

Chapter 18

THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

The priory which the king had bestowed upon Gorenflot was situated near the Porte St. Antoine. This was at that time a very favorite quarter, for the king frequently visited the Chateau of Vincennes, and different noblemen had built charming residences in its neighborhood.

The priory was built on four sides of an immense court, planted with trees; it had a kitchen-garden behind, and a number of out-houses, which made it look like a small village. Two hundred monks occupied the dormitories situated at the end of the courtyard, while in the front, four large windows, with a balcony before them, gave to these apartments air and light.

It was maintained on its own resources and dependencies; its pasture land fed a troop of fifty oxen and ninety-nine sheep, for by some traditional law, no religious order was allowed to possess one hundred of anything, while certain outbuildings sheltered ninety-nine pigs of a particular breed, which were most carefully reared and fattened. The espaliers of the priory, which were exposed to the mid-day sun, furnished peaches, apricots, and grapes, while preserves of these fruits were skillfully made by a certain Brother Eusebius, who was the architect of the famous rock constructed of sweetmeats which had been presented to the two queens by the Hotel de Ville of Paris at the last

state banquet which had taken place there.

In the interior of this paradise for gourmands and sluggards, in a sumptuous apartment, we shall find Gorenflot, ornamented with an additional chin, and characterized by that sort of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and good living gives to the most vulgar faces. Half-past seven in the morning had just struck. The prior had profited by the rule which gave to him an hour's more sleep than to the other monks, and now, although he had risen, he was quietly continuing his sleep in a large armchair as soft as eider down. The furniture of the room was more mundane than religious; a carved table, covered with a rich cloth, books of religious gallantry--that singular mixture of love and devotion, which we only meet with at that epoch of art--expensive vases, and curtains of rich damask, were some of the luxuries of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot had become possessed by the grace of God, of the king, and of Chicot.

Gorenflot slept, as we have said, in his chair, when the door opened softly, and two men entered. The first was about thirty-five years of age, thin and pale, and with a look which commanded, even before he spoke; lightnings seemed to dart from his eyes when they were open, although the expression was generally softened by a careful lowering of the white eyelids. This was Brother Borromée, who had been for the last three weeks treasurer of the convent. The other was a young man about seventeen or eighteen, with piercing black eyes, a bold look, and whose turned-up sleeves displayed two strong arms quick in gesticulation.

"The prior sleeps still, Father Borromée," said he: "shall we wake him?"

"On no account, Brother Jacques."

"Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long, for we might have tried the arms this morning. Did you notice what beautiful cuirasses and arquebuses there were among them?"

"Silence! brother; you will be heard."

"How unlucky," cried the young man, impatiently, stamping his feet, "it is so fine to-day, and the court is so dry."

"We must wait, my child," replied Borromée, with a submission his glance belied.

"But why do you not order them to distribute the arms?"

"I, order!"

"Yes, you."

"You know that I am not the master here; there is the master."

"Yes, asleep, when every one else is awake," replied Jacques, impatiently.

"Let us respect his sleep," said Borromée, overturning a chair, however, as he spoke.

At the sound, Gorenflot looked up and said, sleepily, "Who is there?"

"Pardon us," said Borromée, "if we interrupt your pious meditations, but I have come to take your orders."

"Ah! good-morning, Brother Borromée; what orders do you want?"

"About the arms."

"What arms?"

"Those which your reverence ordered to be brought here."

"I, and when?"

"About a week ago."

"I ordered arms?"

"Without doubt," replied Borromée, firmly.

"And what for?"

"Your reverence said to me, 'Brother Borromée, it would be wise to

procure arms for the use of the brethren; gymnastic exercises develop the bodily forces, as pious exhortations do those of the soul."

"I said that?"

"Yes, reverend prior; and I, an unworthy but obedient brother, hastened to obey."

"It is strange, but I remember nothing about it."

"You even added this text, '_Militat spiritu, militat gladio._'"

"What!" cried Gorenflot, "I added that text!"

"I have a faithful memory," said Borromée, lowering his eyes.

"Well, if I said so, of course I had my reasons for it. Indeed, that has always been my opinion."

"Then I will finish executing your orders, reverend prior," said Borromée, retiring with Jacques.

"Go," said Gorenflot, majestically.

"Ah!" said Borromée, "I had forgotten; there is a friend in the parlor who asks to see your reverence."

"What is his name?"

"M. Robert Briquet."

"Oh! he is not a friend; only an acquaintance."

"Then your reverence will not see him?"

"Oh, yes! let him come up; he amuses me."