

Chapter 71. Port Wine.

In ten minutes the masters slept; not so the servants---hungry, and more thirsty than hungry.

Blaisois and Mousqueton set themselves to preparing their bed which consisted of a plank and a valise. On a hanging table, which swung to and fro with the rolling of the vessel, were a pot of beer and three glasses.

"This cursed rolling!" said Blaisois. "I know it will serve me as it did when we came over."

"And to think," said Mousqueton, "that we have nothing to fight seasickness with but barley bread and hop beer. Pah!"

"But where is your wicker flask, Monsieur Mousqueton? Have you lost it?" asked Blaisois.

"No," replied Mousqueton, "Parry kept it. Those devilish Scotchmen are always thirsty. And you, Grimaud," he said to his companion, who had just come in after his round with D'Artagnan, "are you thirsty?"

"As thirsty as a Scotchman!" was Grimaud's laconic reply.

And he sat down and began to cast up the accounts of his party, whose money he managed.

"Oh, lackadaisy! I'm beginning to feel queer!" cried Blaisois.

"If that's the case," said Mousqueton, with a learned air, "take some nourishment."

"Do you call that nourishment?" said Blaisois, pointing to the barley bread and pot of beer upon the table.

"Blaisois," replied Mousqueton, "remember that bread is the true nourishment of a Frenchman, who is not always able to get bread, ask Grimaud."

"Yes, but beer?" asked Blaisois sharply, "is that their true drink?"

"As to that," answered Mousqueton, puzzled how to get out of the difficulty, "I must confess that to me beer is as disagreeable as wine is to the English."

"What! Monsieur Mousqueton! The English--do they dislike wine?"

"They hate it."

"But I have seen them drink it."

"As a punishment. For example, an English prince died one day because

they had put him into a butt of Malmsey. I heard the Chevalier d'Herblay say so."

"The fool!" cried Blaisois, "I wish I had been in his place."

"Thou canst be," said Grimaud, writing down his figures.

"How?" asked Blaisois, "I can? Explain yourself."

Grimaud went on with his sum and cast up the whole.

"Port," he said, extending his hand in the direction of the first compartment examined by D'Artagnan and himself.

"Eh? eh? ah? Those barrels I saw through the door?"

"Port!" replied Grimaud, beginning a fresh sum.

"I have heard," said Blaisois, "that port is a very good wine."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Mousqueton, smacking his lips. "Excellent; there is port wine in the cellar of Monsieur le Baron de Bracieux."

"Suppose we ask these Englishmen to sell us a bottle," said the honest Blaisois.

"Sell!" cried Mousqueton, about whom there was a remnant of his ancient marauding character left. "One may well perceive, young man, that you

are inexperienced. Why buy what one can take?"

"Take!" said Blaisois; "covet the goods of your neighbor? That is forbidden, it seems to me."

"Where forbidden?" asked Mousqueton.

"In the commandments of God, or of the church, I don't know which. I only know it says, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods, nor yet his wife.'"

"That is a child's reason, Monsieur Blaisois," said Mousqueton in his most patronizing manner. "Yes, you talk like a child--I repeat the word. Where have you read in the Scriptures, I ask you, that the English are your neighbors?"

"Where, that is true," said Blaisois; "at least, I can't now recall it."

"A child's reason--I repeat it," continued Mousqueton. "If you had been ten years engaged in war, as Grimaud and I have been, my dear Blaisois, you would know the difference there is between the goods of others and the goods of enemies. Now an Englishman is an enemy; this port wine belongs to the English, therefore it belongs to us."

"And our masters?" asked Blaisois, stupefied by this harangue, delivered with an air of profound sagacity, "will they be of your opinion?"

Mousqueton smiled disdainfully.

"I suppose that you think it necessary that I should disturb the repose of these illustrious lords to say, 'Gentlemen, your servant, Mousqueton, is thirsty.' What does Monsieur Bracieux care, think you, whether I am thirsty or not?"

"'Tis a very expensive wine," said Blaisois, shaking his head.

"Were it liquid gold, Monsieur Blaisois, our masters would not deny themselves this wine. Know that Monsieur de Bracieux is rich enough to drink a tun of port wine, even if obliged to pay a pistole for every drop." His manner became more and more lofty every instant; then he arose and after finishing off the beer at one draught he advanced majestically to the door of the compartment where the wine was. "Ah! locked!" he exclaimed; "these devils of English, how suspicious they are!"

