

Chapter 74

HOW THE AMBASSADOR OF THE DUC D'ANJOU ARRIVED AT THE LOUVRE, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH.

As neither Catherine nor the Duc d'Anjou reappeared at the Louvre, the dissension between the brothers became apparently every day more and more certain. The king thought, "No news, bad news." The minions added, "François, badly counseled, has detained the queen-mother."

Badly counseled. In these words were comprised all the policy of this singular reign, and the three preceding ones. Badly counseled was Charles IX. when he authorized the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Badly counseled was François II. when he ordered the massacre at Amboise. Badly counseled had been Henri II. when he burned so many heretics and conspirators. And now they dared not say, "Your brother has the family blood in his veins; he wishes, like the rest, to dethrone or poison; he would do to you what you did to your elder brother; what your elder brother did to his, what your mother has taught you to do to one another." Therefore they said, "Your brother is badly counseled."

Now, as only one person was able to counsel François, it was against Bussy that the cry was raised, which became every day more and more furious. At last the news was spread that the duke had sent an ambassador. At this the king grew pale with anger, and the minions swore that he should be cut to pieces, and a piece sent to all the provinces of France as a specimen of the king's anger. Chicot said nothing, but he reflected. Now the king thought much of Chicot's reflections, and he questioned him about them.

"Sire," replied he, "if your brother sends an ambassador, it is because he feels himself strong enough to do so; he who is prudence itself. Now, if he is strong, we must temporize with him. Let us respect his ambassador, and receive him with civility. That engages you to nothing. Do you remember how your brother embraced Admiral Coligny, who came as ambassador from the Huguenots?"

"Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles?"

"Not so, but I cite a fact; and I say to you, do not hurt a poor devil of a herald, or ambassador; perhaps we may find the way to seize the master, the mover, the chief, the great Duc d'Anjou, with the three Guises; and if you can shut them up in a place safer than the Louvre, do it."

"That is not so bad."

"Then why do you let all your friends bellow so?"

"Bellow!"

"Yes; I would say, roar, if they could be taken for lions, but they are more like bearded apes."

"Chicot, they are my friends."

"Friends! I would lay any bet to make them all turn against you before to-morrow."

"Well, what do you advise?"

"To wait, my son. Half the wisdom of Solomon lies in that word. If an ambassador arrive, receive him courteously. And as to your brother, kill him if you can and like, but do not degrade him. He is a great knave, but he is a Valois; besides, he can do that well enough for himself."

"It is true, Chicot."

"One more lesson that you owe me. Now let me sleep, Henri; for the last week I have been engaged in fuddling a monk."

"A monk! the one of whom you have already spoken to me?"

"Just so. You promised him an abbey."

"I?"

"Pardieu! it is the least you can do for him, after all he has done for you."

"He is then still devoted to me?"

"He adores you. Apropos, my son----"

"What?"

"In three weeks it will be the Fête Dieu."

"Well!"

"Are we to have some pretty little procession?"

"I am the most Christian king, and it is my duty to set an example to my subjects."

"And you will, as usual, stop at the four great convents of Paris?"

"Yes."

"At St. Geneviève?"

"Yes, that is the second I stop at."

"Good."

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing--I was curious. Now I know all I want, so good night, Henri!"

But just as Chicot prepared to leave, a great noise was heard.

"What is that noise?" said the king.

"It is ordained that I am not to sleep. Henri, you must get me a room in the town, or I must leave your service; the Louvre becomes insupportable."

At this moment the captain of the guards entered, saying, "Sire, it is an envoy from M. le Duc d'Anjou."

"With a suite?"

"No, sire, alone."

"Then you must receive him doubly well, Henri, for he is a brave fellow."

"Well," said the king, very pale, but trying to look calm, "let all my court assemble in the great hall."