bemuddled on stunned. At last he rose, and taking his handkerchief, steeped it in the blood of the martyred king. Then as the crowd gradually dispersed he kept down, crept from behind the drapery, glided between two horses, mingled with the crowd, and was the first to arrive at the inn.

Having gained his room, he raised his hand to his forehead, and finding his fingers covered with the king's blood, fell down insensible.

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CHAPTER LXXV.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

The snow was falling thick, and frozen. Aramis was the next to come in, and to discover Athos almost insensible. But at the first words he uttered, the Count roused from the kind of lethargy in which he had sunk.

"Are you wounded?" cried Aramis.

"No, this is his blood."

"Where were you, then?"

"Where you left me—under the scaffold."

"Did you see it all?"

"No, but I heard all. God preserve me from another such hour as I have just passed."

"Here is the order he gave me, and the cross I took from his hand; he desired they should be returned to the queen."

"Then here is a handkerchief to wrap them in," replied Athos, drawing from his pocket the one he had steeped in the king's blood.

"And what," he continued, "has been done with the wretched body?"

"By order of Cromwell, royal honors will be accorded to it. The doctors are embalming the corpse, and, when it is ready, it will be placed in a lighted chapel."

"Mockery," muttered Athos, savagely; "royal honors to one whom they have murdered!"

"Well, cheer up," said a loud voice from the staircase, which Porthos had just mounted. "We are all mortal, my poor friends."

"You are late, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, there were some people on the way who delayed me. The wretches were dancing. I took one of them by the throat, and think I throttled him a little. Just then a patrol rode up. Luckily the man I had had most to do with was some minutes recovering before he could speak, so I took advantage of his silence to walk off."

"Have you seen D'Artagnan?"

"We got separated in the crowd, and I could not find him again."

"Oh!" said Athos satirically, "I saw him. He was in the front row of the crowd, admirably placed for seeing; and, as on the whole, the sight was curious, he probably wished to stay to the end."

"Ah! Count de la Perce," said a calm voice, though hoarse with running, "is it you who calumniate the absent?"

This reproach stung Athos to the heart, but as the impression pro
druced by seeing D'Artagnan foremost in a crowd, a fierce and sanguinary crowd had been very strong. He contended himself with replying:

"I do not calumniate you, my friend. They were anxious about you here, and I told them where you were."

So saying, he stretched out his hand, but the other pretended not to see it, and he let it drop again slowly by his side.

"Right! I am tired," said D'Artagnan, sitting down.

"Drink a glass of port," said Aramis; "it will refresh you."

"Yes, let us drink," said Athos, anxious to make it up by hob-nobbing clauses with D'Artagnan, "let us drink, and get away from this hateful country."

"You are in a hurry, sir count," said D'Artagnan.

"But what would you have us do here, now that the king is dead?"

"Go, sir count," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly; "you see nothing to keep you a little longer in England? Well, for my part, I, a bloodthirsty ruffian, who can go and stand close to a scaffold, in order to have a better view of the king's execution— I remain."

Athos turned pale. Every reproach his friend made struck deeply into his heart.

"Haughty!" said Porthos, a little perplexed between the two. "I suppose, as I came with you, I must leave with you. I can't leave you alone in this wondrous country."

"Thanks, my worthy friend. So then I have a little adventure to propose to you when the count is gone. I want to find out who was the man in the mask, who so obligingly offered to cut the king's throat."

"A man in a mask?" cried Athos. "You did not let the executioner escape, then?"

"The executioner is still in the cellar, where, I presume, he has had a few words' conversation with mine host's boots. But you remind me, Musqueton!"

"Sir," answered a voice from the depths of the earth.

"Let out your prisoner. All is over."

"But," said Athos, "who is the wretch who has dared to raise his hand against his king?"

"An amateur headman," replied Aramis, "who, however, does not handle the ax himself."

"Did you not see his face?" asked Athos.

"He wore a mask."

"But you, Aramis, who were close to him?"

"I could see nothing but a gray beard under the bottom of the mask."

"Then it must be a man of a certain age."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "that matters little. When one puts on a mask, it is not difficult to wear a beard under it."

"I am sorry I did not follow him," said Porthos.

"Well, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "that's the very thing which came into my head to do."

Athos understood it all now.

"Forgive me, my friend," he said, offering his hand to D'Artagnan.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "while I was looking on, the fancy took me to discover who that masked individual might be. Well, I
looked about for Porthos, and as I did so, I saw near me a head, which had been broken, but which, for better or worse, had been mended with black silk. 'Humph!' thought I, 'that looks like my cut; I fancy I must have wounded that skull somewhere or other.' And, in fact, it was that unfortunate Scotchman, PARRY'S brother, you know, on whom Gueslaw amused himself by trying his strength. Well, this man was making signs to another at my left, and turning round, I recognized the honest Grimaud. 'Oh!' said I to him. Grimaud turned round with a jerk, recognized me, and pointed to the man in the mask. 'Eh?' said he, when meant, 'Do you see him?' 'Parbleu!' I answered, and we perfectly understood one another. Well, everything finished you know how. The mob dispersed. I made a sign to Grimaud and the Scotchman, and we all three retired into a corner of the square. I saw the executioner return into the king's room, change his clothes, put on a black hat, and a large cloak, and disappear. Five minutes later he came down the grand staircase."

"You followed him?" cried Athos.

