

## Chapter 15. Athos as a Diplomatist.

D'Artagnan retired to bed--not to sleep, but to think over all he had heard that evening. Being naturally goodhearted, and having had once a liking for Athos, which had grown into a sincere friendship, he was delighted at thus meeting a man full of intelligence and moral strength, instead of a drunkard. He admitted without annoyance the continued superiority of Athos over himself, devoid as he was of that jealousy which might have saddened a less generous disposition; he was delighted also that the high qualities of Athos appeared to promise favorably for his mission. Nevertheless, it seemed to him that Athos was not in all respects sincere and frank. Who was the youth he had adopted and who bore so striking a resemblance to him? What could explain Athos's having re-entered the world and the extreme sobriety he had observed at table? The absence of Grimaud, whose name had never once been uttered by Athos, gave D'Artagnan uneasiness. It was evident either that he no longer possessed the confidence of his friend, or that Athos was bound by some invisible chain, or that he had been forewarned of the lieutenant's visit.

He could not help thinking of M. Rochefort, whom he had seen in Notre Dame; could De Rochefort have forestalled him with Athos? Again, the moderate fortune which Athos possessed, concealed as it was, so skillfully, seemed to show a regard for appearances and to betray a latent ambition which might be easily aroused. The clear and vigorous

intellect of Athos would render him more open to conviction than a less able man would be. He would enter into the minister's schemes with the more ardor, because his natural activity would be doubled by necessity.

Resolved to seek an explanation on all these points on the following day, D'Artagnan, in spite of his fatigue, prepared for an attack and determined that it should take place after breakfast. He determined to cultivate the good-will of the youth Raoul and, either whilst fencing with him or when out shooting, to extract from his simplicity some information which would connect the Athos of old times with the Athos of the present. But D'Artagnan at the same time, being a man of extreme caution, was quite aware what injury he should do himself, if by any indiscretion or awkwardness he should betray his manoeuvring to the experienced eye of Athos. Besides, to tell truth, whilst D'Artagnan was quite disposed to adopt a subtle course against the cunning of Aramis or the vanity of Porthos, he was ashamed to equivocate with Athos, true-hearted, open Athos. It seemed to him that if Porthos and Aramis deemed him superior to them in the arts of diplomacy, they would like him all the better for it; but that Athos, on the contrary, would despise him.

"Ah! why is not Grimaud, the taciturn Grimaud, here?" thought D'Artagnan, "there are so many things his silence would have told me; with Grimaud silence was another form of eloquence!"

There reigned a perfect stillness in the house. D'Artagnan had heard the door shut and the shutters barred; the dogs became in their turn silent. At last a nightingale, lost in a thicket of shrubs, in the midst of

its most melodious cadences had fluted low and lower into stillness and fallen asleep. Not a sound was heard in the castle, except of a footstep up and down, in the chamber above--as he supposed, the bedroom of Athos.

"He is walking about and thinking," thought D'Artagnan; "but of what? It is impossible to know; everything else might be guessed, but not that."

At length Athos went to bed, apparently, for the noise ceased.

Silence and fatigue together overcame D'Artagnan and sleep overtook him also. He was not, however, a good sleeper. Scarcely had dawn gilded his window curtains when he sprang out of bed and opened the windows. Somebody, he perceived, was in the courtyard, moving stealthily. True to his custom of never passing anything over that it was within his power to know, D'Artagnan looked out of the window and perceived the close red coat and brown hair of Raoul.

The young man was opening the door of the stable. He then, with noiseless haste, took out the horse that he had ridden on the previous evening, saddled and bridled it himself and led the animal into the alley to the right of the kitchen-garden, opened a side door which conducted him to a bridle road, shut it after him, and D'Artagnan saw him pass by like a dart, bending, as he went, beneath the pendent flowery branches of maple and acacia. The road, as D'Artagnan had observed, was the way to Blois.

"So!" thought the Gascon "here's a young blade who has already his love affair, who doesn't at all agree with Athos in his hatred to the fair

sex. He's not going to hunt, for he has neither dogs nor arms; he's not going on a message, for he goes secretly. Why does he go in secret? Is he afraid of me or of his father? for I am sure the count is his father. By Jove! I shall know about that soon, for I shall soon speak out to Athos."

Day was now advanced; all the noises that had ceased the night before reawakened, one after the other. The bird on the branch, the dog in his kennel, the sheep in the field, the boats moored in the Loire, even, became alive and vocal. The latter, leaving the shore, abandoned themselves gaily to the current. The Gascon gave a last twirl to his mustache, a last turn to his hair, brushed, from habit, the brim of his hat with the sleeve of his doublet, and went downstairs. Scarcely had he descended the last step of the threshold when he saw Athos bent down toward the ground, as if he were looking for a crown-piece in the dust.

"Good-morning, my dear host," cried D'Artagnan.

"Good-day to you; have you slept well?"

"Excellently, Athos, but what are you looking for? You are perhaps a tulip fancier?"

