

"What was it, monsieur?"

"We were talking of those canals and marshes in which a person might be drowned."

"Well?"

"Well, no one can be drowned, if he have a boat, a plank or even a stick."

"Even though the stick be as short as a baton?" said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely," returned Colbert. "I never yet heard of a French marshal who was drowned."

D'Artagnan turned pale with joy, and replied in a voice that faltered:

"They would be very proud of me at home in my native place if they heard I was a marshal of France. But it is necessary to be the commander-in-chief of an expedition in order to obtain the baton."

"Monsieur," said Colbert, "there is in this notebook, which you will please study, a plan of campaign to be followed by the different corps that the King will place under your orders next spring."

D'Artagnan took the book with a trembling hand, which the minister grasped loyally.

"Monsieur," said Colbert, "we have both a revenge to exact from each other. I have had mine; it is now for you to have yours."

"I shall make you a full return, monsieur," replied D'Artagnan; "and be good enough to tell the King that, upon the first occasion that may be offered, he will hear of a victory or hear of my death."

"Then I will have the golden fleur-de-lis affixed to your marshal's baton immediately," said Colbert.

The next morning Aramis, who was about to start for Madrid to negotiate the treaty of neutrality with Spain, came to D'Artagnan's hôtel to bid him adieu.

"We must love each other enough for four," said D'Artagnan, "now that we are only two."

"And you may never see me again, my dear D'Artagnan," answered Aramis. "Ah! you will never know how much I loved you! And I am now old, dying, almost dead!"

"My dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "you will live longer than I shall. Diplomacy orders you to live, while honor condemns me to die."