

Chapter LII. D'Artagnan's Lesson.

Raoul did not meet with D'Artagnan the next day, as he had hoped. He only met with Planchet, whose joy was great at seeing the young man again, and who contrived to pay him two or three little soldierly compliments, savoring very little of the grocer's shop. But as Raoul was returning the next day from Vincennes at the head of fifty dragoons confided to him by Monsieur le Prince, he perceived, in La Place Baudoyer, a man with his nose in the air, examining a house as we examine a horse we have a fancy to buy. This man, dressed in a citizen costume buttoned up like a military pourpoint, a very small hat on his head, but a long shagreen-mounted sword by his side, turned his head as soon as he heard the steps of the horses, and left off looking at the house to look at the dragoons. It was simply M. d'Artagnan; D'Artagnan on foot; D'Artagnan with his hands behind him, passing a little review upon the dragoons, after having reviewed the buildings. Not a man, not a tag, not a horse's hoof escaped his inspection. Raoul rode at the side of his troop; D'Artagnan perceived him the last. "Eh!" said he, "Eh! Mordieux!"

"I was not mistaken!" cried Raoul, turning his horse towards him.

"Mistaken--no! Good-day to you," replied the ex-musketeer; whilst Raoul eagerly pressed the hand of his old friend. "Take care, Raoul," said D'Artagnan, "the second horse of the fifth rank will lose a shoe before he gets to the Pont Marie; he has only two nails left in his off fore-foot."

"Wait a minute, I will come back," said Raoul.

"Can you quit your detachment?"

"The cornet is there to take my place."

"Then you will come and dine with me?"

"Most willingly, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Be quick, then; leave your horse, or make them give me one."

"I prefer coming back on foot with you."

Raoul hastened to give notice to the cornet, who took his post; he then dismounted, gave his horse to one of the dragoons, and with great delight seized the arm of M. d'Artagnan, who had watched him during all these little evolutions with the satisfaction of a connoisseur.

"What, do you come from Vincennes?" said he.

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier."

"And the cardinal?"

"Is very ill; it is even reported he is dead."

"Are you on good terms with M. Fouquet?" asked D'Artagnan, with a disdainful movement of the shoulders, proving that the death of Mazarin did not affect him beyond measure.

"With M. Fouquet?" said Raoul; "I do not know him."

"So much the worse! so much the worse! for a new king always seeks to get good men in his employment."

"Oh! the king means no harm," replied the young man.

"I say nothing about the crown," cried D'Artagnan; "I am speaking of the king--the king, that is M. Fouquet, if the cardinal is dead. You must contrive to stand well with M. Fouquet, if you do not wish to molder away all your life as I have moldered. It is true you have, fortunately, other protectors."

"M. le Prince, for instance."

"Worn out! worn out!"

"M. le Comte de la Fere?"

"Athos! Oh! that's different; yes, Athos--and if you have any wish to make your way in England, you cannot apply to a better person; I can even say, without too much vanity, that I myself have some credit at the court of Charles II. There is a king--God speed him!"

"Ah!" cried Raoul, with the natural curiosity of well-born young people, while listening to experience and courage.

"Yes, a king who amuses himself, it is true, but who has had a sword in his hand, and can appreciate useful men. Athos is on good terms with Charles II. Take service there, and leave these scoundrels of contractors and farmers-general, who steal as well with French hands as others have done with Italian hands; leave the little snivelling king, who is going to give us another reign of Francis II. Do you know anything of history, Raoul?"

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier."

"Do you know, then, that Francis II. had always the earache?"

"No, I did not know that."

"That Charles IV. had always the headache?"

"Indeed!"

"And Henry III. had always the stomach-ache?"

Raoul began to laugh.

"Well, my dear friend, Louis XIV. always has the heart-ache; it is deplorable to see a king sighing from morning till night without saying once in the course of the day, ventre-saint-gris! corboef! or anything to rouse one."

