

## Chapter 23

### THE PENITENT.

Panurge advanced. He looked intelligent, but like a fox.

"Do you know the Louvre?" said Chicot.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And in the Louvre a certain Henri de Valois?"

"The king?"

"People generally call him so."

"Is it to him that I am to go?"

"Just so. You will ask to speak to him."

"Will they let me?"

"Yes, till you come to his valet-de-chambre. Your frock is a passport, for the king is very religious."

"And what shall I say to the valet-de-chambre?"

"Say you are sent by the shade."

"What shade?"

"Curiosity is a vice, my brother."

"Pardon!"

"Say then that you want the letter."

"What letter?"

"Again!"

"Ah! true."

"You will add that the shade will wait for it, going slowly along the road to Charenton."

"It is on that road, then, that I am to join you?"

"Exactly."

As Panurge went out, Chicot thought he saw some one listening at the door, but could not be sure. He fancied it was Borromée.

"Where do you go?" asked Gorenflot.

"Toward Spain."

"How do you travel?"

"Oh! anyhow; on foot, on horseback, in a carriage--just as it happens."

"Jacques will be good company for you."

"Thanks, my good friend, I have now, I think, only to make my adieux."

"Adieu; I will give you my benediction."

"Bah! it is useless between us."

"You are right; but it does for strangers," and they embraced.

"Jacques!" called the prior, "Jacques!"

Borromée appeared.

"Brother Jacques," repeated the prior.

"Jacques is gone."

"What! gone," cried Chicot.

"Did you not wish some one to go to the Louvre?"

"Yes; but it was Panurge."

"Oh! stupid that I am," cried Borromée, "I understood it to be Jacques."

Chicot frowned, but Borromée appeared so sorry that it was impossible to say much.

"I will wait, then," said he, "till Jacques returns."

Borromée bowed, frowning in his turn. "Apropos," said he, "I forgot to announce to your reverence that the unknown lady has arrived and desires to speak to you."

"Is she alone?" asked Gorenflot.

"No; she has a squire with her."

"Is she young?"

Borromée lowered his eyes. "She seems so," said he.

"I will leave you," said Chicot, "and wait in a neighboring room."

"It is far from here to the Louvre, monsieur, and Jacques may be long,

or they may hesitate to confide an important letter to a child."

"You make these reflections rather late," replied Chicot, "however, I will go on the road to Charenton and you can send him after me." And he turned to the staircase.

"Not that way, if you please," said Borromée, "the lady is coming up, and she does not wish to meet any one."

"You are right," said Chicot, smiling, "I will take the little staircase."

"Do you know the way?"

"Perfectly." And Chicot went out through a cabinet which led to another room, from which led the secret staircase. The room was full of armor, swords, muskets, and pistols.

"They hide Jacques from me," thought Chicot, "and they hide the lady, therefore of course I ought to do exactly the opposite of what they want me to do. I will wait for the return of Jacques, and I will watch the mysterious lady. Oh! here is a fine shirt of mail thrown into a corner; it is much too small for the prior, and would fit me admirably. I will borrow it from Gorenflot, and give it to him again when I return." And he quietly put it on under his doublet. He had just finished when Borromée entered.

Chicot pretended to be admiring the arms.

"Is monsieur seeking some arms to suit him?" asked Borromée.

"I! mon Dieu! what do I want with arms?"

"You use them so well."

"Theory, all theory; I may use my arms well, but the heart of a soldier is always wanting in a poor bourgeois like me. But time passes, and Jacques cannot be long; I will go and wait for him at the Croix Faubin."

"I think that will be best."

"Then you will tell him as soon as he comes?"

"Yes."

"And send him after me?"

"I will not fail."

"Thanks, Brother Borromée; I am enchanted to have made your acquaintance."

He went out by the little staircase, and Borromée locked the door behind him.

"I must see the lady," thought Chicot.

He went out of the priory and went on the road he had named; then, when out of sight, he turned back, crept along a ditch and gained, unseen, a thick hedge which extended before the priory. Here he waited to see Jacques return or the lady go out.