

Chapter XXIX. In which D'Artagnan begins to fear he has placed his Money and that of Planchet in the Sinking Fund.

The king could not overcome his surprise, and looked sometimes at the smiling face of the musketeer, and sometimes at the dark window which opened into the night. But before he had fixed his ideas, eight of D'Artagnan's men, for two had remained to take care of the bark, brought to the house, where Parry received him, that object of an oblong form, which, for the moment, inclosed the destinies of England. Before he left Calais, D'Artagnan had had made in that city a sort of coffin, large and deep enough for a man to turn in it at his ease. The bottom and sides, properly upholstered, formed a bed sufficiently soft to prevent the rolling of the ship turning this kind of cage into a rat-trap. The little grating, of which D'Artagnan had spoken to the king, like the visor of the helmet, was placed opposite to the man's face. It was so constructed that, at the least cry, a sudden pressure would stifle that cry, and, if necessary, him who had uttered that cry.

D'Artagnan was so well acquainted with his crew and his prisoner, that during the whole voyage he had been in dread of two things: either that the general would prefer death to this sort of imprisonment, and would smother himself by endeavoring to speak, or that his guards would allow themselves to be tempted by the offers of the prisoner, and put him, D'Artagnan, into the box instead of Monk.

D'Artagnan, therefore, had passed the two days and the two nights of the voyage close to the coffin, alone with the general, offering him wine and food, which the latter had refused, and constantly endeavoring to reassure him upon the destiny which awaited him at the end of this singular captivity. Two pistols on the table and his naked sword made D'Artagnan easy with regard to indiscretions from without.

When once at Scheveningen he had felt completely reassured. His men greatly dreaded any conflict with the lords of the soil. He had, besides, interested in his cause him who had morally served him as lieutenant, and whom we have seen reply to the name of Menneville. The latter, not being a vulgar spirit, had more to risk than the others, because he had more conscience. He believed in a future in the service of D'Artagnan, and consequently would have allowed himself to be cut to pieces, rather than violate the order given by his leader. Thus it was that, once landed, it was to him that D'Artagnan had confided the care of the chest and the general's breathing. It was he, too, he had ordered to have the chest brought by the seven men as soon as he should hear the triple whistle. We have seen that the lieutenant obeyed. The coffer once in the house, D'Artagnan dismissed his men with a gracious smile, saying, "Messieurs, you have rendered a great service to King Charles II., who in less than six weeks will be king of England. Your

gratification will then be doubled. Return to the boat and wait for me." Upon which they departed with such shouts of joy as terrified even the dog himself.

D'Artagnan had caused the coffer to be brought as far as the king's ante-chamber. He then, with great care, closed the door of this ante-chamber, after which he opened the coffer, and said to the general:

"General, I have a thousand excuses to make to you; my manner of acting has not been worthy of such a man as you, I know very well; but I wished you to take me for the captain of a bark. And then England is a very inconvenient country for transports. I hope, therefore, you will take all that into consideration. But now, general, you are at liberty to get up and walk." This said, he cut the bonds which fastened the arms and hands of the general. The latter got up, and then sat down with the countenance of a man who expects death. D'Artagnan opened the door of Charles's study, and said, "Sire, here is your enemy, M. Monk; I promised myself to perform this service for your majesty. It is done; now order as you please. M. Monk," added he, turning towards the prisoner, "you are in the presence of his majesty Charles II., sovereign lord of Great Britain."

Monk raised towards the prince his coldly stoical look, and replied: "I know no king of Great Britain; I recognize even here no one worthy of bearing the name of gentleman: for it is in the name of King Charles II. that an emissary, whom I took for an honest man, came and laid an infamous snare for me. I have fallen into that snare; so much the worse for me. Now, you the tempter," said he to the king; "you the executor," said he to D'Artagnan; "remember what I am about to say to you: you have my body, you may kill it, and I advise you to do so, for you shall never have my mind or my will. And now, ask me not a single word, as from this moment I will not open my mouth even to cry out. I have said."

And he pronounced these words with the savage, invincible resolution of the most mortified Puritan. D'Artagnan looked at his prisoner like a man who knows the value of every word, and who fixes that value according to the accent with which it has been pronounced.

"The fact is," said he, in a whisper to the king, "the general is an obstinate man; he would not take a mouthful of bread, nor swallow a drop of wine, during the two days of our voyage. But as from this moment it is your majesty who must decide his fate, I wash my hands of him."

