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THE LION OF FLANDERS;

OR,

THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued).

The sun was rising in glowing splendour for the fourth time over the free city of Bruges. Matilda was sitting in the same room of Adolf von Nieuwland's house which she had formerly occupied. Her faithful bird, the beloved falcon, accompanied her no more—it was dead. Sickness and sorrow had spread their paleness over the soft features of the maiden; her eyes were dimmed, her cheek had lost its fulness, and her whole appearance showed that a deep grief lay, like a gnawing worm, in her heart.

Those who are visited with long and bitter suffering take pleasure in sad and gloomy dreams; and as if the reality were not painful enough, fashion to themselves phantasms, which appal them yet more; and thus was it with the hapless maiden. She fancied that the secret of her father's liberation had been discovered; she saw in imagination the murderers, bribed by Queen Joanna, mingling poison with his scanty food; and then she would shudder convulsively, and tears of agony would stream down her cheeks. Adolf was dead to her: he had expiated, with his life, his love and his magnanimity. These heart-rending fancies passed ever anew before Matilda's soul, and ceaselessly tortured the poor maiden.

At this moment her friend Maria entered her room. The smile which passed over Matilda's features as she greeted her friend was like the smile which, after a death of anguish, lingers awhile on the face of the departed; it expressed more of pain and profound sorrow than the bitterest wailing could have done. She looked at Adolf's sister, and said:

"Oh! I give me some comfort, some alleviation of my suffering!"

"Maria drew near to the unhappy girl, and pressed her hand in tender sympathy. Her voice took its softest tone, and sank like music into the soul of the sufferer, as she said:

"Your tears flow in stillness, your heart is breaking with anguish and despair; and there is nothing, nothing to lighten your heavy burden! Alas! you are indeed unhappy."

"Unhappy! say you, my friend? Oh, yes! There is a feeling in my heart which fills it to bursting. Can you imagine what hideous fancies are ever floating before my eyes? and can you understand why my tears ceaselessly flow? I have seen my father die of poison; I have heard the voice of an one dying—a voice that said, 'Farewell, my child; thou whom I have loved.'"

"I pray you, maiden," interposed Maria, "banish these gloomy shadows of your fancy. You need my heart with sorrow. Your father is yet alive. You sin grievously in abandoning yourself thus to despair. Forgive me these words of severity."

Matilda seized Maria's hand, and pressed it gently, as though she would express to her what comfort these words had given her. Nevertheless she continued her desponding discourse, and seemed even to find a kind of comfort therein. For the wailings of an oppressed soul are, as it were, tears which lighten the burden of the heart. She continued:

"I have seen yet more than this, Maria. I saw the headman of the Gibbet Joanna of France—he swung his axe over the head of your brother; and I saw that head fall on the dungeon floor!"

"O God!" cried Maria, "what horrible fancies!" She trembled, and her eyes glistened with tears.

"And I heard his voice,—a voice that said, 'Farewell! farewell!'"

Overpowered by these hideous thoughts, Maria threw herself into Matilda's arms; her tears fell fast on the heaving breast of her unhappy friend, and the deep sobbing of the two maidens filled the room. After they had held each other in a long and motionless embrace, Matilda asked:

"Do you understand my sufferings now, Maria? Do you understand now why I am slowly wasting away?"

"O, yes," answered Maria, in an accent of despair; "yes, I understand and feel your sufferings. O, my poor brother!"

The two maidens sat down exhausted, and without uttering a word. They looked at each other awhile with unutterable sorrow; but their tears gradually lightened their grief, and hope returned into the hearts of both, they knew not how. Maria, who was older than Matilda, and more self-possessed in suffering, first broke the deep silence, and said:

"Why should we allow our hearts to be thus crushed by false imaginations? There is nothing to confirm the painful apprehensions which torment us: I feel sure that no harm has befallen Lord Robert, your father, and that my brother has already set out on his return to his fatherland."

