

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER IV. CONTINUED.

As soon as Count Guy was announced, the king, without, however, mounting the throne, by his side stood his son Louis, while his nobles ranged themselves on either hand along the walls. Then the old Count of Flanders drawing near with slow steps, knelt on one knee before the king.

"Vassal!" said Philip, "a humble attitude truly becoms you, after all the trouble you have occasioned us. You have deserved death, and are, in deed, condemned to die; nevertheless, out of our royal grace, we will now hear you. Stand up, therefore, and speak."

Upon this the old Count rose from the ground and said:

"My prince, and liege lord! with confidence in your royal justice I have presented myself at your feet, that you may deal with me according to your will."

"Your submission," returned the king, "comes late. You have entered into a confederacy against me with Edward of England; you have risen up as an unfaithful vassal against your liege lord; you have had the audacity to declare war against us; and your land has therefore been justly confiscated for your manifold transgressions."

"My prince," said Guy, "let me find grace before you. Behold, your self, mighty king, what it is that a father feels deprived of his child. Did I not supplicate you in the deepest woe? Did I not humbly pray you to give me back to me? If your own son, my future lord, Louis, who now stands so manfully by your side,—if he were taken from you, and cast into a dungeon in a strange land, would not your grief carry you any length to avenge or to release your own blood and offspring? Yes, you have a father's heart, and that will understand me. I know that I shall find grace at your feet."

Philip cast a look of tenderness upon his son; at this moment he felt for that Guy had had to suffer, and his heart melted with compassion for the unfortunate Count.

"Sir," cried Louis, with emotion, "for my sake be gracious to him; I pray you have pity upon him and upon his child."

The king, however, had recovered from his emotion, and now assumed a sterner aspect.

"Be not so easily moved by the words of a disobedient vassal, my son," he said. "However, I will not refuse to listen, if only he can make it appear that what he has done has been for his daughter's sake, and not from contumacy."

"Sir," resumed the Count, "your majesty knows that whatever man could do I did, to have my child back; but none of my endeavours availed; all my prayers and supplications were in vain; and even the intervention of the Holy Father was of no effect. What, then, could I do? I flattered myself with the hope of procuring my daughter's deliverance by force of arms; the fortune of war, however, was against me, and the victory was with your majesty."

"But," interrupted the king, "what can we do for you? You have given an evil example to our vassals, and if we show grace to you, will they not all rise up against us, and you, perhaps, once more join yourself to their number?"

"O my prince!" answered Guy, "let it please your majesty to restore the unhappy Philippa to her father, and I swear to you that I shall bind myself with inviolable fidelity to your crown."

"And will Flanders raise the contribution we have imposed? And will you duly repay all the costs of the war which your insolence and contumacy compelled us to make against you?"

"No sacrifice shall be too great for me to repay your majesty's gracious favour; all your commands shall be humbly and punctually obeyed. But my child, sir, my child!"

"Your child?" interposed Philip, hesitatingly; and his thoughts reverted to his wife, Joanna, who, he knew, would hardly with good will release from captivity the daughter of the Count of Flanders. Fearing to provoke the wrath of his imperious queen, he did not venture to follow the better movements of his heart; so, without making any absolute promise to Guy on this point, he replied:

"The intercession of our beloved brother has done much for you; and, moreover, your hard lot moves me to compassion. You have sinned; but your punishment has been bitter. Be good to me; I will endeavor to sweeten your cup. Nevertheless, we cannot, on this very day, finally receive you into favour; so great a matter must first have due deliberation. We require, moreover, that you make a public submission in the presence of our vassals here assembled, that you may be an example to them all. Go now; leave us, that we may once more consider what we can do for an unfaithful and disobedient vassal."

Upon this command the Count of Flanders left the hall; and before he was out of the palace the report was universally current among the French nobles that the king had promised to restore him his land and his daughter. Many wished him joy with all their hearts; others, who had built ambitious hopes on the conquest of Flanders, were inwardly displeased; but as they could not oppose the king's will, they took care that their vexation should not be seen.

Joy and confident hope now filled the hearts of the Flemish applicants; and many a flattering anticipation was entertained of the liberation and renewed happiness of their country. It seemed to them as if nothing could now disturb the good success of their undertaking; since, besides the gracious reception the Count had met with from the king, the latter had moreover given a solemn assurance to his brother De Valois that Guy should be dealt with magnanimously.

