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THE BLACKSMITH OF LIEGE.

A TALE OF THE BURGUNDIAN WARS.

By Emma Roberts.

"Those that feare a matter commonly provide well for it, and have oftener good successe than they that procede with a careless contempt, unless God be fully resolved to strike the stroke, against whom man's wisdom cannot prevaile. Which point is sufficiently proved by the example of these Liegeois, who had been excommunicated the space of five years for their variance with their bishop, whereof notwithstanding they made no account, but continued still in their folly and nightiness, mooved thereunto only through wealth and pride. Wherefore King Lewis was wont to say that 'When pride rideth before, shame and damage follow after.'"

PHILIP DE COMINES.

"NEVER trust me, madam," cried Jacquette, to her young mistress; "but here is the worshipful burgomaster, Wilkin de Retz, in his dress of state, with two varlets in flaming liveries before him, knocking at the great gate as though he would beat it down."

"Well, returned Linda, "and what is that to me? He is come to make cheer with my kinsman;—brother, I suppose I must call him, since my poor mother thought fit to invest him with authority over me." And perceiving that her attendant was inclined to prolong the conversation, the frauken motioned her away; continuing to ply her needle with unconscious industry, while she pondered over her present situation and future prospects. Linda Wilmsfeldt was the daughter of a poor knight of Brabant, and her mother, being reduced to poverty at his decease, had subsequently accepted the hand of a rich burgess of Liege, who was a widower, with an only son. The burgess and his second wife were both in the grave, and the high spirited girl, proud of her noble descent, and chafing over her scanty means, was left dependant upon her step-father's son; who though not destitute of good qualities, was, like the generality of his fellow-citizens, tyrannical, conceited, and unpolished. Linda entertained a secret dread that her guardian would attempt to assert an undue control over her; and she justly imagined that the gay attire of Wilkin de Retz had not been assumed without a purpose: she was therefore more displeased than surprised when she received a summons to attend her brother in the hall. Mustering all her courage she descended to the apartment in which the two worthies were sitting in council together; and the sun's rays streaming in through an open pane in the upper part of the window, catching the rich gold chains with which her visitor had bedecked himself, her eyes were dazzled by the refulgence of these costly ornaments. It soon appeared that the modest burgess trusted entirely to these gauds, and to his velvet gown furred with miniver, for the advancement of his suit; for he preserved a solemn silence, and Franz Klingsohr, the host, was obliged, after a few preliminary hints, to open the negotiation, which had for its object a point of no less importance than the disposal of the fair hand of Linda Wilmsfeldt. The lady, after the approved fashion of gentle dames, declined the offer, modestly, but firmly; the lover uttered a deep sigh which might indeed have been mistaken for a groan; but Franz, of a less imperturbable temperament, burst forth into a torrent of invective, and, after divers reproaches on the score of his ward's obligations to his bounty, vaunted the extent of his own authority, and threatened to compel her to accept the offer of his friend. All the spirit of Linda's martial ancestors flashed out upon this insolent menace. Colouring crimson with indignation, she exclaimed, "Sunk and low as are my fortunes, know, thou base slave of mammon, that I despise thy idol gold; and when next you take upon yourself to propose a match for the daughter of a noble line, choose some fitting suitor; for I tell you, sir, that if you cannot find a man of gentle birth within your city, I will send to the knight, Count Lothaire de Lechtervelde, who now invests your gates; my jeopardy will excuse the indelicacy of the prayer, and should he reject my suit,—which he doubtless will, since I am abused by my connexion with a trader,—rather than wed one of the upstart burghers of this vile city, I will ally myself to the blacksmith who works beneath your wall!"

