

Chapter 49

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC DE GUISE NOR M. D'ANJOU.

"Gentlemen," said the king, after assuring himself that his four friends, now replaced by ten Swiss, were behind him, "a king hears equally the voices which come to him from above and from below, that is to say, what is commanded by God, or asked by his people. I understand perfectly that there is a guarantee for my people, in the association of all classes which has been formed to defend the Catholic faith, and therefore I approve of the counsels of my cousin De Guise. I declare, then, the Holy League duly constituted, and as so great a body must have a powerful head, and as it is necessary that the chief called to sustain the Church should be one of its most zealous sons, I choose a Christian prince for the chief, and declare that this chief shall be"--he made a slight pause--"Henri de Valois, King of France and Poland."

The Duc de Guise was thunderstruck. Large drops stood on his forehead, and he looked from one to the other of his brothers. All the leaguers uttered a murmur of surprise and discontent. The cardinal stole up to his brother, and whispered:

"François; I fear we are no longer in safety here. Let us haste to take leave, for the populace is uncertain, and the king whom they execrated yesterday, will be their idol for two or three days."

During this time the king had signed the act prepared beforehand by M. de Morvilliers, the only person, with the exception of the queen mother, who was in the secret, then he passed the pen to the Duc de Guise, saying:

"Sign, my cousin; there, below me, now pass it to M. le Cardinal and M. de Mayenne."

But these two had already disappeared. The king remarked their absence, and added, "Then pass the pen to M. de Monsoreau."

The duke did so, and was about to retire, but the king said, "Wait."

And while the others signed, he added, "My cousin, it was your advice, I believe, to guard Paris with a good army, composed of all the forces of the League. The army is made, and the natural general of the Parisians is the king."

"Assuredly, sire."

"But I do not forget that there is another army to command, and that this belongs of right to the bravest soldier in my kingdom; therefore go and command the army."

"And when am I to set out, sire?"

"Immediately."

"Henri, Henri!" whispered Chicot; but, in spite of his signs and grimaces, the king gave the duke his brevet ready signed. He took it and retired, and was soon out of Paris. The rest of the assembly dispersed gradually, crying, "Vive le Roi! and Vive la Ligue!"

"Oh, sire!" cried the favorites, approaching the king, "what a sublime idea you have had!"

"They think that gold is going to rain on them like manna," said Chicot, who followed his master about everywhere with lamentations. As soon as they

were left alone, "Ah! M. Chicot!" said Henri, "you are never content. Diable! I do not ask even for complaisance, but for good sense."

"You are right, Henri; it is what you want most."

"Confess I have done well."

"That is just what I do not think."

"Ah! you are jealous, M. Roi de France."

"I! Heaven forbid. I shall choose better subjects for jealousy."

"Corbleu."

"Oh! what self-love."

"Am I or not king of the League?"

"Certainly you are; but----"

"But what?"

"You are no longer King of France."

"And who is king then?"

"Everybody, except you; firstly, your brother----"

"My brother!"

"Yes, M. d'Anjou."

"Whom I hold prisoner."

"Yes, but prisoner as he is, he was consecrated."

"By whom was he consecrated?"

"By the Cardinal de Guise. Really, Henri, you have a fine police. They consecrate a king at Paris before thirty-three people, in the church of St. Genevieve, and you do not know of it!"

"Oh! and you do?"

"Certainly I do."

"How can you know what I do not?"

"Ah! because M. de Morvilliers manages your police, and I am my own."

The king frowned.

"Well, then, without counting Henri de Valois, we have François d'Anjou for king," continued Chicot; "and then there is the Duc de Guise."

"The Duc de Guise!"

"Yes, Henri de Guise, Henri le Balfré."

"A fine king! whom I exile, whom I send to the army."

"Good! as if you were not exiled to Poland; and La Charité is nearer to the Louvre than Cracow is. Ah, yes, you send him to the army--that is so clever; that is to say, you put thirty thousand men under his orders, ventre de biche! and a real army, not like your army of the League; no, no, an army of bourgeois is good for Henri de Valois, but Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers--and what soldiers? hardened warriors, capable of destroying twenty armies of the League; so that if, being king in fact, Henri de Guise had the folly one day to wish to be so in name, he would only have to turn towards the capital, and say, 'Let us swallow Paris, and Henri de Valois and the Louvre at a mouthful,' and the rogues would do it. I know them."

"You forget one thing in your argument, illustrious politician."

"Ah, diable! it is possible! If you mean a fourth king----"

"No; you forget that before thinking of reigning in France, when a Valois is on the throne, it would be necessary to look back and count your ancestors. That such an idea might come to M. d'Anjou is possible; his ancestors are mine, and it is only a question of primogeniture. But M. de Guise!"

"Ah! that is just where you are in error."

"How so?"

"M. de Guise is of a better race than you think."

"Better than me, perhaps," said Henri, smiling.

"There is no perhaps in it."

"You are mad. Learn to read, my friend."

"Well, Henri, you who can read, read this;" and he drew from his pocket the genealogy which we know already, handing it to Henri, who turned pale as he recognized, near to the signature of the prelate, the seal of St. Peter.

"What do you say, Henri? Are not your fleur-de-lys thrown a little in the background?"

"But how did you get this genealogy?"

"I! Do I seek these things? It came to seek me."

"Where?"

"Under the bolster of a lawyer."

"And what was his name?"

"M. Nicolas David."

"Where was he?"

"At Lyons."

"And who took it from under the bolster?"

"One of my good friends."

"Who is he?"

"A monk."

"His name?"

"Gorenflot."

"What! that abominable leaguer, who uttered those incendiary discourses at St. Genevieve, and again yesterday in the streets of Paris?"

"You remember the history of Brutus, who pretended to be a fool?"

"He is, then, a profound politician? Did he take it from the advocate?"

"Yes, by force."

"Then he is brave?"

"Brave as Bayard."

"And having done this, he has not asked for any recompense?"

"He returned humbly to his convent, and only asks me to forget that he ever came out."

"Then he is modest?"

"As St. Crepin."

"Chicot, your friend shall be made a prior on the first vacancy."

"Thanks for him, Henri."

"Ma foi!" said Chicot to himself, "if he escapes being hung by Mayenne, he will have an abbey."