"Well," said Aramis, "what do you say to that?"

"I say, my dear D'Herblay, that it is almost sacrilege to distrust Providence when one has such friends, and therefore we will divide the photons from Porthos, as we divided the louis sent by D'Artagnan."

The division being made by the light of Bazin's taper, the two friends continued their road, and a quarter of an hour later they had joined De Winter at the Porte St. Denis.

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CHAPTER XLI.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT THE FIRST IMPRESSES ARE ALWAYS THE BEST.

The three gentlemen took the road to Fleury—a road so well known to them, and which recalled to Athos and Aramis some of the most picturesque adventures of their youth.

"If Musqueton were with us," observed Athos, on reaching the spot where they had had a dispute with the parson, "how he would tremble at passing this! Do you remember, Aramis, that it was here that he received that famous ball?"

"By my faith, I would allow him to tremble," replied Aramis; "for even I feel a shudder at the recollection; behold, just above that tree is the little spot where I thought I was killed."

It was soon time for Grimaud to recall the past. Arriving before the inn at which his master and himself had made such an enormous repast, he approached Athos, and said, showing him the air-hole of the cellar:

"Sausages!"

Athos began to laugh, and this youthful folly of his appeared to be as amusing as if some one had related it of another person.

At last, after traveling two days and one night, they arrived at Bordes, toward the evening, favored by magnificent weather. Bordeaux was a strong position, and then almost a deserted town, built entirely on the heights, and what is now called the lower town did not then exist.

"Gentlemen," said De Winter, on reaching the gate of the town, "let us do here as at Paris—let us separate to avoid suspicion. I know an inn, little frequented, but of which the host is entirely devoted to me. I will go there, where I expect to find letters, and you go to the first tavern in the town, to L'Epee du Grand Henri for instance, refresh yourselves, and in two hours be upon the jetty—our boat is waiting there for us."

The matter being thus decided, the two friends found, about two hundred paces further, the tavern indicated to them. The horses were fed, but not unsaddled; the rooms supplied—for it was already late—and their two masters, impatient to return, appointed a place of meeting with them on the jetty, and desired them on no account to exchange a word with any one. It is needless to say that this caution concerned Biscos alone—it was long since it had become a use less one to Grimaud.

Athos and Aramis walked down toward the port. From their
dress, covered with dust, and from a certain easy manner by which
a man accustomed to travel is always recognized, the two friends
excited the attention of a few walkers. There was more especially
one upon whom their arrival had produced a decided impression.
This man, who they had observed from the first for the same rea-
son as they had themselves been remarked by others, walked in a
meandering way up and down the jetty. From the moment he per-
cived them he did not cease to look at them, and seemed to burn
with the wish to speak to them.
On reaching the jetty, Athos and Aramis stopped to look at a lit-
tle boat fastened to a stake, and ready rigged as if waiting to start.
"That is, doubtless, our boat," said Athos.
"Yes," replied Aramis. "And the sloop sailing about there must
be that which is to take us to our destination; now," continued he,
"if only Du Winter does not keep us waiting. It is not at all
amusing here—there is not a single woman passing."
"Hush!" said Athos. "We are overhead."
In truth, the walker who, during the observations of the two
friends, had passed and repassed behind them several times, stopped
at the name of Du Winter, but as his face betrayed no emotion at
the mention of this name, it might have been by chance that he had
stopped.
"Gentlemen," said the man, who was young and pale, bowing
with much ease and politeness, "pardon my curiosity, but I see you
come from Paris, or at least that you are strangers at Boulogne."
"We come from Paris, yes," replied Athos, with the same cort-
tesy. "What is there we can do for you?"
"Sir," said the young man, "will you be so good as to tell me if
it be true that Cardinal Mazarin is no longer minister?"
"That is a strange question," said Aramis. "He is and he is not." replied Athos; "that is to say, he is dis-
missed by one-half of France; and that, by means of intrigues and
promises, he makes the other half retain him; you will perceive that
this may last a long time."
"However, sir," said the stranger, "he has neither died, nor is
in prison?"
"No, sir, not at this moment at least."
"Sirs, accept my thanks for your politeness," said the young
man, retreating.
"What do you think of that interrogator?" asked Aramis.
"I think he is either a provincial person who is dull, or a spy
wishing for information."
"And you replied to him with that notion?"
"Nothing warranted me to answer him otherwise; he was polite
to me, and I was so to him."
"But if he be a spy——"
"What do you think a spy would be about here? We are not
living in the time of Cardinal Richelieu, who would have closed the
ports on a bare suspicion."
"It matters not; you were wrong to reply to him as you did,"
continued Aramis, following with his eyes the young man disapp-
earing behind the cliffs.
"And you," said Athos, "you forget that you committed a very
different kind of imprudence in pronouncing Lord De Winter's name. Did you not see that at that name the young man stopped?"

