

A CLASSIC IN A PAGE

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KINGS IN EXILE

By Alphonse Daudet
Born 1840 Died 1897

Probably none of the French writers has suffered more from the translators than has Alphonse Daudet. The average English translation of foreign works is a crime. Young persons in America and England appear to be inspired with an irresistible craving to translate a masterpiece as soon as they have finished their boarding-school course in elementary French. Vigorous, monumental styles like those of Dumas and Hugo can survive the massacre; but a delicate, poetic art like that of Daudet is ruined by any touch except the most skillful.

When Elisee Merat thought of his childhood—and he thought of it often—he saw a place of crowded houses standing in the shadow of the great land of Southern France. At almost every window of these houses was fastened a Jacquard silk loom, at which men in shirt sleeves toiled incessantly. Beyond the mass of roofs stood the most prominent feature of the neighborhood, a rocky knoll, crowned with ancient, abandoned windmills.

There day after day the little Elisee and the other children played a game of which they never tired—that of battle between the Huguenots and the Catholics. Homeric warfare it was, waged with stones from the crumbling mills, and many a life-long scar did the young contestants carry away. Elisee had two—one on his temple and one on his hip.

Their elders did not essay to prevent or moderate the fierceness of these encounters. Even in the days of the Republic, most of the people of that district were intensely royalistic. Elisee's father, welcoming him proudly when he came home tattered and bleeding, would inquire eagerly after the fortunes of the battle, and exult in thunder tones if the Huguenots had been defeated.

"Tholozan! Tholozan!" he roared one day, on hearing that one of that name had made a stubborn defence. "The beggar! I had his father under my gun in 1815. It was well had I killed him."

On the wall over his loom Elisee's father had the picture of the Bourbon whom the people worshipped in secret as their legitimate monarch. Under it was a smaller one, on which there was a large seal or red wax—the words "Faith, Hope, and Charity" of the saint. Merat looked up continually at the picture of the king. His strong, statuesque face, with its aquiline nose, seemed not unlike that of those Bourbons whom he loved so much.

He was a terrible man, violent and despotic. Under his strong emotion his face grew purple. His voice was like claps of thunder. He lived in a royalist legend and his one song, rolled forth at the top of his fine voice, was the ancient royalist chant, "Long live Henry the Fourth! Long live the valiant King!"

"When the King returns I shall buy a new armchair. When the King returns we will change the paper on this room." It was Merat's constant refrain until it was replaced by "When I had the honor of seeing the King."

That was after he had accomplished the pilgrimage to the royal exiles at Frohsdorf, at an expenditure of time and money all but ruinous to a poor village weaver. He had returned dazed. Yet the interview had been very short. "Ah, is it you?" the claimant said to each of the children in turn. Merat was so choked with emotion and his eyes were so blurred by tears that he could not even see the features of his idol.

But His Majesty's military secretary, the Duke of Athlis, had asked him much about the state of mind of the French people. He had even condescended to make a note of the names of Merat's children. Thereafter when anything was said of the future he would answer, "Make yourself easy. The Duke of Athlis made a note of them."

Having become ambitious for his children very suddenly, the old weaver who saw his oldest sons rooted to his own narrow path, built hopes of grandeur on little Elisee. So he sent him to the school of Senor Papel, one of those Spanish refugees who filled the southern town after the capitulation of Marotto.

Papel was a little man, resembling a dwarf in a picture by Velasquez. He wore a dirty white cap drawn over his forehead to hide a great swollen blue vein that ran from his hair to his eyebrows. He was brutal and cruel—a fanatic belonging to the Middle Ages; but he had a prodigious stock of ideas under his broad skull, all dominated by obstinate royalism.

The people whispered that the name "Papel" concealed that of a general under Don Carlos, celebrated for his ferocious manner of making war and giving variety to death. During the many years that Elisee had known the terrible dwarf, whose favorite pupil he was, he never heard him speak a word to justify this suspicion. But when at last his father proposed to send him to Paris, Senor Papel gave him many heavy letters of introduction, sealed with mysterious arms and addressed to the chiefs of the Legitimate party.

The elder Merat ordered this journey because he began to think that the King's return was delayed too long. To defray the expenses of Elisee's residence in Paris he sold his gold watch and his wife's silver chain and his vineyard. He did it with simple and unconscious heroism for his King. "Why do they wait?" said he to his son. "Tell them that the people here are weary of waiting."

