

Chapter XLI. In Which the Squirrel Falls,--the Adder Flies.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The king, full of impatience, went to his cabinet on the terrace, and kept opening the door of the corridor, to see what his secretaries were doing. M. Colbert, seated in the same place M. de Saint-Aignan had so long occupied in the morning, was chatting in a low voice with M. de Brienne. The king opened the door suddenly, and addressed them. "What is it you are saying?"

"We were speaking of the first sitting of the States," said M. de Brienne, rising.

"Very well," replied the king, and returned to his room.

Five minutes after, the summons of the bell recalled Rose, whose hour it was.

"Have you finished your copies?" asked the king.

"Not yet, sire."

"See if M. d'Artagnan has returned."

"Not yet, sire."

"It is very strange," murmured the king. "Call M. Colbert."

Colbert entered; he had been expecting this all the morning.

"Monsieur Colbert," said the king, very sharply; "you must ascertain what has become of M. d'Artagnan."

Colbert in his calm voice replied, "Where does your majesty desire him to be sought for?"

"Eh! monsieur! do you not know on what I have sent him?" replied Louis, acrimoniously.

"Your majesty did not inform me."

"Monsieur, there are things that must be guessed; and you, above all, are apt to guess them."

"I might have been able to imagine, sire; but I do not presume to be positive."

Colbert had not finished these words when a rougher voice than that of the king interrupted the interesting conversation thus begun between the monarch and his clerk.

"D'Artagnan!" cried the king, with evident joy.

D'Artagnan, pale and in evidently bad humor, cried to the king, as he entered, "Sire, is it your majesty who has given orders to my musketeers?"

"What orders?" said the king.

"About M. Fouquet's house?"

"None!" replied Louis.

"Ha!" said D'Artagnan, biting his mustache; "I was not mistaken, then; it was monsieur here;" and he pointed to Colbert.

"What orders? Let me know," said the king.

"Orders to turn the house topsy-turvy, to beat M. Fouquet's servants, to force the drawers, to give over a peaceful house to pillage! Mordieux! these are savage orders!"

"Monsieur!" said Colbert, turning pale.

"Monsieur," interrupted D'Artagnan, "the king alone, understand,--the king alone has a right to command my musketeers; but, as to you, I forbid you to do it, and I tell you so before his majesty; gentlemen who carry swords do not sling pens behind their ears."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" murmured the king.

"It is humiliating," continued the musketeer; "my soldiers are disgraced. I do not command reitres, thank you, nor clerks of the intendant, mordieux!"

"Well! but what is all this about?" said the king with authority.

"About this, sire; monsieur--monsieur, who could not guess your majesty's orders, and consequently could not know I was gone to arrest M. Fouquet; monsieur, who has caused the iron cage to be constructed for his patron of yesterday--has sent M. de Roncherolles to the lodgings of M. Fouquet, and, under the pretense of securing the surintendant's papers, they have taken away the furniture. My musketeers have been posted round the house all the morning; such were my orders. Why did any one presume to order them to enter? Why, by forcing them to assist in this pillage, have they been made accomplices in it? Mordieux! we serve the king, we do; but we do not serve M. Colbert!" [5]

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, sternly, "take care; it is not in

my presence that such explanations, and made in such a tone, should take place."

"I have acted for the good of the king," said Colbert, in a faltering voice. "It is hard to be so treated by one of your majesty's officers, and that without redress, on account of the respect I owe the king."

"The respect you owe the king," cried D'Artagnan, his eyes flashing fire, "consists, in the first place, in making his authority respected, and his person beloved. Every agent of a power without control represents that power, and when people curse the hand which strikes them, it is the royal hand that God reproaches, do you hear? Must a soldier, hardened by forty years of wounds and blood, give you this lesson, monsieur? Must mercy be on my side, and ferocity on yours? You have caused the innocent to be arrested, bound, and imprisoned!"

"Accomplices, perhaps, of M. Fouquet," said Colbert.