"More reason, then, when he spoke to you for sending him about his business."

"A quarrel?" asked Athos.

"And since when have you become afraid of a quarrel?"

"I'd always afraid of a quarrel when I am expected at any place, and that such a quarrel might possibly prevent my reaching it. Besides, let me own something to you. I am anxious to see that young man nearer."

"And why, then?"

"Aramis, you will certainly laugh at me—you will say that I am always repeating the same thing—you will call me the most timorous of visionaries: but to whom do you see a resemblance in that young man?"

"In beauty, or on the contrary?" asked Aramis, laughing.

"In ugliness, and as far as a man can resemble a woman."

"Ah, éhaut!" cried Aramis. "you have made me think. No, in truth, you are no visionary, my dear friend, and now that I think of it—you, yes, I faith, quite right—that delicate and compressed mouth, those eyes which seem always at the command of the intellect, and never of the heart! Yes, it is one of Milady's bastards!"

"You laugh, Aramis."

"From habit, that is all; for I swear to you, I should like no better than yourself to meet that viper in my path."

"Ah! here is De Winter coming," said Athos.

"Good, one thing now is only wanting, and that is that our grooms should not keep us waiting."

"No," said Athos. "I see them about twenty paces behind my lord. I recognize Grimaud by his long legs and stiff gait. He carries our muskets."

"Then we shall embark to-night?" asked Aramis, glancing toward the west, where the sun had left but one golden cloud, which, dipping into the ocean, appeared by degrees to be extinguished.

"Probably so," said Athos.

"Diablo!" resumed Aramis; "I have little fancy for the sea by day, but still less at night; the sounds of the winds and waves, the frightful motion of the vessel—I confess that I prefer to be in the convent of Noisy."

Athos smiled sadly, for it was evident that he was thinking of other things, as he listened to his friend, and he moved toward De Winter.

"What ails our friend?" said Aramis; "he resembles one of Dante's damned people whose neck Satan has dislocated, and who always look at their heels. What the devil makes him look thus behind him?"

When De Winter perceived them, he in his turn he advanced toward them with surprising rapidity.

"What in the matter, my lord?" said Athos: "and what puts you out of breath thus?"

"Nothing," replied De Winter; "nothing; and yet in passing the heights it seemed to me——" and he again turned round.
Atlos glanced at Aramis.

"But let us go," continued De Winter; "let us be off; the boat must be waiting for us; and there is our ship at anchor—do you see it there? I wish I were on board already"—and he looked back again.

"He has seen him," said Athos, in a low tone, to Aramis.

They had now reached the ladder which led to the boat. De Winter made the grooms who carried the arms, and the porters with the baggage, descend the first, and was about to follow them.

At this moment Athos perceived a man walking on the sea-shore parallel to the jetty, and hastening his steps, as if to reach the other side of the port, scarcely twenty steps from the place of embarking. He fancied, in the darkness, that he recognized the young man who had questioned him. Athos now descended the ladder, in his turn, without losing sight of the young man. The latter, to make a short cut, had appeared on a sluice.

