

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE

CHAPTER XVIII. CONTINUED.

The two maidens sat down exhausted, and without uttering a word. They looked at each other with unutterable sorrow; but their tears gradually lightened their grief, and hope returned into the hearts of both, they knew not how. Maria, who was older than Matilda, and more self-possessed in suffering, first broke the deep silence, and said:

"Why should we allow our hearts to be thus crushed by false imaginations? There is nothing to confirm the painful apprehensions which torment us; I feel sure that no harm has befallen Lord Robert, your father, and that my brother has already set out on his return to his father-land."

"Yet you have wept, Maria! Does one weep at the smiling expectation of a brother's return?"

"You are torturing yourself, noble damsel. O! anguish must have struck deep its roots in your heart ere you could cling with such passionate energy to the dark dreams which are overhauling you. Believe me, your father yet lives; and who can say how near his liberation is? Think of the joy you will feel when his voice, the very voice that rings so frightfully in your disturbed fancy, shall say to you, 'My chains are broken!' when you shall feel his warm kiss on your brow, and his loving embraces shall call forth again the roses upon your blanched cheek. Once more shall the fair castle of Wynandael open its gates to welcome you; Messire de Bethune will ascend the throne of his fathers, and then shall you tend him again with loving care; then you will remember no more the sorrows of the present, or remember them only as sorrows which you endured for your father's sake. Tell me now, Matilda, will you not admit one solitary ray of hope into your heart? Cannot these thoughts of joyful promise bring you any consolation?"

"At these words a sensible change came over Matilda; a gentle gladness beamed again in her eyes, and a sweet smile played on her lips."

"O Maria! she sighed, throwing her right arm around her friendly comforter, 'you cannot imagine what relief I feel, what happiness beyond hope you have poured, like a healing balm, into my heart! So may the angel of the Lord minister comfort to you in your last hour! With what soothing words has friendship endowed you, O my sister!'"

"Your sister!" repeated Maria. "This name becomes not your hand-maiden, noble damsel; it is a sufficient reward to me that I have been enabled to dispel the gloom of death from your soul."

"Accept this title, my beloved Maria! I love you so tenderly. And has not your noble brother Adolf been brought up with me? Has not my father given him to me as a brother? Yes, we belong to one family. Alas! I pray the living night, that the holy angels may shield Adolf on his dangerous journey. How can you comfort me, yet cheer me? But what do I hear? Can my prayer have been answered? Yes, yes, that is our beloved brother!"

She stretched forth her arm, and remained standing motionless, pointing towards the street. She stood like a marble statue, and seemed to listen eagerly to a distant sound. Maria was terrified; she thought the maiden had lost her senses. As she was about to reply, she heard the echo of a horse's hoofs in the street; and then the meaning of Matilda's words flashed upon her. The same hope filled her breast, and she felt her heart beat with redoubled energy.

After both had listened awhile in silence, the noise suddenly ceased; and already was the glad hope deserting their hearts, when the door of the chamber was violently thrown open.

more, and thought that she was left alone in that dreadful solitude. But soon she felt a hand which pressed hers; she heard a gentle voice, which spoke to her in sorrow and in sympathy: "Matilda! Matilda! O my hapless sister!"

She looked up, and saw Adolf standing before her, weeping. The tears fell thick and fast from his eyes, and his look expressed the warmest affection, the profoundest compassion. "I am ugly; is it not so, Adolf?" she sighed forth. "You are shocked at me; you will no more love me as in days that are past?"

The knight trembled at these words; he looked at the maiden with a strange and significant expression, and replied: "Matilda, can you entertain a doubt of my affection? O, then, you wrong me much. You are, indeed, changed. What illness, what sufferings have brought you so low, that the roses have thus withered on your cheek? I have wept, and so have been alarmed indeed; but it is from sympathy and compassion, from the deep anguish which your hard lot has caused me. Ever, ever will I remain your brother, Matilda! I can comfort you now with joyful tidings; I can heal your sorrows with a message of gladness."

