

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENRIK CONSCHKE.

CHAPTER XXIII. CONTINUED.

A single banner alone now remained standing in all the French host; the royal standard still waved its glittering folds, its silver lilies, and all the sparkling jewels with which the arms of France were embroidered. Guy pointed out with his hand to the place where it stood, and cried to the golden knight, "Yonder stands our prize!"

They redoubled their efforts to break through the French host; but without avail, until Adolf van Nieuwland, finding a favorable spot, pierced along the masses of the enemy, and fought his way to the great standard. What hostile hand, what envious spirit, impelled the youthful warrior thus to certain and untimely death? Had they known what hot and bitter tears were shed for him at that moment, how fervently and with how many repetitions his name came before God on the wings of a maiden's prayers, they could not have thus ruthlessly consigned him to destruction! For the royal banner was circled round by a band of noble and valiant knights, who had sworn by their troth and by their honor that they would die rather than suffer it to be taken from their keeping. And what could Adolf do against the flower of French chivalry? Words of scornful taunting greeted him, countless swords waved above his head; and, notwithstanding the marvelous intrepidity, he could no longer defend himself. Already his blood streamed from beneath his helm, and his eyes were clouded by the mists of death. Feeling that his last moment was come, he cried, "Matilda! Matilda! farewell!" and gathering up his remaining strength, he threw himself, with the energy of despair, upon the swords of his foes, forced his way through them to the standard, and wrenched it from the standard-bearer; but it was torn from him in an instant by numberless hands, his strength forsook him, he fell forward on his horse, and the wheeling sea of foes closed over him.

The golden knight saw in a moment the danger of Adolf; he thought of the hopeless anguish of the wretched Matilda, who he loved to die by the hand of the enemy; and turning to his men, he cried, with a voice which rose like a thunder-clap above the crash of battle: "Forward, men of Flanders!"

Like the raging sea, which chafes against its embankment with fury irresistible, like that sea when, under some overmastering wave, the impediment to its mad career has been swept away, and it rolls its foaming billows over the plain, tearing up the trees by their roots, and dashing whole villages to the ground—so sprang forward the herd of Flemish lions at the cry of the unknown knight.

The French were burning with too fierce a courage for the Flemings to hope to overthrow them by one impetuous onset; but the clubs and halberds fell thick and fast as hail upon them. Long and desperate was the struggle; men and horses were mingled together in indescribable confusion; but soon the French knights were so hemmed in that they could not move, and they were driven slowly from their position. The axe of the golden knight had cleared his way to the standard, and he was closely followed by Guy and Arnold van Oudenarde, with a few of the bravest Flemings. He looked anxiously in the direction of the banner for the green plume of Adolf van Nieuwland; but it was not to be seen, and he thought he perceived it further on amongst the Flemings. The forty chosen knights who stood ranged around the standard now rushed upon the golden knight; but he wielded his axe with such effect that not a sword touched him. His first blow crushed the head of Alin de Breteigne, his second broke the ribs of Richard de Falaize; and all around the Flemings emulated his valor. The bearer of the standard now retreated, in order to preserve it from capture; but Robert with one blow thrust aside three or four of his foes, and pursued him into the midst of a group of Frenchmen at some distance from the spot where the conflict was raging, and succeeded at length in grasping his prize. A whole troop of knights now assailed him to retake the banner; but the golden knight, placing it as a spear in its rest, dashed impetuously against his pursuers. And thus he won his way back to the Flemish army, where he held aloft the captured standard, and cried, "Flanders! the Lion! the victory is ours!"

He was answered by a universal shout of joy; and the courage and strength of the Flemings seemed to increase every moment. Guy de St. Pol was yet posted at the Pottelberg with about ten thousand foot soldiers and a goodly troop of cavalry. He had already packed up all the valuables in the camp; and was about to save himself by flight, when Pierre Lebrun, one of those who had been fighting near the royal standard, dashed up to him, and cried:

"What, St. Pol! can you act thus? Can you fly like a dastard, and leave unavenged the deaths of Robert d'Arois and our brethren in arms? Stay, I implore you, for the sake of the honor of France! Let us rather die than endure this shame; advance your troops, and victory may yet be ours."

