

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENDRIK CONSILIENCE.

CHAPTER XII. CONTINUED.

A knight, whose dress sufficiently betokened his rank, now approached; and after ordering his men to keep a secure hold upon the prisoner.

"So, secondly!" said he. "we know another of olden days, the ruffian that, in the forest near Wynandael, killed one of Messire de Chastillon's men at arms, and even went so far in your insolence as to threaten us knights with your knife; and now I find you murdering one of my best soldiers on my own ground! But you shall have your reward; this very day shall you be gibbeted upon the castle wall, that your friends in Bruges may see you dangling, and know what comes of rebellion."

"You belie me foully," exclaimed Breydel; "I have killed my opponent in fair fight and in self-defence; and only give me fair play, and I will show you the same over again."

"You dared to insult the royal banner of France!"

"I spoke up for our own Black Lion, and so I will to the breach; let me but have my fair play, and I will show you the same over again."

"I see you understand me, brothers," said the Dean; "yes, that is the only way. Now, you must know that it is the soldiers of the garrison at Male that I have thus been handling. Will you not say, with me, that when tomorrow's sun rises upon Male, he shall find no castle there?"

A unanimous cry of assent followed this appeal.

"Come, then," pursued Breydel, "let us go! Every one to his home. Let each take his keenest axe, and any other arms he can provide; we shall want, too, what may serve for scaling ladders. At eleven o'clock to-night we assemble in the altar-ticket behind St. Cross."

After a few special instructions to the Ancients, the assembly broke up.

At that night, a little before the appointed hour, might be seen in the moonlight, upon the divers paths in the neighborhood of St. Cross, a multitude of figures, all wending their way in one direction, and finally disappearing in the alder thicket.

Some of them carried crossbows, others clubs; the most of them, however, were without any visible arms, though they were in the thickest of the little wood stood Jan Breydel, taking counsel with his fellow-leaders as to the side on which they should attack the castle.

At last it was unanimously determined to make the attempt from the side of the drawbridge, first falling in a portion of the ditch and then endeavoring to scale the walls.

The chronicles tell us, that the men forming this expedition were seven hundred in number; nevertheless so intent were they on effecting their purpose, that the most perfect silence prevailed amongst them; not a sound was heard but the wayward cry of the dog, the dragging of the branches along the earth, and the baying of the dogs, disturbed by the unquiet noise.

Masters and journeymen alike pressed eagerly around their Dean. Never before had they seen him so excitedly excited; all eyes were so cordially fixed upon him as he continued:

"You, like myself, are true born citizens of Bruges; you, like myself, have too long been suffering under the disgrace and burden of bondage; but all that is nothing to what I have had to endure to-day. By heaven! I hardly know how to tell it for very shame."

The bronzed cheeks of the butchers already glowed with wrath, though as yet they knew not the cause of offence; every fat was clenched, and muttered curses rose to the lips of all.

"Listen, my brothers," pursued Breydel, "and bear the shame as you best can; listen attentively, for you will scarcely believe your ears: a French dog has smitten your dean upon the face—yes, on this very cheek!"

If the butchers had been wroth before, they were furious beyond all measure on hearing these words. Cries of rage re-echoed from the vaulted roof, and fearful oaths of vengeance burst out on every side.

"How," continued Breydel, "can such a blot be washed away?"

"With blood!" was the unanimous response.

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Breydel's wounded honour was now avenged; but his end was only half-attained; for the Lady Matilda had not yet been found. After a long and fruitless search in every corner and crevice of the castle, from its loftiest turrets to its deepest dungeons, under the guidance of one who knew it well, he was obliged to conclude that she had been carried off. And now, to make his vengeance complete, he set fire to the four corners of the building. Soon the flames mounted high into the heavens.

The walls cracked and fell, the infernal assailants bowed down the gates, the bridge, the posts, and hurled them into the burning pile. Long before morning nothing was left of the magnificent castle of Male that the fury of the butchers and the devouring fire could lay waste.

Round about the fire bell resounded from village to village, and the peasants, as in duty bound, hurried up to help at the call; but they arrived only to be spectators of the scene of destruction, which, to say the truth, did not greatly displease them.

"There!" shouted Breydel, with a voice of iron, "clear, as the last turret fell! In the light of morning, sun look down upon the place where the castle of Male once was!"

And the butchers marched off in a body to Bruges, singing in chorus as they went the song of the Lion.

CHAPTER XIII.

At the time of the conquest of West Flanders by the French, in the year 1296, the castle of Nieuwenhove had offered them an especially obstinate resistance. A great number of Flemish knights had shut themselves up within it under Robert de Bethune, fully resolved to fight to the death, and to render so long as a single man remained in a condition to defend himself. But their valor was in vain against the overpowering force of their assailants; most of them perished, fighting desperately on the ramparts. The French, on entering through the breach effected by their engines, found not a living soul within the walls; and for want of living beings upon whom to wreak their vengeance, they fired the castle, and afterwards deliberately battered down what the flames had spared, and filled up the moat with the rubbish.

