he came, who was his sire, only he and a poor artist know, and they kept their secret for over thirty years. There is his portrait in the Wallace Collection in London, but from it nothing can be guessed. Records are scant and documents not always reliable. Gaps can only be bridged over by stray reminisces, a promissory note yellow with age, a faded doublet in an old chest, a rusty sword hanging over a mirror. But in Haarlem, where he undoubtedly lived, the Grootemarkt had heard his spurs clanking on the cobbles, the Dam Straat had listened to his mighty laugh, the waters of the Spaarne had shuddered at his furious oaths and the Fishmarkt had echoed to the clash of his sword.

The burghers of Haarlem spoke of him under the nickname of Diogenes, there being a blessing and a warm welcome for the nameless adventurer wherever he should happen to be. And the name was a fitting one; for Diogenes, when some adventure had filled his purse, would dispense philosophy and wine with equal largesse. Unfortunately, those happy occasions were rare. The open air was his usual bedroom and the hedgerows his dining-table. During those

early years the only certainty is his friendship with Frans Hals: his only settled occupation we know anything about is that of artist's model. Between two mad escapades or when in hiding from revengeful pursuit, Diogenes found food and shelter in the artist's attic until it was safe enough for him to venture forth again in quest of money or adventure.

That this man — Diogenes, the Laughing Cavalier, call him what you will — was a vagabond, no one could deny; that he sold his sword to the highest bidder, everybody could condone; that he drank and swore and swaggered and discoursed, no one cared; that he was a very gallant gentleman, everyone must affirm. But wherever the steps of Destiny led this soldier of fortune, whether it was into a dungeon or a beggar's hovel, or into a palace or the council chamber of kings, a laugh reverberates at his passing.

2

Table of Contents

From the picture by Frans Hals, his features are familiar to the world. Change the hat for a powdered wig; replace the doublet with a satin coat and the ruff for a filmy neck-tie; then raze the arrogant moustache and you have the portrait of the Scarlet Pimpernel, every feature faithfully reproduced and, on comparison with the painting by Gainsborough of Sir Percy Blakeney, the two men might be twin brothers. The ancestry is patent to all eyes. Both were men of exceptional personality, possessing exceptional characteristics which their friends pronounced sublime and their detractors arrogant, possessing qualities which called forth the devotion of friends and the rancor of enemies.

There is no doubt but that the Laughing Cavalier—Diogenes—possessed the same sunny disposition, the same careless insouciance, the same infectious laughter and adventurous spirit which is to be observed, transmitted to his descendants in the personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

These are proofs enough for those who admire and love Sir Percy Blakeney. The romantic events of the lives of the two men seem to be too parallel to admit of mere coincidence; the personalities are too akin not to be based on heredity. But for the biographer, the gap of nearly two hundred years must be accounted for, and when the search for evidence began, the connecting links were piled one on top of the other, turning doubt into certitude. The Dutch vagabond was seen to be the great-great-grandfather of the English gentleman in direct line from father to son without break or bar sinister. Nor is there the slightest inconsistency in the known chronicles of the family fortunes to make one pause or consider whether the facts and documents are specious enough to be believed.

Clotho had drawn the thread of this man’s life from the same distaff as that of John Blake of Blakeney, in the county of Sussex, Diogenes’ father, and this is the thread which joins the vagabond who swaggered and fought in Holland in 1625 to the dandy who adventured in France in 1792.

Chapter 2
Blake of Blakeney

Table of Contents

1

Table of Contents

In England, the religious revolution had become an accomplished fact. The rebellion of the earls had failed — Norfolk and Howard had been beheaded. A new social system had been happily secured. The virgin Elizabeth — against whom the Pope had hurled his Bull of illegitimacy — was proclaimed Queen. The new times — that of Marlowe and Shakespeare, of Bacon and Drake — had raised England to a golden age; an age of mystery, of art and horrible brutality, of fervent piety and abnormal lust. Spain was humbled to the dust and Rome crushed to powder. And over all towered that flamboyant, grotesque, marvelous woman, Elizabeth.