But Guy de St. Pol would hear nothing of fighting; fear had taken complete possession of him, and he replied:

"Messire Lebrun, I know my duty. I will not allow the baggage to be captured; it is better I should lead back the survivors to France, than that I should hurry them to certain destruction."

"And will you, then, abandon to the enemy all who are still fighting bravely sword in hand? Surely this is a traitor's deed; and if I survive this day, I will impeach you before the king for disloyalty and cowardice."

"Pudence compels my retreat, Messire Lebrun. I shall go, whatever you may think fit to say of me hereafter; for you are now too much excited to be capable of reflecting on all the circumstances of your position. Rage has bereft you of your reason."

"And you are benumbed and paralyzed by cowardice!" retorted Pierre Lebrun. "Do as you will; to show you that I am as prudent as yourself, I shall march with my division to cover and assist the retreat."

He then took a troop of two thousand foot soldiers, and hastened with them to the field of battle. The number of the French was now so much reduced and there were so many gaps in their line, that the Flemings were enabled to assail them at the same time in front and in rear. The golden knight observed at once Lebrun's movement and its intention; he saw clearly that St. Pol was about to make his escape with the baggage, and he sprang to the side of Guy to inform him of this plan of the enemy. A few moments after, several Flemish hands dispersed themselves over the plain. Messire John Borlout, with the men of Ghent, hurried along the wall of the city and fell on Lebrun's flank; while the butchers, with their Dean, Jan Breydel, made a detour round the castle of Nedermossche, and fell on the rear of the French camp.

St. Pol's soldiers had not reckoned on fighting; they were busy in packing together a crowd of precious things when the axes of the butchers, and death in their train, took them by surprise. St. Pol, being well mounted, made good his escape, without bestowing further thought on the fate of his troops. Soon the camp was won, and in a few moments not a Frenchman remained alive within its walls. The Flemings took possession of all the gold and silver goblets, and of the countless treasures, which the French had brought with them.

On the field of battle the conflict had not yet ceased; about a thousand horsemen still persisted in their defence; they had resolved to sell their lives as dear as possible. Among them were more than a hundred noble knights, who had vowed not to survive this defeat, and so fought on with a calm and despairing courage. But at length they were driven on towards the walls of the city into the Bitter marsh, and their steeds sank into the treacherous bank of the Ronduite brook. The knights could no longer manage or assist their horses; so they sprang upon the ground, ranged themselves in a circle, and continued the fight with desperate energy. Many of them were, however, stifled in the Bitter marsh, which soon became a lake of blood, wherein were seen heads and arms, and legs of slain warriors mingled with helmets and broken swords, and which has preserved a memorial of this dismal tragedy in its present name, "The Bloody Marsh."

When some Lijlards, among whom where John van Gistel, and a number of the men at Brabant, saw that escape was impossible, they mingled with the Flemings and shouted:

"Flanders! the Lion! Hail, hail Flanders!"

They thought thus to elude the notice of their countrymen; but a clothworker rushed from the throng towards John van Gistel, and struck him a blow on the head which crushed his skull to fragments, muttering the while:

"Did not my father tell you, traitor, that you would not die in your bed? That others were soon recognized by the make of their weapons, and hewn down or pierced without pity, as traitors and recreants."

The young Guy felt a profound pity for the remaining knights who maintained so brave and obstinate a defence, and called to them to surrender, assuring them that their lives should be spared. Convinced that neither courage nor intrepidity could avail them, they yielded and were disarmed, and given into the custody of John Borlout. The most illustrious of these noble captives was Thibaud II., subsequently Duke of Lorrain; the remainder were all of noble birth, and as valiant knights; their number was about sixty.

And now their remained on the field not a single enemy to be vanquished; only here and there in the distance were seen a few fugitives hastening to secure a safe retreat.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Although a great part of the Flemish troops was engaged in pursuit of the flying enemy, there still remained some companies drawn up in order on the battlefield.

