

Chapter 72

IN WHICH WE MEET TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES WHOM WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF FOR SOME TIME.

There are two of the personages mentioned in this story, about whom the reader has the right to ask for information. We mean an enormous monk, with thick eyebrows and large lips, whose neck was diminishing every day; and a large donkey whose sides were gradually swelling out like a balloon. The monk resembled a hogshead; and the ass was like a child's cradle, supported by four posts.

The one inhabited a cell at St. Genevieve, and the other the stable at the same convent. The one was called Gorenflot, and the other Panurge. Both were enjoying the most prosperous lot that ever fell to a monk and an ass.

The monks surrounded their illustrious brother with cares and attentions, and Panurge fared well for his master's sake.

If a missionary arrived from foreign countries, or a secret legate from the Pope, they pointed out to him Brother Gorenflot, that double model of the church preaching and militant; they showed Gorenflot in all his glory, that is to say, in the midst of a feast, seated at a table in which a hollow had been cut on purpose for his sacred stomach, and they related with a noble pride that Gorenflot consumed the rations of eight ordinary monks. And when the newcomer had piously contemplated this spectacle, the prior would say, "See how he eats! And if you had but heard his sermon one famous night, in which he offered to devote himself for the triumph of the faith. It is a mouth which speaks like that of St. Chrysostom, and swallows like that of Gargantua."

Every time that any one spoke of the sermon, Gorenflot sighed and said:

"What a pity I did not write it!

"A man like you has no need to write," the prior would reply. "No, you speak from inspiration; you open your mouth, and the words of God flow from your lips."

"Do you think so?" sighed Gorenflot.

However, Gorenflot was not perfectly happy. He, who at first thought his banishment from the convent an immense misfortune, discovered in his exile infinite joys before unknown to him. He sighed for liberty; liberty with Chicot, the joyous companion, with Chicot, whom he loved without knowing why. Since his return to the convent, he had never been allowed to go out. He never attempted to combat this decision, but he grew sadder from day to day. The prior saw this, and at last said to him:

"My dear brother, no one can fight against his vocation; yours is to fight for the faith; go then, fulfil your mission, only watch well over your precious life, and return for the great day."

"What great day?"

"That of the Fête Dieu."

"Ita," replied Gorenflot; it was the only Latin word he knew, and used it on all occasions. "But give me some money to bestow in alms in a Christian manner."

"You have your text, have you not, dear brother?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Confide it to me."

"Willingly, but to you alone; it is this: 'The flail which threshes the corn.'"

"Oh, magnificent! sublime!" cried the prior.

"Now, my father, am I free?"

"Yes, my son, go and walk in the way of the Lord."

Gorenflot saddled Panurge, mounted him with the aid of two vigorous monks, and left the convent about seven in the evening. It was the same day on which St. Luc arrived at Paris from Méridor.

Gorenflot, having passed through the Rue St. Etienne, was going to have turned to the right, when suddenly Panurge stopped; a strong hand was laid on his croup.

"Who is there?" cried Gorenflot, in terror.

"A friend."

Gorenflot tried to turn, but he could not.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Will my venerable brother show me the way to the Corne d'Abondance?"

"Morbleu! it is M. Chicot," cried Gorenflot, joyfully.

"Just so; I was going to seek you at the convent, when I saw you come out, and followed you until we were alone. Ventre de biche! how thin you are!"

"But what are you carrying, M. Chicot?" said the monk, "you appear laden."

"It is some venison which I have stolen from the king."

"Dear M. Chicot! and under the other arm?"

"A bottle of Cyprus wine sent by a king to my king."

"Let me see!"

"It is my wine, and I love it much; do not you, brother?"

"Oh! oh!" cried Gorenflot, raising his eyes and hands to Heaven, and beginning to sing in a voice which shook the neighboring windows. It was the first time he had sung for a month.