

THE MISFORTUNES OF CORNELIS DE CRETZER

BY E. E. MOSSOP

[The Owl Club of Capetown, South Africa, last year brought out the first volume of their annual, The Waste Paper Basket. The story which we reprint here is based on a seventeenth-century episode in Capetown history.]

Secunde Cornelis de Cretzer, a young man of excellent character, held high office under Commander Pieter Hackius in the Cape Government, and was deservedly popular among the burghers. On the tenth of April, 1671, he had the misfortune to kill at a banquet the drunken captain of an Indiaman whom, together with an emissary of the French Government, it had fallen to his duty (Commander Hackius being a confirmed invalid) to entertain at dinner. It was the act of a moment of passion, but its penalty was lifelong. After remaining concealed for some time in the settlement, — the burghers conniving at this and his citation before the court of justice being merely formal, — he escaped to Amsterdam, was acquitted and reinstated by the Directors, and embarked on his return journey to the Cape.

But the ship was captured by a Moorish corsair and the last that is known of De Cretzer is that he was sold as a slave in Algiers. The subjoined story begins with the banquet in Capetown and is told by De Cretzer himself.]

From the *Waste Paper Basket of the Owl Club, 1921*
(CAPETOWN ANNUAL)

THE Frenchman's half-insolent drawl continued monotonously, but I held myself silent, for the time to speak was not yet. De la Haye was to return then to the Baay de Saldanah. Louis of France was of a mind to hold the Cape Settlement and Commander Hackius, the invalid, not the man to prevent him.

'The wine is of the Steenberg, behind the mountain, Monsieur,' I said, politely, as I poured him his measure and neither he nor the half-drunken Kaptyn van Loon saw that my hand trembled for the rage which filled my heart.

'A vintage to become famous in Europe, Mijneer Secunde,' he returned, bowing, and the monotonous drawl continued. My thoughts traveled over the events of the past years to bring no little censure for my blindness. De Mondevergue's venture to Madagascar had proved a dismal failure and the French king looked again for a rest place for the ships of his new Company. This becurled and scented monsieur, who had the Commander's ear and the

entrée to the best houses of the Settlement, had landed from De Mondevergue's fleet, and Mijneer van Loon, trusted sea-captain of the Company, had been friend to Pierre Caron, renegade and traitor to the States-General, bought by a French king's money for this new toy company of France; also Van Loon had assisted De la Haye in the survey of the Baay de Saldanah.

The pieces fell together to complete the design, as did the parts of a picture puzzle I played with when a child, and I waited for fresh treason.

'It is for September, Mijneer, before the coming of the northwest gales; the fleet anchors in the Baay de Saldanah and lands four thousand troops. The fort and town will be occupied before the arrival of the Batavian ships, and a man of parts may climb to high honor under Louis, my master and king, Mijneer de Cretzer.'

The drooping eyelids of Monsieur de Lanoy hid the watchful eyes that gleamed bright under the wax candles

that lighted my supper table; behind my high-backed chair I heard the steady ticking of the great clock my father had brought first from Holland and later from Batavia. He had been that De Cretzer who had for so long served the Company and had left me little besides the clock and a name for good service among their Excellencies of the Council of Seventeen. It had been by my unaided effort and faithful labor that I had risen in the Company's service in this far southern land of my birth, clerk to the Council, secretary, fiscal, secunde — it was no far step to the Commandership, and of late I had noticed the burghers and freemen touched hats politely when I passed and spoke less loudly in my presence.

I had dreamed strange dreams, too, since that day five years ago when, with Corporal Hieronymus Cruse, I had journeyed through the country of the Gouriquas and from the banks of that great river had seen the fertile lands beyond — dreams of a great province stocked by a free people of Europe, men and traders of a free country. A country to be guided and moulded lovingly by him who was wise enough to guide it. I remembered that soon after my return from Leyden and its university, I had bathed one hot summer's day from a sandy cove of the Baay Falso, and coming in from the white-crested breakers I had been softly rolled by gentle swells on to the white sands. I lay half in, half out, the waters of this warm sea; above me the blue sky had blended with the giant peaks of lofty mountains which rose in rugged grandeur from the wind-scarred rocks that lined the shore. Leyden lectures brought to mind the tale of the returning Greek who, stepping shoreward, had knelt and kissed his mother earth, and I pressed my lips to the white sea-sand, murmuring thanks to God for this my sun-kissed heritage.