John Borlout gave orders to his men to keep a strict watch on the field until the following day, according to the custom of war. The division led by Borlout consisted now of three thousand men of Ghent; and in addition to these, many others had remained on the ground, either wounded or exhausted by fatigue. And now that the victory was won, and the chains of their fatherland broken, the Flemings testified their joy by repeated cries of, "Flanders and the Lion! Victory! Victory!" Their shouts were echoed back from the walls of the city by the men of Ypres and Courtrai with even greater energy. They, too, might well shout victory; for while the battle was raging on the Groeningen Place, the Castellan van Lens had made a sortie from the citadel, and would have reduced the city to ashes, had not the men of Ypres made so vigorous a resistance, that they drove him back into the citadel after a long conflict. The castellan found that scarcely a tenth part of his soldiers had escaped the rage of the citizens.

The captains and knights now returned to the camp, and thronged the golden knight, to express to him their fervent gratitude; but, fearful of betraying himself, he answered not a word. Guy, who was standing at his side, turned to the knights and said:

"Messires, the knight who has so wondrously delivered us and all the land of Flanders, is a crusader, and wishes to remain unknown. The noblest son of Flanders bears his name."

The knights were silent immediately; and every one was endeavoring to guess who this could be, who was at once so brave, so noble, and so lofty of stature. Those of them who remembered the meeting at the wood in the valley were not long in recognizing him; but remembering their pledge, they kept profound silence. Others there were who had no doubt that the unknown was the Count of Flanders himself; but the wish of the golden knight

to remain unknown imposed on them also the obligation of secrecy.

After Robert had conversed awhile with Guy in a low voice, he cast his eye over the surrounding group of knights; and then turning to Guy, with trouble depicted on his features, he said: "I do not see Adolf van Nieuwland; an agonizing doubt troubles me. Can it be that my young friend has fallen beneath the sword of the foe? That would indeed be to me an intolerable and an enduring grief; and my poor Matilda! how will she mourn her good brother?"

"He cannot be dead, Robert; I am sure that I saw his green plume waving just now among the trees of the Neerland wood. He must be in close pursuit of the foe; you saw with what irrepressible fury he threw himself upon the French in the battle. Fear nothing for him; God will not have allowed him to be slain."

"O Guy, are you speaking the truth? My heart is wrung that my hapless child cannot taste the joy of this day without an alloy of bitterness. I pray you, my brother, let the men of Messire Borlout search the field, and see whether Adolf is among the slain. I will go to console my anxious Matilda; the presence of her father will be at least a momentary consolation."

He then greeted the knights courteously, and hastened to the Abbey of Groeningen. Guy gave orders to John Borlout to disperse his men over the field, and to bring the wounded and dead knights into the tents. As they began their search, they were seen suddenly to stand still, as though arrested by some sight of horror. Now that the heat and rage of the conflict had subsided, their eyes ranged over the broad plain, where lay in hideous confusion the mangled bodies of men and horses, standards and broken armor. Here and there a wounded man stretched his hands towards them with a piteous cry, and a low wailing, more dismal than the dreariest solitude, filled the air; it was the voice of the wounded, crying, "Water! water! For God's sake water!"

As the men of Ghent roamed over the field, they sought those in whose bosoms were yet some pulses of life, and brought them with care into the camp. One knight was employed to fetch water from the Gaver brook; and it was with a piteous sight to watch the eagerness with which the wounded seized it, and with what gratitude, with what glistening eyes, they welcomed the refreshing draught.

The soldiers had received orders to bring every knight they found killed or wounded, into the camp. They had already recovered more than half of the slain, and had traversed a considerable extent of the field of battle. Suddenly drew near the place where the strife had been most deadly, they found the dead more numerous. They were busily removing the helmet of Messire van Maelchelan, when they heard close at hand a low moan, which seemed to issue from the ground. They listened, but all was still again; not one of the bodies around gave the faintest token of life. Suddenly the moan was repeated; it came from a little distance, from between two prostrate horses. After many efforts, they succeeded in drawing one of the horses aside, and found the knight from whom the sound proceeded. He was lying stretched across the bodies, and drenched in the blood of many of his foes. His armor was indented and broken by the tread of horses; his right hand still convulsively grasped his sword, while in his left was a green veil, his pallid features bore the impress of approaching death, and he gazed on his John Borlout with restless wandering looks.

