Chapter III. Who Messire Jean Percerin Was.

The king's tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honore, near the Rue de l'Arbre Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant stuffs, embroideries, and velvets, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX.; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancy in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambrose Pare, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say, too, in those days; because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she so loved to wear, seeing that they were marvelously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects, which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved, made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensively indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot people, on whom she had long looked with detestation. But Percerin was a very prudent man; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Protestant than to be smiled up on by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic with all his family; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the Crown of France. Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was a grand as the height of one of the loftiest peaks of the Cordilleras. Now Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it, and so contrived to die very skillfully; and that at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and a daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear; the son, a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule; the daughter, apt at embroidery, and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Medici, and the exquisite court-mourning for the afore-mentioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompiere, king of the *beaux* of the period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins. M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galligai, who subsequently shone at the French court, sought to Italianize the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners, and that so well that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem that he would never employ any other, and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with a pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

And so it was a doublet issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the living human body it contained. Notwithstanding the favor Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king, Louis XIII., had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor, and to retain him in his service. At the time that Louis the

Just afforded this great example of equity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom made his *debut* at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume, in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of "Mirame," and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered about the pavements of the Louvre. A man becomes easily notable who has made the dresses of a Duke of Buckingham, a M. de Cinq-Mars, a Mademoiselle Ninon, a M. de Beaufort, and a Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin the third had attained the summit of his glory when his father died. This same Percerin III., old, famous and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV.; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country house, men-servants the tallest in Paris; and by special authority from Louis XIV., a pack of hounds. He worked for MM. de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage; but politic man as he was, and versed in state secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation; it is a matter for guessing or for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live on unseen, intangible ideas; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great), the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen, or a coat for the king; he could mount a mantle for Monsieur, the clock of a stocking for Madame; but, in spite of his supreme talent, he could never hit off anything approaching a creditable fit for M. Colbert. "That man," he used often to say, "is beyond my art; my needle can never dot him down." We need scarcely say that Percerin was M. Fouquet's tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him. M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old, nevertheless still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for M. le Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him; for Master Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order.

It is easy to see at once that a tailor of such renown, instead of running after customers, made difficulties about obliging any fresh ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained patents of nobility. A story used to circulate that even M. de Mazarin, in exchange for Percerin supplying him with a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket.

It was to the house of this grand llama of tailors that D'Artagnan took the despairing Porthos; who, as they were going along, said to his friend, "Take care, my good D'Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I

expect, be very impertinent; for I give you notice, my friend, that if he is wanting in respect I will infallibly chastise him."

"Presented by me," replied D'Artagnan, "you have nothing to fear, even though you were what you are not."

"Ah! 'tis because--"

"What? Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos?"

"I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name."

"And then?"

"The fellow refused to supply me."

"Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which it will be now exceedingly easy to set right. Mouston must have made a mistake."

"Perhaps."

"He has confused the names."

"Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names."

"I will take it all upon myself."

"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are."

"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"'Tis true, but look."

"Well, I do look, and I see--"

"What?"

"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the roof of the carriage in front of us?"

"No."

"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on top of the one in front of it. Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or

forty others which have arrived before us."

"No, you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"

"'Tis very simple. They are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hotel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"

"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."

"And we are going to wait too?"

"Oh, we shall show ourselves prompter and not so proud."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, if you go first."

"Come along, then," said Porthos.

They accordingly alighted and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant, standing before them, was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had told some great noble whom he favored, in confidence, that M. Percerin was engaged on five costumes for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was meditating in his office on the ornaments, colors, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, contented to repeat the tale to others, but others, more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened, and among these last three Blue Ribbons, intended to take parts in a ballet, which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself. D'Artagnan, pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter, behind which the journeyman tailors were doing their best to answer queries. (We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos like the rest, but D'Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, "The king's order," and was let in with his friend.) The poor fellows had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to knit a sentence; and when wounded pride, or disappointed expectation, brought down upon them too cutting a rebuke, he who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter. The line of discontented lords formed a truly remarkable picture. Our

captain of musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; and having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter that sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D'Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring amateur. Only on perceiving, and doubtless recognizing, our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different from what he had desired. In other respects his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers, who were not close observers, to take him for a mere tailor's apprentice, perched behind the board, and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D'Artagnan was not deceived,--not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working at anything, it certainly was not at velvet.

"Eh!" said he, addressing this man, "and so you have become a tailor's boy, Monsieur Moliere!"

"Hush, M. d'Artagnan!" replied the man, softly, "you will make them recognize me."

"Well, and what harm?"

"The fact is, there is no harm, but--"

"You were going to say there is no good in doing it either, is it not so?"

"Alas! no; for I was occupied in examining some excellent figures."

"Go on--go on, Monsieur Moliere. I quite understand the interest you take in the plates--I will not disturb your studies."

"Thank you."

"But on one condition; that you tell me where M. Percerin really is."

"Oh! willingly; in his own room. Only--"

"Only that one can't enter it?"

"Unapproachable."

"For everybody?"

"Everybody. He brought me here so that I might be at my ease to make my

observations, and then he went away."

"Well, my dear Monsieur Moliere, but you will go and tell him I am here."

"I!" exclaimed Moliere, in the tone of a courageous dog, from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; "I disturb myself! Ah! Monsieur d'Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!"

"If you don't go directly and tell M. Percerin that I am here, my dear Moliere," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone, "I warn you of one thing: that I won't exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me."

Moliere indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture, "This gentleman, is it not?"

"Yes."

Moliere fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and hearts of men. The subject doubtless appeared a very promising one, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.