

Chapter 27

THE REVELATION.

M. D'Epernon, in traversing the antechamber, addressed himself to one of the gentlemen who stood there.

"What is your name, monsieur?" said he.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, monsieur."

"Well, M. de Montcrabeau, place yourself at that door, and let no one enter."

"Yes, M. le Duc;" and M. Pertinax, who was sumptuously dressed, with a blue satin doublet and orange stockings, obeyed. Nicholas Poulain followed the duke into his cabinet.

"Now let us hear your conspiracy," said the duke.

"Oh! M. le Duc, it concerns the most frightful crimes."

"They wish to kill me, I suppose."

"It does not concern you, monsieur; it is the king. They wish to carry him off."

"Oh! again that old story," replied the duke, disdainfully.

"This time the thing is serious, M. le Duc."

"On what day do they intend to do it?"

"The first time that his majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter."

"How will they do it?"

"By killing his two attendants."

"And who will do it?"

"Madame de Montpensier."

D'Epernon began to laugh. "That poor duchess; what things are attributed to her!"

"Less than she projects, monsieur."

"And she occupies herself with that at Soissons?"

"No; she is in Paris."

"In Paris!"

"I can answer for it."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"You thought you did?"

"I have had the honor of speaking to her."

"The honor."

"I am wrong; the misfortune."

"But, my dear lieutenant, the duchess cannot carry off the king."

"With her associates, of course."

"And where will she be when this takes place?"

"At a window of the Jacobin Priory, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes."

"What the devil do you tell me?"

"The truth, monsieur: all is prepared to stop the litter at the gate of

the priory."

"And who made the preparations?"

"Alas!--"

"Finish quickly."

"I did, monsieur."

D'Epernon started back. "You, who denounce them!"

"Monsieur, a good servant should risk all in the service of the king."

"Mordieu! you risk hanging."

"I prefer death to infamy, or to the death of the king, therefore I came; and I thought, M. le Duc, that you, the friend of the king, would not betray me, and would turn my news to good account."

The duke looked fixedly at Poulain. "There must be more in it," said he; "resolute as the duchess is, she would not attempt such an enterprise alone."

"She expects her brother."

"The Duke Henri?"

"No, monsieur; only the Duc de Mayenne."

"Ah! good," said d'Epernon; "now I must set to work to counteract these fine projects."

"Doubtless, monsieur; it was for that I came."

"If you have spoken the truth you shall be rewarded."

"Why should I lie, monsieur; where is my interest--I, who eat the king's bread? If you do not believe me, I will go to the king himself."

"No, parfandious, you shall not go to the king: you shall have to deal with me, alone."

"I only said it because you seemed to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; and, first, here are a thousand crowns for you, and you shall keep this secret between you and me."

"I have a family, monsieur."

"Well! a thousand crowns, parfandious."

"If they knew in Lorraine that I had spoken, each word would cost me a pint of blood; and in case of any misfortune, my family must be able to

live, therefore I accept the thousand crowns."

The duke approached a coffer. Poulain thought it was for the money, and held out his hand, but he only drew out a little book and wrote, "Three thousand livres to M. Nicholas Poulain."

"It is as if you had them," said he.

Nicholas bowed, and looked puzzled.

"Then it is agreed?" said the duke.

"What, monsieur?"

"That you will continue to instruct me?"

Nicholas hesitated.

"What! has your noble devotion vanished already?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then I may count on you?"

"You may."

"And I alone know this?"

"You alone."

"Now you may go, my friend; and, parfondious, let M. de Mayenne look to himself."

When D'Epernon returned to the king he found him playing at cup and ball. D'Epernon assumed a thoughtful air, but the king did not remark it. However, as the duke remained perfectly silent, the king raised his head and said, "Well, Lavalette, what is the matter, are you dead?"

"I wish I were," replied D'Epernon, "and I should not see what I do see."

"What, my cup and ball?"

"Sire, in a time of great peril the subject may be alarmed for the safety of his master."

"What! again perils; devil take you, duke."

"Then you are ignorant of what is passing?"

"Ma foi, perhaps."

"Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment."

"Bah! who are they?"

"First, the Duchesse de Montpensier."

"Yes, that is true; she came to see Salcede; but what is that to me?"

"You knew it, then?"

"You see I did."

"But that M. de Mayenne was here?"

"Yes, since yesterday evening."

"What! this secret?" cried D'Epernon, with a disagreeable surprise.

"Are there, then, any secrets from the king? You are zealous, dear Lavalette, but you are slow. This news would have been good at four o'clock yesterday, but to-day--"

"Well, sire, to-day?"

"It comes too late, you will agree?"

"Still too soon, sire, it seems, since you will not listen to me."

"I have been listening for half-an-hour."

"You are menaced--they lay ambushes for you."

"Well, yesterday you gave me a guard, and assured me that my immortality was secured. Are your Forty-five no longer worth anything?"

"Your majesty shall see."

"I should not be sorry, duke; when shall I see?"

"Sooner perhaps than you think."

"Ah! you want to frighten me."

"You shall see, sire. Apropos, when do you go to Vincennes?"

"On Saturday."

"That is enough, sire." D'Epernon bowed and withdrew.