

Chapter 18

BROTHER GORENFLOT.

To the beautiful day had succeeded a beautiful evening, only, as the day had been cold, the evening was still colder. It was one of those frosts which make the lights in the windows of an hotel look doubly tempting. Chicot first entered the dining-room, and looked around him, but not finding there the man he sought for, went familiarly down to the kitchen. The master of the establishment was superintending a frying-pan full of whittings. At the sound of Chicot's step he turned.

"Ah! it is you, monsieur," said he, "good evening, and a good appetite to you."

"Thanks for the wish, but you know I cannot bear to eat alone."

"If necessary, monsieur, I will sup with you."

"Thanks, my dear host, but though I know you to be an excellent companion, I seek for some one else."

"Brother Gorenflot, perhaps?"

"Just so; has he begun supper?"

"No, not yet; but you must make haste nevertheless, for in five minutes he will have finished."

"Monsieur!" cried Chicot, striking his head.

"Monsieur, it is Friday, and the beginning of Lent."

"Well, and what then?" said Chicot, who did not hold a high opinion of Gorenflot's religious austerity.

Boutromet shrugged his shoulders. "Decidedly, something must be wrong," said Chicot, "five minutes for Gorenflot's supper! I am destined to see wonders to-day."

Chicot then advanced towards a small private room, pushed open the door, and saw within the worthy monk, who was turning negligently on his plate a small portion of spinach, which he tried to render more savory by the introduction into it of some cheese. Brother Gorenflot was about thirty-eight years of age and five feet high. However, what he wanted in height, he made up in breadth, measuring nearly three feet in diameter from shoulder to shoulder, which, as everyone knows, is equal to nine feet of circumference. Between these Herculean shoulders rose a neck of which the muscles stood out like cords. Unluckily this neck partook of the same proportions; it was short and thick, which at any great emotion might render Brother Gorenflot liable to apoplexy. But knowing this, perhaps, he never gave way to emotions, and was seldom so disturbed as he was when Chicot entered his room.

"Ah, my friend! what are you doing?" cried Chicot, looking at the vegetables and at a glass filled with water just colored with a few drops of wine.

"You see, my brother, I sup," replied Gorenflot in a powerful voice.

"You call that supper, Gorenflot! Herbs and cheese?"

"We are in the beginning of Lent, brother; we must think of our souls," replied Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

Chicot looked astounded; he had so often seen Gorenflot feast in a different manner during Lent.

"Our souls!" said he; "and what the devil have herbs and water to do with them?"

"We are forbidden to eat meat on Wednesdays and Fridays."

"But when did you breakfast?"

"I have not breakfasted, my brother," said the monk.

"Not breakfasted! Then what have you done?"

"Composed a discourse," said Gorenflot proudly.

"A discourse, and what for?"

"To deliver this evening at the abbey."

"That is odd."

"And I must be quick and go there, or perhaps my audience will grow impatient."

Chicot thought of the infinite number of monks he had seen going to the abbey, and wondered why Gorenflot, whom certainly he had never thought

eloquent, had been chosen to preach before M. de Mayenne and the numerous assemblage. "When are you to preach?" said he.

"At half-past nine."

"Good; it is still a quarter to nine, you can give me a few minutes. *Ventre de biche!* we have not dined together for a week."

"It is not our fault, but I know that your duties keep you near our King Henry III., while my duties fill up my time."

"Yes, but it seems to me that is so much the more reason why we should be merry when we do meet."

"Yes, I am merry," said Gorenflot, with a piteous look, "but still I must leave you."

"At least, finish your supper."

Gorenflot looked at the spinach, and sighed, then at the water, and turned away his head.

"Do you remember," said Chicot, "the little dinner at the Porte Montmartre, where, while the king was scourging himself and others, we devoured a teal from the marshes of the Grauge-Batelière, with a sauce made with crabs, and we drank that nice Burgundy wine; what do you call it?"

"It is a wine of my country, *La Romanée.*"

"Yes, yes, it was the milk you sucked as a baby, worthy son of Noah."

"It was good," said Gorenflot, "but there is better."

"So says Claude Boutromet, who pretends that he has in his cellar fifty bottles to which that is paltry."

"It is true."

"True, and yet you drink that abominable red water. Fie!" And Chicot, taking the glass, threw the contents out of window.

"There is a time for all, my brother," said Gorenflot, "and wine is good when one has only to praise God after it, but water is better when one has a discourse to pronounce,"

"Opinions differ, for I, who have also a discourse to pronounce, am going to ask for a bottle of Romanée. What do you advise me to take with it, Gorenflot?"

