

## Chapter 13

### THE DORMITORY.

In less than five minutes they arrived at their destination. The duke took out a key, and, after crossing a court, opened an arched door, the bottom of which was overgrown with long grass. They went along a dark corridor, and then up a staircase to a room, of which D'Epernon had also the key. He opened the door, and showed the king forty-five beds, and in each of them a sleeper.

The king looked at all this with a troubled curiosity. "Well," said he, "who are these people?"

"People who sleep to-night, but will not do so to-morrow night."

"Why not?"

"That your majesty may sleep in peace."

"Explain yourself. Are these your friends?"

"Chosen by me, sire; intrepid guards, who will not quit your majesty, and who, gentlemen all, will be able to go wherever your majesty goes, and will let no one approach you."

"And you thought of this, D'Epernon?"

"I, alone, sire."

"We shall be laughed at."

"No, we shall be feared."

"But they will ruin me?"

"How can a king be ruined?"

"I cannot pay my Swiss!"

"Look at these men, sire; do you think they would be very expensive to keep?"

"But they could not always live like this, they would be stifled. And look at their doublets!"

"Oh! I confess they are not all very sumptuously clothed, but if they had been born dukes and peers--"

"Yes, I understand; they would have cost me more?"--"Just so."

"Well, how much will they cost? That will, perhaps, decide me, for, in truth, D'Epernon, they do not look very inviting."

"Sire, I know they are rather thin and burned by our southern sun, but I was so when I came to Paris. They will fatten and whiten like me."

"How they snore!"

"Sire, you must not judge them to-night; they have supped well."

"Stay, there is one speaking in his sleep; let us listen."

Indeed, one of the gentlemen called out, "If you are a woman, fly!"

The king approached him softly. "Ah! ah!" said he, "he is a gallant."

"What do you think of him, sire?"

"His face pleases me, and he has white hands and a well-kept beard."

[Illustration: "HIS FACE PLEASES ME, AND HE HAS WHITE HANDS AND A WELL-KEPT BEARD."]

"It is Ernanton de Carmainges, a fine fellow, who is capable of much."

"He has left behind him some love, I suppose, poor fellow. But what a queer figure his next neighbor is."

"Ah! that is M. de Chalabre. If he ruins your majesty, it will not be

without enriching himself, I answer for it."

"And that one, with such a somber air; he does not seem as though he dreamed of love."

"What number, sire?"

"Number 12."

"M. de St. Maline, a brave fellow, with a heart of bronze."

"Well, Lavalette, you have had a good idea."

"I should think so. Imagine the effect that will be produced by these new watch-dogs, who will follow you like your shadow."

"Yes, yes; but they cannot follow me in this guise."

"Now we return to the money. But about this, also, I have an idea."

"D'Epernon!"

"My zeal for your majesty doubles my imagination."

"Well, let us hear it."

"If it depended upon me, each of these gentlemen should find by his bed

a purse containing 1,000 crowns, as payment for the first six months."

"One thousand crowns for six months! 6,000 livres a year! You are mad, duke; an entire regiment would not cost that."

"You forget, sire, that it is necessary they should be well dressed. Each will have to take from his 1,000 crowns enough for arms and equipments. Set down 1,500 livres to effect this in a manner to do you honor, and there would remain 4,500 livres for the first year. Then for subsequent years you could give 3,000 livres."

"That is more reasonable."

"Then your majesty accepts?"

"There is only one difficulty, duke."

"What is it?"

"Want of money."

"Sire, I have found a method. Six months ago a tax was levied on shooting and fishing."

"Well?"

"The first payment produced 65,000 crowns, which have not yet been

disposed of."

"I destined it for the war, duke."

"The first interest of the kingdom is the safety of the king."

"Well; there still would remain 20,000 crowns for the army."

"Pardon, sire, but I had disposed of them, also."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sire; your majesty had promised me money."

"Ah! and you give me a guard to obtain it."

"Oh! sire. But look at them; will they not have a good effect?"

"Yes, when dressed, they will not look bad. Well, so be it."

"Well, then, sire, I have a favor to ask."

"I should be astonished if you had not."

"Your majesty is bitter to-day."

"Oh! I only mean, that having rendered me a service, you have the right

to ask for a return."

"Well, sire, it is an appointment."

"Why, you are already colonel-general of infantry, more would crush you."

"In your majesty's service, I am a Samson."

"What is it, then?"

"I desire the command of these forty-five gentlemen."

"What! you wish to march at their head?"

"No; I should have a deputy; only I desire that they should know me as their head."

"Well, you shall have it. But who is to be your deputy?"

"M. de Loignac, sire."

"Ah! that is well."

"He pleases your majesty?"

"Perfectly."

"Then it is decided?"

"Yes; let it be as you wish."

"Then I will go at once to the treasurer, and get my forty-five purses."

"To-night?"

"They are to find them to-morrow, when they wake."

"Good; then I will return."

"Content, sire?"

"Tolerably."

"Well guarded, at all events."

"By men who sleep."

"They will not sleep to-morrow, sire."