

Chapter 61

HOW THE KING LEARNED THE FLIGHT OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

When Monsoreau had retired, the repast continued, and was more gay and joyous than ever.

"Now, Livarot," said the duke, "finish the recital of your flight from Paris, which Monsoreau interrupted."

Livarot began again, but as our title of historian gives us the privilege of knowing better than Livarot himself what had passed, we will substitute our recital for that of the young man.

Towards the middle of the night Henri III. was awoke by an unaccustomed noise in the palace. It was oaths, blows on the wall, rapid steps in the galleries, and, amidst all, these words continually sounding, "What will the king say?"

Henri sat up and called Chicot, who was asleep on the couch.

Chicot opened one eye.

"Ah, you were wrong to call me, Henri," said he; "I was dreaming that you had a son."

"But listen."

"To what? You say enough follies to me by day, without breaking in on my nights."

"But do you not hear?"

"Oh, oh! I do hear cries."

"Do you hear, 'What will the king say?'"

"It is one of two things--either your dog Narcissus is ill, or the Huguenots are taking their revenge for St. Bartholomew."

"Help me to dress."

"If you will first help me to get up."

"What a misfortune!" sounded from the antechamber.

"Shall we arm ourselves?" said the king.

"We had better go first and see what is the matter."

And almost immediately they went out by the secret door into the gallery. "I begin to guess," said Chicot; "your unlucky prisoner has hanged himself."

"Oh, no; it cannot be that."

"So much the worse."

"Come on;" and they entered the duke's chamber.

The window was open, and the ladder still hung from it. Henri grew as pale as death.

"Oh, my son, you are not so blasé as I thought!" said Chicot.

"Escaped!" cried Henri, in such a thundering voice that all the gentlemen who were crowded round the window turned in terror. Schomberg tore his hair, Quelus and Maugiron struck themselves like madmen; as for D'Epernon, he had vanished. This sight calmed the king.

"Gently, my son," said he, laying hold of Maugiron.

"No! mordieu!" cried he, "I will kill myself!" and he knocked his head against the wall.

"Hola! help me to hold him."

"It would be an easier death to pass your sword through your body!" said Chicot.

"Quelus, my child," said the king, "you will be as blue as Schomberg when he came out of the indigo."

Quelus stopped, but Schomberg still continued to tear at his hair.

"Schomberg, Schomberg, a little reason, I beg."

"It is enough to drive one mad!"

"Indeed, it is a dreadful misfortune; there will be a civil war in my kingdom. Who did it--who furnished the ladder? Mordieu! I will hang all the city! Who was it? Ten thousand crowns to whoever will tell me his name, and one hundred thousand to whoever will bring him to me, dead or alive!"

"It must have been some Angevin," said Maugiron.

"Oh yes! we will kill all the Angevins!" cried Quelus. However, the king suddenly disappeared; he had thought of his mother, and, without saying a word, went to her. When he entered, she was half lying in a great armchair: She heard the news without answering.

"You say nothing, mother. Does not this flight seem to you criminal, and worthy of punishment?"

"My dear son, liberty is worth as much as a crown; and remember, I advised you to fly in order to gain a crown."

"My mother, he braves me--he outrages me!"

"No; he only saves himself."

"Ah! this is how you take my part."

"What do you mean, my son?"

"I mean that with age the feelings grow calm--that you do not love me as much as you used to do."

"You are wrong, my son," said Catherine coldly; "you are my beloved son, but he of whom you complain is also my son."

"Well, then, madame, I will go to find other counselors capable of feeling for me and of aiding me."

"Go, my son; and may God guide your counselors, for they will have need of it to aid you in this strait."

"Adieu, then, madame!"

"Adieu, Henri! I do not pretend to counsel you--you do not need me, I know--but beg your counselors to reflect well before they advise, and still more before they execute."

"Yes, madame, for the position is difficult."

"Very grave," replied she, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Have you any idea who it was that carried him off?" Catherine did not reply.

"I think it was the Angevins," continued the king.

Catherine smiled scornfully.

"The Angevins!"

"You do not think so?"

"Do you, really?"

"Tell me what you think, madame."

"Why should I?"

"To enlighten me."

"Enlighten you! I am but a doting old woman, whose only influence lies in her prayers and repentance."

"No, mother; speak, you are the cleverest of us all."

"Useless; I have only ideas of the last century; at my age it is impossible I should give good counsel."

"Well, then, mother, refuse me your counsel, deprive me of your aid. In an hour I will hang all the Angevins in Paris."

"Hang all the Angevins!" cried Catherine, in amazement.

"Yes, hang, slay, massacre, burn; already, perhaps, my friends are out to begin the work."

"They will ruin themselves, and you with them."

"How so?"

"Blind! Will kings eternally have eyes, and not see?"

"Kings must avenge their injuries, it is but justice, and in this case all my subjects will rise to defend me."

"You are mad."

"Why so?"

"You will make oceans of blood flow. The standard of revolt will soon be raised; and you will arm against you a host who never would rise for François."

"But if I do not revenge myself they will think I am afraid."

"Did any one ever think I was afraid? Besides, it was not the Angevins."

"Who was it then? it must have been my brother's friends."

"Your brother has no friends."

"But who was it then?"

"Your enemy."

"What enemy?"

"O! my son, you know you have never had but one; yours, mine, your brother Charles's; always the same."

"Henri of Navarre, you mean?"

"Yes, Henri of Navarre."

"He is not at Paris."

"Do you know who is at Paris, and who is not? No, you are all deaf and blind."

"Can it have been he?"

"My son, at every disappointment you meet with, at every misfortune that happens to you of which the author is unknown, do not seek or conjecture; it is useless. Cry out, it is Henri of Navarre, and you will be sure to be right. Strike on the side where he is, and you will be sure to strike right. Oh! that man, that man; he is the sword suspended over the head of the Valois."

"Then you think I should countermand my orders about the Angevins?"

"At once, without losing an instant. Hasten; perhaps you are already too late."

Henry flew out of the Louvre to find his friends, but found only Chicot drawing figures in the sand with a stone.