John Borlout recognized in a moment the unfortunate Adolf van Nieuwland. They looked in haste at the joints of his mail, raised his head gently, and moistened his lips with water. His failing voice murmured some unintelligible words, and his eyes closed as if his soul had at length taken its flight from his tortured body. He opened his eyes, and the refreshing water had overpowered him; and he lost for some moments all consciousness.

When he at length opened his eyes, like one whose life was ebbing fast, he pressed Borlout's hand, and said—so slowly, that between each word there was a long pause—

"I am dying. You see it, Messire John; my soul cannot linger much longer on earth. But bewail me not; I die contented, for our fatherland is delivered—free—free—"

His voice here failed him. His breath grew shorter; his head dropped; he slowly brought the green veil to his lips, and imprinted on it a last kiss. This done, he lost all consciousness, and fell apparently lifeless in the arms of John Borlout. Yet his heart continued to beat, and the warmth of his body betokened recovery; so that the captain of Ghent did not altogether abandon hope, but conveyed the wounded knight to the camp with the tenderest care.

Matilda had taken refuge in a cell of the Abbey of Groeningen during the battle, whither she was accompanied by Adolf's sister. Her terror and anxiety were extreme; her relatives, her beloved Adolf—all were in that fearful conflict. On the issue of this contest, waged by the Flemings against so powerful a foe, hung the freedom of her father; this field of battle would either win again for him the throne of Flanders, or forever crumble it to dust. Were the French victorious, she knew that the death of all she loved was inevitable, and that her horrible doom echoed over the field, both maidens shuddered and grew pale, as if in that sound the stroke of death had descended on them. Their terror was too great to be expressed in words; they fell on their hands, and hot tears streamed down their cheeks. And thus they lay in fervent prayer, motionless, almost lifeless, as though sunk in heavy slumber, while from time to time a deep groan broke from their crushed hearts. As they caught the distant sounds of the fight, Maria sighed:

"O God, almighty, Lord God of Hosts, have mercy on us. Bring us help in this our hour of need, O Lord!"

And Matilda's gentle voice continued:

"O loving Jesus, Redeemer of men, shield him! Call him not to Thee, O Jesus most merciful! Holy Mother of God, pray for us! O Mother of Christ, consolation of the afflicted, pray for him!"

Then the roar of battle came nearer, and filled their hearts with fresh alarms; and their hands shook like the tender leaves of the aspen-tree. Deeper sank their heads upon their breasts, and their prayers were murmured with fainter voice; for terror had paralysed all their energies.

The strife lasted long; the appalling cry of the troops, as they fought hand to hand, resounded through the lonely cell. For long hours those low-whispered prayers went forth; and still they prayed, when the golden knight knocked at the abbey gate. The sound of heavy footsteps caused them to turn their eyes towards the door, and they were still and motionless with sweet anticipation.

"Adolf comes again!" sighed Maria. "Oh, our prayer is heard!"

Matilda listened with greater eagerness, and replied in tones of sadness:

"No, no, it is not Adolf; his step is not so heavy. O Maria, it may be a herald of evil tidings!"

The door of the cell turned on its hinges, a nun opened it; and the golden knight entered. Matilda's tender frame trembled with fear; she raised her eyes doubtfully and timidly to the stranger, who stood before her and opened his arms to her. It seemed to her a delusive dream; but her agitation was fleeting as the lightning which flashes and is gone; she rushed eagerly forward and was clasped in her father's arms.

"My father!" she exclaimed; "my beloved father! do I see you again free—your chains broken? Let me press you to my heart. O God, how good Thou art! Do not turn away your face, dearest father; let me taste all my bliss."

Robert Bethune embraced his loving daughter with unutterable joy; and when their hearts at length beat more tranquilly, he laid his hand on the forehead of steel on the low stool on which Matilda had been kneeling. Worn by his exertions, he sank into a couch. Matilda threw her arms around him, gazing with admiration and awe on him whose face had been ever to her so full of consolation and strength—on him whose noble blood flowed in her veins, and who loved her so deeply and tenderly; and she listened with beating heart to the words which that beloved voice murmured in her ear.

