

Chapter XVII. In which Aramis is sought, and only Bazin is found.

Two hours had scarcely elapsed since the departure of the master of the house, who, in Blaisois's sight, had taken the road to Paris, when a horseman, mounted on a good pied horse, stopped before the gate, and with a sonorous "hola!" called the stable-boys, who, with the gardeners, had formed a circle round Blaisois, the historian-in-ordinary to the household of the chateau. This "hola," doubtless well known to Master Blaisois, made him turn his head and exclaim--"Monsieur d'Artagnan! run quickly, you chaps, and open the gate."

A swarm of eight brisk lads flew to the gate, which was opened as if it had been made of feathers; and every one loaded him with attentions, for they knew the welcome this friend was accustomed to receive from their master; and for such remarks the eye of the valet may always be depended upon.

"Ah!" said M. d'Artagnan, with an agreeable smile, balancing himself upon his stirrup to jump to the ground, "where is that dear count?"

"Ah! how unfortunate you are, monsieur!" said Blaisois: "and how unfortunate will monsieur le comte, our master, think himself when he hears of your coming! As ill luck will have it, monsieur le comte left home two hours ago."

D'Artagnan did not trouble himself about such trifles. "Very good!" said he. "You always speak the best French in the world; you shall give me a lesson in grammar and correct language, whilst I wait the return of your master."

"That is impossible, monsieur," said Blaisois; "you would have to wait too long."

"Will he not come back to-day, then?"

"No, nor to-morrow, nor the day after to-morrow. Monsieur le comte has gone on a journey."

"A journey!" said D'Artagnan, surprised; "that's a fable, Master Blaisois."

"Monsieur, it is no more than the truth. Monsieur has done me the honor to give me the house in charge; and he added, with his voice so full of authority and kindness--that is all one to me: 'You will say I have gone to Paris.'"

"Well!" cried D'Artagnan, "since he is gone towards Paris, that is all I wanted to know! you should have told me so at first, booby! He is then

two hours in advance?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I shall soon overtake him. Is he alone?"

"No, monsieur."

"Who is with him, then?"

"A gentleman whom I don't know, an old man, and M. Grimaud."

"Such a party cannot travel as fast as I can--I will start."

"Will monsieur listen to me an instant?" said Blaisois, laying his hand gently on the reins of the horse.

"Yes, if you don't favor me with fine speeches, and make haste."

"Well, then, monsieur, that word Paris appears to me to be only an excuse."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, seriously, "an excuse, eh?"

"Yes, monsieur: and monsieur le comte is not going to Paris, I will swear."

"What makes you think so?"

"This,--M. Grimaud always knows where our master is going; and he had promised me that the first time he went to Paris, he would take a little money for me to my wife."

"What, have you a wife, then?"

"I had one--she was of this country; but monsieur thought her a noisy scold, and I sent her to Paris; it is sometimes inconvenient, but very agreeable at others."

"I understand; but go on. You do not believe the count gone to Paris?"

"No, monsieur; for then M. Grimaud would have broken his word; he would have perjured himself, and that is impossible."

"That is impossible," repeated D'Artagnan, quite in a study, because he was quite convinced. "Well, my brave Blaisois, many thanks to you."

Blaisois bowed.

"Come, you know I am not curious--I have serious business with your master. Could you not, by a little bit of a word--you who speak so well--give me to understand--one syllable only--I will guess the rest."

"Upon my word, monsieur, I cannot. I am quite ignorant where monsieur le comte is gone. As to listening at doors, that is contrary to my nature; and besides, it is forbidden here."

"My dear fellow," said D'Artagnan, "this is a very bad beginning for me. Never mind; you know when monsieur le comte will return, at least?"

"As little, monsieur, as the place of his destination."

"Come, Blaisois, come, search."

"Monsieur doubts my sincerity? Ah, monsieur, that grieves me much."

"The devil take his gilded tongue!" grumbled D'Artagnan. "A clown with a word would be worth a dozen of him. Adieu!"

"Monsieur, I have the honor to present you my respects."

"Cuistre!" said D'Artagnan to himself, "the fellow is unbearable." He gave another look up to the house, turned his horse's head, and set off like a man who has nothing either annoying or embarrassing in his mind. When he was at the end of the wall, and out of sight,--"Well, now, I wonder," said he, breathing quickly, "whether Athos was at home. No; all those idlers, standing with their arms crossed, would have been at work if the eye of the master was near. Athos gone on a journey?--that is incomprehensible. Bah! it is all devilish mysterious! And then--no--he is not the man I want. I want one of a cunning, patient mind. My business is at Melun, in a certain presbytery I am acquainted with. Forty-five leagues--four days and a half! Well, it is fine weather, and I am free. Never mind the distance!"

And he put his horse into a trot, directing his course towards Paris. On the fourth day he alighted at Melun, as he had intended.