To have lived during those exciting years must have been a great privilege. Fame and fortune were easily wooed and won by any man with sufficient contempt of life and enough impudence to carve out his own fortune. Noble birth could not fail to attract recognition in high places, a cunning brain did not lack opportunities of furthering intrigue, a handsome face had no need to beg for fair favours. It is therefore strange and somewhat anomalous to find a man endowed with all these attributes and yet practically unknown to history, a man who cared neither for the pomp and glitter of court, nor for the favouritism of the Queen; a man who

sought neither honour nor glory either in adventure or in war; a man who did not use his good looks and fine physique in order to promote some influential love affair or aristocratic alliance, and yet who prospered according to his own lights, who lived contentedly in this manner, who did not bother about politics or foreign diplomacy, who was happy with the little his industry and learning had procured for him.

Such a one was John Blake, of the village of Blakeney, in the county of Sussex, close to the Kentish border.

Born in the year of grace, 1559, of humble and honest parents, young John passed his childhood in comparative security from the religious troubles which were formenting the drama of the Armada. He lived with his parents in the depths of the Kentish country, his home a cottage on Primrose Hill, near Boxley Wood. Here, on the Kentish downlands, boyhood fled through the years in terms of the seasons. At the age of ten he knew the rotation of crops, the intricacies of cattle breeding and the arts of the dairy. Little else had been inculcated into his eager mind. Of education, a smattering of English grammar, the use of a quill and the capacity to count up to ten were his only accomplishments, taught to him by a father who was totally ignorant of book learning. What more was needed for a farmer’s lad?

But John Blake was infused with an overmastering ambition. Often, of a summer’s evening, had he climbed Primrose Hill and gazed out over Chatham and the sea. His eyes had seen Dutch frigates at anchor in the mouth of the Medway; his ears had heard the clattering of the coach horses as they pulled up and down the hill. Those sights and

sounds brought longing to his soul and eventually inspired him with a dream — a dream to be realized.

A merchant adventurer! He had listened to stories of strange and rare stones brought by “sea-dogs” from mysterious far-off lands. So, when his fifteenth birthday had dawned, he climbed to the top of Boxley Heath, but scrambled resolutely down on the other side, and from that hour the sea claimed him.

From 1574 to 1580, John Blake journeyed on the seven seas. During those years he visited nearly every country in the world, drifting from port to port. He started as clerk to a ship’s chandler, rose to be an agent for a timber merchant, but finally abandoned this steady, though modest employment in order to pursue his ambition into the remote places of India. All the time that he was plying the quill in the stuffy cabins or bargaining for wood in the warehouses, he was busily planning his future career.

The study of gems fascinated him to the exclusion of all else, and he spent all his spare time in this pursuit until he deemed that he had imbibed sufficient knowledge to start out on his own quest for fortune. After many adventures, after frequent vicissitudes of good fortune and ill luck, he acquired the requisite acumen necessary to avoid bad bargains. He contrived to assemble a goodly collection of gems with which he laid the foundations of his wealth. He had learnt to distinguish fake from real at a touch, to estimate a price at a glance. This consummate knowledge brought him renown amongst dealers and jewelers.

Soon he gave up travel and settled in London; his reputation opened for him the doors of trade relationships.

But he refused all offers of partnerships and always insisted on playing a lone hand. Anon, he was presented with a charter by the Queen, becoming thereby, by special appointment, jeweler to Her Majesty. In 1589 there is an entry in the royal account book which reads: “To-day received in audience John Blake, Esquire, who presented us with a diamond. He was suitably rewarded.”

From the temporal standpoint, therefore, John Blake appeared to the eyes of the world as a man who had gained for himself his heart’s desires: his boyhood ambitions were realized: fame and fortune were his. Nevertheless, in spite of those outward insignia of happiness, there was a mystery which his neighbours seemed incapable of piercing. As far as we know, no word of it ever passed his lips even when in his cups. Sly hints or open speech were no avail against his silence on the subject of his secret. His mouth would shut tight and his face would become grim and hard. But all noticed no woman ever graced his house.