"Yet you have wept, Maria! Does one weep at the smiling expectation of a brother's return?"

"You are torturing yourself, noble damsel. Oh! anguish must have struck deep its roots in your heart ere you could cling with such passionate energy to the dark dreams which are overshadowing you. Believe me, your father yet lives; and who can say how near his liberation is? Think of the joy you will feel when his voice, the very voice that rings so faintly in your disturbed fancy, shall say to you, 'My chains are broken' when you shall feel his warm kiss on your brow, and his loving embrace shall call forth again the roses upon your blanched cheek. Once more shall the fair castle of Wynandael open its gates to welcome you; Messire de Bethune will ascend the throne of his fathers, and then shall you tend him again with loving care; then you will remember no more the sorrows of the present, or remember them only as sorrows which you endured for your father's sake. Tell me now, Matilda, will you not admit one solitary ray of hope into your heart? Cannot these thoughts of joyful promise bring you any consolation?"

"At these words, a sensible change came over Matilda; a gentle gladness beamed again in her eyes, and a sweet smile played on her lips.

"O Maria!" she sighed, throwing her right arm around her friendly comforter, "you cannot imagine what relief I feel, what happiness beyond hope you have poured, like a healing balm, into my heart! So may the angel of the Lord minister comfort to you in your last hour! With what soothing words has friendship endowed you, O my sister!"

"Your sister!" repeated Maria. "This name be- seems not your handmaiden, noble damsel; it is a sufficient reward to me that I have been enabled to dispel the gloom of death from your soul."

"Accept this title, my beloved Maria; I love you so tenderly. And has not your noble brother Adolf been brought up with me? Has not my father given him to me as a brother? Yes, we belong to one family. Alas! I pray the living night that the holy angels may shield Adolf on his dangerous journey. He can yet comfort me, yet cheer me. But what do I hear? Can my prayer have been answered? Yes, yes, that is our beloved brother!"

She stretched forth her arm, and remained standing motionless, pointing towards the street. She stood like a marble statue, and seemed to listen eagerly to a distant sound. Maria was terrified; she thought the maiden had lost her senses. As she was about to reply, she heard the echo of a horse's hoofs in the street; and then the wailing of Matilda's words flashed upon her. The same hope filled her breast, and she felt her heart beat with redoubled energy.

After both had listened awhile in silence, the noise suddenly ceased; and already was the glad hope deserting their hearts, when the door of the chamber was violently thrown open.

"There he is! there he is!" cried Matilda. "God be praised that mine eyes have seen him once more!"

She ran eagerly towards the knight, and Adolf as eagerly hastened to meet her, when a sudden emotion overcame him, and he well-nigh fell trembling to the ground.

Instead of the youthful blooming maiden whom he expected to see, he beheld before him a worn and wasted figure, with haggard cheeks and sunken eyes. While yet in doubt whether this shadow could be Matilda, a cold shudder ran through him; all his blood rushed to his oppressed heart, and he turned pale, pale as the white robe of his beloved one. His arms dropped, he fixed his eyes intently on Matilda's wasted cheeks, and remained as one struck by a thunderbolt. A moment he remained in this attitude; and then suddenly his eyes fell, and hot tears rolled down his cheeks. He spoke not a word—no lament, no sigh escaped his lips.—"He would probably have remained yet longer in this stupor of despair,—for his heart was touched with too keen a pain to admit of his finding alleviation in words, but Maria, who had hitherto remained in the background out of respect to Matilda, threw herself on his breast; and the warm kisses which she imprinted on the lips of her beloved brother, in the intervals of the most tender words, soon aroused him from his stupor.

The noble maiden beheld with emotion this outburst of sisterly love; she trembled, and a deep trouble filled her heart. The paleness of Adolf's features, the consternation which had so visibly seized him, said to her, "Thou art ill-favored, thy wasted cheeks and thy dimmed and lustrous eyes inspire fear and abhorrence; he whom thou callest thy brother has shuddered at thy look of death."

