

Chapter IX. In which the Unknown of the Hostelry of Les Medici loses his Incognito.

This officer, who was sleeping, or preparing to sleep, was, notwithstanding his careless air, charged with a serious responsibility.

Lieutenant of the king's musketeers, he commanded all the company which came from Paris, and that company consisted of a hundred and twenty men; but, with the exception of the twenty of whom we have spoken, the other hundred were engaged in guarding the queen-mother, and more particularly the cardinal.

Monsignor Giulio Mazarini economized the traveling expenses of his guards; he consequently used the king's, and that largely, since he took fifty of them for himself--a peculiarity which would not have failed to strike any one unacquainted with the usages of that court.

That which would still further have appeared, if not inconvenient, at least extraordinary, to a stranger, was, that the side of the castle destined for monsieur le cardinal was brilliant, light and cheerful. The musketeers there mounted guard before every door, and allowed no one to enter, except the couriers, who, even while he was traveling, followed the cardinal for the carrying on of his correspondence.

Twenty men were on duty with the queen-mother; thirty rested, in order to relieve their companions the next day.

On the king's side, on the contrary, were darkness, silence, and solitude. When once the doors were closed, there was no longer an appearance of royalty. All the servitors had by degrees retired. Monsieur le Prince had sent to know if his majesty required his attendance; and on the customary "No" of the lieutenant of musketeers, who was habituated to the question and the reply, all appeared to sink into the arms of sleep, as if in the dwelling of a good citizen.

And yet it was possible to hear from the side of the house occupied by the young king the music of the banquet, and to see the windows of the great hall richly illuminated.

Ten minutes after his installation in his apartment, Louis XIV. had been able to learn, by movement much more distinguished than marked his own leaving, the departure of the cardinal, who, in his turn, sought his bedroom, accompanied by a large escort of ladies and gentlemen.

Besides, to perceive this movement, he had nothing to do but look out at his window, the shutters of which had not been closed.

His eminence crossed the court, conducted by Monsieur, who himself held a flambeau; then followed the queen-mother, to whom Madame familiarly gave her arm; and both walked chatting away, like two old friends.

Behind these two couples filed nobles, ladies, pages and officers; the flambeaux gleamed over the whole court, like the moving reflections of a conflagration. Then the noise of steps and voices became lost in the upper floors of the castle.

No one was then thinking of the king, who, leaning on his elbow at his window, had sadly seen pass away all that light, and heard that noise die off--no, not one, if it was not that unknown of the *hostelry des Medici*, whom we have seen go out, enveloped in his cloak.

He had come straight up to the castle, and had, with his melancholy countenance, wandered round and round the palace, from which the people had not yet departed; and finding that on one guarded the great entrance, or the porch, seeing that the soldiers of Monsieur were fraternizing with the royal soldiers--that is to say, swallowing *Beaugency* at discretion, or rather indiscretion--the unknown penetrated through the crowd, then ascended to the court, and came to the landing of the staircase leading to the cardinal's apartment.

What, according to all probability, induced him to direct his steps that way, was the splendor of the flambeaux, and the busy air of the pages and domestics. But he was stopped short by a presented musket and the cry of the sentinel.

"Where are you going, my friend?" asked the soldier.

"I am going to the king's apartment," replied the unknown, haughtily, but tranquilly.

The soldier called one of his eminence's officers, who, in the tone in which a youth in office directs a solicitor to a minister, let fall these words: "The other staircase, in front."

And the officer, without further notice of the unknown, resumed his interrupted conversation.

The stranger, without reply, directed his steps towards the staircase pointed out to him. On this side there was no noise, there were no more flambeaux.

Obscurity, through which a sentinel glided like a shadow; silence, which permitted him to hear the sound of his own footsteps, accompanied with the jingling of his spurs upon the stone slabs.

This guard was one of the twenty musketeers appointed for attendance

upon the king, and who mounted guard with the stiffness and consciousness of a statue.

"Who goes there?" said the guard.

"A friend," replied the unknown.

"What do you want?"

"To speak to the king."

"Do you, my dear monsieur? That's not very likely."

"Why not?"

"Because the king has gone to bed."

"Gone to bed already?"

"Yes."

"No matter: I must speak to him."

"And I tell you that is impossible."

"And yet--"

"Go back!"

"Do you require the word?"

"I have no account to render to you. Stand back!"

And this time the soldier accompanied his word with a threatening gesture; but the unknown stirred no more than if his feet had taken root.

"Monsieur le mousquetaire," said he, "are you a gentleman?"

"I have that honor."

