

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER XXIII. CONTINUED.

In the meadows close about the army, the far extended lines of the French infantry might be seen winding about the fields like the folds of some hideous serpent; the greatest stillness pervaded their ranks.

When Guy observed that the attack was about to commence, he sent a thousand slingers, under the command of Solomon van Serevotte, as far as the second brook, to harass the French outposts and sentinels; then he disposed his various companies into a line, in such a manner that the eyes of all were directed towards its centre. At that point rose an altar constructed of turf, and over it waved the great banner of St. George, the patron of warriors; on its steps melted a priest, arrayed in the vestments of his office, who proceeded to offer the Holy Sacrifice for the good success of the battle.

"Of a truth I tell you, Count, that we are exposing our men to great danger, by trying to force them over the brook, which is scarcely possible, either will or can ford it. Let us rather try to entice the enemy from their position. Believe me, you are striking all against fearful odds in this game."

But the general was too far carried away by his ardour and anger to give attention to this wise counsel. "Onc stable," exclaimed he furiously, "that is advice befitting Lombards! Are you frightened at this pack of wolves, or are you of the same breed with them?"

Godfrey, stung by this reproach, and by the indignation it conveyed, burst forth in uncontrolled wrath. He came up close to the general, and answered with an expression of bitter disdain: "You have doubt on my courage! You dare to taunt and insult me! But, I tell you, having the courage to go with me on foot and alone into the thick of the foe, I would lead you so far that you would return no more."

Here some of the knights threw themselves between the angry generals, and endeavored by every argument to conciliate the senseless that the brook was not fordable by cavalry; but he persisted in his refusal to listen to them and ordered Rodolf de Nesle to renew the charge.

The constable, beside himself with vexation, rode furiously with his troops towards the Flemish position. But at the brook all the horsemen of the front rank were thrown from their saddles, each thrust the other deeper into the morass, and more than five hundred perished in the confusion, either stifled in the mud, or slain by the stones of the Flemish slingers.

Meanwhile Messire John de Barlas had found a place at which the first brook could be forded, and had crossed with the thousand cross-bow men. Having gained the open meadow, he drew up his men in a compact mass, and poured such a shower of arrows upon the Flemish slingers, that the sky was almost darkened by them, and a large number of Flemings fell dead or wounded to the ground, while the French archers continued to make a steady advance.

side. Then Robert d'Artois gave Rodolf de Nesle, general of the first division, the signal to begin the attack. The horsemen sprang eagerly onwards, and soon came to Moschor brook; but here they sank saddle deep in the morass. One stumbled over another; the foremost were thrown from their horses, and either slain by the slingers or suffocated in the swamp.

When the Constable de Nesle saw that the passage was impracticable for cavalry, he came to Messire d'Artois, and said: "Of a truth I tell you, Count, that we are exposing our men to great danger, by trying to force them over the brook, which is scarcely possible, either will or can ford it."

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trodden them under foot were in their turn overthrown and trampled down by others; and so the death-wall was continued unceasingly. The companies in the rear, thinking that the action had become general, spurred their horses on toward the brook, and thus increased the number of the victims of the senseless folly and imprudence.

As yet the Flemings had made no attack upon them; they stood motionless and silent, gazing with wonder and awe on the dismal tragedy enacted before them. Their generals proceeded with more skill and more prudence; other warriors would have thought this the fittest moment for a general attack, and so would perhaps have crossed the brook and fallen on the French; but Guy, and John Borluut, his chief adviser, would not relinquish the advantage which their position gave them.

At length both the brooks were filled with dead bodies of men and horses, and Rodolf de Nesle, seeing that it was impossible to force a passage with about a thousand horsemen. He formed them in a close quadron, and shouted, "France! France! forward forward!"

They charged with furious impetuosity into the centre of the Flemish troops; and rushed on the French; but the horsemen on the points of these frightful weapons. A large number of the assailants were thrown from their horses by the shot and quickly despatched. But Godfrey of Brabant, who had also crossed the brook, and thus a wide stream of Flemings, and received solely on the squadron of William van Gulick, that he overthrew both this and the three first divisions, and so broke the line of the Flemings.

