DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

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The Forty-Five Guardsmen

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
THE PORTE ST. ANTOINE

On the 26th of October, 1585, the barriers of the Porte St. Antoine were, contrary to custom, still closed at half-past ten in the morning. A quarter of an hour after, a guard of twenty Swiss, the favorite troops of Henri III., then king, passed through these barriers, which were again closed behind them. Once through, they arranged themselves along the hedges, which, outside the barrier, bordered each side of the road.

There was a great crowd collected there, for numbers of peasants and other people had been stopped at the gates on their way into Paris. They were arriving by three different roads – from Montreuil, from Vincennes, and from St. Maur; and the crowd was growing more dense every moment. Monks from the convent in the neighborhood, women seated on pack-saddles, and peasants in their carts, and all, by their questions more or less pressing, formed a continual murmur, while some voices were raised above the others in shriller tones of anger or complaint.

There were, besides this mass of arrivals, some groups who seemed to have come from the city. These, instead of looking at the gate, fastened their gaze on the horizon, bounded by the Convent of the Jacobins, the Priory of Vincennes, and the Croix Faubin, as though they were expecting to see some one arrive. These groups consisted chiefly of bourgeois, warmly wrapped up, for the weather was cold, and the piercing northeast wind seemed trying to tear from the trees all the few remaining leaves which clung sadly to them.

Three of these bourgeois were talking together – that is to say, two talked and one listened, or rather seemed to listen, so occupied was he in looking toward Vincennes. Let us turn our attention to this last. He was a man who must be tall when he stood upright, but at this moment his long legs were bent under him, and his arms, not less long in proportion, were crossed over his breast. He was leaning against the hedge, which almost hid his face, before which he also held up his hand as if for further concealment. By his side a little man, mounted on a hillock, was talking to another tall man who was constantly slipping off the summit of the same hillock, and at each slip catching at the button of his neighbor's doublet.

"Yes, Maitre Miton," said the little man to the tall one, "yes, I tell you that there will be 100,000 people around the scaffold of Salcede – 100,000 at least. See, without counting those already on the Place de Greve, or who came there from different parts of Paris, the number of people here; and this is but one gate out of sixteen."

"One hundred thousand! that is much, Friard," replied M. Miton. "Be sure many people will follow my example, and not go to see this unlucky man quartered, for fear of an uproar."

"M. Miton, there will be none, I answer for it. Do you not think so, monsieur?" continued he, turning to the long-armed man. – "What?" said the other, as though he had not heard.

"They say there will be nothing on the Place de Greve to-day."

"I think you are wrong, and that there will be the execution of Salcede."

"Yes, doubtless: but I mean that there will be no noise about it."

"There will be the noise of the blows of the whip, which they will give to the horses."

"You do not understand: by noise I mean tumult. If there were likely to be any, the king would not have had a stand prepared for him and the two queens at the Hotel de Ville."

"Do kings ever know when a tumult will take place?" replied the other, shrugging his shoulders with an air of pity.

"Oh, oh!" said M. Miton; "this man talks in a singular way. Do you know who he is, compere?"

"No."

"Then why do you speak to him? You are wrong. I do not think he likes to talk."

"And yet it seems to me," replied Friard, loud enough to be heard by the stranger, "that one of the greatest pleasures in life is to exchange thoughts."

"Yes, with those whom we know well," answered M. Miton.

"Are not all men brothers, as the priests say?"

"They were primitively; but in times like ours the relationship is singularly loosened. Talk low, if you must talk, and leave the stranger alone."

"But I know you so well, I know what you will reply, while the stranger may have something new to tell me."

"Hush! he is listening."

"So much the better; perhaps he will answer. Then you think, monsieur," continued he, turning again toward him, "that there will be a tumult?"

"I did not say so."

"No; but I believe you think so."

"And on what do you found your surmise, M. Friard?"

"Why, he knows me!"

"Have I not named you two or three times?" said Miton.

"Ah! true. Well, since he knows me, perhaps he will answer. Now, monsieur, I believe you agree with me, or else would be there, while, on the contrary, you are here."

"But you, M. Friard, since you think the contrary of what you think I think, why are you not at the Place de Greve? I thought the spectacle would have been a joyful one to all friends of the king. Perhaps you will reply that you are not friends of the king; but of MM. de Guise, and that you are waiting here for the Lorraines, who they say are about to enter Paris in order to deliver M. de Salcede."

"No, monsieur," replied the little man, visibly frightened at this suggestion; "I wait for my wife, Nicole Friard, who has gone to take twenty-four tablecloths to the priory of the Jacobins, having the honor to be washerwoman to Dom. Modeste Gorenflot, the abbe."

"Look, compere," cried Miton, "at what is passing."

M. Friard, following the direction of his friend's finger, saw them closing yet another door, while a party of Swiss placed themselves before it. "How! more barriers!" cried he.

"What did I tell you?" said Miton.

At the sight of this new precaution, a long murmur of astonishment and some cries of discontent proceeded from the crowd.

"Clear the road! Back!" cried an officer.

This maneuver was not executed without difficulty; the people in carts and on horseback tried to go back, and nearly crushed the crowd behind them. Women cried and men swore, while those who could escape, did, overturning the others.

"The Lorraines! the Lorraines!" cried a voice in the midst of this tumult.

"Oh!" cried Miton, trembling, "let us fly."

"Fly! and where?" said Friard.

"Into this inclosure," answered Miton tearing his hands by seizing the thorns of the hedge.

"Into that inclosure, it is not so easy. I see no opening, and you cannot climb a hedge that is higher than I am."

"I will try," returned Miton, making new efforts.

"Oh! take care, my good woman," cried Friard, in a tone of distress; "your ass is on my feet. Oh, monsieur, take care, your horse is going to kick."

While M. Miton was vainly trying to climb the hedge, and M. Friard to find an opening through which to push himself, their neighbor quietly opened his long legs and strode over the hedge with as much ease as one might have leaped it on horseback. M. Miton imitated him at last after much detriment to his hands and clothes; but poor Friard could not succeed, in spite of all his efforts, till the stranger, stretching out his long arms, and seizing him by the collar of his doublet, lifted him over.

"Ah! monsieur," said he, when he felt himself on the ground, "on the word of Jean Friard, you are a real Hercules; your name, monsieur? the name of my deliverer?"

"I am called Briquet – Robert Briquet, monsieur."

"You have saved me, M. Briquet – my wife will bless you. But apropos; mon Dieu! she will be stifled in this crowd. Ah! cursed Swiss, only good to crush people!"

As he spoke, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and, looking round and seeing that it was a Swiss, he took to flight, followed by Miton. The other man laughed quietly, then turning to the Swiss, said:

"Are the Lorraines coming?"

"No."

"Then why do they close the door. I do not understand it."

"There is no need that you should," replied the Swiss, laughing at his own wit.

CHAPTER II.
WHAT PASSED OUTSIDE THE PORTE ST. ANTOINE

One of the groups was formed of a considerable number of citizens. They surrounded four or five of a martial appearance, whom the closing of the doors annoyed very much, as it seemed, for they cried with all their might, "The door! the door!"

Robert Briquet advanced toward this group, and began to cry also, "The door! the door!"

One of the cavaliers, charmed at this, turned toward him and said, "Is it not shameful, monsieur, that they should close the gates in open day, as though the Spaniards or the English were besieging Paris?"

Robert Briquet looked attentively at the speaker, who seemed to be about forty-five years of age, and the principal personage in the group. "Yes, monsieur," replied he, "you are right: but may I venture to ask what you think their motive is for these precautions?"

"Pardieu! the fear they have lest some one should eat their Salcede."

"Diable!" said a voice, "a sad meal."

Robert Briquet turned toward the speaker, whose voice had a strong Gascon accent, and saw a young man from twenty to twenty-five, resting his hand on the crupper of the horse of the first speaker. His head was bare; he had probably lost his hat in the melée.

"But as they say," replied Briquet, "that this Salcede belongs to M. de Guise – "

"Bah! they say that!"

"Then you do not believe it, monsieur?"

"Certainly not," replied the cavalier, "doubtless, if he had, the duke would not have let him be taken, or at all events would not have allowed him to have been carried from Brussels to Paris bound hand and foot, without even trying to rescue him."

"An attempt to rescue him," replied Briquet, "would have been very dangerous, because, whether it failed or succeeded, it would have been an avowal, on the duke's part, that he had conspired against the Duc d'Anjou."

"M. de Guise would not, I am sure, have been restrained by such considerations; therefore, as he has not defended Salcede, it is certain that he is not one of his men."

"Excuse me, monsieur, if I insist, but it is not I who invent, for it appears that Salcede has confessed."

"Where? before the judges?"

"No, monsieur; at the torture."

"They asserted that he did, but they do not repeat what he said."

"Excuse me again, monsieur, but they do."

"And what did he say?" cried the cavalier impatiently. "As you seem so well informed, what were his words?"

"I cannot certify that they were his words," replied Briquet, who seemed to take a pleasure in teazing the cavalier.

"Well, then, those they attribute to him."

"They assert that he has confessed that he conspired for M. de Guise."

"Against the king, of course?"

"No; against the Duc d'Anjou."

"If he confessed that – "

"Well?"

"Well, he is a poltroon!" said the cavalier, frowning.

"Ah! monsieur, the boot and the thumb-screw make a man confess many things."

"Alas! that is true, monsieur."

"Bah!" interrupted the Gascon, "the boot and the thumb-screw, nonsense: if Salcede confessed that, he was a knave, and his patron another."

"You speak loudly, monsieur," said the cavalier.

"I speak as I please; so much the worse for those who dislike it."

"More calmly," said a voice at once soft and imperative, of which Briquet vainly sought the owner.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort over himself, and then said quietly to the Gascon, "Do you know him of whom you speak?"

"Salcede?" – "Yes."

"Not in the least."

"And the Duc de Guise?"

"Still less."

"Well, then, Salcede is a brave man."

"So much the better: he will die bravely."

"And know that, when the Duc de Guise wishes to conspire, he conspires for himself."

"What do I care?"

"What!"

"Mayneville! Mayneville!" murmured the same voice.

"Yes, mordieu! what do I care?" continued the Gascon, "I came to Paris on business, and find the gates closed on account of this execution – that is all I care for."

At this moment there was a sound of trumpets. The Swiss had cleared the middle of the road, along which a crier proceeded, dressed in a flowered tunic, and bearing on his breast a scutcheon on which was embroidered the arms of Paris. He read from a paper in his hand the following proclamation:

"This is to make known to our good people of Paris and its environs, that its gates will be closed for one hour, and that none can enter during that time; and this by the will of the king and the mayor of Paris."

The crowd gave vent to their discontent in a long hoot, to which, however, the crier seemed indifferent. The officer commanded silence, and when it was obtained, the crier continued:

"All who are the bearers of a sign of recognition, or are summoned by letter or mandate, are exempt from this rule. Given at the hotel of the provost of Paris, 26th of October, 1585."

Scarcely had the crier ceased to speak, when the crowd began to undulate like a serpent behind the line of soldiers.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried all.

"Oh! it is to keep us out of Paris," said the cavalier, who had been speaking in a low voice to his companions. "These guards, this crier, these bars, and these trumpets are all for us; we ought to be proud of them."

"Room!" cried the officer in command; "make room for those who have the right to pass!"

"Cap de Bious! I know who will pass, whoever is kept out!" said the Gascon, leaping into the cleared space. He walked straight up to the officer who had spoken, and who looked at him for some moments in silence, and then said:

"You have lost your hat, it appears, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Is it in the crowd?"

"No. I had just received a letter from my sweetheart, and was reading it, cap de Bious! near the river, about a mile from here, when a gust of wind carried away both my letter and my hat. I ran after the letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond; I caught my letter, but my hat

was carried by the wind into the middle of the river. It will make the fortune of the poor devil who finds it." – "So that you have none?"

"Oh, there are plenty in Paris, cap de Bious! I will buy a more magnificent one, and put in it a still larger diamond."

The officer shrugged his shoulders slightly, and said, "Have you a card?"

"Certainly I have one – or rather two."

"One is enough, if it be the right one."

"But it cannot be wrong – oh, no, cap de Bious! Is it to M. de Loignac that I have the honor of speaking?"

"It is possible," said the officer coldly, and evidently not much charmed at the recognition.

"M. de Loignac, my compatriot?"

"I do not say no."

"My cousin!"

"Good! Your card?"

"Here it is;" and the Gascon drew out the half of a card, carefully cut.

"Follow me," said De Loignac, without looking at it, "and your companions, if you have any. We will verify the admissions."

The Gascon obeyed, and five other gentlemen followed him. The first was adorned with a magnificent cuirass, so marvelous in its work that it seemed as if it had come out of the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. However, as the make of this cuirass was somewhat old-fashioned, its magnificence attracted more laughter than admiration; and it is true that no other part of the costume of the individual in question corresponded with this magnificence. The second, who was lame, was followed by a gray-headed lackey, who looked like the precursor of Sancho Panza, as his master did of Don Quixote. The third carried a child of ten months old in his arms, and was followed by a woman, who kept a tight grasp of his leathern belt, while two other children, one four and the other five years old, held by her dress.

The fourth was attached to an enormous sword, and the fifth, who closed the troop, was a handsome young man, mounted on a black horse. He looked like a king by the side of the others. Forced to regulate his pace by those who preceded him, he was advancing slowly, when he felt a sudden pull at the scabbard of his sword; he turned round, and saw that it had been done by a slight and graceful young man with black hair and sparkling eyes.

"What do you desire, monsieur?" said the cavalier.

"A favor, monsieur."

"Speak; but quickly, I pray you, for I am waited for."

"I desire to enter into the city, monsieur; an imperious necessity demands my presence there. You, on your part, are alone, and want a page to do justice to your appearance."

"Well?"

"Take me in, and I will be your page."

"Thank you; but I do not wish to be served by any one."

"Not even by me," said the young man, with such a strange glance, that the cavalier felt the icy reserve in which he had tried to close his heart melting away.

"I meant to say that I could be served by no one," said he.

"Yes, I know you are not rich, M. Ernanton de Carmainges," said the young page. The cavalier started, but the lad went on, "therefore I do not speak of wages; it is you, on the contrary, who, if you grant what I ask, shall be paid a hundred-fold for the service you will render me; let me enter with you, then, I beg, remembering that he who now begs, has often commanded." Then, turning to the group of which we have already spoken, the lad said, "I shall pass; that is the most important thing; but you, Mayneville, try to do so also if possible."

"It is not everything that you should pass," replied Mayneville; "it is necessary that he should see you."

"Make yourself easy; once I am through, he shall see me."

"Do not forget the sign agreed upon."

"Two fingers on the mouth, is it not?"

"Yes; success attend you."

"Well, monsieur page," said the man on the black horse, "are you ready?"

"Here I am," replied he, jumping lightly on the horse, behind the cavalier, who immediately joined his friends who were occupied in exhibiting their cards and proving their right to enter.

"Ventre de Biche!" said Robert Briquet; "what an arrival of Gascons!"

CHAPTER III.
THE EXAMINATION

The process of examination consisted in comparing the half card with another half in the possession of the officer.

The Gascon with the bare head advanced first.

"Your name?" said De Loignac.

"It is on the card."

"Never mind; tell it to me."

"Well, I am called Perducas de Pincornay."

Then, throwing his eyes on the card. M. de Loignac read. "Perducas de Pincornay, 26 October, 1585, at noon precisely. Porte St. Antoine."

"Very good; it is all right," said he, "enter. Now for you," said he to the second.

The man with the cuirass advanced.

"Your card?" said De Loignac.

"What! M. de Loignac, do you not know the son of your old friend, whom you have danced twenty times on your knee?" – "No."

"I am Pertinax de Montcrabeau," replied the young man, with astonishment. "Do you not know me now?"

"When I am on service, I know no one. Your card, monsieur?"

He held it out. "All right! pass," said De Loignac.

The third now approached, whose card was demanded in the same terms. The man plunged his hand into a little goatskin pouch which he wore, but in vain; he was so embarrassed by the child in his arms, that he could not find it.

"What the devil are you doing with that child?" asked De Loignac.

"He is my son, monsieur."

"Well; put your son down. You are married, then?" – "Yes, monsieur."

"At twenty?"

"They marry young among us; you ought to know that, M. de Loignac, who were married at eighteen."

"Oh!" thought De Loignac, "here is another who knows me."

"And why should he not be married?" cried the woman advancing. "Yes, monsieur, he is married, and here are two other children who call him father, besides this great lad behind. Advance, Militor, and bow to M. de Loignac."

A lad of sixteen, vigorous and agile, with an incipient mustache, stepped forward.

"They are my wife's sons, monsieur."

"In Heaven's name, your card!" cried De Loignac.

"Lardille!" cried the Gascon to his wife, "come and help me."

Lardille searched the pouch and pockets of her husband, but uselessly. "We must have lost it!" she cried.

"Then I arrest you."

The man turned pale, but said, "I am Eustache de Miradoux, and M. de St. Maline is my patron."

"Oh!" said De Loignac, a little mollified at this name, "well, search again."

They turned to their pockets again, and began to re-examine them.

"Why, what do I see there, on the sleeve of that blockhead?" said De Loignac.

"Yes, yes!" cried the father. "I remember, now, Lardille sewed it on."

"That you might carry something, I suppose, you great lazy fellow."

The card was looked at and found all right, and the family passed on in the same order as before.

The fourth man advanced and gave his name as Chalabre. It was found correct, and he also entered.

Then came M. de Carmainges. He got off his horse and presented his card, while the page hid his face by pretending to adjust the saddle.

"The page belongs to you?" asked De Loignac.

"You see, he is attending to my horse."

"Pass, then."

"Quick, my master," said the page.

Behind these men the door was closed, much to the discontent of the crowd. Robert Briquet, meanwhile, had drawn near to the porter's lodge, which had two windows, one looking toward Paris and the other into the country. From this post he saw a man, who, coming from Paris at full gallop, entered the lodge and said, "Here I am, M. de Loignac."

"Good. Where do you come from?"

"From the Porte St. Victor."

"Your number?" – "Five."

"The cards?"

"Here they are."

De Loignac took them, examined them, and wrote on a slate the number five. The messenger left, and two others appeared, almost immediately. One came from the Porte Bourdelle, and brought the number four, the other from the Porte du Temple, and announced six. Then came four others. The first from the Porte St. Denis, with the number five; the next from the Porte St. Jacques, with the number three; the third from the Porte St. Honore, with the number eight; and the fourth from the Porte Montmartre, with the number four. Lastly came a messenger, from the Porte Bussy, who announced four. De Loignac wrote all these down, added them to those who had entered the Porte St. Antoine, and found the total number to be forty-five.

"Good!" said he. "Now open the gates, and all may enter."

The gates were thrown open, and then horses, mules, and carts, men, women, and children, pressed into Paris, at the risk of suffocating each other, and in a quarter of an hour all the crowd had vanished.

Robert Briquet remained until the last. "I have seen enough," said he: "would it be very advantageous to me to see M. Salcede torn in four pieces? No, pardieu! Besides, I have renounced politics; I will go and dine."

CHAPTER IV.
HIS MAJESTY HENRI THE THIRD

M. Friard was right when he talked of 100,000 persons as the number of spectators who would meet on the Place de Greve and its environs, to witness the execution of Salcede. All Paris appeared to have a rendezvous at the Hotel de Ville; and Paris is very exact, and never misses a fete; and the death of a man is a fete, especially when he has raised so many passions that some curse and others bless him.

The spectators who succeeded in reaching the Place saw the archers and a large number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a little scaffold raised about four feet from the ground. It was so low as to be visible only to those immediately surrounding it, or to those who had windows overlooking the Place. Four vigorous white horses beat the ground impatiently with their hoofs, to the great terror of the women, who had either chosen this place willingly, or had been forcibly pushed there.

These horses were unused, and had never done more work than to support, by some chance, on their broad backs the chubby children of the peasants. After the scaffold and the horses, what next attracted all looks was the principal window of the Hotel de Ville, which was hung with red velvet and gold, and ornamented with the royal arms. This was for the king. Half-past one had just struck when this window was filled. First came Henri III., pale, almost bald, although he was at that time only thirty-five, and with a somber expression, always a mystery to his subjects, who, when they saw him appear, never knew whether to say "Vive le Roi!" or to pray for his soul. He was dressed in black, without jewels or orders, and a single diamond shone in his cap, serving as a fastening to three short plumes. He carried in his hand a little black dog that his sister-in-law Marie Stuart had sent him from her prison, and on which his fingers looked as white as alabaster.

