

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE. CHAPTER XIV. CONTINUED.

The black knight did not seem to share the opinions expressed by the last speaker, to judge at least by the significant movements of his head...

"Noble sirs!" he began. At the first sound of his voice all present started, and each looked hastily round upon the speaker, as if to see whether he could read his own thought upon his neighbor's countenance.

"Oh, blessed hour! my brother! my dearest brother! his voice penetrates my inmost heart!" Thus saying, he quickly plucked the helmet from the head of the disguised knight, while he clasped him in his arms with impetuous delight.

"My unhappy brother," continued Guy, "what sufferings have been yours! how deeply have I mourned for you! but now, O happy moment! now, I can once more embrace you; you have broken your chains, and Flanders has regained her Count. Bear with my tears; it is for you they flow, as I think of all you have endured. The Lord be thanked for this unlooked-for happiness!"

Robert pressed the young knight affectionately to his heart; then, after raising and embracing his other brother, John of Namur, he thus spoke: "There are good and weighty reasons, noble sirs, why I should preserve my incognito for the present; nevertheless, the decision to which you have just come has rendered it a still more imperative duty for me to declare myself, that I may, if possible, induce you to reconsider your measures. You must know, then, that Philip of France has summoned all the great feudatories of the crown along with their vassals, to wage war against the Moors. But as the sole ostensible motive of this expedition is to reinstate the King of Majorca in his dominions, it seems certain that the real object of the king in collecting so numerous an army is the maintenance of his dominion in Flanders. The time of assembly is appointed for the close of June; so that one month more, and our enemy will have seventy thousand men in the field. Consider, therefore, whether it is not advisable that the day of our liberation should anticipate his preparations, lest afterwards we find it too late. Remember, however, that I am but giving you information and advice; I lay no commands upon you, for to-morrow I must return to my prison."

There could be no difference of opinion as to the importance of this intelligence; it was therefore unanimously agreed that the utmost expedition was necessary, and that the plan of operations must be modified accordingly. It was decided that all should proceed immediately to co-operate with Deconinck at Damme, taking with them such forces as they could get together on the spur of the occasion. The young Guy, as, in Robert's absence the next representative of the House of Namur, was to take the chief command of the army. William of Juliers, declining the office, as incompatible with his ecclesiastical character, and John of Namur being unable personally to join the Flemings, as his presence at home at this juncture was indispensable for the defense of his own territories. The latter, however, undertook to furnish a considerable contingent of men.

The nobles now separated, and Robert was left alone with his two brothers, his cousin William, and the Deas of the Cloth workers. "O Guy!" he began, in a tone of the deepest grief, "O John! I bring you tidings so terrible, that my tongue can hardly find words to utter them, and the mere thought of them blinds my eyes with tears. You know how basely Queen Joanna threw our poor Philippa into prison; how for six long years the unhappy maiden sighed in the dungeon of the Louvre, far from all she loved. Doubtless you think that she still lives, and continue to pray to God for her release. Alas! your prayers are in vain; my poor sister has been poisoned, and her body cast into the Seine."

"Let not your grief thus carry you away, my fair cousin," interposed William; "mourn for your sister, pray for her soul's repose, but let your sword be drawn only for the freedom of our country. Blood cannot bring the jealous grave to restore its victims."

matters of serious import to communicate to you. Let your attendants wait for you here."

Robert now related to them the wonderful manner in which he had rescued his daughter from the French soldiers, and all the anxiety and anguish which had undergone within the rains of Nieuwenhovene. On entering the chamber where Matilda was lying, they found her to all appearance in a profound and peaceful slumber, her cheeks white as alabaster, and her breathing so imperceptible that she might almost have been taken for a corpse. Great was the emotion of the knights at the sight of the maiden with her disordered and blood-stained dress. Filled with sorrowful compassion, they stood with hands clasped tightly together, but without uttering a word; for the physician's finger, anxiously pressed upon his lips, had warned them that the most perfect silence was necessary for the welfare of his patient.

Guy was not, however, able altogether to repress his feelings. "Can that be the noble daughter of the Lion? but she looks almost dead in agony of grief he threw himself upon his brother's bosom. The physician now motioned to the knights to withdraw from the chamber, and then at last he uncovered his lips: "The young lady," he said "has recovered her senses; but she still suffers greatly from weakness and exhaustion. She woke up in your absence, and recognizing Master Breydel, who stood by, she asked him many questions, as though seeking to collect her ideas. He comforted her with the assurance that she should soon see her father; and as he had no other news, it is very unadvisable to disappoint her. I strongly recommend you not to leave her. Meanwhile, no time should be lost in procuring her a change of clothes and a more fitting resting-place."

