

## Chapter 21

### BROTHER BORROMÉE.

When Chicot, sustaining the reverend prior, arrived in the courtyard, he found there two bands of one hundred men each, waiting for their commander. About fifty among the strongest and most zealous had helmets on their heads and long swords hanging to belts from their waists. Others displayed with pride bucklers, on which they loved to rattle an iron gauntlet.

Brother Borromée took a helmet from the hands of a novice, and placed it on his head. While he did so, Chicot looked at it and smiled.

"You have a handsome helmet there, Brother Borromée," said he; "where did you buy it, my dear prior?"

Gorenflot could not reply, for at that moment they were fastening a magnificent cuirass upon him, which, although spacious enough to have covered Hercules, Farnese constrained wofully the undulations of the flesh of the worthy prior, who was crying:

"Not so tight! I shall stifle; stop!"

But Borromée replied, "It made part of a lot of armor that the reverend prior bought yesterday to arm the convent."

"I!" said Gorenflot.

"Yes; do you not remember that they brought several cuirasses and casques here, according to your reverence's orders?"

"It is true," said Gorenflot.

"Ventre de biche!" thought Chicot; "my helmet is much attached to me, for, after having taken it myself to the Hotel Guise, it comes here to meet me again."

At a sign from Borromée, the monks now formed into lines, while Chicot sat down on a bench to look on.

Gorenflot stood up. "Attention," whispered Borromée to him.

Gorenflot drew a gigantic sword from the scabbard, and waving it in the air, cried in the voice of a stentor, "Attention!"

"Your reverence will fatigue yourself, perhaps, in giving the orders," said Borromée, softly; "if it please you to spare your precious health, I will command to-day."

"I should wish it, I am stifling."

Borromée bowed and placed himself at the head of the troop.

"What a complaisant servant," said Chicot.

"He is charming, I told you so."

"I am sure he does the same for you every day."

"Oh! every day. He is as submissive as a slave."

"So that you have really nothing to do here--Brother Borromée acts for you?"

"Oh! mon Dieu, yes."

It was wonderful to see Borromée with his arms in his hands, his eye dilated, and his vigorous arm wielding his sword in so skillful a manner that one would have thought him a trained soldier. Each time that Borromée gave an order, Gorenflot repeated it, adding:

"Brother Borromée is right; but I told you all that yesterday. Pass the pike from one hand to the other! Raise it to the level of the eye!"

"You are a skillful instructor," said Chicot.

"Yes, I understand it well."

"And Borromée an apt pupil."

"Oh, yes! he is very intelligent."

While the monks went through their exercises, Gorenflot said, "You shall see my little Jacques."

"Who is Jacques?"

"A nice lad, calm-looking, but strong, and quick as lightning. Look, there he is with a musket in his hand, about to fire."

"And he fires well."

"That he does."

"But stay--"

"Do you know him?"

"No; I thought I did, but I was wrong."

While they spoke, Jacques loaded a heavy musket, and placing himself at one hundred yards from the mark, fired, and the ball lodged in the center, amid the applause of the monks.

"That was well done!" cried Chicot.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Jacques, whose cheeks colored with pleasure.

"You manage your arms well," added Chicot.

"I study, monsieur."

"But he is best at the sword," said Gorenflot; "those who understand it, say so, and he is practicing from morning till night."

"Ah! let us see," said Chicot.

"No one here, except perhaps myself, is capable of fencing with him; but will you try him yourself, monsieur?" said Borromée.

"I am but a poor bourgeois," said Chicot; "formerly I have used my sword like others, but now my legs tremble and my arm is weak."

"But you practice still?"

"A little," replied Chicot, with a smile. "However, you, Brother Borromée, who are all muscle and tendon, give a lesson to Brother Jacques, I beg, if the prior will permit it."

"I shall be delighted," cried Gorenflot.

The two combatants prepared for the trial. Borromée had the advantage in height and experience. The blood mounted to the cheeks of Jacques and

animated them with a feverish color. Borromée gradually dropped all appearance of a monk, and was completely the maitre d'armes: he accompanied each thrust with a counsel or a reproach, but often the vigor and quickness of Jacques triumphed over the skill of his teacher, who was several times touched.

When they paused, Chicot said, "Jacques touched six times and Borromée nine; that is well for the scholar, but not so well for the master."

The flash of Borromée's eyes showed Chicot that he was proud.

"Monsieur," replied he, in a tone which he endeavored to render calm, "the exercise of arms is a difficult one, especially for poor monks."

"Nevertheless," said Chicot, "the master ought to be at least half as good again as his pupil, and if Jacques were calmer, I am certain he would fence as well as you."

"I do not think so," replied Borromée, biting his lips with anger.

"Well! I am sure of it."

"M. Briquet, who is so clever, had better try Jacques himself," replied Borromée, in a bitter tone.

"Oh! I am old."

"Yes, but learned."

"Ah! you mock," thought Chicot, "but wait." Then he said, "I am certain, however, that Brother Borromée, like a wise master, often let Jacques touch him out of complaisance."

"Ah!" cried Jacques, frowning in his turn.

"No," replied Borromée, "I love Jacques, certainly, but I do not spoil him in that manner. But try yourself, M. Briquet."

"Oh, no."

"Come, only one pass."

"Try," said Gorenflot.

"I will not hurt you, monsieur," said Jacques, "I have a very light hand."

"Dear child," murmured Chicot, with a strange glance. "Well!" said he, "since every one wishes it, I will try," and he rose slowly, and prepared himself with about the agility of a tortoise.