How should this thin-lipped foreigner know the love this southland stirs in the pulses of her sons? It was but a pawn in the game his king played, and as for Mijnheer Kaptyn van Loon, he loved gulden and good wine only.

Once upon the wharves of Hellevoetsluis I watched two English seamen fight; they struck after the manner of the English with the hand close-fisted, murmuring strange oaths, and they aimed for the point of the chin. I would that I had learned this trick of fight that the blow might hurt, and monsieur's chin invited — but, after all, the men were my guests, official guests, since I played the host on behalf of his Excellency the Cominander — and the Company was jealous of its name for hospitality. It must be done otherwise, and so I smiled into the heavy-lidded eyes of monsieur.

It was the kaptyn who broke the long silence: 'Your voice is of weight in the Council of Policy, De Cretzer, and Gerrit van Blom is with us.'

So I learned that Annette's father was a traitor to the States-General of the United Netherlands. Monsieur was ever in his home, and Mijnheer Gerrit, who had administered to me the oath on filling the Secundes office, had smiled no longer on my suit to Annette after the coming of monsieur. Blind fool that I had been, I wondered who else among my fellows of the Council had sipped this poisoned cup of France.

De Lanoy leaned back in his chair as one who waited, and I smiled across the table at him. The time had come for speech.

'It seems, Monsieur, this country is too small for us,' I said quietly.

There was uncertainty in his tone, but he replied politely, waving his hand toward the north, 'A vast country, Mijnheer, but fit only for bosjesmans and boors,' and he sipped his wine delicately.

'Monsieur mistakes, it is too small for Monsieur and me,' I said.

'To-morrow —' he commenced.

'For one of us there is no to-morrow, Monsieur,' I replied, but in this, though I knew it not, I lied.

It was the kaptyn who took my meaning first; mayhap he knew me better or had suspected my silence from the first. I had been foolish to think him more drunk than usual. 'By God, De Lanoy,' he cried, 'he knows too much for safety.' He had drawn as he rose, his stool dropping backward; murder was in his eyes, and his thrust scored the leathern back of my now empty chair. My quarrel was with monsieur, but the kaptyn was insistent and I gave him the point short where the neck curves outward to the shoulder.

I minded me my fencing master of Maestrecht had called this the thrust of 'The Gurgle,' for properly delivered it takes both the great vein and the windpipe, and Corporal Cruse had shown me the way of it many evenings beneath the walls of the fort where the sea sand is hard underfoot.

Here was dainty work for a man who had for long guided the homely happenings of an infant settlement for an invalid commander, and I waited gaily for the onset of monsieur. The Frenchman's chair was empty; he stood, his sword undrawn, at the half-opened door; his thin lips bared white teeth in a smile that was malicious, and triumph gleamed from between the narrow lids. 'It is an evil thing to kill a drunken guest, and the Company likes not brawlers,' he said softly, and was gone.

The night was hot and close, as it ever is after the southeast monsoon, and though 't was April the wind had scoured the town that day. The casement windows of my apartments in the Zeestraat looked toward the sea, where I could see riding at anchor on the still waters of the Tafelbaay the Indianan

whose captain would return no more. His choking breath-sounds drowned the clock and held quick measure with my thoughts as I saw the black pass that I was come to.

The trick was obvious; to have killed a table guest meant death or at least disgrace, and I had no proofs of treason. De Lanoy had the Commander's ear and my fellows of the Council a wintry smile for such a tale as mine. White rage for the Frenchman filled me, but I felt naught but pity for this drink-sodden puppet who loved good gold before his duty. I thought he breathed something the easier for the untying of his blood-soaked lace cravat, and called on him by name. 'Van Loon, Van Loon, can I do aught to ease you?' His opening eyes looked at me as from a distance and I read therein no sign of hate but only strange warning for myself. 'Beware the Moors, De Cretzer. Beware the Moors,' he gasped, and died.

