

Chapter XXII. D'Artagnan travels for the House of Planchet and Company.

The hostelry of "Le Grand Monarque" was situated in a little street parallel to the port without looking out upon the port itself. Some lanes cut--as steps cut the two parallels of the ladder--the two great straight lines of the port and the street. By these lanes passengers came suddenly from the port into the street, or from the street on to the port. D'Artagnan, arrived at the port, took one of these lanes, and came out in front of the hostelry of "Le Grand Monarque." The moment was well chosen and might remind D'Artagnan of his start in life at the hostelry of the "Franc-Meunier" at Meung. Some sailors who had been playing at dice had started a quarrel, and were threatening each other furiously. The host, hostess, and two lads were watching with anxiety the circle of these angry gamblers, from the midst of which war seemed ready to break forth, bristling with knives and hatchets. The play, nevertheless, was continued. A stone bench was occupied by two men, who appeared thence to watch the door; four tables, placed at the back of the common chamber, were occupied by eight other individuals. Neither the men at the door, nor those at the tables took any part in the play or the quarrel. D'Artagnan recognized his ten men in these cold, indifferent spectators. The quarrel went on increasing. Every passion has, like the sea, its tide which ascends and descends. Reaching the climax of passion, one sailor overturned the table and the money which was upon it. The table fell, and the money rolled about. In an instant all belonging to the hostelry threw themselves upon the stakes, and many a piece of silver was picked up by people who stole away whilst the sailors were scuffling with each other.

The two men on the bench and the eight at the tables, although they seemed perfect strangers to each other, these ten men alone, we say, appeared to have agreed to remain impassible amidst the cries of fury and the chinking of money. Two only contented themselves with pushing with their feet combatants who came under their table. Two others, rather than take part in this disturbance, buried their hands in their pockets; and another two jumped upon the table they occupied, as people do to avoid being submerged by overflowing water.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan to himself, not having lost one of the details we have related, "this is a very fair gathering--circumspect, calm, accustomed to disturbance, acquainted with blows! Peste! I have been lucky."

All at once his attention was called to a particular part of the room. The two men who had pushed the strugglers with their feet, were assailed with abuse by the sailors, who had become reconciled. One of them, half drunk with passion, and quite drunk with beer, came, in a menacing manner, to demand of the shorter of these two sages by what right he had

touched with his foot creatures of the good God, who were not dogs. And whilst putting this question, in order to make it more direct, he applied his great fist to the nose of D'Artagnan's recruit.

This man became pale, without its being to be discerned whether his pallor arose from anger or fear; seeing which, the sailor concluded it was from fear, and raised his fist with the manifest intention of letting it fall upon the head of the stranger. But though the threatened man did not appear to move, he dealt the sailor such a severe blow in the stomach that he sent him rolling and howling to the other side of the room. At the same instant, rallied by the esprit de corps, all the comrades of the conquered man fell upon the conqueror.

The latter, with the same coolness of which he had given proof, without committing the imprudence of touching his weapons, took up a beer-pot with a pewter-lid, and knocked down two or three of his assailants; then, as he was about to yield to numbers, the seven other silent men at the tables, who had not yet stirred, perceived that their cause was at stake, and came to the rescue. At the same time, the two indifferent spectators at the door turned round with frowning brows, indicating their evident intention of taking the enemy in the rear, if the enemy did not cease their aggressions.

The host, his helpers, and two watchmen who were passing, and who from the curiosity had penetrated too far into the room, were mixed up in the tumult and showered with blows. The Parisians hit like Cyclops, with an ensemble and a tactic delightful to behold. At length, obliged to beat a retreat before superior numbers, they formed an intrenchment behind the large table, which they raised by main force; whilst the two others, arming themselves each with a trestle, and using it like a great sledge-hammer, knocked down at a blow eight sailors upon whose heads they had brought their monstrous catapult in play. The floor was already strewn with wounded, and the room filled with cries and dust, when D'Artagnan, satisfied with the test, advanced, sword in hand, and striking with the pommel every head that came in his way, he uttered a vigorous hola! which put an instantaneous end to the conflict. A great back-flood directly took place from the center to the sides of the room, so that D'Artagnan found himself isolated and dominator.

"What is this all about?" then demanded he of the assembly, with the majestic tone of Neptune pronouncing the Quos ego.

