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NO. 16.

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THE LION OF FLANDERS;

OR, THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER XV.

During the week which succeeded to the events last narrated, more than three thousand of the citizens left Bruges, and betook themselves either to Deconinck's camp at Ardenburg, or to Damme, where the Dean of the Butchers was in command. The French garrison, meanwhile, increasing in confidence and security as the able-bodied men left the city, abandoned themselves to every species of license, and treated those of the inhabitants that remained as though they had been their very slaves. Nevertheless, there were only too many at Bruges who, so far from taking umbrage at the presence of foreigners, consorted with them in all cheerfulness, as if they had been their very brethren. But these were such as had denied their country, and sought by their cowardice to curry favor with the stranger; and they were even proud of their by-name of Liliards, as if it had been a title of honour. The rest were indeed Clawards, true sons of Flanders, who hated the yoke, and were longing for the time when they could cast it off; but the worldly goods which they had earned for themselves by the sweat of their brows were too dear to their hearts to be abandoned to the discretion of foreign marauders.

It was these Clawards, and the wives and children of the fugitives, who were made to feel the heavy yoke and the cruel exactions of an insolent foe. Having nothing now to check them in the gratification of their cowardly revenge, the invaders tyrannised and plundered without mercy or moderation; they carried off by force the goods out of the shops, and paid for them with insults or blows. Irritated 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 neighbouring country in quest of supplies. Luckily for them, the deficiency was in part provided for by 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 was 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 as if all the people of Bruges had abandoned their city. Many of the guildsmen made representations to Van Gistel that, inasmuch as they were doing nothing, they were unable to pay the dues; but the unnatural 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 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 Chatillon, then at Courtray, 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 Chatillon to increased severity. He painted the rebellious spirit of the men of Bruges in the blackest colours, and called loudly for 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 Chatillon's wrath at this intelligence exceeded all bounds. Everything he had done for carrying out the king's commands seemed to have been without result; 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 secret assassination. There, too, were the ruined towers of Male, the fire still smouldering among 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 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, De Chatillon resolved on a vigorous demonstration, which should stifle, once for all, the liberties of Flanders in the blood of the 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 May, 1302, at nine o'clock in morning, that the French force entered the city, with the governor-general at their head. Stern and threatening was the aspect of De Chatillon as he rode along the streets, while the hearts of the citizens were oppressed with painful anxiety, foreseeing, as they could not but do, a part at least of the fate that was awaiting them. The Clawards might easily have been recognized by 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 together with the latter stood drawn up under arms upon the Friday's market-place. To them the governor-general's arrival was matter of rejoicing; for from him they expected to obtain retaliation for the contempt and abhorrence with which they were regarded by the Clawards; and as he approached, loud and rapturous cries of "France! France! long live King Philip and our noble governor!" resounded through the 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 breast, and from many an eye trickled the unconscious tear. But while all were terrified at the vengeance which seemed ready to descend upon their heads, not a single voice of greeting was raised for France or her representative. Powerful, indeed, 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 a day of bloody retribution.

While the population were thus looking on in moody silence, De Chatillon 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 despatched, 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 John Van Gistel the Liliard, entered with him into what seemed an animated discussion upon some subject of pressing importance; at least if one might have judged from the passionate gesticulations 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. Warn the serpent in your bosom, and it will sting you! I judge from long experience; and I saw the men of Bruges will never bear the yoke quietly so long as these first brands of sedition live amongst them; these must you quench, or you never will be master in this city."

blood of the ringleaders 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 Chatillon.

"Some forty," he coolly replied.

"How!" cried De Mortenay, in the highest indignation; "you 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 heart, 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 Chatillon, "I think you wrote to inform me that the citizens refused to sell provisions to your men: what call you that but downright 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 refuse any longer to sell except for ready money. I should, in truth, be deeply grieved were my letter to be 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, listen, I tell you to your face, before Messire de Chatillon here, the citizens never would have refused to sell us provisions, if you had not gone so nefariously 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 Chatillon."

"Call you that zeal and fidelity?" exclaimed De Mortenay; "say rather your own malignant spite against your countrymen for the just contempt they bear you. It was a grievous oversight of the king our lord to set one whom all the world cries shame upon over his revenue in Flanders."

"Messire de Mortenay!" cried Van Gistel, passionately, "you shall answer to me for this!"

