

Chapter 23

M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun's Accounts.

The clock of St. Paul was striking seven as Aramis, on horseback, dressed as a simple citizen, that is to say, in colored suit, with no distinctive mark about him, except a kind of hunting-knife by his side, passed before the Rue du Petit-Musc, and stopped opposite the Rue des Tournelles, at the gate of the Bastile. Two sentinels were on duty at the gate; they made no difficulty about admitting Aramis, who entered without dismounting, and they pointed out the way he was to go by a long passage with buildings on both sides. This passage led to the drawbridge, or, in other words, to the real entrance. The drawbridge was down, and the duty of the day was about being entered upon. The sentinel at the outer guardhouse stopped Aramis's further progress, asking him, in a rough tone of voice, what had brought him there. Aramis explained, with his usual politeness, that a wish to speak to M. Baisemeaux de Montlezun had occasioned his visit. The first sentinel then summoned a second sentinel, stationed within an inner lodge, who showed his face at the grating, and inspected the new arrival most attentively. Aramis reiterated the expression of his wish to see the governor; whereupon the sentinel called to an officer of lower grade, who was walking about in a tolerably spacious courtyard and who, in turn, on being informed of his object, ran to seek one of the officers of the governor's staff. The latter, after having listened to Aramis's request, begged him to wait a moment, then went away a short distance, but returned to ask his name. "I cannot tell it you, monsieur," said Aramis; "I need only mention that

I have matters of such importance to communicate to the governor, that I can only rely beforehand upon one thing, that M. de Baisemeaux will be delighted to see me; nay, more than that, when you have told him that it is the person whom he expected on the first of June, I am convinced he will hasten here himself." The officer could not possibly believe that a man of the governor's importance should put himself out for a person of so little importance as the citizen-looking visitor on horseback. "It happens most fortunately, monsieur," he said, "that the governor is just going out, and you can perceive his carriage with the horses already harnessed, in the courtyard yonder; there will be no occasion for him to come to meet you, as he will see you as he passes by." Aramis bowed to signify his assent; he did not wish to inspire others with too exalted an opinion of himself, and therefore waited patiently and in silence, leaning upon the saddle-bow of his horse. Ten minutes had hardly elapsed when the governor's carriage was observed to move. The governor appeared at the door, and got into the carriage, which immediately prepared to start. The same ceremony was observed for the governor himself as with a suspected stranger; the sentinel at the lodge advanced as the carriage was about to pass under the arch, and the governor opened the carriage-door, himself setting the example of obedience to orders; so that, in this way, the sentinel could convince himself that no one quitted the Bastile improperly. The carriage rolled along under the archway, but at the moment the iron-gate was opened, the officer approached the carriage, which had again been stopped, and said something to the governor, who immediately put his head out of the door-way, and perceived Aramis on horseback at the end of the drawbridge. He immediately uttered almost a

shout of delight, and got out, or rather darted out of his carriage, running towards Aramis, whose hands he seized, making a thousand apologies. He almost embraced him. "What a difficult matter to enter the Bastile!" said Aramis. "Is it the same for those who are sent here against their wills, as for those who come of their own accord?"

"A thousand pardons, my lord. How delighted I am to see your Grace!"

"Hush! What are you thinking of, my dear M. Baisemeaux? What do you suppose would be thought of a bishop in my present costume?"

"Pray, excuse me, I had forgotten. Take this gentleman's horse to the stables," cried Baisemeaux.

"No, no," said Aramis; "I have five thousand pistoles in the saddle-bags."

The governor's countenance became so radiant, that if the prisoners had seen him they would have imagined some prince of the royal blood had arrived. "Yes, you are right, the horse shall be taken to the government house. Will you get into the carriage, my dear M. d'Herblay? and it shall take us back to my house."

"Get into a carriage to cross a courtyard! do you believe I am so great an invalid? No, no, we will go on foot."

Baisemeaux then offered his arm as a support, but the prelate did not

accept it. They arrived in this manner at the government house, Baisemeaux rubbing his hands and glancing at the horse from time to time, while Aramis was looking at the bleak bare walls. A tolerably handsome vestibule and a staircase of white stone led to the governor's apartments, who crossed the ante-chamber, the dining-room, where breakfast was being prepared, opened a small side door, and closeted himself with his guest in a large cabinet, the windows of which opened obliquely upon the courtyard and the stables. Baisemeaux installed the prelate with that all-inclusive politeness of which a good man, or a grateful man, alone possesses the secret. An arm-chair, a footstool, a small table beside him, on which to rest his hand, everything was prepared by the governor himself. With his own hands, too, he placed upon the table, with much solicitude, the bag containing the gold, which one of the soldiers had brought up with the most respectful devotion; and the soldier having left the room, Baisemeaux himself closed the door after him, drew aside one of the window-curtains, and looked steadfastly at Aramis to see if the prelate required anything further.

