

Chapter 53. How D'Artagnan and Porthos earned by selling Straw, the one Two Hundred and Nineteen, and the other Two Hundred and Fifteen Louis d'or.

Mazarin was desirous of setting out instantly for Saint Germain, but the queen declared that she should wait for the people whom she had appointed to meet her. However, she offered the cardinal Laporte's place, which he accepted and went from one carriage to the other.

It was not without foundation that a report of the king's intention to leave Paris by night had been circulated. Ten or twelve persons had been in the secret since six o'clock, and howsoever great their prudence might be, they could not issue the necessary orders for the departure without suspicion being generated. Besides, each individual had one or two others for whom he was interested; and as there could be no doubt but that the queen was leaving Paris full of terrible projects of vengeance, every one had warned parents and friends of what was about to transpire; so that the news of the approaching exit ran like a train of lighted gunpowder along the streets.

The first carriage which arrived after that of the queen was that of the Prince de Conde, with the princess and dowager princess. Both these ladies had been awakened in the middle of the night and did not know what it all was about. The second contained the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, the tall young Mademoiselle and the Abbe de la Riviere; and the third, the Duke de Longueville and the Prince de Conti, brother and

brother-in-law of Conde. They all alighted and hastened to pay their respects to the king and queen in their coach. The queen fixed her eyes upon the carriage they had left, and seeing that it was empty, she said:

"But where is Madame de Longueville?"

"Ah, yes, where is my sister?" asked the prince.

"Madame de Longueville is ill," said the duke, "and she desired me to excuse her to your majesty."

Anne gave a quick glance to Mazarin, who answered by an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

"What do you say of this?" asked the queen.

"I say that she is a hostage for the Parisians," answered the cardinal.

"Why is she not come?" asked the prince in a low voice, addressing his brother.

"Silence," whispered the duke, "she has her reasons."

"She will ruin us!" returned the prince.

"She will save us," said Conti.

Carriages now arrived in crowds; those of the Marechal de Villeroy,

Guitant, Villequier and Comminges came into the line. The two musketeers arrived in their turn, holding the horses of D'Artagnan and Porthos in their hands. These two instantly mounted, the coachman of the latter replacing D'Artagnan on the coach-box of the royal coach. Mousqueton took the place of the coachman, and drove standing, for reasons known to himself, like Automedon of antiquity.

The queen, though occupied by a thousand details, tried to catch the Gascon's eye; but he, with his wonted prudence, had mingled with the crowd.

"Let us be the avant guard," said he to Porthos, "and find good quarters at Saint Germain; nobody will think of us, and for my part I am greatly fatigued."

"As for me," replied Porthos, "I am falling asleep, which is strange, considering we have not had any fighting; truly the Parisians are idiots."

"Or rather, we are very clever," said D'Artagnan.

"Perhaps."

"And how is your wrist?"

"Better; but do you think that we've got them this time?"

"Got what?"

"You your command, and I my title?"

"Faith! yes--I should expect so; besides, if they forget, I shall take the liberty of reminding them."

"The queen's voice! she is speaking," said Porthos; "I think she wants to ride on horseback."

"Oh, she would like it, but----"

"But what?"

"The cardinal won't allow it. Gentlemen," he said, addressing the two musketeers, "accompany the royal carriage, we are going forward to look for lodgings."

D'Artagnan started off for Saint Germain, followed by Porthos.

"We will go on, gentlemen," said the queen.

And the royal carriage drove on, followed by the other coaches and about fifty horsemen.

They reached Saint Germain without any accident; on descending, the queen found the prince awaiting her, bare-headed, to offer her his hand.

"What an awakening for the Parisians!" said the queen, radiant.

"It is war," said the prince.

"Well, then, let it be war! Have we not on our side the conqueror of Rocroy, of Nordlingen, of Lens?"

The prince bowed low.

It was then three o'clock in the morning. The queen walked first, every one followed her. About two hundred persons had accompanied her in her flight.

"Gentlemen," said the queen, laughing, "pray take up your abode in the chateau; it is large, and there will be no want of room for you all; but, as we never thought of coming here, I am informed that there are, in all, only three beds in the whole establishment, one for the king, one for me----"

"And one for the cardinal," muttered the prince.

"Am I--am I, then, to sleep on the floor?" asked Gaston d'Orleans, with a forced smile.

"No, my prince," replied Mazarin, "the third bed is intended for your highness."

"But your eminence?" replied the prince.

"I," answered Mazarin, "I shall not sleep at all; I have work to do."

Gaston desired that he should be shown into the room wherein he was to sleep, without in the least concerning himself as to where his wife and daughter were to repose.