"My dear friend, if I am, you must not laugh at me for being so. In the country people alter; one gets to like, without knowing it, all those beautiful objects that God causes to spring from the earth, which are despised in cities. I was looking anxiously for some iris roots I planted here, close to this reservoir, and which some one has trampled

upon this morning. These gardeners are the most careless people in the world; in bringing the horse out to the water they've allowed him to walk over the border."

D'Artagnan began to smile.

"Ah! you think so, do you?"

And he took his friend along the alley, where a number of tracks like those which had trampled down the flowerbeds, were visible.

"Here are the horse's hoofs again, it seems, Athos," he said carelessly.

"Yes, indeed, the marks are recent."

"Quite so," replied the lieutenant.

"Who went out this morning?" Athos asked, uneasily. "Has any horse got loose?"

"Not likely," answered the Gascon; "these marks are regular."

"Where is Raoul?" asked Athos; "how is it that I have not seen him?"

"Hush!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, putting his finger on his lips; and he related what he had seen, watching Athos all the while.

"Ah, he's gone to Blois; the poor boy----"

"Wherefore?"

"Ah, to inquire after the little La Valliere; she has sprained her foot, you know."

"You think he has?"

"I am sure of it," said Athos; "don't you see that Raoul is in love?"

"Indeed! with whom--with a child seven years old?"

"Dear friend, at Raoul's age the heart is so expansive that it must encircle one object or another, fancied or real. Well, his love is half real, half fanciful. She is the prettiest little creature in the world, with flaxen hair, blue eyes,--at once saucy and languishing."

"But what say you to Raoul's fancy?"

"Nothing--I laugh at Raoul; but this first desire of the heart is imperious. I remember, just at his age, how deep in love I was with a Grecian statue which our good king, then Henry IV., gave my father, insomuch that I was mad with grief when they told me that the story of Pygmalion was nothing but a fable."

"It is mere want of occupation. You do not make Raoul work, so he takes his own way of employing himself."

"Exactly; therefore I think of sending him away from here."

"You will be wise to do so."

"No doubt of it; but it will break his heart. So long as three or four years ago he used to adorn and adore his little idol, whom he will some day fall in love with in right earnest if he remains here. The parents of little La Valliere have for a long time perceived and been amused at it; now they begin to look concerned."

"Nonsense! However, Raoul must be diverted from this fancy. Send him away or you will never make a man of him."

"I think I shall send him to Paris."

"So!" thought D'Artagnan, and it seemed to him that the moment for attack had arrived.

"Suppose," he said, "we roughly chalk out a career for this young man. I wish to consult you about some thing."

"Do so."

"Do you think it is time for us to enter the service?"

"But are you not still in the service--you, D'Artagnan?"

"I mean active service. Our former life, has it still no attractions for

you? would you not be happy to begin anew in my society and in that of Porthos, the exploits of our youth?"

"Do you propose to me to do so, D'Artagnan?"

"Decidedly and honestly."

"On whose side?" asked Athos, fixing his clear, benevolent glance on the countenance of the Gascon.

"Ah, devil take it, you speak in earnest----"

"And must have a definite answer. Listen, D'Artagnan. There is but one person, or rather, one cause, to whom a man like me can be useful--that of the king."

"Exactly," answered the musketeer.

"Yes, but let us understand each other," returned Athos, seriously. "If by the cause of the king you mean that of Monsieur de Mazarin, we do not understand each other."

"I don't say exactly," answered the Gascon, confused.

"Come, D'Artagnan, don't let us play a sidelong game; your hesitation, your evasion, tells me at once on whose side you are; for that party no one dares openly to recruit, and when people recruit for it, it is with averted eyes and humble voice."



"Ah! my dear Athos!"

"You know that I am not alluding to you; you are the pearl of brave, bold men. I speak of that spiteful and intriguing Italian--of the pedant who has tried to put on his own head a crown which he stole from under a pillow--of the scoundrel who calls his party the party of the king--who wants to send the princes of the blood to prison, not daring to kill them, as our great cardinal--our cardinal did--of the miser, who weighs his gold pieces and keeps the clipped ones for fear, though he is rich, of losing them at play next morning--of the impudent fellow who insults the queen, as they say--so much the worse for her--and who is going in three months to make war upon us, in order that he may retain his pensions; is that the master whom you propose to me? I thank you, D'Artagnan."

"You are more impetuous than you were," returned D'Artagnan. "Age has warmed, not chilled your blood. Who informed you this was the master I propose to you? Devil take it," he muttered to himself, "don't let me betray my secrets to a man not inclined to entertain them."

"Well, then," said Athos, "what are your schemes? what do you propose?"

"Zounds! nothing more than natural. You live on your estate, happy in golden mediocrity. Porthos has, perhaps, sixty thousand francs income. Aramis has always fifty duchesses quarreling over the priest, as they quarreled formerly over the musketeer; but I--what have I in the world? I have worn my cuirass these twenty years, kept down in this inferior

rank, without going forward or backward, hardly half living. In fact, I am dead. Well! when there is some idea of being resuscitated, you say he's a scoundrel, an impudent fellow, a miser, a bad master! By Jove! I am of your opinion, but find me a better one or give me the means of living."