Who have striven against fortune, and in this hard struggle suffered

so sorely and wept bitterly, how pleasantly comes a ray of joy into your darkling hearts! How easily do you forget your pains, to embrace an uncertain happiness, as if you had already emptied the cup of woe; while the dregs, bitterest of all, still remain for you to drain! You see a smile on every countenance, and press the hand of every one that seems to sympathize in your happiness. But trust not the fickle dame Fortune, nor her ever-rolling wheel; nor yet the words of those who were not your friends when you were in adversity. For envy and treason are hidden under the double countenance, as adders lurk under flowers, and scorpions behind the golden pine apple.

In vain do we seek the track of the serpent in the field; we feel her poisoned tooth, but know not whence it has stricken us. So does the envious and spiteful man work in darkness; for he knows his own wickedness, and out of shame conceals his evil deeds. The black soul does not show upon the flattering countenance; and so his arrows strike us to the heart, even while we hold him for our friend.

Count Guy lost no time in taking the necessary steps for satisfying all the king's requisitions immediately upon his return to Flanders, and for laying the foundations of a long peace, in which his subjects might forget the calamities of war. Even Robert de Bethune seemed to have no doubt of the promised grace; for, ever since his father's appearance at court, the French nobles had on all occasions behaved with the utmost kindness and civility to the Flemings; and as the latter well knew that the thoughts of princes are best read on the countenances of their courtiers, they saw in this demeanour a certain proof of the favour and goodwill of the king.

De Chatillon, among the rest, had repeatedly visited the Count, and overwhelmed him with congratulations; but he concealed a devilish secret in his heart, which he contrived to hide with his smiles. His niece, Joanna of Navarre, having promised him that the fief of Flanders should one day be his, all his ambitious projects had centered upon this one goal; and now he beheld it vanishing into thin air before his eyes, like a dream which is gone and leaves no trace behind.

There is no passion of the human heart which more readily and imperiously leads away those whose are subject to it into every kind of iniquity than the lust of power, pitilessly it tramples down whatever impedes its path, and looks not round to count the havoc it has made, so steadfastly and constantly does it keep its eyes fixed on the darling object. Possessed by this fiend, De Chatillon resolved in his heart on a deed of treachery, of which his own selfish interests were indeed the real motive, but which he decorated before his conscience with the fair names of duty and patriotism.

On the very same day that he arrived at Compiègne he chose out one of his most faithful servants, and mounting him on his best horse, he despatched him in all haste to Paris. A letter which this messenger bore gave a full account of all that had passed to the king and Enguerrand de Marigny, and urgent y pressed their speedy return to court.

His traitorous design met with the fullest success. Joanna of Navarre's lady knew no bounds. The Flemings graciously received! Should they to whom she had sworn an eternal hate thus escape her at the very moment when they seemed at last fully in her power? And Enguerrand de Marigny, who had already squandered, or in prospect laid out, the enormous sums which he reckoned on extorting from the Flemish burghers! Both of these foes of Flanders had too great an interest in the destruction of their prey, to allow it thus easily to give them the slip. No sooner had they received the intelligence than both hastened back to Compiègne, and appeared suddenly and unexpectedly in the king's chamber.

"What, sire!" cried Joanna, "am I, then, nothing to you, that you thus receive my enemies into favor without a word said to me? Or have you lost your reason, that you are resolved on nourishing these Flemish serpents to your own destruction?"

"Madam," answered Philip, calmly, "methinks it would becoms you to address your husband and your king with somewhat more respect. If it is my pleasure to show grace to the old Count of Flanders, so shall it be."

"No!" cried Joanna, inflamed with anger, "so shall it not be! Hear me, sire! I will not have it so! What! shall the rebels who beleaguered my uncles escape thus? Shall they have it to boast that they have shed with impunity the blood royal of Navarre, and insulted its queen?"

"Your passion leads you astray, madam," replied Philip; "betrink yourself calmly, and tell me, is it not right that Philippa should be restored to her father?"

At this Joanna's fury waxed still higher.

"Release Philippa!" she exclaimed. Surely, sire, you cannot think of it! That she may be married to Edward of England's son, and so your own child may lose a throne? No, no; that shall never happen, believe me. And what is more, Philippa is my prisoner; and you shall find that even your kingly power is not sufficient to rescue her from my grasp!"

"Truly, madam," cried Philip, "you are exceeding all bounds! I would have you know that this unseemly defiance much displeases me; take care, moreover, that I do not make you feel it! I am your sovereign, and as such I will be obeyed."

