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THE THREE MUSKETEERS

VOL. II

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

VOL. II



T.M.

“ Sit down, then, before me M. d'Artagnan.”

Page 96.

THE THREE
MUSKETEERS

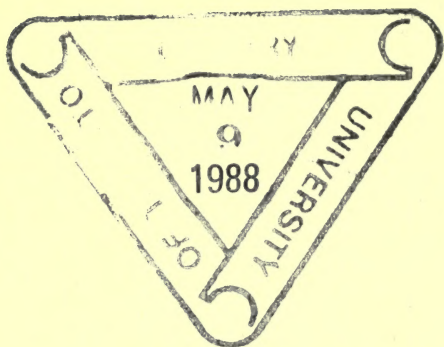
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

VOL. II

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The Three Musketeers

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER XXX.

"MY LADY."

D'ARTAGNAN had followed the other lady from the church, without being observed by her. He saw her enter her carriage, and heard the orders given to her coachman to drive to St. Germain. It was useless to attempt to follow, on foot, a carriage which was drawn by two vigorous trotting horses; and d'Artagnan therefore returned to the Rue Ferou. In the Rue de Seine he met Planchet, who had stopped before a pastry-cook's shop, and appeared to be in perfect ecstasy at the sight of a cake, of most tempting form. D'Artagnan ordered him to go and saddle two horses at M. de Treville's stable, one for each of them, and to come to him at Athos's lodgings. M. de Treville had given d'Artagnan a general permission to avail himself of his stable. Planchet took his way towards the Rue de Columbier, and d'Artagnan to Rue Ferou. Athos was at home, gloomily emptying one of the bottles of that famous Spanish wine which he had brought with him from Picardy. He gave Grimaud a sign to bring a glass for d'Artagnan, and Grimaud obeyed with his habitual silence.

D'Artagnan related to Athos all that had occurred at the church between the attorney's wife and Porthos, and how their companion was already in a fair way of obtaining his equipments.

"For my part," said Athos, in answer to this recital, "I am sure enough that it will not be women who will be at the expense of my outfit."

"And yet, my dear Athos, handsome, and refined, and noble as you are, neither princesses, nor queens even, are beyond what you might seek to win."

At this moment Planchet modestly thrust his head through the half-open door, and announced that the horses were there.

"What horses?" asked Athos.

"Two which M. de Treville lends me, with which I am going to St. Germain."

"And what are you going to do at St. Germain?" inquired Athos.

D'Artagnan then proceeded to inform him of his having seen at the church, that lady, who, in conjunction with the gentleman in the black cloak and with the scar upon his forehead, had been the subject of his thoughts.

"That is to say, that you are in love with this one now, as you were with Madame Bonancieux," ejaculated Athos, shrugging his shoulders, as if in contempt of human weakness.

"Not at all!" exclaimed d'Artagnan. "I am only curious to penetrate the mystery with which she surrounds herself. I know not why, but I fancy that this woman, unknown as she is to me, and I am to her, has hitherto exercised some influence on my life."

"You are right, in fact," said Athos. "I am not acquainted with any woman who is worth the trouble of being sought after when she is once lost. Madame Bonancieux is lost: so much the worse for her; let her get herself found again."

"No, Athos, no; you deceive yourself," said d'Artagnan. "I love poor Constance more fondly than ever; and if I only knew the place where she now is, were it even at the extremity of the world, I would set out to drag her from her enemies. But I know it not; and all my efforts to discover it have been in vain. What would you expect? One must seek some diversion."

"Divert yourself with my lady then, my dear

d'Artagnan ; I recommend it with all my heart, if that will amuse you.”

“ But, Athos,” said d'Artagnan, “ instead of keeping yourself here, secluded like a suspect, get upon a horse, and ride with me to St. Germain.”

“ My friend,” said Athos, “ I ride on horseback if I have a horse ; if I have not, I walk on foot.”

“ Well, for my part,” said d'Artagnan, smiling at that misanthropy in Athos, which, in another, would have offended him, “ I am not so proud as you are : I ride whatever I can find. So farewell, my dear Athos.”

“ Farewell,” said the musketeer, as he made a sign to Grimaud to uncork the bottle he had brought.

D'Artagnan and Planchet got into their saddles, and took the road to St. Germain.

As they went along, d'Artagnan could not help thinking of all that Athos had said to him about Madame Bonancieux. Although he was not of a very sentimental nature, yet the pretty seamstress had made a real impression on his heart. In the meantime he tried to find out who this lady was. She had talked to the man in the dark cloak, and, therefore, she was certainly acquainted with him. Now the man with the dark cloak had, in d'Artagnan's opinion, certainly carried off Madame Bonancieux the second time, as well as the first. d'Artagnan, therefore, was only telling half a lie, which is not much of one, when he said that, by his pursuit of this lady, he was in a way to discover Constance. Thus meditating, and touching his horse occasionally with the spur, d'Artagnan had gone over the distance, and reached St. Germain. He went skirting the pavilion, where, ten years afterwards, Louis XIV. was born. He was passing through a very solitary street, looking right and left to see if he could not discover some vestige of his beautiful English-woman, when, on the ground-floor of a pretty house, which, according to the custom of the time, had no window towards the street, he recognised a countenance he knew. The person in question was walking on a sort of terrace

ornamented with flowers. Planchet was the first to recognise him.

"Eh, sir," said he, "do you not remember that face, which is now gaping at yonder plant?"

"No," said d'Artagnan; "and yet I am convinced it is not the first time that I have seen it."

"Vive Dieu! I believe you," said Planchet; "it is that poor Lubin, the valet of the Count de Wardes, whom you settled so thoroughly a month ago, at Calais, on the way to the governor's house."

"Oh! yes," said d'Artagnan, "I remember him now. Do you believe that he would recognise you?"

"Faith, sir, he was in such a fright, that I doubt whether he could have a very clear recollection of me."

"Well, then," said d'Artagnan, "go and chat with him, and ascertain whether his master is dead."

Planchet dismounted, and went up to Lubin, who, in reality, did not recognise him; and the two valets began to converse together with the utmost good-fellowship; whilst d'Artagnan backed the horses down a lane, and turning behind a house, returned to assist at the conference, concealed by a hedge of hazel bushes. After a minute's observation from behind the hedge, he heard the sound of wheels, and saw the carriage of the unknown lady stop in front of him. There could be no doubt about it, for the lady was inside. D'Artagnan bent down over his horse's neck, that he might see everything, without being himself seen. The lady put her charming fair head out of the door, and gave some orders to her maid. This latter, a pretty girl, of from twenty to two-and-twenty years of age, alert and animated, the fit abigail of a woman of fashion, jumped down the steps, over which she had been seated, according to the custom of the time, and went towards the terrace where d'Artagnan had seen Lubin. D'Artagnan followed the waiting woman with his eyes and saw her going towards the terrace. But, as it happened, an order from the house had called away Lubin, so that Planchet remained alone, looking to see in what direction

his master had concealed himself. The waiting-woman approached Planchet, whom she mistook for Lubin, and handed him a small note.

“For your master,” said she.

“For my master?” said Planchet in astonishment.

“Yes, and in great haste; take it quickly then.”

She then hastened towards the carriage, which had already turned in the direction whence it had come, and jumped on the steps; the vehicle moved away. Planchet turned the note over and over again, and then, accustomed to passive obedience, he went along the lane, and, at twenty paces distance, met his master, who having seen all the proceedings, was hurrying towards him.

“For you, sir,” said Planchet, handing the note to the young man.

“For me?” said d’Artagnan: are you quite sure?”

“Vive Dieu! I am quite sure of it; for the maid said, ‘for your master,’ and I have no other master than you; so—— A pretty slip of a girl that maid is, too, upon my word.”

D’Artagnan opened the letter, and read:—

“A person who interests herself about you more than she can tell, would be glad to know on what day you will be able to walk out in forest. A valet, in black and red, will be waiting to-morrow, at the hotel of the Field of Cloth of Gold, for your reply.”

“Oh, oh!” said d’Artagnan, “this is somewhat ardent. It seems that my lady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well! Planchet, how is this good M. de Wardes? He is not dead then?”

“No, sir; he is as well as a man can be with four sword-wounds in his body—for you made four in that dear gentleman—and he is yet weak, having lost almost all his blood. As I told you, sir, Lubin did not recognise me, and he related to me the whole of our adventure.”

“Well done, Planchet! You are the very king of valets; and now mount your horse again, and let us overtake the carriage.”

This did not take them a long time. In about five minutes they saw the carriage standing in the road, and a richly-dressed cavalier waiting at its door. The conversation between the lady and this cavalier was so animated, that d'Artagnan drew up on the other side of the carriage, without being observed by any one but the pretty waiting-maid. The conversation was in English, which d'Artagnan did not understand; but, by the accent, the young man thought he could perceive that the beautiful Englishwoman was very angry. She concluded by a gesture which left no doubt about the nature of the conversation: it was a blow with her fan, applied with such force that the little feminine toy flew into a thousand pieces. The cavalier burst into a roar of laughter, which appeared to exasperate the lady. D'Artagnan thought that now was the time to interpose: he therefore approached the other door, and taking his hat off respectfully said—

“Madame, will you permit me to offer my services? It appears to me that this gentleman has offended you. Say one word, madame, and I will immediately punish him for his want of courtesy.”

At the first words the lady turned, and looked at the young man with astonishment; and, when he had ended, “Sir,” said she, in very good French, “I would put myself under your protection with the greatest pleasure, if the person with whom I have quarrelled were not my brother.”

“Ah, excuse me then,” said d'Artagnan; “I was not aware of that, madame.”

“What is that presumptuous fellow interfering about?” exclaimed the gentleman whom the lady had claimed as her relation, lowering his head to the top of the door; “why does he not go on about his business?”

“Presumptuous fellow, yourself!” said d'Artagnan, bending on the neck of his horse, and answering through the other door. “I do not go, because I choose to remain here.”

The gentleman spoke a few words in English to his sister.

“I speak in French to you, sir,” said d'Artagnan;

"do me the favour then, I beseech you, to answer in the same language. You are the lady's brother; but, happily, you are not mine."

It might have been imagined that the lady, timid as women generally are, would interpose at the commencement of this quarrel, to prevent its proceeding further: but, on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage, and coolly ordered the coachman to drive to the hotel. The pretty waiting-maid threw a glance of anxiety at d'Artagnan, whose good looks seemed not to have been lost upon her. The carriage hurried on, and left the two men face to face. No material obstacle now intervened between them. The cavalier made as if to follow the carriage; but d'Artagnan—whose already boiling anger was still further increased by recognising in him the Englishman, who, at Amiens, had won his horse, and was very near winning his diamond from Athos—seized him by the horse's bridle, and stopped him.

"Ah, sir," said he, "you appear to be even a more presumptuous fellow than I am; for you pretend to forget that there is already a little quarrel begun between us."

"Ah, ah!" cried the Englishman, "is it you, my master? Then one must always play one game or other with you."

"Yes; and that reminds me that I have a revenge to take. We will see, my dear sir, whether you are as skilful with the sword as with the dice-box."

"You perceive," said the Englishman, "that I have no sword with me. Would you show off your courage against an unarmed man?"

"I hope that you have got one at home," said d'Artagnan; if not, I have two, and will play you for one."

"Quite unnecessary," said the Englishman; "I am sufficiently provided with that kind of tool."

"Well then, sir," replied d'Artagnan, "choose the largest, and come and show it me this evening."

"Oh, certainly, if you please."

"Behind the Luxembourg, there is a charming spot for promenades of the sort to which I am inviting you."

"Very well; I will be there."

“Your hour?”

“Six o’clock.”

“Apropos, you have probably one or two friends?”

“I have three, who will consider it an honour to play the same game as myself.”

“Three—capital! How well it fits in,” said d’Artagnan; “It is precisely my number.”

“And now, who are you?” demanded the Englishman;

“I am M. d’Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, serving in the Guards, in the company of M. des Essarts: and pray, who are you?”

“I am Lord de Winter, Baron of Sheffield.”

“Well, then, I am your humble servant, my lord,” said d’Artagnan, “although you have names which are rather hard to remember.”

And pricking his horse, he put him to the gallop, and took the road to Paris. As he was accustomed to do under similar circumstances, d’Artagnan went straight to Athos’s lodging. He found the musketeer stretched upon a large couch, where he was waiting, as he said, for his equipment to come to him. He told Athos all that had occurred, omitting only the letter to M. de Wardes. Athos was quite enchanted when he heard he was going to fight an Englishman. We have said that to do so was his dream. They sent their servants instantly to look for Aramis and Porthos, and to let them know what was in the wind. Porthos drew his sword from the scabbard, and began to lunge at the wall, drawing back from time to time, and capering about like a dancer. Aramis, who was working hard at his poem, shut himself up in Athos’s closet, and begged that he might not be disturbed again until it was time to draw his sword. Athos, by a signal to Grimaud, demanded another bottle. D’Artagnan arranged a little plan in his own mind, of which we shall hereafter see the execution; and which promised him an agreeable adventure, as might be seen by the smiles which, from time to time, passed across his face, and lighted up its thoughtfulness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

AT the appointed time they proceeded, with their four servants, to an enclosure behind the Luxembourg, which was reserved for goats. Athos gave some money to the goat-herd to keep out of the way; and the valets were ordered to do duty as sentinels.

A silent party soon came to the same field, and joined the musketeers; and then, according to the English custom, the introductions took place.

The Englishmen were all persons of the highest rank. The singular names of the three friends of d'Artagnan were, therefore, not only a subject of surprise to them, but also of disquietude.

"After all," said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had been named, "we know not who you are, and we will not fight with men bearing such names. These names of yours are shepherd's names!"

"As you guess, my lord, they *are* false names," said Athos.

"Which makes us the more desirous of knowing your true ones," said the Englishman.

"You have played against us without knowing them," said Athos, "and, as a token of it, you won our two horses."

"It is true; but then we only hazarded our pistoles. Now we peril our blood. One plays with anybody, but only fights with one's equals."

"That is fair," said Athos.

He then took aside the Englishman with whom he was to fight, and told him his name in a low voice. Porthos and Aramis, on their sides, did the same.

"Does that satisfy you?" asked Athos, of his adversary; "and do you find me sufficiently noble, to do me the favour of crossing swords with me?"

"Yes, sir," said the Englishman, bowing.

"Well, then, now will you allow me to say one thing to you?" coolly resumed Athos.

"What is that?" said the Englishman.

"It is, that you would have done well not to require me to make myself known."

"Why so?"

"Because I am thought to be dead. I have reasons for desiring that it be not known that I am alive; therefore, I shall be obliged to kill you, that my secret may not be divulged."

The Englishman looked at Athos, thinking the latter was jesting. But Athos was not jesting at all.

"Gentlemen," said he, addressing his companions, and their adversaries, "are we all ready?"

"Yes!" replied, with one voice, both English and French.

"Guard, then!" said Athos.

And, immediately, eight swords were glittering in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with a fury which was natural enough between men who were doubly enemies.

Athos fenced with as much calmness and method as if he had been in a fencing-school.

Porthos, no doubt cured of his over-confidence by his adventure at Chantilly, played a game full of dexterity and prudence.

Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, worked away like a man in a great hurry.

Athos was the first to kill his adversary. He had only given him one wound, but, as he had forewarned him, that one was mortal, for it passed directly through his heart.

Porthos next stretched his opponent on the grass; having pierced his thigh. Then, as the Englishman had given up his sword, Porthos took him in his arms, and carried him to his carriage.

Aramis pressed his so vigorously, that, after having driven him back fifty paces, he ended by disabling him.

As for d'Artagnan, he had simply and purely played a defensive game. Then, when he saw that his adversary was quite weary, he had, by a vigorous thrust, disarmed him. The baron, finding himself without a sword, retreated two or three steps; but, his foot slipping as he stepped away, he fell upon his back.

With one bound d'Artagnan was upon him, and, pointing his sword at his throat, said to the Englishman—

“I could kill you, sir, but I give you your life from love to your sister.”

D'Artagnan was overwhelmed with joy: he had accomplished the plan he had designed, and the development of which illuminated his face, as we have said, with smiles.

The Englishman, enchanted at having to deal with so complete a gentleman, pressed d'Artagnan in his arms, and caressed the three musketeers a thousand times. And then, as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage, and Aramis's had fairly run away, they had only to attend to Athos's victim.

As Porthos and Aramis undressed him, in the hope that his wound was not mortal, a heavy purse fell from his belt. D'Artagnan picked it up, and presented it to Lord de Winter.

“Ah! and what the deuce am I to do with that?” said the Englishman.

“You will restore it to his family,” said d'Artagnan.

“Much his family will care about this trifle. They will inherit an income of fifteen thousand louis. Keep this purse for your valets.”

During this scene Athos came up to d'Artagnan.

“Yes,” said he, “let us give this purse, not to our own, but to the English servants.”

Athos took the purse, and threw it to the coachman.

“For you and your comrades,” cried he.

This loftiness of spirit, in a man without a penny, struck even Porthos himself; and this French generosity, being told by Lord de Winter to his friends, had a

great effect everywhere, except upon Messrs. Grimaud, Planchet, Mousqueton, and Bazin.

“And now, my young friend—for I hope that you will permit me to call you by that name,” said Lord de Winter, “I will, if you wish, present you this evening to my sister, for I wish her ladyship to take you into her favour; and, as she is not entirely without influence at court, perhaps a word from her may be useful to you hereafter.

D’Artagnan glowed with delight, and gave an assenting bow.

As Lord de Winter left d’Artagnan, he gave him his sister’s address. She lived at No. 6, in the Place Royale, which was at that time the fashionable part of the town. He also engaged to call for him in order to present him, and d’Artagnan made an appointment, for eight o’clock, at Athos’s chambers.

This presentation to “My Lady” occupied all the thoughts of our young Gascon. He recalled the singular manner in which this woman had before now crossed his path; and, although convinced that she was but one of the cardinal’s tools, he yet felt himself irresistibly attached towards her by a sentiment that was inexplicable. His only fear was that she might recognise him as the man whom she had seen at Meung. Then she would also know that he was a friend of M. de Treville, and, consequently, was heart and soul devoted to the king; and this would involve a loss of some of his advantages over her, since, as soon as she knew him as well as he knew her, the game between them would be equal. As for her incipient intrigue with M. de Wardes, our self-complacent gentleman thought but little of that, although the count was young, rich, handsome, and high in favour with the cardinal. It is something to be twenty years of age, and, moreover, a native of Tarbes.

D’Artagnan began by dressing himself out in a flaming style at home; and he then went to Athos, and, according

to his custom, told him everything. Athos listened to his projects, then shook his head, and recommended prudence in a tone almost of bitterness.

“What!” said he, “you have just lost a woman whom you thought good, charming, perfect, and now you are running after another.”

D'Artagnan felt the justice of the reproach.

“I love Madame Bonancieux,” said he, “with my heart; but I love ‘My Lady’ with my head; and, by going to her house, I hope to enlighten myself as to the character she plays at court.”

“Vive Dieu! the character she plays is not difficult to guess, after all that you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal's, a woman who will draw you into a trap, where you will right easily leave your head.”

“The plague! My dear Athos, you seem to me to look at things on the dark side.”

“My dear fellow, I distrust women—what would you have? I have paid for it—and particularly fair women. This lady is fair, did you not say?”

“She has the finest light hair that was ever seen.”

“Ah! my poor d'Artagnan!” said Athos.

“Listen! I wish to enlighten myself; and then, when I have learned what I want to know, I will leave her.”

“Enlighten yourself, then!” said Athos coldly.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time; but Athos, who was warned beforehand, went into the inner room. His lordship, therefore, found d'Artagnan alone, and, as it was near eight o'clock, they set out at once.

An elegant carriage was in waiting at the door, and, as two excellent horses were harnessed to it, they were almost immediately at the Place Royale.

Her ladyship received d'Artagnan graciously. Her house was furnished with remarkable splendour; and although the English, as a rule, frightened away by the war, were quitting, or were about to quit France, she proved, by the new outlays which she had just made,

that the public measure which drove away the English in general had no influence on her.

“You see,” said Lord de Winter, as he presented d’Artagnan to his sister, “a young gentleman who had my life in his hands, but would not misuse his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, since it was I who insulted him, and since I am, also, an Englishman. Thank him, therefore, madame, on my behalf, if you have any good-will for me.”

The lady slightly frowned; an almost imperceptible cloud passed over her brow; and then a smile so singular appeared upon her lips, that the young man, who saw this triple change, almost shuddered.

Her brother observed none of it; for he had turned aside to play with the lady’s favourite monkey, which had pulled him by the doublet.

“Welcome, sir,” said the lady, in a voice the singular softness of which contrasted strangely with the symptoms of ill-humour which d’Artagnan had just observed; “for you have this day acquired an eternal claim upon my gratitude.”

The Englishman then turned towards them, and related all the circumstances of the combat. Her ladyship listened with the greatest attention; yet it was easy to see, in spite of her endeavours to conceal her emotion, that the account was not agreeable to her. The blood mounted to her face, and her little foot trembled beneath her dress.

Lord de Winter perceived nothing of this, for, as soon as he had ended, he went to a table on which there was a salver, with a bottle of Spanish wine upon it, and filling two glasses, he invited d’Artagnan to drink.

D’Artagnan knew that it was displeasing to an Englishman to decline his toast. He went, therefore, to the table, and took the second glass. But he had not lost sight of the lady, and, by the aid of a mirror, he was a witness to a change which took place in her countenance. Now that she thought she was unobserved, her features

assumed an expression, which almost amounted to one of ferocity.

She tore her handkerchief to pieces with her teeth.

The pretty waiting-maid, whom d'Artagnan had noticed, then entered. She spoke a few words in English to Lord de Winter, who immediately begged d'Artagnan's permission to withdraw, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that called him away, and commissioning his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan shook hands with Lord de Winter, and returned towards her ladyship. The countenance of this woman had, with a surprising power of change, resumed its pleasing expression; but some red stains upon her handkerchief proved that she had bitten her lips until they bled.

Those lips were magnificent: they looked like coral.

The conversation now became animated. Her ladyship appeared entirely recovered. She explained that Lord de Winter was her brother-in-law, and not her brother. She had married a younger son of the family, and was left a widow, with a son. This child was the sole heir of Lord de Winter, if his lordship did not marry. All this exhibited to d'Artagnan a veil which concealed something, but he could not yet distinguish anything beneath that veil.

After half an hour's conversation, d'Artagnan was quite convinced that her ladyship was his own countrywoman. She spoke French with a purity and elegance that left no room for doubt in that respect.

D'Artagnan uttered abundant gallantries and protestations of devotion; and, at all these fooleries that escaped from him, the lady smiled most sweetly. The hour for departure came at last, and d'Artagnan took leave of her ladyship, and quitted her drawing-room, the happiest of men.

On the staircase he met the pretty waiting-maid, who,

having touched him gently in passing, blushed to the very eyes, and begged his pardon, in a voice so sweet, that the forgiveness was at once conferred.

D'Artagnan returned the next day, and received a still more favourable reception. Lord de Winter was not present; and it was her ladyship herself, on this occasion, who did the honours of the evening. She seemed to take a great interest in him; inquiring who he was, and who his friends were; and whether he had not sometimes thought of attaching himself to the cardinal's service.

D'Artagnan, who, as we know, was very prudent for a youth of twenty, then remembered his suspicions concerning her ladyship. He uttered a fine eulogium on the cardinal, saying that he should not have failed to enter his eminence's guards, had he chanced to know M. de Cavois, instead of knowing M. de Treville.

The lady changed the conversation without the slightest affectation; and, with the utmost apparent indifference of manner, asked him whether he had ever been in England.

He replied that he had once been sent over by M. de Treville, to negotiate for a supply of horses, and had even brought back four as a sample. In the course of this conversation her ladyship bit her lips three or four times: she had to deal with a youth who played a pretty close game.

D'Artagnan withdrew at the same hour as on the previous visit. In the corridor, he met once more the pretty Kitty, for that was the abigail's name. The latter looked at him with an expression of mysterious interest. But d'Artagnan was so engrossed by the mistress, that he observed nothing but what was connected with her.

He returned to her ladyship's, on the next day, and the next again; and, on each occasion, my lady gave him a more flattering welcome.

Every evening, too, either in the antechamber, in the

corridor, or on the staircase, he was sure to meet the pretty maid.

But, as we have already said, d'Artagnan paid no attention to this strange persistence on the part of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ATTORNEY'S DINNER.

THE duel, in which Porthos had played such a brilliant part, had not made him forget the dinner to which the attorney's wife had invited him. The next day, therefore, at about one o'clock, having received the last polish from Mousqueton's brush, he proceeded to the Rue aux Ours.

His heart beat, but it was not, like that of d'Artagnan, with a youthful and impatient sentiment. No; a more material influence conducted him. He was at last about to cross that mysterious threshold, to ascend that unknown staircase, up which the old crowns of Master Coquenard had mounted one by one. He was really about to see a certain strong-box, of which he had so often beheld the image in his dream—a strong-box, long and deep in form; padlocked, barred, and fastened to the floor—a strong-box of which he had so often heard, and which the attorney's hands were now about to open before his admiring eyes.

And then he—the wanderer over the face of the earth—the man without fortune, or family—the soldier, who frequented wine-shops, inns, taverns, and posadas—the glutton, generally obliged to be contented with chance mouthfuls;—he was about to taste a family meal, to enjoy a comfortable home.

To go in his capacity of cousin, and sit daily at a good table—to smooth the yellow wrinkled brow of the old attorney—to pluck the young clerks a little, by teaching them the greatest niceties of basset, hazard, and lansquenet, and by winning of them, by way of recompense

for the lesson he should give them in an hour, all that they had saved within a month;—all this accorded well with the singular manners of the times, and prodigiously delighted Porthos.

And yet the musketeer remembered now and then the many bad reports which were current concerning attorneys; their thrifts, their parings, and their fast-days: but as, after all, with the exception of some fits of economy, which Porthos had always found very unseasonable, the attorney's wife had been very liberal—that is, for an attorney's wife, be it understood—he still hoped to meet with an establishment maintained upon a creditable scale.

He began to feel some doubt, however, at the door. Its appearance was not inviting—there was a dark and filthy passage, and a badly lighted staircase, to which a grayish light penetrated, through a grating from a neighbouring courtyard. On the first floor, he found a low door, studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the prison of the Grand Chatelet.

Porthos knocked with his knuckles; and a tall clerk, pale, and buried beneath a forest of hair, opened the door, and bowed to him with the manner of a man who is compelled to respect in another, the size which denotes strength, the military costume which denotes station, and the vermilion complexion which denotes a habit of living well.

There was another clerk, rather shorter, behind the first; another clerk, rather taller, behind the second; and a little stump-in-the-gutter, of twelve years old, behind the third.

In all, there were three clerks and a half, which, considering the period, indicated a highly prosperous business.

Although the soldier was not to arrive till one o'clock, yet the attorney's wife had been on the look-out since noon, and reckoned on the heart, and perhaps, on the stomach, of her adorer, making him come a little before the appointed time.

Madame Coquenard, approaching by the door of the

apartment, met her guest almost at the moment that he arrived by the staircase-door, and the appearance of the worthy dame relieved Porthos from a great embarrassment: for the clerks were looking on him with envious eyes; and he, not well knowing what to say to this ascending and descending gamut, had remained entirely mute.

"It is my cousin!" exclaimed the attorney's wife. "Come in, then; come in, M. Porthos."

The name of Porthos was not without its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned, and all their countenances at once resumed their gravity. They reached the sanctum of the attorney, after having passed through an antechamber in which the clerks were, and an office in which they ought to have been. The latter was a dark room, well furnished with dusty papers. On leaving the office, they passed the kitchen on the right hand, and entered the drawing-room.

All these rooms, opening into one another, did not produce in Porthos very pleasant ideas. Every word could be heard afar off, through all these open doors; and then, in passing, he had cast a quick investigating glance into the kitchen, and he confessed to himself, to the disgrace of his hostess, and his own great regret, that he had not discovered that fire, that animation, that activity, which, on the approach of an abundant meal, generally reigns throughout that sanctuary of gluttony.

The attorney had undoubtedly been informed of this anticipated visit; for he expressed no surprise at the sight of Porthos, who advanced towards him in an easy manner, and saluted him politely.

"We are cousins, it seems, M. Porthos?" said he, raising himself, by means of his arms, from his cane-work easy-chair.

The old man, enveloped in a large black doublet, in which his weakly frame was lost, was yellow and withered; his gray eyes glittered like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grinning mouth, to be the only part

of his countenance in which life remained. Unfortunately, the legs had begun to refuse their services to all this bony machine; and for the last five or six months, during which this weakness had been felt, the worthy attorney had almost become a slave to his wife.

The cousin was received with resignation—nothing more. With good legs, Master Coquenard would have declined all relationship with M. Porthos.

“Yes, sir, we are cousins,” replied Porthos, without being at all disconcerted; for, in fact, he had never calculated on being received by the husband with enthusiasm.

“On the distaff side, I believe?” said the attorney maliciously.

Porthos did not understand the sneer, but mistook it for simplicity, and laughed at it beneath his thick moustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that a simple attorney would be a rare variety of the species, smiled a little, and blushed a good deal.

Master Coquenard had, since Porthos’s arrival, cast many a glance of uneasiness at a large press, placed opposite his own oaken escritoire. Porthos comprehended that this press, although it did not respond in form to that which he had seen in his dreams, must be the blessed strong-box, and he congratulated himself on the fact that the reality was at least six feet taller than the dream.

Master Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigations any further; but, transferring an uneasy glance from the press to Porthos, he contented himself with saying—

“Your cousin will favour us with his company at dinner some time before he departs for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?”

This time Porthos received the blow full in his stomach, and felt it too; nor did Madame Coquenard appear entirely insensible to it, for she added—

“My cousin will not repeat his visit, if he finds that we do not treat him well; but, on the other hand, he has

too short a time to pass in Paris, and, consequently, to see us, for us not to beg of him almost all the moments that he can devote to us before his departure."

"Oh, my legs—my poor, dear legs!" muttered M. Coquenard, with an attempt to smile.

This assistance, which had reached Porthos at the moment when his gastronomic hopes were assailed, inspired the musketeer with exceeding gratitude towards his attorney's wife.

The hour of dinner shortly sounded. They entered the dining-room, which was a large dark room, situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks, who, as it seemed, had snuffed up some perfumes unusual in that house, came with military exactness, and held their stools in their hands, in perfect readiness for sitting down. They might be seen moving their jaws beforehand with fearful anticipations.

"Lord bless us!" thought Porthos, casting a look at these three famished beings—for the stump-in-the-gutter was not, as we may suppose, admitted to the honours of the master's table—"Lord bless us! In my cousin's place, I would not keep such gormandisers. One would take them for shipwrecked people, who had eaten nothing for six weeks."

M. Coquenard entered, pushed forward in his easy-chair by madame, whom Porthos, in his turn, assisted in rolling her husband to the table.

Scarcely had he entered, before he began to move his nose and jaws after the fashion of the clerks.

"Oh, oh!" said he; "here is soup which is quite alluring."

"What the plague do they smell so extraordinary in this soup?" thought Porthos, on beholding a tureen of plentiful, but pale and perfectly meagre broth, on the top of which a few straggling crusts floated, like the islands in an archipelago.

Madame Coquenard smiled; and, on a sign from her, they all eagerly seated themselves.

M. Coquenard was served first, and Porthos next. Madame Coquenard then filled her own plate, and distributed the crusts, without soup, to the three impatient clerks.

At this moment the door of the dining-room opened with a creak, and between the gaping panels, Porthos could perceive the poor little clerk, who, unable to participate in the feast itself, was eating his dry bread, betwixt the odour of the kitchen and that of the dining-room.

After the soup, the servant girl brought in a boiled fowl—an extravagance which expanded the eyelids of the revellers until they seemed almost about to melt entirely away.

“It is very perceptible that you love your family, Madame Coquenard,” said the attorney, with a grin that was almost tragic; “this is indeed a compliment which you have paid to your cousin.”

The poor fowl was awfully thin, and covered with that bristled skin, which the bones can never pierce, in spite of all their efforts: it must have been patiently sought for, before it was detected on the roost to which it had withdrawn to die of old age.

“Faith!” thought Porthos, “this is but a melancholy prospect; I respect old age; but I do not much relish it, either boiled or roasted.”

He looked around to see if his own opinion were the general one; but, on the contrary, he saw nothing but glaring eyes, devouring by anticipation this venerable bird, which he so much despised.

Madame Coquenard drew the dish towards her, adroitly detached the two great black paws, which she placed on her husband’s plate; cut off the neck, which, together with the head, she laid aside for herself; took off a wing for Porthos; and then returned the animal, otherwise untouched, to the servant who had brought it in: so that it had completely disappeared before the musketeer had found time to note the changes which

disappointment had wrought upon the various visages, according to the respective characters and dispositions of those who experienced it.

After the hen, a dish of beans made its appearance—an enormous dish, in the midst of which sundry mutton-bones, which might, at first sight, have been supposed to be accompanied by some meat, displayed themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deception, and their melancholy looks now settled into resignation.

Madame Coquenard, with the moderation of a thrifty housewife, distributed these viands amongst the young men.

The time for wine was come. Master Coquenard poured, from a stone bottle of very slender proportions, the third of a glass for each of the clerks, about an equal quantity for himself, and then passed the bottle to the side of Porthos and madame.

The young men filled up their glasses with water; when they had drunk half, they again filled them up with water; and, by repeating this process, they had come, by the end of the feast, to swallow a beverage which had been transmuted from the colour of the ruby to that of a burnt topaz.

Porthos slowly masticated his fowl's wing: he also drank half a glass of this cherished wine, which he recognised as Montreuil; whilst Master Coquenard sighed as he saw him swallow it neat.

“Will you eat any of these beans, cousin Porthos?” inquired Madame Coquenard, in a tone which plainly said—“take my word for it, you had better not.”

“Thank you, cousin; I am no longer hungry,” replied Porthos.

There was an awful pause. Porthos did not know how to demean himself, for the attorney kept repeating—

“Ah, Madame Coquenard, I compliment you highly: your dinner was a positive banquet!”

Porthos suspected that they were quizzing him, and began to curl his moustache and knit his brow;

but a look from Madame Coquenard recommended forbearance.

At this moment, on a glance from the attorney, the clerks slowly arose from the table, folded their napkins more slowly still, and then bowed and departed.

“Go, young men; go, and aid digestion by labour,” said the attorney, with great gravity.

The clerks being gone, Madame Coquenard arose, and drew from a cupboard a morsel of cheese, some confection of quinces, and a cake which she had herself manufactured with almonds and honey.

Master Coquenard frowned, because he saw this more ample provision.

“A feast! decidedly a feast!” cried he, moving uneasily in his chair. “‘*Epulæ Epularum*’—Lucullus dines with Lucullus.”

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that, with wine, bread, and cheese, he might yet make a dinner; but the wine was soon gone, the bottle being emptied, and neither Master nor Madame Coquenard seemed to observe it.

“Very well,” said Porthos to himself, “here I am, out-generalled.” He passed his tongue over a small spoonful of the confection, and stuck his teeth together in Madame Coquenard’s glutinous cake.

“And now,” thought he, “the sacrifice is consummated.”

After the delights of such a repast, it was necessary for Master Coquenard to take his siesta. Porthos hoped that the affair would be managed in the very locality where he sat; but the attorney would hear of no such thing: it was necessary to conduct him to his own room, and he would not be easy till he was before his press, on the edge of which, as a greater precaution, he deposited his feet.

The lady led Porthos into an adjoining room.

“You may come and dine here thrice a week,” said Madame Coquenard.

“Thank you,” said Porthos; “but I do not wish

to abuse a luxury. Besides, I must think of my equipment."

"That's true," said the lady, with a groan. "It is those unhappy equipments—is it not?"

"Alas, yes!" said Porthos, "that's it."

"But of what does the equipment of your regiment consist, M. Porthos?"

"Oh, of a great many things," said Porthos; "the musketeers, as you know, are chosen troops, and they require many things unnecessary for the guards or the Swiss."

"But, still, you might give me some particulars of them."

"Why they may amount to about——" commenced Porthos, who preferred the sum total to the detail.

The attorney's wife listened in fearful expectation.

"To how much?" said she. "I hope that it will not exceed——" She stopped, for words failed her.

"Oh, no," said Porthos, "it will not exceed two thousand five hundred francs. I believe, indeed, that, with economy, I could manage with two thousand."

"Good God! two thousand francs!" exclaimed she. "Why, it is quite a fortune, and my husband will never be persuaded to lend such a sum!"

Porthos made a most significant grimace, which madame well understood.

"I asked the particulars," said she, "because, as I have many relations and connections in trade, I am sure to be able to get the things a hundred per cent. cheaper than you would pay yourself."

"Ah," said Porthos, "is that what you meant?"

"Yes, dear M. Porthos. And so you will want, first——"

"A horse"

"Yes, a horse. Well, I have got the very thing for you."

"Ah!" said Porthos, cheering up; "then that is arranged as regards my own horse; but I shall require

another for my servant and my portmanteau. As to arms, you need not trouble yourself; I have got them."

"A horse for your servant?" resumed the attorney's wife, hesitating; "but that is really being very grand, my friend."

"Eh, madame!" said Porthos haughtily: "do you happen to take me for a beggar?"

"Oh, no! I only mean to say, that a handsome mule often looks as well as a horse; and it seems to me, that by procuring a handsome mule for Mousqueton——"

"Well, as to a handsome mule," said Porthos, "you are right: I have seen many great Spanish nobleman, all of whose followers were mounted upon mules. But then, you understand, Madame Coquenard, it must be a mule with plumes and bells."

"Be quite easy on that score," said the lady.

"There only remains the portmanteau, then," added Porthos.

"Oh, do not let that disturb you," replied Madame Coquenard; "my husband has five or six portmanteaus, and you shall choose the best. There is one, in particular, which he used to prefer on his journeys, and which is large enough to hold half the world."

"But, is it empty, this portmanteau?" demanded Porthos.

"Yes, certainly, it is empty," replied the attorney's wife.

"Ah, but the portmanteau I want," exclaimed Porthos, "is a well-furnished one, my dear."

Madame Coquenard breathed forth fresh sighs. Moliere had not yet written his *L'Avare*: Madame Coquenard therefore anticipated *Harpagon*.

At length, the remainder of the equipment was haggled over in the same manner; and the result of the settling was, that the attorney's wife should ask her husband for a loan of eight hundred francs in hard cash, and should furnish the horse and mule which were to have the honour of bearing Porthos and Mousqueton upon their way to glory.

These conditions having been arranged, and the interest and time of payment stipulated, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard, and returned home, half-famished, and in a very ill-humour.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAID AND MISTRESS.

Now, as we have already said—in spite of the cries of conscience, in spite of the sage counsels of Athos, and the tender memories of Madame Bonancieux—d'Artagnan became each hour more deeply enamoured of her ladyship; nor did he ever fail to offer her a daily homage, to which the presumptuous Gascon was convinced that she must sooner or later respond.

As he arrived one evening, scenting the air like a man who expects a shower of gold, he met the waiting-maid at the carriage-gate; but, on this occasion, the pretty Kitty was not contented with giving him a passing smile. She gently took his hand.

“Good!” thought d'Artagnan; “she is entrusted with some message for me from her mistress—an appointment for some meeting, which my lady wanted courage to announce herself;” and he looked at the charming girl with the most conquering look he could assume.

“I should be glad to say two words to you, sir,” stammered the waiting-maid.

“Speak, child. Speak!” said d'Artagnan. “I am listening.”

“Not here, sir; it is impossible. What I have to tell you would take up too long a time, and is, besides, too secret.”

“Well! but what is to be done, then?”

“If you would please to follow me, sir,” said Kitty timidly.

“Wherever you please, my pretty child!”

“Then, come.”

By the hand which she had continued to hold, Kitty then led d'Artagnan to a small, dark, winding staircase; and, after having made him ascend some fifteen steps, she opened a door.

“Enter, sir; we shall be alone, and may converse here.”

“And whose room is this, then, my pretty child?” inquired d'Artagnan.

“It is mine, sir; it communicates with that of my mistress, through this door. But you may rely upon it that she will not hear whatever we say, for she never goes to bed till midnight.”

D'Artagnan threw a glance around him. The little room was a charming model of cleanliness and taste; but his eyes involuntarily turned towards the door which communicated, as Kitty had told him, with her ladyship's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the young man's mind, and gave a sigh.

“Then you are very fond of my mistress, sir?” said she.

“I don't know whether I am very fond of her; but what I do know is, that I am mad for her.”

Kitty gave a second sigh.

“Alas! sir, that is a great pity!”

“And what the plague do you see to pity in it?”

“Because, sir, my mistress does not love you at all.”

“What!” exclaimed d'Artagnan; “did she desire you to tell me so?”

“Oh! no, sir, no! But I, from the interest that I take in you, have resolved to tell you.”

“Thanks, my good Kitty, but only for the intention; for you must own that the communication is not very agreeable.”

“That is to say, you do not believe what I have told you. Is that your meaning?”

“One is always vexed to believe such things, my charming child, if it were only on account of self-love.”

"Then, you do not believe me?"

"I confess that, until you condescend to give me some proof of what you assert——"

"What do you say to this?"

Kitty drew from her bosom a small unaddressed note.

"For me?" exclaimed d'Artagnan, as he hastily seized the letter, and, by a movement quick as thought, tore off the envelope, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered when she saw what he was about to do, or rather, what he did.

"Oh, heavens! sir," said she, "what have you done?"

"Vive Dieu!" said d'Artagnan, "must I not make myself acquainted with what is addressed to me?"

He read as follows:

"You have sent no answer to my first note. Are you, then, in too much suffering, or have you indeed forgotten the glances that you gave me at Madame de Guise's ball? Now, is the opportunity, count: do not let it escape you."

D'Artagnan grew pale: he was wounded in his vanity, but he believed it was in his love.

"This note is not for me!" he exclaimed.

"No, it is for somebody else; but you did not give me time to tell you so."

"For somebody else! His name—his name!" exclaimed the furious d'Artagnan.

"The Count de Wardes."

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself at once to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon, and confirmed what Kitty had that moment told him.

"Poor, dear M. d'Artagnan," said she, in a voice full of compassion, as she again pressed the young man's hand.

"You pity me, kind child," said d'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes, with all my heart; for I know well what love is myself."

"You know well what love is?" said d'Artagnan,

looking at her for the first time with some particular attention.

"Alas! yes."

"Well, instead of pitying me, then, you would be doing better by assisting me to take revenge upon your mistress."

"And what kind of vengeance would you seek?"

"I would supplant my rival."

"I will never assist you in that, sir," said Kitty quickly.

"And why not?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"For two reasons."

"Which are?"

"The first—that my mistress will never love you."

"How can you know that?"

"You have offended her too deeply."

"In what can I have offended her—I who, since I have been acquainted with her, have lived at her feet like a very slave? Speak, I beseech you!"

"I will never avow that but to the man who can read to the depths of my soul."

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. There was about the young girl a freshness and a beauty which many a duchess would be glad to purchase with her coronet.

"Kitty," said he, "I will read even the very depths of your soul; so let not that restrain you, my dear child—do speak!"

"Oh! no," exclaimed Kitty, "you do not love me; it is my mistress whom you love; you have this moment told me so."

"And does that prevent you making known your second reason?"

"The second reason," said Kitty, encouraged by the expression of the young man's eyes, "is, that in love we should all help ourselves."

Then did d'Artagnan first recall the languishing glances, the smiles, and stifled sighs of Kitty, whenever

he had chanced to meet her; whilst, in his absorbing wish to please the titled lady, he had neglected the abigail. He who chases the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow.

But our Gascon saw now, at a single glance, all the advantages which he might be able to derive from this passion which Kitty had so unaffectedly avowed:—such as, the interception of all letters to the Count de Wardes, intelligence of everything that occurred, and an entrance at any hour to that chamber which was contiguous to her ladyship's room. In idea, at least, he was already sacrificing the poor young maiden to her noble mistress.

Midnight at length sounded, and, almost at the same instant, a bell was heard from the adjoining chamber.

“Good God!” exclaimed Kitty, “there is my mistress wanting me: go now—go directly!”

D'Artagnan arose, and took his hat as though he intended to obey; then, quickly opening the door of a large press, instead of that of the staircase, he squeezed himself within, amidst the robes and night-clothes of her ladyship.

“Whatever are you about?” exclaimed Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had secured the key beforehand, fastened himself in his press without reply.

“Well!” exclaimed my lady, in a sharp voice, “are you asleep, then, that you do not answer the bell?”

D'Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

“Here I am, my lady, here I am!” exclaimed Kitty, springing forward, that she might meet her mistress.

They returned together to the bed-chamber, and, as the door continued open, d'Artagnan could hear her ladyship complaining, for a time. At last, however, she became appeased; and, as Kitty waited on her mistress, their conversation turned upon the listener.

“Well,” said my lady, “I have not seen our Gascon here, this evening.”

“What, madam,” said Kitty, “has he not been? Can he have proved fickle before he has been favoured?”

“Oh, no! he must have been hindered, either by M. de Treville, or by M. des Essarts. I have some experience, Kitty, and I hold that man securely!”

“What will your ladyship do with him?”

“What will I do with him? Depend upon it, Kitty, there is a something between that man and me of which he little thinks. He very nearly destroyed my credit with his eminence. Oh! I will have vengeance!”

“I thought that your ladyship loved him?”

“Love him! I detest him. The ninny held Lord de Winter’s life in his power, and did not kill him! and, by that alone, he made me lose an income of three hundred thousand francs.”

“It is true,” said Kitty, “your son is the sole heir of his uncle, and, till he came of age, you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune.”

D’Artagnan shuddered to the very marrow of his bones at hearing this sweet creature censuring him, in that voice whose sharpness she had so much trouble to conceal in conversation, for not having slain a man on whom he had seen her heaping indications of affection.

“Yes,” continued her ladyship, “and I would have taken vengeance on him before now, if, for some reason or other, that I know not, the cardinal had not insisted on forbearance.”

“Oh, yes; but your ladyship had no forbearance with that little woman whom he loved.”

“What! the mercer’s wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs! Why, has he not already forgotten her existence! A fine vengeance that was, truly!”

Cold drops trickled on the brow of d’Artagnan: this woman was a very monster.

He set himself again to listen, but the toilet was, unfortunately, ended.

“That will do,” said her ladyship; “go to your own room now, and try, to-morrow, to get me an answer at last to that letter which I have given you.”

“For M. de Wardes?” said Kitty.

“Certainly ; for M. de Wardes.”

“Ah !” said Kitty, “he is one that seems to me of a very different sort from that poor M. d’Artagnan.”

“Leave me, girl,” exclaimed her ladyship ; “I do not like remarks.”

D’Artagnan heard the noise of the closing door, and then of two bolts with which “my lady” secured herself within. Kitty, on her side, turned the key in the lock as gently as it was possible. D’Artagnan then pushed open the door of the press.

“Oh ! my God !” whispered Kitty, “what ails you ? what makes you look so pale ?”

“The abominable wretch !” muttered d’Artagnan.

“Silence ! silence ! Go away,” said Kitty ; “there is only a partition between my room and my lady’s ; and everything that is said in the one is heard in the other.”

“Fortunately so : but I will not leave till you have told me what is become of Madame Bonancieux.”

The poor girl swore to d’Artagnan, upon the crucifix, that she was completely ignorant about the matter, as her mistress never allowed her to know above half of any of her secrets. But she thought he might rely upon it that Madame Bonancieux was not dead.

Nor did Kitty really know anything more about the circumstances which had nearly made her mistress lose her credit with the cardinal. But in this particular, d’Artagnan was better informed. As he had perceived her ladyship on ship-board, at the very moment that he was quitting England, he did not doubt but the circumstance had some reference to the diamond studs.

But what was most manifest of the whole affair, was the genuine, deep, inveterate hatred, which her ladyship entertained against him, for not having killed her brother-in-law.

D’Artagnan returned to her ladyship’s on the next day. He found her in a very ill-humour, and he understood that it was the disappointment of an answer from

de Wardes which thus provoked her. Kitty entered, but "my lady" treated her harshly. A glance which the maid gave at d'Artagnan seemed to say—"see what I suffer upon your account."

But, as the evening wore on, the lovely lioness grew gentle. She listened with a smile to the tender compliments of d'Artagnan, and condescended even to give him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan left her, scarcely knowing what to think. But, as he was a Gascon, who was not easily to be deceived, he had in his mind contrived a little plan.

