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Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
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# **The Amulet**

Hendrik Conscience

# Imprint

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

In the "Amulet," Hendrick Conscience has worked up an incident which occurred at Antwerp, in the 16th century, into a story of great power and deep interest. It was a dark and bloody deed committed, but swift and terrible was the retribution, strikingly illustrating how God laughs the sinner to scorn, and how the most cunningly devised schemes are frustrated, when He permits the light of His avenging justice to expose them in their enormity. On the contrary, it forcibly proves that virtuous actions, sooner or later, bear abundant fruit even in this world. If a man's sins bring upon his head a weight of woe, so do his good deeds draw down the benedictions of heaven and serve as a shield to protect him from his enemies.

**S.J.F.**

*Baltimore.*



**CONTENTS.**

- CHAPTER I. PAGE ANTWERP
- CHAPTER II. SIGNOR DEODATI
- CHAPTER III. THE PALACE OF SIMON TURCHI, AND WHAT OCCURRED THERE
- CHAPTER IV. THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION – THE ASSASSINATOR SLAIN
- CHAPTER V. VAN DE WERVE'S RECEPTION – SIMON TURCHI'S JEALOUSY AND HATRED
- CHAPTER VI. SIMON TURCHI WREAKS HIS VENGEANCE ON GERONIMO
- CHAPTER VII. GRIEF AT GERONIMO'S ABSENCE – TURCHI'S HYPOCRISY
- CHAPTER VIII. SIMON TURCHI TRIES TO CONCEAL HIS CRIME
- CHAPTER IX. GERONIMO RESURRECTED
- CHAPTER X. SIMON TURCHI'S ALARM – CRIME BEGETS CRIME
- CHAPTER XI. FOOD AT LAST – DEATH OF JULIO
- CHAPTER XII. IS IT HIS GHOST? – THE GUILTY EXPOSED
- CHAPTER XIII. MARY VAN DE WERVE'S (NOW MADAME GERONIMO DEODATI) DEPARTURE FOR ITALY – THE PUNISHMENT OF SIMON TURCHI



# THE AMULET.

## CHAPTER I.

Previous to the close of the fifteenth century, the direction taken by European commerce remained unchanged. America had not been discovered, and the only known route to India was by land.

Venice, enthroned by her central position as queen of commerce, compelled the nations of Europe and Asia to convey to her port all the riches of the world.

One single city, Bruges in Flanders, serving as an international mart for the people of the North and South, shared, in some measure, the commercial prosperity of Venice; but popular insurrections and continual civil wars had induced a large number of foreign merchants to prefer Brabant to Flanders, and Antwerp was becoming a powerful rival to Bruges.

At this period two great events occurred, by which a new channel was opened to trade: Christopher Columbus discovered America, and Vasco de Gama, by doubling the Cape of Good Hope, pointed out a new route to India. This latter discovery, by presenting another grand highway to the world, deprived Venice of the peculiar advantages of her situation, and obliged commerce to seek a new emporium. Portugal and Spain were the most powerful nations on sea; countless ships left their ports for the two Indies, and brought back spices, pearls, and the precious metals for distribution throughout the Old World. This commercial activity required an emporium in the centre of Europe, halfway between the North and the South, whither Spaniards, Portuguese, and Italians, as well as French, English, Germans, Swedes, and Russians, could resort with equal facility as to a perpetual mart for all the commodities exchanged between the Old and the New World.[1]

A few years before the commencement of the religious wars which proved so disastrous to the country, Antwerp was in a most

flourishing condition. Thousands of ships of every form and size covered its broad river like a forest of masts, whose many-colored flags indicated the presence of traders from all the commercial nations of the globe.

Portuguese gallions carried thither the gems and spices of the East; Spanish gallions the gold and silver of America; Italian vessels were laden with the delicate fruits and rich stuffs of the Southern countries; German vessels with grains and metals; and all returned to their own countries heavily freighted with other merchandise, and made way for the ships which were continually arriving, and which, according to contemporary chronicles, were often obliged to wait six weeks before they succeeded in approaching the wharf.[2]

Small craft, such as *hers*, ascended the Scheldt, and even ventured out to sea in order to trade with the neighboring people. Transportation into the interior of the country was effected by means of very strong wagons, several hundred of which daily left Antwerp. The heavy vehicles which conveyed merchandise through Cologne to the heart of Germany were called *Hessenwagens*. [3]

This extraordinary activity induced many foreigners to establish themselves in a city where gold was so abundant, and where every one might reasonably hope for large profits.

