

Chapter 87

THE PROCESSION.

As soon as the collation was over, the king had entered his room with Chicot, to put on his penitent's robe and had come out an instant after, with bare feet, a cord round his waist, and his hood over his face; the courtiers had made the same toilet. The weather was magnificent, and the pavements were strewn with flowers; an immense crowd lined the roads to the four places where the king was to stop. The clergy of St. Germain led the procession, and the Archbishop of Paris followed, carrying the holy sacrament; between them walked young boys, shaking censers, and young girls scattering roses. Then came the king, followed by his four friends, barefooted and frocked like himself.

The Duc d'Anjou followed in his ordinary dress, accompanied by his Angevins. Next came the principal courtiers, and then the bourgeois. It was one o'clock when they left the Louvre. Crillon and the French guards were about to follow, but the king signed to them to remain. It was near six in the evening before they arrived before the old abbey, where they saw the prior and the monks drawn up on the threshold to wait for his majesty. The Duc d'Anjou, a little before, had pleaded great fatigue, and had asked leave to retire to his hotel, which had been granted to him. His gentlemen had retired with him, as if to proclaim that they followed the duke and not the king, besides which, they did not wish to fatigue themselves before the morrow. At the door of the abbey the king dismissed his four favorites, that they also might take some repose. The archbishop also, who had eaten nothing since morning, was dropping with fatigue, so the king took pity on him and on the other priests and dismissed them all. Then, turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon, "Here I am, my father," said he; "I come, sinner as I am, to seek repose in your solitude."

The prior bowed, and the royal penitent mounted the steps of the abbey, striking his breast at each step, and the door was immediately closed behind him.

"We will first," said the prior, "conduct your majesty into the crypt, which we have ornamented in our best manner to do honor to the King of heaven and earth."

No sooner had the king passed through the somber arcade, lined with monks, and turned the corner which led to the chapel, than twenty hoods were thrown into the air, and eyes were seen brilliant with joy and triumph. Certainly, they were not monkish or peaceful faces displayed, but bristling mustaches and embrowned skins, many scarred by wounds, and by the side of the proudest of all, who displayed the most celebrated scar, stood a woman covered with a frock, and looking triumphant and happy. This woman, shaking a pair of golden scissors which hung by her side, cried:

"Ah! my brothers, at last we have the Valois!"

"Ma foi, sister, I believe so."

"Not yet," murmured the cardinal.

"How so?"

"Shall we have enough bourgeois guards to make head against Crillon and his guards?"

"We have better than bourgeois guards; and, believe me, there will not be a musket-shot exchanged."

"How so?" said the duchess. "I should have liked a little disturbance."

"Well, sister, you will be deprived of it. When the king is taken he will cry out, but no one will answer; then, by persuasion or by violence, but without

showing ourselves, we shall make him sign his abdication. The news will soon spread through the city, and dispose in our favor both the bourgeois and the troops."

"The plan is good, and cannot fail," said the duchess. "It is rather brutal," said the Duc de Guise; "besides which, the king will refuse to sign the abdication. He is brave, and will rather die."

"Let him die, then."

"Not so," replied the duke, firmly. "I will mount the throne of a prince who abdicates and is despised, but not of an assassinated man who is pitied. Besides, in your plans you forget M. le Duc d'Anjou, who will claim the crown."

"Let him claim, mordieu!" said Mayenne; "he shall be comprised in his brother's act of abdication. He is in connection with the Huguenots, and is unworthy to reign."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Pardieu! did he not escape from the Louvre by the aid of the King of Navarre?"

"Well?"

"Then another clause in favor of our house shall follow; this clause shall make you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, from which to the throne is only a step."

"Yes, yes," said the cardinal, "all that is settled; but it is probable that the French guards, to make sure that the abdication is a genuine one, and above all, a voluntary one, will insist upon seeing the king, and will force the gates of the abbey if they are not admitted. Crillon does not understand joking, and he is just the man to say to the king, 'Sire, your life is in danger; but, before everything, let us save our honor.'"

"The general has taken his precautions. If it be necessary to sustain a siege, we have here eighty gentlemen, and I have distributed arms to a hundred monks. We could hold out for a month against the army; besides, in case of danger, we have the cave to fly to with our prey."

"What is the Duc d'Anjou doing?"

"In the hour of danger he has failed, as usual. He has gone home, no doubt, waiting for news of us, through Bussy or Monsoreau."

"Mon Dieu! he should have been here; not at home."

"You are wrong, brother," said the cardinal; "the people and the nobles would have seen in it a snare to entrap the family. As you said just now, we must, above all things, avoid playing the part of usurper. We must inherit. By leaving the Duc d'Anjou free, and the queen-mother independent, no one will have anything to accuse us of. If we acted otherwise, we should have against us Bussy, and a hundred other dangerous swords."

"Bah! Bussy is going to fight against the king's minions."

"Pardieu! he will kill them, and then he will join us," said the Duc de Guise; "he is a superior man, and one whom I much esteem, and I will make him general of the army in Italy, where war is sure to break out."

"And I," said the duchess, "if I become a widow, will marry him."

"Who is near the king?" asked the duke.

"The prior and Brother Gorenflot."

"Is he in the cell?"

"Oh no! he will look first at the crypt and the relics."

At this moment a bell sounded.

"The king is returning," said the Duc de Guise; "let us become monks again." And immediately the hoods covered ardent eyes and speaking scars, and twenty or thirty monks, conducted by the three brothers, went towards the crypt.