

"No."

"Then why do they close the door. I do not understand it."

"There is no need that you should," replied the Swiss, laughing at his own wit.

Chapter 2

WHAT PASSED OUTSIDE THE PORTE ST. ANTOINE.

One of the groups was formed of a considerable number of citizens. They surrounded four or five of a martial appearance, whom the closing of the doors annoyed very much, as it seemed, for they cried with all their might, "The door! the door!"

Robert Briquet advanced toward this group, and began to cry also, "The door! the door!"

One of the cavaliers, charmed at this, turned toward him and said, "Is it not shameful, monsieur, that they should close the gates in open day, as though the Spaniards or the English were besieging Paris?"

Robert Briquet looked attentively at the speaker, who seemed to be about forty-five years of age, and the principal personage in the group. "Yes, monsieur," replied he, "you are right: but may I venture to ask what you think their motive is for these precautions?"

"Pardieu! the fear they have lest some one should eat their Salcede."

"Diable!" said a voice, "a sad meal."

Robert Briquet turned toward the speaker, whose voice had a strong Gascon accent, and saw a young man from twenty to twenty-five, resting his hand on the crupper of the horse of the first speaker. His head was bare; he had probably lost his hat in the *melée*.

"But as they say," replied Briquet, "that this Salcede belongs to M. de Guise--"

"Bah! they say that!"

"Then you do not believe it, monsieur?"

"Certainly not," replied the cavalier, "doubtless, if he had, the duke would not have let him be taken, or at all events would not have allowed him to have been carried from Brussels to Paris bound hand and foot, without even trying to rescue him."

"An attempt to rescue him," replied Briquet, "would have been very

dangerous, because, whether it failed or succeeded, it would have been an avowal, on the duke's part, that he had conspired against the Duc d'Anjou."

"M. de Guise would not, I am sure, have been restrained by such considerations; therefore, as he has not defended Salcede, it is certain that he is not one of his men."

"Excuse me, monsieur, if I insist, but it is not I who invent, for it appears that Salcede has confessed."

"Where? before the judges?"

"No, monsieur; at the torture."

"They asserted that he did, but they do not repeat what he said."

"Excuse me again, monsieur, but they do."

"And what did he say?" cried the cavalier impatiently. "As you seem so well informed, what were his words?"

"I cannot certify that they were his words," replied Briquet, who seemed to take a pleasure in teasing the cavalier.

"Well, then, those they attribute to him."

"They assert that he has confessed that he conspired for M. de Guise."

"Against the king, of course?"

"No; against the Duc d'Anjou."

"If he confessed that--"

"Well?"

"Well, he is a poltroon!" said the cavalier, frowning.

"Ah! monsieur, the boot and the thumb-screw make a man confess many things."

"Alas! that is true, monsieur."

"Bah!" interrupted the Gascon, "the boot and the thumb-screw, nonsense: if Salcede confessed that, he was a knave, and his patron another."

"You speak loudly, monsieur," said the cavalier.

"I speak as I please; so much the worse for those who dislike it."

"More calmly," said a voice at once soft and imperative, of which Briquet vainly sought the owner.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort over himself, and then said quietly to the Gascon, "Do you know him of whom you speak?"

"Salcede?"--"Yes."

"Not in the least."

"And the Duc de Guise?"

"Still less."

"Well, then, Salcede is a brave man."

"So much the better: he will die bravely."

"And know that, when the Duc de Guise wishes to conspire, he conspires for himself."

"What do I care?"

"What!"

"Mayneville! Mayneville!" murmured the same voice.

"Yes, mordieu! what do I care?" continued the Gascon, "I came to Paris on business, and find the gates closed on account of this execution--that is all I care for."

At this moment there was a sound of trumpets. The Swiss had cleared the middle of the road, along which a crier proceeded, dressed in a flowered tunic, and bearing on his breast a scutcheon on which was embroidered the arms of Paris. He read from a paper in his hand the following proclamation:

"This is to make known to our good people of Paris and its environs, that its gates will be closed for one hour, and that none can enter during that time; and this by the will of the king and the mayor of Paris."

The crowd gave vent to their discontent in a long hoot, to which, however, the crier seemed indifferent. The officer commanded silence, and when it was obtained, the crier continued:

"All who are the bearers of a sign of recognition, or are summoned by letter or mandate, are exempt from this rule. Given at the hotel of the provost of Paris, 26th of October, 1585."