Behind the king came Catherine de Medicis, almost bowed by age, for she might be sixty-six or sixty-seven, but still carrying her head firm and erect, and darting bitter glances from under her thick eyebrows. At her side appeared the melancholy but sweet face of the queen, Louise de Torraine. Catherine came as a triumph, she as a punishment. Behind them came two handsome young men, brothers, the eldest of whom smiled with wonderful beauty, and the younger with great melancholy. The one was Anne, duc de Joyeuse, and the other Henri de Joyeuse, comte de Bouchage. The people had for these favorites of the king none of the hatred which they had felt toward Maugiron, Quelus, and Schomberg.

Henri saluted the people gravely; then, turning to the young men, he said, "Anne, lean against the tapestry; it may last a long time."

"I hope so," said Catherine.

"You think, then, that Salcede will speak, mother?"

"God will, I trust, give this confusion to our enemies."

Henri looked doubtful.

"My son," said Catherine, "do I not see some tumult yonder?"

"What clear sight you have! I believe you are right. I have such bad eyes, and yet I am not old. Yes, here comes Salcede."

"He fears," said Catherine; "he will speak."

"If he has strength," said the king. "See, his head falls about like that of a corpse."

"He is frightful," said Joyeuse.

"How should a man be handsome whose thoughts are so ugly? Have I not explained to you, Anne, the secret connection of the physical and the moral, as Hippocrates and Galen understood and expounded them?"

"I admit it, sire, but I am not a good pupil. I have sometimes seen very ugly men very good soldiers. Have you not, Henri?" said he, turning to his brother: but he looked without seeing, and heard without understanding, so the king answered for him.

"Eh, mon Dieu! my dear Anne, who says this man is not brave? He is brave, pardieu, like a wolf, a bear, or a serpent. He burned in his house a Norman gentleman, his enemy; he has fought ten duels, and killed three of his adversaries. He has now been taken in the act of coining, for which he has been condemned to death."

"That is a well-filled existence, but which will soon finish."

"On the contrary," said Catherine, "I trust it will finish as slowly as possible."

"Madame," said Joyeuse, "I see those four stout horses, who appear to me so impatient of their state of inactivity that I do not believe in a long resistance of the muscles, tendons, and cartilages of M. de Salcede."

"Yes, but my son is merciful," replied she, with the smile peculiar to herself, "and he will tell the men to go gently."

"But, madame," said the queen timidly, "I heard you say this morning that there were only to be two draws?"

"Yes, if he conducts himself well; in that case all will be finished as soon as possible, and, as you interest yourself so much in him, you had better let him know as much, my daughter."

"Madame," said the queen, "I have not your strength when looking at suffering."

"Do not look, then."

The king heard nothing; he was all eyes. They were lifting Salcede from the car on to the scaffold, round which the archers had cleared a large space, so that it was distinctly visible to all eyes.

Salcede was about thirty-five years of age, strong and vigorous; and his pale features, on which stood drops of blood, were animated alternately by hope and anguish. He was no vulgar assassin; he was of good birth, and even distantly related to the queen, and had been a captain of some renown. Those bound hands had valiantly borne the sword, and that livid head, on which were depicted the terrors of death, had conceived great designs. Therefore, to many of the spectators, he was a hero; to others, a victim; some looked on him as an assassin; but the crowd seldom despises those very great criminals who are registered in the book of history as well as in that of justice. Thus they told, in the crowd, that Salcede was of a race of warriors; that his father had fought against the Cardinal de Lorraine, but that the son had joined with the Guises to destroy in Flanders the rising power of the Duc d'Anjou, so hated by the French.

He had been arrested and conducted to France, and had hoped to be rescued by the way; but unfortunately for him, M. de Bellièvre had kept such good watch, that neither Spaniards nor Lorraines, nor leaguers, had been able to approach. In the prison Salcede hoped; during the torture, on the car, even on the scaffold, he still hoped. He wanted neither courage nor resignation; but he was one of those who defend themselves to their last breath. He darted curious glances toward the crowd, but constantly turned away, with a look of disappointment.

At this moment, an usher, raising the tapestry of the royal tent, announced that the president Brisson and four councilors desired the honor of an instant's conversation with the king on the subject of the execution.

"Good," said the king. "Mother, you will be satisfied."

"Sire, a favor," said Joyeuse.

"Speak, Joyeuse; and provided it be not the pardon of the criminal – "

"Sire, permit my brother and me to retire."

"What! you take so little interest in my affairs that you wish to retire at such a moment!"

"Do not say so, sire; all that concerns your majesty profoundly interests me; but I am of a miserable organization, and the weakest woman is stronger than I am on this point. I cannot see an execution without being ill for a week; and as I am the only person who ever laughs at the Louvre,

since my brother – I know not why – has given it up, think what would become of the Louvre – so sad already – if I were sad also."

"You wish to leave me then, Anne."

"Peste! sire, you are exacting; an execution is a spectacle of which, unlike me, you are fond. Is not that enough for you, or must you also enjoy the weakness of your friends?"

"If you will remain, Joyeuse, you will see that it is interesting."

"I do not doubt it, sire; I only think that the interest will be carried to a point that I cannot bear;" and he turned toward the door.

"Go, then," said Henri, sighing; "my destiny is to live alone."

"Quick! Du Bouchage," said Anne to his brother. "The king says yes now; but in five minutes he will say no."

"Thanks, my brother," said Bouchage; "I was as anxious as you to get away."

CHAPTER V.
THE EXECUTION

The councilors entered.

"Well, gentlemen," said the king, "is there anything new?"

"Sire," replied the president, "we come to beg your majesty to promise life to the criminal; he has revelations to make, which, on this promise, we shall obtain."

"But have we not obtained them?"

"Yes, in part; is that enough for your majesty?"

"No," said Catherine; "and the king has determined to postpone the execution, if the culprit will sign a confession substantiating his depositions before the judge."

"Yes," said Henri, "and you can let the prisoner know this."

"Your majesty has nothing to add?"

"Only that there must be no variation in the confessions, or I withdraw my promise; they must be complete."

"Yes, sire; with the names of the compromised parties."

"With all the names."

"Even if they are of high rank?"

"If they were those of my nearest relations."

"It shall be as your majesty wishes."

"No misunderstanding, M. Brisson. Writing materials shall be brought to the prisoner, and he will write his confessions; after that we shall see."

"But I may promise?"

"Oh! yes, promise."

M. Brisson and the councilors withdrew.

"He will speak, sire," said the queen; "and your majesty will pardon him. See the foam on his lips."

"No," said Catherine; "he is seeking something. What is it?"

"Parbleu!" said Henri; "he seeks M. le Duc de Guise, M. le Duc de Parma, and my brother, the very Catholic king. Yes, seek, wait; do you believe that there is more chance of rescue on the Place de Greve than on the route from Flanders?"

Salcede had seen the archers sent off for the horses, and he understood that the order for punishment was about to be given, and it was then that he bit his lips till they were covered with blood, as the queen had remarked.

"No one," murmured he; "not one of those who had promised me help. Cowards! cowards!"

The horses were now seen making their way through the crowd, and creating everywhere an opening which closed immediately behind them. As they passed the corner of the Rue St. Vannerie, a handsome young man, whom we have seen before, was pushed forward impatiently by a young lad, apparently about seventeen. It was the Vicomte Ernanton de Carmainges and the mysterious page.

"Quick!" cried the page; "throw yourself into the opening, there is not a moment to lose."

"But we shall be stifled; you are mad, my little friend."

"I must be near," cried the page, imperiously. "Keep close to the horses, or we shall never arrive there."

"But before we get there, you will be torn to pieces."

"Never mind me, only go on."

"The horses will kick."

"Take hold of the tail of the last; a horse never kicks when you hold him so."

Ernanton gave way in spite of himself to the mysterious influence of this lad, and seized the tail of the horse, while the page clung to him. And thus, through the crowd, waving like the sea, leaving here a piece of a cloak, and there a fragment of a doublet, they arrived with the horses at a few steps from the scaffold.

"Have we arrived?" asked the young man, panting.

"Yes, happily!" answered Ernanton, "for I am exhausted."

"I cannot see."

"Come before me."

"Oh, no! not yet. What are they doing?"

"Making slip knots at the ends of the cords."

"And he – what is he doing?"

"Who?"

"The condemned."

"His eyes turn incessantly from side to side."

The horses were near enough to enable the executioner to tie the feet and hands of the criminal to the harness. Salcede uttered a cry when he felt the cord in contact with his flesh.

"Monsieur," said the Lieutenant Tanchon to him politely, "will it please you to address the people?" and added in a whisper, "a confession will save your life."

Salcede looked earnestly at him, as though to read the truth in his eyes.

"You see," continued Tanchon, "they abandon you. There is no other hope in the world but what I offer you."

"Well!" said Salcede, with a sigh, "I am ready to speak."

"It is a written and signed confession that the king exacts."

"Then untie my hands, and give me a pen and I will write it."

They loosened the cords from his wrists, and an usher who stood near with writing materials placed them before him on the scaffold. "Now," said Tanchon, "state everything."

"Do not fear; I will not forget those who have forgotten me;" but as he spoke, he cast another glance around.

While this was passing, the page, seizing the hand of Ernanton, cried, "Monsieur, take me in your arms, I beg you, and raise me above the heads of the people who prevent me from seeing."

"Ah! you are insatiable, young man."

"This one more service; I must see the condemned, indeed I must."

Then, as Ernanton still hesitated, he cried, "For pity's sake, monsieur, I entreat you."

Ernanton raised him in his arms at this last appeal, and was somewhat astonished at the delicacy of the body he held. Just as Salcede had taken the pen, and looked round as we have said, he saw this young lad above the crowd, with two fingers placed on his lips. An indescribable joy spread itself instantaneously over the face of the condemned man, for he recognized the signal so impatiently waited for, and which announced that aid was near. After a moment's hesitation, however, he took the paper and began to write.

"He writes!" cried the crowd.

"He writes!" exclaimed Catherine.

"He writes!" cried the king, "and I will pardon him."

Suddenly Salcede stopped and looked again at the lad, who repeated the signal. He wrote on, then stopped to look once more; the signal was again repeated.

"Have you finished?" asked Tanchon.

"Yes." – "Then sign."

Salcede signed, with his eyes still fixed on the young man. "For the king alone," said he, and he gave the paper to the usher, though with hesitation.

"If you have disclosed all," said Tanchon, "you are safe."

A strange smile strayed over the lips of Salcede. Ernanton, who was fatigued, wished now to put down the page, who made no opposition. With him disappeared all that had sustained the unfortunate man; he looked round wildly and cried: "Well, come!"

No one answered.

"Quick! quick! the king holds the paper; he is reading!"

Still there was no response.

The king unfolded the paper.

"Thousand devils!" cried Salcede, "if they have deceived me! Yet it was she – it was really she!"

No sooner had the king read the first lines, than he called out indignantly, "Oh! the wretch!"

"What is it, my son?"

"He retracts all – he pretends that he confessed nothing; and he declares that the Guises are innocent of any plot!"

"But," said Catherine, "if it be true?"

"He lies!" cried the king.

"How do you know, my son? Perhaps the Guises have been calumniated: the judges, in their zeal, may have put false interpretation on the depositions."

"Oh! no, madame; I heard them myself!" cried Henri.

"You, my son?"

"Yes, I?"

"How so?"

"When the criminal was questioned, I was behind a curtain and heard all he said."

"Well, then, if he will have it, order the horses to pull."

Henri, in anger, gave the sign. It was repeated, the cords were refastened, four men jumped on the horses, which, urged by violent blows, started off in opposite directions. A horrible cracking, and a terrible cry was heard. The blood was seen to spout from the limbs of the unhappy man, whose face was no longer that of a man but of a demon.

"Ah, heaven!" he cried; "I will speak, I will tell all. Ah! cursed duch – "

The voice had been heard above everything, but suddenly it ceased.

"Stop, stop," cried Catherine, "let him speak."

But it was too late; the head of Salcede fell helplessly on one side, he glanced once more to where he had seen the page, and then expired. Tanchon gave some rapid orders to his archers, who plunged into the crowd in the direction indicated by Salcede's glance.

"I am discovered!" said the page to Ernanton. "For pity's sake, aid me! they come, they come!"

"What do you want?"

"To fly! Do you not see that it is me they want?"

"But who are you, then?"

"A woman. Oh, save me! protect me!"

Ernanton turned pale; but generosity triumphed over fear. He placed his protégée before him, opened a path with blows, and pushed her toward the corner of the Rue du Mouton, toward an open door. Into this door she entered; and she seemed to have been expected, for it closed behind her. Ernanton had not even time to ask her name, or where he should find her again; but in disappearing she had made a sign full of promise.

Meanwhile, Catherine was standing up in her place, full of rage.

"My son," said she, at last, "you would do well to change your executioner; he is a leaguer."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"Salcede suffered only one draw, and he is dead."

"Because he was too sensible to pain."

"No; but because he has been strangled with a fine cord underneath the scaffold, just as he was about to accuse those who let him die. Let a doctor examine him, and I am certain that he will find round his neck the circle that the cord has left."

"You are right!" cried Henri, with flashing eyes; "my cousin of Guise is better served than I am!"

"Hush, my son – no éclat; we shall only be laughed at, for once more we have missed our aim."

"Joyeuse did well to go and amuse himself elsewhere," said the king; "one can reckon on nothing in this world – not even on punishments. Come, ladies, let us go."

CHAPTER VI.
THE BROTHERS

MM. De Joyeuse had, as we have seen, left this scene, and were walking side by side in the streets generally so populous but now deserted, for every one was in the Place de Greve. Henri seemed preoccupied and sad, and Anne was unquiet on account of his brother. He was the first to speak.

"Well, Henri," said he, "where are you taking me?"

"I take you nowhere, brother; I was only walking before you. Do you wish to go anywhere?"

"Do you?"

"Oh! I do not care where I go."

"Yet you go somewhere every evening, for you always go out at the same hour and return late at night."

"Are you questioning me, brother?" said Henri, with gentleness.

"Certainly not; let each keep his own secrets if he wishes to do so."

"If you wish it, brother, I will have no secrets from you."

"Will you not, Henri?"

"No; are you not my elder brother and friend?"

"Oh! I thought you had secrets from me, who am only a poor layman. I thought you confessed to our learned brother, that pillar of theology, that light of the Church, who will be a cardinal some day, and that you obtained absolution from him, and perhaps, at the same time, advice."

Henri took his brother's hand affectionately. "You are more than a confessor to me, my dear Anne – more than a father; you are my friend."

"Then, my friend, why, from so gay as you used to be, have I seen you become sad? and why, instead of going out by day, do you only go out at night?"

"My brother, I am not sad."

"What, then?"

"In love."

"Good! And this preoccupation?"

"Is because I am always thinking of my love."

"And you sigh in saying that?"

"Yes."

"You sigh? – you, Henri, comte de Bouchage? – you, the brother of Joyeuse? – you, whom some people call the third king in France? You know M. de Guise is the second, if not the first; but you, rich and handsome, who will be peer and duke on the first occasion, are in love, and you sigh! – you, whose device is 'hilariter.'"

"My dear Anne, I have never reckoned the gifts of fortune, past and to come, as things to constitute happiness; I have no ambitions."

"That is to say, you have not at present."

"At all events, not for the things you speak of."

"Not just now, perhaps, but later you will return to them."

"Never, brother; I desire nothing – I want nothing."

"You are wrong. When one is called 'Joyeuse,' one of the best names in France, when one has a brother a king's favorite, one desires everything, and has everything."

Henri hung his blond head sadly.

"Come," continued Anne, "we are quite alone here; have you anything to tell me?"

"Nothing, but that I love."

"Diable! that is not a very serious affair; I also am in love."

"Not like me, brother."

"I, also, think sometimes of my mistress."

"Yes, but not always."

"I, also, have annoyances."

"Yes; but you also have joys, for you are loved."

"True; but I have obstacles. They exact from me so much mystery."

"They exact! If your mistress exacts, she loves you."

"Yes, she loves me and M. de Mayenne – or rather only me, for she would give up Mayenne at once if she was not afraid he would kill her; it is his habit to kill women, you know. I am obliged to be constantly on my guard, but I do not grow sad on that account; I continue to laugh – at least, sometimes. Tell me, Henri, is your lady beautiful?"

"Alas! she is not mine."

"Is she beautiful? Her name?"

"I do not know it."

"Come, now."

"On my honor."

"My friend, I begin to think it is more dangerous than I thought; it is not sadness, but madness."

"She never spoke but once before me, and since then I have not heard the sound of her voice."

"And you have not inquired about her?"

"Of whom?"

"Why, of the neighbors."

"She lives in her own house, and no one knows her."

"Ah! *ça!* then she is a ghost!"

"She is a woman, tall and beautiful as a nymph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel!"

"When did you meet her?"

"One day I followed a young girl to the church of La Gypecienne, and I entered a little garden close to it, where there is a stone seat under some trees. Do you know this garden, Anne?"

"No; but never mind – go on."

"It began to grow dark; I had lost sight of the young girl, and in seeking her I arrived at this seat. I saw a woman's dress, and held out my hands. 'Pardon, monsieur,' said the voice of a man whom I had not noticed, and he gently but firmly pushed me away."

"He dared to touch you, Henri?"

"Listen; he had his face hidden in a sort of frock, and I took him for a monk. Besides, he impressed me also by the polite manner of his warning; for, as he spoke, he pointed out to me the woman, whose white dress had attracted me, and who was kneeling before the seat as though it were an altar. It was toward the beginning of September that this happened; the air was warm, the flowers planted by friends around the tombs scattered their delicate perfume, and the moon, rising above the white clouds, began to shed her silver light over all. Whether it were the place, or her own dignity, I know not, but this woman seemed to me like a marble statue, and impressed me with a strange respect. I looked at her earnestly. She bent over the seat, enveloping it in her arms, placed her lips to it, and soon I saw her shoulders heave with such sobs as you never heard, my brother. As she wept she kissed the stone with ardor; her tears had troubled me, but her kisses maddened me."

"But, by the pope, it is she who is mad, to kiss a stone and sob for nothing."

"Oh! it was a great grief that made her sob, a profound love which made her kiss the stone. Only whom did she love? whom did she weep for? whom did she pray for? I know not."

"Did you not question this man?"

"Yes."

"What did he reply?

"That she had lost her husband."

"Bah! as if people weep like that for a husband. Were you content with such an answer?"

"I was obliged to be content, for he would give me no other."

"But the man – what is he?"

"A sort of servant who lives with her." – "His name?"

"He would not tell me."

"Young or old?"

"He might be about thirty."

"Well, afterward? She did not stop all night praying and weeping, did she?"

"No; when she had exhausted her tears she rose, and there was so much mystery and sadness about her that, instead of advancing to her as I might have done to another, I drew back; but she turned toward me, though she did not see me, and the moon shone on her face, which was calm and sad, and the traces of her tears were still on her cheeks; she moved slowly, and the servant went to support her. But, oh! my brother, what dreadful, what superhuman beauty. I have never seen anything like it on earth, only sometimes in my dreams."

"Well, Henri?" said Anne, interested, in spite of himself, at a recital at which he had determined to laugh.

"Oh! it is nearly finished, brother. Her servant whispered something to her, and she lowered her veil; doubtless he told her I was there, but she did not glance toward me. I saw her no more, and it seemed to me, when the veil concealed her face, as if the sky had become suddenly overshadowed – that it was no longer a living thing, but a shade escaped from the tomb, which was gliding silently before me. She went out of the garden, and I followed her; from time to time the man turned and saw me, for I did not hide myself; I had still the old habits in my mind – the old leaven in my heart."

"What do you mean, Henri?"

The young man smiled. "I mean, brother," said he, "that I have often thought I loved before, and that all women, until now, have been for me – women to whom I might offer my love."

"Oh! and what is this one?" said Anne, trying to recover his gayety, which, in spite of himself, had been a little disturbed by his brother's confidence.

