

## Chapter 24. The timely Arrival of D'Artagnan in Paris.

At Blois, D'Artagnan received the money paid to him by Mazarin for any future service he might render the cardinal.

From Blois to Paris was a journey of four days for ordinary travelers, but D'Artagnan arrived on the third day at the Barriere Saint Denis. In turning the corner of the Rue Montmartre, in order to reach the Rue Tiquetonne and the Hotel de la Chevrette, where he had appointed Porthos to meet him, he saw at one of the windows of the hotel, that friend himself dressed in a sky-blue waistcoat, embroidered with silver, and gaping, till he showed every one of his white teeth; whilst the people passing by admiringly gazed at this gentleman, so handsome and so rich, who seemed to weary of his riches and his greatness.

D'Artagnan and Planchet had hardly turned the corner when Porthos recognized them.

"Eh! D'Artagnan!" he cried. "Thank God you have come!"

"Eh! good-day, dear friend!" replied D'Artagnan.

Porthos came down at once to the threshold of the hotel.

"Ah, my dear friend!" he cried, "what bad stabling for my horses here."

"Indeed!" said D'Artagnan; "I am most unhappy to hear it, on account of those fine animals."

"And I, also--I was also wretchedly off," he answered, moving backward and forward as he spoke; "and had it not been for the hostess," he added, with his air of vulgar self-complacency, "who is very agreeable and understands a joke, I should have got a lodging elsewhere."

The pretty Madeleine, who had approached during this colloquy, stepped back and turned pale as death on hearing Porthos's words, for she thought the scene with the Swiss was about to be repeated. But to her great surprise D'Artagnan remained perfectly calm, and instead of being angry he laughed, and said to Porthos:

"Yes, I understand, the air of La Rue Tiquetonne is not like that of Pierrefonds; but console yourself, I will soon conduct you to one much better."

"When will you do that?"

"Immediately, I hope."

"Ah! so much the better!"

To that exclamation of Porthos's succeeded a groaning, low and profound, which seemed to come from behind a door. D'Artagnan, who had just dismounted, then saw, outlined against the wall, the enormous stomach of

Mousqueton, whose down-drawn mouth emitted sounds of distress.

"And you, too, my poor Monsieur Mouston, are out of place in this poor hotel, are you not?" asked D'Artagnan, in that rallying tone which may indicate either compassion or mockery.

"He finds the cooking detestable," replied Porthos.

"Why, then, doesn't he attend to it himself, as at Chantilly?"

"Ah, monsieur, I have not here, as I had there, the ponds of monsieur le prince, where I could catch those beautiful carp, nor the forests of his highness to provide me with partridges. As for the cellar, I have searched every part and poor stuff I found."

"Monsieur Mouston," said D'Artagnan, "I should indeed condole with you had I not at this moment something very pressing to attend to."

Then taking Porthos aside:

"My dear Du Vallon," he said, "here you are in full dress most fortunately, for I am going to take you to the cardinal's."

"Gracious me! really!" exclaimed Porthos, opening his great wondering eyes.

"Yes, my friend."

"A presentation? indeed!"

"Does that alarm you?"

"No, but it agitates me."

"Oh! don't be distressed; you have to deal with a cardinal of another kind. This one will not oppress you by his dignity."

"'Tis the same thing--you understand me, D'Artagnan--a court."

"There's no court now. Alas!"

"The queen!"

"I was going to say, there's no longer a queen. The queen! Rest assured, we shall not see her."

"And you say that we are going from here to the Palais Royal?"

"Immediately. Only, that there may be no delay, I shall borrow one of your horses."

"Certainly; all the four are at your service."

"Oh, I need only one of them for the time being."

"Shall we take our valets?"

"Yes, you may as well take Mousqueton. As to Planchet, he has certain reasons for not going to court."

"And what are they?"

"Oh, he doesn't stand well with his eminence."

"Mouston," said Porthos, "saddle Vulcan and Bayard."

"And for myself, monsieur, shall I saddle Rustaud?"

"No, take a more stylish horse, Phoebus or Superbe; we are going with some ceremony."

"Ah," said Mousqueton, breathing more freely, "you are only going, then, to make a visit?"

