

Chapter XXXII. Athos and D'Artagnan meet once more at the Hostelry of the Corne du Cerf.

The king of England made his entree into Dover with great pomp, as he afterwards did in London. He had sent for his brothers; he had brought over his mother and sister. England had been for so long a time given up to herself--that is to say, to tyranny, mediocrity and nonsense--that this return of Charles II., whom the English only knew as the son of the man whose head they had cut off, was a festival for three kingdoms. Consequently, all the good wishes, all the acclamations which accompanied his return, struck the young king so forcibly that he stooped and whispered in the ear of James of York, his younger brother, "In truth, James, it seems to have been our own fault that we were so long absent from a country where we are so much beloved!" The pageant was magnificent. Beautiful weather favored the solemnity. Charles had regained all his youth, all his good humor; he appeared to be transfigured; hearts seemed to smile on him like the sun. Amongst this noisy crowd of courtiers and worshipers, who did not appear to remember they had conducted to the scaffold at Whitehall the father of the new king, a man, in the garb of a lieutenant of musketeers, looked, with a smile upon his thin, intellectual lips, sometimes at the people vociferating their blessings, and sometimes at the prince, who pretended emotion, and who bowed most particularly to the women, whose bouquets fell beneath his horse's feet.

"What a fine trade is that of king!" said this man, so completely absorbed in contemplation that he stopped in the middle of the road, leaving the cortege to file past. "Now, there is, in good truth, a prince all bespangled over with gold and diamonds, enamelled with flowers like a spring meadow; he is about to plunge his empty hands into the immense coffer in which his now faithful--but so lately unfaithful--subjects have amassed one or two cartloads of ingots of gold. They cast bouquets enough upon him to smother him; and yet, if he had presented himself to them two months ago, they would have sent as many bullets and balls at him as they now throw flowers. Decidedly it is worth something to be born in a certain sphere, with due respect to the lowly, who pretend that it is of very little advantage to them to be born lowly." The cortege continued to file on, and, with the king, the acclamations began to die away in the direction of the palace, which, however, did not prevent our officer from being pushed about.

"Mordioux!" continued the reasoner, "these people tread upon my toes and look upon me as of very little consequence, or rather of none at all, seeing that they are Englishmen and I am a Frenchman. If all these people were asked,--'Who is M. d'Artagnan?' they would reply, 'Nescio vos.' But let any one say to them, 'There is the king going by,' 'There is M. Monk going by,' they would run away, shouting,--'Vive le roi!'

"Vive M. Monk!" till their lungs were exhausted. And yet," continued he, surveying, with that look sometimes so keen and sometimes so proud, the diminishing crowd,--"and yet, reflect a little, my good people, on what your king has done, on what M. Monk has done, and then think what has been done by this poor unknown, who is called M. d'Artagnan! It is true you do not know him, since he is here unknown, and that prevents your thinking about the matter! But, bah! what matters it! All that does not prevent Charles II. from being a great king, although he has been exiled twelve years, or M. Monk from being a great captain, although he did make a voyage to Holland in a box. Well, then, since it is admitted that one is a great king and the other a great captain,--'Hurrah for King Charles II.--Hurrah for General Monk!'" And his voice mingled with the voices of the hundreds of spectators, over which it sounded for a moment. Then, the better to play the devoted man, he took off his hat and waved it in the air. Some one seized his arm in the very height of his expansive loyalism. (In 1660 that was so termed which we now call royalism.)

"Athos!" cried D'Artagnan, "you here!" And the two friends seized each other's hands.

"You here!--and being here," continued the musketeer, "you are not in the midst of all these courtiers, my dear comte! What! you, the hero of the fete, you are not prancing on the left hand of the king, as M. Monk is prancing on the right? In truth, I cannot comprehend your character, nor that of the prince who owes you so much!"

"Always scornful, my dear D'Artagnan!" said Athos. "Will you never correct yourself of that vile habit?"

"But you do not form part of the pageant?"

"I do not, because I was not willing to do so."

"And why were you not willing?"

"Because I am neither envoy nor ambassador, nor representative of the king of France; and it does not become me to exhibit myself thus near the person of another king than the one God has given me for a master."

"Mordioux! you came very near to the person of the king, his father."

"That was another thing, my friend; he was about to die."