"Who told you M. Fouquet had accomplices, or even that he was guilty? The king alone knows that; his justice is not blind! When he says, 'Arrest and imprison' such and such a man, he is obeyed. Do not talk to me, then, any more of the respect you owe the king, and be careful of your words, that they may not chance to convey the slightest menace; for the king will not allow those to be threatened who do him service by others who do him disservice; and if in case I should have, which God forbid! a master so ungrateful, I would make myself respected."

Thus saying, D'Artagnan took his station haughtily in the king's cabinet, his eyes flashing, his hand on his sword, his lips trembling, affecting much more anger than he really felt. Colbert, humiliated and devoured with rage, bowed to the king as if to ask his permission to leave the room. The king, thwarted alike in pride and in curiosity, knew not which part to take. D'Artagnan saw him hesitate. To remain longer would have been a mistake: it was necessary to score a triumph over Colbert, and the only method was to touch the king so near the quick, that his majesty would have no other means of extrication but choosing between the two antagonists. D'Artagnan bowed as Colbert had done; but the king, who, in preference to everything else, was anxious to have all the exact details of the arrest of the surintendant of the finances from him who had made him tremble for a moment,--the king, perceiving that the ill-humor of D'Artagnan would put off for half an hour at least the details he was burning to be acquainted with,--Louis, we say, forgot Colbert, who had nothing new to tell him, and recalled his captain of the musketeers.

"In the first place," said he, "let me see the result of your commission, monsieur; you may rest yourself hereafter."

D'Artagnan, who was just passing through the doorway, stopped at the

voice of the king, retraced his steps, and Colbert was forced to leave the closet. His countenance assumed almost a purple hue, his black and threatening eyes shone with a dark fire beneath their thick brows; he stepped out, bowed before the king, half drew himself up in passing D'Artagnan, and went away with death in his heart. D'Artagnan, on being left alone with the king, softened immediately, and composing his countenance: "Sire," said he, "you are a young king. It is by the dawn that people judge whether the day will be fine or dull. How, sire, will the people, whom the hand of God has placed under your law, argue of your reign, if between them and you, you allow angry and violent ministers to interpose their mischief? But let us speak of myself, sire, let us leave a discussion that may appear idle, and perhaps inconvenient to you. Let us speak of myself. I have arrested M. Fouquet."

"You took plenty of time about it," said the king, sharply.

D'Artagnan looked at the king. "I perceive that I have expressed myself badly. I announced to your majesty that I had arrested Monsieur Fouquet."

"You did; and what then?"

"Well! I ought to have told your majesty that M. Fouquet had arrested me; that would have been more just. I re-establish the truth, then; I have been arrested by M. Fouquet."

It was now the turn of Louis XIV. to be surprised. His majesty was astonished in his turn.

D'Artagnan, with his quick glance, appreciated what was passing in the heart of his master. He did not allow him time to put any questions. He related, with that poetry, that picturesqueness, which perhaps he alone possessed at that period, the escape of Fouquet, the pursuit, the furious race, and, lastly, the inimitable generosity of the surintendant, who might have fled ten times over, who might have killed the adversary in the pursuit, but who had preferred imprisonment, perhaps worse, to the humiliation of one who wished to rob him of his liberty. In proportion as the tale advanced, the king became agitated, devouring the narrator's words, and drumming with his finger-nails upon the table.

"It results from all this, sire, in my eyes, at least, that the man who conducts himself thus is a gallant man, and cannot be an enemy to the king. That is my opinion, and I repeat it to your majesty. I know what the king will say to me, and I bow to it,--reasons of state. So be it! To my ears that sounds highly respectable. But I am a soldier, and I have received my orders, my orders are executed--very unwillingly on my part, it is true, but they are executed. I say no more."

"Where is M. Fouquet at this moment?" asked Louis, after a short silence.

"M. Fouquet, sire," replied D'Artagnan, "is in the iron cage that M. Colbert had prepared for him, and is galloping as fast as four strong horses can drag him, towards Angers."