Gradually a feeling of joy and consolation stole into the maiden's heart. Adolf's voice exercised a wondrous power over her, and she replied, with cheerful animation: "Good tidings, do you say, Adolf? Good tidings of my father? O speak, speak them, my friend!"

With these words, she drew two chairs near her couch, and motioned to Maria and her brother to sit down upon them. Adolf reached forth one hand to Matilda, the other to his beloved sister; and so he sat between the two maidens, as an angel of consolation, on whose words one lingered as on those of some holy hymn.

"Rejoice, Matilda, and thank God for His goodness. Your father returned to Bourges; in sadness, indeed, but in safety and health. No one but the old chatelain and Diederik die Vos know the secret of his temporary liberation. He is already free even in his captivity; for his guards have become his warmest friends."

"But should the evil-minded Joanna desire to avenge on him the insult which has been offered to France, who will then shield him from the executioner? You are no longer with him, my noble friend!"

"Listen, Matilda. The guardians of the castle of Bourges are old warriors, who, by reason of their wounds, are no longer equal to active warfare. Most of them witnessed the heroic deeds of the Lion of Flanders at Beneventum. You cannot imagine with what love, with what admiration, they regard him at whose name the armies of France have so often trembled. Were Robert to seek to escape without the permission of the castellan, their master, doubtless they would prevent him. But I assure you—and I know well the noble souls of those warriors, who have grown grey beneath their coats of mail—that they would shed their last drop of blood for him whom they revere, were but a hair of his head threatened. Fear not, then; the life of your father is assured; and, but for the sorrow he felt on account of your sad fate, he would have borne his captivity in patience."

"You bring me such good tidings, my friend—your words sink so consolingly into my relieved heart—that I seem to drink in fresh life from your smile. Speak on still, if it be only that I may hear the accents of your voice."

"And yet fairer hopes has the Lion given me for you, Matilda. It may be the deliverance of your father is very near at hand; it may be that you will very soon be with him; and all your dear relations, in the beautiful Wynandael."

"What are you saying, Adolf? It is your friendship that prompts these words; but do not mock me with hope of a bliss that is impossible!"

"Be not thus unbelieving, Matilda. Listen to the grounds of this joyful hope. You know that Charles de Valois, that noblest of Frenchmen, has drawn the bravest of the knights after him into Italy. He has not forgotten at the court of Rome that he is the guiltless cause of the captivity of your relatives. It has been a bitter thought to him, that he himself, like a traitor, had delivered his friend and companion in arms, the Lion of Flanders, into the hands of his enemies; and he has been striving, in every possible way, to effect his liberation. Ambassadors have been already sent from Pope Boniface to King Philip the Fair, and he demanded of him, with urgency, the release of your father, and of all your relatives. The Holy Father is sparing no effort to restore to Flanders its rightful prince; and the court of France seems already inclined to concede. Let us embrace this consoling hope, my dear friend."

"Yes, indeed, Adolf, gladly might we surrender ourselves to these consoling thoughts; but why should we flatter ourselves with hopes so deceitful? Will not the king of France avenge his fallen soldiers? Will not De Chatillon, our most rancorous enemy, goad on his terrible niece Joanna? Think, then, Adolf, what pangs cannot this bloodthirsty woman imagine, to avenge on us the bravery of the Flemings?"

Matilda all the information in his power, and had filled her heart with comfort, he turned with brotherly love to his sister, and held with her a soothing discourse, which attuned them all to gladness and serenity. Matilda forgot her bygone sufferings; she breathed freely and with courage, and the veins which were spread over her cheeks like delicate network, were filled with warmer blood.

Suddenly they heard a loud tumult in the street; a thousand voices rang from the roofs of the houses, and the jubilant shouts of the crowd were mingled in indistinguishable confusion; only at intervals was the cry intelligible amidst the joyous clapping of hands: "Flanders, the Lion, hail to our Count!"

Adolf and the two maidens had drawn near to the window; they saw the countless heads of the crowds hastening to the market place. Women and children swelled the procession, which passed before the curious maiden like a flowery sea. In another instant, resounded the tramp of a multitude of horses, so that they were confirmed in their conjecture that a troop of cavalry had entered Bruges. While they were discussing the probable reasons of this popular commotion, a servant announced the arrival of a messenger, who craved an audience from the Count, and was immediately on receiving permission.