D'Artagnan was never in the habit of asking any one on the road for any common information. For these sorts of details, unless in very serious circumstances, he confided in his perspicacity, which was so seldom at fault, in his experience of thirty years, and in a great habit of reading the physiognomies of houses, as well as those of men. At Melun, D'Artagnan immediately found the presbytery--a charming house, plastered over red brick, with vines climbing along the gutters, and a cross, in carved stone, surmounting the ridge of the roof. From the ground-floor of this house came a noise, or rather a confusion of voices, like the chirping of young birds when the brood is just hatched under the down. One of these voices was spelling the alphabet distinctly. A voice thick,

yet pleasant, at the same time scolded the talkers and corrected the faults of the reader. D'Artagnan recognized that voice, and as the window of the ground-floor was open, he leant down from his horse under the branches and red fibers of the vine and cried, "Bazin, my dear Bazin! good-day to you."

A short, fat man, with a flat face, a cranium ornamented with a crown of gray hairs, cut short, in imitation of a tonsure, and covered with an old black velvet cap, arose as soon as he heard D'Artagnan--we ought not to say arose, but bounded up. In fact, Bazin bounded up, carrying with him his little low chair, which the children tried to take away, with battles more fierce than those of the Greeks endeavoring to recover the body of Patroclus from the hands of the Trojans. Bazin did more than bound; he let fall both his alphabet and his ferule. "You!" said he; "you, Monsieur D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, myself! Where is Aramis--no, M. le Chevalier d'Herblay--no, I am still mistaken--Monsieur le Vicaire-General?"

"Ah, monsieur," said Bazin, with dignity, "monseigneur is at his diocese."

"What did you say?" said D'Artagnan. Bazin repeated the sentence.

"Ah, ah! but has Aramis a diocese?"

"Yes, monsieur. Why not?"

"Is he a bishop, then?"

"Why, where can you come from," said Bazin, rather irreverently, "that you don't know that?"

"My dear Bazin, we pagans, we men of the sword, know very well when a man is made a colonel, or maitre-de-camp, or marshal of France; but if he be made a bishop, arch-bishop, or pope--devil take me if the news reaches us before the three quarters of the earth have had the advantage of it!"

"Hush! hush!" said Bazin, opening his eyes: "do not spoil these poor children, in whom I am endeavoring to inculcate such good principles." In fact, the children had surrounded D'Artagnan, whose horse, long sword, spurs, and martial air they very much admired. But above all, they admired his strong voice; so that, when he uttered his oath, the whole school cried out, "The devil take me!" with fearful bursts of laughter, shouts, and bounds, which delighted the musketeer, and bewildered the old pedagogue.

"There!" said he, "hold your tongues, you brats! You have come, M.

d'Artagnan, and all my good principles fly away. With you, as usual, comes disorder. Babel is revived. Ah! Good Lord! Ah! the wild little wretches!" And the worthy Bazin distributed right and left blows which increased the cries of his scholars by changing the nature of them.

"At least," said he, "you will no longer decoy any one here."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile which made a shudder creep over the shoulders of Bazin.

"He is capable of it," murmured he.

"Where is your master's diocese?"

"Monseigneur Rene is bishop of Vannes."

"Who had him nominated?"

"Why, monsieur le surintendant, our neighbor."

"What! Monsieur Fouquet?"

"To be sure he did."

"Is Aramis on good terms with him, then?"

"Monseigneur preached every Sunday at the house of monsieur le surintendant at Vaux; then they hunted together."

"Ah!"

"And monseigneur composed his homilies--no, I mean his sermons--with monsieur le surintendant."

"Bah! he preached in verse, then, this worthy bishop?"

"Monsieur, for the love of heaven, do not jest with sacred things."

"There, Bazin, there! So, then, Aramis is at Vannes?"

"At Vannes, in Bretagne."

"You are a deceitful old hunk, Bazin; that is not true."

"See, monsieur, if you please; the apartments of the presbytery are empty."

"He is right there," said D'Artagnan, looking attentively at the house, the aspect of which announced solitude.

"But monseigneur must have written you an account of his promotion."

"When did it take place?"

"A month back."

"Oh! then there is no time lost. Aramis cannot yet have wanted me. But how is it, Bazin, you do not follow your master?"

"Monsieur, I cannot; I have occupations."

"Your alphabet?"

"And my penitents."

"What, do you confess, then? Are you a priest?"

"The same as one. I have such a call."

"But the orders?"

"Oh," said Bazin, without hesitation, "now that monseigneur is a bishop, I shall soon have my orders, or at least my dispensations." And he rubbed his hands.

"Decidedly," said D'Artagnan to himself, "there will be no means of uprooting these people. Get me some supper, Bazin."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

"A fowl, a bouillon, and a bottle of wine."

"This is Saturday night, monsieur--it is a day of abstinence."

"I have a dispensation," said D'Artagnan.

Bazin looked at him suspiciously.

"Ah, ah, master hypocrite!" said the musketeer, "for whom do you take me? If you, who are the valet, hope for dispensation to commit a crime, shall not I, the friend of your bishop, have dispensation for eating meat at the call of my stomach? Make yourself agreeable with me, Bazin, or by heavens! I will complain to the king, and you shall never confess. Now you know that the nomination of bishops rests with the king,--I have the king, I am the stronger."