2

Table of Contents

The reason for this apparent dislike of the fair sex had its origin in a journey undertaken during the spring of 1598.

A rumour had percolated through the trade that a ruby of unusual size and color had been discovered and was to be found somewhere in Europe. Naturally, John Blake was the first to be consulted on the subject and by unanimous consent of the Goldsmiths’ Company, he was elected chairman of a group of merchants entrusted with the mission to purchase the stone and bring it to England.

He sailed from Chatham with a well-filled purse and the good will of the entire fellowship; he safely reached Amsterdam, which city he proposed to make his headquarters. The search took him into many countries and cities. The bankers of Holland granted him credit and guilders. Whilst waiting for news, John Blake visited Haarlem. It was during this visit that he contracted an ill-advised marriage with a Dutch girl, Phillipina, of unknown origin. It seems strange that this clever and far-seeing man of business should have embarked on a youthful liaison and so conducted the intrigue that he actually was trapped into making a wife of a mistress. Nevertheless, the marriage ceremony was duly performed and is recorded in the archives of the city. Frans Hals had all the papers relating thereto; and the entry into the register of St. Peter's Church can be no forgery.

But John Blake, though an unwilling bridegroom, was not to be tied by a service in a church. Matrimony lay lightly on his shoulders and he wore it as if it were a cloak, to be cast off as soon as its use was no longer needed. Within the year, the famous ruby had been found and bought by him; he shook the dust of Haarlem from off his feet, deserting the young girl-wife of a few months, soon to become a mother, without compunction, without a thought for her welfare and that of his unborn child.

On returning to England, the profit made on the same ruby was such that retirement from active business was now well within his reach. Without denying himself of any of the pleasures of life, he retained his trade relationships with Amsterdam and London, and was thus able to add

considerably to his income, already swollen in the past years to healthy proportions. In other words, from the general practitioner, he became the consultant, the expert whose advise was sought and whose opinion soon became law, whilst he drew a goodly percentage for the services so rendered.

Thus in the year 1600, he had prospered exceedingly. He was the possessor of a stately country mansion in the village of Blakeney, in Sussex; his freehold of over a thousand acres was rich in pasture and timber; he had banking accounts in every capital of Europe and the Queen had received him at Court. Fortune had indeed smiled on this rough farmer turned jeweler and country squire, and every project or transaction which he touched turned to gold. Life had treated him kindly and age didn't seem to impair his magnificent physique. But there remained always an unpleasant taste in his mouth at the recollection of the Dutch wife.

3

Table of Contents

Since Dutch Protestantism looked upon sexual sin as the cardinal crime, and since few were ready to believe the story of her marriage to John Blake — at any rate, those who had known her as his mistress and who were not impressed, therefore, by her talk of marriage lines — Phillipina, after Blake's desertion of her, was exposed to obliquity and insult. From this life of shame and misery she was rescued by Frans Hals, who, a true friend, gave her shelter in his house and his protection for what it was worth. It was whilst living

under his roof that she gave birth to John Blake’s son, who was christened Percy.

There seems to be no record extant of those early years. We know the artist cared for the boy and gave him what learning was necessary, providing him with clothes and paying the required fees. Of Phillipina next to nothing is known. Diogenes was wont to call his mother a saint; beyond this one phrase, he hardly ever spoke of her. Where she died, and when, is wrapped in the silence of time.

Thus is Destiny accomplished…thus the story told of a hero’s birth…thus is the life of a vagabond linked through a poor little anonymous Dutch girl to that of the English dandy, Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel.

But in the year 1625, Lachesis was spinning the thread of life of the nameless adventurer, working into the woof the warp of coming events….

Chapter 3
Coat of Arms

Table of Contents

1

Table of Contents

There comes a time in all biographies when dull facts must be recorded to appreciate to the full the life and works of the principal figure. A legendary hero may act upon the world's stage isolated from the rest of the chorus or the minor roles. He is permitted to pirouette and prance in a *pas seul*, and people do not require rhyme or reason for his dance. But an historic personage needs a background of ancestry from which his hereditary characteristics, both virtues and vices, may be accurately deduced; for the man or woman cannot escape from environment and upbringing, nor be separated from them. A man's actions are too complex, his thoughts too tangled to be analyzed simply. He cannot be detached from the foundation rock of family; he cannot be impaled on the point of a pin like a winkle and relished without seasoning. The necessary details must be touched upon — those details which describe the real man, however briefly.

