something; thank you—you have, indeed, repaid me magnificently for my services."

And he threw himself at the feet of Cromwell, and in spite of the efforts of the Puritan general, who did not like this almost kingly homage, he took his hand and kissed it.

"What!" said Cromwell, arresting him for a moment as he rose; "is there nothing more you wish? neither gold nor rank?"

"You have given me all you can give me, and from today your debt is paid."

And Mordaunt darted out of the general's tent, his heart beating, and his eyes sparkling with joy.

Cromwell gazed a moment after him.

"He has killed his uncle!" he murmured. "What are my servants? Perhaps those who ask nothing, or seem to ask nothing, have asked more in the eyes of heaven than those who tax the country, and steal the bread of the poor. Nobody serves me for nothing. Charles, who is my prisoner, may still have friends; but I have none!"

And with a deep sigh he again sank into the reverie which had been interrupted by Mordaunt.

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CHAPTER LVI.

MOHAMMED.

Whilst Mordaunt was making his way to Cromwell's tent, D'Artagnan and Porthos had brought their prisoners to the house which had been assigned to them as their dwelling at Newcastle.

The two friends made the prisoners enter the house first, whilst they stood at the door, desiring Musqueton to take all the four horses to the stable.

"Why don't we go in with them?" asked Porthos.

"We must first see what the sergeant wishes us to do," replied D'Artagnan; and he then asked the sergeant his wishes.

"We have had orders," answered the man, "to help you in taking care of your prisoners."

There could be no fault found with this arrangement; on the contrary, it seemed to be a delicate attention to be received gratefully; D'Artagnan, therefore, thanked the man, and gave him a crown piece to drink to General Cromwell's health.

The sergeant answered that Puritans never drank, and put the crown piece into his pocket.

"Ah!" said Porthos, "what a fearful day, my dear D'Artagnan!"

"What! a fearful day, when we have to-day found our friends!"

"Yes; but under what circumstances?"

"It is true that our position is an awkward one; but let us go in and see more clearly what is to be done."

"Things look very bad," replied Porthos; "I understand now why Aramis advised me to strangle that horrible Mordaunt."

"Silence!" cried the Gascon; "do not utter that name."

"But," argued Porthos, "I speak French, and they are all English."
D'Artagnan looked at Porthos with that air of wonder which a sensible man cannot help feeling at stupidity in every degree.

But, as Porthos on his side could not comprehend his astonishment, he merely pushed him in doors, saying, "Let us go in."

They found Athos in a profound despondency; Aramis looked first at Porthos and then at D'Artagnan without speaking; but the latter understood his meaning.

"You want to know how we came here; it's easily guessed. Mazarin sent us with a letter to General Cromwell."

"But how came you to fall into company with Morlaas, whom I hate you distrust?" asked Athos.

"Mazarin again. Cromwell had sent him to Mazarin. Mazarin sent us to Cromwell. There has been a fate in it."

"Yes, you are right, D'Artagnan, a fate which will separate and ruin us; so, my dear Aramis, say no more about it, and let us prepare to submit to our destiny."

"Zounds! let us speak about things, on the contrary—for we always agreed to keep on the same side; and here we are engaged in conflicting parties."

"Yes," added Athos, "I now ask you, D'Artagnan, what side you are on? Ah! behold for what end the wretched Mazarin has made use of you. Do you know in what crime you are to-day concerned? In the capture of a king, in his degradation, in his death."

"Oh! oh!" cried Porthos, "do you think so?"

"You are exaggerating, Athos; we are not so far gone as that," replied the lieutenant.

"Good heavens! we are on the very eve of it. I say, why is the king taken prisoner? Those who wish to respect him as a master, would not buy him as a slave."

"I don't say to the contrary," said D'Artagnan. "But what's that to us! I am here, because I am a soldier, and have to obey orders; I have taken an oath to obey, and I do obey; but you who have taken no oath, why are you here, and what cause do you serve?"

"That most sacred in the world," said Athos: "the cause of misfortune, of religion, of royalty. A friend, a wife, a daughter, have done us the honor to call us to their aid. We have served them to the best of our poor means, and God will recompense the will, and forgive the want of power; you may see matters differently, D'Artagnan, and think otherwise. I do not attempt to argue with you, but I blame you."

