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FEUDAL TIMES; OR, TWO SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

A Romance of Daring
and Adventure.

(Translated especially for
the FAVORITE from
the French of Paul
Duplessis.)

CHAPTER XLVI.

A MORNING'S WORK OF THE CAPTAIN'S.

The crowd of Gascon gentlemen, pages, valets, jockeys and pikemen who guarded and blocked up the approaches to the palace of the Duc d'Epéron, situated close to the Vieille-du-Temple, rendered the dwelling of the favorite indisputably more difficult of access than the Louvre.

Roland de Maurevert knew all that sort of thing too well to allow himself to be impeded by such an obstacle. In deference to the dashing, half-threatening air he assumed on presenting himself, he was freely allowed to enter the waiting-hall.

"Monsieur," he said, addressing a Gascon whose costume, at once sordid and pretentious, announced poverty and self-esteem combined, "will you be so good as to tell me—if I am not mistaken in supposing you to be one of the familiars of the house—why Monsieur le Duc does not at once receive me? I am so little accustomed to the ways of ante-chambers, that I am fearful of cutting a ridiculous figure by remaining here any longer unannounced."

"Monsieur le Duc d'Epéron is at the present moment in conference with Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse," replied the Gascon, very drily.

"Thank you. That is reason the more why I should be introduced without delay. I shall not be sorry to shake hands with the dear Seigneur d'Arques. I have just arrived off a journey, and it is some time since we have seen one another. He will be delighted to see me."

At the assured manner in which De Maurevert pronounced these words, the Gascon bowed to the ground, and, springing towards a footman who was passing, brought him to the adventurer.

"Go and inform your master," said the captain, in a tone of majestic authority, "that a gentleman, one of his friends, desires to see him immediately, on an affair of the highest importance, and which admits of no delay."

"Whom am I to announce, monsieur?"

"Nobody; I desire to preserve the strictest incognito."

The valet looked askance at De Maurevert, but on observing his magnificent appearance, decided upon obeying him.

"Monsieur," said the Gascon, as soon as the valet was gone, "may I beg you will not be offended at the question I am about to ask you. The disturbed state of my mind must be my excuse for my impertinence. I have just lost my purse containing ten crowns. Now that sum, insignificant as it was, constituted my whole fortune; for I gave five thousand livres yesterday to my mistress, and lost ten thousand crowns at the gaming table last night. I should therefore not be sorry to replace myself of these miserable ten crowns. You have not by any chance found them on your way?"

"No, monsieur," replied De Maurevert, gravely; "I have found only one crown."



"DE MAUREVERT LEAVING THE DUC D'EPERON'S PALACE."

"Only one! How very singular! It really must be admitted that rascals have strange ways sometimes. Why should my thief have left one crown behind him?" cried the Gascon, holding out his hand, into which the adventurer dropped the piece of money.

"That arises from want of virtue," murmured De Maurevert, looking with an air of pity after the Gascon, who had hastily left him to throw himself in the way of a person who had just entered the waiting-hall. "This man is young, robust, well-made, carries a sword, and yet asks charity. What a sad falling is idleness!—it leads us to utter forgetfulness of personal dignity!"

The return of the footman interrupted the adventurer in his philosophical reflections. The Duc d'Epéron consented to receive *incognito* the seigneur, who announced himself as having such urgent business to communicate.

After passing through several magnificently decorated rooms, De Maurevert was shown into the sleeping chamber of the *mignon*, whose dressing was being completed by his valets.

D'Epéron, standing in front of a table laden with papers, and on the edge of which he rested his hand, was reading with much attention a parchment filled with beautiful writing. His rival in the king's favor, the Duc de Joyeuse, was half-lying in a large arm-chair, and amusing himself by blowing comfits through a tube against a large watch-clock hung against one of the wall tapestries. So warmed and excited was he with his work of destruction as not to notice the adventurer's arrival.

"*Tudieu!*—I have lost the effect of my entrance!" thought the captain, with vexation. Suddenly the Duc d'Epéron turned towards him.

"Oh! it is you, Monsieur de Maurevert, is it?" he said, abruptly.