"Oh! yes, of course, Mouston; nothing else. But to avoid risk, put the pistols in the holsters. You will find mine on my saddle, already loaded."

Mouston breathed a sigh; he couldn't understand visits of ceremony made under arms.

"Indeed," said Porthos, looking complacently at his old lackey as he went away, "you are right, D'Artagnan; Mouston will do; Mouston has a very fine appearance."

D'Artagnan smiled.

"But you, my friend--are you not going to change your dress?"

"No, I shall go as I am. This traveling dress will serve to show the cardinal my haste to obey his commands."

They set out on Vulcan and Bayard, followed by Mousqueton on Phoebus, and arrived at the Palais Royal at about a quarter to seven. The streets were crowded, for it was the day of Pentecost, and the crowd looked in wonder at these two cavaliers; one as fresh as if he had come out of a bandbox, the other so covered with dust that he looked as if he had but just come off a field of battle.

Mousqueton also attracted attention; and as the romance of Don Quixote was then the fashion, they said that he was Sancho, who, after having lost one master, had found two.

On reaching the palace, D'Artagnan sent to his eminence the letter in which he had been ordered to return without delay. He was soon ordered to the presence of the cardinal.

"Courage!" he whispered to Porthos, as they proceeded. "Do not be intimidated. Believe me, the eye of the eagle is closed forever. We have only the vulture to deal with. Hold yourself as bolt upright as on the day of the bastion of St. Gervais, and do not bow too low to this Italian; that might give him a poor idea of you."

"Good!" answered Porthos. "Good!"

Mazarin was in his study, working at a list of pensions and benefices, of which he was trying to reduce the number. He saw D'Artagnan and Porthos enter with internal pleasure, yet showed no joy in his countenance.

"Ah! you, is it? Monsieur le lieutenant, you have been very prompt. 'Tis well. Welcome to ye."

"Thanks, my lord. Here I am at your eminence's service, as well as Monsieur du Vallon, one of my old friends, who used to conceal his nobility under the name of Porthos."

Porthos bowed to the cardinal.

"A magnificent cavalier," remarked Mazarin.

Porthos turned his head to the right and to the left, and drew himself up with a movement full of dignity.

"The best swordsman in the kingdom, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

Porthos bowed to his friend.

Mazarin was as fond of fine soldiers as, in later times, Frederick of Prussia used to be. He admired the strong hands, the broad shoulders and

the steady eye of Porthos. He seemed to see before him the salvation of his administration and of the kingdom, sculptured in flesh and bone. He remembered that the old association of musketeers was composed of four persons.

"And your two other friends?" he asked.

Porthos opened his mouth, thinking it a good opportunity to put in a word in his turn; D'Artagnan checked him by a glance from the corner of his eye.

"They are prevented at this moment, but will join us later."

Mazarin coughed a little.

"And this gentleman, being disengaged, takes to the service willingly?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord, and from pure devotion to the cause, for Monsieur de Bracieux is rich."

"Rich!" said Mazarin, whom that single word always inspired with a great respect.

"Fifty thousand francs a year," said Porthos.

These were the first words he had spoken.



"From pure zeal?" resumed Mazarin, with his artful smile; "from pure zeal and devotion then?"

"My lord has, perhaps, no faith in those words?" said D'Artagnan.

"Have you, Monsieur le Gascon?" asked Mazarin, supporting his elbows on his desk and his chin on his hands.

"I," replied the Gascon, "I believe in devotion as a word at one's baptism, for instance, which naturally comes before one's proper name; every one is naturally more or less devout, certainly; but there should be at the end of one's devotion something to gain."

"And your friend, for instance; what does he expect to have at the end of his devotion?"

"Well, my lord, my friend has three magnificent estates: that of Vallon, at Corbeil; that of Bracieux, in the Soissonais; and that of Pierrefonds, in the Valois. Now, my lord, he would like to have one of his three estates erected into a barony."

"Only that?" said Mazarin, his eyes twinkling with joy on seeing that he could pay for Porthos's devotion without opening his purse; "only that? That can be managed."

"I shall be baron!" explained Porthos, stepping forward.

"I told you so," said D'Artagnan, checking him with his hand; "and now

his eminence confirms it."

"And you, Monsieur D'Artagnan, what do you want?"