At the period of which we speak, Antwerp counted among its inhabitants nearly a thousand merchants from other countries, each of whom had his own attendants; one chronicle estimates, perhaps with some exaggeration, the number of strangers engaged in commerce at five thousand. [4]

Twice a day these merchants met on Change, not only for purposes of trade and for information of the arrival of ships, but principally for banking operations.

To convey an idea of the amount of wealth at the disposal of the houses of

Antwerp, it suffices to say that the king of Portugal obtained in one day in this city a loan of three millions of gold crowns, and Queen Mary of

England contracted a debt of seventy millions of francs.

One merchant, called the rich Fugger, left at his death legacies amounting to nearly six millions of gold crowns, a sum which for that period would seem fabulous, if the fact were not established by indisputable documents.

This wealth and the presence of so many nations vying with each other had carried luxury to such a height that magistrates were frequently obliged to publish edicts, in order to restrain the lavish expenditure. This was not done on account of the foreign inhabitants of the place, but for the advantage of many noble families and the people of the middle classes, who were tempted by the example of others to a display of magnificence which might have seriously injured their fortunes.

The greater part of the Italian merchants from Lucca, Genoa, Florence, and other cities beyond the Alps, were noblemen, and from this circumstance they were thrown into intimate intercourse with the noble families of Antwerp, all of whom spoke fluently three or four languages, and who particularly studied to speak with purity and elegance the soft Italian idiom.[5]

In the *Hipdorp*, not far from the Church of St. James, stood an elegant mansion, which was the favorite resort of the élité of the Italian merchants. It was the residence of William Van de Werve, lord of Schilde.

Although this nobleman did not himself engage in mercantile transactions, because the aristocratic families of Brabant regarded commerce as an occupation unsuitable to persons of high birth,[6] he was very cordial and hospitable to all strangers whose rank entitled them to admission to his home circle. Moreover, he was extremely wealthy, luxurious in his manner of living, and so well versed in three or four different languages, that he could with ease enter into an agreeable and useful conversation in either of them.

The house of Mr. Van de Werve had still other attractions to noble foreigners. He had a daughter of extraordinary beauty, so lovely, so modest, notwithstanding the homage offered to her charms, that her

admirers had surnamed her *la bionda maraviglia*, "the wonderful blonde."

One morning in the year 1550 the beautiful Mary Van de Werve was seated in her father's house in a richly sculptured arm-chair. The young girl had apparently just returned from church, as she still held in her hand a rosary of precious stones, and her hood lay on a chair near her. She seemed to be engrossed by some pleasing thought which filled her heart with a sweet anticipation, for a slight smile parted her lips, and her eyes were upraised to heaven as if imploring a favor from Almighty God.

Against the wall behind her hung a picture from the pencil of John Van Eyck, in which the great master had represented the Virgin in prayer, whilst she was still ignorant of the sublime destiny that awaited her.

The artist had lavished upon this masterpiece the most ardent inspirations of his pious and poetic genius, for the image seemed to live and think. It charmed by the beauty of feature, the majestic calm of expression, the sweetness of the smile, the look full of love cast from earth to heaven.

There was a striking resemblance between the creation of the artist and the young girl seated beneath in almost the same attitude. In truth, the youthful Mary Van de Werve was as beautiful as the poetical representation of her patroness. She had the same large blue eyes, whose expression, although calm and thoughtful, revealed a keen sensibility and a tender, loving soul; her golden hair fell in ringlets over a brow of marble whiteness, and no painter had ever traced a cheek of lovelier mould or more delicate hue; her whole being expressed that calm recollection and attractive gravity which is the true poetry of the immaterial soul, and which was comprehended only by the believing artists of the North before the material inspiration of pagan art had been transmitted to them from the South.

Mary Van de Werve was most richly attired; but there was in her dress an absence of ornament which appeared strange at that period of extreme pomp and show. A waist of sky-blue velvet encircled her slender form, and a brocade skirt fell in large folds to her feet. Only on her open sleeves appeared some gold thread, and the clasp

which fastened the chamois-skin purse suspended from her girdle was encrusted with precious stones.