"Sirs," interposed the governor-general, "let there be an end of this! I forbid you to exchange another word in my presence; let your swords decide your quarrel at a fitting opportunity. At the same time I tell you, Messire de Mortenay, that the fashion of your speech displeases me, and that in all things Messire Van Gistel has demeaned himself according to my will. The honours of the French crown must be avenged; and were it not that the ringleaders have left the city, there should be more gibbets this day in Bruges than there are crossways to plant them in. Meanwhile, however, and until a convenient time arrives for putting the rebels to the rout at Damme, I am resolved to make a severe example now and 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 the 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 Chatillon, Governor-general of this land of Flanders, and that 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 up to the square into the immediate presence of De Chatillon. 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 some thirty years of age; but among them approached one grey-headed old man, with slow-drawn steps, 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 with us?" 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 threatening aspect 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 swayed tumultuously 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 trumpeter came forward, sounded a blast, and made proclamation:

"Know ye 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 a despot's threats may seal their lips; 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 into horror, their 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 Chatillon: his turn was come, he had confessed himself, and was ready for the executioner but still De Chatillon 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 the very man who had been busiest in stirring up the population against the garrison. At last, 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 graciously with you. He grants you your life, on condition that henceforth you bear yourself as a true and faithful subject of the French crown. Cry, 'France for ever!' and you are pardoned."

With a bitter smile of mingled scorn and indignation, the aged patriot replied:

"Yes! were I such as you, I should do your bidding like a coward, and sully my white hairs by that last act of business. But God, I know, will give me grace to defy your threats and resist you to the death. You, vile traitor that you are, are not ashamed, like the reptile that tears its mother's entrails, to deliver over to the stranger the land that gave you birth and nourished you. But tremble for yourself; I have sons that will avenge me. You shall not die peacefully in your bed and you know that the words of an expiring man fall not to the ground."

Van Gistel turned pale at this solemn denunciation. A terrible foreboding passed over his heart, and he repented already of his gratified revenge; for the dread of death is ever the strongest feeling in a traitor's soul. De Chatillon, meanwhile, had sufficiently read the old Claward's determination in his countenance.

"Well, what says the rebel?" he asked.

"Messire," answered Van Gistel, "he scoffs at me, and despises the mercy you offer him."

"Hang him, then!" was the stern reply.

The soldier who did the office of executioner now took the old man by the arm, and led him unresisting to the gallows.

The priest had given his final blessing, the victim had set his foot upon the first round of the ladder, and the rope was already about his neck, when suddenly a violent commotion showed itself in the crowd, which all the efforts of the soldiers were unable to subdue. Some strong impulse from behind seemed to be communicating itself to the multitude driving some forward, others sideways against the walls of the houses, and a young man, with naked arms, and a countenance intensely agitated with rage and terror, forced his way through into the open space in front. Once clear of the obstruction of the throng, he cast a wild look round the square, and sprang forward with the speed of an arrow, exclaiming, "My father! my father! you shall not die!"

Even as he spoke the words he had reached the foot of the gallows; his cross knife flashed aloft, and the next instant was buried in the heart of the executioner. With a single cry he rolled expiring on the ground, while the young Fleming seized his father in his arms, threw him upon his shoulder, and hastened with his sacred burden towards the crowd. For a moment the soldiers stood motionless with astonishment, like so many passive spectators of the scene; but De Chatillon's voice speedily aroused them, and before the young man had time to take a dozen steps under his load, more than twenty of them were upon him. In an instant he placed his father behind him, and confronted his assailants with his knife still reeking in his hand. Some fifty other Flemings stood about him; for he had already reached the foremost ranks of the multitude when overtaken by his pursuers, so that they had been compelled to push in among the throng in order to follow him. With what rage were the hearts of the Frenchmen now filled, as, one by one, they beheld their twenty comrades bite the dust; for suddenly the bystanders rushed upon the soldiers, and with their knives stabbed them down without any mercy, while many a gallant Fleming too perished in the fray.

Upon this the whole body of the men-at-arms made a furious onset upon the citizens, the large two-handed swords mowing down the helpless multitude, and the steel clad chargers trampling them under their hoofs as they attempted to escape. They fell not, however, unavenged; for many a Frenchman gave his heart's best blood to swell the crimson stream that flowed upon the pavement. The father and the son lay one upon the other, both pierced by the self-same thrust; their souls had not parted company upon that last journey. The streets were thronged with fugitives, and rounded every where with cries of terror; each one hastened to gain the shelter of his habitation, doors and windows were closed and fastened, and Bruges soon presented the aspect of a city of the dead.

But the stillness did not last long. Soon the infuriated soldiery, fierce as untamed beasts, and thirsting for revenge, spread themselves through the deserted streets, the Liliards acting as their guides, and pointing out the houses of the Clawards. Doors or windows were instantly forced in; money

and goods seized and carried off, and whatever was not worth the trouble of removal broken and destroyed. The terrified women, dragged from their hiding-places, were subjected to the grossest outrage, the men who raised a hand in defence of wife or sister murdered on the spot. Every here and there upon the streets, before the doors of the plundered houses, lay a mangled corpse amid fragments of shattered furniture. No sound was to be heard but the furious cries of the soldiers and the screams of the unhappy women. The plunderers came laughing out of the houses they had laid desolate, their hands filled with Flemish gold, and red with Flemish gore; and as each party, sated with blood and booty, drew off from the spot, another worse than it followed in its place; and so the horrid work proceeded, till the full cup of misery was drained to the dregs by the despairing citizens.

