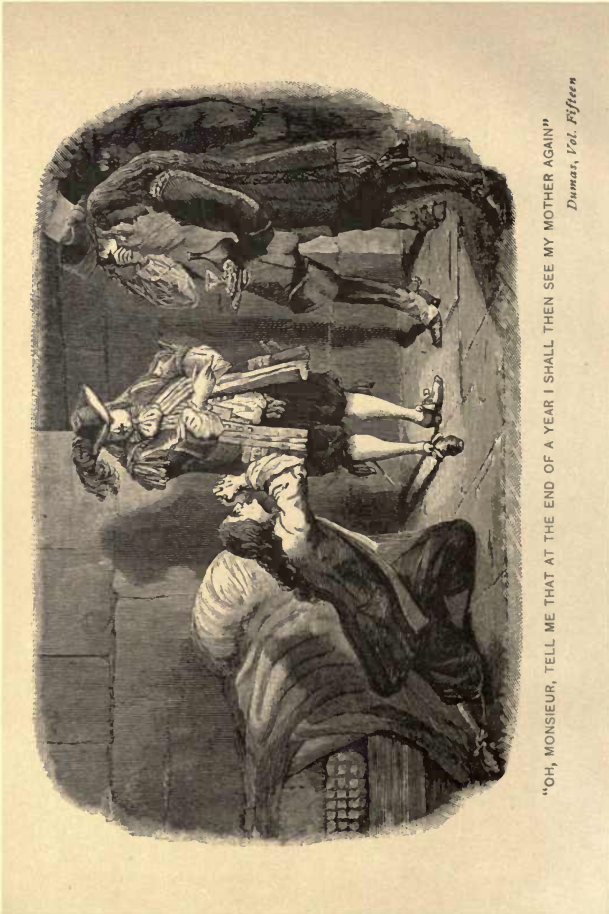


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TEN YEARS LATER



"OH, MONSIEUR, TELL ME THAT AT THE END OF A YEAR I SHALL THEN SEE MY MOTHER AGAIN"

Dumas, Vol. Fifteen

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES



TEN YEARS LATER



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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TEN YEARS LATER.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN FINISHES BY AT LENGTH PLACING
HIS HANDS UPON HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

THE reader guesses beforehand whom the usher announced in announcing the messenger from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully the height of each step, upon which resounded the ring of his bloody spurs. He perceived in the doorway he was passing through the surintendant coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who, an hour before, was bringing him ruin and death. D'Artagnan found in his goodness of heart and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception of this man; he bowed then, also, much more from benevolence and compassion than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise, "Fly." But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king, and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously, and could save nobody. D'Artagnan then contented himself with bowing to Fouquet, and entered. At this moment the king floated between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and as rapid as if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, devouring humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him:

"Ah! Monsieur Colbert, you have then nine hundred thousand livres at the intendance?"

Colbert, suffocated, bowed, but made no reply. All this

scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan, by the eyes and ears, at once. The first word of Louis to his musketeer, as if he wished it to be in opposition to what he was saying at the moment, was a kind "good-day." The second was to send away Colbert. The latter left the king's cabinet, livid and tottering, while D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my presenting myself thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, monsieur?"

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words; Belle Isle is fortified, admirably fortified. Belle Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its ports contain three corsairs, and the side batteries only wait for their cannon."

"I know all that, monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle Isle," said the king.

"Your majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really it, sire; and I saw a similar one on the spot." The brow of D'Artagnan became clouded. "Ah! I understand all. Your majesty has not trusted to me alone, but has sent some other person," said he, in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, monsieur, in which I have learned what I know, so that I do know it?"

"Sire, sire," said the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your majesty that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times the breaking of my neck, to salute me on my arrival with such intelligence. Sire, when people are not trusted, or are deemed insufficient, they should not be employed." And D'Artagnan, with a movement perfectly military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood. The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph.

"Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle Isle is mine."

"That is well! that is well, sire; I ask no more," replied D'Artagnan. "My discharge."

"What! your discharge?"

"Without doubt. I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without gaining it, or rather, by gaining it badly. My discharge, sire!"

"Oh! oh!"

"I ask for my discharge, or I shall take it."

"You are angry, monsieur?"