"Matilda," said he, "my noble child, God has long proved us, with suffering; but now our sorrows are ended; Flanders is free—free—free—"

The maiden listened with agonized attention to the words of her father. She looked at him with a peculiar expression; she could not faintly smile. Joy had come so suddenly upon her, that she seemed deprived of all power of speech. After a few moments, she observed that her father had ceased speaking; and she said:

"O my God, our fatherland is free! The French are defeated and slain; and you, my father, I possess you once more. We shall go back again to our beautiful Wynandael. Sorrow shall no more cloud your days; and I shall pass my life joyfully and happily in your arms. This is beyond hope—beyond all that I have dared to ask of God in my prayers."

"Listen attentively, my child; and be calm, I beseech you; this day I must leave you again. The noble knight who released me from my bonds has my word of honor that I would return as soon as the battle was over."

The maiden's head sank again upon her breast, and she sighed, in bitter grief.

"They will put you to a cruel death, O my poor father!"

"Do not be so fearful, Matilda," continued Robert; "my brother Guy has taken sixty French knights of noblest blood prisoners; Philip the Fair will be told that their lives are hostages for mine; and he cannot allow the brave survivors of his army to be offered up as victims to his vengeance. Flanders is now more powerful than France. So I implore you dry your tears. Rejoice for a blessed future awaits us; I will restore Castle Wynandael again, that we may live in it as in days gone by. Then we shall again enjoy the chase, with our falcons on our wrist. Can you not imagine how merry our first hunting party will be?"

An inexpressible sweet smile and a fervent kiss were Matilda's answer. But on a sudden a thought of pain seemed to cross her mind; for her countenance was overspread with gloom, and she bent her eyes on the ground, like one who is overcome by shame.

Robert looked at her inquiringly and asked:

"Matilda, my child, why is your countenance so suddenly overcast with sadness?"

"The maiden only half raised her eyes, and answered with a low voice:

"But my father—you say nothing of Adolf;—why did he not come with you?"

There was a slight pause before Robert replied. He discerned that unknown to herself, a profound feeling was slumbering in Matilda's heart; therefore without design he answered her thus:

"Adolf is detained by his duty, my child; fugitives are scattered over the plain, and I believe he is pursuing them. I may say to you, Matilda, that our very Adolf is the most valiant and the most noble knight I know. Never have I seen more manliness and intrepidity. Twice he saved the life of my brother Guy; beneath the banner royal of France the enemy fell in numbers beneath his sword; all the knights are repeating his praises, and ascribe to him a large share in the deliverance of Flanders."

While Robert was uttering these words, he kept his eye fixed on his

daughter, and scrutinized every emotion that flitted across her expressive features. He read therein a mingled pride and rapture, and had no further doubt that his conjecture was well founded. Maria, the while, stood with her eyes fixed on Robert, and drank in with eager joy the praises which he bestowed so lavishly on her brother.

While Matilda was gazing on her father in a transport of bliss, there was heard suddenly a confused noise of voices in the court of the monastery. After a few moments all was again still; then the door of the cell opened, and Guy entered slowly, and with a disturbed countenance he came near to his brother, and said:

"A great disaster has befallen us my brother, in the loss of one who is most dear to us all; the men of Ghent found him on the field of battle, lying under a heap of slain, and they have brought him here into the monastery. His life trembles on his lips, and I think the hour of his death cannot be very distant. He anxiously begs to see you once more ere he quits this world; therefore I pray you my brother, grant him this last favor." Then, turning to Maria, he continued: "He desires to see you also, noble maiden."

One cry of bitter anguish broke from the hearts of both maidens. Matilda fell lifeless into her father's arms; and Maria flew to the door, and rushed from the chamber in an agony of despair. Their cries brought two nuns into the cell, who took charge of the unhappy Matilda; her father stooped and kissed her, and turned to visit the dying Adolf; when the maiden, perceiving his intention, tore herself from the arms of the nuns, and clinging to her father, cried:

"Let me go with you my father; let me see him once more! Woe, woe is mine! what a sharp sword pierces my heart! My father, I shall die with him! I feel already the approach of death. I must see him; come, come speedily; he is dying! O Adolf! Adolf!"