"Locked!" said Blaisois; "ah! the deuce it is; unlucky, for my stomach is getting more and more upset."

"Locked!" repeated Mousqueton.

"But," Blaisois ventured to say, "I have heard you relate, Monsieur Mousqueton, that once on a time, at Chantilly, you fed your master and yourself by taking partridges in a snare, carp with a line, and bottles with a slipnoose."

"Perfectly true; but there was an airhole in the cellar and the wine was

in bottles. I cannot throw the loop through this partition nor move with a pack-thread a cask of wine which may perhaps weigh two hundred pounds."

"No, but you can take out two or three boards of the partition," answered Blaisois, "and make a hole in the cask with a gimlet."

Mousqueton opened his great round eyes to the utmost, astonished to find in Blaisois qualities for which he did not give him credit.

"'Tis true," he said; "but where can I get a chisel to take the planks out, a gimlet to pierce the cask?"

"Trousers," said Grimaud, still squaring his accounts.

"Ah, yes!" said Mousqueton.

Grimaud, in fact, was not only the accountant, but the armorer of the party; and as he was a man full of forethought, these trousers, carefully rolled up in his valise, contained every sort of tool for immediate use.

Mousqueton, therefore, was soon provided with tools and he began his task. In a few minutes he had extracted three boards. He tried to pass his body through the aperture, but not being like the frog in the fable, who thought he was larger than he really was, he found he must take out three or four more before he could get through.

He sighed and set to work again.

Grimaud had now finished his accounts. He arose and stood near Mousqueton.

"I," he said.

"What?" said Mousqueton.

"I can pass."

"That is true," said Mousqueton, glancing at his friend's long and thin body, "you will pass easily."

"And he knows the full casks," said Blaisois, "for he has already been in the hold with Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan. Let Monsieur Grimaud go in, Monsieur Mouston."

"I could go in as well as Grimaud," said Mousqueton, a little piqued.

"Yes, but that would take too much time and I am thirsty. I am getting more and more seasick."

"Go in, then, Grimaud," said Mousqueton, handing him the beer pot and gimlet.

"Rinse the glasses," said Grimaud. Then with a friendly gesture toward Mousqueton, that he might forgive him for finishing an enterprise so

brilliantly begun by another, he glided like a serpent through the opening and disappeared.

Blaisois was in a state of great excitement; he was in ecstasies. Of all the exploits performed since their arrival in England by the extraordinary men with whom he had the honor to be associated, this seemed without question to be the most wonderful.

"You are about to see," said Mousqueton, looking at Blaisois with an expression of superiority which the latter did not even think of questioning, "you are about to see, Blaisois, how we old soldiers drink when we are thirsty."

"My cloak," said Grimaud, from the bottom of the hold.

"What do you want?" asked Blaisois.

"My cloak--stop up the aperture with it."

"Why?" asked Blaisois.

"Simpleton!" exclaimed Mousqueton; "suppose any one came into the room."

"Ah, true," cried Blaisois, with evident admiration; "but it will be dark in the cellar."

"Grimaud always sees, dark or light, night as well as day," answered Mousqueton.

"That is lucky," said Blaisois. "As for me, when I have no candle I can't take two steps without knocking against something."

"That's because you haven't served," said Mousqueton. "Had you been in the army you would have been able to pick up a needle on the floor of a closed oven. But hark! I think some one is coming."

Mousqueton made, with a low whistling sound, the sign of alarm well known to the lackeys in the days of their youth, resumed his place at the table and made a sign to Blaisois to follow his example.

Blaisois obeyed.

The door of their cabin was opened. Two men, wrapped in their cloaks, appeared.

"Oho!" said they, "not in bed at a quarter past eleven. That's against all rules. In a quarter of an hour let every one be in bed and snoring."

These two men then went toward the compartment in which Grimaud was secreted; opened the door, entered and shut it after them.

"Ah!" cried Blaisois, "he is lost!"

"Grimaud's a cunning fellow," murmured Mousqueton.

They waited for ten minutes, during which time no noise was heard that

might indicate that Grimaud was discovered, and at the expiration of that anxious interval the two men returned, closed the door after them, and repeating their orders that the servants should go to bed and extinguish their lights, disappeared.

