

Chapter XXX. The Inventory of M. de Beaufort.

To have talked of D'Artagnan with Planchet, to have seen Planchet quit Paris to bury himself in his country retreat, had been for Athos and his son like a last farewell to the noise of the capital--to their life of former days. What, in fact, did these men leave behind them--one of whom had exhausted the past age in glory, and the other, the present age in misfortune? Evidently neither of them had anything to ask of his contemporaries. They had only to pay a visit to M. de Beaufort, and arrange with him the particulars of departure. The duke was lodged magnificently in Paris. He had one of those superb establishments pertaining to great fortunes, the like of which certain old men remembered to have seen in all their glory in the times of wasteful liberality of Henry III.'s reign. Then, really, several great nobles were richer than the king. They knew it, used it, and never deprived themselves of the pleasure of humiliating his royal majesty when they had an opportunity. It was this egotistical aristocracy Richelieu had constrained to contribute, with its blood, its purse, and its duties, to what was from his time styled the king's service. From Louis XI.--that terrible mow-down of the great--to Richelieu, how many families had raised their heads! How many, from Richelieu to Louis XIV., had bowed their heads, never to raise them again! But M. de Beaufort was born a prince, and of a blood which is not shed upon scaffolds, unless by the decree of peoples--a prince who had kept up a grand style of living. How did he maintain his horses, his people, and his table? Nobody knew; himself less than others. Only there were then privileges for the sons of kings, to whom nobody refused to become a creditor, whether from respect or the persuasion that they would some day be paid.

Athos and Raoul found the mansion of the duke in as much confusion as that of Planchet. The duke, likewise, was making his inventory; that is to say, he was distributing to his friends everything of value he had in his house. Owing nearly two millions--an enormous amount in those days--M. de Beaufort had calculated that he could not set out for Africa without a good round sum, and, in order to find that sum, he was distributing to his old creditors plate, arms, jewels, and furniture, which was more magnificent in selling it, and brought him back double. In fact, how could a man to whom ten thousand livres were owing, refuse to carry away a present worth six thousand, enhanced in estimation from having belonged to a descendant of Henry IV.? And how, after having carried away that present, could he refuse ten thousand livres more to this generous noble? This, then, was what had happened. The duke had no longer a dwelling-house--that had become useless to an admiral whose place of residence is his ship; he had no longer need of superfluous arms, when he was placed amidst his cannons; no more jewels, which the sea might rob him of; but he had three or four hundred thousand crowns fresh in his coffers. And throughout the house there was a joyous movement of people who believed they were plundering monseigneur. The prince had, in a supreme degree, the art of making happy the creditors

most to be pitied. Every distressed man, every empty purse, found in him patience and sympathy for his position. To some he said, "I wish I had what you have; I would give it you." And to others, "I have but this silver ewer; it is worth at least five hundred livres,--take it." The effect of which was--so truly is courtesy a current payment--that the prince constantly found means to renew his creditors. This time he used no ceremony; it might be called a general pillage. He gave up everything. The Oriental fable of the poor Arab who carried away from the pillage of palace a kettle at the bottom of which was concealed a bag of gold, and whom everybody allowed to pass without jealousy,--this fable had become a truth in the prince's mansion. Many contractors paid themselves upon the offices of the duke. Thus, the provision department, who plundered the clothes-presses and the harness-rooms, attached very little value to things which tailors and saddlers set great store by. Anxious to carry home to their wives presents given them by monseigneur, many were seen bounding joyously along, under the weight of earthen jars and bottles, gloriously stamped with the arms of the prince. M. de Beaufort finished by giving away his horses and the hay from his lofts. He made more than thirty happy with kitchen utensils; and thirty more with the contents of his cellar. Still further; all these people went away with the conviction that M. de Beaufort only acted in this manner to prepare for a new fortune concealed beneath the Arabs' tents. They repeated to each other, while pillaging his hotel, that he was sent to Gigelli by the king to reconstruct his lost fortunes; that the treasures of Africa would be equally divided between the admiral and the king of France; that these treasures consisted in mines of diamonds, or other fabulous stones; the gold and silver mines of Mount Atlas did not even obtain the honor of being named. In addition to the mines to be worked--which could not be begun till after the campaign--there would be the booty made by the army. M. de Beaufort would lay his hands on all the riches pirates had robbed Christendom of since the battle of Lepanto. The number of millions from these sources defied calculation. Why, then, should he, who was going in quest of such treasure, set any store by the poor utensils of his past life? And reciprocally, why should they spare the property of him who spared it so little himself?

Such was the position of affairs. Athos, with his piercing practiced glance, saw what was going on at once. He found the admiral of France a little exalted, for he was rising from a table of fifty covers, at which the guests had drunk long and deeply to the prosperity of the expedition; at the conclusion of which repast, the remains, with the dessert, had been given to the servants, and the empty dishes and plates to the curious. The prince was intoxicated with his ruin and his popularity at one and the same time. He had drunk his old wine to the health of his wine of the future. When he saw Athos and Raoul:

"There is my aide-de-camp being brought to me!" he cried. "Come hither, comte; come hither, vicomte."

