CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE UNCLE AND THE NEPHEW.

This horse and servant belonging to De Winter were waiting for him at the door; he mounted toward his abode very thoughtfully, looking behind him from time to time to contemplate the dark and silent façade of the Louvre. It was then that he saw a horseman as it were detach himself from the wall, and follow him at a little distance. In leaving the Palais Royal he remembered to have observed a similar shadow.

"Tony," he said, motioning to his groom to approach.

"Here I am, my lord."

"Did you remark that man who is following us?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, only he has followed your grace from the Palais Royal, stopped at the Louvre to wait for you, and now leaves the Louvre with you."

"Some spy of the Cardinal," said De Winter to him aside. "Let us pretend not to notice that he is watching us."

And spurred on he pursued the labyrinth of streets which led to his hotel, situated near the Murais, for having for so long a time lived near the Palais Royale, Lord de Winter naturally returned to lodge near his ancient dwelling.

The unknown put his horse into a gallop.

De Winter dismounted at his hotel, went up into his apartment,

intending to watch the spy; but as he was about to place his gloves and hat on a table, he saw reflected in a glass opposite to him a figure which stood on the threshold of the room. He turned round, and Morlanne was before him.

There was a moment of frozen silence between these two men.

"Sir," said De Winter, "I thought I had already made you aware that I am weary of this persecution; withdraw, then, or I shall call, and have you turned out as you were in London. I am not your uncle, I know you not."

"My uncle," replied Morlanne, with his harsh and bantering tone, "you are mistaken; you will not have me turned out this time as you did in London, you dare not. As for declaring that I am your nephew, you will think twice about it, now that I have learnt some things of which I was ignorant a few days ago."

"And how does it concern me what you have learnt?" said De Winter.

"Oh, it concerns you much, my uncle, I am sure; and you will soon he of my opinion," added he, with a smile, which sent a shudder through the veins of him whom he addressed. "When I presented myself before you for the first time in London, it was to ask you what had become of my wealth; the second time it was to demand who had sufficed my name; and this time I come before you to ask a question far more terrible than any other, to ask you, my lord,
what have you done with your sister—your sister, who was my mother?
"Your mother?" he said.
"Yes, my lord, my mother," replied the young man, advancing into the room until he was face to face with Lord de Winter, and crossing his arms. "I have asked the headsman of Bethune," he said; his voice hoarse, and his face livid with passion and grief.
"And the headsman of Bethune gave me a reply."
De Winter fell back into a chair as if struck by a thunderbolt, and in vain attempted to answer.
"Yes," continued the young man; "all is now explained; with this key the abyss is opened. My mother had inherited an estate from her husband, and you have assassinated my mother; my name would have secured to me the paternal estate, and you have despoiled me of my name, you have deprived me of my fortune. I am no longer astonished that you knew me not. I am not surprised that you refused to recognize me. When a man is a robber it is unbecoming to call him a nephew whom one has impoverished! When one is a murderer, to term that man whom one has made an orphan a relative."

These words produced a contrary effect to what Mordaunt had anticipated. De Winter remembered the monster that Milady had been; he rose, dignified and calm, restraining by the severity of his look the wild glances of the young man.
"You desire to fathom this horrible secret?" said De Winter; "well, then, so be it. Know, then, what that woman was for whom to-day you come to call me to account. That woman had, in all probability, poisoned my brother, and in order to inherit from me she was about to assassinate me in my turn. I have proof of it.
What say you to that?"
"I say that she was my mother."
"She caused the unfortunate Duke of Buckingham to be stabbed by a man who was, ere that, honest, good, and pure. What say you to that crime, of which I have the proofs?"
"She was my mother!"
"On our return to France she had a young woman who was attached to one of her foes poisoned in the convent of the Augustines at Bethune. Will this crime persuade you of the justice of her punishment—of this I have the proofs."
"Silence, sir—she was my mother," explained the young man, his face burning with sweat, his hair, like Hamlet's, standing upon his forehead—and raging with fury; "she was my mother; her crimes, I know them not—her disorders, I know them not—her views, I know them not. But this I know, that I had a mother, that five men leaped against one woman, murdered her clandestinely by night—silently—like cowards. I know that you were one of them, my uncle, and that you cried louder than the others—she must die. Therefore I warn you—and listen well to my words, that they may be engraved on your memory, never to be forgotten—this murder, which has robbed me of everything—this murder, which has deprived me of my name—this murder, which has impoverished me—this murder, which has made me corrupt, wicked, implacable—"
TWENTY YEARS AFTER

shall summon you to account for it first, and then those who were your accomplices—when I discover them!"

With hatred in his eyes, forming at his mouth, and his flat extended, Mordant had advanced one more step—a threatening, terrible step—toward De Winter. The latter put his hand to his sword, and said, with the smile of a man who for thirty years has jested with death:

"Would you assassinate me, sir? Then I shall recognize you as my nephew, for you are a worthy son of such a mother."

"No," replied Mordant, forcing all the veins in his face, and the muscles of his body, to resume their usual places and to be calm;

"no, I shall not kill you—at least not at this moment, for without you I could not discover the others. But when I have found them, then tremble, sir. I have stabbed the headman of Bethune—stabbed him without mercy or pity, and he was the least guilty of you all."

With these words the young man went out, and descended the stair sufficiently calm to pass unobserved; then upon the lowest landing place he passed Tony leaning over the balustrade, waiting only for a call from his master to mount to his room.

But De Winter did not call; crushed, enfeebled, he remained standing, and with listening ear: then only when he had heard the step of the horse going away he fell back on a chair saying:

"My God, I thank Thee that he knows me alone."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PATERNAL AFFECTION.

While this terrible scene was passing at Lord de Winter's, Athos, seated near his window, his elbow on the table, and his head supported on his hand, was listening intently to Raoul's account of the adventures he met with on his journey, and the details of the battle. Listening to the relation of those first emotions so fresh and pure, the fine, noble face of Athos betrayed indescribable pleasure; he inclined the tones of that young voice, as harmonious music. He forgot all that was dark in the past, and that was cloudy in the future. It almost seemed as if the return of this much loved boy had changed his fears into hopes. Athos was happy—happy as he had never been before.

"And you assisted and took part in this great battle, Bragelonne?"
said the ancient Musketeer.

"Yes, sir."

"And it was a hard one?"

"His highness the prince charged eleven times in person."

"He is a great commander, Bragelonne."

"He is a hero, sir; I did not lose sight of him for an instant. Oh! how fine it is to be called Comte, and to be so worthy of such a name!"

"He is calm and radiant, is he not?"

"As calm as at parade; as radiant as at a file. When we went up to the enemy, it was slowly; we were forbidden to draw first,