

## Chapter 20

### HOW CHICOT, FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE ABBEY, SAW AND HEARD THINGS VERY DANGEROUS TO SEE AND HEAR.

Chicot hastened to get down from his chair, and to mix among the monks so as to discover, if possible, what signs they used. By peeping over their shoulders, he found out that it was a farthing, with a star cut in the middle. Our Gascon had plenty of farthings in his pocket, but unluckily none with a star in it. Of course, if when on coming to the door he was unable to produce the necessary signs, he would be suspected and examined. He gained the shade of a pillar, which stood at the corner of a confessional, and stood there wondering what he should do. An assistant cried, "Is everyone out, the doors are about to be shut."

No one answered; Chicot peeped out and saw the chapel empty, with the exception of the three monks, who still kept their seats in front of the choir.

"Provided they do not shut the windows, it is all I ask," thought Chicot.

"Let us examine," said the young lad to the porter. Then the porter lifted a taper, and, followed by the young lad, began to make the tour of the church. There was not a moment to lose. Chicot softly opened the door of the confessional, slipped in, and shut the door after him. They passed close by him, and he could see them through the spaces of the sculpture.

"Diable!" thought he, "he cannot stay here all night, and once they are gone, I will pile chairs upon benches, Pelion on Ossa, and get out of the window. Ah! yes, but when I have done that, I shall be, not in the street, but in the court. I believe it will be better to pass the night in the confessional; Gorenflot's robe is warm."

"Extinguish the lamps," now cried the lad; and the porter with an immense extinguisher put out the lamps, and left the church dark, except for the rays of the moon which shone through the windows. The clock struck twelve.

"Ventre de biche!" said Chicot, "Henri, if he were here, would be nicely frightened; but, luckily, I am less timid. Come, Chicot, my friend, good night and sleep well."

Then Chicot pushed the inside bolt, made himself as comfortable as he could, and shut his eyes. He was just falling asleep, when he was startled by a loud stroke on a copper bell, and at the same time the lamp in the choir was relighted, and showed the three monks still there.

"What can this mean?" thought Chicot, starting up. Brave as he was, Chicot was not exempt from superstitious fears. He made the sign of the cross, murmuring, "Vade retro, Satanas!" But as the lights did not go out at the holy sign, Chicot began to think he had to deal with real monks and real lights; but at this moment one of the flagstones of the choir raised itself slowly, and a monk appeared through the opening, after which the stone shut again. At this sight Chicot's hair stood on end, and he began to fear that all the priors and abbés of St. Geneviève, from Opsat, dead in 533, down to Pierre Boudin, predecessor of the present superior, were being resuscitated from their tombs, and were going to raise with their bony heads the stones of the choir. But this doubt did not last long.

"Brother Monsoreau," said one of the monks to him who had just made so strange an appearance.

"Yes, monseigneur," said he.

"Open the door that he may come to us."

Monsoreau descended to open the door between the staircases, and at the same time the monk in the middle lowered his hood, and showed the great scar, that noble sign by which the Parisians recognized their hero.

"The great Henri of Guise himself!" thought Chicot, "whom his very imbecile majesty believes occupied at the siege of La Charité. Ah! and he at the right is the Cardinal of Lorraine, and he at the left M. de Mayenne--a trinity not very holy, but very visible."

"Did you think he would come?" said La Balafre to his brothers.

"I was so sure of it, that I have under my cloak where-with to replace the holy vial."

And Chicot perceived, by the feeble light of the lamp, a silver gilt box, richly chased. Then about twenty monks, with their heads buried in immense hoods, came out of the crypt, and stationed themselves in the nave. A single one, conducted by M. de Monsoreau, mounted the staircase, and placed himself at the right of M. de Guise. Then M. de Guise spoke. "Friends," said he, "time is precious; therefore I go straight to the point. You have heard just now, in the first assembly, the complaints of some of our members, who tax with coldness the principal person among us, the prince nearest to the throne. The time is come to render justice to this prince; you shall hear and judge for yourselves whether your chiefs merit the reproach of coldness and apathy made by one of our brothers, the monk Gorenflot, whom we have not judged it prudent to admit into our secret."