Monk, erect, pale, and resigned, waited with his eyes fixed and his arms folded. D'Artagnan turned towards him. "You will please to understand perfectly," said he, "that your speech, otherwise very fine, does not suit anybody, not even yourself. His majesty wished to speak to you, you refused an interview; why, now that you are face to face, that you are here by a force independent of your will, why do you confine yourself to

the rigors which I consider useless and absurd? Speak! what the devil! speak, if only to say 'No.'"

Monk did not uncloset his lips; Monk did not turn his eyes; Monk stroked his mustache with a thoughtful air, which announced that matters were going on badly.

During all this time Charles II. had fallen into a profound reverie. For the first time he found himself face to face with Monk; with the man he had so much desired to see; and, with that peculiar glance which God has given to eagles and kings, he had fathomed the abyss of his heart. He beheld Monk, then, resolved positively to die rather than speak, which was not to be wondered at in so considerable a man, the wound in whose mind must at the moment have been cruel. Charles II. formed, on the instant, one of those resolutions upon which an ordinary man risks his life, a general his fortune, and a king his kingdom. "Monsieur," said he to Monk, "you are perfectly right upon certain points; I do not, therefore, ask you to answer me, but to listen to me."

There was a moment's silence, during which the king looked at Monk, who remained impassible.

"You have made me just now a painful reproach, monsieur," continued the king; "you said that one of my emissaries had been to Newcastle to lay a snare for you, and that, parenthetically, cannot be understood by M. d'Artagnan here, and to whom, before everything, I owe sincere thanks for his generous, his heroic devotion."

D'Artagnan bowed with respect; Monk took no notice.

"For M. d'Artagnan--and observe, M. Monk, I do not say this to excuse myself--for M. d'Artagnan," continued the king, "went to England of his free will, without interest, without orders, without hope, like a true gentleman as he is, to render a service to an unfortunate king, and to add to the illustrious actions of an existence, already so well filled, one glorious deed more."

D'Artagnan colored a little, and coughed to keep his countenance. Monk did not stir.

"You do not believe what I tell you, M. Monk," continued the king. "I can understand that,--such proofs of devotion are so rare, that their reality may well be put in doubt."

"Monsieur would do wrong not to believe you, sire," cried D'Artagnan: "for that which your majesty has said is the exact truth, and the truth so exact that it seems, in going to fetch the general, I have done something which sets everything wrong. In truth, if it be so, I am in despair."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, pressing the hand of the musketeer, "you have obliged me as much as if you had promoted the success of my cause, for you have revealed to me an unknown friend, to whom I shall ever be grateful, and whom I shall always love." And the king pressed his hand cordially. "And," continued he, bowing to Monk, "an enemy whom I shall henceforth esteem at his proper value."

The eyes of the Puritan flashed, but only once, and his countenance, for an instant, illuminated by that flash, resumed its somber impassibility.

"Then, Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued Charles, "this is what was about to happen: M. le Comte de la Fere, who you know, I believe, has set out for Newcastle."

"What, Athos!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that was his nom de guerre, I believe. The Comte de la Fere had then set out for Newcastle, and was going, perhaps, to bring the general to hold a conference with me or with those of my party, when you violently, as it appears, interfered with the negotiation."

"Mordioux!" replied D'Artagnan, "he entered the camp the very evening in which I succeeded in getting into it with my fishermen--"

An almost imperceptible frown on the brow of Monk told D'Artagnan that he had surmised rightly.

"Yes, yes," muttered he; "I thought I knew his person; I even fancied I knew his voice. Unlucky wretch that I am! Oh! sire, pardon me! I thought I had so successfully steered my bark."

"There is nothing ill in it, sir," said the king, "except that the general accuses me of having laid a snare for him, which is not the case. No, general, those are not the arms which I contemplated employing with you, as you will soon see. In the meanwhile, when I give you my word upon the honor of a gentleman, believe me, sir, believe me! Now, Monsieur d'Artagnan, a word with you, if you please."

"I listen on my knees, sire."

"You are truly at my service, are you not?"

"Your majesty has seen that I am, too much so."