Robert gazed on his daughter with tender compassion; he could not doubt now the existence of that secret feeling which had slowly and quietly taken root in his daughter's heart. The discovery gave him no pain, caused him no displeasure; unable to comfort her with words, he pressed her to his heart. But Matilda disengaged herself from these tender bonds, and drew Robert towards the door, crying:

"O my father, have pity on me! Come, that I may once more hear the voice of my good brother, that his eyes may look on me once more before he dies."

She knelt down at his feet, and continued, amidst burning tears:

"I implore you, do not reject my petition; hear me; grant it, my lord and my father."

Robert would have preferred leaving his daughter in the care of the nuns; for he feared, with reason, that the sight of the dying knight would completely overwhelm her; yet he could not deny her urgent prayers; he took her, therefore, by the hand, and said:

"Be it so, my daughter; go with me, and visit the unfortunate Adolf. But, I pray you, disturb him not by your grief; think that God has this day bestowed on us a great mercy, and that He may be justly provoked to anger by your despair."

Ere these words were ended they had left the cell. Adolf had been brought into the refectory of the monastery, and laid carefully on a feather-bed upon the floor. A priest, well skilled in the healing art, had examined him with care, and found no open wound; long blue stripes indicated the blows he had received, and in many places were large bruises and contusions. He was bled; and then his body was carefully washed, and a restorative balsam applied. Through the care of the skillful priest he had recovered a measure of strength; but yet he seemed at the point of death, although his eyes were no longer so dull and listless. Around his bed stood many knights in deep silence, mourning for their friend. John van Renesse, Arnold van Oudenarde, and Peter Deconinck assisted the priest in his operations; William van Gulick, John Borlout, and Baldwin van Papenrode stood at the left hand of the couch, while Guy, Jan Breydel, and the other more illustrious knights, gazed on the wounded man with their heads bowed low in sorrow and in sympathy.

Maria was kneeling weeping near her brother; she had seized his hand, and was bedewing it with her tears, while Adolf bent on her an unsteady and almost vacant look. As Robert and his daughter entered the refectory, the knights were all struck with wonder and emotion. He, who had come in their hour of need, their mysterious deliverer, was the Lion of Flanders, Count! They all bowed before him with profound reverence, and said:

"Honor to the Lion, our Lord!"

Robert left his daughter's hand, raised Messires John Borlout and van Renesse from the ground, and kissed both of them on the cheek; he then beckoned to the other knights to rise, and addressed them thus:

"My true and loyal vassals, my friends, you have shown me to-day how mighty is a nation of heroes! I wear my coronet now with a loftier pride than that with which Philip the Fair wears the crown of France; for of you I may well boast and glory."

He then approached Adolf, took his hand, and looked at him for some time in silence; a tear glistened awhile beneath each eyelid of the Lion, and at length dropped—a pearl of price—upon the ground. Matilda was kneeling at the head of Adolf's couch; she had taken her green veil from her hand; and her tears fell hot and fast upon this token of her affection, and of his self-sacrifice and devotedness. She spoke not a word; she did not even steal a look at Adolf; but covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly.

The priest, too, stood motionless, his eyes steadily fastened on the wounded knight. He marked some wonderful change passing over his features; some-thing which, increasing every moment, spoke of returning life and vigor. And in truth his eyes had lost their fixed and glassy expression, and his countenance no longer bore the signs of approaching death. Soon he raised his eyes to Robert, with a look of intense love and devotion; and said slowly, and

with a voice broken by suffering and weakness:

"Oh, my Lord and Count! your presence is to me a sweet consolation. Now I can die in peace. . . . Our fatherland is free! You will occupy the Lion's throne in peaceful and happy days. . . . Gladly do I now quit this earth, now that the future promises so much happiness to you and to your noble daughter. Oh, believe me, in this my hour of death, your mischances were more grievous to me, than unworthy servant, than to yourself. Often have I, in the still night, moistened my bed with my tears, as I thought of the mournful lot of the noble Matilda, and of your captivity. . . . Then turning his head slightly towards Matilda, he made her tears flow yet more abundantly, as he said:

"Weep not, noble maiden; I merit not this tender compassion. There is another life than this! There it is I hope and trust I shall see my good sister again. Remain on earth, the stay and solace of your father's old age; and sometimes in your prayers think of your brother, who must quit you—"

Suddenly he stopped, and looked around him in astonishment.

