

Chapter 71

WHAT TEMPER THE KING WAS IN WHEN ST. LUC REAPPEARED AT THE LOUVRE.

Since the departure of Catherine, Henri, however, confident in his ambassador, had thought only of arming himself against the attacks of his brother. He amused, or rather ennuyéd, himself by drawing up long lists of proscriptions, in which were inscribed in alphabetical order all who had not shown themselves zealous for his cause. The lists became longer every day, and at the S---- and the L----, that is to say, twice over, was inscribed the name of M. de St. Luc. Chicot, in the midst of all this, was, little by little, and man by man, enrolling an army for his master. One evening Chicot entered the room where the king sat at supper.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"M. de St. Luc."

"M. de St. Luc?"

"Yes."

"At Paris?"

"Yes."

"At the Louvre?"

"Yes."

The king rose, red and agitated.

"What has he come for? The traitor!"

"Who knows?"

"He comes, I am sure, as deputy from the states of Anjou--as an envoy from my rebellious brother. He makes use of the rebellion as a safe conduct to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?"

"Or perhaps he comes to ask me for his property, of which I have kept back the revenues, which may have been rather an abuse of power, as, after all, he has committed no crime."

"Who knows?"

"Ah, you repeat eternally the same thing; mort de ma vie! you tire my patience out with your eternal 'Who knows?'"

"Eh! mordieu! do you think you are very amusing with your eternal questions?"

"At least you might reply something."

"And what should I reply? Do you take me for an ancient oracle? It is you who are tiresome with your foolish suppositions."

"M. Chicot?"

"M. Henri."

"Chicot, my friend, you see my grief and you laugh at me."

"Do not have any grief."

"But everyone betrays me."

"Who knows? Ventre de biche! who knows?"

Henri went down to his cabinet, where, at the news of his return, a number of gentlemen had assembled, who were looking at St. Luc with evident distrust and animosity. He, however, seemed quite unmoved by this. He had brought his wife with him also, and she was seated, wrapped in her traveling-cloak, when the king entered in an excited state.

"Ah, monsieur, you here!" he cried.

"Yes, sire," replied St. Luc.

"Really, your presence at the Louvre surprises me."

"Sire, I am only surprised that, under the circumstances, your majesty did not expect me."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Sire, your majesty is in danger."

"Danger!" cried the courtiers.

"Yes, gentlemen, a real, serious danger, in which the king has need of the smallest as well as the greatest of those devoted to him; therefore I come to lay at his feet my humble services."

"Ah!" said Chicot, "you see, my son, that I was right to say, 'who knows.'"

Henri did not reply at once; he would not yield immediately. After a pause, he said, "Monsieur, you have only done your duty; your services are due to us."

"The services of all the king's subjects are due to him, I know, sire; but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I, sire, come to pay mine, happy that your majesty will receive me among the number of your creditors."

"Then," said Henri, in a softer tone, "you return without any other motive than that which you state; without any mission, or safe-conduct?"

"Sire, I return simply and purely for that reason. Now, your majesty may throw me into the Bastille, or have me shot, but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire; Touraine is about to revolt; Guienne is rising. M. le Duc d'Anjou is hard at work."

"He is well supported, is he not?"

"Sire, M. de Bussy, firm as he is, cannot make your brother brave."

"Ah! he trembles, then, the rebel."

"Let me go and shake St. Luc's hand," said Chicot, advancing.

The king followed him, and going up to his old favorite, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said,--

"You are welcome, St. Luc!"

"Ah! sire," cried St. Luc, kissing the king's hand, "I find again my beloved master."

"Yes, but you, my poor St. Luc, you have grown thin."

"It is with grief at having displeased your majesty," said a feminine voice. Now, although the voice was soft and respectful, Henri frowned, for it was as distasteful to him as the noise of thunder was to Augustus.

"Madame de St. Luc!" said he. "Ah! I forgot."

Jeanne threw herself at his feet.

"Rise, madame," said he, "I love all that bear the name of St. Luc." Jeanne took his hand and kissed it, but he withdrew it quickly.

"You must convert the king," said Chicot to the young woman, "you are pretty enough for it."

But Henri turned his back to her, and passing his arm round St. Luc's neck, said,--

"Then we have made peace, St. Luc?"

"Say rather, sire, that the pardon is granted."

"Madame!" said Chicot, "a good wife should not leave her husband," and he pushed her after the king and St. Luc.