Elisee Merat went to Paris in his twentieth year, overflowing with exalted convictions. The leaders of the party received him with astonishment, mingled with fright. This madman with the dazzling black eyes shining in long lionine face, was ready for everything. They invited him reluctantly to political reunions held in fear in luxurious ivy-covered mansions whose occupants lived in indolence and plenty. There Elisee found the great names of La Vendee and the fusillades of Quiberon borne by old gentlemen who were bald and enveloped in fine cloth. Bending over whitened tables that reflected the lights of tall, shaded candles, they whispered the latest news from Frohsdorf and expressed solemn admiration for the unwearying patience of the exiles.

Then affrighted at their audacity, they crept mysteriously home to avoid the police, who were greatly amused at these platonic conspiracies. Elisee soon saw that he was too young for these ghosts of ancient France. He learned, too, that the opinions of his district were not held by everybody, and that the return of the legitimate king would be delayed longer than his people at home supposed. His loyalty was only increased by this. But it changed his plan. He decided to write a book—a burning book to convince France.

Like all the people in his part of the country, Elisee was a man of words and gestures. Ideas only came to him when he was on his feet and heard the sound of his own voice. His thoughts left his pen slowly, drop by drop; but they flowed from his lips in a perfect tide of eloquence. So it happened that he began speaking in the cafe especially those in the Latin Quarter. These were the only places where opposition could be expressed, when books and journals were under the ban of the Government. Every cafe had its orator and its great man. Indeed, all the learned and eloquent youth went there to repeat the fine political and philosophical discussions of the beer taverns of Bonn and Heidelberg.

In this noisy forge of ideas the tall Gascon, who was always inspired and whose convictions were as old-fashioned as antiquarian objects in that modern Paris, became famous quickly. "Here is Merat!" the crowd would exclaim when they saw the tall, gaunt figure, with a book or review under its arm. And Merat would toss back his inextinguishable tangle of black hair surrounded by a broad white buff, peer forward with his haggard, near-sighted eyes and begin to speak. While the young men pressed around him.

"Come in quickly! We have Monsieur Merat here!" the lady at the cafe counter would say proudly to all who entered. The place at once became a temple. The billiard players leaned over the stairs. Being without intrigue or personal ambition, Elisee considered himself the apostle of his faith and threw himself into it with indefatigable energy. He worked the mission. The years came and passed almost unnoticed to this man of the rapid dream and the splendid vision. He lived hard and sparsely, earning enough to keep himself in a shabby room and in shabby clothes by giving lessons. Thus for eighteen years he sowed ideas among the young men of Paris. Many who reached high positions carefully gathered for their own glory the crumbs that the throne fell down dropped carelessly from his table. Merat knew it. When he found one of his ideas repeated by a distinguished gentleman he felt the disinterested happiness of a father who sees his daughters well married, yet has no desire to claim them.

It was the chivalric self-denial of the old weaver—the old man who sang in his loudest tones: "Long live Henry the Fourth!" when he lay dying.

This was Elisee's dream when the world was thrilled by the heroic defence of Ragusa by the King and Queen of Illyria and Dalmatia after their people had risen in revolt against them. He devoured all the news—how the insolent crowds cried for his life; how the council, mad with fear, begged the King to abdicate, only to be met with a refusal; how the royal couple with the young heir to the throne fled across the mountains at night and disguised as peasants, and how at last, having shut themselves up in Ragusa, they defended the place for two months, besieged by the nation in arms outside and assailed by hunger, illness and despair inside.

When at last they escaped and succeeded in taking ship for France, Elisee Merat was foremost in the crowd that assembled around the hotel where the exiled couple had taken refuge. When they came off the balcony he saw a slender, frail man with a dull complexion, black curly hair and a meagre mustache which he twirled continually. His eyes were handsome and irresolute. That was the King.

His Queen was a tall, lithe, beautiful Dalmatian, with an extraordinary brilliance of complexion and superb hair of Venetian blonde. Her eyes were sad and serious. She looked down at the crowd with haughty pride. Their son was a tiny, weak little creature, 5 or 6 years old, with sharp, marked features and light colored hair. For him exile opened happily. He was enraptured by being relieved of the childish fear of the cannon. The King, too, seemed decidedly gay. He looked with keen interest at the busy street.

While they stood thus Elisee Merat suddenly swung himself to the fence opposite the hotel and waved his hat, crying: "Long live the King!" The Queen looked greatly downward at this unknown friend in republican Paris. The salutation, of which she had been deprived so long, warmed her to the heart, and the appearing reaction was completed by the cheer of another exiled monarch. The King, too, accepted the salute with a smile, and the Duke of Rosen, the conqueror at Mastar and Livno and the hero of the great Montenegrin wars, had been away from Illyria for three years, ever since the King had removed him from his place as chief of the military service to give it to a Liberal.

