

Chapter 36

CHICOT AND THE KING.

That same evening M. de Monsoreau presented his wife in the queen's circle. Henri, tired, had gone to bed, but after sleeping three or four hours, he woke, and feeling no longer sleepy, proceeded to the room where Chicot slept, which was the one formerly occupied by St. Luc; Chicot slept soundly, and the king called him three times before he woke. At last he opened his eyes and cried out, "What is it?"

"Chicot, my friend, it is I."

"You; who?"

"I, Henri."

"Decidedly, my son, the pheasants must have disagreed with you; I warned you at supper, but you would eat so much of them, as well as of those crabs."

"No; I scarcely tasted them."

"Then you are poisoned, perhaps. *Ventre de biche!* how pale you are!"

"It is my mask," said the king.

"Then you are not ill?"

"No."

"Then why wake me?"

"Because I am annoyed."

"Annoyed! if you wake a man at two o'clock in the morning, at least you should bring him a present. Have you anything for me?"

"No; I come to talk to you."

"That is not enough."

"Chicot, M. de Morvilliers came here last evening."

"What for?"

"To ask for an audience. What can he want to say to me, Chicot?"

"What! it is only to ask that, that you wake me?"

"Chicot, you know he occupies himself with the police."

"No; I did not know it."

"Do you doubt his watchfulness?"

"Yes, I do, and I have my reasons."

"What are they?"

"Will one suffice you?"

"Yes, if it be good."

"And you will leave me in peace afterwards?"

"Certainly."

"Well, one day--no, it was one evening, I beat you in the Rue Foidmentel; you had with you Quelus and Schomberg."

"You beat me?"

"Yes, all three of you."

"How, it was you! wretch!"

"I, myself," said Chicot, rubbing his hands, "do I not hit hard?"

"Wretch!"

"You confess, it was true?"

"You know it is, villain."

"Did you send for M. de Morvilliers the next day?"

"You know I did, for you were there when he came."

"And you told him the accident that had happened to one of your friends?"

"Yes."

"And you ordered him to find out the criminal?"

"Yes."

"Did he find him?"

"No."

"Well, then, go to bed, Henri; you see your police is bad." And, turning round, Chicot refused to say another word, and was soon snoring again.

The next day the council assembled. It consisted of Quelus, Maugiron, D'Epernon, and Schomberg. Chicot, seated at the head of the table, was making paper boats, and arranging them in a fleet. M. de Morvilliers was announced, and came in, looking grave.

"Am I," said he, "before your majesty's council?"

"Yes, before my best friends; speak freely."

"Well, sire, I have a terrible plot to denounce to your majesty."

"A plot!" cried all.

"Yes, your majesty."

"Oh, is it a Spanish plot?"

At this moment the Duc d'Anjou, who had been summoned to attend the council, entered.

"My brother," said Henri, "M. de Morvilliers comes to announce a plot to us."

The duke threw a suspicious glance round him. "Is it possible?" he said.

"Alas, yes, monseigneur," said M. de Morvilliers.

"Tell us all about it," said Chicot.

"Yes," stammered the duke, "tell us all about it, monsieur."

"I listen," said Henri.

"Sire, for some time I have been watching some malcontents, but they were shopkeepers, or junior clerks, a few monks and students."

"That is not much," said Chicot.

"I know that malcontents always make use either of war or of religion."

"Very sensible!" said the king.

"I put men on the watch, and at last I succeeded in persuading a man from the provosty of Paris to watch the preachers, who go about exciting the people against your majesty. They are prompted by a party hostile to your majesty, and this party I have studied, and now I know their hopes," added he, triumphantly. "I have men in my pay, greedy, it is true, who, for a good sum of money, promised to let me know of the first meeting of the conspirators."

"Oh! never mind money, but let us hear the aim of this conspiracy."

"Sire, they think of nothing less than a second St. Bartholomew."

"Against whom?"

"Against the Huguenots."

"What have you paid for your secret?" said Chicot.

"One hundred and sixty thousand livres."

Chicot turned to the king, saying, "If you like, for one thousand crowns, I will tell you all the secrets of M. de Morvilliers."

"Speak."

"It is simply the League, instituted ten years ago; M. de Morvilliers has discovered what every Parisian knows as well as his _ave_."

"Monsieur," interrupted the chancellor.

"I speak the truth, and I will prove it," cried Chicot.

"Tell me, then, their place of meeting."

"Firstly, the public streets; secondly, the public streets."

"M. Chicot is joking," said the chancellor; "tell me their rallying sign."

"They are dressed like Parisians, and shake their legs when they walk."

A burst of laughter followed this speech; then M. de Morvilliers said, "They have had one meeting-place which M. Chicot does not know of."

"Where?" asked the king.

"The Abbey of St. Geneviève."

"Impossible!" murmured the duke.

"It is true," said M. de Morvilliers, triumphantly.

"What did they decide?" asked the king.

"That the Leaguers should choose chiefs, that every one should arm, that every province should receive a deputy from the conspirators, and that all the Huguenots cherished by his majesty (that was their expression)----"

The king smiled.

"Should be massacred on a given day."

"Is that all?" said the duke.

"No, monseigneur."

"I should hope not," said Chicot; "if the king got only that for one hundred and sixty thousand livres, it would be a shame."

"There are chiefs----"

The Duc d'Anjou could not repress a start.

"What!" cried Chicot, "a conspiracy that has chiefs! how wonderful! But we ought to have more than that for one hundred and sixty thousand livres."

"Their names?" asked the king.

"Firstly, a fanatic preacher; I gave ten thousand livres for his name."

"Very well."

"A monk called Gorenflot."

"Poor devil!" said Chicot.

"Gorenflot?" said the king, writing down the name; "afterwards----"

"Oh!" said the chancellor, with hesitation, "that is all." And he looked round as if to say, "If your majesty were alone, you should hear more."

"Speak, chancellor," said the king, "I have none but friends here."

"Oh! sire, I hesitate to pronounce such powerful names."

"Are they more powerful than I am?" cried the king.

"No, sire; but one does not tell secrets in public."

"Monsieur," said the Duc d'Anjou, "we will retire."

The king signed to the chancellor to approach him, and to the duke to remain. M. de Morvilliers had just bent over the king to whisper his

communication, when a great clamor was heard in the court of the Louvre. The king jumped up, but Chicot, running to the window, called out, "It is M. de Guise entering the Louvre."

"The Duc de Guise," stammered the Duc d'Anjou.

"How strange that he should be in Paris," said the king, reading the truth in M. de Morvilliers' look. "Was it of him you were about to speak?" he asked.

"Yes, sire; he presided over the meeting."

"And the others?"

"I know no more."

"You need not write that name on your tablets! you will not forget it," whispered Chicot.

The Duc de Guise advanced, smiling, to see the king.