Franz was dumb during this speech, merely from inability to find words strong enough to express his rage. Recovering himself just as Linda was sweeping out of the room in triumph, he seized her by the hand, and making a strong effort to repress his wrath, desired her to seek her chamber, and remain a prisoner there until she should be prepared to obey commands which he possessed the power to enforce. Gladly flying from the spot, the fair orphan rushed up to her dormitory; but felt a little abashed when reflecting upon the loss of all her self-command, and the somewhat needless display of indignation which had provoked her guardian to draw a heavy bolt across her door, and to detain her

in strict confinement. Her rash speech had made a deep impression upon Franz; he was most bitterly incensed by her allusion to the Count de Lechtervelde, who was the scourge and the terror of the inhabitants of Liege; although at this time pulled up with self-confidence, they despised his threat of reducing the city, and treated his approaches with contempt. It was indeed scarcely possible for a place so strong and well fortified to entertain any apprehension from the slender force which the Burgundian knight could bring against it; but while the Liegeois felt perfectly secure of the impracticability of his efforts, they would have given half their city, could they, by that means, have got him into their power, and have been enabled to wreak their long cherished desire of vengeance upon his head. Lothaire, entrenched in an impregnable fortress, situated on the summit of a hill, which commanded the whole of the adjacent country, and overlooked the city of Liege, had, during more peaceable times, in consequence of a contract not unfrequent in those days, kept the road, from sunrise to sunset, free from all robbers and spoilers; exacting only such a toll from wayfaring passengers, in return for this service, as they were well able to pay. Even when the stipulated hour had passed, and all stray travellers were generally considered fair booty by the knight who patrolled the highways, living, as the phrase went, "by the saddle," he despoiled them of neither life nor property, but took a moderate ransom, and dismissed them in peace.

Notwithstanding these courtesies, the ungrateful Liegeois hated the bold knight, who, it must be confessed, took great delight in showing his powers over, and his scorn of, the greasy Burgheers, as he was wont to call the lords and rulers of the city; and many a time did they attempt, with all their puissance, to dislodge him from his tower of strength; but he repelled their assaults, and obliged them to retreat sorely beaten, and miserably disgraced. And now that, the duke of Burgundy being embroiled with the king of France, the people of Liege had seized the opportunity to revolt, Lothaire mustered a small body of men at arms, threw up works, and laid regular siege to the city, keeping it in check while his master's troops were otherwise employed. It was in vain that the garrison sallied out, resolved to put this contemptible force to flight; they were unable to carry the very weakest of the entrenchments; so admirably were they constructed, and so desperately did the Burgundians defend their outposts; nor were stratagems of more avail; they were discovered and turned upon the contrivers,—nay, at length, Lothaire, to show his utter contempt for their inventions, and the accurate knowledge which he possessed of every thing that passed within the city, had the audacity to despatch a trumpet regularly every morning to the walls, with orders to proclaim aloud to the garrison the exact nature of the plans which the council of war meditated for the day; and the enraged Liegeois having fired upon the flag of truce which accompanied the embassy, and killed the bearer, he swore that he would hang twenty of the delinquents before sunset, and kept his oath.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the name of the count de Lechtervelde should be poison in the ear of a Liegeois; and Linda, as gracious recollections of the kindness which she had received from the family who had fostered her from infancy, came across her mind, regretted her cutting sarcasms. Obeying therefore the gentle impulse which prompted her to seek a reconciliation with her offended kinsman, she despatched a humble and penitent message by Jacquette, praying to be forgiven. Franz, mistaking the motive for this concession, in the true spirit of his townsmen, resolved to impose hard terms upon one who seemed willing to submit; and refused to grant a pardon without a promise from the fair culprit to receive his friend Wilkin in the character of a lover; a requisition which Linda treated with disdain; and was, in consequence, kept more strictly confined than ever, being even deprived of Jacquette's conversation.

