

## Chapter 80. The Gratitude of Anne of Austria.

Athos found much less difficulty than he had expected in obtaining an audience of Anne of Austria. It was granted, and was to take place after her morning's "levee," at which, in accordance with his rights of birth, he was entitled to be present. A vast crowd filled the apartments of Saint Germain. Anne had never at the Louvre had so large a court; but this crowd represented chiefly the second class of nobility, while the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Beaufort and the coadjutor assembled around them the first nobility of France.

The greatest possible gayety prevailed at court. The particular characteristic of this was that more songs were made than cannons fired during its continuance. The court made songs on the Parisians and the Parisians on the court; and the casualties, though not mortal, were painful, as are all wounds inflicted by the weapon of ridicule.

In the midst of this seeming hilarity, nevertheless, people's minds were uneasy. Was Mazarin to remain the favorite and minister of the queen? Was he to be carried back by the wind which had blown him there? Every one hoped so, so that the minister felt that all around him, beneath the homage of the courtiers, lay a fund of hatred, ill disguised by fear and interest. He felt ill at ease and at a loss what to do.

Conde himself, whilst fighting for him, lost no opportunity of

ridiculing, of humbling him. The queen, on whom he threw himself as sole support, seemed to him now not much to be relied upon.

When the hour appointed for the audience arrived Athos was obliged to stay until the queen, who was waited upon by a new deputation from Paris, had consulted with her minister as to the propriety and manner of receiving them. All were fully engrossed with the affairs of the day; Athos could not therefore have chosen a more inauspicious moment to speak of his friends--poor atoms, lost in that raging whirlwind.

But Athos was a man of inflexible determination; he firmly adhered to a purpose once formed, when it seemed to him to spring from conscience and to be prompted by a sense of duty. He insisted on being introduced, saying that although he was not a deputy from Monsieur de Conti, or Monsieur de Beaufort, or Monsieur de Bouillon, or Monsieur d'Elbeuf, or the coadjutor, or Madame de Longueville, or Broussel, or the Parliament, and although he had come on his own private account, he nevertheless had things to say to her majesty of the utmost importance.

The conference being finished, the queen summoned him to her cabinet.

Athos was introduced and announced by name. It was a name that too often resounded in her majesty's ears and too often vibrated in her heart for Anne of Austria not to recognize it; yet she remained impassive, looking at him with that fixed stare which is tolerated only in women who are queens, either by the power of beauty or by the right of birth.

"It is then a service which you propose to render us, count?" asked Anne

of Austria, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, madame, another service," said Athos, shocked that the queen did not seem to recognize him.

Athos had a noble heart, and made, therefore, but a poor courtier.

Anne frowned. Mazarin, who was sitting at a table folding up papers, as if he had only been a secretary of state, looked up.

"Speak," said the queen.

Mazarin turned again to his papers.

"Madame," resumed Athos, "two of my friends, named D'Artagnan and Monsieur du Vallon, sent to England by the cardinal, suddenly disappeared when they set foot on the shores of France; no one knows what has become of them."

"Well?" said the queen.

"I address myself, therefore, first to the benevolence of your majesty, that I may know what has become of my friends, reserving to myself, if necessary, the right of appealing hereafter to your justice."

"Sir," replied Anne, with a degree of haughtiness which to certain persons became impertinence, "this is the reason that you trouble me in the midst of so many absorbing concerns! an affair for the police! Well,

sir, you ought to know that we no longer have a police, since we are no longer at Paris."

"I think your majesty will have no need to apply to the police to know where my friends are, but that if you will deign to interrogate the cardinal he can reply without any further inquiry than into his own recollections."

"But, God forgive me!" cried Anne, with that disdainful curl of the lips peculiar to her, "I believe that you are yourself interrogating."

"Yes, madame, here I have a right to do so, for it concerns Monsieur d'Artagnan---d'Artagnan," he repeated, in such a manner as to bow the regal brow with recollections of the weak and erring woman.

The cardinal saw that it was now high time to come to the assistance of Anne.

"Sir," he said, "I can tell you what is at present unknown to her majesty. These individuals are under arrest. They disobeyed orders."

"I beg of your majesty, then," said Athos, calmly and not replying to Mazarin, "to quash these arrests of Messieurs d'Artagnan and du Vallon."

"What you ask is merely an affair of discipline and does not concern me," said the queen.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan never made such an answer as that when the service

of your majesty was concerned," said Athos, bowing with great dignity. He was going toward the door when Mazarin stopped him.

"You, too, have been in England, sir?" he said, making a sign to the queen, who was evidently going to issue a severe order.

"I was a witness of the last hours of Charles I. Poor king! culpable, at the most, of weakness, how cruelly punished by his subjects! Thrones are at this time shaken and it is to little purpose for devoted hearts to serve the interests of princes. This is the second time that Monsieur d'Artagnan has been in England. He went the first time to save the honor of a great queen; the second, to avert the death of a great king."

"Sir," said Anne to Mazarin, with an accent from which daily habits of dissimulation could not entirely chase the real expression, "see if we can do something for these gentlemen."

"I wish to do, madame, all that your majesty pleases."

"Do what Monsieur de la Fere requests; that is your name, is it not, sir?"

"I have another name, madame--I am called Athos."

"Madame," said Mazarin, with a smile, "you may rest easy; your wishes shall be fulfilled."

"You hear, sir?" said the queen.

"Yes, madame, I expected nothing less from the justice of your majesty.  
May I not go and see my friends?"

"Yes, sir, you shall see them. But, apropos, you belong to the Fronde,  
do you not?"

"Madame, I serve the king."

"Yes, in your own way."

"My way is the way of all gentlemen, and I know only one way," answered  
Athos, haughtily.

"Go, sir, then," said the queen; "you have obtained what you wish and we  
know all we desire to know."

Scarcely, however, had the tapestry closed behind Athos when she said to  
Mazarin:

"Cardinal, desire them to arrest that insolent fellow before he leaves  
the court."

"Your majesty," answered Mazarin, "desires me to do only what I was  
going to ask you to let me do. These bravoos who resuscitate in our  
epoch the traditions of another reign are troublesome; since there are  
two of them already there, let us add a third."

Athos was not altogether the queen's dupe, but he was not a man to run away on suspicion--above all, when distinctly told that he should see his friends again. He waited, then, in the ante-chamber with impatience, till he should be conducted to them.

He walked to the window and looked into the court. He saw the deputation from the Parisians enter it; they were coming to assign the definitive place for the conference and to make their bow to the queen. A very imposing escort awaited them without the gates.

Athos was looking on attentively, when some one touched him softly on the shoulder.

"Ah! Monsieur de Comminges," he said.

"Yes, count, and charged with a commission for which I beg of you to accept my excuses."

"What is it?"

"Be so good as to give me up your sword, count."

Athos smiled and opened the window.

"Aramis!" he cried.

A gentleman turned around. Athos fancied he had seen him among the crowd. It was Aramis. He bowed with great friendship to the count.

"Aramis," cried Athos, "I am arrested."

"Good," replied Aramis, calmly.

"Sir," said Athos, turning to Comminges and giving him politely his sword by the hilt, "here is my sword; have the kindness to keep it safely for me until I quit my prison. I prize it--it was given to my ancestor by King Francis I. In his time they armed gentlemen, not disarmed them. Now, whither do you conduct me?"

"Into my room first," replied Comminges; "the queen will ultimately decide your place of domicile."

Athos followed Comminges without saying a single word.