Count Robert having thrown aside his incognito unwillingly, and solely under the pressure of necessity, was still anxious to restrict the knowledge of his presence within the narrowest possible circle; he therefore made no reply for the moment to the physician's recommendations, but returning with his companions to Matilda's side, sat gazing in silent sorrow upon the pale and seemingly lifeless form of his child. Soon her lips began to move, and she uttered from time to time half-audible sounds. Presently she drew a deeper breath; and twice the sweet word "father," distinctly articulated, struck the listening ear of the Count. A long kiss imprinted upon the pale lips expressed the parent's delight, and hastened the maiden's awakening; her blood seemed again to flow, the color returned to her lips, and began even faintly to tinge her cheeks, while her eyes opened to the light with a soft and cherishing smile.

It would be impossible to describe the expression of the maiden's countenance at the sight which met her returning consciousness; she did not speak, but raised her arms as though to throw them about her father's neck, who, in his turn, bent over to meet her fond embrace. Yet her manner of greeting him was not such as he expected; with fondling tenderness she pressed both her hands over his face, and then gently stroked his cheeks for the moment father and daughter seemed to be lost in one absorbing dream of happiness. Nor were the bystanders, in their measure, less affected by the moving spectacle; they looked on in profound silence, and cautiously suppressing every sound or movement that might disturb a scene of almost solemn interest. It was curious, however, to observe how differently the several persons gave expression to their feelings. John of Namur, who had the most command over himself, stood gazing steadily before him, his hands, the priest, with bended knees and folded hands, sought composure in prayer; while, to judge from their varying gestures, and the changeful working of their countenances, Sir Guy and Jan Breydel seemed to be sprayed alternately by fierce desires of vengeance and the tenderest emotions of sympathy. Deconinck, usually so cold in appearance, was now the most deeply moved of all; a stream of tears flowed from under the hand which his eyes were screened. No living heart in Flanders beat more warmly for his honored lord than that of the patriotic Clothworker of Bruges; all that belonged to the greatness of his fatherland was holy in the eyes of this noble citizen.

At last Matilda awoke from her trance-like contemplation, clasped her father in her arms, and with a faint voice gave utterance to her feelings in words; to which he, on his part, in tones of heartfelt joy, mingled however with sorrow, as ardently responded.

"Sir Guy now approached to welcome his niece. "Ha!" she exclaimed, but still without losing her hold of her father, "what is that I see! my dear uncle Guy here, weeping over me! and my cousin William there on his knees, praying for my uncle John of Namur! Aro ve, then, at Wynaendael?" "My dear unhappy niece," replied Guy, "my heart is ready to break to behold you thus; let me too embrace you, it will be some alleviation to my grief; and he tenderly drew her from her father's arms into his own. Then, somewhat raising her voice, she said: "Come, my good cousin of Juliers, do you too give me a kiss; and you too, my kind uncle John."

"Thus, as if once more within the bosom of her family, she seemed to forget her sorrows for a moment, and to catch a passing gleam of her childhood-like happiness. But when William of Juliers approached, she regarded him with astonishment from head to foot, and exclaimed: "Why, how is this, cousin William? You, a servant of God, in harness, and with sword by your side! I, the jealous grave to restore its victims."

"My brothers," interrupted Robert, "and you, my cousin, be pleased to follow me; I will lead you to my poor child Matilda. She is not far from hence, and on the way I have other

little distance from the couch, participated in the general joy. Deeply grateful for the faithful affection they had exhibited towards her, Matilda again drew her father's head to her bosom, and whispered in his ear: "Will you promise me one thing, my dear father?" "What is it my child? It will be a delight to me to fulfil any wish of yours."

"Well, then, forget not, I pray you, to reward these two good and faithful subjects according to their deserts. Daily have they risked their lives in the cause of our country and our house."

"Your desire shall be accomplished, my child. But loose your arms for a moment from my neck," he added, "that I may speak with your uncle Guy."

The two left the chamber together; and when they had reached a convenient spot, the Count said: "My brother, it is fitting that fidelity and affection such as these two good citizens have shown should not be allowed to pass unrewarded; and I am about to charge you not to neglect my wishes in their regard. Remember, then, that it is my desire, that upon the first suitable occasion, with the standard of our house unfurled, and in presence of the guilds drawn up under arms, and in full armor, you confer the honor of knighthood upon Master Deconinck and Jan Breydel, and all my knights in the name of our country which confers the best patent of nobility. Keep this command secret until the time arrives for performing it. And now let us rejoin the rest; for it is high time that I should be gone."

