CHAPTER XXI.

THE ABBE SCAARON.

There was once, in the Rue des Tournelles, a house known by all the sedan chairmen and footmen of Paris, and yet, nevertheless, this house was neither that of a great lord, nor of a rich man. There was neither dining, nor playing at cards, nor dancing, in that house. Nevertheless, it was the rendezvous of all the great world, and all Paris went there. It was the abode of little Scarvon.

There, in the home of that witty abbé, there was incessant laughter; there all the news of the day had their source, and were so quickly transformed, misrepresented, and converted, some into epigrams, some into falsehoods, that every one was anxious to pass an hour with little Scarvon, listening to what he said, and reporting it to others.

The diminutive Abbe Scarvon, who, however, was only an abbé because he owned an abbey, and not because he was in orders, had formerly been one of the gayest prebendaries in the town of Mauv, which he inhabited. But he had become lame; every move had been in vain employed to restore the use of his limbs. He had been subjected to a severe discipline; at length he sent away all his doctors, declaring that he preferred the disease to the treatment, and came to Paris, where the fame of his wit had preceded him. There he had a chair made on his own plan; and one day, visiting Anne of Austria, in this chair, she asked him, charmed as she was with his wit—if he did not wish for a title.

'Yes, your majesty, there is a title which I covet much,' replied Scarvon.

'And what is that?'

'That of being your invalid,' answered Scarvon.

So he was called the queen's invalid, with a pension of fifteen hundred francs.

From that lucky moment Scarvon led a happy life, spending both income and principal. One day, however, an emissary of the Cardinal's gave him to understand that he was wrong in receiving the Coadjutor so often.

'And why?' asked Scarvon; 'is he not a man of good birth?'

'Certainly.'

'Agreeable?'

'Undeniably.'

'Witty?'

'He has, unluckily, too much wit.'

'Well, then, why do you wish me to give up seeing such a man?'

'Because he is an enemy.'

'Of whom?'

'Of the Cardinal.'

'How?' answered Scarvon; 'I continue to receive Monsieur
Gilles Despreaux, who thinks ill of me, and you wish me to give up seeing the Condurator, because he thinks ill of another man."

Now, the very morning of which we speak was that of his quarterday's payment, and Scarron, as usual, had sent his servant to fetch his money at the pension-office, but he had returned and said that the Government had no more money to give Monsieur Scarron.

It was on Thursday, the abbé's day of reception; people went there in crowds. The Cardinal's refusal to pay the pension was known about the town in half an hour, and he was abused with vehemence.

Athos made two visits in Paris; at seven o'clock he and Raoul directed their steps to the Rue des Bourreaux; it was stopped by porters, horses, and footmen. Athos forced his way through and entered, followed by the young man. The first person that struck him on his entrance was Aramis, planted near a great chair on castors, very large, covered with a canopy of tapestry under which there moved, enveloped in a quilt of brocade, a little face, rather young, rather merry, but somewhat pale—whilst his eyes never ceased to express a sentiment at once lively, intellectual, and amiable. This was the Abbé Scarron, always laughing, joking, complimenting—you suffering—and scratching himself with a little scythe.

Around this kind of rolling tent pressed a crowd of gentlemen and ladies. The room was neat and comfortably furnished. Large valances of silk, embroidered with flowers of gay color, which were rather faded, fell from the wide windows; the fitting-up of the room was simple, but in good taste. Two men-servants, well trained, attended on the company. On perceiving Athos, Aramis advanced toward him, took him by the hand, and presented him to Scarron. Raoul remained silent, for he was not prepared for the dignity of the "bel esprit."

After some minutes the door opened, and a footman announced Mademoiselle Panivet.

Athos touched the shoulder of the vicomte.

"Look at this lady, Raoul, she is an historic personage; it was to visit her that King Henry IV. was going when he was assassinated."

Every one thronged round Mademoiselle Panivet, for she was always much in fashion. She was a tall woman, with a wary and slender figure, and a forest of golden curls, such as Raphael was fond of, and as Titian has painted all his Magdalens with. This fawn-colored hair—or, perhaps, the sort of ascendency which she had over other women—gave her the name of "La Léonie."

Mademoiselle Panivet took her accustomed seat; but before sitting down, she cast, in all her queen-like grandeur, a look round the room—and her eyes rested on Raoul.

Athos smiled.

"Mademoiselle Panivet has observed you, vicomte; go and bow to her; don’t try to appear anything but what you are—a true country youth—on no account speak to her of Henry IV."

"When shall we two walk together?" Athos then said to Aramis.

"Presently—there are not a sufficient number of people here yet—we shall be remarked."

At this moment the door opened, and in walked the Condurator.
At this name every one looked round, for it was already a name very celebrated. Athos did the same. He knew the Abbé de Gondy by report.