Scarcely had the crier ceased to speak, when the crowd began to undulate like a serpent behind the line of soldiers.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried all.

"Oh! it is to keep us out of Paris," said the cavalier, who had been speaking in a low voice to his companions. "These guards, this crier,

these bars, and these trumpets are all for us; we ought to be proud of them."

"Room!" cried the officer in command; "make room for those who have the right to pass!"

"Cap de Bious! I know who will pass, whoever is kept out!" said the Gascon, leaping into the cleared space. He walked straight up to the officer who had spoken, and who looked at him for some moments in silence, and then said:

"You have lost your hat, it appears, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Is it in the crowd?"

"No. I had just received a letter from my sweetheart, and was reading it, cap de Bious! near the river, about a mile from here, when a gust of wind carried away both my letter and my hat. I ran after the letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond; I caught my letter, but my hat was carried by the wind into the middle of the river. It will make the fortune of the poor devil who finds it."--"So that you have none?"

"Oh, there are plenty in Paris, cap de Bious! I will buy a more magnificent one, and put in it a still larger diamond."

The officer shrugged his shoulders slightly, and said, "Have you a card?"

"Certainly I have one--or rather two."

"One is enough, if it be the right one."

"But it cannot be wrong--oh, no, cap de Bious! Is it to M. de Loignac that I have the honor of speaking?"

"It is possible," said the officer coldly, and evidently not much charmed at the recognition.

"M. de Loignac, my compatriot?"

"I do not say no."

"My cousin!"

"Good! Your card?"

"Here it is;" and the Gascon drew out the half of a card, carefully cut.

"Follow me," said De Loignac, without looking at it, "and your companions, if you have any. We will verify the admissions."

The Gascon obeyed, and five other gentlemen followed him. The first was adorned with a magnificent cuirass, so marvelous in its work that it seemed as if it had come out of the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. However, as the make of this cuirass was somewhat old-fashioned, its magnificence attracted more laughter than admiration; and it is true that no other part of the costume of the individual in question corresponded with this magnificence. The second, who was lame, was followed by a gray-headed lackey, who looked like the precursor of Sancho Panza, as his master did of Don Quixote. The third carried a child of ten months old in his arms, and was followed by a woman, who kept a tight grasp of his leathern belt, while two other children, one four and the other five years old, held by her dress.

The fourth was attached to an enormous sword, and the fifth, who closed the troop, was a handsome young man, mounted on a black horse. He looked

like a king by the side of the others. Forced to regulate his pace by those who preceded him, he was advancing slowly, when he felt a sudden pull at the scabbard of his sword; he turned round, and saw that it had been done by a slight and graceful young man with black hair and sparkling eyes.

"What do you desire, monsieur?" said the cavalier.

"A favor, monsieur."

"Speak; but quickly, I pray you, for I am waited for."

"I desire to enter into the city, monsieur; an imperious necessity demands my presence there. You, on your part, are alone, and want a page to do justice to your appearance."

"Well?"

"Take me in, and I will be your page."

"Thank you; but I do not wish to be served by any one."

"Not even by me," said the young man, with such a strange glance, that the cavalier felt the icy reserve in which he had tried to close his heart melting away.

"I meant to say that I could be served by no one," said he.

"Yes, I know you are not rich, M. Ernanton de Carmainges," said the young page. The cavalier started, but the lad went on, "therefore I do not speak of wages; it is you, on the contrary, who, if you grant what I ask, shall be paid a hundred-fold for the service you will render me; let me enter with you, then, I beg, remembering that he who now begs, has often commanded." Then, turning to the group of which we have already spoken, the lad said, "I shall pass; that is the most important thing; but you, Mayneville, try to do so also if possible."

"It is not everything that you should pass," replied Mayneville; "it is

necessary that he should see you."

"Make yourself easy; once I am through, he shall see me."

"Do not forget the sign agreed upon."

"Two fingers on the mouth, is it not?"

"Yes; success attend you."

"Well, monsieur page," said the man on the black horse, "are you ready?"

"Here I am," replied he, jumping lightly on the horse, behind the cavalier, who immediately joined his friends who were occupied in exhibiting their cards and proving their right to enter.

"Ventre de Biche!" said Robert Briquet; "what an arrival of Gascons!"