"Not these herbs, they are not nice." Chicot, seizing the plate, threw it after the water, and then cried, "Maître Claude."

The host appeared.

"M. Claude, bring me two bottles of your Romanée, which you call so good."

"Why two bottles," said Gorenflot, "as I do not drink it?"

"Oh! if you did I would have four or six, but if I drink alone, two will do for me."

"Indeed; two bottles are reasonable, and if you eat no meat with it, your confessor will have nothing to reproach you with."

"Oh, of course not; meat on a Friday in Lent!" And going to the larder, he drew out a fine capon.

"What are you doing, brother?" said Gorenflot, following his movements with interest.

"You see I am taking this carp."

"Carp!" cried Gorenflot.

"Yes, a carp," said Chicot, showing him the tempting bird.

"And since when has a carp had a beak?"

"A beak! do you see a beak? I only see a nose."

"And wings?"

"Fins!"

"Feathers?"

"Scales, my dear Gorenflot, you are drunk."

"Drunk! I, who have only eaten spinach and drunk water?"

"Well, your spinach has overloaded your stomach, and your water has mounted to your head."

"Parbleu! here is our host, he shall decide."

"So be it, but first let him uncork the wine."

M. Boutromet uncorked a bottle and gave a glass to Chicot. Chicot swallowed and smacked his lips.

"Ah!" said he, "I have a bad memory, I cannot remember if it be better or worse than that at Montmartre. Here, my brother, enlighten me," said he, giving a little to the monk, who was looking on with eager eyes.

Gorenflot took the glass, and drank slowly the liquor it contained.

"It is the same wine," said he, "but I had too little to tell whether it be better or worse."

"But I want to know, and if you had not a sermon to preach, I would beg you to drink a little more."

"If it will give you pleasure, my brother."

Chicot half filled the monk's glass. Gorenflot drank it with great gravity.

"I pronounce it better," said he.

"You flatter our host."

"A good drinker ought, at the first draught, to recognize the wine, at the second, the quality, and, at the third, the age."

"Oh! I should like to know the age of this wine."

"Give me a few drops more, and I will tell you."

Chicot filled his glass. He drank it off, and then said, "1561."

"Right," cried Claude Boutromet, "it was 1561."

"Brother Gorenflot," cried Chicot, "they have beatified men at Rome who were worth less than you."

"A little habit," said Gorenflot, modestly.

"And talent; for I flatter myself I have the habit, and I could not do it. But what are you about?"

"Going to my assembly."

"Without eating a piece of my carp?"

"Ah I true; you know still less of eating than drinking. M. Boutromet, what is the name of this animal?"

The innkeeper looked astonished. "A capon," said he.

"A capon!" cried Chicot, with an air of consternation.

"Yes, and a fine one."

"Well!" said Gorenflot, triumphantly.

"Well I it seems I was wrong, but as I wish to eat this capon, and yet not sin, be so kind, brother, as to throw a few drops of water upon it, and christen it a carp."

"Ah! ah!"

"Yes, I pray you, save me from mortal sin."

"So be it," cried Gorenflot, "but there is no water."

"Oh! the intention is all; baptize it with wine, my brother; the animal will be less Catholic but quite as good." And Chicot refilled the monk's glass. The first bottle was finished.

"In the name of Bacchus, Momus, and Comus, trinity of the great saint Pantagruel, I baptize thee, carp," said Gorenflot.

"Now," said Chicot, "to the health of the newly baptized; may it be cooked to perfection, and may M. Boutromet add to the excellent qualities which it has received from nature."

"To his health," cried Gorenflot, interrupting a hearty laugh to swallow his wine.

"M. Claude, put this carp at once on the spit, cover it with fresh butter, with shalots in it, and put some toast in the frying-pan, and serve it hot." Gorenflot approved with a motion of his head.

"Now, M. Boutromet, some sardines and a tunny fish, meanwhile; it is Lent, and I wish to make a maigre dinner. And let me have two more bottles of wine."

The smell of the cookery began to mount to the brain of the monk. Yet he made a last effort to rise.

"Then you leave me, after all?" said Chicot.

"I must," said Gorenflot, raising his eyes to heaven.

"It is very imprudent of you to go to pronounce a discourse fasting."

"Why?"

"Because your strength will fail you. Galen has said it. Pulmo hominis facile deficit."

"Alas! yes."

"You see, then?"

