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NO. 3.

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REVEREND J. J. MURPHY,

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THE LION OF FLANDERS;

OR, THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER III.

The knight, or minstrel, who was admitted within the walls of Wynandael by the hospitality or compassion of its inhabitants, found himself on passing its gates in an open square; on his right he saw the stables, amply sufficient for a hundred horses, before which innumerable pigeons and ducks were picking up the stray grain; on his left were the lodgings for the soldiers and military retainers of all kinds, together with the magazines for the siege artillery of that day; as, for instance, battering-rams, with their carriages and supports, ballistas, which at one cast threw a shower of arrows into the besieged place, and catapults, which hurled crushing masses of stone against the hostile walls; scaling-ladders, fire-barrels, and other like implements of war.

Right in front of the entrance lay the residence of the Count and his family, rising majestically with its turrets above the lower buildings about it. A flight of stone steps, at the foot of which two black lions, reposed, gave entrance to the ground-floor, consisting of a long range of quadrangular rooms, many of them provided with beds for the accommodation of chance guests, others decorated with the arms of bygone Counts of Flanders, and with banners and pennons won on many a hard-fought field.

On the right-hand side, in one corner of this vast building, was a smaller apartment, altogether different from the rest. On the tapestry with which its walls were adorned might be read the whole story of the sixth crusade in figures which almost looked alive. On one side stood Guy, armed from head to foot, and surrounded by his warriors, who were receiving from his hands the Cross; in the background was a long train of men-at-arms already on their way to the scene of action. The second side exhibited the battle of Massara, won by the Christian army in the year 1250. St. Louis, King of France, and Count Guy, were distinguishable from the other figures by their banners. The third side presented a hideous scene. A multitude of Christian knights lay dying of the plague upon a desert plain. Among the corpses of their comrades, and the carcasses of horses, black ravens flew over the fated camp, watching for each one's death to gorge themselves with his flesh. The fourth side showed the happy return of the Count of Flanders. His first wife, Fogets of Bethune, lay weeping on his breast, while her little sons Robert and Baldwin lovingly pressed his hand in theirs.

and bitter tears; but by the evening of that same day her tears were dried and forgotten, and she was ready to caress her hawk as before.

After Guy's eyes had for some time rested unmeaningly upon his son, he suddenly let fall the hand which supported his head, and asked, "William, my son, what is it you are asking so fervently of God?"

"I am praying for my poor sister Philippa," was the youth's answer; "God knows, my father, whether the Queen Joanna has not already sent her to her grave; but in that case my prayers are for her soul!"

And as he spoke he bowed forward his head, as if to conceal the tears which fell from his eyes. The old father sighed heavily and painfully. He felt that his son's evil foreboding might but too easily turn out true, for Joanna of Navarre was wicked enough to make it so; nevertheless he would not give utterance to such a feeling, and so he only replied:

"It is not right, William, to sadden yourself with forebodings of evil. Hope is given to us mortals for our consolation here on earth; and why, then, should you not hope? Since your sister has been in prison, you mourn and pine so, that not a smile ever passes over your countenance. It is well to feel for your sister; but in God's name do not give yourself up to this dark despair."

"Smile, said you, father? smile while our poor Philippa is buried in a dungeon? No, that I can not! Her tears drop upon the cold ground in the silence of her dungeon; she cries to heaven because of her sorrows; she calls on you, my father,—she calls on us all for relief; and who answers her? the hollow echo of the deep vaults of the Louvre! See you her not, pale as death, wasted and faded like a dying flower, with her hands raised to heaven? hear you her not, how she cries, 'My father, my brothers, help me; I am dying in these chains!' All this I see and hear in my heart; I feel it in my soul; how, then, can I smile?"

Matilda, who had half listened to these sorrowful words, set her hawk hastily on the back of a chair, and fell with a violent burst of tears and sobbing at the feet of her grandfather. Laying her head on his knees, she cried out piteously:

"Is my dear aunt dead? O God! what sorrow! shall I not then see her again?"