He saw a little dark man, ill-made, and awkward with his hands in everything—except when drawing a sword, and firing a pistol, and with something haughty and contemptuous in his face.

Scarron turned round toward him, and came to meet him in his chair.

"Well," said the Coadjutor, on seeing him, "you are in disgrace, then, Abbé?"

This was the orthodox phrase. It had been said that evening a hundred times—and Scarron was at his hundredth "bon-mot" on the subject—he was very near stopping short, but one despairing effort saved him.

"Monsieur, the Cardinal Mazarin has been so kind as to think of me," he said.

"But how can you continue to receive us?" asked the Coadjutor.

"If your income is increased, I shall be obliged to make you a canon of Notre Dame."

"Oh, no," cried Scarron, "I should compromise you too much,"

"Perhaps you have resources of which we are ignorant?"

"I shall borrow from the queen."

"But Her Majesty has no property," interposed Aramis.

At this moment the door opened, and Madame de Chevreuse was announced. Every one rose. Scarron turned his chair toward the door; Rachel blushed, Athos made a sign to Aramis, who went to hide himself in the inclosure of a window.

In the midst of all the compliments that awaited her on her entrance, the ducez seemed to be looking for some one; at last he found out Raoul, and her eyes sparkled; she perceived Athos, and became thoughtful; she saw Aramis in the seclusion of the window, and gave a start of surprise behind her fan.

"Apropos," she said, as to drive away thoughts that pursued her in spite of herself, "how is poor Voiture, do you know, Scarron?"

"What, is Monsieur Voiture ill?" inquired a gentleman who had spoken to Athos in the Rue St. Honore; "what is the matter with him?"

"He was acting—but forgot to take the precaution to have clean linen brought to change," said the Coadjutor, "so he took cold, and is going to die."

"Is he then so ill, dear Voiture?" asked Aramis, half hidden by the window curtain.

"De die!" cried Madame孴e Pareé, bitterly; "he why he is surrounded by suffrages, like a Turk. Madame de Saintot has hastened to him with broth; La Renaudet warms his sheets; the Marquise de Rambouillet sends him his tisanes;"

"You don’t like him, my dear Tartine," said Scarron.

"What an injustice, my dear Tartine! I hate him so little, that I should be delighted to order masses for the repose of his soul."

"You are not called ‘ Lisbon’ for nothing," observed Madame de Chevreuse, "you bite most cruelly."
"You are unjust to a great poet, so it seems to me," Raoul ventured to say.

"A great poet! He is none other than Vicomte, that you see, from the provinces, and have never seen him. A great poet! He is scarcely five feet high."

"Bravo! bravo!" cried a tall man with an enormous moustache and a long rapier. "Bravo, fair Panace, it is high time to put little Voutour in his right place. For my part, I always thought his poetry detestable, and I think I know something about poetry."

"Who is this officet," inquired Raoul of Athos, "who is speaking?"

"Monsieur de Scarron, the author of 'Delia,' and of 'Le Grand Cyrus,' which were composed partly by him, and partly by his sister, who is now talking to that pretty person yonder, near Monsieur Scarron."

Raoul turned, and saw two faces just arrived. One was perfectly charming, delicate, passive, shaded by beautiful dark hair, and eyes soft as velvet, like those lovely flowers—the heartsease, under which shine the golden petals. The other, of nature gay, seemed to have the former one under her charge—and was cold, dry, and yellow—the true type of a duchess or a devotee.

Raoul resolved not to quit the room without having spoken to the beautiful girl with the soft eyes, who by a strange fancy—although she bore no resemblance—reminded him of his poor little Louise, whom he had left in the Château de la Valliere, and whom, in the midst of all the party, he had never one moment forgot. Meantime Aramis had drawn near to the Councilor, who, smiling all the while, had contrived to drop some words into his ear. Raoul, following the advice of Athos, went toward them. Athos had now joined the other two, and they were in deep consultation as the youth approached them.

"This a momentous Monsieur Voutour that Monsieur l'Abbé is repeating to me," said Athos, in a loud voice, "and I confess I think it incomparable."

Raoul stayed only a few minutes near them, and then mingled in the group around Madame de Cherville.

"Well, then," asked Athos, in a low tone, as soon as the three friends were unserved, "to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow," said Aramis quickly, "at six o'clock."

"Where?"

"At St. Mandé."

"Who told you?"

"The Count de Rochefort."

Some one drew near.

"And then the philosophical ideas are wholly wanting in Voutour's works—but I am of the same opinion as the Councilor—he is a poet, a true poet," Aramis spoke so as to be heard by everybody.

"And I too," murmured the young lady with the velvet eyes.

"I fear the misfortune also to admire his poetry exceedingly."