The ruins of the castle of Nieuwenhove lay some few miles from Bruges, in a place predicated along it at a rapid pace, and who, by their countenances, appeared to be French. They were without lances, though otherwise armed at all points, and one carried before him upon the saddle a female, whose wild and terrified air, irrespective of the suggestions of distress which occasionally burst from her lips, sufficiently indicated that she was an unwilling captive in their hands.

Levelled spear the black knight awaited them. The Frenchmen no sooner beheld this unlooked for opponent, than they reined in their horses, and regarded the stranger with looks of wonder not unmingled with fear; while that seemed to have the command of the escort advanced to the front, and called out in a loud voice:

"Out of the way, sir knight, or you ride over you!"

"Stand, false and dishonorable knight!" was the answer, "stand and let this lady, or you will have me to deal with!"

"Forward! down with him!" cried the leader to his men.

But the black knight gave them no time to make their onset; stooping upon his charger's neck, he dashed in full career upon the astonished Frenchmen, and in an instant one of them fell mortally wounded from his saddle. The rest, meanwhile, had fallen upon him from all sides with their drawn swords, and St. Pol, the leader of the band, had already with a tremendous blow cut away one of the sable champion's shoulder-plates. Seeing himself thus beset, the knight dropped his spear, and drew his giant sword, and with a single stroke, he speedily cleared a space around him; for, after a short experience of his prowess, no one of his opponents dared to venture within its sweep. St. Pol, whose horse, irritated by a wound, was no longer fully at his command, perceiving now the result, the conflict was less certain; at all events, made a sign to the soldier on whose horse the prisoner rode to make his escape by his charge.

But the black knight was as vigilant as he was valiant. By a sudden movement he barred the way, and, dexterously parrying the blow which rained upon him, "For your life, set her down!" he cried in a voice of thunder; and, as the soldier turned off on the road, and sought to slip him on one side, the mighty sword descended quickly upon his head, and cleft him to the seat. In two red streams the blood gushed from the unhappy man, and crimsoning the white drapery of the young girl, and bedabbling her fair locks. For a moment the arms of the dying man convulsively retained their hold, and then both sank together to the ground. The consciousness of the young maiden had failed her under the alternate agitations of hope and terror, and she lay beside the corpse of the soldier motionless and senseless.

Meanwhile the black knight had already laid prostrate another of his foes, whom now only three remained. But these seemed rather exasperated than intimidated by the fall of their companions, and the fight continued with increased fury. The horses tore up the ground, and seemed themselves to take part in the conflict; wonder, it was that the unconscious maiden was not dashed to atoms upon the ground, while the Frenchmen's hearts leaped with exultation as they thought that he was at about to retreat. But they did not long enjoy this pleasing illusion, for

ordinary vivacity of his eyes testified of the fire which still glowed within his breast. For some moments he remained lost in thought, gazing fixedly upon the ruins; then a bitter smile passed over his lips, his head sank upon his breast, and he seemed intent upon something at his feet; at last a tear fell from either eye, as he thus spoke:

"O my brave brothers in arms! these stones have been wetted with your noble blood, and here beneath my feet you sleep the long sleep of death! But happy you who have left this troublous life in your country's cause, and without having seen our beloved Flanders in bondage. The blood of him to whom you gave the proud name of the Lion bedewed this ground along with yours; but, less fortunate than you, he still survives—an outcast, left to sigh over your silent graves, like a helpless woman, impotent for aught but tears."

Suddenly the knight rose from his seat, and hastily closing his visor, turned towards the ramble passerover, giving his ear to some distant sound. A noise as of the tramp of horses was now audible in the distance. As soon as he had convinced himself that his first impression had not deceived him, the knight seized his spear, and hastily mounted his charger, with up his station behind a portion of the wall, so as effectually to conceal himself from view. He had not long occupied this post, however, when other sounds fell upon his ear along with those which it had already caught; through the clank of armor the rapid tramp of the horses he could now distinctly hear the lamentations of a female voice. At this his cheeks grew pale under his helmet, not with fear—for that was a thing his heart knew not—but his honor as a knight, his feeling as a man, urged him to succor the helpless, and above all, his sense of duty, which, at the same time a high mission and a solemn vow forbade him to expose himself to recognition. The mental struggle which he had thus to undergo showed itself plainly in his countenance.

But soon the party drew nearer, and he could distinctly hear the maiden's words, as with an agonising voice she cried: "Father! oh, my father!"