"Well, my lord," he said, still standing up, "of all men of their word, you still continue to be the most punctual."

"In matters of business, dear M. de Baisemeaux, exactitude is not a virtue only, it is a duty as well."

"Yes, in matters of business, certainly; but what you have with me is not of that character; it is a service you are rendering me."

"Come, confess, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that, notwithstanding this exactitude, you have not been without a little uneasiness."

"About your health, I certainly have," stammered out Baisemeaux.

"I wished to come here yesterday, but I was not able, as I was too fatigued," continued Aramis. Baisemeaux anxiously slipped another cushion behind his guest's back. "But," continued Aramis, "I promised myself to come and pay you a visit to-day, early in the morning."

"You are really very kind, my lord."

"And it was a good thing for me I was punctual, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, you were going out." At which latter remark Baisemeaux colored and said, "It is true I was going out."

"Then I prevent you," said Aramis; whereupon the embarrassment of Baisemeaux became visibly greater. "I am putting you to inconvenience," he continued, fixing a keen glance upon the poor governor; "if I had known that, I should not have come."

"How can your lordship imagine that you could ever inconvenience me?"

"Confess you were going in search of money."

"No," stammered out Baisemeaux, "no! I assure you I was going to - "

"Does the governor still intend to go to M. Fouquet?" suddenly called out the major from below. Baisemeaux ran to the window like a madman. "No, no," he exclaimed in a state of desperation, "who the deuce is speaking of M. Fouquet? are you drunk below there? why am I interrupted when I am engaged on business?"

"You were going to M. Fouquet's," said Aramis, biting his lips, "to M. Fouquet, the abbe, or the superintendent?"

Baisemeaux almost made up his mind to tell an untruth, but he could not summon courage to do so. "To the superintendent," he said.

"It is true, then, that you were in want of money, since you were going to a person who gives it away!"

"I assure you, my lord - "

"You were afraid?"

"My dear lord, it was the uncertainty and ignorance in which I was as to where you were to be found."

"You would have found the money you require at M. Fouquet's, for he is a man whose hand is always open."

"I swear that I should never have ventured to ask M. Fouquet for money. I only wished to ask him for your address."

"To ask M. Fouquet for my address?" exclaimed Aramis, opening his eyes in real astonishment.

"Yes," said Baisemeaux, greatly disturbed by the glance which the prelate fixed upon him, - "at M. Fouquet's certainly."

"There is no harm in that, dear M. Baisemeaux, only I would ask, why ask my address of M. Fouquet?"

"That I might write to you."

"I understand," said Aramis smiling, "but that is not what I meant; I do not ask you what you required my address for: I only ask why you should go to M. Fouquet for it?"

"Oh!" said Baisemeaux, "as Belle-Isle is the property of M. Fouquet, and as Belle-Isle is in the diocese of Vannes, and as you are bishop of Vannes - "

"But, my dear Baisemeaux, since you knew I was bishop of Vannes, you had no occasion to ask M. Fouquet for my address."

"Well, monsieur," said Baisemeaux, completely at bay, "if I have acted indiscreetly, I beg your pardon most sincerely."

"Nonsense," observed Aramis calmly: "how can you possibly have acted indiscreetly?" And while he composed his face, and continued to smile cheerfully on the governor, he was considering how Baisemeaux, who was not aware of his address, knew, however, that Vannes was his residence.

"I shall clear all this up," he said to himself; and then speaking aloud, added, - "Well, my dear governor shall we now arrange our little accounts?"

"I am at your orders, my lord; but tell me beforehand, my lord, whether you will do me the honor to breakfast with me as usual?"

"Very willingly, indeed."

"That's well," said Baisemeaux, as he struck the bell before him three times.

"What does that mean?" inquired Aramis.

"That I have some one to breakfast with me, and that preparations are to be made accordingly."

"And you rang thrice. Really, my dear governor, I begin to think you are acting ceremoniously with me."

"No, indeed. Besides, the least I can do is to receive you in the best way I can."

"But why so?"

"Because not even a prince could have done what you have done for me."

"Nonsense! nonsense!"

"Nay, I assure you - "

"Let us speak of other matters," said Aramis. "Or rather, tell me how your affairs here are getting on."