"Why did you leave him on the road?"

"Because your majesty did not tell me to go to Angers. The proof, the best proof of what I advance, is that the king desired me to be sought for but this minute. And then I had another reason."

"What is that?"

"Whilst I was with him, poor M. Fouquet would never attempt to escape."

"Well!" cried the king, astonished.

"Your majesty ought to understand, and does understand, certainly, that my warmest wish is to know that M. Fouquet is at liberty. I have given him one of my brigadiers, the most stupid I could find among my musketeers, in order that the prisoner might have a chance of escaping."

"Are you mad, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" cried the king, crossing his arms on his breast. "Do people utter such enormities, even when they have the misfortune to think them?"

"Ah! sire, you cannot expect that I should be an enemy to M. Fouquet, after what he has just done for you and me. No, no; if you desire that he should remain under your lock and bolt, never give him in charge to me; however closely wired might be the cage, the bird would, in the end, take wing."

"I am surprised," said the king, in his sternest tone, "you did not follow the fortunes of the man M. Fouquet wished to place upon my throne. You had in him all you want--affection, gratitude. In my service, monsieur, you will only find a master."

"If M. Fouquet had not gone to seek you in the Bastille, sire," replied D'Artagnan, with a deeply impressive manner, "one single man would have gone there, and I should have been that man--you know that right well, sire."

The king was brought to a pause. Before that speech of his captain of the musketeers, so frankly spoken and so true, the king had nothing to offer. On hearing D'Artagnan, Louis remembered the D'Artagnan of former times; him who, at the Palais Royal, held himself concealed behind the curtains of his bed, when the people of Paris, led by Cardinal de Retz,

came to assure themselves of the presence of the king; the D'Artagnan whom he saluted with his hand at the door of his carriage, when repairing to Notre Dame on his return to Paris; the soldier who had quitted his service at Blois; the lieutenant he had recalled to be beside his person when the death of Mazarin restored his power; the man he had always found loyal, courageous, devoted. Louis advanced towards the door and called Colbert. Colbert had not left the corridor where the secretaries were at work. He reappeared.

"Colbert, did you make a perquisition on the house of M. Fouquet?"

"Yes, sire."

"What has it produced?"

"M. de Roncherolles, who was sent with your majesty's musketeers, has remitted me some papers," replied Colbert.

"I will look at them. Give me your hand."

"My hand, sire!"

"Yes, that I may place it in that of M. d'Artagnan. In fact, M. d'Artagnan," added he, with a smile, turning towards the soldier, who, at sight of the clerk, had resumed his haughty attitude, "you do not know this man; make his acquaintance." And he pointed to Colbert. "He has been made but a moderately valuable servant in subaltern positions, but he will be a great man if I raise him to the foremost rank."

"Sire!" stammered Colbert, confused with pleasure and fear.

"I always understood why," murmured D'Artagnan in the king's ear; "he was jealous."

"Precisely, and his jealousy confined his wings."

"He will henceforward be a winged-serpent," grumbled the musketeer, with a remnant of hatred against his recent adversary.

But Colbert, approaching him, offered to his eyes a physiognomy so different from that which he had been accustomed to see him wear; he appeared so good, so mild, so easy; his eyes took the expression of an intelligence so noble, that D'Artagnan, a connoisseur in physiognomies, was moved, and almost changed in his convictions. Colbert pressed his hand.

"That which the king has just told you, monsieur, proves how well his majesty is acquainted with men. The inveterate opposition I have displayed, up to this day, against abuses and not against men, proves

that I had it in view to prepare for my king a glorious reign, for my country a great blessing. I have many ideas, M. d'Artagnan. You will see them expand in the sun of public peace; and if I have not the good fortune to conquer the friendship of honest men, I am at least certain, monsieur, that I shall obtain their esteem. For their admiration, monsieur, I would give my life."

