

## Chapter 96

### THE COMBAT.

The place where this terrible combat was to take place was sequestered and shaded by trees. It was generally frequented only by children, who came to play there during the day, or by drunkards or robbers, who made a sleeping-place of it by night.

Chicot, his heart palpitating, although he was not of a very tender nature, seated himself before the lackeys and pages, on a wooden balustrade.

He did not love the Angevins, and detested the minions, but they were all brave young men, and in their veins flowed a generous blood, which he was probably destined to see flow before long.

D'Epernon made a last bravado, "What! you are all afraid of me?" he cried.

"Hold your tongue," said Antragues.

"Come away, bravest of the brave," said Chicot, "or else you will lose another pair of shoes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there will soon be blood on the ground, and that you will walk in it, as you did last night."

D'Epernon became deadly pale, and, moving away, he seated himself at some distance from Chicot.

The combat began as five o'clock struck, and for a few minutes nothing was heard but the clashing of swords; not a blow was struck. At last Schomberg touched Ribeirac in the shoulder, and the blood gushed out; Schomberg tried to repeat the blow, but Ribeirac struck up his sword, and wounded him in the side.

"Now let us rest a few seconds, if you like," said Ribeirac.

Quelus, having no dagger, was at a great disadvantage; for he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and, as it was bare, on each occasion it cost him a wound. His hand was soon bleeding in several places, and Antragues had also wounded him in the breast; but at each wound he repeated, "It is nothing."

Livarot and Maugiron were still unwounded.

Ribeirac and Schomberg recommenced; the former was pierced through the breast, and Schomberg was wounded in the neck.

Ribeirac was mortally wounded, and Schomberg rushed on him and gave him another; but he, with his right hand, seized his opponent's, and with his left plunged his dagger into his heart.

Schomberg fell back, dragging Ribeirac with him. Livarot ran to aid Ribeirac to disengage himself from the grasp of his adversary, but was closely pursued by Maugiron, who cut open his head with a blow of his sword. Livarot let his sword drop, and fell on his knees; then Maugiron hastened to give him another wound, and he fell altogether.

Quelus and Maugiron remained against Antragues. Quelus was bleeding, but from slight wounds.

Antragues comprehended his danger; he had not the least wound, but he began to feel tired, so he pushed aside Quelus' sword and jumped over a barrier; but at the same moment, Maugiron attacked him behind; Antragues turned, and Quelus profited by this movement to get under the barrier.

"He is lost!" thought Chicot.

"Vive le roi!" cried D'Epernon.

"Silence, if you please, monsieur," said Antragues. At this instant Livarot, of whom no one was thinking, rose on his knees, hideous from the blood with which he was covered, and plunged his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who fell, crying out, "Mon Dieu! I am killed!"

Livarot fell back again, fainting.

"M. de Quelus," said Antragues, "you are a brave man; yield--I offer you your life."

"And why yield?"

"You are wounded, and I am not."

"Vive le roi!" cried Quelus; "I have still my sword!" And he rushed on Antragues, who parried the thrust, and, seizing his arm, wrested his sword from him, saying, "Now you have it no longer."

"Oh, a sword!" cried Quelus; and, bounding like a tiger on Antragues, he threw his arms round him.

Antragues struck him with his dagger again and again, but Quelus managed to seize his hands, and twisted round him like a serpent, with arms and legs. Antragues, nearly suffocated, reeled and fell, but on the unfortunate Quelus. He managed to disengage himself, for Quelus' powers were failing him, and, leaning on one arm, gave him a last blow.

"Vive le r----" said Quelus, and that was all. The silence and terror of death reigned everywhere.

Antragues rose, covered with blood, but it was that of his enemy.

D'Epernon made the sign of the cross, and fled as if he were pursued by demons.

Chicot ran and raised Quelus, whose blood was pouring out from nineteen wounds.

The movement roused him, and he opened his eyes.

"Antragues," said he, "on my honor, I am innocent of the death of Bussy."

"Oh! I believe you, monsieur," cried Antragues, much moved.

"Fly!" murmured Quelus; "the king will never forgive you."

"I cannot abandon you thus, even to escape the scaffold."

"Save yourself, young man," said Chicot; "do not tempt Providence twice in one day."

Antragues approached Ribeirac, who still breathed.

"Well?" asked he.

"We are victors," said Antragues, in a low tone, not to offend Quelus.

"Thanks," said Ribeirac; "now go."

And he fainted again.

Antragues picked up his own sword, which he had dropped, then that of Quelus, which he presented to him. A tear shone in the eyes of the dying man. "We might have been friends," he murmured.

"Now fly," said Chicot; "you are worthy of being saved."

"And my companions?"

"I will take care of them, as of the king's friends."

Antragues wrapped himself in a cloak which his squire handed to him, so that no one might see the blood with which he was covered, and, leaving the dead and wounded, he disappeared through the Porte St. Antoine.