

Chapter 75. The Return.

During the six weeks that Athos and Aramis had been absent from France, the Parisians, finding themselves one morning without either queen or king, were greatly annoyed at being thus deserted, and the absence of Mazarin, a thing so long desired, did not compensate for that of the two august fugitives.

The first feeling that pervaded Paris on hearing of the flight to Saint Germain, was that sort of affright which seizes children when they awake in the night and find themselves alone. A deputation was therefore sent to the queen to entreat her to return to Paris; but she not only declined to receive the deputies, but sent an intimation by Chancellor Seguier, implying that if the parliament did not humble itself before her majesty by negating all the questions that had been the cause of the quarrel, Paris would be besieged the very next day.

This threatening answer, unluckily for the court, produced quite a different effect to that which was intended. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, supported by the citizens, replied by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin was the cause of all the discontent; denounced him as the enemy both of the king and the state, and ordered him to retire from the court that same day and from France within a week afterward; enjoining, in case of disobedience on his part, all the subjects of the king to pursue and take him.

Mazarin being thus placed beyond the pale of the protection of the law, preparations on both sides were commenced--by the queen, to attack Paris, by the citizens, to defend it. The latter were occupied in breaking up the pavement and stretching chains across the streets, when, headed by the coadjutor, appeared the Prince de Conti (the brother of the Prince de Conde) and the Duc de Longueville, his brother-in-law. This unexpected band of auxiliaries arrived in Paris on the tenth of January and the Prince of Conti was named, but not until after a stormy discussion, generalissimo of the army of the king, out of Paris.

As for the Duc de Beaufort, he arrived from Vendome, according to the annals of the day, bringing with him his high bearing and his long and beautiful hair, qualifications which gained him the sovereignty of the marketplaces.

The Parisian army had organized with the promptness characteristic of the bourgeois whenever they are moved by any sentiment whatever to disguise themselves as soldiers. On the nineteenth the impromptu army had attempted a sortie, more to assure itself and others of its actual existence than with any more serious intention. They carried a banner, on which could be read this strange device: "We are seeking our king."

The next following days were occupied in trivial movements which resulted only in the carrying off of a few herds of cattle and the burning of two or three houses.

That was still the situation of affairs up to the early days of

February. On the first day of that month our four companions had landed at Boulogne, and, in two parties, had set out for Paris. Toward the end of the fourth day of the journey Athos and Aramis reached Nanterre, which place they cautiously passed by on the outskirts, fearing that they might encounter some troop from the queen's army.

It was against his will that Athos took these precautions, but Aramis had very judiciously reminded him that they had no right to be imprudent, that they had been charged by King Charles with a supreme and sacred mission, which, received at the foot of the scaffold, could be accomplished only at the feet of Queen Henrietta. Upon that, Athos yielded.

On reaching the capital Athos and Aramis found it in arms. The sentinel at the gate refused even to let them pass, and called his sergeant.

The sergeant, with the air of importance which such people assume when they are clad with military dignity, said:

"Who are you, gentlemen?"

"Two gentlemen."

"And where do you come from?"

"From London."

"And what are you going to do in Paris?"

"We are going with a mission to Her Majesty, the Queen of England."

"Ah, every one seems to be going to see the queen of England. We have already at the station three gentlemen whose passports are under examination, who are on their way to her majesty. Where are your passports?"

"We have none; we left England, ignorant of the state of politics here, having left Paris before the departure of the king."

"Ah!" said the sergeant, with a cunning smile, "you are Mazarinists, who are sent as spies."

"My dear friend," here Athos spoke, "rest assured, if we were Mazarinists we should come well prepared with every sort of passport. In your situation distrust those who are well provided with every formality."

"Enter the guardroom," said the sergeant; "we will lay your case before the commandant of the post."

The guardroom was filled with citizens and common people, some playing, some drinking, some talking. In a corner, almost hidden from view, were three gentlemen, who had preceded Athos and Aramis, and an officer was examining their passports. The first impulse of these three, and of those who last entered, was to cast an inquiring glance at each other. The first arrivals wore long cloaks, in whose drapery they

were carefully enveloped; one of them, shorter than the rest, remained pertinaciously in the background.

When the sergeant on entering the room announced that in all probability he was bringing in two Mazarinists, it appeared to be the unanimous opinion of the officers on guard that they ought not to pass.

"Be it so," said Athos; "yet it is probable, on the contrary, that we shall enter, because we seem to have to do with sensible people. There seems to be only one thing to do, which is, to send our names to Her Majesty the Queen of England, and if she engages to answer for us I presume we shall be allowed to enter."

On hearing these words the shortest of the other three men seemed more attentive than ever to what was going on, wrapping his cloak around him more carefully than before.

"Merciful goodness!" whispered Aramis to Athos, "did you see?"

"What?" asked Athos.

"The face of the shortest of those three gentlemen?"

"No."

"He looked to me--but 'tis impossible."