At this name, pronounced in a tone which showed bad intentions towards the warlike monk, Chicot in his confessional could not help laughing quietly.

"Monsieur," said the duke, now turning towards the mysterious personages at his right, "the will of God appears to me manifest; for since you have consented to join us, it shows that what we do is well done. Now, your highness, we beg of you to lower your hood, that your faithful friends may see with their own eyes that you keep the promise which I made in your name, and which they hardly dared to believe."

The mysterious personage now lowered his hood, and Chicot saw the head of the Duc d'Anjou appear, so pale that, by the light of the lamp, it looked like that of a marble statue.

"Oh, oh!" thought Chicot, "the duke is not yet tired of playing for the crown with the heads of others!"

"Long live Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" cried the assembly.

The duke grew paler than ever.

"Fear nothing, monseigneur," said Henri de Guise; our chapel is deaf, and its doors are well closed."

"My brothers," said the Comte de Monsoreau, "his highness wishes to address a few words to the assembly."

"Yes, yes!" cried they.

"Gentlemen," began he, in a voice so trembling that at first they could hardly distinguish his words, "I believe that God, who often seems insensible and deaf to the things of this world, keeps, on the contrary, His piercing eyes constantly on us, and only remains thus careless in appearance in order to remedy, by some great blow, the disorders caused by the foolish ambitions of men. I also have kept my eyes, if not on the world, at least on France. What have I seen there? The holy religion of Christ shaken to its foundation by those who sap all belief, under the pretext of drawing nearer to God, and my soul has been full of grief. In the midst of this grief, I heard that several noble and pious gentlemen, friends of our old faith, were trying to strengthen the tottering altar. I threw my eyes around me, and saw on one side the heretics, from whom I recoiled with horror; on the other side the elect, and I am come to throw myself into their arms. My brothers, here I am."

The applause and bravos resounded through the chapel. Then the cardinal, turning to the duke, said:

"You are amongst us of your own free will?"

"Of my free will, monsieur."

"Who instructed you in the holy mystery?"

"My friend, the Comte de Monsoreau, a man zealous for religion."

"Then," said the Duc de Guise, "as your highness has joined us, have the goodness to tell us what you intend to do for the league."

"I intend to serve the Catholic religion in all its extent."

"Ventre de biche!" thought Chicot, "why not propose this right out to the king? It would suit him excellently--processions, macerations, extirpation of heresy, fagots, and auto-da-fés! Go on, worthy brother of his majesty, noble imbecile, go on!"

And the duke, as if sensible of the encouragement, proceeded: "But the interests of religion are not the sole aim which you gentlemen propose. As for me, I see another; for when a gentleman has thought of what he owes to God, he then thinks of his country, and he asks himself if it really enjoys all the honor and prosperity which it ought to enjoy. I ask this about our France, and I see with grief that it does not. Indeed, the state is torn to pieces by different wills and tastes, one as powerful as the other. It is, I fear, to the feebleness of the head, which forgets that it ought to govern all for the good of its subjects, or only remembers this royal principle at capricious

intervals, when the rare acts of energy are generally not for the good, but the ill of France, that we must attribute these evils. Whatever be the cause, the ill is a real one, although I accuse certain false friends of the king rather than the king himself. Therefore I join myself to those who by all means seek the extinction of heresy and the ruin of perfidious counselors."

This discourse appeared profoundly to interest the audience, who, throwing back their hoods, drew near to the duke.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "in thanking your royal highness for the words you have just uttered, I will add that you are surrounded by people devoted not only to the principles which you profess, but to the person of your highness; and if you have any doubt, the conclusion of this sitting will convince you."

"Monseigneur," said the cardinal, "if your highness still experiences any fear, the names of those who now surround you will, I hope, reassure you. Here is M. le Gouverneur d'Aunis, M. d'Antragues, M. de Ribeirac, and M. de Livarot, and gentlemen whom your highness doubtless knows to be as brave as loyal. Here are, besides, M. de Castillon, M. le Baron de Lusignan, MM. Cruce and Leclerc, all ready to march under the guidance of your highness, to the emancipation of religion and the throne. We shall, then, receive with gratitude the orders that you will give us."