"I have reason, *mordieux!* I am thirty-two hours in the saddle; I ride night and day; I perform prodigies of speed; I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hung, and another arrives before me! Come, sire, I am a fool! My discharge, sire!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Louis, leaning his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I tell you will not at all affect that which I promised you. A word given, a word should be kept." And the king, going straight to his table, opened a drawer, and took out a folded paper.

"Here is your commission of captain of musketeers; you have won it, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and looked at it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle Isle, but, moreover, for your brave intervention at the Place de Grève. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan, without his own command being able to prevent a certain redness mounting to his eyes; "you know that also, sire?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment, when it was his object to read a conscience.

"You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, monsieur; you know that I told you, once for all, that you are to be quite frank with me."

"Well, sire, what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hung."

"Is that quite true that you tell me?"

"And why should your majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I know you well, monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your majesty is deceived, and greatly. Yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword, on account of the results that action produced; the poor men who were hung, sire, were neither your enemies nor mine, and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, Monsieur d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes. You were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Grève."

"No, sire, no," said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to engross to himself all the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordieux!* and, as your majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion, too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, sire, a young man. Oh! your majesty must accept my compliments; you are as well informed of things out-of-doors as with things within. It is Monsieur Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

"Monsieur Colbert had said nothing but good of you, Monsieur d'Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else."

"That is fortunate."

"But he also said much good of that young man."

"And with justice," said the musketeer.

"In short, it appears that this young man is a brave," said Louis, in order to sharpen the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

"A brave! Yes, sire," repeated D'Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king's attention to Raoul.

"Do you not know his name?"

"Well, I think——"

"You know him then?"

"I have known him nearly twenty-five years, sire."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the king.

"Well, sire; I have known him ever since his birth, that is all."

"Do you affirm that?"

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your majesty questions me

with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. Monsieur Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he not forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne is?"

"Certainly, sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne is of a valiant race, sire."

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather, to Monsieur Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer me his alliance?"

"Exactly, sire."

"And the Comte de la Fere is a brave, say you?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king, your father, than there are, at present, days in the happy life of your majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lips in his turn.

"That is well, Monsieur d'Artagnan, very well! And Monsieur le Comte de la Fere is your friend, say you?"

"For about forty years—yes, sire. Your majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Should you be glad to see this young man, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared.

"Call Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of Monsieur le Prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and, on seeing D'Artagnan, smiled on him with that charming smile which is only found upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not affect anything against his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked Monsieur le Prince to be kind enough to give you up to me. I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur le Prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the change."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love, within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties, and flattering, even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with a voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father—"sire, it is not from to-day that I belong to your majesty."

"Oh! no, I know," said the king; "you mean your enterprise of the Grève. That day you were truly mine, monsieur."

"Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the presence of such a man as Monsieur d'Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your majesty."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "what is that circumstance? Tell me, monsieur."

"This is it, sire. When I was setting out on my first campaign, that is to say, to join the army of Monsieur le Prince, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere came to conduct me as far as St. Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. wait, upon the lowest steps of the funereal *basilique*, a successor, whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty represented by you—incarnate in you, sire—to serve it in word, in thought, and in action. I swore, and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your majesty, and nothing else; and, on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison."

Raoul was silent, and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

"*Mordieux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that is well spoken! is it not, your majesty? A good race! a noble race!"

"Yes," murmured the agitated king, without, however, daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than the contact with a nature eminently aristocratic. "Yes, monsieur, you say truly; wherever you were, you were the king's. But in changing your garrison, believe me, you will find an advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul saw that there stopped what the king had to say to

him; and with that perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

"Is there anything else, monsieur, of which you have to inform me?" said the king, when he found himself again alone with D'Artagnan.

"Yes, sire; and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning."

"What do you tell me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth, you terrify me, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Sire, this word was pronounced to me by a *piqueur* who wore a crape on his arm.

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not warned of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh, do not be angry, sire," said D'Artagnan; "neither the couriers of Paris nor the couriers of the whole world can travel with your servant; the courier from Blois will not be here these two hours, and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I only passed him on the other side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and comprising in those three words all that his memory recalled of that name of opposite sentiments.

"Eh! yes, sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought—"it is thus the past flies away."

"That is true, monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God, the future; and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "and now——"

"You are right, monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred leagues you have just ridden. Go, monsieur; take care of one of the best of soldiers, and when you have reposed a little, come and place yourself at my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I always am so."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

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