"My brother," said Henri, seizing his hand in a fervent grasp, "as truly as I live, I know not if she be a creature of this world or not."

"Holy Fathers! you would make me afraid, if a Joyeuse could know fear. However, as she walks, weeps, and gives kisses, it seems to me to augur well. But finish."

"There is little more. I followed her, and she did not try to escape or lead me astray; she never seemed to think of it."

"Well, and where does she live?"

"By the side of the Bastille, Rue de Lesdiguieres. At the door, the servant turned and saw me."

"You asked to speak to him?"

"You will think it ridiculous, but I dared not."

"You entered the house, then?"

"No, brother."

"Really, Henri, I am tempted to disown you this evening. But you returned the next day?"

"Yes, but uselessly, and equally so to La Gypecienne."

"She had disappeared?"

"Like a shadow."

"But you inquired?"

"The street has few inhabitants, and no one knew her. I watched for the servant, but he also had disappeared; however, a light which shone every evening through the Venetian blinds consoled me by the knowledge that she was still there. At last this disappeared; she had quitted the Rue de Lesdiguieres, and no one knew where she had gone."

"But you found her again?"

"Chance did it. Listen: it is really strange. I was going along the Rue de Bussy, a fortnight ago, about midnight; you know how strict the regulations are about fire; well, I saw, not only light in the windows of a house, but a real fire, which had broken out in the second story. I knocked at the door, and a man appeared at the window. 'You have fire in your house!' I cried. 'Silence! I beg; I am occupied in putting it out.' 'Shall I call the watch?' I asked. 'No! in Heaven's name, call no one!' 'But can I help you?' 'Will you? I shall be very grateful,' and he threw me the key out of the window.

"I mounted the stairs rapidly, and entered the room where the fire was burning; it was used as a chemist's laboratory, and in making I know not what experiments, an inflammable liquid had been spilled, which had ignited the floor. When I entered, the fire was almost got under. I looked at the man; a dreadful scar disfigured his cheek, and another his forehead; the rest of his face was hidden by a thick beard. 'I thank you, monsieur,' said he; 'but you see all is finished now; if you are as gallant a man as you seem, have the goodness to retire, for my mistress may return at any moment, and will be angry if she sees a stranger here.'

"The sound of his voice struck me instantly. I was about to cry, 'You are the man of La Gypecienne – of the Rue de Lesdiguieres!' for you remember that I had not seen his face before, but only heard his voice, when suddenly a door opened, and a woman entered. 'What is the matter, Remy, and why this noise?' she asked. Oh! my brother, it was she! more beautiful than ever, by the dying light of the fire. It was she! – the woman whose memory had ever lived in my heart. At the cry which I uttered the servant looked narrowly at me. 'Thanks, monsieur,' said he, again; 'you see the fire is out; go, I beg of you.'

"'My friend,' said I, 'you dismiss me very rudely.' 'Madame,' said he, 'it is he.' 'Who?' 'The young man we met in the garden, and who followed us home.' She turned toward me and said, 'Monsieur, I beg of you to go.' I hesitated; I wished to speak, but my words failed me. I remained motionless and mute, gazing at her. 'Take care, monsieur,' said the servant, sadly; 'you will force her to fly again.' 'Heaven forbid!' cried I; 'but how do I offend you, madame?' She did not reply; insensible, mute, and cold, as though she had not heard me, she turned, and I saw her disappear gradually in the shade."

"And is that all?"

"All; the servant led me to the door, saying, 'Forget, monsieur, I beg of you.' I fled, bewildered and half crazy, and since then I have gone every evening to this street, and, concealed in the angle of the opposite house, under the shade of a little balcony, I see, once in ten times, a light in her room: that is my life, my happiness."

"What happiness!"

"Alas! I should lose this, if I tried for more."

"But in acting thus, you lose all the amusements of the world."

"My brother," said Henri, with a sad smile, "I am happy thus."

"Not so, mordieu! One monk in a family is enough."

"No railleries, brother."

"But let me say one thing!"

"What is it?"

"That you have been taken in like a schoolboy."

"I am not taken in; I only gave way to a power stronger than mine. When a current carries you away, you cannot fight against it."

"But if it lead to an abyss?"

"You must be swallowed up!"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes!"

"I do not: and in your place – "

"What would you have done?"

"Enough, certainly, to have learned her name and – "

"Anne, you don't know her."

"No, but I know you, Henri. You had 50,000 crowns that I gave you out of the last 100,000 the king gave to me."

"They are still in my chest, Anne; I have not touched one of them."

"Mordieu! If they were not there, you would be in a different position."

"Oh! my brother!"

"Certainly. An ordinary servant may be bought for ten crowns, a good one for 100, an excellent one for 1,000, and a marvel for 3,000. Let us see, then. Suppose this man to be the phoenix of all servants – the beau ideal of fidelity, yet, by the pope! for 20,000 crowns you will buy him. There would then remain 30,000 crowns for the phoenix of women, and all would be settled."

"Anne!" sighed Henri, "there are people who cannot be bought; there are hearts that the king is not rich enough to purchase."

"Well! perhaps so; but hearts are sometimes given. What have you done to win that of the beautiful statue?"

"I believe, Anne, that I have done all I could."

"Really, Comte du Bouchage, you are mad. You see a woman, sad, solitary, and melancholy, and you become more sad, more recluse, and more melancholy than she. She is alone – keep her company; she is sad – be gay; she regrets – console her, and replace him she regrets."

"Impossible! brother."

"Have you tried? Are you in love, or are you not?"

"I have no words to express how much!"

"Well! I see no reason to despair."

"I have no hope."

"At what time do you see her?"

"I have told you that I do not see her." – "Never?" – "Never!"

"Not even at her window?"

"Not even at her window!"

"We must put an end to that. Do you think she has a lover?"

"I have never seen any one enter her house, except the Remy of whom I spoke to you."

"Take the house opposite."

"It may not be to let."

"Bah! offer double the rent!"

"But if she sees me there, she will disappear as before."

"You shall see her this evening."

"I!"

"Yes! Be under her balcony at eight o'clock."

"I am always there."

"Well, give me the address."

"Between the Porte Bussy and the Hotel St. Denis, near the corner of the Rue des Augustins, and a few steps from a large inn, having for a sign, 'The Sword of the Brave Chevalier.'"

"Very well, then; this evening at eight o'clock."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"You shall see: meanwhile, go home; put on your richest dress, and use your finest perfume, and I hope that you will enter the house to-night."

"May you be a true prophet, brother!"

"Well! I leave you for the present, for my lady-love waits for me: and I confess, that after your account, I prefer her to yours. Adieu! Henri, till the evening."

The brothers then pressed each other's hands, and separated.

CHAPTER VII.
"THE SWORD OF THE BRAVE CHEVALIER."

During the conversation we have just related, night had begun to fall, enveloping the city with its damp mantle of fog.

Salcede dead, all the spectators were ready to leave the Place de Greve, and the streets were filled with people, hurrying toward their homes. Near the Porte Bussy, where we must now transport our readers, to follow some of their acquaintances, and to make new ones, a hum, like that in a bee-hive at sunset, was heard proceeding from a house tinted rose color, and ornamented with blue and white pointings, which was known by the sign of "The Sword of the Brave Chevalier," and which was an immense inn, recently built in this new quarter. This house was decorated to suit all tastes. On the entablature was painted a representation of a combat between an archangel and a dragon breathing flame and smoke, and in which the artist, animated by sentiments at once heroic and pious, had depicted in the hands of "the brave chevalier," not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he hacked in pieces the unlucky dragon, of which the bleeding pieces were seen lying on the ground. At the bottom of the picture crowds of spectators were represented raising their arms to heaven, while from above, angels were extending over the chevalier laurels and palms. Then, as if to prove that he could paint in every style, the artist had grouped around gourds, grapes, a snail on a rose, and two rabbits, one white and the other gray.

Assuredly the proprietor must have been difficult to please, if he were not satisfied, for the artist had filled every inch of space – there was scarcely room to have added a caterpillar. In spite, however, of this attractive exterior, the hotel did not prosper – it was never more than half full, though it was large and comfortable. Unfortunately, from its proximity to the Pre-aux-Clercs, it was frequented by so many persons either going or ready to fight, that those more peaceably disposed avoided it. Indeed, the cupids with which the interior was decorated had been ornamented with mustaches in charcoal by the habitues; and Dame Fournichon, the landlady, always affirmed that the sign had brought them ill-luck, and that had her wishes been attended to, and the painting represented more pleasing things, such as the rose-tree of love surrounded by flaming hearts, all tender couples would have flocked to them.

M. Fournichon, however, stuck to his sign, and replied that he preferred fighting men, and that one of them drank as much as six lovers.

About a month before the execution of Salcede, the host and hostess, all of whose rooms were then empty, were looking out of the window, sadly, and were watching the exercises of some soldiery on the Pre-aux-Clercs, when they saw an officer, followed by a single soldier, advancing toward their hotel. He was about to pass, when the host called out loudly – "Oh! wife, what a beautiful horse!"

Madame Fournichon replied in an equally audible voice, "And what a handsome cavalier!"

The officer, who did not appear insensible to flattery, raised his head and looked first at the host and hostess and then at the hotel. Fournichon ran rapidly downstairs and appeared at the door.

"Is the house empty?" asked the officer.

"Yes, monsieur; just at present," replied the host, humiliated; "but it is not usually so."

However, Dame Fournichon, like most women, was more clear-sighted than her husband, and called out, "If monsieur desires solitude, he will find it here."

"Yes, my good woman, that is what I desire, at present," said the officer, who dismounted, threw the bridle to the soldier, and entered the hotel.

He was a man of about thirty-five years of age, but he did not look more than twenty-eight, so carefully was he dressed. He was tall, with a fine countenance and a distinguished air.

"Ah! good!" said he, "a large room and not a single guest. But there must be something," he added, "either in your house or conduct that keeps people away."

"Neither, monsieur," replied Madame Fournichon; "only the place is new, and we choose our customers."

"Oh! very well."

"For example," continued she, "for a person like your lordship, we would send away a dozen."

"Thanks, my kind hostess."

"Will monsieur taste the wine?" asked M. Fournichon.

"Will monsieur visit the rooms?" added his wife.

"Both, if you please."

Fournichon descended to the cellar.

"How many people can you lodge here?" asked the captain of the hostess.

"Thirty."

"That is not enough."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"I had a project – but we will speak of it no more."

"Ah! monsieur, you will find nothing larger, except the Louvre itself."

"Well; you can lodge thirty people?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"But for a day?"

"Oh! for a day, forty, or even forty-five."

"Without making a commotion outside?" – "We have often eighty soldiers here, on Sundays."

"And no crowd before the house – no spying by the neighbors?"

"Mon Dieu! no! our nearest neighbors are a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with no one, and a lady who lives so retired, that although she has been here for three weeks, I have not seen her."

"That will do excellently."

"So much the better."

"And in a month from to-day – "

"That will be the 26th of October."

"Precisely. Well, on that day I hire your inn." – "The whole of it?"

"Yes, the whole. I wish to give a surprise to some countrymen, officers – or at least – soldiers: they will be told to come here."

"But if it be a surprise – "

"Oh! if you are curious, or indiscreet – "

"No, no, monsieur," cried she.

M. Fournichon, who had heard what had passed, added, "Monsieur, you shall be master here; and all your friends will be welcome."

"I did not say my friends, I said countrymen," replied the officer, haughtily.

"Yes, monsieur, it was my mistake."

"You will give them supper."

"Certainly."

"If necessary, they will sleep here."

"Yes, monsieur."

"In a word, give them all they want, and ask no questions."

"Very well, monsieur."

"Here are thirty livres in advance."

"Well, monsieur, these gentlemen shall be treated like princes; will you assure yourself by tasting the wine?"

"Thank you, I never drink."

"But, monsieur, how shall I know these gentlemen?"

"That is true; parfandious! I forgot. Give me paper, light, and wax."

When they were brought, the captain made a seal on the paper with a ring he had on his finger. "Do you see this figure?" said he.

"A beautiful woman."

"Yes; a Cleopatra. Well, each of these men will present a similar one, on which you will receive him. You will have further orders afterward."

The captain then descended the stall's and rode off, leaving the Fournichons delighted with their thirty livres in advance.

"Decidedly," said the host, "the sign has brought us good fortune."

CHAPTER VIII.
THE GASCON

We dare not affirm that Dame Fournichon was as discreet as she had promised to be, for she interrogated the first soldier whom she saw pass as to the name of the captain who had conducted the review. The soldier, more cautious than she, asked her why she wished to know.

"Because he has just been here," she replied, "and one likes to know to whom one has been talking."

The soldier laughed. "The captain who conducted the review would not have entered this hotel," said he.

"Why not; is he too great for that?"

"Perhaps so."

"Well, but it is not for himself that he wanted the hotel."

"For whom then?"

"For his friends."

"He would not lodge his friends here, I am sure."

"Peste! why, who can he be, then?"

"Well, my good woman, he who conducted the review is simply Monsieur le Duc Nogaret de Lavalette d'Epernon, peer of France, and colonel-general of infantry. What do you say to that?"

"That if it was he, he did me great honor."

"Did you hear him say 'parfandious'?"

"Oh! yes."

We may now judge if the 26th of October was impatiently expected. On the evening of the 25th a man entered, bearing a heavy bag, which he placed on Fournichon's table.

"It is the price of the repast ordered for to-morrow," said he.

"At how much a head?"

"At six livres."

"Will they have only one meal here?"

"That is all."

"Has the captain found them a lodging, then?"

"It appears so," said the messenger, who went, and declined to answer any more questions.

At last the much-desired day arrived; half-past twelve had just struck when some cavaliers stopped at the door of the hotel. One, who appeared to be their chief, came with two well-mounted lackeys. Each of them produced the seal of Cleopatra's head, and were received with all sorts of courtesies, especially the young man with the lackeys. Nevertheless, excepting this young man, they all seemed timid and preoccupied. Most of them dispersed, however, until supper-time, either to swell the crowd at the execution of Salcede, or to see Paris.

About two o'clock, others began to arrive. One man came in alone, without a hat, a cane in his hand, and swearing at Paris, where he said the thieves were so adroit that they had stolen his hat as he had passed through a crowd, without his being able to see who had taken it. However, he said, it was his own fault, for wearing a hat ornamented with such a superb diamond. At four o'clock, forty people had arrived.

"Is it not strange," said Fournichon to his wife, "they are all Gascons?"

"Well, what of that? The captain said they were all countrymen, and he is a Gascon. M. d'Epernon is from Toulouse."

"Then you still believe it was M. d'Epernon?"

"Did he not say three times the famous 'parfandious'?"

Very soon the five other Gascons arrived; the number of guests was complete. Never was such surprise painted on so many faces; for an hour nothing was heard but "saudioux," "mordioux!" and "cap de Bious!" and such noisy joy, that it seemed to the Fournichons that all Poitou and Languedoc were collected in their room. Some knew, and greeted each other.

"Is it not singular to find so many Gascons here?" asked one.

"No," replied Perducas de Pincornay, "the sign is tempting for men of honor."

"Ah! is it you?" said St. Maline, the gentleman with the lackeys, "you have not yet explained to me what you were about to do, when the crowd separated us."

"What was that?" asked Pincornay, reddening.

"How it happens that I met you on the road between Angoulême and Angers without a hat, as you are now?"

"It seems to interest you, monsieur?"

"Ma foi! yes. Poitiers is far from Paris, and you came from beyond Poitiers."

"Yes, from St. Andre de Cubsac."

"And without a hat?"

"Oh! it is very simple. My father has two magnificent horses, and he is quite capable of disinheriting me for the accident that has happened to one of them."

"What is that?"

"I was riding one of them when it took fright at the report of a gun that was fired close to me, and ran away; it made for the bank of the Dordogne and plunged in."

"With you?"

"No; luckily I had time to slip off, or I should have been drowned with him."

"Ah! then the poor beast was drowned?"

"Pardioux! you know the Dordogne – half a league across."

"And then?"

"Then I resolved not to return home, but to go away as far as possible from my father's anger."

"But your hat?"

"Diable! my hat had fallen."

"Like you."

"I did not fall; I slipped off."

"But your hat?"

"Ah! my hat had fallen. I sought for it, being my only resource, as I had come out without money."

"But how could your hat be a resource?"

"Saudioux! it was a great one, for I must tell you that the plume of this hat was fastened by a diamond clasp, that his majesty the emperor Charles V. gave to my grandfather, when, on his way from Spain to Flanders, he stopped at our castle."

"Ah! ah! and you have sold the clasp, and the hat with it. Then, my dear friend, you ought to be the richest of us all, and you should have bought another glove; your hands are not alike; one is as white as a woman's, and the other as black as a negro's."

"But listen; as I turned to seek my hat I saw an enormous crow seize hold of it."

"Of your hat!"

"Or rather of the clasp; attracted by the glitter, and in spite of my cries, he flew away with it, and I saw it no more. So that, overwhelmed by this double loss, I did not dare to return home, but came to seek my fortune in Paris."

"Good!" cried a third, "the wind has changed into a crow. I heard you tell M. de Loignac that the wind had carried it away while you were reading a letter from your mistress."

"Now," cried St. Maline, "I have the honor of knowing M. d'Aubigne, who, though a brave soldier, writes well, and I recommend you to tell him the history of your hat; he will make a charming story of it."

Several stifled laughs were heard.

"Ah! gentlemen," cried the Gascon, "do you laugh at me?"

They turned away to laugh again.

Perducas threw a glance around him, and saw a young man near the fireplace hiding his face in his hands. He thought it was to laugh, and, going up to him, struck him on the shoulder, saying —

"Eh! monsieur, if you laugh, at all events show your face."

The young man looked up; it was our friend Ernanton de Carmainges.

"I beg you will leave me alone," said he, "I was not thinking of you."

Pincornay turned away, grumbling; but at this moment an officer entered.

"M. de Loignac!" cried twenty voices.

At this name, known through all Gascony, every one rose and kept silence.

CHAPTER IX.
M. DE LOIGNAC

"Supper!" cried M. de Loignac; "and from this moment let all be friends, and love each other like brothers."

"Hum!" said St. Maline.

"That would be difficult," added Ernanton.

"See," cried Pincornay, "they laugh at me because I have no hat, and they say nothing to M. Montcrabeau, who is going to supper in a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom it probably came. See what it is to have defensive arms."

"Gentlemen," cried Montcrabeau, "I take it off; so much the worse for those who prefer seeing me with offensive instead of defensive arms;" and he gave his cuirass to his lackey, a man about fifty years of age.

"Peace! peace!" cried De Loignac, "and let us go to table."

Meanwhile the lackey whispered to Pertinax, "And am I not to sup? Let me have something, Pertinax. I am dying of hunger."

Pertinax, instead of being offended at this familiar address, replied, "I will try, but you had better see for something for yourself."

"Hum! that is not reassuring."

"Have you no money?"

"We spent our last crown at Sens."

"Diable! then try to sell something."

A few minutes after a cry was heard in the street of "Old iron! who wants to sell old iron?"

Madame Fournichon ran to the door, while M. Fournichon placed the supper on the table, and to judge by its reception it must have been exquisite. As his wife did not return, however, the host asked a servant what she was doing.

"Oh, master," he replied, "she is selling all your old iron for new money."

"I hope not my cuirass and arms," said he, running to the door.

"No," said De Loignac, "it is forbidden to buy arms."

Madame Fournichon entered triumphantly.

"You have not been selling my arms?" cried her husband.

"Yes, I have."

"I will not have them sold."

"Bah! in time of peace; and I have got ten crowns instead of an old cuirass."

"Ten crowns! Samuel, do you hear?" said Pertinax, looking for his valet, but he was not to be seen.

"It seems to me that this man carries on a dangerous trade. But what does he do with them?"

"Sells them again by weight."

"By weight! and you say he gave you ten crowns – for what?"

"A cuirass and a helmet."

"Why, even if they weighed twenty pounds, that is half-a-crown a pound. This hides some mystery."

Voices rose, and the mirth grew loud with all, except Carmainges, who still thought of the mysterious page. He sat by M. de Loignac, who said to him:

"Here are a number of joyful people, and they do not know what for."

"Nor I, neither; but at least I am an exception."

"You are wrong, for you are one of those to whom Paris is a paradise."