William van Gulick fought like a lion; he stood alone with his standard-bearer and Philip van Hofstede, surrounded by thirty of the enemy, who standard-bearer of the Flemings; but as every arm which had been put forth to seize it had been severed by his sword. At this moment, Arthur de Mertelet, a Norman knight, sprang over the brook, with a considerable number of horsemen, and dashed at full speed to the aid of William van Gulick.

Their arrival crushed the hopes of the Flemings; for the number of the foe was now too great, and their superiority too manifest; and when the Norman saw William's banner, he charged to wards it with the speed of an arrow, and put his lance in rest to pierce the standard-bearer of the Flemings. He perceived the intention, dashed through the French foot soldiers to stay the course of De Mertelet. The shock of the meeting of the two knights was so impetuous, that the lance of each pierced the heart of his antagonist, and both died in the middle of the moment before their arrival, it seemed though a preternatural influence had suddenly cooled their rage; one would have thought each was leaning on the spear with all his weight, in order to thrust it deeper into the body of his antagonist; but this was but for a moment; De Mertelet's horse made a slight convulsive movement, and the corpses of both fell to the ground.

Messire John van Renesse, who commanded the right wing, seeing the danger of William van Gulick, left his position, and, with Breydel and his guides, fell back behind the line of battle on the rear of the French. Nothing could resist men like the butchers of Bruges; they exposed themselves to every weapon with naked breast, and before their death scorning every thing gave way. Their axes heaved the legs of the horses, or claved the shields of their falling riders. A moment after their arrival, the ground was so cleared that scarcely twenty Frenchmen remained behind the line of battle. Among them was Godfrey of Brabant, who blushed not to fight against those who were his brethren both by birth and by language. When John van Renesse espied him, he shouted to him: "Godfrey, Godfrey! your course is run—you shall die!"

"Apply your words to yourself," replied Godfrey, aiming at the head of Messire John a tremendous blow; but Van Renesse, with a dexterous and rapid movement of his sword from below, struck him so violently under the chin that he rolled out of his saddle to the ground. More than twenty butchers fell immediately upon him, and he received innumerable wounds, the last of which was mortal. Meanwhile Jan Breydel and some of his men had penetrated further and further amongst the enemy, and had fought long enough to gain the standard of Brabant; he regained his butchers, demanding his prize at every step, tearing the banner in pieces, and throwing it pole scornfully from him, he exclaimed: "Shame and dishonor to the traitors!"

thrown to the ground, and four several times did he rise again, still grasping his banner, though covered with wounds. William van Gulick led around and dead at his feet a large number of the French; and every fresh blow of his huge broadsword struck down a foe. At length, wearied, covered with wounds, and exhausted by loss of blood, he grew pale, and felt his strength failing him, filled with anger and vexation, he retired to the rear to refresh himself and rest awhile.

John de Viamynck, hisquire, loosed the plates of his armor and stripped him of his heavy mail, that he might breathe more freely. In the absence of William, the French had regained some of the ground they had lost, and the Flemings manifested a disposition to retreat. This threw Van Gulick into an agony of despair, and induced John de Viamynck to adopt a singular device, which bore witness in its results to the fame of his master's bravery.

He hastily put on the armor of Messire William, and threw himself into the thick of the enemy with the cry: "Give way—back—men of France! William van Gulick is here again!" He accompanied these words with a shower of well-directed blows, and struck a considerable number of the Flemings; but he was soon surrounded, and his death seemed certain. De Chatillon made most strenuous efforts to get possession of the great standard of Flanders; but, although Segher Louke, who bore it, had been many times thrown down, De Chatillon could not succeed in his attempt; he waved around it and urged on his men, and death his blows in every direction upon the three invincible Flemings. Doubtless those could not long have continued to defend themselves against such a cloud of foes; but they had previously made such good use of their weapons, that they stood surrounded and protected by a rampart of slain. Mad with rage and impatience, De Chatillon snatched a long spear from the hand of one of his horsemen, and dashed at full gallop towards Guy. He would not fallibly have slain the Count; for he occupied with so many enemies, he did not notice De Chatillon's approach; the spear seemed to be already piercing his neck between the helmet and the surcoat, when Adolf van Nieuwland swung his sword round with the rapidity of lightning, the spear flew in pieces and the life of his general was saved.