Then M. de Mayenne said: "You are by your birth, and by your wisdom, monseigneur, the natural chief of the Holy Union, and we ought to learn from you what our conduct should be with regard to the false friends of his majesty of whom you just now spoke."

"Nothing more simple," replied the prince, with that feverish excitement which in weak natures supplies the place of courage to weak minds; "when venomous plants grow in a field, we root them up. The king is surrounded, not with friends, but with courtiers, who ruin him, and cause a perpetual scandal in France and all Christendom."

"It is true," said the Duc de Guise, in a gloomy tone.

"And," said the cardinal, "these courtiers prevent us, who are his majesty's true friends, from approaching him as we have the right to do by our birth and position."

"Let us, then," said M. de Mayenne, "leave the heretics to the vulgar leaguers; let us think of those who annoy and insult us, and who often fail in respect to the prince whom we honor, and who is our chief."

The Duc d'Anjou grew red.

"Let us destroy," continued Mayenne, "to the last man, that cursed race whom the king enriches, and let each of us charge ourselves with the life of one. We are thirty here; let us count."

"I," said D'Antragues, "charge myself with Quelus."

"I with Maugiron," said Livarot.

"And I with Schomberg," said Ribeirac.

"Good!" said the duke; "and there is Bussy, my brave Bussy, who will undertake some of them."

"And us!" cried the rest.

M. de Monsoreau now advanced. "Gentlemen," said he, "I claim an instant's silence. We are resolute men, and yet we fear to speak freely to each other;

we are intelligent men, and yet we are deterred by foolish scruples. Come, gentlemen, a little courage, a little hardihood, a little frankness. It is not of the king's minions that we think; there does not lie our difficulty. What we really complain of is the royalty which we are under, and which is not acceptable to a French nobility; prayers and despotism, weakness and orgies, prodigality for fêtes which make all Europe laugh, and parsimony for everything that regards the state and the arts. Such conduct is not weakness or ignorance--it is madness."

A dead silence followed this speech. Everyone trembled at the words which echoed his own thoughts. M. de Monsoreau went on.

"Must we live under a king, foolish, inert, and lazy, at a time when all other nations are active, and work gloriously, while we sleep? Gentlemen, pardon me for saying before a prince, who will perhaps blame my temerity (for he has the prejudices of family), that for four years we have been governed, not by a king, but by a monk."

At these words the explosion so skilfully prepared and as skilfully kept in check, burst out with violence.

"Down with the Valois!" they cried, "down with Brother Henri! Let us have for chief a gentleman, a knight, rather a tyrant than a monk."

"Gentlemen!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, hypocritically, "let me plead for my brother, who is led away. Let me hope that our wise remonstrances, that the efficacious intervention of the power of the League, will bring him back into the right path."

"Hiss, serpent, hiss," said Chicot to himself.

"Monseigneur," replied the Duc de Guise, "your highness has heard, perhaps rather too soon, but still you have heard, the true meaning of the



association. No! we are not really thinking of a league against the Béarnais, nor of a league to support the Church, which will support itself: no, we think of raising the nobility of France from its abject condition. Too long we have been kept back by the respect we feel for your highness, by the love which we know you to have for your family. Now, all is revealed, monseigneur, and your highness will assist at the true sitting of the League. All that has passed is but preamble."

"What do you mean, M. le Duc?" asked the prince, his heart beating at once with alarm and ambition.

"Monseigneur, we are united here, not only to talk, but to act. To-day we choose a chief capable of honoring and enriching the nobility of France; and as it was the custom of the ancient Franks when they chose a chief to give him a present worthy of him, we offer a present to the chief whom we have chosen."

All hearts beat, and that of the prince most of any; yet he remained mute and motionless, betraying his emotion only by his paleness.

"Gentlemen," continued the duke, taking something from behind him, "here is the present that in your name I place at the feet of the prince."

"A crown!" cried the prince, scarcely able to stand, "a crown to me, gentlemen?"