"Luckily, I have zeal."

"Ah! but that is not enough; I advise you to eat some sardines, and drink a little of this nectar."

"A single sardine, then, and one glass." Chicot gave him the sardine, and passed him the bottle. He himself took care to keep sober.

"I feel myself less feeble," said Gorenflot.

"Oh! you must feel quite strong before you go, and so I advise you to eat the fins of the carp." And as they entered with the pullet, Chicot cut off a leg and thigh, which Gorenflot soon despatched.

"What a delicious fish!" said Gorenflot. Chicot cut off the other leg and gave it to Gorenflot, while he ate the wings.

"And famous wine," said he, uncorking another bottle.

Having once commenced, Gorenflot could not stop. His appetite was enormous; he finished the bird, and then called to Boutromet. "M. Claude," said he, "I am hungry; did you not offer me omelet just now?"

"Certainly."

"Well, bring it."

"In five minutes."

"Ah!" said Gorenflot, "now I feel in force; if the omelet were here, I could eat it at a mouthful, and I swallow this wine at a gulp." And he swallowed a quarter of the third bottle.

"Ah! you were ill before."

"I was foolish, friend; that cursed discourse weighed on my mind; I have been thinking of it for days."

"It ought to be magnificent."

"Splendid."

"Tell me some of it while we wait for the omelet."

"No, no; not a sermon at table."

"We have beautiful discourses at the court, I assure you."

"About what?"

"About virtue."

"Ah! yes, he is a very virtuous man, our King Henri III."

"I do not know if he be virtuous; but I know that I have never seen anything there to make me blush."

"You blush!"

At this moment M. Boutromet entered with the omelet and two more bottles.

"Bring it here," cried the monk, with a smile, which showed his thirty-two teeth.

"But, friend, I thought you had a discourse to pronounce."

"It is here," cried Gorenflot, striking his forehead.

"At half-past nine."

"I lied; it was ten."

"Ten! I thought the abbey shut at nine."

"Let it shut; I have a key."

"A key of the abbey!"

"Here, in my pocket."

"Impossible; I know the monastic rules. They would not give the key to a simple monk."

"Here it is," said Gorenflot, showing a piece of money.

"Oh, money! you corrupt the porter to go in when you please, wretched sinner! But what strange money!"

"An effigy of the heretic, with a hole through his heart."

"Yes, I see it is a tester of the Béarn king's, and here is a hole."

"A blow with a dagger. Death to the heretic. He who does it is sure of Paradise."

"He is not yet drunk enough;" so thought Chicot; and he filled his glass again.

"To the mass!" cried Gorenflot, drinking it off.

Chicot remembered the porter looking at the hands of the monks, and said--

"Then, if you show this to the porter----"

"I enter."

"Without difficulty?"

"As this wine into my stomach." And the monk absorbed a new dose.

"And you pronounce your discourse?"

"And I pronounce my discourse. I arrive--do you hear? The assembly is numerous and select. There are barons, counts, and dukes."

"And even princes?"

"And even princes. I enter humbly among the faithful of the Union----"

"The Union--what does that mean?"

"I enter; they call Brother Gorenflot, and I advance----"

At these words the monk rose. "And I advance," continued he, trying to do so, but at the first step he rolled on the floor.

"Bravo!" cried Chicot; "you advance, you salute the audience and say----"

"No, it is my friends who say, Brother Gorenflot--a fine name for a leaguer, is it not?"

"A leaguer," thought Chicot: "what truths is this wine going to bring out?"

"Then I begin." And the monk rose, and leaned against the wall.

"You begin," said Chicot, holding him up.

"I begin, 'My brothers, it is a good day for the faith, a very good day, my brothers; it is a very good day for the faith.'"

After this, as Chicot loosed his hold, Gorenflot fell full length again on the floor, and before many minutes a loud snoring was heard.

"Good," said Chicot, "he is in for twelve hours sleep. I can easily undress him."

He then untied the monk's robe, and pulled it off; then rolled Gorenflot in the tablecloth, and covered his head with a napkin, and hiding the monk's frock under his cloak, passed into the kitchen.

"M. Boutromet," said he, "here is for our supper, and for my horse; and pray do not wake the worthy Brother Gorenflot, who sleeps sound."

"No, no; be easy, M. Chicot."

Then Chicot ran to the rue St. Etienne, put on the monk's robe, took the tester in his hand, and at a quarter to ten presented himself, not without a beating heart, at the wicket of the Abbey St. Geneviève.