"And you intend to restore Flanders to this rebel, and to put him in a position once more to make war upon you? A grievous repentance will you prepare for yourself by so ill considered a step! For my part, since I see that I am of so small account with you, that a matter so nearly concerning me is to be settled without my being consulted, I will return to my own land of Navarre, and Philippa shall go with me."

This last speech of Queen Joanna had a powerful effect upon the king's mind; for the possession of Navarre was in truth a matter of no small importance to the crown of France, and Philip would have parted with a great deal rather than that. Joanna had more than once threatened him with retiring to her own states, and he feared that she might one day carry this design into effect. After some consideration, therefore, he replied:

"You are offended without cause, madam. Who has told you that I intend to restore Flanders? I have not yet come to any determination on the subject."

"You have said enough to let your intentions be seen," answered Joanna. "But be that as it may, I tell you, that if you disregard me so far as to set my wishes and opinions at naught, I will leave you; I will not stay here to be exposed to the consequences of your want of prudence and foresight. The war against Flanders has exhausted your treasury and your people; and now that you have the means in your hands of retrieving yourself at the expense of the rebels, you are about to receive them into favor, and to give them all back again! Never have our finances been in a worse condition; that Messire de Marigny can tell you."

Thus appealed to, Enguerrand de Marigny addressed the king. "Sire," said he, "it is impossible we can continue to pay the troops who are maintaining for the people cannot or will not any longer pay the taxes. The *Prévet des Marchands* at Paris has refused the additional contribution; so that before long I shall see the soldiers of the king's household, to carry the debasement of the coin, too, any farther is impossible. Our only resource, then, is Flanders where the commissioners whom I have despatched are at this moment engaged in raising the money to help us out of our difficulties. Consider, sire, that in restoring this land to the Count, you deprive yourself of your last resource, and expose yourself to all the consequences of the existing embarrassments."

"What!" said Philip, in a tone of mistrust, "can it be that the whole of the last contribution levied upon the third estate is already expended?"

"Sire," replied de Marigny, "I have had to repay to Stephen Barthelemy the money which the farmers of the tolls at Paris had advanced. There remains but little or nothing in the treasury."

The queen saw with malicious joy the downcast air with which the king received this news, and she perceived that now was her opportunity for obtaining a final sentence of condemnation upon the old Count. Drawing near, therefore, to her husband with a well dissembled return of gentleness, she thus spoke:

"You see well, sire, that my counsel is good. How can you lose sight of the interests of your own kingdom solely to favor these rebels? They have openly defied you; they have joined with your enemies, and have set at naught your just commands. Seeing that it is their wealth that thus puts them up, and makes them insolent, no thing can be better in every way than to take from them this superfluity of riches; and as they have all justly deserved to die, they may well kiss your royal hand, and thank you that you do not also deprive them of their lives."

"But, Messire de Marigny," said the king, turning to his minister, "can you find no means of meeting the necessary expenses for some short time at least? For I hardly think that the moneys from Flanders will come in so quickly. What you tell me of the state of things disquiets me to the last degree."

"I know of no expedient, sire; we have already employed too many."

"Listen to me," interposed Joanna. "If you have had news from the Count, deal with Guy as I desire, I will procure a loan on the credit of my kingdom of Navarre, so that we shall be set free of all anxiety for some time to come."

Whether from weakness or poverty, the king gave way, and agreed to all that Joanna required. The poor old Count was thus delivered into the hands of the traitress, in order to undergo the ceremony of a public humiliation, and then to be kept a prisoner, far away from his own land and people!

CHAPTER V.

The evening was already far advanced when Joanna of Navarre arrived at Compiègne; and while with threats and cunning she was extorting from her traitorous husband the sentence of condemnation upon the House of Flanders, its unfortunate chief was sitting with his nobles in a large room of his lodging. The wine passed round again and again in silver goblets; and joyful hopes and pleasant anticipations formed the universal subject of conversation. More than one point had already been earnestly discussed, when the door opened and Diederik die Vos, who as Robert de Bethune's bosom friend, was lodged in the same house with the Count's family, entered the apartment.

For a while he stood without speaking, looking at the old Count and his sons, first at one, then at the other. His countenance bore an expression of deep affliction and intense compassion. Joyous and open as his bearing ever was, his comrades were not a little terrified at his unusual deportment; and they suspected that some evil news must have reached him, thus to overcast his countenance and disturb his spirit.

Robert de Bethune was the first to give expression to this feeling in words. "Have you lost your tongue, Diederik?" he exclaimed; "speak, and if you have had news for us, spare your jests, I pray you."

