TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Is the fox a genius, Athos?" asked the Gascon. "No! he knows how to crunch fowls, to dodge the huntsman, and to find his way home by day or by night, that's all. Well, is all said?"

"All."

"Then let's count our money, and divide it. Ah! hurrad! there's the sun! Good-morrow, my friend, the sun! 'Tis a long time since I saw you!"

"Come, come, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "do not affect to be strong-minded; there are tears in your eyes; let us be open to each other, and sincere."

"What?" cried the Gascon, "do you think, Athos, we can take leave, calmly, of two friends, at a time not free from danger to you and Aramis?"

"No," answered Athos; "embrace me, my son."

"Zounds!" said Porthos, sobbing, "I believe I'm crying; but how foolish it is!"

Then they embraced. At that moment their fraternal bond of union was closer than ever, and when they parted, each to take the route agreed on, they turned back to utter to each other affectionate expressions, which the echoes of the Dunes repeated. At last they lost sight of each other; Porthos and D'Artagnan taking the road to Paris, followed by Musqueton, who, after having been too cold all night, found himself, at the end of half an hour, far too warm.

CHAPTER LXXIII.
THE RETURN.

During the six months that Athos and Aramis had been absent from France, the Parliaments, finding themselves one morning without either a queen or a king, were greatly alarmed at being thus deserted, and the absence of Mazarin so much desired, did not compensate for that of the two august fugitives.

The first feeling which pervaded Paris on hearing of the flight to Saint Germains, was that sort of affright which seizes children when they awake in the night and find themselves alone. A deputation was therefore sent to the queen to entreat her to return soon to Paris; but she not only declined to receive the deputies, but sent an intimation by Chancellor Sequier, implying that if the Parliament did not humble itself before her Majesty by negativing all the questions that had been the cause of the quarrel, Paris would be besieged the next day.

This threatening answer, unfortunately for the court, produced quite a different effect to that which was intended. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, supported by the citizens, replied by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin was the cause of all the discontent; denounced him as the enemy both of the king and the state; and ordered him to retire from the court that very day, and from France within a week afterward; and enjoining, in case of disobedience on his part, all the subjects of the king to pursue and take him.

Mazarin being thus out of the protection of the law, preparations on both sides were commenced: the queen, to attack Paris—the
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citizens, to defend it. The latter were occupied in breaking up the pavement, and stretching chains across the streets, when, headed by
the Conjuror, appeared the Prince de Conti (the brother of the
Prince de Condé) and the Due de Longueville, his brother-in-law.
This unexpected band of auxiliaries arrived in Paris on the tenth of
January, and the Prince de Conti was named, but not until after a
stormy discussion, generally adverse to the army of the king, out of
Paris.

As for the Due de Beaufort, he arrived from Vendôme, according
to the orders of the day, bringing with him his high bearing, and
his long and beautiful hair, qualifications which insured him the
sovereignty of the market-places, and their occupants.

It was just at this epoch that the four friends had landed at
Dunkirk, and begun their route toward Paris. On reaching the
capital, Athos and Aramis found it in arms. The sentinel at the
gate refused even to let them pass, and called his sergeant.

The sergeant, with the air of importance which such people
assume when they are clad with military dignity, said:

"Who are you, gentlemen?"

"Two gentlemen."

"And where do you come from?"

"From London?"

"And what are you going to do in Paris?"

"We are going with a mission to her Majesty, the Queen of Eng-
land."

"Where are your orders?"

"We have none; we left England, ignorant of the state of politics
here, having left Paris before the departure of the king."

"Ah!" said the sergeant, with a cunning smile, "you are
Mazarinists, who are sent as spies."

"My dear friend," here Athos spoke, "be assured, if we were
Mazarinists, we should have all sorts of passports. In your situa-
tion, distrust those who are well provided with every formality."

"Enter into the guard-room," said the sergeant; "we will lay
your case before the commandant of the post."

The guard-room was filled with citizens, and common people,
some playing, some drinking, some talking. In a corner, almost
bald, but not from view, were three gentlemen, who had preceded Athos
"of Aramis, and an officer was examining their passports. The
first impulsion of those three gentlemen, and of those who last entered,
was to cast an inquiring glance at each other. Those first arrived
were long cloaks, in the drapery of which they were carefully en-
volved; one of them, shorter than the rest, remained permanently
in the background.

When the sergeant, on entering the room, announced that, in all
probability he was bringing in two Mazarinists, it appeared to be the
unanimous opinion of the officers on guard that they ought not to
pass.

"Be it so," said Athos; "yet it is probable, on the contrary, that
we shall enter, because we seem to have to do with sensible people.