At the very instant, at the first sound of his voice, to carry on the Virgilian metaphor, D'Artagnan's recruits, recognizing each his sovereign lord, discontinued their plank-fighting and trestle blows. On their side, the sailors, seeing that long naked sword, that martial air, and the agile arm which came to the rescue of their enemies, in the person of a man who seemed accustomed to command, the sailors picked up

their wounded and their pitchers. The Parisians wiped their brows, and viewed their leader with respect. D'Artagnan was loaded with thanks by the host of "Le Grand Monarque." He received them like a man who knows that nothing is being offered that does not belong to him, and then said he would go and walk upon the port till supper was ready. Immediately each of the recruits, who understood the summons, took his hat, brushed the dust off his clothes, and followed D'Artagnan. But D'Artagnan, whilst walking and observing, took care not to stop; he directed his course towards the downs, and the ten men--surprised at finding themselves going in the track of each other, uneasy at seeing on their right, on their left, and behind them, companions upon whom they had not reckoned--followed him, casting furtive glances at each other. It was not till he had arrived at the hollow part of the deepest down that D'Artagnan, smiling to see them outdone, turned towards them, making a friendly sign with his hand.

"Eh! come, come, gentlemen," said he, "let us not devour each other; you are made to live together, to understand each other in all respects, and not to devour one another."

Instantly all hesitation ceased; the men breathed as if they had been taken out of a coffin, and examined each other complacently. After this examination they turned their eyes towards their leader, who had long been acquainted with the art of speaking to men of that class, and who improvised the following little speech, pronounced with an energy truly Gascon:

"Gentlemen, you all know who I am. I have engaged you from knowing you to be brave, and willing to associate you with me in a glorious enterprise. Imagine that in laboring for me you labor for the king. I only warn you that if you allow anything of this supposition to appear, I shall be forced to crack your skulls immediately, in the manner most convenient to me. You are not ignorant, gentlemen, that state secrets are like a mortal poison: as long as that poison is in its box and the box is closed, it is not injurious; out of the box, it kills. Now draw near, and you shall know as much of this secret as I am able to tell you." All drew close to him with an expression of curiosity. "Approach," continued D'Artagnan, "and let not the bird which passes over our heads, the rabbit which sports on the downs, the fish which bounds from the waters, hear us. Our business is to learn and to report to monsieur le surintendant of the finances to what extent English smuggling is injurious to the French merchants. I shall enter every place, and see everything. We are poor Picard fishermen, thrown upon the coast by a storm. It is certain that we must sell fish, neither more nor less, like true fishermen. Only people might guess who we are, and might molest us; it is therefore necessary that we should be in a condition to defend ourselves. And this is why I have selected men of spirit and courage. We shall lead a steady life, and not incur much danger, seeing that we have behind us a powerful protector, thanks to whom no embarrassment

is possible. One thing alone puzzles me; but I hope that after a short explanation, you will relieve me from that difficulty. The thing which puzzles me is taking with me a crew of stupid fishermen, which crew will annoy me immensely, whilst if, by chance, there were among you any who have seen the sea--"

"Oh! don't let that trouble you," said one of the recruits; "I was a prisoner among the pirates of Tunis three years, and can maneuver a boat like an admiral."

"See," said D'Artagnan, "what an admirable thing chance is!" D'Artagnan pronounced these words with an indefinable tone of feigned bonhomie, for he knew very well that the victim of the pirates was an old corsair, and had engaged him in consequence of that knowledge. But D'Artagnan never said more than there was need to say, in order to leave people in doubt. He paid himself with the explanation, and welcomed the effect, without appearing to be preoccupied with the cause.

"And I," said a second, "I, by chance, had an uncle who directed the works of the port of La Rochelle. When quite a child, I played about the boats, and I know how to handle an oar or a sail as well as the best Ponantais sailor." The latter did not lie much more than the first, for he had rowed on board his majesty's galleys six years, at Ciotat. Two others were more frank: they confessed honestly that they had served on board a vessel as soldiers as punishment, and did not blush for it. D'Artagnan found himself, then, the leader of ten men of war and four sailors, having at once an land army and a sea force, which would have carried the pride of Planchet to its height, if Planchet had known the details.

Nothing was now left but arranging the general orders, and D'Artagnan gave them with precision. He enjoined his men to be ready to set out for the Hague, some following the coast which leads to Breskens, others the road to Antwerp. The rendezvous was given, by calculating each day's march, a fortnight from that time, upon the chief place at the Hague. D'Artagnan recommended his men to go in couples, as they liked best, from sympathy. He himself selected from among those with the least disreputable look, two guards whom he had formerly known, and whose only faults were being drunkards and gamblers. These men had not entirely lost all ideas of civilization, and under proper garments their hearts would beat again. D'Artagnan, not to create any jealousy with the others, made the rest go forward. He kept his two selected ones, clothed them from his own wardrobe, and set out with them.