"Monsieur Scarron, do me the honor," said Raoul, blushing, to tell me the name of that young lady whose opinion seems so different to that of others of the company generally."
"Aha! my young vicomte," replied Scarron. "I suppose you wish to propose to her an alliance offensive and defensive."

Raoul blushed again.

"You asked the name of that young lady. She is called the fair Indian."

"Excuse me, sir," returned Raoul, blushing still more deeply. "I know no more than I did before. Also, I am from the country."

"Which means that you know very little about the nonsense which flows here, down our streets. So much the better, young man! so much the better! Don't try to understand it—you will only lose your time."

"You forgive me then, sir," said Raoul; "and you will decline to tell me who is the person that you call the young Indian."

"Certainly; one of the most charming persons that lives—Mademoiselle Frances d'Aubigné."

"Does she belong to the family of the celebrated Agrippus, the friend of Henry IV?"

"His granddaughter. She comes from Martinique, so I call her the beautiful Indian."

Raoul looked surprised and his eyes met those of the young lady, who smiled.

The company went on speaking of the poet Voltaire.

"Monsieur," said Mademoiselle d'Aubigné to Scarron, as if she wished to join in the conversation he was engaged in with Raoul.

"Do you not admire Monsieur Voltaire's friends? Listen how they pull him to pieces, even whilst they praise him: one takes away from him all claim to good sense, another runs off with his poetry, another with his originality, another with his humor, another with his independence of character, another—but, good heavens! what will they leave him? as Mademoiselle de Scudery remarks."

Scarron and Raoul laughed. The fair Indian, astonished at the sensation her observations produced, looked down and resumed her air of "naïveté."

Athos—still within the influence of the window—watched this scene with a smile of disdain on his lips.

"Tell the Count de la Fère to come to me," said Madame de Chevreuse. "I want to speak to him."

"And I," said the Condé, "want it to be thought that I do not speak to him. I admire, I love him—for I know his former adventures—but I shall not speak to him until the day after to-morrow."

"And what then?" asked Madame de Chevreuse.

"You shall know to-morrow evening," replied the Condé, laughing.

Athos then drew near her.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the duchess, giving him a letter, "here is what I promised you; our young friend will be extremely well received."

"Madame, he is very happy in owing any obligation to you." Madame de Chevreuse rose to depart.

"Viveats," said Athos to Raoul, "follow the duchess; beg her to do you the favor to take your arm in going down-stairs, and thank her as you descend."

The fair Indian approached Scarron.
"You are going already?" he said.
"One of the least, as you see; if you hear anything of Monsieur Voltaire, be so kind as to send me word to-morrow."
"Oh!" said Scarron, "he may die now."
"Why?" asked the young girl with the velvet eyes.
"Certainly—his pain may have been uttered."
They parted, laughing; she, turning back to gaze at the poor pensive man with interest, he, looking after her with eyes of love. So the invalid disappeared soon afterward, and went into his sleeping room; and one by one the lights in the saloon of La Rue des Tournelles were extinguished.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAINT DENIS.

The day had begun to break when Athos rose and dressed himself; it was plain, by a paleness still greater than usual, and by those traces which loss of sleep leaves on the face, that he must have passed almost the whole of the night without sleeping. Contrary to the custom of a man so firm and decided, there was this morning in his personal appearance something slow and irresolute. He was evidently occupying himself in preparations for the departure of Raoul; after employing nearly an hour in those cares, he opened the door of the room in which the vicomte slept, and entered.

The sun, already high, penetrated into the room through the window, the curtains of which Raoul had neglected to close on the previous evening. He was still sleeping, his head gracefully reposing on his arm.

Athos approached, and hung over the youth in an attitude full of tender melancholy; he looked long on this young man, whose smiling mouth, and half-closed eyes, bespoke soft dreams and light slumber, as if his guardian angel watched over him with solicitude and affection. By degrees Athos gave himself up to the charms of his reverie in the proximity of youth, so pure, so fresh. His own youth seemed to re-appear, bringing with it all those soft remembrances, which are like portions more than thoughts. Between the past and the present there was an abyss. But imagination has the flight of an angel of light, and traverses over the seas where we have been almost shipwrecked—the darkness in which our associations are lost—the precipice, whence our happiness has been hurled and swallowed up. He remembered that all the first part of his life had been embittered by a woman, and he thought with alarm of the influence which love might possess over so fine, and, at the same time, so vigorous an organization as that of Raoul.

In recalling all that he had suffered, he foresaw all that Raoul would suffer; and the expression of the deep and tender compassion which throbbled in his heart was pictured in the moist eye with which he gazed on the young man.

At this moment Raoul awoke, without a cloud on his face—without weariness or languidness; his eyes were fixed on those of Athos, and he, perhaps, comprehended all that passed in the heart of the