



The Story of William of Orange

Ottokar Schup

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To ascertain the origin and characteristics of a plant one must study it growing in the soil. So the bare description of one life is of little value in ascertaining the peculiar characteristics and qualities of the family to which it belongs. Family excellencies and defects exercise more enduring and far-reaching influences than is generally imagined, even though they may not always display themselves prominently or significantly. In the case of William of Orange, however, it can be positively stated that he possessed in the highest degree the ambitious spirit and statesman-like qualities of the old Nassau counts, and that in the exercise of them he became the most distinguished representative of the family. We know nothing of his early training except the little that can be gathered from the statements of a contemporary writer, who says that his parents availed themselves of every opportunity to develop the boy's unmistakably superior talents.

At the age of eleven the youth unexpectedly inherited rich estates, which had been acquired by his uncle principally by marriage. They included large possessions in the Netherlands, where the family had been wealthy for centuries. They owned the princely Nassau palace in Brussels, and the city of Breda had been held by them since 1404. Besides these Netherlands estates, the young prince inherited the principality of Orange, lying between Languedoc, Provence, Dauphine, and Avignon, in southern France, from which he derived his title "Prince of Orange." In his eleventh year William was the richest nobleman of his time, and as such he attracted the attention of Charles V, who was well acquainted with the Nassau family, many members of it having been in his service as soldiers and statesmen. He besought the parents to entrust the talented youth to him so that he might have a better training than it was possible for him to obtain in the secluded valley of the Westerwald, where educational advantages were very meagre: The mother, a most excellent woman, at first declined the offer. It was hard for her to give up her boy, but the honor which she knew would be conferred upon her family, and the certainty that her ambitious son would have a brilliant career, at last dried the mother's tears. The boy, on the other hand, was eager to go. He was sorry to leave his native mountains and forests, and many a time afterwards, in the stormy periods of his life, he longed for the peace and quiet of his loved valley; but all else was for the time forgotten amid the attractions of his new home...

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