"Nothing!" replied Grimaud.

"Those fools!" cried Porthos, "they have not even protected us. Oh! if we had been in their place!"

"Yes, they are wrong," said D'Artagnan. "I would willingly have said two words to Mordant in this little Thèbes. See what a nice place for bringing down a man properly!"

"I think, decidedly," observed Aramis, "gentlemen, that the son is not so bad as his mother."

"What, my good fellow!" replied Athos; "wait awhile, we have scarcely left him two hours ago—he does not know yet in what direction we came, nor where we are. We may say that he is not equal to his mother when we put foot in France, if we are not poisoned or killed before then."

"Meanwhile let us dine," suggested Porthos.

"I see, yes," said Athos, "for I am hungry."

"Look out for the black fowls!" cried Aramis.

And the four friends, guided by Musqueton, took up the way toward the house, already almost restored to their former gaiety; for they were now, as Athos had said, all four united and of one mind.

CHAPTER LVIII
RESPECT TO PALLEN MAJESTY.

As our fugitives approached the house, they found the ground cut up, as if a considerable body of horsemen had preceded them. Before the door, the traces were yet more apparent; these horsemen, whoever they might be, had halted there.

"Egal!" cried D'Artagnan; "it is quite clear that the king and his escort have been here."

He pushed open the door, and found the first room empty and deserted.

"Well!" cried Porthos.

"I can see nobody," said D'Artagnan. "Ahah!"

"What!"

"Blood!"

At this word the three friends leapt from their horses, and entered. D'Artagnan had already opened the door of the second room, and, from the expression of his face, it was clear that he there beheld some extraordinary object.

The three friends drew near, and discovered a young man stretched on the ground, and bathed in a pool of blood. It was evident that he had attempted to regain his bed, but had not had the strength to do so.

Athos, who imagined that he saw him move, was the first to go up to him.

"Well?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Well, if he is dead." said Athos, "he has not been so long, for he is still warm. But no, his heart is beating. Eh! there, my friend!"

The wounded man heaved a sigh. D'Artagnan took some water in the hollow of his hand, and threw it upon his face. The man
opened his eyes, made an effort to raise his head, and fell back again. The wound was in the top of the skull, and the blood was flowing copiously.

Aramis dipped a cloth into some water, and applied it to the gash. Again the wounded man opened his eyes, and looked in astonishment at these strangers, who appeared to pity him.

"You are among friends," said Athos in English; "so cheer up, and tell us, if you have the strength to do so, what has happened?"

"The king," muttered the wounded man, "the king is a prisoner."

"Make your mind easy," resumed Athos, "we are all faithful servants of his Majesty." "Is what you tell me true?" asked the wounded man.

"On our honor as gentlemen."

"Then I may tell you all. I am the brother of Parry, his Majesty's lackey."

Athos and Aramis remembered that this was the name by which De Winter had called the man whom they had found in the passage of the king's tent.

"We know him," said Athos; "he never left the king."

"Yes, that is he. Well, he thought of me, when he saw that the king was taken, and as they were passing before the house here, he begged in the king's name that they should stop, as the king was hungry. They brought him into this room, and placed sentinels at the doors and windows. Parry knew this room, as he had often been to see me when the king was at Newcastle. He knew that there was a trap-door communicating with a cellar, from which one could get into the orchard. He made me a sign, which I understood, but the king's guards must have noticed it, and put themselves on their guard. I went out as if to fetch wood, passed through the subterranean passage into the cellar, and while Parry was gently holding the door, pushed up the board, and beckoned to the king to follow me. Ahad! he would not. But Parry clasped his hands and implored him, and at last he agreed. I went on first, quite delighted. The king was a few steps behind me, when suddenly I saw something rise up in front of me, like a huge shadow. I wanted to cry out to warn the king, but the same moment I felt a blow as if the house was falling on my head, and fell insensible. When I came to myself again, I was stretched in the same place. I dragged myself as far as the yard. The king and his escort were gone."

"And now what can we do for you?" asked Athos.

"Help me to get on to the bed; that will ease me."

They helped him on to the bed, and, calling Grimouard to dress his wound, returned to the outer room to consult.

"Now," said Aramis, "we know how the matter stands. The king and his escort have gone this way; we had better take the opposite direction, eh?"

"Yes," said Porthos; "if we follow the escort we shall find everything desolated, and die of hunger. What a confounded country this England is! This is the first time I shall have lost my dinner, and it's my best meal."

"What do you say about it, D'Artagnau?" said Athos.
"Just the contrary to Aramis."

"What! follow the escort!" cried Porthos, quite alarmed.

"No, but join them. They will never look for us among the Puritans."

"A good idea," said Athos; "they will think we want to leave England, and seek us in the ports. Meanwhile we shall reach London with the king, and once there, it is not difficult to conceal one's self."

"But," said Aramis, "isn't we be suspected by Colonel Harrison?"

"Egad!" cried D'Artagnan, "he's just the man I count upon. Colonel Harrison is one of our friends. We have met him twice at General Cromwell's. He knows that we were sent from France by Monsieur Mazarin; he will consider us as brothers. Besides, is he not a butcher's son? Well, then, Porthos will show him how to knock down an ox with a blow of the fist; and I, how to trip up a bull, by taking him by the horns. That will insure his confidence."

Athos smiled.

At this moment Grimaud came in. He had stanch'd the wound, and the man was better.

The little troop recommenced their march, and, at the end of two hours, perceived a considerable body of horsemen about half a league ahead.

"My dear friends," said D'Artagnan, "give your swords to Monsieur Mousqueton, who will return them to you in proper time and place, and do not forget you are our prisoners."

It was not long ere they joined the escort. The king was in the front, surrounded by troopers, and when he saw Athos and Aramis, his face of pleasure lighted up his pale cheeks.