The Count returned to the chamber, and Robert, approaching his daughter, took her hand in his. "My child," he said, "you know by what means I have obtained this temporary freedom; a generous friend is risking his life by taking my place this while. Strive, like me, to bear with patience and—"

"I know too well what you would say," she interrupted; "you are about to leave me!" "You have said it, my noble child! I must return to my prison. I have pledged my faith and honor to remain only one day in Flanders. But weep not, these evil days will soon be over."

"I will not weep—that were a grievous sin. I give thanks to God for his consolation which He has sent me, and will endeavor to deserve a renewal of such happiness by prayer and patience. Go, my father; one kiss more, and may all the holy angels be with you on your way!" "Deane," said Robert, turning to the two citizens, "to you I intrust the command of the men of Bruges; to Master Deconinck especially, as principal leader of the forces. But first, I pray you to procure the services of some good and trusty tire woman for my daughter, and provide her with other clothing. Take her with you hence, and defend her from all wrong; in your charge I commit her, to be cared for as becomes the blood from which the popular fury, either in open fray or by secret assassination. There, too, were the towers of Male, the fire still smouldering in its walls, and its stones still reeking with the Frenchmen's blood."

The fountain head of this stream of disaffection was evidently Bruges; there it was that the spirit of revolt had first displayed itself, and thence it had spread over the whole land of Flanders. Breydel and Deconinck were the two heads of the dragon which thus obstinately refused to crouch under the sceptre of King Philip. All this considered, Deconinck resolved on a vigorous demonstration, which should stifle, once for all, the liberties of Flanders in the blood of all her refractory. Drawing together in all haste seventeen hundred men-at-arms out of Hainault, Picardy, and French Flanders, he joined to them a large body of infantry; and thus, in complete battle-array, marched upon Bruges. Fully determined to take summary vengeance on the patriots, he carried with him several large casks, containing the ropes with which he designed to hang Deconinck, Breydel, and such as supported them, from the windows of their own houses. His expedition, meanwhile, was kept a profound secret from all in the city, with the sole exception of the governor, as a precaution against any defensive measures which the Clawards might adopt.

It was on the 13th of May, 1302, at 9 o'clock in the morning, that the French force entered the city, with the governor general at their head. Stern and threatening was the aspect of Deconinck, as he rode along the streets, while on his face the citizens were oppressed with painful anxiety, foreboding, as they could not but do, a part at least of the fate which was awaiting them. The Clawards might easily be recognized by their troubled countenances and downcast bearing; still they did not apprehend much beyond a rigorous enforcement of the capitation tax, and a general increase of severity.

The Liliards had joined the garrison, and altogether with the latter stood drawn up under arms upon the Friday's market-place. To them the governor-general's arrival was a matter of rejoicing, for from him they looked to obtain retaliation for the contempt and abhorrence with which they were regarded by the Clawards; and as he approached, loud and repeated cries of "France! France! long live king Philip and our noble governor!" resounded from their ranks.

Attracted by curiosity, the people had flocked together from every quarter of the city, and now occupied in crowds the whole neighbourhood of the market-place. Every countenance bore an expression of the deepest fear and anxiety; mothers pressed their children closer to their breasts, and from many eyes looked the unconscious tears. But while all were terrified at the vengeance which seemed ready to descend upon their heads, not a single word of greeting was raised for France or her representative. Powerless, in

with this oppression, the citizens with one accord ceased to expose their goods for sale, and the French could no longer procure provisions even for ready money. Not a loaf of bread, not a piece of meat, was to be had; all were hidden away under ground, out of the way of the enemy's search. Before four days were over, the garrison was in such distress for food, that foraging parties were sent to scour the neighboring country in quest of supplies. Luckily for them, the deficiency was in part provided for by the care of their Liliard friends; but notwithstanding their assistance, a grievous scarcity reigned within the gates. All the houses of the Clawards were shut up, all business of sale and purchase were at an end; the whole city seemed asleep, with the exception of the cowardly Liliards and the violent and restless soldiers. The working people, being deprived of all employment, could no longer pay their assessments, and were obliged to lurk about in order to conceal themselves from Van Gistel's requisitions. On Saturdays, when the tax-gatherers went round for the silver penny, they found no one at home; it was the people of Bruges that had abandoned their city. Many of the guildsmen made representations to Van Gistel that, inasmuch as they were earning nothing, they were unable to pay the dues; but the unattractive Fleming turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances, and proceeded to levy the arrears by force. A great number of the citizens were then cast into prison; some—for resisting, or for making public complaint—were even put to death.

