

Chapter 90

HIS HIGHNESS MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC DE GUISE.

On Sunday the 10th of June, toward eleven o'clock in the day, the whole court were assembled in the apartment leading to the cabinet in which, since his meeting with Diana de Meridor, the Duc d'Anjou was dying by slow but sure degrees. Neither the science of the physicians, nor his mother's despair, nor the prayers which the king had desired to be offered up, had been successful in averting the fatal termination.

Miron, on the morning of this same 10th of June, assured the king that all chance of recovery was hopeless, and that Francois d'Anjou would not outlive the day. The king pretended to display extreme grief, and turning toward those who were present, said, "This will fill my enemies full of hope."

To which remark the queen-mother replied: "Our destiny is in the hands of Heaven, my son."

Whereupon Chicot, who was standing humbly and reverently near Henri III., added in a low voice:

"Let us help Heaven when we can, sire."

Nevertheless, the dying man, toward half-past eleven, lost both color and sight; his mouth, which, up to that moment, had remained open,

became closed; the flow of blood which for several days past had terrified all who were near him, as the bloody sweat of Charles IX. had similarly done at an earlier period, had suddenly ceased, and hands and feet became icy cold. Henri was sitting beside the head of the couch whereon his brother was extended. Catherine was standing in the recess in which the bed was placed, holding her dying son's hand in hers.

The bishop of Chateau-Thierry and the Cardinal de Joyeuse repeated the prayers for the dying, which were joined in by all who were present, kneeling, and with their hands clasped reverently together. Toward mid-day, the dying man opened his eyes; the sun's rays broke through a cloud and inundated the bed with a flood of light. Francois, who, up to that moment, had been unable to move a single finger, and whose mind had been obscured like the sun which had just re-appeared, raised one of his arms toward heaven with a horror-stricken gesture.

He looked all round the room, heard the murmuring of the prayers, grew conscious of his illness as well as of his weakness, became aware of his critical position, perhaps because he already caught a glimpse of that unseen and terrible future, the abode of certain souls after they have quitted their earthly prison.

He thereupon uttered a loud and piercing cry, and struck his forehead with a force which made every one tremble.

Then, knitting his brows, as if one of the mysterious incidents of his life had just recurred to him, he murmured:

"Bussy! Diana!"

This latter name had been overheard by none but Catherine, so weakened had the dying man's voice become before pronouncing it.

With the last syllable of that name Francois d'Anjou breathed his last sigh.

At this very moment, by a singular coincidence, the sun, which had gilded with its rays the royal arms of France, and the golden fleurs-de-lis, was again obscured: so that the fleurs-de-lis which had been so brilliantly illumined but a moment before, became as dark and gloomy as the azure ground which they had but recently studded with constellations almost as resplendent as those whereon the eye of the dreamer rests in his upward gaze toward heaven.

Catherine let her son's hand fall.

Henri III. shuddered, and leaned tremblingly on Chicot's shoulder, who shuddered too, but from a feeling of awe which every Christian feels in the presence of the dead.

Miron placed a golden spatula on Francois' lips; after a few seconds, he looked at it carefully and said:

"Monseigneur is dead."

Whereupon a deep prolonged groan arose from the antechamber, like an accompaniment to the psalm which the cardinal murmured: "Cedant iniquitates meæ ad vocem deprecationis meæ."

"Dead," repeated the king, making the sign of the cross as he sat in his fauteuil; "my brother, my brother!"

"The sole heir of the throne of France," murmured Catherine, who, having quitted the bed whereon the corpse was lying, had placed herself beside the only son who now remained to her.

"Oh!" said Henri, "this throne of France is indeed large for a king without issue; the crown is indeed large for a single head. No children! no heirs! Who will succeed me?"

Hardly had he pronounced these words when a loud noise was heard on the staircase and in the apartments.

Nambu hurriedly entered the death chamber, and announced--"His Highness
Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

Struck by this reply to the question which he had addressed to himself, the king turned pale, rose, and looked at his mother. Catherine was paler than her son. At the announcement of the horrible misfortune which mere chance had foretold to his race, she grasped the king's hand,

and pressed it, as if to say--

"There lies the danger; but fear nothing, I am near you."

The son and mother, under the influence of the same terror and the same menace, had comprehended each other.

The duke entered, followed by his officers. He entered, holding his head loftily erect, although his eyes ranged from the king to the death-bed of his brother with a glance not free from a certain embarrassment.

Henri III. stood up, and with that supreme majesty of carriage which, on certain occasions, his singularly poetic nature enabled him to assume, checked the duke's further progress by a kingly gesture, and pointed to the royal corpse upon the bed, the covering of which was in disorder from his brother's dying agonies. The duke bowed his head, and slowly fell on his knees. All around him, too, bowed their heads and bent their knees. Henri III., together with his mother, alone remained standing, and bent a last look, full of pride, upon those around him. Chicot observed this look, and murmured in a low tone of voice, "Dejiciet potentes de sede et exaltabit humiles"--"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek."

POSTSCRIPT.

A few words with reference to the principal characters in the novel of the "Forty-five Guardsmen" are necessary to complete the story.

Diana de Monsoreau, having taken the vows at the Convent des Hospitalières, survived the Duc d'Anjou only two years. Of Remy, her faithful companion, we hear no more: he disappeared without leaving a trace behind him.

History, however, informs us more fully as to the others. The Duc de Guise, having at last broken into open rebellion against Henri III., was so far successful, that with the aid of the League he compelled the king to fly from Paris. A hollow reconciliation was, however, patched up between them, the Duc de Guise stipulating that he should be appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom; but no sooner had the king returned to the Louvre than he determined on the assassination of the duke. He sounded Crillon, the leader of the "Forty-five," on the subject, but this noble soldier refused to have anything to do with it, offering, however, to challenge him to single combat. De Loignac was less scrupulous, and we know the result; the Duc de Guise and his brother the cardinal were both murdered. Ten days after this event, Catherine de Medicis, the queen-mother, died, regretted by none.

The Parisians, exasperated by the murder of the Duc de Guise, declared his brother, the Duc de Mayenne, the head of the League, and rose against the king, who was again obliged to fly. He begged the king of

Navarre for aid, who promptly responded to the call, and they were shortly before Paris with a united army of Catholics and Huguenots. Henri III. was, however, pursued by the relentless hate of the clever and unscrupulous Duchesse de Montpensier. She worked so skillfully on the fanatical mind of the young Jacobin friar, Jacques Clement, that he undertook the death of the king. He entered the camp with letters for Henri, whom he stabbed while reading them. The king died on the 2d August, 1589, after having declared Henri of Navarre his successor.

Of the subsequent life and adventures of Chicot, unfortunately nothing authentic is known. TRANSLATOR.