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, foaming at his mouth, and his flat ex- tended, Mordant had advanced one more step—a threatening, ter- rible 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 Huntsman 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 leaping 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 sup- ported 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 these first emotions so fresh and pure, the fine, noble face of Athos betrayed indescribable pleasure; he in- clined the tones of that young voice, as harmonious music. He for- got 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 fete. When we went up to the enemy, it was slowly: we were forbidden to draw first,
and we were marching toward the Spaniards, who were on a height with lowered muskets. When we arrived about thirty paces from them, the prince turned round to the soldiers, 'Comrades,' he said, 'you are about to suffer a furious discharge; but—' There was such dead silence, that friends and enemies could have heard these words; then raising his sword, 'Sound trumpets!' he cried."
"Well, very good, you will do as much when the opportunity occurs—will you, Raoul?"
"I know not, sir, but I thought it was very fine and grand!"
"Were you afraid, Raoul?" asked the count.
"Yes, sir," replied the young man anxiously; "I felt a great chill at my heart, and at the word 'fire,' which resonated in Spanish from the enemy's ranks, I closed my eyes and thought of you."
"In honest truth, Raoul!" said Athos, pressing his hand.
"Yes, sir; at that instant there was such a thing that one might have supposed that the infernal regions were opened, and those who were not killed felt the heat of the flames. I opened my eyes, astounded at my being alive, or at least unhurt; a third of the squad were lying on the ground, mutilated and bloody. At this moment I encountered the eye of the prince, and I had but one thought, and that was that he was observing me. I spurred on, and found myself in the enemy's ranks."
"And the prince was pleased with you?"
"He told me so at least, sir, when he desired me to return to Paris with Monsieur de Chatillon, who was charged to carry the news to the queen, and to bring the colors we had taken. 'Go,' said he; 'the enemy will not rally for fifteen days, and until that time I have no need of your service. Go and see those whom you love, and who love you, and tell my sister De Longueville that I thank her for the present she made me of you.' And I came, sir." Athos, gazing at the count with a smile of real affection, "for I thought you would be glad to see me again.

Athos drew the young man toward him, and pressed his lips to his brow, as he would have done to a young daughter.
"And now, Raoul," said he, "you are launched; you have dukes for friends, a marshal of France for a godfather, a prince of the blood as commander, and on the day of your return you have been rescued by two queens; it is rather well for a novice."
"Oh, sir," said Raoul, suddenly, "you recall something to me, which, in my haste to relate my exploit, I had forgotten; it is that there was, with her Majesty the Queen of England, a gentleman, who, when I pronounced your name, uttered a cry of surprise and joy; he said he was a friend of yours—asked your address, and is coming to see you."
"What is his name?"
"I did not dare ask, sir; he spoke elegantly, although I thought from his accent he was an Englishman."
"Ah!" said Athos, leaning down his head as if to remember who it could be. "Then, when he raised it again, he was struck by the presence of a man who was standing at the open door, and was gazing at him with a compassionate air."
"Lords de Winter!" exclaimed the count.
"Athis, my friend!"

And the two gentlemen were for an instant locked in each other's arms; then Athis, looking into his friend's face, and taking him by both hands, said:

"What alas you, my lord? you appear as unhappy as I am happy."

"Yes, truly, dear friend; and I may even say that the sight of you increases my dismay."

And De Winter glancing around him, Raoul quickly understood that the two friends wished to be alone, and he therefore left the room unaffectedly.

"Come, now that we are alone," said Athis, "let us talk of yourself."

"Whilst we are alone let us speak of ourselves," replied De Winter. "He is here."

"Who?"

"Monsieur's son."

Athis, who was again struck by this name, which seemed to pursue him like an echo, hesitated for a moment, then slightly knitting his brows, he calmly said:

"I know it; Grimaud met him between Bethune and Arras, and then came here to warn me of his presence."

"Does Grimaud know him, then?"

"No; but he was present at the deathbed of a man who knew him."

"The headsman of Bethune?" exclaimed De Winter.

"You know about that?" cried Athis, astonished.

"He has just left me," replied De Winter, "after telling me all. Ah! my friend! what a horrible scene! Why did we not destroy the child with the mother?"

"What need you fear?" said Athis, recovering from the instinctive fear he had at first experienced, by the aid of reason; "are we not here to defend ourselves? Is this young man an assassin by profession—a murderer in cold blood? He has killed the executioner of Bethune in an impulse of passion, but now his fury is assuaged."

De Winter smiled sorrowfully, and shook his head.

"Do you not then know the race?" said he.

"Pooh!" said Athis, trying to smile in his turn. "It must have lost its ferocity in the second generation. Besides, my friend, Providence has warned us, and we may be on our guard. All we can do is to wait. Let us wait; and, as I said before, let us speak of yourself. What brings you to Paris?"