"Father! oh, my father!" a voice, too, which he recognized, it not, had yet something in its sound that spoke irresistibly to his heart. In an instant all hesitation was at an end; giving the spur to his horse, he hastily made his way over the heaps of rubbish, came forth upon the open road a little in advance of a body of six horsemen, who were proceeding along it at a rapid pace, and who, by their countenances, appeared to be French. They were without lances, though otherwise armed at all points, and one carried before him upon the saddle a female, whose wild and terrified air, irrespective of the suggestions of distress which occasionally burst from her lips, sufficiently indicated that she was an unwilling captive in their hands.

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an instant after he rode at them at full speed; and so well had he calculated his blow, that, even as he reached the nearest of them, helmet and head went flying across the road. This dexterous feat completed the discomfiture of the foreigners; for, astonished and terrified, St. Pol and his one remaining companion instantly turned rein and fled, in the full conviction that it was no mortal adversary they had encountered.

These events, which have taken so many words to describe, were crowded into a few rapid moments. The sun had not yet risen above the horizon, but the veil of mist was already lifting itself from the woods, and the tops of trees were beginning to show a brighter green.

The black knight, now finding himself master of the field, with no more enemies in view, made haste to dismount, bound his horse to a tree, and proceeded to bestow his care upon the lady he had rescued, and who still lay senseless, under the corpse of the soldier which had fallen upon her, and to which, probably, she in a great measure owed her escape from the hoofs of the horses. Her face covered with mire and blood, her long hair trampled in the mud, her features were totally indistinguishable; nor, indeed, did her deliverer for the present seek to examine them more closely, his first care being to convey her to some place of greater security. With this object he raised her carefully from the ground, and carried her in his arms within the ruins of Nieuwenhove. Having laid her gently down upon the herbage in the court-yard, he proceeded to investigate the yet remaining portions of the building, if perchance some place of shelter should be found. At last he discovered one chamber of which the vaulting had not fallen in, and which might, in default of better, serve for a place of temporary refuge. The windows were gone, but otherwise the shelter was complete; there were even some tattered remnants of tapestry hanging from the walls, and pieces of broken furniture scattered about the floor, from portions of which he succeeded in putting together a kind of couch, which, rude as it was, was at least better than the cold and damp ground.

Well pleased at the result of his search, he returned to his insensible charge, and carried her to the temporary bed he had prepared for her. Here, with anxious care he laid her down, pillowing her head with a bundle of the tapestry rolled together. This done, he first cautiously satisfied himself that she was still alive and unharmed, and that the blood which she was covered with was not her own; then, returning to the scene of combat, he filled one of the helmets with water at a neighbouring spring, and led his horse back with the ruins. His next care was to cleanse the lady's hair, face, and hands, from mud and gore, as completely as the means at his disposal and the gloom of the vaulted chamber would allow—a gloom, indeed, notwithstanding that the sun was by this time peeping above the horizon, which still rendered her features wholly indistinct, even though the hideous mask which had concealed them was removed. Having now done all for her that the circumstances in which they were placed rendered possible, he left her for a while, in the hopes that rest and nature might gradually restore her.

The knight's attention was next bestowed on his horse and armour; a considerable time was spent in collecting a heap of forage for the one, and in cleansing the other from the marks of the combat. When this occupation was completed, and the sun stood high in the heavens, and the face of nature showed in all its varied colors, the sun beams fell upon the window which lighted the chamber where the maiden lay; and thither the knight now returned, to avail himself of the increased light for making further acquaintance with his charge. He entered; she was sitting up upon her couch, surveying with an astonished air the bare and blackened walls of her apartment; but there was a wildness and fixedness in her gaze, which spoke of deeper disturbance than mere astonishment. No sooner had the knight looked upon her, than suddenly he turned ashy pale, a cold shudder ran over all his limbs, his blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins, and when he essayed to speak, he could only utter incoherent ejaculations; then, as suddenly, he rushed forward, and clasped the maiden in his arms, exclaiming in tones of mingled love and anguish:

"My own child! my poor Matilda! have I then left my prison only to find you thus in the arms of death?"

But the maiden pushed him back from her with a look and gesture of passionate aversion.

"Traitor!" she exclaimed, "how dare you deal thus insolently with a daughter of the House of Flanders? Ah, you think that I am helpless now! Neither fear nor shame restrain you! But I have still a protector—God, who watches over me. There is lightning yet in store for you;—yes, your punishment is at hand! Hark, wretch! hear you how the thunder growls?"

In an agony of grief and terror, Robert de Bethune tore the helmet from his brow. "O my own Matilda!" he cried, "you do not know me: I am your father, whom you love so much, and for whose sorrows you have wept so many bitter tears. Heavens! she thrusts me from her!"

