

## Chapter 88

### CHICOT THE FIRST.

The king visited the crypt, kissed the relics-often striking his breast, and murmuring the most doleful psalms. At last the prior said, "Sire, will it please you now to depose your earthly crown at the feet of the eternal king?"

"Let us go!" said the king.

They arrived at the cell, on the threshold of which stood Gorenflot, his eyes brilliant as carbuncles.

Henri entered. "Hic portus salutis!" murmured he.

"Yes," replied Foulon.

"Leave us!" said Gorenflot, with a majestic gesture; and immediately the door shut, and they were left alone.

"Here you are, then, Herod! pagan! Nebuchadnezzar!" cried Gorenflot, suddenly.

"Is it to me you speak, my brother?" cried the king, in surprise.

"Yes, to you. Can one accuse you of anything so bad, that it is not true?"

"My brother!"

"Bah! you have no brother here. I have long been meditating a discourse, and now you shall have it. I divide it into three heads. First, you are a tyrant; second, you are a satyr; third, you are dethroned."

"Dethroned!"

"Neither more or less. This abbey is not like Poland, and you cannot fly."

"Ah! a snare!"

"Oh, Valois, learn that a king is but a man."

"You are violent, my brother."

"Pardieu! do you think we imprison you to flatter you?"

"You abuse your religious calling."

"There is no religion."

"Oh, you are a saint, and say such things!"

"I have said it."

"You speak dreadfully, my brother."

"Come, no preaching; are you ready?"

"To do what?"

"To resign your crown; I am charged to demand it of you."

"You are committing a mortal sin."

"Oh! I have right of absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come, renounce, Brother Valois."

"Renounce what?"

"The throne of France."

"Rather death!"

"Oh! then you shall die! Here is the prior returning. Decide!"

"I have my guards--my friends; they will defend me."

"Yes, but you will be killed first."

"Leave me at least a little time for reflection."

"Not an instant!"

"Your zeal carries you away, brother," said the prior, opening the door; and saying to the king, "Your request is granted," he shut it again.

Henri fell into a profound reverie. "I accept the sacrifice," he said, after the lapse of ten minutes.

"It is done--he accepts!" cried Gorenflot.

The king heard a murmur of joy and surprise.

"Read him the act," said a voice, and a monk passed a paper to Gorenflot.

Gorenflot read it to the king, who listened with his head buried in his hands.

"If I refuse to sign?" cried he, shedding tears.

"It will be doubly your ruin," said the Duc de Guise, from under his hood. "Look on yourself as dead to the world, and do not force your subjects to shed the blood of a man who has been their king."

"I will not be forced."

"I feared so," said the duke to his sister. Then, turning to his brother, "Let everyone arm and prepare," said he.

"For what?" cried the king, in a miserable tone.

"For anything."

The king's despair redoubled.

"Corbleu!" cried Gorenflot, "I hated you before, Valois, but now I despise you! Sign, or you shall perish by my hand!"

"Have patience," said the king; "let me pray to my divine Master for resignation."

"He wishes to reflect again," said Gorenflot.

"Give him till midnight," said the cardinal.

"Thanks, charitable Christian!" cried the king:

"His brain is weak," said the duke; "we serve France by dethroning him."

"I shall have great pleasure in clipping him!" said the duchess.

Suddenly a noise was heard outside, and soon they distinguished blows struck on the door of the abbey, and Mayenne went to see what it was. "My brothers," said he, "there is a troop of armed men outside."

"They have come to seek him," said the duchess.

"The more reason that he should sign quickly."

"Sign, Valois, sign!" roared Gorenflot.

"You gave me till midnight," said the king, piteously.

"Ah! you hoped to be rescued."

"He shall die if he does not sign!" cried the duchess. Gorenflot offered him the pen. The noise outside redoubled.

"A new troop!" cried a monk; "they are surrounding the abbey!"

"The Swiss," cried Foulon, "are advancing on the right!"

"Well, we will defend ourselves; with such a hostage in our hands, we need not surrender."

"He has signed!" cried Gorenflot, tearing the paper from Henri, who buried his face in his hands.

"Then you are king!" cried the cardinal to the duke; "take the precious paper."

The king overturned the little lamp which alone lighted the scene, but the duke already held the parchment.

"What shall we do?" said a monk. "Here is Crillon, with his guards, threatening to break in the doors!"

"In the king's name!" cried the powerful voice of Crillon.

"There is no king!" cried Gorenflot through the window.

"Who says that?" cried Crillon.

"I! I!"

"Break in the doors, Monsieur Crillon!" said, from outside, a voice which made the hair of all the monks, real and pretended, stand on end.

"Yes, sire," replied Crillon, giving a tremendous blow with a hatchet on the door.

"What do you want?" said the prior, going to the window.

"Ah! it is you, M. Foulon," replied the same voice, "I want my jester, who is in one of your cells. I want Chicot, I am ennuyé at the Louvre."

"And I have been much amused, my son," said Chicot, throwing off his hood, and pushing his way through the crowd of monks, who recoiled, with a cry of terror.

At this moment the Duc de Guise, advancing to a lamp, read the signature obtained with so much labor. It was "Chicot I."

"Chicot!" cried he; "thousand devils!"

"Let us fly!" said the cardinal, "we are lost."

"Ah!" cried Chicot, turning to Gorenflot, who was nearly fainting, and he began to strike him with the cord he had round his waist.