He found Kitty at the door, and went, as on the evening before, to her room to collect information. Kitty had been sadly scolded, and accused of negligence. Her ladyship could not comprehend the silence of the Count de Wardes, and had commanded her maid to come to her for orders at nine o'clock on the next morning.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to come to him in the morning, to tell him what might be the nature of these new commands. The poor girl promised all that d'Artagnan desired: she was driven mad.

At eleven o'clock, he saw Kitty make her appearance. She held in her hand another note from her ladyship. On this occasion, the poor girl did not even endeavour to withhold it from d'Artagnan; she let him do as he chose; in body and in soul, she belonged to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened this second note, which, like the other, bore neither signature nor address, and read as follows:—

"This is the third time that I have written to tell you that I love you: take care that I do not write a fourth time, to tell you that I hate you."

D'Artagnan's colour changed several times, as he perused this note.

"Oh! you love her still!" said Kitty, whose eyes had never once been turned away from the young man's face.

“No, Kitty, you deceive yourself. I no longer love her, but I want to avenge myself for her contempt.”

Kitty sighed.

D'Artagnan took up a pen, and wrote:—

“Madame,—Until now, I have been in doubt whether your former notes could really have been meant for me, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honour; but, to-day, I must at last believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter, but your servant also, affirms that I have the happiness to be the object of your love.

“At eleven to-night, I shall come to implore your forgiveness. To delay another day, at present, would be, in my opinion, to offer you a new affront.”

“He whom you have rendered the happiest of mankind.”

This note was not precisely a forgery, as d'Artagnan did not sign it, but it was an indelicacy: it was, even according to the standard of our present manners, something like an act of infamy; but the people of those times were less scrupulous than we are now. Moreover, d'Artagnan knew, from her ladyship's own avowal, that she had been guilty of treacheries in the most important affairs, and his esteem for her was singularly small. He had, in a word, to revenge both her fickleness toward himself, and her conduct toward Madame Bonancieux.

D'Artagnan's plot was very simple. Through Kitty's chamber he would enter that of her mistress; he would confound the deceiver, threaten to expose her publicly, and perhaps obtain through her fears all the information which he desired concerning the fate of Constance. It might even happen that the liberation of the mercer's pretty wife might be a result of this interview.

“There,” said the young man, handing the sealed note to Kitty, “give this letter to her ladyship: it is M. de Wardes' reply.”

Poor Kitty became as pale as death: she suspected what the note contained.

“Listen, my dear child,” said d'Artagnan; “you understand that all this must come to an end in one

way or another. Your mistress may discover that you delivered the first note to my servant, instead of to the Count's; and that it was I who unsealed the others, which should have been unsealed by M. de Wardes. Her ladyship will then dismiss you, and you know that she is not the kind of woman to be moderate in her revenge."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "why have I exposed myself to all that?"

"For me, I know, my beauty," said the young man, "and very grateful am I for it, I swear."

"But what does your note contain?"

"Her ladyship will tell you."

"Alas! you do not love me!" exclaimed Kitty, "and I am very wretched!"

Kitty wept much before she determined to deliver this letter to her mistress; but, from devotedness to the young soldier, she did determine at last, and that was all that d'Artagnan desired.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCERNING THE EQUIPMENTS OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

WHILST the four friends were all engaged in looking out for their equipment, there had no longer been any regular meetings between them. They dined, without one another, wherever they chanced to be; and assembled when they could. Duty also, on its side, occupied a part of that precious time which was so rapidly passing away. But they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o'clock, at Athos's chambers, as it was known that he, according to his vow, would never cross the threshold of his door.

The very day on which Kitty had visited d'Artagnan at his own home, was one of their days of meeting; and scarcely had the waiting-maid quitted d'Artagnan, before he proceeded to the Rue Ferou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophising. Aramis had still some secret inclination to return to the cassock; and Athos, according to his custom, neither dissuaded nor encouraged him. Athos liked every one to exercise his own free-will.

He never gave his advice before it was demanded; and, even then, it must be demanded twice.

"In general, people only ask for advice," he said, "that they may not follow it; or, if they should follow it, that they may have somebody to blame for having given it."

Porthos arrived an instant after d'Artagnan; so the four friends were all assembled.

Their four countenances had four different expressions: that of Porthos, tranquillity; of d'Artagnan, hope; of Aramis, anxiety; and that of Athos, perfect indifference.

After a moment's conversation, in which Porthos obscurely intimated that a lady high in rank had kindly taken upon herself to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered.

He came to request Porthos to come to his lodging, where—so he said in a most melancholy tone—his presence was most urgently required.

"Are my equipages come?" demanded Porthos.

"Yes and no," replied Mousqueton.

"But what do you mean, I ask you?"

"Come and see, sir!"

Porthos arose, bowed to his friends, and followed Mousqueton.

A moment afterwards, Bazin appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"What do you want, my friend?" inquired Aramis, with that softness of tone which was always observable in him when his ideas inclined towards the church.

"A man is awaiting you, sir, at your rooms," replied Bazin.

"A man? What sort of a man?"

"A beggar."

“ Give him something, Bazin, and tell him to pray for a poor sinner.”

“ This beggar-man insists on seeing you, and pretends to say that you will be very glad to see *him*.”

“ Has he not anything particular for me ? ”

“ Yes. ‘ If M. Aramis hesitates to come to me, ’ said he, ‘ tell him I have just arrived from Tours ! ’ ”

“ From Tours ! I will go directly ! ” exclaimed Aramis. “ Gentlemen, a thousand pardons ; but undoubtedly this man brings me the intelligence that I expected.”

And getting up at once, he went off at a run.

There now remained only Athos and d’Artagnan.

“ I verily believe that those fellows have settled their affairs, ” said Athos. “ What think you about it, d’Artagnan ? ”

“ I knew that Porthos was in a fair way for it ; and as for Aramis, to tell the truth, I was never very uneasy about him. But you, my dear Athos, who so generously gave away the English pistoles which were your legitimate property—what will you do ? ”

“ I am very glad that I killed the rascal, ” said Athos, “ seeing that he had the silly curiosity to know my real name ; but if I had pocketed his pistoles, they would have weighed me down with remorse.”

“ Well, my dear Athos, you really have an inconceivable delicacy, ” said d’Artagnan.

“ Let it pass ! But what was M. de Treville saying, when he did me the honour to call and see me yesterday—that you frequent the house of these suspicious English people, whom the cardinal protects ? ”

“ That is to say, that I frequent the house of an Englishwoman—she of whom I spoke to you.”

“ Ah, yes, the fair woman, about whom I gave you some advice, which, naturally enough, you took especial care not to follow.”

“ I gave you my reasons. But I am now certain that this woman had something to do with the disappearance of Madame Bonancieux.”

"Yes, I comprehend; to find one woman, you make love to another. It is the longest way, but by far the most amusing."

We will now leave the two friends, who had nothing very important to say to one another, and follow Aramis.

On entering his room, he found a little man, with intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

"Is it you who want me?" said the musketeer.

"I am in search of M. Aramis: is that the name by which you are called?"

"Yes. Have you anything for me?"

"Yes, if you can show me a certain embroidered handkerchief."

"Here it is," said Aramis, taking a key from his bosom, and opening a small ebony casket, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. "Here it is. Look!"

"That is right," said the beggar; "now dismiss your servant."

For, in fact, Bazin, curious to know what the beggar wanted with his master, had kept pace with the latter, and arrived almost at the same time. But his speed was of little benefit to him. At the suggestion of the beggar, his master made a sign to him to withdraw, and he had no alternative but to obey.

When Bazin was gone, the beggar glanced rapidly around, to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and then, opening his ragged vest, which was badly held together by a leathern belt, he began to unrip the top of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at sight of the seal, kissed the writing, and, with a respect almost religious, opened the letter, which contained the following:—

"MY FRIEND,—Fate wills that we be separated for a little longer time, but the bright days of youth are not for ever lost. Do your duty in the camp: I will do mine elsewhere. Take what the bearer will give you; make the campaign like a good and graceful gentleman; and still remember me.—Farewell, until we meet again."

The beggar was yet engaged unripping: he drew from his dirty clothes, one by one, a hundred and fifty double Spanish pistoles, which he placed in a row upon the table; then he opened the door, bowed, and was gone before the astonished young man had dared to address a word to him.

Aramis now perused the letter again, and perceived that it had the following postscript:—

“*P.S.*—You may welcome the bearer, who is a count, and a grandee of Spain.”

“Golden dreams!” exclaimed Aramis; “oh! heavenly life! yes, we are still young! yes, we shall still bask in brighter days! Oh! thou art my love, my life-blood, my being! All in all, art thou, my beautiful beloved!”

And he kissed the letter passionately, without even glancing at the gold which glittered on the table.

Bazin was scratching at the door, and, Aramis, as he had now no reason for keeping him away, permitted him to enter.

Bazin was confounded at the sight of so much gold, and forgot that he ought to announce d’Artagnan, who, curious to know what this beggar-man was, had come on to Aramis’s when he left Athos.

But d’Artagnan never stood on ceremony with Aramis; and therefore, seeing that Bazin had forgotten to announce him, he announced himself.

“Ah, the deuce! my dear Aramis,” said he, on entering, “these are the plums they send you from Tours: you must forward my congratulations on them to the gardener who gathers them.”

“You are mistaken, my dear fellow,” said the ever-discreet Aramis; “it is my publisher, who has just sent me the price of my poem, in verses of one syllable, which I began down in the country.”

“Ah! really?” said d’Artagnan. “Well, all I can say, my dear Aramis, is, that your publisher is very generous.”

“What, sir,” said Bazin, “does a poem sell for such a sum? It is inconceivable! Oh, sir, you may do whatever you desire—you may become equal to M. Voiture, and M. de Benserade. I like that now, myself. A poet! It is almost an abbé. Ah, sir, establish yourself then, as a poet, I beseech you!”

“Bazin, my friend,” said Aramis, “I think that you are interposing in the conversation.”

Bazin understood that he was wrong, bowed his head, and left the room.

“Ah!” said d’Artagnan, with a smile, “you sell your productions for their weight in gold! You are fortunate, my friend! But take care, or you will lose that letter, which is falling out of your coat, and which, without doubt, is also from your publisher.”

Aramis blushed to the very white of his eyes, replaced the letter, and buttoned up his doublet.

“My dear d’Artagnan,” said he, “we will, if you please, go to our friends; and, as I am now so rich, we will begin to dine together again, till you become, in turn, rich yourselves.”

“Faith, and with great pleasure,” replied d’Artagnan; “it is a long time since we have had a proper dinner; and as I have myself rather a hazardous expedition this evening, I shall not be sorry, I confess, to have two or three bottles of old Burgundy mounting up into my head.”

“Well, as for old Burgundy, I do not hate it myself, either,” said Aramis, out of whose head the sight of the gold had driven all thoughts of retirement.

And, having put three or four double pistoles into his pocket for present use, he enclosed the remainder in the ebony casket, incrusting with pearl, which already contained the famous handkerchief that had served him as a talisman.

The two friends went first to Athos, who, faithful to his vow not to go from home, undertook to have the dinner brought to his own rooms. As he was marvelously familiar with all gastronomical details, d’Artagnan

and Aramis had no hesitation in confiding to him this important care.

They then went to Porthos; but, at the corner of the Rue du Bac, they met Mousqueton, who, with a most piteous face, was driving a mule and a horse before him.

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise, not unmingled with joy.

"Ah! my yellow horse!" cried he. "Aramis, look at this horse!"

"Oh, what a frightful beast!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Well, my dear boy, it is the horse on which I came to Paris."

"What, sir, do you know the horse?" inquired Mousqueton.

"He certainly is of a most original colour," said Aramis. "I never saw one with a hide like this before."

"I can well believe it," replied d'Artagnan; "and I sold him for three crowns, which must have been for the hide, for certainly the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how do I find this horse in your hands, Mousqueton?"

"Ah," said the valet, "do not say anything about it, sir. It is a horrible trick of our duchess's husband."

"How so?"

"Yes, we are looked upon most favourably, by a woman of quality, the duchess of ——. But, excuse me, my master has enjoined me to be discreet. She obliged us to accept a small souvenir—a magnificent Spanish charger, and an Andalusian mule, which were most marvellous to behold. But the husband found it out, kidnapped, on their way, the two magnificent animals, and substituted these frightful beasts for them."

"And are you taking them back to him?"

"Yes, exactly so, sir," replied Mousqueton. "You know it is impossible for us to accept such frights as these, instead of those which had been promised us."

"No, egad! though I should have enjoyed seeing

Porthos on my yellow horse. It would have given me some idea of what I was myself when I came to Paris. But do not let us detain you, Mousqueton. Go and execute your master's commission: go. Is he at home?"

"Yes, sir," said Mousqueton, "but in a very bad humour."

He then continued on his way towards the quay of the Grands-Augustins, whilst the two friends went to ring at the unfortunate Porthos's door. But the latter had seen them crossing the court, and was careful not to admit them. So their ringing was in vain.

In the meantime, Mousqueton proceeded on, and, crossing the Pont-Neuf—still driving the two sorry beasts before him—he reached the Rue aux Ours, where, in accordance with his master's orders, he fastened the horse and the mule to the knocker of the attorney's door; and then, without disturbing himself about their future fate, he returned to find Porthos, and inform him that his commission had been exactly fulfilled.

After some time, the two unhappy beasts, having eaten nothing since the morning, made so great a noise, by lifting up and letting fall the knocker, that the attorney ordered his stump-in-the-gutter to inquire in the neighbourhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognised her present, and could not, at first, at all comprehend this restitution. But a visit from Porthos soon enlightened her. The rage which, in spite of the constraint that he imposed upon himself, sparkled in the musketeer's eyes, alarmed his susceptible admirer. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met d'Artagnan and Aramis; and that the former had recognised, in the yellow horse, the very Bearnese nag on which he had arrived in Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos left again, as soon as he had made an appointment to meet the attorney's wife in the cloister

of St. Magloire. When her husband saw that Porthos was really leaving, he invited him to dinner—an invitation which the musketeer declined with an air of majestic dignity.

Madame Coquenard trembled as she went towards the cloister St. Magloire, for she anticipated the reproaches that awaited her there. But she was fascinated by the lofty manners of Porthos.

All the imprecations and reproaches that a man, whose vanity is wounded, can pour upon a woman's head, were poured by Porthos on the humble head of the attorney's wife.

"Alas!" said she, "I did it all for the best. One of our clients is a horse-dealer: he owed us money, and was manifestly reluctant to pay; so I took this mule and horse in discharge of his debt. But he had promised me two royal animals."

"Well, madame," said Porthos, "if his debt was more than five crowns, your horse-dealer is a swindler."

"It is not forbidden one to look out for a good bargain, M. Porthos," said the attorney's wife, by way of excuse.

"No, madame; but those who look out for good bargains ought to permit others to look out for more generous friends."

And, turning on his heel, Porthos made a step toward retiring.

"M. Porthos! M. Porthos!" exclaimed the attorney's wife, "I confess that it was wrong: I ought not to have thought of bargaining about the equipment of a gentleman like you."

Without replying, Porthos took a second step toward retiring.

The attorney's wife fancied that she saw him in a glittering hemisphere, encompassed by duchesses and marchionesses, who scattered bags of gold before his feet.

"Stay! in Heaven's name, stay, M. Porthos!" exclaimed she; "stay, and let us talk it over."

"To talk with you brings me misfortune," said Porthos.

"But, tell me, what do you require?"

"Nothing; for that amounts to the same thing as though I required something of you."

The attorney's wife hung on Porthos's arm, and, in the violence of her grief, exclaimed—

"M. Porthos, I am completely ignorant about all these things. What can I know about a horse! What can I know about equipments!"

"You should leave it to me, then, who do know about them, madame. But you wanted to get things cheap, that you might lend at usury."

"It was wrong, M. Porthos; and I will give you reparation, on my word of honour."

"And how so?" demanded the musketeer.

"Listen. M. Coquenard is going this evening to the Duke de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is to a consultation which will last at least two hours. Come, then; we shall be alone, and can arrange the business."

"Good. That is something."

"And you will pardon me?"

"We shall see," replied Porthos majestically.

They parted from each other, both repeating—"till this evening!"

"I'faith!" thought Porthos, as he went his way, "I seem now to be making some approaches towards M. Coquenard's strong-box."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALL CATS ARE ALIKE GRAY IN THE DARK.

THE evening, so impatiently expected by d'Artagnan, at length arrived.

At about nine o'clock he went, as usual, to her ladyship's, and, as he found her in a charming humour, he was received more graciously than ever. Our Gascon

saw, at the first glance, that the pretended note of the Count de Wardes had been delivered by Kitty to her mistress, and that it was producing its effect.

Kitty came in with some confections. Her mistress looked at her kindly, and smiled on her with her most gracious smile; but the poor girl was so concerned that she did not even notice the latter's good-will.

D'Artagnan looked by turns at these two women, and could not but confess that nature had committed a mistake in their formation: to the great lady she had given a venal and perfidious soul; and, to the waiting-maid, a loving and devoted heart.

At ten o'clock her ladyship began to appear uneasy, and d'Artagnan soon guessed the meaning of her trouble. She looked at the timepiece, got up, sat down again, and smiled at d'Artagnan, with a look which seemed to say—"you are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be charming if you would go."

D'Artagnan arose, and took his hat, and then her ladyship gave him her hand to kiss. The young man was sensible of a gentle pressure, which he attributed, not to coquetry, but to gratitude on account of his departure.

"She loves him madly!" muttered he, as he went out.

On this occasion Kitty was not awaiting him, either in the antechamber, in the corridor, or at the gate; and d'Artagnan had to discover, alone, the staircase and the little chamber.

Kitty was sitting with her face hid between her hands, crying. She heard d'Artagnan enter, but did not lift up her head. The young man went to her, and took her hands, and then she burst out crying.

As d'Artagnan had suspected, her ladyship, on receiving the letter which she regarded as the Count de Wardes's reply, had, in the delirium of her joy, made her waiting-maid acquainted with the whole, and then, as a recompense for the manner in which her mission had been executed, given her a purse of gold.

Kitty, on returning to her own room, had thrown the purse into a corner, where it was lying open, disgorging three or four golden coins upon the carpet.

When at last the poor girl, at d'Artagnan's entreaty, raised her head, he was struck with alarm at the expression of her face. She clasped her hands together with a supplicating air, but without venturing to speak a word.

Little sensitive as was d'Artagnan's heart, he was yet affected by this silent grief. But he was too positive in all his projects, and especially in this one, to deviate at all from his ordained arrangement. He would not give to Kitty the least hope of hindering the rash enterprise on which he had resolved; but he represented it to her as what it really was — that is, as an act of simple vengeance against her ladyship's coquetry; and as the only means which he possessed of obtaining, from her dread of the scandal of exposure, the information that he wanted in respect to Madame Bonancieux.

This plan, further, became the more easy in its execution, from her ladyship having, from some inexplicable motive, to which she appeared to attach extreme importance, commanded Kitty to extinguish all the lights in her apartment, as well as in the abigail's own chamber.

An instant afterwards, her ladyship was heard returning to her chamber. D'Artagnan immediately hurried into his press. Scarcely was he blockaded in it, before the bell rang.

Kitty went to her mistress, and did not leave the door open; but the partition was so thin, that the conversation of the two women was almost wholly audible.

Her ladyship seemed to be intoxicated with joy. She made Kitty repeat to her the most trifling details of her pretended interview with de Wardes, and tell her how he had received her letter, and how he answered it; what was the expression of his face, and whether he seemed much enamoured: and, to all these questions, poor Kitty, who was compelled to keep a good countenance,

answered in a stifled voice, of which her mistress, so egotistical in felicity, did not even observe the disconsolate tone.

As the hour of her interview with the count approached, her ladyship had all the lights in her own room actually extinguished, and commanded Kitty to return to her chamber, and to introduce de Wardes as soon as he arrived.

Kitty had not long to wait. Hardly had d'Artagnan seen, through the key-hole of his press, that the whole apartment was in darkness, before he sprang from his dungeon, at the very moment that Kitty closed the communicating door.

"What is that noise?" inquired my lady.

"It is I," whispered d'Artagnan—"I, the Count de Wardes."

"Oh, my God! my God!" groaned Kitty, "he could not even wait for the hour he himself had fixed."

"Well!" said the lady in a trembling voice, "why does he not come in? Count, count," added she, "you know that I am waiting for you."

At this appeal, d'Artagnan put Kitty gently aside, and sprang into her ladyship's chamber.

If rage and grief can ever torture the soul, it must be those of the lover who receives, under a name that is not his own, protestations of affection which are addressed to his favoured rival.

D'Artagnan was in a situation of which he had not calculated the suffering: jealousy was gnawing at his heart; and he had to endure almost as much as poor Kitty, who was at the same time weeping in the adjoining chamber.

"Yes, count," said her ladyship, in her sweetest tones, as she tenderly pressed one of his hands between her own; "yes, I am happy in the love which your glances and words have expressed whenever we have met. And I, too, return your love. Ah! to-morrow you must let me have some souvenir, which will prove you think

of me; and, as you might forget me, count, keep this."

And she slipped a ring from her own finger on to that of d'Artagnan.

It was a magnificent sapphire, encircled by diamonds.

The first emotion of d'Artagnan prompted him to return it; but her ladyship added—

"No, no; keep this ring for love of me. Besides," added she, in a voice of much emotion, "you really do me a far greater service by accepting it than you can possibly imagine."

"This woman is full of mystery," thought d'Artagnan.

He felt himself at this moment ready to confess everything. He had, in fact, already opened his mouth to tell her ladyship who he was, and with what desire of vengeance he had come, when she added—

"Poor angel! whom that monster of a Gascon just missed killing."

That monster was he himself.

"Oh!" continued her ladyship, "do you still suffer from your wounds?"

"Yes, greatly," answered d'Artagnan, who was somewhat at a loss what to say.

"Depend upon it," muttered her ladyship, in a tone which gave but little comfort to her hearer, "that I will take a cruel vengeance on him for your sufferings."

"Egad!" said d'Artagnan to himself, "the time for my confession is scarcely come yet."

It required some little time for d'Artagnan to recover himself from this little dialogue. All the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. This woman exercised an inconceivable power over him: he hated and adored her at one and the same time. Never had he believed that two sentiments so inconsistent could exist together in the same heart, or create, by commingling, such a strange, and, in some respects, diabolical love.

But the clock had struck one, and it was time for

them to separate. At the moment of quitting her ladyship, d'Artagnan was only sensible of a deep regret at having parted from her; and in the passionate adieu which they reciprocally addressed to one another, a new meeting was agreed upon in the ensuing week.

Poor Kitty hoped to have an opportunity of saying a few words to d'Artagnan as he passed through her chamber, but her mistress led him out herself in the darkness, and only left him when they reached the staircase.

In the morning of the next day, d'Artagnan hastened to Athos; for, being engaged in such a singular adventure, he wished for his advice. He told him everything; and Athos's brow was often knitted during the narration.

"Your lady," said he, "appears to me to be an infamous creature; but you are not, on that account, the less wrong in thus deceiving her. You may now be sure that, in one way or another, you will have a bitter enemy with whom to deal."

Whilst still speaking, Athos looked earnestly at the sapphire, encircled with diamonds, which d'Artagnan now wore in the place of the queen's ring, which was carefully deposited in a case.

"You are looking at this ring?" said the Gascon, proud of displaying before his friends such a splendid gift.

"Yes," replied Athos; "it reminds me of a family jewel."

"It is beautiful, is it not?" said d'Artagnan.

"Magnificent!" rejoined Athos; "I did not believe that there were two sapphires existent of so fine a water. Did you exchange your diamond for it?"

"No," replied d'Artagnan; "it is a present from my beautiful Englishwoman, or, rather, my beautiful Frenchwoman—for, although I have not asked her, I am sure she was born in France."

"And this ring was given to you by her ladyship," said Athos, in a voice in which it was easy to perceive extreme emotion.

"Yes, by herself: she gave it to me last night."

"Let me look at it," said Athos.

"Here it is," said d'Artagnan, drawing it from his finger.

Athos examined it, and became very pale; he then tried it on the ring-finger of his left hand, and it fitted as if it had been made for him.

A shade of anger and revenge passed across the generally calm forehead of the gentleman.

"It is impossible that it can be the same," said he. "How could this ring come into the hands of that lady? And yet it is very strange that two jewels should be so singularly alike."

"Do you know that ring?" asked d'Artagnan.

"I thought I recognised it," said Athos, "but I dare say I am deceived."

He then returned the ring to d'Artagnan, without, however, ceasing to fix his gaze upon it.

"Let me entreat you," said he, an instant afterwards, "either to take that ring from your finger, or to turn the stone inside: it summons up to me such painful remembrances, that I should not be collected enough for any conversation. Did you not come to ask my advice: did you not say that you were in a difficulty as to what to do? But stop, let me look at that sapphire again? The one I mentioned had one of its surfaces scratched by an accident."

D'Artagnan again drew off the ring, and handed it to Athos.

Athos trembled.

"Look," said he, "look! Is it not strange?" And he pointed out to d'Artagnan the scratch that he remembered should be there.

"But whence came this sapphire, Athos?"

"It was my mother's, who had received it from her mother. As I told you, it is an ancient jewel, which ought never to have gone out of the family."

"And you — sold it?" demanded d'Artagnan, with some hesitation.

“No,” replied Athos, with a singular smile; “I gave it away, during a moment of love, even as it was given to you.”

D’Artagnan grew pensive in his turn. He thought that he could discern, in her ladyship’s life, abysses which were black and terrible in their depths.

He put the ring, not on his finger, but into his pocket.

“Listen,” said Athos, taking the young man’s hand. “You know how much I love you, d’Artagnan. Had I a son, I could not love him more dearly. Well, take my advice—renounce this woman. I do not know her; but a kind of intuition tells me that she is a lost creature, and that there is something fatal in her.”

“You are right,” said d’Artagnan, “and I *will* renounce her. I will confess that this woman frightens even me.”

“And will you have the resolution?” asked Athos.

“Yes; and at once, too,” replied d’Artagnan.

“You are quite right, my dear d’Artagnan,” said Athos, pressing his hand with an affection almost paternal; “and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely been a part of your existence, may leave no pestilential trace upon it!”

And Athos bowed his head, like a man who would rather be left to his own thoughts.

On reaching home, d’Artagnan found Kitty awaiting him. A month of fever would not have made a greater change in the poor girl than had been produced by an hour of jealousy and grief.

She had been sent by her mistress to the Count de Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love—intoxicated with joy: she wanted to know when the count would accord her a second interview.

The pale and trembling Kitty waited there for d’Artagnan’s reply.

Athos had considerable influence over the young man. The counsels of his friend, co-operating with the sentiments of d’Artagnan’s own heart, and with the memory

of Madame Bonancieux, which was but rarely absent from him, had made him resolve, now that his pride was saved, to see her ladyship no more. As his only answer, he took a pen and wrote the following letter, which he sent, as he had done the preceding one, unsigned:—

“Do not reckon any more on me, madame. Now that I am becoming convalescent, I have so many interviews of the same kind to grant, that I must put them into some regular order. When your turn comes round, I shall have the honour to inform you. I kiss your hands.”

Not a word was said about the sapphire; the Gascon wished to keep it for the present, as a weapon against her ladyship.

It would be wrong to judge of the actions of one age by the habits of another. The conduct which would now be regarded as a disgrace to a man of honour, was, at that time, quite simple and natural.

D'Artagnan handed the open letter to Kitty, who read it at first without understanding it, and who very nearly went mad, when she read it a second time.

Kitty scarcely could believe in such happiness; and d'Artagnan was obliged to repeat to her, verbally, the assurance which the letter gave in writing. Whatever might be the danger which, on account of the passionate character of her mistress, the poor girl incurred in delivering such a note to her ladyship, she none the less ran back, as fast as her legs could carry her, to the Place Royale.

The heart of the kindest woman is pitiless towards a rival's pains.

Her ladyship opened the letter with an eagerness equal to that with which the abigail had brought it; but at the first words that she read, she became actually livid: then, she crushed the letter in her hand, and turned, with lightning in her eyes, to Kitty.

“What is this letter?” said she.

"It is the answer to your ladyship's," said the trembling Kitty.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the lady; "impossible, that a gentleman should have written such a letter to a lady!"

Then, suddenly, she cried—

"My God! could he know——"

She checked herself, shuddering. She ground her teeth—her face was of an ashy colour. She endeavoured to take a step towards the window for air, but she could only stretch out her arms: her strength failed her, and she sank back into an easy-chair.

Kitty, thinking she was fainting, rushed forward to open her corset. But, raising herself up suddenly, she exclaimed—

"What do you want? why do you touch me?"

"I thought your ladyship was ill, and I wished to assist you," replied the poor damsel, frightened at the terrible expression which the countenance of her mistress had assumed.

"*I* unwell! Do you take me for a weak woman? When I am insulted, I do not feel unwell—I avenge myself! Do you hear?"

And she motioned Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

IN the evening, her ladyship gave orders that M. D'Artagnan should be admitted as usual, as soon as he should come. But he came not.

On the next morning Kitty went again to see d'Artagnan, and told him all that had occurred on the previous day. D'Artagnan smiled. This jealous anger of her ladyship was his revenge.

The patience of the indignant lady had increased by

night. She renewed her orders relative to the young Gascon; but, as on the preceding evening, her hopes were in vain.

On the next morning Kitty visited d'Artagnan. She was, however, no longer joyous and alert, as on the previous days, but, on the contrary, overcome with grief.

D'Artagnan inquired of the poor girl what ailed her; but the latter, as her sole reply, drew from her pocket a letter, which she handed to him.

This letter was in her ladyship's handwriting: only, on this occasion, it was really meant for d'Artagnan, and not for M. de Wardes.

He opened it, and read as follows:—

“DEAR M. D'ARTAGNAN,

“It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, especially when about to part for so long a time. I and my brother looked for you in vain, both yesterday and the day before. Will it be the same this evening?”

“Your very grateful,
“LADY DE WINTER.”

“This is all very plain,” said d'Artagnan, “and I expected this letter. My credit rises as that of the Count de Wardes falls.”

“And will you go?” asked Kitty.

“Listen, my dear child,” replied the Gascon, who sought to excuse himself in his own eyes for failing in his promise to Athos. “You must see that it would be imprudent to refuse so imperative an invitation. Her ladyship, on seeing that I kept away, would wonder at the cessation of my visits, and might perhaps suspect something. And who can tell the limits of such a woman's vengeance?”

“Oh, mon Dieu!” exclaimed Kitty, “you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always right. But you will go and pay your court to her again; and if you should happen to please her now, with your own face and under your true name, it will be far worse than before!”

The poor girl guessed, by instinct, something of what was about to occur.

D'Artagnan comforted her as well as he was able, and promised her that he would remain insensible to her ladyship's seductions.

He sent word, by way of answer, that he was as grateful as man could be for her ladyship's kindness, and that he would not fail to wait upon her as she commanded; but he did not venture to write to her, lest, to her experienced eyes, he should be unable to disguise his handwriting sufficiently.

At nine o'clock d'Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was obvious that the servants, who were waiting in the antechamber, had already received their orders; for, as soon as he had appeared, before he had even inquired if her ladyship was to be seen, one of them hastened to announce him.

"Show him in," said my lady, in a voice so piercing that he heard it in the antechamber.

He was at once admitted.

"Not at home to anybody," said her ladyship; "do you hear? Not to anybody."

D'Artagnan observed the lady with great curiosity. She was pale, and her eyes were heavy, either from weeping or from want of sleep. The customary lights in the room had been designedly diminished in number; and yet the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had been consuming her for two days. D'Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry; and she made a mighty effort to receive him, but never did a more agitated face contradict a more enchanting smile.

To d'Artagnan's questions respecting her health, she replied—

"Bad, very bad."

"Then," said d'Artagnan, "I am indiscreet in coming: you are unquestionably in want of a little peace, and I will immediately retire."

"No," said her ladyship, "remain, M. d'Artagnan. Your pleasing company will, on the contrary, give me great relief."

"She has never been so charming before," thought d'Artagnan; "let me keep upon my guard."

Her ladyship assumed the most affectionate air possible, and gave the utmost charm to her conversation. At the same time that fever, which had for a moment left her, returned, to restore the lustre to her eyes, the roses to her cheeks, and the carmine to her lips. D'Artagnan again saw the Circé who had already encompassed him with her enchantments. Her ladyship smiled, and he felt that he would dare perdition for that smile.

There was a moment, during which he experienced something like remorse for what he had contrived against her.

Her ladyship became, by degrees, more communicative. She asked d'Artagnan whether his heart were occupied by any love?

"Alas!" said he, assuming the most sentimental manner that he could, "how can you be so cruel as to ask me such a question—me, who, ever since I first saw you, have only breathed and lived by you and for you?"

The lady smiled most strangely.

"And so you love me?" said she.

"Need I tell you so now? And have you never perceived it?"

"Yes, I have; but, you know, the prouder hearts are, the more difficult they are to win."

"Ah, no difficulties can ever daunt me," replied d'Artagnan: "my only fear is, of impossibilities."

"Nothing is impossible," said the lady, "to one who truly loves."

"Nothing, madame?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"I'faith," thought d'Artagnan, "the tune is changed. Will the capricious creature chance to fall in love with

me; and will she be disposed to give me another sapphire, equal to that she gave me for de Wardes?"

"Come," resumed her ladyship, "let me hear what you would do to prove the love that you profess?"

"Everything that you can ask. Command; and I am ready to obey?"

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he did not risk much by such an engagement.

"Well, then, let us talk a little about it," said she, drawing her chair nearer d'Artagnan.

"I am all attention, madame," said the latter.

The lady paused for a moment, thoughtful and undecided; then, appearing to form her resolution, she said—

"I have an enemy."

"You, madame!" cried d'Artagnan, feigning surprise. "Mon Dieu! beautiful and good as you are, is it possible!"

"A mortal enemy!"

"Indeed?"

"An enemy who has so cruelly insulted me, that there is war to the death between us. Can I reckon upon you as an ally?"

D'Artagnan instantly perceived at what the vindictive creature was aiming.

"You can, madame," said he emphatically. "My arm and my life belong to you, as well as my love."

"Well, then," said her ladyship, "since you are as generous as you are enamoured——" She hesitated.

"Well?" demanded d'Artagnan.

"Well," resumed her ladyship, after a moment's silence, "cease, from this day, to speak of impossibilities."

"Do not overwhelm me with my happiness!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands which she abandoned to him.

“Yes!” thought the lady, “avenge me on that wretch, de Wardes, and I shall easily get rid of you afterwards—double fool! living sword-blade!”

“Yes!” thought d’Artagnan also, on his side, “tell me that you love me, after having so audaciously deceived me; and then, dangerous and hypocritical woman! I will laugh at you, in concert with him whom you wish to punish by my hand.”

Raising his head, d’Artagnan said, “I am ready.”

“You understand me, then, dear d’Artagnan?” said her ladyship.

“I can read your every look.”

“Then you will, for me, employ that arm which has already gained such great renown?”

“Yes, instantly.”

“And how,” said her ladyship, “shall I ever repay a service so important?”

“Your love is the only recompense that I desire—the only one that would be worthy either of you or me,” replied d’Artagnan.

“Infatuated creature!” said she, smiling.

“Ah!” exclaimed d’Artagnan, carried away for an instant by the passion which this woman had the power of exciting in his heart—“ah! your love appears to me improbable, and, fearful of seeing it vanish like a dream, I am impatient to receive from your own lips the assurance of its reality.”

“Do you already merit such an avowal?”

“I am at your command,” replied d’Artagnan.

“Are you quite determined?” said she, with a lingering doubt.

“Name the wretch who has drawn tears from your beautiful eyes!”

“And who has told you that there have been tears?” exclaimed she.

“I imagined so.”

“Women of my character never weep,” replied her ladyship.

"So much the better. But tell me his name?"

"Remember that his name is all my secret."

"Yet I must know it."

"Yes, you must. See what confidence I place in you."

"You overpower me with joy! What is his name?"

"You know it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"It is not one of my friends?" said he, feigning hesitation, as an evidence of his ignorance.

"And if it were one of your friends—would you hesitate?" said her ladyship, whilst a threatening flash was sparkling in her eyes.

"Not if it were my brother!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, as though carried away by enthusiasm.

Our Gascon advanced without danger, for he knew where he was going.

"I love your devotedness," said the lady.

"Alas! do you love only that in me?" said d'Artagnan.

"I will tell you that another time," replied she, taking his hand.

And this pressure made d'Artagnan tremble, as though the fever which her ladyship endured had also infected him.

"You will love me some day—you?" exclaimed he. "Oh! if that should come to pass, the bliss will deprive me of reason!"

D'Artagnan was, in fact, intoxicated with joy; and in his temporary delirium, he almost believed in the tenderness of her ladyship, and in the crime of de Wardes. If the latter had been at that moment near him, he would have slain him.

The lady seized the opportunity.

"He is called——" she uttered, in her turn.

"De Wardes—I know it!" interrupted d'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" asked she, seizing his two hands and looking into his eyes, as if striving to read his very soul.



D'Artagnan felt that he had allowed himself to be led into a fault.

"Tell me, tell me, tell me, then," she exclaimed, "how do you know it?"

"How do I know it?" repeated d'Artagnan.

"Yes!"

"I know it, because yesterday, in a drawing-room where I was, de Wardes displayed a ring, which he said you gave him."

"The wretch!" exclaimed her ladyship.

It will easily be understood that this epithet resounded in the very depths of d'Artagnan's heart.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you on this—wretch!" said d'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"Thanks, my brave friend!" exclaimed the lady. "And when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow—immediately—whenever you command!"

Her ladyship was about to exclaim—"immediately!" but she reflected that such precipitation would be but little complimentary to d'Artagnan. She had, moreover, a thousand precautions to take, and a thousand counsels to impress on her defender, that he should avoid all explanations with the count in the presence of witnesses.

"To-morrow," resumed d'Artagnan, "you shall be revenged, or I shall no more exist."

"No," said she, "you will revenge me, and you will not die. I know something in reference to that."

"What do you know?"

"Why, it seems to me that, in your former contest with him, you had no reason to complain of fortune."

"Fortune is a fickle jade: to-day, favourable; she may betray me to-morrow."

"Does this mean, that you now hesitate?"

"No, I do not hesitate; God forbid! But——"

"Silence!" she interrupted; "I hear my brother; it is inexpedient that he should find you here."

She rang the bell, and Kitty entered.

“Go through this door,” said she to d’Artagnan, as she opened a small secret door, “and return at eleven o’clock, when we can end this conversation. Kitty will conduct you to me.”

As the poor girl heard these few words, she felt as if she would sink into the earth.

“Well! what are you about, mademoiselle, that you stand there as motionless as a statue? Come, show this gentleman out!—Remember, at eleven to-night.”

“It appears that all your appointments are for eleven o’clock,” thought d’Artagnan: “it is a confirmed habit.”

The lady gave him her hand, which he kissed with tenderness.

“Well,” thought he, as he went away, scarcely replying to the reproaches of Kitty, “well, I must not make a fool of myself: unquestionably this woman is an abominable wretch: I must be on my guard!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LADY’S SECRET.

D’ARTAGNAN had gone out of the hotel, instead of at once ascending to Kitty’s room, there to wait for the hour of his appointment with her ladyship. He had two reasons for adopting this course: the first was, that, by this means, he avoided the recriminations and entreaties of the girl; and the second was, that he wished coolly to reflect on the secret thought of the lady, and, if possible, to penetrate it.

What seemed to him most certain, was, that he was exposing himself to love her ladyship like a madman; whilst she, on the other hand, did not love him the least in the world, and never would. At one time he considered that the best thing to do would be to return home, and write a long letter to her ladyship, in which

he would confess, that, as far as he was concerned, he and de Wardes were the same individual, and, consequently, that it was only by suicide he could kill the de Wardes by whom she thought herself injured; but—with the conviction that she would still detest him, and would regard him only as a vile instrument of vengeance, that she could break when it had served her turn—the yearning to avenge himself returned to his heart. He longed to rule over the woman who had trifled with and insulted him, and wounded him also, in his sincere and pure love, by becoming an accomplice in the abduction of Madame Bonancieux.

He went five or six times round the Place Royale, agitated by all these conflicting emotions, and returning every ten paces to regard the light which was still visible through the blinds of her ladyship's apartment. It was manifest that she was not, on this occasion, in such eager haste to return into her chamber.

At length it struck eleven. This sound drove all irresolution from d'Artagnan's heart. He recalled each detail of the interview which he had just had with her ladyship; and, by one of those revulsions so common in similar cases, he entered the house with his heart palpitating, and his head on fire, and rushed into Kitty's room.

The poor girl, pale as death, and trembling in every limb, would have kept d'Artagnan back; but her mistress, with her ear on the watch, had heard the noise he had made in entering, and opened the door.

"Come," said she,

D'Artagnan was no longer sane. He felt himself entangled in one of those fantastic intrigues which are ours in dreams. He advanced towards her ladyship, attracted by the magnetic power which the loadstone exercises over the steel.

The door was closed behind them.

Kitty, in her turn, rushed forwards to the door.

Jealousy, and fury, and offended pride—all the

passions, in a word, which rule the heart of an enamoured woman—impelled her to a confession. But she would be herself ruined, if she confessed her participation in such a machination; and, above all, d'Artagnan would be for ever lost to her. This last thought of love still urged her to the crowning sacrifice.

D'Artagnan, upon his side, had surrendered himself entirely to the inspiration of vanity. It was not now a rival who was loved in his person: it was himself, apparently, to whom the love was given. A secret voice, from the depths of his own heart, truly told him that he was only a weapon, which was caressed until it had inflicted death; but pride, and self-love, and folly, silenced this voice, and stifled this murmur; and besides, our Gascon, with the degree of confidence which we know him to possess, compared himself with de Wardes, and inquired why, taking one consideration with another, he should not be loved for himself alone.

Thanks to the influence of these thoughts, her ladyship ceased to be a woman of wicked dispositions, who had for a moment terrified him: she became a charming being, who promised to experience herself the love that she excited.

Nevertheless, the lady, who had not the same motives as d'Artagnan for forgetfulness, quickly drew him from his contemplations, and recalled him to the reality of their interview. She inquired whether the measures which were to bring about a meeting with de Wardes, on the next day, were all definitely determined on, beforehand, in his own mind.

But d'Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another course, forgot himself, like a fool, and gallantly answered, that it was not in her presence, when he was occupied with nothing but the happiness of seeing and of hearing her, that he could think of duels with the sword.

This coldness, on the only subject which interested her, alarmed her ladyship, and her questions became more pressing.

Then d'Artagnan, who had never seriously thought of this impossible duel, endeavoured to turn the conversation, but found himself unable.

Her ladyship kept the conference within the limits that she had herself traced beforehand, with her irresistible spirit, and her iron will.

D'Artagnan then thought himself very clever in endeavouring to persuade her to renounce, by forgiving de Wardes, the furious projects she had formed.

But, at the first words that he uttered, her countenance assumed a most repulsive expression.

"Are you afraid, dear M. d'Artagnan?" cried she, in a sharp and mocking voice, that sounded strangely in the young man's ears.

"You cannot think so, my adored," replied d'Artagnan; "but what if this poor Count de Wardes was less culpable than you imagine?"

"In any case," said her ladyship seriously, "he has deceived me, and, from that moment, has deserved death."

"Then he shall die, since you condemn him," said d'Artagnan, in a tone so firm that it appeared to her ladyship the expression of an unconquerable devotion.

She smiled upon him once more.

"Yes, I am prepared," continued d'Artagnan, with an involuntary excitement; "but, first, there is one thing of which I would fain be sure."

"What?" inquired the lady.

"That you love me!"

"Your presence here is a proof of that, I think," replied she, feigning some embarrassment.

"Yes! And I am yours, body and soul. Dispose of my arm!"

"Thanks, my brave defender; and, even as I prove my love by admitting you here, you will, in your turn, prove yours—will you not?"

"Certainly. But, if you love me, as you say," resumed d'Artagnan, "do you not fear anything on my account?"

"What can I fear?"

"I might be dangerously wounded—killed even."

"Impossible," said the lady; "you are so valiant a man, and so expert a swordsman."

"Then you would not prefer," resumed d'Artagnan, "a method which would equally well revenge you, yet render the combat unnecessary?"

The lady looked at the young man in silence: her clear eyes had an expression singularly malevolent.

"Really," said she, "I verily believe that you are now faltering again."

"No, I have no hesitation; but this poor de Wardes awakens my compassion, now that you no longer love him; and it appears to me that a man must be sufficiently punished by the loss of your love, without meriting further chastisement."

"And who has told you that I ever loved him?" asked her ladyship.

"At least, I may believe, without any great folly, that you love another," replied the young man gallantly, "and I repeat, that I am interested in the count."

"You?" demanded the lady. "And why?"

"Because I alone know——"

"What?"

"That he has been far less culpable towards you than you think."

"Really?" said the lady, with an uneasy look. "Explain yourself; for, upon my word, I cannot understand what you mean."

And she looked at d'Artagnan with eyes which were gradually lighted up by a more baleful flame.

"Yes, I am a man of honour," said d'Artagnan, determined now to finish what he had begun; "and, since you have confessed your love for me, since I am quite sure of possessing it—for I possess it, do I not?"

"Entirely! But proceed."

"Well, then, I find myself quite transformed, and a confession forces itself from me."

“A confession?”

“If I doubted your love, I would not venture on it; but you do love me—do you not?”

“Undoubtedly!”

“Then, if through excess of love to you I had committed a fault, you would forgive me?”

“Perhaps so. But this confession,” said she, becoming pale—“what is this confession?”

“You had an interview with de Wardes, last Thursday, in this very chamber, had you not?”

“I? No! it is not true,” said the lady, in a tone so firm, and with a countenance so impassive, that, had d’Artagnan not possessed such perfect certainty, he must have doubted.

“Do not lie, my beauteous angel,” said d’Artagnan, endeavouring to smile; “it is quite useless.”

“What do you mean? Speak, now, for you kill me!”

“Oh! be at ease you are not culpable towards me, and I have already forgiven you.”

“What next—what next?”

“De Wardes has nothing to boast of.”

“How? You told me yourself that this ring——”

“That ring, I myself have! The de Wardes of Thursday, and the d’Artagnan of to-day, are the same person.”

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with bashfulness—a little storm, which would dissolve in tears; but he strangely deceived himself, and his error was quickly apparent.

Pale and terrible, her ladyship raised herself up, and pushing away d’Artagnan, who was near her, by a violent blow on the chest, sought to hasten from him.

D’Artagnan restrained her by her robe, in order to implore her pardon. But, with a powerful and resolute effort, she endeavoured to escape. In this effort, her robe gave way near the corset; and then, one of her beautiful shoulders being uncovered, d’Artagnan, with inexpressible horror, perceived upon it the fleur-de-lis—

that indelible mark impressed by the degrading hand of the executioner.

“Great God!” exclaimed he, letting fall the robe; and he remained mute, motionless, and rooted to his place.

But the lady felt herself denounced, even by d’Artagnan’s horror. Doubtless he had seen everything. The young man now knew her secret—that terrible secret, of which the whole world was ignorant, except him!

She turned, no longer like a mere furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

“Ah, wretch!” said she, “you have betrayed me like a coward; and, moreover, you have learned my secret! You must die!”

And she ran to an inlaid cabinet on her toilet table, opened it with a feverish, trembling hand, drew from it a small dagger, with a golden hilt and a sharp and slender blade, and returned with one bound to the side of d’Artagnan, her vesture in pieces.

Although the young man was, as we know, brave, he was frightened at that convulsed countenance, at those horribly dilated pupils, at those pale cheeks, and bleeding lips: he arose, and recoiled, as from the approach of a serpent that had crawled towards him; and, instinctively putting his perspiring hand to his sword, he drew it from the sheath.

But, without being at all dismayed at the sight of the sword, her ladyship still advanced towards him to strike him, and only stopped when she felt the sharp point upon her bosom.

Then she attempted to seize the sword in her hands; but d’Artagnan always withheld it from her grasp, by pointing it, without touching her, sometimes at her eyes, and sometimes at her breast; whilst he still retreated, endeavouring to find the door which opened into Kitty’s room.

During all this time, her ladyship was rushing at him in horrible transports of rage, and howling in a fearful manner.

