Chapter 19. In which the Contents of the Pates made by the Successor of Father Marteau are described.

In half an hour La Ramee returned, full of glee, like most men who have eaten, and more especially drank to their heart's content. The pates were excellent, the wine delicious.

The weather was fine and the game at tennis took place in the open air.

At two o'clock the tennis balls began, according to Grimaud's directions, to take the direction of the moat, much to the joy of La Ramee, who marked fifteen whenever the duke sent a ball into the moat; and very soon balls were wanting, so many had gone over. La Ramee then proposed to send some one to pick them up, but the duke remarked that it would be losing time; and going near the rampart himself and looking over, he saw a man working in one of the numerous little gardens cleared out by the peasants on the opposite side of the moat.

"Hey, friend!" cried the duke.

The man raised his head and the duke was about to utter a cry of surprise. The peasant, the gardener, was Rochefort, whom he believed to be in the Bastile.

"Well? Who's up there?" said the man.

"Be so good as to collect and throw us back our balls," said the duke.

The gardener nodded and began to fling up the balls, which were picked up by La Ramee and the guard. One, however, fell at the duke's feet, and seeing that it was intended for him, he put it into his pocket.

La Ramee was in ecstasies at having beaten a prince of the blood.

The duke went indoors and retired to bed, where he spent, indeed, the greater part of every day, as they had taken his books away. La Ramee carried off all his clothes, in order to be certain that the duke would not stir. However, the duke contrived to hide the ball under his bolster and as soon as the door was closed he tore off the cover of the ball with his teeth and found underneath the following letter:

My Lord,--Your friends are watching over you and the hour of your deliverance is at hand. Ask day after to-morrow to have a pie supplied you by the new confectioner opposite the castle, and who is no other than Noirmont, your former maitre d'hotel. Do not open the pie till you are alone. I hope you will be satisfied with its contents.

"Your highness's most devoted servant,

"In the Bastile, as elsewhere,

"Comte de Rochefort."

The duke, who had latterly been allowed a fire, burned the letter, but kept the ball, and went to bed, hiding the ball under his bolster. La Ramee entered; he smiled kindly on the prisoner, for he was an excellent man and had taken a great liking for the captive prince. He endeavored to cheer him up in his solitude.

"Ah, my friend!" cried the duke, "you are so good; if I could but do as you do, and eat pates and drink Burgundy at the house of Father Marteau's successor."

"'Tis true, my lord," answered La Ramee, "that his pates are famous and his wine magnificent."

"In any case," said the duke, "his cellar and kitchen might easily excel those of Monsieur de Chavigny."

"Well, my lord," said La Ramee, falling into the trap, "what is there to prevent your trying them? Besides, I have promised him your patronage."

"You are right," said the duke. "If I am to remain here permanently, as Monsieur Mazarin has kindly given me to understand, I must provide myself with a diversion for my old age, I must turn gourmand."

"My lord," said La Ramee, "if you will take a bit of good advice, don't put that off till you are old."

"Good!" said the Duc de Beaufort to himself, "every man in order that he may lose his heart and soul, must receive from celestial bounty one of the seven capital sins, perhaps two; it seems that Master La Ramee's is gluttony. Let us then take advantage of it." Then, aloud:

"Well, my dear La Ramee! the day after to-morrow is a holiday."

"Yes, my lord--Pentecost."

"Will you give me a lesson the day after to-morrow?"

"In what?"

"In gastronomy?"

"Willingly, my lord."

"But tete-a-tete. Send the guards to take their meal in the canteen of Monsieur de Chavigny; we'll have a supper here under your direction."

"Hum!" said La Ramee.

The proposal was seductive, but La Ramee was an old stager, acquainted with all the traps a prisoner was likely to set. Monsieur de Beaufort had said that he had forty ways of getting out of prison. Did this proposed breakfast cover some stratagem? He reflected, but he remembered that he himself would have charge of the food and the wine and therefore

that no powder could be mixed with the food, no drug with the wine. As to getting him drunk, the duke couldn't hope to do that, and he laughed at the mere thought of it. Then an idea came to him which harmonized everything.

The duke had followed with anxiety La Ramee's unspoken soliloquy, reading it from point to point upon his face. But presently the exempt's face suddenly brightened.

"Well," he asked, "that will do, will it not?"

"Yes, my lord, on one condition."

"What?"

"That Grimaud shall wait on us at table."

Nothing could be more agreeable to the duke, however, he had presence of mind enough to exclaim:

"To the devil with your Grimaud! He will spoil the feast."

