

Chapter LII. M. de Gesvres's Round.

D'Artagnan was little used to resistance like that he had just experienced. He returned, profoundly irritated, to Nantes. Irritation, with this vigorous man, usually vented itself in impetuous attack, which few people, hitherto, were they king, were they giants, had been able to resist. Trembling with rage, he went straight to the castle, and asked an audience with the king. It might be about seven o'clock in the morning, and, since his arrival at Nantes, the king had been an early riser. But on arriving at the corridor with which we are acquainted, D'Artagnan found M. de Gesvres, who stopped him politely, telling him not to speak too loud and disturb the king. "Is the king asleep?" said D'Artagnan. "Well, I will let him sleep. But about what o'clock do you suppose he will rise?"

"Oh! in about two hours; his majesty has been up all night."

D'Artagnan took his hat again, bowed to M. de Gesvres, and returned to his own apartments. He came back at half-past nine, and was told that the king was at breakfast. "That will just suit me," said D'Artagnan. "I will talk to the king while he is eating."

M. de Brienne reminded D'Artagnan that the king would not see any one at meal-time.

"But," said D'Artagnan, looking askant at Brienne, "you do not know, perhaps, monsieur, that I have the privilege of entree anywhere--and at any hour."

Brienne took the captain's hand kindly, and said, "Not at Nantes, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan. The king, in this journey, has changed everything."

D'Artagnan, a little softened, asked about what o'clock the king would have finished his breakfast.

"We don't know."

"Eh?--don't know! What does that mean? You don't know how much time the king devotes to eating? It is generally an hour; and, if we admit that the air of the Loire gives an additional appetite, we will extend it to an hour and a half; that is enough, I think. I will wait where I am."

"Oh! dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, the order of the day is not to allow any person to remain in this corridor; I am on guard for that particular purpose."

D'Artagnan felt his anger mounting to his brain a second time. He went out quickly, for fear of complicating the affair by a display of

premature ill-humor. As soon as he was out he began to reflect. "The king," said he, "will not receive me, that is evident. The young man is angry; he is afraid, beforehand, of the words that I may speak to him. Yes; but in the meantime Belle-Isle is besieged, and my two friends by now probably taken or killed. Poor Porthos! As to Master Aramis, he is always full of resources, and I am easy on his account. But, no, no; Porthos is not yet an invalid, nor is Aramis in his dotage. The one with his arm, the other with his imagination, will find work for his majesty's soldiers. Who knows if these brave men may not get up for the edification of his most Christian majesty a little bastion of Saint-Gervais! I don't despair of it. They have cannon and a garrison. And yet," continued D'Artagnan, "I don't know whether it would not be better to stop the combat. For myself alone I will not put up with either surly looks or insults from the king; but for my friends I must put up with everything. Shall I go to M. Colbert? Now, there is a man I must acquire the habit of terrifying. I will go to M. Colbert." And D'Artagnan set forward bravely to find M. Colbert, but was informed that he was working with the king, at the castle of Nantes. "Good!" cried he, "the times have come again in which I measured my steps from De Treville to the cardinal, from the cardinal to the queen, from the queen to Louis XIII. Truly is it said that men, in growing old, become children again!--To the castle, then!" He returned thither. M. de Lyonne was coming out. He gave D'Artagnan both hands, but told him that the king had been busy all the preceding evening and all night, and that orders had been given that no one should be admitted. "Not even the captain who takes the order?" cried D'Artagnan. "I think that is rather too strong."

"Not even he," said M. de Lyonne.

"Since that is the case," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the heart; "since the captain of the musketeers, who has always entered the king's chamber, is no longer allowed to enter it, his cabinet, or his salle-a-manger, either the king is dead, or his captain is in disgrace. Do me the favor, then, M. de Lyonne, who are in favor, to return and tell the king, plainly, I send him my resignation."

"D'Artagnan, beware of what you are doing!"

"For friendship's sake, go!" and he pushed him gently towards the cabinet.

"Well, I will go," said Lyonne.

D'Artagnan waited, walking about the corridor in no enviable mood. Lyonne returned.

"Well, what did the king say?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"He simply answered, 'Tis well,'" replied Lyonne.

"That it was well!" said the captain, with an explosion. "That is to say, that he accepts it? Good! Now, then, I am free! I am only a plain citizen, M. de Lyonne. I have the pleasure of bidding you good-bye! Farewell, castle, corridor, ante-chamber! a bourgeois, about to breathe at liberty, takes his farewell of you."