Nevertheless, as this was ending in a strong resemblance to a duel, d'Artagnan gradually recovered his coolness.

"Well done! beautiful lady, well done!" said he; "but, for God's sake, be calm, or I will draw a second fleur-de-lis on the other shoulder."

"Wretch! wretch!" vociferated her ladyship.

But d'Artagnan, still seeking the door, maintained himself on the defensive.

At the noise that they made by overturning the furniture—she to get at him, and he to get behind it, out of the way—Kitty opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had never ceased manœuvring to get near this door, was only three paces from it. With one bound, therefore, he sprang out of the lady's chamber into that of her maid, and, as quick as lightning, closed the door again, and leaned against it with his whole weight, whilst Kitty fastened the bolts.

Her ladyship then endeavoured, with a force far beyond the strength of an ordinary woman, to break down the barriers which confined her in her own room; but, finding this impossible, she stabbed the door with her dagger, sometimes penetrating the entire thickness of the panels. Each blow was accompanied by some horrible imprecation.

"Quick, quick! Kitty," said d'Artagnan in a whisper, when the bolts were fastened. "Make haste to let me out of the hotel, or she will have me killed by the lackeys. Let us be quick, do you hear? for it is a matter of life and death."

Kitty too well understood him. She drew him down the stairs in the darkness. And it was time. Her ladyship had already rung, and aroused the whole of her establishment. The porter drew the cord at Kitty's call, at the very instant that his mistress screamed from the window—"Do not open!"

The young man fled, whilst she still menaced him with an impotent gesture. At the same moment that she lost sight of him, she fell senseless in her chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW, WITHOUT DISTURBING HIMSELF, ATHOS OBTAINED HIS EQUIPMENT.

D'ARTAGNAN was so completely confounded, that, without considering what would become of Kitty, he ran through half of Paris, and did not stop till he found himself at Athos's door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the shouts of some of the watch, who had pursued him, only made him the more expeditious in his progress. He traversed the court, mounted the two flights of stairs, and knocked as if he would break down the door.

Grimaud opened it, with his eyes swollen by sleep; and d'Artagnan rushed into the antechamber with such violence as almost to overthrow him as he passed.

This time, at any rate, in spite of his habitual taciturnity, Grimaud found his tongue. "Hollo!" he cried, "what do you want, hussy?" D'Artagnan then rid himself of the woman's hood and cloak given him to escape in, by Kitty. At the sight of d'Artagnan's naked sword, the poor fellow saw that he had to deal with a man—with some assassin, perhaps.

"Help, help! murder!" exclaimed he.

"Be silent, you unlucky dog!" said the young man; "I am d'Artagnan. Do you not know me? Where is your master?"

"You, M. d'Artagnan!" exclaimed the panic-stricken Grimaud. "Impossible!"

"Grimaud!" said Athos, as he quietly emerged from his chamber in his dressing-gown; "Grimaud, I believe that you are permitting yourself to speak!"

"Ah! sir, it is because——"

"Silence!"

Grimaud then contented himself with pointing to d'Artagnan with his finger.

Athos, phlegmatic as he was, burst out into a fit of laughter, which was occasioned by d'Artagnan's wild appearance—hood askew, skirt falling, sleeves tucked up, moustache bristling!

"Do not laugh, my friend," exclaimed d'Artagnan: "in the name of Heaven, do not laugh! for, upon my soul, I assure you that there is nothing to laugh at."

He uttered these words with so much solemnity, and with such undissembled horror, that Athos immediately seized his hands, saying—

"Are you wounded, my friend? You are very pale."

"No; but something very terrible has just happened to me. Are you alone, Athos?"

"Sang Dieu! who would you expect to be with me at this time of night?"

"Good! good!"

And d'Artagnan hurried into Athos's chamber.

"Well, speak now," said the latter, bolting the door: "is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are altogether upset. Come, speak, for I am dying with anxiety."

"Athos," replied d'Artagnan, "prepare to hear something perfectly incredible—unparalleled."

"Speak, then, speak," said Athos.

"Well, then," continued d'Artagnan, bending towards Athos's ear, and whispering, "her ladyship is branded with a fleur-de-lis upon her shoulder!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the musketeer, as if he had received a bullet in his heart.

"But are you quite sure," continued d'Artagnan, "that *the other* is really dead?"

"*The other!*" murmured Athos, in a voice so faint, as scarcely to be audible.

"Yes; she of whom you told me, one day, at Amiens?"

Athos groaned, and his head fell upon his hands.

"This one," said d'Artagnan, "is a woman of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age."

"Blonde?" said Athos.

"Yes."

"With clear blue eyes, of an uncommon brightness, and with black eyelashes and eyebrows?"

"Yes."

"Tall, and well made? Has she also lost a tooth, near the eye-tooth, on the left side?"

"Yes."

"The fleur-de-lis is small, of a red colour, and as if somewhat effaced by layers of paste applied to it?"

"Yes."

"And yet you say that this woman is English?"

"She is called 'my lady,' but she may yet be a Frenchwoman: Lord de Winter is only her brother-in-law."

"I must see her, d'Artagnan!"

"Take care, Athos, take care. You wished to kill her: she is a woman who would willingly pay you back, and is not likely to fail."

"She dare not say a word—it would be denouncing herself."

"She is equal to anything! Did you ever see her furious?"

"No," said Athos.

"A tigress! a panther! Ah! my dear Athos, I fear that I have drawn down upon us both a terrible vengeance."

D'Artagnan then recounted everything—the lady's maddened rage, and her menaces of death.

"You are quite right; and, upon my soul, I would sell my life for a hair," said Athos. "Happily, however, we leave Paris the day after to-morrow, and shall probably go to La Rochelle. Once off——"

"She will pursue you to the end of the world, Athos, should she recognise you. Let her, then, vent her hatred on me alone."

"Ah, my friend, what does it signify that she should kill me?" said Athos. "Do you for an instant suppose that I am at all anxious to live?"

“There is some horrible mystery under all this, Athos. I am certain that this woman is one of the cardinal’s spies.”

“In that case, take care of yourself. If the cardinal does not greatly admire you for that London affair, he hates you thoroughly; but as he has, all being considered, nothing to bring forward openly against you, and yet must gratify his revenge, take care of yourself. If you go out, do not go alone: if you eat, use every precaution: distrust everything, even your own shadow.”

“Happily,” said d’Artagnan, “we only need to manage till to-morrow evening without accident; for, when once with the army, I hope that we shall only have men to fear.”

“In the meantime,” said Athos, “I renounce my plan of seclusion, and shall go everywhere with you. You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and I will accompany you.”

“Be it so, my dear Athos; but first, let me return to you this ring, which I received from that woman. This sapphire is yours. Did you not tell me that it was a family jewel?”

“Yes; my father gave two thousand crowns for it, as he formerly told me; it was a part of the marriage present that he made my mother. It is magnificent. My mother gave it to me; and, instead of guarding it as a sacred relic—madman that I was!—I gave it to that wretch.”

“Well, take back your ring; for I understand that you must prize it.”

“I take it, after it has passed through that wretch’s hands? Never! the ring is polluted, d’Artagnan.”

“Then sell it, or pledge it: you can borrow a thousand crowns on it. With that sum you will be well off; and then, with the first money you obtain, you can redeem it, cleansed of its ancient stains, since it will have passed through the hands of usurers.”

Athos smiled.

“You are a charming companion, my dear d’Artagnan,” said he; “your eternal gaiety revives the souls of the afflicted. Well, then, let us pledge this ring of mine, but on one condition.”

“And what is that?”

“That you will have five hundred crowns, and I shall have five hundred.”

“But think a moment, Athos. I shall not want a quarter of that sum—I, who am only in the guards; and, by selling my saddles, I can easily procure it. What do I really want? A horse for Planchet—nothing more. Besides, you forget that I have a ring also.”

“Which you value even more than I do mine: at least I think that I have so observed.”

“Yes; for, in extremities, it might relieve us, not only from great embarrassment, but even from great danger. It is not only a simple diamond—it is also an enchanted talisman.”

“I do not understand you, yet I believe what you say. But, to return to my ring, or rather ours: you shall take half the sum it may produce, or I will throw it into the Seine; and I much doubt whether, as in the case of Polycrates, a fish would be so obliging as to restore it to us.”

“Well, then, I agree to it,” said d’Artagnan.

At this moment Grimaud came in, accompanied by Planchet, who was uneasy about his master, and anxious to know what had happened to him.

Athos dressed himself; and, when he was ready to go out, made the gesture of a man taking aim to Grimaud. The latter immediately took down his carbine, and prepared to follow his master.

D’Artagnan and Athos, attended by their servants, reached the Rue des Fossoyeurs in safety. M. Bonancieux was at his door, and looked at d’Artagnan with a bantering air.

“Hollo, my dear lodger,” said he, “make haste. There is a pretty young girl waiting for you; and the women, you know, do not like to be kept waiting.”

"It is Kitty!" exclaimed d'Artagnan to himself, as he rushed towards the stairs.

In fact, on the landing-place before his apartment, and crouching against his door, he found the poor trembling girl. As soon as she saw him, she exclaimed—

"You promised me your protection—you promised to save me from her anger: remember, it is you who have ruined me?"

"Yes, certainly," said d'Artagnan; "make yourself easy about that, Kitty. But what happened after I was gone?"

"I can scarcely tell," replied Kitty. "At the outcries that she made, the lackeys ran to her. She was furious with passion. Whatever can be uttered in the way of imprecation, she vomited forth against you. Then, I thought she would remember that it was through my room that you had entered hers, and would take me for your accomplice; so I collected the little money that I had, and my most precious clothes, and ran hither for safety."

"Poor child! But what am I to do with you? I am going off the day after to-morrow."

"Anything you like, sir. Send me away from Paris—send me out of France."

"But I cannot take you with me to the siege of La Rochelle," said d'Artagnan.

"No; but you might place me in the service of some lady of your acquaintance—in your own province, for instance."

"Ah! my child, in my own province the ladies have no waiting-maids. But wait; I know what I will do. Planchet, go to Aramis, and ask him to come here directly. We have matters of great importance to discuss with him."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? It appears to me, that his marchioness——"

"Porthos's marchioness, sooner than keep a lady's-maid, would have her clothes put on by her husband's

clerks," said d'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would rather not live in the Rue aux Ours! Would you, Kitty?"

"I will live where you please," said Kitty, "provided I am concealed, and that nobody knows where I am."

"But, Kitty, now that we are going to be separated, and that you are therefore no longer jealous of me——"

"Sir," interrupted Kitty, "far or near, I shall never cease to love you."

"Where the plague does constancy repair to nestle!" muttered Athos.

"And I, also," said d'Artagnan—"I, also, shall always love you, you may be sure. But, now, answer me. This question is one of great importance:—did you never hear anything said about a young woman who was abducted one night?"

"Wait a minute. Oh! Mon Dieu! sir! Do you still love that woman?"

"No. It is one of my friends who loves her. Yes—it is Athos there."

"I!" exclaimed Athos, in a tone pretty much like that of the man who sees himself about to tread upon an adder.

"Yes, to be sure, you!" said d'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest that we all take in that poor little Madame Bonancieux. Besides, Kitty will not tell—will you, Kitty? You understand, my child," exclaimed d'Artagnan, "that she is the wife of that ugly ape whom you saw upon the doorstep, as you came in."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Kitty, "you remind me how frightened I was lest he should have recognised me!"

"How, *recognised!* Then you have seen this man before?"

"Yes, he came twice to my lady's."

"As might be expected. About what time?"

"About a fortnight ago."

"Just about the time."

“And yesterday evening he came again.”

“Yesterday evening?”

“Yes, a minute before you came yourself.”

“My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a web of spies! And do you believe that he recognised you, Kitty?”

“I drew down my hood, when I saw him—but perhaps it was too late.”

“Go down, Athos—he suspects you less than me—and see whether he is still at the door.”

Athos went down, and returned immediately.

“He is gone,” said he, “and the house is closed.”

“He is gone to make his report, and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dovecot.”

“Well, then, let us be off,” said Athos, “leaving only Planchet here to bring us intelligence.”

“Wait one instant! And what about Aramis, whom we have sent for?”

“True,” said Athos, “let us wait for Aramis.”

An instant afterwards, Aramis entered. They explained the affair to him, and told him how urgent it was for him to find, amongst some of his high connections, a situation for Kitty.

“And will this really be a service to you, d’Artagnan?”

“I will be grateful for it for ever.”

“Well, then, Madame de Bois Tracy has requested me to find a trustworthy waiting-maid for one of her friends, who lives in the provinces; and if you, my dear d’Artagnan, can answer for the young woman——”

“Oh! sir,” exclaimed Kitty, “I shall be entirely devoted, be assured, to the lady who will give me the means of leaving Paris.”

“Then,” said Aramis, “nothing can be better.”

He sat himself down at the table, and wrote a short note, which he sealed with a ring, and gave to Kitty.

“And now, my child,” said d’Artagnan, “you know that this place is no safer for us than for you. So let us separate. We shall meet again in happier days.”

“And at whatever time or place we may meet again,

sir," said Kitty, "you will find me loving you still more than now."

"A gamester's vow!" said Athos, whilst d'Artagnan was accompanying Kitty down the stairs.

A few minutes afterwards, the three friends separated, after making an appointment for four o'clock at Athos's chambers, and leaving Planchet to mind the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and d'Artagnan busied themselves about pledging the sapphire.

As our Gascon had foreseen, they easily procured three hundred pistoles on the ring; and the Jew moreover declared, that, if they chose to sell it, as it would make a splendid drop for ear-rings, he would give as much as five hundred pistoles for it.

Athos and d'Artagnan, with the activity of two soldiers, and the science of two connoisseurs, scarcely spent three hours in purchasing the equipment of the musketeer. Besides, Athos had the character and manners of a nobleman, even to his fingers' ends. Directly anything suited him, he paid for it at once, without haggling to reduce the price. D'Artagnan wished to make some objections to this; but Athos laid his hand on his shoulder, smiling; and d'Artagnan understood that it was very well for a little Gascon gentleman like him to bargain, but not for a man who had the deportment of a prince.

The musketeer saw a superb Andalusian horse, as black as jet, with fiery nostrils, and fine and elegant legs, rising six years. He examined it, and found it faultless. He got it for a thousand francs. Perhaps he might have had it for less; but while d'Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos counted down the hundred pistoles on the table.

Grimaud had a cob, from Picardy, which cost three hundred francs.

But when the saddle of this latter horse, and Grimaud's arms, were bought, Athos had not one sou remaining of the hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan therefore

begged his friend to bite a mouthful out of his share, which he could restore to him afterwards, if he chose. But Athos only answered by shrugging his shoulders.

“How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire, to buy it out and out?” asked he, at last.

“Five hundred pistoles.”

“That is two hundred pistoles more—a hundred for each of us. Why, that is quite a fortune! Let us go to the Jew again, my friend.”

“But would you really do this?”

“Yes; this ring would unquestionably recall memories too melancholy. Besides, we shall never have three hundred pistoles to redeem it with; therefore, we should actually lose two hundred by the bargain. Go and tell him that the ring is his, d’Artagnan, and come back with the two hundred pistoles.”

“Reflect, Athos.”

“Ready money is scarce in these times, and we should learn to make sacrifices. Go, d’Artagnan, go. Grimaud shall bear you company with his carbine.”

Half an hour afterwards, d’Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres; no accident having befallen him on his way.

It was thus that Athos found, without giving himself any trouble, resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHARMING VISION.

At the appointed hour the four friends were re-united at the house of Athos. Their anxiety about equipment had entirely disappeared, and their faces no longer bore the marks of any but their own secret care—for, behind all present happiness, there lurks some fear about the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bearing two letters, addressed to d’Artagnan. One was a little note,

delicately folded lengthwise, with a pretty seal of green wax, on which was depicted a dove bearing a green bough. The other was a large square envelope, glittering with the terrible arms of his eminence, the cardinal-duke.

At sight of the little letter, d'Artagnan's heart bounded, for he believed that he recognised the writing; and, though he had only seen that writing once, the memory of it was engraven in his heart's core. So he took the note, and unsealed it hastily.

"Walk out" [it said] "about six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening next, on the Chaillot road, and look carefully into the carriages as they pass. But as you value your own life, or that of some who love you, do not speak, do not make one motion which may show that you have recognised her who exposes herself to every ill, only to see you for an instant."

There was no signature.

"It is a snare," said Athos; "do not go, d'Artagnan."

"And yet," said d'Artagnan, "I think that I know the writing well."

"But it may be feigned," said Athos. "At six or seven o'clock, at this season, you would be as solitary on the Chaillot road as if you went to walk in the Forest of Bondy."

"But what if we should all go?" said d'Artagnan. "Surely they could not eat us all four, besides the four servants, the horses, and our arms: the act would certainly bring on a fit of indigestion."

"Besides, it will be a fine opportunity to display our equipments," said Porthos.

"But, if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, "and this woman does not wish to be seen, consider that you compromise her, d'Artagnan, which is not becoming in a gentleman."

"We will remain behind," said Porthos, "and he can advance alone."

"Yes, but a pistol-shot is easily fired from a carriage going at full speed."

“Bah!” said d’Artagnan, “it would miss me. And we would then overtake the carriage, and exterminate whoever might be in it. It would be still so many enemies the fewer.”

“He is right,” said Porthos; “let us give battle! Besides, we needs must try our arms.”

“Faith! let us give ourselves this treat,” said Aramis, in his soft and careless way.

“Just as you please,” said Athos.

“Gentlemen,” said d’Artagnan, “it is now half-past four, and we have but just time to get to the Chaillot road by six.”

“Besides, if we go out too late, no one will see us,” said Porthos; “and that would be a sad pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen.”

“But this second letter,” said Athos; “you forget that. And yet, I fancy, the seal indicates that it is worth opening. As for me, I confess, my dear d’Artagnan, that I think much more of it than of that little gew-gaw which you so gently bestowed, just now, over your heart.”

D’Artagnan grew crimson.

“Well,” said the young man, “let us now see what his eminence wants with me.”

D’Artagnan opened the letter, and read:—

“M. d’Artagnan, of the King’s guards, of M. des Essarts’ company, is expected at the cardinal’s palace, at eight o’clock this evening.

“LA HOUDINIÈRE

“Captain of the guards.”

“The devil!” said Athos, “here is an appointment, not a whit less disquieting, in other respects, than the first.”

“I will go to the second, on returning from the first,” said d’Artagnan. “One is at seven, the other at eight. There will be time enough for both.”

“Hum! I would not go,” said Aramis. “A gallant gentleman cannot decline an appointment made by a

lady; but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from waiting on his eminence, particularly when he has some reason to believe that he is not sent for to listen to compliments."

"I am of Aramis's opinion," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied d'Artagnan, "I have already received a similar invitation from his eminence, through M. de Cavois. I neglected it; and the next day a great misfortune happened to me—Constance disappeared. Whatever may be the result, I will go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "do it."

"But the Bastile," said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out again," rejoined d'Artagnan.

"Certainly," replied Aramis and Porthos, with the greatest coolness, and as if it had been the simplest thing in the world—"certainly, we will pull you out again. But, as we must be off the day after to-morrow, you would do better not to run the risk of getting in."

"Let us do better," said Athos; "let us not leave him throughout the evening. Let each of us, accompanied by three musketeers, wait at a gate of the palace. If we see any closed carriage, that looks suspicious, coming out, we will fall upon it. It is a long time since we have had a crow to pluck with the cardinal's guards; and M. de Treville must think us dead."

"Decidedly, Athos," said Aramis; "you were cut out for the general of an army. What do you say to the plan, gentlemen?"

"Splendid!" cried the young men, in chorus.

"I have got no horse," said d'Artagnan, "but I can go and take one of M. de Treville's."

"That is unnecessary," remarked Aramis; "you can have one of mine."

"How many have you, then?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"My dear fellow," said Athos, "you are certainly the best paid poet in France."

“Or, in Navarre,” added d’Artagnan.

“But listen, my dear Aramis,” said Athos; “you will not know what to do with three horses, will you? I do not understand, indeed, why you have bought three.”

“Nor did I, in fact, buy more than two,” replied Aramis.

“Did the third come from the clouds, then?”

“No; the third was brought to me this morning, by a servant without livery, who would not tell me from whom he came; and who merely said, that he had been ordered by his master——”

“Or his mistress,” interposed d’Artagnan.

“That makes no difference,” said Aramis, colouring; “and who merely said, that he had been ordered by his master, or his mistress, to put this horse in my stable, without telling me from whom it came.”

“It is only to poets that such things happen,” gravely remarked Athos.

“Well, then, in that case we can do better,” said d’Artagnan. “Which of the two horses will you ride, Aramis? that which you bought, or that which was given you?”

“That which was given to me, without doubt. You understand, d’Artagnan, that I could not so affront——”

“The mysterious donor,” added d’Artagnan.

“Or the mysterious donatrix,” said Athos.

“Then that which you bought becomes of no use to you?”

“Almost so.”

“You chose it yourself?”

“And with the greatest care. The safety of the horseman, you know, depends almost always on his horse.”

“Well, then, let me have him at the price you gave.”

“I was going to offer you this trifle, my dear d’Artagnan, giving you your own time to repay me.”

“And how much did he cost you?”

“Eight hundred francs.”

“Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend,” said d’Artagnan, taking that sum from his pocket. “I know that it is the same piece in which you are paid for your poems.”

“You are in cash, then?”

“Rich—rolling in wealth!” said d’Artagnan, rattling the rest of his pistoles in his pocket.

“Send your saddle, then, to the hotel of the musketeers, and your horse shall be brought here with ours.”

“Very well. But it is almost five o’clock. Let us make haste.”

In about a quarter of an hour afterwards, Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Ferou, on a magnificent Spanish horse. Mousqueton was following him, on a small but strong horse from Auvergne. Porthos was radiant with joy and pride.

At the same time Aramis was seen, at the other end of the street, mounted on a superb English steed. Bazin followed, on a roan horse, leading a vigorous Mecklenburgian horse, which now belonged to d’Artagnan.

The two musketeers met at the door: Athos and d’Artagnan were looking at them from the window.

“By my faith!” said Aramis, “you have a grand horse there, my friend.”

“Yes,” replied Porthos, “it is the one that was to have been sent at first. A foolish joke of the husband’s substituted the other: but the husband has been well punished since, and I have obtained reparation.

Grimaud appeared in his turn, leading his master’s horse. D’Artagnan and Athos came down; got into their saddles by the side of their companions; and they all four proceeded towards the quay—Athos, on the horse for which he was indebted to his wife; Aramis, on the horse for which he was indebted to his mistress; Porthos, on the horse for which he was indebted to the attorney’s wife; and d’Artagnan, on the horse for which he was indebted only to his own good-fortune, which is the best of all mistresses.

The valets followed them.

As Porthos had expected, the cavalcade produced a fine effect; and, if Madame Coquenard had been in Porthos's path, and could have seen how well he looked upon his fine Spanish steed, she would hardly have regretted the bleeding operation that she had performed upon her husband's strong-box.

Near the Louvre, the four friends met M. de Treville, returning from St. Germain's. He stopped them, to compliment them on their equipment; which drew around them, in an instant, a few hundred loafers.

D'Artagnan took advantage of this circumstance to speak to M. de Treville about the great letter, with the great red seal and ducal arms. It will be imagined that, of the other letter, he did not breathe a syllable.

M. de Treville approved of the resolution they had formed, and assured him, that if he should not be seen again on the next day, he would manage to find him out, wherever he might be.

At that moment, the clock of the Samaritan struck six. The four friends excused themselves, on account of an engagement, and set off.

A short gallop took them to the Chaillot road. The day was beginning to decline. Carriages were passing backwards and forward. D'Artagnan, supported by his friends at a little distance, looked eagerly into every carriage, but saw no face he knew.

At length, after about a quarter of an hour's expectation, and as the twilight thickened around, a carriage, advancing at the utmost speed of the horses, was seen upon the Sevres road. A presentiment announced to d'Artagnan that this carriage contained the individual who had made the appointment with him. The young man was himself astonished at the violent beating of his heart. Almost at the same instant, a woman's head was visible at the window, with two fingers on the lips, as if to enjoin silence, or to send a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a faint cry of joy. This woman, or rather this

apparition, for the carriage passed away with the rapidity of a vision, was Madame Bonancieux.

By an involuntary movement, and in spite of the caution he had received, d'Artagnan set his horse to a gallop, and in a few bounds was beside the carriage; but the window was hermetically closed—the vision was no longer there.

D'Artagnan then remembered the warning:—"If you value your own life, and that of those who love you, remain motionless, as if you had seen nothing."

He stopped, therefore; trembling not for himself, but for the poor woman, who had evidently exposed herself to no trifling peril by the appointment she had made.

The carriage proceeded on its way, and, still advancing rapidly, soon entered Paris, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had remained speechless on the same spot, knowing not what to think. If it were really Madame Bonancieux, and if she were returning to Paris, why this fugitive meeting, why this passing interchange of glances, why this kiss, committed to the winds? If, on the other hand, it were not really she—which was in fact very possible, for the insufficiency of light made error easy—might not this be the beginning of an attack prepared by the attraction of a woman for whom his love was known?

The three companions gathered around him. They had all distinctly seen a woman's head at the window, but neither of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonancieux by sight. Athos believed that it was really that lady whom they had seen; but, having been less engrossed than d'Artagnan by that pretty face, he thought that he had seen a second head, and a manly one, at the back of the carriage.

"If that is the case," said d'Artagnan, "they are undoubtedly conveying her from one prison to another. But what can they want to do with the poor creature, and how shall I ever rejoin her?"

"My friend," said Athos gravely, "remember that the

dead are the only ones whom we can never encounter again on earth. You know a story to that effect, as well as I do, do you not? Now, if your mistress is not really dead, if it was actually her whom we saw just now, at one time or another you will meet with her again. And perhaps," added he, in those tones of misanthropy which were habitual to him, "perhaps more quickly even than you might have wished!"

It now struck half-past seven; the carriage had been twenty minutes beyond the appointed time. His friends reminded d'Artagnan that there was another visit to pay, which, however, it was yet possible for him to decline.

But d'Artagnan was, at the same time, both obstinate and curious. He had, in his own mind, determined to go to the cardinal's palace, and to know what his eminence had to say to him. Nothing could make him change his resolution. They reached the Rue St. Honoré, and the Place du Palais Cardinal, where they found the twelve musketeers walking about, whilst they awaited their companions. Then, for the first time, was the business they had met for communicated to these brave allies.

D'Artagnan was well known to the honourable company of king's musketeers, amongst whom, it was further understood, he would one day take his place: he was therefore regarded as a comrade, by anticipation. It resulted from this, that every one willingly engaged in the affair to which he had been invited; and they had, moreover, the probability of doing an ill turn to the cardinal or his people; and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always well prepared.

Athos divided them into three parties: of one, he took the command himself; the second, he gave to Aramis; and the third, to Porthos; and then each party placed itself in ambush, opposite an entrance of the palace.

D'Artagnan, on his part, boldly entered by the principal gate.

Although he felt himself strongly supported, the young man did not ascend the grand staircase without uneasiness.

His conduct towards her ladyship had some slight resemblance to a treachery, and he suspected that there were political relations between this woman and the cardinal. Moreover, de Wardes, whom he had handled so roughly, was a faithful follower of his eminence; and d'Artagnan well knew, that, while the cardinal was a terror to his enemies, he was also constant in his attachment to his friends.

“If de Wardes has related all our interview to his eminence, of which there can be no doubt, and if he has recognised me, which is probable, I may consider myself almost a condemned man,” thought d'Artagnan, shaking his head. “But why should he have waited till to-day? It is clear enough her ladyship has made complaints against me, with all that hypocritical sorrow which renders her so interesting; and this last crime has made the vase run over. Fortunately,” added he, “my good friends are below, and they will not let me be carried off without a conflict. And yet M. de Treville's company of musketeers, alone, cannot carry on a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom the queen has no power, and the king no will. D'Artagnan, my friend, thou art brave, thou art prudent, thou hast excellent qualities, but—women will destroy thee!”

He had come to this sad conclusion, just as he entered the antechamber. He gave his letter to the officer on duty, who showed him into the waiting-room, and himself proceeded into the interior of the palace.

In this room there were five or six of his excellency's guards, who, recognising d'Artagnan, and knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, looked at him with a singular smile.

This smile seemed to d'Artagnan a bad omen. But as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or, rather, thanks to the abundant pride natural to men of his province, did not easily betray what was passing in his mind, when what was passing there resembled fears—he

stood boldly before the gentlemen of the guards, and waited, with his hand upon his hip, in an attitude not ungraceful.

The officer returned, and made a sign to d'Artagnan to follow him.

It seemed to the young man, that, as he left the room, the guards began to whisper to each other.

He went along a corridor, passed through a large saloon, entered a library, and found himself before a man, who was seated at a desk, writing.

The officer introduced him, and retired without uttering a word.

D'Artagnan remained standing, and examined this man.

At first, d'Artagnan thought that he was in the presence of a judge, who was examining his papers; but he soon saw that the man at the desk was writing, or rather correcting, lines of an unequal length, and was scanning the words upon his fingers: d'Artagnan found that he was in the presence of a poet. At the expiration of a minute, the poet closed his manuscript, on the back of which was written, "*Mirame*: a Tragedy, in five acts."

He raised his head; and d'Artagnan recognised the cardinal.

CHAPTER XL.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

RICHELIEU rested his elbow on his manuscript, and his cheek on his hand, and looked at d'Artagnan for an instant. No one had an eye more profoundly penetrating than the cardinal; and the young man felt this gaze running through his veins like a fever.

Nevertheless, he kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand, and waiting his eminence's pleasure, without too much pride, but at the same time without too much humility.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "are you one d'Artagnan, of Bearn?"

"Yes, my lord."

"There are several branches of the d'Artagnans in Tarbes, and in its neighbourhood: to which of them do you belong?"

"I am the son of him who fought in the religious wars, with the great King Henry, the father of his gracious majesty."

"That is it: it is you who set out from your native place, about seven or eight months ago, to come and seek your fortune in the capital?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You came by Meung, where something happened to you—I do not exactly know what—but something?"

"My lord," said d'Artagnan, "this is what happened——"

"Unnecessary, quite unnecessary," interrupted the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story quite as well as he who wished to narrate it. "You were recommended to M. de Treville, were you not?"

"Yes, my lord, but in that unlucky affair at Meung——"

"The letter of introduction was lost," resumed his eminence. "Yes, I know that. But M. de Treville is a skilful physiognomist, who knows men at the first sight, and he has placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts, leaving you to hope, that, some day or other, you will be enrolled in the musketeers."

"Your lordship is perfectly correct."

"Since that time, many things have happened to you: you walked behind the Chartreux, one day, when you had much better have been elsewhere; then you made a journey to the waters of Forges, with your friends; they stopped upon the road, but you—you continued your journey. That was natural enough: you had business in England."

“My lord,” said d’Artagnan, quite confounded, “I went——”

“To hunt at Windsor, or somewhere else. That is no business of anybody’s. I know it, because it is my duty to know everything. On your return, you were received by an august person, and I see with pleasure that you have kept the souvenir which she gave you.”

D’Artagnan put his hand on the diamond which the queen had given him, and quickly turned the stone inwards: but it was too late.

“On the next day, you were waited upon by Cavois,” continued the cardinal: “he came to beg you to come to the palace. But you did not return that visit; and, in that, you were wrong.”

“My lord, because I feared that I had incurred your eminence’s displeasure.”

“And why so, sir? Because you had performed the orders of your superiors, with more intelligence and courage than another could have done? Incur my displeasure, when you merited praise! It is those who do not obey that I punish; and not those who, like you, obey—too well. And to prove it, recall the date of the day on which I sent for you to come to see me, and seek in your memory what happened on that very night.”

It was the evening on which Madame Bonancieux was carried off. D’Artagnan shuddered; and he remembered, that, half an hour before this present moment, the poor woman had passed before him, no doubt again borne away by the same power which had directed that abduction.

“At last,” continued the cardinal, “as I had heard nothing of you for some time, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you certainly owe me some thanks: you have yourself remarked what consideration has been always shown towards you.”

D’Artagnan bowed respectfully.

“That,” continued the cardinal, “proceeded not only

from a sentiment of natural justice, but also from a plan that I had traced respecting you."

D'Artagnan was more and more astonished.

"It was my desire," continued the cardinal, "to explain this plan to you on the day that you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing has been lost by the delay; and to-day you shall hear the explanation. Sit down, then, before me, M. d'Artagnan: you are gentleman enough not to be kept standing whilst you listen."

The cardinal pointed out a chair to the young man, who was so astonished at what was taking place, that he waited, before he obeyed, for a second intimation from his interlocutor.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," resumed his eminence; "and you are prudent, which is far better. I love men of head and heart. Do not be alarmed," he added, smiling; "by men of heart, I mean courageous men. But, young as you are, and only on the threshold of the world, your enemies are very powerful. If you do not take care, they will destroy you."

"Alas! my lord," replied the young man, "they will undoubtedly accomplish it very easily; for they are strong and well-supported, whilst I stand alone."

"Yes, that is true: but, alone as you are, you have already done much, and will, I doubt not, do still more. Yet you have, I believe, need of a guide in the adventurous career you have undertaken; since, if I am not deceived, you have come to Paris, with the ambitious intention of making a fortune."

"I am at the age of foolish hopes, my lord," said d'Artagnan.

"No hopes are foolish, except for blockheads, sir; and you are a man of ability. Come, what would you say to an ensigncy in my guards, and a company at the end of the campaign?"

"Ah, my lord!"

"You accept it—do you not?"



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“And by what right would you prevent my death?”

“My lord——” replied d’Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

“What? Do you decline it?” exclaimed the cardinal, with a look of astonishment.

“I am in his majesty’s guards, my lord, and I have no cause to be discontented.”

“But it seems to me,” said his eminence, “that my guards are also his majesty’s guards; and that whosoever serves in a French regiment, serves the king.”

“My lord, your eminence has misunderstood my words.”

“You want a pretext, do you not? I understand. Very well! This pretext, here it is—promotion, the opening of a campaign, the opportunity which I offer you—these will be sufficient for the world: for yourself, the necessity of sure protection. For, it is as well for you to know, M. d’Artagnan, that I have received serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your nights and days exclusively to the service of the king.”

D’Artagnan blushed.

“Moreover,” added the cardinal, laying his hand on a roll of papers, “I have here a whole bundle of particulars about you. But, before reading them, I wished to talk with you. I know that you are a man of resolution; and your services, if well directed, instead of leading you to evil, might benefit you greatly. Come, reflect and make up your mind.”

“Your goodness confounds me, my lord,” replied d’Artagnan; “and I discover in your eminence a greatness of soul, which makes me insignificant as the crawling worm; but, in fact, since your eminence permits me to speak frankly——”

D’Artagnan stopped.

“Yes, speak.”

“Well, then, I must inform your eminence that all my friends are amongst the musketeers and the king’s guards; and that all my enemies, by some

inconceivable fatality, are in the service of your eminence. On this account, I should be unwelcome here, and despised there, if I accepted what your eminence is good enough to offer."

"And can you already have the proud idea that I do not offer you as much as you deserve, sir?" inquired the cardinal, with a smile of scorn.

"My lord, your eminence is a hundred times too good to me; and, on the contrary, I do not think that I have yet done enough to merit your kindness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to commence, my lord. I shall serve under your eminence's own eyes; and, if I shall have the good fortune to conduct myself in such a manner at the siege, as to merit your approbation, it will be well! After that, I shall at least have to my credit, some action of sufficient brilliancy to justify the protection with which your eminence may condescend to honour me. Everything should be effected at an appropriate time. Perhaps, hereafter, I may have the right to give myself away—at present, I should be supposed to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, sir?" said the cardinal, in a tone of anger, through which, however, might be traced a sentiment of esteem. "Remain in freedom, then, and still preserve your hatreds and your sympathies."

"My lord——"

"Well, well," continued the cardinal; "I am not offended with you; but you must understand—it is quite enough to protect and recompense one's friends: one owes nothing to one's enemies. And yet I will give you one piece of advice. Take care of yourself, M. d'Artagnan; for, from the moment that I shall have withdrawn my hand from you, I would not give one farthing for your life."

"I will do my best, my lord," replied the Gascon, with modest confidence.

"And hereafter, at the moment that any misfortune

has befallen you, remember"—said Richelieu, with some feeling—"that it is I who have sought you, and that I have done what I could to avert from you that misfortune."

"Let what may happen," said d'Artagnan, bowing, with his hand upon his breast, "I shall retain a sentiment of eternal gratitude to your eminence, for what you are doing for me at the present time."

"Well, then, M. d'Artagnan, as you say, we shall see each other again after the campaign. I shall keep my eyes upon you, for I shall be there," continued the cardinal, pointing to a magnificent suit of armour which he was to wear. "And, on our return, we will decide on our arrangement!"

"Ah! my lord!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your displeasure: remain neutral, my lord, if you find that I behave gallantly."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I can once more say to you what I have said to-day, I promise you that I *will* say it."

This last expression of Richelieu involved a terrible doubt. It alarmed d'Artagnan more than a threat would have done; for it was a warning: it implied that the cardinal was endeavouring to shield him from some impending evil. He opened his lips to answer; but, with a haughty gesture, the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan left the room; but, at the door, his heart almost failed him, and he was strongly tempted to return. Yet the serious and severe countenance of Athos arose before his mind. If he agreed to what the cardinal proposed, Athos would no longer offer him his hand—Athos would disown him.

It was this fear that determined him. So powerful is the influence of a truly noble character over all that approaches it.

D'Artagnan went down by the same staircase that he had ascended; and found, before the door, Athos and the four musketeers who were awaiting him, and were

beginning to be anxious about him. With one word he reassured them; and Planchet ran to the other posts to announce that any further guard was unnecessary, as his master had returned, safe and sound, out of the cardinal's palace.

When they were housed at Athos's, Aramis and Porthos inquired about the object of this singular interview; but d'Artagnan merely told them that Richelieu had sent for him to offer him an ensign's commission in the guards, and that he had refused it.

"And you were right!" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie, and said nothing. But, when he was alone with d'Artagnan, he said—

"You have done as you ought, although, perhaps, you were imprudent."

D'Artagnan sighed; for this voice responded to a secret whisper of his own soul, which announced that great misfortunes were preparing for him.

The next day was occupied in preparations for departure.

D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Treville. At this time, it was still believed that the separation of the guards and musketeers would be but momentary—the king holding his parliament that very day, and proposing to set out on the next. M. de Treville therefore only asked d'Artagnan whether he wanted anything of him; but d'Artagnan replied, that he had all he should need.

In the evening, all the comrades of M. de Treville's and M. des Essarts's companies, who had become attached to one another, met together. They were about to part, to meet again, when, and if it should please God to let them. The night was, therefore, as may be supposed, a very boisterous one; for, on such occasions, nothing but extreme pleasure can drive away extreme care.

The next day, at the first sound of the trumpets, the

friends separated: the musketeers hastened to M. de Treville's hotel, and the guards to that of M. des Essarts. Each captain then led his company to the Louvre, where the king reviewed them.

His majesty was sad, and seemed in ill-health, which detracted somewhat from his usual dignified appearance. In fact, the evening before, a fever had attacked him, even whilst he was holding a court of judicature, amidst the parliament. But he was not the less determined to set out in the evening; and, in spite of all these presentations which had been made to him, he would hold this review, hoping, by this first vigorous opposition, to overpower the malady that had assailed him.

The review being ended, the guards alone began their march—the musketeers being to set out only with the king—a delay which gave Porthos an opportunity of displaying his superb equipage in the Rue aux Ours.

The attorney's wife saw him passing by, in his new uniform, and on his splendid horse. But she loved Porthos too well to let him leave her thus; so she beckoned to him to dismount and enter. Porthos was magnificent: his spurs rattled, his cuirass beamed, and his sword smote dashingly against his legs. The clerks had no disposition to laugh this time: the musketeer looked too much like one who would soon slit their ears.

The visitor was introduced to Maitre Coquenard, whose little gray eyes glistened with rage when he beheld his pretended cousin so showily adorned. Nevertheless, he had one source of inward consolation. It was everywhere reported that the campaign would be a rough one; and he gently hoped, at the bottom of his heart, that Porthos might be one of the slain.

Porthos presented his compliments to Maitre Coquenard, and took his leave. The attorney wished him all sorts of prosperity. As to Madame Coquenard, she was unable to restrain her tears, but no evil thoughts could be suggested by her grief: she was known to be strongly attached to her relations, on whose account

she had always had the bitterest contentions with her husband.

Whilst the attorney's wife was able to follow her handsome cousin with her eyes, she waved a handkerchief, and leaned from the window as though she was about to precipitate herself into the street. Porthos received all these indications of tenderness like a man hardened to such demonstrations. But, as he turned the corner of the street, he raised his hat, and waved it in token of adieu.

Aramis, on his part, wrote a long letter. To whom? None knew. In the next room, Kitty, who was to set off that very evening for Tours, was waiting for this mysterious epistle.

Athos drank, sip by sip, the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime, d'Artagnan was marching with his company. In passing through the faubourg St. Antoine, he turned, and looked gaily at the Bastille, which he had at least as yet escaped. As he looked only at the Bastille, he did not see my lady, who, mounted on a dun horse, pointed him out with her finger to two ill-looking men, who immediately approached the ranks to reconnoitre him. To an interrogation which they addressed to the lady by a look, she answered by a sign that it was really he. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she spurred her horse, and disappeared.

The two men followed the company; and, at the end of the faubourg St. Antoine, they mounted two horses, which a servant out of livery was holding in readiness for them.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE.

THE siege of La Rochelle was one of the greatest events of the reign of Louis XIII.

The political views of the cardinal, when he undertook the siege, were extensive. Of the important cities which had been given by Henry IV. to the Huguenots, as places of safety, La Rochelle alone remained. The cardinal wished to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism.

La Rochelle, which had derived additional importance from the ruin of the other Calvinistic towns, was, besides, the last port which remained open to the English in the kingdom of France; and, by closing it to England—our eternal enemy—the cardinal would end the work of Joan of Arc, and of the Duke of Guise.

Thus it was, that Bassompierre, who was at the same time both Protestant and Catholic—Protestant, from conviction; and Catholic, as commander of the order of the Saint Esprit—Bassompierre, who was a German by birth, and a Frenchman at heart—Bassompierre, who had a particular command at the siege of La Rochelle—said, on charging at the head of many other Protestant noblemen like himself: “You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take La Rochelle.”

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonades of the Isle of Rhé were a prelude to the dragonnades of the Cevennes; the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the edict of Nantes.

But, by the side of these general views of the levelling and simplifying minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is obliged to dwell upon the petty objects of the lover and the jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had been enamoured of the queen. Had this love a purely political aim; or was it one of those profound passions, with which Anne of

Austria inspired those who were around her? This is what we cannot satisfactorily decide. Yet, at all events, it has been seen, by the circumstances which have been detailed in this history, that Buckingham had gained a superiority over him in two or three points, and that, especially in the affair of the diamond studs—thanks to the devotion of the three musketeers, and the courage of d'Artagnan—he had most cruelly befooled him.

It was Richelieu's object, therefore, not merely to rid France of an enemy, but to revenge himself on a rival. The revenge ought, too, to be great and signal, and completely worthy of the man who held in his hand, as a weapon, the forces of a whole realm.

Richelieu knew, that, in fighting against England, he was fighting against Buckingham; that, in triumphing over England, he should triumph over Buckingham; and, lastly, that in humiliating England in the eyes of Europe, he should humiliate Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his part, Buckingham, whilst he was putting the honour of England prominently forward as his motive, was impelled by interests absolutely similar to those of the cardinal.

Buckingham also pursued a private revenge. Under no pretext had Buckingham been able to enter France as an ambassador; and he wished, therefore, to enter it as a conqueror. It follows from this, that the true stake, in this game which two powerful kingdoms were playing for the pleasure of two amorous men, was nothing more than a glance from the eye of Anne of Austria.

The Duke of Buckingham had gained the first advantage. Arriving unexpectedly before the Isle of Rhé, with ninety vessels and twenty thousand men, he had surprised the Count de Toiras, who was the king's commander in that isle, and, after a bloody contest, had accomplished a disembarkation.

Let us record, by the way, that the Baron de Chantal fell in this combat, leaving an orphan daughter, a little

girl, eighteen months old. This little girl was afterwards Madame de Sevigné.

The Count de Torias retreated into the citadel of St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a small fort, which was called the port of La Prée.

This event had hastened the decision of the cardinal; and, until he and the king could go and take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was resolved on, he had sent his majesty's brother forward to direct the first operations, and had made all the troops of which he could dispose march towards the theatre of war.

It was to this detachment of the army, which was sent forward as a vanguard, that our friend d'Artagnan, belonged. The king, as we have said, was to follow when his court of justice had been held. On rising from this sitting, on the twenty-eighth of June, he had found himself seized with fever. He had, nevertheless, persisted in setting out; but, getting worse, he had been obliged to stop at Villeroi.

Now, where the king stopped, there also stopped the musketeers. Hence it followed, that d'Artagnan, who was only in the guards, found himself separated, for a time at least, from his good friends, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This separation, which was only annoying to him, would certainly have become a source of serious anxiety, had he been able to discern by what unsuspected dangers he was surrounded.

Nevertheless, he arrived without mishap at the camp before La Rochelle.

Everything was at present in the same state. The Duke of Buckingham and the English, in possession of the Isle of Rhé, continued to besiege, but without success, the Fort of La Prée and the citadel of St. Martin; and the hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced two or three days before, about a battery which the Duke d'Angoulême had just constructed near the city.

The guards, under M. des Essarts, were stationed at the Minimes.

But we know that d'Artagnan, engrossed by the ambition of becoming a musketeer, had formed but few intimacies with his comrades, and he found himself, therefore, isolated, and abandoned to his own reflections.

And these reflections were not cheerful. During the year that he had been in Paris, he had engaged himself in public affairs, and consequently his own private affairs, either of love or of fortune, had made no great advances.

As to love, the only woman for whom he had a sincere affection was Madame Bonancieux; and Madame Bonancieux had disappeared, nor could he yet discover what had become of her.

As to fortune, he—a mere insect—had made an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom the nobles of the kingdom trembled, and even the king himself.

That man had power to crush him, and yet he had abstained.

To a mind as clear-sighted as that of d'Artagnan, this forbearance was a dawn which gave promise of a happier futurity.

Then, he had made himself another enemy, less to be dreaded as he thought, but one whom he felt instinctively was not to be despised. That enemy was her ladyship.

In exchange for all this, he had the protection and good-will of the queen; but her majesty's good-will was, in the circumstances of the times, only an additional course of persecution; and her protection, it is known, protected very badly—witness Chalais, and Madame Bonancieux.

So that what he had most manifestly gained, in all this, was the diamond, worth five or six thousand francs, which he wore upon his finger; and even this diamond, supposing that he must preserve it, to remind the queen at some future day of her gratitude, had not, in the meantime, since he could not dispose of it, any greater value than the pebbles that he trampled beneath his feet. We say the pebbles that he trampled beneath

his feet, for d'Artagnan made these reflections whilst he was walking alone in a pretty little path which led from the camp to an adjoining village. But these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline, when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he seemed to perceive the barrel of a musket glittering behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye, and a ready wit. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself, and that he who held it was not concealed behind a hedge with any very amicable intentions. He determined, therefore, to gain the open country; but, on the other side of the road, behind a rock, he perceived the muzzle of a second musket. It was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man gave a glance at the first musket, and beheld with some anxiety that it was aiming in his direction; but, as soon as he saw the orifice of the barrel motionless, he threw himself upon his face. At that instant the shot was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball, as it passed above his head.

There was no time to lose. D'Artagnan raised himself up with a bound, and, at the same moment, the bullet of the second musket scattered the stones in the very part of the path where he had thrown himself down.

D'Artagnan was not one of those foolishly brave men who seek a ridiculous death in order to have it said of them that they never retreated a step. Besides, courage could do nothing here: he had fallen into an ambuscade.

"If there is a third shot," said he to himself, "I am a dead man."

He immediately scampered towards the camp, with all the swiftness of his countrymen, who are so famous for their activity; but, fast as was his course, the one who had fired first, having had time to reload his gun, made another shot at him, so well directed this time,

that the ball passed through his hat, and drove it ten paces before him.

