

Chapter 21

HOW CHICOT LEARNED GENEALOGY.

When the Duc d'Anjou was gone, and had been followed by all the others, the three Guises entered the vestry. Chicot, thinking of course this was the end, got up to stretch his limbs, and then, as it was nearly two o'clock, once more disposed himself to sleep.

But to his great astonishment, the three brothers almost immediately came back again, only this time without their frocks. On seeing them appear, the lad burst into so hearty a fit of laughing, that Chicot could hardly help laughing also.

"Do not laugh so loud, sister," said the Duc de Mayenne, "they are hardly gone out, and might hear you."

As he spoke, the seeming lad threw back his hood, and displayed a head as charming and intelligent as wan ever painted by Leonardo da Vinci. Black eyes, full of fun, but which could assume an expression almost terrible in its seriousness, a little rosy month, and a round chin terminating the perfect oval of a rather pale face. It was Madame de Montpensier, a dangerous syren, who had the soul of a demon with the face of an angel.

"Ah, brother cardinal," cried she, "how well you acted the holy man! I was really afraid for a minute that you were serious; and he letting himself be greased and crowned. Oh, how horrid he looked with his crown on!"

"Never mind," said the duke, "we have got what we wanted, and François cannot now deny his share. Monsoreau, who doubtless had his own reasons for it, led the thing on well, and now he cannot abandon us, as he did La Mole and Coconnas."

Chicot saw that they had been laughing at M. d'Anjou, and as he detested him, would willingly have embraced them for it, always excepting M. de Mayenne, and giving his share to his sister.

"Let us return to business," said the cardinal, "is all well closed?"

"Oh, yes!" said the duchess, "but if you like I will go and see."

"Oh, no; you must be tired."

"No; it was too amusing."

"Mayenne, you say he is here?"

"Yes."

"I did not see him."

"No, he is hidden in a confessional."

These words startled Chicot fearfully.

"Then he has heard and seen all?" asked the duke.

"Never mind, he is one of us."

"Bring him here, Mayenne."

Mayenne descended the staircase and came straight to where Chicot was hiding. He was brave, but now his teeth chattered with terror. "Ah," thought he, trying to get out his sword from under his monk's frock, "at least I will kill him first!" The duke had already extended his hand to open the door, when Chicot heard the duchess say:

"Not there, Mayenne; in that confessional to the left."

"It was time," thought Chicot, as the duke turned away, "but who the devil can the other be?"

"Come out, M. David," said Mayenne, "we are alone."

"Here I am, monseigneur," said he, coming out.

"You have heard all?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"I have not lost a word, monseigneur."

"Then you can report it to the envoy of his Holiness Gregory XIII.?"

"Everything."

"Now, Mayenne tells me you have done wonders for us; let us see."

"I have done what I promised, monseigneur; that is to say, found a method of seating you, without opposition, on the throne of France!"

"They also!" thought Chicot; "everyone wants then to be King of France!"

Chicot was gay now, for he felt safe once more, and he had discovered a conspiracy by which he hoped to ruin his two enemies.

"To gain a legitimate right is everything," continued Nicolas David, "and I have discovered that you are the true heirs, and the Valois only a usurping branch."

"It is difficult to believe," said the duke, "that our house, however illustrious it may be, comes before the Valois."

"It is nevertheless proved, monseigneur," said David, drawing out a parchment. The duke took it.

"What is this?" said he.

"The genealogical tree of the house of Lorraine."

"Of which the root is?"

"Charlemagne, monseigneur."

"Charlemagne!" cried the three brothers, with an air of incredulous satisfaction, "Impossible!"

"Wait, monseigneur; you may be sure I have not raised a point to which any one may give the lie. What you want is a long lawsuit, during which you can

gain over, not the people, they are yours, but the parliament. See, then, monseigneur, here it is. Ranier, first Duc de Lorraine, contemporary with Charlemagne;--Guibert, his son;--Henri, son of Guibert----

"But----" said the duke.

"A little patience, monseigneur. Bonne----

"Yes," said the duke, "daughter of Ricin, second son of Ranier."

"Good; to whom married?"

"Bonne?"

"Yes."

"To Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV., King of France."

"Just so. Now add, 'brother of Lothaire, despoiled of the crown of France by the usurper, Hugh Capet.'"

"Oh! oh!" said the duke and the cardinal.

"Now, Charles of Lorraine inherited from his brother Lothaire. Now, the race of Lothaire is extinct, therefore you are the only true heirs of the throne."

"What do you say to that, brother?" cried the cardinal.

"I say, that unluckily there exists in France a law they call the Salic law, which destroys all our pretensions."

"I expected that objection, monseigneur," said David, but what is the first example of the Salic law?"

"The accession of Philippe de Valois, to the prejudice of Edward of England."

"What was the date of that accession?"

"1328," said the cardinal.

"That is to say, 341 years after the usurpation of Hugh Capet, 240 years after the extinction of the race of Lothaire. Then, for 240 years your ancestors had already had a right to the throne before the Salic law was invented. Now, everyone knows that the law cannot have any retrospective effect."

"You are a clever man, M. David," said the Duc de Guise.

"It is very ingenious," said the cardinal.

"It is very fine," said Mayenne.

"It is admirable," said the duchess; "then I am a princess royal. I will have no one less than the Emperor of Germany for a husband."

"Well; here are your 200 gold crowns which I promised you."

"And here are 200 others," said the cardinal, "for the new mission with which we are about to charge you."

"Speak, monseigneur, I am ready."

"We cannot commission you to carry this genealogy yourself to our holy Father, Gregory XIII."

"Alas! no; my will is good, but I am of too poor birth."

"Yes, it is a misfortune. We must therefore send Pierre de Gondy on this mission."

"Permit me to speak," said the duchess. "The Gondys are clever, no doubt, but ambitious, and not to be trusted."

"Oh! reassure yourself. Gondy shall take this, but mixed with other papers, and not knowing what he carries. The Pope will approve, or disapprove, silently, and Gondy will bring us back the answer, still in ignorance of what he brings. You, Nicolas David, shall wait for him at Chalons, Lyons, or Avignon, according to your instructions. Thus you alone will know our true secret."

Then the three brothers shook hands, embraced their sister, put on again their monk's robes, and disappeared. Behind them the porter drew the bolts, and then came in and extinguished the lights, and Chicot heard his retreating steps fainter and fainter, and all was silent.

"It seems now all is really over," thought Chicot, and he came out of the confessional. He had noticed in a corner a ladder destined to clean the windows. He felt about until he found it, for it was close to him, and by the light of the moon placed it against the window. He easily opened it, and

striding across it and drawing the ladder to him with that force and address which either fear or joy always gives, he drew it from the inside to the outside. When he had descended, he hid the ladder in a hedge, which was planted at the bottom of the wall, jumped from tomb to tomb, until he reached the outside wall over which he clambered. Once in the street he breathed more freely; he had escaped with a few scratches from the place where he had several times felt his life in danger. He went straight to the Corne d'Abondance, at which he knocked. It was opened by Claude Boutromet himself, who knew him at once, although he went out dressed as a cavalier, and returned attired as a monk.

"Ah! is it you?" cried he.

Chicot gave him a crown, and asked for Gorenflot.

The host smiled, and said, "Look!"

Brother Gorenflot lay snoring just in the place where Chicot had left him.