Bazin smiled hypocritically. "Ah, but we have monsieur le surintendant," said he.

"And you laugh at the king, then?"

Bazin made no reply; his smile was sufficiently eloquent.

"My supper," said D'Artagnan, "it is getting towards seven o'clock."

Bazin turned round and ordered the eldest of the pupils to inform the cook. In the meantime, D'Artagnan surveyed the presbytery.

"Phew!" said he, disdainfully, "monseigneur lodged his grandeur very meanly here."

"We have the Chateau de Vaux," said Bazin.

"Which is perhaps equal to the Louvre?" said D'Artagnan, jeeringly.

"Which is better," replied Bazin, with the greatest coolness imaginable.

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan.

He would perhaps have prolonged the discussion, and maintained the superiority of the Louvre, but the lieutenant perceived that his horse remained fastened to the bars of a gate.

"The devil!" said he. "Get my horse looked after; your master the bishop has none like him in his stables."

Bazin cast a sidelong glance at the horse, and replied, "Monsieur le surintendant gave him four from his own stables; and each of the four is worth four of yours."

The blood mounted to the face of D'Artagnan. His hand itched and his eye glanced over the head of Bazin, to select the place upon which he should discharge his anger. But it passed away; reflection came, and D'Artagnan contented himself with saying,--

"The devil! the devil! I have done well to quit the service of the king. Tell me, worthy Master Bazin," added he, "how many musketeers does monsieur le surintendant retain in his service?"

"He could have all there are in the kingdom with his money," replied Bazin, closing his book, and dismissing the boys with some kindly blows of his cane.

"The devil! the devil!" repeated D'Artagnan, once more, as if to annoy the pedagogue. But as supper was now announced, he followed the cook, who introduced him into the refectory, where it awaited him. D'Artagnan placed himself at the table, and began a hearty attack upon his fowl.

"It appears to me," said D'Artagnan, biting with all his might at the tough fowl they had served up to him, and which they had evidently forgotten to fatten,--"it appears that I have done wrong in not seeking service with that master yonder. A powerful noble this intendant, seemingly! In good truth, we poor fellows know nothing at the court, and the rays of the sun prevent our seeing the large stars, which are also suns, at a little greater distance from our earth,--that is all."

As D'Artagnan delighted, both from pleasure and system, in making people talk about things which interested him, he fenced in his best style with Master Bazin, but it was pure loss of time; beyond the tiresome and hyperbolical praises of monsieur le surintendant of the finances, Bazin, who, on his side, was on his guard, afforded nothing but platitudes to the curiosity of D'Artagnan, so that our musketeer, in a tolerably bad humor, desired to go to bed as soon as he had supped. D'Artagnan was introduced by Bazin into a mean chamber, in which there was a poor bed; but D'Artagnan was not fastidious in that respect. He had been told that Aramis had taken away the key of his own private apartment, and as he knew Aramis was a very particular man, and had generally many things to conceal in his apartment, he had not been surprised. He, therefore, although it seemed comparatively even harder, attacked the bed as bravely as he had done the fowl; and, as he had as good an inclination to sleep as he had had to eat, he took scarcely longer time to be snoring harmoniously than he had employed in picking the last bones of the bird.

Since he was no longer in the service of any one, D'Artagnan had promised himself to indulge in sleeping as soundly as he had formerly slept lightly; but with whatever good faith D'Artagnan had made himself this promise, and whatever desire he might have to keep it religiously, he was awakened in the middle of the night by a loud noise of carriages, and servants on horseback. A sudden illumination flashed over the walls of his chamber; he jumped out of bed and ran to the window in his shirt. "Can the king be coming this way?" he thought, rubbing his eyes; "in truth, such a suite can only be attached to royalty."

"Vive le monsieur le surintendant!" cried, or rather vociferated, from a window on the ground-floor, a voice which he recognized as Bazin's, who at the same time waved a handkerchief with one hand, and held a large candle in the other. D'Artagnan then saw something like a brilliant human form leaning out of the principal carriage; at the same time loud bursts of laughter, caused, no doubt, by the strange figure of Bazin, and issuing from the same carriage, left, as it were, a train of joy upon the passage of the rapid cortege.

"I might easily see it was not the king," said D'Artagnan; "people don't laugh so heartily when the king passes. Hola, Bazin!" cried he to his neighbor, three-quarters of whose body still hung out of the window, to



follow the carriage with his eyes as long as he could. "What is all that about?"

"It is M. Fouquet," said Bazin, in a patronizing tone.

"And all those people?"

"That is the court of M. Fouquet."

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan; "what would M. de Mazarin say to that if he heard it?" And he returned to his bed, asking himself how Aramis always contrived to be protected by the most powerful personages in the kingdom. "Is it that he has more luck than I, or that I am a greater fool than he? Bah!" That was the concluding word by the aid of which D'Artagnan, having become wise, now terminated every thought and every period of his style. Formerly he said, "Mordioux!" which was a prick of the spur, but now he had become older, and he murmured that philosophical "Bah!" which served as a bridle to all the passions.