"Oh, sir," replied the old man, "had any misfortune happened to you, I should never have dared to have shown myself to the marshal again."

"But how did the accident happen?" asked Raoul.

"Oh, sir, in the most natural manner possible," replied he to whom they had given the title of count, "we were about a third of the way across the river when the cord of the ferry-boat broke. Alarmed by the cries and the gestures of the boatmen, my horse sprang into the water. I swim badly, and dared not throw myself into the river. Instead of aiding the movements of my horse, I paralyzèd them; and I was just going to drown myself, with the best grace in the world, when you arrived just in time to pull me out of the water; therefore, sir, if you will agree, henceforth we are friends in life until death."

"Sir," replied Raoul, bowing, "I am entirely at your service, I assure you."

"I am called the Count de Guiche," continued the young man, "my father is the Marechal de Grammont; and now that you know who I am, do me the honor to inform me who you are."

"I am the Viscount de Bragelonne," answered Raoul, blushin at being unable to name his father, as the Count de Guiche had done.

"Viscount, your countenance, your goodness, and your courage incline me toward you; my gratitude is already due to you—shake hands—I ask your friendship."

"Sir," said Raoul, returning the count's pressure of the hand, "I like you already from my heart; pray regard me as a devoted friend, I beseech you."

"And now, where are you going, Viscount?" inquired De Guiche.

"To the army, under the prince, count."

"And I, too!" exclaimed the young man, "is a transport of joy."

"Oh, so much the better; we shall fire off the first pistol shot together."

"It is well—he friends," said the tutor; "young as you both are, you were perhaps born under the same star, and were destined to meet. And now," continued he, "you must change your clothes, your servants, to whom I gave directions the moment they had left the ferry-boat, ought to be already at the inn. Linen and wine are both being warmed—come."

The young men had no objection to make to this proposition; on the contrary, they thought it an excellent one.

They mounted again at once, whilst looks of admiration passed between them. They were indeed two elegant horsemen, with figures slight and upright—two noble faces, with open foreheads—bright and proud looks—loyal and intelligent smiles.

De Guiche might have been about eighteen years of age; but he was scarcely taller than Raoul, who was only fifteen.

CHAPTER XXX.
SKIRMISHING.

Turn halt at Noyon was short; every one there being wrapped in profound sleep, Raoul had desired to be awakened should Grimaud...
have arrived—but Grimaud did not arrive. Doubtless, too, the
horses on their parts appreciated the eight hours of repose, and the
abundant stabling which was granted to them. The Count de Guiche
was awakened at five o'clock in the morning by Raoul, who came
to wish him good day. They had breakfast in haste, and at six
o'clock had already gone ten miles.

The young count's conversation was most interesting to Raoul;therefore he listened much, whilst the count talked much. Brought
up in Paris, where Raoul had been but once; at the court, which
Raoul had never seen—his follies as page—two duels, which he had
already found the means of fighting in spite of the efforts against
them, and more especially in spite of his tutor's vigilance—these
things excited the greatest curiosity in Raoul. Raoul had only been
at M. Sarron's house; he named to Guiche the people whom he
had seen there. Guiche knew everybody—Madame de Mailhac,
Mademoiselle D'Aubigné, Madame de Scudéry, Mademoiselle
Paulet, Madame de Chevreuse. He criticized everybody humor-
ously. Raoul trembled lest he should laugh among the rest at
Madame de Chevreuse, for whom he entertained deep and genuine
sympathy, but either instinctively, or from affection for the Du-
chesse de Chevreuse, he said everything possible in her favor. His
praises increased Raoul's friendship for him twofold. Then came
the question of gallantry and love affairs. Under this head also,
Brangébanc had much more to hear than to tell. He listened atten-
atively, and fancied that he discovered through three or four rather
brilliant adventures, that the count, like himself, had a secret to
hide in the depths of his heart.

De Guiche, as we have said before, had been educated at the
court; and the intriguers of this court were known to him. It was
the same court of which Raoul had so often heard the Count de la
Fère speak, except that its aspect had much changed since the period
when Athos had himself witnessed it; therefore everything which
the Count de Guiche related was new to his traveling companion.
The young count, witty and caustic, passed all the world in review;
the queen herself was not spared, and Cardinal Mazarin came in for
his share of ridicule.

