

Chapter 89

INTEREST AND CAPITAL.

As the king spoke and the conspirators listened, they passed from astonishment to terror. Chicot I. relinquished his role of apparent terror, threw back his hood, crossed his arms, and, while Gorenflot fled at his utmost speed, sustained, firm and smiling, the first shock. It was a terrible moment, for the gentlemen, furious at the mystification of which they had been the dupes, advanced menacingly on the Gascon. But this unarmed man, his breast covered only by his arms--this laughing face, stopped them still more than the remonstrance of the cardinal, who said to them that Chicot's death could serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the king, who was the jester's accomplice in this scene of terrible buffoonery.

The result was, that daggers and rapiers were lowered before Chicot, who continued to laugh in their faces.

However, the king's menaces and Crillon's blows became more vehement, and it was evident that the door could not long resist such an attack. Thus, after a moment's deliberation, the Duc de Guise gave the order for retreat. This order made Chicot smile, for, during his nights with Gorenflot, he had examined the cave and found out the door, of which he had informed the king, who had placed there Torquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards. It was then evident that the leaguers, one after another, were about to throw themselves into the trap. The cardinal made off first, followed by about twenty gentlemen. Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number, and afterwards Mayenne. When Chicot saw him go he laughed outright. Ten minutes passed, during which he listened earnestly, thinking to hear the noise of the leaguers sent back into the cave, but to his astonishment, the sound continued to go further and further off. His laugh began to change into oaths. Time passed, and the leaguers did not return; had they seen that the door was guarded and found another way out? Chicot was about to rush from the cell, when all at once the door was obstructed by a mass which fell at his feet, and began to tear its hair.

"Ah! wretch that I am!" cried the monk. "Oh! my good M. Chicot, pardon me, pardon me!"

How did Gorenflot, who went first, return now alone? was the question that presented itself to Chicot's mind.

"Oh! my good M. Chicot!" he continued to cry, "pardon your unworthy friend, who repents at your knees."

"But how is it you have not fled with the others?"

"Because the Lord in His anger has struck me with obesity, and I could not pass where the others did. Oh! unlucky stomach! Oh! miserable paunch!" cried the monk, striking with his two hands the part he apostrophized. "Ah! why am not I thin like you, M. Chicot?"

Chicot understood nothing of the lamentations of the monk.

"But the others are flying, then?" cried he, in a voice of thunder.

"Pardieu! what should they do? Wait to be hung? Oh! unlucky paunch!"

"Silence, and answer me."

"Interrogate me, M. Chicot; you have the right."

"How are the others escaping?"

"As fast as they can."

"So I imagine; but where?"

"By the hole."

"Mordieu! what hole?"

"The hole in the cemetery cellar."

"Is that what you call the cave?"

"Oh! no; the door of that was guarded outside. The great cardinal, just as he was about to open it, heard a Swiss say, 'Mich dwistel,' which means, 'I am thirsty.'"

"Ventre de biche! so then they took another way?"

"Yes, dear M. Chicot, they are getting out through the cellar."

"How does that run?"

"From the crypt to the Porte St. Jacques."

"You lie; I should have seen them repass before this cell."

"No, dear M. Chicot; they thought they had not time for that, so they are creeping out through the air-hole."

"What hole?"

"One which looks into the garden, and serves to light the cellar."

"So that you----"

"I was too big, and could not pass, and they drew me back by my legs, because I intercepted the way for the others."

"Then he who is bigger than you?"

"He! who?"

"Oh! Holy Virgin, I promise you a dozen wax candles, if he also cannot pass."

"M. Chicot!"

"Get up."

The monk raised himself from the ground as quickly as he could.

"Now lead me to the hole."

"Where you wish."

"Go on, then, wretch."

Gorenflot went on as fast as he was able, while Chicot indulged himself by giving him a few blows with the cord. They traversed the corridor, and descended into the garden.

"Here! this way," said Gorenflot.

"Hold your tongue, and go on."

"There it is," and exhausted by his efforts, the monk sank on the grass, while Chicot, hearing groans, advanced, and saw something protruding through the hole. By the side of this something lay a frock and a sword. It was evident that the individual in the hole had taken off successively all the loose clothing which increased his size; and yet, like Gorenflot, he was making useless efforts to get through.

"Mordieu! ventrebleu! sangdien!" cried a stifled voice. "I would rather pass through the midst of the guards. Do not pull so hard, my friends; I shall come through gradually; I feel that I advance, not quickly, it is true, but I do advance."

"Ventre de biche!" murmured Chicot, "it is M. de Mayenne. Holy Virgin, you have gained your candles."

And he made a noise with his feet like some one running fast.

"They are coming," cried several voices from inside.

"All!" cried Chicot, as if out of breath, "it is you, miserable monk!"

"Say nothing, monseigneur!" murmured the voices, "he takes you for Gorenflot."

"Ah! it is you, heavy mass--pondus immobile; it is you, indigesta moles!"

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, arrived at last at his desired vengeance, let fall the cord with all the weight of his arm on the body before him.

"Silence!" whispered the voices again; "he takes you for Gorenflot."

Mayenne only uttered groans, and made immense efforts to get through.

"Ah! conspirator!" cried Chicot again; "ah! unworthy monk, this is for your drunkenness, this for idleness, this for anger, this for greediness, and this for all the vices you have."

"M. Chicot, have pity," whispered Gorenflot.

"And here, traitor, this is for your treason," continued Chicot.

"Ah! why did it not please God to substitute for your vulgar carcass the high and mighty shoulders of the Duc de Mayenne, to whom I owe a volley of blows, the interest of which has been accumulating for seven years!"

"Chicot!" cried the duke.

"Yes, Chicot, unworthy servant of the king, who wishes he had the hundred arms of Briareus for this occasion."

And he redoubled his blows with such violence, that the sufferer, making a tremendous effort, pushed himself through, and fell torn and bleeding into the arms of his friends. Chicot's last blow fell into empty space. He turned, and saw that the true Gorenflot had fainted with terror.