"You need not fear my jesting, Lord Robert," was the reply. "But I know not how to tell you what I have to say; I cannot bear to be a messenger of evil."

An expression of fear passed over the countenances of all present; they regarded Diederik with anxious curiosity. The latter meanwhile filled a goblet with me, drank it off, and then proceeded:

"That will give me courage; and in truth I wanted it. Listen, then and

forgive your faithful servant Die Vos that it is from his mouth you hear such news. You are all in hopes of being graciously received by the king, and not without reason, for he is a generous prince. To-day before yesterday he found place in the thought of showing him all magnanimous; but then he was not, as now, possessed by evil spirits."

"What is it you say?" cried his hearers in astonishment; "is the king so ill-treated?"

"Sir Diederik," said Robert sharply, "a truce to your flowery rhetoric; you have something serious to tell us,—that I can see, but it does not seem to come readily from your lips."

"You have said the truth, Lord Robert," answered Diederik; "hear, then, my news, which it sadly grieves me to have to bring; Joanna of Navarre and Enguerrand de Marigny are at Compiègne!"

These names had a terrible effect on all the company, who, as if suddenly struck dumb, bowed their heads with out speaking a word. At last the young William lifted up his hands, and cried despairingly:

"Heavens! the cruel Joanna and Enguerrand de Marigny! oh, my poor sister, my father, we are lost!"

"Well, then, now you understand," said Diederik; "those are the evil spirits which possess the good prince. You see, most noble Count, that your servant Diederik was not so far wrong, when he warned you at Wynandael against this trap."

"Who told you that the queen is at Compiègne?" asked the Count, as though he still thought the matter doubtful.

"My own eyesight," answered Diederik. "Ever fearing some underhand work (for I put no trust in their double tongued speeches), I kept on the watch, with eyes and ears both wide open. I have seen Joanna of Navarre, even her face, and heard her voice. My faith and honor on the truth of what I tell you."

"What Diederik tells us is doubtless the truth," said Walter of Lovendeghem; "Joanna is certainly at Compiègne, for he pledges his honor that it is so; and she will as certainly use every effort to destroy our hopes from the king, with whom her influence is, heaven knows, only too great. The best we can do is to consider with all speed how to get out of the trap; when we are prisoners, it will be too late."

The effect of this intelligence upon the old Count was such as to depress him even to despair. His position was so dangerous, that he could find no outlet from it; escape seemed impossible, for they were in the very heart of the king's territories, or at least too far from Flanders to have any hope of safety in flight. Robert de Bethune chafed like a lion in the toils, and cursed the journey which had thus delivered him bound hand and foot into the power of his enemies.

Thus for a while they sat in gloomy silence—the Count disconsolate and uncertain what to do, and the eyes of all the rest fixed on him. Suddenly a servant of the court appeared at the door of the chamber, and cried with a loud voice:

"Messire de Nogaret, with a message from the king."

A sudden movement sufficiently evinced the anxiety felt by the Flemings at this startling announcement. Messire de Nogaret was the accustomed and well known instrument of the king's secret commands; and they all supposed that he was now come with an armed force to arrest them. Robert de Bethune drew his sword from the sheath, and laid it before him on the table. The other knights grasped the hilts of their swords, and looked fixedly at the door; in which position they still were when Messire de Nogaret entered, who, courteously bowing to

the knights, turned to Count Guy, and thus addressed him:

"Count of Flanders! My gracious king and master requires of you to appear before him to-morrow, an hour before noon, and there publicly to ask pardon of him for your transgression. The arrival of our most gracious queen has hastened this command. She has herself interceded in your behalf with her royal consort, and I have it in command from her to assure you of the satisfaction your submission gives her. To-morrow, then, gentlemen! Forgive me that I leave you hastily; their majesties are waiting for me, and I cannot stay. The Lord have you in His keeping!"

And with this greeting he left the room.

"Thanks be to Heaven, gentlemen!" exclaimed Count Guy; "the king is gracious to us; now we may go to rest with hearts at ease. You have heard with majesty's commands; be pleased to hold yourselves in readiness to obey them."

The knights now recovered their spirits once more. They conversed for some time upon the alarm Diederik had given them, and the happy result which seemed now to await their expedition; while a goblet of wine was emptied to the health of their aged Count.

As they were separating for the night, Diederik took Robert's hand, and in a suppressed voice said to him:

"Farewell, my friend and master! I, farewell; for I fear it will be long before my hand shall again press yours. But remember, that your servant Diederik will ever stand by you and comfort you, in whatsoever land—in whatsoever dungeon your lot may be cast."