At this instant the sergeant, who had been for his orders, returned, and

pointing to the three gentlemen in cloaks, said:

"The passports are in order; let these three gentlemen pass."

The three gentlemen bowed and hastened to take advantage of this permission.

Aramis looked after them, and as the last of them passed close to him he pressed the hand of Athos.

"What is the matter with you, my friend?" asked the latter.

"I have--doubtless I am dreaming; tell me, sir," he said to the sergeant, "do you know those three gentlemen who are just gone out?"

"Only by their passports; they are three Frondist, who are gone to rejoin the Duc de Longueville."

"'Tis strange," said Aramis, almost involuntarily; "I fancied that I recognized Mazarin himself."

The sergeant burst into a fit of laughter.

"He!" he cried; "he venture himself amongst us, to be hung! Not so foolish as all that."

"Ah!" muttered Athos, "I may be mistaken, I haven't the unerring eye of D'Artagnan."

"Who is speaking of Monsieur D'Artagnan?" asked an officer who appeared at that moment upon the threshold of the room.

"What!" cried Aramis and Athos, "what! Planchet!"

"Planchet," added Grimaud; "Planchet, with a gorget, indeed!"

"Ah, gentlemen!" cried Planchet, "so you are back again in Paris. Oh, how happy you make us! no doubt you come to join the princes!"

"As thou seest, Planchet," said Aramis, whilst Athos smiled on seeing what important rank was held in the city militia by the former comrade of Mousqueton, Bazin and Grimaud.

"And Monsieur d'Artagnan, of whom you spoke just now, Monsieur d'Herblay; may I ask if you have any news of him?"

"We parted from him four days ago and we have reason to believe that he has reached Paris before us."

"No, sir; I am sure he hasn't yet arrived. But then he may have stopped at Saint Germain."

"I don't think so; we appointed to meet at La Chevrette."

"I was there this very day."

"And had the pretty Madeleine no news?" asked Aramis, smiling.

"No, sir, and it must be admitted that she seemed very anxious."

"In fact," said Aramis, "there is no time lost and we made our journey quickly. Permit me, then, my dear Athos, without inquiring further about our friend, to pay my respects to M. Planchet."

"Ah, monsieur le chevalier," said Planchet, bowing.

"Lieutenant?" asked Aramis.

"Lieutenant, with a promise of becoming captain."

"'Tis capital; and pray, how did you acquire all these honors?"

"In the first place, gentlemen, you know that I was the means of Monsieur de Rochefort's escape; well, I was very near being hung by Mazarin and that made me more popular than ever."

"So, owing to your popularity----"

"No; thanks to something better. You know, gentlemen, that I served the Piedmont regiment and had the honor of being a sergeant?"

"Yes."

"Well, one day when no one could drill a mob of citizens, who began to

march, some with the right foot, others with the left, I succeeded, I did, in making them all begin with the same foot, and I was made lieutenant on the spot."

"So I presume," said Athos, "that you have a large number of the nobles with you?"

"Certainly. There are the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Longueville, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, the Marechal de la Mothe, the Marquis de Sevigne, and I don't know who, for my part."

"And the Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne?" inquired Athos, in a tremulous voice. "D'Artagnan told me that he had recommended him to your care, in parting."

"Yes, count; nor have I lost sight of him for a single instant since."

"Then," said Athos in a tone of delight, "he is well? no accident has happened to him?"

"None, sir."

"And he lives?"

"Still at the Hotel of the Great Charlemagne."

"And passes his time?"

"Sometimes with the queen of England, sometimes with Madame de Chevreuse. He and the Count de Guiche are like each other's shadows."

"Thanks, Planchet, thanks!" cried Athos, extending his hand to the lieutenant.

"Oh, sir!" Planchet only touched the tips of the count's fingers.

"Well, what are you doing, count--to a former lackey?"

"My friend," said Athos, "he has given me news of Raoul."

"And now, gentlemen," said Planchet, who had not heard what they were saying, "what do you intend to do?"

"Re-enter Paris, if you will let us, my good Planchet."

"Let you, sir? Now, as ever, I am nothing but your servant." Then turning to his men:

"Allow these gentlemen to pass," he said; "they are friends of the Duc de Beaufort."

"Long live the Duc de Beaufort!" cried the sentinels.

The sergeant drew near to Planchet.

"What! without passports?" he murmured.

"Without passports," said Planchet.

"Take notice, captain," he continued, giving Planchet his expected title, "take notice that one of the three men who just now went out from here told me privately to distrust these gentlemen."

"And I," said Planchet, with dignity, "I know them and I answer for them."

As he said this, he pressed Grimaud's hand, who seemed honored by the distinction.

"Farewell till we meet again," said Aramis, as they took leave of Planchet; "if anything happens to us we shall blame you for it."

"Sir," said Planchet, "I am in all things at your service."

"That fellow is no fool," said Aramis, as he got on his horse.

"How should he be?" replied Athos, whilst mounting also, "seeing he was used so long to brush your hats."