

Chapter XLIII. Guenaud.

The cardinal's order was pressing; Guenaud quickly obeyed it. He found his patient stretched on his bed, his legs swelled, his face livid, and his stomach collapsed. Mazarin had a severe attack of gout. He suffered tortures with the impatience of a man who has not been accustomed to resistances. On seeing Guenaud: "Ah!" said he; "now I am saved!"

Guenaud was a very learned and circumspect man, who stood in no need of the critiques of Boileau to obtain a reputation. When facing a disease, if it were personified in a king, he treated the patient as a Turk treats a Moor. He did not, therefore, reply to Mazarin as the minister expected: "Here is the doctor; good-bye disease!" On the contrary, on examining his patient, with a very serious air:

"Oh! oh!" said he.

"Eh! what! Guenaud! How you look at me!"

"I look as I should on seeing your complaint, my lord; it is a very dangerous one."

"The gout--oh! yes, the gout."

"With complications, my lord."

Mazarin raised himself upon his elbow, and, questioning by look and gesture: "What do you mean by that? Am I worse than I believe myself to be?"

"My lord," said Guenaud, seating himself beside the bed; "your eminence has worked very hard during your life; your eminence has suffered much."

"But I am not old, I fancy. The late M. de Richelieu was but seventeen months younger than I am when he died, and died of a mortal disease. I am young, Guenaud: remember, I am scarcely fifty-two."

"Oh! my lord, you are much more than that. How long did the Fronde last?"

"For what purpose do you put such a question to me?"

"For a medical calculation, monseigneur."

"Well, some ten years--off and on."

"Very well; be kind enough to reckon every year of the Fronde as three

years--that makes thirty; now twenty and fifty-two makes seventy-two years. You are seventy-two, my lord; and that is a great age."

Whilst saying this, he felt the pulse of his patient. This pulse was full of such fatal indications, that the physician continued, notwithstanding the interruptions of the patient: "Put down the years of the Fronde at four each, and you have lived eighty-two years."

"Are you speaking seriously, Guenaud?"

"Alas! yes, monseigneur."

"You take a roundabout way, then, to inform me that I am very ill?"

"Ma foi! yes, my lord, and with a man of the mind and courage of your eminence, it ought not to be necessary to do so."

The cardinal breathed with such difficulty that he inspired pity even in a pitiless physician. "There are diseases and diseases," resumed Mazarin. "From some of them people escape."

"That is true, my lord."

"Is it not?" cried Mazarin, almost joyously; "for, in short, what else would be the use of power, of strength of will? What would the use of genius be--your genius, Guenaud? What would be the use of science and art, if the patient, who disposes of all that, cannot be saved from peril?"

Guenaud was about to open his mouth, but Mazarin continued:

"Remember," said he, "I am the most confiding of your patients; remember I obey you blindly, and that consequently--"

"I know all that," said Guenaud.

"I shall be cured, then?"

"Monseigneur, there is neither strength of will, nor power, nor genius, nor science that can resist a disease which God doubtless sends, or which He cast upon the earth at the creation, with full power to destroy and kill mankind. When the disease is mortal, and nothing can--"

"Is--my--disease--mortal?" asked Mazarin.

"Yes, my lord."

His eminence sank down for a moment, like an unfortunate wretch who is crushed by a falling column. But the spirit of Mazarin was a strong one,

or rather his mind was a firm one. "Guenaud," said he, recovering from his first shock, "you will permit me to appeal from your judgment. I will call together the most learned men of Europe: I will consult them. I will live, in short, by the virtue of I care not what remedy."

"My lord must not suppose," said Guenaud, "that I have the presumption to pronounce alone upon an existence so valuable as yours. I have already assembled all the good physicians and practitioners of France and Europe. There were twelve of them."

"And they said--"

"They said that your eminence was suffering from a mortal disease; I have the consultation signed in my portfolio. If your eminence will please to see it, you will find the names of all the incurable diseases we have met with. There is first--"

"No, no!" cried Mazarin, pushing away the paper. "No, no, Guenaud, I yield! I yield!" And a profound silence, during which the cardinal resumed his senses and recovered his strength, succeeded to the agitation of this scene. "There is another thing," murmured Mazarin; "there are empirics and charlatans. In my country, those whom physicians abandon run the chance of a quack, who kills them ten times but saves them a hundred times."

"Has not your eminence observed, that during the last month I have changed my remedies ten times?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I have spent fifty thousand crowns in purchasing the secrets of all these fellows: the list is exhausted, and so is my purse. You are not cured: and, but for my art, you would be dead."

"That ends it!" murmured the cardinal; "that ends it." And he threw a melancholy look upon the riches which surrounded him. "And must I quit all that?" sighed he. "I am dying, Guenaud! I am dying!"

"Oh! not yet, my lord," said the physician.

Mazarin seized his hand. "In what time?" asked he, fixing his two large eyes upon the impassible countenance of the physician.

"My lord, we never tell that."

"To ordinary men, perhaps not;--but to me--to me, whose every minute is worth a treasure. Tell me, Guenaud, tell me!"

"No, no, my lord."

"I insist upon it, I tell you. Oh! give me a month, and for every one of those thirty days I will pay you a hundred thousand crowns."

"My lord," replied Guenaud, in a firm voice, "it is God who can give you days of grace, and not I. God only allows you a fortnight."

The cardinal breathed a painful sigh, and sank back down upon his pillow, murmuring, "Thank you, Guenaud, thank you!"

The physician was about to depart; the dying man, raising himself up: "Silence!" said he, with flaming eyes, "silence!"

"My lord, I have known this secret two months; you see that I have kept it faithfully."

"Go, Guenaud; I will take care of your fortunes; go, and tell Brienne to send me a clerk called M. Colbert. Go!"