



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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REVEREND J. J. MURPHY,

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THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

BY CLEMENT G. MOORE.

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap, Had just settled our brains for a long winter nap.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow, Gave a luster of midday to objects below;

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came, And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:

As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly, When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;

As I drew in my head and was turning round, Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound;

His eyes, how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry;

He had a broad face and a little round belly That shook when he laughed like a bowl of jelly.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And filled all the stockings, then turned with a jerk,

THE LION OF FLANDERS;

OR,

THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS.

BY HENDRIK CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued).

But Jan Breydel recognised his voice. "Comrades," said he, wild with rage, "I must have the soul of this traitor. Forwards! he has lived long enough. Whoso loves me, let him follow me close."

With these words, he threw himself with his axe amongst the French, and soon struck down every foe within reach of his arm. So furious was his onslaught, that they soon drove the enemy back against the walls of the houses; and five hundred of them fell beneath the axes of the butchers.

While this fray was going on, Deconinck was occupied in hunting out the few remaining Frenchmen in the Stone Street, near S. Salvator; and the other guilds were following his example in the quarters assigned to them.

The Lion of Flanders! Whoso is French is false; strike home! Here and there a Frenchman fled before a Fleming, but only to meet his death, a few steps further on, from the weapon of another foe.

This scene of vengeance lasted until the sun stood high in the heavens; it shone on the dead bodies, and dried the flowing blood, of five thousand of the French. Yes, in this night five thousand aliens were offered to the shades of the murdered Flemings; it is a bloody page in the chronicles of Flanders, that wherein this number is written.

Before the dwelling of De Mortenay was a strange and appalling sight. A thousand butchers lay spread out on the ground with their axes in their hands, their threatening revengeful eyes riveted on the door. Their naked arms and their jerkins were smeared with blood; around them were piled heaps of uncounted slain.

Although their hearts were full of rage, yet no word of reviling escaped the lips of the butchers. The dwelling of De Mortenay was to them sacred in virtue of their plighted word. They respected Deconinck's pledge, and had, moreover, a great esteem for the governor of the city; so they contented themselves with investing the entire quarter and keeping careful watch.

Messire de Chatillon and Jan van Gistel the Liliard had taken refuge in De Mortenay's house. They were overpowered by an extreme dread; for an inevitable death hovered before their eyes. De Chatillon was a man of courage, and awaited his fate with coolness; but the face of Jan van Gistel was bloodless, and his whole frame quaked with fear.

The heart of the Liliard throbbed with anguish, as he saw in the gleam of these thousand axes his doom of death; and, turning to his companions, he said, in a tone of despair,

"We must die, messieurs; there is no mercy for us, for they thirst for our blood like famished hounds. You will never leave this place. My God! what shall we do?"

"It is a disgrace," replied De Chatillon, "to meet one's death at the hands of this rabble; rather would I be slain sword in hand. But so it must be. The coolness of De Chatillon disquieted Van Gistel still more.

He opened the window, and cried, "Master Breydel, Messire van Gistel wishes to ask you whether you will give him safe-conduct for a heavy ransom. Ask whatever you please, name the required sum; and do not delay, I pray you."

"Comrades," shouted the Dean to his companions, with a bitter laugh, "they offer us gold! they think they can buy off the revenge of a people with gold; shall we accept it?"

"No; we will have the Liliard!" cried the butchers; "he must die: the traitor—the dastard, degenerate Fleming!"

This exclamation echoed hideously in Van Gistel's ears, and it seemed to him as though he already felt the sharp edge of the axe upon his neck. De Mortenay allowed the stormy cries for vengeance to pass away, and then again called out,

"You promised me that my house should be an asylum and sanctuary; why, then, do you violate the pledge you have given?"

"We will not violate your dwelling," answered Breydel; "but I swear to you that neither De Chatillon nor Van Gistel shall leave the city alive; their blood must atone for the blood of our brothers, and we will not leave this spot until our axes have given them the death-blow."

"And may I leave the city without molestation?" "You, Messire de Mortenay, are at liberty to go whithersoever you please, with your personal retinue and no one shall touch a hair of your head. But do not attempt to deceive us; for we are too well acquainted with those of whom we are in quest."

"I give you notice, then, that in an hour from this time I shall take my departure for Courtrai." "May God protect you!" "And have you no compassion for unarmed knights?"

"They had no compassion on our brethren, and their blood must be shed. The gallows which they themselves erected still stands in the market-place."