As d'Artagnan had no other hat, he picked it up as he ran; and reaching his lodging, pale and out of breath, he sat down, without speaking to any one, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes. The first, and most natural, was, that it might be an ambuscade from La Rochelle, whose citizens would not have been sorry to kill one of his majesty's guards, as it would make one enemy the less, and that enemy might have a well-filled purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole that the ball had made, and shook his head. The bullet did not belong to a musket, but to an arquebuss; the precision of the aim had already made him think that it was fired by a civilian weapon: so it was not a military ambuscade, since the ball was not of that calibre.

It might be a kind memorial of the cardinal. It may be remembered that, at the very moment when, thanks to the blessed beam of sunshine, he had perceived the gun-barrel, he was marvelling at the leniency his eminence had shown towards him. But d'Artagnan shook his head with an air of doubt. The cardinal seldom had recourse to such means, towards people whom a movement of his hand might crush.

It might be her ladyship's revenge.

This conjecture was more reasonable.

He tried in vain to recall either the features or the dress of the assassins; but he had hurried away too rapidly to have leisure to remark them.

"Ah! my poor friends," muttered d'Artagnan, "where are you? Alas! how much I miss you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he awoke with a start, fancying that a man approached his bed to stab him. Yet the day dawned, without any accident having occurred during the darkness.

But d'Artagnan suspected that what is deferred is not therefore lost.

He remained in his quarters throughout the whole day ; and gave, as an excuse to himself, the dullness of the weather.

At nine o'clock on the next morning, they beat to arms. The Duke of Orleans was visiting the pickets. The guards mustered, and d'Artagnan took his place amidst his comrades.

His royal highness passed in front of the line ; and then all the superior officers approached to pay their respects to him. M. des Essarts, the captain of the guards, went with the others.

After a short time, d'Artagnan thought that he perceived M. des Essarts making a sign to him to draw near. He waited for another gesture, fearing that he might have been mistaken ; but on its being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive the order.

" His royal highness is about to ask for volunteers for a dangerous expedition, which will be honourable to those who perform it ; and I made you a sign, that you might hold yourself in readiness."

" Thank you, captain," replied d'Artagnan, who required nothing better than to distinguish himself before the eyes of the lieutenant-general.

The Rochellois had, in fact, made a sortie during the night, and recaptured a bastion which the royal army had invested two days before. The idea was to push a forlorn hope so forward, as to be able to discover in what manner the enemy guarded this bastion.

After a few minutes, his royal highness raised his voice, and said—

" I want three or four volunteers for this expedition, led by a man who can be depended upon."

" As for your trustworthy man, here he is," said M. des Essarts, pointing to d'Artagnan ; " and as for the four or five volunteers, your royal highness has only to

make your wishes known, and the men will not be wanting."

"Four men, who will volunteer to come and be killed with me!" cried d'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his companions in the guards rushed towards him instantaneously; and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was complete. D'Artagnan, therefore, rejected all others, to avoid injustice to those who had the prior claim.

It was not known whether the Rochellois, after having taken the bastion, had evacuated it, or placed a garrison in it. It was therefore necessary to examine the spot from a point sufficiently near to ascertain this point.

D'Artagnan went off with his four companions, in the line of the trench. The two guards marched by his side, and the two soldiers in the rear.

Sheltering themselves in this manner by the rampart, they arrived within a hundred paces of the bastion; and, on turning round at that moment, d'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared. Believing them to have remained behind from fear, he continued to advance.

At the turn of the counterscarp, they found themselves about sixty yards from the bastion; but they saw no one, and the bastion seemed evacuated.

The three volunteers deliberated whether they should advance farther, when suddenly a circle of smoke appeared, and a dozen balls whistled around d'Artagnan and his companions.

They knew now what they had come to learn: the bastion was guarded; a longer delay, therefore, in so dangerous a place, would have been only an unnecessary imprudence. So d'Artagnan and the two guards turned their backs, and began a rapid retreat.

On reaching the angle of the trench, which would serve as a rampart to them, one of the guards fell with a ball through his chest, whilst the other, who was safe and sound, made the best of his way to the camp.

D'Artagnan would not thus abandon a companion, and leaned over him to lift him up, and aid him to regain the lines; but, at that very moment, two shots were fired: one ball shattered the head of the man who was already wounded, and the other was flattened against a rock, after having passed within two inches of d'Artagnan's body.

The young man turned very quickly; for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The remembrance of the two soldiers who had abandoned him, occurred to his mind, and suggested to him his assassins of the previous evening. He resolved, on this occasion, to find out what it meant; and fell, therefore, upon the body of his comrade, as though he had been dead. He immediately saw that two heads were raised above an abandoned breastwork, which was about thirty yards from him: they were those of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan was not mistaken: these men had remained behind solely for the purpose of assassinating him, hoping that the death of the young man would be imputed to the attack of the enemy.

But as he might be only wounded, and might denounce their crime, they drew near to complete their work. Happily, deceived by the sight of d'Artagnan's position, they neglected to reload their muskets. When they were about three paces from him, d'Artagnan, who had taken especial care, in falling, not to relinquish his sword, suddenly arose, and sprang upon them.

The assassins were well aware, that, if they fled towards the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him; and therefore their first impulse was to pass over to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel, and made use of it as a club: he dealt a terrible blow at d'Artagnan, who avoided it by jumping aside; by this movement, however, d'Artagnan opened a passage to the bandit, who

immediately sprang forth towards the bastion. But as the Rochellois who guarded it were ignorant of his intentions in advancing, they fired upon him, and he fell, with his shoulder broken by a ball.

In the meantime, d'Artagnan threw himself on the second soldier with his sword. The struggle was not long. This wretch had only his discharged fusee to defend himself with. The sword of the guardsman glided along the barrel of this useless weapon, and passed through the assassin's thigh. As soon as he had fallen, d'Artagnan applied the point of his weapon to his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" exclaimed the bandit. "Pardon, pardon! sir, and I will confess everything!"

"Is it worth my while to grant you your life for your secret?" demanded the young man.

"Yes, if you consider life of any value to a man of twenty-two years of age, who, being as handsome, and as brave as you are, may accomplish anything."

"Wretch!" cried d'Artagnan, "come, speak quickly. Who engaged you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I do not know, but who was called 'my lady.'"

"But, if you do not know this woman, how came you to know her name?"

"My comrade knew her, and called her so: it was with him that she arranged the affair—not with me. He has a letter from this person now in his pocket which would be of great importance to you, according to what I heard him say."

"But how came you to be his partner in this ambuscade?"

"He proposed to me to join him in it, and I agreed."

"And how much has she paid you for this pretty expedition?"

"A hundred louis."

“ Well, upon my word,” said the young man, laughing, “ she thinks me of some value. A hundred louis ! It is quite a fortune for two wretches like you. I can well understand that you would accept it ; and so I pardon you, but on one condition.”

“ What is that ? ” said the soldier, uneasy at discovering that all was not yet ended.

“ That you go and get me the letter out of your companion’s pocket.”

“ But,” exclaimed the bandit, “ that is only another way of killing me. How can you ask me to go for the letter, under the very fire of the bastion ? ”

“ But you must make up your mind to go for it, or I swear that you shall directly die by my hand.”

“ Mercy ! sir, mercy ! in the name of that young lady whom you love, and whom, perhaps, you imagine dead, but who is not so,” screamed the bandit, throwing himself upon his knees, and supporting himself on his hand ; for he was beginning to lose his strength along with his blood.

“ And how do you know that there is a young lady whom I love, and that I have believed her to be dead ? ” demanded d’Artagnan.

“ By that letter in my comrade’s pocket.”

“ You see, then, that I must have that letter,” said d’Artagnan. “ So, let us have no longer delay, no more hesitation, or, whatever may be my repugnance to bathe my sword a second time in the blood of such a wretch as you are, I swear to you, on the word of an honourable man——”

At these words, d’Artagnan made such a threatening gesture, that the wounded man arose.

“ Stop ! stop ! ” exclaimed he, recovering courage through the very force of fear : “ I will go—I will go.”

D’Artagnan took the soldier’s arquebuss, made him walk before him, and urged him at the same time towards

his companion, by pricking him in the loins with the point of his sword.

It was a fearful spectacle to witness this unhappy being leaving a long track of blood upon the path he took, growing pale from the approach of death, and yet striving to drag himself, without being seen, to the body of his accomplice, which was stretched out at a distance of twenty paces.

Terror was so depicted on his countenance, which was covered with an icy sweat, that d'Artagnan both pitied and despised him.

"Come!" said he, "I will show you the difference between a man of courage, and a coward like you! Wait where you are: I will go!" And with an active step, and his eye upon the bastion, observing the proceedings of the enemy, and availing himself of every inequality of ground, he managed to advance as far as the second soldier.

There were two methods of accomplishing his purpose: either to search him where he was; or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and then to search him at leisure in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second plan, and had thrown the body of the assassin on his shoulders just at the very moment that the enemy fired.

A slight tremor, a final cry, a shudder of agony, proved to d'Artagnan that he who had sought to assassinate him, had now saved his life.

D'Artagnan reached the trench, and threw the body by the side of the wounded man, who was quite as pale as the dead one.

He then began to take an inventory. There was a leather pocket-book, a purse, which evidently contained a part of the sum which the banditti had received, and a dice-box and dice; and these composed the inheritance of the dead man.

He left the dice-box and dice where they had fallen, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocket-book.

Amongst several unimportant papers, he found the following letter: it was that for which he had gone to search at the hazard of his life—

“Since you have lost the track of that woman, and she is now in safety in the convent, which you never ought to have allowed her to reach, take care at any rate not to miss the man; otherwise, you know that I have a long arm, and you shall pay dearly for the hundred louis which you have had of mine.”

There was no signature.

Nevertheless, it was evident that the letter was from her ladyship. He kept it, therefore, as a testimony against her; and finding himself in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to question the wounded man. The latter confessed that he had been engaged with his comrade, the same who had now been killed, to carry off a young woman, who was to leave Paris by the barrier of La Villette; but that, having stopped drinking at a wine-shop, they had been ten minutes too late for the carriage.

“But what were you to have done with this woman?” demanded d’Artagnan, in an agony of doubt.

“We were to have taken her to an hotel in the Place Royale,” said the wounded man.

“Yes, yes,” muttered d’Artagnan, “that is it; to her ladyship herself.”

The young man shuddered as he comprehended with how terrible a thirst for vengeance this woman was impelled to destroy him, and those who loved him; and how well she was acquainted with the secrets of the court, since she had detected even this. For this exact information she was indebted to the cardinal.

But, as some degree of compensation, he ascertained with unfeigned joy that the queen had at last discovered the prison to which Madame Bonancieux had been sent to expiate her devotion, and had already rescued her from it. Thus the letter, which he had received from the young woman, and her appearance in the carriage on the Chaillot road, were explained to him.

Thenceforth, as Athos had predicted, it was possible to find Madame Bonancieux again, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea disposed his heart to clemency. He turned towards the wounded man, who watched all the changes of his countenance with anxiety, and stretching out his arm to him—

“Come,” said he, “I will not leave you here. Rest on me, and let us return to the camp.”

“Yes,” said the wounded man, who could hardly credit so much magnanimity; “but is it not to have me hanged?”

“You have my word,” replied he; “for the second time, I grant you your life.”

The wounded man fell on his knees, and kissed the feet of his preserver; but d’Artagnan, who had no longer any motive for remaining so near the enemy himself, cut short these displays of gratitude.

The guard, who had returned at the first discharge from the bastion, had announced the death of his four companions. There was, therefore, both great astonishment and great joy in the regiment, when they saw the young man returning safe and sound.

D’Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie, which he invented. He recounted the death of the other soldier, and the perils they had run. This account was the occasion of a veritable triumph to him. For one day the whole army spoke of this expedition; and his royal highness himself sent to compliment him on his conduct.

And, lastly, as every good action brings its recompense with it, that of d’Artagnan had the happy result of restoring to him the tranquillity that he had lost. In fact, the young man thought that he might cease to be disturbed, since, of his two enemies, one was killed, and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity, however, proved one thing—that d’Artagnan did not yet thoroughly estimate her ladyship.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WINE OF ANJOU.

AFTER almost hopeless accounts of the king, the report of his recovery began to spread through the camp; and as he was in great haste to be at the siege in person, it was said that he would set out as soon as he could mount his horse.

In the meantime, his royal highness—who knew that he should soon be superseded, either by the Duc d'Angoulême, or by Bassompierre, or by Schomberg, who were already disputing with one another for the command—did but little, lost his time in petty attacks, and dared not hazard any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Rhé, where they besieged the citadel of St. Martin, and the fort of La Préé; whilst the French, on their side, were besieging La Rochelle.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had become now easy in his mind, as always happens after a past danger, and when peril seems to have entirely vanished.

Yet one anxiety still remained to him, which was, that he received no tidings of his friends.

But one morning he received an explanation, in the following letter, addressed from Villeroi—

“M. d'Artagnan,

“Messrs. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had a capital dinner party at my house, and enjoyed themselves very much, made so great a noise, that the provost of the castle, who is a strict disciplinarian, put them in confinement for a few days. I must, nevertheless, execute the orders that they gave me, to send you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, which they greatly admired. They hope that you will drink to their healths, in their own favourite wine.

“I have done this; and am, sir, with great respect, your most obedient, humble servant,

“GODEAU.

“The host of Messieurs the Musketeers.”

“Good!” exclaimed d’Artagnan; “they think of me amidst their pleasures, as I have thought of them in my weariness. Certainly I will drink to them, and with all my heart, too; but not alone.”

And d’Artagnan hastened to the quarters of two guards, with whom he had become more intimate than with any of the others, to invite them to come and drink some of the delicious wine of Anjou, which had just arrived from Villeroi.

One of the two guards was to be on duty in the evening, and the other on the morrow; so the appointment was made for the day after.

D’Artagnan sent his twelve bottles of wine to the mess-room of the guards, desiring to have it kept with care; and on the day of the entertainment, as the dinner was fixed for twelve o’clock, he sent Planchet at nine to get everything prepared.

Planchet, elated at this exaltation to the dignity of butler, determined to perform his duties like an intelligent man. To effect this, he called in the aid of the valet, named Fourneau, of one of his master’s guests, and also that of the pretended soldier who had sought to slay our hero, and who, belonging to no regiment, had, since the Gascon spared his life, entered into d’Artagnan’s service, or, rather, into Planchet’s.

The appointed dinner-hour being come, the two guests arrived and took their places, and the dishes were arranged upon the table. Planchet waited, with a napkin on his arm; Fourneau uncorked the bottles; and Brisemont, for that was the invalid’s name, decanted the wine, which seemed to have been somewhat disturbed by the shaking of the journey. The first bottle being a little thick towards the bottom, Brisemont poured the lees into a wine glass, and d’Artagnan permitted him to drink it, for the poor wretch was still very weak.

The guests, having finished their soup, were just conveying the first glass of wine to their lips, when

suddenly the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Pont-Neuf. The guards, thinking that there was some unexpected attack, either from the garrison, or from the English, immediately seized their swords: d'Artagnan did the same, and the three hastened out towards their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the mess-room, before they found the reason of this great noise. Cries of "Long live the king!" "Long live the cardinal!" re-echoed on every side, and drums were beat in all directions.

In fact, the king, in his impatience, had made such forced marches that he had at that moment arrived, with a reinforcement of ten thousand men. His musketeers preceded and followed him. D'Artagnan, placed in line with his company, with an expressive gesture saluted his friends and M. de Treville, whom he at once recognised.

The ceremony of reception being ended, the four friends were soon united.

"Egad!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived in better time; the dinner will not have had even time to get cold. Is it not so, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning to the two guards, whom he presented to his friends.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "it appears that you were feasting."

"I hope," said Aramis, "that there are no ladies at your dinner."

"Is there any wine that is drinkable in this paltry place?" said Athos.

"Why, sang Dieu! there is your own, my dear friend," answered d'Artagnan.

"Our wine?" said Athos, in astonishment.

"Yes, that which you sent me."

"Wine that we sent you?"

"Yes, you know very well; that wine from the hills of Anjou."

"Yes, I know what wine you are talking of——"

"Your favourite wine——"

"Ay, when I have neither champagne nor chambertin."

"Well, in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must be contented with this."

"And so we, gluttons as we are, have sent you some wine, have we?" said Porthos.

"No, but it is the wine which was sent me by your orders."

"By our orders?" echoed the musketeers.

"Did you send the wine, Aramis?" inquired Athos.

"No; did you, Porthos?"

"No; did you, Athos?"

"No."

"If it was not you," said d'Artagnan, "then it was your host."

"Our host?"

"Yes, your host—Godeau, at Villeroi."

"Faith, let it come from whom it may, no matter!" said Porthos. "Let us taste it, and, if good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "let us not drink any wine without knowing whence it comes."

"You are right, Athos," said d'Artagnan. "Did none of you direct the host, Godeau, to send me the wine?"

"No; and yet he sent you some in our names?"

"Here is the letter," said d'Artagnan, and he presented the letter to his companions.

"It is not his writing," said Athos: "I know his hand, for it was I who, before we left, settled our joint account."

"A false letter!" said Porthos indignantly; "we have not been imprisoned."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a tone of reproach, "how could you believe that we had become noisy?"

D'Artagnan grew suddenly pale, and a convulsive trembling shook his limbs.

"You frighten me," said Athos; "what can have occurred?"

“Let us run, my friends, let us run,” said d’Artagnan : “a horrible suspicion crosses my mind. Can this, too, be another of that woman’s acts of vengeance?”

It was now Athos who, in his turn, grew pale.

D’Artagnan sprang towards the mess-room, followed by the three musketeers and the two guards.

The first object which struck d’Artagnan’s sight on entering the room was Brisemont, extended on the floor, and writhing in most horrible convulsions. Planchet and Fournau, looking as pale as corpses, were endeavouring to assist him; but it was evident that all aid was useless: the features of the dying man were contracted with agony.

“Ah!” cried he, when he perceived d’Artagnan, “you pretended to forgive me, and you poison me!”

“I, wretch! I!” exclaimed the young man; “what can you mean?”

“I say that it is you who gave me the wine; and it is you who told me to drink it. You wanted to take your revenge—oh! it is dreadful!”

“Do not think so, Brisemont,” said d’Artagnan, “for I swear——”

“Oh! but God is there—God will punish you! My God! may you one day suffer what I suffer now!”

“Upon the gospel,” cried d’Artagnan, rushing towards the dying man, “I swear that I knew not that this wine was poisoned, and also that I was about to drink it as well as yourself.”

“I do not believe you,” exclaimed the soldier; and he expired in exaggerated tortures.

“Horrible! horrible!” muttered Athos; whilst Porthos broke the bottles; and Aramis—rather late, it must be confessed—sent off for a confessor.

“Oh! my friends,” said d’Artagnan, “you have now again saved my life; and not mine only, but the lives of these gentlemen also. Gentlemen,” continued he, addressing the guards, “may I request your silence concerning this catastrophe? Persons of high condition may be

implicated in what you have now seen, and the misery of it all would fall upon us."

"Ah! sir," stammered out Planchet, more dead than alive; "ah! sir, what a narrow escape I have had!"

"What, you rascal!" cried d'Artagnan, "were you going to drink my wine?"

"To the king's health, sir: I was going to drink one little glass, if Fourneau had not said that some one called me."

"Alas!" said Fourneau, whose teeth were chattering with fright, "I wanted to get rid of him that I might drink some myself."

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, addressing the guards, "you must be aware that our entertainment would be but a melancholy affair after what has passed. I beseech you, therefore, to receive my excuses, and let us postpone it till some other day."

The two guards courteously accepted these apologies; and, understanding that the four friends wished to be alone, they took their departure.

When the young guard and the three musketeers were without witnesses, they looked at one another for an instant, in a way which proved how well they understood the seriousness of their situation.

"First," said Athos, "let us quit this room: a dead man is but sorry company."

"Planchet," said d'Artagnan, "I recommend you to look to the body of this poor devil, and see that it is buried in consecrated ground. He had committed a crime, it is true; but he had repented of it."

Having entrusted the funeral rites of Brisemont to Planchet and Fourneau, the four friends quitted the room.

The host gave them another chamber, and furnished them with fresh eggs, whilst Athos himself fetched water for them from the well. Aramis and Porthos were, in a few words, informed of all that had occurred.

"Well!" said d'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, my dear friend, it is war to the death!"

Athos shook his head. "Yes, yes," said he, "I see it well enough; but are you sure that it is she?"

"Perfectly."

"Nevertheless, I confess that I have still some doubts."

"But that fleur-de-lis upon the shoulder?"

"It is an Englishwoman, who has committed some crime in France, and has been branded in consequence."

"Athos, it is your wife, I tell you," repeated d'Artagnan. "Do you not remember how the two marks agree?"

"And yet I should have thought that the other was dead—I had hanged her so thoroughly!"

It was d'Artagnan who shook his head this time.

"But, after all, what is to be done?" said the young man.

"The fact is, that it is impossible to remain in this manner, with a sword always suspended over one's head," replied Athos; "and you must get freed from such a situation."

"But how?"

"Listen: try to find her, and to come to an understanding with her. Say to her—'peace or war? On the honour of a gentleman, I will never say one word, or take one step, to injure you. On your part, give me a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will go to the chancellor, to the king, and to the executioner: I will excite the court against you, and will declare you branded: I will cause you to be tried; and, if you are acquitted, well then, on the word of a gentleman, I will kill you myself, as I would a mad dog.'"

"I like this plan well enough," said d'Artagnan; "but how am I to find her?"

"Time my dear friend—time brings opportunity: opportunity is man's martingale; the more one has shipped, the more one gains when he knows how to wait."

"Yes; but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

“Bah!” said Athos, “God has preserved us hitherto, and God will preserve us still.”

“Yes. Besides, we are men, and, after all, it is our business to risk our lives; but, she?” added d’Artagnan in a low voice.

“And who is she?” asked Athos.

“Constance.”

“Madame Bonancieux? True! I had forgotten,” said Athos. “Poor fellow! I forgot that you were in love.”

“Well,” said Aramis, “but did you not see, by the very letter that you found on the wretch who was killed, that she was in a convent? One is quite safe in a convent, and as soon as the siege of La Rochelle is ended, I promise you, on my own part——”

“Good!” said Athos, “good! Yes, my dear Aramis, we know that your views all tend towards religion.”

“I am only a musketeer temporarily,” said Aramis meekly.

“It would seem that he has not heard from his mistress for a long while,” said Athos, in a whisper, to d’Artagnan; “but do not make any remark—we know it.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “it seems to me that there is a very simple means.”

“And what is that?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“She is in a convent, you say?” continued Porthos.

“Yes.”

“Well, as soon as the siege is raised, we will take her out of this convent.”

“But, first, we must know what convent she is in.”

“Ah, that is true,” said Porthos.

“But, do you not say, my dear d’Artagnan,” said Athos, “that it is the queen who has chosen this convent for her?”

“Yes. I believe so, at least.”

“Well, then, Porthos will help us in that case.”

“How so, pray?” asked Porthos.

“Why, through your marchioness, or duchess, or princess: she ought to have a long arm.”

“Hush!” said Porthos, putting his fingers on his lips; “I fancy she is a cardinalist, and she must know nothing about it.”

“Then,” said Aramis, “I undertake to get some news of Madame Bonancieux.”

“You, Aramis?” exclaimed the three friends; “you, and how so?”

“Through the queen’s almoner, with whom I am very intimate,” answered Aramis, blushing.

On this assurance the four friends, who had ended their simple repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again the same evening. D’Artagnan returned to the Minimes, and the three musketeers went to the king’s quarters, where they had to provide themselves with lodgings.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RED DOVE-COT TAVERN.

ALMOST as soon as he had reached the camp, the king—who was in great haste to find himself before the enemy, and who participated in the cardinal’s hatred of Buckingham—wished to complete the preparations, first, for driving the English from the Isle of Rhé, and then for forcing the siege of La Rochelle. But, in spite of all his endeavours, he was retarded by the dissensions which broke out between de Bassompierre and Schomberg against the Duke of Angoulême.

Schomberg and de Bassompierre were marshals of France, and insisted on their right to command the army, under the superintendence of the king; but the cardinal, apprehensive that Bassompierre, who was a Huguenot at heart, might fight feebly against the English and the Rochellois, who were his co-religionists, supported the Duke of Angoulême, whom his majesty had,

at his instigation, already made lieutenant-general. The result was, that, with the alternative of seeing Schomberg and de Bassompierre desert the army, they were compelled to give each a separate command. Bassompierre took his station at the north of the city, from Lalen to Dompierre; the Duke of Angoulême took his to the east, from Dompierre to Périgny; and Schomberg, to the south, from Périgny to Angoulin.

His royal highness fixed his quarters at Dompierre; his majesty was sometimes at Estré, and sometimes at Jarrie; and the cardinal established himself at a simple house, without any entrenchment, at Pont de la Pierre, upon the downs.

Thus, his royal highness overlooked Bassompierre: the king, the Duke of Angoulême; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this arrangement had been established, they had occupied themselves in driving the English from the isle.

The conjuncture was favourable. The English—who, above all things, require to be well-fed in order to prove good soldiers—eating only salted provisions and bad biscuits, had many invalids in their camp; and, moreover, the sea—which was, at that season of the year, highly dangerous on all the western coasts—was every day disastrous to some small vessel or other, and the shore, from the point of l'Aiguillon to the trenches, was literally strewed at every tide with the wrecks of pinnaces, cutters, and feluccas. The result was, that, should the king's troops even keep within their camp, Buckingham, who remained in the Isle of Rhé only from obstinacy, would sooner or later be obliged to raise the siege.

But, as M. de Toiras announced that everything was preparing in the enemy's camp for a new assault, the king concluded on adopting final measures, and issued the necessary orders for a decisive affair.

Our intention being, not to make a journal of the siege, but merely to record those events in it which bear

upon the history we are relating, we shall be contented with stating that the enterprise succeeded to the great satisfaction of the king, and the great glory of the cardinal. The English, beaten back foot by foot, conquered in every encounter, trodden down in their passage from the isle, were compelled to re-embark, leaving, on the field of battle, two thousand men, amongst whom were five colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, and twenty gentlemen of quality, as well as four pieces of cannon and sixty flags, which last were conveyed to Paris by Claude de St. Simon, and suspended with great pomp to the arched roof of Notre-Dame.

Te Deums were sung in the camp, and soon spread themselves thence throughout the whole of France.

The cardinal was thus at liberty to carry on the siege, without having, at least for the time, any reason to be apprehensive of the English.

But, as we have just said, the security was only momentary. An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, one whose name was Montague, having been seized, they found upon him proofs of a league between the Empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine. This league was formed against France.

And in the quarters of Buckingham, which he had been forced to abandon precipitately, there had been found papers confirming—as the cardinal declares in his memoirs—the existence of this league, and compromising greatly Madame de Chevreuse, and, consequently, the queen.

It was upon the cardinal that all the responsibility rested; for a man can never be an absolute minister without being responsible. On this account, all the resources of his vast genius were exerted by night and day, and occupied in listening to the least breath that stirred in any one of the great realms of Europe.

The cardinal was well aware of the activity, and, above all, of the hatred of Buckingham. If the league

which threatened France should triumph, all his influence would be lost. The policies of Spain and Austria would have each its representatives in the cabinet at the Louvre, where they had as yet only partisans. He, Richelieu, the French minister, the minister emphatically national, would be ruined; and the king, who, even whilst he was obeying him like a child, hated him as a child hates its masters, would abandon him to the combined vengeance of his royal highness and the queen. He should be ruined himself, and perhaps France with him; and these were disasters that he was bound to prevent.

On this account couriers, becoming more numerous every instant, were seen succeeding each other by night and by day, at that small house, at the Pont de la Pierre, in which the cardinal had fixed his home.

There were monks, who wore the monastic habit so ill that it was easy to recognise them as belonging to the church militant; women, a little awkward in their pages' costumes, the looseness of whose dresses would not entirely conceal their rounded forms; and countrymen, with blackened hands, but fine limbs, who might be known for men of quality at a league's distance.

Other visits, too, there were, more disagreeable; for it had been two or three times reported that the cardinal had narrowly escaped assassination. It is true that the enemies of his eminence declared, that it was he himself who had employed these unskilful assassins, so that he might, on occasion, have the right of retaliation: but we should believe neither what ministers say, nor what their enemies say.

Yet this did not prevent the cardinal, whose most violent detractors never called in question his personal courage, from making many nocturnal expeditions; sometimes to communicate important orders to the Duke of Angoulême, sometimes to enter into council with the king, and sometimes to confer with some

messenger, whom he did not choose to have admitted to his own abode.

The musketeers, on their side, not having much to occupy them in the siege, were not very strictly controlled, and led a merry life. This was the more easy to our three companions especially, as, being friends of M. de Treville, they readily obtained from him special permissions to absent themselves, even after the hour at which the camp was closed.

Now, one evening, when d'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, could not accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their chargers, enveloped in their service cloaks, and with their hands on the butt-ends of their pistols, were returning together from a tavern, which Athos had discovered two days before on the La Jarrie road, and which was called the Red Dove-Cot. They were proceeding on the road toward the camp, keeping a good look-out for fear of an ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boisnau, they thought they heard the sound of horses coming towards them. They all immediately halted, in close rank, and waited, keeping in the middle of the road. After a short time, and just as the moon emerged from behind a cloud, they saw, coming round the corner of the road, two horsemen, who, upon perceiving them, halted also, appearing to deliberate whether they should advance or retreat. This hesitation excited the suspicion of our three friends; and Athos, advancing a few paces, cried out, in his firm voice—

“Who goes there?”

“Who goes there, yourself?” replied one of the two horsemen.

“That is no reply, that!” said Athos. “Who goes there? Answer, or we charge!”

“Take care what you are about, gentlemen,” said a sonorous voice, which appeared to be accustomed to command.

"It is some officer of rank who is making his nightly rounds," said Athos, turning towards his companions. "What will you do, gentlemen?"

"Who are you?" said the same voice, in the same commanding tone. "Reply, or you may find yourselves in some trouble for your disobedience."

"King's musketeers!" answered Athos, more than ever convinced that he who thus questioned him had the right to do so.

"Of what company?"

"Company of Treville."

"Advance, and give an account of what you are doing here at this hour."

The three companions advanced, with their ears a little drooping; for they were all now convinced that they had to deal with one more powerful than themselves. They left Athos to be their spokesman.

One of the two horsemen—he who had spoken the second time—was about ten paces before his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to remain in the same manner in the rear, and advanced alone.

"Excuse us, sir," said Athos, "but we did not know who you were, and you may see that we kept a good look-out."

"Your name?" said the officer, who covered part of his face with his cloak.

"But you, yourself, sir," said Athos, who began to be indignant at this questioning, "give me, I beg, some proof that you have the right thus to question me."

"Your name?" said the cavalier a second time, letting his cloak fall, so that his countenance might be seen.

"The cardinal!" cried the astounded musketeer.

"Your name!" repeated his eminence, a third time.

"Athos," said he.

The cardinal made a sign to his equerry, who approached him.

"These three musketeers will follow us," said he in a low voice: "I do not wish it to be known that I

have left the camp; and, by making them follow us, we shall be certain that they will not tell any one."

"We are gentlemen, my lord," said Athos: "ask us for our words, and do not be in doubt about us. Thank God, we know how to keep a secret."

The cardinal fixed his piercing eyes upon the daring speaker.

"You have a fine ear, M. Athos," said the cardinal, "but now listen to this: it is not through distrust that I request you to follow me: it is for my own security. Undoubtedly your two companions are Messrs. Porthos and Aramis?"

"Yes, your eminence," said Athos, whilst the two musketeers came forward, hat in hand.

"I know you, gentlemen," said the cardinal; "I know you. I am aware that you are not entirely my friends, and I am sorry for it; but I know that you are brave and loyal gentlemen, and that you may safely be trusted. M. Athos, do me the honour, therefore, to accompany me, with your two friends, and then I shall have an escort which might excite the envy of his majesty, if we should meet him."

The three musketeers bowed to the very necks of their horses.

"Well, then, upon my honour," said Athos, "your eminence is right to take us with you. We have met some sinister faces on the road, and we have even had a quarrel with four of them at the Red Dove-Cot."

"A quarrel! And on what account, gentlemen?" said the cardinal. "I do not like rufflers, you know."

"That is exactly why I have had the honour to warn your eminence of what has just happened; for you might hear it from others, and, from a false report, be induced to believe that we had been at fault."

"And what were the consequences of this quarrel?" demanded the cardinal, frowning.

"Why, my friend Aramis there has received a slight wound in the arm, which, however, as your eminence

may see, will not hinder him from mounting to the assault to-morrow, if your eminence commands the attack."

"But you are not the kind of men to take wounds in that way," said the cardinal. "Come, be frank, gentlemen; you certainly gave some in return: confess yourselves; you know that I have the right to pronounce absolution."

"I, my lord," said Athos, "did not even draw my sword; but I took him, with whom I was engaged, up in my arms, and threw him out of the window; and," continued Athos, with some slight hesitation, "I fancy that, in falling, he broke his thigh."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal; "and you, M. Porthos?"

"I, my lord, knowing that sword-play is forbidden seized a bench, and gave one of these brigands a blow which, I think, broke his shoulder."

"Very well," said the cardinal: "and you, M. Aramis?"

"I, my lord, as I am naturally very gentle, and am, besides, as your eminence perhaps does not know, on the point of taking orders, I wanted to lead away my companions, when one of these wretches treacherously stabbed me through the left arm; my patience then failed me, I drew my sword in turn, and, as he returned to the charge, I fancy that I felt, as he threw himself upon me, that the weapon passed through his body. I only know that he fell, and seemed to be carried away with his two companions."

"The fiend, gentlemen!" said the cardinal: "three men disabled in a tavern quarrel! You have rather active hands. But, by the way, what was the cause of the quarrel?"

"These wretches were drunk," said Athos, "and, knowing that a lady had arrived at the tavern that evening, they wanted to force her door."

"And was this woman young and pretty?" demanded the cardinal, with some anxiety.

"We did not see her, my lord," replied Athos.

"You did not see her? Ah! very good!" briskly replied the cardinal; "you did right to defend the honour of a woman; and as I am myself going down to the Red Dove-Cot, I shall know whether you have told me the truth."

"My lord," proudly replied Athos, "we are gentlemen, and would not tell a lie to save our lives."

"Nor do I doubt what you have told me, M. Athos—no, not for one moment; but," added he, to change the conversation, "was this lady alone?"

"The lady had a cavalier closeted with her; but as he did not show himself, in spite of the noise, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"Judge not rashly, says the Gospel," replied the cardinal.

Aramis bowed.

"And now, gentlemen," said the cardinal, "I know what I wanted to learn—follow me."

The three musketeers fell behind the cardinal, who again covered his face with his cloak, and went forward, keeping himself eight or ten paces before his four companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary tavern. The landlord was unquestionably aware what an illustrious visitor he was to expect, and had dismissed all troublesome persons.

Ten paces before he reached the door, the cardinal made a sign to his equerry, and to the three musketeers, to halt. A ready-saddled horse was fastened to the shutter. The cardinal knocked three times in a peculiar manner.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, came out directly, and quickly exchanged a few words with the cardinal; after which he mounted the horse, and went off towards Surgère, which was also the road to Paris.

"Come forward, gentlemen," said the cardinal. "I find that you have told me the truth, gentlemen, and it will not be my fault if our meeting this evening should

not turn out to your advantage. In the meantime, follow me."

The cardinal dismounted, and the three musketeers did the same. The cardinal cast his bridle over the arm of his equerry, and the musketeers fastened theirs to the shutters. The landlord stood on the step of his door: to him, the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you any chamber on the ground floor, where these gentlemen may wait for me, by a good fire?" inquired the cardinal.

The landlord opened the door of a large room, where a sorry, closed iron stove had lately been replaced by a large and excellent chimney.

"I have this," replied he.

"That will do excellently," said the cardinal. "Enter, gentlemen, and be pleased to wait for me here: I shall not be more than half an hour."

And whilst the three musketeers entered the chamber on the ground floor, the cardinal, without requiring any direction, ascended the stairs, like a man who has no need to be told the way.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE FUNNELS.

It was evident, that, unconsciously, and moved solely by their chivalrous and adventurous character, our three friends had rendered a service to some one whom the cardinal honoured with his own especial protection.

But, who was that some one? This was the question which our three musketeers first asked themselves; then, finding that none of the replies which their intelligence suggested were satisfactory, Porthos called the landlord, and asked for some dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at a table, and

began to play, whilst Athos walked up and down the room, in deep thought.

As he walked and meditated, he passed and repassed before the funnel of the former stove, which had been half broken off, and of which the other end went into the apartment above. Each time that he passed he heard the murmur of speech, which at last attracted his notice. Athos approached, and distinguished some words, which certainly appeared to deserve so much attention, that he made signs to his two companions to be silent, and remained himself with his ear bent down to the level of the lower opening of the funnel.

“Listen, my lady,” said the cardinal. “The business is important. Sit down, and let us talk about it.”

“My lady!” muttered Athos.

“I am listening to your eminence with the greatest attention,” replied a voice, which made him start.

“A small vessel, with an English crew, whose captain is devoted to me, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at the Fort de la Pointe; it will sail to-morrow morning.”

“I must go there to-night, then?”

“Directly; that is to say, as soon as you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door when you go out, will escort you. You will let me depart first, and then, half an hour after, you will depart yourself.”

“Yes, my lord. Now, let us return to the commission with which you are pleased to charge me; and, as I am anxious to continue to merit your confidence, deign to explain it, in clear and precise terms, so that I may not make any error.”

There was a moment of profound silence between the two interlocutors. It was evident that the cardinal was weighing beforehand the expressions he was about to use, and that the lady was collecting all her intellectual faculties to understand what he was going to say, and to engrave it on her memory when it was said.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door inside, and to beckon them to come and listen with him. The two musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves, and one for Athos. They all three seated themselves, with their heads close together, and their ears wide open.

"You are going to London," resumed the cardinal; "on arriving there, you will seek out Buckingham."

"I would observe to your eminence," said her ladyship, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, in which the duke has always suspected me, his grace mistrusts me."

"But you have no occasion this time," said the cardinal, "to gain his confidence: you are to present yourself frankly and loyally, as an ambassadress."

"Frankly and loyally!" repeated the lady, with an indescribable accent of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and loyally," replied the cardinal, in the same tone; "all this business must be transacted openly."

"I will follow your eminence's instructions to the very letter, and I wait for you to give them."

"You will go to Buckingham from me, and you will tell him that I am aware of all the preparations he is making, but that I do not much disturb myself about them, seeing that, at the first step on which he ventures, I will destroy the queen."

"Will he believe that your eminence is in a condition to execute your threats?"

"Yes, for I am in possession of proofs."

"It will be necessary for me to be able to submit these proofs to his examination."

"Certainly; and you will say to him, first, that I shall publish the report of Bois-Robert, and of the Marquis de Beautru, concerning the interview which the duke had with the queen, at the house of the high-constable's lady, on the evening that the latter gave a masked ball; and you will add—in order to leave him no room for doubt—

that he came in the costume of the Great Mogul, which was to have been worn by the Duke of Guise, and which he bought of this latter for the sum of three thousand pistoles."

"Good, my lord!"

"All the details of his entry into the Louvre, where he introduced himself in the character of an Italian fortune-teller, and of his leaving in the night, are known to me; and you will tell him, in order that he may be again assured of the accuracy of my information, that he had, under his cloak, a large white robe, thickly-covered with tears, and death's heads, and cross-bones, in which, in case of surprise, he was to personate the phantom of the white lady, who, as is well known, revisits the Louvre whenever any great event is about to be accomplished."

"Is that all, my lord?"

"Tell him that I know all the particulars of the adventure at Amiens; and that I shall make a little spiritually-turned romance of it, with a plan of the garden, and the portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal scene."

"I will tell him this."

"Tell him, further, that I have got Montague in the Bastille: it is true we found no letter on him, but the torture may make him tell all he knows—and even a little more."

"Perfect!"

"And, lastly, add, that his grace, in his nurry to leave the Isle of Rhé, forgot to remove from his quarters a certain letter of Madame de Chevreuse, which strangely compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves, not only that her majesty can love the enemies of the king, but, also, that she can conspire with the enemies of France. You now thoroughly comprehend all that I have told you, do you not?"

"Your eminence shall judge: the high-constable's lady's ball; the night at the Louvre; the evening at Amiens; the arrest of Montague; and the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That is right, my lady; that is right; you have an excellent memory."

"But," resumed she to whom the cardinal had just addressed this compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the duke should not surrender, and should continue to menace France?"

"The duke is in love like a madman, or rather like a ninny," replied Richelieu, with intense bitterness. "Like the Paladins of old, he has only undertaken this war to obtain a glance from his mistress's eyes. If he knows that the war will cost the lady of his love her honour, and perhaps her liberty, I warrant you that he will look twice at it before he decides."

"But yet," said the lady, with a perseverance which proved that she was determined to understand all that was included in the mission that she was about to undertake; "but yet, if he should persist?"

"If he persists?" said the cardinal. "But it is not probable!"

"It is possible!" rejoined the lady.

"If he persists?"—His eminence paused, and then continued: "If he persists—well, I must put my hope in one of those events which change the fortunes of nations."

"If your eminence would cite to me some of those historical events," said her ladyship, "I might possibly participate in your confidence concerning the future."

"Well, look for example," said Richelieu, "when, for a cause very similar to that which now actuates the duke, his majesty Henry IV., of glorious memory, went, in 1610, to invade at the same time both Flanders and Italy, in order that he might assail Austria on both sides, did not an event occur which saved Austria? Why should the king of France not have the same good fortune as the emperor?"

"Your eminence alludes to the assassin's knife in the Rue de la Féronniere?"

"Precisely so," said the cardinal.

“Is your eminence not afraid that the fate of Ravailac would deter those who might be for an instant tempted to imitate his example?”

“In all times and all countries, especially in those countries which are divided within by religious faith, there are always fanatics who would be well contented to be regarded as martyrs. And here, at this very moment, it occurs to me that the Puritans are furious against the Duke of Buckingham, and that their preachers speak of him as the anti-Christ.”

“Well?” inquired her ladyship.

“Well,” continued the cardinal, in a careless tone, “it would be only necessary, for instance, to find some young, beautiful, and clever woman, who wanted to take revenge upon the duke. Such a woman may be found. The duke has been a favoured lover; and, if he has sown much affection by his promises of eternal constancy, he has also sown much hatred by his continual infidelities.”

“Unquestionably,” remarked her ladyship coldly, “such a woman may be found.”

“Well, such a woman would, by putting the knife of Clément or of Ravailac into the hands of an assassin, save France.”

“Yes! but she would be an accomplice in assassination!”

“Have the accomplices of Ravailac, or of Jacques Clément, ever been discovered?”

“No; for they were perhaps too high in station for any one to dare to seek them where they really were. It is not for everybody, my lord, that the Palace of Justice would be burned down.”

“What, do you not believe, then, that the burning of the palace was an accident of chance?” asked Richelieu, in the very tone with which he would have asked the most unimportant question.

“I, my lord,” replied her ladyship, “I have no belief about it. I cite a fact—nothing more. Only, I would

say, that if I were called Mademoiselle de Montpensier, or the queen Marie de Médicis, I should take fewer precautions than I do, now that I am simply named Lady de Winter."

"That is quite fair," said Richelieu; "what is it, then, that you require?"

"I require an order, ratifying beforehand whatever I may think it necessary to do for the prosperity of France."

"But we must, first, find the woman I alluded to, who craves revenge upon the duke."

"She is found!" said the lady.

"Then we must find out the wretched fanatic who will serve as the instrument of God's justice."

"He shall be found!"

"Well," said the cardinal, "it will then be time enough to solicit the order that you have just demanded."

"Your eminence is right," resumed her ladyship, "and I was to blame for seeing, in the mission with which you honour me, anything beyond what it in truth embraces: that is—to announce to his grace, in your eminence's name, that you are aware of the different disguises under which he contrived to approach the queen at the entertainment given by the constable's lady; that you have proofs of the interview which the queen granted at the Louvre to a certain Italian astrologer, who was no other than the Duke of Buckingham; that you have given directions for a spiritual little romance concerning the adventure at Amiens, with a plan of the garden in which it occurred, and portraits of the actors who took part in it; that Montague is in the Bastille, and that the torture may make him tell all that he remembers, and even much that he does not remember; and, finally, that you possess a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse, which was found in his grace's quarters, and which strangely compromises, not only her who wrote it, but also her in whose name it has been written. But, if he persists in spite of these representations, as this is the limit of my

commission, it will only remain for me to pray to God to perform a miracle for the salvation of France. This is my precise mission, is it not, my lord; and I have nothing else to do?"

"Exactly so," said Richelieu coldly.

"And now," continued her ladyship, without appearing to observe the altered manner of his eminence towards her, "since I have received your eminence's instructions with regard to your enemies, will your lordship permit me to say a few words concerning mine?"

"You have enemies, then?" said Richelieu.

"Yes, my lord, enemies against whom you are bound to support me, since I made them in the service of your eminence."

"And who are they?" demanded the cardinal.

"There is, first, a little busybody, of the name of Bonancieux."

"She is in prison, at Nantes."

"That is to say, she was there," replied the lady; "but the queen has inveigled an order from the king, by the assistance of which she has removed her to a convent."

"To a convent?" said the cardinal.

"Yes; a convent."

"And in what convent?"

"I do not know: the secret has been well kept."

"I will know it, though!"

"And your eminence will let me know in what convent this woman is?"

"I see no objection to that," replied the cardinal.

"Very well. Now I have another enemy, whom I fear far more than this little Madame Bonancieux."

"Who is that?"

"Her lover."

"What is his name?"

"Oh! your eminence knows him well," exclaimed the lady, carried away by her anger; "it is the evil genius of both of us: it is he who, in an encounter with your

eminence's guards, turned the victory in favour of the king's musketeers; it is he who gave three sword wounds to de Wardes, your eminence's emissary, and who rendered the affair of the diamond studs abortive; and, lastly, it is he who, knowing that it was I who had deprived him of Madame Bonancieux, has sworn my death."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal, "I know who you mean."

"Yes, I mean that wretch, d'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow, that," said the cardinal.

"And it is exactly because he is a bold fellow that he is the more to be feared."

"We ought first," said the cardinal, "to have some proof of his association with the duke."

"A proof!" exclaimed the lady; "I will have a dozen."

"Well, then, let me have that proof, and it is the simplest thing in the world: I will send him to the Bastile."

"Very well, my lord; but then afterwards?"

"When a man is in the Bastile, there is no *afterwards*," said the cardinal in a hollow voice. "Ah, Mort Dieu!" continued he, "if it was as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is to rid you of yours, and if it was against such people as these that you asked me for impunity——"

"My lord," said the lady, "boon for boon, life for life, man for man: give me the one, and I will give you the other."

"I do not understand what you mean," replied the cardinal, "nor do I wish to do so; but I shall be glad to oblige you, and I see no objection to giving you the order you demand, as to such an insignificant creature as this; and the more willingly, as you tell me that this little d'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, and a traitor."

"A wretch, my lord—a wretch."

"Then give me a pen, ink, and paper," said the cardinal.

“Here they are, my lord.”

“Perfect.”

There was a moment's silence, which proved that the cardinal was occupied in thinking of the words in which the order should be written, or perhaps in writing it. Athos, who had not lost one word of the conversation, took a hand of each of his companions, and led them to the other end of the room.

“Well,” said Porthos, “what do you want, and why do you not let us hear the end of the conversation?”

“Hush!” said Athos in a whisper, “we have heard all that it was necessary for us to hear; besides, I do not hinder you from hearing the rest, but I must go.”

“You must go,” said Porthos: “but if the cardinal should ask for you, what are we to say?”

“You will not wait for him to ask. You will tell him beforehand, that I am gone in advance to clear the way, since, from certain words of our landlord's, I have been led to suppose that the road is not quite safe. I will drop a word or two to the cardinal's equerry. The rest concerns myself—do not be uneasy about it.”

“Be prudent, Athos,” said Aramis.

“Make yourself easy,” replied Athos; “you know that I am cool enough.”

Porthos and Aramis returned to their places near the funnel.

