

Chapter 31

THE BOURGEOIS OF PARIS.

M. de Mayenne, with whom they were so much occupied at the Louvre, set out from the Hotel Guise, booted and on horseback, as though he had just arrived. He was received by the king affectionately.

"Well, cousin," said he, "you have, then, come to visit Paris?"

"Yes, sire; I come in my brother's name and my own, to recall to your majesty that you have no more faithful subjects than ourselves."

"Mordieu!" said the king, "that is so well known that you might have spared yourself this trouble. You must have had some other motive."

"Sire, I feared that your regard for us might be shaken by the reports which our enemies circulate about us."

"What reports?" asked Henri.

"What!" cried Mayenne, rather disconcerted; "has not your majesty heard any reports unfavorable to us?"

"My cousin, know once for all that I allow no one to speak ill in my presence of the Guises."

"Well, sire, I do not regret my visit, since I have had the pleasure of finding my king so well disposed toward us; but I will allow that it was needless."

"Oh! there is always something to do in Paris."

"Yes, sire; but we have our business at Soissons."

"What business, duke?"

"Your majesty's, sire."

"Ah! true; continue, Mayenne, to do as you have done; I know how to appreciate the conduct of my subjects."

The duke retired, smiling. The king rubbed his hands, and De Loignac made a sign to Ernanton, who spoke to his valet, and then followed M. de Mayenne. There was no fear of missing him, for the news of his arrival had spread, and some hundred leaguers had assembled to greet him.

As the duke reached his hotel, Ernanton saw a litter pierce through the crowd. De Mayenne approached it, and the curtains were opened, and Ernanton thought he recognized his former page. The litter disappeared under the gateway, and Mayenne followed; an instant after, M. de Mayneville appeared on the balcony, and thanked the Parisians in the duke's name, but begged them to disperse and go home.

All went away accordingly, except ten men, who had entered after the duke. These were the deputies of the League, who were sent to thank M. de Mayenne for his visit, and to beg that his brothers would come also. They had a number of plans, which only wanted the sanction and support of the chiefs. Bussy Leclerc came to announce that he had instructed the monks of three monasteries in the use of arms, and had enrolled 500 bourgeois in a regiment.

Lachapelle-Marteau had worked on the magistrates and had 200 black robes ready for councilors. Brigard had gained the merchants of the Rue Lombards and the Rue St. Denis. Cruce could answer for the University of Paris, and Delbar promised for all the sailors in the port, a dangerous body of 500 men. Each of the others had something to offer, even Nicholas Poulain, the friend of Chicot.

When Mayenne had heard them all, he said, "I admire your strength, but I do not see the end you propose to yourselves."

Bussy Leclerc answered, "We want a change, and as we are the strongest--"

"But how will you arrive at this change?"

"It seems to me," replied Bussy, boldly, "that as the idea of the Union came from our chiefs, it is for them to point out its aim."

"You are perfectly right," said Mayenne, "but it is also for them to judge of the proper time for action. The troops of M. de Guise may be ready, but he does not give the signal until he thinks fit."

"But, monseigneur, we are impatient."

"For what?"

"To arrive at our end. We also have our plan."

"Ah! that is different; if you have your own plan, I say no more."

"Yes, monseigneur; but may we count on your aid?"

"Doubtless, if this plan be approved by my brother and myself."

"We believe it will."

"Let me hear it, then."

The leaguers looked at each other, then Marteau advanced.

"Monseigneur," said he, "we think the success of our plan certain. There are particular points where all the strength of the city lies--the great and the little Chatelet, the Hotel de Ville, the arsenal and the Louvre."

"It is true."

"All these are guarded, but could easily be surprised."

"I admit this also."

"The town itself, however, is defended outside, firstly, by the chevalier of the watch with his archers. We thought of seizing him in his house, which could be easily done, as it is a lonely place."

Mayenne shook his head. "However lonely," said he, "you cannot force a door and fire twenty shots without attracting attention."

"We have foreseen this objection, but one of the archers of the watch is on our side. In the middle of the night, two or three of us will go and knock at the door; the archer will open, and tell his chief that the king wishes to speak to him, which would not appear strange, as he is often sent for in this manner. Once the door is open, we will introduce ten men--sailors who lodge near--who will soon finish him."

"Murder him?"

"Yes, monseigneur. At the same time we will force the doors of the other functionaries who might take his place, such as M. d'O, M. de Chiverny, and M. le Procureur Laguesle. St. Bartholomew has taught us how to manage."

"This is all well, gentlemen; but you have not told me if you mean, at the same time, to force the doors of the Louvre--that strong and well-guarded fortress. Believe me, the king is not so easily taken as the chevalier of the watch."

"We have chosen four thousand men, who hate the king, for this undertaking."

"And you think that enough?"

"Doubtless; we shall be ten to one."

"Why, the Swiss are four thousand strong."

"Yes, but they are at Lagny, and that is eight leagues from Paris, and supposing they were to send for them, it would take two hours for the messenger to go on horseback, and eight for them to return on foot, so that they would just arrive in time to be stopped at the gates, and in a few hours we should be masters of Paris."

"Very good; but supposing all this accomplished, the watch disarmed, the authorities disappeared, and all obstacles removed, what do you mean to do?"

"Form a new government of honest people. As for ourselves, so long as our commerce is successful, and we have enough for our wives and

children, we care for little else. Some among us might desire a command, and they should have it. We are not difficult to satisfy."

"I know you are all honest, and would not suffer a mixture in your ranks."

"No, no!" cried several voices.

"Now, M. Poulain," said the duke, "are there many idlers and bad people in the Ile de France?"

Nicholas Poulain, who had hitherto kept in the background, was now forced to advance. "Certainly, monseigneur, there are a great many," he replied.

"Could you guess at their number?"

"About four thousand thieves, three thousand or more beggars, and four or five hundred assassins."

"Well, there are at least eight thousand good-for-nothings; of what religion are they?"

Poulain laughed. "Of all, monseigneur; or, rather, of none; gold is their god, and blood their prophet."

"Yes; but their politics? Are they Valois, Leaguers, Navarrais, or

what?"

"Robbers only."

"Monseigneur," said Cruce, "do not suppose that we mean to take these people for allies!"

"No, I do not suppose so; and that is what disturbs me."

"And why so, monseigneur?" they asked with surprise.

"Because as soon as there are no longer magistrates in Paris, as soon as there is no longer royalty, or public force, or anything to restrain them, they will begin to pillage your shops while you fight, and your houses while you occupy the Louvre. Sometimes they will join the Swiss against you, and sometimes you against the Swiss, so that they will always be the strongest."

"Diable!" cried the deputies, looking at each other.

"I think this is a question for grave consideration, gentlemen," said the duke. "I will think it over, and endeavor to find the means of overcoming the difficulty; your interests, before our own, has ever been our maxim."

The deputies gave a murmur of approbation.

"Now, gentlemen, permit a man who has traveled twenty-four leagues on horseback in forty-eight hours to seek a little sleep."

"We humbly take our leave, monseigneur," said Brigard; "what day shall you fix for our next meeting?"

"As soon as possible, gentlemen; to-morrow, or the day after. Au revoir."

No sooner had he disappeared than a door opened, and a woman rushed in.

"The duchesse!" they cried.

"Yes, gentlemen; who comes to save you from your embarrassments. What the Hebrews could not do, Judith did; hope, then, gentlemen, for I also have my plan;" and she disappeared through the same door as her brother.

"Tudieu!" cried Bussy Leclerc; "I believe that is the man of the family."

"Oh!" murmured Nicholas Poulain, "I wish I were out of all this."