

Chapter 17

CHICOT'S PURSE.

Chicot passed the remainder of the night dreaming in his armchair, for the face of that woman brought before him a number of illustrious shades connected with many happy or terrible souvenirs, and he who had regretted his sleep on first arriving, now thought no more of it.

When morning dawned he got up, threw a cloak over his shoulders, and with the firmness of a sage, examined the bottom of his purse and his shoes. Chicot, a man of lively imagination, had made in the principal beam which ran through his house a cavity, a foot and a half long and six inches wide, which he used as a strong box, to contain 1,000 crowns in gold. He had made the following calculation: "I spend the twentieth part of one of these crowns every day; therefore I have enough to last me for 20,000 days. I cannot live so long as that, but I may live half as long, and as I grow older my wants and expenses will increase, and this will give me twenty-five or thirty good years to live, and that is enough." He was therefore tranquil as to the future.

This morning on opening his store, "Ventre de biche!" he cried, "times are hard, and I need not be delicate with Henri. This money did not come from him, but from an old uncle. If it were still night, I would go and get 100 crowns from the king; but now I have no resource but in myself or in Gorenflot."

This idea of drawing money from Gorenflot made him smile. "It would be odd," thought he, "if Gorenflot should refuse 100 crowns to the friend through whom he was appointed prior to the Jacobins. But this letter of the king's. I must go and fetch it. But these Joyeuses are in truth capable of burning my house down some night, to attract the lady to her window: and my 1,000 crowns! really, I think it would be better to hide them in the ground. However, if they burn my house the king shall pay me for it."

Thus reassured, he left the house, and at that moment saw at the window of the opposite house the servant of the unknown lady. This man, as we have said, was completely disfigured by a scar extending from the left temple to the cheek; but although bald and with a gray beard, he had a quick, active appearance, and a fresh and young-looking complexion. On seeing Chicot, he drew his hood over his head, and was going in, but Chicot called out to him:

"Neighbor! the noise here last night quite disgusted me, and I am going for some weeks to my farm; will you be so obliging as to look after my house a little?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"And if you see robbers?"

"Be easy, monsieur, I have a good arquebuse."

"I have still one more favor to ask."

"What is it?"

"I hardly like to call it out."

"I will come down to you."

He came down accordingly, with his hood drawn closely round his face, saying, as a sort of apology, "It is very cold this morning."

"Yes," said Chicot, "there is a bitter wind. Well, monsieur, I am going away."

"You told me that before!"

"Yes, I know; but I leave a good deal of money behind me."

"So much the worse; why not take it with you?"

"I cannot; but I leave it well hidden--so well, that I have nothing to fear but fire. If that should happen, will you try and look after that great beam you see on the right."

"Really, monsieur, you embarrass me. This confidence would have been far better made to a friend than to a stranger of whom you know

nothing."

"It is true, monsieur, that I do not know you; but I believe in faces, and I think yours that of an honest man."

"But, monsieur, it is possible that this music may annoy my mistress also, and then she might move."

"Well, that cannot be helped, and I must take my chance."

"Thanks, monsieur, for your confidence in a poor unknown; I will try to be worthy of it;" and bowing, he went into the house.

Chicot murmured to himself, "Poor young man, what a wreck, and I have seen him so gay and so handsome."