"Shall we obey?" asked Blaisois. "All this looks suspicious."

"They said a quarter of an hour. We still have five minutes," replied Mousqueton.

"Suppose we warn the masters."

"Let's wait for Grimaud."

"But perhaps they have killed him."

"Grimaud would have cried out."

"You know he is almost dumb."

"We should have heard the blow, then."

"But if he doesn't return?"

"Here he is."

At that very moment Grimaud drew back the cloak which hid the aperture and came in with his face livid, his eyes staring wide open with terror,

so that the pupils were contracted almost to nothing, with a large circle of white around them. He held in his hand a tankard full of a dark substance, and approaching the gleam of light shed by the lamp he uttered this single monosyllable: "Oh!" with such an expression of extreme terror that Mousqueton started, alarmed, and Blaisois was near fainting from fright.

Both, however, cast an inquisitive glance into the tankard--it was full of gunpowder.

Convinced that the ship was full of powder instead of having a cargo of wine, Grimaud hastened to awake D'Artagnan, who had no sooner beheld him than he perceived that something extraordinary had taken place. Imposing silence, Grimaud put out the little night lamp, then knelt down and poured into the lieutenant's ear a recital melodramatic enough not to require play of feature to give it pith.

This was the gist of his strange story:

The first barrel that Grimaud had found on passing into the compartment he struck--it was empty. He passed on to another--it, also, was empty, but the third which he tried was, from the dull sound it gave out, evidently full. At this point Grimaud stopped and was preparing to make a hole with his gimlet, when he found a spigot; he therefore placed his tankard under it and turned the spout; something, whatever it was the cask contained, fell silently into the tankard.

Whilst he was thinking that he should first taste the liquor which the

tankard contained before taking it to his companions, the door of the cellar opened and a man with a lantern in his hands and enveloped in a cloak, came and stood just before the hogshead, behind which Grimaud, on hearing him come in, instantly crept. This was Groslow. He was accompanied by another man, who carried in his hand something long and flexible rolled up, resembling a washing line. His face was hidden under the wide brim of his hat. Grimaud, thinking that they had come, as he had, to try the port wine, effaced himself behind his cask and consoled himself with the reflection that if he were discovered the crime was not a great one.

"Have you the wick?" asked the one who carried the lantern.

"Here it is," answered the other.

At the voice of this last speaker, Grimaud started and felt a shudder creeping through his very marrow. He rose gently, so that his head was just above the round of the barrel, and under the large hat he recognized the pale face of Mordaunt.

"How long will this fuse burn?" asked this person.

"About five minutes," replied the captain.

That voice also was known to Grimaud. He looked from one to the other and after Mordaunt he recognized Groslow.

"Then tell the men to be in readiness--don't tell them why now. When the

clock strikes a quarter after midnight collect your men. Get down into the longboat."

"That is, when I have lighted the match?"

"I will undertake that. I wish to be sure of my revenge. Are the oars in the boat?"

"Everything is ready."

"'Tis well."

Mordaunt knelt down and fastened one end of the train to the spigot, in order that he might have nothing to do but to set it on fire at the opposite end with the match.

He then arose.

"You hear me--at a quarter past midnight--in fact, in twenty minutes."

"I understand all perfectly, sir," replied Groslow; "but allow me to say there is great danger in what you undertake; would it not be better to intrust one of the men to set fire to the train?"

"My dear Groslow," answered Mordaunt, "you know the French proverb, 'Nothing one does not do one's self is ever well done.' I shall abide by that rule."

Grimaud had heard all this, if he had not understood it. But what he saw made good what he lacked in perfect comprehension of the language. He had seen the two mortal enemies of the musketeers, had seen Mordaunt adjust the fuse; he had heard the proverb, which Mordaunt had given in French. Then he felt and felt again the contents of the tankard he held in his hand; and, instead of the lively liquor expected by Blaisois and Mousqueton, he found beneath his fingers the grains of some coarse powder.

Mordaunt went away with the captain. At the door he stopped to listen.

"Do you hear how they sleep?" he asked.

In fact, Porthos could be heard snoring through the partition.

"'Tis God who gives them into our hands," answered Groslow.

"This time the devil himself shall not save them," rejoined Mordaunt.

And they went out together.