"Do not laugh at me, M. de Loignac."

"I do not; I distinguished you at once, and that other young man also who looks so grave."

"Who?"

"M. de St. Maline."

"And why this distinction, if this question be not too curious?"

"I know you, that is all."

"Me! you know me?"

"You, and he, and all here."

"It is strange."

"Yes, but necessary."

"Why?"

"Because a chief should know his soldiers."

"And all these men – "

"Will be my soldiers to-morrow."

"But I thought that M. d'Epernon – "

"Hush! do not pronounce that name here."

Then rising, M. de Loignac said, "Gentlemen, since chance unites here forty-five compatriots, let us empty a glass of wine to the prosperity of all."

This proposal gave rise to frantic applause. "They are almost all half drunk," said De Loignac; "it would be a good opportunity to make them repeat their histories, only time does not permit of it." Then he added aloud, "Hola! M. Fournichon, dismiss from the room all women, children and lackeys."

Lardille retired grumbling, but Militor did not move. "Did you not hear, M. Militor," said De Loignac; "to the kitchen!"

There remained only forty-five men, and M. de Loignac then said, "Now, gentlemen, each knows who called him to Paris. Good! that will do; do not call out his name. You know also that you have come to obey him."

A murmur of assent came from all, mingled with astonishment, for each one knew only what concerned himself, and was ignorant that his neighbor had been moved by the same influence.

"Well, then!" continued De Loignac, "you will have time to become acquainted with each other afterward. You agree that you have come here to obey him?"

"Yes, yes," they cried.

"Then, to begin; go quietly out of this hotel to the lodgings prepared for you."

"For all?" asked St. Maline.

"Yes, for all."

"We are all equal here," cried Perducas, whose limbs felt rather doubtful under him.

"Yes," replied De Loignac; "all are equal before the will of the master."

"Oh!" cried Carmainges, coloring; "I do not know that M. d'Epernon would be called my master."

"Wait!"

"I did not expect that."

"Wait, hot head! I did not tell you who was to be your master."

"No; but you said we should have one."

"Every one has a master; and if you are too proud to acknowledge him we spoke of, you may look higher; I authorize you."

"The king!" murmured Carmainges.

"Silence!" said De Loignac. "But first will you do me the favor to read aloud this parchment."

Ernanton took it and read these words:

"Order to M. de Loignac to take the command of the forty-five gentlemen whom I have sent for to Paris with the consent of his majesty.

"NOGARET DE LAVALETTE.

"Duc d'Epernon."

They all bowed at this.

"Thus," continued De Loignac, "you have to follow me at once; your equipages and servants will remain here, M. Fournichon will take care of them: we will send for them; but now, be quick! the boats are ready."

"The boats!" cried they.

"Certainly; to go to the Louvre, we must go by water."

"To the Louvre!" cried they, joyfully. "Cap de Bious! we are going to the Louvre."

De Loignac made them all pass before him, counting them as they went, and then conducted them to the place where three large boats were waiting for them.

CHAPTER X.
THE PURCHASE OF CUIRASSES

As soon as the valet of Pertinax heard the words of Madame Fournichon, he ran after the dealer, but as it was night and he was doubtless in a hurry, he had gone some little way and Samuel was obliged to call to him. He appeared to hesitate at first, but seeing that Samuel was laden with merchandise, he stopped.

"What do you want, my friend?" said he.

"Pardieu! I want to do a little business with you." – "Well, be quick!"

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes."

"When you have seen what I bring you, you will be willing to wait."

"What is it?"

"A magnificent piece, of which the work – but you do not listen."

"Yes; but I am also looking round."

"Why?"

"Do you not know that it is forbidden to buy arms?"

Samuel thought it best to feign ignorance, and said, "I know nothing; I have just arrived from Mont-de-Marsan."

"Oh! that is another thing; but how did you know that I bought arms?"

"I was at the door of 'The Brave Chevalier.'"

"Well, come under that portico; it is too public here. Now, let me see this cuirass," said he, when they were there.

"It is so heavy."

"It is old and out of date."

"A work of art."

"I will give you six crowns."

"What! six crowns! and you gave ten just now for an old thing – "

"Six, or none."

"But look at the chasing."

"Of what use is the chasing, when I sell by weight?"

"The gilding alone is worth ten crowns – "

"Well, I will give you seven."

"You bargain here, and at the inn you gave anything; you go against the law and then endeavor to cheat honest people." – "Do not call out so loud."

"Oh! I am not afraid."

"Come, then, take ten crowns and begone."

"I told you the gold was worth more. Ah! you want to escape; I will call the guard," and he raised his voice.

At the noise, a window opposite was opened.

"Come," said the dealer; "I see I must give you what you want. Here are fifteen crowns; now go."

"That will do," said Samuel; "only these are for my master: I want something for myself."

The dealer half drew his dagger.

"Yes, yes, I see your dagger," said Samuel; "but I also see the figure in that balcony, watching you."

The dealer, white with terror, looked up, and saw a man who had witnessed the whole scene. "Oh!" said he, affecting to laugh; "you get all you want out of me: here is another crown. And may the devil take you," he added to himself.

"Thanks, my good friend," said Samuel, and he made off.

The dealer began to take up his wares and was also going, when the bourgeois opposite cried out:

"It seems, monsieur, that you buy armor."

"No, monsieur," replied the unlucky dealer; "this was a mere chance."

"A chance that suits me."

"In what respect, monsieur?"

"I have a heap of old things that I want to get rid of."

"I have as much as I can carry."

"But let me show them to you."

"It is useless; I have no more money."

"Never mind, I will give you credit; you look like an honest man."

"Thank you; but I cannot wait."

"It is odd how I seem to know you."

"Know me!" cried the dealer, trembling.

"Look at this helmet," said the bourgeois, showing it from the window.

"You say you know me?" asked the dealer.

"I thought so. Are you not – " he seemed seeking for the name. "Are you not Nicholas – "

The dealer looked frightened.

"Nicholas Trouchon, ironmonger, Rue de la Cossonnerie?"

"No, no!" cried the man, breathing more freely again.

"Never mind; will you buy all my armor, cuirass, sword, and all?"

"It is a forbidden commerce."

"I know that; he whom you dealt with just now called it out loud enough."

"You heard!"

"Yes, all; and you were liberal. But be easy, I will not be hard upon you; I have been a trader myself."

"What did you sell?"

"Never mind; I have made my fortune." – "I congratulate you."

"Well, will you buy all my armor?"

"No, I only want the cuirass."

"Do you only buy cuirasses?"

"Yes."

"That is odd, for if you buy and sell by weight, one sort of iron is as good as another."

"That is true, but I have preferences."

"Well, then, buy only the cuirass, or rather – now I think again – buy nothing at all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in these times every one wants his arms."

"What! in perfect peace?"

"My good friend, if we were in perfect peace, you would not buy so many cuirasses, and so secretly, too. But really, the longer I look at you, the more I think I know your face. You are not Nicholas Trouchon, but still I know you."

"Silence!"

"And if you buy cuirasses – "

"Well!"

"I am sure it is for a work agreeable to God."

"Hold your tongue!"

"You enchant me!" cried the bourgeois, stretching out a long arm over the balcony and seizing the hand of the dealer.

"Then who the devil are you?" cried he, who felt his hand held as if in a vise.

"I am Robert Briquet, the terror of schismatics, the friend of the Union, and a fierce Catholic; and you are not Nicholas Gimbelot, the currier."

"No, no! good-by."

"What! are you going?"

"Yes!" and he ran off.

But Robert Briquet was not a man to be foiled; he jumped from his balcony and ran after him.

"You are mad!" said he. "If I were your enemy, I have but to cry out, and the watch is in the next street; but you are my friend, and now I know your name. You are Nicholas Poulain, lieutenant to the provost of Paris. I knew it was Nicholas something."

"I am lost!" murmured the man.

"No; you are saved. I will do more for the good cause than ever you would; you have found a brother. Take one cuirass, and I will take another; I give you my gloves and the rest of my armor for nothing. Come on, and Vive l'Union!"

"You accompany me?"

"I will help you to carry these cuirasses which are to conquer the Philistines. Go on, I follow."

A spark of suspicion lingered in the soul of the lieutenant, but he thought; "If he wished me ill, he would not have acknowledged he knew me. Come on then!" he added aloud, "if you will."

"To life or death!" cried Briquet, and he continued to talk in this strain till they arrived near the Hotel Guise, where Nicholas Poulain stopped.

"I fancied it would be here," thought Briquet.

"Now," said Nicholas, with a tragic air, "there is still time to retire before entering the lion's den."

"Bah! I have entered many. *Et non intermuit medulla mea!*" exclaimed Briquet; "but pardon me, perhaps you do not understand Latin?"

"Do you?" – "As you see."

"What a catch?" thought Poulain, "learned, strong, bold, and rich!" Then he added aloud, "Well! let us enter," and he conducted Briquet to the door of the hotel. The court was full of guards and men wrapped in cloaks, and eight horses, saddled and bridled, waited in a corner; but there was not a light to be seen. Poulain whispered his name to the porter, and added, "I bring a good companion." – "Pass on."

"Take these to the magazine," said Poulain, handing the cuirasses to a soldier. "Now I will present you," said he to Briquet.

"No, I am very timid. When I have done some work, I will present myself."

"As you please. Then wait here for me." – "What are we waiting for?" asked a voice.

"For the master," replied another.

At this moment, a tall man entered. "Gentlemen," said he, "I come in his name."

"Ah! it is M. de Mayneville," said Poulain.

"Ah, really!" said Briquet, making a hideous grimace, which quite altered him.

"Let us go, gentlemen," said M. de Mayneville, and he descended a staircase leading to a vault. All the others followed, and Briquet brought up the rear, murmuring: "But the page! where the devil is the page?"

CHAPTER XI
STILL THE LEAGUE

At the moment when Robert Briquet was about to enter, he saw Poulain waiting for him.

"Pardon," said he, "but my friends do not know you, and decline to admit you to their councils till they know more of you."

"It is just, and I retire, happy to have seen so many brave defenders of the Holy Union."

"Shall I re-conduct you?"

"No, I thank you, I will not trouble you."

"But perhaps they will not open for you; yet I am wanted."

"Have you not a password?"

"Yes."

"Then give it to me. I am a friend, you know."

"True. It is 'Parma and Lorraine!'"

"And they will open?"

"Yes."

"Thanks; now return to your friends."

Briquet took some steps as if to go out, and then stopped to explore the locality. The result of his observations was, that the vault ran parallel to the exterior wall, and terminated in a hall destined for the mysterious council from which he had been excluded. What confirmed him in this supposition was that he saw a light at a barred window, pierced in the wall, and guarded by a sort of wooden pipe, such as they placed at the windows of convents and prisons to intercept the view from without, while the air was still admitted. Briquet imagined this to be the window of the hall, and thought that if he could gain this place he could see all. He looked round him; the court had many soldiers and servants in it, but it was large, and the night was dark; besides, they were not looking his way, and the porter was busy, preparing his bed for the night.

Briquet rapidly climbed on to the cornice which ran toward the window in question, and ran along the wall like a monkey, holding on with his hands and feet to the ornaments of the sculpture. Had the soldiers seen in the dark this figure gliding along the wall without apparent support, they would not have failed to cry, "Magic!" but they did not see him. In four bounds he reached the window, and established himself between the bars and the pipe, so that from the inside he was concealed by the one, and from the outside by the other.

He then saw a great hall, lighted by a torch, and filled with armor of all sorts. There were enough pikes, swords, halberds, and muskets to arm four regiments. He gave less attention, however, to the arms than to the people engaged in distributing them, and his piercing eyes sought eagerly to distinguish their faces.

"Oh! oh!" thought he, "there is M. Cruce, little Brigard and Leclerc, who dares to call himself Bussy. Peste! the bourgeoisie is grandly represented; but the nobility – ah! M. de Mayneville presses the hand of Nicholas Poulain; what a touching fraternity! An orator, too!" continued he, as M. de Mayneville prepared to harangue the assembly.

Briquet could not hear a word, but he thought that he did not make much impression on his audience, for one shrugged his shoulders, and another turned his back. But at last they approached, seized his hand, and threw up their hats in the air. But though Briquet could not hear, we must inform our readers of what passed.

First, Cruce, Marteau, and Bussy had complained of the inaction of the Duc de Guise.

Marteau was spokesman, and said, "M. de Mayneville, you come on the part of M. le Duc de Guise, and we accept you as his ambassador; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable.

After the death of his glorious father, he, when only eighteen years of age, made all good Frenchmen join this project of the Union, and enrolled us under this banner. We have risked our lives, and sacrificed our fortunes, for the triumph of this sacred cause, according to our oaths, and yet, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses – nothing is decided. Take care, M. de Mayneville, Paris will grow tired, and then what will you do?"

This speech was applauded by all the leaguers.

M. de Mayneville replied, "Gentlemen, if nothing is decided, it is because nothing is ripe. Consider our situation; M. le Duc and his brother the cardinal are at Nancy – the one is organizing an army to keep in check the Huguenots of Flanders, whom M. d'Anjou wishes to oppose to us, the other is expediting courier after courier to the clergy of France and to the pope, to induce them to adopt the Union. The Duc de Gruise knows, what you do not, that the old alliance between the Duc d'Anjou and the Béarnais is ready to be renewed, and he wishes, before coming to Paris, to be in a position to crush both heresy and usurpation."

"They are everywhere where they are not wanted," said Bussy. "Where is Madame de Montpensier, for instance?"

"She entered Paris this morning."

"No one has seen her."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who was it?"

"Salcede."

"Oh! oh!" cried all.

"But where is she?" cried Bussy. "Has she disappeared? how did you know she was here?"

"Because I accompanied her to the Porte St. Antoine."

"I heard that they had shut the gates."

"Yes, they had."

"Then, how did she pass."

"In her own fashion. Something took place at the gates of Paris this morning, gentlemen, of which you appear to be ignorant. The orders were to open only to those who brought a card of admission – signed by whom I know not. Immediately before us five or six men, some of whom were poorly clothed, passed with these cards, before our eyes. Now, who were those men? What were the cards? Reply, gentlemen of Paris, who promised to learn everything concerning your city."

Thus Mayneville, from the accused, became the accuser, which is the great art of an orator.

"Cards and exceptional admissions!" cried Nicholas Poulain, "what can that mean?"

"If you do not know, who live here, how should I know, who live in Lorraine?"

"How did these people come?"

"Some on foot, some on horseback; some alone, and some with lackeys."

"Were they soldiers?"

"There were but two swords among the six; I think they were Gascons. This concerns you, M. Poulain, to find out. But to return to the League. Salcede, who had betrayed us, and would have done so again, not only did not speak, but retracted on the scaffold – thanks to the duchess, who, in the suite of one of these card-bearers, had the courage to penetrate the crowd even to the place of execution, and made herself known to Salcede, at the risk of being pointed out. At this sight Salcede stopped his confession, and an instant after, the executioner stopped his repentance. Thus, gentlemen, you have nothing to fear as to our enterprise in Flanders; this secret is buried in the tomb."

It was this last speech which had so pleased all the conspirators. Their joy seemed to annoy Briquet; he slipped down from his place, and returning to the court, said to the porter, "Parma and Lorraine." The gate was opened, and he left.

History tells us what passed afterward. M. de Mayneville brought from the Guises the plan of an insurrection which consisted of nothing less than to murder all the principal people of the city

who were known to be in favor with the king, and then to go through the streets crying, "Vive la Messe! death to our enemies!" In fact, to enact a second St. Bartholomew; in which, however, all hostile Catholics were to be confounded with the Protestants.

CHAPTER XII.
THE CHAMBER OF HIS MAJESTY HENRI III

In a great room at the Louvre sat Henri, pale and unquiet. Since his favorites, Schomberg, Quelus and Maugiron had been killed in a duel, St. Megrin had been assassinated by M. de Mayenne, and the wounds left by their deaths were still fresh and bleeding. The affection he bore his new favorites was very different from what he had felt for the old. He had overwhelmed D'Epernon with benefits, but he only loved him by fits and starts, and at certain times he even hated him, and accused him of cowardice and avarice.

D'Epernon knew how to hide his ambition, which was indeed vague in its aspirations; but his cupidity governed him completely. When he was rich, he was laughing and good-tempered; but when he was in want of money, he used to shut himself up in one of his castles, where, frowning and sad, he bemoaned his fate, until he had drawn from the weakness of the king some new gift.

Joyeuse was very different. He loved the king, who, in turn, had for him almost a fatherly affection. Young and impulsive, he was, perhaps, somewhat egotistical, and cared for little but to be happy. Handsome, brave and rich, Nature had done so much for him that Henri often regretted that she had left so little for him to add. The king knew his men well, for he was remarkably clear-sighted: and though often betrayed, was never deceived. But ennui was the curse of his life; he was ennuyé now, and was wondering if any one would come and amuse him, when M. le Duc d'Epernon was announced. Henri was delighted.

"Ah! good-evening, duke; I am enchanted to see you. Why were you not present at the execution of Salcede? – I told you there would be room in my box."

"Sire, I was unable to avail myself of your majesty's kindness."

"Unable?"

"Yes, sire; I was busy."

"One would think that you were my minister, coming to announce, with a long face, that some subsidy had not been paid."

"Ma foi! your majesty is right; the subsidy has not been paid, and I am penniless. But it was not that which occupied me."

"What then?"

"Your majesty knows what passed at the execution of Salcede?"

"Parbleu! I was there."

"They tried to carry off the criminal."

"I did not see that."

"It is the rumor all through the city, however."

"A groundless one."

"I believe your majesty is wrong."

"On what do you found your belief?"

"Because Salcede denied before the people what he had confessed to the judges."

"Ah! you know that, already."

"I try to know all that interests your majesty."

"Thanks; but what do you conclude from all this?"

"That a man who dies like Salcede was a good servant, sire."

"Well?"

"And the master who has such followers is fortunate."

"You mean to say that I have none such; or, rather, that I no longer have them. You are right, if that be what you mean."

"I did not mean that; your majesty would find, I am sure, were there occasion, followers as devoted as Salcede."

"Well, duke, do not look gloomy; I am sad enough already. Do be gay."

"Gayety cannot be forced, sire."

The king struck the table angrily. "You are a bad friend," said he; "I lost all, when I lost my former ones."

"May I dare to say to your majesty that you hardly encourage the new ones."

The king looked at him with an expression which he well understood.

"Ah! your majesty reproaches me with your benefits," said he, "but I do not reproach you with my devotion."

"Lavalette," cried Henri, "you make me sad; you who are so clever, and could so easily make me joyful. It is not your nature to fight continually, like my old favorites; but you are facetious and amusing, and give good counsel. You know all my affairs, like that other more humble friend, with whom I never experienced a moment's ennui."

"Of whom does your majesty speak?"

"Of my poor jester, Chicot. Alas! where is he?"

D'Epernon rose, piqued. "Your majesty's souvenirs, to-day, are not very amusing for other people," said he.

"Why so?"

"Your majesty, without intending it, perhaps, compared me to Chicot, which is not very flattering."

"You are wrong, D'Epernon; I could only compare to Chicot a man who loves me, and whom I love."

"It was not to resemble Chicot, I suppose, that your majesty made me a duke?"

"Chicot loved me, and I miss him; that is all I can say. Oh! when I think that in the same place where you now are have been all those young men, handsome, brave, and faithful – that there, on that very chair on which you have placed your hat, Chicot has slept more than a hundred times – "

"Perhaps that was very amusing," interrupted the duke, "but certainly not very respectful."

"Alas! he has now neither mind nor body." – "What became of him?"

"He died, like all who loved me."

"Well, sire, I think he did well to die; he was growing old, and I have heard that sobriety was not one of his virtues. Of what did he die – indigestion?"

"Of grief."

"Oh! he told you so, to make you laugh once more."

"You are wrong; he would not sadden me with the news of his illness. He knew how I regretted my friends – he, who had so often seen me weep for them."

"Then it was his shade that came to tell you?"

"No; I did not even see his shade. It was his friend, the worthy prior Gorenflot, who wrote me this sad news."

"I see that if he lived your majesty would make him chancellor."

"I beg, duke, that you will not laugh at those who loved me, and whom I loved."

"Oh! sire, I do not desire to laugh, but just now you reproached me with want of gayety, parfandious!"