D'Artagnan passed to the head of the column, and leaving his friends under the guard of Porthos, went straight to Harrison, who recognized him as having met him at Cromwell's, and received him as politely as a man of his breeding and disposition could. It turned out as D'Artagnan had foreseen. The colonel neither had nor could have any suspicion.

They halted for the king to dine. This time, however, due precautions were taken to prevent any attempt at escape. In the large room of the hotel a small table was placed for him, and a large one for the officers.

"Will you dine with me?" asked Harrison of D'Artagnan.

"Gad, I should be very happy, but I have my companion, Monsieur du Vallon, and the two prisoners, whom I cannot leave. Let us manage it better. Have a table set for us in a corner, and hand us whatever you like from yours."

"Good," answered Harrison.

The table at which the Puritan officers were seated was round, and whether by chance, or a coarse intention, Harrison had his back turned to the king.

The king saw the four gentlemen come in, but appeared to take no notice of them.

They sat down in such a manner as to turn their backs upon nobody.

"I faith, colonel," said D'Artagnan, "we are very grateful for
your gracious invitation; for, without you, we ran the risk of going without dinner, as we have without breakfast. My friend, Monsieur de Valois, shares my gratitude, for he was particularly hungry."

"And I am so still," said Porthos, bowing to Harrison.

"And how," said Harrison, laughing, "did this serious calamity of going without breakfast happen to you?"

"In a very simple manner, colonel," said D'Artagnan. "I was in a hurry to join you, and took the road you had already gone by. You can understand our disappointment, when arriving at a pretty little house on the skirts of a wood, which, at a distance, had quite a gay appearance, with its red roof and green shutters, we found nothing but a poor wretch bidden—— Ah! colonel, pay my respects to the officer of yours who struck that blow."

"Yes," said Harrison, laughing, and looking over at one of the officers seated at his table. "When Grosboi undertakes this kind of thing, there's no need to go over the ground after him."

"Ah! it's that gentleman?" said D'Artagnan, bowing to the officer. "I am sorry he does not speak French, that I might offer him my compliments."

"I am ready to receive and return them, sir," said the officer, in pretty good French. "For I realised these years in Paris."

"Then, sir, allow me to assure you that your blow was so well directed that you have nearly killed your man."

"Nearly? I thought it was quite," said Grosboi.

"No. It was a very near thing, but he is not dead."

As he said this, D'Artagnan gave a glance at Parry, who was standing in front of the king, to show him that the news was meant for him.

The king, too, who had listened in the greatest agony, now breathed again.

"Hang it," said Grosboi, "I thought I had succeeded better. If it were not so far from here to the house, I would return and finish him."

"And you would do well, if you are afraid of his recovering; for you know, if a wound in the head does not kill at once, it is cured in a week."

And D'Artagnan threw a second glance toward Parry, on whose face such an expression of joy was manifested that Charles stretched out his hand to him, smiling.

Parry bent over his master's hand, and kissed it respectfully.

"I've a great desire to drink the king's health," said Athos.

"Let me propose it, then," said D'Artagnan.

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan, quite amazed at the resource with which his companion's Gascron sharpness continually supplied him. D'Artagnan took his tin cup, filled it, and rose.

"Gentlemen," said he, "let us drink to him who presides at the repast. Here's to our colonel, and let him know that we are always at his commands as far as London, and further."

And as D'Artagnan, as he spoke, looked at Harrison, the colonel imagined the toast was for himself. He rose and bowed to the four friends, whose eyes were fixed on Charles, while Harrison cupped his glass without the slightest misgiving.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

The king, in return, looked at the four gentlemen, and drank with a smile full of nobleness and gratitude.

"Come, gentlemen," said Harrison, quite regardless of his illustrious captive, "let's be off."

"Where do we sleep, colonel?"

"At Thirsk," replied Harrison.

"Parry," said the king, rising, too, "my horse: I desire to go to Thirsk."

"Egal!" said D'Artagnan to Athos, "your king has thoroughly taken me, and I am quite at his service."

"If what you say is sincere," replied Athos, "he will never reach London."

"How so?"

"Because, before then, we shall have carried him off."

"Well, this time, Athos," said D'Artagnan, "upon my word, you are mad."

"Have you some plan in your head, then?" asked Aramis.

"Ay!" said Porthos, "the thing would not be impossible with a good plan."

"I have none," said Athos, "but D'Artagnan will discover one."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders and went on.

CHAPTER LX.

D'ARTAGNAN HITS ON A PLAN

As night closed in they arrived at Thirsk.

D'Artagnan was thoughtful, and assured for the moment to have lost his usual equanimity. Porthos, who could never see anything that was not self-evident, talked to him as usual. He replied in monosyllables, and Athos and Aramis looked significantly at one another.

Next morning D'Artagnan was the first to rise. He had gone down to the stables, had already had a look at the horses, and given all the necessary orders for the day, while Athos and Aramis were still in bed, and Porthos snoring.

At eight o'clock, the march was resumed in the same order as the night before, except that D'Artagnan left his friends and began to renew the acquaintance which he had already struck up with Monsieur Grosow.

"Really, sir," D'Artagnan said to him, "I am happy to find some with whom to talk in my own poor tongue. My friend, Monsieur du Vallon, is of a very melancholy disposition, so much so, that one can scarcely get three words a day out of him. As for our two prisoners, you can imagine, that they are but little in the humor for conversation."

"They are hot royalists," said Grosow.

"The more reason they should be sauky with us for having captured the Stuart, for whom, I hope, you're preparing a pretty trial."

"Why," said Grosow, "that is just what we are taking him to London for."

"And you don't lose sight of him, I presume?"