What is it that those who die are given to see in the time of passing? I had heard this warning to beware of the Moors before. Long ago, as a little child of seven, I had played with Annette beneath the young apple trees of the Van Blom farm on the Wynberg behind the mountain. Gerrit van Blom had but small holding then and had not yet risen to affluence in the Company's service. I had played the gallant knight and defended my lady with my wooden sword from the attack of the Hottentot serving-maid, Oude Meidje, who wished to carry my distressed fair one indoors. Oude Meidje had been almost old when Little Thornback had come and, though Van Riebeek had seen her baptized, she still prayed to the Hottentot god and had the gift to foretell strange things. My gentle mother and Mevrouw van Blom had sat beneath the trellised vines and viewed their offspring proudly. 'It is a brave little man,' Mevrouw

van Blom had said, 'and should one day make our Annette happy.' Oude Meidje had tilted up my chin and gazed at me long before she spoke, 'He has sad eyes, mistress, and should be a great one in the land if the Blackamoors allowed it,' and though my mother pressed her she would say no more.

But here was man's work waiting and the occasion found me dreaming.

The lights of the Siekenhuis burned brightly and so I went by way of the Burgstraat and, turning to the left, entered the Thuystraat which limits the Company's garden. The open space where the church was to be built was unoccupied and no sound came from the locked and guarded Slavenbuys. Here on this side the garden and toward the slopes of the mountain were springing up the houses of the wealthier burghers, each surrounded by its orchard. The best of these was of Mijneer Gerrit van Blom.

The hour was late; the homestead hushed in darkness. I knew my love lay sleeping there and got some comfort from the thought; but I had wished to see my father's old friend Gerrit before I spoke with Hackius, and I turned sadly toward the new fort.

I had not taken count of the Frenchman's cunning, for one came running in my direction who proved to be my friend, the Sieur Hendrick Crudop. 'Crudop,' I called, 'I must see his Excellency immediately; I bring him such a tale of treachery as —' He looked at me strangely as he interrupted, 'I, too, have already heard a tale of strange treachery and toward a guest this night, Mijneer. Monsieur de Lanoy has roused Hackius from his sick bed; his Excellency has summoned Van Blom, the President of the Justice Council, and others of the Council; I am sent to Van Breitenbach with orders that he arrest you for the murder of a faithful servant of the Company.'

'Treachery? Rather I should have said treason, Crudop,' I replied. 'This man is Louis's spy; there is to be an attempt to seize the Settlement. It is all hatched, and some of our friends of the Council have been toying with this project. Van Loon and —' I ceased lamely, for how should I bring Annette's father to shame. He spoke soothingly, his hand upon my shoulder; I could see he thought badly of my plight or that I was distraught. 'All this shall be inquired into, De Cretzer, but go not to the fort to-night. Hackius is raging at this insult to his guest and is in no mood to reason. I, as secretary to the Council, must convey this message to Van Breitenbach, but count me your friend. Meanwhile go you and hide, for this turmoil will blow over and your friends will work for you.'

I have but a confused recollection of the days of hiding and anxiety which followed. Throughout I remained in various houses in the town and took my exercise after nightfall. Lieutenant Coonraad van Breitenbach, new come to the settlement and but the friend of a month, saw to it that the soldiers searched each house in turn only after I had left it. Many to whom, in the days of prosperity, I had given no thought now showed me kindness. Of all, Corporal Cruse helped me most and to him I owe it that the citation to appear before the Justice Council never reached me. The rumor was abroad that I had fled and was in hiding beyond the Hottentot Holland, and though twice I might have taken ship, I waited, for I had business with monsieur.

De Lanoy was ever at the Commander's elbow and had the freedom of my love's home; Hackius would see me only as a prisoner and smelled treason in all who spoke for me, and during those days the bitterness of loneliness sank deep into my soul.

It was not until the night of my de-

parture and of the Commander's ball that I saw my love. His Excellency held high entertainment to celebrate his return to health, and to honor the betrothal of Juffrouw Annette van Blom and Monsieur de Lanoy. A myriad lights made bright the banquet-hall and the environs of the fort, when by friendly service of Lieutenant Johannis Coon, the corporal, and others, I waited long in the secluded corner at the foot of the great stairs. Doubtless I made a sorry picture with my haggard face and ill-kept clothes, but there was no fear in my love's face when she came toward me. For years my coquette Annette had teased and charmed me; it had ever been a smile to-day and a frown to-morrow with her. Here was no coquette, but only love distressed and sweet anxiety for the loved one.

'Cornelis,' she said, and I took her in my arms, 'dear love, it is death for you to be found here.'

