



# The True Witness

## CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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NO. 21.

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### THE LION OF FLANDERS; OR, THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER XIX.—(CONTINUED.)

In the centre of the vacant space, between the deans and the knights, stood the herald of Courtrai. As soon as each had taken his place, Guy commanded him to repeat his tidings in presence of the deans; and the herald obeyed, and began:—  
"The good citizens of Courtrai greet you by me, noble lords, and inform you that they have driven the French from their city, and that five hundred of them have bitten the dust. But now the city is in the greatest straits. The traitor Van Lens has fallen back on the citadel, and daily discharges burning arrows upon the houses, so that the farthest portion of the city is already reduced to ashes.—Messire Arnold van Oudenarde has brought them some succours, yet is the number of the enemy too great. In this their need and distress, they beseech the Count Guy in particular, and you, friendly citizens of Bruges, in general, to send them aid; and they hope that you will not delay a single day the rescue of your distressed brothers. Such is the message which the good citizens of Courtrai send to you by my mouth."  
"You have heard, deans," said Guy, "that one of our noblest cities is in peril of utter destruction; I do not think that the cry of distress from your brothers of Courtrai will fall in vain on your ears. The matter demands haste; your aid alone can deliver them from their danger; therefore I pray you all instantly to summon your guilds to arms. How long time do you require to prepare your comrades to set forth?"  
The Dean of the Clothworkers replied: "This afternoon, most illustrious Count, four thousand clothworkers will stand full armed on the Friday Market-place: I will lead them whithersoever you command."  
"And you, Master Breydel, you will be there also."  
Breydel advanced proudly, and replied: "Your servant Breydel will place at your disposition, my Lord Count, not less than eight thousand of his craftsmen."  
"A cry of astonishment ran along the circle of knights. 'Eight thousand!' said they all at once. 'Yes, truly, messires,' continued the Dean of the Butchers, 'eight thousand, and more.' All the guilds of Bruges, except that of the clothworkers, have elected me their captain, and God knows how I can repay this honor. This very afternoon, if you will let us, the Friday Market-place shall be filled with your trusty townsmen; and I can assure you that in my butchers you have a thousand lions in your host; the sooner, the better, noble Count; our axes are beginning to rust."  
"Master Breydel," said Guy, "you are a brave and a worthy vassal of my father. The land in which such men live can never long remain enslaved. I thank you for your hearty good-will."  
A smile of satisfaction showed how much pleasure Breydel's words had given to the circle of knights; but the Dean turned back again, and whispered in Deconinck's ear. "I pray you, master, do not angry with me for speaking thus to the Count. You are and will ever be my superior; I will follow your counsel; it should be better if good men would have no cause for displeasure."  
The Dean of the Clothworkers pressed Breydel's hand in token of friendship and perfect accord.  
"Master Deconinck," inquired Guy, "have you

made known to the guilds my former request? will the requisite gold be provided for me?"  
"The guilds of Bruges place all their wealth at your disposal, noble Count," was the answer. "If you will but send some of your servants with a command in writing to the Guildhall, as many marks of silver will be delivered to them as you may require. The guilds beseech you not to spare them; freedom can never cost them too dear."  
Just as Guy was about to acknowledge the good-will and confidence of the citizens with words of gratitude, the door of the hall was opened, and every eye was fixed with astonishment on a monk, who entered boldly and uninvited, and drew near to the Dean. A robe of thick brown cloth was confined by a girdle around his loins; a black hood overhung his face, and so concealed his features as to render it impossible to recognise him. He seemed very old; for his body was bent, and a long beard floated on his breast. With hasty and furtive glances, he regarded the knights who were present; and his keen eye seemed to pierce the lowest depth of their hearts. Adolf van Nieuwland recognised in him the same monk who had brought him the letter of Robert de Bethune, and was about to greet him with a loud voice; but the gestures of the monk were so extraordinary, that the words died away on the lips of the young man. All who were present began to kindle with anger; the daring looks which the unknown bent on them were such as they would not willingly endure; yet they gave no indication of their displeasure, for they saw that the riddle would soon be solved.  
