

Chapter XXXI. Monk reveals Himself.

D'Artagnan, although he flattered himself with better success, had, nevertheless, not too well comprehended his situation. It was a strange and grave subject for him to reflect upon--this voyage of Athos into England; this league of the king with Athos, and that extraordinary combination of his design with that of the Comte de la Fere. The best way was to let things follow their own train. An imprudence had been committed, and, whilst having succeeded, as he had promised, D'Artagnan found that he had gained no advantage by his success. Since everything was lost, he could risk no more.

D'Artagnan followed Monk through his camp. The return of the general had produced a marvelous effect, for his people had thought him lost. But Monk, with his austere look and icy demeanor, appeared to ask of his eager lieutenants and delighted soldiers the cause of all this joy. Therefore, to the lieutenants who had come to meet him, and who expressed the uneasiness with which they had learnt his departure,--

"Why is all this?" said he; "am I obliged to give you an account of myself?"

"But your honor, the sheep may well tremble without the shepherd."

"Tremble!" replied Monk, in his calm and powerful voice; "ah, monsieur, what a word! Curse me, if my sheep have not both teeth and claws; I renounce being their shepherd. Ah, you tremble, gentlemen, do you?"

"Yes, general, for you."

"Oh! pray meddle with your own concerns. If I have not the wit God gave to Oliver Cromwell, I have that which He has sent to me: I am satisfied with it, however little it may be."

The officer made no reply; and Monk, having imposed silence on his people, all remained persuaded that he had accomplished some important work or made some important trial. This was forming a very poor conception of his patience and scrupulous genius. Monk, if he had the good faith of the Puritans, his allies, must have returned fervent thanks to the patron saint who had taken him from the box of M. d'Artagnan. Whilst these things were going on, our musketeer could not help constantly repeating,--

"God grant that M. Monk may not have as much pride as I have; for I declare that if any one had put me into a coffer with that grating over my mouth, and carried me packed up, like a calf, across the seas, I should cherish such a memory of my piteous looks in that coffer, and

such an ugly animosity against him who had inclosed me in it, I should dread so greatly to see a sarcastic smile blooming upon the face of the malicious wretch, or in his attitude any grotesque imitation of my position in the box, that, Mordieux! I should plunge a good dagger into his throat in compensation for the grating, and would nail him down in a veritable bier, in remembrance of the false coffin in which I had been left in to grow moldy for two days."

And D'Artagnan spoke honestly when he spoke thus; for the skin of our Gascon was a very thin one. Monk, fortunately, entertained other ideas. He never opened his mouth to his timid conqueror concerning the past; but he admitted him very near to his person in his labors, took him with him to several reconnoiterings, in such a way as to obtain that which he evidently warmly desired,--a rehabilitation in the mind of D'Artagnan. The latter conducted himself like a past-master in the art of flattery: he admired all Monk's tactics, and the ordering of his camp; he joked very pleasantly upon the circumvallations of Lambert's camp, who had, he said, very uselessly given himself the trouble to inclose a camp for twenty thousand men, whilst an acre of ground would have been quite sufficient for the corporal and fifty guards who would perhaps remain faithful to him.

Monk, immediately after his arrival, had accepted the proposition made by Lambert the evening before, for an interview, and which Monk's lieutenants had refused under the pretext that the general was indisposed. This interview was neither long nor interesting: Lambert demanded a profession of faith from his rival. The latter declared he had no other opinion than that of the majority. Lambert asked if it would not be more expedient to terminate the quarrel by an alliance than by a battle. Monk hereupon demanded a week for consideration. Now, Lambert could not refuse this: and Lambert, nevertheless, had come saying that he should devour Monk's army. Therefore, at the end of the interview, which Lambert's party watched with impatience, nothing was decided--neither treaty nor battle--the rebel army, as M. d'Artagnan had foreseen, began to prefer the good cause to the bad one, and the parliament, rumpish as it was, to the pompous nothings of Lambert's designs.

They remembered, likewise, the good feasts of London--the profusion of ale and sherry with which the citizens of London paid their friends the soldiers;--they looked with terror at the black war bread, at the troubled waters of the Tweed,--too salt for the glass, not enough so for the pot; and they said to themselves, "Are not the roast meats kept warm for Monk in London?" From that time nothing was heard of but desertion in Lambert's army. The soldiers allowed themselves to be drawn away by the force of principles, which are, like discipline, the obligatory tie in everybody constituted for any purpose. Monk defended the parliament--Lambert attacked it. Monk had no more inclination to support parliament than Lambert, but he had it inscribed on his standards, so

that all those of the contrary party were reduced to write upon theirs, "Rebellion," which sounded ill to puritan ears. They flocked, then, from Lambert to Monk, as sinners flock from Baal to God.

Monk made his calculations; at a thousand desertions a day Lambert had men enough to last twenty days; but there is in sinking things such a growth of weight and swiftness, which combine with each other, that a hundred left the first day, five hundred the second, a thousand the third. Monk thought he had obtained his rate. But from one thousand the deserters increased to two thousand, then to four thousand, and, a week after, Lambert, perceiving that he had no longer the possibility of accepting battle, if it were offered to him, took the wise resolution of decamping during the night, returning to London, and being beforehand with Monk in constructing a power with the wreck of the military party.

But Monk, free and without uneasiness, marched towards London as a conqueror, augmenting his army with all the floating parties on the way. He encamped at Barnet, that is to say, within four leagues of the capital, cherished by the parliament, which thought it beheld in him a protector, and awaited by the people, who were anxious to see him reveal himself, that they might judge him. D'Artagnan himself had not been able to fathom his tactics; he observed--he admired. Monk could not enter London with a settled determination without bringing about civil war. He temporized for a short time.

Suddenly, when least expected, Monk drove the military party out of London, and installed himself in the city amidst the citizens, by order of the parliament; then, at the moment when the citizens were crying out against Monk--at the moment when the soldiers themselves were accusing their leader--Monk, finding himself certain of a majority, declared to the Rump Parliament that it must abdicate--be dissolved--and yield its place to a government which would not be a joke. Monk pronounced this declaration, supported by fifty thousand swords, to which, that same evening, were united, with shouts of delirious joy, the five thousand inhabitants of the good city of London. At length, at the moment when the people, after their triumphs and festive repasts in the open streets, were looking about for a master, it was affirmed that a vessel had left the Hague, bearing King Charles II. and his fortunes.

"Gentlemen," said Monk to his officers, "I am going to meet the legitimate king. He who loves me will follow me." A burst of acclamations welcomed these words, which D'Artagnan did not hear without the greatest delight.

"Mordioux!" said he to Monk, "that is bold, monsieur."

"You will accompany me, will you not?" said Monk.

"Pardieu! general. But tell me, I beg, what you wrote by Athos, that

is to say, the Comte de la Fere--you know--the day of our arrival?"

"I have no secrets from you now," replied Monk. "I wrote these words: 'Sire, I expect your majesty in six weeks at Dover.'"

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I no longer say it is bold; I say it is well played; it is a fine stroke!"

"You are something of a judge in such matters," replied Monk.

And this was the only time the general had ever made an allusion to his voyage to Holland.