There seems to be only one thing to do, which is, to send our names
to her Majesty, the Queen of England, and, if she engages to answer
for us, I presume we shall be allowed to enter."
On hearing these words, the shortest of the other three men seemed more attentive than ever to what was going on, and he wrapped his cloak around him more carefully than before.

"Merciful goodness!" whispered Aramis to Athos. "Did you see?"

"What?" asked Athos.

"The face of the shortest of those three gentlemen?"

"No."

"He seemed to me—but 'tis impossible."

At this instant the sergeant, who had been for his orders, returned, and, pointing to the three gentlemen in cloaks, said:

"The passports are right; let these three gentlemen pass."

The three gentlemen bowed, and hastened to take advantage of this permission.

Aramis looked after them, and, as the last of them passed close to him, he pressed the hand of Athos.

"What is the matter with you, my friend?" asked the latter.

"I have—doubtless I am dreaming; tell me, sir," he said to the sergeant, "do you know those three gentlemen who are just gone out?"

"Only by their passports; they are three Fromilots, who are gone to rejoin the Due de Longueville."

"Tis strange," said Aramis, almost involuntarily; "I fancied that I recognized Mazarin himself."

The sergeant burst into a fit of laughter.

"He!" he cried; "he venture himself amongst us, to be hung! Not so foolish as all that."

"Ah!" muttered Athos. "I may be mistaken, I haven't the unerring eye of D'Artagnan."

"Who is speaking of D'Artagnan?" asked an officer, who appeared at that moment upon the threshold of the room.


"Planchet," added Grimaud; "Planchet, with a gorged, indeed!"

"Ah, gentlemen!" cried Planchet, "so you are back again in Paris. Oh, how happy you make us! No doubt you are come to join the princes!"

"As thou seest, Planchet," said Aramis, whilst Athos smiled at the importance now assumed by the old comrade of Musqueton in his new rank in the City Militia.

"Ah, so!" said Aramis: "allow me to congratulate you, Monseigneur Planchet."

"Ah, the chevalier!" returned Planchet, bowing.

"Lieutenant?" asked Aramis.

"Lieutenant, with a promise of becoming a captain."

"The capital! and pray how did you acquire all these honors?"

"In the first place, gentlemen, you know that I was the means of Moneur de Rochefort's escape: well, I was very near being hung by Mazarin, and that made me more popular than ever."

"So, owing to your popularity—"

"No; thanks to something better. You know, gentlemen, that I served in Piedmont's regiment, and had the honor of being a sergeant?"

"Yes."
"Well, one day when no one could drill a mob of citizens, who began to march, some with the right foot, others with the left, I succeeded, I did, in making them all begin with the same foot, and I was made a lieutenant on the field."

"So, I presume," said Athos, "that you have a huge number of the nobles with you?"

"Certainly. There are the Prince de Conti, the Duc de Longueville, the Duc de Beaufort, the Duc de Bouillon, the Marechal de la Mothe, the Marquis de Savigny, and I don’t know who, for my part."

"And the Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne?" inquired Athos, in a tremendous voice; "D’Artagnan told me that he had recommended him to your care, in parting."

"Yes, count; nor have I lost sight of him for an instant since."

"Then," said Athos, "I saw a joy of delight, "he is well? no accident has happened him?"

"None, sir."

"And he lives?"

"Still—at the hotel of the Great Charlemagne."

"And passes his time?"

"Sometimes with the queen of England—sometimes with Madame de Chevreuse. He and the Count de Grichy are never asunder."

"Thanks—Planchet—thanks," cried Athos, extending his hand to his lieutenant.

"Oh, sir!" Planchet only touched the tips of the count’s fingers.

"Oh, sir!—and now, gentlemen, what do you intend to do?"

"To re-enter Paris—if you will let us, my good Planchet."

"Let you, sir? I am nothing but your servant!" Then turning to his men:

"Allow these gentlemen to pass," he said; "they are friends of the Duc de Beaufort."

"Long live the Duc de Beaufort!" cried all the sentinels.

"Farewell till we meet again," said Aramis, as they took leave of Planchet; "if anything happens to us, we shall blame you for it."

"Sir," answered Planchet, "I am in all things yours to command."

"That fellow is too fast," said Aramis, as he got on his horse.

"How should he be?" replied Athos, whilst mounting also,

"seeing that he has been so long used to brush his master’s hats?"

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CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE EMBASSADORS.

The two friends rode rapidly down the declivity of the Faubourg, put on arriving at the bottom were surprised to find that the streets of Paris had become rivers—and the open places, lakes; after the great rains which fell in the month of January, the Seine had overflowed its banks, and the river inundated half the capital. The two gentlemen were obliged, therefore, to get off their horses, and take a boat, and in that manner they approached the Louvre.