"Not over well."

"The deuce!"

"M. de Mazarin was not hard enough."

"Yes, I see; you require a government full of suspicion - like that of the old cardinal, for instance."

"Yes; matters went on better under him. The brother of his 'gray eminence' made his fortune here."

"Believe me, my dear governor," said Aramis, drawing closer to Baisemeaux, "a young king is well worth an old cardinal. Youth has its suspicions, its fits of anger, its prejudices, as old age has its hatreds, its precautions, and its fears. Have you paid your three years' profits to Louvidre and Tremblay?"

"Most certainly I have."

"So that you have nothing more to give them than the fifty thousand francs I have brought with me?"

"Nothing."

"Have you not saved anything, then?"

"My lord, in giving the fifty thousand francs of my own to these gentlemen, I assure you that I gave them everything I gain. I told M. d'Artagnan so yesterday evening."

"Ah!" said Aramis, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, but became immediately afterwards as unmoved as before; "so you have been to see my old friend D'Artagnan; how was he?"

"Wonderfully well."

"And what did you say to him, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I told him," continued the governor, not perceiving his own thoughtlessness; "I told him that I fed my prisoners too well."

"How many have you?" inquired Aramis, in an indifferent tone of voice.

"Sixty."

"Well, that is a tolerably round number."

"In former times, my lord, there were, during certain years, as many as two hundred."

"Still a minimum of sixty is not to be grumbled at."

"Perhaps not; for, to anybody but myself, each prisoner would bring in two hundred and fifty pistoles; for instance, for a prince of the blood I have fifty francs a day."

"Only you have no prince of the blood; at least, I suppose so," said Aramis, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"No, thank heaven! - I mean, no, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by unfortunately?"

"Because my appointment would be improved by it. So fifty francs per day for a prince of the blood, thirty-six for a marechal of France - "

"But you have as many marechals of France, I suppose, as you have princes of the blood?"

"Alas! no more. It is true lieutenant-generals and brigadiers pay twenty-six francs, and I have two of them. After that, come councilors of parliament, who bring me fifteen francs, and I have six of them."

"I did not know," said Aramis, "that councilors were so productive."

"Yes; but from fifteen francs I sink at once to ten francs; namely, for an ordinary judge, and for an ecclesiastic."

"And you have seven, you say; an excellent affair."

"Nay, a bad one, and for this reason. How can I possibly treat these poor fellows, who are of some good, at all events, otherwise than as a councilor of parliament?"

"Yes, you are right; I do not see five francs difference between them."

"You understand; if I have a fine fish, I pay four or five francs for it; if I get a fine fowl, it cost me a franc and a half. I fatten a good deal of poultry, but I have to buy grain, and you cannot imagine the army of rats that infest this place."

"Why not get half a dozen cats to deal with them?"

"Cats, indeed; yes, they eat them, but I was obliged to give up the idea because of the way in which they treated my grain. I have been obliged to have some terrier dogs sent me from England to kill the rats. These dogs, unfortunately, have tremendous appetites; they eat as much as a prisoner of the fifth order, without taking into account the rabbits and fowls they kill."

Was Aramis really listening or not? No one could have told; his downcast eyes showed the attentive man, but the restless hand betrayed the man absorbed in thought - Aramis was meditating.

"I was saying," continued Baisemeaux, "that a good-sized fowl costs me a franc and a half, and that a fine fish costs me four or five francs. Three meals are served at the Bastille, and, as the prisoners, having nothing to do, are always eating, a ten-franc man costs me seven francs and a half."

"But did you not say that you treated those at ten francs like those at

fifteen?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well! Then you gain seven francs and a half upon those who pay you fifteen francs."

"I must compensate myself somehow," said Baisemeaux, who saw how he had been snapped up.

"You are quite right, my dear governor; but have you no prisoners below ten francs?"

"Oh, yes! we have citizens and barristers at five francs."

"And do they eat, too?"

"Not a doubt about it; only you understand that they do not get fish or poultry, nor rich wines at every meal; but at all events thrice a week they have a good dish at their dinner."

"Really, you are quite a philanthropist, my dear governor, and you will ruin yourself."

"No; understand me; when the fifteen-franc has not eaten his fowl, or the

ten-franc has left his dish unfinished, I send it to the five-franc prisoner; it is a feast for the poor devil, and one must be charitable, you know."

"And what do you make out of your five-franc prisoners?"

"A franc and a half."

"Baisemeaux, you're an honest fellow; in honest truth I say so."