De Mortenay closed the window and said to the knights, "I commiserate you, messieurs; they insist on shedding your blood. You are in a very great peril; but I hope that, by God's assistance, I shall yet be able to rescue you. There is an outlet behind the court-yard, through which you may be fortunate enough to escape from your bloodthirsty enemies. Disguise yourselves, and mount your horses; then I and my servants will leave the house by the principal entrance; and while I thus draw off the attention of the butchers on myself, you may be able to make your escape along the walls. At the Smiths' Gate there is a breach through which it will not be difficult for you to gain the open country, and your horses will secure you from being overtaken."

De Chatillon and Van Gistel joyfully embraced this last hope. The governor-general put on the clothes of his castellan, and Van Gistel those of one of the meaner servants; the thirty remaining Frenchmen led their horses from the stables and made them ready, in order that they might fly with their commander.

When all were mounted, De Mortenay and his servants issued forth into the street, in which the butchers lay, as it were, encamped. The latter, having no suspicion of deceit, stood up, and regarded with careful scrutiny all those who accompanied the governor-general. But soon the cry, "The Lion for Flanders! Whoso is French is false! strike home!" resounded in another street, and the clattering hoofs of horses at full gallop were heard round the corner.

The butchers had pursued the flying Frenchmen as far as the gate; but when they saw the enemies they most dreaded disappear between the trees in the distance, they raged and yelled in baffled wrath; for now their revenge seemed to them unsated. After remaining some moments gazing on the spot where De Chatillon had disappeared from their view, they left the wall and returned to the Friday Market-place. Soon another tumult arrested their attention. From the centre of the city arose a shout of mingled voices, filling the air with prolonged sounds of rejoicing, as though a prince were making his festal entry. For some time the butchers could not distinguish the triumphant cries, for they came from too great a distance; but by degrees the exciting crowd drew nearer and nearer, and the shouts became intelligible:

"Long live the Blue Lion! long live our Dean! Flanders is free!"

An innumerable multitude, consisting of all the inhabitants of Bruges, poured itself through the streets in dense throngs. The acclamations of the liberated Flemings echoed back from the houses, and filled the city as with the booming of thunder. Women and children ran confusedly amongst the armed guildsmen; and the joyous clapping of their hands mingled with and harmonised the uninterrupted shouting, "Hail! hail to the Blue Lion!"

From the midst of this crowd rose a white standard; on the waving folds of which was wrought, in blue silk, a lion rampant. It was the great banner of the city of Bruges, which had for so long a time disappeared before the illicits of France. Once more it came forth from its concealment into the light of day; now it waved over the prostrate bodies of its foes; and the resurrection of this holy standard was greeted with ten thousand shouts of rejoicing.

A man of small stature bore the banner, and with his arms crossed over his breast, pressed it to his heart, as though it inspired him with the deepest love. Abundant tears flowed down his cheeks; tears of love of fatherland mingled with tears of joy and sadness; and an unutterable expression of happiness beamed from his very features. He who had shed no tear for his greatest personal misfortune, now wept when he brought back the Lion to the city of his fathers—to the altar of freedom.

All eyes were turned towards the man, and the cries, "Long live Deconinck! Hail to the Blue

Lion!" were echoed and re-echoed ever louder and louder. As the Dean of the Clothworkers drew near to the Friday Market-place holding aloft the standard, an inexpressible joy filled the hearts of the Butchers; they, too, swelled the exulting shout of victory, and clapped their hands with an impetuous outburst of love. Breydel rushed eagerly to meet the banner, and stretched his impatient hands towards the Lion. Deconinck resigned it to him, and said:

"There, my friend, this hast thou this day won—the palladium of our freedom." Breydel answered nothing—his heart was too full. Trembling with emotion, he embraced the drapery of the standard and the Blue Lion. He hid his face in the folds of the silk, and wept; for a few moments he remained motionless; then the banner fell from his grasp, and he sank exhausted by his transport on Deconinck's breast.

While the two deans held each other in this warm embrace, the people ceased not their shouts; loud exulting cries poured from the lips of all, and their quick and impassioned gestures attested the rapturous gladness of their hearts. The Friday Market-place was too small to contain the thronging citizens. In the Stone Street, far away to S. Salvator's, were clustering swarms of men; the Smiths' Street and Bouverie Street were crowded with women and children.