"Very well! I also am one; and between gentlemen some consideration ought to be observed."

The soldier lowered his arms, overcome by the dignity with which these words were pronounced.

"Speak, monsieur," said he; "and if you ask me anything in my power--"

"Thank you. You have an officer, have you not?"

"Our lieutenant? Yes, monsieur."

"Well, I wish to speak to him."

"Oh, that's a different thing. Come up, monsieur."

The unknown saluted the soldier in a lofty fashion, and ascended the staircase; whilst a cry, "Lieutenant, a visit!" transmitted from sentinel to sentinel, preceded the unknown, and disturbed the slumbers of the officer.

Dragging on his boot, rubbing his eyes, and hooking his cloak, the lieutenant made three steps towards the stranger.

"What can I do to serve you, monsieur?" asked he.

"You are the officer on duty, lieutenant of the musketeers, are you?"

"I have that honor," replied the officer.

"Monsieur, I must absolutely speak to the king."

The lieutenant looked attentively at the unknown, and in that look, he saw all he wished to see--that is to say, a person of high distinction in an ordinary dress.

"I do not suppose you to be mad," replied he; "and yet you seem to me to be in a condition to know, monsieur, that people do not enter a king's apartments in this manner without his consent."

"He will consent."

"Monsieur, permit me to doubt that. The king has retired this quarter of an hour; he must be now undressing. Besides, the word is given."

"When he knows who I am, he will recall the word."

The officer was more and more surprised, more and more subdued.

"If I consent to announce you, may I at least know whom to announce, monsieur?"

"You will announce His Majesty Charles II., King of England, Scotland, and Ireland."

The officer uttered a cry of astonishment, drew back, and there might be seen upon his pallid countenance one of the most poignant emotions that

ever an energetic man endeavored to drive back to his heart.

"Oh, yes, sire; in fact," said he, "I ought to have recognized you."

"You have seen my portrait, then?"

"No, sire."

"Or else you have seen me formerly at court, before I was driven from France?"

"No, sire, it is not even that."

"How then could you have recognized me, if you have never seen my portrait or my person?"

"Sire, I saw his majesty your father at a terrible moment."

"The day--"

"Yes."

A dark cloud passed over the brow of the prince; then, dashing his hand across it, "Do you see any difficulty in announcing me?" said he.

"Sire, pardon me," replied the officer, "but I could not imagine a king under so simple an exterior; and yet I had the honor to tell your majesty just now that I had seen Charles I. But pardon me, monsieur; I will go and inform the king."

But returning after going a few steps, "Your majesty is desirous, without doubt, that this interview should be a secret?" said he.

"I do not require it; but if it were possible to preserve it--"

"It is possible, sire, for I can dispense with informing the first gentleman on duty; but, for that, your majesty must please to consent to give up your sword."

"True, true; I had forgotten that no one armed is permitted to enter the chamber of a king of France."

"Your majesty will form an exception, if you wish it; but then I shall avoid my responsibility by informing the king's attendant."

"Here is my sword, monsieur. Will you now please to announce me to his majesty?"

"Instantly, sire." And the officer immediately went and knocked at the

door of communication, which the valet opened to him.

"His Majesty the King of England!" said the officer.

"His Majesty the King of England!" replied the valet de chambre.

At these words a gentleman opened the folding-doors of the king's apartment, and Louis XIV. was seen, without hat or sword, and his pourpoint open, advancing with signs of the greatest surprise.

"You, my brother--you at Blois!" cried Louis XIV., dismissing with a gesture both the gentlemen and the valet de chambre, who passed out into the next apartment.

"Sire," replied Charles II., "I was going to Paris, in the hope of seeing your majesty, when report informed me of your approaching arrival in this city. I therefore prolonged my abode here, having something very particular to communicate to you."

"Will this closet suit you, my brother?"

"Perfectly well, sire; for I think no one can hear us here."

"I have dismissed my gentleman and my watcher; they are in the next chamber. There, behind that partition, is a solitary closet, looking into the ante-chamber, and in that ante-chamber you found nobody but a solitary officer, did you?"

"No, sire."

"Well, then, speak, my brother; I listen to you."

"Sire, I commence, and entreat your majesty to have pity on the misfortunes of our house."

The king of France colored, and drew his chair closer to that of the king of England.

"Sire," said Charles II., "I have no need to ask if your majesty is acquainted with the details of my deplorable history."

Louis XIV. blushed, this time more strongly than before; then, stretching forth his hand to that of the king of England, "My brother," said he, "I am ashamed to say so, but the cardinal scarcely ever speaks of political affairs before me. Still more, formerly I used to get Laporte, my valet de chambre, to read historical subjects to me; but he put a stop to these readings, and took away Laporte from me. So that I beg my brother Charles to tell me all those matters as to a man who knows nothing."