"Affairs of importance which you shall know later. But what is this that I hear from Her Majesty the Queen of England? Monsieur d'Aragnan is with Mazarin! Pardon my frankness, dear friend. I neither hate nor blame the Cardinal, and your opinions will be held ever sacred by me; do you happen to belong to this man?"

"Monsieur d'Aragnan," replied Athis, "is in the service; he is a soldier, and obeys the constituted authority. Monsieur d'Aragnan is not rich, and has need of his position as lieutenant to enable him to live. Millionaires like yourself, my lord, are rare in France."
"Ah!" said De Winter. "I am at this moment as poor as he is, if not poorer; but to return to our subject.

"Well, then, you wish to know if I am of Mazarin's party? No. Pardon my frankness, also, my lord."

"I am obliged to you, count, for this pleasing intelligence! You make me young and happy again by it. Ah! so you are not a Mazarinist! Delightful! Indeed, you could not belong to him. But pardon me, are you free? I mean to ask if you be not married?"

"Ah! as to that, no," replied Athos, laughing.

"Because that young man—so handsome, so elegant, so polished——"

"He is a child that I have adopted, and who does not even know who was his father."

"Very well—you are always the same, Athos, great and generous. Are you still friends with Monsieur Porthos and Monsieur Aramis?"

"And so, Monsieur d'Artagnan, too, my lord. We still remain four friends devoted to each other; but when it becomes a question of serving the Cardinal, or of fighting, or being Mazarinists or Frondeurs, then we are only two."

"Is Monsieur Aramis with D'Artagnan?" asked Lord de Winter.

"No," said Athos; "Monsieur Aramis does me the honor to share my opinions."

"Could you put me in communication with your witty and agreeable friend? Is he changed?"

"He has become an abbé, that is all."

"You alarm me; his profession must have made him renounce any great undertakings."

"On the contrary," said Athos, smiling, "he has never been so much a musketeer as since he became an abbé, and you will find him a veritable soldier."

"Could you engage to bring him to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, on the Pont de Louvre?"

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Athos, smiling, "you have a duel in prospect."

"Yes, count, and a splendid duel, too; a duel in which I hope you will take your part."

"Where are we to go to, my lord?"

"To Her Majesty the Queen of England, who has desired me to present you to her."

"This is an enigma," said Athos; "but it matters not; from the moment that you have guessed the word, I ask no further. Will your lordship do me the honor to sup with me?"

"Thanks, count; no," replied De Winter. "I owe to you that this young man's visit has taken away my appetite, and will probably deprive me of sleep. What undertaking can have brought him to Paris? It was not to meet me that he came, for he was ignorant of my journey. This young man terrifies me, my lord; for there lies in him a sanguinary predilection."

"What occupies him in England?"

"He is one of Cromwell's most enthusiastic disciples."
"But what has attached him to this cause? His father and mother were Catholics, I believe?"

"His hatred of the king, who deprived him of his estates, and for that he has lost his name of De Winter."

"And how is he now called?"

"Mordant."

"A partisan, yet disguised as a monk, he travels alone in France."

"Do you say as a monk?"

"It was thus, and by mere accident—may God pardon me if I blaspheme—that he heard the confession of the executioner of Bethune."

"Then I understand it all; he has been sent by Cromwell to Mazarin, and the queen guessed rightly; we have been forestalled. Everything is clear to me now. Adieu, count, till tomorrow."

"But the night is dark," said Athos, perceiving that Lord de Winter seemed more uneasy than he wished to show; ' and you have no servant."

"I have Tovy, a good but simple youth."

"Hallen there, Grimaud, Olivier and Blaisois, call the viscount here, and take the musket with you."

Blaisois was the tall youth, half groom, half peasant, whom we saw at the Château de Brégelonne, whom Athos had christened by the name of his province.

"Viscount," said Athos to Raoul, as he entered, "you will conduct my lord as far as his hotel, and permit no one to approach him."

"Oh! count," said De Winter, "for whom do you take me?"

"For a stranger, who does not know Paris," said Athos, "and to whom the viscount will show the way."

De Winter shook him by the hand.

"Grimaud," said Athos, "put yourself at the head of the troop, and beware of the monk."

Grimaud shuddered, and nodding, awaited the departure, regarding the butt of his musket with silent eloquence. Then, obeying the orders given him by Athos, he headed the little procession, bearing the torch in one hand and the musket in the other, until it reached the door of De Winter's inn, when, striking on the door with his fist, he bowed to my lord, without saying a word.

The same order was followed in returning; nor did Grimaud's searching glance discover anything of a suspicious appearance, save a dark shadow in ambush, at the corner of the Rue Quinevaux and of the Quai. He fancied, also, that in going he had already observed the street watcher who had attracted his attention. He pushed on toward him, but before he could reach it, the shadow had disappeared into an alley, into which Grimaud deemed it scarcely prudent to pursue it.

The next day, on awaking, the count perceived Raoul by his bedside. The young man was already dressed, and was reading a new book by M. Chapelain.