"Why not, Monsieur le Duc?" asked the adventurer, boldly. "Does my presence appear to

you so inconvenient, that you should be unable to hide the discontent it causes you? What the devil, monseigneur!—I am not such a pitiful person as to be treated in that manner."

"The Captain has not had a pleasant waking this morning," said De Joyeuse, who, having succeeded in breaking the long hand of the clock, had thrown down his tube. "Good day, captain—what news? Have you killed anybody since yesterday?"

"Not yet, monseigneur?"

"You are making holiday then, De Maurevert?"

"No, monseigneur, quite the contrary—I am just entering upon two big pieces of business."

"Dear De Maurevert—always the same!—with an activity and conscience proof against everything! Do you know, De Maurevert, I have always felt a weakness towards you. Your sword-thrusts delight me."

"You confuse me with joy and pride," replied the adventurer. "The fact is that, after you, I believe I am the most skillful swordsman in the kingdom."

"After me, De Maurevert! Are you speaking sincerely?—are you not trying to flatter me?"

"What good would that do me, monseigneur? I am not a solicitor—a *ante-chamber* hunter."

"So you really think that if we were to fight I should have the advantage?" replied De Joyeuse.

"No, monseigneur; on the contrary, I should kill you. I can well understand your astonishment at this apparent contradiction. Your method of fencing, Monsieur le Duc, is that of a great nobleman—generous, bold, imprudent, liberal; mine, that of a poor devil of a gentleman who has to gain his living—circumspect, artful, sneaking, infallibly safe. You study fighting as an art; I as a business. That is all the difference. If your position were changed to-morrow, and you were obliged to rely on your sword for the means of subsistence, I am per-

suaded that you would become of equal force with myself; or, as you possess more eloquence, that I should have to recognize in you my superior."

This response agreeably flattered the self-esteem of the Gascon favorite.

"Come, De Maurevert," he said, in an affable tone, "tell me and Epéron, what these two big affairs are in which you are engaged. I have always been pleased with your manner of telling a story. Some lady-love in the case, no doubt?"

"No, monseigneur."

"Some insult to avenge?"

"This time you have guessed aright."

"Do you know, De Maurevert, what, if I were in your place, would considerably cool my ardor?—the idea that I was fighting for a coward!"

"Monseigneur, you are this time on the wrong track. I am employed by a gentleman who cannot obtain satisfaction by arms, for a grave wrong, and who has, therefore, to punish the refusal of his adversary to meet him face to face."

"That is an excellent cause, De Maurevert. And your second affair?"

"Ah! that is altogether different. It concerns a great nobleman—very brave, doubtless, but proud to excess—who, fearing to compromise his rank by accepting the challenge of a simple gentleman, has decided to have him assassinated!"

"Some what doubtful as to morality, that, De Maurevert. Unless he is a prince of the blood, or a seigneur very highly placed, he has no right to decline the challenge of a simple gentleman."

"The fact is, monseigneur, that the subject is open to discussion."

"And tell me, De Maurevert, what are the names of your clients? We promise, Epéron and me, the most perfect discretion."

"On your honor, Monsieur le Duc?"

"On my honor."

"Excuse me for still further insisting, monseigneur. You have, if I do not deceive myself, formally engaged yourself never to reveal to any person—not even to the king—any of the details which, with the desire of obeying your wishes, I am about to confide to you? You must further promise me that, should my revelations in any respect offend you, you will not attempt, in any way, to act to my injury."

"Yes, a hundred times, yes, I promise!" cried De Joyeuse.

"I am thoroughly reassured, then, as to the consequences of my indiscretion. Question me, monseigneur—I will answer."

"In the first place, what is the name of the gentleman who, having been unable to obtain satisfaction of his adversary, has confided to your skill the care of his vengeance?"

"The Chevalier Sforzi, monseigneur."

At the name of Sforzi the Duc d'Epéron started, and his friend De Joyeuse cast a rapid and significant glance at him.

"And against whom does the Chevalier Sforzi count on employing your rare talents?" inquired De Joyeuse, hastily.

"Against Monseigneur le Duc d'Epéron," replied De Maurevert, coolly.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed De Joyeuse, bursting into a fit of laughter. "It is becoming delightfully droll. And now, as to the second affair?"

"That of the great nobleman who, fearing to