

THE LION OF FLANDERS. BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE. CHAPTER VII. CONTINUED.

Soon De Chatillon entered the room, and bent one knee to the ground before the queen. "Messeire de Chatillon," she said, giving him her hand to rise, "it seems that you do not pay much attention to my wishes. Did I not appoint you to come to me long ere this?"

"True, madam; but I was detained by the king my master. Believe, I pray you, my illustrious niece, that I have been upon burning coals, so earnest was my desire to fulfil your royal pleasure."

"I thank you for your good-will, Messeire; and I am desirous this very day of rewarding you for all your faithful services."

"Gracious, princess, it is itself a great boon to me to be permitted to follow and serve your majesty. Only let me always and everywhere accompany you. Let others seek office and power; for me, your presence is my best joy;—I ask for nothing besides."

The queen looked with a contemptuous smile upon the flatterer; for she knew too well how much his heart belied his words. With a peculiar emphasis, therefore, she continued:

"But what if I were to set you over the land of Flanders?"

De Chatillon never had not reckoned on so speedy an attainment of his great object, almost repented of his words; and for the first moment knew not what answer to make. He soon recovered himself, however, and said:

"If it should please your majesty to give me so great a proof of confidence, I should not for a moment venture to oppose myself to your royal will; but should thankfully, and as a good subject, accept the gift, and kiss your gracious hand with love and reverence."

"Listen, Messeire de Chatillon," cried the queen, impatiently; "I did not send for you to hear fine speeches; you will therefore greatly oblige me if you will put all such aside, and tell me without circumlocution, or disguise, what you think of our entry to-day. Has not Bruges given the queen of France and of Navarre a reception beyond all she could have looked or hoped for?"

"I pray you, my illustrious niece, leave those bitter jests for the scorn that has been done you has touched me to the very heart. A vile and contemptible people has defied you to your very face, and your dignity has met with grievous affront. But be not troubled; all is in our power now, and we shall soon find means to tame these insolent subjects, and bring them to their senses."

"Do you know your niece, Messeire de Chatillon? Do you know how jealous is Joanna of Navarre?"

"In truth, madam, with the noblest and most laudable jealousy; for to wear a crown, and not to maintain its dignity, is to deserve to forfeit it. Your princely spirit is the object of universal admiration."

"Do you know, too, that it is no paltry vengeance that satisfies me? The punishment of those that have affronted me must be commensurate with my dignity. Both as a queen and woman I must be revenged; that is enough for you to whom I am about to commit the government of Flanders, and who will have to execute my will."

"It is needless, madam, for you to trouble yourself further about this matter; be assured that your vengeance shall be complete. Peradventure I shall even exceed your wishes; for I will not only avenge not only the affront to you, but also those which are daily offered to the crown of France by this rebellious and headstrong people."

"But, Messeire de Chatillon, do not, I pray you, lose sight of sound policy. Be not too hasty in drawing the noose fast about their necks; break their spirit rather by gradual humiliation. Above all, fleece them bit by bit of their wealth which supports their obstinacy; and then, when you have them fairly in the harness, press down the yoke so tight upon their necks, that I may be able to feast my eyes upon their slavery. Be in no hurry; I have patience enough, when the end can be more effectually reached thereby. And the better to succeed, it will be advisable to take the first opportunity of removing one Deconinck from his place of Dean of the Clothworkers in this city, and to take care that none but our friends are admitted to offices of power."

De Chatillon listened attentively to the queen's counsel, and secretly admired her skill in the crooked ways of policy; and as his private revenge was equally interested in the establishment of despotism, he was highly delighted at being able to gratify at once his own passions and those of his niece. With evident joy he replied:

"I receive with gratitude the honour which your majesty confers on me, and will spare nothing to carry out the counsels of my sovereign lady, as a true and faithful servant. Have you any further commands for me?"

In putting this question he had the young Matilda in view. De Chatillon well knew that she had drawn upon herself the queen's enmity, and was convinced she would not be long without feeling its effects. Joanna answered:

"I think it might be as well to have away that daughter of Messeire de Bruges into France; she seems full of Flemish pride and obstinacy; and I shall be pleased to have her at my court. Enough said;—you understand me. To-morrow I leave this accursed land; I have had more than enough of their insolence. Raoul de Nesle goes with you; you remain here as Governor-general of Flanders, with full power to rule the land at your discretion, and accountable only to ourselves for your fidelity."

"Say rather at the discretion of my royal niece," interposed De Chatillon, in a tone of flattery.

"Be it so," said Joanna; "I am gratified by your devotedness. Twelve hundred men at arms shall remain with you to support your authority. And now it is time for us both to go to rest."

my fair uncle; so I wish you good night."

"May all good angels watch over your majesty!" said De Chatillon, with a profound bow; and with these words he left the chamber of the evil-minded queen.

CHAPTER VIII.

The city magistrates and their friends the Lilyards had gone to great expense about the ceremonial of the royal entry. The triumphal arches and scaffolding, and the precious stuffs with which they were adorned, had cost large sums of money; besides which a quantity of the best wine had been served out to each of the king's men-at-arms. As all this had been done by order of the magistrates, and consequently had to be paid for out of the common chest, it had been regarded by the citizens with the greatest dissatisfaction.