"I will direct him to stand behind your chair, and since he doesn't speak, your highness will neither see nor hear him and with a little effort can imagine him a hundred miles away."

"Do you know, my friend, I find one thing very evident in all this, you distrust me."

"My lord, the day after to-morrow is Pentecost."

"Well, what is Pentecost to me? Are you afraid that the Holy Spirit will come as a tongue of fire to open the doors of my prison?"

"No, my lord; but I have already told you what that damned magician predicted."

"And what was it?"

"That the day of Pentecost would not pass without your highness being out of Vincennes."

"You believe in sorcerers, then, you fool?"

"I---I mind them no more than that----" and he snapped his fingers; "but it is my Lord Giulio who cares about them; as an Italian he is superstitious."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then," with well acted good-humor, "I allow Grimaud, but no one else; you must manage it all. Order whatever you like for supper--the only thing I specify is one of those pies; and tell the confectioner that I will promise him my custom if he excels this time in his pies--not only now, but when I leave my prison."

"Then you think you will some day leave it?" said La Ramee.

"The devil!" replied the prince; "surely, at the death of Mazarin. I am fifteen years younger than he is. At Vincennes, 'tis true, one lives faster----"

"My lord," replied La Ramee, "my lord----"

"Or dies sooner, for it comes to the same thing."

La Ramee was going out. He stopped, however, at the door for an instant.

"Whom does your highness wish me to send to you?"

"Any one, except Grimaud."

"The officer of the guard, then, with his chessboard?"

"Yes."

Five minutes afterward the officer entered and the duke seemed to be immersed in the sublime combinations of chess.

A strange thing is the mind, and it is wonderful what revolutions may be wrought in it by a sign, a word, a hope. The duke had been five years in prison, and now to him, looking back upon them, those five years, which had passed so slowly, seemed not so long a time as were the two days, the forty-eight hours, which still parted him from the time fixed for

his escape. Besides, there was one thing that engaged his most anxious thought--in what way was the escape to be effected? They had told him to hope for it, but had not told him what was to be hidden in the mysterious pate. And what friends awaited him without? He had friends, then, after five years in prison? If that were so he was indeed a highly favored prince. He forgot that besides his friends of his own sex, a woman, strange to say, had remembered him. It is true that she had not, perhaps, been scrupulously faithful to him, but she had remembered him; that was something.

So the duke had more than enough to think about; accordingly he fared at chess as he had fared at tennis; he made blunder upon blunder and the officer with whom he played found him easy game.

But his successive defeats did service to the duke in one way--they killed time for him till eight o'clock in the evening; then would come night, and with night, sleep. So, at least, the duke believed; but sleep is a capricious fairy, and it is precisely when one invokes her presence that she is most likely to keep him waiting. The duke waited until midnight, turning on his mattress like St. Laurence on his gridiron. Finally he slept.

But at daybreak he awoke. Wild dreams had disturbed his repose. He dreamed that he was endowed with wings--he wished to fly away. For a time these wings supported him, but when he reached a certain height this new aid failed him. His wings were broken and he seemed to sink into a bottomless abyss, whence he awoke, bathed in perspiration and nearly as much overcome as if he had really fallen. He fell asleep again

and another vision appeared. He was in a subterranean passage by which he was to leave Vincennes. Grimaud was walking before him with a lantern. By degrees the passage narrowed, yet the duke continued his course. At last it became so narrow that the fugitive tried in vain to proceed. The sides of the walls seem to close in, even to press against him. He made fruitless efforts to go on; it was impossible. Nevertheless, he still saw Grimaud with his lantern in front, advancing. He wished to call out to him but could not utter a word. Then at the other extremity he heard the footsteps of those who were pursuing him. These steps came on, came fast. He was discovered; all hope of flight was gone. Still the walls seemed to be closing on him; they appeared to be in concert with his enemies. At last he heard the voice of La Ramee. La Ramee took his hand and laughed aloud. He was captured again, and conducted to the low and vaulted chamber, in which Ornano, Puylaurens, and his uncle had died. Their three graves were there, rising above the ground, and a fourth was also there, yawning for its ghastly tenant.

The duke was obliged to make as many efforts to awake as he had done to go to sleep; and La Ramee found him so pale and fatigued that he inquired whether he was ill.

"In fact," said one of the guards who had remained in the chamber and had been kept awake by a toothache, brought on by the dampness of the atmosphere, "my lord has had a very restless night and two or three times, while dreaming, he called for help."

"What is the matter with your highness?" asked La Ramee.

"'Tis your fault, you simpleton," answered the duke. "With your idle nonsense yesterday about escaping, you worried me so that I dreamed that I was trying to escape and broke my neck in doing so."