"And yet that which you did for him--"

"I did it because it was my duty to do it. But you know I hate all ostentation. Let King Charles II., then, who no longer stands in need of me, leave me to my rest, and the shadow; that is all I claim of him."

D'Artagnan sighed.

"What is the matter with you?" said Athos. "One would say that this happy return of the king to London saddens you, my friend; you who have done at least as much for his majesty as I have."

"Have I not," replied D'Artagnan, with his Gascon laugh, "have I not done much for his majesty, without any one suspecting it?"

"Yes, yes, but the king is well aware of it, my friend," cried Athos.

"He is aware of it!" said the musketeer bitterly. "By my faith! I did not suspect so, and I was even a moment ago trying to forget it myself."

"But he, my friend, will not forget it, I will answer for him."

"You tell me that to console me a little, Athos."

"For what?"

"Mordioux! for all the expense I incurred. I have ruined myself, my friend, ruined myself for the restoration of this young prince who has just passed, cantering on his isabelle colored horse."

"The king does not know you have ruined yourself, my friend; but he knows he owes you much."

"And say, Athos, does that advance me in any respect? for, to do you justice, you have labored nobly. But I--I who in appearance marred your combinations, it was I who really made them succeed. Follow my calculations closely; you might not have, by persuasions or mildness, convinced General Monk, whilst I so roughly treated this dear general, that I furnished your prince with an opportunity of showing himself generous: this generosity was inspired in him by the fact of my fortunate mistake, and Charles is paid by the restoration which Monk has brought about."

"All that, my dear friend, is strikingly true," replied Athos.

"Well, strikingly true as it may be, it is not less true, my friend, that I shall return--greatly beloved by M. Monk, who calls me dear captain all day long, although I am neither dear to him nor a captain;--and much appreciated by the king, who has already forgotten my name;--it is not less true, I say, that I shall return to my beautiful country, cursed by the soldiers I had raised with the hopes of large pay, cursed by the brave Planchet, of who I have borrowed a part of his fortune."

"How is that? What the devil had Planchet to do in all this?"

"Ah, yes, my friend; but this king, so spruce, so smiling, so adored, M. Monk fancies he has recalled him, you fancy you have supported him, I fancy I have brought him back, the people fancy they have reconquered him, he himself fancies he has negotiated his restoration; and yet nothing of all this is true, for Charles II., king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, has been replaced upon the throne by a French grocer, who lives in the Rue des Lombards, and is named Planchet. And such is grandeur! 'Vanity!' says the Scripture: vanity, all is vanity."

Athos could not help laughing at this whimsical outbreak of his friend.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, pressing his hand affectionately, "should you not exercise a little more philosophy? Is it not some further satisfaction to you to have saved my life as you did by arriving so fortunately with Monk, when those damned parliamentarians wanted to burn me alive?"

"Well, but you, in some degree, deserved a little burning, my friend."

"How so? What, for having saved King Charles's million?"

"What million?"

"Ah, that is true! you never knew that, my friend; but you must not be angry, for it was my secret. That word 'REMEMBER' which the king pronounced upon the scaffold."

"And which means 'souviens-toi!'"

"Exactly. That was signified. 'Remember there is a million buried in the vaults of Newcastle Abbey, and that that million belongs to my son.'"

"Ah! very well, I understand. But what I understand likewise, and what is very frightful, is, that every time his majesty Charles II. will think of me, he will say to himself: 'There is the man who came very near to making me lose my crown. Fortunately I was generous, great, full of presence of mind.' That will be said by the young gentleman in a shabby black doublet, who came to the chateau of Blois, hat in hand, to ask me if I would give him access to the king of France."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" said Athos, laying his hand on the shoulder of the musketeer, "you are unjust."

"I have a right to be so."

"No--for you are ignorant of the future."

D'Artagnan looked his friend full in the face, and began to laugh. "In truth, my dear Athos," said he, "you have some sayings so superb, that they only belong to you and M. le Cardinal Mazarin."

Athos frowned slightly.

"I beg your pardon," continued D'Artagnan, laughing, "I beg your pardon if I have offended you. The future! Nein! what pretty words are words that promise, and how well they fill the mouth in default of other things! Mordieux! After having met with so many who promised, when shall I find one who will give? But, let that pass!" continued D'Artagnan. "What are you doing here, my dear Athos? Are you the king's treasurer?"