"I should think so, but not without difficulty. Every minute he turned round, and thus obliged us to conceal ourselves. I might have gone up to him and killed him. But I am not selfish; and I thought it might console you all a little to have a share in the matter. So we followed him through the lowest streets in the city, and, in half an hour's time, he stopped before a small isolated house. Grimaud drew out a pistol. 'Eh?' said he, showing it. I held back his arm. The man in the mask stopped before a low door, and drew out a key; but before he placed it in the lock, he turned round to see if he was not followed. Grimaud and I got behind a tree, and the Scotchman, having nowhere to hide himself, threw himself on his face in the road. Next moment the door opened, and the man disappeared. I placed the Scotchman at the door by which he entered, making a sign to him to follow the man wherever he might go, if he came out again. Then going round the house, I placed Grimaud at the other exit, and here I am. Our game is beaten up. Now for the tally-ho."

Athos threw himself into D'Artagnan's arms.

'Humph!'' said Porthos. "Don't you think the executioner might be Master Cromwell himself, who, to make sure of this affair, undertook it himself."

"Aha! just so. Cromwell is stout and short, and this man thin and lank, and rather tall than otherwise."

"Some condemned soldier, perhaps," suggested Athos, "whom they have pardoned at the price of this deed."

"No, no," continued D'Artagnan, "it was not the measured step of a foot soldier, nor the easy gate of a horseman. If I am not mistaken, it was a gentleman's walk."

A gentleman! exclaimed Athos. "Impossible! It would be a disgrace to his whole family."

Fine sport, by Jove!" cried Porthos, with a laugh that shook the windows. "Fine sport!"

"Swords!" cried Aramis, "sword at and let us not lose a moment."

The four friends resumed their own clothes, girt on their swords
ordered Musqueton and Blaisde to pay the bill, and to arrange everything for immediate departure, and, wrapped in their large cloaks, left in search of their game.

The night was dark, the snow was falling, and the streets deserted. D'Artagnan led the way through the intricate windings and narrow alleys of the city, and ere long they had reached the house in question. For a moment D'Artagnan thought that Prry's brother had disappeared; but he was mistaken. The robust Scotchman, accustomed to the snows of his native hills, had stretched himself against a post, and like a fallen statue, insensible to the inclemencies of the weather, had allowed the snow to cover him. He rose, however, as they approached.

"Come," said Athos, "here's another good servant. Really honest men are not so scarce as I thought."

"Don't be in a hurry to weave crowns for our Scotchman. I believe the fellow is here on his own account; for I have heard that these gentlemen born beyond the Tweed are very vindictive. I should not like to be Groslow, if he meets him."

"Well?" said Athos, to the man in English.

"No one has come out," he replied.

"Then, Porthos and Aramis, will you remain with this man, while we go round to Grimaud?"

Grimaud had made himself a kind of sentry-box out of a hollow willow, and as they drew near, he put his head out and gave a low whistle.

"Oh!" said Athos.

"Yes," replied Grimaud.

"Well, has anybody come out?"

"No, but somebody has gone in."

"A man or a woman?"

"A man."

At the same time he pointed to a window, through the shutters of which a faint light streamed.

They returned round the house to fetch Porthos and Aramis.

"Have you seen anything?" they asked.

"No, but we are going to," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to Grimaud, who had already climbed some five or six feet from the ground.

All four came up together. Grimaud continued to climb like a cat, and succeeded at last in catching hold of a hook, which served to keep one of the shutters back when opened. Then resting his foot on a small ledge, he made a sign to show that he was all right.

"Well?" asked D'Artagnan.

Grimaud showed his closed hand, with two fingers spread out.

"Speak," said Athos; "we cannot see your signs. How many are they?"

"Two. One opposite to me, the other with his back to me."

"Good. And the man opposite to you is——?"

"The man I saw go in."

"Do you know him?"

"I thought I recognized him, and was not mistaken. Short and stout."

"Who is it?" they all asked together in a low tone.

"General Oliver Cromwell."
The four friends looked at one another.
"And the other?" asked Athos.
"Thin and hank," the executioner said D'Artagnan and Aramis at the same
time.
"I can see nothing but his back," resumed Grimaud. "But
wait. He is moving; and if he has taken off his mask, I shall be
able to see. Ah—?"
And, as if struck in the heart, he let go the hook, and dropped
with a groan.
"Did you see him?" they all asked.
"Yes," said Grimaud, with his hair standing on end.
"The thin and spare man?"
"Yes."
"The executioner in short?" asked Aramis.
"Yes."
"And who is it?" said Porthos.
"He—he—" murmured Grimaud, pale as death, and seizing
his master's hand.
"Who? Her?" asked Athos.
"Mordaunt," replied Grimaud.
D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Aramis uttered a cry of joy.
Athos stepped back, and passed his hand over his brow.
"Fatality!" he muttered.

CHAPTER LXVI
CROMWELL'S HOUSE.

It was, in fact, Mordaunt whom D'Artagnan had followed, with
out knowing it. On entering the house he had taken off his mask
and the false beard, and mounting a staircase, had opened a door,
and in a room lighted by a single lamp, found himself face to face
with a man seated behind a desk.

This man was Cromwell.

Cromwell had two or three of these retreats in London, unknown
except to the most intimate of his friends. Now Mordaunt was
among these.
"It is you, Mordaunt," he said. "You are late."
"General, I wished to see the ceremony to the end, which delayed
me."
"Ah! I scarcely thought you were so curious as that."
"I am always curious to see the downfall of your master's enemies,
and that one was not among the least of them. But you, general,
were you not at Whitehall?"
"No," said Cromwell.

There was a moment's silence.
"Have you had any account of it?"
"None. I have been here since the morning. I only know that
there was a conspiracy to rescue the king."
"Ah, you knew that," said Mordaunt.
"It matters little. Four men, disguised as workmen, were to