A dark despair overcame her; she felt her strength desert her; only with great effort did she succeed in reaching a couch; and then sank down faint and exhausted. She hid her face in her hands, as though to exclude from her view a spectacle that appalled her; and thus remained still and motionless. After

a few moments, all was quiet in the room; she heard no more, and thought that she was left alone in that dreadful solitude.

But soon she felt a hand which pressed hers; she heard a gentle voice, which spoke to her in sorrow and in sympathy:

"Matilda! Matilda! O my hapless sister!" She looked up, and saw Adolf standing before her, weeping. The tears fell thick and fast from his eyes, and his look expressed the warmest affection, the profoundest compassion.

"I am ugly; is it not so, Adolf?" she sighed forth. "You are shocked at me; you will no more love me as in days that are past?"

The knight trembled at these words; he looked at the maiden with a strange and significant expression, and replied:

"Matilda, can you entertain a doubt of my affection? O, then, you wrong me much. You are, indeed, changed. What illness, what sufferings have brought you so low, that the roses have thus withered on your cheek? I have wept, and have been alarmed indeed; but it is from sympathy and compassion, from the deep anguish which your hard lot has caused me. Ever, ever will I remain your brother, Matilda! I can comfort you now with joyous tidings; I can heal your sorrows with a message of gladness."

Gradually a feeling of joy and consolation stole into the maiden's heart. Adolf's voice exercised a wondrous power over her, and she replied, with cheerful animation:

"Good tidings do you say, Adolf? Good tidings of my father? Speak, speak them, my friend!"

With these words, she drew two chairs near her couch, and motioned to Maria and her brother to sit down upon them.

Adolf reached forth one hand to Matilda, the other to his beloved sister; and so he sat between the two maidens, as an angel of consolation, on whose words one lingered as on those of some holy hymn.

"Rejoice, Matilda, and thank God for His goodness. Your father returned to Bourges; in sadness indeed, but in safety and in health. No one but the old chatelain and Diederik die Vos know the secret of his temporary liberation. He is already free even in his captivity; for his gaolers have become his warmest friends."

"But should the evil-minded Joanna desire to avenge on him the insult which has been offered to France, who will then shield him from the executioner? You are no longer with him, my noble friend."

"Listen, Matilda. The guardians of the castle of Bourges are all old warriors, who, by reason of their wounds, are no longer equal to active warfare.—Most of them witnessed the heroic deeds of the Lion of Flanders at Beneventum. You cannot imagine with what love, with what admiration, they regard him at whose name the armies of France has so often trembled. Were Robert to seek to escape without the permission of the castellan, their master, doubtless they would prevent him. But I assure you,—and I know well the noble souls of those warriors, who have grown grey beneath their coats of mail,—that they would shed their last drop of blood for him whom they revere, were but a hair of his head threatened. Fear not, then; the life of your father is assured; and, but for the sorrow he felt on account of your sad fate, he would have borne his captivity in patience."

"You bring me such good tidings, my friend,—your words sink so consolingly into my relieved heart,—that I seem to drink in fresh life from your smile. Speak on still, if it be only that I may hear the accents of your voice."

"And yet fairer hopes has the Lion given me for you, Matilda. It may be the deliverance of your father is very near at hand; it may be that you will very soon be with him, and all your dear relations, in the beautiful Wynandael."

"What are you saying, Adolf? It is your friendship that prompts these words; but do not mock me with hope of a bliss that is impossible."