The exploits which gained for the unacknowledged son of John Blake the hand of Gilda Beresteyn, the beautiful daughter of the richest burgher in Haarlem and the honours which the Stadholder showered upon his broad shoulders, have been handed down from father to son in the families of two countries. The daughters of the Blakeneys of Sussex are

still married in the lace veil worn by Gilda Beresteyn on her wedding day; the sons of the Blakes of Haarlem show pridefully the sword of Bucephalus with the petals of blood-rust upon its blade. Diogenes emerges against his will from the obscurity of his vagabondage and, in a few months, appears in the limelight of the historical stage. And his cue was the face of a beautiful maiden who whispered a few frightened words into his ear on New Year's Eve, 1625.

So much of the history is now legendary that it has been difficult to disentangle truth from fiction. History, however, provides the evidence which goes to prove that Diogenes, on New Year's Eve, 1625, fell in with a group of hooligans and rescued a Spanish girl from death at their hands. His two companions, vagabonds like himself, were wounded during the affray and Diogenes carried them into the precincts of St. Peter's Church in order to render them first aid. There it was that he encountered Gilda Beresteyn for the first time.

That much of the story is quite clear. The remainder of the tale is to be found in a little brochure written, some fifty years later, by Hans Beresteyn, a cousin of this same Gilda. Unfortunately the author, in his endeavour to sing the praises of Percy Blake—Diogenes—whom he seems to have greatly admired, has slurred over the true facts, and in certain chapters he is undoubtedly guilty of deliberate romancing. Nevertheless, even allowing for considerable bias, a fairly accurate outline of the story may be gleaned from Hans' book, so long as the reader is careful to discount —at any rate, in part—the eulogistic phrases concerning

Diogenes and to reject certain quotations of conversation for which the author must have drawn upon his imagination.

“Lord Stoutenberg,” he writes, “that arch villain, was nursing his hatred against the Stadholder. On New Year’s Eve, 1625, he, together with Nikolaes Beresteyn and a few others, was plotting to murder Maurice of Nassau. Fearful of some eavesdropper overhearing their nefarious plans, those abominable traitors had chosen the chancel of the church for their council chamber. And Gilda, who had entered the church to pray to the Almighty, unhappily overheard the treachery through the lips of her own dearly beloved brother.

“She was discovered. Horrified at the dastardly plot, she threatened to reveal it to her father; whereupon Stoutenberg demanded of Nikolaes the removal of Gilda to a place of safety where she could be kept prisoner until such a time as the deed was accomplished, lest she put her threat into execution. Nikolaes, unwilling personally to put this outrage upon his sister, searched the town for a man who would be unscrupulous enough to do it for a consideration. Everybody in Haarlem knew that Diogenes, the vagabond, was always ready for adventure, and that he suffered from a chronic lack of money. To him did Nikolaes unfold his story and succeeded in bribing him to abduct Gilda.”

According to Hans Beresteyn, Diogenes accepted the bribe and consented to carry out this shameful plan because he deemed that the girl would be safer in his hands than in those of a pack of assassins and conspirators headed by her own brother.

He carried out the instructions given him by Nikolaes Beresteyn. Those were that he should convey Gilda, by a roundabout route, to Rotterdam, and there place her under the care of one Ben Isaye, with whom Nikolaes and his family often had business dealings. It seems that once there, the girl did attempt to win Diogenes over to her side and revealed to him the truth surrounding her abduction. Thus he learnt for the first time of the conspiracy to murder the Stadholder.

Percy Blake was now in a quandary. The adventure which had begun as a lighthearted affair, had turned into an undertaking of a grave and dangerous nature. He felt that he must try to warn the Stadholder of the peril which threatened him and, at the same time, keep watch over Gilda in order to protect her from the machinations of Stoutenberg.