When the monk had well scrutinised each of those present, he loosed his girdle from his loins, threw his robe and his hood on the ground, and remained standing in the middle of the hall. He raised his head proudly; he was a man of about thirty years of age, tall and of noble frame; he looked round upon the knights as though he said, Do ye not recognise me?  
The answer did not come quickly enough, and he cried out: "You are astonished, messires, to find a fox under this coat; yet he has lain concealed in it for two years."  
"Welcome, welcome, dear Diederik, good friend!" exclaimed the nobles all at once; "we thought you had been long since dead."  
"Then you may thank God that I have risen again," continued Diederik. "No, I was not dead; my captive brother and Adolf van Nieuwland can bear testimony to that. I have been able to console all for as an itinerant friar I had access to the prisons; and may God forgive me the vile Latin I have uttered. Yes, you may laugh, messires, but I have spoken Latin. I bring you, moreover, news from all our hapless countrymen for their relatives and friends."  
Some of the knights wished to make more particular inquiry concerning the fate of the prisoners; but he put them aside, and continued: "For God's sake, cease these questions; I have far more important tidings to announce to you. Hear, and tremble not; for I bring you evil news. You have shaken off the yoke, and have fought and won the battle of your freedom; I grieve that I could not share this joy with you. Honor to you, brave knights and trusty citizens; honor to you that you have freed your fatherland. I assure you, that if the Flemings do not wear new chains within fourteen days, not all the devils in hell will be able to rob them of their liberty; but the new chains that are preparing make me anxious and sad."  
"Explain yourself more clearly, Messire Diederik," cried Guy; "explain your meaning, and do not torture us with enigmatical hints."  
"Well, then, I tell you plainly, that sixty-two thousand Frenchmen are escaped before Lille."  
"Sixty-two thousand!" repeated the knights, gazing in alarm on one another.  
"Sixty-two thousand!" echoed Breydel, rubbing his hands for joy; "what a fine flock!"  
Deconinck's head sank on his breast, and he was lost in deep thought. Soon, however, he had estimated the greatness of the danger, and considered the means to avert it.  
"I assure you, messires," continued Diederik die Vos, "that they number more than thirty-two thousand horse, and at least as many foot. They plunder and burn as though they were thereby rendering an acceptable service to heaven."  
"Are these evil tidings well founded?" asked Guy, anxiously; "has not he who told you this deceived you, Messire Diederik?"  
"No, no, noble Count, I saw it with my own eyes; and last evening I ate my supper in the tent of the Seneschal Robert d'Artois. He swore on his honor, in my presence, that the last Fleming should die by his hand. Consider now what it behoves you to do. For myself, I shall buckle on my armour without delay; and if I stand alone against these two-and-thirty thousand accursed Frenchmen, I shall not yield an inch of ground; I, at least, will no longer witness the slavery of Flanders."  
Jan Breydel could not keep himself still a moment; his feet were in perpetual motion, and he swung his arms in angry impatience. Could he but dare to speak; but reverence for the lords who stood around restrained him. Guy and the other nobles looked at one another in helpless dismay.—Two-and-thirty thousand well equipped and warlike horsemen! It was altogether impossible that they could hope to offer a resistance to a force like this. In the Flemish army there were only the five hundred horsemen of Namur, whom Guy had brought with him; and what could this handful avail against the frightful number of the foe?  
"What is to be done?" asked Guy. "Speak, how is our fatherland to be delivered?"  
Some were of opinion that they should throw themselves into Bruges, and there await the dispersion of the French army for want of provisions.—Others wished to be let loose upon the enemy, and to fall upon them that very night. Many projects were discussed, of which the greater part were rejected as "dishonorable" and "the remainder as impracticable."  