The Dean of the Clothworkers turned himself towards the centre of the market-place, and advanced to the gallows. The bodies of the Flemings who had been hanged had already been taken down and buried; but the eight ropes had been purposely left dangling in the air as signs and memorials of the tyranny which had put them to death. The standard with the Lion of Bruges was planted close to the apparatus of murder, and greeted afresh with cries of joy. After regarding for a few moments in silence the reconquered banner, Deconinck slowly bent his knee, bowed his head, and prayed with folded hands.

When one throws a stone into still water, the movement spreads in tremulous circles over the entire surface, and awakes the ripples of the whole lake; so the thought and the act of Deconinck communicated themselves to the crowd of citizens, although but few could positively see him. First, those who were immediately near to him knelt silently down; then the movement extended itself further and further amongst the more distant, until every head was bowed in prayer; the voices of those in the centre of the vast circle were first hushed, and so further and further spread the silence, until it pervaded the whole multitude. Eight thousand knees touched the yet bloody earth; eight thousand heads humbled themselves before the God who hath created men for freedom. What a harmony must have swelled up to the Throne of the Most High in that moment! How grateful to Him must have been that solemn prayer, which, like a cloud of fragrance, was wafted upwards to His Footstool!

After a short time Deconinck arose, and availed himself of the unbroken stillness to address the following words to his assembled fellow-citizens:

"Brothers! this day the sun shines on us with fairer splendor, the breeze of heaven is purer and more exhilarating in our city; the breath of the foreigner pollutes it no more. The haughty Frenchmen deemed that we were their slaves for ever; but they have learned, at the price of their lives, that our Lion may indeed slumber awhile—die it never can. Again have we re-conquered the heritage of our fathers, and washed out in blood the footprints of the aliens. But all our enemies are not yet overcome; France will send us yet more armed hirelings, for blood demands blood. That, indeed, is of small moment; for henceforth we are invincible; but, nevertheless, think not that you may sleep after the victory achieved. Keep your hearts firm, hold, quiet; never let the noble fire which at this moment glows in your breasts waver or wane. Let each betake himself now to his abode, and rejoice with his family in the victory of this day. Exult and drink the wine of gladness; for this is the fairest day of your lives. Those citizens who have no wine may go to the hall; there a measure shall be distributed to each."

The shouts, which gradually became louder and louder did not permit Deconinck to say more; he made a sign to the surrounding deans, and went with them up the Stone Street. The crowds reverentially made way for him, and on him, above all, were bestowed the gladdest greetings of the happy citizens. Every one now pressed towards the standard which reared itself up by the side of the gallows; each in succession gazed with ecstasy on the Blue Lion, as on a friend who had again returned among his brethren after long journeyings in strange lands. They stretched out their hands towards it; and were so overpowered with joy, that they would have seemed to the cool and dispassionate observer to have lost their senses.

Soon came guildsmen with full cans back to the market-place, and spread the joyful tidings that a measure of wine would be distributed to each. An hour later every citizen had his wine-glass in his hand. And so ended the eventful day, without confusion and without strife; one and the same feeling quickened every heart—the feeling which fills the heart of a captive when he once more beholds the light of the sun, and the wide world is his only prison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two years had gone by since the foreigner had set foot in Flanders, and cried: "Bow your heads, ye Flemings! ye sons of the north, yield to the children of the south, or die!" Little thought they that there had been born in Bruges a man endowed with large sagacity, and inspired with heroic courage: a man who shone forth as a bright light amongst his contemporaries; and to whom, as to His servant Moses, God had said: "Go, and deliver thy brethren, the children of Israel, from the thralldom of Pharaoh."

When the desolating bands of the French first trod the soil of his fatherland, and darkened the horizon with the dust of their march, a secret voice spoke in Deconinck's soul, and said: "Take heed, these are in quest of slaves!"

At this sound, the noble citizen quivered with anguish and wrath: "Slaves! ye slaves!" groaned he; "forbid it, O

Lord our God! The blood of our free-born fathers hath flowed in defence of Thine altars: they have died on the sands of Arabia with Thy Holy Name on their lips. O, suffer not their sons to bear the debasing fetters of the alien;—suffer not the temple which they have raised unto Thee to have bondsmen for worshippers!"

Deconinck had breathed this prayer from his deepest soul, and all his heart lay open to his Creator. He found therein all the noble courage and energy wherewith He had endowed the Fleming; and He sent down an answering ray of trust and hope. Instantly filled with a secret strength, Deconinck felt as though all his capacities of thought and action were doubled in energy; and, impelled by a true inspiration, he cried:

"Yea, Lord, I have felt Thy strong and Thy strengthening hand; yes, I shall ward off this degradation from my fatherland; the graves of Thy servants, my fathers, shall never be trodden down by the foot of the alien. Blessed art Thou, O my God, who hast called me to this!"