As for Athos, he went out without any disguise, took his horse, which was fastened along with those of his two friends to the shutter, convinced the equerry in four words of the necessity of an advance-guard on their return, looked with affected care at the priming of his pistols, put his sword between his teeth, and set off as a forlorn hope, on the road that led towards the camp.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, the cardinal was not long before he descended. He opened the door of the room in which he had left the three musketeers, and found Porthos and Aramis engaged in a most earnest game of dice. With a rapid glance, he examined every corner of the room, and saw that one of his men was missing.

“What has become of M. Athos?” he asked.

“My lord,” replied Porthos, “he is gone forward on the look out, as some remarks of our landlord’s led him to suspect that the road was not safe.”

“And what have you been doing, M. Porthos?”

“I have won five pistoles from Aramis.”

“And can you now return with me?”

“We are at your eminence’s command.”

“To horse, then, gentlemen; for it is getting late.”

The equerry was at the door, holding the cardinal’s horse. At a little distance two men and three horses were visible in the shade: these men were the individuals who were to conduct her ladyship to the Fort de la Pointe, and to superintend her embarkation.

The equerry confirmed what the two musketeers had already told the cardinal concerning Athos. Richelieu gave a sign of approbation, and resumed his journey, taking the same precautions in his return as he had done in his advance.

Let us leave him on his way to the camp, protected by the equerry and the two musketeers, and return to Athos.

For a hundred yards he had preserved the same pace. But, once out of view, he had pushed his horse to the right, had made a small circuit, and had returned to within twenty paces, where, concealed in the coppice, he awaited the passage of the little troop. Having

recognised the laced hats of his companions, and the gold fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he tarried till the party had turned the corner of the road ; and having lost sight of them, he galloped up to the tavern, and was admitted without any difficulty.

The landlord recognised him again.

" My officer," said Athos, " has forgotten a communication of importance which he should have made to the lady on the first floor, and has sent me to repair his forgetfulness."

" Go up," said the landlord ; " the lady is still in her chamber."

Athos availed himself of this permission, and ascended the stairs with his lightest step ; and when he had reached the landing-place, he perceived, through the half-open door, the lady, who was fastening on her hat.

He entered the room, and closed the door behind him.

Enveloped in his cloak, and with his hat drawn down over his eyes, Athos stood upright before the door.

On seeing this figure, mute and motionless as a statue, the lady was alarmed.

" Who are you, and what do you want ? " exclaimed she.

" Yes ! it is indeed she," muttered Athos.

Letting his cloak fall, and lifting up his hat, he advanced towards her ladyship.

" Do you recognise me, madame ? " said he.

The lady took one step forward, and then recoiled as though she had seen a serpent.

" Come," said Athos, " I can see that you recognise me."

" The Count de la Fére ! " muttered her ladyship, growing deadly pale, and drawing back till the wall prevented her retreat.

" Yes, my lady," replied Athos, " the Count de la Fére in person, who returns expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of seeing you. Let us sit down then, and converse, to quote the cardinal."

Impelled by an inexpressible terror, her ladyship sat down, without uttering a word.

"You are a demon let loose upon the earth," said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you know, also, that, with God's assistance, men have often overcome the most terrible demons. You have once before crossed my path. I thought that I had crushed you, madame; but, either I deceived myself, or hell has given you new life."

At these words, which recalled most fearful memories, the lady held down her head, and groaned.

"Yes, hell has given you new life," resumed Athos; "hell has made you rich, hell has given you another name, hell has almost endowed you with another face; but it has not expunged either the brand from your body or the stains from your soul."

The lady arose, as if moved by a spring, and her eyes darted lightning. Athos remained seated.

"You thought me dead, did you not?" he continued, "as I thought you dead; and the name of Athos has concealed the Count de la Fère, even as the name of Lady de Winter has concealed Anne de Breuil? Was that not what you were called, when your honoured brother married us? Our position is truly strange," continued Athos, laughing: "we have both of us only lived till now, because each thought the other dead; and remembrance is less burdensome than a reality—although a remembrance, even, is sometimes a voracious thing!"

"But, after all," said the lady in a hollow voice, "what brings you here to me, and what want you with me?"

"I want to tell you, that, although I have been invisible to you, I have not lost sight of you."

"You know what I have done?"

"I can recite your actions, day by day, from your entrance into the cardinal's service, until to-night."

A smile of incredulity passed across the pale lips of her ladyship.

“Listen. It is you who cut the two diamond studs from Buckingham’s shoulder; it is you who stole away Madame Bonancieux; it is you who, enamoured of de Wardes, and thinking to receive him, opened your door to M. d’Artagnan; it is you who, believing that de Wardes deceived you, wished to have him slain by his rival; it is you who, when this rival had discovered your disgraceful secret, sought to have him assassinated in his turn, by two murderers, whom you sent to dog him; it is you who, when you found bullets fail, sent poisoned wine, with a forged letter, to make your victim fancy that it was the present of his friends; and, lastly, it is you who—here in this very room, seated on the very chair where I now sit—have this moment made an engagement with the Cardinal Richelieu to get the Duke of Buckingham assassinated, in exchange for his undertaking to allow you to assassinate M. d’Artagnan.”

Her ladyship was livid.

“You must indeed be Satan!” said she.

“Perhaps so,” replied Athos; “but, at all events, mark this well: assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause him to be assassinated—it is of no consequence to me: I know him not; and he is, besides, the enemy of France. But, touch not one single hair of the head of d’Artagnan, who is my faithful friend, whom I love and will protect; or I swear to you, by my father’s head, that the crime which you have then committed, or attempted to commit, shall be indeed your last.”

“M. d’Artagnan has cruelly insulted me,” said she, “and he must die.”

“Indeed! And is it possible that you can be insulted, madame?” said Athos, laughing: “he has insulted you, and he must die!”

“He shall die!” repeated her ladyship: “she, first; and he, afterwards.”

Athos felt his brain begin to reel. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of the woman in her nature, recalled most fearful recollections. He thought how one

day, in a situation less perilous than that in which he now stood, he had already sought to sacrifice her to his honour. His murderous desire came burning back upon him, like an invading fever. He arose in his turn, and put his hand to his belt, from which he drew a pistol, which he cocked.

The lady, pale as a corpse, endeavoured to cry out; but her frozen tongue could only utter a hoarse sound, which had no resemblance to the human voice, but seemed rather the growl of some savage beast. Glued as it were against the sombre tapestry, with her dishevelled hair, she looked like the appalling image of Terror—

Athos slowly raised the pistol, stretched forth his arm until the weapon almost touched the lady's forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible, as it had all the intense calmness of an inflexible resolution.

"Madame," said he, "you must immediately give me the paper which the cardinal wrote just now, or, on my soul, I will blow out your brains."

With any other man the lady might have had some doubt; but she knew Athos. Nevertheless, she remained motionless.

"You have one second in which to decide," continued he.

The lady saw, from the contraction of his brow, that the shot was coming: she hastily put her hand to her bosom, and drew forth a paper, which she handed to Athos.

"Take it," said she, "and may you be accursed!"

Athos took the paper, replaced the pistol in his belt, went to the lamp to assure himself that it was the right paper, unfolded it, and read—

"It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

"RICHELIEU."

"And now," said Athos, resuming his cloak, and

replacing his hat upon his head, "and now, that I have drawn your teeth, bite if you can!"

He left the room without even looking once behind him.

At the door he found the two men with the led horse.

"Gentlemen," said he, "his lordship's order is, you know, to conduct this woman, without loss of time, to the Fort de la Pointe, and not to leave her until she is on board."

As these words exactly accorded with the order which they had received, they bowed their heads in token of assent.

As for Athos, he sprang lightly into his saddle, and went off at a gallop. Only, instead of keeping to the road, he went across the fields, pushing his horse on very fast, and halting from time to time to listen.

In one of these halts, he heard the sound of several horses on the road. He did not doubt that it was the cardinal and his escort. Taking immediately another direction forward, and then rubbing his horse with some sweet broom and leaves, he placed himself in the middle of the road, at not more than two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, when he heard the horsemen.

"It is our brave musketeer, I believe," said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord," replied Athos, "it is he in person."

"M. Athos," said Richelieu, "accept my best thanks for the care that you have taken. Gentlemen, we have reached our destination. Take the gate to the left hand; the word for the night is—'Roi et Rhé.'"

As he said this, the cardinal bowed to the three friends, and turned to the right, followed by his equerry; for, on that night, he slept in the camp.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, "well, he signed the paper that she demanded."

“I know it,” said Athos quietly, “for here it is.”

The three friends did not exchange another word before they reached their own quarters, excepting to give the word to the sentinels on guard.

But they sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, on leaving the trenches, to come immediately to the musketeers' rooms.

On the other hand, as Athos had foreseen, her ladyship, on finding the two men at the door, followed them without hesitation. She had, for an instant, an idea of seeking another interview with the cardinal, and relating to him what had passed; but a revelation on her part would produce one on that of Athos. She might easily say that Athos had ruined her; but he would state that she was branded. So she thought it better to be silent, to depart discreetly, to accomplish with her accustomed ability the difficult commission which had been entrusted to her, and then, when these things were ended to the cardinal's satisfaction, to return and claim her vengeance.

Consequently, having travelled all night, she was at Fort la Pointe by seven in the morning; at eight she had embarked; and at nine the vessel weighed anchor, and made sail for England.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BASTION OF ST. GERVAIS.

ON arriving at his friends' quarters, d'Artagnan found them assembled in one room. Athos was thinking; Porthos was twisting his moustache; and Aramis was reading his prayers in a charming little book, bound in blue velvet.

“By my soul, gentlemen,” said d'Artagnan, “I hope that what you have to tell me is worth the trouble, otherwise I should not forgive your having made me

dismantle a bastion, entirely by myself. Ah! why were you not there, gentlemen? It was hot work!"

"We were in another place, where it was by no means cold either," said Porthos, giving his moustache a turn peculiar to himself.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh, oh!" said d'Artagnan, understanding the slight frown of the musketeer, "it seems that there is something fresh astir."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you breakfasted at the Parpaillot tavern, the day before yesterday, I believe?"

"Yes."

"How are things there?"

"Why, I fared but badly myself; it was a fast-day, and they had nothing but meat."

"What," said Athos, "in a sea-port, and no fish?"

"They say that the mound which the cardinal is building drives the fish out into the open sea," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading.

"But that is not what I wanted to know, Aramis," continued Athos. "Were you free, and did no one disturb you?"

"Why, I think that there were not many idlers," replied Aramis. "Yes, in fact, for what you want, Athos, I think we shall do well enough at the Parpaillot."

"Come, then; let us to the Parpaillot," said Athos, "for here the walls are like leaves of paper."

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend's manner, and understood by a word, a gesture, or a look from him, that circumstances called for seriousness, took his arm, and went out with him, without uttering a word. Porthos followed them, in conversation with Aramis.

On their way they met Grimaud, and Athos beckoned to him to attend them. Grimaud, according to custom, obeyed in silence: the poor fellow had finished by almost forgetting how to speak.

When they arrived at the Parpaillot, it was seven in

the morning, and the day was just beginning to dawn. The three friends ordered breakfast, and entered a room where, the landlord assured them, that they would not be disturbed.

The hour was, unfortunately, ill-chosen for a conference. The morning drum had just been beaten; every one was busy shaking off the sleepiness of night, and, to drive away the dampness of the morning air, coming to take a drop at the tavern. Dragoons, Swiss, guards, musketeers, and light cavalry, succeeded one another with a rapidity very beneficial to the business of mine host, but very unfavourable to the designs of our four friends, who replied, but sullenly, to the salutations, toasts, and jests of their companions.

“Come,” said Athos, “we shall bring some good quarrel on our hands presently, and we do not want that just now. D’Artagnan, tell us about your night’s work: we will tell you about ours afterwards.”

“In fact,” said one of the light-cavalry, who, whilst rocking himself, held in his hand a glass of brandy, which he slowly sipped—“in fact, you were in the trenches, you gentlemen of the guards, and it seems to me that you had a squabble with the Rochellois.”

D’Artagnan looked at Athos, to see whether he ought to answer this intruder who intruded on the conversation.

“Well,” said Athos, “did you not hear M. de Busigny, who did you the honour to address you? Tell us what took place in the night, as these gentlemen seem desirous to hear it.”

“Did you not take a bastion?” asked a Swiss, who was drinking rum mixed with a glass of beer.

“Yes, sir,” replied d’Artagnan, bowing, “we had that honour. And also, as you may have heard, we introduced a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which, on exploding, made a very pretty breach, without reckoning that, as the bastion is very old, all the rest of the building is much shaken.”

“And what bastion is it?” asked a dragoon, who held,

spitted on his sabre, a goose which he had brought to be cooked.

"The bastion St. Gervais," replied d'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellois annoyed our sappers."

"And was it warm work?"

"Yes. We lost five men, and the Rochellois some eight or ten."

"Balzampleu!" said the Swiss, who, in spite of the admirable collection of oaths which the German language possesses, had got the habit of swearing in French.

"But it is probable," said the light-horseman, "that they will send pioneers to repair the bastion this morning."

"Yes, it is probable," said d'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"Ah! a wager," said the Swiss.

"What is it?" asked the light-horseman.

"Stop," said the dragoon, laying his sabre like a spit on the two great iron dogs which supported the fire in the chimney, "I am in it! A dripping-pan here, instantly, you noodle of a landlord, that I may not lose one drop of the fat of this estimable bird."

"He is right," said the Swiss; "the fat of a goose is very good with sweetmeats."

"There!" said the dragoon; "and now for the wager. We are listening, M. Athos."

"Well, M. de Busigny," said Athos, "I bet you, that my three comrades, Messieurs Porthos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais, and that we will stay there for one hour by the clock, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at one another, for they began to understand.

"Why," said d'Artagnan, stooping to Athos's ear, "you are going to get us all killed without mercy."

"We shall be more certainly killed if we do not go," replied Athos.

"Ah, faith, gentlemen," said Porthos, throwing himself back in his chair, and twirling his moustache, "that is a fine wager, I hope."

"And I accept it," said M. de Busigny. "Now we must fix the stakes."

"You are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four: a dinner for eight—will that suit you?"

"Just the thing!" replied M. de Busigny.

"Exactly," said the dragoon.

"That will do!" exclaimed the Swiss. The fourth auditor, who had remained silent throughout the conversation, bowed his head, as a sign that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The dejeuner of these gentlemen is ready," broke in the landlord.

"Well, then, bring it here," said Athos.

The landlord obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, showed him a large basket, which was lying in a corner, and made him a sign to wrap up in the napkins all the eatables which had been brought.

Grimaud, comprehending at once that they were going to breakfast on the grass, took the basket, packed up the eatables, put in the bottles, and took the basket up in his arms.

"But where are you going to eat this breakfast," said the landlord.

"What does it signify to you," replied Athos, "provided you are paid for it?" And he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

"Must I give you the change, sir?" said mine host.

"No; but add a couple of bottles of champagne, and the balance will pay for the napkins."

The landlord had not made quite such a good thing of it as he at first expected; but he recompensed himself for it by palming off on his four guests two bottles of Anjou wine, instead of the two bottles of champagne.

"M. de Busigny, will you regulate your watch by

mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?" inquired Athos.

"At your pleasure," said the light-dragoon, drawing from his fob a very beautiful watch, encircled with diamonds. "Half-past seven," added he.

"Five-and-thirty minutes after seven," said Athos; "we shall remember that I am five minutes in advance, sir."

Then, bowing to the astonished party, the four young men took the road towards the bastion of St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, not knowing where he was going, and, from the passive obedience that was habitual to him, not even thinking of inquiring.

Whilst they were within the precincts of the camp, the four friends did not exchange a word: they were, besides, followed by the curious, who, having heard of the wager, wished to know how they would extricate themselves from the affair. But when once they had got beyond the lines of circumvallation, and found themselves in the open country, d'Artagnan, who was entirely ignorant of what they were about, thought it high time to demand some explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "do me the favour to tell me where we are going."

"You can see well enough," replied Athos; "we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"You know very well—we are going to breakfast there."

"But why do we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?"

"Because we have most important things to tell you, and it was impossible to converse for five minutes in that tavern, with all those troublesome fellows, who come and go, and continually accost us. Here, at least," continued Athos, pointing to the bastion, "no one will come to interrupt us."

"It appears to me," said d'Artagnan, with that prudence which was so thoroughly and so naturally

united with his extreme courage—"it appears to me, that we could have found some retired spot, somewhere among the downs, on the sea-shore."

"Where we should have been seen all four in council together, so that, in a quarter of an hour, the cardinal would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a consultation."

"Yes," said Aramis, "Athos is right: *animadvertuntur in desertis.*"

"A desert would not have been a bad place," remarked Porthos; "but the difficulty is to find one."

"There is no desert where a bird could not pass over one's head, or a fish jump from the water, or a rabbit run from her burrow; and I believe that bird, fish, and rabbit are all amongst the cardinal's spies. It is much better, therefore, to pursue our enterprise. Besides, we cannot now recede without disgrace. We have made a bet—a bet which could not have been foreseen, and of which I defy any one to guess the true motive. To win it, we must remain an hour in the bastion. Either we shall, or shall not, be attacked. If we are not, we shall have time to talk, and no one will hear us; for I will answer for it that the walls of that bastion have no ears. If we are attacked, we will talk just the same, and shall, moreover, by defending ourselves, be covered with glory. So you see that everything is favourable to us."

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "but we shall indubitably be shot."

"Well," rejoined Athos, "but you know very well that the bullets most to be feared are not those of the enemy."

"Yet it seems to me," said Porthos, "that, for such an expedition, we should at least have brought our muskets."

"You are a simpleton, friend Porthos; why should we encumber ourselves with a useless burden?"

"I do not find a good regulation musket, with a

dozen cartridges and a powder-flask, useless in front of an enemy."

"Well," rejoined Athos, "did you not hear what d'Artagnan said?"

"And what did d'Artagnan say?" asked Porthos.

"D'Artagnan says, that, in last night's attack, as many as eight or ten Frenchmen were killed, and as many of the enemy."

"Well!"

"There has not been time to strip them, has there, seeing there was something more urgent to which to attend?"

"Well?"

"Well, we shall find their muskets, powder-flasks, and cartridges, and, instead of four muskets and a dozen balls, we shall have about fifteen muskets, and a hundred rounds of ammunition to fire."

"Oh, Athos!" said Aramis, "you are really a great man!"

Porthos bowed his head in token of acquiescence.

D'Artagnan alone did not appear completely convinced.

Grimaud unquestionably partook of the young man's incredulity; for, seeing that they continued to march towards the bastion, which he suspected before, he plucked his master by the skirt of his coat.

"Where are we going?" he inquired by a sign.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

"But," said the silent Grimaud, still in the same dialect, "we shall leave our skins there."

Athos raised his eyes and his fingers towards heaven.

Grimaud set down his basket on the ground, and seated himself upon it, shaking his head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked at the priming, cocked it, and levelled it at Grimaud's ear.

Grimaud found himself raised up, upon his legs, as if by the force of a spring.

Athos then beckoned to him to take up the basket, and to march in front.

Grimaud obeyed: so that all the poor fellow had gained by this momentary pantomime, was, that he had been transformed from the rear guard to the advanced guard.

Having reached the bastion, the four friends looked behind them. More than three hundred soldiers, of every arm, had assembled at the entrance of the camp; and, in a separate group, they saw M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth wagerer.

Athos took off his hat, raised it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned his salutation, accompanying this act of politeness with a loud hurrah, which reached the ears of the party.

After this occurrence they all four disappeared in the bastion, where Grimaud had already preceded them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was only occupied by about a dozen dead bodies, French and Rochellois.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had taken the command of the expedition, "whilst Grimaud prepares the table, let us begin by gathering together the muskets and ammunition. We can, moreover, converse whilst we are doing it. These gentlemen," added he, pointing to the dead bodies, "do not hear us."

"But we may, nevertheless, throw them into the ditches," said Porthos, "having first satisfied ourselves that they have nothing in their pockets."

"Yes," replied Athos, "but that is Grimaud's affair."

"Well, then," said d'Artagnan, "let Grimaud search them, and throw them over the walls."

"Not upon any account," said Athos; "they may be of use to us."

"These dead be of use to us!" exclaimed Porthos.

"Ah, nonsense! you are going crazy, my dear friend!"

"Do not judge rashly, say both the gospel and the cardinal," replied Athos. "How many muskets are there, gentlemen?"

"Twelve."

"How much ammunition?"

"A hundred rounds."

"It is quite as many as we need: let us load our muskets."

The four companions set themselves to work; and just as they had loaded the last musket, Grimaud made a sign to them that breakfast was ready.

Athos indicated by a gesture that he was contented with what was done, and then pointed out to Grimaud a sort of sheltered box, where he was to place himself as sentinel. But, to relieve the tedium of his watch, Athos allowed him to take with him a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

"And now, to breakfast!" said Athos.

The four friends squatted upon the ground, like Turks or tailors.

"And now," said d'Artagnan, "as you are no longer afraid of being heard, I hope that you are going to let us know your secret."

"I hope that I provide you at the same time both with amusement and glory, gentlemen?" said Athos. "I have induced you to take a charming little excursion: here is a most sustaining breakfast; and below there, are five hundred persons, as you may perceive through the embrasures, who take us for madmen or heroes—two classes of fools who very much resemble each other."

"But this secret?"

"I saw her ladyship last night," said Athos.

D'Artagnan was just conveying his glass to his lips; but, at the sound of her ladyship's name, his hand trembled so that he placed his glass upon the ground, in order that he might not spill its contents.

“You have seen your wi——”

“Hush, then!” interrupted Athos; “you forget, my dear fellow, that these gentlemen are not, like you, initiated in the privacies of my family affairs. I have seen her ladyship.”

“And where did that happen?” demanded d’Artagnan.

“About two leagues from hence, at the Red Dove-Cot.”

“In that case, I am a lost man,” said d’Artagnan.

“Not just yet,” replied Athos; “for, by this time, she must have quitted the shores of France.”

D’Artagnan breathed again.

“But, after all,” inquired Porthos, “who is this lady?”

“A charming woman,” said Athos, sipping a glass of sparkling wine. “Scamp of a landlord!” exclaimed he, “who gives us Anjou for champagne, and thinks we shall be deceived by the subterfuge! Yes,” continued he, “a charming woman, to whom our friend d’Artagnan has done something unpardonable, for which she has been endeavouring to avenge herself—a month ago, by trying to get him shot; a week ago, by sending him some poison; and yesterday, by demanding his head of the cardinal.”

“What! demanding my head of the cardinal?” cried d’Artagnan, pale with terror.

“Yes,” said Porthos, “it is true as gospel; for I heard her with my own ears.”

“And I also,” said Aramis.

“Then,” said d’Artagnan, letting his arm fall in a desponding manner, “it is useless to struggle longer: I may as well blow out my brains at once, and have done with it.”

“That is the last folly to be perpetrated,” said Athos, “seeing it is the only one which will admit of no remedy.”

“But, with such enemies, I shall never escape,” said d’Artagnan. “First, my unknown antagonist of Meung; then, de Wardes, on whom I inflicted four wounds; next,

this lady, whose secret I found out; and, lastly, the cardinal, whose revenge I defeated."

"Well!" said Athos, "and all this makes only four, and we are four—one against one. Vive Dieu! if we may trust to Grimaud's signs, we are now about to be engaged with a far greater number of foes. What's the matter, Grimaud? Considering the seriousness of the circumstances, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be brief, I beseech you. What do you see?"

"A troop."

"Of how many persons?"

"Twenty men."

"What sort of men?"

"Sixteen pioneers, and four soldiers."

"How far off are they?"

"Five hundred paces."

"Good! we have still time to finish this fowl, and to drink a glass of wine. To your health, d Artagnan!"

"To your health!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, then, to my health; although I do not imagine that your good wishes will be of much benefit to me."

"Bah!" said Athos, "God is great, as the Mahometans say, and the future is in His hands."

Then, having swallowed his wine, and put the glass down, Athos carelessly arose, took the first musket which came to his hand, and went towards an embrasure.

The three others did the same. As for Grimaud, he had orders to place himself behind them, and to reload their muskets.

An instant afterwards, they saw the troop appearing. It came along a kind of branch trench, which formed a communication between the bastion and the town.

"Mort Dieu!" said Athos, "it was scarcely worth while to disturb ourselves for a score of fellows armed with pick-axes, mattocks, and spades! Grimaud ought to have quietly waved to them to go about their business, and I am quite convinced that they would have left us to ourselves."

"I much doubt it," said d'Artagnan, "for they come forward with great resolution. Besides, in addition to the workmen, there are four soldiers, and a brigadier, armed with muskets."

"That is because they have not seen us," replied Athos.

"Faith," said Aramis, "I confess that I am reluctant to fire upon these poor devils of citizens."

"He is a bad priest," said Porthos, "who pities heretics."

"Upon my word," said Athos, "Aramis is right. I will give them a notice."

"What the plague are you doing?" cried d'Artagnan; "you will get yourself shot, my dear fellow."

But Athos paid no attention to this warning; and mounting on the breach, his fusee in one hand, and his hat in the other—

"Gentlemen," said he, bowing courteously, and addressing himself to the soldiers and pioneers, who, astonished by this apparition, halted at about fifty paces from the bastion—"gentlemen, we are, some of my friends and myself, engaged in breakfasting in this bastion. Now you know that nothing is more disagreeable than to be disturbed at breakfast; so we entreat of you, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast, or to come back in a little while; unless, indeed, you experience the salutary desire of forsaking the ranks of rebellion, and coming to drink with us to the health of the king of France."

"Take care, Athos," said d'Artagnan; "don't you see that they are aiming at you."

"Yes, yes," said Athos; "but these are civilians, who are shocking bad marksmen, and will take care not to hit me."

In fact, at that moment four shots were fired, and the bullets whistled around Athos, but without one touching him.

Four shots were instantaneously fired in return, but

with a far better aim than that of the aggressors: three soldiers fell dead, and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, from the breach, "another musket."

Grimaud obeyed immediately.

The three friends had also reloaded their arms. A second discharge soon followed the first, and the brigadier and two pioneers fell dead. The rest of the troop took to flight.

"Come, gentlemen, a sortie!" said Athos.

The four friends rushed out of the fort, reached the field of battle, picked up the muskets of the soldiers, and the half-pike of the brigadier; and, satisfied that the fugitives would never stop till they reached the city, they returned to the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Reload the muskets, Grimaud," said Athos; "and let us, gentlemen, continue our breakfast and conversation. Where were we?"

"I recollect," said d'Artagnan; "you were saying, that, after having demanded my head of the cardinal, her ladyship had left the shores of France. And where is she going?" added d'Artagnan, who was painfully anxious about the itinerary of the lady's journey.

"She is going to England," replied Athos.

"And why?"

"To assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or to get him assassinated."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and horror.

"It is infamous!" exclaimed he.

"Oh! as to that," said Athos, "I beg you to believe that I concern myself very little about it. Now that you have finished, Grimaud," continued he, "take the half-pike of our brigadier, fasten a napkin to it, and fix it on the end of our bastion, that those rebellious Rochellois may see that they are opposed to brave and loyal subjects of the king."

Grimaud obeyed without reply ; and an instant afterwards the white flag floated over the heads of the four friends. A cry of joy, a thunder of applause, saluted its appearance. Half the camp was at the barriers.

“What !” said d’Artagnan, “you concern yourself but little about her assassinating Buckingham, or causing him to be assassinated ? The duke is our friend.”

“The duke is an Englishman; the duke fights against us : let her do therefore what she likes with the duke. I care as little about him as about an empty bottle.”

As Athos said this, he threw, some fifteen yards before him, a bottle which he held in his hand, and from which he had just poured the last drop into his own glass.

“Wait an instant,” said d’Artagnan, “I do not abandon Buckingham in that manner : he gave us some very fine horses.”

“And especially some very beautiful saddles,” added Porthos, who was then wearing the lace of his upon his cloak.

“Besides,” said Aramis, “God wishes for the conversion, not the death, of a sinner.”

“Amen !” said Athos, “and we will return to that by and by, if such is your pleasure ; but that which most engaged my attention at the time, and I am sure you will understand why, d’Artagnan, was how to take from this woman a *carte-blanche*, which she had extorted from the cardinal, and by means of which she might get rid of you, and perhaps the whole of us, with impunity.”

“This creature is a very demon !” said Porthos, holding his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

“And this document,” said d’Artagnan ; “did it remain in her hands ?”

“No, it passed into mine. I cannot say that it was without some trouble ; for, if I said that, I should tell a lie.”

“My dear Athos,” said d’Artagnan, “I must no longer count the times I owe my life to you.”

“ Then it was to visit her that you quitted us ? ” said Aramis.

“ Exactly so.”

“ And you have got the cardinal’s letter ? ” inquired d’Artagnan.

“ Here it is,” replied Athos.

He took the precious paper from the pocket of his coat. D’Artagnan unfolded it with a hand, of which he did not attempt to hide the tremor, and read—

“ It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

“ RICHELIEU.”

“ It is, in fact, a regular indulgence,” said Aramis.

“ We must destroy this paper,” said d’Artagnan, who seemed to read in it his own sentence of death.

“ On the contrary,” replied Athos, “ it must be most scrupulously preserved ; and I would not give it up for the gold that would cover it in coin.”

“ And what will she do now ? ” inquired d’Artagnan.

“ Why,” said Athos carelessly, “ she will probably write to the cardinal, that a cursed musketeer, named Athos, took her safe-guard from her by force ; and she will, at the same time, advise his eminence to get rid of him, and also of his two friends, Porthos and Aramis. The cardinal will recollect that these are the very men that are always in his way. Then, some fine morning, he will have d’Artagnan arrested, and, that he may not be annoyed by solitude, will send us to keep him company in the Bastille.”

“ Ah ! then,” said Porthos, “ I think that you are cracking somewhat melancholy jokes.”

“ I am not joking,” replied Athos.

“ Do you know,” said Porthos, “ that I fancy it would be less of a crime to twist this cursed lady’s neck, than those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have never committed any greater crime than singing, in French, the very psalms which we sing in Latin ! ”

“What does the abbé say to that?” quietly asked Athos.

“I say that I am quite of Porthos’s opinion.”

“And I also,” said d’Artagnan.

“Happily, she is far away,” added Porthos, “for I confess that she would annoy me much here.”

“She annoys me in England, as well as in France,” said Athos.

“She annoys me everywhere,” said d’Artagnan.

“But, when you had her in your power,” said Porthos, “why did you not drown, strangle, or hang her? It is only the dead who never return.”

“Do you think so, Porthos?” replied Athos, with a dark smile, which d’Artagnan alone could understand.

“I have an idea,” said d’Artagnan.

“Let us hear it,” cried the musketeers.

“To arms!” exclaimed Grimaud.

The young men arose hastily, and ran to their muskets.

This time there was a small band advancing, composed of twenty or of five-and-twenty men, no longer pioneers, but soldiers of the garrison.

“Suppose we now return to the camp,” said Porthos; “it seems to me that the match is not equal.”

“Impossible, for three reasons,” answered Athos. “The first is, because we have not finished our breakfast. The second, because we have still some important affairs to talk about; and the third, it wants yet ten minutes before the hour is elapsed.”

“All the same,” said Aramis, “we must arrange a plan of battle.”

“It is vastly simple,” replied Athos. “As soon as the enemy is within musket-shot, we must fire; if he continues to advance, we must fire again; in fact, we must blaze away as long as we have guns loaded. If the remnant of the band should then wish to mount to the assault, we must let the besiegers descend as far as the ditch, and then we must heave on their heads a large mass of the wall, which only stays up now by a miracle of equilibrium.”

“Bravo!” exclaimed Porthos. “Athos, you were undoubtedly born to be a general; and the cardinal, who thinks himself a great warrior, is a mere nothing to you.”

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, “do not waste your ammunition, I beseech you; let each pick out his man.”

“I have got mine,” said d’Artagnan.

“And I mine,” said Porthos.

“And I the same,” said Aramis.

“Fire!” cried Athos.

The four guns made but one report, and four men fell.

The drum then beat, and the little band advanced to the charge.

The shots of the four friends were then fired without regularity, but invariably with the same deadly effect. Yet, as though they had known the numerical weakness of their opponents, the Rochellois continued to advance at a quick pace.

At three other reports, two men fell; yet the march of those who remained unwounded did not slacken.

Having reached the foot of the bastion, there were still twelve or fifteen of the enemy. A last discharge received, but did not arrest, them. They leaped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

“Now, my friends,” said Athos, “let us finish them at one blow. To the wall! to the wall!”

And the four friends, assisted by Grimaud, set themselves to topple over, with the barrels of their muskets, an enormous mass of wall, which bowed as though the wind waved it, and, loosening itself from its foundation, fell with a tremendous crash into the ditch. A fearful cry was then heard; a cloud of dust ascended toward the skies; and—that was all.

“Can we have crushed them all, from the first to the last?” said Athos.

“Faith, it looks very like it,” replied d’Artagnan.

“No,” said Porthos; “there are two or three of them escaping, quite crippled.”

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate beings,

covered with mire and blood, fled along the hollow way, and regained the town. They were all the survivors of the little band.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour, and now the wager is gained: but we must be good players; besides, d'Artagnan has not yet told us his idea."

And the musketeer, with his habitual coolness, seated himself before the remains of the breakfast.

"Would you like to hear my plan?" said d'Artagnan to his three companions, when, after the alarm which had had so fearful a termination for the little troop of Rochellois, the quartette had resumed their places before the remnants of their meal.

"Yes," replied Athos; "you said that you had an idea."

"Ah! I have it," exclaimed d'Artagnan. "I will go to England for the second time, will find his grace of Buckingham, and warn him of the plot which has been concocted against his life."

"You will do no such thing, d'Artagnan," said Athos coldly.

"Why not? Did I not go before?"

"Yes, but at that time we were not at war; at that time the Duke of Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy: what you now suggest would amount to treason."

D'Artagnan understood the force of this reasoning and was silent.

"But," said Porthos, "I fancy that I, in my turn, have also got an idea."

"Silence for M. Porthos's idea," cried Aramis.

"I will ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, on any pretext whatsoever that you can suggest: I am not very clever at excuses myself. The lady does not know me: I will get near her without exciting her alarm; and, when I have found the beauty, I will strangle her."

"Ah," said Athos, "I am really somewhat disposed to adopt Porthos's idea."

"Fie, then!" exclaimed Aramis; "kill a woman! No! Listen, I have the right idea."

"Let us have your idea, Aramis," said Athos, who felt much deference for the young musketeer.

"We must announce it to the queen."

"Ah, faith, yes!" cried d'Artagnan and Porthos together; "I believe that we have found the true course at last."

"Announce it to the queen?" said Athos; "and how can we do that? Have we any friends at court? Can we send any one to Paris, without its being known in the camp? There are a hundred and forty leagues between here and Paris, and our letter will not have reached Angers before we ourselves shall be in a dungeon."

"As for getting a letter safely delivered to the queen," said Aramis, blushing, "I myself will undertake it. I know a very skilful person at Tours——"

Aramis stopped, on seeing Athos smile.

"Well; will you not adopt this plan, Athos?" inquired d'Artagnan.

"I do not entirely reject it," replied Athos, "but I would merely observe to Aramis, that he cannot himself leave the camp; and that, with anybody but one of ourselves, there will be no security that, two hours after the messenger has started, all the capuchins, all the alguazils, all the black-bonnets of the cardinal, will not know your letter by heart; and that you and your very skilful person will not be immediately arrested."

"Without calculating," added Porthos, "that the queen would save the Duke of Buckingham, while leaving us to our fate."

"Gentlemen," said d'Artagnan, "Porthos's objection is full of sense!"

"Ah, ah! what is going on in the town?" said Athos. "They are beating to arms."

The four friends listened, and the sound of the tattoo reached their ears.

"You will see," continued Athos, "that they will send an entire regiment against us."

"You do not expect to hold your ground against an entire regiment?" said Porthos.

"Why not?" replied the musketeer. "I feel myself in the humour, and would hold it against an army, if we had only had the precaution to bring a dozen bottles more."

"Upon my word, the drum comes nearer," said d'Artagnan.

"Let it come," replied Athos; "there is a quarter of an hour's march between the town and this place. It is more time than we shall require to arrange our plans. If we go away from here, we shall never again find such a convenient spot. And listen, gentlemen; the very idea has come into my mind."

"Let us hear it."

Athos made a sign for his valet to come to him.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the dead bodies, which lay in the bastion, "you will take these gentlemen, fix them upright against the wall, put their hats on their heads, and place their muskets in their hands."

"Oh, great man!" cried d'Artagnan, "I understand you."

"You understand him?" said Porthos.

"And you, Grimaud, do you understand?" inquired Aramis.

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative.

"It is all that is necessary," said Athos; "now, let us return to my idea."

"I should like, however, to understand as well," said Porthos.

"It is of no use."

"Yes, yes, the idea of Athos!" said d'Artagnan and Aramis at the same time.

"This lady, this woman, this creature, this demon, has a brother-in-law, I think you told me?"

“Yes; I even know him, and I believe that he has no great sympathy with his sister-in-law.”

“There is no harm there,” replied Athos; “and if he detested her, even, it would be so much the better.”

“In that case, we are fitted to a nicety.”

“Nevertheless,” said Porthos, “I should like to understand what Grimaud is about.”

“Silence, Porthos!” cried Aramis.

“What is the name of this brother-in-law?”

“Lord de Winter.”

“Where is he at present?”

“He returned to London on the first report of the war.”

“Well, there is exactly the man we want,” said Athos. “It is to him that we must give information: we must let him know that his sister-in-law is going to assassinate some one, and entreat him to keep his eye upon her. There must be in London, I should hope, some establishment like the Madelonettes, or the Magdalen: he must place his sister-in-law there, and we shall then be at peace.”

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan, “until she gets out again.”

“Ah, faith,” said Athos, “you ask too much, d’Artagnan. I have given you all that I have, and I tell you that my budget is now empty.”

“I think it the best plan we can devise,” observed Aramis; “we will inform the queen and Lord de Winter at the same time.”

“But by whom shall we convey the one letter to London, and the other to Tours?”

“I answer for Bazin,” replied Aramis.

“And I for Planchet,” added d’Artagnan.

“In fact,” said Porthos, “if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys can.”

“Certainly,” added Aramis; “so we will write the letters this very day, give them some money, and send them on the journey.”

“We will give them some money?” said Athos; “then you have got money, have you?”

The four friends looked at each other, and a cloud passed over the brows which had been for an instant brightened.

"Attention," cried d'Artagnan; "I see black and red points in motion, below there. What were you saying about a regiment, Athos? It is a regular army."

"Faith, yes," replied Athos, "there they are. Do you see the crafty fellows, who are advancing without drum or trumpet? Ah, ah! Have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a dozen dead bodies, which he had placed in the most picturesque attitudes—some carrying arms, others seeming to take aim, others sword in hand.

"Bravo!" cried Athos, "that does credit to your imagination."

"That may be," said Porthos; "and yet I should like to understand it."

"Let us decamp first," said d'Artagnan; "you will understand afterwards."

"One moment, gentlemen—wait one moment; let us give Grimaud time to take away the breakfast things."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "here are the black and red points becoming visibly larger, and I am of d'Artagnan's opinion: I believe that we have no time to lose in regaining the camp."

"Faith," said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat: we betted for an hour, and we have remained an hour and a half. There is nothing more to communicate; so let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off."

Grimaud had already commenced his retreat, with the basket and the fragments. The four friends followed behind him, and had taken about a dozen steps, when——

"Ah! What the plague are we about, gentlemen?" exclaimed Athos.

"Have you forgotten anything?" inquired Aramis.

“The flag: zounds! we must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even though it be a napkin.”

And Athos rushed back into the bastion, mounted the platform, and took down the flag. But, as the Rochellois had come within musket-shot, they opened a sharp fire upon this man, who thus exposed himself, as if for amusement, to their discharge. It might have been fancied, however, that Athos bore a charmed life: the bullets whistled around him, yet he stood unharmed.

Athos waved his standard, and bowed towards the camp as he turned his back on the town. Loud shouts resounded on both sides—shouts of anger from the one; and, from the other, of enthusiasm.

A second discharge soon followed the first, and three balls, by passing through the napkin, made a regular standard of it.

They heard the whole camp exclaiming—“Come down! come down!”

Athos slowly descended. His companions, who waited for him with anxiety, welcomed his re-appearance with joy.

“Come along, Athos, come along,” said d’Artagnan; “let us make haste. Now that we have found everything, except money, it would be absurd to get killed.”

But Athos persisted in his majestic walk; and his companions, finding all remonstrance useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket had formed the advance guard, and were both soon out of range.

After a minute or two the quartette heard the sound of a furious firing.

“What is that?” asked Porthos; “at what are they firing! I do not hear the bullets whistle, nor do I see anybody.”

“They are firing at our dead men!” replied Athos.

“But our dead men will not return their fire.”

“Exactly so. They will then believe that there is an ambuscade: they will deliberate, and will afterwards reconnoitre; and by the time they discover the trick, we

shall be beyond the reach of their fire. Thus, you see, it is unnecessary to give ourselves a fit of the pleurisy by over haste."

"Oh! I understand now!" said the astonished Porthos.

"That's very fortunate," replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The French, on their side, perceiving their adventurous comrades returning, uttered cries of enthusiasm.

At length, a fresh volley was heard, and this time the bullets were actually flattened on the stones around the four friends, and whistled mournfully about their ears. The Rochellois had at last taken possession of the bastion.

"They are a set of awkward fellows," remarked Athos; "how many of them have we shot? A dozen?"

"Or fifteen."

"How many did we crush?"

"Eight or ten."

"And, in exchange for this, we have not got a scratch. Ah! yes, though! What is the matter with your hand there, d'Artagnan? It bleeds, I think?"

"It is nothing," replied d'Artagnan.

"Was it a spent ball?"

"No."

"What then?"

We have said that Athos loved d'Artagnan as his own son; and, though of a gloomy and inflexible character, he sometimes manifested towards the young man a solicitude truly paternal.

"Merely a scratch," replied d'Artagnan. "I caught my fingers between two stones—that of the wall, and that of my ring—and the skin is broken."

"See what it is to wear diamonds, my master," said Athos contemptuously.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, "there is a diamond, in fact; and why the plague, then, as there is a diamond, do we complain of having no money?"

“See, there, now!” said Aramis.

“Well done, Porthos; this time you really have got an idea.”

“Certainly,” continued Porthos, bridling up at Athos’s compliment; “and since there is a diamond, let us sell it.”

“But,” said d’Artagnan, “it is the queen’s diamond.”

“All the more reason,” said Athos—“the queen saving the Duke of Buckingham, her lover: nothing can be more just—the queen saving us, her friends: nothing can be more moral. Let us sell the diamond. What does the abbé say? I do not ask Porthos’s opinion—that is already given.”

“Why, I think,” said Aramis, blushing, “that as the ring does not come from a mistress, and, consequently, is not a love-token, d’Artagnan may sell it.”

“My dear fellow, you speak like theology personified. So your advice is—”

“To sell the diamond,” replied Aramis.

“Well,” said d’Artagnan gaily, “let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it.”

The fusillade still continued, but the friends were beyond its range, and the Rochellois seemed to be firing only for the satisfaction of their own consciences.

“Faith,” said Athos, “it was quite time for this idea of Porthos’s to present itself; for here we are at the camp. So now, gentlemen, not another word about this business. We are observed. They are coming to meet us, and we shall be borne home in triumph.”

In fact, as we have already said, the whole camp was in commotion. More than two thousand persons had witnessed, as at a theatre, the fortunate bravado of the four friends—a bravado, of which they had been far from suspecting the true motive. Nothing could be heard but cries of “long live the guards!” “long live the musketeers!” M. de Busigny was the first who came to press the hand of Athos, and to confess that he had lost his bet. The dragoon and the Swiss

had followed him; and all their comrades had followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was no end to the congratulations, shaking of hands, embraces, and inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellois; and, at last, the tumult was so great, that the cardinal supposed there was a mutiny, and sent La Houdinière, the captain of his guards, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

The circumstance was related to his messenger with all the warmth of enthusiasm.

"Well?" demanded the cardinal, when he saw La Houdinière.

"Well, my lord," replied the latter, "it is three musketeers and a guardsman, who laid a wager with M. de Busigny to go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais; and who, whilst at breakfast, maintained their ground for two hours against the Rochellois, and killed I know not how many of the enemy."

"Did you learn the names of these musketeers?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What are they?"

"Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

"Always my three brave fellows!" muttered the cardinal. "And the guardsman?"

"M. d'Artagnan."

"My young madcap again! Decidedly these four men must be mine."

On the same evening, the cardinal spoke to M. de Treville of the exploit, which formed the subject of conversation throughout the whole camp. M. de Treville, who had heard the recital of the adventure from the lips of those who were its heroes, recounted it in all its particulars to his eminence, without forgetting the episode of the napkin.

"Very good, M. de Treville," said the cardinal; "give me this napkin, I beg of you. I will get three fleurs-de-lis embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to you as a standard for your company."

“My lord,” said M. de Treville, “that would be unjust towards the guards. M. d’Artagnan does not belong to me, but to M. des Essarts.”

“Well, then, take him,” said the cardinal; “it is not fair that these four brave soldiers, who love each other so much, should not serve in the same company.”

On the same evening, M. de Treville announced this good news to the three musketeers and to d’Artagnan, inviting them to breakfast with him on the morrow.

D’Artagnan could not contain himself for joy. We know that the dream of his whole life had been to be a musketeer.

The three friends were also much delighted.

“Faith,” said d’Artagnan to Athos, “yours was a triumphant idea; and, as you said, we have gained glory by it, besides being able to hold a conversation of the greatest importance.”

“Which we may henceforth renew without suspicion; for, with God’s help, we shall henceforth be regarded as cardinalists.”

On the same evening d’Artagnan went to pay his respects to M. des Essarts, and to inform him of his promotion.

M. des Essart, who had great affection for d’Artagnan, offered him any assistance that he might require, as this change of regiment brought with it new expenses of equipment.

D’Artagnan declined this assistance, but, thinking the opportunity a good one, requested him to ascertain the value of the diamond, which he placed in his hands, stating that he wished to turn it into money.

At eight o’clock the next morning, M. des Essarts’s valet came to d’Artagnan, and handed to him a bag, containing seven thousand livres in gold. It was the price of the queen’s diamond.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

ATHOS had found the right expression. It was necessary to call Buckingham's *a family affair!* A family affair was not subject to the investigation of the cardinal. A family affair concerned no one: they might occupy themselves before all the world with a family affair.

Aramis had found the idea—the valets!

Porthos had found the means—the diamond!

D'Artagnan alone, generally the most inventive of the four, had found nothing; but we must also confess that the very name of her ladyship paralysed him. Yet, we are mistaken—he had found a purchaser of the diamond.

The breakfast at M. de Treville's was charmingly gay. D'Artagnan had already got his uniform. As he was about the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis, being so handsomely paid, as may be remembered, by the bookseller who had bought his poem, had furnished himself with everything in duplicate, he had accommodated his friend with a complete equipment.

D'Artagnan would have been completely happy, had he not seen her ladyship like a dark cloud on the horizon.

After the breakfast, they agreed to meet again in the evening at Athos's quarters, in order to terminate their arrangements.

D'Artagnan passed the day in displaying his musketeer's uniform in every avenue throughout the camp.

At the appointed time in the evening, the four friends assembled. There were but three things left to decide: what they should write to the lady's brother-in-law; what they should write to the clever person at Tours; and which of the valets should be the bearer of the letters.

For the latter purpose, each offered his own. Athos

vaunted the discretion of Grimaud, who only spoke when his master permitted him to open his mouth; Porthos boasted of the strength of Mousqueton, who was big enough to drub four men of ordinary dimensions; Aramis, confident in the cunning of Bazin, made a pompous eulogium on his candidate; and, lastly, d'Artagnan had entire dependence in Planchet's bravery, and recalled to their minds how well he had behaved in their most hazardous encounter at Calais.

These four virtues for a long time contended for the mastery, and gave occasion for some magnificent speeches, which we shall not report lest they should be deemed tiresome.

"Unhappily," said Athos, "it is necessary that he whom we send, should possess in himself all the four qualities united."

"But where can we find such a servant?"

"It is impossible, I know," said Athos; "so take Grimaud."

"Take Mousqueton."

"Take Bazin."

"Take Planchet: he is frank and skilful: so there are two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the chief thing is, not to know which of our four valets is the most discreet, the strongest, the most cunning, or the bravest, but to find out which of them is the most fond of money."