It was a youthful page, a delicate boy, whose features bore a peculiar expression of innocence and truthfulness; he was clothed in black and blue silk, set off with manifold adornments. As he drew near to the ladies, he respectfully uncovered his head, and made low obeisance without speaking a word.

"What good tidings do you bring us, dear boy?" asked Matilda graciously. The page raised his head, and replied with his gentle voice: "For the most illustrious daughter of the Lion, our Count, I bring a message from my lord and master Guy, who has just entered the city with five hundred horsemen. He sends his greeting to his fair niece, Matilda de Bethune, and will in a few moments, express his deep affection to her in person. This is the message, noble maiden, which I was charged to deliver to you."

And with these words he made a reverential bow, and disappeared at the door. In fulfilment of the promise which he made to Deconinck in the wood, near the ruins of Nieuwenhove, the young Guy had arrived with the promised succours from Namur. He had taken Castle Wynandael on his way, and had cut the French garrison to the sword. He had razed to the ground the Castle of Systeule, because the castellan was a sworn Lizard, and had offered the French a refuge within its walls. The victorious entry of Guy filled the citizens of Bruges with exulting joy, and in every street resounded the cry: "Hail to our Count Flanders! the Lion!"

When the young general with his suite had reached the Friday market place, the masters of the guilds presented him with the keys of the city; and he was thus proclaimed Count of the home of Nieuwland, he bestowed his afflicted niece, and reunited with joy how he had driven the aliens from their beloved Wynandael. A costly banquet awaited them, prepared by Maria in honour of her brother's return. They drank the wine of joy for the liberation of the enslaved Flemings, and consecrated a tear to the mournful memory of the poisoned Philippa.

CHAPTER XIX.

After the fearful night in which the blood of the French had flowed in such abundant streams, De Chatillon, Jan van Gistel, and the few others who had escaped death, were received within the home of Nieuwland, trusting in peaceful security to the strength of the castle; for on this place the French counted most confidently, as its fortifications were really unassailable. De Chatillon, a prey to hopeless despair on account of his defeat, was burning with the desire of vengeance. He had already drawn some small companies of mercenaries from the other cities of Courtrai, in order still further to protect it in the event of an attack, and he intrusted the command of these troops to the castellan Van Lens, a Fleming. Using the utmost despatch, he visited the other frontier cities, placed within them the troops that yet remained to him in Picardy, gave the command of Lisle to the chancelier, Pierre Flotte, and hastened to France, to the court of Philip at Paris, where the tidings of the defeat of his army had already preceded him.

Philip the Fair received the governor-general of Flanders with marked displeasure, and reproached him angrily with the tyrannical conduct which had been the cause of the disaster. De Chatillon would have undoubtedly fallen into disgrace, had not Queen Joanna, who, as we know, hated the Flemings and exulted in their oppression, found means to exculpate her uncle so dexterously, that Philip at length began to believe that he deserved thanks for the success of the king. And thus the whole wrath of the king was again turned back on the Flemings, and he swore that he would exact from them a dire revenge.

An army of twenty thousand men had been already assembled at Paris, in order to deliver the kingdom of Majorca from the hand of the infidel; and these were the troops of whose gathering Robert de Bethune had spoken to the lords of Flanders. They might easily have smothered this host upon Flanders; but Philipp would run no risk of defeat, and resolved therefore to postpone his vengeance a short time in order to collect more soldiers.

A proclamation was borne throughout France by swift messengers; the great vassals of the kingdom were informed how the Flemings had put to death seven thousand Frenchmen; and that the king summoned them to Paris with all the troops at their command, and with the utmost speed, in order to avenge the insult. In those times warfare and feats of arms were the sole occupation of the nobles, and they exulted at the very mention of battle; so we need not wonder that this appeal met an immediate and hearty response. From every quarter, from every castle of mighty France, poured the great feudatories of the crown with their vassals; and in a very short time the French army counted more than fifty thousand men.