"How--why the king's treasurer?"

"Well, since the king possess a million, he must want a treasurer. The king of France, although he is not worth a sou, has still a superintendent of finance, M. Fouquet. It is true, that, in exchange, M. Fouquet, they say, has a good number of millions of his own."

"Oh! our million was spent long ago," said Athos, laughing in his turn.

"I understand; it was frittered away in satin, precious stones, velvet, and feathers of all sorts and colors. All these princes and princesses stood in great need of tailors and dressmakers. Eh! Athos, do you remember what we fellows spent in equipping ourselves for the campaign of La Rochelle, and to make our appearance on horseback? Two or three thousand livres, by my faith! But a king's robe is the more ample; it would require a million to purchase the stuff. At least, Athos, if you are not treasurer, you are on good footing at court."

"By the faith of a gentleman, I know nothing about it," said Athos, simply.

"What! you know nothing about it?"

"No! I have not seen the king since we left Dover."

"Then he has forgotten you, too! Mordieux! That is shameful!"

"His majesty has had so much business to transact."

"Oh!" cried D'Artagnan, with one of those intelligent grimaces which he alone knew how to make, "that is enough to make me recover my love for Monseigneur Giulio Mazarini. What, Athos! the king has not seen you since then?"

"No."

"And you are not furious?"

"I! why should I be? Do you imagine, my dear D'Artagnan, that it was on the king's account I acted as I have done? I did not know the young man. I defended the father, who represented a principle--sacred in my eyes, and I allowed myself to be drawn towards the son from sympathy for this same principle. Besides, he was a worthy knight, a noble creature, that father; do you remember him?"

"Yes; that is true; he was a brave, an excellent man, who led a sad life, but made a fine end."

"Well, my dear D'Artagnan, understand this; to that king, to that man of heart, to that friend of my thoughts, if I durst venture to say so, I swore at the last hour to preserve faithfully the secret of a deposit which was to be transmitted to his son, to assist him in his hour of need. This young man came to me; he described his destitution; he was ignorant that he was anything to me save a living memory of his father. I have accomplished towards Charles II. what I promised Charles I.; that is all! Of what consequence is it to me, then, whether he be grateful or not? It is to myself I have rendered a service, by relieving myself of this responsibility, and not to him."

"Well, I have always said," replied D'Artagnan, with a sigh, "that disinterestedness was the finest thing in the world."

"Well, and you, my friend," resumed Athos, "are you not in the same situation as myself? If I have properly understood your words, you allowed yourself to be affected by the misfortunes of this young man; that, on your part, was much greater than it was upon mine, for I had a duty to fulfill; whilst you were under no obligation to the son of the martyr. You had not, on your part, to pay him the price of that precious drop of blood which he let fall upon my brow, through the floor of the scaffold. That which made you act was heart alone--the noble and good heart which you possess beneath your apparent skepticism and sarcastic irony; you have engaged the fortune of a servitor, and your own, I suspect, my benevolent miser! and your sacrifice is not acknowledged! Of what consequence is it? You wish to repay Planchet his money. I can comprehend that, my friend: for it is not becoming in a gentleman to borrow from his inferior, without returning to him principal and interest. Well, I will sell La Fere if necessary, and if not, some little farm. You shall pay Planchet, and there will be enough, believe me, of corn left in my granaries for us two and Raoul. In this way, my friend, you will be under obligations to nobody but yourself; and, if I know you well, it will not be a small satisfaction to your mind to be able to say, 'I have made a king!' Am I right?"

"Athos! Athos!" murmured D'Artagnan, thoughtfully, "I have told you more than once that the day on which you will preach I shall attend the sermon; the day on which you will tell me there is a hell--Mordioux! I shall be afraid of the gridiron and the pitch-forks. You are better than I, or rather, better than anybody, and I only acknowledge the possession of one quality, and that is, of not being jealous. Except that defect, damme, as the English say, if I have not all the rest."

"I know no one equal to D'Artagnan," replied Athos; "but here we are, having quietly reached the house I inhabit. Will you come in, my friend?"

"Eh! why this is the tavern of the Corne du Cerf, I think," said D'Artagnan.

"I confess I chose it on purpose. I like old acquaintances; I like to sit down on that place, whereon I sank, overcome by fatigue, overwhelmed by despair, when you returned on the 31st of January."