"What Aramis says is full of sense," said Athos; "it is necessary to calculate upon the defects of mankind, and not upon their virtues. M. Abbé, you are a great moralist!"

"Unquestionably so," said Aramis; "for we need to be well served, not only to succeed, but not to fail; since, in case of failure, it will endanger the head, not of the valet——"

"Not so loud, Aramis," said Athos.

"You are right: not of the valet," resumed Aramis, "but of the master, or, even, of the masters. Are our

valets sufficiently devoted to us to hazard their lives for us? No."

"Faith!" said d'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet?"

"Well, then, my dear friend, add to that devotion a good round sum, which will secure him some independence, and, instead of answering for him once, you may answer twice."

"Ah, good God! you will be deceived just as much," said Athos, who was an optimist in reasoning on things, and a pessimist when reasoning on men; "they will promise everything to get money, and, when the occasion comes, fear will prevent their acting. Once taken, they will be imprisoned; and, once imprisoned, they will confess everything. What the plague! we are not children! To get to England" (Athos lowered his voice), "one must pass through the whole of France, which is thickly sown with the spies and creatures of the cardinal. Then, a passport is necessary for embarkation; then, English must be spoken, to find the way to London. Ah, I see that it is a very difficult affair."

"Not at all," said d'Artagnan, who was very anxious that the thing should be accomplished; "I can see that it is easy enough. We know, without being told, vive Dieu! that if we wrote to Lord de Winter, loudly proclaiming all manner of enormities concerning the cardinal——"

"Not so loud," said Athos.

"Or communicating state secrets and intrigues," continued d'Artagnan, profiting by his friend's warning, "we know, without being told, that we should all be broken on the wheel; but, for God's sake, do not forget what you have said yourself, Athos—that we only write about a family affair—that we write with the sole motive of getting this lady, as soon as she arrives in London, placed in such a situation that she cannot injure us. I would therefore write him a letter in something like these terms."

“Now let us hear,” said Aramis, putting on a critical face beforehand.

“‘Sir, and dear friend——’”

“Ah! yes; ‘dear friend’ to an Englishman!” broke in Athos; “that’s a good start! Bravo, d’Artagnan! For that word alone you will be quartered, instead of broken on the wheel.”

“Well, then, I would say, ‘Sir,’—quite short.”

“You might even say, ‘My lord,’” rejoined Athos, who thought a good deal of the proprieties.

“My lord,—Do you remember the little enclosure for goats, near the Luxembourg?”

“Good! the Luxembourg, indeed! That will be taken for an allusion to the queen-mother. How very ingenious!” said Athos.

“Well, then, we will simply say: ‘My lord,—Do you remember a certain little enclosure where your life was spared?’”

“My dear d’Artagnan,” said Athos, “you never will be anything but a vastly bad composer: where your life was spared!—for shame! It is not dignified: no one reminds a gallant man of such services. A benefit cast up is always an insult.”

“Ah! my dear fellow,” said d’Artagnan, “you are unbearable; and if one must write under your critical eye, I renounce the task.”

“And you do wisely. Handle the sword and the musket, my dear boy—you perform those exercises admirably well; but give up the pen to the abbé—it is his vocation.”

“Yes,” said Porthos, “give up the pen to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin.”

“Very well! so be it,” answered d’Artagnan. “Compose this note for us, Aramis; but, by our holy father the Pope, mind what you are about, for I shall pluck you in turn, I warn you.”

“I ask nothing better,” said Aramis, with that natural confidence which every poet has in himself; “but first

make me acquainted with all the circumstances. I have indeed heard, now and then, that his sister-in-law is a minx. I have, in fact, got proof of it, by listening to her conversation with the cardinal."

"Zounds! Not so loud, then," cried Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the particulars I do not know."

"Nor I, either," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at one another for some time in silence. At last Athos, having collected himself, and become even paler than usual, gave a sign of assent; and d'Artagnan understood that he might speak.

"Well, then, here is what you must write," resumed d'Artagnan.

"My lord,—Your sister-in-law is a wicked woman, who wished to have you killed in order to obtain your inheritance. But she could not marry your brother, being already married in France, and having been——" D'Artagnan stopped, as if he was seeking for the right word, and looked at Athos.

"Driven away by her husband," dictated Athos.

"Because she had been branded," continued d'Artagnan.

"Bah!" cried Porthos; "impossible! and did she wish to have her brother-in-law killed?"

"Yes."

"And she was really married?" demanded Aramis.

"Yes."

"And her husband found out that she had a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?" cried Porthos.

"Yes."

Three times had Athos uttered this "yes," each time in a more gloomy tone.

"And who saw this fleur-de-lis?" demanded Aramis.

"D'Artagnan and myself; or, rather, to observe the chronological order, I and d'Artagnan," replied Athos.

"And the husband of this horrible creature is yet alive?" inquired Aramis.

"Yes."

"You are quite sure of it?"

"I am certain of it."

There was a moment of profound silence, during which each felt himself affected according to his disposition.

"This time," said Athos, first breaking silence, "d'Artagnan has given us a good start, and it is that which we must write first."

"The devil!" said Aramis; "you are right, Athos, and the composition is difficult. The chancellor himself would be at a loss to compose an epistle of this significancy, and yet the chancellor draws up a criminal process very agreeably. Never mind—be quiet—I will write."

Aramis took a pen, reflected for a few moments, and then wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little feminine hand; then, in a soft and slow voice, as if every word had been scrupulously weighed, he read what follows:—

"MY LORD,—

"The person who writes these few lines had the honour of crossing swords with you in a little enclosure in the Rue de l'Enfer. As you have been kind enough, since, often to declare yourself the friend of that person, he is bound to reciprocate that friendship by an important warning. You have twice escaped being the victim of a near relation, whom you consider your heiress, because you know not, that, before contracting her marriage in England, she had been already married in France. But the third time, which is now, you might become her victim. Your relation has left La Rochelle for England. Watch for her arrival, for she has great and terrible designs. If you wish really to know of what she is capable, read her past history on her left shoulder."

"Well, that is admirable," said Athos; "and you have the pen of a secretary of state, my dear Aramis. De Winter will keep a good lookout now, provided he receives the letter; and, should it ever fall into the hands of his eminence, we could not be compromised. But, as the valet whom we send might make us believe that he had been to London, whilst he only stopped at Chatellerault, give him only half the sum, promising

him the other half on receipt of the answer. Have you the diamond?" continued Athos.

"I have better than that," replied d'Artagnan. "I have got the money;" and he threw the bag upon the table.

At the sound of the gold, Aramis lifted up his eyes, Porthos started, and as for Athos, he remained unmoved.

"How much is there in this little bag?" said he.

"Seven thousand livres, in twelve franc-pieces."

"Seven thousand livres!" exclaimed Porthos. "Was that paltry little diamond worth seven thousand livres?"

"So it seems," said Athos, "since there they are. I presume that our friend d'Artagnan has not put in any on his own account."

"But, gentlemen," continued d'Artagnan, "we forget the queen. Let us take some little care of the health of her dear Buckingham. It is the least that we owe her."

"That is true," said Athos; "but this concerns Aramis."

"Well," inquired the latter, colouring, "what must I do?"

"Why," replied Athos, "it is very simple: just compose a second letter to that clever person who lives at Tours."

Aramis resumed the pen, began to reflect again, and wrote the following lines, which he submitted immediately to the approbation of his friends:—

"My dear Cousin—"

"Ah, ha!" said Athos, "this clever person is your relation!"

"Cousin-german," replied Aramis.

"Practically cousin."

Aramis continued—

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—

"His eminence the cardinal, whom may God preserve for the happiness of France, and the confusion of the enemies of the realm, is about to exterminate the rebellious heretics of La

Rochelle. It is probable that the aid of the English fleet will not even arrive in time within sight of the place: I might almost venture to say, that his grace of Buckingham will even be prevented from leaving England by some great event. His eminence is the most illustrious politician of time past, time present, and, most probably, of time to come. He would extinguish the sun, if the sun were in his way. Give this happy intelligence to your sister, my dear cousin. I dreamed that this cursed Englishman was dead. I do not remember whether it was by poison, or the sword; only, I am sure that he was dead; and you know that my dreams are always fulfilled. Be assured, therefore, that you will shortly see me return."

"Wonderfully good!" said Athos; "you are the king of poets, my dear Aramis; you are eloquent as the Apocalypse, yet are as true as the gospel. There only remains, now, the address to put upon this letter."

"That is easy enough," said Aramis.

He folded the letter in a coquettish manner, and wrote—

"Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, at Tours."

The three friends looked at each other, and laughed. They were caught.

"Now, gentlemen," said Aramis, "you understand that Bazin alone can convey this letter to Tours. My cousin only knows Bazin, and will trust no one else. To send any other messenger would only ensure a failure. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned. Bazin has read history, gentlemen: he knows that Sextus the Fifth became pope after having herded swine; and, as he intends to enter the Church at the same time as myself, he does not despair of becoming himself a pope, or at any rate a cardinal. You will understand that a man who has such views will not allow himself to be caught, or, if he should be caught, will rather suffer martyrdom than speak."

"Very well," said d'Artagnan, "I allow you Bazin with all my heart; only allow me Planchet. Her ladyship once sent him away well caned. Now Planchet has

a good memory ; and I promise you that, if he thought revenge possible, he would allow himself to be broken on the wheel rather than not effect it. If the business at Tours belongs peculiarly to you, that in London is peculiarly mine. So I entreat you to choose Planchet, who has, on his part, already been to London with me, and knows how to say, very correctly—‘ London, sir, if you please ’ ; and, ‘ My master, Lord d’ Artagnan.’ You may be quite sure that, with this knowledge, he will find his way there and back.”

“ In that case,” said Athos, “ Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for each half of his journey, and Bazin three hundred. That will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We will each take a thousand livres, to spend as we please, and we will leave a fund of a thousand, of which the abbé shall take care, for extraordinary expenses and our common wants. What do you say to that ? ”

“ My dear Athos,” said Aramis, “ you speak like Nestor, who was, as everybody knows, the wisest of the Greeks.”

“ Then it is settled,” continued Athos ; “ Planchet and Bazin will set out. After all, I am not sorry to keep Grimaud : he is accustomed to my ways, and I could depend upon him. Yesterday’s expedition must have rather shaken him already ; and this voyage would undo him altogether.”

Planchet was sent for to receive his instructions. He had already received some intimation of the journey from his master, who had instanced to him, first, the glory ; then, the profit ; and lastly, the danger.

“ I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat,” said Planchet, “ and will swallow it if I am taken.”

“ But then you will be unable to perform your commission,” said d’ Artagnan.

“ You will give me a copy this evening, which I shall know by heart to-morrow.”

D’ Artagnan looked at his friends, as much as to say, “ Well, did I not tell you so.”

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to reach Lord de Winter, and eight days to return here; that is, sixteen days in all. If, on the sixteenth day from your departure you have not arrived at eight o'clock in the evening, not a farthing more money shall you have, though you were only later by five minutes."

"Then, sir," said Planchet, "buy me a watch."

"Here, take this," said Athos, with heedless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a brave lad. Consider that, if you talk, if you babble, you will sacrifice the head of your master, who has so much confidence in your fidelity that he has answered for you to us. But remember, also, that if, by any fault of yours, any such calamity should befall d'Artagnan, I will hunt you out wherever you may be, and completely perforate you."

"Oh, sir!" cried Planchet, humiliated at the suspicion, and particularly alarmed by the calmness of the musketeer.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his great eyes, "remember, that I will skin you alive."

"Ah, sir!"

"And I," said Aramis, with his soft and melodious voice, "remember, that I will roast you at a slow fire, as if you were an untutored savage."

"Ah, sir!"

And Planchet began to cry; but we cannot venture to say whether it was from terror on account of the threats he had heard, or from being affected at seeing so close a union of hearts between the four friends.

D'Artagnan took his hand. "You see, Planchet," said he, "that these gentlemen speak thus from affection towards me; but, notwithstanding all this, they esteem you."

"Ah, sir!" said Planchet, "I shall either succeed, or I shall be quartered; and, were I even quartered, you may rely upon it that not one piece of me will speak."

It was decided that Planchet should start the next day, at eight in the morning, in order that, as he said, he might, during the night, have time to learn the letter by heart. He gained just twelve hours by this arrangement, as he was to return at eight o'clock on the evening of the sixteenth day.

Just as he was about to mount his horse in the morning, d'Artagnan, who felt his heart incline towards Buckingham, took Planchet aside.

"Listen," said he; "when you have delivered your letter to Lord de Winter, and he has read it, say to him, 'Watch over the Duke of Buckingham, for they are seeking to assassinate him.' But this, do you see, Planchet, is a thing of such momentous importance, that I would not even confess to my friends that I have confided the secret to you; and, even for a captain's commission, I would not write it down."

"Be easy, sir," said Planchet; "you shall see whether you can trust me."

Mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at twenty leagues from La Rochelle, to take the post, Planchet went off at a gallop; his heart was a little shaken by the threats of the musketeers, but, on the whole, he was in a most favourable state of mind.

Bazin left the next morning for Tours, and had eight days allowed him for his expedition.

The four friends, during the whole time of their absence, had, as may be well supposed, their eyes more than ever on the watch, their noses in the wind, and their ears upon the alert. The days were consumed in trying to catch every report, to watch the movements of the cardinal, and to scent out the couriers who arrived. More than once an unconquerable anxiety seized them, on being sent for on some unexpected service. They had also to be watchful of their own safety: her ladyship was a phantom, who, having once appeared to any one, would never more allow him to sleep in tranquillity.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling as usual, entered the room at the Parpailot, just as the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying, according to the agreement they had made—

“M. Aramis, here is the answer from your cousin.”

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance. Half their work was done: it is true that it was the shortest and easiest half.

Aramis took the letter, blushing in spite of himself. The writing was vulgar, and the spelling wretched.

“Good God,” said he, laughing, “I decidedly despair of her. This poor Michon will never write like M. de Voiture!”

“Who does that mean—‘this poor Michon’?” asked the Swiss, who was commencing a gossip with the four friends when the letter was brought.

“Oh, mon Dieu! less than nothing,” replied Aramis. “She is a charming little seamstress, whom I was very much in love with, and from whom I have begged a few lines, in her own handwriting, by way of remembrance.”

“Egad!” said the Swiss, “if she is as ladylike as her own penmanship, you must be a happy fellow, comrade.”

Aramis read the letter, and handed it to Athos.

“Just see what she writes, Athos,” said he.

Athos threw a glance over the letter, and then, to destroy any suspicions which might have been awakened, read it aloud—

“COUSIN,—

“My sister and I understand dreams very well, and we are shocking frightened at them: but of yours it may be said, I hope—all dreams are false. Adieu! Take care of yourself, and let us hear of you from time to time.

“MARIE MICHON.”

“What dream is she talking about?” asked the dragoon, who had approached whilst they were reading the letter.

"Yes, what dream?" said the Swiss.

"Oh! vive Dieu!" said Aramis, "it is plain enough: about a dream of mine that I told them."

"Ah! yes," said the Swiss, "it is quite natural to tell one's dreams; but, for my part, I never dream at all."

"You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising, "and I wish I could say the same thing!"

"Never," repeated the Swiss, delighted that a man like Athos should envy him in anything—"never, never!"

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did the same, and took his arm and left the room.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind, to face the gossip of the Swiss and the dragoon.

As for Bazin, he went to sleep upon a truss of straw, and, as he had more imagination than the Swiss, dreamt that M. Aramis, who had become pope, was placing on his head a cardinal's hat.

But, as we have already said, Bazin had, by his fortunate return, removed only a part of the uneasiness which tormented the four friends. The days of suspense are always long, and d'Artagnan, especially, could have sworn that each of these days was eight-and-forty hours long. He forgot the unavoidable delays of navigation; he exaggerated the power of her ladyship; he gave to this woman, who appeared to him to resemble a demon, auxiliaries as supernatural as herself; and he fancied, at every noise, that they were coming to arrest him, or were bringing Planchet to be confronted with himself and his friends. And, more than that, his extraordinary confidence in the worthy Picard diminished day by day. This suspense was so powerful, that it infected Porthos and Aramis. Athos alone remained unmoved, as though no danger filled the air around him, and he breathed in his habitual atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, particularly, these signs of agitation were so perceptible in d'Artagnan and his two

friends, that they could not remain in any one place, and wandered about like shadows on the road by which Planchet was expected to return.

“Really,” said Athos, “you are not men; you are only children, to let a woman frighten you so much. And, after all, what is it that you fear? Imprisonment? Well, we should be released from prison, as Madame Bonancieux has been. Execution? Why, we gladly expose ourselves, every day, in the trenches, to worse than that: for a bullet might break a leg; and I am quite sure that a surgeon puts one to more pain in amputating a thigh, than an executioner in cutting off a head. So, keep yourselves easy: in two, four, six hours, at the latest, Planchet will be here. He has given us his promise; and I, for my part, have great confidence in the promises of Planchet, for he seems to me a very worthy lad.”

“But what if he should not come?” said d’Artagnan.

“Well, and if he should not come, he has been delayed—that’s all. He may have fallen from his horse; he may have made a somersault over a bridge; he may have brought on a disease of his chest, by running too quickly. Come, gentlemen, let us allow for accidents. Life is a large chaplet of little miseries, which the philosopher shakes with a laugh. Be philosophers, like me, gentlemen: come around the table, and let us drink. Nothing makes the future of so rosy a hue, as to look at it through a glass of chambertin.”

“That is all very well,” replied d’Artagnan; “but I am weary of imagining, every time I drink, that the wine may have come from her ladyship’s cellar.”

“You are very fastidious!” said Athos. “Such a beautiful woman!”

“A woman with a brand!” said Porthos, with his horse-laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his forehead, to wipe off the perspiration, and rose, in his turn, with a nervous agitation that he was unable to restrain.

The day, however, glided on, and the evening came more slowly; but, at last, it arrived. The taverns were full of customers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, now scarcely ever left the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, moreover, had given them a superb dinner, a partner worthy of himself. They were playing together, according to custom, when the clock struck seven; and they heard the patrols passing to change the guard. At half-past seven the drums beat the last post.

"We are lost," whispered d'Artagnan in Athos's ear.

"You mean to say that we *have* lost," replied Athos, with great tranquillity, drawing at the same time ten pistols from his pocket, and throwing them upon the table. "Come, gentlemen," continued he, "that is the last drum; let us go to bed."

And Athos left the Parpaillot, followed by d'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos. Aramis was mouthing verses; and Porthos, from time to time, tore a few hairs from his moustache, in token of despair. But behold, suddenly, in the obscurity, a shadow was perceptible, of a form familiar to d'Artagnan, and a well-known voice said to him—

"Sir, I have brought you your cloak, for it is cold this evening."

"Planchet!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy.

"Planchet!" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos.

"Well—yes, Planchet," said Athos; "what is there surprising in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock, and it is now just striking eight. Bravo, Planchet! You are a lad of your word, and, if ever you leave your master, I will keep a place for you in my service."

"Oh, no, never!" said Planchet; "I shall never leave M. d'Artagnan."

And at the same moment d'Artagnan felt Planchet slip a small note into his hand.

D'Artagnan had a great desire to embrace Planchet; but he was afraid such a mark of delight, conferred upon

his valet in the public highway, would look rather odd to any passer-by; so he restrained himself. "I have got the letter," said he to Athos and his friends.

"Very well," said Athos, "let us go to our quarters, and read it."

The letter burned the hand of d'Artagnan. He wished to hurry on; but Athos kept a firm hold of his arm, and the young man was compelled to regulate his speed by that of his friend.

They reached their tent at last, and lighted a lamp; and, whilst Planchet stood at the door, to see that the four friends were not interrupted, d'Artagnan, with a trembling hand, broke the seal, and opened the long-expected letter.

It contained half a line in a hand truly British, and of a brevity truly Spartan.

"Thank you: be easy."

Athos took the letter from d'Artagnan's hands, put it to the lamp, lighted it, and did not quit his hold until it was reduced to ashes. Then, calling Planchet—

"Now, my boy," said he, "you have a right to the other seven hundred livres; but you did not run much risk with such a letter as that."

"Nevertheless, I have invented a great many ways of securing it," replied Planchet.

"Well," said d'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"But it is a long story, sir," answered he.

"You are right, Planchet," said Athos; "besides, the last drum has sounded, and we shall be observed if we burn our light longer than other people."

"Well, then, let us go to bed," said d'Artagnan; "sleep well, Planchet."

"Faith, sir, it will be my first time for sixteen days."

"And mine also," said d'Artagnan.

"And mine too!" exclaimed Porthos.

"And mine too!" re-echoed Aramis.

"Well, shall I confess the truth? and mine too!" said Athos.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FATALITY.

IN the meantime, her ladyship—intoxicated with rage, and raging on the vessel's deck like an excited lioness—had been even tempted to cast herself into the sea; for she could not bring herself to brook the thought, that she had been insulted by d'Artagnan, and threatened by Athos, and was now quitting France without having obtained revenge. So insupportable had this idea at last become, that, at the risk of the most terrible consequences to herself, she had entreated the captain to land her on the French coast. But the captain, anxious to escape from his false position—where he was placed between the English and French cruisers, like a bat between the rats and the birds—was in extreme haste to arrive in England. He obstinately refused, therefore, to obey what he regarded as a woman's caprice; he promised, however, to his passenger, who had been particularly recommended to his care by the cardinal, to land her at some port in Brittany, either Brest or Lorient, should the weather and the French permit. But, in the meantime, the wind was contrary, and the sea rough: they tacked about continually; and, nine days after her departure from Charente, her ladyship, pale with grief and rage, saw only the blue shores of Finisterre.

She calculated that, to traverse that angle of France, and return to the cardinal, would take her at least three days; add one day for landing, and that would make four. Add these four to the nine already elapsed, and here were thirteen days lost—thirteen days, during which so many important events might have occurred in London. She considered that the cardinal would undoubtedly be furious at her return, and, consequently, would be disposed to listen more to any accusations which were made against her, than to those which she might make against

others. Without solicitation, therefore, she permitted the captain to carry her past Lorient and Brest; and he, on his part, was careful not to remind her of her wishes. She thus continued her voyage; and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth, to return to France, the messenger of his eminence entered the port triumphantly.

The whole town was in a state of extraordinary excitement. Four large ships, recently built, had just been launched into the sea. Standing on the jetty, covered with gold, and glittering as usual with diamonds and precious stones, his hat adorned with a white plume which dropped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was visible, surrounded by a staff almost as gorgeous as himself.

It was one of those few and fine summer days, when Englishmen remember that there is a sun. The pale, but still splendid luminary, was just setting on the horizon, empurpling the heavens and the sea with bands of fire, and casting a last golden ray on the towers and the old buildings of the town, which made the windows gleam as with the reflection of a conflagration. Her ladyship—as she inhaled the sea-breeze, which is fresher and more balmy in the vicinity of land, and contemplated all those mighty preparations which she was ordered to destroy, and all the might of that armament against which she had come to contend alone—a woman, with a few bags of gold—mentally compared herself to Judith, the terrible Jewess, when she penetrated into the camp of the Assyrians, and saw the enormous mass of chariots, of horses, of men, and of arms, which one movement of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the roads, but, just as they were making ready to cast anchor, a small, strongly-armed cutter, presenting itself as a coast-guard, approached the merchant-vessel, and put off its gig which was steered toward them. The gig contained an officer, a lieutenant, and eight men. The officer alone came on board, where

he was received with all the respect which his uniform inspired.

The officer conversed for a few minutes with the captain, and inspected some papers which the latter brought with him; and then, on the captain's order, all the crew and passengers of the vessel were mustered upon deck. When this had been done, the officer inquired aloud, as to where the brig had come from, what had been its course, and where it had put in; and to all these questions the captain replied satisfactorily, without hesitation or difficulty. The officer then began to examine all the persons on deck, one after the other, and, stopping before her ladyship, he looked at her very earnestly, but without uttering a single word.

Having returned to the captain, and made some new communication to him, the officer, as if he had now taken command of the vessel, gave an order which the crew immediately executed. By this means the vessel was again in motion; but it was still escorted by the little cutter, which kept beside it, menacing its broadside with the mouths of her cannons; the boat followed in the vessel's wake, an object scarcely visible behind the enormous mass.

Whilst the officer had been examining her ladyship, she, as may be well imagined, had, on her side, not failed to scrutinize him most intently. But however much this woman, with her eye of fire, was accustomed to read the hearts of those whose secret she desired to discover, she had found at last a countenance so perfectly impenetrable that no insight followed her investigation.

The officer who stood before her, and silently studied her with so much care, might be about twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He had a very fair complexion, with blue eyes, rather deeply set. His fine and well-cut mouth continued perfectly motionless in its classic lines. His well-developed chin denoted that strength of will which, in the prevailing English character, is commonly no better than obstinacy; and his slightly receding

forehead—such as is accorded to poets, to enthusiasts, and to soldiers—was scantily shaded by short thin hair, which, as well as the beard that covered the lower part of his face, was of a beautiful deep chestnut colour.

When they entered the harbour it was already dark. The fog increased the obscurity, and formed, around the lanterns of the ships and jetties, a circle similar to that which surrounds the moon, when it threatens rainy weather. The atmosphere was melancholy, damp, and cold.

Her ladyship, firm as she was, felt herself shivering, in spite of all her efforts.

The officer had had her ladyship's packages indicated to him, and ordered them to be put into the boat; after which, offering his hand to assist her, he requested her to descend herself.

Her ladyship looked at the man, and hesitated.

“Who are you, sir,” said she, “who are so good as to trouble yourself so particularly about me?”

“You may see, madam, from my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy,” replied the young man.

“But is it usual for the officers of the English navy to put themselves at the service of their countrywomen, when they approach a British port, and to display their gallantry so far as to conduct them on shore?”

“Yes, my lady, it is the custom—not from gallantry, but prudence—that, in time of war, strangers may be conducted to a certain appointed hotel, in order that they may, until every information be obtained concerning them, remain under the inspection of the government.”

The words were uttered with the most exact politeness, and the most perfect calmness: and yet they did not satisfy her ladyship.

“But I am not a foreigner, sir,” said she, in an accent as pure as was ever uttered between Portsmouth and Manchester. “My name is Lady de Winter, and this proceeding——”

“This proceeding is general, my lady, and you will in vain endeavour to escape it.”

"I will follow you, then, sir."

And, accepting the officer's hand, she began to descend the ladder, at the bottom of which the boat was waiting. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread in the stern: the officer made her seat herself on it, and placed himself by her side.

"Give way!" said he to the sailors.

The eight oars all fell into the water at the same instant, and the boat seemed to fly along the surface of the harbour. In five minutes they reached the shore. The officer sprang upon the quay, and gave his hand to her ladyship. A carriage was waiting for them.

"Is this carriage for us?" demanded the lady.

"Yes, madam," replied the officer.

"Then the hotel is at some distance?"

"At the other end of the town."

"Let us go," said her ladyship.

She then entered the carriage with a resolute step.

Having superintended the safe consignment of the baggage, the officer took his place beside her ladyship, and closed the carriage door.

Then, without any orders being given to him, or any indication as to where he was to go, the coachman set off at a gallop, and was soon threading the streets of the town.

A reception so strange naturally supplied her ladyship with abundant matter for reflection. And, seeing that the young officer did not appear at all inclined to enter into conversation, she leant back in one of the corners of the carriage, and passed in review, one after the other, all the suppositions which presented themselves to her mind.

But, in about a quarter of an hour, surprised at the length of their journey, she looked out of the window to observe where they were going. She could no longer see any houses; but trees were visible in the darkness, like vast black phantoms, chasing one another.

Her ladyship shuddered.

"But we have left the town, sir," she remarked.

The young officer remained silent.

"I positively declare, sir, that I will go no further, if you do not tell me where you are conveying me."

This threat produced no reply.

"Ah! it is too much!" exclaimed her ladyship.
"Help! help!"

No voice responded to her cries. The carriage continued its rapid course. The officer seemed to be a statue.

Her ladyship gazed on him with one of those terrible glances which were peculiar to her own face, and which so rarely failed of their effect. Passion made her eyes positively sparkle in the gloom; but the young man continued perfectly immovable.

She then attempted to open the door and throw herself out.

"Take care, madam," coldly observed the officer; "you will kill yourself if you leap out."

The lady resumed her seat, foaming with rage. He leant forwards, looked at her in his turn, and seemed surprised to find a countenance, before so beautiful, now so convulsed with rage, as to have become almost hideous. The crafty creature, comprehending that she would sacrifice her own interests by thus betraying her true nature, at once composed her features, and, in a beseeching voice, said—

"For Heaven's sake, sir! tell me if it be to yourself, or to your government, or to an enemy, that I am to impute this violence that is inflicted on me?"

"No violence is inflicted, madam; and that which has befallen you is the result of a very simple measure, which we are forced to pursue towards all those who land in England."

"Then you do not know me, sir?"

"It is the first time that I have had the honour of seeing you."

"And, upon your honour, you have no cause of enmity against me?"

“None whatever, I swear.”

There was so much calmness, so much serenity, so much gentleness even, in the young man's voice, that her ladyship was reassured.

At last, after about an hour's drive, the carriage stopped at an iron gate, at the entrance of a narrow road, which led to a gloomy-looking, massive, and isolated castle. And, as the carriage-wheels rolled over a soft gravel, her ladyship heard a mighty roaring, which she recognised as the sound of the sea breaking upon a rocky coast.

The carriage passed under two arches, and stopped at last in a square and gloomy courtyard. The door was almost immediately opened, the young officer leapt lightly out, presented his arm to her ladyship, who leaned upon it, and got out, in her turn, with great calmness.

“So, I am a prisoner,” said she, looking around, and then fixing her eyes on the young man with the most gracious smile imaginable, “But I shall not be one long, I am certain,” added she. “My own conscience and your politeness give me that assurance, sir.”

Flattering as the compliment might be, the officer made no reply, but, drawing from his pocket a small silver whistle, like those used by boatswains on board of men-of-war, he sounded it three times, in three different modulations. Several men immediately appeared, who unharnessed the horses, and took the carriage into a coach-house.

The officer, still preserving the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the castle. The latter, with the same smile upon her countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low arched doorway, which led them, through a vault lighted only at the end, to a stone staircase, winding round an angle of the same material. They then stopped before a massive door, which, upon the application of a key that the young man carried, slowly swung upon its hinges, and gave access to the apartment intended for her ladyship.

In one glance, the prisoner grasped the minutest

particulars of this room. It was a chamber, of which the furniture was at the same time suitable for a prison, and for the habitation of the free. But the bars to the windows, and the locks outside the doors, decided the question in favour of the prison. For an instant, all the strength of mind of this creature, although hardened from the most vigorous sources, abandoned her. She sank into a seat, folded her arms, drooped her head, and waited in momentary expectation of seeing a judge enter to interrogate her.

But no one came, except two or three marines, who brought in her baggage, and, having deposited it in a corner, withdrew without uttering a word.

The officer presided over all these details with the same calmness which her ladyship had invariably observed, not speaking a syllable, and enforcing obedience merely by a gesture of his hand, or a note from his whistle. One would have said that, between this man and his inferiors, verbal language either had never existed, or had become unnecessary.

Her ladyship could at last no longer restrain herself, and she thus broke the silence.

“In Heaven’s name, sir,” she exclaimed, “what does all this mean? Relieve my perplexity: I have courage to face any danger which I can see approaching, any misfortune which I comprehend. Where am I, and why am I here? Am I free? Wherefore these bars and doors? Am I a prisoner? What crime have I committed?”

“You are here, madam, in the apartment destined for you. I was ordered to go and arrest you at sea, and to conduct you to this castle. I have accomplished that order, I think, with the rigid exactitude of an officer, but, at the same time, with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least for the present, the charge with which I have been entrusted concerning you. The remainder devolves upon another person.”

“And this other person—who is he?” demanded her ladyship; “can you not tell me his name?”

As she spoke, the clashing of spurs was heard upon the staircase; some voices passed by, and were lost in the distance, and the sound of a solitary step approached the door.

"That person is now here, madam," said the officer, standing on one side, and assuming an attitude of submission and respect.

At the same instant the door opened, and a man appeared upon the threshold. He was without a hat, carried a sword at his side, and was crushing a handkerchief between his fingers.

Her ladyship thought that she recognised this shadow in the gloom; and, supporting herself with one hand on the arm of the chair, she advanced her head, in order, as it were, to meet a certainty.

The stranger slowly approached, and as he advanced and gradually came within range of the rays emitted by the lamp, her ladyship involuntarily recoiled. And then, when she had no longer any doubt—

"What! my brother," she exclaimed, overwhelmed with astonishment, "is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady," replied Lord de Winter, making her a bow, half courteous and half ironical, "myself."

"But, then, this castle——"

"Is mine."

"This apartment——"

"Is yours."

"Then I am your prisoner?"

"Or something very like it."

"But it is a frightful abuse of power."

"No hard words, madam: let us sit down and have some quiet conversation, as is suitable between brother and sister."

Then, turning towards the door, and perceiving that the young officer awaited his final orders:

"It is all right," said he, "I thank you. Now leave us, Mr. Felton."

CHAPTER L.

A CHAT BETWEEN A BROTHER AND SISTER.

DURING the time which Lord de Winter occupied in shutting and bolting the door, and bringing a seat beside the easy-chair of his sister-in-law, her ladyship was thoughtfully directing her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovering the whole of that plot, of which she could form no conception, so long as she continued ignorant of the person into whose hands she had unhappily fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a true gentleman, who was fond of the chase, played freely, and was gallant in regard to women, but of powers below the average in respect to intrigues. How had he been able to know of her arrival, and to have her arrested; and why did he desire to detain her?

Athos had let fall a few words, which proved that her conversation with the cardinal had been heard by other ears; but she could not imagine that he could so promptly and so boldly lay a countermine. She rather feared that her former proceedings in England had been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off his diamond studs, and have sought to avenge himself for that petty treachery. But Buckingham was incapable of any extremities against a woman, especially if that woman were supposed to have been actuated by a sentiment of jealousy.

This supposition appeared the most probable: she thought that they wished to revenge the past, and not to anticipate the future.

But, at any rate, she congratulated herself on having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, with whom she contemplated little difficulty, rather than into those of a former enemy.

"Yes, brother, let us have some chat," she said, with a sort of sprightliness, determined as she was to draw

from this conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation which Lord de Winter might bring to it, such information as she needed to guide her future conduct.

"You have made up your mind, then, to return to England," said Lord de Winter, "in spite of the determination you so often expressed to me, in Paris, never again to set your foot upon the territory of Great Britain?"

Her ladyship replied to this question by another.

"First, tell me," said she, "how you could manage to have me watched so closely, as not only to know beforehand that I was coming, but also the day, the hour, and the port at which I should arrive?"

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as her ladyship, thinking that, as his sister-in-law employed them, they were undoubtedly the best.

"But, tell me yourself, my dear sister, for what purpose you are come to England?"

"Why, I have come to see you," replied the lady, ignorant of how much she aggravated by this answer the suspicions which d'Artagnan's letter had excited in her brother-in-law's mind, and only wishing to captivate the kindness of her auditor by a lie.

"Oh! to see me!" said Lord de Winter sneeringly.

"Assuredly, to see you. What is there surprising in that?"

"And you had no other motive in coming to England than to see me?"

"No."

"Then it is for my sake alone that you have given yourself the trouble to cross the straits?"

"For you alone."

"I'faith, your tenderness is excessive, my dear sister!"

"But am I not your nearest relation?" demanded the lady, in a tone of the most touching simplicity.

"And you are also my sole heiress, are you not?" said Lord de Winter, in his turn, fixing his eyes upon those of her ladyship—"that is to say, through your son."

Great as was her power of self-command, her ladyship could not refrain from starting; and as, in uttering these last words, Lord de Winter had laid his hand upon his sister's arm, this start had not escaped him.

In truth, the blow was both direct and deep. The first idea in the lady's mind was, that Kitty had betrayed her, and had disclosed to the baron that interested aversion, whose manifestations she had imprudently permitted to escape her before her maid; and she also recollected the furious and impolitic attack which she had made on d'Artagnan, after he had saved her brother-in-law's life.

"I do not understand what you mean, my lord," said she, wishing to gain time, and to make her adversary talk: "is there some concealed signification in your words?"

"Oh! no," said Lord de Winter, with apparent good-humour; "you wish to see me, and you come to England. I am informed of this wish, or rather I suspect that you feel it, and, to spare you all the inconvenience consequent on a nocturnal arrival in the harbour, and all the fatigues of landing, I send one of my officers to meet you. I put a carriage at your disposal, and he brings you here to this castle, of which I am the governor, where I come every day, and where, to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing one another, I have had an apartment prepared for your reception. What is there in all this more surprising than in what you have told me?"

"No; but what surprises me, is, that you should have received previous intelligence of my arrival."

"And yet it is the simplest thing in the world, my dear sister. Did you not observe, that, on entering the Roads, the captain of your little vessel sent forward his log-book and the register of his passengers and crew, that he might obtain permission to enter the port? I am the governor of the port: this book was brought

to me, and I recognised your name. My heart told me what your speech has just confirmed; that is to say, your motive for thus braving the dangers of a sea so perilous, or, at any rate, so fatiguing, at this season; and I sent out my cutter to convey you. You know what followed."

Her ladyship was satisfied that his lordship lied, and she was only the more alarmed.

"Brother," said she, "was not that the Duke of Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty as I disembarked?"

"Himself," replied Lord de Winter. "Oh! I can well imagine that the sight of him would strike you. You come from a country where they must think a good deal about him; and I know that his armaments against France much engage the attention of your friend, the cardinal?"

"My friend, the cardinal!" exclaimed the lady, perceiving that on this point also, as on the other, Lord de Winter seemed to be equally well-informed.

"Is he not your friend, then?" carelessly inquired the baron. "Oh! pardon me; I thought he was. But we will discuss his grace hereafter. Let us not abandon the sentimental turn which the conversation had taken. You came, you say, to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have told you that your wish shall be gratified, and that we shall see one another every day."

"Must I then remain here for ever?" demanded the lady, with some degree of dread.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged here, my dear sister. Ask for what you want, and I will hasten to provide it."

"But I have neither my own women, nor my servants, with me here."

"You shall have everything you want of that kind. Only tell me what kind of establishment your first husband kept for you, and, although I am but your

brother-in-law, I will fix your present home upon a similar footing."

"My first husband?" exclaimed the lady, looking at Lord de Winter, with wildness in her eyes.

"Yes, your French husband—I do not mean my own brother. But, if you have forgotten it, as he is yet alive, I can write to him, and he can send me the necessary information on the subject."

Cold drops rolled down her ladyship's forehead.

"You are jesting," said she, in a hoarse voice.

"Do I look like it?" inquired the baron, rising, and retreating a step.

"Or, rather, you mean to insult me," continued she, convulsively grasping the arms of her chair, and raising herself by that means.

"I insult you!" said Lord de Winter, contemptuously; "and do you really think that possible, madam?"

"Sir," said her ladyship, "you are either drunk or mad. Leave me, and send me my women."

"Women are very indiscreet, my dear sister. Cannot I serve you as a waiting-maid? And thus all our secrets will remain in the family."

"Insolent fellow!" exclaimed her ladyship. Then, as if moved by a spring, she bounded towards the baron, who awaited her with composure, yet with a hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Ah, ah?" said he, "I know that you have a habit of assassinating people; but I will defend myself, I warn you, even against you."

"Ah! you are right," said the lady, "and you look to me like one who is coward enough to raise his hand against a woman!"

"And, if I did, I should have an excuse. Besides, mine would not be the first man's hand that had been laid upon you, I imagine."

And the baron, by a slow accusing gesture, pointed to the lady's left shoulder, which he almost touched with his finger.

Her ladyship uttered a hoarse cry, and retreated to the further corner of the room, like a panther drawing back before its spring.

“Oh, roar as much as you please!” exclaimed Lord de Winter, “only do not try to bite; for, I warn you, that would only prove the worse for you. There are no lawyers here, who regulate successions beforehand; there is no knight-errant, who will pick a quarrel with me for the sake of the fair lady whom I keep imprisoned; but I have at hand, judges, that will dispose of a woman, who, being already married, was shameless enough to intrude herself into our family; and these judges will hand you over to an executioner, who will make your two shoulders alike.”

The eyes of her ladyship shot forth such lightning glances, that, although he was an armed man, before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear penetrating his very soul. Nevertheless, he continued, but with increasing fury:—

“Yes, I understand: after having inherited my brother’s property you would like to inherit mine also; but, be assured in advance, though you may be able to assassinate me, or to get me assassinated, my precautions are already taken:—not one penny of what I possess shall come either into your hands or into those of your son. Are you not already wealthy enough in the enjoyment of nearly half a million; and can you not arrest yourself in your fatal course, if you do not really do wickedness from a limitless and intense love of it! Oh, doubt not, if my brother’s memory had not been still sacred to me, that you should be sent to rot in some dungeon of the state, or to satiate the curiosity of the mob at Tyburn! I shall, however, be silent; but you must learn to endure your confinement with tranquillity. In a fortnight or three weeks I shall set out with the army for La Rochelle; but, on the evening before my departure, you will be sent on board a vessel, which I shall watch set sail, and which will convey you to one of

our southern colonies; and you may rely upon it, that I shall associate with you a companion who will blow out your brains on the first attempt that you may make to return to England, or to the continent."

Her ladyship listened with an attention that expanded the pupils of her burning eyes.

"Yes," continued Lord de Winter, "but at present you will continue in this castle: the walls are thick, the doors are strong, the bars are solid; and, besides, your window looks directly down into the sea. My ship's company, who are devoted to me in life and death, keep guard around this chamber, and command every passage that conducts into the courtyard; and, even there, you would find three iron-grated doors, to pass which, the watchword is requisite; hence, therefore, a step, a motion, or a word, which bears the semblance of an intention to escape, will draw their fire upon you. If you should be killed, English justice ought, I think, to be grateful to me for having spared her some trouble. Ah! your features have resumed their composure, and your countenance regains its confidence. 'Ten days, or a fortnight,' you say to yourself—'Bah! by that time, some idea will suggest itself to my inventive mind; I have an infernal disposition, and shall find some victim. Within a fortnight from this time, I shall have escaped from here.'—Well, try your fortune!"

Finding her thoughts thus plainly read, her ladyship dug her nails into her flesh, that she might deprive her face of every expression but that of agony.

Lord de Winter continued—

"As to the officer who holds the command here in my absence, you have seen him; therefore you already know him. You are aware that he can keep to his instructions; for you did not travel from Portsmouth here without trying to make him talk. What think you of him? Could a marble statue be more impassive or mute? You have already tried the power of your seductions over many men, and, unfortunately, you have always succeeded; but

try it now on this man, and, by Jove! if you succeed, I shall believe you to be the very fiend himself."

He went towards the door, and opened it suddenly.

"Call Mr. Felton," said he. And again, "Wait a moment, madam, and I will recommend you to his care."

During the strange silence which was then maintained between them, the sound of a slow and regular step was heard approaching. In the shadow of the corridor a human form was soon apparent, and the young lieutenant, with whom we have already made acquaintance, stood at the door, in waiting for the baron's orders.

"Come in, my dear John," said Lord de Winter, "come in, and shut the door."

The young officer entered the room.

"Now," said the baron, "look at this woman. She is young and beautiful; she has every worldly attraction; but she is a monster, who, at twenty-five years of age, has committed as many crimes as you could read of in a year in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prepossesses you in her favour; her beauty fascinates her victims. She will attempt to seduce you—perhaps to kill you. I have rescued you from misery, Felton; I have had you made lieutenant; I have once saved your life—you remember on what occasion; I am not only your protector, but your friend—not only your benefactor, but your father. This woman has come to England to plot against my life. I have got the serpent into my power. Well, I call you here, and I say to you—'My dear Felton—John, my son—defend me, and guard yourself especially, from this woman. Swear that you will preserve her for the punishment that she deserves! John Felton, I trust to your word—John Felton, I confide in your honour.'"

"My lord," answered the young officer, exhibiting on his open face all the hatred for the lady, that he could find in his heart, "I swear to you that everything shall be done as you desire."

Her ladyship received this look like a resigned victim.

It was impossible to see a softer or more submissive expression than that which then reigned upon her beautiful face. Scarcely could Lord de Winter himself recognise the tigress which he had the instant before almost prepared to fight.

“She must never leave this room—do you hear, John?” continued the baron; “she must have no communication with any one; she must speak to no one but yourself, if, indeed, you will do her the honour to talk with her.”

“It is quite enough, my lord—I have sworn!”

“And now, madam,” said the baron, “endeavour to make your peace with God, for you have been judged by men.”

Her ladyship let her head droop, as if she felt herself actually crushed by this sentence. Lord de Winter left the room, making a sign to Felton, who followed him, and closed the door.

Directly afterwards was heard in the passage the heavy tread of a marine, who was keeping guard, with his axe at his belt, and his musket in his hand.

Her ladyship remained for a few minutes in the same position, for she fancied that they might be watching her through the keyhole. Then, she slowly raised her head, which had resumed a formidable expression of menace and defiance; ran to the door and listened, looked out of the window, and returned to bury herself in an immense easy-chair, and abandon herself to anxious consideration.

CHAPTER LI.

THE OFFICER.

IN the meantime, the cardinal was expecting news from England; but as no news arrived, excepting such as was vexatious and alarming, La Rochelle was formally invested. However certain success appeared—thanks to the

precautions which had been taken, and more especially to the mole, which no longer permitted any vessel to approach the besieged town—the blockade might yet continue a long time; and it was a great affront to the arms of the king, and a great annoyance to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII. with Anne of Austria, for that had been accomplished, but to reconcile M. de Bassompierre, who had quarrelled with the Duke of Angoulême.

The town, in spite of the incredible persistence of its mayor, had attempted a sort of mutiny in order to surrender. But the mayor had sent the mutineers to be hung. This execution subdued the most unruly, who were thereby determined to submit, in preference, to death from starvation, as the latter mode of dying appeared to them less certain and more slow than that of strangulation.

The besiegers, on their side, occasionally captured some of the messengers whom the Rochellois despatched to Buckingham, or the spies whom Buckingham had sent to the Rochellois. In both cases, the captives were subjected to a summary trial. The cardinal pronounced the single word—"Hung!" His majesty was invited to the execution. The king came languidly, and chose a good place for observing all the details of the operation. This amused him for a time, and gave him a little patience with the siege; but it did not prevent him from becoming heartily weary, or from talking incessantly of returning to Paris; so that, if the messengers or spies had fallen short, his eminence, in spite of all his fertility of imagination, would have found himself in very considerable embarrassment.

Nevertheless, the time passed away, and still the Rochellois did not surrender. The last spy who had been captured was the bearer of a letter, which informed Buckingham that the town was at the last extremity; but instead of adding—"if your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight, we must surrender," it merely

said—"if your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight, we shall be all dead from hunger when it does arrive."

The Rochellois, therefore, had no hope but in Buckingham—Buckingham was their Messiah! It was manifest that, if they should receive indubitable information that no further dependence was to be placed on Buckingham, their courage would forsake them, along with their hope.

The cardinal, on this account, waited with extreme impatience for intelligence from England, which might announce to him that Buckingham would not arrive.

The question of taking the town by assault, which had been often debated in the king's council, had been always dismissed. In the first instance, La Rochelle appeared to be impregnable; and then the cardinal, whatever he might himself have said about it aloud, was well aware that the horror of the blood which would have been shed in such an encounter—where Frenchmen fought against Frenchmen—would have been a retrogression of sixty years imprinted on his policy; and the cardinal was, at that epoch, what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sack of La Rochelle, and the slaughter of three or four thousand Huguenots who would have perished, would have had, in 1628, too great a resemblance to the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572. Finally, in addition to all this, this extreme measure, to which his majesty, like a good catholic, had no repugnance, always broke down before this argument of the besieging generals: "La Rochelle is impregnable, except by famine."

The cardinal was unable to dismiss from his own mind the fear which he entertained of his terrible emissary; for he also had understood the strange characteristics of that woman, who was half lioness and half serpent. Had she betrayed him? Or, was she dead? He knew her well enough, in any case, to be assured that, whether she was acting for him or against him, whether enemy or friend, she could not remain inactive without very powerful

obstructions. But whence could these obstructions arise? This was what he was unable to divine.