After the Lion of Flanders and Charles de Valois, Robert d'Artois was the ablest warrior that Europe boasted at that time; and indeed his great and varied experiences, gained in numerous expeditions, gave him, in some respects an advantage over these two commanders. For he had spent his youth in never laid aside his armour; his hair had literally grown grey beneath the helmet. The unrelenting hatred with which he regarded the Flemings, who had slain his only son at Furnes, de termined the queen to give him the chief command of the whole army; and in that post he was better qualified for this honourable post than Robert d'Artois.

Want of money, and the daily arrival of the more distant vassals of the crown, retarded for some time the departure of the host. The excessive ardour and precipitation with which the French nobles had so often proved prejudicial to them, and they had learnt at such heavy cost that prudence and foresight are important elements of strength, that they resolved on this occasion to take every precaution, and proceed with the greatest deliberation.

The French queen sent for Robert d'Artois, and urged him to chastise the Flemings with the utmost cruelty. In the mean time, the Flemings had greatly increased their army. The illustrious Master John Borlart had excited the citizens of Ghent to rise and drive out of their city the French garrison; and seven hundred were slain in this insurrection. Oudenarde and several other cities effected their freedom in like manner; so that the enemy retained possession only of a few fortified places, in which the flying Frenchmen found refuge. William van Gulick, the priest, came from Germany to Bruges with a numerous troop of archers, and as soon as Master John Borlart had assembled four hundred Zealanders, they united their forces, and accompanied by a crowd of volunteers, moved towards Cassel, in order to fall upon and expel the French garrison. This city was exceedingly well fortified, so that it could not be taken by surprise. William van Gulick and his men had no objection to the citizens; but the French kept so vigilant a guard that they could not make the slightest movement; so that Master William found himself compelled to begin a regular siege, and await the arrival of the necessary stores and battering machines.

The youthful Guy had received with acclamations in all the most important cities of West Flanders, his presence everywhere infused courage, and inspired every man with a burning ardour to defend his fatherland. Adolf van Nieuwland had also visited the lesser towns, in order to summon together all who were capable of bearing arms.

In Courtrai there lay about three thousand French under the command of the Count of Flanders. Instead of endeavoring to win the affection of the people by kindness, they exhausted their patience by continued acts of depredation and petty tyranny. Encouraged by the example of the other cities, the inhabitants rose suddenly against the French, and slew more than half of them; the remainder made their escape to the citadel, which they hastily fortified in the best way they could. There they revenged themselves by shooting burning arrows into the city; so that many of its finest buildings, especially those surrounding the market-place and the Beguinage, became a prey to the flames. The citizens themselves invested the citadel with their whole forces; but they did not number sufficiently strong to be able to expel the French. Filled with the mournful apprehension that their city would soon be entirely destroyed by fire, they sent messengers to Bruges with an earnest request to the young Count Guy for aid.

The messenger reached Guy in Bruges on the 5th of July, 1302, and made him acquainted with the melancholy condition of the city, and its urgent need of aid. The Count was deeply moved by the account they gave, and determined to hasten with all delay to the hapless city. As William van Gulick had taken all the troops within him to Cassel, Guy had no other resource than to call together the guildsmen. He caused the Deans to be immediately summoned to the upper hall of the prince's castle, and betook himself thither with the few knights who were about him. An hour later, all the Deans, thirty in number, were assembled, and awaited, with uncovered heads and in silence, the subject to be proposed for their liberation. Deconinck and Breydel, as leaders of the most powerful guilds occupied the foremost place. Count Guy sat in a rich arm-chair at the upper end of the hall; around him stood Messire John van Lichterwede and Messire van Heyne, both peers of the realm; Messire van Gavem, whose father had been slain by the French at Furnes; Messire van Bornhem, a knight templar; Robert van Leunereghem; Baldwin van Raveshoet; Ivo van Belleghem; Henry, Lord of

Lonchyn, in Luxemburg; Gorys van Gutzonhove and Jan van Cuyck of Brabant; Peter and Louis van Lichterwede; Peter and Louis Goethals of Ghent; and Henry van Peterabem. Adolf van Nieuwland was standing on the right hand of the Count, and engaged in confidential conversation with him.