"That is well; from a man like you one word suffices. In addition to that word you bring actions. General, have the goodness to follow me. Come with us, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, considerably surprised, prepared to obey. Charles II. went out, Monk followed him, D'Artagnan followed Monk. Charles took the path by which D'Artagnan had come to his abode; the fresh sea breezes soon caressed the faces of the three nocturnal travelers, and, at fifty paces from the little gate which Charles opened, they found themselves upon the down in the face of the ocean, which, having ceased to rise, reposed upon the shore like a wearied monster. Charles II. walked pensively along, his head hanging down and his hand beneath his cloak. Monk followed him, with crossed arms and an uneasy look. D'Artagnan came last, with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Where is the boat in which you came, gentlemen?" said Charles to the musketeer.

"Yonder, sire; I have seven men and an officer waiting me in that little bark which is lighted by a fire."

"Yes, I see; the boat is drawn upon the sand; but you certainly did not come from Newcastle in that frail bark?"

"No, sire; I freighted a felucca, at my own expense, which is at anchor within cannon-shot of the downs. It was in that felucca we made the voyage."

"Sir," said the king to Monk, "you are free."

However firm his will, Monk could not suppress an exclamation. The king added an affirmative motion of his head, and continued: "We shall waken a fisherman of the village, who will put his boat to sea immediately, and will take you back to any place you may command him. M. d'Artagnan here will escort your honor. I place M. d'Artagnan under the safeguard of your loyalty, M. Monk."

Monk allowed a murmur of surprise to escape him, and D'Artagnan a profound sigh. The king, without appearing to notice either, knocked against the deal trellis which inclosed the cabin of the principal fisherman inhabiting the down.

"Hey! Keyser!" cried he, "awake!"

"Who calls me?" asked the fisherman.

"I, Charles the king."

"Ah, my lord!" cried Keyser, rising ready dressed from the sail in which he slept, as people sleep in a hammock. "What can I do to serve you?"

"Captain Keyser," said Charles, "you must set sail immediately. Here is a traveler who wishes to freight your bark, and will pay you well; serve

him well." And the king drew back a few steps to allow Monk to speak to the fisherman.

"I wish to cross over into England," said Monk, who spoke Dutch enough to make himself understood.

"This minute," said the patron, "this very minute, if you wish it."

"But will that be long?" said Monk.

"Not half an hour, your honor. My eldest son is at this moment preparing the boat, as we were going out fishing at three o'clock in the morning."

"Well, is all arranged?" asked the king, drawing near.

"All but the price," said the fisherman; "yes, sire."

"That is my affair," said Charles, "the gentleman is my friend."

Monk started and looked at Charles on hearing this word.

"Very well, my lord," replied Keyser. And at that moment they heard Keyser's son, signaling from the shore with the blast of a bull's horn.

"Now, gentlemen," said the king, "depart."

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "will it please your majesty to grant me a few minutes? I have engaged men, and I am going without them; I must give them notice."

"Whistle to them," said Charles, smiling.

D'Artagnan, accordingly, whistled, whilst the patron Keyser replied to his son; and four men, led by Menneville, attended the first summons.

"Here is some money in account," said D'Artagnan, putting into their hands a purse containing two thousand five hundred livres in gold. "Go and wait for me at Calais, you know where." And D'Artagnan heaved a profound sigh, as he let the purse fall into the hands of Menneville.

"What, are you leaving us?" cried the men.

"For a short time," said D'Artagnan, "or for a long time, who knows? But with 2,500 livres, and the 2,500 you have already received, you are paid according to our agreement. We are quits, then, my friend."

"But the boat?"

"Do not trouble yourself about that."

"Our things are on board the felucca."

"Go and seek them, and then set off immediately."

"Yes, captain."

D'Artagnan returned to Monk, saying,--"Monsieur, I await your orders, for I understand we are to go together, unless my company be disagreeable to you."

"On the contrary, monsieur," said Monk.

"Come, gentlemen, on board," cried Keyser's son.

Charles bowed to the general with grace and dignity, saying,--"You will pardon me this unfortunate accident, and the violence to which you have been subjected, when you are convinced that I was not the cause of them."

Monk bowed profoundly without replying. On his side, Charles affected not to say a word to D'Artagnan in private, but aloud,--"Once more, thanks, monsieur le chevalier," said he, "thanks for your services. They will be repaid you by the Lord God, who, I hope, reserves trials and troubles for me alone."

Monk followed Keyser and his son embarked with them. D'Artagnan came after, muttering to himself,--"Poor Planchet! poor Planchet! I am very much afraid we have made a bad speculation."