"Hey-day!" cried D'Artagnan: "what matters it to me, after all, if Cromwell, who's an Englishman, revolts against his king, who is a Scotchman? I am myself a Frenchman. I have nothing to do with these things—why make me responsible for them?"

"Why you? Because, D'Artagnan, a man springing from the ancient nobility of France, bearing a good name, carrying a sword, have helped to give up a king to bersellers, shopkeepers, and wagoners—ah! D'Artagnan! perhaps you have done your duty as a soldier, but, as a gentleman, I say that you are very culpable."

D'Artagnan was chewing the stalk of a flower, unable to reply, and very uncomfortable.
And you, Porthos—you a gentleman in manners—in courage—are as much to blame as D'Artagnan."

Porthos colored, and lowering his head, mild:

"Yes, yes, my dear count, I feel that you are right."

Athos arose.

"Come," he said, stretching out his hand to D'Artagnan, "come, don't be sulky, my dear son, for I have said all this to you, if not in the tone, at least with the feelings of a father. It would have been easier to me merely to have thanked you for preserving my life, and not to have uttered a word of this."

"Doubtless, doubtless, Athos. But this is it—you have sentiments, the devil knows what, such as every one can't have. Who could suppose that a sensible man could leave his house—France—his ward—a charming youth—for we saw him in the camp—to fly to the aid of a rotten, worm-eaten royalty, which is going to crumble one of these days like an old cake? The sentiments you sport are certainly fine—so fine, that they are superhuman."

"However that may be, D'Artagnan," replied Athos, "without falling into the snare which his Guizot friends had prepared for him by an appeal to his parental love, 'whosoever may be, you know, in the bottom of your heart, that it is true; but I am coming to dispute with my superiors. D'Artagnan, I am your prisoner—treat me as such.'"

D'Artagnan said nothing; but, after having gnawed the flower-stalk, he began to bite his nails. At last:

"Do you imagine," he resumed, "that they mean to kill you? And wherefore should they do so? What interest have they in your death? Moreover, you are our prisoners."

"Pest!" cried Aramis; "knowest thou not, then, Mordaunt? I have merely exchanged with him one look, but that look convinced me that we were damned."

"The truth is, I'm very sorry that I did not strangle him, as you advised me to do," said Porthos.

"Stop," cried Athos, extending his hand to one of the grated windows by which the room was lighted; "you will soon know what to expect, for here he is."

In fact, looking at the place to which Athos pointed, D'Artagnan saw a cavalier coming toward the house at full gallop.

It was Mordaunt.

D'Artagnan rushed out of the room.

Porthos wanted to follow him.

"Stay," said D'Artagnan, "and do not come till you hear me beat like a drum with my fingers upon the door."

When Mordaunt arrived opposite the house he saw D'Artagnan upon the threshold, and the soldiers lying on the grass, here and there, with their arms.

"Hallo!" he cried, "are the prisoners still there?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant, uncovering his head.

"Tis well; order four men to conduct them to my lodging."

Four men prepared to do so.

"What do you want, sir?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Sir," replied Mordaunt, "I have ordered the two prisoners that we made this morning to be conducted to my lodging."
"Wherefore, sir? Excuse curiosity, but I wish to be enlightened on the subject."

"Because these prisoners, sir, are at my disposal, and I choose to dispose of them as I like."

"Allow me—allow me, sir," said D’Artagnan, "to observe you in error. The prisoners belong to those who took them, and not to those who only saw them taken. You might have taken Lord Winter—who, 'tis said, was your uncle—prisoner, but you preferred killing him: 'tis well—well, that is, Monsieur de Valon and I—could have killed our prisoners—we preferred taking them."

Mordaunt’s very lips were white with rage.

D’Artagnan now saw that affairs were growing worse, and he beat the guard’s march upon the door. At the first beat, Porthos rushed out and stood on the other side of the door.

This movement was observed by Mordaunt.

"Sir!" he thus addressed D’Artagnan; "your resistance is useless—these prisoners have just been given me by my illustrious patron, Oliver Cromwell."

These words struck D’Artagnan like a thunderbolt. The blood mounted to his temples, his eyes became dim; he saw from what source the ferocious hopes of the young man arose, and he put his hand to the hilt of his sword.

As to Porthos, he lookedquiringly at D’Artagnan.