"Well, now I am in the mood to hear bad news, if you have any to tell. Luckily I have strength to bear it, or I should be dead ten times a day."

"Which would not displease certain people of our acquaintance."

"Oh! against them I have the arms of my Swiss."

"I could find you a better guard than that."

"You?" – "Yes, sire."

"What is it?"

"Will your majesty be so good as to accompany me to the old buildings of the Louvre?"

"On the site of the Rue de l'Astruce?"

"Precisely."

"What shall I see there?"

"Oh! come first."

"It is a long way, duke."

"We can go in five minutes through the galleries."

"D'Epernon – "

"Well, sire?"

"If what you are about to show me be not worth seeing, take care."

"I answer for it, sire."

"Come, then," said the king, rising.

The duke took his cloak, presented the king's sword to him, then, taking a light, preceded his majesty.

CHAPTER XIII.
THE DORMITORY

In less than five minutes they arrived at their destination. The duke took out a key, and, after crossing a court, opened an arched door, the bottom of which was overgrown with long grass. They went along a dark corridor, and then up a staircase to a room, of which D'Epernon had also the key. He opened the door, and showed the king forty-five beds, and in each of them a sleeper.

The king looked at all this with a troubled curiosity. "Well," said he, "who are these people?"

"People who sleep to-night, but will not do so to-morrow night."

"Why not?"

"That your majesty may sleep in peace."

"Explain yourself. Are these your friends?"

"Chosen by me, sire; intrepid guards, who will not quit your majesty, and who, gentlemen all, will be able to go wherever your majesty goes, and will let no one approach you."

"And you thought of this, D'Epernon?"

"I, alone, sire."

"We shall be laughed at."

"No, we shall be feared."

"But they will ruin me?"

"How can a king be ruined?"

"I cannot pay my Swiss!"

"Look at these men, sire; do you think they would be very expensive to keep?"

"But they could not always live like this, they would be stifled. And look at their doublets!"

"Oh! I confess they are not all very sumptuously clothed, but if they had been born dukes and peers – "

"Yes, I understand; they would have cost me more?" – "Just so."

"Well, how much will they cost? That will, perhaps, decide me, for, in truth, D'Epernon, they do not look very inviting."

"Sire, I know they are rather thin and burned by our southern sun, but I was so when I came to Paris. They will fatten and whiten like me."

"How they snore!"

"Sire, you must not judge them to-night; they have supped well."

"Stay, there is one speaking in his sleep; let us listen."

Indeed, one of the gentlemen called out, "If you are a woman, fly!"

The king approached him softly. "Ah! ah!" said he, "he is a gallant."

"What do you think of him, sire?"

"His face pleases me, and he has white hands and a well-kept beard."

"It is Ernanton de Carmainges, a fine fellow, who is capable of much."

"He has left behind him some love, I suppose, poor fellow. But what a queer figure his next neighbor is."

"Ah! that is M. de Chalabre. If he ruins your majesty, it will not be without enriching himself, I answer for it."

"And that one, with such a somber air; he does not seem as though he dreamed of love."

"What number, sire?"

"Number 12."

"M. de St. Maline, a brave fellow, with a heart of bronze."

"Well, Lavalette, you have had a good idea."

"I should think so. Imagine the effect that will be produced by these new watch-dogs, who will follow you like your shadow."

"Yes, yes; but they cannot follow me in this guise."

"Now we return to the money. But about this, also, I have an idea."

"D'Epernon!"

"My zeal for your majesty doubles my imagination."

"Well, let us hear it."

"If it depended upon me, each of these gentlemen should find by his bed a purse containing 1,000 crowns, as payment for the first six months."

"One thousand crowns for six months! 6,000 livres a year! You are mad, duke; an entire regiment would not cost that."

"You forget, sire, that it is necessary they should be well dressed. Each will have to take from his 1,000 crowns enough for arms and equipments. Set down 1,500 livres to effect this in a manner to do you honor, and there would remain 4,500 livres for the first year. Then for subsequent years you could give 3,000 livres."

"That is more reasonable."

"Then your majesty accepts?"

"There is only one difficulty, duke."

"What is it?"

"Want of money."

"Sire, I have found a method. Six months ago a tax was levied on shooting and fishing."

"Well?"

"The first payment produced 65,000 crowns, which have not yet been disposed of."

"I destined it for the war, duke."

"The first interest of the kingdom is the safety of the king."

"Well; there still would remain 20,000 crowns for the army."

"Pardon, sire, but I had disposed of them, also."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sire; your majesty had promised me money."

"Ah! and you give me a guard to obtain it."

"Oh! sire. But look at them; will they not have a good effect?"

"Yes, when dressed, they will not look bad. Well, so be it."

"Well, then, sire, I have a favor to ask."

"I should be astonished if you had not."

"Your majesty is bitter to-day."

"Oh! I only mean, that having rendered me a service, you have the right to ask for a return."

"Well, sire, it is an appointment."

"Why, you are already colonel-general of infantry, more would crush you."

"In your majesty's service, I am a Samson."

"What is it, then?"

"I desire the command of these forty-five gentlemen."

"What! you wish to march at their head?"

"No; I should have a deputy; only I desire that they should know me as their head."

"Well, you shall have it. But who is to be your deputy?"

"M. de Loignac, sire."

"Ah! that is well."

"He pleases your majesty?"

"Perfectly."

"Then it is decided?"

"Yes; let it be as you wish."
"Then I will go at once to the treasurer, and get my forty-five purses."
"To-night?"
"They are to find them to-morrow, when they wake."
"Good; then I will return."
"Content, sire?"
"Tolerably."
"Well guarded, at all events."
"By men who sleep."
"They will not sleep to-morrow, sire."

CHAPTER XIV.
THE SHADE OF CHICOT

The king, as we have said, was never deceived as to the character of his friends; he knew perfectly well that D'Epernon was working for his own advantage, but as he expected to have had to give and receive nothing in return, whereas he had got forty-five guards, he had thought it a good idea. Besides, it was a novelty, which was a thing that a poor king of France could not always get, and especially Henri III., who, when he had gone through his processions, counted his dogs, and uttered his usual number of sighs, had nothing left to do. Therefore he became more and more pleased with the idea as he returned to his room.

"These men are doubtless brave, and will be perhaps very devoted," thought he; "and forty-five swords always ready to leap from their scabbards are a grand thing."

This thought brought to his mind the other devoted swords that he regretted so bitterly. He became sad again, and inquired for Joyeuse. They replied that he had not returned.

"Then call my valets-de-chambre."

When he was in bed, they asked if his reader should attend, for Henri was subject to long fits of wakefulness, and was often read to sleep.

"No," replied the king, "I want no one; only if M. de Joyeuse returns, bring him to me."

"If he returns late, sire?"

"Alas! he is always late; but whatever be the hour, bring him here."

The servants extinguished the candles and lighted a lamp of essences, which gave a pale blue flame, that the king liked. Henri was tired, and soon slept, but not for long; he awoke, thinking he heard a noise in the room.

"Joyeuse," he asked; "is it you?"

No one replied. The light burned dim, and only threw faint circles on the ceiling of carved oak.

"Alone, still!" murmured the king. "Mon Dieu! I am alone all my life, as I shall be after death."

"'Alone after death'; that is not certain," said a powerful voice near the bed.

The king started up and looked round him in terror. "I know that voice," cried he.

"Ah! that is lucky," replied the voice.

"It is like the voice of Chicot."

"You burn, Henri: you burn."

Then the king, getting half out of bed, saw a man sitting in the very chair which he had pointed out to D'Epernon.

"Heaven protect me!" cried he; "it is the shade of Chicot."

"Ah! my poor Henriquet, are you still so foolish?"

"What do you mean?"

"That shades cannot speak, having no body, and consequently no tongue."

"Then you are Chicot, himself?" cried the king, joyfully.

"Do not be too sure."

"Then you are not dead, my poor Chicot?"

"On the contrary; I am dead."

"Chicot, my only friend."

"You, at least, are not changed."

"But you, Chicot, are you changed?"

"I hope so."

"Chicot, my friend, why did you leave me?"

"Because I am dead."

"You said just now that you were not dead."

"Dead to some – alive to others."

"And to me?" – "Dead."

"Why dead to me?"

"It is easy to comprehend that you are not the master here."

"How?"

"You can do nothing for those who serve you."

"Chicot!"

"Do not be angry, or I shall be so, also."

"Speak then, my friend," said the king, fearful that Chicot would vanish.

"Well, I had a little affair to settle with M. de Mayenne, you remember?"

"Perfectly."

"I settled it; I beat this valiant captain without mercy. He sought for me to hang me; and you, whom I thought would protect me, abandoned me, and made peace with him. Then I declared myself dead and buried by the aid of my friend Gorenflot, so that M. de Mayenne has ceased to search for me."

"What a frightful courage you had, Chicot; did you not know the grief your death would cause me?"

"I have never lived so tranquilly as since the world thought me dead."

"Chicot, my head turns; you frighten me – I know not what to think."

"Well! settle something."

"I think that you are dead and – "

"Then I lie; you are polite."

"You commence by concealing some things from me; but presently, like the orators of antiquity, you will tell me terrible truths."

"Oh! as to that, I do not say no. Prepare, poor king!"

"If you are not a shade, how could you come unnoticed into my room, through the guarded corridors?" And Henri, abandoning himself to new terrors, threw himself down in the bed and covered up his head.

"Come, come," cried Chicot; "you have only to touch me to be convinced."

"But how did you come?"

"Why, I have still the key that you gave me, and which I hung round my neck to enrage your gentlemen, and with this I entered."

"By the secret door, then?"

"Certainly."

"And why to-day more than yesterday?"

"Ah! that you shall hear."

Henri, sitting up again, said like a child, "Do not tell me anything disagreeable, Chicot; I am so glad to see you again."

"I will tell the truth; so much the worse if it be disagreeable."

"But your fear of Mayenne is not serious?"

"Very serious, on the contrary. You understand that M. de Mayenne gave me fifty blows with a stirrup leather, in return for which I gave him one hundred with the sheath of my sword. No doubt he thinks, therefore, that he still owes me fifty, so that I should not have come to you now, however great your need, had I not known him to be at Soissons."

"Well, Chicot, I take you now under my protection, and I wish that you should be resuscitated and appear openly."

"What folly!"

"I will protect you, on my royal word."

"Bah! I have better than that."
"What?"
"My hole, where I remain."
"I forbid it," cried the king, jumping out of bed.
"Henri, you will catch cold; go back to bed, I pray."
"You are right, but you exasperated me. How, when I have enough guards, Swiss, Scotch, and French, for my own defense, should I not have enough for yours?"
"Let us see: you have the Swiss – "
"Yes, commanded by Tocquenot."
"Good! then you have the Scotch – "
"Commanded by Larchant."
"Very well! and you have the French guards – "
"Commanded by Crillon. And then – but I do not know if I ought to tell you – "
"I did not ask you."
"A novelty, Chicot!"
"A novelty?"
"Yes; imagine forty-five brave gentlemen."
"Forty-five? What do you mean?"
"Forty-five gentlemen."
"Where did you find them? Not in Paris, I suppose?"
"No, but they arrived here yesterday."
"Oh!" cried Chicot, with a sudden illumination, "I know these gentlemen."
"Really!"
"Forty-five beggars, who only want the wallet; figures to make one die with laughter."
"Chicot, there are splendid men among them."
"Gascons, like your colonel-general of infantry."
"And like you, Chicot. However, I have forty-five formidable swords at command."
"Commanded by the 46th, whom they call D'Epernon."
"Not exactly."
"By whom, then?"
"De Loignac."
"And it is with them you think to defend yourself?"
"Yes, mordieu! yes."
"Well, I have more troops than you."
"You have troops?"
"Why not?"
"What are they?"
"You shall hear. First, all the army that MM. de Guise are raising in Lorraine."
"Are you mad?"
"No; a real army – at least six thousand men."
"But how can you, who fear M. de Mayenne so much, be defended by the soldiers of M. de Guise?"
"Because I am dead."
"Again this joke!"
"No; I have changed my name and position."
"What are you, then?"
"I am Robert Briquet, merchant and leaguer."
"You a leaguer?"

"A devoted one, so that I keep away from M. de Mayenne. I have, then, for me, first, the army of Lorraine – six thousand men; remember that number."

"I listen."

"Then, at least one hundred thousand Parisians."

"Famous soldiers!"

"Sufficiently so to annoy you much: 6,000 and 100,000 are 106,000; then there is the pope, the Spaniards, M. de Bourbon, the Flemings, Henry of Navarre, the Duc d'Anjou – "

"Have you done?" interrupted Henri, impatiently.

"There still remain three classes of people."

"What are they?"

"First the Catholics, who hate you because you only three parts exterminated the Huguenots: then the Huguenots, who hate you because you have three parts exterminated them; and the third party is that which desires neither you, nor your brother, nor M. de Guise, but your brother-in-law, Henri of Navarre."

"Provided that he abjure. But these people of whom you speak are all France."

"Just so. These are my troops as a leaguer; now add, and compare."

"You are joking, are you not, Chicot?"

"Is it a time to joke, when you are alone, against all the world?"

Henri assumed an air of royal dignity. "Alone I am," said he, "but at the same time I alone command. You show me an army, but where is the chief? You will say, M. de Guise; but do I not keep him at Nancy? M. de Mayenne, you say yourself, is at Soissons, the Duc d'Anjou is at Brussels, and the king of Navarre at Pau; so that if I am alone, I am free. I am like a hunter in the midst of a plain, waiting to see his prey come within his reach."

"On the contrary; you are the game whom the hunters track to his lair."

"Chicot!"

"Well! let me hear whom you have seen come."

"No one."

"Yet some one has come."

"Of those whom I named?"

"Not exactly, but nearly."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"My sister Margot?"

"No; the Duchesse de Montpensier."

"She! at Paris?"

"Mon Dieu! yes."

"Well, if she be; I do not fear women."

"True; but she comes as the avant courier to announce the arrival of her brother."

"Of M. de Guise?"

"Yes."

"And do you think that embarrasses me? Give me ink and paper."

"What for? To sign an order for M. de Guise to remain at Nancy?"

"Exactly; the idea must be good, since you had it also."

"Execrable, on the contrary."

"Why?"

"As soon as he receives it he will know he is wanted at Paris, and he will come."

The king grew angry. "If you only returned to talk like this," said he, "you had better have stayed away."

"What would you have? Phantoms never flatter. But be reasonable; why do you think M. de Guise remains at Nancy?"

"To organize an army."

"Well; and for what purpose does he destine this army?"

"Ah, Chicot! you fatigue me with all these questions."

"You will sleep better after it. He destines this army – "

"To attack the Huguenots in the north – "

"Or rather, to thwart your brother of Anjou, who has called himself Duke of Brabant, and wishes to build himself a throne in Flanders, for which he solicits your aid – "

"Which I never sent."

"To the great joy of the Duc de Guise. Well, if you were to feign to send this aid – if they only went half way – "

"Ah! yes, I understand; M. de Guise would not leave the frontier."

"And the promise of Madame de Montpensier that her brother would be here in a week – "

"Would be broken."

"You see, then?"

"So far, good; but in the south – "

"Ah, yes; the Béarnais – "

"Do you know what he is at?"

"No."

"He claims the towns which were his wife's dowry," said the king.

"Insolent! to claim what belongs to him."

"Cahors, for example; as if it would be good policy to give up such a town to an enemy."

"No; but it would be like an honest man."

"But to return to Flanders. I will send some one to my brother – but whom can I trust? Oh! now I think of it, you shall go, Chicot."

"I, a dead man?"

"No; you shall go as Robert Briquet."

"As a bagman?"

"Do you refuse?" – "Certainly."

"You disobey me!"

"I owe you no obedience – "

Henri was about to reply, when the door opened and the Duc de Joyeuse was announced.

"Ah! there is your man," said Chicot; "who could make a better ambassador?"

Chicot then buried himself in the great chair, so as to be quite invisible in the dim light. M. de Joyeuse did not see him. The king uttered a cry of joy on seeing his favorite, and held out his hand.

"Sit down, Joyeuse, my child," said he; "how late you are."

"Your majesty is very good," answered Joyeuse, approaching the bed, on which he sat down.

CHAPTER XV.
THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING A GOOD AMBASSADOR

Chicot was hidden in his great chair, and Joyeuse was half lying on the foot of the bed in which the king was bolstered up, when the conversation commenced.

"Well, Joyeuse," said Henri, "have you well wandered about the town?"

"Yes, sire," replied the duke, carelessly.

"How quickly you disappeared from the Place de Greve."

"Sire, to speak frankly, I do not like to see men suffer."

"Tender heart."

"No; egotistical heart, rather; then sufferings act on my nerves."

"You know what passed?"

"Ma foi! no."

"Salcede denied all."

"Ah!"

"You bear it very indifferently, Joyeuse."

"I confess I do not attach much importance to it; besides, I was certain he would deny everything."

"But since he confessed before the judges – "

"All the more reason that he should deny it afterward. The confession put the Guises on their guard, and they were at work while your majesty remained quiet."

"What! you foresee such things, and do not warn me?"

"I am not a minister, to talk politics."

"Well, Joyeuse, I want your brother."

"He, like myself, is at your majesty's service."

"Then I may count on him?"

"Doubtless."

"I wish to send him on a little mission."

"Out of Paris?"

"Yes."

"In that case, it is impossible."

"How so?"

"Du Bouchage cannot go away just now."

The king looked astonished. "What do you mean?" said he.

"Sire," said Joyeuse quietly, "it is the simplest thing possible. Du Bouchage is in love, but he had carried on his negotiations badly, and everything was going wrong; the poor boy was growing thinner and thinner."

"Indeed," said the king, "I have remarked it."

"And he had become sad, mordieu! as if he had lived in your majesty's court."

A kind of grunt, proceeding from the corner of the room interrupted Joyeuse, who looked round astonished.

"It is nothing, Joyeuse," said the king, laughing, "only a dog asleep on the footstool. You say, then, that Du Bouchage grew sad? – "

"Sad as death, sire. It seems he has met with some woman of an extraordinary disposition. However, one sometimes succeeds as well with this sort of women as with others, if you only set the right way to work."

"You would not have been embarrassed, libertine!"

"You understand, sire, that no sooner had he made me his confidant, than I undertook to save him."

"So that – "

"So that already the cure commences."

"What, is he less in love?"

"No; but he has more hope of making her so. For the future, instead of sighing with the lady, we mean to amuse her in every possible way. To-night I stationed thirty Italian musicians under her balcony."

"Ah! ma foi! music would not have amused me when I was in love with Madame de Conde."

"No; but you were in love, sire; and she is as cold as an icicle."

"And you think music will melt her?"

"Diable! I do not say that she will come at once and throw herself into the arms of Du Bouchage, but she will be pleased at all this being done for herself alone. If she do not care for this, we shall have plays, enchantments, poetry – in fact, all the pleasures of the earth, so that, even if we do not bring gayety back to her, I hope we shall to Du Bouchage."

"Well, I hope so; but since it would be so trying to him to leave Paris, I hope you are not also, like him, the slave of some passion?"

"I never was more free, sire."

"Oh! I thought you were in love with a beautiful lady?"

"Yes, sire, so I was; but imagine that this evening, after having given my lesson to Du Bouchage, I went to see her, with my head full of his love story, and, believing myself almost as much in love as he, I found a trembling frightened woman, and thinking I had disturbed her somehow, I tried to reassure her, but it was useless. I interrogated her, but she did not reply. I tried to embrace her, and she turned her head away. I grew angry, and we quarreled: and she told me she should never be at home to me any more."'

"Poor Joyeuse; what did you do?"

"Pardieu, sire! I took my hat and cloak, bowed, and went out, without once looking back."

"Bravo, Joyeuse; it was courageous."

"The more so, sire, that I thought I heard her sigh."

"But you will return?"

"No, I am proud."

"Well, my friend, this rupture is for your good."

"Perhaps so, sire; but I shall probably be horribly ennuyé for a week, having nothing to do. It may perhaps amuse me, however, as it is something new, and I think it distingué."

"Certainly it is, I have made it so," said the king. "However, I will occupy you with something."

"Something lazy, I hope?"