"Be not thus unbelieving, Matilda. Listen to the grounds of this joyful hope. You know that Charles de Valois, that noblest of Frenchmen, has drawn the bravest of the knights after him into Italy. He has not forgotten at the court of Rome that he is the guiltless cause of the captivity of your relatives. It has been a bitter thought to him, that he himself, like a traitor, had delivered his friend and companion in arms, the Lion of Flanders, into the hands of his enemies; and he has been striving in every possible way, to effect his liberation. Ambassadors have already been sent from Pope Boniface to King Philip the Fair, and have demanded of him, with urgency, the release of your father and all your relatives. The Holy Father is sparing no effort to restore to Flanders its rightful princes; and the court of France seems already inclined to peace. Let us embrace this consoling hope, my dear friend."

"Yes, indeed, Adolf, gladly might we surrender ourselves to these consoling thoughts; but why should we flatter ourselves with hopes so deceitful? Will not the King of France avenge his fallen soldiers? Will not De Chastillon, our most rancorous enemy, goad on his terrible niece Joanna? Think, then, Adolf, what pangs cannot this bloodthirsty woman imagine, to avenge on us the bravery of the Flemings?"

"Torment not yourself; for your fears are without foundation. Probably the horrible death of his soldiers has convinced Philip the Fair that the Flemings will never bow their free necks to the yoke of the alien. His own interest will constrain him to set at liberty our country's lords; otherwise he will lose the fairest fief of his crown. You see, noble damsel, that every thing is propitious to us."

"Yes, yes, Adolf; in your presence all my sorrows melt away, and disappear utterly. Your speech is so full of comfort, you awaken such sweetly echoing tones in my heart."

"They conversed thus a long time, peacefully together on their fears and their hopes. When Adolf had given Matilda all the information in his power, and had filled her heart with comfort, he turned with brotherly love to his sister, and held with her a soothing discourse, which attained them all to gladness and serenity. Matilda forgot her bygone sufferings; she breathed freely, and with courage, and the veins, which were spread over her cheeks

like delicate network, were filled with warmer blood.

Suddenly they heard a loud tumult in the street; a thousand voices rang from the roofs of the houses, and the jubilant shouts of the crowd were mingled in indistinguishable confusion; only at intervals was the cry intelligible amidst the joyous clapping of hands; "Flanders, the Lion! hail, hail to our Count!" Adolf and the two maidens had drawn near to the window; they saw the countless heads of the crowds hastening to the market-place. Women and children swelled the procession, which passed before the curious maidens like a billow sea. In another street resounded the tramp of a multitude of horses, so that they were confirmed in their conjecture that a troop of cavalry had entered Bruges. While discussing the probable reasons of this popular commotion, a servant announced the arrival of a messenger, who craved an audience, and who entered the room immediately on receiving permission.

It was a youthful page, a delicate boy, whose features bore a peculiar expression of innocence and truthfulness: he was clothed in black and blue silk, set off with manifold adornments. As he drew near to the ladies, he respectfully uncovered his head, and made lowly obeisance without speaking a word.

"What good tidings do you bring us, dear boy?" asked Matilda, graciously. The page raised his head, and replied with his gentle voice:

"For the most illustrious daughter of the Lion, our Count. I bring a message from my lord and master Guy, who has just entered the city with five hundred horsemen. He sends his greeting to his fair niece, Matilda de Bethune, and will, in a few moments, express his deep affection to her in person. This is the message, noble maiden, which I was charged to deliver to you."

And with these words he made a reverential bow, and disappeared at the door. In fulfilment of the promise which he had made to Deconinck in the wood, near the ruins of Nieuwenhove, the young Guy had arrived with the promised succour from Namur. He had taken Castle Wynandael on his way, and had put the French garrison to the sword. He had razed to the ground the Castle of Sysselo, because the castellan was a sworn Liliard, and had offered the French a refuge within its walls. The victorious entry of Guy filled the citizens of Bruges with exulting joy, and in every street resounded the cry, "Hail to our Count! Flanders! the Lion!"

