

Chapter XXI. In which D'Artagnan prepares to travel for the Firm of Planchet & Company.

D'Artagnan reflected to such good purpose during the night that his plan was settled by morning. "This is it," said he, sitting up in bed, supporting his elbow on his knee, and his chin in his hand;--"this is it. I shall seek out forty steady, firm men, recruited among people a little compromised, but having habits of discipline. I shall promise them five hundred livres for a month if they return; nothing if they do not return, or half for their kindred. As to food and lodging, that concerns the English, who have cattle in their pastures, bacon in their bacon-racks, fowls in their poultry-yards, and corn in their barns. I will present myself to General Monk with my little body of troops. He will receive me. I shall win his confidence, and take advantage of it, as soon as possible."

But without going further, D'Artagnan shook his head and interrupted himself. "No," said he; "I should not dare to relate this to Athos; the way is therefore not honorable. I must use violence," continued he,--"very certainly I must, but without compromising my loyalty. With forty men I will traverse the country as a partisan. But if I fall in with, not forty thousand English, as Planchet said, but purely and simply with four hundred, I shall be beaten. Supposing that among my forty warriors there should be found at least ten stupid ones--ten who will allow themselves to be killed one after the other, from mere folly? No; it is, in fact, impossible to find forty men to be depended upon--they do not exist. I must learn how to be contented with thirty. With ten men less I should have the right of avoiding any armed encounter, on account of the small number of my people; and if the encounter should take place, my chance is better with thirty men than forty. Besides, I should save five thousand francs; that is to say, the eighth of my capital; that is worth the trial. This being so, I should have thirty men. I shall divide them into three bands,--we will spread ourselves about over the country, with an injunction to reunite at a given moment; in this fashion, ten by ten, we should excite no suspicion--we should pass unperceived. Yes, yes, thirty--that is a magic number. There are three tens--three, that divine number! And then, truly, a company of thirty men, when all together, will look rather imposing. Ah! stupid wretch that I am!" continued D'Artagnan, "I want thirty horses. That is ruinous. Where the devil was my head when I forgot the horses? We cannot, however, think of striking such a blow without horses. Well, so be it, that sacrifice must be made; we can get the horses in the country--they are not bad, besides. But I forgot--peste! Three bands--that necessitates three leaders; there is the difficulty. Of the three commanders I have already one--that is myself;--yes, but the two others will of themselves cost almost as much money as all the rest of the troop. No; positively I must have but one

lieutenant. In that case, then, I should reduce my troop to twenty men. I know very well that twenty men is but very little; but since with thirty I was determined not to seek to come to blows, I should do so more carefully still with twenty. Twenty--that is a round number; that, besides, reduces the number of the horses by ten, which is a consideration; and then, with a good lieutenant--Mordioux! what things patience and calculation are! Was I not going to embark with forty men, and I have now reduced them to twenty for an equal success? Ten thousand livres saved at one stroke, and more safety; that is well! Now, then, let us see; we have nothing to do but to find this lieutenant--let him be found, then; and after--That is not so easy; he must be brave and good, a second myself. Yes, but a lieutenant must have my secret, and as that secret is worth a million, and I shall only pay my man a thousand livres, fifteen hundred at the most, my man will sell the secret to Monk. Mordioux! no lieutenant. Besides, this man, were he as mute as a disciple of Pythagoras,--this man would be sure to have in the troop some favorite soldier, whom he would make his sergeant; the sergeant would penetrate the secret of the lieutenant, in case the latter should be honest and unwilling to sell it. Then the sergeant, less honest and less ambitious, will give up the whole for fifty thousand livres. Come, come! that is impossible. The lieutenant is impossible. But then I must have no fractions; I cannot divide my troop in two, and act upon two points, at once, without another self, who--But what is the use of acting upon two points, as we have only one man to take? What can be the use of weakening a corps by placing the right here, and the left there? A single corps--Mordioux! a single one, and that commanded by D'Artagnan. Very well. But twenty men marching in one band are suspected by everybody; twenty horsemen must not be seen marching together, or a company will be detached against them and the password will be required; the which company, upon seeing them embarrassed to give it, would shoot M. d'Artagnan and his men like so many rabbits. I reduce myself then to ten men; in this fashion I shall act simply and with unity; I shall be forced to be prudent, which is half the success in an affair of the kind I am undertaking; a greater number might, perhaps, have drawn me into some folly. Ten horses are not many, either, to buy or take. A capital idea; what tranquillity it infuses into my mind! no more suspicions--no passwords--no more dangers! Ten men, they are valets or clerks. Ten men, leading ten horses laden with merchandise of whatever kind, are tolerated, well received everywhere. Ten men travel on account of the house of Planchet & Co., of France,--nothing can be said against that. These ten men, clothed like manufacturers, have a good cutlass or a good musket at their saddle-bow, and a good pistol in the holster. They never allow themselves to be uneasy, because they have no evil designs. They are, perhaps, in truth, a little disposed to be smugglers, but what harm is in that? Smuggling is not, like polygamy, a hanging offense. The worst that can happen to us is the confiscation of our merchandise. Our merchandise confiscated--a fine affair that! Come, come! it is a superb plan. Ten men only--ten men, whom I will engage for my service; ten men who shall be as resolute as forty, who would cost me four times as much,