Deconinck stood with his head still bowed in deep thought; he heard, indeed, every proposition that was made, but the attention he gave did not hinder the course of his own reflections. At last Guy addressed him, and asked what way of escape he saw from this critical position.  
"Noble Count," replied Deconinck raising his

head, "were I commander-in-chief, I should begin operations thus: I should march with all speed with the guildsmen of Bruges upon Courtrai, in order to expel thence the castellan Van Lens. That fortress would no longer be a stronghold and place of refuge for the French, and we should have a secure shelter for our women and children, as well as for ourselves; for the citadel of Courtrai strong, while Bruges, in its present condition, could not stand a siege, but might easily be taken by storm. I would further despatch mounted messengers into all parts of Flanders to announce the nearness of the enemy, and to summon all the Clauwars to Courtrai; Messires van Gulick and Renesse should also fall back on the place. In this way, I am sure, noble Count that the Flemish army would, within four days, amount to thirty thousand picked men of war, and then we need have no great fear of the French."  
The knights listened in eager silence; they could not help being astonished at the extraordinary man who had in a few minutes thought out so able a method of defence, and given them such appropriate counsel. Though they had long known Deconinck's high qualities, they could scarcely believe that they were the endowments of a clothworker, a man from the class of the people.  
"You have more wisdom than all of us together," cried Diederik die Vos. "Yes, yes, it is so indeed; we are far stronger than we thought. Now we turn over a new leaf; and I am inclined to think the French will have good reason to rue their journey hitherwards."  
"I thank God, who has inspired you with these counsels, Master Deconinck," said the youthful Count; "your good service shall not lack its fitting reward. I will act on the plan you have advised; it is most wise and most prudent. I hope, Master Breydel, that you will not fail to supply us the men whom you have promised."  
"Eight thousand, did I say, most noble Count?" replied Breydel. "Well, now, I say ten thousand. No guildsmen or apprentices shall remain in Bruges; young and old, all must forth to the fight. I will take care that the French shall not make their entry into Flanders except over our dead bodies, and their Deans, my friends, will do the same, I know right well."  
"Certainly, noble lord," exclaimed the Deans with one voice; "no man will fail in his duty, for all are eager for the fight."  
"Our time is too precious to be consumed in talking," said Guy. "Go now and gather the guildsmen together with what speed you can; in two hours I shall be ready to depart, and will place myself at the head of the expedition in the Friday Market-place. Go now, I am right well pleased with your zeal and courage."  
All then left the hall. Guy immediately despatched numerous messengers in all directions to the nobles who still remained loyal to their fatherland; and at the same time he sent directions to William van Gulick and John van Renesse to fall back on Courtrai.  
The alarming tidings were spread in a few moments over the whole city. As the rumour diffused itself, the number of the enemy was exaggerated in a wonderful manner, and now the French host was more than two hundred thousand strong. One may imagine with what terror and grief the sorrowful intelligence struck the women and children. In every street were weeping mothers embracing their terrified daughters with loving compassion. The children began to cry because they saw their mothers weep and tremble, and without any notion of the danger that threatened them. Their agonised sobs and the expression of mortal terror on their countenances contrasted singularly with the lofty and impatient bearing of the men.  
From all sides hastened the guildsmen to the place of rendezvous; the clatter of the iron plates, with which many were covered, mingled like a joyous song, with the wailing cries of the women and children. Whenever a party of men met in the street, they halted a moment to exchange a few words, and kindle each other's courage to the fight for victory or for death. Here and there might be seen a father at the door of his house, embracing one by one his children and their mother; then dashing the tears from his eye, and disappearing like an arrow in the direction of the Friday Market-place; and the mother would linger on the threshold of the house, gazing on the corner round which the father of her children had vanished. That farewell seemed to her a separation for ever; tears rolled down from beneath her eyelids,—she pressed her children to her throbbing breast, and turned back despairingly into her home.  