The old Count raised her tenderly from the ground, and said kindly:

"Be calm, my dear Matilda; weep not; Philippa is not dead!"

"Not dead!" exclaimed the girl with astonishment; "why, then, does my uncle William speak so of death?"

"You have not understood him," answered the Count; "we know of no change that has taken place with regard to her."

The young girl then dried her tears, casting the while a reproachful look upon William, and saying to him, in the midst of her sobs:

"You are always saddening me to no purpose, uncle! One would think that you had forgotten all words of comfort; for you ever talk in a way that makes me tremble. My very hawk is frightened at your voice, it sounds so hollow! It is not kind of you, uncle, and it vexes me much."

William regarded his niece with eyes that seemed full of sorrow for the suffering he had caused her. No sooner had Matilda perceived this look of grief, than, running up to him, and seizing tenderly one of his hands:

"Forgive me, dear uncle William!" she said; "I do love you dearly; but do you too think of me, and not torture me so with the terrible word, death, which is now ever upon your lips and in my ears. Forgive me, I pray you."

And before her uncle could answer her, she had already returned to the other end of the room, and was playing with her hawk again, though with tears still in her eyes.

"My son, said Count Guy, 'do not take our little Matilda's words amiss; you know she does not mean unkindly.'"

"I forgive her, sir, from my heart; for, indeed, I love her from my heart. And the sorrow which she showed at my poor sister's supposed death was comforting to me."

And again William opened his book, and read, this time aloud:

"O Jesus Christ the Saviour, have mercy upon my sister! By thy bitter pangs release her, O Lord! And as the name of his Lord sounded in the old Count's ears, he uncovered his head, folded his hands, and joined in William's prayer. Matilda set down her hawk again on the back of the chair, and knelt in a corner of the chamber, on a great cushion, before a crucifix.

William went on:

"Blessed Mary, Mother of God, hear me, I pray! Comfort her in the dark dungeon, O Holy Virgin! O Jesus! sweet Jesus! full of pity! have mercy on my poor sister!"

Count Guy waited till the prayer was at an end, and then asked, without giving further heed to Matilda, who had again returned to her hawk:

"I, with my nobles, must go to the king at Compiègne, and throw ourselves at his feet."

"And Queen Joanna?"

"The implacable Joanna of Navarre is at Paris, and Enguerrand de Marigny with her. Never was there a moment so favourable as this."

"The Lord grant that your hope may not deceive you! And when will you undertake this perilous expedition, my father?"

"The day after to-morrow Messire de Valois comes to Wynaendael with his suite, and he will accompany us. I have called together those nobles who remained true to me in my misfortune, in order to inform them of this matter. But your brother Robert comes not; how is it that he has not yet returned to the castle?"

"Have you already forgotten his quarrel of this morning, my father? he has had to clear himself of the lie direct; of course he is with De Chatillon."

"You are right, William. I had forgotten that. This quarrel may do us harm; for Messire de Chatillon is powerful at the court of Philip the Fair."

In those times honour and good name were a knight's dearest possessions, and not the shadow of a reproach could he allow to pass upon them without a demand for instant reckoning; combats, therefore, were matters of daily occurrence, and excited but little attention.

Presently Guy rose, and said:

"There, I hear the bridge fall; doubtless my faithful nobles are already there. Come, let us go to the great hall."

And immediately they went out together, leaving the young Matilda alone, and took their way to the hall, where they were speedily joined by the Lords of Maldeghem, of Roode, of Courtrai, of Oudenarde, of Heyle, of Nevele, of Roubaix, Walter of Lovendeghem, with his two brothers, and several more, who came in one after the other, to the number of two-and-fifty in all. Some of them were already temporarily lodged in the castle, others had their possessions and residences in the neighbouring plain.

