

## Chapter LXXII. The Grandeur of the Bishop of Vannes.

Porthos and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D'Artagnan as guide. The worthy baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgement of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who imposed upon him morally, a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion; for all these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of His Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D'Artagnan remarked at once, in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that His Greatness had just returned to his apartment and was preparing to appear in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock. After a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking mutually at each other with the white of their eyes, and turning their thumbs in all the different evolutions which go from north to south, a door of the chamber opened and His Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress, complete, of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command: his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his white hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine mustache, and the lengthened royale of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which, among elegant men and women of high fashion, never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural emanation. In this case only, the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the chamber, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which, whatever it might be, would have been cold on such an occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most distrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D'Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal ardor. Porthos pressed the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D'Artagnan remarked that His Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already ten times had been near injuring his fingers covered with rings, by pounding his flesh in the vise of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and only presented flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed, against the gold or the angles of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D'Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light

fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. This maneuver, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this maneuver; but he did not appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but, precisely because he was caught he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it little imported to him, old condottiere as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. Aramis began the conversation.

"Ah! dear friend! my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what an excellent chance!"

"It is a chance, my reverend companion," said D'Artagnan, "that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you."

"Ah! indeed," said Aramis, without explosion, "you have been seeking me?"

"Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis," said Porthos, "and the proof is that he has unharbored me at Belle-Isle. That is amiable, is it not?"

"Ah! yes," said Aramis, "at Belle-Isle! certainly!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "there is my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack."

"At Belle-Isle!" said Aramis, "in that hole, in that desert! That is kind, indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D'Artagnan armed his mouth with a finesse almost ironical.

"Yes, I knew, but I was willing to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if, on seeing each other, our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which salutes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes, Porthos said hush! and you--"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Doubtless."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air.

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that; I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eyes over Aramis, "you don't mean to bury yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only I do not admit the word bury."

"But it seems to me, that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have found them here. What is there more beautiful, and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica. I find here, dear

D'Artagnan, all that is opposite to what I formerly loved, and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is opposite to the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to salute me here, now and then, without diverting me from the road of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak; what brings you hither? May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "it is nothing of that kind.--I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you or Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe--particularly on seeing his friend in such humble guise--that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour of explanations was come, related the history of his English adventures. During the recital he saw, ten times, the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan; it was enthusiasm, it was delirium. When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see, then, I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart tells you so, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm was his look, he could not this time support the look of Aramis. He allowed, therefore, his eye to stray upon Porthos--like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure, and seeks another road.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular traveling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich, I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me!" cried Aramis. "Me! for the last year past I have not once crossed the sea."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "I should never have supposed you such a housekeeper."

"Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the Aramis of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor, ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age,--preliminary parleyings with death. I linger, my dear D'Artagnan, I linger."

"Well, that is all the better, my friend, for we shall probably be neighbors soon."

"Bah!" said Aramis with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. "You my neighbor!"

"Mordioux! yes."

"How so?"

"I am about to purchase some very profitable salt-mines, which are situated between Piriac and Le Croisic. Imagine, my dear friend, a clear profit of twelve per cent. Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses; the ocean, faithful and regular, brings every twelve hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamt of such a speculation. Do not say anything about it, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the matter. I am to have three leagues of country for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and new defense. "I heard that you had had some difference with the court, but that you had come out of it as you know how to get through everything, D'Artagnan, with the honors of war."

"I!" said the musketeer, with a burst of laughter that did not conceal his embarrassment: for, from those words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. "I! Oh, tell me all about that, pray, Aramis?"

"Yes, it was related to me, a poor bishop, lost in the middle of the Landes, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you one morning, over the bridge of Blois to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation!"

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing more so."

"It was after that, then, that you went to the Comte de la Fere's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No, I did not know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man as you are, what you wanted to propose to us all four. I suspected you had something to do with that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he appeared to treat you like a friend, or rather like a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil did you learn all that?" asked D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigation of Aramis had extended further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man, every night, lights a lantern to direct the barks that come from sea. He is

concealed in his sentry-box, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest; he divines them; he calls them; he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher; from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all those I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a sentry-box."

"Well, what did I do when I came from England?"

"Ah! there," replied Aramis, "you get beyond my depth. I know nothing of you since your return. D'Artagnan, my eyes are dim. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again, and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you, solemnly! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! mon Dieu! on the eve of my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! tell me all about it!"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Greve, and in consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window, as he would have flung a sack full of flock."

"Come, that's pretty well," said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" said Porthos.

D'Artagnan remarked upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of the two farmers of the revenue, friends of M. Fouquet,

whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged them."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh, oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"MM. d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know these names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then," said Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Why, it seems to me--"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death."

"That may be," said Porthos; "but in the place of M. Fouquet--"

Aramis was afraid Porthos was about to say something awkward, so interrupted him. "Come, D'Artagnan," said he; "this is quite enough about other people, let us talk a little about you."

"Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary let me hear a little about you, Aramis."

"I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me."

"Nor of the Abbe d'Herblay even?"

"No, not even of him. You see a man whom Providence has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for."

"Providence?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange! I was told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you that?" cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent the color rising to his cheeks.

"Ma foi! why, Bazin!"

"The fool!"

"I do not say he is a man of genius, it is true; but he told me so; and after him, I repeat it to you."

"I have never even seen M. Fouquet," replied Aramis with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

"Well, but if you had seen him and known him, there is no harm in that," replied D'Artagnan. "M. Fouquet is a very good sort of a man."

"Humph!"

"A great politician." Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I only hold to the king and the pope."

"Dame! listen then," said D'Artagnan, in the most natural tone imaginable. "I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's; the salt-mines I am about to buy are M. Fouquet's; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet's; the garrison is M. Fouquet's; the galleys are M. Fouquet's. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is a different master from the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as Louis."

"Thank God! I am not vassal to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own master," replied Aramis, who, during this conversation, followed with his eye every gesture of D'Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D'Artagnan was impassible and Porthos motionless; the thrusts aimed so skillfully were parried by an able adversary; not one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of what had been meant. He had held himself motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper; but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D'Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis played astonishment at every word of politics D'Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D'Artagnan, as the eternal indifference of D'Artagnan provoked the

suspicious of Aramis. At length D'Artagnan, designedly, uttered the name of Colbert: he had reserved that stroke for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

"Oh! come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that is too strong! We must be careful, mordieux! we must be careful."

And he then gave Aramis all the information respecting M. Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather, the conversation, was prolonged till one o'clock in the morning between D'Artagnan and Aramis. At ten o'clock precisely, Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up and they sent him to bed. "Hum!" said he, "I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting you were talking about."

At one o'clock Aramis conducted D'Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the episcopal residence. Two servants were placed at his command. "To-morrow, at eight o'clock," said he, taking leave of D'Artagnan, "we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said D'Artagnan; "so late?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," said Aramis.

"That is true."

"Good-night, dear friend!" And he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D'Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door closed, "Good!" cried he, "at five o'clock I will be on foot."

This determination being made, he went to bed and quietly, "put two and two together," as people say.