In Peter Deconinck's house there was not an article of furniture but was broken into fragments; nor would the very walls have been left standing, but that the plunderers grudged the time which they had destined for more ruthless deeds. Another party hastened straight to the dwelling of Jan Breydel. In a few moments the door was shattered to pieces; and breathing threats of vengeance, some twenty of the bloodthirsty crew rushed into the shop, where, however, they could discover no one, though each possible and impossible lurking-place was rigidly examined. Chests and closets were forced open, and rifled of their contents; and then every thing the house contained was wantonly broken up and demolished. At last, tired with their work of destruction, they were contemplating its results with malignant satisfaction, when one of the band who had mounted the staircase returned, saying, "I have heard something moving in the loft; I'll be sworn there are some Flemings lurking under the roof; and if we make a sharper search, depend upon it we shall find something better worth looking for; most likely they have the best of their gear with them."

Upon this the whole party hurried towards the stairs, each eager to be the first at the spoil; their comrade, however, checked their haste.

"Stay, stay!" said he; "you can't get in yet. The trap-door is ten feet above the floor, and they have drawn up the ladder; but that makes no odds, —I saw a ladder in the yard. Wait a moment and I will fetch it."

This was speedily effected, and they all ascended the stairs together, and mounted to the trap-door; but there was still an impediment,—the trap was firmly fastened down, and could not be raised. "Well, then," cried one of the men, taking up a heavy piece of wood from the floor, "if the door is locked we must find a key to it."

So saying he struck violently against the trap, which, however, still held fast, without showing the slightest sign of giving way; but a cry of terror and lamentation, as though the very soul itself was passing out with it, sounded from the loft. "Ha! ha!" cried the soldiers, they are lying on the trap."

"Wait!" cried another voice; "I will soon show them the way off it. Lend a hand here."

With their united strength they now lifted a massive beam, and plied it so furiously against the trap that the shattered board soon fell down among them. With a wild shout of triumph they rushed up the ladder, and in an instant were all within the loft. Here they suddenly stood still. It seemed as if some strange and solemn spectacle had touched their hearts; for the curses died upon their lips, and they looked at each other with an air of hesitation.

At the farther end of the loft stood a pole—he could not be above fourteen—with a boy-axe in his hand. His face was pale; no word or sound issued from his compressed lips. He held up his weapon in a threatening attitude against the intruders, and his blue eyes flashed with the heroism of despair; while the muscles of his delicate cheeks were violently contracted to an expression of awe and ghastly. There he stood, like the miniature statue of some Grecian hero. Behind the youth were two women kneeling upon the floor—an old grey-headed mother, with folded hands and eyes raised to heaven; and a tender maiden, whose hair hung dishevelled about her shoulders. The trembling girl had hidden her face in her mother's clothes, and was clinging to her as in the last extremity of terror.

Recovered from their first surprise, the soldiers pushed rudely forward upon the affrighted women, overwhelmed them with insults, and were about to lay hands upon them; serious opposition on the part of the boy they had never for a moment contemplated. What, then, was their astonishment when, with his left foot planted firmly behind him, he fiercely brandished his axe, and defied them to come on. For a moment the young champion checked their onset; then, as one of them thought with a single thrust to pierce him through, he parried the weapon, and struck with the force of despair at the shoulder of his assailant, who immediately staggered back and fell into the arms of his comrades. At the same moment the youth himself, as though he had received his death wound from some unseen hand, fell heavily to the ground, and there lay senseless and motionless by the side of the woman he had endeavoured to protect. The soldiers pressing about their wounded comrade, proceeded to remove his accoutrements and clothes amid frightful imprecations and threats of vengeance; while the elder female, still on her knees, with floods of tears, and in heart-rending accents, sued for mercy.

"Oh, sirs!" she cried, addressing the soldiers in their own tongue, "have pity on us, miserable creatures that we are! Do not murder us, for the love of our merciful Lord, and as you shall one day yourselves look for mercy from Him! God knows we have suffered more than enough already; and what can the death of two defenceless women profit you?"

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)

An acquaintance remarked to Dr. Robert South, the celebrated presbyter at the court of Charles II. "Ah! doctor, you are such a wit!" The doctor replied, "Don't make game of people's infirmities; you, sir, have been born a wit."