Messire de Mortenay, the French governor of the city and commander of the garrison, more merciful than the Flemish tax-gatherer, when he perceived the extremity to which the people were reduced, would gladly have diminished the burdens which pressed so heavily upon them; and with this view sent an account of the alarming and distressing state of things to his superior, De Chastillon, then at Courtrai, requesting his authority for the abolition of the obnoxious tax. Van Gistel, however, well aware that his countrymen cried shame upon him as an apostate, and, like every apostate, hating those whom he had betrayed, seized the opportunity to urge De Chastillon to increased severity. He painted the rebellious spirit of the men of Bruges in the blackest colors, and exhorted him to chastisement on their headstrong obstinacy; representing that their alleged inability to procure employment was a mere pretence, and that they wilfully abstained from work in order that they might have a plausible pretext for refusing payment of the tax.

De Chastillon's words, and the intelligence exceeded all bounds. Every thing he had done for carrying out the king's commands seemed to have been without result; and the Flemish people were unsubdued, and to all appearance still indomitable. In all the towns of Flanders tumults were every day occurring; every where hatred of the French name began to display itself more publicly; and not at Bruges only, but in other places, the servants of King Philip frequently fell victims to the popular fury, either in open fray or by secret assassination. There, too, were the towers of Male, the fire still smouldering in its walls, and its stones still reeking with the Frenchmen's blood.

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deed they were for the present; but hatred against their oppressors burned fiercely in their hearts, and ever and anon flashed out in threatening glances from their eyes; they thought of Breydel and Deconinck, and of a day of bloody retribution. While the population were thus looking on in moody silence, De Chastillon had drawn up his forces in the market-place in such wise that either side of it was lined with men-at-arms, while one end was entirely occupied by a strong body of infantry;—the troops thus forming three sides of a square, of which the fourth remained open; an arrangement which allowed the citizens a full view of all that was passing in the centre. He then dispatched, as quietly as possible, a strong body of men to each of the city gates, with instructions to seize, secure, and defend them.

The governor-general, accompanied by some of his principal officers, now advanced into the centre of the square. Here the chancellor Peter Flotte, the governor of the city De Mortenay, and Jon Van Gistel the Liliard, entered with him, and commenced an animated discussion upon some subject of pressing importance; at least if one might have judged from the passionate gestures and exclamations of the speakers. Although they were careful not to raise their voices so as to be heard by the citizens, their words were nevertheless occasionally audible to the French officers; and more than one brave knight cast looks of compassion upon the anxious people, and of contempt upon the traitor Van Gistel, as he thus addressed the governor general: "Believe me, Messire, I know the headstrong nature of my countrymen; your lenity will serve only to increase their insolence. Warm the serpent in your bosom, and it will sting you! I judge from long experience; and I say, the men of Bruges will never bear the yoke quietly so long as these freetrans of sedition live amongst them; these must you quench, or you never will be master in this city."

"Methinks," said the chancellor with a malicious smile, "that Messire Van Gistel's countrymen are not much beholden to him for his good word. If we were to believe him, I trow there would not be many alive in Bruges to-morrow morning."

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"On my honour, noble sirs," replied Van Gistel, "it is only out of faithful regard for the king's interests that I speak. I repeat it, nothing but the blood of the ring-leaders can quench the mutinous spirit of our citizens. I can give you a list of all the thorough-paced Clawards here; and as long as they remain at large, I tell you there will never be any peace in Bruges."

"How many names might your list contain?" asked De Chastillon.

"Some forty," he coolly replied.

"How!" cried De Mortenay, in the highest indignation; "you would have forty of these citizens hung for your good pleasure? It is not those here, however, who deserve such punishment. The principal offenders have escaped to Damme. Hang Breydel, Deconinck, and their crew, with all my hands, when and where you can lay hands upon them; but not these poor defenceless creatures, on whom you are merely seeking to wreak your revenge."

"Messire de Mortenay," observed De Chastillon, "I think you wrote to inform me that the citizens refused to sell provisions to your men; what call you that but down right rebellion?" "It is true, my lord governor, that in some respects they have passed all bounds, and have forgotten their duty as obedient subjects; but it is now six months since my people have received their pay, and the Flemings are ready any longer to sell except for the occasion of any extreme measures."