In the centre of the vacant space, between the Deans and the knights, stood the herald of Courtrai. As soon as each had taken his place, Guy commanded him to repeat his tidings in presence of the Deans; and the herald obeyed, and began: "The good citizens of Courtrai greet you by me, noble lords, and inform you that they have driven the French from their city, and that five hundred of them have bitten the dust. But now the city is in the greatest straits. The traitor van Lens has fallen back on the citadel, and daily discharges burning arrows upon the houses; so that the fairest portion of the city is a ready reduced to ashes. Messire Arnold van Oudenarde has brought them some succour, yet is the number of the enemy too great. In this their need and distress, they beseech the Count Guy in particular, a good citizen of Courtrai in general, to send them aid; and they hope that you will not delay a single day the rescue of your distressed brothers. Such is the message which the good citizens of Courtrai send to you by my mouth."

"You have heard, Deans," said Guy, "that one of our noblest cities is in peril of utter destruction; I do not think that the cry of distress from your brothers of Courtrai will fall in vain on your ears. The matter demands haste; your aid alone can deliver them from their danger; therefore I pray you all instantly to summon your guilds to arms. How long time do you require to prepare your comrades to set forth?"

The Deans of the Clothworkers replied: "This afternoon, some illustrious Count, four thousand Clothworkers will stand fast armed on the Friday Market-place; I will lead them whithersoever you command."

"And you, Master Breydel, you will be there also?"

Breydel advanced proudly, and replied: "Your servant, Breydel, will place at your disposition, my Lord Count, not less than eight thousand of his craftsmen."

"A cry of astonishment ran along the circle of knights, 'Eight thousand!' said they, all at once. 'Yes, truly, messires,' continued the Dean of the Butchers; 'eight thousand men and more. All the guilds of Bruges, except that of the clothworkers, have elected me their captain; and God knows how I can repay this honor. This very afternoon, if you will it so, the Friday Market-place shall be filled with your trusty towns men; and I can assure you that in my butcher's shop you shall find a thousand men in your host; the sooner the better, noble Count; our axes are beginning to rust."

"Master Breydel," said Guy, "you are a brave and a worthy vassal of my father. The land in which such men live can never long remain enslaved. I thank you for your hearty good-will. A smile of satisfaction showed how much pleasure Breydel's words had given to the circle of knights; but the Dean turned back again, and whispered to Deconinck's ear; I pray you, master, be not angry with me for speaking thus to the Count. You are and will ever be my superior; for without your counsel I should do but little good. My words have not caused you displeasure?"

The Dean of the Clothworkers pressed Breydel's hand in sign of friendship and perfect accord. "Master Deconinck," inquired Guy, "have you made known to the guilds my former request? Will the requisite gold be provided for me?"

"The guilds of Bruges place all their wealth at your disposal, noble Count," was the answer. "If you will but send some of your servants with a command in writing to the Guildhall, as many marks of silver will be delivered to them as you may require. The guilds beseech you not to spare them; freedom can never cost them too dear."

Just as Guy was about to acknowledge the good will and confidence of the citizens with words of gratitude, the door of the hall was opened, and every eye was fixed with astonishment on a monk, who entered boldly and uninvited, and drew near to the Dean. A robe of thick brown cloth was concealed his face, and so he concealed his features as to render it impossible to recognize him. He seemed very old; for his body was bent, and a long beard floated on his breast. With hasty and furtive glances, he regarded the knights who were present; and his keen eye seemed to pierce the lowest depth of their hearts. Adolf van Nieuwland recognized in him the same monk who had brought him the letter of Robert de Bethune, and was about to greet him with a loud voice; but the gestures of the monk were so extraordinary, that the words died away on the lips of the young man. All who were present began to kindle with anger; the daring looks which the unknown bent on them were such as they would not willingly endure; yet they gave no indication of their displeasure, for they saw that the riddle would soon be solved.