With this double object in view, he hastened to Delft, where the Stadholder was staying, and was thus able, that same night, to warn Maurice of Nassau of the plot against his life. On his return to Rotterdam early the next morning, he found that Stoutenberg, no doubt aware that Gilda was likely to betray her knowledge of the conspiracy, had taken steps to keep her in durance under his own eye and, to Percy Blake’s dismay, he saw Gilda being borne off in a sleigh, whither he knew not, surrounded by Stoutenberg’s men.

To make matters worse, whilst endeavouring to keep Gilda in sight, he himself was set upon by a band of ruffians and overpowered. He was taken across country to a deserted Molen where the conspirators had their

headquarters, and here he was kept a helpless prisoner. He had apparently failed in his second undertaking. He certainly had succeeded in warning the Stadholder, but he was now powerless to help Gilda, who was trapped in the snares of the plotters; both she and he were at Stoutenberg's mercy.

"Gilda," Hans Beresteyn tells us, "proud and disdainful, still smarting under the humiliation of her abduction at the hands of the vagabond, believed the plausible stories which her brother and Stoutenberg now told her. She believed that Diogenes had abducted her solely for the sake of the ransom which her father would be willing to pay — she believed that Stoutenberg had renounced his plan of murdering Maurice of Nassau and had, in fact, freed her from the hands of an unscrupulous and venal adventurer."

And here the author's admiration for Diogenes becomes very marked, for he declares that Diogenes actually confessed to the truth of these calumnies, because his one wish was to spare Gilda the pain of learning the full extent of her brother's turpitude. He denied nothing and calmly awaited death at the hands of his tormentors.

"Indeed," says Hans Beresteyn, "the brave man was on the point of suffering a shameful death when rumour spread like wildfire among Stoutenberg's followers that the plot had been discovered and that the Stadholder was advancing upon the Molen with a large body of troops. During the *sauve qui peut* which ensued, Diogenes succeeded in getting Gilda out of Stoutenberg's hands and forcing Nikolaes to confess to his father the ignoble part that he had played in the plot against his own sister."

That same evening, Percy Blake was betrothed to Gilda.

3

Table of Contents

Cornelius Beresteyn was forced to admit that the vagabond was indeed a fine fellow! Ungrudgingly, the father agreed that Diogenes had earned the right to marry his daughter. But he was very anxious lest Diogenes' lack of patronymic should cause future unpleasantness for the young couple and affect their position in Haarlem. Now that the happy-go-lucky days were presumably over, now that Diogenes was assuming civic responsibilities by taking Gilda for wife, Cornelius insisted, not unkindly, that his future son-in-law should try and tell him something of his parentage.

Diogenes frankly told him all he knew; his father's name, the secret marriage, the cruel desertion of the young wife and child. Tactful questions had elicited these and other facts about the sad story. The older man felt that the time had come to forget rancor and to heal the breach between father and son. Not that Cornelius was a man of that stamp who would refuse his daughter happiness just because her lover was nameless; but he felt that irresponsibility had been carried too far and that the jest had been overdone.

But neither persuasion nor threats prevailed against Diogenes' obstinacy. He flatly refused to take any steps toward reconciliation with a father who had disowned him and broken his mother's heart. Cornelius therefore determined to seek out John Blake himself. The world was indeed a small place, Cornelius felt, for Blake was a man whom he had often met in the course of business; in fact,

many pieces of the Beresteyn jewelry had been acquired from the English merchant.

As soon as the excitement of the Stoutenberg conspiracy had died down, Cornelius arranged a meeting between father and son. He discovered that John Blake was at that time visiting Rotterdam and straightaway sought him out and invited him to stay at the Beresteyn house in Haarlem. It was indeed a strange meeting for John Blake and Percy — a meeting fraught with hidden and subtle emotions; on one side, the dull ache of ancient memories and the sharp pricks of a guilty conscience; on the other, the fierce force of hate and the cold contempt for the coward who had deserted wife and child.