The day passed away as rapidly as one hour. The count's tutor,
a man of the world, and a "bon vivant," up to his eyes in learn-
ing, as his pupil described him, often recalled the profound erudition,
the witty and caustic satire of Athos to Raoul; but as regarded
grace, delicacy, and nobility of external appearance, no one in these
points was to be compared to the Count de la Fère.

The horses, which were better cared for than on the previous
day, stopped at Amiens at four o'clock in the evening. They were ap-
proaching the scene of war; and as bands of Spaniards sometimes
took advantage of the night to make expeditions even as far as the
neighborhood of Amiens, they determined to remain in the town until
the morrow. The French army held all between Pont-a-Mare as far
as Valenciennes, failing back upon Raoul. The prince was said to
be in person at Bethune.

The enemy's army extended from Cassel to Courtry; and as
there was no species of violence or pillage which it did not commit,
the poor people on the frontier quitted their isolated dwellings, and
fled for refuge into the strong cities which held out a shelter to
them. Arrels was encumbered with fugitives. An approaching
battle was much spoken of, the prince having manoeuvred, until
that moment, only in order to wait re-enforcement which had just
reached him.

The young men congratulated themselves on having arrived so
opportunistically. The evening was employed in discussing the war;
the grooms polished the arms; the young men loaded the pistols in
case of a skirmish, and they awoke in despair, having bethought
themselves too late to participate in the battle. In the
morning it was rumored that Prince Conde had evacuated Bethune,
and fallen back upon Carvin, leaving, however, a strong garrison in
the former city.

But as there was nothing positively certain in this report, the
young men decided to continue their way toward Bethune, free on
the road, to diverge to the right, and to march to Carvin if neces-
sary.

The count’s tutor was well acquainted with the country; he con-
siderably proposed to take a cross road, which lay between that of
Lens and that of Bethune. They obtained information at Ablain,
and a statement of their route was left for Grimand. About seven
o’clock in the morning they set out. De Gulche, who was young
and impulsive, said to Raoul, “Here we are, three masters and three
servants. Our valets are well armed, and yours seem to be tough
enough.”

“I have never seen him put to the test,” replied Raoul, “but he
is a Byron, which promises something.”

“Yes, yes,” resumed De Gulche, “I am sure he can fire a mus-
ket when required. On my side I have two very sure men, who
have been in action with my father. We, therefore, represent six
fighting men; if we should meet a little troop of enemies, equal or
even superior in number to our own, shall we charge them, Raoul?”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the vicecount.

“Halt! young people—stop there!” said the tutor, joining in
the conversation. “Zounds! how do you arrange my instructions,
pray, count? You seem to forget the orders I received to conduct
you safe and sound to his highness the prince! Once with the
army, you may be killed at your good pleasure; but, until that
time, I warn you, that in my capacity of general of the army, I
shall order a retreat, and turn my back on the first red coat I see.”

De Gulche and Raoul glanced at each other, smiling.

They arrived at Ablain without accident. There they inquired,
and learned that the prince had in reality quitted Bethune and
placed himself between Cambrai and La Vendine. Therefore, lea-
ving directions at every place for Grimand, they took a cross road,
which conducted the little troop upon the bank of a small stream
flowing into the Lys. The country was beautiful, intersected by
valleys as green as the emerald. Every here and there they passed
little copsees crossing the path which they were following. In an-
ticipation of some ambushes in each of these little woods, the tutor
placed his two servants at the head of the band, thus forming the
advance guard. Himself and the two young men represented the
body of the army, whilst Olivain, with his rifle on his knee, and his
eye on the watch, protected the rear.

They had observed for some time before them on the horizon, a
rather thick wood; and when they had arrived at a distance of a
hundred steps from it, M. d'Armines took his usual precau-
tions, and sent on in advance the count's two grooms. The serv-
ants had just disappeared under the trees, followed by the tutor, and
the young men were laughing and talking about a hundred yards
off. Olivain was at the same distance in the rear, when suddenly
there resounded five or six musket shots. The tutor cried halt, the
young men obeyed, pulling up their steeds, and at the same moment
the two grooms were seen returning at a gallop.

The young men, impatient to learn the cause of the firing, spurred
on toward the servants. The tutor followed them behind.

"Were you stopped?" eagerly inquired the two youths.

"No," replied the servants, "it is even probable that we have
not been seen; the shots were fired about a hundred steps in ad-
vance of us, almost in the thickest part of the wood, and we re-
turned to ask your advice."