"Was that the reason why you quitted the service, monsieur le chevalier?"

"Yes."

"But you yourself, M. d'Artagnan, are throwing the handle after the axe; you will not make a fortune."

"Who? I?" replied D'Artagnan, in a careless tone; "I am settled--I had some family property."

Raoul looked at him. The poverty of D'Artagnan was proverbial. A Gascon, he exceeded in ill-luck all the gasconnades of France and Navarre; Raoul had a hundred times heard Job and D'Artagnan named together, as the twins Romulus and Remus. D'Artagnan caught Raoul's look of astonishment.

"And has not your father told you I have been in England?"

"Yes, monsieur le chevalier."

"And that I there met with a very lucky chance?"

"No, monsieur, I did not know that."

"Yes, a very worthy friend of mine, a great nobleman, the viceroy of Scotland and Ireland, has endowed me with an inheritance."

"An inheritance?"

"And a good one, too."

"Then you are rich?"

"Bah!"

"Receive my sincere congratulation."

"Thank you! Look, that is my house."

"Place de Greve?"

"Yes; don't you like this quarter?"

"On the contrary, the look-out over the water is pleasant. Oh! what a pretty old house!"

"The sign Notre Dame; it is an old cabaret, which I have transformed into a private house in two days."

"But the cabaret is still open?"

"Pardieu!"

"And where do you lodge, then?"

"I? I lodge with Planchet."

"You said, just now, 'This is my house.'"

"I said so, because, in fact, it is my house. I have bought it."

"Ah!" said Raoul.

"At ten years' purchase, my dear Raoul; a superb affair; I bought the house for thirty thousand livres; it has a garden which opens to the Rue de la Mortillerie; the cabaret lets for a thousand livres, with the first story; the garret, or second floor, for five hundred livres."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed."

"Five hundred livres for a garret? Why, it is not habitable."

"Therefore no one inhabits it; only, you see, this garret has two windows which look out upon the Place."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, then, every time anybody is broken on the wheel or hung,

quartered, or burnt, these two windows let for twenty pistoles."

"Oh!" said Raoul, with horror.

"It is disgusting, is it not?" said D'Artagnan.

"Oh!" repeated Raoul.

"It is disgusting, but so it is. These Parisian cockneys are sometimes real anthropophagi. I cannot conceive how men, Christians, can make such speculation.

"That is true."

"As for myself," continued D'Artagnan, "if I inhabited that house, on days of execution I would shut it up to the very keyholes; but I do not inhabit it."

"And you let the garret for five hundred livres?"

"To the ferocious cabaretier, who sub-lets it. I said, then, fifteen hundred livres."

"The natural interest of money," said Raoul,--"five per cent."

"Exactly so. I then have left the side of the house at the back, store-rooms, and cellars, inundated every winter, two hundred livres; and the garden, which is very fine, well planted, well shaded under the walls and the portal of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais, thirteen hundred livres."

"Thirteen hundred livres! why, that is royal!"

"This is the whole history. I strongly suspect some canon of the parish (these canons are all rich as Croesus)--I suspect some canon of having hired the garden to take his pleasure in. The tenant has given the name of M. Godard. That is either a false name or a real name; if true, he is a canon; if false, he is some unknown; but of what consequence is it to me? he always pays in advance. I had also an idea just now, when I met you, of buying a house in the Place Baudoyer, the back premises of which join my garden, and would make a magnificent property. Your dragoons interrupted my calculations. But come, let us take the Rue de la Vannerie: that will lead us straight to M. Planchet's." D'Artagnan mended his pace, and conducted Raoul to Planchet's dwelling, a chamber of which the grocer had given up to his old master. Planchet was out, but the dinner was ready. There was a remains of military regularity and punctuality preserved in the grocer's household. D'Artagnan returned to the subject of Raoul's future.

"Your father brings you up rather strictly?" said he.

"Justly, monsieur le chevalier."