All stood with uncovered head before their lord, anxiously awaiting the intelligence or command he might have to communicate. After keeping silence for some little time, Count Guy addressed them thus:

"My friends, it is well known to you that the true obedience with which I have ever followed the commands of my liege lord King Philip has been the cause of all my misfortunes. He it was that laid it upon me to call the city corporations to account for their government, which I therefore as a true subject and vassal desired and attempted to do. Then the city of Bruges refused me obedience, and my subjects rose against me. . . . Afterwards, when I went into France to do my homage to the king, he made me prisoner; and not only me, but my poor child, who was with me, and who still groans in the dungeons of the Louvre. All this you know; for you were the companions of your prince. Then, as became me, I sought to make good my right with arms; but fortune was against us, and the false Edward of England disregarded the bond we had entered into, and deserted us in our need. Now my land is confiscated, I am now the least among you, and your prince no more; another is now your lord."

"Not yet!" cried Walter of Lovendeghem; "when that day comes I break my sword forever. I know no other lord than the noble Guy of Dampierre."

"Sir Walter of Lovendeghem, your faithful attachment is truly gratifying to me; but hear me patiently to the end. Messire de Valois has overrun Flanders with his arms, and has now received it as a fief from his brother King Philip. Were it not for his magnanimity, I should not be with you here at Wynaendael; for he it was that assigned me this pleasant abode. But this is not all; he has resolved to build up again the house of Flanders, and to set me once more on my father's seat. This is the matter which I have to speak of with you, my noble friends; for I need your help in it."

The astonishment of all present, who were listening with the deepest attention, reached its highest pitch at this announcement. That Charles de Valois should be willing to give up the land he had won and taken possession of, seemed to them utterly incredible. They regarded the Count with looks that expressed all they felt; and after a short pause he resumed:

"My noble friends, I doubt not in the least your affection for me; therefore I speak in the full confidence that you will grant me this last request which I now make you; to-morrow I set out for France, to throw myself at the king's feet, and I desire to be accompanied by you, my faithful nobles."

All present answered, one after the other, that they were ready to accompany and stand by their Count, where and when and in what way he would. All answered him except one, Diederik de Vos.

"Sir Diederik," asked the Count, "will you not go with us?"

"Surely, surely," answered he, thus personally appealed to; "the fox will go with you, were it to the mouth of hell. But I tell you, noble Count,—forgive me, but I must have my say—I tell you, that one need be no fox to see where the trap lies here. What! after once having been caught in this way, will you run into the very same snare again? God grant that all may turn out well; but one thing I tell you, Philip the Fair shall not catch the fox."

"You judge and speak too slightly, Sir Diederik," answered Guy; "we are to have a written safe conduct from Charles de Valois, and his honour is pledged for our free return to Flanders."

The Flemish nobles, well knowing De Valois as a model of knightly honour and good faith, were satisfied to trust to his promise, and went on to discuss the matter with the old Count. Meanwhile Diederik slipped unobserved out of the hall, and wandered up and down the outer court wrapped in deep thought.

Before he had spent much time in this occupation, the bridge was lowered, and Robert de Bethune entered the castle. As soon as he had dismounted, Diederik approached, and thus addressed him:

"I need not ask, noble Count, as to the result of your affair of to-day; the Lion's sword has never fallen from his yet; doubtless by this time Messire de Chatillon is on his journey for the other world."

"No," answered Robert; "my sword came down upon his helmet in such sort that he will hardly

speaking for some days to come. He is not dead, God be praised for that; but another mishap has befallen us. Adolf of Nieuwland, who was with me as my second, fought with St. Pol, and he had already wounded his opponent in the head, when his breastplate failed him; upon which he received a severe wound, I fear even a mortal one. In a few minutes you will see him, for my men are now carrying him hither."

"But say, my lord," proceeded Diederik; "think you not that this journey to France is a venture somewhat of the rashest?"

"What journey? I know not what you mean."