Athos was for a few moments thoughtful.

"Good! D'Artagnan is for Mazarin," he said to himself.

From that moment he grew very guarded.

On his side D'Artagnan became more cautious also.

"You spoke to me," Athos resumed, "of Porthos; have you persuaded him to seek his fortune? But he has wealth, I believe, already."

"Doubtless he has. But such is man, we always want something more than we already have."

"What does Porthos wish for?"

"To be a baron."

"Ah, true! I forgot," said Athos, laughing.

"'Tis true!" thought the Gascon, "where has he heard it? Does he correspond with Aramis? Ah! if I knew that he did I should know all."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Raoul.

"Is our little neighbor worse?" asked D'Artagnan, seeing a look of vexation on the face of the youth.

"Ah, sir!" replied Raoul, "her fall is a very serious one, and without any ostensible injury, the physician fears she will be lame for life."

"This is terrible," said Athos.

"And what makes me all the more wretched, sir, is, that I was the cause of this misfortune."

"How so?" asked Athos.

"It was to run to meet me that she leaped from that pile of wood."

"There's only one remedy, dear Raoul--that is, to marry her as a compensation." remarked D'Artagnan.

"Ah, sir!" answered Raoul, "you joke about a real misfortune; that is cruel, indeed."

The good understanding between the two friends was not in the least altered by the morning's skirmish. They breakfasted with a good appetite, looking now and then at poor Raoul, who with moist eyes and a full heart, scarcely ate at all.

After breakfast two letters arrived for Athos, who read them with profound attention, whilst D'Artagnan could not restrain himself from jumping up several times on seeing him read these epistles, in one of which, there being at the time a very strong light, he perceived the fine writing of Aramis. The other was in a feminine hand, long, and crossed.

"Come," said D'Artagnan to Raoul, seeing that Athos wished to be alone, "come, let us take a turn in the fencing gallery; that will amuse you."

And they both went into a low room where there were foils, gloves, masks, breastplates, and all the accessories for a fencing match.

In a quarter of an hour Athos joined them and at the same moment Charles brought in a letter for D'Artagnan, which a messenger had just desired might be instantly delivered.

It was now Athos's turn to take a sly look.

D'Artagnan read the letter with apparent calmness and said, shaking his head:

"See, dear friend, what it is to belong to the army. Faith, you are indeed right not to return to it. Monsieur de Treville is ill, so my company can't do without me; there! my leave is at an end!"

"Do you return to Paris?" asked Athos, quickly.

"Egad! yes; but why don't you come there also?"

Athos colored a little and answered:

"Should I go, I shall be delighted to see you there."

"Halloo, Planchet!" cried the Gascon from the door, "we must set out in ten minutes; give the horses some hay."

Then turning to Athos he added:

"I seem to miss something here. I am really sorry to go away without having seen Grimaud."

"Grimaud!" replied Athos. "I'm surprised you have never so much as asked after him. I have lent him to a friend----"

"Who will understand the signs he makes?" returned D'Artagnan.

"I hope so."

The friends embraced cordially; D'Artagnan pressed Raoul's hand.

"Will you not come with me?" he said; "I shall pass by Blois."

Raoul turned toward Athos, who showed him by a secret sign that he did not wish him to go.

"No, monsieur," replied the young man; "I will remain with monsieur le comte."

"Adieu, then, to both, my good friends," said D'Artagnan; "may God preserve you! as we used to say when we said good-bye to each other in the late cardinal's time."

Athos waved his hand, Raoul bowed, and D'Artagnan and Planchet set out.

The count followed them with his eyes, his hands resting on the shoulders of the youth, whose height was almost equal to his own; but as soon as they were out of sight he said:

"Raoul, we set out to-night for Paris."

"Eh?" cried the young man, turning pale.

"You may go and offer your adieux and mine to Madame de Saint-Remy. I shall wait for you here till seven."

The young man bent low, with an expression of sorrow and gratitude mingled, and retired in order to saddle his horse.

As to D'Artagnan, scarcely, on his side, was he out of sight when he drew from his pocket a letter, which he read over again:

"Return immediately to Paris.--J. M----."

"The epistle is laconic," said D'Artagnan; "and if there had not been a postscript, probably I should not have understood it; but happily there is a postscript."

And he read that welcome postscript, which made him forget the abruptness of the letter.

"P. S.--Go to the king's treasurer, at Blois; tell him your name and show him this letter; you will receive two hundred pistoles."

"Assuredly," said D'Artagnan, "I admire this piece of prose. The cardinal writes better than I thought. Come, Planchet, let us pay a visit to the king's treasurer and then set off."

"Toward Paris, sir?"

"Toward Paris."

And they set out at as hard a canter as their horses could maintain.