This look of Porthos’s made the Gascon regret that he had summoned the brute force of his friend to aid him in an affair which seemed to require, chiefly, cunning.

"Violence," he said to himself, "would spoil all; D’Artagnan, my friend, prove to this young serpent that thou art not only stronger, but more subtle than he is.

"Ah!" he said, making a low bow, "why did you not begin by saying that, Monsieur Mordaunt? What! are you sent by General Oliver Cromwell, the most illustrious captain of his age?"

"I have this instant left him," replied Mordaunt, alighting, in order to give his horse to a soldier to hold.

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear sir! all England is with Cromwell; and since you ask for my prisoners, I bend, sir, to your wishes. They are yours; take them."

Mordaunt, delighted, advanced—Porthos looking at D’Artagnan with open-mouthed astonishment. Then D’Artagnan took his foot, and Porthos began to understand that this was all a yarning.

Mordaunt put his foot on the first step of the door, and, with his hat in his hand, prepared to pass by the two friends, mothering to the four men to follow him.

"But pardon me," he said, stopping short, "since the illustrious general has given my prisoners into your hands, he has, of course, confirmed that act in writing."

Mordaunt stood still, then retreated—cast a terrible glance at D’Artagnan which was answered by the most amicable and friendly mine that could be imagined.

"Speak out, sir," said Mordaunt.

"Monsieur de Valon, yonder, is rich, and has forty thousand francs yearly, so he does not care about money. I do not speak for him but for myself."

"Well, sir? What more?"

"Well— I'm not rich. In Gascony 'de edehonor, sir, nobody is rich; and Henry IV., of glorious memory, who was the king of the Gascons, as his Majesty Phillip IV. is the king of the Spaniards, never had a penny in his pockets.'"

"Go on, sir, I see where you wish to come to, and if it is what I think that stops you, I can oblige you difficulty."

"Ah, I knew well," said the Gascon, "that you were a man of talent. Well, here's the case: here's where the snare bites me, as we French say. I am an officer of fortune, nothing else: I have nothing but what my sword brings me in—that is to say, more blows than bank notes. Now, on taking prisoners this morning, two Frenchmen, who seemed to me of high birth—in short, two knights of the Garter—I said to myself, my fortune is made."

Mordaunt, completely deceived by the worldly civility of D'Artagnan, smiled like a man who understands perfectly the resume given him, and said:

"I shall have the order signed directly, sir, and with it two thousand pistoles; meanwhile, let me take these men away."

"No," replied D'Artagnan, "what aesthetics a delay of half an hour? I am a man of order, sir; let us do things in order."

"Nevertheless," replied Mordaunt, "I could compel you; I command here."

"Ah, sir!" said D'Artagnan, "I see that, although we have had the honor of traveling in your company, you do not know us. We are gentlemen; we are both of us, able to kill you and your eight men; we two only. For Heaven's sake don't be obstinate. For when others are obstinate I am obstinate likewise, and then I become resolute and headstrong; and there's my friend, who is even more headstrong and ferocious than I am; besides, we are sent here by Cardinal Mazarin, and at this moment represent both the king and the Cardinal, and are, therefore, as embassadoir, able to act with impunity, a thing that General Oliver Cromwell, who is assuredly a great a politician as he is a general, is quite a man to understand. Ask him then for the written order. What will that cost you, my dear Monseur Mordaunt?"

"Yes, the written order," said Porthos, who now began to comprehend what D'Artagnan was aiming at, "nothing but that will satisfy us."

However anxious Mordaunt was to have recourse to violence, he quite understood the reasons that D'Artagnan gave him; and besides, completely ignorant of the friendship which existed between the four Frenchmen, all his uneasiness disappeared when he heard of the plausible motive of the reason. He decided, therefore, not only to fetch the order, but the two thousand pistoles, at which he estimated the prisoners. He therefore mounted his horse, and disappeared.

