

THE LION OF FLANDERS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER II. CONTINUED.

On the way, Charles de Valois, resumed his conversation with the old Count Guy. The latter, much as he mistrusted the result of the proposed expedition into France, was yet out of love for his children, disposed to understand it and finally, on the repeated instances of the French prince, resolved on casting himself at King Philip's feet, with all the nobles who remained faithful to him, in the hope that so humiliating a homage might move the conqueror to compassion.

Since their morning's quarrel Robert de Bethune and De Chatillon had not met again; they purposely avoided each other, and neither of them mentioned the subject of the subject of what had passed between them. Adolph of Nieuwland was now riding beside Matilda and her brother William. The young lady was evidently occupied in learning off some lay or tale which Adolph was repeating to her; for every now and then one of her ladies exclaimed in admiration.

"What a master in minstrelsy Sir Adolph of Nieuwland is!"

And so at last they got back to Wynandael. The whole train entered the castle; but this time the bridge was not raised nor did the portcullis fall, and after a delay of a few minutes the French knights issued again from its walls armed as they had come. As they rode over the bridge De Chatillon observed to his brother:

"You know that I have this evening to uphold the honor of our niece; I reckon on you as my second."

"Against this rough spoken Robert de Bethune?" asked St. Pol. "I know not what may happen, but I fear you may come but badly out of it; for this Lion of Flanders is no cat to be taken hold of without gloves, and that you know as well as I."

"What is that to the purpose?" answered De Chatillon hastily. "A knight trusts to his skill and valour, and not to mere strength."

"You are quite right, my good brother; a knight must hold his ground against every one, be he who he may; but for his better not to expose oneself unnecessarily. In your place I should have let Robert talk his spite out. What signifies what he says now that his lands are gone, and he is as good as our prisoner?"

"Be silent, St. Pol. Is that a seemly way to talk? Are you a coward?"

As he spoke these words they disappeared among the trees. And now the portcullis fell; the bridge was raised; and the interior of the castle was again concealed from view.

and possessed by his enemies. Not that she was wanting in feeling; but, child as she was, her sorrow did not last beyond the immediate impression which excited it. When she was told that all the towns of Flanders were occupied by the foe, she burst into abundant 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 fell 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 young man'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 no use, my son, 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 enters your eyes, and you cannot see it 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 cannot do. 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 fast 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 to vex me much; but do you too think of me, and do not torture me so with that 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."

"Yes, my father, I do understand it, when it is Charles de Valois that does it. But, after all, what can he do for us and my sister?"

"Listen, William. This morning, as we were riding together to the hawk-king, he stowed me a way whereby, with God's help, we may be reconciled with King Philip."

In a transport of joy the young man struck his hands together, and exclaimed:

"O Heaven! His good angel must have spoken by his mouth! And what is it you have to do, my father?"

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

"And Queen Joanna?"

"The impious Joanna of Navarre is at Paris, and Enguerrand de Marigny with her. Never was there a moment so favorable 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 Wynandael with his suite, and he will accompany us. I have called together those nobles who remained true to me in my misfortunes, 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 it. This quarrel may do us no harm; for Messire de Chatillon is powerful at the court of Philip the Fair."

In those times honor and good name were a knight's dearest possessions, and not the shadow of a reproach could be allowed 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 Malengehem, of Rooode, of Courtrai, of Oudenarde, of Heyle, of Nevelde, of Roubaix, Walter of Lovendeghem, with his two brothers, and several more, who came in one after the other, till a 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 neighboring plain.

All stood with uncovered head before their lord, and in a respectful silence awaited the intelligence which he might 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, and I was driven to flight. 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 with me, and then, as became me, I sought to make good my right, and to the king, he made me prisoner; 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 day, and I am no more."

"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 Danpire."

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

The Flemish nobles, well knowing De Valois as a model of knightly honor 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 failed him 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 speak for some days to come. He is not dead; God be praised for that; but another messag has betaken us. Adolph of Nieuwland 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 rash?"

"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 are you 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 Wynandael."

Robert could hardly contain himself for indignation at this intelligence.

"Diederik, my friend," he said, "I pray you have my poor Adolph 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 can 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, 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 armor from head to foot.

"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 French man, 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, Robert?"

"No, never!" cried Robert; "never shall that blot rest upon my shield. Bow before a foreigner!—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 bites, and laws 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 our 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 agonizing grief and anger.

"What will you do 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 commands, your entreaty, even is of no avail. I will not—I cannot do it!"

Two tears glistened upon the old man's hollow cheeks. The singular expression of his countenance, throw the lookers-on into doubt whether it was joy or grief that had touched him, for at the same time a smile of comfort seemed to hover on his countenance.

Robert was deeply moved by his father's tears; he felt, as it were, the pains of martyrdom in his heart. At last his emotion burst all bounds, and almost beside himself, he exclaimed:

"My prince and father! I swear upon me, if you will! but this I swear to you—never will I creep or bow before a Frenchman! In this thing I cannot obey you."

But even amid all his excitement Robert was terrified at his own words. Pale and trembling in every limb, he clenched his hands convulsively, till the iron-scales of his gauntlets might be heard grinding upon one another throughout the hall. He felt his resolution shrinking, and awaited the curse he had defied in an anguish like that of death.

All present waited for the reply of the old Count with anxious expectation. At last he threw his aged arms around his son's neck, and cried with tears of love and joy:

"O my noble son! my blood—the blood of the Counts of Flanders, flows undegenerate in your veins! Your disobedience has bestowed on me the happiest day of my life. Now willingly could I die! One more embrace, my son; for words do not suffice to express the joy of my heart."

Admiration and sympathy filled the hearts of all the noble company, who looked on in solemn silence, while the old Count, releasing his son from his embrace, and turning to his barons, exclaimed enthusiastically:

"See, my friends; such was I in my young days, and such have the Dan-pierres ever been. Judge by what you have seen and heard whether Robert de Bethune does not deserve to wear his father's coronet. Such are the men of Flanders! Yes, my son, you are right; a Count of Flanders must bow his head before no stranger. But Philip's father, 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; so there may be a Count of Flanders after me 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 proceeding 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, per-haps even unto 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 as yet, and all the knights that are here with us. When, 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 Adolph 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 their hands on his forehead, the 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."

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Itching skin and the difficulty in healing the sores are the two features of eczema which make it the despair of doctors. Dr. Chase's Ointment controls these two symptoms, cures the disease, and leaves the skin smooth, natural and healthy.

Redness and Irritation of the skin, Heat and Inflammation, Discharge of Watery Matter, Formation of a Yellow or Brown Crust,

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