Already the guildsmen stood in long files in the market-place; Breydel had kept his promise; he counted among his men twelve thousand guildsmen of all crafts. The axes of the butchers glittered like mirrors in the sunshine, and dazzled the beholder with their broad and fiery flashings. Over the heads of the clothworkers arose two thousand 'good days' with deep iron heads, and one division of them carried cross-bows. Guy was standing in the middle of the square, surrounded by a retinue of about twenty knights; he was awaiting the return of the remaining craftsmen, who had been despatched into the city to collect waggon and horse. A clothworker, whom Deconinck had sent to the great bell-tower, advanced into the market-place at this moment, with the great standard of Bruges. No sooner had the guildsmen caught sight of the Blue Lion, than they raised a deafening shout of joy and over-awed was repeated the war-cry which had given the signal of vengeance on that night of blood: "Flanders and the Lion; all that is French is false!"  
And then they brandished their weapons, as though already in possession of the city.  
When all that was necessary had been disposed in the waggon, the butchers gave forth their shrill tones, and the men of Bruges left their city, with waving banners, by the gate of Ghent. The women were now left without any protection; their distress was greater than ever; they saw nothing before them but misery and death. In the afternoon, Matilda left the city with all her maidens and attendants; this party departed to some village to the west of Courtrai, and sought a more secure retreat in Courtrai. They hastily gathered together a few necessaries, shut up their houses, and followed in the

steps of their husbands through the gate of Ghent. Numberless families ran in this manner with bleeding feet the whole distance from Bruges to Courtrai, and watered with their bitter tears the grass which skirted the way; while in Bruges reigned a stillness—as of the grave.  
**CHAPTER XX.**  
It was already dark night when Guy reached Courtrai with about sixteen thousand men. The inhabitants, apprised of their approach by mounted messengers, stood in dense crowds on the walls of the city, and welcomed their rightful lords with glad and joyous acclamations, amidst the blaze of innumerable torches. As soon as the host had entered the city, and been distributed throughout its various quarters, the citizens of Courtrai brought forth every kind of food and refreshment; they placed before their weary brethren large flagons of wine to restore their exhausted strength, and kept watch over them the whole night. While they were embracing one another with transport, and expressing their affection in every possible manner, some hastened to meet the weary women and children, and to relieve them of the burdens they carried. Not a few of these poor creatures, whose feet were torn and bleeding with their painful march, were borne to the city on the broad shoulders of the brave citizens of Courtrai; all were lodged and carefully tended, and comforted in every way. The gratitude of the men of Courtrai, and their extreme kindness, strengthened wonderfully the courage of the men of Bruges; of men's souls are ever enlarged and elevated by frank and noble treatment.  
Matilda and Maria, the sister of Adolf van Nieuwland, with a considerable number of the noble ladies of Bruges, had been some hours in Courtrai before the army arrived. They had been already received by their friends, and had busied themselves in providing shelter and quarters for the knights and nobles, their relatives and friends; so that on their arrival, Guy and his companions found supper already prepared for them.  
Early the next morning Guy and a few of the most distinguished inhabitants reconnoitred the fortifications of the citadel; and found, to their great dismay, that it was impossible to take it without a large siege-train. The walls were far too lofty, and the overhanging towers allowed too many arrows to be discharged on the advancing besiegers. He saw that a bold attack might easily cost him a thousand men; and, after mature deliberation, he determined not to storm the citadel at once. He gave orders for the construction of battering-rams and movable towers, and for the collection of every material in the city that could be available for the assault. It was clear that this could not take place for five days at least; the French garrison had ceased to shoot burning arrows into the city; the soldiers were, indeed, seen standing with their bows at the loop-holes of the battlements, but yet they did not discharge them. The Flemings could not conceive the reason of this cessation; they thought that some artifice lay concealed therein, and remained carefully on their guard. Guy had forbidden every aggression; he would attempt nothing until he had all his machines ready for storming the citadel, and could securely reckon on the victory.  