When the young general with his suite had reached the Friday Market-place, the masters of the guilds presented him with the keys of the city; and he was thus proclaimed Count of Flanders, until the liberation of Robert de Bethune, his brother.—The citizens already deemed their liberty secure; for now they had a chief who could lead them forth to the fight. The horsemen were quartered amongst the most distinguished citizens; and so great was the zeal and the joy of the inhabitants, that there was quite a struggle to seize the reins of the horses; for every one wished to receive into his house one of the Count's followers; but it is easy to imagine with what kindness and courtesy these valuable auxiliaries were welcomed.

As soon as Guy assumed the Government which Deconinck had established and secured, he hastened to the house of Nieuwland, embraced his afflicted niece, and recounted to her with joy how he had driven the aliens from their beloved Wynandael.—A costly banquet awaited them, prepared by Maria in honor of her brother's return. They drank the wine of joy for the liberation of the enslaved Flemings, and consecrated a tear to the mournful memory of the poisoned Philipppa.

CHAPTER XIX.

After the fearful night in which the blood of the French had flowed in such abundant streams, De Chastillon, Jan Van Gistel, and the few others who had escaped death, were received within the walls of Courtrai. In the city they found a numerous garrison, trusting in peaceful security to the strength of the castle; for on this place the French counted most confidently, as its fortifications were really unassailable. De Chastillon, a prey to hopeless despair on account of his defeat, was burning with the desire of vengeance. He hastily drew some small companies of mercenaries from other cities to Courtrai, in order still further to protect it in the event of an attack, and he entrusted the command of these troops to the castellan, Van Lens, a Bastard Fleming. Using the utmost despatch, he visited the other frontier cities, placed within them the troops that remained to him in Picardy, gave the command of Lille to the chancellor, Pierre Flotte, and hastened to France, to the court of Philip at Paris, where the tidings of the defeat of his army had already preceded him.

Philip the Fair received the governor-general of Flanders with marked displeasure, and reproached him angrily with the tyrannical conduct which had been the cause of the disaster. De Chastillon would have undoubtedly fallen into disgrace, had not Queen Joanna, who, as we know, hated the Flemings and exulted in their oppression, found means to exculpate her uncle so dexterously, that Philip at length began to believe that he deserved thanks rather than reproofs. And thus the whole wrath of the king was again turned back on the Flemings, and he swore that he would exact from them a dire revenge.

An army of twenty thousand men had assembled at Paris, in order to deliver the kingdom of Majorca from the hand of the infidel; and these were the troops of whose gathering Robert de Bethune had spoken to the lords of Flanders. They might easily have marched this host upon Flanders; but Philip would run no risk of defeat, and resolved therefore to postpone his vengeance a short time in order to collect more soldiers.

A proclamation was borne throughout France by swift messengers; the great vassals of the kingdom were informed how the Flemings had put to death seven thousand Frenchmen; and that the king summoned them to Paris with all the troops at their command, and with the utmost speed, in order to avenge the insult. In those times warfare and feats of arms were the sole occupation of the nobles, and they exulted at the very mention of battle; so we need not wonder that this appeal met an immediate and hearty response. From every quarter, from every castle of mighty France, poured the

great feudatories of the crown with their vassals; and in a very short time the French army counted more than fifty thousand men.

After the Lion of Flanders and Charles de Valois, Robert d'Artois was the ablest warrior that Europe boasted that time; and indeed his great and varied experience, gained in numerous expeditions, gave him, in some respects, an advantage over these two commanders. For eight whole years he had never laid aside his armour; his hair had literally grown gray beneath the helmet. The unrelenting hate with which he regarded the Flemings, who had slain his only son at Furnes, determined the Queen to give him the chief command of the whole army; and in truth no one was better qualified to fill this honorable post than Robert d'Artois.

Want of money, and the daily arrival of the more distant vassals of the crown, retarded for some time the departure of the host. The excessive ardour and precipitation with which the French nobles usually entered on their expeditions had so often proved prejudicial to them, and they had learned at such heavy cost that prudence and foresight are important elements of strength, that they resolved on this occasion to take every precaution, and proceed with the greatest deliberation.