But the call of the flesh proved stronger than hate or conscience. The father gazed upon the handsome, devil-may-care adventurer and indifference turned to ungrudging admiration. Here was a man to be proud of — a man any father would joyfully acknowledge as his son. The wistful expression of the lonely old man thawed the ice which had frozen Diogenes' heart and, in a trice, the two were locked in one another's embrace, half-crying, half-laughing, with the emotion which overwhelmed them.

Naturally the father, overjoyed that the breach had been healed, wished for this son's company. He also felt that it was only right and proper that Percy should visit England with him; to be introduced to English society and installed as his legal heir — a worthy heir indeed to the wealth and position which he had built up; and also to instill into his son a love for his own country.

Thus did Diogenes sail for England. An old letter written by him to Gilda in Dutch gives us an amusing insight into his first impressions of the country.

“My journey to England,” he wrote, “has killed my only attempt at sobriety, for there I found that the stock from which I come was both irreproachable and grave, had been so all the time that I, the most recent scion of so noble a race, was roaming round the world, the most shiftless and thriftless vagabond it had ever seen.”

Gilda, however, did not believe him, since it was nearly always impossible to detect when he was joking or being serious. And this time he was joking. He had now seen the stately home; he had breathed the calm air of his native land; his blood had responded to the call. He realized that he was English of the English, and not just a nameless and homeless vagabond. He felt that he could easily learn to love this rain-soaked country as soon as Gilda should live there as his wife.

England, at this time, was transported with joy; illuminations and bonfires lit up the streets of London all night long! The marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales, and the Spanish Infanta had been definitely broken off. The people acclaimed with enthusiasm the collapse of that shameful policy which for so long had dragged England on the tow-rope of Spain. The return of the Prince from there was taken as a sign of his strength and the complete rupture of any Catholic alliance. Buckingham demanded war! Cranfield was accused of deceit! The Spanish ambassador left London!

So England turned to its only Protestant ally—Holland. James the First sent for John Blake and entrusted to him the mission of winning the Stadholder's support. And the father, proud of his only son, and knowing how high Diogenes stood in the Stadholder's esteem, led him to the king, and it was agreed that Percy should lead the Embassy to Holland, not as a poor vagrant, but as the representative of a mighty nation. The Stadholder showed appreciation of the delicate compliment paid him by the King of England in thus sending to him as ambassador, the man who had saved his life, by readily acceding to the English proposals.

On the successful conclusion of the mission and the signing of the treaty of alliance, King James, realizing the signal services thus rendered by John Blake, desired to confer some honour on him. But the latter, either because he was advanced in years, or because he desired to show some singular mark of favour to his son and to make amends for past wrongs, petitioned His Majesty to bestow the proposed honour upon his only son.

The King agreed to this course and conferred a baronetcy upon Percy Blake. But an initial difficulty arose, owing to the fact that at this time, no legal precedent existed which permitted a son to take a hereditary title whilst a father was still alive. A compromise, however, was reached; Percy changed his name to that of the village in which his father now lived — a name that was curiously like to his own — Blakeney. Thus it came about that Diogenes, the vagabond, the beggar, the outcast, became Sir Percy Blakeney — the first Sir Percy.

3

Table of Contents

But Diogenes — Sir Percy Blakeney — did not remain in England long; his heart was away in Haarlem with Gilda, the lone star which had led him into accepting honour, position, and wealth. For himself, he laughed heartily at the very notion that he had now become a baronet of England. So, within three short months, he was back again in Holland, awaiting, with as much patience as he could muster, the day of his marriage.

Nevertheless, the few fleeting weeks had been sufficient to give birth to that strange sense of longing and incompleteness which he had always felt. The call of blood had worked its miracle in him; the green meadows and scented orchards of England had twined themselves into his heart. He was infused with its spirit, drunk with its fragrance, filled with its beauty. After the wedding, he made up his mind that he would return thither with his bride, to dream his life away in love and contentment.

4

Table of Contents

But the Fates decreed otherwise. Sir Percy Blakeney did not return to England until 1630. The records show that he was again called upon to take an active part in the destinies of his adopted country, Holland. Van Aitzema, in his voluminous work entitled *Saken von Staat*, refers again and again to the “Englishman,” the husband of Gilda Beresteyn. He is recorded by that chronicler to have been an active

participator in the fighting which followed a second uprising engineered by Lord Stoutenberg.