The castellan Van Lens was at his wits' end; his archers had but a very slender supply of arrows left, and prudence compelled him to reserve them for the assault. His provisions, too, were so far exhausted, that he could supply only half rations to his soldiers. Still he hoped to elude the vigilance of the Flemings, and to find some opportunity to send a messenger to Lille, where the French army lay encamped.  
Arnold of Oudenarde, who had a few days before brought the citizens of Courtrai a reinforcement of three hundred men, had bivouacked with his soldiers on the Groningen Place, close to the abbey and the walls of the city. This place was especially fitted for a general encampment, and had been chosen for that purpose by Guy and his council of war. While the carpenters' guild was labouring at the storming engines, the other Flemings were set to work the next morning to dig trenches. The clothworkers and the butchers wielded each a pickaxe and a spade, and set to work with great ardour; the entrenchments and siege-works arose as by enchantment; the whole army toiled with emulous zeal, and each sought to surpass his neighbour in exertion. The spades and pickaxes rose and descended like gleams of lightning, so that the eye could not follow them; and the thick clods of earth fell on the entrenchments like showers of stones thrown down on the assailants from a beleagued city.  
As soon as a part of the earth-works were completed, the soldiers hastened to pitch the tents. Ever and anon the workmen would leave the poles sticking in the earth and scramble away to work at the entrenchments; and then would arise a loud shout of welcome greeting, and the cry, "Flanders and the Lion!" boomed in the distance as an answering echo. And this happened, too, whenever reinforcement arrived from the other cities. The Flemish people had unjustly accused their nobles of disloyalty and cowardice; true, a large number had declared for the alien, but the loyal were far more numerous than the traitors. Fifty-and-two of the noblest knights of Flanders joined in the prisons of France; and to these prisoners their love for their fatherland and for their native prince had consigned them. The rest of the true-hearted nobles who remained in Flanders deemed it a degradation to take part with the insurgent townspeople; to them the tournament and the battle-field were the only places fit for deeds of arms. The manners of the time had given them this notion; for then the distance between a knight and a citizen was as great as that between a master and a servant now. So long as the struggle was carried on within the walls of the cities, and under command of popular leaders, they remained shut up in their castles, sighing over their country's oppression; but now that Guy had placed himself at the head of his people, the general in-chief appointed by their Count, they poured in from all sides with their retainers.  
On the first day, early in the morning, there entered Courtrai Messires Baldwin of Papebrode, Henry of Raveschoth, and of Belleghem, Solomon

of Serecofs, and the lord of Maldegem. Towards mid-day a cloud of dust arose over the distant trees in the direction of Moorsele, and amidst the loud shouts of the men of Bruges, fifteen hundred men of Furnes entered the city, with the renowned warrior Eustachius Sporkyn at their head. They were accompanied by a multitude of knights who had joined them on their march. Amongst these the most distinguished were Messires John van Aysboren, William van Daeckem, and his brother Peter; Messire van Landeghem, Hugo van der Moere, and Simon van Caester. John Willebaert of Thorout had also placed himself, with a small contingent of troops, under the command of Van Sporkyn. Each moment, moreover, some stray knight would enter the camp; not a few of these were from surrounding countries, and gladly came to lend their aid to the Flemings in their struggle for liberty. In this way Henry van Loucheyn of Luxemburg, Goaway van Goetzehove and John van Cuyck, two nobles of Brabant, were already with Guy when the troops of Furnes marched into the city. As soon as each new-comer had recruited his strength, and refreshed himself with food, he was sent into the camp, and placed under the command of Messire van Renesse.  