La Ramee laughed.

"Come," he said, "'tis a warning from Heaven. Never commit such an imprudence as to try to escape, except in your dreams."

"And you are right, my dear La Ramee," said the duke, wiping away the sweat that stood on his brow, wide awake though he was; "after this I will think of nothing but eating and drinking."

"Hush!" said La Ramee; and one by one he sent away the guards, on various pretexts.

"Well?" asked the duke when they were alone.

"Well!" replied La Ramee, "your supper is ordered."

"Ah! and what is it to be? Monsieur, my majordomo, will there be a pie?"

"I should think so, indeed--almost as high as a tower."

"You told him it was for me?"

"Yes, and he said he would do his best to please your highness."

"Good!" exclaimed the duke, rubbing his hands.

"Devil take it, my lord! what a gourmand you are growing; I haven't seen you with so cheerful a face these five years."

The duke saw that he had not controlled himself as he ought, but at that moment, as if he had listened at the door and comprehended the urgent need of diverting La Ramee's ideas, Grimaud entered and made a sign to La Ramee that he had something to say to him.

La Ramee drew near to Grimaud, who spoke to him in a low voice.

The duke meanwhile recovered his self-control.

"I have already forbidden that man," he said, "to come in here without my permission."

"You must pardon him, my lord," said La Ramee, "for I directed him to come."

"And why did you so direct when you know that he displeases me?"

"My lord will remember that it was agreed between us that he should wait upon us at that famous supper. My lord has forgotten the supper."

"No, but I have forgotten Monsieur Grimaud."

"My lord understands that there can be no supper unless he is allowed to

be present."

"Go on, then; have it your own way."

"Come here, my lad," said La Ramee, "and hear what I have to say."

Grimaud approached, with a very sullen expression on his face.

La Ramee continued: "My lord has done me the honor to invite me to a supper to-morrow en tete-a-tete."

Grimaud made a sign which meant that he didn't see what that had to do with him.

"Yes, yes," said La Ramee, "the matter concerns you, for you will have the honor to serve us; and besides, however good an appetite we may have and however great our thirst, there will be something left on the plates and in the bottles, and that something will be yours."

Grimaud bowed in thanks.

"And now," said La Ramee, "I must ask your highness's pardon, but it seems that Monsieur de Chavigny is to be away for a few days and he has sent me word that he has certain directions to give me before his departure."

The duke tried to exchange a glance with Grimaud, but there was no glance in Grimaud's eyes.

"Go, then," said the duke, "and return as soon as possible."

"Does your highness wish to take revenge for the game of tennis yesterday?"

Grimaud intimated by a scarcely perceptible nod that he should consent.

"Yes," said the duke, "but take care, my dear La Ramee, for I propose to beat you badly."

La Ramee went out. Grimaud looked after him, and when the door was closed he drew out of his pocket a pencil and a sheet of paper.

"Write, my lord," he said.

"And what?"

Grimaud dictated.

"All is ready for to-morrow evening. Keep watch from seven to nine. Have two riding horses ready. We shall descend by the first window in the gallery."

"What next?"

"Sign your name, my lord."

The duke signed.

"Now, my lord, give me, if you have not lost it, the ball--that which contained the letter."

The duke took it from under his pillow and gave it to Grimaud. Grimaud gave a grim smile.

"Well?" asked the duke.

"Well, my lord, I sew up the paper in the ball and you, in your game of tennis, will send the ball into the ditch."

"But will it not be lost?"

"Oh no; there will be some one at hand to pick it up."

"A gardener?"

Grimaud nodded.

"The same as yesterday?"

Another nod on the part of Grimaud.

"The Count de Rochefort?"

Grimaud nodded the third time.

"Come, now," said the duke, "give some particulars of the plan for our escape."

"That is forbidden me," said Grimaud, "until the last moment."

"Who will be waiting for me beyond the ditch?"

"I know nothing about it, my lord."

"But at least, if you don't want to see me turn crazy, tell what that famous pate will contain."

"Two poniards, a knotted rope and a poire d'angoisse." *

*This poire d'angoisse was a famous gag, in the form of a pear, which, being thrust into the mouth, by the aid of a spring, dilated, so as to distend the jaws to their greatest width.

"Yes, I understand."

"My lord observes that there will be enough to go around."

"We shall take to ourselves the poniards and the rope," replied the duke.

"And make La Ramee eat the pear," answered Grimaud.

"My dear Grimaud, thou speakest seldom, but when thou dost, one must do thee justice--thy words are words of gold."