Robert saw a tear glisten in Diederik's eye which told him how deeply his faithful friend was moved.

"I understand you, Diederik," he whispered in reply; "what you fear is what I too foresee. But there is no escape left now. Farewell then till better days."

"Gentlemen," pursued Diederik, turning to the company and speaking aloud, "if you have any commands to your friends in Flanders, I shall be happy to convey them; but I must beg you to be quick."

"What do you mean?" cried Walter Lovendeghem; "are you not going to court with us to-morrow, Diederik?"

"Yes, I shall be there with you; but neither you nor the Frenchmen shall know me. I have said it, it will take a better nuntiam than king Philip to catch the fox. God have you in His guard, gentlemen!"

He was already on the door when he addressed to them this last greeting. The Count withdrew with his attendants, and the rest of the company likewise left the apartment, and betook themselves to their beds.

Already at the appointed hour the Flemish knights, with their old Count, might be seen standing in a spacious hall of the royal palace; but without their arms, which they had to lay aside in an ante-chamber. Joy and satisfaction shone upon their countenances, as though they were congratulating themselves beforehand on the promised pardon. Robert de Bethune's alone was quite a different expression from that of all the rest; on it were to be read bitter annoyance and stifled rage.

It was only with much difficulty that the valiant Fleming could brook the insolent glances of the French knights; and it was solely consideration for his father that kept him from demanding an account from more than one of them. The violence he was obliged to put upon himself caused a severe struggle in his breast, and from time an observant eye might have remarked a convulsive clutching of his fingers, as though grasping something which they endeavored to crush.

Charles de Valois stood by the old Count in friendly conversation with him, awaiting the moment when, at his brother's command, he should present the Flemings at the foot of the throne. There were besides many abbots and bishops present in the hall; as also some of the good burghesses of Compiègne, who had purposely been invited to attend the ceremony.

While all present were busily talking over the affair of the Count of Flanders, an old pilgrim entered the hall. But little indeed was to be discerned of his countenance; for the broad-brimmed hat, deeply pressed down upon his brow, overshadowed his visage, which was moreover humbly bent downward upon his breast, with eyes fixed upon the ground. His figure was concealed under a wide upper garment of brown stuff, and a long stick, with a drinking-vessel attached supported his weary limbs. The prelates, as soon as they observed him came up to him and overwhelmed him with all kinds of questions. The one desire to know how it stood with the Christians in Syria, another the last news of the Italian wars, a third inquired whether he had brought back with him any precious relics of the saints, and many other like questions were put to him, such as his character of pilgrim suggested. He answered as one might who had just returned from those distant parts, and had so many wonders to relate, that all listened to him with interest and respect. Although the most of what he told was serious and even moving, yet ever and anon came an expression from his mouth of such comic force, that the prelates themselves could not refrain from laughter. He soon had a circle of more than fifty persons about him, of whom some carried their veneration for his character so far, that they secretly passed their hands over his ample pilgrim's coat, in the hope of thus obtaining the blessing of Heaven.

And yet the mysterious stranger was, in truth, no pilgrim; the lands which he seemed so well to know he had indeed visited in his youth; but that was long ago, and his memory did not always serve him; then his imagination had to serve him in stead;—and often when he told of the wonders he had seen, he chuckled within himself over the credulity of his hearers. The seeming palmer was, in truth, Diederik die Vos, who possessed in unrivalled perfection the art of disguising himself, and of assuming the most various forms and characters. Putting no trust whatever in the royal word, and not choosing, as he had told the count, that king Philip should trap the fox, he had thus disguised himself, in order to escape the danger which he foresaw.

And now the king and queen entered the hall, with a numerous train of knights and pages, and took their seats upon the throne. Most of the French knights ranged themselves along the walls; the rest stood together at the farther end of the hall, and near them the citizens who were present. Two heralds, with the arms of France and of Navarre, were stationed, one on either hand, at the foot of the throne.

The king gave a sign, and Charles de Valois came forward with the Flemish nobles. Velvet cushions were placed on the ground in front of the throne, and on these the Flemings knelt on one knee, in which humble position they awaited in silence the king's declaration. On Count Guy's right hand knelt his son William; and on his left Walter of Maldeghem, a noble of high rank. Robert de Bethune was not in his place; he remained at some distance, standing among the French knights, and for a while entirely escaped king Philip's notice.

Queen Joanna's dress was all brilliant with gold and jewels; on her head was a royal crown, which threw back the sun's rays from its thousand diamonds. Haughty and arrogant, she kept

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