"After having discovered the abode of the masked executioner? Yes, that was a terrible day!"

"Come in, then," said Athos, interrupting him.

They entered the large apartment, formerly the common one. The tavern, in general, and this room in particular, had undergone great changes; the ancient host of the musketeers, having become tolerably rich for an innkeeper, had closed his shop, and made of this room of which we were speaking, a store-room for colonial provisions. As for the rest of the house, he let it ready furnished to strangers. It was with unspeakable emotion D'Artagnan recognized all the furniture of the chamber of the first story; the wainscoting, the tapestries, and even that geographical chart which Porthos had so fondly studied in his moments of leisure.

"It is eleven years ago," cried D'Artagnan. "Mordioux! it appears to me a century!"

"And to me but a day," said Athos. "Imagine the joy I experience, my friend, in seeing you there, in pressing your hand, in casting from me sword and dagger, and tasting without mistrust this glass of sherry. And, oh! what still further joy it would be, if our two friends were there, at the two corners of the table, and Raoul, my beloved Raoul, on the threshold, looking at us with his large eyes, at once so brilliant and so soft!"

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, much affected, "that is true. I approve particularly of the first part of your thought; it is very pleasant to smile there where we have so legitimately shuddered in thinking that from one moment to another M. Mordaunt might appear upon the landing."

At this moment the door opened, and D'Artagnan, brave as he was, could not restrain a slight movement of fright. Athos understood him, and, smiling,--

"It is our host," said he, "bringing me a letter."

"Yes, my lord," said the good man; "here is a letter for your honor."

"Thank you," said Athos, taking the letter without looking at it. "Tell me, my dear host, if you do not remember this gentleman?"

The old man raised his head, and looked attentively at D'Artagnan.

"No," said he.

"It is," said Athos, "one of those friends of whom I have spoken to you, and who lodged here with me eleven years ago."

"Oh! but," said the old man, "so many strangers have lodged here!"

"But we lodged here on the 30th of January, 1649," added Athos, believing he should stimulate the lazy memory of the host by this remark.

"That is very possible," replied he, smiling; "but it is so long ago!" and he bowed, and went out.

"Thank you," said D'Artagnan--"perform exploits, accomplish revolutions, endeavor to engrave your name in stone or bronze with strong swords! there is something more rebellious, more hard, more forgetful than iron, bronze, or stone, and that is, the brain of a lodging-house keeper who has grown rich in the trade;--he does not know me! Well, I should have known him, though."

Athos, smiling at his friend's philosophy, unsealed his letter.

"Ah!" said he, "a letter from Parry."

"Oh! oh!" said D'Artagnan; "read it, my friend, read it! No doubt it contains news."

Athos shook his head, and read:

"MONSIEUR LE COMTE.--The king has experienced much regret at not seeing you to-day beside him, at his entrance. His majesty commands me to say so, and to recall him to your memory. His majesty will expect you this evening, at the palace of St. James, between nine and ten o'clock.



"I am, respectfully, monsieur le comte, your honor's very humble and very obedient servant,--PARRY."

"You see, my dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, "we must not despair of the hearts of kings."

"Not despair! you are right to say so!" replied D'Artagnan.

"Oh! my dear, very dear friend," resumed Athos, whom the almost imperceptible bitterness of D'Artagnan had not escaped. "Pardon me! can I have unintentionally wounded my best comrade?"

"You are mad, Athos, and to prove it, I shall conduct you to the palace; to the very gate, I mean; the walk will do me good."

"You shall go in with me, my friend; I will speak to his majesty."

"No, no!" replied D'Artagnan, with true pride, free from all mixture; "if there is anything worse than begging yourself, it is making others beg for you. Come, let us go, my friend, the walk will be charming; on the way I shall show you the house of M. Monk, who has detained me with him. A beautiful house, by my faith. Being a general in England is better than being a marechal in France, please to know."

Athos allowed himself to be led along, quite saddened by D'Artagnan's forced attempts at gaiety. The whole city was in a state of joy; the two friends were jostled at every moment by enthusiasts who required them, in their intoxication, to cry out, "Long live good King Charles!" D'Artagnan replied by a grunt, and Athos by a smile. They arrived thus in front of Monk's house, before which, as we have said, they had to pass on their way to St. James's.