When the monk had well scrutinized each of those who were present, he loosened his loins, threw his robe and his hood on the ground, and remained standing in the middle of the hall. He raised his head proudly; he was a man of about thirty years of age, tall and of noble frame; he looked round upon the knights as though he said, Do you recognize me? The answer did not come quickly enough, and he cried out: "You are astonished, messires, to find a fox under this coat; yet he has lain concealed in it for two years."

"Then you may thank God that I have risen again," continued Diederik. "No, I was not dead; our captive brother and Adolph van Nieuwland can bear testimony to that. I have been able to console all; for as an itinerant priest I had access to the prisons; and they God forgive me the vile Latin I have uttered. Yes, you may laugh, messires, but I have spoken Latin, I bring you, moreover, news from all our hapless countrymen from their relatives and friends."

Some of the knights wished to make more particular inquiry concerning the fate of the prisoners; but he put them aside, and continued: "For God's sake cease these questions; I have far more important tidings to announce to you. Hear, and tremble not; for I bring you evil news. You have shaken off the yoke, and fought and won the battle of your freedom; I grieve that I could not share this joy with you. Honor to you, brave knights and trusty citizens; honor to you that have freed your fatherland. I assure you that if the Flemings do not wear new chains within fourteen days, not all the devils in hell will be able to rob them of their liberty; but the new chains that are preparing make me anxious and sad."

"Explain yourself more clearly, Messire Diederik," cried Guy; "explain your meaning, and do not torture us with enigmatical hints."

"Well, then, I tell you plainly, that sixty-two thousand Frenchmen are encamped before Lille."

"Sixty-two thousand!" repeated the knights, gazing in alarm on one another. "Sixty-two thousand!" echoed Breydel, rubbing his hands for joy; "what a fine flock!"

Deconinck's head sank on his breast, and he was lost in deep thought. Soon, however, he had estimated the greatness of the danger, and considered the means to avert it. "I assure you, messires," continued Diederik die Vos, "that they number more than thirty-two thousand horse, and at least many of our nobles looked and burn as though they were hereby rendering an acceptable service to heaven."

"Are these evil tidings well founded?" asked Guy anxiously; "has not he who told you this deceived you, Messire Diederik?"

"No, noble Count, I saw it with my own eyes; and last evening I ate my supper in the tent of the Sergeant Robert d'Artois. He swore on his honor, in my presence, that the last Fleming should die by his hand. Consider now what it behoves you to do. For myself, I shall buckle on my armour without delay; and if I stand alone against these two-and-sixty-thousand accursed Frenchmen, I will not yield an inch of ground; I, at least, will no longer witness the slavery of Flanders!"

Jan Breydel could not keep himself still a moment; his feet were in perpetual motion, and he swung his arms in angry impatience. Could he but dare to speak; but reverence for the lords who stood around restrained him. Guy and the other nobles looked at one another in helpless dismay. Two and thirty thousand well equipped and warlike horsemen! It was altogether impossible that they could hope to offer a successful resistance to a force like this. In the Flemish army there were only the five hundred horsemen of Namur, whom Guy had brought with him; and what could he do with all against the frightful number of the foe?

"What is to be done?" asked Guy. "Speak; how is our fatherland to be delivered?"

Some were of opinion that they should throw themselves into Bruges, and there await the dispersion of the French army from want of provisions. Others wished to be let loose upon the enemy, and to fall upon them that very night. Many projects were discussed, of which the greater part were rejected as dishonourable, and the remainder as impracticable.

Deconinck stood with his head still bowed in deep thought; he had, indeed, every proposition that was made, but the attention he gave did not hinder the course of his own reflections. At last Guy addressed him, and asked what way of escape he saw from this critical position. "Noble Count," replied Deconinck raising his head, "were I commander-in-chief, I should begin operations this I should march with all speed with the guildsmen of Bruges upon Courtrai, in order to expel thence the castellan Van Lens. That fortress would no longer be a stronghold and place of refuge for the French, and we should have a secure shelter for our women and children, as well as for our vines; for the citadel of Courtrai is strong, while Bruges, in its present condition, could not stand a siege, but might easily be

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