A second noise came from the chair; one might have thought the dog was laughing at the words of Joyeuse.

"What am I to do, sire?" continued Joyeuse.

"Get on your boots."

"Oh! that is against all my ideas."

"Get on horseback."

"On horseback! impossible."

"And why?"

"Because I am an admiral, and admirals have nothing to do with horses."

"Well, then, admiral, if it be not your place to mount a horse, it is so at all events to go on board ship. So you will start at once for Rouen, where you will find your admiral's ship, and make ready to sail immediately for Antwerp."

"For Antwerp!" cried Joyeuse, in a tone as despairing as though he had received an order for Canton or Valparaiso.

"I said so," replied the king, in a cold and haughty tone, "and there is no need to repeat it."

Joyeuse, without making the least further resistance, fastened his cloak and took his hat.

"What a trouble I have to make myself obeyed," continued Henri. "Ventrebleu! if I forget sometimes that I am the master, others might remember it."

Joyeuse bowed stifly, and said, "Your orders, sire?"

The king began to melt. "Go," said he, "to Rouen, where I wish you to embark, unless you prefer going by land to Brussels."

Joyeuse did not answer, but only bowed.

"Do you prefer the land route, duke?" asked Henri.

"I have no preference when I have an order to execute, sire."

"There, now you are sulky. Ah! kings have no friends."

"Those who give orders can only expect to find servants."

"Monsieur," replied the king, angry again, "you will go then to Rouen; you will go on board your ship, and will take the garrisons of Caudebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I will replace afterward. You will put them on board six transports, and place them at the service of my brother, who expects aid from me."

"My commission, if you please, sire."

"And since when have you been unable to act by virtue of your rank as admiral?"

"I only obey, sire; and, as much as possible, avoid responsibility."

"Well, then, M. le Duc, you will receive the commission at your hotel before you depart."

"And when will that be?"

"In an hour."

Joyeuse bowed and turned to the door. The king's heart misgave him. "What!" cried he, "not even the courtesy of an adieu? You are not polite, but that is a common reproach to naval people."

"Pardon me, sire, but I am a still worse courtier than I am a seaman;" and shutting the door violently, he went out.

"See how those love me, for whom I have done so much," cried the king; "ungrateful Joyeuse!"

"Well, are you going to recall him?" said Chicot, advancing. "Because, for once in your life, you have been firm, you repent it."

"Ah! so you think it very agreeable to go to sea in the month of October? I should like to see you do it."

"You are quite welcome to do so; my greatest desire just now is to travel."

"Then if I wish to send you somewhere you will not object to go?"

"Not only I do not object, but I request it."

"On a mission?"

"Yes."

"Will you go to Navarre?"

"I would go to the devil."

"You are joking."

"No; since my death I joke no more."

"But you refused just now to quit Paris."

"I was wrong, and I repent. I will go to Navarre, if you will send me."

"Doubtless; I wish it."

"I wait your orders, gracious prince," said Chicot, assuming the same attitude as Joyeuse.

"But you do not know if the mission will suit you. I have certain projects of embroiling Margot with her husband."

"Divide to reign was the A B C of politics one hundred years ago."

"Then you have no repugnance?"

"It does not concern me; do as you wish. I am ambassador, that is all; and as long as I am inviolable, that is all I care for."

"But now you must know what to say to my brother-in-law."

"I say anything! Certainly not."

"Not?"

"I will go where you like, but I will say nothing."

"Then you refuse?"

"I refuse to give a message, but I will take a letter."

"Well, I will give you a letter."

"Give it me, then."

"What! you do not think such a letter can be written at once. It must be well weighed and considered."

"Well, then, think over it. I will come or send for it early to-morrow."

"Why not sleep here?"

"Here?"

"Yes, in your chair."

"I sleep no more at the Louvre."

"But you must know my intentions concerning Margot and her husband. My letter will make a noise, and they will question you; you must be able to reply."

"Mon Dieu!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "how obtuse you are, great king. Do you think I am going to carry a letter a hundred and fifty leagues without knowing what is in it? Be easy, the first halt I make I shall open your letter and read it. What! have you sent ambassadors for ten years to all parts of the world, and know no better than that? Come, rest in peace, and I will return to my solitude."

"Where is it?"

"In the cemetery of the Grands-Innocens, great prince."

Henri looked at him in astonishment again.

"Ah! you did not expect that," said Chicot. "Well, till to-morrow, when I or my messenger will come – "

"How shall I know your messenger when he arrives?"

"He will say he comes from the shade." And Chicot disappeared so rapidly as almost to reawaken the king's fears as to whether he were a shade or not.

CHAPTER XVI.
THE SERENADE

From the Louvre Chicot had not far to go to his home. He went to the bank of the Seine and got into a little boat which he had left there.

"It is strange," thought he, as he rowed and looked at the still-lighted window of the king's room, "that after so many years, Henri is still the same. Others have risen or fallen, while he has gained some wrinkles, and that is all. He has the same weak, yet elevated mind – still fantastical and poetical – still the same egotistical being, always asking for more than one has to give him, friendship from the indifferent, love from the friendly, devotion from the loving, and more sad than any one in his kingdom. By-the-by, he did not speak of giving me any money for my journey; that proves at least that he thinks me a friend." And he laughed quietly.

He soon arrived at the opposite bank, where he fastened his boat. On entering the Rue des Augustins, he was struck by the sound of instruments and voices in the street at that late hour.

"Is there a wedding here?" thought he, "I have not long to sleep, and now this will keep me awake."

As he advanced, he saw a dozen flambeaux carried by pages, while thirty musicians were playing on different instruments. The band was stationed before a house, that Chicot, with surprise, recognized as his own. He remained for an instant stupefied, and then said to himself, "There must be some mistake; all this noise cannot be for me. Unless, indeed, some unknown princess has suddenly fallen in love with me."

This supposition, flattering as it was, did not appear to convince Chicot, and he turned toward the house facing his, but it showed no signs of life.

"They must sleep soundly, there," said he; "such a noise is enough to wake the dead."

"Pardon me, my friend," said he, addressing himself to a torch-bearer, "but can you tell me, if you please, who all this music is for?"

"For the bourgeois who lives there." replied he, pointing out to Chicot his own house.

"Decidedly it is for me!" thought he. "Whom do you belong to?" he asked.

"To the bourgeois who lives there."

"Ah! they not only come for me, but they belong to me – still better. Well! we shall see," and piercing through the crowd, he opened his door, went upstairs, and appeared at his balcony, in which he placed a chair and sat down.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you sure there is no mistake? is all this really for me?"

"Are you M. Robert Briquet?"

"Himself."

"Then we are at your service, monsieur," said the leader of the band, giving the sign to recommence.

"Certainly it is unintelligible," thought Chicot. He looked around; all the inhabitants of the street were at their windows, excepting those of the opposite house, which, as we have said, remained dark and quiet. But on glancing downward, he saw a man wrapped in a dark cloak, and who wore a black hat with a red feather, leaning against the portico of his own door, and looking earnestly at the opposite house.

The leader of the band just then quitted his post and spoke softly to this man, and Chicot instantly guessed that here lay all the interest of the scene. Soon after, a gentleman on horseback, followed by two squires, appeared at the corner of the street, and pushed his way through the crowd, while the music stopped.

"M. de Joyeuse," murmured Chicot, who recognized him at once.

The cavalier approached the gentleman under the balcony.

"Well! Henri," said he, "what news?"

"Nothing, brother." – "Nothing?"

"No; she has not even appeared."

"They have not made noise enough."

"They have roused all the neighborhood."

"They did not cry as I told them, that it was all in honor of this bourgeois."

"They cried it so loud, that there he is, sitting in his balcony, listening."

"And she has not appeared?"

"Neither she, nor any one."

"The idea was ingenious, however, for she might, like the rest of the people, have profited by the music given to her neighbor."

"Ah! you do not know her, brother."

"Yes, I do; or at all events I know women, and as she is but a woman, we will not despair."

"Ah! you say that in a discouraged tone, brother."

"Not at all; only give the bourgeois his serenade every night."

"But she will go away."

"Not if you do not speak to her, or seem to be doing it on her account, and remain concealed. Has the bourgeois spoken?"

"Yes, and he is now speaking again."

"Hold your tongue up there and go in," cried Joyeuse, out of humor. "Diable! you have had your serenade, so keep quiet."

"My serenade! that is just what I want to know the meaning of; to whom is it addressed?"

"To your daughter."

"I have none." – "To your wife, then."

"Thank God, I am not married."

"Then to yourself, and if you do not go in – " cried Joyeuse, advancing with a menacing air.

"Ventre de biche! but if the music be for me – "

"Old fool!" growled Joyeuse. "If you do not go in and hide your ugly face they shall break their instruments over your head."

"Let the man alone, brother," said Henri, "the fact is, he must be very much astonished."

"Oh! but if we get up a quarrel, perhaps she will look to see what is the matter; we will burn his house down, if necessary."

"No, for pity's sake, brother, do not let us force her attention; we are beaten, and must submit."

Chicot, who heard all, was mentally preparing the means of defense, but Joyeuse yielded to his brother's request, and dismissed the pages and musicians.

Then he said to his brother, "I am in despair; all conspires against us."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no longer time to aid you."

"I see now that you are in traveling dress; I did not remark it before."

"I set off to-night for Antwerp, by desire of the king."

"When did he give you the order?"

"This evening."

"Mon Dieu!"

"Come with me, I entreat."

"Do you order me, brother?" said Henri, turning pale at the thought.

"No; I only beg you."

"Thank you, brother. If I were forced to give up passing my nights under this window."

"Well?"

"I should die."

"You are mad."

"My heart is here, brother; my life is here."

Joyeuse crossed his arms with a mixture of anger and pity. "If our father," he said, "begged you to let yourself be attended by Miron, who is at once a philosopher and a doctor?"

"I should reply to my father that I am well and that my brain is sound, and that Miron cannot cure love sickness."

"Well, then, Henri, I must make the best of it. She is but a woman, and at my return I hope to see you more joyous than myself."

"Yes, yes, my good brother, I shall be cured – I shall be happy, thanks to your friendship, which is my most precious possession."

"After your love."

"Before my life."

Joyeuse, much touched, interrupted him.

"Let us go, brother," said he.

"Yes, brother, I follow you," said Du Bouchage, sighing.

"Yes, I understand; the last adieux to the window; but you have also one for me, brother."

Henri passed his arms round the neck of his brother, who leaned down to embrace him.

"No!" cried he. "I will accompany you to the gates," and with a last look toward the window, he followed his brother.

Chicot continued to watch. Gradually every one disappeared, and the street was deserted. Then one of the windows of the opposite house was opened, and a man looked out.

"There is no longer any one, madame," said he; "you may leave your hiding-place and go down to your own room," and lighting a lamp, he gave it into a hand stretched out to receive it.

Chicot looked earnestly, but as he caught sight of her pale but sublime face, he shuddered and sat down, entirely subjugated, in his turn, by the melancholy influence of the house.

CHAPTER XVII.
CHICOT'S PURSE

Chicot passed the remainder of the night dreaming in his armchair, for the face of that woman brought before him a number of illustrious shades connected with many happy or terrible souvenirs, and he who had regretted his sleep on first arriving, now thought no more of it.

When morning dawned he got up, threw a cloak over his shoulders, and with the firmness of a sage, examined the bottom of his purse and his shoes. Chicot, a man of lively imagination, had made in the principal beam which ran through his house a cavity, a foot and a half long and six inches wide, which he used as a strong box, to contain 1,000 crowns in gold. He had made the following calculation: "I spend the twentieth part of one of these crowns every day; therefore I have enough to last me for 20,000 days. I cannot live so long as that, but I may live half as long, and as I grow older my wants and expenses will increase, and this will give me twenty-five or thirty good years to live, and that is enough." He was therefore tranquil as to the future.

This morning on opening his store, "Ventre de biche!" he cried, "times are hard, and I need not be delicate with Henri. This money did not come from him, but from an old uncle. If it were still night, I would go and get 100 crowns from the king; but now I have no resource but in myself or in Gorenflot."

This idea of drawing money from Gorenflot made him smile. "It would be odd," thought he, "if Gorenflot should refuse 100 crowns to the friend through whom he was appointed prior to the Jacobins. But this letter of the king's. I must go and fetch it. But these Joyeuses are in truth capable of burning my house down some night, to attract the lady to her window: and my 1,000 crowns! really, I think it would be better to hide them in the ground. However, if they burn my house the king shall pay me for it."

Thus reassured, he left the house, and at that moment saw at the window of the opposite house the servant of the unknown lady. This man, as we have said, was completely disfigured by a scar extending from the left temple to the cheek; but although bald and with a gray beard, he had a quick, active appearance, and a fresh and young-looking complexion. On seeing Chicot, he drew his hood over his head, and was going in, but Chicot called out to him:

"Neighbor! the noise here last night quite disgusted me, and I am going for some weeks to my farm; will you be so obliging as to look after my house a little?"

"Willingly, monsieur."

"And if you see robbers?"

"Be easy, monsieur, I have a good arquebuse."

"I have still one more favor to ask."

"What is it?"

"I hardly like to call it out."

"I will come down to you."

He came down accordingly, with his hood drawn closely round his face, saying, as a sort of apology, "It is very cold this morning."

"Yes," said Chicot, "there is a bitter wind. Well, monsieur, I am going away."

"You told me that before!"

"Yes, I know; but I leave a good deal of money behind me."

"So much the worse; why not take it with you?"

"I cannot; but I leave it well hidden – so well, that I have nothing to fear but fire. If that should happen, will you try and look after that great beam you see on the right."

"Really, monsieur, you embarrass me. This confidence would have been far better made to a friend than to a stranger of whom you know nothing."

"It is true, monsieur, that I do not know you; but I believe in faces, and I think yours that of an honest man."

"But, monsieur, it is possible that this music may annoy my mistress also, and then she might move."

"Well, that cannot be helped, and I must take my chance."

"Thanks, monsieur, for your confidence in a poor unknown; I will try to be worthy of it;" and bowing, he went into the house.

Chicot murmured to himself, "Poor young man, what a wreck, and I have seen him so gay and so handsome."

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS

The priory which the king had bestowed upon Gorenflot was situated near the Porte St. Antoine. This was at that time a very favorite quarter, for the king frequently visited the Chateau of Vincennes, and different noblemen had built charming residences in its neighborhood.

The priory was built on four sides of an immense court, planted with trees; it had a kitchen-garden behind, and a number of out-houses, which made it look like a small village. Two hundred monks occupied the dormitories situated at the end of the courtyard, while in the front, four large windows, with a balcony before them, gave to these apartments air and light.

It was maintained on its own resources and dependencies; its pasture land fed a troop of fifty oxen and ninety-nine sheep, for by some traditional law, no religious order was allowed to possess one hundred of anything, while certain outbuildings sheltered ninety-nine pigs of a particular breed, which were most carefully reared and fattened. The espaliers of the priory, which were exposed to the mid-day sun, furnished peaches, apricots, and grapes, while preserves of these fruits were skillfully made by a certain Brother Eusebius, who was the architect of the famous rock constructed of sweetmeats which had been presented to the two queens by the Hotel de Ville of Paris at the last state banquet which had taken place there.

In the interior of this paradise for gourmands and sluggards, in a sumptuous apartment, we shall find Gorenflot, ornamented with an additional chin, and characterized by that sort of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and good living gives to the most vulgar faces. Half-past seven in the morning had just struck. The prior had profited by the rule which gave to him an hour's more sleep than to the other monks, and now, although he had risen, he was quietly continuing his sleep in a large armchair as soft as eider down. The furniture of the room was more mundane than religious; a carved table, covered with a rich cloth, books of religious gallantry – that singular mixture of love and devotion, which we only meet with at that epoch of art – expensive vases, and curtains of rich damask, were some of the luxuries of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot had become possessed by the grace of God, of the king, and of Chicot.

Gorenflot slept, as we have said, in his chair, when the door opened softly, and two men entered. The first was about thirty-five years of age, thin and pale, and with a look which commanded, even before he spoke; lightnings seemed to dart from his eyes when they were open, although the expression was generally softened by a careful lowering of the white eyelids. This was Brother Borromée, who had been for the last three weeks treasurer of the convent. The other was a young man about seventeen or eighteen, with piercing black eyes, a bold look, and whose turned-up sleeves displayed two strong arms quick in gesticulation.

"The prior sleeps still, Father Borromée," said he: "shall we wake him?"

"On no account, Brother Jacques."

"Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long, for we might have tried the arms this morning. Did you notice what beautiful cuirasses and arquebuses there were among them?"

"Silence! brother; you will be heard."

"How unlucky," cried the young man, impatiently, stamping his feet, "it is so fine to-day, and the court is so dry."

"We must wait, my child," replied Borromée, with a submission his glance belied.

"But why do you not order them to distribute the arms?"

"I, order!"

"Yes, you."

"You know that I am not the master here; there is the master."

"Yes, asleep, when every one else is awake," replied Jacques, impatiently.

"Let us respect his sleep," said Borromée, overturning a chair, however, as he spoke.

At the sound, Gorenflot looked up and said, sleepily, "Who is there?"

"Pardon us," said Borromée, "if we interrupt your pious meditations, but I have come to take your orders."

"Ah! good-morning, Brother Borromée; what orders do you want?"

"About the arms."

"What arms?"

"Those which your reverence ordered to be brought here."

"I, and when?"

"About a week ago."

"I ordered arms?"

"Without doubt," replied Borromée, firmly.

"And what for?"

"Your reverence said to me, 'Brother Borromée, it would be wise to procure arms for the use of the brethren; gymnastic exercises develop the bodily forces, as pious exhortations do those of the soul.'"

"I said that?"

"Yes, reverend prior; and I, an unworthy but obedient brother, hastened to obey."

"It is strange, but I remember nothing about it."

"You even added this text, '*Militat spiritu, militat gladio.*'"

"What!" cried Gorenflot, "I added that text!"

"I have a faithful memory," said Borromée, lowering his eyes.

"Well, if I said so, of course I had my reasons for it. Indeed, that has always been my opinion."

"Then I will finish executing your orders, reverend prior," said Borromée, retiring with Jacques.

"Go," said Gorenflot, majestically.

"Ah!" said Borromée, "I had forgotten; there is a friend in the parlor who asks to see your reverence."

"What is his name?"

"M. Robert Briquet."

"Oh! he is not a friend; only an acquaintance."

"Then your reverence will not see him?"

"Oh, yes! let him come up; he amuses me."

CHAPTER XIX.
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."'

CHAPTER XX.
THE BREAKFAST

Gorenflot was not long in giving his orders. The cook was summoned.

"Brother Eusebius," said Gorenflot, in a severe voice, "listen to what my friend M. Briquet is about to tell you. It seems that you are negligent, and I hear of grave faults in your last soup, and a fatal mistake in the cooking of your ears. Take care, brother, take care; a single step in a wrong direction may be irremediable."

The monk grew red and pale by turns, and stammered out an excuse.

"Enough," said Gorenflot, "what can we have for breakfast to-day?"

"Eggs fried with cock's combs."

"After?"

"Mushrooms."

"Well?"

"Crabs cooked with Madeira."

"Those are all trifles; tell us of something solid."

"A ham boiled with pistachios."

Chicot looked contemptuous.

"Pardon!" cried Eusebius, "it is cooked in sherry wine."

Gorenflot hazarded an approving glance toward Chicot.

"Good! is it not, M. Briquet?" said he.

Chicot made a gesture of half-satisfaction.

"And what have you besides?"

"You can have some eels."

"Oh! we will dispense with the eels," said Chicot.

"I think, M. Briquet," replied the cook, "that you would regret it if you had not tasted my eels."

"What! are they rarities?"

"I nourish them in a particular manner."

"Oh, oh!"

"Yes," added Gorenflot; "it appears that the Romans or the Greeks – I forget which – nourished their lampreys as Eusebius does his eels. He read of it in an old author called Suetonius."

"Yes, monsieur, I mince the intestines and livers of fowls and game with a little pork, and make a kind of sausage meat, which I throw to my eels, and they are kept in soft water, often renewed, in which they become large and fat. The one which I shall offer you to-day weighs nine pounds."

"It must be a serpent!" said Chicot.

"It swallowed a chicken at a meal."

"And how will it be dressed?"