The same moment, and before De Chatillon had time to seize his sword again, Adolf sprang over the head of a slain man, and dealt the French knight so terrible a blow on the head, that his cheek, and the part of the helmet which covered it, were severed and fell to the ground. The blood streamed from his wound; still he persisted in defending himself; but two mighty blows from Adolf's sword hurled him from his saddle under the hoofs of the horses. Some Flemings drew him out, and having carried him to the rear, hewed him in pieces, taunting him the while with his merciless ferocity.

While this conflict was pending, Arnold van Oudenarde had come to the succour of the Flemings, and changed the fate of the battle. The men of Farnes, thus encouraged, retreated with them; and soon the French were thrown into hopeless disorder. Men and horses fell in such numbers, and the confusion of the foe was so great, that the Flemings deemed the battle won, and from the whole line poured forth a loud and exulting shout: "Victory! Victory! Flanders! the Lion! Who is France is false! strike all dead!" And over all the battle field raged the butchers, their arms, their bosoms, and their axes smeared with gore, their hair streaming wild, their features rendered undiscernible by mire and blood, and sweat, yet fixed in a grim expression of bitterest hatred of the French and intense enjoyment of the conflict.

While the first division of the French army was thus defeated and destroyed, the Seneschal d'Artois stood with the second division at a distance from the Flemish camp. As the front of the enemy was not extensive enough to admit of a simultaneous attack with his whole army, he had not thought it necessary to advance. He knew nothing of the fortunes of the battle, but concluded that his troops were certainly victorious; for otherwise, he thought, some of them would have retreated. In the meantime he sent Messire Louis de Clermont with four thousand Norman cavalry through the Neerland wood, to take the left wing of the Flemings in flank. De Clermont had the good fortune to find his ground on this side; he crossed the brook without losing a man, and fell suddenly on the rear of fresh troops, while they were scarcely able to keep De Chatillon's men in check, they found it impossible to offer any resistance. The first ranks were broken, and cut to pieces; the others were thrown into confusion, and all this part of the Flemish army gave way and retreated. The voice of the youthful Guy, conjuring them by the memory of their fatherland to stand firm, inspired them with courage enough; but this was of no avail; the violence of the attack was too great; and all that they could do, in answer to their general's appeal, was to make their retreat as slow and orderly as possible.

At this moment Guy received so violent a blow on his helmet, that he fell forward on the neck of his horse, and his sword dropped from his hand. In this position, stunned and giddy, he could no longer defend himself, and would certainly have perished had not Adolf come to his rescue. The young knight sprang in front of Guy, and valiantly that the Frenchmen were effectually prevented from striking the Count. In a short time his arm waxed weak and weary in this desperate conflict; his blows became ever slower and weaker; and the countless strokes that fell on his coat of mail made him feel his whole body bruised and swollen, and he was already on the point of taking a last farewell of the world; for he seemed to see death beckoning to him in the distance. In

the meantime Guy had been carried behind the line of battle, and had recovered from his wound; he now looked with anguish on the perilous position of his deliverer; and as he seized his sword, he was in a moment at his side, and fighting with renewed vigor. Many of the most valiant of the Flemings had hastened after him; and the French would have been compelled to retreat, had they not received fresh reinforcements by way of the Neerland woods. The intrepidity of the Flemings could not avail to check the advance of the enemy. The cry "Flanders! the Lion!" was answered by "Noel! Noel! the victory is ours! death to the rebels!"