All the machinery of the pageant had long been removed; De Chatillon was at Courtrai, and the royal visit almost forgotten, when one morning at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, a crier appeared before the town-hall, at the usual place of proclamation, and by sound of trumpet called the people together. As soon as he saw a sufficient number of hearers assembled, he produced a parchment from a case which hung at his side, and began to read aloud:

"It is hereby made known to each and every citizen, that the worshipful magistrates have ordered as follows, that is to say:

"That an extraordinary contribution be levied for covering the expenses of the entry of our gracious prince, king Philip.

"That each and every inhabitant of the city pay thereof the sum of eight groats Flemish, to be paid head by head, without distinction of age.

"That the tax gatherers collect the same on Saturday next, from door to door; and that such as by force or fraud refuse or evade payment of the same be compelled thereto in due course of law.

Those of the citizens who heard this proclamation looked at one another with astonishment, and secretly murmured at so arbitrary an exaction. Among these were several journeymen of the Clothworkers' Company, who, without cause, hastened to make the matter known to their Dean.

Deconinck received the intelligence with extreme displeasure. Such a violent blow struck at the rights and liberties of the commonalty filled him with mistrust as to what might follow, for he saw in it a first step toward the despotism under which, with the aid of France, the nobles were endeavouring to bring the people; and he determined to defeat these first attempts either by force or policy.

Well knew that any opposition might easily be fatal to him, for the foreign armies still occupied Flanders; but no consideration could check his patriotic zeal; he had devoted himself body and soul to the weal of his native city. Sending immediately for the company's badge, he thus commissioned him:

"Go round instantly to all the masters and summon them in my name to meet forthwith at the hall. Let them lay all aside, and delay not a moment, for the matter is urgent."

The Clothworkers' Hall was a spacious building with a round gable, a single large window in front, over which stood the arms of the company, gave light to the great room on the first floor; over the wide doorway stood St. George and the dragon, artistically cut in stone. In all other respects the front was without ornament or pretension; it would have been difficult in fact to guess from its appearance that it was here the wealthiest guild in Flanders held its meetings for it was far excelled in magnificence by many of the houses around it.

Notwithstanding the considerable number of large and small chambers which the building contained, not one of them was empty or unemployed. In a spacious room on the second story were to be seen the master pieces or specimens of work which every one had to show before he could be admitted to the mastership; and also patterns of the most costly stuffs that the looms of Bruges could produce. In an adjoining chamber were exhibited models of all the implements made use of by weavers, fullers, and dyers. In a third apartment were laid away the dresses and arms which were used by the guild on occasions of ceremony.

The principal room, in which the masters held their meetings, lay towards the street. All the operations which the wool had to undergo, from those of the shepherd and shearer to those of the weaver and dyer, and even to the foreign merchant, who came from distant lands to exchange his gold for the stuffs of Flanders, were exhibited upon the walls in well-executed paintings. Several oak tables and a number of massive seats stood upon the stone floor. Six velvet-covered arm chairs at the farther end indicated the place of the Dean of the guild.

The beadle once despatched, it was not long before a considerable number of master-clothworkers were assembled at the hall, energetically discussing the matter which for the time most occupied them, and overspread every countenance with the deepest gloom. Most of them were violent in their expressions of indignation against the magistrates; nevertheless, there are some who seemed disinclined to take any extreme step. While the assembly was thus each moment increasing, Deconinck entered the room, and passed slowly through the crowd of his fellows up to the great chair where his place was. The Ancients took their seats beside him; the rest mostly remained standing by their seats, the better to catch sight of their Dean's countenance, and read off from his forehead brow the full sense of his weighty and eloquent speech. The whole number present was sixty persons.

As soon as Deconinck saw the attention of his fellows directed upon him,

self, with an emphatic gesture of his hand he thus spoke:

"My brethren! give heed to my words, for the enemies of our freedom, the enemies of our prosperity, are forging letters for our feet! The magistrates and Lilyards have flattered the foreigner who is become our master by receiving him with extraordinary pomp; they have pressed us into their service for the erection of their scaffolding and arches, and now they require that we should make good the cost of their scandalous prodigality from the fruits of our honest labour; a demand which is an affront alike on the liberties of our city and on the rights of our company. Under stand me well, my brethren, and endeavor with me to penetrate the future; if for this once we submit to an arbitrary imposition, our liberty will soon be trampled under foot. This is the first experiment, the first pressure of the yoke that is hereafter to sit heavy upon our necks. The unfaithful Lilyards, who leave their Count, our lawful lord, in a foreign prison, that they may the better be able to gain the mastery over us, have long lapsed upon the sweat of our brows. Long did the people serve them—serve them as beasts of burden, and with sighs and groans. To you, men of Bruges, my fellow-citizens, was it first given to receive the heavenly beam of the light of freedom; you were the first to break the chain of slavery; you rose up against your tyrants like men, and never again shall you bow your necks under the yoke of despotism. At present our prosperity is the envy, our greatness the admiration, of all the people of the earth; is it not then our bounden duty to preserve for ourselves the right of freedom, to break the chain of slavery, to rise up against your tyrants like men, and never again shall you bow your necks under the yoke of despotism. 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