On the second day arrived in haste the men of Ypres. Although they had their own city to care for, they could not allow Flanders to be liberated without them. Their troops were the finest and richest in equipment of all the army. They were five hundred clubmen, all arrayed in scarlet, and with magnificent feathers in their glittering morions; they wore also breastplates and kneecaps, which gleamed wondrously in the sunshine. Seven hundred others carried enormous crossbows, with bolts of steel; and their uniform was green turned up with yellow. With them came Messires John of Ypres, armour-bearer of Count John of Namur, Diederik van Vlamertinghe, Joseph van Hollebecke and Balwin van Passchendale; their leaders were Philip Baelde and Peter Belle, the deans of the two principal guilds of Ypres. In the afternoon arrived two hundred well-appointed warriors from east and west Vrye, the villages around Bruges.  
On the third day, early in the morning, Messires William van Gulick, the priest, and John van Renesse, returned from Cassel. Five hundred knights, four hundred Zealanders, and another detachment of the men of Bruges, marched with them into the camp.  
And now from every part the knights and warriors who had been summoned had arrived. Men of all arms were ranged under the command of Guy. It is impossible to express the joy which filled the hearts of the Flemings during these days; for now they saw that their fellow-countrymen had not degenerated, and that their fatherland still counted loyal and valiant sons in every quarter. Already one-and-twenty thousand men lay encamped, and ready for battle, under the banner of the Black Lion; and their number was being hourly increased by small reinforcements.  
Although the French had an army of sixty-two thousand men, of which the half was cavalry, yet not the slightest fear found entrance into the hearts of the Flemings. In their enthusiasm they would cease their work, and embrace one another, exchanging words of confidence and triumph, as though there were nothing that could rob them of their victory.  
Towards evening, as the labourers were returning to their tents, the cry, "Flanders and the Lion!" arose anew over the walls of Courtrai. All ran back to the entrenchments to see what the sound could mean. No sooner did their eyes range freely over the ramparts, than they sent back a loud and joyous answering shout. Six hundred horsemen, all clad in steel, sprang into the trenches amid deafening acclamations. They came from Namur; and Count John, the brother of Robert de Bethune, had sent them into Flanders. The arrival of these horsemen greatly raised the spirits and increased the joy of the Flemings; for it was in cavalry that they were particularly deficient. Although they knew right well that the men of Namur could not understand one word they said, they overwhelmed them with words of greeting and welcome, and brought them wine in profusion; and when the foreign warriors saw this friendly reception, they felt themselves animated by a like spirit of affection; and they swore that they would sacrifice both blood and life for their good hosts.  
Ghent alone had sent neither message nor contingent to Courtrai. It had been long known that the Lilyards were very numerous there, and that the governor was a staunch ally of the French. But nevertheless, seven hundred French mercenaries had been slain by the townsmen, and John Borlant had promised his aid. The matter was doubtful, and so the Flemings did not venture openly to accuse their brethren of Ghent of disloyalty; nevertheless they entertained great suspicion of them, and not seldom gave free expression to their displeasure. In the evening, when the sun had already disappeared more than an hour behind the village of Moorsele, the labourers had dispersed themselves amongst the tents. Here and there was still heard a sound, interrupted at intervals by the clapping of hand and the chink of drinking-glasses, and the concluding verse of which was caught up and enthusiastically repeated by a multitude of voices. In other tents was heard a confused murmur, which, when one listened attentively, resolved itself into an interchange of encouragements and exhortations in the midst of the camp at a little distance from the tents, a large fire was blazing, which illuminated a portion of the entrenchments with its ruddy glare. About ten men were appointed to keep it burning, about from time to time, threw large branches of trees upon it; and then would be heard the voice of the captain, saying, "Gently, my men, gently; lay the branches carefully, and do not drive the sparks towards the camp."  
A few steps from this fire was the tent of the camp sentinels. It was a covering of ox-hides, the framework of which rested on eight massive beams; the four sides were open, so that it commanded the camp in all directions.  
It was Jan Breydel's duty to keep watch this night with fifty of his butchers; they sat on little wooden stools round a table under the roof, which protected them from the dew and rain; their axes, shone in their hands like weapons of glowing flame. The sentinels they had sent out, were seen in the