All her surroundings betokened her father's opulence: large stained-glass windows, covered with the armorial bearings of his ancestors, cast their varied hues upon the inlaid marble floor; tables and chairs of oak, slabs supporting exquisite statuary from the chisel of the most celebrated artists, were ranged along the walls; an ivory crucifix surmounted a silver basin of rare workmanship containing holy water. Even the massive andirons, which stood in the broad fireplace, were partly of gold and ornamented with the coat of arms.

Her prayer was finished, or it might be that her thoughts had taken another turn; she arose and walked slowly towards the large window which overlooked the garden. She fixed her eyes upon the beautiful blue sky; her countenance was bright, as though a sweet hope filled her heart, and a rosy hue suffused her cheeks.

An old man at this moment entered the room. Heavy moustaches shaded his lips, and a long beard fell upon his breast. There was something grave and severe in his imposing appearance and even in his dress; for although his doublet was of gold cloth, his whole body was enveloped in a long cloak, whose dark color was relieved by a lining of white fur.

"Good morning, Mary," he said, as he approached the young girl.

"May the blessing of God always be with you, dear father," she replied.

"Come, see how lovely the sky is, and how brightly the sun shines."

"It is charming weather; we might almost imagine ourselves in the month of May."

"It is the eve of May, father." And with a joyous smile she drew her father to the window, and pointing to the sky, said: "The wind has changed; it blows from the direction of England."

"True; since yesterday it has been south-east."

"So much the better; the ships which have been kept out at sea can ascend the Scheldt with to-day's or to-morrow's tide."

"And you hope," said Mr. Van de Werve, shaking his head, "that among these vessels will be found the *Il Salvatore*, which is to bring the old Signor Deodati from Lucca?"

"I have so long implored of heaven this favorable wind," replied the young girl. "I thank the God of mercy that my prayer has been heard!"

Mr. Van de Werve was silent; his daughter's words had evidently made a disagreeable impression upon him.

She passed her arm caressingly around his neck, and said:

"Dear father, you are sorrowful; and yet you promised me to await tranquilly the arrival of Signor Deodati."

"It is true, my child," he replied; "but, as the time approaches when I must come to a decision, my soul is filled with anxiety. We are the descendants of an illustrious family, and our style of living should be so magnificent as to reflect credit on our rank. The Signor Geronimo, whom you seem to prefer to all others, lives very economically; he dresses simply, and abstains from all that kind of expenditure which, being an evidence of wealth and chivalric generosity, elevates a man in the eyes of the world. That makes me fear that his uncle is either in moderate circumstances or very avaricious."

"But, father, permit me to say that the Signor Deodati of Lucca is very rich and of high birth," replied the young girl, sadly. "Did not the banker Marco Riccardi give you satisfactory information on that point?"

"And should he be miserly, Mary, will he accept the conditions I propose? I shall demand of him the renunciation of a considerable portion of his possessions in favor of his nephew Geronimo. Would it not be an insult to you, which your brothers would avenge, were your hand to be refused from pecuniary motives? I regret that you have so irrevocably fixed your affections on the Signor Geronimo, when you might have chosen among a hundred others richer and of

higher estate. The head of the powerful house of Buonvisi had more claim upon my sympathy and yours."

"Simon Turchi!" said the young girl, sorrowfully bowing her head.

"What has this poor Signor Turchi left undone during the past three years to prove his chivalric love?" replied her father. "Festivals, banquets, concerts, boating on the Scheldt, nothing has been spared; he has expended a fortune to please you. At one time you did not dislike him; but ever since the fatal night when he was attacked by unknown assassins and wounded in the face, you look upon him with different eyes. Instead of being grateful to the good Turchi, you comport yourself in such a manner towards him, that I am induced to believe that you hate him."

"Hate the Signor Turchi!" exclaimed Mary, as if frightened by the accusation. "Dear father, do not indulge such a thought."

"He is a handsome, dignified gentleman, my child."

"Yes, father; he has long been an intimate friend of the Signor Geronimo." [7]

Mr. Van de Werve took his daughter's hand, and said, gently: "Geronimo may be finer-looking to a woman's eye; but his future depends upon his uncle's kindness. He is young and inexperienced, and he possesses nothing himself. The Signor Turchi, on the contrary, is rich and highly esteemed in the world as partner and administrator of the well-known house of Buonvisi. Think better of your choice, Mary; satisfy my desires and your brothers': it is not yet too late."

