

## Chapter 9

M. DE LOIGNAC.

"Supper!" cried M. de Loignac; "and from this moment let all be friends, and love each other like brothers."

"Hum!" said St. Maline.

"That would be difficult," added Ernanton.

"See," cried Pincornay, "they laugh at me because I have no hat, and they say nothing to M. Montcrabeau, who is going to supper in a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom it probably came. See what it is to have defensive arms."

"Gentlemen," cried Montcrabeau, "I take it off; so much the worse for those who prefer seeing me with offensive instead of defensive arms;" and he gave his cuirass to his lackey, a man about fifty years of age.

"Peace! peace!" cried De Loignac, "and let us go to table."

Meanwhile the lackey whispered to Pertinax, "And am I not to sup? Let me have something, Pertinax. I am dying of hunger."

Pertinax, instead of being offended at this familiar address, replied,

"I will try, but you had better see for something for yourself."

"Hum! that is not reassuring."

"Have you no money?"

"We spent our last crown at Sens."

"Diable! then try to sell something."

A few minutes after a cry was heard in the street of "Old iron! who wants to sell old iron?"

Madame Fournichon ran to the door, while M. Fournichon placed the supper on the table, and to judge by its reception it must have been exquisite. As his wife did not return, however, the host asked a servant what she was doing.

"Oh, master," he replied, "she is selling all your old iron for new money."

"I hope not my cuirass and arms," said he, running to the door.

"No," said De Loignac, "it is forbidden to buy arms."

Madame Fournichon entered triumphantly.

"You have not been selling my arms?" cried her husband.

"Yes, I have."

"I will not have them sold."

"Bah! in time of peace; and I have got ten crowns instead of an old cuirass."

"Ten crowns! Samuel, do you hear?" said Pertinax, looking for his valet, but he was not to be seen.

"It seems to me that this man carries on a dangerous trade. But what does he do with them?"

"Sells them again by weight."

"By weight! and you say he gave you ten crowns--for what?"

"A cuirass and a helmet."

"Why, even if they weighed twenty pounds, that is half-a-crown a pound. This hides some mystery."

Voices rose, and the mirth grew loud with all, except Carmainges, who still thought of the mysterious page. He sat by M. de Loignac, who said

to him:

"Here are a number of joyful people, and they do not know what for."

"Nor I, neither; but at least I am an exception."

"You are wrong, for you are one of those to whom Paris is a paradise."

"Do not laugh at me, M. de Loignac."

"I do not; I distinguished you at once, and that other young man also who looks so grave."

"Who?"

"M. de St. Maline."

"And why this distinction, if this question be not too curious?"

"I know you, that is all."

"Me! you know me?"

"You, and he, and all here."

"It is strange."

"Yes, but necessary."

"Why?"

"Because a chief should know his soldiers."

"And all these men--"

"Will be my soldiers to-morrow."

"But I thought that M. d'Epernon--"

"Hush! do not pronounce that name here."

Then rising, M. de Loignac said, "Gentlemen, since chance unites here forty-five compatriots, let us empty a glass of wine to the prosperity of all."

This proposal gave rise to frantic applause. "They are almost all half drunk," said De Loignac; "it would be a good opportunity to make them repeat their histories, only time does not permit of it." Then he added aloud, "Hola! M. Fournichon, dismiss from the room all women, children and lackeys."

Lardille retired grumbling, but Militor did not move. "Did you not hear, M. Militor," said De Loignac; "to the kitchen!"

There remained only forty-five men, and M. de Loignac then said, "Now, gentlemen, each knows who called him to Paris. Good! that will do; do not call out his name. You know also that you have come to obey him."

A murmur of assent came from all, mingled with astonishment, for each one knew only what concerned himself, and was ignorant that his neighbor had been moved by the same influence.

"Well, then!" continued De Loignac, "you will have time to become acquainted with each other afterward. You agree that you have come here to obey him?"

"Yes, yes," they cried.

"Then, to begin; go quietly out of this hotel to the lodgings prepared for you."

"For all?" asked St. Maline.

"Yes, for all."

"We are all equal here," cried Perducas, whose limbs felt rather doubtful under him.

"Yes," replied De Loignac; "all are equal before the will of the master."

"Oh!" cried Carmainges, coloring; "I do not know that M. d'Epernon would be called my master."

"Wait!"

"I did not expect that."

"Wait, hot head! I did not tell you who was to be your master."

"No; but you said we should have one."

"Every one has a master; and if you are too proud to acknowledge him we spoke of, you may look higher; I authorize you."

"The king!" murmured Carmainges.

"Silence!" said De Loignac. "But first will you do me the favor to read aloud this parchment."

Ernanton took it and read these words:

"Order to M. de Loignac to take the command of the forty-five gentlemen whom I have sent for to Paris with the consent of his majesty.

"NOGARET DE LAVALETTE.

"Duc d'Epéron."

They all bowed at this.

"Thus," continued De Loignac, "you have to follow me at once; your equipages and servants will remain here, M. Fournichon will take care of them: we will send for them; but now, be quick! the boats are ready."

"The boats!" cried they.

"Certainly; to go to the Louvre, we must go by water."

"To the Louvre!" cried they, joyfully. "Cap de Bious! we are going to the Louvre."

De Loignac made them all pass before him, counting them as they went, and then conducted them to the place where three large boats were waiting for them.