Thus, in the spring of 1626, Van Aitzema tells us that the Dutch were being driven in defeat in front of an invading Austrian army headed by Stoutenberg; that these troops had contrived to cut the Dutch armies in two; that an attack on Arnheim had been successful and that Vorden was menaced with a siege. He relates that the Dutch had been caught unawares and thus had been put to flight, but that the only chance of salvation lay in sending a message across the Veluwe, through the invaded areas, so that the Dutch troops and German mercenaries in the Stadholder's pay could join forces in time to co-operate and perhaps thus avoid total destruction.

"The Englishman," he writes, "undertook this perilous task. By night, right under the mouth of the Austrian musket and cannon, did Sir Blakeney (as he calls him) swim under the Veluwe. For ten long miles he swam, sometimes diving under the icy waters in order to escape detection by the Austrian outposts; sometimes battling desperately against an adverse wind which whipped up the surface of the river and threatened to drown him. But, though spent and severely wounded, he reached Vorden in time to save us from disaster."

Again, a few weeks later, Blakeney, it seems, was leading a detachment of Dutch troops against the Austrians at the "Battle of the Molen," and distinguished himself in conspicuous style by the capture of Lord Stoutenberg himself. In fact, Van Aitzema declares that it was through

Blakeney’s fine tactics that the Austrian army was forced to retreat and the uprising finally stamped out.

It seems that from then on Sir Percy Blakeney sheathed the sword Bucephalus and took to the quill. But, in his case, the pen was certainly not mightier than the sword, for he made but little mark in the world of politics, though the Stadholder showered appointments upon him.

In 1627, Maurice of Nassau appointed Blakeney reorganizer of the army. In this he seems to have succeeded remarkably well and was created a general of the Dutch army as a reward for his industry. And he himself has left us a record of his impressions in a long letter which he penned to his father about this time.

“I fear me,” he writes, “that I am no clerk. Certainly I am no diplomat. Already have I made enemies with the stolid Dutch colleagues with whom I am supposed to work. They are senseless and wooden-headed, and do not seem to realize that fighting consists of a little more than mere brawn and a straight eye. It really amazes me that these people have ever contrived to win a battle. But one must give them their due; they are a loyal set of men, earnest and patriotic, thinking only of the good of their beloved country and the greatness of it. The Stadholder continues to shower honours upon my unworthy shoulders — honours which I am totally unfitted for. Thus, he informs me that he wished me to become his comptroller! Imagine it! Diogenes, the vagabond who could never keep a guilder in his purse, practicing accounts and learning the art of domestic economy! Cornelius, that dear man who is my father-in-law,

naturally desires me to accept. I feel that my only chance of safety lies in escaping to Blakeney Manor.”

In spite of all his protests, Blakeney was persuaded to accept the position, and so his dream of returning to England receded farther and farther into the future.

The only other event during those five years worth recording is the attempt that was made on his life. At least, the happening must be so designated; actually, it seems to be rather of a mystery, and so far, an unsolved one.

To celebrate the anniversary of the “Battle of the Molen,” the Stadholder had commanded a military display of all the Dutch troops. This review took place on the banks of the Veluwe, on the old-time battle-field. The principle event in this display was a mimic battle portraying the actual fight of three years ago. For this purpose Blakeney unsheathed his sword Bucephalus and re-enacted his part in the affair. At the critical moment when he was charging to the head of the company, a musket was loosed and the bullet wounded Blakeney in the left shoulder, luckily only causing a flesh wound.

An investigation was immediately set up in order to discover the culprit. It was speedily ascertained that there were many malcontents among the troops — men who resented Blakeney’s position as general of the army. But as those men confessed freely to their opinion, it was perfectly evident that none of them would ever have dreamt of attempting a criminal act on Blakeney’s person.

The soldiers who had been standing near the spot from whence the shot must have been fired, stated that they had noticed nothing untoward and were willing to undergo