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "a quarter of an hour to go to the tent, a quarter of an hour to return;" then turning, without the least change of countenance, to Porthos, he said, looking him full in the face: "Friend Porthos, listen to this: first, not a syllable to either of our friends about the service we are going to render them."
"Very well; I understand."
"Go to the stable; you will find Mousqueton there. Saddle your horses, put your pistols in your saddle-bags, take out the horses, and lead them to the street below this, so that there will be nothing to do but to mount them; all the rest is my business."
Porthos made no remark, but obeyed, with the sublime confidence that he had in his friend. He then proceeded, with his usual calm gait, to the stable, and went into the very midst of the soldiers, who, Frenchman as he was, could not help admiring his height and the strength of his powerful limbs.
At the corner of the street he met Mousqueton, and took him with him.
D'Artagnan, meantime, went into the house, whistling a tune which he had begun before Porthos went away. "My dear Athos, I have reflected on your arguments, and am convinced. I am sorry to have had anything to do with this matter. As you say, Mazurin is a knave, I have resolved to fly with you; not a word; be ready; your swords are in the corner; do not forget them, they are, in many circumstances, very useful; there's Porthos's purse, too."
He put it into his pocket. The two friends were perfectly stupefied.
"Well, pray is there anything to be so surprised at?" he said.
"I was blind: Athos made me see clearly; that's all—come here."
The two friends went near him.
"Do you see that street? There are the horses. Go out by the door, turn to the right, jump into your saddles, all will be right; don't be uneasy at anything except mistaking the signal. That will be the signal when I call out—Mohammed!"
"But give us your word that you will come too, D'Artagnan," said Athos.
"I swear I will, by Heaven."
"Tis settled," said Aramis; "at the cry Mohammed we go out, upset all that stands in our way, run to our horses, jump into our saddles, spur them—is that all?"
"Exactly."
"See, Aramis, as I have told you, D'Artagnan is the best of us all," said Athos.
"Very true," replied the Gascon, "but I always run away from compliments. Don't forget the signal—Mohammed!" and he went out as he came in, whistling the air that he had been whistling when he came in.
The soldiers were playing or sleeping; two of them were singing in a corner, out of tune, the psalm—"On the rivers of Babylon." D'Artagnan called the sergeant. "My dear friend, General Cromwell has sent Monsieur Mornant to fetch me. Guard the prisoners well, I beg of you."
The sergeant made a sign, as much as to say he did not understand French, and D'Artagnan tried to make him comprehend him by signs and gestures. Then he went into the stable; he found the five horses, and his own among others, saddled. He gave his instructions, and Porthos and Mousqueton went to their post according to his directions.
Then D'Artagnan, being alone, struck a light and lighted a small
“Help! help!” cried D’Artagnan. "Stop, my horse has the staggerers.”

In an instant blood came from his eyes, and he was white with foam.

"Help!" cried D’Artagnan. "What! will you let me be killed?—by Mohammed!"

Scarcely had he uttered this cry, than the door opened, and Athos and Aramis rushed out. The coast, owing to the Gascon’s stratagem, was clear.

"The prisoners are escaping! the prisoners are escaping!” cried the sergeant.

"Stop! stop!” cried D’Artagnan, giving rein to his famous steed, who, charging forth, overturned several men.

"Stop! stop!” cried the soldiers, and ran for their arms.

But the prisoners were on their saddles, and lost no time, hastening to the nearest gate.

In the middle of the street they saw Grimaud and Berthois, who were coming to find their masters. With one wave of his hand, Athos made Grimaud, who followed the little troop, understand everything, and they pressed on, like a whirlwind, D’Artagnan still directing them from behind with his voice.

They passed through the gate like apparitions, without the guards thinking of detaining them, and reached the open country.

All this while the soldiers were calling out, "Stop! stop!” and the sergeant, who began to see that he was the victim of an artifice, was almost in a frenzy of despair. Whilst all this was going on, a cavalier in full gallop was seen approaching. It was Morland with the order in his hand.

"The prisoners!” he exclaimed, jumping off his horse. The sergeant had not the courage to reply; he showed him the open door and the empty room. Morland darted to the steps—understood all, uttered a cry, as if his very heart were pierced, and fell fainting on the stone steps.

CHAPTER LVII.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT UNDER THE MOST TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES NOBLE NATURES NEVER LOSE THEIR COURAGE, NOR GOOD STOMACHS THEIR APPETITES.

The little troop, without looking behind them, or exchanging a single word, fled at a rapid gallop, crossing on foot a little stream, of which none of them knew the name, and leaving on their left a town, which Athos declared to be Duriam. At last they came in sight of a small wood, and spurring their horses afresh, they rode in the direction of it.