"What! you have not yet heard of it?"

"Not one word."

"Well, we set off to-morrow with your noble father for France."

"What is it you say, Diederik? are you jesting—to France?"

"Yes, Lord Robert. To throw ourselves at the feet of the French king, and sue for forgiveness.—I have never yet seen a cat creep into a sack of her own accord; but before long I shall see it at Compiègne, or I am greatly mistaken."

"But you are quite sure of what you say, Diederik? You fill me with alarm."

"Sure, do you say? Be pleased to go into the hall; there you may see all your friends assembled with your father. To-morrow we set out for our prison. Believe me, then, and cross yourself when you leave Wynaendael."

Robert could hardly contain himself for indignation at this intelligence.

"Diederik, my friend," he said, "I pray you have my poor Adolf taken up to my own chamber when he is brought in, and laid upon the left-hand bed. See that he is duly cared for until I come myself; and send, too, for Master Roger to dress his wounds."

And with these words, he hurried away to the hall, where the Count was still in conference with his nobles, and pressed forward hastily till he stood before his father, not a little to the astonishment of all present; for he was still in full armour from head to foot.

"O my lord and father!" cried he; "what report is this I hear? are you really about to deliver yourself up to your enemies, that they may make a mock of your grey hairs? that the vile Joanna may cast you into fetters?"

"Yes, my son," answered the Count steadfastly; "I am going to France, and you with me,—such is the will of your father."

"Let it be so, then," replied Robert; "I will go with you; but not to fall at the king's feet! God forbid that we should so humiliate ourselves!"

"It must be so, my son; and it behoves you to accompany me," was the unalterable reply.

"I!" cried Robert in fury; "I fall at Philip's feet! I, Robert de Bethune, prostrate myself before our foe! What! shall the Lion of Flanders bow his head before a Frenchman, a maker of false coin, a perjured prince?"

The Count was silent for a few moments; but as soon as Robert's first burst of indignation had subsided, he resumed:

"And yet, my son, you will do it for my sake?"

"No, never!" cried Robert; "never shall that blot rest upon my shield. Bow before a foreigner—I! You know not your son, my father!"

"Robert," pursued the old Count calmly, "your father's will is a law for you; I command it!"

"No!" cried Robert yet again; "the Lion of Flanders lites and fawns not. Before God alone, and you, my father, have I ever bowed the head or bent the knee; and no other man on earth shall be able to say of me that I have thus humbled myself before him."

"But, Robert," insisted his father, "have you no compassion for me, for your poor sister Philippa, and for your unhappy country, that you thus reject the one only means by which we may yet be delivered?"

Robert wrung his hands violently, in a very agony of grief and anger.

"What will you now, my father?" he exclaimed; "do you indeed desire that a Frenchman should look down upon me as his slave? I am ready to die with shame at the very thought. No, never! Your command, your entreaty, even, is of no avail. I will not,—I cannot do it!"

ther, and yours, my brave son. I will myself kneel before Philip; since such is the will of God, I humbly submit. And you, Robert, shall go with me; but not to bow the head or bend the knee before the oppressor. Hold yourself, as ever, erect; that so there may be a Count of Flanders after me free from shame and reproach."

The various preparations for the journey were now discussed at length, and many important points were deliberated upon and settled. Robert de Bethune now calmer and more collected, left the hall, and proceeded to the smaller apartment, where Matilda still remained; he took the maiden by the hand and led her to a chair; then drawing one for himself, he sat down beside her.

"My dear Matilda," he began, "you love your father, do you not?"

"You know I do," was the reply, while she caressed the knight's bearded cheek with her soft hand.

"But," he continued, "would you not also love a man that ventured his life in my defence?"

"Yes, surely; and bear him eternal gratitude?"

"Well then, my daughter; a knight has risked his life in your father's quarrel, and is sorely wounded, perhaps even to death."

"O God! I will pray for his recovery forty days, and more too!"

