

Chapter 8

HOW THE KING WAS AFRAID OF BEING AFRAID.

When the king left St. Luc, he found the court, according to his orders, in the great gallery. Then he gave D'O, D'Epernon and Schomberg an order to retire into the provinces, threatened Quelus and Maugiron to punish them if they quarreled anymore with Bussy, to whom he gave his hand to kiss, and then embraced his brother François.

As for the queen, he was prodigal in politeness to her.

When the usual time for retiring approached, the king seemed trying to retard it. At last ten o'clock struck.

"Come with me, Chicot," then said he, "good night, gentlemen."

"Good night, gentlemen," said Chicot, "we are going to bed. I want my barber, my hairdresser, my valet de chambre, and, above all, my cream."

"No," said the king, "I want none of them to-night; Lent is going to begin."

"I regret the cream," said Chicot.

The king and Chicot entered the room, which we already know.

"Ah ça! Henri," said Chicot, "I am the favorite to-night. Am I handsomer than that Cupid, Quelus?"

"Silence, Chicot, and you, gentlemen of the toilette, go out."

They obeyed, and the king and Chicot were left alone.

"Why do you send them away?" asked Chicot, "they have not greased us yet. Are you going to grease me with your own royal hand? It would be an act of humility."

"Let us pray," said Henri.

"Thank you, that is not amusing. If that be what you called me here for, I prefer to return to the bad company I have left. Adieu, my son. Good night."

"Stay," said the king.

"Oh! this is tyranny. You are a despot, a Phalaris, a Dionysius. All day you have made me tear the shoulders of my friends with cow-hide, and now we are to begin again. Do not let us do it, Henri, when there's but two, every blow tells."

"Hold your tongue, miserable chatterer, and think of repentance."

"I repent! And of what? Of being jester to a monk. Confiteor--I repent, mea culpa, it is a great sin."

"No sacrilege, wretch."

"Ah! I would rather he shut up in a cage with lions and apes, than with a mad king. Adieu, I am going."

The king locked the door.

"Henri, you look sinister; if you do not let me go, I will cry, I will call, I will break the window, I will kick down the door."

"Chicot," said the king, in a melancholy tone, "you abuse my sadness."

"Ah! I understand, you are afraid to be alone. Tyrants always are so. Take my long sword, and let me take the scabbard to my room."

At the word "afraid," Henri shuddered, and he looked nervously around, and seemed so agitated and grew so pale, that Chicot began to think him really ill, and said,--

"Come, my son, what is the matter, tell your troubles to your friend Chicot."

The king looked at him and said, "Yes, you are my friend, my only friend."

"There is," said Chicot, "the abbey of Valency vacant."

"Listen, Chicot, you are discreet."

"There is also that of Pithiviers, where they make such good pies."

"In spite of your buffooneries, you are a brave man."

"Then do not give me an abbey, give me a regiment."

"And even a wise one."

"Then do not give me a regiment, make me a counselor; but no, when I think of it, I should prefer a regiment, for I should be always forced to be of the king's opinion."

"Hold your tongue, Chicot, the terrible hour approaches."

"Ah! you are beginning again."

"You will hear."

"Hear what?"

"Wait, and the event will show you. Chicot, you are brave!"

"I boast of it, but I do not wish to try. Call your captain of the guard, your Swiss, and let me go away from this invisible danger."

"Chicot, I command you to stay."

"On my word, a nice master. I am afraid, I tell you. Help!"

"Well, drôle, if I must, I will tell you all."

"Ah!" cried Chicot, drawing his sword, "once warned, I do not care; tell, my son, tell. Is it a crocodile? my sword is sharp, for I use it every week to cut

my corns." And Chicot sat down in the armchair with his drawn sword between his legs.

"Last night," said Henri, "I slept----"

"And I also," said Chicot.

"Suddenly a breath swept over my face."

"It was the dog, who was hungry, and who licked your cream."

"I half woke, and felt my beard bristle with terror under my mask."

"Ah! you make me tremble deliciously."

"Then," continued the king, in a trembling voice, "then a voice sounded through the room, with a doleful vibration."

"The voice of the crocodile! I have read in Marco Polo, that the crocodile has a voice like the crying of children; but be easy, my son, for if it comes, we will kill it."

"Listen! miserable sinner,' said the voice----"

"Oh! it spoke; then it was not a crocodile."

"Miserable sinner,' said the voice, 'I am the angel of God.'"

"The angel of God!"

"Ah! Chicot, it was a frightful voice."

"Was it like the sound of a trumpet?"

"'Are you there?' continued the voice, 'do you hear, hardened sinner; are you determined to persevere in your iniquities?'"

"Ah, really; he said very much the same as other people, it seems to me."

"Then, Chicot, followed many other reproaches, which I assure you were most painful."

"But tell me what he said, that I may see if he was well informed?"

"Impious! do you doubt?"

"I? all that astonishes me is, that he waited so long to reproach you. So, my son, you were dreadfully afraid?"

"Oh, yes, the marrow seemed to dry in my bones."

"It is quite natural; on my word, I do not know what I should have done in your place. And then you called?"

"Yes."

"And they came?"

"Yes."

"And there was no one here?"

"No one."

"It is frightful."

"So frightful, that I sent for my confessor."

"And he came?"

"Immediately."

"Now, be frank, my son; tell the truth for once. What did he think of your revelation?"

"He shuddered."

"I should think so."

"He ordered me to repent, as the voice told me."

"Very well. There can be no harm in repenting. But what did he think of the vision?"

"That it was a miracle, and that I must think of it seriously. Therefore, this morning----"

"What have you done"

"I gave 100,000 livres to the Jesuits."

"Very well."

"And scourged myself and my friends."

"Perfect! but after?"

"Well, what do you think of it, Chicot? It is not to the jester I speak, but to the man of sense, to my friend."

"Ah, sire, I think your majesty had the nightmare."

"You think so?"

"Yes, it was a dream, which will not be renewed, unless your majesty thinks too much about it."

"A dream? No, Chicot, I was awake, my eyes were open."

"I sleep like that."

"Yes, but then you do not see, and I saw the moon shining through my windows, and its light on the amethyst in the hilt of my sword, which lay in that chair where you are."

"And the lamp?"

"Had gone out."

"A dream, my son."

"Why do you not believe, Chicot? It is said that God speaks to kings, when He wishes to effect some change on the earth."

"Yes, he speaks, but so low that they never hear Him."

"Well, do you know why I made you stay?--that you might hear as well as I."

"No one would believe me if I said I heard it."

"My friend, it is a secret which I confide to your known fidelity."

"Well, I accept. Perhaps it will also speak to me."

"Well, what must I do?"

"Go to bed, my son."

"But----"

"Do you think that sitting up will keep it away?"

"Well, then, you remain."

"I said so."

"Well, then, I will go to bed."

"Good."

"But you will not?"

"Certainly not, I will stay here."

"You will not go to sleep?"

"Oh, that I cannot promise; sleep is like fear, my son, a thing independent of will."

"You will try, at least?"

"Be easy; I will pinch myself. Besides, the voice would wake me."

"Do not joke about the voice."

"Well, well, go to bed."

The king sighed, looked round anxiously, and glided tremblingly into bed. Then Chicot established him in his chair, arranging round him the pillows and cushions.

"How do you feel, sire?" said he.

"Pretty well; and you?"

"Very well; good night, Henri."

"Good night, Chicot; do not go to sleep."

"Of course not," said Chicot, yawning fit to break his jaws.

And they both closed their eyes, the king to pretend to sleep, Chicot to sleep really.