"Long live François III.!" cried all the gentlemen, drawing their swords.

"I! I!" cried the Duke, trembling with joy and terror. "It is impossible! My brother still lives; he is the anointed of the Lord."

"We depose him," said the duke, "waiting for the time when God shall sanction, by his death, the election which we are about to make, or rather, till one of his subjects, tired of this inglorious reign, forestalls by poison or the dagger the justice of God."

"Gentlemen!" said the duke, feebly.

"Monseigneur," then said the cardinal, "to the scruple which you so nobly expressed just now, this is our answer. Henri III. was the anointed of the Lord, but we have deposed him; it is you who are going to be so. Here is a temple as venerable as that of Rheims; for here have reposed the relics of St Geneviève, patroness of Paris; here has been embalmed the body of Clovis, our first Christian king; well, monseigneur, in this holy temple, I, one of the princes of the Church, and who may reasonably hope to become one day its head, I tell you, monseigneur, that here, to replace the holy oil, is an oil sent by Pope Gregory XIII. Monseigneur, name your future archbishop of Rheims, name your constable, and in an instant, it is you who will be king, and your brother Henri, if he do not give you up the crown, will be the usurper. Child, light the altar."

Immediately, the lad, who was evidently waiting, came out, and presently fifty lights shone round the altar and choir.

Then was seen on the altar a miter glittering with precious stones, and a large sword ornamented with fleur-de-lis. It was the archbishop's miter and the constable's sword. At the same moment the organ began to play the Veni Creator. This sudden stroke, managed by the three Lorraine princes, and which the Duc d'Anjou himself did not expect, made a profound impression on the spectators. The courageous grew bolder than ever, and the weak grew strong. The Duc d'Anjou raised his head, and with a firmer step than might have been expected, walked to the altar, took the miter in the left hand and the sword in the right, presented one to the cardinal and the other to the duke. Unanimous applause followed this action.

"Now, gentlemen," said the prince to the others, "give your names to M. de Mayenne, grand Master of France, and the day when I ascend the throne, you shall have the cordon bleu."

"Mordieu!" thought Chicot, "what a pity I cannot give mine; I shall never have such another opportunity."

"Now to the altar, sire," said the cardinal.

"Monsieur de Monsoreau my colonel, MM. de Ribeirac and d'Antragues my captains, and M. Livarot, my lieutenant of the guards, take your places."

Each of those named took the posts which, at a real coronation, etiquette would have assigned to them. Meanwhile, the cardinal had passed behind the altar to put on his pontifical robes; soon he reappeared with the holy vial. Then the lad brought to him a Bible and a cross. The cardinal put the cross on the book and extended them towards the Duc d'Anjou, who put his hand on them, and said,--

"In the presence of God, I promise to my people to maintain and honor our holy religion as a Christian king should. And may God and His saints aid me!"

Then the Duc de Guise laid the sword before the altar, and the cardinal blessed it and gave it to the prince.

"Sire," said he, "take this sword, which is given to you with the blessing of God, that you may resist your enemies, and protect and defend the holy Church, which is confided to you. Take this sword that, with it, you may exercise justice, protect the widow and the orphan, repair disorders, so that, covering yourself with glory by all the virtues, you will be a blessing to your people."

Then the prince returned the sword to the Duc de Guise, and knelt down. The cardinal opened the gold box, and, with the point of a golden needle, drew out some holy oil; he then said two prayers, and taking the oil on his finger, traced with it a cross on the head of the prince, saying, "Ungo dein regem de oleo sanctificato, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."

The lad wiped off the oil with an embroidered handkerchief. Then the cardinal took the crown, and, holding it over the head of the prince, said, "God crown thee with the crown of glory and justice." Then, placing it, "Receive this crown, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

All brandished their swords and cried, "Long live François III."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "you reign henceforth over France."

"Gentlemen," said the prince, "I shall never forget the names of the thirty gentlemen who first judged me worthy to reign over them; and now adieu, and may God have you in His holy keeping."

The Duc de Mayenne led away the new king, while the other two brothers exchanged an ironical smile.