Indignation at the treatment which she experienced, enabled Linda to pass the first day of her captivity without suffering from ennui; but the second appeared insupportably tedious; and tired of her embroilery, she stationed herself at the window of her apartment in the hope of finding amusement in the passing scene without. The lattice overlooked the city wall, and was exactly opposite to the forge of the blacksmith, whose hand she had declared herself to be willing to accept in preference to that of Wilkin de Retz. She had often seen the honest artizan before, without however remarking his personal appearance; and she was surprised, and not a little shocked to perceive that he was a fine well-proportioned man, with a set of remarkably white teeth, and a pair of dark flashing eyes; an enormous bush of hair

on his face obscured his other features, and his skin was so grimed with his occupation, that he might have been mistaken for a Nubian; but although he possessed sufficient attractions to render the surmise possible, that admiration claimed some share in the choice; and deeply mortified by the supposition that so unpleasant a construction might be placed upon her flippant declaration, Linda was sufficiently punished for the heedless speech. But her vexation did not end here; the blacksmith, probably made acquainted, through the loquacity of the servants, of the flattering mention of his name, was continually turning from his work to gaze at the window of the lady who had honoured him with her regards; and though his demeanour was not disrespectful, a smile played round his lips, and his eyes spoke eloquent things, if by chance they happened to encounter hers.

Linda, driven away from the lattice by the too pointed admiration of her neighbour, passed the dreary hours in listless solitude. At night, however, when she could look into the street without being visible herself, she resumed her station. The forge had now become a picturesque object as it contrasted with the surrounding darkness. Its lurid fires spread a strong illumination around, displaying the swart figures which moved about in their red light, and throwing out showers of sparks as the heavy hammer descended on the anvil; even the clink of those instruments sounded not unpleasantly on the ear; and the bustle, hilarity, and activity which prevailed, both within and without, afforded abundant entertainment for the spectator. Citizens were seen hurrying to and fro, bringing their weapons to be repaired; others led their clumsy, but highly conditioned horses to be shod; the pavement was strewn with armour, and the bright cuirass, and the polished lance, gleamed in the light of the furnace. While surveying the different persons thus busily engaged, Linda could not avoid being struck by the superiority of the blacksmith over all the rest. Prompt, agile, ready upon every occasion, he superintended the work of his satellites, with an air which convinced her that he had been intended by nature for a superior station. He had, moreover, a kind word and a joke for all; and remedying with his own hand any thing that was done amiss, sent away all his customers well satisfied. There was an exquisite grace and ease in his movements which surprised the frauken; more especially as she perceived, that aware how ill suited it was to his station, he sometimes affected a rustic and clownish manner—an appearance however which he could ill support; for if his attention happened to be called off, he forgot to school his limbs and mien, and the agile spring, the dexterous elegant movement, all betrayed familiar acquaintance with camps and courts.

Convinced that some mystery lurked beneath, the proceedings of the blacksmith became exceedingly interesting to the fair prisoner; and she was further assured that he was not exactly what he professed to be, by remarking that when the forge was deserted and free from all visitors and lookers on, he never troubled himself with manual labour, though showing at other times considerable expertness at his trade. He seemed to be more familiar with the javelin than with the coulter, and when freed from the gaze of strangers, he lounged idly over his tools, or tilted against the wall, while his fellow-mechanics paid him the most profound respect. It was in vain that she puzzled herself to fathom the secret; and tired at length with fruitless conjectures, she dismissed the subject from her mind, and began to consider how she could best recover her freedom. Franz was inexorable to all her entreaties for pardon, and would accept of nothing less than unconditional obedience.

The burgess had lately obtained an office of some importance in the government of the city, an elevation which he owed to his friend Wilkin,—and having had the casting vote in two instances, in one of which he displayed his rigorous devotion to justice, by dooming the criminal to the block, and in the other, his love of mercy, by favouring the more lenient party,—he began to fancy that he possessed the power of dispensing life and death.

There could be no hope for Linda while her guardian continued to entertain these inflated notions of his own dignity; so she made up her mind to a prolonged imprisonment, and from the mere necessity of taking exercise, busied herself with making alterations in the disposition of the furniture of her apartment. In removing a large press which, for some time, bade defiance to her efforts, a piece of the arras hanging fell from the wall, and in endeavouring to replace it, she touched a secret spring. A panel in the wainscot flew open, and disclosed an aperture, which, upon inspection, proved to be the entrance to a flight of dark, narrow, winding stairs. The necessity of preparing a light to guide her through the mazes of this passage, obliged the impatient