

Chapter XXXVII. How D'Artagnan regulated the "Assets" of the Company before he established its "Liabilities."

"Decidedly," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I have struck a good vein. That star which shines once in the life of every man, which shone for Job and Iris, the most unfortunate of the Jews and the poorest of the Greeks, is come at last to shine on me. I will commit no folly, I will take advantage of it; it comes quite late enough to find me reasonable."

He supped that evening, in very good humor, with his friend Athos; he said nothing to him about the expected donation, but he could not forbear questioning his friend, while eating, about country produce, sowing, and planting. Athos replied complacently, as he always did. His idea was that D'Artagnan wished to become a land-owner, only he could not help regretting, more than once, the absence of the lively humor and amusing sallies of the cheerful companion of former days. In fact, D'Artagnan was so absorbed, that, with his knife, he took advantage of the grease left at the bottom of his plate, to trace ciphers and make additions of surprising rotundity.

The order, or rather license, for their embarkation, arrived at Athos's lodgings that evening. While this paper was remitted to the comte, another messenger brought to D'Artagnan a little bundle of parchments, adorned with all the seals employed in setting off property deeds in England. Athos surprised him turning over the leaves of these different acts which established the transmission of property. The prudent Monk--others would say the generous Monk--had commuted the donation into a sale, and acknowledged the receipt of the sum of fifteen thousand crowns as the price of the property ceded. The messenger was gone. D'Artagnan still continued reading, Athos watched him with a smile. D'Artagnan, surprising one of those smiles over his shoulder, put the bundle in its wrapper.

"I beg your pardon," said Athos.

"Oh! not at all, my friend," replied the lieutenant, "I shall tell you--"

"No, don't tell me anything, I beg you; orders are things so sacred, that to one's brother, one's father, the person charged with such orders should never open his mouth. Thus I, who speak to you, and love you more tenderly than brother, father, or all the world--"

"Except your Raoul?"

"I shall love Raoul still better when he shall be a man, and I shall have seen him develop himself in all the phases of his character and his

actions--as I have seen you, my friend."

"You said, then, that you had an order likewise, and that you would not communicate it to me."

"Yes, my dear D'Artagnan."

The Gascon sighed. "There was a time," said he, "when you would have placed that order open upon the table, saying, 'D'Artagnan, read this scrawl to Porthos, Aramis, and to me.'"

"That is true. Oh! that was the time of youth, confidence, the generous season when the blood commands, when it is warmed by feeling!"

"Well! Athos, will you allow me to tell you?"

"Speak, my friend!"

"That delightful time, that generous season, that ruling by warm blood, were all very fine things, no doubt: but I do not regret them at all. It is absolutely like the period of studies. I have constantly met with fools who would boast of the days of penums, ferules, and crusts of dry bread. It is singular, but I never loved all that; for my part, however active and sober I might be (you know if I was so, Athos), however simple I might appear in my clothes, I would not the less have preferred the braveries and embroideries of Porthos to my little perforated cassock, which gave passage to the wind in winter and the sun in summer. I should always, my friend, mistrust him who would pretend to prefer evil to good. Now, in times past all went wrong with me, and every month found a fresh hole in my cassock and in my skin, a gold crown less in my poor purse; of that execrable time of small beer and see-saw, I regret absolutely nothing, nothing, nothing save our friendship; for within me I have a heart, and it is a miracle that heart has not been dried up by the wind of poverty which passed through all the holes of my cloak, or pierced by the swords of all shapes which passed through the holes in my poor flesh."

"Do not regret our friendship," said Athos, "that will only die with ourselves. Friendship is composed, above all things, of memories and habits, and if you have just now made a little satire upon mine, because I hesitate to tell you the nature of my mission into France--"

"Who! I?--Oh! heavens! if you knew, my dear friend, how indifferent all the missions of the world will henceforth become to me!" And he laid his hand upon the parchment in his vest pocket.

Athos rose from the table and called the host in order to pay the reckoning.

"Since I have known you, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "I have never discharged the reckoning. Porthos often did, Aramis sometimes, and you, you almost always drew out your purse with the dessert. I am now rich, and should like to try if it is heroic to pay."

"Do so," said Athos, returning his purse to his pocket.

The two friends then directed their steps towards the port, not, however, without D'Artagnan's frequently turning round to watch the transportation of his dear crowns. Night had just spread her thick veil over the yellow waters of the Thames; they heard those noises of casks and pulleys, the preliminaries of preparing to sail which had so many times made the hearts of the musketeers beat when the dangers of the sea were the least of those they were going to face. This time they were to embark on board a large vessel which awaited them at Gravesend, and Charles II., always delicate in small affairs, had sent one of his yachts, with twelve men of his Scots guard, to do honor to the ambassador he was sending to France. At midnight the yacht had deposited its passengers on board the vessel, and at eight o'clock in the morning, the vessel landed the ambassador and his friend on the wharf at Boulogne. Whilst the comte, with Grimaud, was busy procuring horses to go straight to Paris, D'Artagnan hastened to the hostelry where, according to his orders, his little army was to wait for him. These gentlemen were at breakfast upon oysters, fish, and spiced brandy, when D'Artagnan appeared. They were all very gay, but not one of them had yet exceeded the bounds of reason. A hurrah of joy welcomed the general. "Here I am," said D'Artagnan, "the campaign is ended. I am come to bring each his supplement of pay, as agreed upon." Their eyes sparkled. "I will lay a wager there are not, at this moment, a hundred crowns remaining in the purse of the richest among you."