Tears filled the eyes of the young girl; she replied, however, with a sweet resignation: "Father, I am your submissive child. Command, and I will obey without a murmur, and humbly kiss the venerated hand which imposes the painful sacrifice. But Geronimo! poor Geronimo!"

At these words her fortitude forsook her; she covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly; her tears fell like bright pearls upon the marble floor.

For some moments Mr. Van de Werve contemplated his daughter with ever-increasing pity; then overcome by the sight of her grief, he took her hand, and tenderly pressing it, he said to her: "Cheer up, my dear Mary, do not weep. We will see what answer the Signor Deodati will return to the conditions I will propose to him. Geronimo is of noble birth; if his uncle will consent to bestow upon him a suitable fortune, your desires shall be fulfilled."

"But, dear father," said the still weeping girl, "that depends upon the magnitude of your demands. If you ask impossibilities of the Signor Deodati—"

"No, no, have no anxiety," said Mr. Van de Werve, interrupting her. "I will endeavor to fulfil my duty as a father, and at the same time to spare you any future sorrow. Are you satisfied now?"

Mary silently embraced her father, and her eyes expressed such gratitude that Mr. Van de Werve was deeply moved, and said, tenderly:

"Who could refuse you anything? Age, experience, prudence, all yield before one glance of your eye. Conceal your emotion; I hear some one coming."

A servant opened the door, and announced, "The Signor Geronimo."

The young nobleman thus introduced was remarkable for his fine form, and the graceful elegance of his manners and carriage. His complexion was of that light and clear brown which adds so much to the manly beauty of some Southern nations. The dark beard and hair, his spirited black eyes, gave a singular charm to his countenance, while his calm and sweet smile indicated goodness of heart.

Although upon his entrance he strove to appear cheerful, Mary's eye detected a concealed sadness.

The dress of Geronimo was simple in comparison with the rich attire of the other Italian nobles, his compatriots. He wore a felt hat ornamented with a long plume, a Spanish cloak, a cloth doublet lined with fur, violet satin breeches, and gray boots. His modest attire was relieved only by the sword which hung at his side; for the

hilt glittered with precious stones, and the armorial bearings engraved upon it proved him to be of noble birth.

"Che la pace sia in quelle casa!" (May peace be in this house!) he said, as he entered the hall.

He bowed profoundly to Mr. Van de Werve, and saluted him most respectfully; but the traces of tears which he perceived on Mary's face so startled him that he interrupted his ceremonious greetings, and fixed his eyes inquiringly upon her. She had been weeping, and yet she smiled joyously.

"Mary is naturally very susceptible, Signor Geronimo," said Mr. Van de Werve. "I was speaking to her of her beloved mother, and she wept. You appear, and she smiles as though she knew no sorrow."

The young girl did not await the conclusion of this explanation; before her father had finished speaking, she led her lover to the window, pointed to the weathercock, and said: "Look, Geronimo, the wind is from the west."

"I noticed it last night," replied the young man, with an involuntary sigh.

"Rejoice then, for to-day your uncle may be in sight of the city."

"I do not think so; however, it is possible," said the young man, sadly.

"How coldly you speak, Geronimo!" exclaimed the young girl, in surprise; "what cloud obscures your soul?"

"I myself notice something extraordinary in your manner, signor," remarked the father. "You seem dejected; have you received bad news of your uncle?"

Geronimo hesitated for an answer; then, as though endeavoring to drive away unpleasant thoughts, he said, in a faltering voice: "No, no, it is not that. I witnessed just now near the Dominican Convent something which touched me deeply, and I have not yet recovered from the shock. Have you not heard of a Florentine merchant named Massimo Barberi?"

"Is he noble?" asked Mary. "I do not remember him."

"No, a commoner, but a man highly esteemed."

"I know him well," said Mr. Van de Werve. "I met him lately in company with Lopez de Galle, for whom he had attended to some financial affairs. What have you to tell us concerning him?"

"Something terrible, Mr. Van de Werve. I saw the corpse of poor Barberi taken out of a sewer; he had two dagger-wounds in his throat. He was undoubtedly attacked and slain last night."

