

Chapter XXXVIII. In which it is seen that the French Grocer had already been established in the Seventeenth Century.

His accounts once settled, and his recommendations made, D'Artagnan thought of nothing but returning to Paris as soon as possible. Athos, on his part, was anxious to reach home and to rest a little. However whole the character and the man may remain after the fatigues of a voyage, the traveler perceives with pleasure, at the close of the day--even though the day has been a fine one--that night is approaching, and will bring a little sleep with it. So, from Boulogne to Paris, jogging on, side by side, the two friends, in some degree absorbed each in his individual thoughts, conversed of nothing sufficiently interesting for us to repeat to our readers. Each of them given up to his personal reflections, and constructing his future after his own fashion, was, above all, anxious to abridge the distance by speed. Athos and D'Artagnan arrived at the gates of Paris on the evening of the fourth day after leaving Boulogne.

"Where are you going, my friend?" asked Athos. "I shall direct my course straight to my hotel."

"And I straight to my partner's."

"To Planchet's?"

"Yes; at the Pilon d'Or."

"Well, but shall we not meet again?"

"If you remain in Paris, yes; for I shall stay here."

"No: after having embraced Raoul, with whom I have appointed a meeting at my hotel, I shall set out immediately for La Fere."

"Well, adieu, then, dear and true friend."

"Au revoir! I should rather say, for why can you not come and live with me at Blois? You are free, you are rich, I shall purchase for you, if you like, a handsome estate in the vicinity of Cheverny or of Bracieux. On the one side you will have the finest woods in the world, which join those of Chambord; on the other, admirable marshes. You who love sporting, and who, whether you admit it or not, are a poet, my dear friend, you will find pheasants, rail and teal, without counting sunsets and excursions on the water, to make you fancy yourself Nimrod and Apollo themselves. While awaiting the purchase, you can live at La Fere, and we shall go together to fly our hawks among the vines, as Louis XIII. used to do. That is a quiet amusement for old fellows like us."

D'Artagnan took the hands of Athos in his own. "Dear count," said he, "I shall say neither 'Yes' nor 'No.' Let me pass in Paris the time necessary for the regulation of my affairs, and accustom myself, by degrees, to the heavy and glittering idea which is beating in my brain and dazzles me. I am rich, you see, and from this moment until the time when I shall have acquired the habit of being rich, I know myself, and I shall be an insupportable animal. Now, I am not enough of a fool to wish to appear to have lost my wits before a friend like you, Athos. The cloak is handsome, the cloak is richly gilded, but it is new, and does not seem to fit me."

Athos smiled. "So be it," said he. "But a propos of this cloak, dear D'Artagnan, will you allow me to offer you a little advice?"

"Yes, willingly."

"You will not be angry?"

"Proceed."

"When wealth comes to a man late in life or all at once, that man, in order not to change, must most likely become a miser--that is to say, not spend much more money than he had done before; or else become a prodigal, and contract so many debts as to become poor again."

"Oh! but what you say looks very much like a sophism, my dear philosophic friend."

"I do not think so. Will you become a miser?"

"No, pardieu! I was one already, having nothing. Let us change."

"Then be prodigal."

"Still less, Mordieux! Debts terrify me. Creditors appear to me, by anticipation, like those devils who turn the damned upon the gridirons, and as patience is not my dominant virtue, I am always tempted to thrash those devils."

"You are the wisest man I know, and stand in no need of advice from any one. Great fools must they be who think they have anything to teach you. But are we not at the Rue Saint Honore?"

"Yes, dear Athos."

"Look yonder, on the left, that small, long white house is the hotel where I lodge. You may observe that it has but two stories; I occupy the first; the other is let to an officer whose duties oblige him to be absent eight or nine months in the year,--so I am in that house as in my

own home, without the expense."

"Oh! how well you manage, Athos! What order and what liberality! They are what I wish to unite! But, of what use trying! that comes from birth, and cannot be acquired."

"You are a flatterer! Well! adieu, dear friend. A propos, remember me to Master Planchet; he always was a bright fellow."

"And a man of heart, too, Athos. Adieu."

And they separated. During all this conversation, D'Artagnan had not for a moment lost sight of a certain pack-horse, in whose panniers, under some hay, were spread the sacoches (messenger's bags) with the portmanteau. Nine o'clock was striking at Saint-Merri. Planchet's helps were shutting up his shop. D'Artagnan stopped the postilion who rode the pack-horse, at the corner of the Rue des Lombards, under a pent-house, and calling one of Planchet's boys, he desired him not only to take care of the two horses, but to watch the postilion; after which he entered the shop of the grocer, who had just finished supper, and who, in his little private room, was, with a degree of anxiety, consulting the calendar, on which, every evening, he scratched out the day that was past. At the moment when Planchet, according to his daily custom, with the back of his pen, erased another day, D'Artagnan kicked the door with his foot, and the blow made his steel spur jingle. "Oh! good Lord!" cried Planchet. The worthy grocer could say no more; he had just perceived his partner. D'Artagnan entered with a bent back and a dull eye: the Gascon had an idea with regard to Planchet.

"Good God!" thought the grocer, looking earnestly at the traveler, "he looks sad!" The musketeer sat down.

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Planchet, with a horrible palpitation of the heart. "Here you are! and your health?"

"Tolerably good, Planchet, tolerably good!" said D'Artagnan, with a profound sigh.

"You have not been wounded, I hope?"