From that moment one only feeling, one only deep yearning lived in Deconinck's heart; his every thought, his every faculty, all were consecrated to the great word—my fatherland! Business, family, repose, all were banished from his ample heart, which held but one, one only affection—his love for the native soil of the Liou. And what man more truly noble than this Fleming, who a hundred times risked life and liberty itself for the freedom of Flanders? what man was ever endowed with more ample sagacity? Alone and unaided, in spite of recalcitrants and Liliards, who would have sold their country's freedom, he it was who bled the efforts of the King of France—he alone it was who preserved for his brethren a lion's heart even under the chains of slavery, and thus gradually achieved their deliverance.

The French knew this well;—well they knew him who at every moment shattered the wheels of their triumphal chariot. Gladly would they have rid themselves of this troublesome guardian of his country's weal; but with the cunning he combined perfectly the prudence of the serpent. He had raised up for himself a secure rampart and defence in the love of his brethren; and the stranger well knew that a dire and bloody revenge would follow any attempt upon him. During the time that the French ruled all Flanders with the rod of tyranny, Deconinck lived in entire freedom amongst his townsmen; and he was indeed the master of his laws, for they feared him much more than he feared them.

And now seven thousand Frenchmen had on one day atoned with their lives for the oppressions of two long years; not a single foreigner breathed within Bruges, the victorious and free; the city echoed the joyous lays wherewith wandering minstrels celebrated this deliverance, and from the watch-tower the white flag displayed the Blue Lion on its waving folds. The ensign, which had once waved from the battlements of Jerusalem, and commemorated so many proud achievements, filled the hearts of the citizens with lofty courage. On that day it seemed impossible that Flanders should again sigh in the chains of captivity; for on that day the people remembered the blood their fathers had shed in behalf of liberty. Tears rolled down their cheeks—those tears which relieve the heart when it is overfull, when it throbs with too strong and sublime an emotion.

One would have thought that, now his great work was done, the Dean of the Clothworkers would have occupied himself in the re-construction of his plundered and desolated home. But no; he thought neither of the dwelling nor of the wealth of which he had been despoiled; the welfare and the peace of his brethren was his first care. He knew that disorganisation might soon follow upon inaction, and therefore, on that very day, he placed at the head of each guild, with the concurrence of the people, an old experienced master. He was not chosen to the presidency of this council, no one devolved any duty on him; but he undertook and accomplished all. No one ventured to do any thing without him; his judgment was in every thing an injunction; and without issuing a single command, his thought was the absolute rule of right to the republic, so transcendent and all-subduing is the sway of genius.

The French host was, indeed, destroyed; but it was certain that Philip the Fair would send fresh and more numerous troops to Flanders to avenge the insult put upon him. The greater part of the citizens thought little about this terrible certainty; it was enough for them to enjoy the freedom and the gladness of the moment. But Deconinck did not share the common joy; he had almost forgotten the present in his schemes for averting future disaster. He well knew that the exhilaration and courage of a people vanish at the approach of danger, and endeavored by every means in his power to keep alive a warlike spirit in the city. Every guildman was provided with a "good-day" or other weapon, the banners were put in order, and the command issued that all should be ready for battle at a moment's notice. The guild of masons began to repair and strengthen the fortifications, and the smiths were forbidden to forge any thing but weapons for the people. The tolls were again imposed, and the city dues collected. By these wise regulations, Deconinck made every thought, every effort of the citizens converge to one object and one aim; and so he warded off from his beloved city the manifold evils which a great insurrection, how noble soever its cause, is apt to inflict on a people. All was as orderly as if the new government had existed for years.

Immediately after the victory, and while the people were drinking in every street the wine of gladness, Deconinck had sent a messenger to the campment at Damme, to recall the remaining guildsmen; with the women and children, into the city. Matilda had come with them, and had been offered a magnificent dwelling in the Princes' Court; but she preferred the house of Nieuwland, in which all her dreams were associated. She found in the excellent sister of Adolf a tender and affectionate friend, into whose heart she could pour all the love and all the grief which overflowed her own. It is, indeed, a consolation for us, when our hearts are pained with mortal anguish, to find a soul which can understand our sufferings because itself has suffered: a soul that loves those whom we love, and whose walls are the echo of our own. So