"Do so, my child, and for me too; but I have to ask yet something more of you."

"Speak, my father; I am your obedient child."

"Understand me well, Matilda; we are going for some days on a journey, your grandfather and I, and all the knights that are here with us. Who, then, shall give the poor wounded knight to drink when he is thirsty?"

"Who? I, my father; I will never leave his side till you return. I will take my hawk into my chamber, and be his constant attendant. Fear not that I will leave him to the servants; my own hand shall hold the cup to his lips. His recovery shall be my best hope and my dearest joy."

"That is well, my child; I know your loving heart; but you must, moreover, promise me that in the first days of his illness you will keep his chamber perfectly still; make no noise there yourself, nor let any one else do so."

"Fear not for that, father; I will talk to my hawk so softly, that not one word of it shall the wounded knight hear."

Robert took his daughter by the hand, and led her out of the chamber.

"I must show you your patient," he said; "but speak low while you are with him."

Meanwhile Adolf of Nieuwland had been carried by the attendants into a chamber of Robert's lodging, and laid upon a bed; two surgeons had bound up his wounds, and now stood with Diederik de Vos by the bedside. No sign of life was to be perceived; the countenance of the young knight was pale and his eyes closed.

"Well, Master Roger," inquired Robert of one of the surgeons, "how goes it with our unfortunate friend?"

"But badly, my lord," answered Roger; "but badly indeed. I cannot at this moment say what hope there is, and yet I have a sort of presentiment that he will not die."

"Then the wound is not mortal?"

"Well, it is and it is not; nature is the best physician, and often works cures which neither mineral nor simple could effect. I have laid upon his breast, too, a thorn from the Holy Crown; the virtue of that relic will, I trust, assist us."

During this conversation Matilda had gradually approached the wounded knight's face, she suddenly recognised that of her dear friend and play-fellow. With a mournful cry she started back, tears burst from her eyes, and she sobbed aloud.

"What is this, my child?" said Robert, "are you no longer mistress of yourself than that? Know you not that that one must be calm and quiet by a wounded man's bedside?"

"Calm shall I be! Calm when our poor Adolf lies at the point of death! He that taught me such sweet songs! Who shall be our minstrel at Wynaendael now? Who shall help me to break my hawk's and to be to me as a brother?" And then approaching the bed again, she wept over him as he lay insensible, and at last sobbed out: "Sir Adolf! Sir Adolf! my good brother!"

But no answer came. Covering her face with her hands, she fell back in an agony of grief into a chair.

After some little time thus spent, Robert, seeing that she was unable to command herself, and that her presence would be more injurious than useful, took her by the hand.

"Come, my child," he said, "leave this chamber till you are somewhat more mistress of your sorrow."

But she would not leave the room. "O, no!" she replied, "let me stay here, my father! I will not weep any more. Let me care for my brother Adolf. Those fervent prayers, which he has himself taught me, will I pour out for him by his bedside."

And thus saying, she took the cushion from a chair, laid it on the ground at the head of the bed, and kneeling on it began to pray silently, while suppressed sobs burst from her breast, and her eyes overflowed with tears.

Robert de Bethune remained till far on in the night by Adolf's bedside, hoping to see him come somewhat to himself. His hopes were, however, in vain; the wounded man breathed feebly and slowly; nor was there the slightest movement perceptible either in limbs or body. Master Roger, too, began to fear seriously for his life; for a slight fever had made its appearance, and the sufferer's temples began to burn.

Those of the nobles who were present at the conference and were not lodged in the castle had already taken their departure, not without a feeling of contentment at what had happened; for, as true knights, they rejoiced at having an opportunity of once more doing their old prince's pleasure and a service. Such of them as were the Count's guests betook themselves to their bedchambers. Two hours later not a sound was heard at Wynaendael but the call of the sentinels, the baying of the dogs, and the screech of the night-owl.

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)

The more business a man has to do, the more he can accomplish.