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "it is twenty years since Cardinal de Richelieu made me lieutenant."

"Yes, and you would be gratified if Cardinal Mazarin should make you captain."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"Well, that is not impossible. We will see, gentlemen, we will see. Now, Monsieur de Vallon," said Mazarin, "what service do you prefer, in the town or in the country?"

Porthos opened his mouth to reply.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "Monsieur de Vallon is like me, he prefers service extraordinary--that is to say, enterprises that are considered mad and impossible."

That boastfulness was not displeasing to Mazarin; he fell into meditation.

"And yet," he said, "I must admit that I sent for you to appoint you to quiet service; I have certain apprehensions--well, what is the meaning of that?"

In fact, a great noise was heard in the ante-chamber; at the same time the door of the study was burst open and a man, covered with dust, rushed into it, exclaiming:

"My lord the cardinal! my lord the cardinal!"

Mazarin thought that some one was going to assassinate him and he drew back, pushing his chair on the castors. D'Artagnan and Porthos moved so as to plant themselves between the person entering and the cardinal.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Mazarin, "what's the matter? and why do you rush in here, as if you were about to penetrate a crowded market-place?"

"My lord," replied the messenger, "I wish to speak to your eminence in secret. I am Monsieur du Poin, an officer in the guards, on duty at the donjon of Vincennes."

Mazarin, perceiving by the paleness and agitation of the messenger that he had something of importance to say, made a sign that D'Artagnan and Porthos should give place.

D'Artagnan and Porthos withdrew to a corner of the cabinet.

"Speak, monsieur, speak at once!" said Mazarin "What is the matter?"

"The matter is, my lord, that the Duc de Beaufort has contrived to escape from the Chateau of Vincennes."

Mazarin uttered a cry and became paler than the man who had brought the news. He fell back, almost fainting, in his chair.

"Escaped? Monsieur de Beaufort escaped?"

"My lord, I saw him run off from the top of the terrace."

"And you did not fire on him?"

"He was out of range."

"Monsieur de Chavigny--where was he?"

"Absent."

"And La Ramee?"

"Was found locked up in the prisoner's room, a gag in his mouth and a poniard near him."

"But the man who was under him?"

"Was an accomplice of the duke's and escaped along with him."

Mazarin groaned.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, advancing toward the cardinal, "it seems to

me that your eminence is losing precious time. It may still be possible to overtake the prisoner. France is large; the nearest frontier is sixty leagues distant."

"And who is to pursue him?" cried Mazarin.

"I, pardieu!"

"And you would arrest him?"

"Why not?"

"You would arrest the Duc de Beaufort, armed, in the field?"

"If your eminence should order me to arrest the devil, I would seize him by the horns and would bring him in."

"So would I," said Porthos.

"So would you!" said Mazarin, looking with astonishment at those two men. "But the duke will not yield himself without a furious battle."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan, his eyes aflame, "battle! It is a long time since we have had a battle, eh, Porthos?"

"Battle!" cried Porthos.

"And you think you can catch him?"

"Yes, if we are better mounted than he."

"Go then, take what guards you find here, and pursue him."

"You command us, my lord, to do so?"

"And I sign my orders," said Mazarin, taking a piece of paper and writing some lines; "Monsieur du Vallon, your barony is on the back of the Duc de Beaufort's horse; you have nothing to do but to overtake it. As for you, my dear lieutenant, I promise you nothing; but if you bring him back to me, dead or alive, you may ask all you wish."

"To horse, Porthos!" said D'Artagnan, taking his friend by the hand.

"Here I am," smiled Porthos, with his sublime composure.

They descended the great staircase, taking with them all the guards they found on their road, and crying out, "To arms! To arms!" and immediately put spur to horse, which set off along the Rue Saint Honore with the speed of the whirlwind.

"Well, baron, I promise you some good exercise!" said the Gascon.

"Yes, my captain."

As they went, the citizens, awakened, left their doors and the street dogs followed the cavaliers, barking. At the corner of the Cimetiere

Saint Jean, D'Artagnan upset a man; it was too insignificant an occurrence to delay people so eager to get on. The troop continued its course as though their steeds had wings.

Alas! there are no unimportant events in this world and we shall see that this apparently slight incident came near endangering the monarchy.