"Well, for my part, I shall go to bed," said D'Artagnan; "come, Porthos."

Porthos followed the lieutenant with that profound confidence he ever had in the wisdom of his friend. They walked from one end of the chateau to the other, Porthos looking with wondering eyes at D'Artagnan, who was counting on his fingers.

"Four hundred, at a pistole each, four hundred pistoles."

"Yes," interposed Porthos, "four hundred pistoles; but who is to make four hundred pistoles?"

"A pistole is not enough," said D'Artagnan, "'tis worth a louis."

"What is worth a louis?"

"Four hundred, at a louis each, make four hundred louis."

"Four hundred?" said Porthos.

"Yes, there are two hundred of them, and each of them will need two,

which will make four hundred."

"But four hundred what?"

"Listen!" cried D'Artagnan.

But as there were all kinds of people about, who were in a state of stupefaction at the unexpected arrival of the court, he whispered in his friend's ear.

"I understand," answered Porthos, "I understand you perfectly, on my honor; two hundred louis, each of us, would be making a pretty thing of it; but what will people say?"

"Let them say what they will; besides, how will they know that we are doing it?"

"But who will distribute these things?" asked Porthos.

"Isn't Mousqueton there?"

"But he wears my livery; my livery will be known," replied Porthos.

"He can turn his coat inside out."

"You are always in the right, my dear friend," cried Porthos; "but where the devil do you discover all the notions you put into practice?"

D'Artagnan smiled. The two friends turned down the first street they came to. Porthos knocked at the door of a house to the right, whilst D'Artagnan knocked at the door of a house to the left.

"Some straw," they said.

"Sir, we don't keep any," was the reply of the people who opened the doors; "but please ask at the hay dealer's."

"Where is the hay dealer's?"

"At the last large door in the street."

"Are there any other people in Saint Germain who sell straw?"

"Yes; there's the landlord of the Lamb, and Gros-Louis the farmer; they both live in the Rue des Ursulines."

"Very well."

D'Artagnan went instantly to the hay dealer and bargained with him for a hundred and fifty trusses of straw, which he obtained, at the rate of three pistoles each. He went afterward to the innkeeper and bought from him two hundred trusses at the same price. Finally, Farmer Louis sold them eighty trusses, making in all four hundred and thirty.

There was no more to be had in Saint Germain. This foraging did not occupy more than half an hour. Mousqueton, duly instructed, was put at



the head of this sudden and new business. He was cautioned not to let a bit of straw out of his hands under a louis the truss, and they intrusted to him straw to the amount of four hundred and thirty louis. D'Artagnan, taking with him three trusses of straw, returned to the chateau, where everybody, freezing with cold and more than half asleep, envied the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orleans, on their camp beds. The lieutenant's entrance produced a burst of laughter in the great drawing-room; but he did not appear to notice that he was the object of general attention, but began to arrange, with so much cleverness, nicety and gayety, his straw bed, that the mouths of all these poor creatures, who could not go to sleep, began to water.

"Straw!" they all cried out, "straw! where is there any to be found?"

"I can show you," answered the Gascon.

And he conducted them to Mousqueton, who freely distributed the trusses at the rate of a louis apiece. It was thought rather dear, but people wanted to sleep, and who would not give even two or three louis for a few hours of sound sleep?

D'Artagnan gave up his bed to any one who wanted it, making it over about a dozen times; and since he was supposed to have paid, like the others, a louis for his truss of straw, he pocketed in that way thirty louis in less than half an hour. At five o'clock in the morning the straw was worth eighty francs a truss and there was no more to be had.

D'Artagnan had taken the precaution to set apart four trusses for his

own use. He put in his pocket the key of the room where he had hidden them, and accompanied by Porthos returned to settle with Mousqueton, who, naively, and like the worthy steward that he was, handed them four hundred and thirty louis and kept one hundred for himself.

Mousqueton, who knew nothing of what was going on in the chateau, wondered that the idea had not occurred to him sooner. D'Artagnan put the gold in his hat, and in going back to the chateau settled the reckoning with Porthos, each of them had cleared two hundred and fifteen louis.

Porthos, however, found that he had no straw left for himself. He returned to Mousqueton, but the steward had sold the last wisp. He then repaired to D'Artagnan, who, thanks to his four trusses of straw, was in the act of making up and tasting, by anticipation, the luxury of a bed so soft, so well stuffed at the head, so well covered at the foot, that it would have excited the envy of the king himself, if his majesty had not been fast asleep in his own. D'Artagnan could on no account consent to pull his bed to pieces again for Porthos, but for a consideration of four louis that the latter paid him for it, he consented that Porthos should share his couch with him. He laid his sword at the head, his pistols by his side, stretched his cloak over his feet, placed his felt hat on the top of his cloak and extended himself luxuriously on the straw, which rustled under him. He was already enjoying the sweet dream engendered by the possession of two hundred and nineteen louis, made in a quarter of an hour, when a voice was heard at the door of the hall, which made him stir.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" it cried.