"Oh, yes, I know Athos is just; but close, perhaps?"

"A royal hand, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well, never want, my boy! If ever you stand in need of a few pistoles, the old musketeer is at hand."

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"Do you play a little?"

"Never."

"Successful with the ladies, then?--Oh! my little Aramis! That, my dear friend, costs even more than play. It is true we fight when we lose; that is a compensation. Bah! that little sniveller, the king, makes winners give him his revenge. What a reign! my poor Raoul, what a reign! When we think that, in my time, the musketeers were besieged in their houses like Hector and Priam in the city of Troy; and the women wept, and then the walls laughed, and then five hundred beggarly fellows clapped their hands and cried, 'Kill! kill!' when not one musketeer was hurt. Mordieux! you will never see anything like that."

"You are very hard upon the king, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan and yet you scarcely know him."

"I! Listen, Raoul. Day by day, hour by hour,--take note of my words,--I will predict what he will do. The cardinal being dead, he will fret; very well, that is the least silly thing he will do, particularly if he does not shed a tear."

"And then?"

"Why, then he will get M. Fouquet to allow him a pension, and will go and compose verses at Fontainebleau, upon some Mancini or other, whose eyes the queen will scratch out. She is a Spaniard, you see,--this queen of ours; and she has, for mother-in-law, Madame Anne of Austria. I know something of the Spaniards of the house of Austria."

"And next?"

"Well, after having torn the silver lace from the uniforms of his Swiss, because lace is too expensive, he will dismount his musketeers, because oats and hay of a horse cost five sols a day."

"Oh! do not say that."

"Of what consequence is it to me? I am no longer a musketeer, am I? Let them be on horseback, let them be on foot, let them carry a larding-pin, a spit, a sword, or nothing--what is it to me?"

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, I beseech you speak no more ill of the king. I am almost in his service, and my father would be very angry with me for having heard, even from your mouth, words injurious to his majesty."

"Your father, eh! He is a knight in every bad cause. Pardieu! yes, your father is a brave man, a Caesar, it is true--but a man without perception."

"Now, my dear chevalier," exclaimed Raoul, laughing, "are you going to speak ill of my father, of him you call the great Athos? Truly you are in a bad vein to-day; riches render you as sour as poverty renders other people."

"Pardieu! you are right. I am a rascal and in my dotage; I am an unhappy wretch grown old; a tent-cord untwisted, a pierced cuirass, a boot without a sole, a spur without a rowel;--but do me the pleasure to add one thing."

"What is that, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Simply say: 'Mazarin was a pitiful wretch.'"

"Perhaps he is dead."

"More the reason--I say was; if I did not hope that he was dead, I would entreat you to say: 'Mazarin is a pitiful wretch.' Come, say so, say so, for love of me."

"Well, I will."

"Say it!"

"Mazarin was a pitiful wretch," said Raoul, smiling at the musketeer, who roared with laughter, as in his best days.

"A moment," said the latter; "you have spoken my first proposition, here is the conclusion of it,--repeat, Raoul, repeat: 'But I regret Mazarin.'"

"Chevalier!"

"You will not say it? Well, then, I will say it twice for you."

"But you would regret Mazarin?"

And they were still laughing and discussing this profession of principles, when one of the shop-boys entered. "A letter, monsieur," said he, "for M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you; give it me," cried the musketeer.

"The handwriting of monsieur le comte," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes." And D'Artagnan broke the seal.

"Dear friend," said Athos, "a person has just been here to beg me to seek for you, on the part of the king."

"Seek me!" said D'Artagnan, letting the paper fall upon the table. Raoul picked it up, and continued to read aloud:--

"Make haste. His majesty is very anxious to speak to you, and expects you at the Louvre."

"Expects me?" again repeated the musketeer.

"He, he, he!" laughed Raoul.

"Oh, oh!" replied D'Artagnan. "What the devil can this mean?"