"Well, sire, I think that by taking things from the beginning I shall have a better chance of touching the heart of your majesty."

"Speak on, my brother--speak on."

"You know, sire, that being called in 1650 to Edinburgh, during Cromwell's expedition into Ireland, I was crowned at Scone. A year after, wounded in one of the provinces he had usurped, Cromwell returned upon us. To meet him was my object; to leave Scotland was my wish."

"And yet," interrupted the young king, "Scotland is almost your native country, is it not, my brother?"

"Yes, but the Scots were cruel compatriots for me, sire; they had forced me to forsake the religion of my fathers; they had hung Lord Montrose, the most devoted of my servants, because he was not a Covenanter; and as the poor martyr, to whom they had offered a favor when dying, had asked that his body might be cut into as many pieces as there are cities in Scotland, in order that evidence of his fidelity might be met with everywhere, I could not leave one city, or go into another, without passing under some fragments of a body which had acted, fought, and breathed for me.

"By a bold, almost desperate march, I passed through Cromwell's army, and entered England. The Protector set out in pursuit of this strange flight, which had a crown for its object. If I had been able to reach London before him, without doubt the prize of the race would have been mine; but he overtook me at Worcester.

"The genius of England was no longer with us, but with him. On the 3rd of September, 1651, sire, the anniversary of the other battle of Dunbar, so fatal to the Scots, I was conquered. Two thousand men fell around me before I thought of retreating a step. At length I was obliged to fly.

"From that moment my history became a romance. Pursued with persistent inveteracy, I cut off my hair, I disguised myself as a woodman. One day spent amidst the branches of an oak gave to that tree the name of the royal oak, which it bears to this day. My adventures in the county of Stafford, whence I escaped with the daughter of my host on a pillion behind me, still fill the tales of the country firesides, and would furnish matter for ballads. I will some day write all this, sire, for the instruction of my brother kings.

"I will first tell how, on arriving at the residence of Mr. Norton, I met with a court chaplain, who was looking on at a party playing at skittles, and an old servant who named me, bursting into tears, and who was as near and as certainly killing me by his fidelity as another might have been by treachery. Then I will tell of my terrors--yes, sire, of

my terrors--when, at the house of Colonel Windham, a farrier who came to shoe our horses declared they had been shod in the north."

"How strange!" murmured Louis XIV. "I never heard anything of all that; I was only told of your embarkation at Brighelmstone and your landing in Normandy." [1]

"Oh!" exclaimed Charles, "if Heaven permits kings to be thus ignorant of the histories of each other, how can they render assistance to their brothers who need it?"

"But tell me," continued Louis XIV., "how, after being so roughly received in England, you can still hope for anything from that unhappy country and that rebellious people?"

"Oh, sire! since the battle of Worcester, everything is changed there. Cromwell is dead, after having signed a treaty with France, in which his name is placed above yours. He died on the 3rd of September, 1658, a fresh anniversary of the battles of Dunbar and Worcester."

"His son has succeeded him."

"But certain men have a family, sire, and no heir. The inheritance of Oliver was too heavy for Richard. Richard was neither a republican nor a royalist; Richard allowed his guards to eat his dinner, and his generals to govern the republic; Richard abdicated the protectorate on the 22nd of April, 1659, more than a year ago, sire.

"From that time England is nothing but a tennis-court, in which the players throw dice for the crown of my father. The two most eager players are Lambert and Monk. Well, sire, I, in my turn, wish to take part in this game, where the stakes are thrown upon my royal mantle. Sire, it only requires a million to corrupt one of these players and make an ally of him, or two hundred of your gentlemen to drive them out of my palace at Whitehall, as Christ drove the money-changers from the temple."

"You come, then," replied Louis XIV., "to ask me--"

"For your assistance; that is to say, not only for that which kings owe to each other, but that which simple Christians owe to each other--your assistance, sire, either in money or men. Your assistance, sire, and within a month, whether I oppose Lambert to Monk, or Monk to Lambert, I shall have reconquered my paternal inheritance, without having cost my country a guinea, or my subjects a drop of blood, for they are now all drunk with revolutions, protectorates, and republics, and ask nothing better than to fall staggering to sleep in the arms of royalty. Your assistance, sire, and I shall owe you more than I owe my father,--my poor father, who bought at so dear a rate the ruin of our house! You may



judge, sire, whether I am unhappy, whether I am in despair, for I accuse my own father!"

