

Chapter 62

HOW, AS CHICOT AND THE QUEEN MOTHER WERE AGREED, THE KING BEGAN TO AGREE WITH THEM.

"Is this how you defend your king?" cried Henri.

"Yes, it is my manner, and I think it is a good one."

"Good, indeed!"

"I maintain it, and I will prove it."

"I am curious to hear this proof."

"It is easy; but first, we have committed a great folly."

"How so?" cried Henri, struck by the agreement between Chicot and his mother.

"Yes," replied Chicot, "your friends are crying through the city, 'Death to the Angevins!' and now that I reflect, it was never proved that they had anything to do with the affair. And your friends, crying thus through the city, will raise that nice little civil war of which MM. de Guise have so much need, and which they did not succeed in raising for themselves. Besides which, your friends may get killed, which would not displease me, I confess, but which would afflict you, or else they will chase all the Angevins from the city, which will please M. d'Anjou enormously."

"Do you think things are so bad?"

"Yes, it not worse."

"But all this does not explain what you do here, sitting on a stone."

"I am tracing a plan of all the provinces that your brother will raise against you, and the number of men each will furnish to the revolt."

"Chicot, Chicot, you are a bird of bad augury."

"The owl sings at night, my son, it is his hour. Now it is dark, Henri, so dark that one might take the day for the night, and I sing what you ought to hear. Look!"

"At what?"

"My geographical plan. Here is Anjou, something like a tartlet, you see; there your brother will take refuge. Anjou, well managed, as Monsoreau and Bussy will manage it, will alone furnish to your brother ten thousand combatants."

"Do you think so?"

"That is the minimum; let us pass to Guyenne; here it is, this figure like a calf walking on one leg. Of course, you will not be astonished to find discontent in Guyenne; it is an old focus for revolt, and will be enchanted to rise. They can furnish 8,000 soldiers; that is not much, but they are well trained. Then we have Béarn and Navarre; you see these two compartments, which look like an ape on the back of an elephant--they may furnish about 16,000. Let us count now--10,000 for Anjou, 8,000 for Guyenne, 16,000 for Béarn and Navarre; making a total of 34,000."

"You think, then, that the King of Navarre will join my brother?"

"I should think so."

"Do you believe that he had anything to do with my brother's escape?"

Chicot looked at him. "That is not your own idea, Henri."

"Why not?"

"It is too clever, my son."

"Never mind whose idea it was; answer my question."

"Well! I heard a 'Ventre St. Gris' in the Rue de la Ferronnerie."

"You heard a 'Ventre St. Gris!' But it might not have been he."

"I saw him."

"You saw Henri of Navarre in Paris?"

"Yes."

"You saw my mortal enemy here, and did not tell me?"

"I am not a spy. Then there are the Guises; 20,000 or 25,000 men under the orders of the Duc de Guise will make up altogether a nice little army."

"But Henri of Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies."

"Which will not prevent them from uniting against you; they will be free to fight with each other when they have conquered you."

"You are right, Chicot, and my mother is right. I will call the Swiss."

"Oh, yes! Quelus has got them."

"My guards, then."

"Schomberg has them."

"My household at least."

"They have gone with Maugiron."

"Without my orders?"

"And when do you ever give orders, except, perhaps, to flagellate either your own skin, or that of others?--But about government.--Bah! allow me to observe that you have been a long time finding out that you rank seventh or eighth in this kingdom."

"Here they are!" cried the king, as three cavaliers approached, followed by a crowd of men on foot and on horseback.

"Schomberg! Quelus! come here," cried the king. They approached.

"I have been seeking you, and waiting for you impatiently. What have you done? Do not go away again without my permission."

"There is no more need," said Maugiron, who now approached, "since all is finished."

"All is finished?"

"Heaven be praised," said D'Epernon, appearing all at once, no one knew from whence.

"Then you have killed them?" cried the king; "well, at least the dead do not return."

"Oh! we had not that trouble; the cowards ran away, we had scarcely time to cross our swords with them."

Henri grew pale. "With whom?" said he.

"With Antragues?"

"On the contrary, he killed a lackey of Quelus's."

"Oh!" murmured the king, "here is a civil war lighted up."

Quelus started. "It is true," said he.

"Ah" said Chicot. "You begin to perceive it, do you?"

"But, M. Chicot, you cried with us, 'Death to the Angevins!'"

"Oh! that is a different thing; I am a fool, and you are clever men."

"Come, peace, gentlemen; we shall have enough of war soon."

"What are your majesty's orders?"

"That you employ the same ardor in calming the people as you have done in exciting them, and that you bring back all the Swiss, my guards, and my household, and have the doors of the Louvre closed, so that perhaps tomorrow the bourgeois may take the whole thing for a sortie of drunken people."

The young men went off, and Henri returned to his mother.

"Well," said she, "what has passed?"

"All you foresaw, mother."

"They have escaped?"

"Alas! yes."

"What else?"

"Is not that enough?"

"The city?"

"Is in tumult; but that is not what disquiets me."

"No, it is the provinces."

"Which will revolt."

"What shall you do?"

"I see but one thing."

"What is that?"

"To withdraw the army from La Charité, and march on Anjou."

"And M. de Guise?"

"Oh, I will arrest him if necessary."

"And you think violent measures will succeed?"

"What can I do, then?"

"Your plan will not do."

"Well, what is your idea?"

"Send an ambassador."

"To whom?"

"To your brother."

"An ambassador to that traitor! You humiliate me, mother."

"This is not a moment to be proud."

"An ambassador will ask for peace?"

"Who will buy it if necessary."

"With what? mon Dieu!"

"If it were only to secure quietly, afterwards, those who have gone to make war on you."

"I would give much for that."

"Well, then, the end is worth the means."

"I believe you are right, mother; but whom shall I send?"

"Seek among your friends."

"My mother, I do not know a single man to whom I could confide such a mission."

"Confide it to a woman, then."

"My mother, would you consent?"

"My son, I am very old, and very weak, and death will perhaps await me on my return; but I will make this journey so rapidly that your brother and his friends will not have had time to learn their own power."

"Oh, my good mother!" cried Henri, kissing her hands, "you are my support, my benefactress!"

"That means that I am still Queen of France," murmured she.