

Chapter 19

THE TWO FRIENDS.

When Chicot entered, the prior did not rise, but merely bent his head.

"Good-morning," said Chicot.

"Ah! there you are; you appear to have come to life again."

"Did you think me dead?"

"Diable! I never saw you."

"I was busy."

"Ah!"

Chicot knew that before being warmed by two or three bottles of old Burgundy, Gorenflot was sparing of his words; and so, considering the time of the morning, it was probable that he was still fasting, Chicot sat down to wait.

"Will you breakfast with me, M. Briquet?" asked Gorenflot.

"Perhaps."

"You must not be angry with me, if it has become impossible for me to give you as much time as I could wish."

"And who the devil asked you for your time? I did not even ask you for breakfast; you offered it."

"Certainly I offered it; but--"

"But you thought I should not accept."

"Oh! no, is that my habit?"

"Ah! a superior man like you can adopt any habits, M. le Prior."

Gorenflot looked at Chicot; he could not tell whether he was laughing at him or speaking seriously. Chicot rose.

"Why do you rise, M. Briquet?" asked Gorenflot.

"Because I am going away."

"And why are you going away, when you said you would breakfast with me?"

"I did not say I would; I said, perhaps."

"You are angry."

Chicot laughed. "I angry!" said he, "at what? Because you are impudent, ignorant, and rude? Oh! my dear monsieur, I have known you too long to be angry at these little imperfections."

Gorenflot remained stupefied.

"Adieu," said Chicot.

"Oh! do not go."

"My journey will not wait."

"You travel?"

"I have a mission."

"From whom?"

"From the king."

"A mission from the king! then you have seen him again?"

"Certainly."

"And how did he receive you?"

"With enthusiasm; he has a memory, king as he is."

"A mission from the king!" stammered Gorenflot.

"Adieu," repeated Chicot.

Gorenflot rose, and seized him by the hand. "Come! let us explain ourselves," said he.

"On what?"

"On your susceptibility to-day."

"I! I am the same to-day as on all other days."

"No."

"A simple mirror of the people I am with. You laugh, and I laugh; you are rude, so am I."

"Well! I confess I was preoccupied."

"Really!"

"Can you not be indulgent to a man who has so much work on his shoulders? Governing this priory is like governing a province: remember, I command two hundred men."

"Ah! it is too much indeed for a servant of God."

"Ah! you are ironical, M. Briquet. Have you lost all your Christian charity? I think you are envious, really."

"Envious! of whom?"

"Why, you say to yourself, Dom Modeste Gorenflot is rising--he is on the ascending scale."

"While I am on the descending one, I suppose?"

"It is the fault of your false position, M. Briquet."

"M. Gorenflot, do you remember the text, 'He who humbles himself, shall be exalted?'"

"Nonsense!" cried Gorenflot.

"Ah! now he doubts the Holy Writ; the heretic!"

"Heretic, indeed! But what do you mean, M. Briquet?"

"Nothing, but that I set out on a journey, and that I have come to make you my adieux; so, good-by."

"You shall not leave me thus."

"I must."

"A friend!"

"In grandeur one has no friends."

"Chicot!"

"I am no longer Chicot; you reproached me with my false position just now."

"But you must not go without eating; it is not wholesome."

"Oh! you live too badly here."

"Badly, here!" murmured the prior, in astonishment.

"I think so."

"You had to complain of your last dinner here?"

"I should think so."

"Diable! and of what?"

"The pork cutlets were burned."

"Oh!"

"The stuffed ears did not crack under your teeth."

"Ah!"

"The capon was soft."

"Good heavens!"

"The soup was greasy."

"Misericorde!"

"And then you have no time to give me."

"I!"

"You said so, did you not? It only remains for you to become a liar."

"Oh! I can put off my business: it was only a lady who asks me to see her."

"See her, then."

"No, no! dear M. Chicot, although she has sent me a hundred bottles of Sicilian wine."

"A hundred bottles!"

"I will not receive her, although she is probably some great lady. I will receive only you."

"You will do this?"

"To breakfast with you, dear M. Chicot--to repair my wrongs toward you."

"Which came from your pride."

"I will humble myself."

"From your idleness."

"Well! from to-morrow I will join my monks in their exercises."

"What exercises?"

"Of arms."

"Arms!"

"Yes; but it will be fatiguing to command."

"Who had this idea?"

"I, it seems."

"You! impossible!"

"No. I gave the order to Brother Borromée."

"Who is he?"

"The new treasurer."

"Where does he come from?"

"M. le Cardinal de Guise recommended him."

"In person?"

"No, by letter."

"And it is with him you decided on this?"

"Yes, my friend."

"That is to say, he proposed it and you agreed."

"No, my dear M. Chicot; the idea was entirely mine."

"And for what end?"

"To arm them."

"Oh! pride, pride! Confess that the idea was his."

"Oh! I do not know. And yet it must have been mine, for it seems that I pronounced a very good Latin text on the occasion."

"You! Latin! Do you remember it?"

"Militat spiritu--"

"Militat gladio."

"Yes, yes: that was it."

"Well, you have excused yourself so well that I pardon you. You are still my true friend."

Gorenflot wiped away a tear.

"Now let us breakfast, and I promise to be indulgent."

"Listen! I will tell the cook that if the fare be not regal, he shall be

placed in confinement; and we will try some of the wine of my penitent."

"I will aid you with my judgment."