And without waiting longer, the captain sprang from the terrace down the staircase, where he had picked up the fragments of Gourville's letter. Five minutes after, he was at the hostelry, where, according to the custom of all great officers who have lodgings at the castle, he had taken what was called his city-chamber. But when he arrived there, instead of throwing off his sword and cloak, he took his pistols, put his money into a large leather purse, sent for his horses from the castle-stables, and gave orders that would ensure their reaching Vannes during the night. Everything went on according to his wishes. At eight o'clock in the evening, he was putting his foot in the stirrup, when M. de Gesvres appeared, at the head of twelve guards, in front of the hostelry. D'Artagnan saw all from the corner of his eye; he could not fail seeing thirteen men and thirteen horses. But he feigned not to observe anything, and was about to put his horse in motion. Gesvres rode up to him. "Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said he, aloud.

"Ah, Monsieur de Gesvres! good evening!"

"One would say you were getting on horseback."

"More than that,--I am mounted,--as you see."

"It is fortunate I have met with you."

"Were you looking for me, then?"

"Mon Dieu! yes."

"On the part of the king, I will wager?"

"Yes."

"As I, three days ago, went in search of M. Fouquet?"

"Oh!"

"Nonsense! It is of no use being over-delicate with me; that is all labor lost. Tell me at once you are come to arrest me."

"To arrest you?--Good heavens! no."

"Why do you come to accost me with twelve horsemen at your heels, then?"

"I am making my round."

"That isn't bad! And so you pick me up in your round, eh?"

"I don't pick you up; I meet with you, and I beg you to come with me."

"Where?"

"To the king."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, with a bantering air; "the king is disengaged."

"For Heaven's sake, captain," said M. de Gesvres, in a low voice to the musketeer, "do not compromise yourself! these men hear you."

D'Artagnan laughed aloud, and replied:

"March! People who are arrested are placed between the six first guards and the six last."

"But as I am not arresting you," said M. de Gesvres, "you will march behind, with me, if you please."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "that is very polite, duke, and you are right in being so; for if ever I had had to make my rounds near your chambre-de-ville, I should have been courteous to you, I assure you, on the word of a gentleman! Now, one favor more; what does the king want with me?"

"Oh, the king is furious!"

"Very well! the king, who has thought it worth while to be angry, may take the trouble to grow calm again; that is all. I shan't die of that, I will swear."

"No, but--"

"But--I shall be sent to keep company with unfortunate M. Fouquet. Mordieux! That is a gallant man, a worthy man! We shall live very sociably together, I will be sworn."

"Here we are at our place of destination," said the duke. "Captain, for Heaven's sake be calm with the king!"

"Ah! ah! you are playing the brave man with me, duke!" said D'Artagnan, throwing one of his defiant glances over Gesvres. "I have been told that you are ambitious of uniting your guards with my musketeers. This strikes me as a splendid opportunity."

"I will take exceeding good care not to avail myself of it, captain."

"And why not, pray?"

"Oh, for many reasons--in the first place, for this: if I were to succeed you in the musketeers after having arrested you--"

"Ah! then you admit you have arrested me?"

"No, I don't."

"Say met me, then. So, you were saying if you were to succeed me after having arrested me?"

"Your musketeers, at the first exercise with ball cartridges, would fire my way, by mistake."

"Oh, as to that I won't say; for the fellows do love me a little."

Gesvres made D'Artagnan pass in first, and took him straight to the cabinet where Louis was waiting for his captain of the musketeers, and placed himself behind his colleague in the ante-chamber. The king could be heard distinctly, speaking aloud to Colbert in the same cabinet where Colbert might have heard, a few days before, the king speaking aloud with M. d'Artagnan. The guards remained as a mounted picket before the principal gate; and the report was quickly spread throughout the city that monsieur le capitaine of the musketeers had been arrested by order of the king. Then these men were seen to be in motion, and as in the good old times of Louis XIII. and M. de Treville, groups were formed, and staircases were filled; vague murmurs, issuing from the court below, came rolling to the upper stories, like the distant moaning of the waves. M. de Gesvres became uneasy. He looked at his guards, who, after being interrogated by the musketeers who had just got among their ranks, began to shun them with a manifestation of innocence. D'Artagnan was certainly less disturbed by all this than M. de Gesvres, the captain of the guards. As soon as he entered, he seated himself on the ledge of a window whence with his eagle glance he saw all that was going on without the least emotion. No step of the progressive fermentation which had shown itself at the report of his arrest escaped him. He foresaw the very moment the explosion would take place; and we know that his previsions were in general correct.

"It would be very whimsical," thought he, "if, this evening, my praetorians should make me king of France. How I should laugh!"

But, at the height, all was stopped. Guards, musketeers, officers, soldiers, murmurs, uneasiness, dispersed, vanished, died away; there was an end of menace and sedition. One word had calmed the waves. The king

had desired Brienne to say, "Hush, messieurs! you disturb the king."

D'Artagnan sighed. "All is over!" said he; "the musketeers of the present day are not those of his majesty Louis XIII. All is over!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are wanted in the ante-chamber of the king," proclaimed an usher.