A smile of triumph curled Matilda's lip as she exclaimed:

"Now you trouble, now fear seizes upon your base and coward heart! But there is no mercy for you. The Lion, my father, will avenge me; and not with impunity shall you have put affront upon the blood of the Counts of Flanders. Hark! I hear the Lion's roar; I hear his tread; my father comes! To me he brings his dear embrace, and death to you."

Not one of these words but pierced the father's heart like a venomous arrow, and filled it with untold anguish. Burning tears ran down his furrowed cheeks; in despair he smote his breast.

"But, my poor child!" he cried, "do you not know me? Laugh not so bitterly; you strike my soul with death."

I am your father—I am the Lion—whom you love, whom you call to help you."

"You the Lion!" she replied in accents of contempt; "You the Lion—say rather, liar! Is the lion the tongue of the Queen Joanna that I hear you speak with—the tongue that flatters to betray? The Lion, too, went with them. They said, 'Come; and what found he? A dun-geon! and soon, perhaps, poison and a grave!'"

In a transport of grief the knight pressed her in his arms. "But do you not hear, my child," he cried, "that it is the speech of our fathers that is upon my lips? What unheard-of sufferings have thus unbinged your mind? Do you not remember, that our friend Sir Adolf of Nieuwland has procured my liberty? Oh, talk not so; your words wring my very heart!"

At the name of Adolf, the convulsive strain of the features somewhat relaxed, and a soft smile replaced their painful expression, while she answered more gently, and this time without repelling her deliverer:

"Adolf, say you? Adolf is gone to fetch the Lion. Have you seen him? He told you of the poor Matilda, did he not? Oh, yes! he is my brother. He has composed a new song for me. Listen! I hear the tones of his harp. How sweet are those sounds! But what is that? My father comes! I see a ray of light—blessed beam of hope! Begone, ostend!"

Her words died away into inarticulate sounds, while her countenance was overshadowed with an expression of the deepest melancholy.

Hall distracted with alarm and grief, the knight left his heart sink within him, and he knew not what to do. Silently he took the maiden's hand within his own, and bathed it with his tears; but almost instantly she snatched it back, exclaiming:

"No; this has done for a Frenchman! A false knight may not touch it. Go, your tears defile it; but the Lion will wash out the stain with blood. Look! there is blood upon my garment too—French blood! She has garbled it!"

Again the knight endeavored to make his wretched child comprehend who he was; again he took her in his arms, and would have pressed her to his bosom; but she violently pushed him from her, while in piercing tones she exclaimed:

"Begone! away with those arms! They coil around me like venomous serpents; their very touch is dishonor. Release me, villain! Help! help!"

With a sudden and desperate effort she disengaged herself from her deliverer, and sprang shrieking from the couch, the knight hastily pursuing her to prevent her egress from the chamber. A heart-rending scene here ensued. Beside himself with grief and alarm, he caught the unhappy maiden in his arms and strove to carry her back to the couch; while she, as if by magic, resisted his endeavors. Great as was the strength of the knight, she seemed for a while almost a match for him; but at last, making a gigantic effort, he succeeded in bearing her back to the couch. She now ceased from all further resistance; her mood appeared suddenly to change. She sat still; and looking reproachfully on the knight, said with bitter tears:

"It well becoms you to set your strength against that of a maiden, false knight. But God has placed death between us; a yawning grave divides us. Therefore do you weep, because you love. The unhappy father was too much overcome by his grief to catch the last words of the maiden. Fall of despair, he had seated himself upon a stone, and was gazing upon her with eyes moist with tears, unconscious of aught but a sensation of unutterable anguish."

Presently Matilda's eyes closed, and she appeared to sleep. As he perceived this, a beam of hope lighted up the heart of the ill-fated father. Sleep might restore her; and finding in this thought support and consolation, he sat noiselessly by her side watching with tenderness and anxiety every breath she drew.

TO BE CONTINUED.

None feared to approach our Lord; all found Him leisure, considerate, gentle, helpful. And yet a slight headache or annoyance, a little press of work, is enough to make me preoccupied, inordinate and churlish to all around me. Lord make my heart like unto Thine!

Must study our Lord's faithfulness to His friends. His patience, His loveliness. Not for us only, but for all our brethren, for all our fellow servants, for every soul on the wide earth, Christ died.

Appendicitis Prevented In Seven Out of Ten Cases by Avoiding Constipation with an Occasional Dose of Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills.

Appendicitis is the direct result of constipation, or a cold settling in the abdomen, starting inflammation of the appendix. Of these 75 per cent. are the result of constipation. Besides abdominal soreness, and the colicky pains which finally centralize in a persistent localized pain in the right abdomen, the patient may be subject to vomiting, stomach upset, and occasionally chills and shivering.