"Merciful God!" cried he, turning an inquiring look on the priest, "what means this? I feel a renewed vigor; my blood flows more freely in my veins!"

Matilda arose at these words, and gazed at him in painful expectation, and looked anxiously and inquiringly at the priest, who had been attentively watching Adolf during this scene, and noting his most fleeting expression and emotion. He took Adolf's hand and felt his pulse, while all the bystanders followed his every movement with eager curiosity; and at length they read in the good priest's countenance that he had not abandoned all hope of restoring the wounded knight. The skillful leech opened the eyelids of his patient in silence, and attentively examined his eyes; he opened his mouth, and passed his hand over his uncovered breast; and then turning to the knights around the couch, he said, in a tone of decided conviction:

"I can now assure you, messires, that the fever which threatened the life of the youthful knight has subsided; he will not die."

A sensible tremor passed over all present, and one might have thought the priest had uttered a doom of death; but soon this convulsive thrill was succeeded by a bounding joy, which broke forth in words and gestures.

Maria had answered the assurance of the priest with a piercing cry, and clasped her brother to her breast; while Matilda fell on her knees, raised her hands toward heaven, and cried with a loud voice:

"I thank Thee, O God all merciful, full of compassion, that Thou hast heard the prayers of Thine unworthy handmaiden!"

And after this brief thanksgiving she sprang up, and threw herself, trembling with joy, into her father's arms.

"He will live!" he will live!" she exclaimed, in a transport of gladness. "Oh, now I am happy!" and she rested a moment exhausted on Robert's breast. But soon she turned again eagerly back to Adolf, and exchanged words of joy and gratitude with him.

What appeared a miracle to all present was but a natural result of Adolf's condition. He had received no open wound, but many bruises; the pain which these occasioned him had induced a violent fever, which threatened his life; but the presence of Matilda seemed to have brought the malady to a crisis, and by imparting fresh energy to his soul, gave him strength to battle with it, and as it were, to cast it off; and thus did she appear as an angel of life to rescue him from the grave, which already yawned to receive him.

Robert de Bethune allowed his daughter, who was beside herself with joy, to remain kneeling by Adolf's side; and advancing towards the knights, he addressed them in these words:

"You, noble sons of Flanders, have this day won a victory. The memory whereof shall live amongst your children's children as a record of your lofty prowess; you have shown the whole world how dearly the alien has expiated his temerity in setting his foot on the soil of the Lion. The love of your fatherland has exalted you into heroes; and your arms, nervous by a holy righteous vengeance, have laid the tyrant low. Freedom is a precious thing in the esteem of those who have sealed it with their heart's blood. Henceforth no prince of the south shall enslave us more; you would all rather die a thousand deaths, than allow the alien to sing over a song of triumph. Now this fear exists no longer. Flanders, this day, exalted high above all other lands, and this glory she owes to you, most noble knights! And now our will is, that rest and peace should recompense the loyalty of our subjects; our highest joy will be that all should greet us by the name of father, so far as our loving care and unceasing vigilance can render us worthy of this title. Nevertheless, should the French dare to return, again would we be the Lion of Flanders, and again would our battle-axe lead you on to the conflict. And now let our victory be unstained by further violence; above all, pursue not the Lijlards, it behooves us to protect even their rights. For the present I must leave you; until my return, I pray you obey my brother Guy as your liege lord and count."

"What say you of leaving?" cried the skeptical John Borlout; "you are surely not going back to France. They will avenge their defeat on you, noble count."

"Messires," said Robert, let me ask you, who is there amongst you who would, from fear of death, break his word of honor and stain his knighthood's loyalty?"