"Here!" cried Porthos, "here!"

Porthos foresaw that if D'Artagnan was called away he should remain the sole possessor of the bed. An officer approached.

"I am come to fetch you, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"From whom?"

"His eminence sent me."

"Tell my lord that I'm going to sleep, and I advise him, as a friend, to do the same."

"His eminence is not gone to bed and will not go to bed, and wants you instantly."

"The devil take Mazarin, who does not know when to sleep at the proper time. What does he want with me? Is it to make me a captain? In that case I will forgive him."

And the musketeer rose, grumbling, took his sword, hat, pistols, and cloak, and followed the officer, whilst Porthos, alone and sole possessor of the bed, endeavored to follow the good example of falling asleep, which his predecessor had set him.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the cardinal, on perceiving him, "I have not forgotten with what zeal you have served me. I am going to prove to you that I have not."

"Good," thought the Gascon, "this is a promising beginning."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," he resumed, "do you wish to become a captain?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And your friend still longs to be made a baron?"

"At this very moment, my lord, he no doubt dreams that he is one already."

"Then," said Mazarin, taking from his portfolio the letter which he had already shown D'Artagnan, "take this dispatch and carry it to England."

D'Artagnan looked at the envelope; there was no address on it.

"Am I not to know to whom to present it?"

"You will know when you reach London; at London you may tear off the outer envelope."

"And what are my instructions?"

"To obey in every particular the man to whom this letter is addressed."

You must set out for Boulogne. At the Royal Arms of England you will find a young gentleman named Mordaunt."

"Yes, my lord; and what am I to do with this young gentleman?"

"Follow wherever he leads you."

D'Artagnan looked at the cardinal with a stupefied air.

"There are your instructions," said Mazarin; "go!"

"Go! 'tis easy to say so, but that requires money, and I haven't any."

"Ah!" replied Mazarin, "so you have no money?"

"None, my lord."

"But the diamond I gave you yesterday?"

"I wish to keep it in remembrance of your eminence."

Mazarin sighed.

"'Tis very dear living in England, my lord, especially as envoy extraordinary."

"Zounds!" replied Mazarin, "the people there are very sedate, and their habits, since the revolution, simple; but no matter."

He opened a drawer and took out a purse.

"What do you say to a thousand crowns?"

D'Artagnan pouted out his lower lip in a most extraordinary manner.

"I reply, my lord, 'tis but little, as certainly I shall not go alone."

"I suppose not. Monsieur du Vallon, that worthy gentleman, for, with the exception of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, there's not a man in France that I esteem and love so much as him----"

"Then, my lord," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to the purse which Mazarin still held, "if you love and esteem him so much, you--understand me?"

"Be it so! on his account I add two hundred crowns."

"Scoundrel!" muttered D'Artagnan. "But on our return," he said aloud, "may we, that is, my friend and I, depend on having, he his barony, and I my promotion?"

"On the honor of Mazarin."

"I should like another sort of oath better," said D'Artagnan to himself; then aloud, "May I not offer my duty to her majesty the queen?"

"Her majesty is asleep and you must set off directly," replied Mazarin;

"go, pray, sir----"

"One word more, my lord; if there's any fighting where I'm going, must I fight?"

"You are to obey the commands of the personage to whom I have addressed the inclosed letter."

"'Tis well," said D'Artagnan, holding out his hand to receive the money.

"I offer my best respects and services to you, my lord."

D'Artagnan then, returning to the officer, said:

"Sir, have the kindness also to awaken Monsieur du Vallon and to say 'tis by his eminence's order, and that I shall await him at the stables."

The officer went off with an eagerness that showed the Gascon that he had some personal interest in the matter.

Porthos was snoring most musically when some one touched him on the shoulder.

"I come from the cardinal," said the officer.

"Heigho!" said Porthos, opening his large eyes; "what have you got to say?"

"That his eminence has ordered you to England and that Monsieur d'Artagnan is waiting for you in the stables."

Porthos sighed heavily, arose, took his hat, his pistols, and his cloak, and departed, casting a look of regret upon the couch where he had hoped to sleep so well.

No sooner had he turned his back than the officer laid himself down in it, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold before his successor, in his turn, was snoring immoderately. It was very natural, he being the only person in the whole assemblage, except the king, the queen, and the Duke of Orleans, who slept gratuitously.