

Chapter 57. Oliver Cromwell.

"Have you been to the general?" said Mordaunt to D'Artagnan and Porthos;  
"you know he sent for you after the action."

"We want first to put our prisoners in a place of safety," replied  
D'Artagnan. "Do you know, sir, these gentlemen are each of them worth  
fifteen hundred pounds?"

"Oh, be assured," said Mordaunt, looking at them with an expression he  
vainly endeavoured to soften, "my soldiers will guard them, and guard  
them well, I promise you."

"I shall take better care of them myself," answered D'Artagnan;  
"besides, all they require is a good room, with sentinels, or their  
simple parole that they will not attempt escape. I will go and see about  
that, and then we shall have the honor of presenting ourselves to the  
general and receiving his commands for his eminence."

"You think of starting at once, then?" inquired Mordaunt.

"Our mission is ended, and there is nothing more to detain us now but  
the good pleasure of the great man to whom we were sent."

The young man bit his lips and whispered to his sergeant:

"You will follow these men and not lose sight of them; when you have discovered where they lodge, come and await me at the town gate."

The sergeant made a sign of comprehension.

Instead of following the knot of prisoners that were being taken into the town, Mordaunt turned his steps toward the rising ground from whence Cromwell had witnessed the battle and on which he had just had his tent pitched.

Cromwell had given orders that no one was to be allowed admission; but the sentinel, who knew that Mordaunt was one of the most confidential friends of the general, thought the order did not extend to the young man. Mordaunt, therefore, raised the canvas, and saw Cromwell seated before a table, his head buried in his hands, his back being turned.

Whether he heard Mordaunt or not as he entered, Cromwell did not move. Mordaunt remained standing near the door. At last, after a few moments, Cromwell raised his head, and, as if he divined that some one was there, turned slowly around.

"I said I wished to be alone," he exclaimed, on seeing the young man.

"They thought this order did not concern me, sir; nevertheless, if you wish it, I am ready to go."

"Ah! is it you, Mordaunt?" said Cromwell, the cloud passing away from

his face; "since you are here, it is well; you may remain."

"I come to congratulate you."

"To congratulate me--what for?"

"On the capture of Charles Stuart. You are now master of England."

"I was much more really so two hours ago."

"How so, general?"

"Because England had need of me to take the tyrant, and now the tyrant is taken. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, sir." said Mordaunt.

"What is his bearing?"

Mordaunt hesitated; but it seemed as though he was constrained to tell the truth.

"Calm and dignified," said he.

"What did he say?"

"Some parting words to his friends."

"His friends!" murmured Cromwell. "Has he any friends?" Then he added aloud, "Did he make any resistance?"

"No, sir, with the exception of two or three friends every one deserted him; he had no means of resistance."

"To whom did he give up his sword?"

"He did not give it up; he broke it."

"He did well; but instead of breaking it, he might have used it to still more advantage."

There was a momentary pause.

"I heard that the colonel of the regiment that escorted Charles was killed," said Cromwell, staring very fixedly at Mordaunt.

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?" inquired Cromwell.

"By me."

"What was his name?"

"Lord Winter."

"Your uncle?" exclaimed Cromwell.

"My uncle," answered Mordaunt; "but traitors to England are no longer members of my family."

Cromwell observed the young man a moment in silence, then, with that profound melancholy Shakespeare describes so well:

"Mordaunt," he said, "you are a terrible servant."

"When the Lord commands," said Mordaunt, "His commands are not to be disputed. Abraham raised the knife against Isaac, and Isaac was his son."

"Yes," said Cromwell, "but the Lord did not suffer that sacrifice to be accomplished."

"I have looked around me," said Mordaunt, "and I have seen neither goat nor kid caught among the bushes of the plain."

Cromwell bowed. "You are strong among the strong, Mordaunt," he said; "and the Frenchmen, how did they behave?"

"Most fearlessly."

"Yes, yes," murmured Cromwell; "the French fight well; and if my glass was good and I mistake not, they were foremost in the fight."

"They were," replied Mordaunt.

"After you, however," said Cromwell.

"It was the fault of their horses, not theirs."

Another pause.

"And the Scotch?"

"They kept their word and never stirred," said Mordaunt.

"Wretched men!"

"Their officers wish to see you, sir."

"I have no time to see them. Are they paid?"

"Yes, to-night."

"Let them be off and return to their own country, there to hide their shame, if its hills are high enough; I have nothing more to do with them nor they with me. And now go, Mordaunt."

"Before I go," said Mordaunt, "I have some questions and a favor to ask you, sir."

"A favor from me?"

Mordaunt bowed.

"I come to you, my leader, my head, my father, and I ask you, master, are you contented with me?"

Cromwell looked at him with astonishment. The young man remained immovable.

"Yes," said Cromwell; "you have done, since I knew you, not only your duty, but more than your duty; you have been a faithful friend, a cautious negotiator, a brave soldier."

"Do you remember, sir it was my idea, the Scotch treaty, for giving up the king?"

"Yes, the idea was yours. I had no such contempt for men before."

"Was I not a good ambassador in France?"

"Yes, for Mazarin has granted what I desire."

"Have I not always fought for your glory and interests?"

"Too ardently, perhaps; it is what I have just reproached you for. But what is the meaning of all these questions?"

"To tell you, my lord, that the moment has now arrived when, with a

single word, you may recompense all these services."

"Oh!" said Oliver, with a slight curl of his lip, "I forgot that every service merits some reward and that up to this moment you have not been paid."

"Sir, I can take my pay at this moment, to the full extent of my wishes."

"How is that?"

"I have the payment under my hand; I almost possess it."

"What is it? Have they offered you money? Do you wish a step, or some place in the government?"

"Sir, will you grant me my request?"

"Let us hear what it is, first."

"Sir, when you have told me to obey an order did I ever answer, 'Let me see that order'?"

"If, however, your wish should be one impossible to fulfill?"

"When you have cherished a wish and have charged me with its fulfillment, have I ever replied, 'It is impossible'?"



"But a request preferred with so much preparation----"

"Ah, do not fear, sir," said Mordaunt, with apparent simplicity: "it will not ruin you."

"Well, then," said Cromwell, "I promise, as far as lies in my power, to grant your request; proceed."

"Sir, two prisoners were taken this morning, will you let me have them?"

"For their ransom? have they then offered a large one?" inquired Cromwell.

"On the contrary, I think they are poor, sir."

"They are friends of yours, then?"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Mordaunt, "they are friends, dear friends of mine, and I would lay down my life for them."

"Very well, Mordaunt," exclaimed Cromwell, pleased at having his opinion of the young man raised once more; "I will give them to you; I will not even ask who they are; do as you like with them."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Mordaunt, "thank you; my life is always at your service, and should I lose it I should still owe you something; thank you; you have indeed repaid me munificently for my services."

He threw himself at the feet of Cromwell, and in spite of the efforts of the Puritan general, who did not like this almost kingly homage, he took his hand and kissed it.

"What!" said Cromwell, arresting him for a moment as he arose; "is there nothing more you wish? neither gold nor rank?"

"You have given me all you can give me, and from to-day your debt is paid."

And Mordaunt darted out of the general's tent, his heart beating and his eyes sparkling with joy.

Cromwell gazed a moment after him.

"He has slain his uncle!" he murmured. "Alas! what are my servants? Possibly this one, who asks nothing or seems to ask nothing, has asked more in the eyes of Heaven than those who tax the country and steal the bread of the poor. Nobody serves me for nothing. Charles, who is my prisoner, may still have friends, but I have none!"

And with a deep sigh he again sank into the reverie that had been interrupted by Mordaunt.