Surely the old chief of pandours had the right to be aggrieved at Christian, who had sacrificed him coldly and had permitted him to depart without a word of regret or farewell. Yet here he was, standing erect and stiff, but waiting with so much emotion for the favor of a welcome that one could see his limbs quiver and note the quick heaving of his broad chest. He knelt to his Queen and kissed her hand.

"Ah, my poor Rosen! My poor Rosen!" she murmured, and slowly closed her eyes that none should see tears in them. But all those she had shed in years had left their traces.

"How she has suffered," thought the general. Then, to conceal his emotion, he called, "Colette! Herbert! Come here and salute your queen!"



LONG LIVE THE KING!

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Prince Herbert de Rosen, who had lean jaws like those of a horse, and innocent, babyish cheeks, advanced. The King signed the addresses and memoranda that she laid before him, but he did it with a scornful contraction at one corner of the lips. It was with ennui and fatigue that he listened to Frederique's attempts to waken in him some of her fervor; and it was with an "Out!" of relief that he escaped to the delights of Paris.

Although they had fled with only a few hundred thousand francs, the royal couple lived in a gilded cage. Both being sovereigns and the children of kings, they did not know the cost of anything; and far from being astonished at their comfort, they felt that their new existence was almost unendurable because of the pomp and luxuries that it lacked.

Christian, who soon learned the difficulties of getting money in Paris and thus had become more experienced than his Queen, did occasionally say: "This Rosen is incomprehensible. I really do not know how he manages." Then he would add, laughing: "But one may be sure that he does not use any of his own money!"

The truth was that Rosen's name had always been considered synonymous with that of Miser. He had not waged war against the Turks and Montenegrins for glory alone. After each campaign his baggage was returned well laden. His magnificent palace in Paris overflowed with rare things, spoils from palaces, convents and harems all piled up in suites of immense reception rooms. He had not pillaged at random, like some general who carried away with them everything in their path, in the manner of a bombshell that takes gold or wisps of straw alike.

Now that he was installed as head of the military and domestic service for his monarchs, the duke saw to it that there were half a score of horses in the stables and that a throng of servants commensurate with royal dignity pervaded the place. His face gleamed with the many of avarice every time he paid a bill; but the bills were paid, and he managed to provide money for the pleasure of the King. The rulers had been in exile a year when Father Alpheus appeared in the shabby apartment of Elisee Merat and engaged him as tutor for the young Prince Zara.

Elisee found a frail, precocious, sickly little boy with a forehead as wrinkled as if it felt the weight of the 600 years of his race. Yet he fancied that he saw a preordained leader of men and of nations, and said gravely and with a trembling voice: "Your highness, you will be king some day and you must learn what it is to be a king. Listen to me and look at me attentively."

Then, as one who stoops to the poor, he bent himself to reach that little intelligence with fit words and images that might explain the dogma of divine right—that kings are ordained by God with a mission to the people, and charged with duties and responsibilities which other men have not.

The Queen listened in delighted surprise to words which she had waited for in despair for many months. Little Zara felt the warm, vivifying influence of the rich heart of the Gascon, though he did not understand all, or nearly all, that he said.

The Queen thought of her fellow-rulers in exile who were content to live at the expense of duplicity, lying and flight. When the first six months of exile had passed without sign of reawakening royalist influence in Illyria. General Rosen bought a house in St. Mandé for the royal home. Christian made the distance a welcome pretext for longer absences.

Queen Frederique became more the Queen than ever. She sent letter after letter to the courts of Europe, and conspired constantly, sending her

chaplain, Father Alpheus, on mysterious journeys. The King signed the addresses and memoranda that she laid before him, but he did it with a scornful contraction at one corner of the lips. It was with ennui and fatigue that he listened to Frederique's attempts to waken in him some of her fervor; and it was with an "Out!" of relief that he escaped to the delights of Paris.

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in her mind's vision the handsome, irresolute face of the King. Day after day she saw new intelligence come into Little Zara's face, but he did it with a scornful contraction at one corner of the lips. It was with ennui and fatigue that he listened to Frederique's attempts to waken in him some of her fervor; and it was with an "Out!" of relief that he escaped to the delights of Paris.

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were the elite and flower of the party.

But when they appeared at the residence the King lay in his room drunk. Elisee, who had tried vainly to arouse him, could not prevent the Queen from entering. She looked at the helpless, huddled man lying on the couch, drew herself up and said: "At last I am tired of acting for this wretched king!"