"My advice," says Monsieur d'Armines, "and, if needs be, my
will is, that we beat a retreat. There may be an ambuscade con-
cealed in this wood."

"Did you see nothing then?" asked the count.

"I thought I saw," said one of the servants, "horsemen dressed
in yellow, creeping along the bed of the stream."

"That's it," said the tutor. "We have fallen in with a party of
Spaniards. Come back, sirs—back."
The two youths looked at each other, and at this moment a pistol-
shot and several cries for help were heard. Another glance between
the young men convinced them both that neither had any wish to
get back, and the tutor had already turned his horse's head, they
both spurred on forward. Raul crying: "Follow me, Olivain!" and
Count de Guiche: "Follow, Urban, and Blanchet." And before
the tutor could recover his surprise, they had both disappeared into
the forest. When they spurred their steeds, they held their pistols
ready also. Five minutes after they arrived at the spot whence the
noise had proceeded, therefore, restraining their horses, they ad-
vanced cautiously.

"Hush," whispered De Guiche: "these are cavaliers."

"Yes, three on horseback, and three who have dismounted.

"Can you see what they are doing?"

"Yes, they appear to be searching a wounded or dead man."

"It is some cowardly assassination," said De Guiche.

"They are robbers, though," resumed Du-Buglione.

"Yes, skirmishers; that is to say, highway robbers."

"At them!" cried Raul. "At them!" echoed De Guiche.

"O! sirs, sirs; in the name of Heaven!" cried the poor tutor.
But he was not listened to, and his cries only served to arouse the
attention of the Spaniards.

The men on horseback at once rushed at the two youths, leaving
the three others to complete the plunder of the two travelers; for,
on approaching nearer, instead of one extended figure, the young
men discovered two. De Guiche fired the first shot at ten paces, and
missed his man; and the Spaniard, who had advanced to meet
Raoul, aimed in his turn, and Raoul felt a pain in the left arm, simi-
lar to that of a blow from a whip. He let off his fire at last four
paces. Struck in the breast, and extending his arms, the Spaniard
fell back on the croup of his horse, which, turning round, carried
him off.

Raoul, at this moment, perceived the muzzle of a gun pointed at
him, and remembering the recommendation of Athos, he, with the
rapidity of lightning, made his horse rear as the shot was fired. His
horse bounded to one side, losing its footing, and fell, entangling
Raoul's leg under its body. The Spaniard sprang forward, and
seized the gun by its muzzle, in order to strike Raoul on the head by
the butt end. In the position in which Raoul lay, unfortunately,
he could neither draw his sword from the scabbard, nor his pistols
from their holsters. The butt-end of the musket hovered over his
head, and he could scarcely restrain himself from closing his eyes,
when, with one bound, Guiche reached the Spaniard, and placed a
pistol at his throat. "Yield!" he cried, "or you are a dead man."
The musket fell from the soldier's hands, who yielded at the instant.
Guiche summoned one of his grooms, and delivering the prisoner
into his charge, with orders to shoot him through the head if he at-
ttempted to escape, he leaped from his horse and approached Raoul.

"Faith, sir," said Raoul, smiling, although his pallor somewhat
betrayed the excitement consequent on a first affair, "you are in a
great hurry to pay your debts, and have not been long under any
obligation to me. Without your aid," continued he, repeating the
count's words, "I should have been a dead man—three dead."

"My antagonist took flight," replied De Guiche, and left me at
liberty to come to your aid. But are you seriously wounded? I
see you are covered with blood!"

"I believe," said Raoul, "that I have got something like a scratch
on the arm. If you will help me to drag myself from under my
horse, I hope nothing need prevent us continuing our journey."

Monsieur d'Armingues and Olivain had already dismounted, and
were attempting to raise the horse, which struggled in terror. At
last Raoul succeeded in drawing his feet from the stirrup, and his
leg from under the animal, and in a second he was on his feet again.

"Nothing broken?" asked De Guiche.

"Faith, no, thank Heaven!" replied Raoul, "but what has be-
come of the poor wretches whom these scoundrels were murdering?"

"I fear we arrived too late. They had killed them and taken
flight, carrying off their booty. My two servants are examining the
bodies."

"Let us go and see whether they are quite dead, or if they can be
recovered," suggested Raoul. "Olivain, we have come into pos-
session of two horses, but I have lost my own; take the best of the
two for yourself, and give me yours."

Saying this, they approached the spot where the victims lay.