'Annette, Annette,' I cried and held her close, 'I must go this night, but I will return to you; wait for me, Annette.'

She sealed her promise with her kiss as the laughter and voices of the descending ladies came to us from above. It would be soon the hour for dancing, but the gentlemen were still at their wine in the hall. My love waved me her adieu as she ascended to her friends, and it was while I gazed longingly after her that I felt in my hand the missive she had pressed therein. I shall keep it till I die.

But I was for monsieur.

He had sat on the Commander's right hand that night and now stood in the place of honor, his glass held high above his handsome head. Familiar faces lined the board. It was his hour of triumph, and since all eyes were turned upon him, none saw me as I entered and stood behind him in the

shadows; or, if any saw, they were my friends and held their peace.

'I toast you, gentlemen,' he cried, 'the fairest maiden in the settlement — the beautiful Annette van Blom.'

He had not drunk the toast nor had the company risen ere I touched him on the shoulder and my voice seemed not mine own. 'Draw quickly, Monsieur, for it is to-morrow, and you drink toasts no more.'

I give him credit for his quickness, for he had drawn ere he had turned.

He drawled: 'Mijnheer de Cretzer wishes to die young.'

He fought after the Italian fashion, with the arm held high, the point depressed, and I read surprise in his eyes as it came to him that I, too, was learned in this school of fence. I do not know when he found he was to die, for he gave no sign of fear when he learned that he had met his master in this art. And so my rapier found and searched his heart.

I think my friends kept others from pressing me, and none offered to molest me as I passed out. The corporal was waiting with my horse and spurred with me hotfoot through the night. We rode around the mountain and, crossing the Nek of Constantia, descended the long valley which leads to the Bay of Woods, where the good ship Grundel awaited my coming.

The flat top of Tafelberg has dipped this many days below the line of the sea to the south, and often I draw from my breast Annette's letter and read: 'Beloved, my heart is like to break and I think of you daily. The good corporal tells me you are grown very thin. My father would force me to this French monsieur who is always here and whose eyes make me shudder. They say you are in the pay of France and would betray the Settlement to Louis, but I know they lie. Do you get enough to eat? I love you, Cornelis, and will have

none but you. Do you remember the tale of Holland our mothers told us, of the man who slept and awakened after a hundred years to find his friends all dead? I dreamed the like had befallen me, Cornelis, and that twenty years had passed. I saw you toiling with other Christians in the sun and guarded by black-bearded men who plied their whips and called you "dogs," and I sat on the stoep of the old farm looking so plain and wan and old, Cornelis, wait-

ing for you, and you came not. O love, come soon, come soon to thy Annette.'

Well, the Frenchman's eyes will frighten Annette no more and I go to plead my cause before the Council at Amsterdam. What should black-bearded slavers have to do with Cornelis de Cretzer, Secunde of the Settlement of the Cape?

Surely, surely I will return — I must return, in honor, to my southern land — and to Annette.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

BY PROMETHEUS

From the *English Review*, July
(LIBERAL MONTHLY)

'O! like a rose-wing'd pelican
She hath bred blessed babes to Pan!
— *The Wizard Way*.

In a story by Lord Dunsany, Fame says to the poet, 'I will meet you in the graveyard at the back of the Workhouse in a hundred years.' If Shelley has been more fortunate — though it hardly matters to him! — it is not on account of his poetry, which passed as readable even among his contemporary detractors, but of his prophetic gift and the moral wizardry which gave its spirit a body, in face of those qualities which made serious people consider seriously that in him *Diabolus incarnatus est, et homo factus est*.

It seems at first sight astounding that Shelley was sent down from Oxford for theological views which are accepted to-day by the youngest average undergraduate with scarce a mumbled protest from the oldest average don; that

he should have been robbed of his children on account of a moral attitude which modern children themselves find reactionary rather than advanced; and that he should have been practically exiled from England because of political notions which the most case-hardened Tory of to-day would hardly dare to whisper in the gloom of his club.

The truth is that the 'Sun-treader' (as Browning calls him in *Pauline*) happened to be on the crest of a true dawn. The world, save for sporadic outbreaks of Bourbon *folie des grandeurs*, has rolled steadily toward that slight, shrill angel figure in the east. The poetry of Shelley hardly matters, in a sense, by comparison with his ethical ideals. He was the voice of the *Zeitgeist*, and it is relatively unimpor-