"Thank you, my lord. But I feel most for the small tradesmen and bailiffs' clerks, who are rated at three francs. They do not often see Rhine carp or Channel sturgeon."

"But do not the five-franc gentlemen sometimes leave some scraps?"

"Oh! my lord, do not believe I am so stingy as that; I delight the heart of some poor little tradesman or clerk by sending him a wing of a red partridge, a slice of venison, or a slice of a truffled pasty, dishes which he never tasted except in his dreams; these are the leavings of the twenty-four-franc prisoners; and as he eats and drinks, at dessert he cries 'Long live the King,' and blesses the Bastile; with a couple bottles of champagne, which cost me five sous, I make him tipsy every Sunday. That class of people call down blessings upon me, and are sorry to leave the prison. Do you know that I have remarked, and it does me infinite honor, that certain prisoners, who have been set at liberty,

have, almost immediately afterwards, got imprisoned again? Why should this be the case, unless it be to enjoy the pleasures of my kitchen? It is really the fact."

Aramis smiled with an expression of incredulity.

"You smile," said Baisemeaux.

"I do," returned Aramis.

"I tell you that we have names which have been inscribed on our books thrice in the space of two years."

"I must see it before I believe it," said Aramis.

"Well, I can show it to you, although it is prohibited to communicate the registers to strangers; and if you really wish to see it with your own eyes - "

"I should be delighted, I confess."

"Very well," said Baisemeaux, and he took out of a cupboard a large register. Aramis followed him most anxiously with his eyes, and Baisemeaux returned, placed the register upon the table, and turned over the leaves for a minute, and stayed at the letter M.

"Look here," said he, "Martinier, January, 1659; Martinier, June, 1660; Martinier, March, 1661. Mazarinades, etc.; you understand it was only a pretext; people were not sent to the Bastille for jokes against M. Mazarin; the fellow denounced himself in order to get imprisoned here."

"And what was his object?"

"None other than to return to my kitchen at three francs a day."

"Three francs - poor devil!"

"The poet, my lord, belongs to the lowest scale, the same style of board as the small tradesman and bailiff's clerk; but I repeat, it is to those people that I give these little surprises."

Aramis mechanically turned over the leaves of the register, continuing to read the names, but without appearing to take any interest in the names he read.

"In 1661, you perceive," said Baisemeaux, "eighty entries; and in 1659, eighty also."

"Ah!" said Aramis. "Seldon; I seem to know that name. Was it not you who spoke to me about a certain young man?"

"Yes, a poor devil of a student, who made - What do you call that where

two Latin verses rhyme together?"

"A distich."

"Yes; that is it."

"Poor fellow; for a distich."

"Do you know that he made this distich against the Jesuits?"

"That makes no difference; the punishment seems very severe. Do not pity him; last year you seemed to interest yourself in him."

"Yes, I did so."

"Well, as your interest is all-powerful here, my lord, I have treated him since that time as a prisoner at fifteen francs."

"The same as this one, then," said Aramis, who had continued turning over the leaves, and who had stopped at one of the names which followed Martinier.

"Yes, the same as that one."

"Is that Marchiali an Italian?" said Aramis, pointing with his finger to the name which had attracted his attention.

"Hush!" said Baisemeaux.

"Why hush?" said Aramis, involuntarily clenching his white hand.

"I thought I had already spoken to you about that Marchiali."

"No, it is the first time I ever heard his name pronounced."

"That may be, but perhaps I have spoken to you about him without naming him."

"Is he an old offender?" asked Aramis, attempting to smile.

"On the contrary, he is quite young."

"Is his crime, then, very heinous?"

"Unpardonable."

"Has he assassinated any one?"

"Bah!"

"An incendiary, then?"

"Bah!"

"Has he slandered any one?"

"No, no! It is he who - " and Baisemeaux approached Aramis's ear, making a sort of ear-trumpet of his hands, and whispered: "It is he who presumes to resemble the - "

"Yes, yes," said Aramis; "I now remember you already spoke about it last year to me; but the crime appeared to me so slight."

"Slight, do you say?"

"Or rather, so involuntary."

"My lord, it is not involuntarily that such a resemblance is detected."

"Well, the fact is, I had forgotten it. But, my dear host," said Aramis, closing the register, "if I am not mistaken, we are summoned."

Baisemeaux took the register, hastily restored it to its place in the closet, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket. "Will it be agreeable to your lordship to breakfast now?" said he; "for you are right in supposing that breakfast was announced."

"Assuredly, my dear governor," and they passed into the dining-room.