

Chapter 11

STILL THE LEAGUE.

At the moment when Robert Briquet was about to enter, he saw Poulain waiting for him.

"Pardon," said he, "but my friends do not know you, and decline to admit you to their councils till they know more of you."

"It is just, and I retire, happy to have seen so many brave defenders of the Holy Union."

"Shall I re-conduct you?"

"No, I thank you, I will not trouble you."

"But perhaps they will not open for you; yet I am wanted."

"Have you not a password?"

"Yes."

"Then give it to me. I am a friend, you know."

"True. It is 'Parma and Lorraine!'"

"And they will open?"

"Yes."

"Thanks; now return to your friends."

Briquet took some steps as if to go out, and then stopped to explore the locality. The result of his observations was, that the vault ran parallel to the exterior wall, and terminated in a hall destined for the mysterious council from which he had been excluded. What confirmed him in this supposition was that he saw a light at a barred window, pierced in the wall, and guarded by a sort of wooden pipe, such as they placed at the windows of convents and prisons to intercept the view from without, while the air was still admitted. Briquet imagined this to be the window of the hall, and thought that if he could gain this place he could see all. He looked round him; the court had many soldiers and servants in it, but it was large, and the night was dark; besides, they were not looking his way, and the porter was busy, preparing his bed for the night.

Briquet rapidly climbed on to the cornice which ran toward the window in question, and ran along the wall like a monkey, holding on with his hands and feet to the ornaments of the sculpture. Had the soldiers seen

in the dark this figure gliding along the wall without apparent support, they would not have failed to cry, "Magic!" but they did not see him. In four bounds he reached the window, and established himself between the bars and the pipe, so that from the inside he was concealed by the one, and from the outside by the other.

He then saw a great hall, lighted by a torch, and filled with armor of all sorts. There were enough pikes, swords, halberds, and muskets to arm four regiments. He gave less attention, however, to the arms than to the people engaged in distributing them, and his piercing eyes sought eagerly to distinguish their faces.

"Oh! oh!" thought he, "there is M. Cruce, little Brigard and Leclerc, who dares to call himself Bussy. Peste! the bourgeoisie is grandly represented; but the nobility--ah! M. de Mayneville presses the hand of Nicholas Poulain; what a touching fraternity! An orator, too!" continued he, as M. de Mayneville prepared to harangue the assembly.

Briquet could not hear a word, but he thought that he did not make much impression on his audience, for one shrugged his shoulders, and another turned his back. But at last they approached, seized his hand, and threw up their hats in the air. But though Briquet could not hear, we must inform our readers of what passed.

First, Cruce, Marteau, and Bussy had complained of the inaction of the Duc de Guise.

Marteau was spokesman, and said, "M. de Mayneville, you come on the part of M. le Duc de Guise, and we accept you as his ambassador; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable. After the death of his glorious father, he, when only eighteen years of age, made all good Frenchmen join this project of the Union, and enrolled us under this banner. We have risked our lives, and sacrificed our fortunes, for the triumph of this sacred cause, according to our oaths, and yet, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses--nothing is decided. Take care, M. de Mayneville, Paris will grow tired, and then what will you do?"

This speech was applauded by all the leaguers.

M. de Mayneville replied, "Gentlemen, if nothing is decided, it is because nothing is ripe. Consider our situation; M. le Duc and his brother the cardinal are at Nancy--the one is organizing an army to keep in check the Huguenots of Flanders, whom M. d'Anjou wishes to oppose to us, the other is expediting courier after courier to the clergy of France and to the pope, to induce them to adopt the Union. The Duc de Gruise knows, what you do not, that the old alliance between the Duc d'Anjou and the Béarnais is ready to be renewed, and he wishes, before coming to Paris, to be in a position to crush both heresy and usurpation."

"They are everywhere where they are not wanted," said Bussy. "Where is Madame de Montpensier, for instance?"

"She entered Paris this morning."

"No one has seen her."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who was it?"

"Salcede."

"Oh! oh!" cried all.

"But where is she?" cried Bussy. "Has she disappeared? how did you know she was here?"

"Because I accompanied her to the Porte St. Antoine."

"I heard that they had shut the gates."

"Yes, they had."

"Then, how did she pass."

"In her own fashion. Something took place at the gates of Paris this morning, gentlemen, of which you appear to be ignorant. The orders were to open only to those who brought a card of admission--signed by whom I know not. Immediately before us five or six men, some of whom were poorly clothed, passed with these cards, before our eyes. Now, who were

those men? What were the cards? Reply, gentlemen of Paris, who promised to learn everything concerning your city."

Thus Mayneville, from the accused, became the accuser, which is the great art of an orator.

"Cards and exceptional admissions!" cried Nicholas Poulain, "what can that mean?"

"If you do not know, who live here, how should I know, who live in Lorraine?"

"How did these people come?"

"Some on foot, some on horseback; some alone, and some with lackeys."

"Were they soldiers?"

"There were but two swords among the six; I think they were Gascons. This concerns you, M. Poulain, to find out. But to return to the League. Salcede, who had betrayed us, and would have done so again, not only did not speak, but retracted on the scaffold--thanks to the duchess, who, in the suite of one of these card-bearers, had the courage to penetrate the crowd even to the place of execution, and made herself known to Salcede, at the risk of being pointed out. At this sight Salcede stopped his confession, and an instant after, the executioner stopped his repentance. Thus, gentlemen, you have nothing to fear as to our

enterprise in Flanders; this secret is buried in the tomb."

It was this last speech which had so pleased all the conspirators. Their joy seemed to annoy Briquet; he slipped down from his place, and returning to the court, said to the porter, "Parma and Lorraine." The gate was opened, and he left.

History tells us what passed afterward. M. de Mayneville brought from the Guises the plan of an insurrection which consisted of nothing less than to murder all the principal people of the city who were known to be in favor with the king, and then to go through the streets crying, "Vive la Messe! death to our enemies!" In fact, to enact a second St. Bartholomew; in which, however, all hostile Catholics were to be confounded with the Protestants.