Athos tried to find a passage through the heaps of linen and plate.

"Ah! step over, step over!" said the duke, offering a full glass to Athos. The latter drank it; Raoul scarcely moistened his lips.

"Here is your commission," said the prince to Raoul. "I had prepared it, reckoning upon you. You will go before me as far as Antibes."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Here is the order." And De Beaufort gave Raoul the order. "Do you know anything of the sea?"

"Yes, monseigneur; I have traveled with M. le Prince."

"That is well. All these barges and lighters must be in attendance to form an escort and carry my provisions. The army must be prepared to embark in a fortnight at the very latest."

"That shall be done, monseigneur."

"The present order gives you the right to visit and search all the isles along the coast; you will there make the enrolments and levies you may want for me."

"Yes, monsieur le duc."

"And you are an active man, and will work freely, you will spend much money."

"I hope not, monseigneur."

"But I am sure you will. My intendant has prepared the orders of a thousand livres, drawn upon the cities of the south; he will give you a hundred of them. Now, dear vicomte, be gone."

Athos interrupted the prince. "Keep your money, monseigneur; war is to be waged among the Arabs with gold as well as lead."

"I wish to try the contrary," replied the duke; "and then you are acquainted with my ideas upon the expedition--plenty of noise, plenty of fire, and, if so it must be, I shall disappear in the smoke." Having spoken thus, M. de Beaufort began to laugh; but his mirth was not reciprocated by Athos and Raoul. He perceived this at once. "Ah," said he, with the courteous egotism of his rank and age, "you are such people as a man should not see after dinner; you are cold, stiff, and dry when I am all fire, suppleness, and wine. No, devil take me! I should always see you fasting, vicomte, and you, comte, if you wear such a face as that, you shall see me no more."

He said this, pressing the hand of Athos, who replied with a smile,
"Monseigneur, do not talk so grandly because you happen to have plenty of money. I predict that within a month you will be dry, stiff, and cold, in presence of your strong-box, and that then, having Raoul at your elbow, fasting, you will be surprised to see him gay, animated, and generous, because he will have some new crowns to offer you."

"God grant it may be so!" cried the delighted duke. "Comte, stay with me!"

"No, I shall go with Raoul; the mission with which you charge him is a troublesome and difficult one. Alone it would be too much for him to execute. You do not observe, monseigneur, you have given him command of the first order."

"Bah!"

"And in your naval arrangements, too."

"That may be true. But one finds that such fine young fellows as your son generally do all that is required of them."

"Monseigneur, I believe you will find nowhere so much zeal and intelligence, so much real bravery, as in Raoul; but if he failed to arrange your embarkation, you would only meet the fate that you deserve."

"Humph! you are scolding me, then."

"Monseigneur, to provision a fleet, to assemble a flotilla, to enroll your maritime force, would take an admiral a year. Raoul is a cavalry officer, and you allow him a fortnight!"

"I tell you he will do it."

"He may; but I will go and help him."

"To be sure you will; I reckoned upon you, and still further believe that when we are once at Toulon you will not let him depart alone."

"Oh!" said Athos, shaking his head.

"Patience! patience!"

"Monseigneur, permit us to take our leave."

"Begone, then, and may my good luck attend you."

"Adieu! monseigneur; and may your own good luck attend you likewise."

"Here is an expedition admirably commenced!" said Athos to his son. "No provisions--no store flotilla! What can be done, thus?"

"Humph!" murmured Raoul; "if all are going to do as I am, provisions will not be wanted."

"Monsieur," replied Athos, sternly, "do not be unjust and senseless in your egotism, or your grief, whichever you please to call it. If you set out for this war solely with the intention of getting killed therein, you stand in need of nobody, and it was scarcely worth while to recommend you to M. de Beaufort. But when you have been introduced to the prime commandant--when you have accepted the responsibility of a post in his army, the question is no longer about you, but about all those poor soldiers, who, as well as you, have hearts and bodies, who will weep for their country and endure all the necessities of their condition. Remember, Raoul, that officers are ministers as useful to the world as priests, and that they ought to have more charity."

"Monsieur, I know it and have practiced it; I would have continued to do so still, but--"

"You forget also that you are of a country that is proud of its military glory; go and die if you like, but do not die without honor and without advantage to France. Cheer up, Raoul! do not let my words grieve you; I love you, and wish to see you perfect."

"I love your reproaches, monsieur," said the young man, mildly; "they alone may cure me, because they prove to me that some one loves me still."

"And now, Raoul, let us be off; the weather is so fine, the heavens so clear, those heavens which we always find above our heads, which you will see more clear still at Gigelli, and which will speak to you of me there, as they speak to me here of God."

The two gentlemen, after having agreed on this point, talked over the wild freaks of the duke, convinced that France would be served in a very incomplete manner, as regarded both spirit and practice, in the ensuing expedition; and having summed up the ducal policy under the one word vanity, they set forward, in obedience rather to their will than destiny. The sacrifice was half accomplished.