

Chroniques de Charles VI

Book VII

CHAPITRE I

The king of Armenia is sent to deal with the English.

The truce settled between the kings of France and England having expired, as the frosts of winter had just disappeared to make way for spring, the main captains of the kingdom gathered in the palace. The previous year, the king had ordered them to gather all men of war they could find. A big council was held to deliberate on the destination of the troops that would take part in the campaign. Noted among other famous people, Louis Duke of Touraine, the king's brother, the Dukes of Berri, Bourgogne and Bourbon, his uncles, and not only all the family's princes, but also the king of Armenia and several famous barons, from noble and ancient families.

According to the tale of those whose mission allowed them entrance to councils, most lords were of the opinion that it was no longer necessary to send delegations regarding the truce, nor receive enemy's delegates, nor accept any peace proposal, but take revenge for the offenses made to the Treaty, by openly attacking the English and fighting back for every damage. Those who didn't agree on this point begged the king of Armenia to communicate their opinion. He was a prince of a vivacious wit and great insight; he had hitherto been silent in the councils, because he was little versed in the Latin language and didn't express himself fluently in French. However, he spoke on this occasion, and addressed these few words to the audience:

“Illustrious dukes, if I have to attribute to a noble feeling the desire to avenge the country of injuries it has received, I might add, with the permission of the king, that nothing should be overlooked in order to achieve this legitimate revenge, while complying nevertheless with the established rules, and avoiding the anger that leads all to a bad end. So I think that, although the enemies have repeatedly violated the truces and oaths, you must move less hastily in this matter and seek to bring them back to peace through the gentle path.

If they continue to appear haughty and inflexible, the justice of your cause will be even more evident. Your ancestors have always set an example of such behavior. To remove any suspicion about the sincerity of my advice, I offer, if you agree, to complete this mission. No bond of friendship unites me with the English; but perhaps I shall succeed with them better than a messenger of your nation, against which they harbor a relentless hatred.”

Those who had to speak after his discourse approved of him, and soon the whole congregation shared that sentiment. The king thanked him and made him responsible for the negotiation, forming a procession of several nobles of the court in his honor. The Ambassador then took his leave, and went to England with a favorable wind. At the news of his arrival, King Richard, considering that it was a tremendous honor for him to receive such a great prince and that this glory hadn't fallen to any of his predecessors, and also attracted by the splendor of his reputation and the fame of his exploits, was determined to welcome him with the utmost respect.

He sent the principal officers of his palace and several people from his court to greet him; then, when he approached, he went in person to meet him with a large entourage of horsemen, greeted him with great affability, gave him the kiss of peace, and showed him by his words and his look of satisfaction that he was delighted by his arrival. He gave him a hotel in London, treated him lavishly for several days, showed him great kindness, and often had friendly talks with him.

CHAPITRE II

Vain efforts of the king of Armenia to restore peace between the two kings

Nine days after his arrival, the king of Armenia, that the British already accused of being too favorable to France, obtained the right to speak in an assembly of the principal nobles, and sought to restore peace between the two kings through this speech: *"It is not flattery, it is a feeling of brotherly love that makes me say that the people of the East have admired your strength so far, and they would cease to shower you with praise, if you keep refusing to resign yourself to peace. Alas! Fortune compels me to make a sad and cruel confession to you: it is thanks to your divisions that infidels have turned their victorious arms against me. From the king that I was, now outlawed, I can say: I have prevailed in mourning and tears.*

Thrown into the abyss by the fickleness of fate, I must now consider my crown only as a funeral ornament, and the royal headband at my forehead like the veil of a victim destined for death. Powerful princes, if you would have come to help Jesus - Christ with the support of your arms as you have so often required Christians to, whom our Lord has redeemed with his blood, they would not have been condemned to spend their days in bitterness, misery and slavery in the East. Cities in these countries, long attached to the Christian religion, especially Bethlehem, the holy birthplace of Jesus - Christ, and Sion that he has particularly illustrated by his miracles, would not be subject to the intolerable yoke of the Turks, Arabs and Persians. But neglecting the wisest stance, you turned your lethal weapons against the bosom of Christianity. For sixty years now, from either side we have seen only captured or destroyed cities from top to bottom, burned and looted suburbs, countryside residents taken captive. The war, which was fought with varying success, has only resulted in the shedding of

much blood. But tell me, I pray to you, which of the two parties has benefited the most. Let's consult the men of learning and experience on the topic. If you exult in your victories, you can at least agree that you paid a high price for it; if you list the castles you conquered in the kingdom of France, now that you have lost all of them, and that there is only one left in your power, your opponents would say:

"It is better to maintain than extend one's conquests"

The King of Armenia asserted other considerations; I will explain them in few words. *"Serene Prince, he said, if I have to make the truth heard rather than specious words, I will not deny that what has so far maintained the war is this ambition calling you to conquer France. The former kings of this country have been insured by a continuous possession the crown they had acquired by their bravery; and if all the strength of a throne lies in the obedience of subjects, I view the one of France as unshakeable."*

He ended his speech in this way: *"The hostilities between the two nations have lasted too long. I think we should beseech the two rivals to content themselves with their vast estates, and to end the war between their subjects, in order to thwart the enemies of Christ and break the yoke of Christians scattered in the East, waiting for your help day in and day out, Serene princes, and humbly implore it."*

The king didn't hear this speech without some displeasure; however, he answered in few words: *"Know that I do not reject your proposals of accommodation. The crown of France belonged to the king my predecessor, from the head of his mother; but since he judged it appropriate to give it up for the full and complete restitution of the duchies of Aquitaine and Normandy, it is under these conditions, and not to others, that I am ready to finalize a treaty of perpetual peace with the French."*

Thus ended the conference. The king pointed his noble generosity, one might almost say his prodigality, to the envoy and those of his followers. In dismissing them, he loaded them with rich gifts, donated some silk materials, horses, precious jewels, and in a private interview, recommended that they work toward a conclusion of peace. He told them he had already prepared a mission to further deal with the matter with the French, if they wanted. He also asked them to make known to their king his vivacious desire to see him.

The king of Armenia, after a prosperous voyage, came to bring this news to the king of France, who, despite the lack of confidence that he had in the promises of his enemy, didn't want anyone to blame him for refusing an accommodation. Maturely reflecting the words of the King of England, and considering that an interview and stoma between rivals often help to hasten their reconciliation, he moved forward to Boulogne, escorted by his nobility, but without any war machine. By the deadline, having learned that the King of England had not crossed the sea to get to Calais, and had handed over his powers to some of his knights, he sent some of the French knights to Lelighen, halfway to Calais and Boulogne. Several conferences were held, but they remained unsuccessful. Against all odds, the English proved

this time to be more arrogant and more demanding than ever in their claims. Following their custom, they prolonged the talks for six weeks because of their slowness and their subterfuges. Pirates used this time to wander in the sea: I couldn't say if the English were aware of it.

They attacked the coasts of France, surprised fishermen and other people without suspicion and without fear, and took them prisoners in England. On the other hand, the English garrisons of the maritime cities of Calais, Cherbourg and Brest, went out and kidnapped men and cattle. Emboldened by the length of the conference, those soldiers pillaged and took everything they could find outside of strongholds, and returned home without obstacle, gorged with booty.