"That is true!" cried they in chorus.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "then, this is the last order. The treaty of commerce has been concluded, thanks to our coup-de-main which made us masters of the most skillful financier of England, for now I am at liberty to confess to you that the man we had to carry off was the treasurer of General Monk."

This word treasurer produced a certain effect on his army. D'Artagnan observed that the eyes of Menneville alone did not evince perfect faith. "This treasurer," he continued, "I conveyed to a neutral territory, Holland; I forced him to sign the treaty; I have even reconducted him to Newcastle, and he was obliged to be satisfied with our proceedings towards him--the deal coffer being always carried without jolting, and being lined softly, I asked a gratification for you. Here it is." He threw a respectable-looking purse upon the cloth; and all involuntarily stretched out their hands. "One moment, my lambs," said D'Artagnan; "if there are profits, there are also charges."

"Oh! oh!" murmured they.

"We are about to find ourselves, my friends, in a position which would not be tenable for people without brains. I speak plainly; we are between the gallows and the Bastile."

"Oh! Oh!" said the chorus.

"That is easily understood. It was necessary to explain to General Monk the disappearance of his treasurer. I waited, for that purpose, till the unhopèd-for moment of the restoration of King Charles II., who is one of my friends."

This army exchanged a glance of satisfaction in reply to the sufficiently proud look of D'Artagnan. "The king being restored, I restored to Monk his man of business, a little plucked, it is true, but, in short, I restored him. Now, General Monk, when he pardoned me, for he has pardoned me, could not help repeating these words to me, which I charge every one of you to engrave deeply there, between the eyes, under the vault of the cranium:--'Monsieur, the joke has been a good one, but I don't naturally like jokes; if ever a word of what you have done' (you understand me, Menneville) 'escapes from your lips, or the lips of your companions, I have, in my government of Scotland and Ireland, seven hundred and forty-one wooden gibbets, of strong oak, clamped with iron, and freshly greased every week. I will make a present of one of these gibbets to each of you, and observe well, M. d'Artagnan,' added he (observe it also, M. Menneville), 'I shall still have seven hundred and thirty left for my private pleasure. And still further--'"

"Ah! ah!" said the auxiliaries, "is there still more?"

"A mere trifle. 'Monsieur d'Artagnan, I send to the king of France the treaty in question, with a request that he will cast into the Bastile provisionally, and then send to me, all who have taken part in this expedition; and that is a prayer with which the king will certainly comply.'"

A cry of terror broke from all corners of the table.

"There! there! there!" said D'Artagnan, "this brave M. Monk has forgotten one thing, and that is he does not know the name of any one of you; I alone know you, and it is not I, you well may believe, who will betray you. Why should I? As for you--I cannot suppose you will be silly enough to denounce yourselves, for then the king, to spare himself the expense of feeding and lodging you, will send you off to Scotland, where the seven hundred and forty-one gibbets are to be found. That is all, messieurs; I have not another word to add to what I have had the honor to tell you. I am sure you have understood me perfectly well, have you

not, M. Menneville?"

"Perfectly," replied the latter.

"Now the crowns!" said D'Artagnan. "Shut the doors," he cried, and opened the bag upon the table, from which rolled several fine gold crowns. Every one made a movement towards the floor.

"Gently!" cried D'Artagnan. "Let no one stoop, and then I shall not be out in my reckoning." He found it all right, gave fifty of those splendid crowns to each man, and received as many benedictions as he bestowed pieces. "Now," said he, "if it were possible for you to reform a little, if you could become good and honest citizens--"

"That is rather difficult," said one of the troop.

"What then, captain?" said another.

"Because I might be able to find you again, and, who knows what other good fortune?" He made a sign to Menneville, who listened to all he said with a composed air. "Menneville," said he, "come with me. Adieu, my brave fellows! I need not warn you to be discreet."

Menneville followed him, whilst the salutations of the auxiliaries were mingled with the sweet sound of the money clinking in their pockets.

"Menneville," said D'Artagnan, when they were once in the street, "you were not my dupe; beware of being so. You did not appear to have any fear of the gibbets of Monk, or the Bastille of his majesty, King Louis XIV., but you will do me the favor of being afraid of me. Then listen; at the smallest word that shall escape you, I will kill you as I would a fowl. I have absolution from our holy father, the pope, in my pocket."

"I assure you I know absolutely nothing, my dear M. d'Artagnan, and that your words have all been to me so many articles of faith."

"I was quite sure you were an intelligent fellow," said the musketeer; "I have tried you for a length of time. These fifty crowns which I give you above the rest will prove the esteem I have for you. Take them."

"Thanks, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Menneville.

"With that sum you can really become an honest man," replied D'Artagnan, in the most serious tone possible. "It would be disgraceful for a mind like yours, and a name you no longer dare to bear, to sink forever under the rust of an evil life. Become a gallant man, Menneville, and live for a year upon those hundred gold crowns: it is a good provision; twice the pay of a high officer. In a year come to me, and, Mordieux! I will make something of you."

Menneville swore, as his comrades had sworn, that he would be as silent as the grave. And yet some one must have spoken; and as, certainly, it was not one of the nine companions, and quite as certainly, it was not Menneville, it must have been D'Artagnan, who, in his quality of a Gascon, had his tongue very near to his lips. For, in short, if it were not he, who could it be? And how can it be explained that the secret of the deal coffer pierced with holes should come to our knowledge, and in so complete a fashion that we have, as has been seen, related the history of it in all its most minute details; details which, besides, throw a light as new as unexpected upon all that portion of the history of England which has been left, up to the present day, completely in darkness by the historian of our neighbors?