and to whom, for greater security, I will never open my mouth as to my designs, and to whom I shall only say 'My friends, there is a blow to be struck.' Things being after this fashion, Satan will be very malicious if he plays me one of his tricks. Fifteen thousand livres saved--that's superb--out of twenty!"

Thus fortified by his laborious calculations, D'Artagnan stopped at this plan, and determined to change nothing in it. He had already on a list furnished by his inexhaustible memory, ten men illustrious amongst the seekers of adventure, ill-treated by fortune, and not on good terms with justice. Upon this D'Artagnan rose, and instantly set off on the search, telling Planchet not to expect him to breakfast, and perhaps not to dinner. A day and a half spent in rummaging amongst certain dens of Paris sufficed for his recruiting; and, without allowing his adventurers to communicate with each other, he had picked up and got together, in less than thirty hours, a charming collection of ill-looking faces, speaking a French less pure than the English they were about to attempt. These men were, for the most part, guards, whose merit D'Artagnan had had an opportunity of appreciating in various encounters, whom drunkenness, unlucky sword-thrusts, unexpected winnings at play, or the economical reforms of Mazarin, had forced to seek shade and solitude, those two great consolers of irritated and chafing spirits. They bore upon their countenances and in their vestments the traces of the heartaches they had undergone. Some had their visages scarred,--all had their clothes in rags. D'Artagnan comforted the most needy of these brotherly miseries by a prudent distribution of the crowns of the company; then, having taken care that these crowns should be employed in the physical improvement of the troop, he appointed a trysting place in the north of France, between Bergues and Saint Omer. Six days were allowed as the utmost term, and D'Artagnan was sufficiently acquainted with the good-will, the good-humor, and the relative probity of these illustrious recruits, to be certain that not one of them would fail in his appointment. These orders given, this rendezvous fixed, he went to bid farewell to Planchet, who asked news of his army. D'Artagnan did not think it proper to inform him of the reduction he had made in his personnel. He feared that the confidence of his associate would be abated by such an avowal. Planchet was delighted to learn that the army was levied, and that he (Planchet) found himself a kind of half king, who from his throne-counter kept in pay a body of troops destined to make war against perfidious Albion, that enemy of all true French hearts. Planchet paid down in double louis, twenty thousand livres to D'Artagnan, on the part of himself (Planchet), and twenty thousand livres, still in double louis, in account with D'Artagnan. D'Artagnan placed each of the twenty thousand francs in a bag, and weighing a bag in each hand,--"This money is very embarrassing, my dear Planchet," said he. "Do you know this weighs thirty pounds?"

"Bah! your horse will carry that like a feather."

D'Artagnan shook his head. "Don't tell me such things, Planchet: a horse overloaded with thirty pounds, in addition to the rider and his portmanteau, cannot cross a river so easily--cannot leap over a wall or ditch so lightly; and the horse failing, the horseman fails. It is true that you, Planchet, who have served in the infantry, may not be aware of all that."

"Then what is to be done, monsieur?" said Planchet, greatly embarrassed.

"Listen to me," said D'Artagnan. "I will pay my army on its return home. Keep my half of twenty thousand livres, which you can use during that time."

"And my half?" said Planchet.

"I shall take that with me."

"Your confidence does me honor," said Planchet: "but supposing you should not return?"