"It is had to see so many murders committed in Antwerp," said Mr. Van de Werve. "This is the fourth during the past month. The victims each time have been either Spaniards or Italians, and that vengeance or jealousy was the cause is sufficiently proved by the fact that in no case have the bodies been despoiled of their money or jewels. This custom of lying in wait, attacking and killing each other, often without cause, is an outrage both against God and man. And do you not yourself sometimes fear, Signor Geronimo, the assassin's dagger?"

The young man shook his head.

"For instance," continued Mary's father, "this is the eve of May, I need not ask if you intend to offer to Mary the homage of a serenade. It is the custom of your countrymen to pay this attention to young girls, and you would not omit this opportunity were it not for the advice of a man of experience. Geronimo, listen to the words of calm reason: do not rashly expose yourself to the danger of death; abandon your design this time. Many of your compatriots have aspired to Mary's hand; they have been less successful than you, and on this account they may harbor unkind feelings towards you."

The young man received this advice with a smile which indicated its refusal.

"It is difficult, sir, to speak of such things in the presence of the one who is to be the object of our homage. Permit me, however, the liberty to decide upon the manner in which I will acquit myself of my duty to this young lady."

"But permit me, signor, to tell you," said the old man, in an offended tone, "that it does you no honor to reject the advice of a man

of experience, in order to carry out an unimportant fancy. Rashness does not indicate courage, but rather an absence of good sense."

"Father," exclaimed Mary, in a supplicating tone, "be not angry with Signor Geronimo; he will incur no danger."

"Foolish confidence!" said the old man. "Why should Geronimo think himself less exposed to danger than others? That Geronimo should be rash is excusable; but, Mary, you deserve a severe reprimand for encouraging your friend in his perilous design."

The young girl bowed her head at this reproof of her father, and murmured as if to excuse herself: "Geronimo has a relic, father."

This revelation embarrassed the young man, and he glanced reproachfully at Mary.

She said, caressingly:

"Don't be displeased, Geronimo; show the relic to my father, and he will then know why you do not fear that any accident will happen to you."

The young man felt that he could not refuse Mary's request. He drew from under his doublet an object suspended on a steel chain, and, approaching Mr. Van de Werve, he placed it in his hand.

It was a flat medal of greenish copper, on which were engraven unknown letters and signs. A cross between two bent sabres, and beneath them a crescent, filled up the centre of the medal. At the foot of the cross was a gray stone, rudely inlaid. The whole was rough and heavy.

Mr. Van de Werve examined this medal attentively for some time; he turned it over and over, as though he sought to comprehend the signification of this singular emblem.

"A relic!" he murmured. "Here are two cimeters, a crescent, and cabalistic characters. It is a Mohammedan talisman, and, perhaps, an emblem shocking to our holy religion!"

"You are certainly mistaken, sir," replied Geronimo.

"Is not the cross placed above the crescent, and would not that signify that the faith of Christ has triumphed over the doctrines of Mahomet?"

"But why do you call it a relic?"

"Mary so named it, not I. It is an amulet, and if it has any power, it derives it from the gray stone beneath the cross. This stone is a *draconite*, taken, at the risk of life, from the head of a dragon in the country of the negroes."

A half contemptuous smile curled the lips of the old man as he contemplated the talisman in silence. At last he said: "I remember, Signor Geronimo, to have read in Pliny curious details of the draconite and its extraordinary powers, but I also remember that the great naturalist forgets to tell us the inherent qualities of the stone. Alas! signor, would you trust in this talisman, and believe that it could protect you against the dagger of the assassin? The people of the South have a strange piety: in their superstition they confound what is holy with things which owe their efficacy, if they possess any, to the conjurations of sorcerers."

The young noble colored slightly, and replied: "You are mistaken, sir, as far as I am concerned. For my justification allow me to tell you that this amulet belonged to a pilgrim; that it rested one entire night of Good Friday upon the tomb of our Lord at Jerusalem; but I will be candid, and say to you that I do not consider it possessed of the power to preserve me from danger. And yet I always wear it with the firm and unshaken conviction that it will protect me in a critical hour from some misfortune."

"Perhaps it belonged to your deceased parents," said Mr. Van de Werve, struck by the singular explanation of the young man.

"No, sir," replied Geronimo; "this amulet is to me a cherished souvenir of a day upon which God gave me the grace to perform a good action. I would willingly tell you how the amulet fell into my hands, and why I believe in its power to protect me, but it is a long story."

"I would, nevertheless, be much pleased if you would satisfy my curiosity," said the old noble.