This change, this sudden elevation, this mute approbation of the king, gave the musketeer matter for profound reflection. He bowed civilly to Colbert, who did not take his eyes off him. The king, when he saw they were reconciled, dismissed them. They left the room together. As soon as they were out of the cabinet, the new minister, stopping the captain, said:

"Is it possible, M. d'Artagnan, that with such an eye as yours, you did not, at the first glance, at the first impression, discover what sort of man I am?"

"Monsieur Colbert," replied the musketeer, "a ray of the sun in our eyes prevents us from seeing the most vivid flame. The man in power radiates, you know; and since you are there, why should you continue to persecute him who had just fallen into disgrace, and fallen from such a height?"

"I, monsieur!" said Colbert; "oh, monsieur! I would never persecute him. I wished to administer the finances and to administer them alone, because I am ambitious, and, above all, because I have the most entire confidence in my own merit; because I know that all the gold of this country will ebb and flow beneath my eyes, and I love to look at the king's gold; because, if I live thirty years, in thirty years not a denir of it will remain in my hands; because, with that gold, I will build granaries, castles, cities, and harbors; because I will create a marine, I will equip navies that shall waft the name of France to the most distant people; because I will create libraries and academies; because I will make France the first country in the world, and the wealthiest. These are the motives for my animosity against M. Fouquet, who prevented my acting. And then, when I shall be great and strong, when France is great and strong, in my turn, then, will I cry, 'Mercy!'"

"Mercy, did you say? then ask his liberty of the king. The king is only crushing him on your account."

Colbert again raised his head. "Monsieur," said he, "you know that is not so, and that the king has his own personal animosity against M. Fouquet; it is not for me to teach you that."

"But the king will grow tired; he will forget."

"The king never forgets, M. d'Artagnan. Hark! the king calls. He is going to issue an order. I have not influenced him, have I? Listen."

The king, in fact, was calling his secretaries. "Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he.

"I am here, sire."

"Give twenty of your musketeers to M. de Saint-Aignan, to form a guard for M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan and Colbert exchanged looks. "And from Angers," continued the king, "they will conduct the prisoner to the Bastille, in Paris."

"You were right," said the captain to the minister.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "you will have any one shot who shall attempt to speak privately with M. Fouquet, during the journey."

"But myself, sire," said the duke.

"You, monsieur, you will only speak to him in the presence of the musketeers." The duke bowed and departed to execute his commission.

D'Artagnan was about to retire likewise; but the king stopped him.

"Monsieur," said he, "you will go immediately, and take possession of the isle and fief of Belle-Ile-en-Mer."

"Yes, sire. Alone?"

"You will take a sufficient number of troops to prevent delay, in case the place should be contumacious."

A murmur of courtly incredulity rose from the group of courtiers. "That shall be done," said D'Artagnan.

"I saw the place in my infancy," resumed the king, "and I do not wish to see it again. You have heard me? Go, monsieur, and do not return without the keys."

Colbert went up to D'Artagnan. "A commission which, if you carry it out well," said he, "will be worth a marechal's baton to you."

"Why do you employ the words, 'if you carry it out well'?"

"Because it is difficult."

"Ah! in what respect?"

"You have friends in Belle-Isle, Monsieur d'Artagnan; and it is not an



easy thing for men like you to march over the bodies of their friends to obtain success."

D'Artagnan hung his head in deepest thought, whilst Colbert returned to the king. A quarter of an hour after, the captain received the written order from the king, to blow up the fortress of Belle-Isle, in case of resistance, with power of life and death over all the inhabitants or refugees, and an injunction not to allow one to escape.

"Colbert was right," thought D'Artagnan; "for me the baton of a marechal of France will cost the lives of my two friends. Only they seem to forget that my friends are not more stupid than the birds, and that they will not wait for the hand of the fowler to extend over their wings. I will show them that hand so plainly, that they will have quite time enough to see it. Poor Porthos! Poor Aramis! No; my fortune should shall not cost your wings a feather."

Having thus determined, D'Artagnan assembled the royal army, embarked it at Paimboeuf, and set sail, without the loss of an unnecessary minute.