"Skinned and fried in anchovy paste, and done with bread crumbs; and I shall have the honor of serving it up with a sauce flavored with garlic and allspice, lemons and mustard."

"Perfect!" cried Chicot.

Brother Eusebius breathed again.

"Then we shall want sweets," said Gorenflot.

"I will invent something that shall please you."

"Well, then, I trust to you; be worthy of my confidence."

Eusebius bowed and retired. Ten minutes after, they sat down, and the programme was faithfully carried out. They began like famished men, drank Rhine wine, Burgundy and Hermitage, and then attacked that of the fair lady.

"What do you think of it?" asked Gorenflot.

"Good, but light. What is your fair petitioner's name?"

"I do not know; she sent an ambassador."

They ate as long as they could, and then sat drinking and talking, when suddenly a great noise was heard.

"What is that?" asked Chicot.

"It is the exercise which commences."

"Without the chief? Your soldiers are badly disciplined, I fear."

"Without me! never!" cried Gorenflot, who had become excited with wine. "That cannot be, since it is I who command – I who instruct – and stay, here is Brother Borromée, who comes to take my orders."

Indeed, as he spoke, Borromée entered, throwing on Chicot a sharp and oblique glance.

"Reverend prior," said he, "we only wait for you to examine the arms and cuirasses."

"Cuirasses!" thought Chicot, "I must see this," and he rose quietly.

"You will be present at our maneuvers?" said Gorenflot, rising in his turn, like a block of marble on legs. "Your arm, my friend; you shall see some good instruction."

CHAPTER XXI.
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.

CHAPTER XXII.
THE LESSON

Fencing was not at that time the science that it is now. The swords, sharp on each side, made them strike as often with the edge as with the point; besides, the left hand, armed with a dagger, was at the same time offensive and defensive, and hence resulted a number of slight wounds, which, in a real combat, kept up a continual excitement. Fencing, then in its infancy, consisted in a crowd of evolutions, in which the actor moved continually, and which, on a ground chosen by chance, might be continually impeded by its nature.

It was common to see the fencer throw himself forward, draw back again, or jump to the right or left, so that agility, not only of the hand, but of the whole body, was necessary. Chicot did not appear to have learned in this school, but seemed to have forestalled the modern style, of which the superiority and grace is in the agility of the hands and immovability of the body. He stood erect and firm, with a wrist at once strong and supple, and with a sword which seemed a flexible reed from the point to the middle of the blade, and an inflexible steel from thence to the guard.

At the very first commencement, Jacques, seeing before him this man of bronze, whose wrist alone seemed alive, gave some impatient passes, which merely made Chicot extend his arm, and at every opening left by the young man, strike him full on the chest. Jacques, red with anger and emulation as this was repeated, bounded back, and for ten minutes displayed all the resources of his wonderful agility – he flew like a tiger, twisted like a serpent, and bounded from right to left; but Chicot, with his calm air and his long arm, seized his time, and putting aside his adversary's sword, still sent his own to the same place, while Borromée grew pale with anger. At last, Jacques rushed a last time on Chicot, who, parrying his thrust with force, threw the poor fellow off his equilibrium, and he fell, while Chicot himself remained firm as a rock.

"You did not tell us you were a pillar," said Borromée, biting his nails with vexation.

"I, a poor bourgeois!" said Chicot.

"But, monsieur, to manage a sword as you do, you must have practiced enormously."

"Oh! mon Dieu! yes, monsieur, I have often held the sword, and have always found one thing." – "What is that?"

"That for him who holds it, pride is a bad counselor and anger a bad assistant. Now, listen, Jacques," added he: "you have a good wrist, but neither legs nor head; you are quick, but you do not reason. There are three essential things in arms – first the head, then the hands and legs: with the one you can defend yourself, with the others you may conquer, but with all three you can always conquer."

"Ah! monsieur," said Jacques, "try Brother Borromée; I should like to see it."

"No," said the treasurer, "I should be beaten, and I would rather confess it than prove it."

"How modest and amiable he is!" said Gorenflot.

"On the contrary," whispered Chicot, "he is stupid with vanity. At his age I would have given anything for such a lesson," and he sat down again.

Jacques approached him, and admiration triumphing over the shame of defeat:

"Will you give me some lessons, M. Briquet?" said he; "the prior will permit it, will you not, your reverence?"

"With pleasure, my child."

"I do not wish to interfere with your master," said Chicot, bowing to Borromée.

"Oh! I am not his only master," said he. "Neither all the honor nor the defeat are wholly due to me."

"Who is the other, then?"

"Oh! no one!" cried Borromée, fearing he had committed an imprudence.

"Who is he, Jacques?" asked Chicot.

"I remember," said Gorenflot; "he is a little fat man who comes here sometimes and drinks well."

"I forget his name," said Borromée.

"I know it," said a monk who was standing by. "It is Bussy Leclerc."

"Ah! a good sword," said Chicot.

Jacques reiterated his request.

"I cannot teach you," said Chicot. "I taught myself by reflection and practice; and I advise you to do the same."

Gorenflot and Chicot now returned to the house.

"I hope," said Gorenflot, with pride, "that this is a house worth something, and well managed."

"Wonderful! my friend; and when I return from my mission – "

"Ah! true, dear M. Chicot; let us speak of your mission."

"So much the more willingly, that I have a message to send to the king before I go."

"To the king, my dear friend! You correspond with the king?"

"Directly."

"And you want a messenger?"

"Yes."

"Will you have one of our monks? It would be an honor to the priory."

"Willingly."

"Then you are restored to favor?"

"More than ever."

"Then," said Gorenflot, "you can tell the king all that we are doing here in his favor."

"I shall not fail to do so."

"Ah! my dear Chicot," cried Gorenflot, who already believed himself a bishop.

"But first I have two requests to make."

"Speak."

"First, money, which the king will restore to you."

"Money! I have my coffers full."

"Ma foi! you are lucky."

"Will you have 1,000 crowns?"

"No, that is far too much; I am modest in my tastes, humble in my desires, and my title of ambassador does not make me proud; therefore 100 crowns will suffice."

"Here they are; and the second thing?"

"An attendant!"

"An attendant?"

"Yes, to accompany me; I love society."

"Ah! my friend, if I were but free, as formerly."

"But you are not."

"Greatness enslaves me," murmured Gorenflot.

"Alas!" said Chicot, "one cannot do everything at once. But not being able to have your honorable company, my dear prior, I will content myself with that of the little Jacques; he pleases me."

"You are right, Chicot, he is a rare lad."

"I am going to take him 250 leagues, if you will permit it."

"He is yours, my friend."

The prior struck a bell, and when the servant appeared said, "Let Brother Jacques come here, and also our messenger."

Ten minutes after both appeared at the door.

"Jacques," said Gorenflot, "I give you a special mission."

"Me!" cried the young man, astonished.

"Yes, you are to accompany M. Robert Briquet on a long journey."

"Oh!" cried he, enthusiastically, "that will be delightful. We shall fight every day – shall we not, monsieur?"

"Yes, my child."

"And I may take my arquebuse?"

"Certainly."

Jacques bounded joyfully from the room.

"As to the message, I beg you to give your orders. Advance, Brother Panurge."

CHAPTER XXIII.
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.

CHAPTER XXIV.
THE AMBUSH

Chicot made a slight opening through the hedge, that he might see those who came and went. The road was almost deserted as far as he could see; there was no one but a man poorly clothed measuring the ground with a long, pointed stick. Chicot had nothing to do, and therefore was preparing to watch this man, when a more important object attracted his attention.

The window of Gorenflot's room opened with folding-doors on to a balcony, and Chicot saw them open, and Gorenflot come out, with his most gallant manner and winning smile, leading a lady almost hidden under a mantle of velvet and fur.

"Oh!" thought Chicot, "here is the penitent. She looks young; it is very odd, but I find resemblances in every one I see. And here comes the squire; as for him, there is no mistake; I know him, and if he be Mayneville – ventre de biche! – why should not the lady be Madame de Montpensier? And, morbleu! that woman *is* the duchess!"

After a moment, he saw the pale head of Borromée behind them.

"What are they about?" thought Chicot; "does the duchess want to board with Gorenflot?"

At this moment Chicot saw M. de Mayneville make a sign to some one outside. Chicot looked round, but there was no one to be seen but the man measuring. It was to him, however, that the sign was addressed, for he had ceased measuring, and was looking toward the balcony. Borromée began also to gesticulate behind Mayneville, in a manner unintelligible to Chicot, but apparently clear to this man, for he went further off, and stationed himself in another place, where he stopped at a fresh sign. Then he began to run quickly toward the gate of the priory, while M. de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

"Diable!" said Chicot, "this is all very odd."

As the man passed him, he recognized Nicholas Poulain, the man to whom he had sold his armor the day before. Shortly after, they all re-entered the room and shut the window, and then the duchess and her squire came out of the priory and went toward the litter which waited for them. Gorenflot accompanied them to the door, exhausting himself in bows and salutations. The curtains of the litter were still open, when a monk, in whom Chicot recognized Jacques, advanced from the Porte St. Antoine, approached, and looked earnestly into it. The duchess then went away, and Nicholas Poulain was following, when Chicot called out from his hiding place —

"Come here, if you please."

Poulain started, and turned his head.

"Do not seem to notice, M. Nicholas Poulain," said Chicot.

The lieutenant started again. "Who are you, and what do you want?" asked he.

"I am a friend, new, but intimate; what I want will take long to explain; come here to me."

"To you?"

"Yes; here in the ditch."

"What for?"

"You shall know when you come."

"But – "

"Come and sit down here, without appearing to notice me."

"Monsieur?"

"Oh! M. Robert Briquet has the right to be exacting."

"Robert Briquet!" cried Poulain, doing as he was desired.

"That is right; it seems you were taking measures in the road."

"I!"

"Yes; there is nothing surprising that you should be a surveyor, especially as you acted under the eyes of such great people."

"Great people! I do not understand."

"What! you did not know?"

"What do you mean?"

"You did not know who that lady and gentlemen on the balcony were?"

"I declare – "

"Oh! how fortunate I am to be able to enlighten you. Only imagine, M. Poulain; you had for admirers Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville. Do not go away. If a still more illustrious person – the king – saw you – "

"Ah! M. Briquet – "

"Never mind; I am only anxious for your good."

"But what harm have I done to the king, or to you, or anybody?"

"Dear M. Poulain, my ideas may be wrong, but it seems to me that the king would not approve of his lieutenant of the Provostry acting as surveyor for M. de Mayneville; and that he might also take it ill that you should omit in your daily report the entrance of Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville, yesterday, into his good city of Paris."

"M. Briquet, an omission is not an offense, and his majesty is too good – "

"M. Poulain, I see clearer than you, and I see – "

"What?"

"A gallows."

"M. Briquet!"

"And more – a new cord, four soldiers at the four cardinal points, a number of Parisians around, and a certain lieutenant of my acquaintance at the end of the cord."

Nicholas Poulain trembled so that he shook the hedge. "Monsieur!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"But I am your friend, dear M. Poulain, and I will give you a counsel."

"A counsel?"

"Yes; and very easy to follow. Go at once, you understand, to – "

"Whom?"

"Let me think. To M. d'Epernon."

"M. d'Epernon, the king's friend?"

"Take him aside, and tell him all about this."

"This is folly."

"No, it is wisdom. It is clear that if I denounce you as the man of the cuirasses and measures, they will hang you; but if, on the contrary, you disclose all, with a good grace, they will reward you. You do not appear convinced, however. Well! that will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre, but I do not mind doing that for you," and he began to rise.

"No, no; stay here, I will go."

"Good! But you understand, no subterfuges, or to-morrow I shall send a little note to the king, whose intimate friend I have the honor to be, so that if you are not hanged till the day after to-morrow, you will only be hanged the higher."

"I will go; but you abuse your position."

"Oh! M. Poulain, you were a traitor five minutes ago, and I make you the savior of your country. Now, go quickly, for I am in a hurry. The Hotel d'Epernon – do not forget."

Nicholas Poulain ran off, with a despairing look.

"Ah! it was time," said Chicot, "for some one is leaving the priory. But it is not Jacques; that fellow is half as tall again."

Chicot then hastened to the Croix Faubin, where he had given the rendezvous. The monk, who was there to meet him, was a giant in height; his monk's robe, hastily thrown on, did not hide

his muscular limbs, and his face bore anything but a religious expression. His arms were as long as Chicot's own, and he had a knife in his belt.

As Chicot approached, he turned and said, "Are you M. Robert Briquet?"

"I am."

"Then I have a letter for you from the reverend prior."

Chicot took the letter, and read as follows:

> "My dear friend, I have reflected since we parted; it is impossible for me to let the lamb confided to me go among the wolves of the world. I mean, you understand, our little Jacques, who has fulfilled your message to the king. Instead of him, who is too young, I send you a good and worthy brother of our order; his manners are good, and his humor innocent, and I am sure you will like him. I send you my benediction. Adieu, dear friend."

"What fine writing," said Chicot; "I will wager it is the treasurer's."

"It was Brother Borromée who wrote it," said the Goliath.

"In that case you will return to the priory, my friend." – "I?"

"Yes; and tell his reverence that I have changed my mind, and intend to travel alone."

"What! you will not take me, monsieur?" said the man, with astonishment, mixed with menace.

"No, my friend."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because I must be economical, and you would eat too much."

"Jacques eats as much as I do."

"Yes, but Jacques was a monk."

"And what am I?"

"You, my friend, are a gendarme, or a foot soldier."

"What do you mean? Do you not see my monk's robe?"

"The dress does not make the monk, my friend; tell Brother Borromée that, if you please."

The giant disappeared, grumbling, like a beaten hound.

CHAPTER XXV.
THE GUISES

On the evening of the same day on which Chicot set off for Navarre, we shall find again, in a large room at the Hotel Guise, the person who, disguised as a page, had entered Paris behind Carmainges, and who was also, as we know, the penitent of Gorenflot. On this occasion her sex was disclosed, and, elegantly dressed, with her hair glittering with precious stones, she was waiting impatiently for some one.

At last a horse's step was heard, and the usher almost immediately announced M. le Duc de Mayenne. Madame de Montpensier ran to her brother so hastily that she forgot to proceed on the point of the right foot, as was her habit, in order to conceal her lameness.

"Are you alone, brother?" asked she.

"Yes, my sister."

"But Henri; where is Henri? Do you know that every one expects him here?"

"Henri has nothing to do here, and plenty to do in Flanders and Picardy. We have work to do there, and why should we leave it to come here, where our work is done?"

"But where it will be quickly undone, if you do not hasten."

"Bah!"

"Bah! if you like. I tell you the citizens will be put off no longer; they insist upon seeing their Duke Henri."

"They shall see him at the right time. And Salcede – ?"

"Is dead."

"Without speaking?"

"Without uttering a word."

"Good! and the arming?"

"Finished."

"And Paris?"

"Is divided into sixteen quarters."

"And each quarter has the chief pointed out?"

"Yes."

"Then let us live in peace, and so I shall say to our good bourgeoisie."

"They will not listen to you."

"Bah!"

"I tell you they are furious."

"My sister, you judge others by your own impatience. What Henri says must be done; and he says we are to remain quiet."

"What is to be done, then?" asked the duchess impatiently.

"What do you wish to do?"

"Firstly, to take the king."

"That is your fixed idea; I do not say it is bad, if it could be done, but think how often we have failed already."

"Times are changed, the king has no longer defenders."

"No; except the Swiss, Scotch, and French guards."

"My brother, when you wish it, I will show you the king on the road with only two lackeys."

"I have heard that a hundred times, and never seen it once."

"You will see it if you stay here only three days."

"Another project: tell me what it is."

"You will laugh at a woman's idea."

At this moment, M. de Mayneville was announced. "My accomplice," said she: "let him enter."

"One word, monseigneur," said he to M. de Mayenne as he entered; "they suspect your arrival at the Louvre."

"How so?"

"I was conversing with the captain of the guards at St. Germain l'Auxerrois, when two Gascons passed – "

"Do you know them?"

"No; they were quite newly dressed. 'Cap de Bious!' said one, 'you have a magnificent doublet, but it will not render you so much service as your cuirass of yesterday.' 'Bah!' said the other; 'however heavy the sword of M. de Mayenne may be, it will do no more harm to this satin than to my cuirass,' and then he went on in a series of bravadoes, which showed that they knew you were near."

"And to whom did these men belong?"

"I do not know; they talked so loudly that some passers-by approached, and asked if you were really coming. They were about to reply, when a man approached, whom I think was De Loignac, and touched them on the shoulder. He said some words in a low voice, and they looked submissive, and accompanied him, so that I know no more; but be on your guard."

"You did not follow them?"

"Yes, but from afar. They went toward the Louvre, and disappeared behind the Hotel des Meubles."

"I have a very simple method of reply," said the duke.

"What?"

"To go and pay my respects to the king to-night."

"To the king?"

"Certainly; I have come to Paris – he can have nothing to say against that."

"The idea is good," said Mayneville.

"It is imprudent," said the duchess.

"It is indispensable, sister, if they indeed suspect my arrival. Besides, it was the advice of Henri to go at once and present to the king the respects of the family; that once done, I am free, and can receive whom I please."

"The members of the committee, for example, who expect you."

"I will receive them at the Hotel St. Denis on my return from the Louvre. You will wait for us, if you please, my sister." – "Here?"

"No; at the Hotel St. Denis, where I have left my equipages. I shall be there in two hours."

CHAPTER XXVI.
THE LOUVRE

That same day, about noon, the king came out of his cabinet and called for M. d'Epernon. The duke, when he came, found the king attentively examining a young monk.

The king took D'Epernon aside, "Look, what an odd-looking monk," said he.

"Does your majesty think so? – I think him very ordinary."

"Really!" Then to the monk, the king said, "What is your name?"

"Brother Jacques, sire."

"Your family name?"

"Clement."

"Good. You have performed your commission very well."

"What commission, sire?" said the duke, with his wonted familiarity.

"Nothing!" said Henri. "It is a little secret between me and some one you do not know."

"How strangely you look at the lad, sire! you embarrass him."

"It is true; I know not why, but it seems to me that I have seen him before; perhaps it was in a dream. Go, my child; I will send the letter to him who asks for it; be easy. D'Epernon, give him ten crowns."

"Thanks, sire," said the monk.

"You did not say that as if you meant it," said D'Epernon, who did not understand a monk despising ten crowns.

"I would rather have one of those beautiful Spanish knives on the wall," said Jacques.

"What! you do not prefer money?"

"I have made a vow of poverty."

"Give him a knife, then, and let him go, Lavalette," said the king.

The duke chose one of the least rich and gave it to him. Jacques took it, quite joyful to possess such a beautiful weapon. When he was gone, the king said to D'Epernon, "Duke, have you among your Forty-five two or three men who can ride?"

"Twelve, at least, sire; and in a month all will be good horsemen."

"Then choose two, and let them come to me at once."

The duke went out, and calling De Loignac, said to him, "Choose me two good horsemen, to execute a commission for his majesty."

De Loignac went to the gallery where they were lodged, and called M. de Carmainges and M. de St. Maline. They soon appeared, and were conducted to the duke, who presented them to the king, who dismissed the duke.

"You are of my Forty-five, then?" said he to the young men.

"I have that honor, sire," said St. Maline.

"And you, monsieur?"

"And I, also, sire," replied Carmainges; "and I am devoted to your majesty's service, as much as any one in the world."

"Good! Then mount your horses, and take the road to Tours – do you know it?"

"We will inquire."

"Go by Charenton."

"Yes, sire."

"And proceed till you overtake a man traveling alone."

"Will your majesty describe him?" said St. Maline.

"He has long arms and legs, and has a large sword by his side."

"May we know his name, sire?" asked Carmainges.

"He is called 'the Shade.'"

"We will ask the name of every traveler we see, sire."

"And we will search the hotels."

"When you find him, give him this letter."

Both the young men held out their hands.

The king was embarrassed. "What is your name?" said he.

"Ernanton de Carmainges, sire."

"And yours?"

"Rene de St. Maline."

"M. de Carmainges, you shall carry the letter, and you, M. de St. Maline, shall deliver it."

Ernanton took the precious deposit, and was going to place it in his doublet, when St. Maline stopped him, kissed the letter, and then returned it to Ernanton.