After all, however, he had, with good reason, much confidence in her ladyship. He had suspected, in her past career, circumstances so terrible, that his own red mantle was required to conceal them; and he felt that, from some cause or other, this woman was his own, because from him alone could she obtain support more potent than the danger which pursued her.

The cardinal resolved, therefore, to conduct the war alone, and to expect aid foreign to himself only as one may expect the coincidence of a fortunate chance. He continued the construction of that famous embankment, which was to carry famine into La Rochelle; and, in the meantime, he cast his eyes over that unhappy city, which contained so much profound misery, and so many heroic virtues, recalling to his mind the expression of Louis XI., who had been his own political predecessor, as he himself was the predecessor of Robespierre, and adopting this maxim of the companion of Tristran — “Divide, to govern.”

When Henry IV. besieged Paris, he had thrown over the walls bread and other edibles. The cardinal threw over brief addresses, in which he represented to the Rochellois how unjust, and self-willed, and barbarous, had been the conduct of their chiefs, who possessed abundance of wheat, yet did not distribute it; and who adopted as a maxim—for they also had their maxims—that the death of women, of old men, and of children, was a thing of little moment, so that the men who were to defend the walls continued vigorous and well. Until then, either from devotion or from inability to contend against it, this maxim had, without being generally adopted, passed from theory into practice; but these addresses successfully assailed it. They reminded the men, that these women, children, and old men, who were allowed to die of hunger, were their wives, their offspring, and their sires; and that it would be more just if all were

alike subjected to the common misery, so that a similarity of position might give occasion for unanimity of resolution.

But, at the very moment that his eminence saw his measure beginning to bear fruit, and was applauding himself for having adopted it, an inhabitant of Rochelle, who had arrived from Portsmouth, managed to pass through the royal lines, God knows how—so complete was the threefold watchfulness of Bassompierre, Schomberg, and the Duke of Angoulême, themselves overlooked by the cardinal—and announced that he had seen a splendid fleet, ready to set sail before another week. Buckingham, moreover, declared to the mayor, that the great league against France was at last about to be proclaimed, and that the kingdom would be speedily invaded, at the same time, by the armies of England, Spain, and the empire. This letter was publicly read in all parts of the town, copies of it were posted at the corners of the streets, and even those who had attempted to commence negotiations, interrupted them, with a resolution to wait for the succour which was so soon to reach them.

This unexpected circumstance renewed all the original anxieties of Richelieu, and compelled him to turn his eyes once more across the sea.

During all this time, the royal army, free from the inquietude of its only true commander, led a most joyous life, for provisions were not scarce in the camp, or money either. The regiments were all at rivalry in gaiety and audacity. To take spies and to hang them, to undertake the daring expeditions on the mole or the sea, to imagine follies and to execute them calmly—such were the pastimes which made those days seem short to the army, while they were long not only for the Rochellois, who were worried by famine and anxieties, but for the cardinal, who blockaded them so vigorously.

Sometimes, when the cardinal, who was always riding about like the humblest soldier of the army,

directed his thoughtful eyes over the works which advanced so slowly in comparison to his desires, although constructed by engineers whom he had recruited from the remotest corners of France, if he met with a musketeer of M. de Treville's company, he approached him, and looked at him in a singular way; and then, not recognising him as one of our four companions, he transferred to other objects his penetrating glance and his vast thoughts.

One day, when, consumed by a mortal lassitude of mind, without hopes of treating with the Rochellois, and without intelligence from England, the cardinal went forth, with no other aim but that of going out, and only accompanied by Cahusac and La Houdinière, wandering along the sands, and mingling the immensity of his own dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came at a gentle pace to a small hill, from the top of which he perceived behind a hedge, reclining on the grass, and protected from the sun by a clump of trees, seven men, surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our musketeers, getting ready to listen to the reading of a letter which one of them had just received. This letter was so important, that it had made them desert some cards and dice which they had left upon a drum.

The three others were the valets of the gentlemen, and were at the moment engaged in opening an enormous demi-john of Collioure wine.

The cardinal, as we have said, was in a gloomy mood; and, when he was in this state of mind, nothing so much increased his sullenness, as the gaiety of others.

He had, besides, a singular habit of always supposing that the circumstances which caused his sadness, were those which excited the gaiety of strangers. Making a sign to Cahusac and La Houdinière to halt, he got off his horse, and approached these suspicious laughers; hoping, by the aid of the sand, which deadened the sound of his steps, and of the hedge, which concealed

his person, to hear some words of a conversation which appeared so interesting. At ten paces from the hedge he recognised the Gascon dialect of d'Artagnan; and, as he had already seen that these men were musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those who were called the inseparables—that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be imagined that this discovery increased his desire of hearing the conversation. His eyes assumed a strange expression, and, with the stealthy tread of a tiger-cat, he approached the hedge; but he had been only able to catch a few vague syllables, having no definite meaning, when a sonorous and brief exclamation made him start, and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

“Officer!” called out Grimaud.

“You are speaking, I think, rascal,” said Athos, raising himself on one elbow, and fascinating Grimaud with his sparkling eye.

Grimaud, therefore, did not add one word, contenting himself with pointing with his finger towards the hedge, and indicating by this gesture the cardinal and his escort.

The four musketeers were on their feet with one bound, and bowed respectfully.

The cardinal appeared furious.

“It seems that the gentlemen of the musketeers have themselves guarded!” said he. “Is it because the English are expected by land, or do the musketeers regard themselves as superior officers?”

“My lord,” replied Athos—for, in the midst of the general confusion, he alone had preserved that coolness and calmness of the nobleman which never failed him—“my lord, the musketeers, when their duty is ended, or when they are off duty, play and drink, and are very superior officers to their own servants.”

“Their servants!” growled out the cardinal; “servants who have a watch-word to warn their masters when any

one approaches. They are not servants—they are sentinels.”

“Your eminence may, however, perceive, that had we not taken this precaution, we should have run the hazard of permitting you to pass without paying our respects, and without offering our thanks to you for uniting d’Artagnan and ourselves,” continued Athos. “You, d’Artagnan, who were but now wishing for an opportunity of expressing your gratitude to his eminence, here is one given to you: take advantage of it.”

These words were uttered with that imperturbable coolness which distinguished Athos in times of danger, and with that excessive politeness which made him, on certain occasions, a king more dignified than kings by birth.

D’Artagnan came forward, and stammered out some words of thanks, which quickly died away before the severe gaze of the cardinal.

“It does not signify, gentlemen,” continued the cardinal, without appearing in the slightest degree turned from his first intention by the incident which Athos had suggested; “it does not signify. I do not like simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged regiment, to play the great man. Discipline is the same for all.”

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish his sentence, and bowing assent, thus replied:—

“Discipline, my lord, has been, I hope, in no degree forgotten by us. We are not on duty; and we believed that, not being on duty, we might dispose of our time precisely as we pleased. If it should fortunately happen that your eminence has some special orders to give us, we are ready to obey them. Your lordship perceives,” continued Athos, frowning, for this species of interrogatory began to irritate him, “that, to be ready at the least alarm, we have brought with us all our arms.”

He pointed with his finger to the four muskets, stacked near the drum which bore the cards and dice.

“Your eminence may believe,” added d’Artagnan, “that we should have come to meet you, if we could have supposed that it was you who approached us with so small a retinue.”

The cardinal bit his moustaches, and even his lips.

“Do you know what you look like—always together as you now are, armed as you now are, and guarded by your valets?” said the cardinal. “You look like four conspirators.”

“Oh! as to that, my lord,” said Athos, “it is true; and we do conspire, as your eminence might have seen the other morning—only, it is against the Rochellois.”

“Ah! gentlemen politicians,” replied the cardinal, frowning in his turn, “the secret of many things might be found in your brains, if one could read in them, as you were reading in that letter which you concealed the moment that you saw me coming.”

The colour flew into the face of Athos, and he made one step towards his eminence.

“It might be thought that you really do suspect us, my lord, and that we are undergoing a real examination. If that be the case, would your eminence deign to explain yourself, and we should at least know what we are to expect.”

“And if it were an examination,” replied the cardinal, “others besides you have been subjected to one, M. Athos, and have answered.”

“And therefore, my lord, have I said, that your eminence has only to question, and that we are ready to reply.”

“What letter was that which you were reading, M. Aramis, and which you concealed?”

“A letter from a woman, my lord.”

“Oh, I understand,” said the cardinal: “discretion is necessary as to epistles of that kind; but nevertheless they may be shown to a confessor, and you know I am in orders.”

“My lord,” said Athos, with a calmness the more

fearful, that he slightly moved his head whilst making this answer—"my lord, the letter is from a woman, but it is not signed either by Marion de Lorme, or by Madame de Courbalet, or Madame de Chaulnes."

The cardinal became as pale as death. A savage flash was emitted from his eyes. He turned about as if to give an order to Cahusac and La Houdinière. Athos saw the movement, and took a step towards the muskets, on which the eyes of his three friends were fixed, like those of men who were not inclined to allow themselves to be arrested. The cardinal was himself only the third man of his party. The musketeers, including their valets, were seven. He judged, also, that the game would be still more unequal, if Athos and his friends were really conspiring; and, by one of those rapid changes which he always had at command, all his anger melted into a smile.

"Come, come," said he, "you are brave young men, proud in the sunshine, but faithful in the dark; and there is no great harm in keeping a good watch over yourselves, when you watch so well over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night when you served as my escort in going to the Red Dove-Cot. If there were any danger to be feared on the road I am about to take, I would beg you to accompany me; but as there is none, remain where you are, and finish your wine, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen."

And again mounting his horse, which Cahusac had brought him, he saluted them with his hand, and went his way.

The four young men, erect and motionless, followed him with their eyes, but without uttering a word, until he was out of sight. Then they looked at each other.

The countenance of all of them indicated consternation; for, in spite of the amicable adieu of his eminence, they well knew that the cardinal had gone away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled, with a haughty and disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of reach of sound, as well as out of sight—

“That Grimaud called out very late,” said Porthos, who had a great desire to vent his ill-humour on some one.

Grimaud was about to answer by excusing himself, when Athos raised his finger, and Grimaud remained silent.

“Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?” said d’Artagnan.

“I had decided,” said Aramis, in the softest, most melodious voice, “that if he had persisted in requiring the letter, I would have presented it to him with one hand, and passed my sword through his body with the other.”

“I expected as much,” said Athos, “and that is the reason that I threw myself between you. Verily, that man is extremely imprudent to talk in such a style to other men. One would imagine that he had never been engaged with any but women and children.”

“My dear Athos,” said d’Artagnan, “I admire you; but yet we were wrong, after all.”

“How wrong!” said Athos. “Whose, then, is this air we breathe? Whose this ocean, over which our looks extend? Whose is this land, on which we were reclined? Whose is this letter from your mistress? Do all these belong to the cardinal? Upon my honour, this man fancies that the world belongs to him. There were you, stammering, stupefied, and overwhelmed as though the Bastile stared you in the face, and the gigantic Medusa had transformed you into stone. Is it a conspiracy, I wonder, to be in love? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has chosen to confine: you wish to rescue her from his hands: it is a game which you are playing against his eminence. This letter is your hand. Why should you show your card to your adversary? If he can guess it, very good. We shall easily guess his, you may be assured.”

“In fact, Athos, what you now say is full of sense,” replied d’Artagnan.

“In that case, let us not say another word about what has just occurred, and let Aramis resume his cousin’s letter where the cardinal interrupted him.”

Aramis re-extracted the letter from his pocket; the three friends drew near him; and the three valets again grouped themselves around the capacious demi-john.

“You had only read one or two lines,” said d’Artagnan: “begin over again at the very beginning.”

“With pleasure,” replied Aramis.

“MY DEAR COUSIN,

“I really believe that I shall decide on going to Bethune, where my sister has made our little servant enter into a convent of the Carmelites. That poor child is quite resigned: she knows that she cannot live anywhere else, without endangering her salvation. Nevertheless, if our family affairs should be settled as we wish, I think that she will run the danger of perdition, and will return to those whom she regrets; more particularly, as she knows that they are always thinking of her. In the meantime, she is not very unhappy: all that she now desires is a letter from her intended. I know very well that this sort of article has some difficulty in passing through the gratings; but after all, as I have proved to you, my dear cousin, I am not very unskilful, and I will undertake the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and enduring remembrance: she was for a short time in great anxiety, but she is at present more composed, having sent her agent down there, that nothing may happen unexpectedly.

“Adieu, my dear cousin. Let me hear from you as often as you can; that is to say, as often as you can safely.—I embrace you.

“MARIE MICHON.”

“Oh, what do I owe you, Aramis!” exclaimed d’Artagnan. “Dear Constance! At last I have intelligence of her. She lives—she is in safety in a convent—she is at Bethune! And where is Bethune, Athos?”

“On the frontiers of Artois and Flanders: when once the siege is raised, we may make a tour there.”

“And it will not be long, it is to be hoped,” said Porthos, “for this morning they hung another spy, who declared that the Rochellois were now reduced to feed

upon the uppers of their shoes. Supposing that, after having eaten the uppers, they should consume the sole, I do not exactly see what can remain for them afterwards, unless they should take to eating one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux, which, without possessing at that time the reputation that it now enjoys, did not the less deserve it—"poor fools! as if the catholic faith were not the most profitable and the most agreeable of all religions. Yet never mind," added he, smacking his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows. But what the plague are you doing, Aramis?" continued Athos: "are you putting that letter into your pocket?"

"True," said d'Artagnan; "Athos is right: it must be burned. And who knows, even then, but that the cardinal may have some secret for interrogating ashes?"

"He must have one," said Athos.

"But what will you do with the letter?" inquired Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos. "To punish you for having spoken without leave, my friend, you must eat this piece of paper: then, to reward you for the service which you will have rendered us, you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine. Here is the letter first: chew it hard."

Grimaud smiled, and with his eyes fixed on the glass, which Athos filled to the very brim, chewed away at the paper, and finally swallowed it.

"Bravo, Master Grimaud!" said Athos; "and now take this. Good! I will dispense with your saying thank you."

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux; but during the whole time that this pleasant operation lasted, his eyes, which were fixed upon the heavens, spoke a language, which, though mute, was not therefore the less expressive.

"And now," said Athos, "unless the cardinal should

form the ingenious idea of opening Grimaud's stomach, I believe that we may be pretty easy."

During this time, his eminence pursued his melancholy way, murmuring under his moustaches—

"Decidedly, these four men must belong to me!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIRST DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

LET us now return to her ladyship, of whom, a glance, given to the coast of France, has made us lose sight for an instant.

We shall again find her in the same desperate position in which we left her: digging for herself an abyss of dark reflections—a gloomy hell—at the gate of which she had almost left hope behind her; for, for the first time, she doubts; and, for the first time, she fears.

Twice has her fortune failed her; twice has she seen herself betrayed; and, on both of these occasions, it was against that fatal talent, sent no doubt by Providence on purpose to oppose her, that she had been wrecked. D'Artagnan had conquered her;—her, who had been, until then, invincible in evil.

He had abused her in her love, humiliated her in her pride, checked her in her ambition; and, now, he was ruining her in her fortune, depriving her of her liberty, and menacing even her life. But, more than all, he had raised up a corner of her mask—of that ægis which had covered her, and rendered her so potent.

D'Artagnan had averted from Buckingham, whom she hated—as she did everything that she had once loved—that tempest with which Richelieu threatened him, through the person of the queen. D'Artagnan had personated de Wardes, for whom she had felt the

caprice of a tigress, irresistible as the caprices of women of that character ever are. D'Artagnan had discovered that terrible secret which she had sworn that none should know, and not die. And, lastly, at the very moment that she had obtained from Richelieu an instrument, by means of which she hoped to avenge herself on her enemy, that instrument is snatched from her hands, and it is d'Artagnan who holds her a prisoner, and who is going to transport her to some infamous Tyburn of the New World.

For all this comes unquestionably from d'Artagnan. By whom, except him, could so many disgraces be accumulated on her head? He alone could have transmitted to Lord de Winter all these frightful secrets, which he had himself discovered one after another by a kind of fatality. He knew her brother-in-law, and must have written to him.

How much of hatred she distils! There, motionless, with fixed and ardent eyes, seated in her solitary chamber, how well do the outbreaks of those stifled howls, which escape at times from the recesses of her heart, accord with the sound of surge which rises, bellows, moans, and breaks, like some eternal, impotent despair, against the rocks on which that dark and haughty edifice is built! How, by the light of those flashes which her furious anger casts across her mind, does she conceive against Madame Bonancieux, against Buckingham, but, most of all, against d'Artagnan, projects of magnificent revenge, which are imperceptible in the remoteness of the future!

Yes, but to avenge herself, she must be free; and for the prisoner to get free, there is a wall to pierce, bars to loosen, boards to break through; and these are enterprises, which the patience and force of a man may accomplish, but before which the febrile irritation of a woman must infallibly be exercised in vain. Besides, for all these labours, time is needed—months, or perhaps years—and she has but ten or twelve days, according

to the declaration of Lord de Winter, her fraternal yet most fearful goaler.

And yet if she were a man, she would attempt all this, and might perchance succeed. Why, then, has Heaven committed the mistake of enshrining a soul so strong within a form so frail and delicate?

Thus were the first moments of her captivity terrible: convulsions of rage, which she was impotent to restrain, paid to nature the tribute of her feminine weakness. But, by degrees, she overcame these ebullitions of distempered anger: the nervous tremblings which had agitated her frame, subsided; and she at length fell back upon her own strength, like a tired serpent taking its repose.

"Come, come, I was a fool to be so violent," said she, as she looked at the reflection of her burning glances in the glass in which she seemed to interrogate herself. "No violence! Violence is a proof of weakness. Besides, I have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps if I used my strength against women, I might chance to find them more feeble than myself, and, consequently, might vanquish them; but it is against men that I struggle, and I am only a woman to them. Let me struggle like a woman. My strength is in my weakness."

Then, as if to satisfy herself of the changes to which she could subject her most flexible and expressive features, she made them successively assume all expressions, from that of anger which contracted every muscle, to that of the softest, most affectionate, and most seductive smile. Then, under her artistic hands, her hair was made to adopt every undulation which might add to the varied attractions of her charming face. At last, in self-complacency, she murmured—

"Well, there is nothing lost! I am still beautiful."

It was nearly eight o'clock in the evening. Her ladyship perceived a bed, and she thought that a few hours of repose would not only refresh her head, but her complexion also. Yet, before she lay down, a still better idea

suggested itself. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been above an hour in the room: they could not tarry long before they brought her meal. The prisoner did not wish to lose any time, and resolved, even this very evening, to make some attempt to feel her way, by studying the characters of those to whom her wardship had been confided.

A light appeared beneath the door, and this announced the return of her gaolers. Her ladyship, who had risen up, threw herself hastily into the chair, with her head thrown back, her beautiful hair loose and dishevelled, her throat half-naked under the ruffled lace, and one hand on her heart, and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn; the door grated on its hinges; steps were heard in the chamber, and approached her.

"Place the table there," said a voice, which the prisoner recognised as that of Felton.

The order was obeyed.

"You will bring lights, and change guard," continued Felton; and this double order, which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals, proved to the lady that her attendants and her guards were the same men, that is to say, soldiers.

The commands of Felton were executed with a silent rapidity, which gave a good idea of the flourishing state of discipline that he maintained.

At last Felton, who had not yet looked at her ladyship, turned toward her.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "she sleeps: very well, when she awakes she will sup."

And he took a few steps towards the door.

"But, lieutenant," said a soldier, who was less stoical than his officer, who had approached her ladyship, "this woman is not asleep."

"What! not asleep!" said Felton. "What is she about, then?"

"She has fainted. Her face is very pale, and I can scarcely hear her respiration."

"You are right," said Felton, after he had looked at her ladyship from the place where he stood, without taking a single step towards her: "go and tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted; for I do not know what to do, the circumstance being unexpected."

The soldier left the room to execute his officer's commands. Felton seated himself in a chair, which happened to be near the door, and waited, without uttering a word or making the least movement. Her ladyship was mistress of that great art, so studied by women, of seeing everything by means of a mirror, a reflection, or a shadow; and she perceived in the glass Felton, who had turned his back towards her. She continued watching him for about ten minutes, and during these ten minutes he did not once look round.

It then occurred to her that Lord de Winter would soon arrive, and, by his presence, add power to her gaoler. Her first experiment had failed; and she bore it like a woman who had confidence in her own resources. She therefore raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed feebly.

At this sigh, Felton at length turned round.

"Ah! you are awake at last, madam," said he, "so I have nothing more to do here. If you require anything, you will call."

"Oh, my God! my God! what I have suffered!" murmured her ladyship, in that harmonious tone of voice, which, like the tones of the enchantresses of old, fascinated all whom she desired to destroy.

On raising herself in her chair, she assumed an attitude more graceful and more alluring than that which she had assumed during the time she was reclining.

Felton arose.

"You will be waited upon in this way, madam, three times a day," said he; "in the morning, at nine o'clock; in the afternoon, at one o'clock; and in the evening, at eight. If this should be not agreeable to you, you can appoint your own hours, instead of those

which I propose, and on this point your wishes shall be attended to."

"But am I to remain always alone, in this large, melancholy room?" demanded her ladyship.

"A woman from the neighbourhood has received instructions to attend upon you: she will henceforth reside in the castle, and will come whenever you require her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner humbly.

Felton bowed slightly, and went toward the door. Just as he was about to cross the threshold, Lord de Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him that her ladyship had fainted. He held in his hand a bottle of salts.

"Well, what is the matter here?" said he, in a jeering tone, when he saw the lady standing, and Felton just about to leave the room. "Is this dead person alive again? By Jove, Felton, my boy, did you not see that she took you for a novice, and gave you the first act of a comedy, of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure of seeing all the continuation?"

"I thought so, my lord," said Felton. "But as, after all, the prisoner is a woman, I wished to show that consideration for her, which is due from every well-bred man to a woman, if not for her sake, at least for his own."

Her ladyship shuddered throughout her frame. These words of Felton's penetrated like ice through all her veins.

"So," continued Lord de Winter, still laughing, "these beautiful locks, so skilfully displayed, that delicate complexion, and that languishing look, have not yet seduced you, stony heart?"

"No, my lord," replied the insensible young man; "and, believe me, it requires more than the petty stratagems and affectations of a woman to corrupt me."

"As that is the case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave the lady to find something new, and let us go to supper.

Oh, you may be quite easy ; she has a very fertile imagination, and the second act of this comedy will soon follow the first."

As he uttered these words, Lord de Winter took Felton by the arm, and led him away, laughing.

"Oh, I will surely be a match for you!" muttered her ladyship, between her teeth. "Make yourself easy, poor spoiled monk, poor converted soldier, whose uniform has been cut out of a churchman's habit!"

"Apropos, my lady," said Lord de Winter, stopping on the threshold of the door, "do not allow this failure to disturb your appetite. Taste this fowl, and that fish, which, I give you my honour, I have not had poisoned. I am on good terms with my cook, and, as he is not to be my heir, I have great confidence in him. Do as I do. Farewell, my dear sister, till your next fainting-fit."

This was all that her ladyship was able to endure. Her hands grasped the arms of her chair convulsively, she ground her teeth heavily, her eyes followed the movement of the door as it closed behind Lord de Winter and Felton ; and then, as soon as she found herself alone, a new paroxysm of despair invaded her—her glance wandered to the table : she saw a knife that glittered on it, and, rushing forward, she snatched it up ; but dreadful was her disappointment when she found that the edge was rounded, and the blade of flexible silver.

A shout of laughter resounded from behind the half-closed door, and it was again opened.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Lord de Winter, "do you see, Felton? It is exactly as I told you. That knife was intended for you, my boy : she would have killed you. It is one of her eccentricities, thus to get rid, in one way or another, of those who annoy her. If I had attended to you, the knife would have been of steel, and sharp ; and then—farewell, Felton. She would have cut your throat first, and all our throats afterwards. Just look, John, how well she holds her knife?"

Her ladyship, in fact, still held the inoffensive weapon

in her convulsive grasp ; but these last words, this crowning insult, unnerved her hands, her strength, and even her will, and the knife fell upon the ground.

“You are quite right, my lord,” said Felton, in a tone of deep disgust, which penetrated to the very recesses of her ladyship’s heart. “You are right, and I was in the wrong.”

And they both once more left the room.

But, on this occasion, the lady lent a more attentive ear than before, and she heard their steps becoming more distant, until the sound was lost in the depths of the corridors.

“I am undone !” she muttered : “I am in the power of people over whom I shall have no greater influence than over statues of bronze or of granite. They know me thoroughly, and bear breastplates proof against my arms. And yet,” she continued, a moment after, “it is impossible that everything should terminate as they have willed it.”

In fact, as this last remark, and this instinctive return to hope, indicated, fear and all feeble sentiments could not long predominate in that deep-thinking soul. Her ladyship seated herself at table, ate of various viands, drank a small quantity of Spanish wine, and felt that all her resolution was restored.

Before she retired to rest, she had already studied, analysed, commented on, and examined, in every possible way, the words, the steps, the gestures, the signs, and even the silence of her gaolers ; and, from this learned, and profound, and skilful examination, it resulted that Felton was, upon the whole, to be held the least invulnerable of the two.

One word, especially, recurred to the prisoner’s mind.

“If I had attended to you,” said Lord de Winter to Felton.

Felton, then, had spoken in her favour, since Lord de Winter had refused to listen to him. “Weak or strong,” reasoned her ladyship, “this man has a ray of pity in his

soul ; and of this ray I will make a flame that shall consume him. As to the other one, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect from me should I ever escape from his hands : it is, therefore, perfectly useless to attempt anything with regard to him. But, with Felton, it is different. He appears to be a simple, pure, and virtuous young man. There are means of winning him."

Her ladyship laid down, and slept with a smile upon her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping, would have taken her for a young girl, dreaming of the garland of flowers which she was to braid around her forehead at an approaching ball.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SECOND DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

HER ladyship was dreaming that she had at last defeated d'Artagnan, and was looking on the spectacle of his death ; and it was the sight of his abominated blood, flowing beneath the executioner's axe, which aroused the charming smile that hovered on her lips.

She slept like a prisoner lulled by dawning hope.

On the next morning, when they entered the room, she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He had brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken on the previous evening, and who had just arrived. This woman entered, and approached her ladyship's bed, offering her services.

Her ladyship was naturally pale, and her complexion would, therefore, easily deceive any one who saw her for the first time.

"I am feverish," she said ; "I have not slept a moment throughout the tedious night. I am in dreadful suffering : will you be more humane than they were yesterday evening ? All I ask is, to be permitted to remain in bed."

“Would you like a physician to be summoned?” asked the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue, without uttering a word.

Her ladyship reflected, that, the more numerous the persons who surrounded her, the more there would be to soften, and the more severe would be the vigilance of Lord de Winter. Besides, the physician might declare that the malady was feigned; and her ladyship, having lost her first throw, did not design to lose her second.

“A physician?” said she—“and for what purpose? Those gentlemen declared, yesterday, that my illness was all a comedy. It will undoubtedly be the same to-day; for, since last night, there has been abundant time to prejudice the doctor.”

“Then,” said Felton, in a tone of impatience, “say yourself, madam, what you desire to have done.”

“Ah, my God! how can I tell? I feel my sufferings, and that is all. Give me what you please—it is of little consequence to me.”

“Go for Lord de Winter,” said Felton, wearied by these repeated complaints.

“Oh, no, no!” exclaimed the lady: “no, sir, do not send for him, I beseech you! I am very well—I do not want anything—do not send for him!”

She uttered this exclamation with a vehemence so natural, that Felton was attracted for a few steps into the chamber.

“He is touched,” thought her ladyship.

“And yet, madam,” said Felton, “if you are *really* suffering, we must send for a physician. If you are deceiving us, so much the worse for yourself; but, at all events, we shall have nothing with which to reproach ourselves.”

Her ladyship made no reply; but, turning her beautiful head on the pillow, she burst into a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

Felton looked at her for a moment with his ordinary insensibility; but, seeing that the crisis threatened to continue, he left the room.

The woman followed him; and Lord de Winter did not make his appearance.

"I think I begin to see a method," muttered the lady, with savage delight, as she buried herself under the bed-clothes, to hide from those who might be watching her this burst of heartfelt satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

"It is now time for my malady to end," thought she. "Let me get up, and gain some benefit to-day. I have but ten days, and by this evening two of them will have already passed away."

When the servants entered the lady's chamber in the morning, her breakfast had been brought. She concluded that they would soon return to take it away, and that she should then see Felton again.

Her ladyship was not deceived. Felton reappeared, and, without noticing whether the lady had touched anything or not, he ordered the attendants to remove the table, which was generally brought in with everything laid out upon it.

Felton, holding a book in his hand, saw every other person leave the room.

Reclining in an easy-chair near the fire-place, beautiful, pale, and resigned, her ladyship looked like a holy virgin expecting martyrdom.

Felton approached her and said—

"Lord de Winter, who, like yourself, madam, is a catholic, has imagined that the loss of the rites and ceremonies of your religion might be painful to you: he therefore permits you to read the daily office of your mass; and here is a book which contains the ritual."

From the manner with which Felton laid the book on the little table near her ladyship, from the tone in which he pronounced the words, *your mass*, and from the contemptuous smile with which he accompanied them,

her ladyship raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

Then—by that stiff manner of wearing the hair, by that dress of exaggerated simplicity, by that forehead, as polished as marble, but equally hard and impenetrable—she recognised one of those gloomy puritans, whom she had so often met with, both at the court of King James, and at that of the King of France, where, in spite of the recollections of St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek a refuge.

She then experienced one of those sudden inspirations which are reserved for geniuses alone, on those great emergencies, those momentous crises, which decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words—*your mass*—and a single glance at Felton, had, in fact, revealed to her all the pregnancy of the answer which she was about to make.

But, with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, that answer presented itself, as if ready framed, upon her lips.

“I?” said she, in an accent of contempt, equal to that which she had observed in the voice of the young officer—“I, sir!—*my mass*? Lord de Winter, the corrupted catholic, well knows that I am not of his religion, and it is a snare which he wishes to spread for me.”

“And of what religion are you then, madam?” demanded Felton, with an astonishment, which, in spite of his self-command, he could not perfectly conceal.

“I will tell it,” exclaimed the lady with feigned enthusiasm, “when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith.”

The looks of Felton displayed to her ladyship all the extent of space which she had opened to herself by this single expression.

And yet the young officer remained mute and motionless. His countenance alone had spoken.

“I am in the hands of my enemies,” continued she, in the enthusiastic tone which she knew was popular amongst

the puritans. "Well! either may my God save me, or may I perish for my God! That is the answer which I beg you to convey to Lord de Winter; and as to this book," continued she, pointing to the ritual with the tip of her finger, but without touching it, as though she would have been contaminated by the contact—"you may carry it away, and make use of it yourself; for you are, undoubtedly, doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter—an accomplice in his persecution, and an accomplice in his heresy."

Felton made no reply; but he took the book with the same repugnance that he had before manifested, and, in a pensive mood, withdrew.

Lord de Winter came at about five in the evening. During the day, her ladyship had found time to trace a plan of procedure; and she received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself on a chair opposite the lady, and stretching his feet carelessly toward the hearth—"it appears that we have made a slight apostacy."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, that, since the last time we met, we have changed our religion. Have you by chance married a third husband—a protestant?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner, with great dignity; "for I hear your words, but I do not understand them."

"Then, the truth must be, that you have no religion at all. Well, I like that the better," said Lord de Winter, with a sneer.

"It is certainly more in unison with your own principles," coldly replied the lady.

"Oh, I confess to you, that it is quite a matter of indifference to me."

"You can avow no religious indifference, my lord, but what your debauchery and crimes sufficiently confirm."

"What! and do you talk of debauchery, Madame

Messalina? Do you talk of crimes, Lady Macbeth? Either I have misunderstood you, or you are, by God, exceedingly impudent."

"You speak thus, my lord, because we are overheard," coldly replied her ladyship, "and you wish to prejudice your gaolers and your executioners against me."

"My gaolers! my executioners! Why, madam, you speak poetically, and yesterday's comedy is turned to-night to tragedy. But, after all, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be accomplished."

"Infamous task! impious task!" replied the lady, with the feigned enthusiasm of the martyr who provokes her judge.

"I verily believe, upon my honour," said Lord de Winter, rising, "that this singular creature is going mad. Come, come, calm yourself, Madam Puritan, or I will put you into a dungeon. By Jove, it is my Spanish wine that has got into your head, is it not? But be quiet: this sort of intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no bad consequence."

And Lord de Winter left the room swearing, which was, at that time, considered a habit perfectly gentlemanly.

Felton was, in fact, behind the door, and had not lost one syllable of this conversation.

Her ladyship had judged correctly.

"Yes, go, go!" said she to her brother. "The consequences are, on the contrary, fast approaching. But you, fool that you are, will not know them until it is too late to evade them."

Silence again prevailed; and two more hours elapsed. Supper was served, and her ladyship was found engaged in prayers—prayers which she had picked up from an austere puritan, an old servant of her second husband. She appeared to be in a sort of ecstasy, and not even to observe what was passing around her.

Felton made a sign that she was not to be disturbed;

and when everything was arranged, he softly left the room with the soldiers.

The lady knew that she might be watched, and, therefore, she continued at her prayers until the end. She fancied that the sentinel at her door did not maintain his usual step, but seemed to listen to her.

For the present, she desired nothing more. She arose, seated herself at the table, ate a little, and only drank some water.

In an hour afterwards, the table was removed, but her ladyship remarked that, on this occasion, Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He was afraid, then, of seeing her too often.

She turned her head aside to smile; for there was so much of triumph in that smile, that it alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed half an hour to elapse; and as everything was then entirely silent in the old castle—as no sound was heard but the eternal murmur of the surge, that mighty respiration of the sea—with her pure, thrilling, and harmonious voice, she began the first stanza of the psalm which was then in great favour with the puritans:

“Thou leavest us, oh Lord!
To prove if we are strong;
But then, thou dost afford
The meed that to exertion should belong.”

These verses were not excellent; they were, indeed, far enough from it; but, as every one knows, the puritans did not pride themselves on poetry.

Even as she sung, her ladyship listened. The sentinel on duty at her door had stopped, as if transformed to stone. Her ladyship judged by that of the effect she had produced.

She then continued her psalm, with a fervour and feeling which are indescribable. It seemed to her as the sound diffused itself afar off beneath the arches, and went like a magic charm to melt the hearts of her oppressors.

Nevertheless, it appeared as if the soldier on guard, a zealous Catholic, no doubt, shook off the charm, for, through the grating which he opened, he exclaimed,—

“Be silent, madam! Your song is as melancholy as a ‘*De Profundis* ;’ and if, besides the pleasure of being shut up in this garrison, we must be compelled also to hear these things, it will be perfectly unbearable.”

“Silence there!” cried a severe voice, which the lady recognised as that of Felton. “What business is it of yours, fellow? Did any one order you to hinder that woman from singing? No. You were told to guard her—to fire upon her if she attempted to escape: guard her, then; shoot her if she tries to escape; but go not beyond your orders.”

An inexpressible gleam of joy illuminated the lady’s countenance; but this gleam was transient as the lightning’s flash; and, without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she resumed her singing, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction, with which Satan had endowed it—

“For all my fears and cares,
For exile, and for chains,
I have my youth, my prayers,
And God, who keeps a record of my pains.”

That voice, of uncommon power and of sublime passion, gave to the rude unpolished poetry of these psalms, a magic and an expression that the most exalted puritans rarely detected in the songs of their brethren, which they were compelled to adorn with all the aids of imagination. Felton thought that he was listening to the singing of the angel who comforted the three Israelites in the fiery furnace.

The lady continued—

“But God, the just and strong!
Our morn of freedom sends
And should our hopes be wrong,
Still martyrdom, still death, our trials ends!”

This last couplet, into which the terrible enchantress had poured her whole soul, completed the disorder in the young officer's heart. He opened the door suddenly, and her ladyship saw his countenance, as pale as ever, but with flashing and almost delirious eyes.

"Why do you sing in this manner," said he, "and in such tones?"

"Pardon me, sir," said her ladyship softly; "I forgot that my songs were not becoming in this house. I have no doubt wounded your religious feelings, but I assure you that it was unintentionally. Pardon, therefore, a fault which may be great, but which was certainly involuntary."

Her ladyship looked so beautiful at that moment, and the religious enthusiasm which she had assumed had given such an expression to her countenance, that Felton, completely dazzled, fancied that he now saw the angel whom he had before only heard.

"Yes, yes!" replied he, "yes, you vex, you agitate, the inhabitants of the castle."

But the poor madman did not perceive the incoherence of his own language, whilst her ladyship plunged her lynx eye into the very depths of his heart.

"I will be silent," said she, casting down her eyes, with all the softness that she could give to her voice, and with all the resignation which she could impart to her manner.

"No, no, madam," said Felton; "only, do not sing so loudly, and especially at night."

After these words, Felton, feeling that he could no longer preserve his usual severity towards his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

"You are right, lieutenant," said the soldier; "those songs disturb the soul; and yet one becomes in time accustomed to them—the voice is so beautiful!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE THIRD DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

FELTON was attracted; but more than this must yet be done: it was necessary to retain him; or, rather, it was necessary that he should remain of himself; and her ladyship had only an obscure perception of the means by which this result must be achieved.

But even more was needed. He must be made to speak, that she might answer him; for her ladyship was well aware that her most seductive power was in her voice, which could run skilfully through the whole scale of tones, from mortal speech, upwards to the language of heaven.

And yet, in spite of all this seduction, her ladyship might fail; for Felton had been forewarned against her, even to the minutest chance. From this time she studied all her actions, all her words, and even her slightest glance and gesture, nay even her respiration, which might be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything, like a skilful actress, who had just accepted a rôle which she had never been accustomed to perform.

Before Lord de Winter, her behaviour was easier to arrange, and she had therefore determined upon that the evening before. To remain silent and dignified in his presence; from time to time to irritate him by affected contempt, or, by a disdainful expression; to urge him to menaces and violence, which contrasted so completely with her own perfect resignation—such was her ladyship's plan. Felton would see this: perhaps he would say nothing; but, at any rate, he would see it.

In the morning, Felton came as usual; but her ladyship allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast, without addressing him. At the very moment that he was about to leave the room, she had a gleam of hope, for she thought that he was really about to speak; but

his lips moved, without any sound issuing from them, and, controlling himself by an effort, he suppressed in his own breast the words which he had nearly uttered, and withdrew.

About noon, Lord de Winter entered.

It was rather a fine summer's day, and a beam of that pale English sun, which enlightens, but does not warm, penetrated through the bars of the prison.

Her ladyship looked out of the window, and pretended not to have heard the door open.

"Ah, ah!" said Lord de Winter, "after having represented comedy and tragedy, we are now doing melodrama."

The prisoner did not answer.

"Yes, yes," continued his lordship; "I understand it very well. You would gladly enough be free upon this beach. You would gladly enough, in some good ship, glide through the waves of that sea, which is as green as an emerald. You would gladly enough, whether on land or on the ocean, concoct against me one of those pretty little plots which you are so dexterous in contriving. Patience, patience! In four days you shall be permitted to approach the beach, and the sea will be open to you—more open, perhaps, than you would wish—for in four days England will be rid of you."

Her ladyship clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven.

"Lord! Lord!" exclaimed she, with an angelic sweetness of gesture and of intonation, "forgive this man, as I myself forgive him!"

"Yes, pray, accursed creature," exclaimed the baron. "Your prayer is the more generous, as you are in the power of a man, who, I swear, will never pardon you."

And he left the room.

At the moment he went out, a piercing glance through the half-opened door enabled her to perceive Felton, who drew himself quickly back that he might not be seen.

She then threw herself upon her knees and began to pray—

“My God! thou knowest for what sacred cause I suffer: give me, therefore, strength to bear my trials.”

The door opened softly; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to have heard it, and, with a voice almost choked by tears, she continued—

“O God, the avenger! O God of mercy! wilt thou permit the wicked designs of this man to be accomplished?”

Then only did she appear to hear the sound of Felton’s footsteps; and rising as quickly as thought, she blushed, as though ashamed at being seen upon her knees.

“I do not like to interrupt those who pray,” gravely observed Felton, “so do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you, madam.”

“How do you know that I was praying, sir?” said her ladyship, in a voice suffocated by sobs: “you are mistaken, sir; I was not praying.”

“Do you think, then, madam,” replied Felton, in his habitual grave voice, but with a gentler accent, “that I assume to myself the right of preventing a fellow-creature from throwing herself at the foot of her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance is becoming in the guilty, whatever crime they may have committed; and a criminal, prostrate before God, is sacred in my eyes.”

“I, guilty!” replied the lady, with a smile which would have disarmed the angel at the day of judgment. “Guilty! Oh, my God! thou knowest what I am! Suppose that I am condemned, sir—yet you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned.”

“Were you condemned, were you innocent, and were you a martyr,” replied Felton, “you would have still more reason to pray, and I would myself assist you with my prayers.”

“Oh, you are a just man!” exclaimed her ladyship, throwing herself at his feet. “I can no longer restrain

myself, for I fear that my strength will fail me at the moment wherein I must endure the trial, and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a woman in despair. They deceive you, sir. But that is not the point: I only ask one favour of you, and, if you grant it, I will bless you both in this world and in that which is to come."

"Speak to my superior, madam," said Felton. "Fortunately, I have no commission either to pardon or to punish: it is to one higher than me that God has given this responsibility."

"To you—no, to you alone. Listen to me, rather than contribute to my destruction and my shame."

"If you have deserved this disgrace, madam—you have incurred this ignominy—you should bear it as a sacrifice to God."

"What mean your words? Oh! you do not understand me. When I talk of ignominy, you think that I speak of some punishment—of imprisonment, or of execution. Would to God it were so! What care I for death or imprisonment?"

"It is I that do not understand you now, madam," said Felton.

"Or pretend that you do not understand me," replied the prisoner, with a smile of doubt.

"No, madam, by the honour of a soldier, by the faith of a Christian!"

"What! do you not know the designs which Lord de Winter has against me?"

"I do not know them."

"Impossible! You are his confidant."

"Madam, I never lie!"

"Oh! but he is too unreserved for you to have failed to guess them."

"Madam, I never attempt to guess anything: I always wait for confidence; and, except what Lord de Winter has said in your presence, he has told me nothing."

"Then," exclaimed the lady, with an indescribable accent of truth, "you are not his accomplice? You do not know that he designs for me a disgrace; which all the punishments on earth could not equal in horror?"

"You are mistaken, madam," said Felton, colouring; "Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"Good!" said the lady to herself: "without knowing what it is, he calls it a crime."

Then, she added, aloud—

"The friend of the wretch is himself capable of anything."

"And whom do you call the wretch?" said Felton.

"Are there, then, two men in England to whom that term can be applied?"

"You mean George Villiers," said Felton.

"Whom the pagans, the Gentiles, and the infidels, call Duke of Buckingham," resumed her ladyship. "I would not have believed that there was a man in all England who would have required so much explanation to recognise the person to whom I alluded."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him: he will not escape the punishment that he deserves."

Felton only expressed concerning the duke, that sentiment of execration which had been vowed by every Englishman against him, whom Catholics themselves called the tyrant, the extortioner, and the profligate; and whom the puritans simply termed Satan.

"Oh, my God! my God!" exclaimed the lady, "how I beseech thee to inflict upon that man the punishment which is his due. Thou knowest that I seek not the gratification of my own revenge, but that I implore the deliverance of all the people."

"Do you know him then, madam?" inquired Felton.

"He questions me at last?" said her ladyship to herself, delighted at having so quickly obtained this great result.

"Oh, yes! I know him! Oh, yes! to my misfortune—to my eternal misfortune!"

And her ladyship writhed her arms, as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt that his strength was giving way: he made some steps towards the door; but the prisoner, who did not lose sight of him, bounded after him, and stopped his progress.

“Sir,” said she, “be good—be merciful—hear my prayer! That knife, of which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me, because he knew the use that I should make of it—oh, hear me to the end!—that knife, return it to me only for one instant, for mercy’s sake, for pity’s sake! I embrace your knees! See! you may shut the door—I do not want to injure you. O God! How could I have any design against you—you, the only just, and good, and compassionate being that I have met with!—you, perhaps, my preserver! One minute the knife—only one minute!—I will return it to you through the wicket of the door! Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honour.”

“To kill yourself!” exclaimed Felton, in great terror, and forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of his prisoner—“to kill yourself!”

“I have said it, sir,” murmured the lady, dropping her voice, and sinking exhausted on the floor: “I have divulged my secret! He knows all, and, O my God! I am lost!”

Felton remained standing, motionless and irresolute.

“He still doubts,” thought the lady. “I have not been true enough to the character I am acting.”

Some one was heard in the corridor; and her ladyship recognised the slow step of Lord de Winter.

Felton also recognised it, and approached the door.

Her ladyship rushed forwards.

“Oh! not one word,” she cried, in a concentrated voice. “Tell not to that man one word of what I have said to you, or I am lost; and it is you—you——”

Then, as the steps drew nearer, she was silent, lest her

voice should be heard, and merely pressed her beautiful hand on Felton's lips, with a gesture of infinite terror.

Felton gently repulsed her, and she sank upon a couch.

Lord de Winter passed by the door without stopping, and his departing steps were heard in the distance.

Felton, pale as a corpse, stood for some moments intently listening; then, when the sound had entirely ceased, he breathed like a man awakening from a dream, and rushed out of the room.

"Ah!" said her ladyship, as she listened in turn to the sound of Felton's steps, as he retreated in the direction opposite to that of Lord de Winter, "at last, then, you are mine!"

But instantly her countenance grew dark.

"If he should speak to the baron," said she, "I am ruined; for the baron, who well knows that I would not destroy myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hands, and he will at once perceive that all this great despair is but a farce."

She went and stood before a glass, and gazed upon herself. Never had she been more beautiful.

"Oh, yes," she said, smiling, "but he will *not* tell him!"

In the evening, Lord de Winter came in, when the supper was served.

"Sir," said her ladyship to him, "is your presence to be a compulsory aggravation of my imprisonment, and cannot you spare me that additional torture which your visits cause me."

"Why, my dear sister," said the baron, "did you not sentimentally announce to me, with that pretty mouth which is to-day so cruel, that you came to England for the sole purpose of seeing me without restraint—a pleasure of which, you told me, you felt the loss so strongly, that you had, for it, risked sea-sickness, storms, and captivity. Well, here I am, and you ought to be satisfied. But, besides, I have a particular reason for my visit, this time."

Her ladyship shuddered, for she thought that Felton

had spoken. Never, perhaps, in her whole life, had this woman, who had experienced so many strong and opposite emotions, felt so violent a beating of her heart.

She was sitting down. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it to her side, and seated himself upon it; and he produced a paper from his pocket, which he slowly unfolded.

“Here,” said he, “I wished to show you the sort of passport which I have myself drawn up, and which will serve as a kind of warrant, in the life which I permit you to lead.”

Then, directing her ladyship’s eyes to the paper, he read—

“Order to convey to ——

“The name is left blank,” said the baron; “if you have any preference, you will let me know, and, provided it be a thousand leagues from London, your request shall be granted. So I resume—‘Order so convey to —— Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after punishment. She will reside in that place, without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt at escape, she is to be put to death. She will be allowed five shillings a day for her lodging and board!’”

“This warrant does not concern me,” said her ladyship coldly, “since a name is inserted in it which is not mine.”

“A name! And have you one?”

“I have that of your brother.”

“You make a mistake: my brother was only your second husband, and your first is still alive. Tell me his name, and I will insert it instead of Charlotte Backson. No, you will not—you are silent. Very well; you shall be registered under the name of Charlotte Backson.”

Her ladyship remained silent: not now from artifice, but from fear. She believed that the warrant was to be immediately executed; she thought that Lord de Winter had hurried forward her departure; she suspected, even, that she was to go that very evening. For an instant,

therefore, she imagined that all hope was gone ; when all of a sudden she perceived that the warrant had no signature.

The joy she experienced at this discovery was so great that she was unable to conceal it.

“ Yes, yes,” said Lord de Winter, who saw what was passing in her mind ; “ yes, you are looking for the signature, and you say to yourself — ‘ all is not lost, since the warrant is not signed ! He shows it to me to frighten me, that is all. ’ — But you deceive yourself : this warrant will be sent to-morrow to the Duke of Buckingham ; on the day after it will be returned, signed by his hand, and sealed with his seal ; and four-and-twenty hours after that, I answer for it that the execution of it shall have been begun. Adieu, madam ; this is all that I have to say to you.”