"Already up, Raoul?" exclaimed the count.

"Yes, sir," replied Raoul, with a slight hesitation, "I did not sleep well."
"You, Raoul, not sleep well! then you must have something on your mind!" said Athos.

"Sir, you will, perhaps, think that I am in great hurry to leave you when I have only just arrived, but——"

"Have you only two days of leave, Raoul?"

"On the contrary, sir, I have ten; nor is it to the camp that I wish to go."

"Where, then?" said Athos, smiling. "If it be not a secret. You are now almost a man since you have made your first passage of arms, and have acquired the right to go where you will without telling me."

"Never, sir," said Raoul, "as long as I possess the happiness of having you for a protector, shall I deem I have the right of freeing myself from a guardianship which is so valuable to me. I have, therefore, the wish to go and pass a day only at Blois. You look at me, and are going to laugh at me."

"No; on the contrary, I am not inclined to laugh," said Athos, suppressing a sigh. "You wish to see Blois again; it is but very natural."

"Then you permit me to go, and you are not angry in your heart?" exclaimed Raoul, joyfully.

"Certainly; and why should I regret what will give you pleasure?"

"Oh! how kind you are," exclaimed the young man, pressing his guardian's hand; "and I can set out immediately?"

"When you like, Raoul."

"Sir," said Raoul, as he turned to leave the room, "I have thought of one thing, and that is about the Duchess of Chevreuse."

"And you ought to thank her, Raoul. Well, try the Hôtel de Laynes, Raoul, and ask if the duchess can receive you. I am glad to see that you pay attention to the usages of the world. You must take Grimaud and Olivia."

"Both, sir?" asked Raoul, astonished.

"Both."

Raoul went out, and when Athos heard his young, joyous voice calling to Grimaud and Olivia, he sighed.

"It is very soon to leave me," he thought, "but he follows the common lot. Nature has made us thus; she looks on before her. He certainly likes that child, but will he love me less because he loves others?"

And Athos confessed to himself that he was unprepared for so prompt a departure; but Raoul was so happy that this consideration effaced everything else from the mind of his guardian.

Everything was ready at ten o'clock for their journey, and as Athos was seeing Raoul mount, a groom rode up from the Duchess de Chevreuse. He was charged to tell the Count de la Fère that she had learnt the return of her youthful protégé, and also the manner he had conducted himself on the field, and she added that she should be very glad to offer him her congratulations.

"Tell her grace," replied Athos, "that the viscount has just mounted his horse to proceed to the Hôtel de Laynes."

Then, with renewed instructions to Grimaud, Athos signified to
RAOUl that he could set out, and ended by reflecting that it was, perhaps, better that Raou1 should be away from Paris at that moment.

CHAPTER XL

AGAIN A QUEST DEMANDING HELP.

Athos had not failed to send early to Aramis, and had given his letter to Biaisois, the only serving-man whom he had left. Biaisois found Bazin donning his bagde's gown, his services being required that day at Notre Dame.

Athen had desired Biaisois to try to speak to Aramis himself. Biaisois, a tall, simple youth, who understood nothing but what he was desired, asked, therefore, for the Abbe d'Herblry, and in spite of Bazin's assurances that his master was not at home, he persisted in such a manner as to put Bazin into a passion. Biaisois seeing Bazin in clerical guise, was a little discomposd at his densities, and wished to pass at all costs, believing, too, that he with whom he had to do was endowed with the virtues of his cloth—mannity, patience and Christian charity.

But Bazin, still the servant of a Musketeer, when once the blood mounted to his fat cheeks, seized a broomstick and began thumping Biaisois, saying:

"You have insulted the church: my friend, you have insulted the church!"

At this moment Aramis, aroused by this unusual disturbance, cautiously opened the door of his room; and Biaisois, looking reproachfully at the Cerberus, drew the letter from his pocket, and presented it to Aramis.

"From the Comte de la Fere," said Aramis. "All right." And he retired into his room without even asking the cause of so much noise.

Biaisois returned disconsolate to the Hotel of the Grand Roi Charlemagne, and when Athos inquired if his commission was executed, he related his adventure.

"You foolish fellow!" said Athos, laughing. "And you did not tell him that you came from me?"

"No, sir."

At ten o'clock Athos, with his habitual exactitude, was waiting on the Pont du Louvre, and was almost immediately joined by Lord de Winter.

They waited ten minutes, and then his lordship began to fear that Aramis was not coming to join them.

"Patience," said Athos, whose eyes were fixed in the direction of the Rue du Bac, "patience; I see an abbe giving a cuffs to a man, and a blow to a woman—that must be Aramis."

It was he in truth; having run against a young shopkeeper who was gapping at the crowds, and who had splashed him, Aramis with one blow of his fist had distanced him ten paces.

At this moment one of his patients passed, and as she was young and pretty, Aramis took off his cap to her with his most gracious smile.