Following on this blow that shattered all her plans with shame and disgrace, another humiliating revelation came to the Queen. By chance she overheard a conversation that told her that the cost of the mansion they lived in and the expenses of the household and of the King made sums so great that even Frederique knew they could not be met from their small income. She confronted Rosen with her discovery.

He turned pale and muttered the words, "duty," "gratitude" and "restoration."

"Duke," said Frederique, "the King cannot take back what he has once given. And the Queen must not be maintained like a dancer."

Tears sparkled in the old man's eyes. "Pardon! Pardon!" said he. "I beg your majesty to accept it. Who would dream that the money comes from the old miser Rosen?"

But the Queen remained inflexible. On the very next day the greater part of the retinue of servants was dismissed, the carriages and horses were sold and rigid economy was begun.

To Frederique's surprise, Christian did not object nor did it appear to be inconvenient by the sudden cutting off the supply of gold. The mystery was soon explained, however. It was not long before all Paris was amusing itself over a thriving trade in Illyrian orders and decorations.

General Rosen quietly took up his cross of the Legion of Honor one day when he found that a barber on the Boulevard des Capucines was wearing one for which he had paid 15,000 francs.

The secret agent who conducted this traffic for the King soon conceived a scheme that promised him a fortune. It was to lure Christian into signing the renunciation of the title to the crown after all. "He is sure to sign it some day," said this agent, who masqueraded in Paris under the name of Tom Levis. "Let him get heavily into debt and he will snatch a pen. So it is for us to involve him. Then, when he is forced into a corner, we shall have played our cards but ill if we do not get a great part of the two hundred millions."

"The cards," to which the high-minded Tom referred consisted most likely of his wife, Sephora, a woman who concealed a heart of iron under a beautiful face of a Madonna—a woman who had in her features the tempting timidity of an Oriental slave, with sloping profile, amber tints of skin, straight eyebrows and parted, rich, red lips that gave an Asiatic look to this Parisian woman.

No sooner had the King seen her than he was in love with her. But he found a new and surprising thing, was that whenever an affair began to weary him he would send a tiny silk-hairnet to her, after which she would go to the Royal Club where he no longer said "Turn off a mistress," but "Send her an oustis-tit."

Scarcely had he told her this before Colette arose and swept away like a gust of wind. The innocent fellow wondered repentantly what he had done to offend her. Had he followed his adored little beauty of a wife, he would have seen her dash madly into her room, snatch a little money from its rug, and hurl it out of the window, after which she buried her face in her pillows.

The King had made many new conquests and had even achieved the dignity of being known throughout Paris by a nickname, when one day the royal exiles were informed that the Republic of Illyria had resolved to restore all the crown property to them, amounting to more than two hundred million francs, on condition that the King renounce for himself and his descendants all right to the throne.

"This must be answered!" cried the Queen, when the King remained silent. "We must not endure this!" she looked at Elisee. He sat down and wrote hastily. Presently he read aloud what he had drafted. It was a haughty proclamation to the Illyrian people rejecting the outrageous proposition and assuring those who remained loyal of their rulers' steadfast faith.

The Queen clapped her hands enthusiastically and held the paper out to the King. "Does that not agree with your ideas?" asked she. "Certainly," said he, biting his nails. "All that is very fine. Only the question is how much longer we can hold out."

"If we want bread," said the Queen, "we will beg it from door to door. But royalty will never surrender."

"We can hold out for five years," said the Queen, drawing up his tail form.

"Well, then," said the King angrily, "give me that letter and I will sign it."

It was read in full Parliament. At Elisee's advice it was printed and sent throughout Europe. Within a few months deputations began to arrive at Saint Mandé. Fishermen and peasants made the voyage to renew their allegiance, much to the annoyance of Christian, who had to give up precious afternoons to them. At last the royalist members of the Illyrian Diet undertook the journey also. The Queen, perceiving that a vital and crucial moment in their destinies had arrived, made great preparations to receive these visitors, among whom

one the young men departed, to avoid danger of being detected. Among those who went was Herbert de Rosen, who for himself with tears from the arms of his beloved Colette.

On the night following their departure the King was to go. But he thought of his farewell first to Sephora, and of course permitted the wily woman to extract the whole story from him.

She succeeded in preventing him from saying the rest of the party, assuming that he had gone ahead in another ship, set sail for Illyria, and went blindly into a trap, for Tom Levis and his associates had sent warning of the attempt to the authorities.