"This tenderness for the rebels can end only in the direst results to the interests of the crown of France," insisted Van Gistel; "and I wonder much to hear Messire de Mortenay thus pleading in their behalf."

There was a sneering tone in these words of the Fleming, which incensed De Mortenay even more than the speech itself. Casting a look of the deepest scorn upon the Liliard, the noble-hearted soldier thus replied: "If you felt for your country as an honest man should feel, it would not be necessary for me, a Frenchman, to defend your unhappy brethren against your bloodthirsty malice. And now, I tell you to your face, before Messire de Chastillon here, the citizens never would have refused to sell us provisions, if you had not gone so negligently to work in exacting the capitation-tax. It is to you we owe these troubles; for all your thought is how to trample under foot your own people. No wonder they are full of the bitterest hatred against us and our government, when power is intrusted to such as you."

"I call every one of you to witness, that I have only, with zeal and in all fidelity, executed the orders of Messire de Chastillon."

Damme, I am resolved to make a severe example now on the spot. Messire Van Gistel, give me the names of the eight most obstinate Clawards in the city, and to the gallows with them without more ado."

Determined not to miss this first instalment of his revenge, Van Gistel passed his eyes along the multitude before him; and picking out eight persons from amongst the crowd, marked them on the instant to the governor-general. A herald was then called, who speedily made his appearance in front of the citizens; and having first, by a blast of his trumpet, warned them to keep silence, he thus proceeded to make proclamation: "In the name of the most high and noble prince, our most gracious sovereign lord, King Philip, the citizens whose names I shall now read forth are hereby summoned to appear without delay before Messire James de Chastillon, governor-general of this land of Flanders, and to sit on pain of death in case of disobedience." He then proceeded to read out the names.

The stratagem fully succeeded; for as each name was called, the person designated came forth out of the crowd and advanced upon the square in the immediate presence of De Chastillon. Little did they suspect what awaited them; though indeed their hearts boded them no good, and they would probably have sought safety in flight had that been possible. Most of them were men of thirty years of age; but among them approached one grey-headed old man, with slow drawn sword, and back bowed down with the weight of years, his countenance expressive of placid resignation without the slightest shade of fear. He stood before the governor, looking up at him with an inquiring air: "What would you wish with me?" his bearing seemed to say.

As soon as the last had obeyed the summons, at a sign from the governor the eight Clawards were seized and bound in spite of all resistance. The murmurs of the spectators were soon repressed by the threat of a spectre of a party of men at arms detached with that intention. In a few moments a lofty gallows was set up in the middle of the square, and a priest might be seen standing by the side of the victims. At the sight of the fell instrument of death, the wives, children, and friends of the unhappy men called aloud for mercy, and the masses of people wept unanimously to and fro. A mighty sigh, mingled with curses and cries for vengeance, burst from the crowd, and ran along its ranks like the growling of the thunder which precedes the storm.

Again a trumpet came forward, sounded a blast, and made proclamation: "Know you all, that whosoever shall disturb the lawful execution of the justice of my lord the governor-general by seditious cries, or otherwise, shall be treated as an accomplice of these rebels, and an accessory to their crimes, and as such be hanged upon the same gallows."

Immediately the murmurs died away and a death-like stillness fell upon the multitude. The weeping women lifted up their eyes to heaven, and addressed their supplications to Him whose ear is ever open to His creatures' prayers, though they be uttered in a desolate and silent place; the men, inwardly burning with rage and indignation, cursed their own impotence to help. Seven of the Clawards were brought up, one after another, to the gallows, and turned off before the faces of their fellow citizens. The dismay of the terrified crowd changed to horror, then to horror into desperation; as each fresh victim was thrust from the ladder, they averted their eyes or bowed their heads towards the ground, to avoid the spectacle of his dying struggles. To escape from the scene by flight was not allowed them, and the slightest appearance of movement among the throng was instantly repressed by the threatening weapons of the soldiery who barred the way.

Only one Claward now remained by the side of Messire de Chastillon; his turn was come, he had confessed himself, and was ready for the execution; but still de Chastillon delayed to give the word. De Mortenay was earnestly soliciting the pardon of the aged man (for he it was), while Van Gistel, who bore him an especial hatred, was as earnestly representing that he was one of the very men who had been busiest in stirring up the population against the garrison, and that, by the governor's command, the apostate thus addressed his countryman: "You have seen how your fellows have been punished for their rebellious conduct, and you are yourself condemned to share their fate; nevertheless, the lord governor, out of regard to your grey hairs, is willing to deal

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