The fiery queen of Navarre sent for Robert d'Artois, and urged him to chastise the Flemings with the utmost cruelty. She enjoined him for instance, "to whip up all the Flemish swine, and to split their ribs on the point of the sword, and to strike every Flemish dog dead." The swine and the whelps were the women and children of Flanders; and the dogs were those heroes who, sword in hand, were defending their fatherland. The faithful chronicles have preserved for us these shameful words of a queen and a woman, as a token of Joanna's ferocious spirit.

In the mean time the Flemings had greatly increased their army. The illustrious Master John Borluut had excited the citizens of Ghent to rise and drive out of their city the French garrison; and seven hundred were slain in this insurrection. Oudenarde and several other cities effected their freedom in like manner; so that the enemy retained possession only of a few fortified places, in which the flying Frenchmen found refuge. William van Gulick, the priest, came from Germany to Bruges with a numerous troop of archers, and as soon as Master John van Renesse had assembled four hundred Zealanders, they united their forces, and, accompanied by a crowd of volunteers, moved towards Cassel, in order to fall upon and expel the French garrison. This city was exceedingly well fortified, so that it could not be taken by surprise. William van Gulick had counted on the co-operation of the citizens; but the French kept so vigilant a guard, that they could not make the slightest movement; so that Master William found himself compelled to begin a regular siege, and await the arrival of the necessary stores and battering machines.

The youthful Guy had been received with acclamation in all the more important cities of West Flanders, his presence everywhere infused courage, and inspired every man with a burning desire to defend his fatherland. Adolf van Nieuwland had also visited the lesser towns, in order to summon together all who were capable of bearing arms.

In Courtrai there lay about three thousand French under command of the castellan Van Lens. Instead of endeavouring to win the affections of the people by kindness, they exhausted their patience by continued acts of depredation and petty tyranny. Encouraged by the example of the other cities, the inhabitants rose suddenly against the French, and slew more than half of them; the remainder made their escape to the citadel, which they fortified in the best way they could. There they revenged themselves by shooting burning arrows into the city; so that many of its finest buildings, especially those surrounding the market-place and the Beguinege, became a prey to the flames. The citizens thereupon invested the citadel with their whole forces; but they did not number sufficiently strong to be able to expel the French. Filled with mournful apprehension that their city would soon be entirely destroyed by fire they sent messengers to Bruges with an earnest request to the young Count Guy for aid.

The messenger reached Guy in Bruges on the 5th of July 1302, and made him acquainted with the melancholy condition of the city, and its urgent need of aid. The Count was deeply moved by the account they gave, and determined to hasten without delay to the hapless city. As William van Gulick had taken all the troops with him to Cassel, Guy had no other resource than to call together the guildsmen. He caused all the deans to be immediately summoned to the upper-hall of the prince's castle, and betook himself thither with the few knights who were about him. An hour later, all the deans, thirty in number, were assembled, and awaited, with uncovered heads and in silence, the subject to be proposed for their deliberation. Deconinck and Broydel, as leaders of the two most powerful guilds, occupied the foremost place. Count Guy sat in a rich arm-chair at the upper end of the hall; around him stood Messire John van Lichterweld and Messire van Heyne, both peers of Flanders; Messire van Gavem, whose father had been slain by the French at Furnes; Messire van Bornhove, a knight templar; Robert van Leuenerghem; Baldwin van Raveschoot; Iv. van Belleghem; Henry, Lord of Lonchye, in Luxemburg; Gorwyer van Goetzenhove and Jan van Coeyck of Brabant; Peter and Louis van Lichterweld; Peter and Louis van Goethals of Ghent; and Henry van Petershem, Adolf van Nieuwland was standing on the right hand of the Count, and engaged in confidential conversation with him.

(TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)

There were four noble families in Flanders, of which the heads were called Beers, or peers; when the race of the count became extinct, the new prince was to be chosen from amongst these Beers.