Few of the young men escaped alive. Among those who fell was young Rosen. Even the reckless Christian could not overcome the effect of this frightful catastrophe. He yielded to the demands of the Queen and signed his abdication, resigning the throne in favor of his son. Then he hastened away to seek the comfort of arms of Sephora. But when he told her what he had done that cruelly disappointed woman cried, "Fool! Fool!" and away from him. Without a son, crown or even sweetheart, Christian went forth into the night.

A year more and the ex-King was only a hanger-on, hardly tolerated in the clubs. The notes that he had signed for the establishment of the faithless Sephora were presented by the conspirators. In his emergency Christian appealed to General de Rosen. The old soldier sent for art dealers and collectors and stripped himself of his treasures. While they were examining a desk he saw a bundle of letters bearing Christian's royal cipher. They were addressed to Colette; and the general discovered that Christian, for whom he was about to ruin himself, and for whom Herbert had died, had betrayed and shamed them. The old man stretched out his hand to take two weapons from the wall. But he stopped. It was the King! One does not demand strict conduct from his King! He destroyed the letters and paid the notes, returning to Saint Mandé quite poor and forsaken to continue silently in his duties as manager of the royal household.

Abandoning the former King to his own low devices, the Queen centred all her mind on Zara; and under the guiding genius of Elisee the boy's mind broadened and grew regal, so that Merat looked on him as a true King. He was making a true King.

Then one day, while the lad was at target practice, he asked his tutor to try his rifle. The bullet rebounded from an iron bar and destroyed one of Zara's eyes. In his grief and anger the Queen drove Merat away, crying, "Begone!" she cried. "I may never see thee again!" At that moment everyone who heard her realized that she was punishing and curing herself by confessing before them all.

It was her love that she flung into Merat's face like a stone. And Merat—Merat, who had loved the Queen for more than a year, but had never dreamed of raising his eyes to her—never Merat knew in that instant. But his view over the disaster to the young King crushed his woe over his own tragedy.

Little Zara lay for many months in a darkened room, from which the Queen never stirred. Christian came in and out, but helpless. Lurking in the shrubbery outside of the grounds, Elisee spent all of his days at night, waiting for the night, to snatch bits of news brought to him by the servants.

At last the doctors declared that the little prince would lose his sight if he remained in the room. They urged him to be removed. They urged him to consent to an operation. Suspicious of motives, he went to a famous surgeon with Zara, keeping her name and station secret, and asked his advice.

"The great surgeon examined the lad. 'Madam,' said he, 'your child is indeed threatened with the loss of sight. Yet, if he were my own son, I would not operate. I find a shattered constitution. There is the most vicious, most cruellest of the poorest druggists.'

"The blood of kings!" exclaimed the Queen, overcome by her destiny at last. "And to think that they have been advising this operation, though they knew they could cost him his life! In a month they expect the diet of Illyria to invite us to show to the people. But they want a blind King; so at the risk of killing him they would perform this operation. Poor little Zara! What matters it whether he reign or not? Let him live, let him live!"

And so she made her sacrifice, and Frederique is the ambitious Queen no longer, but only a mother, who holds her darling fiercely to her breast and in whose sight the crown suddenly sinks away to nothing.

When Elisee saw his young pupil able to go out again he resumed his old life in the Latin Quarter and went back to his old shabby room. Soon his tall, ungainly figure was seen with a book under his arm and with gesticulating hands as he talked. He walked about in disdainful sorrow, which was too great and deep to be understood. In cold and rain he stood, oblivious of the weather.

One day he felt a terrible burning sensation which rose from his chest like a sense of annihilation and filled his mouth instantly with blood.

He was not frightened, though it was so mysterious and horrible. "What is the matter with me?" he asked some of his medical friends in the cafe, describing his symptoms.

"Everything," said they. "Your father Alpheus said to the Queen: 'Monsieur Merat is dying.' She made no reply."

Elisee Merat lay in his bed in his shabby room. On the bare, dingy walls there was only one ornament—the picture of the Bourbon whom the people worshipped in secret as their legitimate monarch. He looked at it, and his childhood's dream came back to him, his memory, which was already fading. Suddenly the door is opened partly. There is the rustle of a dress. "How do you do, Monsieur Elisee?" It is his pupil, looking at him with the shy, awkward glance which his infirmity had made habitual. A veiled lady stands behind the pupil, and his infirmity, with coming any nearer herself, she sends her pardon by the hands of the child, and that hand Elisee Merat takes and presses to his lips. Then, turning to the veiled figure on the threshold, he says for the last time, with his last breath, "Long live the King!"