Athos and D'Artagnan said but little on the road, for the simple reason that they would have had so many things to talk about if they had spoken. Athos thought that by speaking he should evince satisfaction, and that might wound D'Artagnan. The latter feared that in speaking he should allow some little bitterness to steal into his words which would render his company unpleasant to his friend. It was a singular emulation of silence between contentment and ill-humor. D'Artagnan gave way first to that itching at the tip of his tongue which he so habitually experienced.

"Do you remember, Athos," said he, "the passage of the 'Memoires de D'Aubigny,' in which that devoted servant, a Gascon like myself, poor as myself, and, I was going to add, brave as myself, relates instances of the meanness of Henry IV.? My father always told me, I remember, that D'Aubigny was a liar. But, nevertheless, examine how all the princes, the issue of the great Henry, keep up the character of the race."

"Nonsense!" said Athos, "the kings of France misers? You are mad, my friend."

"Oh! you are so perfect yourself, you never agree to the faults of others. But, in reality, Henry IV. was covetous, Louis XIII., his son, was so likewise; we know something of that, don't we? Gaston carried this vice to exaggeration, and has made himself, in this respect, hated by all who surround him. Henriette, poor woman, might well be avaricious, she who did not eat every day, and could not warm herself every winter; and that is an example she has given to her son Charles II., grandson of the great Henry IV., who is as covetous as his mother and his grandfather. See if I have well traced the genealogy of the misers?"

"D'Artagnan, my friend," cried Athos, "you are very rude towards that eagle race called the Bourbons."

"Eh! and I have forgotten the best instance of all--the other grandson of the Bernais, Louis XIV., my ex-master. Well, I hope he is miserly enough, he who would not lend a million to his brother Charles! Good! I see you are beginning to be angry. Here we are, by good luck, close to my house, or rather that of my friend, M. Monk."

"My dear D'Artagnan, you do not make me angry, you make me sad; it is cruel, in fact, to see a man of your deserts out of the position his services ought to have acquired; it appears to me, my dear friend, that your name is as radiant as the greatest names in war and diplomacy. Tell me if the Luynes, the Ballegardes, and the Bassompierres have merited, as we have, fortunes and honors? You are right, my friend, a hundred times right."

D'Artagnan sighed, and preceded his friend under the porch of the mansion Monk inhabited, at the extremity of the city. "Permit me," said he, "to leave my purse at home; for if in the crowd those clever pickpockets of London, who are much boasted of, even in Paris, were to steal from me the remainder of my poor crowns, I should not be able to return to France. Now, content I left France, and wild with joy I should return to it, seeing that all my prejudices of former days against England have returned, accompanied by many others."

Athos made no reply.

"So, then, my dear friend, one second, and I will follow you," said D'Artagnan. "I know you are in a hurry to go yonder to receive your reward, but, believe me, I am not less eager to partake of your joy, although from a distance. Wait for me." And D'Artagnan was already passing through the vestibule, when a man, half servant, half soldier, who filled in Monk's establishment the double function of porter and

guard, stopped our musketeer, saying to him in English:

"I beg your pardon, my Lord d'Artagnan!"

"Well," replied the latter: "what is it? Is the general going to dismiss me? I only needed to be expelled by him."

These words, spoken in French, made no impression upon the person to whom they were addressed, and who himself only spoke an English mixed with the rudest Scots. But Athos was grieved at them, for he began to think D'Artagnan was not wrong.

The Englishman showed D'Artagnan a letter: "From the general," said he.

"Aye! that's it, my dismissal!" replied the Gascon. "Must I read it, Athos?"

"You must be deceived," said Athos, "or I know no more honest people in the world but you and myself."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders and unsealed the letter, while the impassible Englishman held for him a large lantern, by the light of which he was enabled to read it.

"Well, what is the matter?" said Athos, seeing the countenance of the reader change.

"Read it yourself," said the musketeer.

Athos took the paper and read:

"MONSIEUR D'ARTAGNAN.--The king regrets very much you did not come to St. Paul's with his cortege. He missed you, as I also have missed you, my dear captain. There is but one means of repairing all this. His majesty expects me at nine o'clock at the palace of St. James's: will you be there at the same time with me? His gracious majesty appoints that hour for an audience he grants you."

This letter was from Monk.