"Phew!"

"Ah, I see," continued Planchet, more and more alarmed, "the expedition has been a trying one?"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan. A shudder ran down Planchet's back. "I should like to have something to drink," said the musketeer, raising his head piteously.

Planchet ran to the cupboard, and poured out to D'Artagnan some wine in a large glass. D'Artagnan examined the bottle.

"What wine is that?" asked he.

"Alas! that which you prefer, monsieur," said Planchet; "that good old Anjou wine, which was one day nearly costing us all so dear."

"Ah!" replied D'Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, "Ah! my poor Planchet, ought I still to drink good wine?"

"Come! my dear master," said Planchet, making a super-human effort, whilst all his contracted muscles, his pallor and his trembling betrayed the most acute anguish. "Come! I have been a soldier and consequently have some courage; do not make me linger, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan; our money is lost, is it not?"

Before he answered, D'Artagnan took his time, and that appeared an age to the poor grocer. Nevertheless he did nothing but turn about on his chair.

"And if that were the case," said he, slowly, moving his head up and down, "if that were the case, what would you say, my dear friend?"

Planchet, from being pale, turned yellow. It might have been thought he was going to swallow his tongue, so full became his throat, so red were his eyes!

"Twenty thousand livres!" murmured he. "Twenty thousand livres, and yet--"

D'Artagnan, with his neck elongated, his legs stretched out, and his hands hanging listlessly, looked like a statue of discouragement. Planchet drew up a sigh from the deepest cavities of his breast.

"Well," said he, "I see how it is. Let us be men! It is all over, is it not? The principal thing is, monsieur, that your life is safe."

"Doubtless! doubtless!--life is something--but I am ruined!"

"Cordieu! monsieur!" said Planchet, "If it is so, we must not despair for that; you shall become a grocer with me; I shall take you for my partner, we will share the profits, and if there should be no more profits, well, why then we shall share the almonds, raisins and prunes, and we will nibble together the last quarter of Dutch cheese."

D'Artagnan could hold out no longer. "Mordioux!" cried he, with great emotion, "thou art a brave fellow, on my honor, Planchet. You have not been playing a part, have you? You have not seen the pack-horse with the

bags under the shed yonder?"

"What horse? What bags?" said Planchet, whose trembling heart began to suggest that D'Artagnan was mad.

"Why, the English bags, Mordieux!" said D'Artagnan, all radiant, quite transfigured.

"Ah! good God!" articulated Planchet, drawing back before the dazzling fire of his looks.

"Imbecile!" cried D'Artagnan, "you think me mad! Mordieux! On the contrary, never was my head more clear, or my heart more joyous. To the bags, Planchet, to the bags!"

"But to what bags, good heavens!"

D'Artagnan pushed Planchet towards the window.

"Under that shed yonder, don't you see a horse?"

"Yes."

"Don't you see how his back is laden?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Don't you see your lad talking with the postilion?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Well, you know the name of that lad, because he is your own. Call him."

"Abdon! Abdon!" vociferated Planchet, from the window.

"Bring the horse!" shouted D'Artagnan.

"Bring the horse!" screamed Planchet.

"Now give ten livres to the postilion," said D'Artagnan, in the tone he would have employed in commanding a maneuver; "two lads to bring up the first two bags, two to bring up the two last,--and move, Mordieux! be lively!"

Planchet rushed down the stairs, as if the devil had been at his heels. A moment later the lads ascended the stairs, bending beneath their burden. D'Artagnan sent them off to their garrets, carefully closed the door, and addressing Planchet, who, in his turn, looked a little wild,--

"Now, we are by ourselves," said he; and he spread upon the floor a large cover, and emptied the first bag into it. Planchet did the same with the second; then D'Artagnan, all in a tremble, let out the precious bowels of the third with a knife. When Planchet heard the provoking sound of the silver and gold--when he saw bubbling out of the bags the shining crowns, which glittered like fish from the sweep-net--when he felt himself plunging his hands up to the elbows in that still rising tide of yellow and white coins, a giddiness seized him, and like a man struck by lightning, he sank heavily down upon the enormous heap, which his weight caused to roll away in all directions. Planchet, suffocated with joy, had lost his senses. D'Artagnan threw a glass of white wine in his face, which incontinently recalled him to life.

"Ah! good heavens! good heavens! good heavens!" said Planchet, wiping his mustache and beard.

At that time, as they do now, grocers wore the cavalier mustache and the lansquenet beard, only the money baths, already rare in those days, have become almost unknown now.

"Mordioux!" said D'Artagnan, "there are a hundred thousand livres for you, partner. Draw your share, if you please, and I will draw mine."

"Oh! the lovely sum! Monsieur d'Artagnan, the lovely sum!"

"I confess that half an hour ago I regretted that I had to give you so much; but now I no longer regret it; thou art a brave grocer, Planchet. There, let us close our accounts, for, as they say, short reckonings make long friends."

"Oh! rather, in the first place, tell me the whole history," said Planchet; "that must be better than the money."

"Ma foi!" said D'Artagnan, stroking his mustache, "I can't say no; and if ever the historian turns to me for information, he will be able to say he has not dipped his bucket into a dry spring. Listen, then, Planchet, I will tell you all about it."

"And I shall build piles of crowns," said Planchet. "Begin, my dear master."

"Well, this is it," said D'Artagnan, drawing his breath.

"And that is it," said Planchet, picking up his first handful of crowns.