"That is possible, though not very probable. Then, Planchet, in case I should not return--give me a pen; I will make my will." D'Artagnan took a pen and some paper, and wrote upon a plain sheet,--"I, D'Artagnan, possess twenty thousand livres, laid up cent per cent during thirty years that I have been in the service of his majesty the king of France. I leave five thousand to Athos, five thousand to Porthos, and five thousand to Aramis, that they may give the said sums in my name and their own to my young friend Raoul, Vicomte de Bragelonne. I give the remaining five thousand to Planchet, that he may distribute the fifteen thousand with less regret among my friends. With which purpose I sign these presents.--D'ARTAGNAN."

Planchet appeared very curious to know what D'Artagnan had written.

"Here," said the musketeer, "read it."

On reading the last lines the tears came into Planchet's eyes. "You think, then, that I would not have given the money without that? Then I will have none of your five thousand francs."

D'Artagnan smiled. "Accept it, accept it, Planchet; and in that way you will only lose fifteen thousand francs instead of twenty thousand, and you will not be tempted to disregard the signature of your master and friend, by losing nothing at all."

How well that dear Monsieur d'Artagnan knew the hearts of men and grocers! They who have pronounced Don Quixote mad because he rode out to the conquest of an empire with nobody but Sancho his squire, and they who have pronounced Sancho mad because he accompanied his master in

his attempt to conquer the said empire,--they certainly will have no hesitation in extending the same judgment to D'Artagnan and Planchet. And yet the first passed for one of the most subtle spirits among the astute spirits of the court of France. As to the second, he had acquired by good right the reputation of having one of the longest heads among the grocers of the Rue des Lombards; consequently of Paris, and consequently of France. Now, to consider these two men from the point of view from which you would consider other men, and the means by the aid of which they contemplated to restore a monarch to his throne, compared with other means, the shallowest brains of the country where brains are most shallow must have revolted against the presumptuous madness of the lieutenant and the stupidity of his associate. Fortunately, D'Artagnan was not a man to listen to the idle talk of those around him, or to the comments that were made on himself. He had adopted the motto, "Act well, and let people talk." Planchet, on his part had adopted this, "Act and say nothing." It resulted from this, that, according to the custom of all superior geniuses, these two men flattered themselves, *intra pectus*, with being in the right against all who found fault with them.

As a beginning, D'Artagnan set out in the finest of possible weather, without a cloud in the heavens--without a cloud on his mind, joyous and strong, calm and decided, great in his resolution, and consequently carrying with him a tenfold dose of that potent fluid which the shocks of mind cause to spring from the nerves, and which procure for the human machine a force and an influence of which future ages will render, according to all probability, a more arithmetical account than we can possibly do at present. He was again, as in times past, on that same road of adventures which had led him to Boulogne, and which he was now traveling for the fourth time. It appeared to him that he could almost recognize the trace of his own steps upon the road, and that of his fist upon the doors of the hostelryes;--his memory, always active and present, brought back that youth which neither thirty years later his great heart nor his wrist of steel would have belied. What a rich nature was that of this man! He had all the passions, all the defects, all the weaknesses, and the spirit of contradiction familiar to his understanding changed all these imperfections into corresponding qualities. D'Artagnan, thanks to his ever active imagination, was afraid of a shadow, and ashamed of being afraid, he marched straight up to that shadow, and then became extravagant in his bravery, if the danger proved to be real. Thus everything in him was emotion, and therefore enjoyment. He loved the society of others, but never became tired of his own; and more than once, if he could have been heard when he was alone, he might have been seen laughing at the jokes he related to himself or the tricks his imagination created just five minutes before ennui might have been looked for. D'Artagnan was not perhaps so gay this time as he would have been with the prospect of finding some good friends at Calais, instead of joining the ten scamps there; melancholy, however, did not visit him more than once a day, and it was about five visits that he received from that somber deity before he got sight of the sea at Boulogne, and then

these visits were indeed but short. But when once D'Artagnan found himself near the field of action, all other feelings but that of confidence disappeared never to return. From Boulogne he followed the coast to Calais. Calais was the place of general rendezvous, and at Calais he had named to each of his recruits the hostelry of "Le Grande Monarque," where living was not extravagant, where sailors messed, and where men of the sword, with sheath of leather, be it understood, found lodging, table, food, and all the comforts of life, for thirty sous per diem. D'Artagnan proposed to himself to take them by surprise in flagrante delicto of wandering life, and to judge by the first appearance if he could count on them as trusty companions.

He arrived at Calais at half past four in the afternoon.