This made Henri smile. "Come, gentlemen," said he, "I see I shall be well served." – "Is this all, sire?"

"Yes, gentlemen; only our last recommendation. This letter is more precious than the life of a man – for your heads, do not lose it; give it secretly to the Shade, who will give you a receipt for it, which you will bring back to me; and, above all, travel as though it were on your own affairs. Go."

The two young men went out – Ernanton full of joy, and St. Maline filled with jealousy. M. d'Epernon waited for them, and wished to question them, but Ernanton replied: "M. le Duc, the king did not authorize us to speak."

They went to the stables, when the king's huntsman gave them two strong horses. M. d'Epernon would have followed them, but at that moment he was told that a man much wished to speak to him at once. "Who is he?" he asked.

"The lieutenant of the provost of the Ile de France."

"Parfandious! am I sheriff or provost?"

"No, monsieur; but you are a friend of the king, and, as such, I beg you to hear me," said a humble voice at his side.

The duke turned. Near him was a man, bowing perpetually.

"Who are you?" asked the duke.

"Nicholas Poulain, monsieur."

"And you wish to speak to me?"

"I beg for that favor."

"I have no time."

"Not even to hear a secret?"

"I hear a hundred every day."

"But this concerns the life of his majesty," said Poulain, in a low voice.

"Oh! oh! then come into my cabinet."

CHAPTER XXVII.
THE REVELATION

M. D'Epernon, in traversing the antechamber, addressed himself to one of the gentlemen who stood there.

"What is your name, monsieur?" said he.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, monsieur."

"Well, M. de Montcrabeau, place yourself at that door, and let no one enter."

"Yes, M. le Duc;" and M. Pertinax, who was sumptuously dressed, with a blue satin doublet and orange stockings, obeyed. Nicholas Poulain followed the duke into his cabinet.

"Now let us hear your conspiracy," said the duke.

"Oh! M. le Duc, it concerns the most frightful crimes."

"They wish to kill me, I suppose."

"It does not concern you, monsieur; it is the king. They wish to carry him off."

"Oh! again that old story," replied the duke, disdainfully.

"This time the thing is serious, M. le Duc."

"On what day do they intend to do it?"

"The first time that his majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter."

"How will they do it?"

"By killing his two attendants."

"And who will do it?"

"Madame de Montpensier."

D'Epernon began to laugh. "That poor duchess; what things are attributed to her!"

"Less than she projects, monsieur."

"And she occupies herself with that at Soissons?"

"No; she is in Paris."

"In Paris!"

"I can answer for it."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"You thought you did?"

"I have had the honor of speaking to her."

"The honor."

"I am wrong; the misfortune."

"But, my dear lieutenant, the duchess cannot carry off the king."

"With her associates, of course."

"And where will she be when this takes place?"

"At a window of the Jacobin Priory, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes."

"What the devil do you tell me?"

"The truth, monsieur: all is prepared to stop the litter at the gate of the priory."

"And who made the preparations?"

"Alas! – "

"Finish quickly."

"I did, monsieur."

D'Epernon started back. "You, who denounce them!"

"Monsieur, a good servant should risk all in the service of the king."

"Mordieu! you risk hanging."

"I prefer death to infamy, or to the death of the king, therefore I came; and I thought, M. le Duc, that you, the friend of the king, would not betray me, and would turn my news to good account."

The duke looked fixedly at Poulain. "There must be more in it," said he; "resolute as the duchess is, she would not attempt such an enterprise alone."

"She expects her brother."

"The Duke Henri?"

"No, monsieur; only the Duc de Mayenne."

"Ah! good," said d'Epernon; "now I must set to work to counteract these fine projects."

"Doubtless, monsieur; it was for that I came."

"If you have spoken the truth you shall be rewarded."

"Why should I lie, monsieur; where is my interest – I, who eat the king's bread? If you do not believe me, I will go to the king himself."

"No, parfandious, you shall not go to the king: you shall have to deal with me, alone."

"I only said it because you seemed to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; and, first, here are a thousand crowns for you, and you shall keep this secret between you and me."

"I have a family, monsieur."

"Well! a thousand crowns, parfandious."

"If they knew in Lorraine that I had spoken, each word would cost me a pint of blood; and in case of any misfortune, my family must be able to live, therefore I accept the thousand crowns."

The duke approached a coffer. Poulain thought it was for the money, and held out his hand, but he only drew out a little book and wrote, "Three thousand livres to M. Nicholas Poulain."

"It is as if you had them," said he.

Nicholas bowed, and looked puzzled.

"Then it is agreed?" said the duke.

"What, monsieur?"

"That you will continue to instruct me?"

Nicholas hesitated.

"What! has your noble devotion vanished already?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then I may count on you?"

"You may."

"And I alone know this?"

"You alone."

"Now you may go, my friend; and, parfandious, let M. de Mayenne look to himself."

When D'Epernon returned to the king he found him playing at cup and ball. D'Epernon assumed a thoughtful air, but the king did not remark it. However, as the duke remained perfectly silent, the king raised his head and said, "Well, Lavalette, what is the matter, are you dead?"

"I wish I were," replied D'Epernon, "and I should not see what I do see."

"What, my cup and ball?"

"Sire, in a time of great peril the subject may be alarmed for the safety of his master."

"What! again perils; devil take you, duke."

"Then you are ignorant of what is passing?"

"Ma foi, perhaps."

"Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment."

"Bah! who are they?"

"First, the Duchesse de Montpensier."

"Yes, that is true; she came to see Salcede; but what is that to me?"

"You knew it, then?"

"You see I did."

"But that M. de Mayenne was here?"

"Yes, since yesterday evening."

"What! this secret?" cried D'Epernon, with a disagreeable surprise.

"Are there, then, any secrets from the king? You are zealous, dear Lavalette, but you are slow. This news would have been good at four o'clock yesterday, but to-day – "

"Well, sire, to-day?"

"It comes too late, you will agree?"

"Still too soon, sire, it seems, since you will not listen to me."

"I have been listening for half-an-hour."

"You are menaced – they lay ambushes for you."

"Well, yesterday you gave me a guard, and assured me that my immortality was secured. Are your Forty-five no longer worth anything?"

"Your majesty shall see."

"I should not be sorry, duke; when shall I see?"

"Sooner perhaps than you think."

"Ah! you want to frighten me."

"You shall see, sire. Apropos, when do you go to Vincennes?"

"On Saturday."

"That is enough, sire." D'Epernon bowed and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
TWO FRIENDS

We will now follow the two young men sent by the king. Scarcely on horseback, Ernanton and St. Maline, determined that one should not get before the other, nearly crushed each other in the gateway. The face of St. Maline became purple, and that of Ernanton pale.

"You hurt me, monsieur," cried the former; "do you wish to crush me?"

"You also hurt me, only I did not complain."

"You wish to give me a lesson, I believe?"

"I wish to give you nothing."

"Ah!" cried St. Maline, "pray repeat that."

"You are seeking a quarrel, are you not?" replied Ernanton, quietly; "so much the worse for you."

"And why should I wish to quarrel? I do not know you," replied St. Maline, disdainfully.

"You know me perfectly, monsieur, because at home my house is but two leagues from yours, and I am well known there, being of an old family; but you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought that you alone were sent for; also, because the king gave me the letter to carry."

"Well," said St. Maline, "it may be true, but there is one result."

"What is it?"

"That I do not like to be near you."

"Go away, then; pardieu, I do not want to keep you. On the contrary, I understand perfectly; you would like to take the letter from me and carry it yourself; but unfortunately you must kill me first."

"And who tells you that I do not wish to do that?"

"To desire and to do are two different things."

"Descend with me to the banks of the water, and you will see that with me they are the same."

"My dear monsieur, when the king gives me a letter to carry, I carry it."

"I will tear it from you by force."

"You will not force me, I hope, to shoot you like a dog."

"You!"

"Yes; I have a pistol, and you have not."

"You shall pay for this."

"I trust so, after my commission is over; but, meanwhile, I beg you to observe that as we belong to the king, it is setting a bad example to quarrel."

St. Maline was furious, he bit his fingers with rage. As they crossed the Rue St. Antoine, Ernanton saw a litter with a lady in it. "My page!" cried he, and he rode toward it; but she did not seem to recognize him, and passed on.

The young men now rode on without speaking. St. Maline soon discovered, to his chagrin, that his horse was not as good as Ernanton's, and could hardly keep pace with him. This annoyed him so much that he began to quarrel with his horse, and to fret him so perpetually with the spur, that at last the animal started off and made for the river Bievre, where he got rid of his rider by throwing him in. One might have heard half a mile off the imprecations of St. Maline, although he was half stifled by the water. By the time he scrambled out his horse had got some little way off. He himself was wet and muddy, and his face bleeding with scratches, and he felt sure that it was useless to try and catch it; and to complete his vexation, he saw Ernanton going down a cross-road which he judged to be a short cut.

He climbed up the banks of the river, but now could see neither Ernanton nor his own horse. But while he stood there, full of sinister thoughts toward Ernanton, he saw him reappear from the cross-road, leading the runaway horse, which he had made a detour to catch. At this sight St. Maline was

full of joy and even of gratitude; but gradually his face clouded again as he thought of the superiority of Ernanton over himself, for he knew that in the same situation he should not even have thought of acting in a similar manner.

He stammered out thanks, to which Ernanton paid no attention, then furiously seized the reins of his horse and mounted again. They rode on silently till about half-past two, when they saw a man walking with a dog by his side. Ernanton passed him; but St. Maline, hoping to be more clever, rode up to him and said, "Traveler, do you expect something?"

The man looked at him. Certainly his aspect was not agreeable. His face still bore marks of anger, and the mud half dried on his clothes and the blood on his cheeks, and his hand extended more in menace than interrogation, all seemed very sinister to the traveler.

"If I expect something," said he, "it is not some one; and if I expect some one, it is not you."

"You are impolite," said St. Maline, giving way to the anger that he had restrained so long; and as he spoke he raised his hand armed with a cane to strike the traveler, but he, with his stick, struck St. Maline on the shoulder, while the dog rushed at him, tearing his clothes, as well as his horse's legs.

The horse, irritated by the pain, rushed furiously on. St. Maline could not stop him for some time, but he kept his seat. They passed thus before Ernanton, who took no notice. At last St. Maline succeeded in quieting his horse, and they rode on again in silence till Ernanton said: "There is he whom we seek waiting for us."

CHAPTER XXIX.
ST. MALINE

Ernanton was not deceived; the man he saw was really Chicot. He on his side had seen the cavaliers coming, and suspecting that it was for him that they came, waited for them.

Ernanton and St. Maline looked at each other.

"Speak, monsieur, if you wish," said Ernanton to his adversary.

St. Maline was suffocated by this courtesy, he could not speak, he could only bend his head; then Ernanton, advancing said, to Chicot —

"Monsieur, would it be indiscreet to inquire your name?"

"I am called 'the Shade.'"

"Do you expect anything?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you be good enough to tell us what?"

"A letter."

"From where?"

"From the Louvre."

"Sealed with what seal?"

"The royal seal."

Ernanton put his hand into the breast of his doublet and drew out a letter.

"That is it," said Chicot, "and for greater certainty, I was to give you something in exchange, was I not?"

"A receipt." – "Yes."

"Monsieur," continued Ernanton, "I was told to carry it, but this gentleman was to deliver it." And he handed the letter to St. Maline, who gave it to Chicot.

"You see," said Ernanton, "that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission. There is no one here, and no one has seen us give you the letter."

"It is true, gentlemen; but to whom am I to give the receipt?"

"The king did not say," said St. Maline, with a meaning air.

"Write two, monsieur, and give one to each of us. It is far from this to the Louvre, and some misfortune may happen to one of us on the road," and as he spoke, Ernanton's eyes flashed in their turn.

"You are wise," said Chicot, drawing his tablets from his pocket, from which he tore out two pages and wrote on each, "Received from the hands of St. Maline the letter brought by M. Ernanton de Carmainges. – THE SHADE."

"Adieu, monsieur," said St. Maline, taking his.

"Adieu, monsieur, and a pleasant journey to you," added Ernanton. "Have you anything else to send to the Louvre?"

"Nothing, I thank you."

Then the young men set off toward Paris, and Chicot in the opposite direction. When he was out of sight —

"Now, monsieur," said Ernanton to St. Maline, "dismount, if you please."

"And why so?"

"Our task is accomplished; we have now to converse, and this place appears excellent for an explanation of this sort."

"As you please, monsieur;" and they got off their horses.

Then Ernanton said, "You know, monsieur, that without any cause on my part, you have during the whole journey insulted me grievously. You wished to make me fight at an inopportune time, and I refused; but now the time is good and I am your man."

But St. Maline was angry no longer, and did not wish to fight.

"Monsieur," replied he, "when I insulted you, you responded by rendering me a service. I can no longer hold the language I did just now."

"No; but you think the same."

"How do you know?"

"Because your words were dictated by hatred and envy, and they cannot already be extinct in your heart."

St. Maline colored, but did not reply.

Ernanton continued, "If the king preferred me to you, it was because I pleased him best. If I was not thrown into the Bievre like you, it was because I ride better; if I did not accept your challenge before, it was because I was wiser than you; if I was not bitten by the dog, it was because I had more sagacity; if I now summon you to draw your sword, it is because I have more honor; and if you hesitate, I shall say more courage."

St. Maline looked like a demon, and drew his sword furiously.

"I have fought eleven times," said he, "and two of my adversaries are dead. Are you aware of that, monsieur?"

"And I, monsieur, have never fought, for I have never had occasion, and I did not seek it now. I wait your pleasure, monsieur."

"Oh!" said St. Maline, "we are compatriots, and we are both in the king's service; do not let us quarrel. You are a brave man, and I would give you my hand if I could. What would you have? I am envious – it is my nature. M. de Chalabre, or M. de Montcrabeau, would not have made me angry; it was your superior merit. Console yourself, therefore, for I can do nothing against you, and unluckily your merit remains. I should not like any one to know the cause of our quarrel."

"No one will know it, monsieur."

"No one?"

"No; for if we fight I should kill you, or you would kill me. I do not despise life; on the contrary, I cling to it, for I am only twenty-three years of age, have a good name and am not poor, and I shall defend myself like a lion."

"Well, I, on the contrary, am thirty, and am disgusted with life; but still I would rather not fight with you."

"Then you will apologize?"

"No, I have said enough. If you are not content, so much the better, for you are not superior to me."

"But, monsieur, one cannot end a quarrel thus, without the risk of being laughed at." – "I know it."

"Then you refuse to fight?"

"With you."

"After having provoked me?"

"I confess it."

"But if my patience fail, and I attack you?"

"I will throw my sword away; but I shall then have reason to hate you, and the first time I find you in the wrong, I will kill you."

Ernanton sheathed his sword. "You are a strange man," said he, "and I pity you."

"You pity me!"

"Yes, for you must suffer."

"Horribly."

"Do you never love?"

"Never."

"Have you no passions?"

"One alone, jealousy; but that includes all others to a frightful degree. I adore a woman, as soon as she loves another; I love gold, when another possesses it; – yes, you are right, I am unhappy."

"Have you never tried to become good?"

"Yes, and failed. What does the venomous plant? What do the bear and bird of prey? They destroy, but certain people use them for the chase. So shall I be in the hands of MM. d'Epernon and Loignac, till the day when they shall say, 'This plant is hurtful, let us tear it up; this beast is furious, let us kill him.'"

Ernanton was calmed; St. Maline was no longer an object of anger but of pity.

"Good fortune should cure you," said he; "when you succeed, you should hate less."

"However high I should rise, others would be higher."

They rode on silently for some time. At last Ernanton held out his hand to St. Maline, and said, "Shall I try to cure you?"

"No, do not try that; you would fail. Hate me, on the contrary, and I shall admire you."

An hour after they entered the Louvre; the king had gone out, and would not return until evening.

CHAPTER XXX.
DE LOIGNAC'S INTERVIEW WITH THE FORTY-FIVE

Each of the young men placed himself at a window to watch for the return of the king. Ernanton, however, soon forgot his present situation, and became abstracted in thinking who the woman could be who had entered Paris as his page, and whom he had since seen in such a splendid litter; and with a heart more disposed to love adventure than to make ambitious calculations, he forgot why he was sitting there, till, suddenly raising his head, he saw that St. Maline was no longer there. He understood at once that he had seen the king arrive, and had gone to him. He rose quickly, traversed the gallery, and arrived at the king's room just as St. Maline was coming out.

"Look!" cried he joyfully, "what the king has given me," and he showed a gold chain.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," said Ernanton, quietly, and he entered in his turn.

St. Maline waited impatiently until he came out again, which he did in about ten minutes, although it appeared an hour to St. Maline.

When Ernanton came out, he looked all over him, and seeing nothing, he cried joyfully, "And you, monsieur, what has he given to you?"

"His hand to kiss," replied Ernanton.

St. Maline crushed his chain impatiently in his hands, and they both returned in silence. As they entered the hall, the trumpet sounded, and at this signal all the Forty-five came out of their rooms, wondering what was the matter; while they profited by this reunion to examine each other. Most of them were richly dressed, though generally in bad taste. They all had a military tournour, and long swords, boots and gloves of buckskin or buffalo, all well gilded or well greased, were almost universal.

The most discreet might be known by their quiet colors, the most economical by the substantial character of their equipments, and the most gay by their white or rose-colored satins. Perducas de Pincornay had bought from some Jew a gold chain as thick as a cable; Pertinax de Montcrabeau was all bows and embroidery: he had bought his costume from a merchant who had purchased it of a gentleman who had been wounded by robbers. It was rather stained with blood and dirt, it was true, but he had managed to clean it tolerably. There remained two holes made by the daggers of the robbers, but Pertinax had had them embroidered in gold.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had had to clothe Lardille, Militor, and the two children. All the gentlemen were there admiring each other, when M. de Loignac entered frowning, and placed himself in front of them, with a countenance anything but agreeable.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you all here?"

"All!" they replied.

"Gentlemen, you have been summoned to Paris as a special guard to the king; it is an honorable title, but it engages you to much. Some of you seem not to have understood your duties; I will, therefore, recall them to you. If you do not assist at the deliberations of the council, you will constantly be called upon to execute the resolutions passed there; therefore, the responsibility of those secrets rests upon you. Suppose now that one of the officers on whom the safety of the state and the tranquillity of the crown reposes, betray the secrets of the council, or a soldier charged with a commission does not execute it, his life is the forfeit; you know that?"

"Doubtless," replied many voices.

"Well, gentlemen, this very day a measure of his majesty's has been betrayed, and a step which he wished to take rendered, perhaps, impossible."

Terror began to replace pride in the minds of the Forty-five, and they looked at each other with suspicion and disquietude.

"Two of you, gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "have been heard in the open street chattering like a couple of old women, and that about grave things."

St. Maline advanced. "Monsieur," said he, "pray explain at once, that suspicion may not rest on us all."

"That is easy. The king heard to-day that one of his enemies – precisely one of those whom we have been enrolled to guard him against – had arrived in Paris to conspire against him. This name was pronounced quietly, but was overheard by a soldier on guard, that is to say, by a man who should be regarded as a wall – deaf, dumb, and immovable. However, that man repeated this name in the street with a noise and boasting which attracted the attention of the passers-by and raised quite an emotion; I know it, for I was there, and heard and saw all, and had I not placed my hand on his shoulder to stop him, he would have compromised such grave interests, that, had he not been quiet at my touch, I should have been compelled to poniard him on the spot."

Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas de Pincornay turned deadly pale, and Montcrabeau tried to stammer out some excuses. All eyes were turned toward them.

"Nothing can excuse you," said De Loignac; "even if you were drunk you should be punished for that; and you shall be punished."

A terrible silence ensued. Then Pertinax said, "Pardon, monsieur! we are provincials, new to the court, and unaccustomed to politics."

"You should not have accepted your posts without weighing their duties."

"For the future we will be as mute as sepulchers, we swear to you."

"Good; but can you repair the evil you have done to-day?"

"We will try."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"Then, for this time, pardon us."

"You live," continued De Loignac, "with a sort of license which I must repress. Those who find the terms too hard will return; I can easily replace them; but I warn you that justice will be done among us, secretly and expeditiously. Traitors will be punished with death on the spot."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.