All at once hung their heads, and uttered not a word. They saw with sorrow that they dared not oppose their count's return. He continued:

"Messire Deconinck, by a holy wisdom has been of essential service to us, and we hope to task it still further; you are now a member of our council, and I require you to live with us in our castle. Messire Breydel, your valor and nobility merit a great reward; I appoint you

with a voice broken by suffering and weakness:

"Oh, my Lord and Count! your presence is to me a sweet consolation. Now I can die in peace. . . . Our fatherland is free! You will occupy the Lion's throne in peaceful and happy days. . . . Gladly do I now quit this earth, now that the future promises so much happiness to you and to your noble daughter. Oh, believe me, in this my hour of death, your mischances were more grievous to me, than unworthy servant, than to yourself. Often have I, in the still night, moistened my bed with my tears, as I thought of the mournful lot of the noble Matilda, and of your captivity. . . . Then turning his head slightly towards Matilda, he made her tears flow yet more abundantly, as he said:

"Weep not, noble maiden; I merit not this tender compassion. There is another life than this! There it is I hope and trust I shall see my good sister again. Remain on earth, the stay and solace of your father's old age; and sometimes in your prayers think of your brother, who must quit you—"

Suddenly he stopped, and looked around him in astonishment.

"Merciful God!" cried he, turning an inquiring look on the priest, "what means this? I feel a renewed vigor; my blood flows more freely in my veins!"

Matilda arose at these words, and gazed at him in painful expectation, and looked anxiously and inquiringly at the priest, who had been attentively watching Adolf during this scene, and noting his most fleeting expression and emotion. He took Adolf's hand and felt his pulse, while all the bystanders followed his every movement with eager curiosity; and at length they read in the good priest's countenance that he had not abandoned all hope of restoring the wounded knight. The skillful leech opened the eyelids of his patient in silence, and attentively examined his eyes; he opened his mouth, and passed his hand over his uncovered breast; and then turning to the knights around the couch, he said, in a tone of decided conviction:

"I can now assure you, messires, that the fever which threatened the life of the youthful knight has subsided; he will not die."

A sensible tremor passed over all present, and one might have thought the priest had uttered a doom of death; but soon this convulsive thrill was succeeded by a bounding joy, which broke forth in words and gestures.

Maria had answered the assurance of the priest with a piercing cry, and clasped her brother to her breast; while Matilda fell on her knees, raised her hands toward heaven, and cried with a loud voice:

"I thank Thee, O God all merciful, full of compassion, that Thou hast heard the prayers of Thine unworthy handmaiden!"

And after this brief thanksgiving she sprang up, and threw herself, trembling with joy, into her father's arms.

"He will live!" he will live!" she exclaimed, in a transport of gladness. "Oh, now I am happy!" and she rested a moment exhausted on Robert's breast. But soon she turned again eagerly back to Adolf, and exchanged words of joy and gratitude with him.

What appeared a miracle to all present was but a natural result of Adolf's condition. He had received no open wound, but many bruises; the pain which these occasioned him had induced a violent fever, which threatened his life; but the presence of Matilda seemed to have brought the malady to a crisis, and by imparting fresh energy to his soul, gave him strength to battle with it, and as it were, to cast it off; and thus did she appear as an angel of life to rescue him from the grave, which already yawned to receive him.

Robert de Bethune allowed his daughter, who was beside herself with joy, to remain kneeling by Adolf's side; and advancing towards the knights, he addressed them in these words:

"You, noble sons of Flanders, have this day won a victory. The memory whereof shall live amongst your children's children as a record of your lofty prowess; you have shown the whole world how dearly the alien has expiated his temerity in setting his foot on the soil of the Lion. The love of your fatherland has exalted you into heroes; and your arms, nervous by a holy righteous vengeance, have laid the tyrant low. Freedom is a precious thing in the esteem of those who have sealed it with their heart's blood. Henceforth no prince of the south shall enslave us more; you would all rather die a thousand deaths, than allow the alien to sing over a song of triumph. Now this fear exists no longer. Flanders, this day, exalted high above all other lands, and this glory she owes to you, most