"He certainly bodes us no good," said Athos; "but let us embark—once out at sea, let him come."

And Athos sprang into the boat, which was immediately pushed off, and which soon distanced the shore under the efforts of four strong rowers.

But the young man had begun to follow, or rather to advance before the boat. She was obliged to pass between the point of the jetty, surmounted by a beacon, just lighted, and a rock which jutted out. They saw him in the distance climbing the rock, in order to look down upon the boat as he passed.

"Ay, but," said Aramis, "that young man is decidedly a spy."

"Which is the young man?" asked De Winter, turning round.

"He who followed us, and spoke to us, and awaits us there—aided." De Winter turned, and followed the direction of Aramis's finger.

The beacon bathed its light upon the little strait through which they were about to pass, and the rock where the young man stood with bare head and crossed arms.

"It is he!" exclaimed De Winter, seizing the arm of Athos; "it is he! I thought I recognized him, and I was not mistaken."

"Who—him?" asked Aramis.

"Milady's son," replied Athos.

"The monk!" exclaimed Grimaud.

The young man heard these words, and bent so forward over the rock that one might have supposed he was about to precipitate himself from it.

"Yes, it is I, my uncle,—I, the son of Milady—I, the monk—I, the secretary and friend of Cromwell—and I know you, both you and your companions."

There were in that boat three men, unquestionably brave, and whose courage no man would have dared to dispute, nevertheless, at that voice, that accent, and these gestures, they felt a shudder of terror run through their veins. As for Grimaud, his hair stood on end, and drops of sweat ran from his brow.

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, "that is the nephew, the monk, and the son of Milady, as he says himself."

"Aha, yes," murmured De Winter.
"Then, wait," said Aramis; and with the terrible coolness which on important occasions he showed, he took one of the muskets from Tony, shouldered it, and aimed it at the young man, who stood, like the accusing angel, upon the rock.

"Fire!" cried Grimaud, unconsciously.

Athos threw himself on the mouth of the gun, and arrested the shot which was about to be fired.

"The devil take you," said Aramis. "I had him so well at the point of my gun, I should have sent a ball into his breast."

"It is enough to have killed the mother," said Athos, harshly.

"The mother was a wretch, who struck at us all, and at those dear to us."

"Yes, but the son has done us no harm."

Grimaud, who had risen to watch the effect of the shot, fell back hopelessly, wringing his hands.

The young man burst into a laugh.

"Ah, it is certainly you," he cried, "and I know you now."

His mocking laugh and threatening words passed over their heads, carried on by the breeze, until lost in the depths of the horizon.

Aramis shouldered.

"Be calm!" exclaimed Athos, "for Heaven's sake; have we ceased to be men?"

"No," said Aramis; "but that being is a fiend; and ask the uncle whether I was going to rid him of his nephew."

De Winter only replied by a groan.

"It was all up with him," continued Aramis; "ah, I much fear that, with your wisdom, you have made me commit a great folly."

Athos took Lord de Winter's hand, and tried to turn the conversation.

"When shall we land in England?" he asked; but De Winter seemed not to hear his words, and made no reply.

"Hold, Athos," said Aramis; "perhaps there is still time. See if he is still in the same place."

Athos turned round with an effort; the sight of the young man was evidently painful to him, and there he stood, in fact on the rock, the beacon shedding round him, as it were, a glory of light.

"Dostethly, Aramis," said Athos; "I think I was wrong not to let you fire."

"Hold your tongue," replied Aramis; "you will make me weep if it were possible."

At this moment they were hailed by a voice from the slope, and a few seconds later, men, servants and baggage were on deck. The captain had been only waiting his passengers; and hardly had they put foot on board, ere her head was turned toward Hastings, where they were to disembark. At this instant the three friends turned, in spite of themselves, a last look on the rock, upon the menacing figure which pursued them, and stood out boldly. Then a voice reached them once more, sending out this threat: "To our next meeting, sirs, in England."