It was to these two, whom he seemed to honor with an absolute confidence, that D'Artagnan imparted a false secret, destined to secure the success of the expedition. He confessed to them that the object was not to learn to what extent French merchants were injured by English

smuggling, but to learn how far French smuggling could annoy English trade. These men appeared convinced; they were effectively so. D'Artagnan was quite sure that at the first debauch, when thoroughly drunk, one of the two would divulge the secret to the whole band. His game appeared infallible.

A fortnight after all we have said had taken place at Calais, the whole troop assembled at the Hague.

Then D'Artagnan perceived that all his men, with remarkable intelligence, had already travestied themselves into sailors, more or less ill-treated by the sea. D'Artagnan left them to sleep in a den in Newkerke street, whilst he lodged comfortably upon the Grand Canal. He learned that the king of England had come back to his old ally, William II. of Nassau, stadtholder of Holland. He learned also that the refusal of Louis XIV. had a little cooled the protection afforded him up to that time, and in consequence he had gone to reside in a little village house at Scheveningen, situated in the downs, on the sea-shore, about a league from the Hague.

There, it was said, the unfortunate banished king consoled himself in his exile, by looking, with the melancholy peculiar to the princes of his race, at that immense North Sea, which separated him from his England, as it had formerly separated Mary Stuart from France. There, behind the trees of the beautiful wood of Scheveningen, on the fine sand upon which grows the golden broom of the down, Charles II. vegetated as it did, more unfortunate, for he had life and thought, and he hoped and despaired by turns.

D'Artagnan went once as far as Scheveningen, in order to be certain that all was true that was said of the king. He beheld Charles II., pensive and alone, coming out of a little door opening into the wood, and walking on the beach in the setting sun, without even attracting the attention of the fishermen, who, on their return in the evening, drew, like the ancient mariners of the Archipelago, their barks up upon the sand of the shore.

D'Artagnan recognized the king; he saw him fix his melancholy look upon the immense extent of the waters, and absorb upon his pale countenance the red rays of the sun already cut by the black line of the horizon. Then Charles returned to his isolated abode, always alone, slow and sad, amusing himself with making the friable and moving sand creak beneath his feet.

That very evening D'Artagnan hired for a thousand livres a fishing-boat worth four thousand. He paid a thousand livres down, and deposited the three thousand with a Burgomaster, after which he brought on board, without their being seen, the six men who formed his land army; and with the rising tide, at three o'clock in the morning, he got into the open

sea, maneuvering ostensibly with the four others, and depending upon the science of his galley slave as upon that of the first pilot of the port.

Chapter XXIII. In which the Author, very unwillingly, is forced to write a Little History.

While kings and men were thus occupied with England, which governed itself quite alone, and which, it must be said in its praise, had never been so badly governed, a man upon whom God had fixed his eye, and placed his finger, a man predestined to write his name in brilliant letters upon the page of history, was pursuing in the face of the world a work full of mystery and audacity. He went on, and no one knew whither he meant to go, although not only England, but France, and Europe, watched him marching with a firm step and head held high. All that was known of this man we are about to tell.

Monk had just declared himself in favor of the liberty of the Rump Parliament, a parliament which General Lambert, imitating Cromwell, whose lieutenant he had been, had just blocked up so closely, in order to bring it to his will, that no member, during all the blockade, was able to go out, and only one, Peter Wentworth, had been able to get in.

Lambert and Monk--everything was summed up in these two men; the first representing military despotism, the second pure republicanism. These men were the two sole political representatives of that revolution in which Charles I. had first lost his crown, and afterwards his head. As regarded Lambert, he did not dissemble his views; he sought to establish a military government, and to be himself the head of that government.

Monk, a rigid republican, some said, wished to maintain the Rump Parliament, that visible though degenerated representative of the republic. Monk, artful and ambitious, said others, wished simply to make of this parliament, which he affected to protect, a solid step by which to mount the throne which Cromwell had left empty, but upon which he had never dared to take his seat.

Thus Lambert by persecuting the parliament, and Monk by declaring for it, had mutually proclaimed themselves enemies of each other. Monk and Lambert, therefore, had at first thought of creating an army each for himself: Monk in Scotland, where were the Presbyterians and the royalists, that is to say, the malcontents; Lambert in London, where was found, as is always the case, the strongest opposition to the existing power which it had beneath its eyes.

Monk had pacified Scotland, he had there formed for himself an army, and found an asylum. The one watched the other. Monk knew that the day was not yet come, the day marked by the Lord for a great change; his sword,