And the blood mounted to the pale face of Charles II., who remained for an instant with his head between his hands, and as if blinded by that blood which appeared to revolt against the filial blasphemy.

The young king was not less affected than his elder brother; he threw himself about in his fauteuil, and could not find a single word of reply.

Charles II., to whom ten years in age gave a superior strength to master his emotions, recovered his speech the first.

"Sire," said he, "your reply? I wait for it as a criminal waits for his sentence. Must I die?"

"My brother," replied the French prince, "you ask of me for a million--me, who was never possessed of a quarter of that sum! I possess nothing. I am no more king of France than you are king of England. I am a name, a cipher dressed in fleur-de-lised velvet,--that is all. I am upon a visible throne; that is my only advantage over your majesty. I have nothing--I can do nothing."

"Can it be so?" exclaimed Charles II.

"My brother," said Louis, sinking his voice, "I have undergone miseries with which my poorest gentlemen are unacquainted. If my poor Laporte were here, he would tell you that I have slept in ragged sheets, through the holes of which my legs have passed; he would tell you that afterwards, when I asked for carriages, they brought me conveyances half-destroyed by the rats of the coach-houses; he would tell you that when I asked for my dinner, the servants went to the cardinal's kitchen to inquire if there were any dinner for the king. And look! to-day, this very day even, when I am twenty-two years of age,--to-day, when I have attained the grade of the majority of kings,--to-day, when I ought to have the key of the treasury, the direction of the policy, the supremacy in peace and war,--cast your eyes around me, see how I am left! Look at this abandonment--this disdain--this silence!--Whilst yonder--look yonder! View the bustle, the lights, the homage! There!--there you see the real king of France, my brother!"

"In the cardinal's apartments?"

"Yes, in the cardinal's apartments."

"Then I am condemned, sire?"

Louis XIV. made no reply.

"Condemned is the word; for I will never solicit him who left my mother and sister to die with cold and hunger--the daughter and grand-daughter of Henry IV.--as surely they would have if M. de Retz and the parliament had not sent them wood and bread."

"To die?" murmured Louis XIV.

"Well!" continued the king of England, "poor Charles II., grandson of Henry IV., as you are, sire having neither parliament nor Cardinal de Retz to apply to, will die of hunger, as his mother and sister had nearly done."

Louis knitted his brow, and twisted violently the lace of his ruffles.

This prostration, this immobility, serving as a mark to an emotion so visible, struck Charles II., and he took the young man's hand.

"Thanks!" said he, "my brother. You pity me, and that is all I can require of you in your present situation."

"Sire," said Louis XIV., with a sudden impulse, and raising his head, "it is a million you require, or two hundred gentlemen, I think you say?"

"Sire, a million would be quite sufficient."

"That is very little."

"Offered to a single man it is a great deal. Convictions have been purchased at a much lower price; and I should have nothing to do but with venalities."

"Two hundred gentlemen! Reflect!--that is little more than a single company."

"Sire, there is in our family a tradition, and that is, that four men, four French gentlemen, devoted to my father, were near saving my father, though condemned by a parliament, guarded by an army and surrounded by a nation."

"Then if I can procure you a million, or two hundred gentlemen, you will be satisfied; and you will consider me your well-affectioned brother?"

"I shall consider you as my saviour; and if I recover the throne of my father, England will be, as long as I reign it, a sister to France, as you will have been a brother to me."

"Well, my brother," said Louis, rising, "what you hesitate to ask for, I will myself demand; that which I have never done on my own account, I will do on yours. I will go and find the king of France--the other--the rich, the powerful one, I mean. I will myself solicit this million, or these two hundred gentlemen; and--we will see."

"Oh!" cried Charles; "you are a noble friend, sire--a heart created by God! You save me, my brother; and if you should ever stand in need of the life you restored me, demand it."

"Silence, my brother,--silence!" said Louis, in a suppressed voice. "Take care that no one hears you! We have not obtained our end yet. To ask money of Mazarin--that is worse than traversing the enchanted forest, each tree of which inclosed a demon. It is more than setting out to conquer a world."

"But yet, sire, when you ask it--"

"I have already told you that I never asked," replied Louis with a haughtiness that made the king of England turn pale.

And the latter, like a wounded man, made a retreating movement--"Pardon me, my brother," replied he. "I have neither a mother nor a sister who are suffering. My throne is hard and naked, but I am firmly seated on my throne. Pardon me that expression, my brother; it was that of an egotist. I will retract it, therefore, by a sacrifice,--I will go to monsieur le cardinal. Wait for me, if you please--I will return."