

Chapter 40

THE EVENING OF THE LEAGUE.

Paris presented a fine sight, as through its then narrow streets thousands of people pressed towards the same point, for at eight o'clock in the evening, M. le Duc de Guise was to receive the signatures of the bourgeois to the League. A crowd of citizens, dressed in their best clothes, as for a fête, but fully armed, directed their steps towards the churches. What added to the noise and confusion was that large numbers of women, disdainful to stay at home on such a great day, had followed their husbands, and many had brought with them a whole batch of children. It was in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec that the crowd was the thickest. The streets were literally choked, and the crowd pressed tumultuously towards a bright light suspended below the sign of the Belle Etoile. On the threshold a man, with a cotton cap on his head and a naked sword in one hand and a register in the other, was crying out, "Come come, brave Catholics, enter the hotel of the Belle Etoile, where you will find good wine; come, to-night the good will be separated from the bad, and to-morrow morning the wheat will be known from the tares; come, gentlemen, you who can write, come and sign;--you who cannot write, come and tell your names to me, La Hurière; vive la messe!" A tall man elbowed his way through the crowd, and in letters half an inch high, wrote his name, 'Chicot.' Then, turning to La Hurière, he asked if he had not another register to sign. La Hurière did not understand raillery, and answered angrily. Chicot retorted, and a quarrel seemed approaching, when Chicot, feeling some one touch his arm, turned, and saw the king disguised as a simple bourgeois, and accompanied by Quelus and Maugiron, also disguised, and carrying an arquebuse on their shoulders.

"What!" cried the king, "good Catholics disputing among themselves; par la mordieu, it is a bad example."

"Do not mix yourself with what does not concern you," replied Chicot, without seeming to recognize him. But a new influx of the crowd distracted the attention of La Hurière, and separated the king and his companions from the hotel.

"Why are you here, sire?" said Chicot.

"Do you think I have anything to fear?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! in a crowd like this it is so easy for one man to put a knife into his neighbor, and who just utters an oath and gives up the ghost."

"Have I been seen?"

"I think not; but you will be if you stay longer. Go back to the Louvre, sire."

"Oh! oh! what is this new outcry, and what are the people running for?"

Chicot looked, but could at first see nothing but a mass of people crying, howling, and pushing. At last the mass opened, and a monk, mounted on a donkey, appeared. The monk spoke and gesticulated, and the ass brayed.

"Ventre de biche!" cried Chicot, "listen to the preacher."

"A preacher on a donkey!" cried Quelus.

"Why not?"

"He is Silenus," said Maugiron.

"Which is the preacher?" said the king, "for they speak both at once."

"The underneath one is the most eloquent," said Chicot, "but the one at the top speaks the best French; listen, Henri."

"My brethren," said the monk, "Paris is a superb city; Paris is the pride of France, and the Parisians a fine people." Then he began to sing, but the ass mingled his accompaniment so loudly that he was obliged to stop. The crowd burst out laughing.

"Hold your tongue, Panurge, hold your tongue," cried the monk, "you shall speak after, but let me speak first."

The ass was quiet.

"My brothers," continued the preacher, "the earth is a valley of grief, where man often can quench his thirst only with his tears."

"He is drunk," said the king.

"I should think so."

"I, who speak to you," continued the monk, "I am returning from exile like the Hebrews of old, and for eight days Panurge and I have been living on alms and privations."

"Who is Panurge?" asked the king.

"The superior of his convent, probably but let me listen."

"Who made me endure this? It was Herod; you know what Herod I speak of. I and Panurge have come from Villeneuve-le-Roi, in three days, to assist at this great solemnity; now we see, but we do not understand. What is passing, my brothers? Is it to-day that they depose Herod? Is it to-day that they put brother Henri in a convent?--Gentlemen," continued he, "I left Paris with two friends; Panurge, who is my ass, and Chicot, who is his majesty's jester. Can you tell me what has become of my friend Chicot?"

Chicot made a grimace.

"Oh," said the king, "he is your friend." Quelus and Maugiron burst out laughing. "He is handsome and respectable," continued the king.

"It is Gorenflot, of whom M. de Morvilliers spoke to you."

"The incendiary of St. Geneviève?"

"Himself!"

"Then I will have him hanged!"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"He has no neck."

"My brothers," continued Gorenflot: "I am a true martyr, and it is my cause that they defend at this moment or, rather, that of all good Catholics. You do

not know what is passing in the provinces, we have been obliged at Lyons to kill a Huguenot who preached revolt. While one of them remains in France, there will be no tranquillity for us. Let us exterminate them. To arms! to arms!"

Several voices repeated, "To arms!"

"Par la mordieu!" said the king, "make this fellow hold his tongue, or he will make a second St. Bartholomew!"

"Wait," said Chicot, and with his stick he struck Gorenflot with all his force on the shoulders.

"Murder!" cried the monk.

"It is you!" cried Chicot.

"Help me, M. Chicot, help me! The enemies of the faith wish to assassinate me, but I will not die without making my voice heard. Death to the Huguenots!"

"Will you hold your tongue?" cried Chicot. But at this moment a second blow fell on the shoulders of the monk with such force that he cried out with real pain. Chicot, astonished, looked round him, but saw nothing but the stick. The blow had been given by a man who had immediately disappeared in the crowd after administering this punishment.

"Who the devil could it have been?" thought Chicot, and he began to run after the man, who was gliding away, followed by only one companion.