The Flemings wavered, broke their ranks, and were thrown into inextricable disorder. The marvellous efforts of Guy failed to prevent their retreat; for there were at least ten horsemen to one Fleming, and the horses either trampled them down or drove them back with an irresistible impetus. Half of them fled before the advancing foe; great numbers were slain, and the remainder were so scattered, that they could offer no resistance to the horsemen, and were pursued to the Leyde where many of them were miserably drowned. On the banks of this river Guy continued to form a few of his men in tolerable order; but the numbers of the enemy were too disproportionate to great. The men of Farnes, although their ranks were utterly broken, fought on with a mute and steady desperation; the foam stood on their lips, the blood streamed over their bodies from numerous wounds; but their heroic valor was of no avail. Each of the horsemen already slain three or four of the horsemen; yet their numbers diminished moment by moment, while those of the French were continually increasing; and soon there remained but one hope—one only thought—to die with honor and avenged.

Guy beheld the destruction of his troops, and deemed the battle lost. He could have wept aloud for anguish; but there was no room for grief in his manly heart—a moody rage had taken entire possession of it. In conformity with his oath, he desired to live no longer, and spurred his horse into the very thick of the exulting enemy. Adolf van Nieuwland and Arnold van Oudenarde kept close to his side; so desperate was their onset, that the foe was appalled by their feats of valor, and the horsemen fell, on all sides, as if by magic, beneath their blows. Yet the Flemings were more courageous than all slain; the French continued their shouts of victory; for it seemed that nothing could extricate the remnant of Guy's division from their perilous position.

And now there appeared in the direction of Oudenarde, beyond the Gaver brook, an object that glowed brightly between the trees; it drew rapidly near, and soon two horsemen might be distinguished in full career towards the field of battle. One was evidently a noble knight, as the magnificence of his armour attested. His coat of mail, and all the steel that enveloped both himself and his horse, were covered with gold and shone with wonderful brilliancy. An enormous blue plume streamed behind him in the wind, the reins of his horse were covered with silver plates, and on his breast was a red cross, surmounted by the word "Flanders" flashing in silver letters from a black ground.

No knight in the field was so gorgeously arrayed as this unknown one; but what excited most attention was his unusual stature. He was at least a head above the tallest of the knights; and he was so powerfully built, in body and in limbs, that he might well have been taken for a son of the race of giants. The horse he rode was of a size and of a power proportioned to those of its rider. Large flakes of foam flew from the mouth of the noble beast, and his breath rolled in two dense clouds from his expanded nostrils. The knight carried no other weapon than a huge axe of steel, which contrasted strangely with the golden splendor of his armour.

The other horseman was a monk, very meagrely attired; his mail and helmet were so rusty, that they seemed streaked with red; this was Brother William van Saetinghe. In his monastery at Doest he had heard that at Oudenarde the Flemings were in conflict with the French; he went at once to the stable, took thence two horses, exchanged one for the rust eaten armour he wore, and spurred the other at his utmost speed towards the battle field. He too was extraordinarily strong and brave; a long sword gleamed in his grasp, and the flash of his dark eye showed that he knew right well how to wield it. He had just fallen in with the wondrous unknown knight; and as both were bent on the same errand, they had continued their ride together. The Flemings turned their eyes hopefully and joyfully towards the golden knight as he advanced in the distance. They could not distinguish the word "Flanders," and so knew not whether he was friend or foe; but in this their extremity they felt a hope that God had sent them one of His saints, to deliver them. And everything combined to strengthen their hopes—the gorgeous armour—the extraordinary form and stature—the glowing red cross on the breast of the unknown. Guy and Adolf, who were fighting surrounded by foes, looked at each other with beaming joy—they had recognised the golden knight. It seemed to them as though they heard the death doom of the French; so absolute was their confidence in the prowess and skill of the new warrior. They exchanged a look which said: "O happy chance! there is the Lion of Flanders!"

At length the golden knight came near; and before one could ask whom he came to aid, he fell with such impetuosity on the horsemen, and struck such fearful blows with his axe of steel, that the bewildered foe was smitten with a panic, and overthrew one another in their eagerness to escape from the dreaded strokes. Every thing fell before his crushing axe—behind him he left a clear space, like the wake of a sailing ship on the waters; and thus, carrying death before him, he reached

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