“ And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this banishment under a false name, are infamous ! ”

“ Would your ladyship prefer being hanged under your true name ? You know that the English laws are inexorable concerning the abuse of the marriage contract. Explain yourself freely. Although my name, or rather my brother’s, is mixed up in all this, I will risk the scandal of a public trial, to be sure of my aim in getting rid of you.”

Her ladyship made no answer ; but she became as pale as a lifeless form.

“ Oh, I see you would rather travel. Very well, madam : there is a proverb which says that travelling is beneficial to youth. Faith, you are right after all. Life is sweet ; and that is the reason why I am not very anxious that you should take mine away. There remains, then, only the settlement of the five shillings a day. I am a little too parsimonious, am I not ? But it is because I do not wish you to corrupt your keepers. Besides, you will still have your charms with which to seduce them. Try them, if your failure as to Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind.”

"Felton has not spoken," said her ladyship to herself ; "so nothing is lost after all."

"And now, madam, farewell ; to-morrow I shall come and apprise you of the departure of my messenger."

Lord de Winter arose, bowed sarcastically to her ladyship, and left the room.

Her ladyship breathed again. She had yet four days before her ; and four days would serve her to complete the seduction of Felton.

And yet a terrible idea suggested itself to her mind. Perhaps Lord de Winter might send Felton himself to Buckingham with the warrant ; and thus Felton would escape her ; for, to ensure her success, it was necessary that the magic charm of her seduction should be undisturbed.

Yet, as we have said, one thing reassured her ; Felton had not spoken.

She did not wish to appear disheartened by the threats of Lord de Winter : she therefore placed herself at table, and ate. Then, as she had done the night before, she fell upon her knees, and repeated her prayers aloud. And, as on the previous evening, the soldier ceased his beat, and stood to listen.

But she soon heard steps, lighter than those of the sentinel, approaching from the end of the corridor, and which ceased before her door.

"It is he !" she said. And she began the same religious strains which had so violently excited Felton on the previous evening.

But, although her soft, full, sonorous voice now thrilled more touchingly and more harmoniously than ever, the door continued closed. It did indeed appear to her ladyship, in one of those furtive glances which she directed to the little wicket, that she could perceive, through the close grating, the ardent eyes of the young man ; but, whether this were a reality or a vision, he had at least sufficient self-control, on this occasion, to keep himself from coming in.

Yet, a few moments after the conclusion of her religious song, her ladyship fancied that she heard a deep sigh, and then the same steps that she had heard approaching, retired slowly, and, as it were, with reluctance.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FOURTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

WHEN Felton entered the room the next day, he found her ladyship mounted on a chair, holding in her grasp a cord made of some cambric handkerchiefs, torn into strips, twisted together, and fastened end to end. At the noise Felton made in opening the door, her ladyship lightly jumped off her chair, and endeavoured to conceal behind her the extemporaneous cord which she held in her hand.

The young man was even more pale than usual, and his eyes, red from want of sleep, proved that he had passed through a feverish night. And yet his forehead bore a serenity more austere than ever.

He slowly advanced towards her ladyship, who had seated herself; he took hold of the end of this murderous woof, which inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, she had left unconcealed.

“What is this, madam?” he asked coldly.

“That? Nothing!” said her ladyship, smiling with that melancholy expression which she so well knew how to impress upon her smile. “Weariness, you know, is the mortal enemy of prisoners. I was wearied, and, therefore, I amused myself with twisting this cord.”

Felton cast his eyes up to that part of the wall where he had seen her ladyship standing on the chair which she now was sitting on, and, above her head, he saw a gilded hook, fastened in the wall, which was placed there to support either clothes or arms.

He started, and the prisoner saw him start; for,

though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her observation.

“And why were you standing on this chair?” he asked.

“What does it signify to you?” replied the lady.

“But,” insisted Felton, “I desire to know.”

“Do not question me,” said the prisoner; “you know that to us true Christians it is forbidden to speak falsehood.”

“Well,” said Felton, “I will tell you what you were doing, or, rather, what you were about to do. You were about to complete the fatal work which you meditated. Remember, madam, if your God has forbidden you to speak falsehood, He has much more emphatically forbidden you to commit suicide.”

“When God sees one of His creatures unjustly persecuted—placed, as it were, between suicide and dishonour—believe me, sir,” replied her ladyship, in a tone of profound conviction, “God will pardon suicide, for suicide then becomes martyrdom.”

“You either say too much, or too little. Speak, madam; in the name of Heaven, explain yourself!”

“What! shall I relate my misfortunes to you, that you may treat them as fables—shall I tell you my designs, that you may disclose them to my persecutor! No, sir! Besides, of what consequence can the life or the death of an unhappy convict be to you? You are only responsible for my body, are you not? And provided that you produced a dead body, which could be recognised as mine, no more would be required of you, and perhaps you might even receive a double recompense.”

“I, madam—I!” exclaimed Felton. “Then you suppose that I would ever receive a price for your life? Oh! you do not think what you are pleased to say!”

“Leave me to myself, Felton—leave me to myself,” said her ladyship, with some excitement; “every soldier ought to be ambitious, ought he not? You are a lieutenant: well, you would follow at my funeral with the rank of captain.”

“But what have I done to you, then?” said Felton,

much alarmed, "that you should burden me with such a heavy responsibility before God and men? In a few days you will be far from here, madam. Your life will then be no longer under my care; and," he added with a sigh, "then—then, you can do with it what you will."

"So!" exclaimed her ladyship, as if she were unable to restrain her holy indignation. "You, a pious man—you, who pass for a just man—you only demand one thing, and that is, not to be inculpated, not to be inconvenienced, by my death."

"It is my duty to watch over your life, madam, and I will do so."

"But, do you understand the duty you discharge? It is cruel, even if I were guilty; but what name will you give it—with what term will the Almighty brand it—if I am innocent?"

"I am a soldier, madam; and I execute the orders that I have received."

"And do you believe that, at the day of final judgment, the Almighty will make a distinction between the hoodwinked executioner and the unrighteous judge? You will not allow me to kill my body, and yet you make yourself the instrument of him who wishes to kill my soul!"

"But, I repeat to you," said Felton, much moved, "that no danger threatens you: I answer for Lord de Winter, as for myself."

"Madman!" exclaimed her ladyship, "poor madman, who presumes to answer for another, when the wisest, those who are the most after God's own heart, are afraid of answering for themselves, and join the party of the strongest and most fortunate, to conquer the weakest and most miserable!"

"Impossible, madam, impossible!" muttered Felton, who yet felt in his heart's core the force of this argument; "whilst a prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me; whilst alive, you will not lose your life by my connivance."

"Yes," exclaimed her ladyship, "but I shall lose what

is much dearer to me than life—I shall lose my honour, Felton; and it is you whom I will make responsible, before God and man, for my shame and infamy!”

On this occasion, Felton, impassive as he was, or as he pretended to be, could no longer resist the secret influence which had already enthralled him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision—to hear her by turns imploring and threatening—to suffer under the combined ascendancy of grief and beauty, was too much for a brain whose strength was sapped by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith: it was too much for a heart corroded, at the same time, by the love of heaven, which burns, and by the hatred of mankind, which destroys.

Her ladyship perceived his agitation: she felt, as it were by intuition, the contending passions which burned with the blood in the young fanatic's veins; and, like a skilful general, who sees the enemy preparing to retreat, and then rushes upon him with a shout of victory, she arose—beautiful as a priestess of antiquity—inspired as a Christian virgin—with extended arms, and neck uncovered, and dishevelled hair—and with a hand modestly confining her dress upon her bosom, and with a glance illuminated by that fire which had already carried disorder into the senses of the young puritan, she walked towards him, uttering, to an impetuous air, in that sweet voice to which she gave so terrible an emphasis—

“ To Baal his victim send ;
 To lions cast the martyr :
 Yet vengeance is God's charter !
 To Him, my cries ascend.”

Felton stood like one petrified.

“ Who are you? What are you?” exclaimed he, clasping his hands; “are you an angel or a demon? Are you Eloas or Astarte?”

“ Have you not recognised me, Felton? I am neither angel nor demon: I am but a daughter of the earth, a sister of the faith;—nothing more!”

“ Yes, yes,” said Felton, “ I suspected it at first, but now I am satisfied.”

“ You are convinced ! And yet you are the accomplice of that child of Belial, whom men call Lord de Winter. You are convinced, and yet you leave me in the hands of my enemies—of the enemy of England, and of the enemy of God ! You are convinced, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and pollutes the world with his heresies and debaucheries—to that infamous Sardanapalus, whom the blind call Buckingham, and the believers Antichrist !”

“ I deliver you up to Buckingham ! I ! What do you mean ? ”

“ They have eyes,” exclaimed the lady, “ and they will not see ; they have ears, and they will not hear.”

“ Yes, yes,” said Felton, drawing his hand over his damp forehead, as if to drag away his last remaining doubt ; “ yes, I recognise the voice that speaks to me in my dreams ; yes, I recognise the features of the angel which visits me each night, crying to my sleepless soul—strike ! save England ! save thyself ! for thou wilt die without having appeased the Lord ! Speak,” cried Felton, “ speak ! I can understand you now.”

A flash of delight, fearful, but rapid as thought, gleamed from her ladyship’s eyes.

Fugitive as was this homicidal glance, Felton perceived it, and started, as if it had thrown light into the dark abysses of that woman’s heart.

He suddenly recalled the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of her ladyship, and her first attempts on her arrival : he retreated a step, and drooped his head, but without ceasing to regard her ; as if, fascinated by this singular being, he could not avert his eyes.

Her ladyship was not the woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. In the midst of these apparent emotions, her icy coolness did not leave her. Before she was obliged, by Felton’s answer, to resume a conversation which it would be so difficult to maintain in the same exalted tone, she let her hands fall, as if the

weakness of the woman resumed its ascendancy over the enthusiasm of the inspired saint.

“But, no,” said she, “it is not for me to be the Judith who will deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the Eternal One is too heavy for my arm. Let me, then, escape dishonour by death—let me find a refuge in martyrdom. I neither ask for liberty, like a criminal; nor for vengeance, like a pagan. To be allowed to die, is all that I demand. I entreat you, I implore you on my knees—let me die—and my last sigh shall breathe forth a blessing on my preserver!”

Before this voice, so soft and supplicating—at this look, so timid and submissive, Felton advanced towards her. By degrees, the enchantress had resumed that magic charm which she took up and laid aside at pleasure; that is to say, beauty, softness, tears, and, above all, the irresistible attraction of that mystical voluptuousness which is the most irresistible of all kinds of voluptuousness.

“Alas!” said Felton, “I can only pity you, if you prove to me that you are a victim. But Lord de Winter makes most serious complaints against you. You are a Christian woman—you are my sister in the faith. I feel myself drawn towards you—I, who have never loved any one but my benefactor—I, who have only found traitors, and infidels, throughout my life. But you, madam—you, so really beautiful—you, apparently so pure, must have committed many crimes for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus.”

“‘They have eyes,’” repeated the lady, with indescribable softness, “‘and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear.’”

“But then,” exclaimed the young officer, “speak—oh, speak!”

“What, to confide my shame to you!” exclaimed the lady, with the blush of modesty upon her face; “for, often, the crime of one is the shame of another. To confide my crime to you, a man, and I a woman! Oh!” she continued, modestly placing her hand before her eyes, “oh! never, never could I dare!”

“To me, as to a brother!” pled Felton.

The lady regarded him for a long time with an expression which Felton took for doubt, but which was, nevertheless, only observation and a desire to fascinate.

A suppliant in his turn, Felton clasped his hands.

“Well, then!” exclaimed the lady, “I will dare to trust my brother.”

At this moment the step of Lord de Winter was heard. But the dreaded brother-in-law was not contented, this time, with merely passing the door, as he had done the evening before: he stopped, and, after exchanging two words with the sentinel, he opened the door and entered.

Whilst these two words were passing, Felton had rapidly moved from the lady’s side, and, when Lord de Winter appeared, he was at some paces distance from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, and let his searching glance travel from the prisoner to the young officer.

“You have been here a long time, John,” said he. “Has this woman related her crimes to you? If so, I can comprehend the duration of the interview.”

Felton started; and her ladyship felt that she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted puritan.

“Ah! you fear that your prisoner will escape you!” said she. “Well! ask your gaoler what the favour was that I but now solicited of him.”

“And were you asking a favour?” said the baron suspiciously.

“Yes, she was, my lord,” replied the young man, much confused.

“And what favour? Come, let us hear,” added Lord de Winter.

“A knife—which she would return to me, through the wicket, an instant after she received it,” replied Felton.

“Is there any one, then, concealed here, whose throat this gracious person wishes to cut?” inquired Lord de Winter, in a tone of mockery and contempt.

"Yes, I am concealed here!" replied her ladyship.

"I gave you your choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord de Winter: "choose Tyburn, my lady: the rope is, believe me, surer than the knife."

Felton grew pale, and made one step forward; for he remembered that, when he came in, the lady held a cord in her hand.

"You are right," said she, "and I had already thought of it." Then she added, in a lower voice, "I will think of it again."

Felton shuddered, even to the very marrow of his bones. Lord de Winter probably observed this; for he said—

"John, my friend, distrust yourself. I have reposed my confidence in you: be watchful; I have warned you. Besides, be of good cheer, my boy: in three days we shall get rid of this creature, and where I send her, she can never again injure any one."

"You hear him!" cried her ladyship, with a burst of indignation, which the baron thought was addressed to heaven, but which Felton comprehended was for him.

Felton held down his head and mused.

The baron took the officer by the arm, looking over his own shoulder, so as not to lose sight of the lady whilst he was in the room.

"Come, come," reasoned the prisoner, when the door was shut, "I am not so far advanced as I believed myself to be. De Winter has changed his customary stupidity into unparalleled prudence. This is the desire of vengeance; and thus does that desire form a man! As to Felton, he hesitates. Ah! he is not a man of resolution, like that cursed d'Artagnan."

Nevertheless, her ladyship remained in anxious expectation. She thought that the day would not pass away without her seeing Felton again. At last, in about an hour after the scene that we have just narrated, she heard some whispering at the door, and soon afterwards it was opened, and she recognised Felton.

The young man came hastily into the room, leaving the door open behind him, and making a sign to her ladyship to be silent. His countenance was fearfully agitated.

“What do you want?” said she.

“Listen!” replied Felton, in a slow voice. “I have just dismissed the sentinel, that I may remain here without any one knowing that I have come, and speak to you without any one overhearing what I say. The baron has just related to me a terrible tale.”

The lady assumed her smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

“Either you are a demon,” continued Felton, “or the baron—my benefactor, my more than father—is a monster. I have known you four days—I have loved him ten years: therefore I may well hesitate between you two. Be not alarmed at what I say: I want to be convinced. This night, after midnight, I will come to you, and you must convince me.”

“No, Felton—no, my brother,” said she, “the sacrifice is too great, and I see what it will cost you. No, I am lost—do not destroy yourself with me. My death will be far more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the corpse will convince you better than the living prisoner’s words.”

“Hush, madam,” said Felton, “and do not speak to me thus. I am come that you may promise me upon your honour—that you may swear to me by that which is most sacred to you—that you will make no attempt upon your life.”

“I will not promise,” said her ladyship; “for no one respects an oath more than I do; and, if I promise, I must keep my word.”

“Well,” said Felton, “bind yourself only till I have seen you once again. If, after we have met, you still persist, you shall then be free, and I myself will provide you with the weapon you have asked for.”

“So be it!” said her ladyship; “for your sake, I shall wait.”

“Swear it.”

“I swear it by our God! Are you satisfied?”

“Well,” said Felton, “this night.”

And he rushed out of the apartment, shut the door again, and waited outside, with the soldier’s half-pike in his hand, as if he were mounting guard.

The soldier having returned, Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the wicket, which she had approached, her ladyship saw the young man cross himself with delirious fervour, and hurry along the corridor in a transport of delight.

As for herself, she returned to her seat with a smile of savage scorn upon her lips, and she blasphemously repeated the fearful name of that God by whom she had just sworn, without ever having learned to know Him.

“My God!” said she. “Fanatical fool!—*My* God is myself; and whoever will assist in my revenge!”

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FIFTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

HER ladyship had, however, achieved a half triumph, and the success she had obtained renewed her strength.

There was no difficulty in vanquishing, as she had hitherto done, men ready to be led astray, whom the education of a gallant court swiftly drew into her snares. Her ladyship was beautiful enough to fascinate the senses, and skilful enough to prevail over all the obstacles of the mind.

But, on this occasion, she had to strive against an untutored nature, concentrated by austerity. Religion and penitence had made of Felton a man impenetrable to all ordinary seductions. Schemes so vast, projects so tumultuous, were floating in that fervid brain, that there was no room for love—the sentiment that feeds itself on

leisure, and thrives and fattens on corruption. Her ladyship had made a breach, by her false virtue, in the opinion of a man prejudiced against her, and, by her beauty, in the heart and senses of a pure and candid man. By this experiment upon the most rebellious subjects that nature and religion could submit to her examination, she had at last taken the measurement of powers hitherto unknown even to herself.

Often, however, during the evening, had she despaired of fate, and of herself. We know that she did not invoke the aid of God: she trusted in the genius of evil—that boundless sovereignty which rules over the details of human life, and through which, as in the Arabian fable, a pomegranate seed suffices to build up again a ruined world.

Her ladyship, being quite prepared to receive Felton, was at liberty to make her batteries ready for the next day. She well knew that only two days remained for her; that, were the warrant once signed by Buckingham—and Buckingham would sign it the more freely, as it bore a false name, and he could not recognise the real woman whom it concerned—this warrant once signed, we say, the baron would immediately embark her; and she knew, also, that women condemned to transportation, use, in their seductions, arms much less powerful than those pretended virtuous women, whose beauty is illumined by the sun of fashion, whose wit is vaunted by the voice of the world, and whom an aristocratic beam gilds with its enchanted light. To be a woman condemned to a wretched and disgraceful punishment, is no impediment to beauty, but it is an insurmountable obstacle to power. Like all persons of real genius, her ladyship well knew what accorded with her nature and her means. Poverty disgusted her—subjection deprived her of two-thirds of her greatness. Her ladyship was only a queen amongst queens: the enjoyment of satisfied pride was essential to her sway. To command beings of an inferior nature, was, to her, rather a humiliation than a pleasure.

She would most assuredly return from her banishment : of that she had not the slightest doubt ; but how long would that banishment continue ? To an active and ambitious nature, like that of her ladyship, the days which are not spent in self-elevation are unlucky ones. What then can we call the days of bitter descent ? To lose one, two, three years, that is an actual eternity ; to return, perhaps, after the death or the fall of the cardinal ; to return when d'Artagnan and his friends, happy and successful, had received from the queen the recompense that they so richly merited for their services to her—these were the desolating thoughts which a woman like her ladyship was altogether unable to endure. Besides, the storm which raged in her breast was increasing in its violence, and she would have burst her prison walls if her body could have enjoyed, for a single instant, the same proportions as her soul.

And then, in the midst of all this, she was goaded by the remembrance of the cardinal. What would be thought, what would be said, of her silence by that cardinal, so distrustful, so anxious, and so suspicious—that cardinal, who was not only her sole support, her sole stay, her sole protector, for the present, but, also, the principal instrument of her future fortunes and revenge ? She knew him well : she knew that, on her return after a fruitless expedition, she might talk in vain of her imprisonment—she would in vain exaggerate her sufferings. The cardinal would answer, with the mocking calmness of the sceptic, strong at once in power and in genius :

“ You should not have allowed yourself to be entrapped.”

Her ladyship then concentrated all her energy, murmuring forth, in the intricacies of her thought, the name of Felton, the sole gleam of light which visited her, in the depths of that hell into which she had fallen ; and, like a serpent coiling and uncoiling its rings, to satisfy itself of its own strength, she, by anticipation, enveloped Felton in the countless folds of her own inventive imagination.

Yet time rolled on. The hours, one after the other,

appeared to arouse the clock as they passed, and every stroke vibrated in the prisoner's heart. At nine o'clock, Lord de Winter paid his customary visit; looked at the windows and bars; sounded the flooring and the walls; and examined the chimney and the doors; yet, during this long and minute investigation, not one word was uttered either on her part or on his.

"Come, come," said the baron, as he left the room, "you will not escape to-night."

At ten o'clock Felton came to relieve the sentinel at the door. Her ladyship now recognised his step, as a mistress recognises that of her lover, and yet she both hated and despised this weak fanatic.

It was not the appointed time, so Felton did not enter the room.

Two hours after, just on the stroke of twelve, the sentinel was relieved.

And now the time had come, and, from this moment, her ladyship waited with impatience.

The new sentinel began to walk along the corridor.

In ten minutes Felton came. Her ladyship listened.

"Observe," said the young man to the sentinel; "on no account whatever are you to leave this door; for you know that a soldier was punished for leaving his post for a moment last night, although it was I who kept guard during his short absence."

"Yes, I know that," said the soldier.

"I advise you, therefore, to adopt the strictest vigilance. For my part, I am going to inspect the room again, and to observe this woman, who has, I fear, conceived some violent designs against herself. My orders are to watch her closely."

"Good!" murmured her ladyship. "There is the austere puritan, telling a lie."

The soldier smiled.

"Plague take it, lieutenant," said he, "you are not badly off in getting such a commission, especially if your orders are not to go till she is ready for bed."

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have rebuked the soldier, who indulged himself in such a joke ; but his own conscience was now criminating him too loudly to permit his tongue to speak.

" If I call," said he, " come in ; and also, if any one comes, call me."

" Yes, sir," said the soldier.

Felton entered the room. Her ladyship arose.

" You are come," said she.

" I promised to come," replied Felton, " and I have come."

" You promised me something else, though," said she.

" What then, oh, my God !" said the young man, who, in spite of all his self-command, felt his knees tremble, and his brow grow damp.

" You promised to bring me a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview."

" Do not speak of that, madam," said Felton ; " there is no situation, however terrible it may be, that can permit one of God's creatures to destroy himself. I have reflected that I never ought to render myself accessory of such a crime."

" Ah ! you have reflected !" said the prisoner, again seating herself in her chair, with a disdainful smile. " And I, also, have reflected !"

" About what ?"

" That I had nothing to say to a man who did not keep his word."

" Oh, my God !" murmured Felton.

" You may leave the room," said her ladyship ; " I shall not speak."

" Here is the knife," said Felton, taking from his pocket the weapon, which he had, according to his promise, brought, although he hesitated to entrust it to his prisoner.

" Let me look at it," said the lady.

" For what purpose ?" said Felton.

" I will return it immediately, upon my honour. You

may lay it upon that table, and stand between it and me."

Felton gave the weapon to her ladyship, who examined it attentively, and tried its point upon the end of her finger.

"Very well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer; "it is a serviceable weapon: you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took the knife, and laid it upon the table, as had been agreed with the prisoner.

Her ladyship's eyes followed his act, with a satisfied glance.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The injunction was unnecessary; for the young man stood before her, waiting for her words, that he might feast upon them.

"Felton," said her ladyship, with a melancholy solemnity—"Felton, suppose your sister, the daughter of your father, should say to you—'Whilst still young, and unfortunately beautiful, I was decoyed into a snare, but I resisted—temptations and assaults were multiplied around me, but I resisted—the religion that I serve, and the God whom I adore, were blasphemed, because I called that God and that religion to my aid, and I resisted—then, outrages were heaped upon me, and, as they could not sacrifice my soul, they determined for ever to defile my body—at last—'"

Her ladyship stopped, and a bitter smile was visible on her lips.

"At last—" said Felton, "and what did they do at last?"

"At last, they resolved one night to paralyse that resistance which they could not overcome otherwise; one night they mixed a powerful narcotic with my drink. Scarcely had I finished my repast, before I found myself sinking gradually into an unusual torpor. Although I had no suspicions, yet a nameless dread made me struggle against this drowsiness. I arose; I endeavoured

to reach the window, to call for help; but my limbs refused to support me; it seemed to me as if the ceiling lowered itself on my head, and crushed me with its weight. I stretched forth my arms, and endeavoured to speak, but could only utter inarticulate sounds; an irresistible numbness stole upon me, and I clung to my chair, feeling that I was about to fall; but even this support was soon insufficient for my feeble arms; I fell, first on one knee, then on both; I sought to pray, but my tongue was frozen: God neither saw, nor heard me, and I sank upon the floor, subjugated by a sleep resembling death.

“Of all the time which elapsed during this sleep, I had no recollection whatever. The only thing I can remember, is, that I awoke, and found myself transported into a circular chamber, most sumptuously furnished, into which no light penetrated but through an opening in the ceiling. There seemed to be no door to enter by: it looked like a magnificent prison.

“It was a long time before I could observe the place in which I was, or recall the circumstances which I now relate. My mind appeared to struggle in vain against the oppressive darkness of that sleep, from which I was unable to escape. I had some vague perceptions of a space passed over, and of the rolling of a carriage; but all this was so misty, and so indistinct, that these events appeared rather to belong to the life of some other person than to my own, and yet to be incorporated with mine by some fantastical duality.

“For some time, the state in which I found myself appeared so strange, that I supposed it was a dream. By degrees, however, the fearful reality forced itself upon me: I was no longer in the house which I had inhabited. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, two-thirds of the day were already spent. It was on the evening of the previous day that I had fallen asleep: my slumber had, therefore, lasted nearly four-and-twenty hours. What had happened during this protracted sleep?

“I arose, staggering. All my slow and torpid movements showed that the influence of the narcotic had not yet ceased. I found that my chamber had been furnished for the reception of a woman; and the most complete coquette could not have formed a wish, that, in looking around the apartment, she would not have found satisfied.

“Assuredly I was not the first captive who had been confined within that splendid prison. But you understand, Felton, the more beautiful the prison, the more was I alarmed. Yes, it was a prison; for in vain I endeavoured to escape. I tried all the walls to find a door; but everywhere the walls gave back a dull and heavy sound. I went round this room, perhaps twenty times, seeking some kind of outlet: there was none; and I sank upon a chair, worn out with terror and fatigue.

“In the meantime, the night approached rapidly; and, with the night, my fears increased. I knew not what to do: it seemed as if I were encompassed by unknown dangers, amidst which I must plunge at every step. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented me from feeling hunger.

“No external noise, by which I could compute the lapse of time, had reached me, but I presumed that it must be about seven or eight in the evening; for we were in the month of October, and it was quite dark.

“Suddenly the noise of a door turning on its hinges startled me: a ball of fire appeared above the window in the ceiling, casting a brilliant light into the room; and I perceived, with horror, that a man was standing at a few paces from me.

“A table with two covers, with a supper all prepared, was arranged, as if by magic, in the middle of the room.

“And this man was he who had pursued me for a year, who had sworn my dishonour, and who, from the first words which fell from his lips, left me no hope of being at any future time restored to liberty.”

“Infamous!” murmured Felton.

“Oh, yes! the wretch!” exclaimed her ladyship, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed hanging on her lips, took in this strange tale. “Oh, yes! the wretch! He thought that it was quite enough to have abducted me in my sleep: he now came, hoping that I should yield to my shame, since that shame was consummated—he came to offer me his fortune in exchange for my love.

“Everything that a woman’s heart can conceive of haughty scorn, and of contemptuous speech, I poured out upon that man. Undoubtedly he was habituated to such reproaches, for he listened to me with a calm and smiling look, and with his arms folded on his breast; and then, when he thought that I had nothing more to say, he approached to take my hand:—I rushed towards the table, seized a knife, and placed it to my bosom. ‘Take one step more,’ I cried, ‘and, besides my dishonour, you shall have to answer for my death!’

“Doubtless there was, in my look, my voice, my whole appearance, that character of truth which carries conviction into the most wicked minds; for he paused.

“‘Your death!’ cried he. ‘Oh, no! you are much too charming a prisoner for me to consent to lose you so. Adieu, beautiful creature! I will wait until you are in a better temper, before I pay you another visit.’

“At these words, he whistled; and the flaming globe which illuminated my room ascended, and disappeared. I found myself once more in total darkness. The same noise of a door opening and shutting was, an instant afterwards, again audible; the globe of light descended anew, and I was once more alone.

“This moment was frightful. Had I been at all uncertain about my misery, every doubt was now dispelled before this fearful reality. I was in the power of a man whom I not only detested, but despised—of a man who had already given me a fatal proof of what he dared to do.”

“But who was that man?” demanded Felton.

Her ladyship gave no answer to his question, but continued her recital.

“ I spent the night upon a chair, starting at the least noise ; for, about midnight, the lamp went out, and I was again in darkness. But the night passed away without any reappearance of my persecutor. Daylight came : the table was gone ; and I had still the knife in my hand. This knife was my sole hope.

“ I was overwhelmed with fatigue : my eyes were burning from sleeplessness : I had not dared to close them for a single instant. Daylight reassured me. I threw myself on my bed, still grasping the protecting knife, which I concealed beneath my pillow.

“ When I awoke, another table was arranged. But now, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agonies, a ravenous hunger made itself be felt. For eight-and-forty hours I had enjoyed no nourishment. I ate some bread and a little fruit. Then, remembering the narcotic mingled with the water I had drunk, I did not touch that which was on the table, but went and filled my glass from a marble reservoir fixed in the wall above my toilet-table.

“ And yet, in spite of this precaution, I remained for some time in extreme anguish ; though on this occasion my fears were unfounded. I passed the day without experiencing anything that resembled what I feared. I took the precaution, however, to empty the decanter of half the water, that my distrust might not be perceived.

“ The evening came ; but, profound as was the darkness, my eyes began to grow accustomed to it. In the midst of this obscurity, I saw the table sink into the floor : a quarter of an hour afterwards, it reappeared bearing my supper : a moment later, thanks to the same lamp, my apartment was again lighted.

“ I was resolved only to eat of those things with which it was impossible to mingle anything somniferous. Two eggs and some fruit composed my meal, and then I drew a glass of water from my guardian fountain, and drank

it. At the first mouthful, it appeared to me no longer to have the same taste as in the morning. A sudden suspicion seized me. I stopped; but I had already swallowed half a glass. I threw the remainder away with horror, and waited, with the icy dew of terror on my brow. Some invisible witness had unquestionably seen me take the water from the fountain, and had taken advantage of my confidence, the more certainly to accomplish my ruin, so coldly planned, so cruelly pursued.

“Half an hour had not passed over, before the same symptoms began to reappear. Only, as I had now taken no more than half a glass of water, I struggled longer against them, and, instead of sleeping soundly, I fell into that kind of slumber which left me the perception of all that passed around me, whilst it quite deprived me of the power of resistance or defence. I dragged myself towards my bed, to seek the sole bulwark which remained—my guardian knife. But I could not reach the pillow. I fell upon my knees, grasping with my hands one of the posts at the foot of the bed.”

Felton became fearfully pale, and a convulsive shudder pervaded all his frame.

“And what was more horrible,” continued the lady, her voice trembling as if she yet felt the anguish of that terrible moment, was, that, on this occasion, I was conscious of the danger which hung over me. My soul, if I may so express myself, was watching over my sleeping body. I saw—I heard,—as in a dream, it is true; but my perceptions were, on that account, only the more terrific. I saw the lamp again ascending, and was gradually left in utter darkness. I then heard the sound of that door, so well recognized, although it had been opened but twice. I felt instinctively that some one was approaching me. It is said that the wretched beings who are lost in the deserts of America thus feel the approach of the serpent. I wished to make an effort. I endeavoured to cry out. By an incredible exertion of

my will, I even raised myself up; but it was only to fall down again immediately."

"But tell me, then, who was your persecutor?" exclaimed the young officer.

Her ladyship saw at a glance how deeply she affected Felton, by dwelling on each detail of her narrative; but she did not wish to spare him any torture. The more deeply she wounded his heart, the more surely would he avenge her. So she once more proceeded, as if she had not heard his question, or as if she thought that the time for answering it had not yet come.

"I heard him exclaim, when he perceived me, 'Oh, these miserable puritan women! I knew that they harassed their executioners, but I believed them to be less earnest in resisting their seducers.'"

Felton listened without uttering aught but a sort of roar. The perspiration trickled down his brow; and, with a hand hidden beneath his dress, he tore his flesh.

"My first impulse, on returning to myself," continued her ladyship, "was to look under my pillow for the knife, which I had been unable to reach: if it had not served as a defence, it might at least be useful for an expiation. But, on taking this knife, Felton, a terrible idea suggested itself to me. I have sworn to tell you everything, and I will do so: I have promised you the truth, and I will tell it, though it should ruin me."

"The idea suggested itself to you to revenge yourself on this man, did it not?" exclaimed Felton.

"Well! yes," said her ladyship, "it was as you have guessed. That idea was not becoming in a Christian, I know. Undoubtedly the eternal enemy of our souls himself breathed it into my mind. In fact—how shall I confess it, Felton?" continued her ladyship, in the tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime—"that idea not only came into my mind, but has never left it since. And, perhaps, my present sufferings are but the punishment of this homicidal thought."

“Go on—go on,” said Felton ; “I long to hear of the accomplishment of your revenge.”

“Oh ! I determined that it should be as short a time as possible delayed. I doubted not that he would return on the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear. On this account, at breakfast time, I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I was resolved to pretend to sup, but to taste nothing. I must, therefore, by the morning’s nourishment, prepare myself to sustain the evening fast. I concealed a glass of water from my breakfast, as thirst had been my severest suffering when I remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

“The day passed without producing any other effect upon me than to strengthen the resolution I had taken. But I took care that my face should not betray the thoughts of my heart ; for I doubted not that I was watched. Many times, indeed, I even felt a smile upon my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you the idea at which I smiled—you would abominate me for it !”

“Go on—go on,” said Felton ; “you see that I listen to you, and I want to know the end.”

“The evening came,” continued her ladyship, “and the usual circumstances took place. During the darkness, my supper was served as usual ; and then the lamp was lighted, and I placed myself at table. I ate only some fruit, and pretended to pour some water from the decanter, but drank that which I had kept in my own glass : the substitution was, however, so adroitly made, that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of the truth. After supper, I exhibited all the appearances of the drowsiness that I had felt the evening before : but this time, as if overwhelmed with fatigue, or as if I was familiarised with danger, I pretended to fall asleep. I had now found my knife, and, whilst I feigned to sleep, my hand convulsively grasped the handle.

“Two hours glided away, without anything new occurring. On this occasion—oh, my God ! who would

have predicted that on the previous night!—I actually began to fear that he might fail to come.

“At last I saw the lamp gently rising, and disappearing in the depths of the ceiling. My apartment became dark; but I made an effort with my glances to penetrate the gloom. About ten minutes then elapsed, during which I heard nothing but the beating of my own heart. I implored of heaven that he might come.

“At length I heard the well-known creak of the door opening and shutting; I perceived, in spite of the thickness of the carpet, a step which made the floor groan; I saw, in spite of the darkness, a shadow which approached my couch.”

“Make haste! make haste!” interrupted Felton; “do you not see that every one of your words burns me like molten lead!”

“Then,” continued her ladyship, “I collected all my strength. I called to mind that the moment of revenge, or rather of justice, had now arrived. I considered myself a second Judith. I held the knife in my hand; and, when I saw him near me, then, with a last cry of grief and of despair, I struck him in the middle of the breast! The wretch! he had foreseen the blow. His breast was covered by a coat of mail: the knife itself was blunted.

“‘Ah! ah!’ cried he, seizing me by the arm, and tearing from me the weapon which had so badly served me; ‘you want to kill me, my pretty puritan: but that is more than hatred—it is ingratitude. Come, come, calm yourself, my charming girl. I thought you had grown gentler. I am not one of those tyrants who keep women in opposition to their wills. You do not love me? I had my doubts about it, with my usual folly; now, I am convinced of it. To-morrow you shall be free.’

“I had only one wish, which was that he should kill me.

“‘Take care,’ said I, ‘for my liberty shall be your disgrace!’

“‘What mean you, my beautiful sibyl.’

“‘Yes, for as soon as I am free, I will tell everything : I will proclaim your violence towards me—I will proclaim my captivity—I will denounce this palace of infamy. You are greatly exalted, my lord, but tremble ! Above you is the king—and above the king, is God.’

“Master as he appeared to be of himself, my persecutor allowed a sign of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I had felt the trembling of his arm, on which my hand rested.

“‘Then you shall never leave this place,’ said he.

“‘Right ! right !’ I exclaimed : ‘then the site of my punishment shall be also the site of my tomb. Right ! I will die here, and you shall see whether an accusing phantom be not even more terrible than the living enemy who menaces.’

“‘But you shall have no weapon.’

“‘There is one, which despair has placed within the reach of every creature who has courage to make use of it—I will die of hunger.’

“‘Come,’ said the wretch, ‘is not peace of more value than such a war ? I give you your liberty this instant ; I will proclaim your virtue, I will call you the Lucretia of England.’

“‘And I will proclaim you the Sextus : I will denounce you before men, as I have already denounced you before God ; and if it should be necessary, that, like Lucretia, I should attest the accusation with my blood, I *will* attest it.’

“‘Ah, ah,’ said my enemy, in a tone of mockery, ‘then it is quite another thing. Faith, after all, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing ; and, if you allow yourself to die of hunger, it will be your own fault.’

“At these words he left the room. I heard the door open and shut, and remained overwhelmed :—not so much, I confess, with grief, as with the shame of having failed in my revenge.

“He kept his word. The next day and night passed

without my seeing him; but I kept mine, also, and neither ate nor drank anything. I was resolved, as I had told him, to let myself die of hunger. I spent the day and night in prayer; for I hoped that God would forgive my self-murder. On the second night, the door was opened. I was lying on the floor, for my strength began to fail me. At the noise, I raised myself upon my hand.

“‘Well,’ said a voice which vibrated on my ear too terribly to be mistaken—‘Well, have you become a little more compliant, and will you purchase liberty by a mere promise of silence? Come, I am a good noble,’ added he, ‘and although I do not love the puritans, I do them justice, as well as to their women—when they are pretty. Come, give me a little oath upon the cross: I ask for nothing more.’

“‘On the cross!’ I exclaimed, raising myself up, for, at that detested word I had recovered all my strength. ‘Upon the cross I swear, that no promise, no threat, no torture, shall close my lips! Upon the cross I swear to denounce you everywhere, as a murderer, as a violator of honour, as a coward! On the cross I swear, if ever I accomplish my escape, to demand vengeance against you from the whole human race!’

“‘Take care!’ said the voice in a tone of menace that I had not yet heard; ‘I have one expedient, which I will only employ at the last extremity, to stop your mouth; or, at least, to prevent any one from believing a syllable of what you say.’

“I rallied all my strength to answer by a laugh of scorn.

“He saw that from this time it was war to the death between us.

“‘Listen,’ said he: ‘I yet give you the remainder of this night, and to-morrow. Reflect! Promise to be silent; and wealth, consideration, honours even, shall surround you. Threaten to speak, and I condemn you to infamy.’

“‘You?’ I exclaimed, ‘you!’

“‘To eternal, ineffaceable infamy!’

“‘You!’ I repeated. Oh! I assure you, Felton, I believed that he was mad.

“‘Yes, I!’ he replied.

“‘Ah, leave me,’ I cried, ‘leave me, if you do not wish me to dash out my brains against the wall, before your very eyes.’

“‘Well!’ said he; ‘you demand it? I therefore leave you till to-morrow evening.’

“‘Till to-morrow evening,’ I replied, sinking on the floor, and biting the carpet in my rage.”

Felton supported himself with a chair; and her ladyship saw, with a demoniacal joy, that the fortitude of the young officer would probably give way before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER LVII.

AN EVENT IN CLASSICAL TRAGEDY.

AFTER a moment's silence, which her ladyship employed in observing the young officer who was listening to her, she continued her recital.

“For nearly three days, I had neither eaten nor drunk,” said she, “and I was suffering dreadful tortures. Sometimes, a feeling as of passing clouds, which pressed upon my brow and dimmed my sight, came over me. It was delirium. The evening arrived. I was so weak that I fainted constantly; and each time that I fainted, I thanked God, for I believed that I was dying. During one of these fainting fits, I heard the door open, and terror recalled me to myself. My persecutor entered, followed by a man in a mask. He was himself also masked; but I recognised his step, his voice, and that commanding air which hell has given to his person, for the misfortune of mankind.

“‘Well,’ said he, ‘have you determined to take the oath which I require of you?’

“‘You have yourself said that the puritans are faithful to their word ; and you have already heard my resolution—it is, to appeal against you here, on earth, to the tribunal of men, and, in heaven, to the tribunal of God!’

“‘So! you persist?’

“‘Yes! I swear it before that God who hears me—I will call the whole world to witness to your crime, and will never cease until I have found an avenger.’

“‘You are an abandoned woman,’ said he, in a voice of thunder, ‘and you shall suffer the punishment of prostitutes! Tainted as you are in the eyes of that world which you invoke, try to prove to it that you are neither guilty nor insane.’

“Then, addressing the man who accompanied him—‘Executioner,’ said he, ‘do your duty!’”

“Oh! his name! his name!” cried Felton, in a new burst of rage; “tell me his name!”

“Then, in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance—for I began to understand that something worse than death was meditated against me—the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, and bound me so as to wound and bruise me by his violence; and then—whilst I was suffocated by my sobs, almost senseless, and calling aloud on that God who would not listen to my cries—I uttered suddenly a fearful shriek of agony and shame. A burning instrument—a red-hot iron—the brand of the executioner—had been stamped upon my shoulder!”

Felton groaned.

“Look!” said her ladyship, rising with all the majesty of a queen—“look, Felton, how a new kind of martyrdom has been invented for a pure young girl, the victim of a monster’s brutal crime! Learn to know the hearts of men, and, henceforth, be more reluctant to become the instrument of their unjust revenge.”

Her ladyship, with a rapid motion, tore open her robe, tore away the cambric which covered her shoulder, and, crimsoned by pretended rage and simulated shame,

exposed to the young man the ineffaceable mark which dishonoured that beautiful shoulder.

“But,” exclaimed Felton, “it is a fleur-de-lis that I see!”

“And in that consists the greater infamy,” replied her ladyship. “The brand of England would have made it necessary for him to prove from what court the sentence had been issued; and I should have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the realm: but the brand of France—oh! by that I was indeed branded!”

It was more that Felton could endure. Pale, motionless, petrified by this frightful revelation—dazzled by the superhuman loveliness of that woman, who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime—he fell upon his knees before her, as did the first Christians before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors delivered, in the Circus, to the sanguinary violators of the mob. The mark of infamy disappeared—the beauty alone remained.

“Forgive me, forgive me!” exclaimed Felton; “oh, forgive me!”

Her ladyship read in his eyes—“Love! love!”

“Forgive you—for what?” she inquired.

“Forgive me for uniting myself with your oppressors.”

Her ladyship held out her hand.

“So beautiful! so young!” exclaimed Felton, covering that hand with kisses.

Her ladyship cast upon him one of those glances which convert the slave into a monarch.

Felton, puritan as he was, relinquished her hand to kiss her feet. He had before violently loved—he now adored her!

When this crisis had passed over—when her ladyship appeared to have resumed the calmness she had never really lost,—

“Ah!” said he, “I have now only one thing more to ask of you: it is the name of your true executioner—

for, in my opinion, there was only one: the other was an instrument—nothing more.”

“Brother!” exclaimed her ladyship, “can it be necessary for me now to tell his name? Have you not already guessed it?”

“What!” resumed Felton, “him — again him! — What! the true criminal?”

“The true criminal,” said her ladyship, “is the plunderer of England, the persecutor of all true believers, the cowardly destroyer of woman’s honour—he who, for a caprice of his polluted heart, is about to shed so much of England’s blood—who protects the Protestants to-day, and to-morrow will betray them!”

“Buckingham! It is indeed Buckingham, then!” exclaimed the exasperated Felton.

Her ladyship hid her face in her hands, as if she was unable to endure the shame which that name recalled.

“Buckingham! the violator of this angelic creature!” exclaimed Felton. “And thou, O God! hast not smitten him! Thou hast left him, noble, honoured, powerful, for the destruction of us all!”

“God abandons him who ceases to be constant to himself,” said her ladyship.

“But, surely he must wish to draw down upon himself the chastisement reserved for the accursed!” continued Felton, with increasing excitement. “Surely he must wish that human vengeance should anticipate the chastisement of heaven!”

“Yet men fear, and spare him!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Felton, “I fear him not, neither will I spare him!”

Her ladyship felt her heart bathed in a flood of infernal joy.

“But how,” continued Felton, “does Lord de Winter—my protector, my father—come to be concerned in this?”

“Listen, Felton,” replied her ladyship.—“By the side of the cowardly and contemptible, there are always men

of noble, generous natures. I was betrothed to a man whom I loved, and who loved me; a heart like yours, Felton—a man like you. I went to him, and told him what had taken place. He knew the duke well, and did not entertain a moment's doubt. He was a nobleman—a man equal in every respect to Buckingham. He spoke not, but he girded on his sword, wrapped his cloak around him, and proceeded to the palace of the duke."

"Yes, yes," said Felton, "I understand: yet, with such men, it is not the sword that should be used, but the dagger."

"Buckingham had departed on the previous evening, on an embassy to the court of Spain, where he went to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I., then Prince of Wales. My lover returned.

"'Listen,' said he: 'this man is gone, and, consequently, for the present he escapes my vengeance. But, in the meantime, let us be united, as we ought to be; and, then, depend on Lord de Winter to support his own honour and the honour of his wife.'"

"Lord de Winter!" exclaimed Felton.

"Yes," said her ladyship, "Lord de Winter. And now you understand it all, do you not? Buckingham remained absent nearly a year: eight days before his return, Lord de Winter died suddenly, leaving me his sole heiress. Whence came this blow? God, who sees everything, doubtless knows: as for me, I accuse nobody."

"Oh, what an abyss! what an abyss!" exclaimed Felton.

"Lord de Winter had died without confiding in his brother. The terrible secret was to have been concealed from every one, until it burst like thunder on the head of the guilty duke. Your protector had seen, with pain, this marriage of his brother with a young and dowerless girl; and I perceived that I could expect no assistance from a man who was disappointed in his hopes of an

inheritance. I went to France, resolved to remain there for the remainder of my life. But my whole fortune was in England; and all communications being stopped by the war, I was in want of everything, and was in fact compelled to return. Six days ago, I arrived at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well! Buckingham had unquestionably been apprised of my return, and announced it to Lord de Winter, who was already prejudiced against me, and at the same time he persuaded him that his sister-in-law was a dissolute and branded woman. The pure and noble voice of my husband was no longer there to defend me. Lord de Winter no doubt believed all that he heard, and the more readily, because it was to his interest to believe it. Hence he caused me to be arrested, conveyed here, and placed under your charge. You know the sequel. The day after to-morrow he banishes, he transports me—the day after to-morrow he sends me forth amongst the infamous. Oh! the woof is well woven, the plot is skilfully planned, and my honour will perish in it. You see, Felton, that I must die! Felton, give me the knife!"

At these words, as if all her strength was exhausted, her ladyship sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer.

"No, no!" said he; "no, you shall live—you shall live, honoured and pure—you shall live, to triumph over your enemies!"

Her ladyship gently forced him back with her hand, whilst she attracted him by her look.

"Oh, death! death!" said she, lowering her eyelids and her voice; "death, rather than disgrace, Felton—my brother, my friend—I implore you!"

"No!" exclaimed Felton, "no! you shall live, and you shall be avenged."

"Felton, I bring misfortune upon everything that surrounds me! Felton, desert me—let me die!"

"Well, then, let us die together!" exclaimed he.

Several knocks sounded on the door.

"Listen!" said she; "we have been overheard. They come, and it is all over. We are undone!"

"No," said Felton, "it is the sentinel, who merely lets me know that the guard is about to be changed."

"Hasten, then, to the door, and open it yourself."

Felton obeyed her. This woman already wholly engrossed his thoughts—she was already mistress of all his soul.

On opening the door he found himself confronted by a sergeant, who commanded a patrol of the guard.

"Well, what is the matter?" demanded the young lieutenant.

"You told me," replied the sentinel, "to open the door if I heard you call for help, but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out, without knowing what you said: I tried to open the door, but it was fastened inside; and therefore I called the sergeant."

"And here I am," said the sergeant.

Felton—wandering, wild, verging upon madness—remained speechless.

Her ladyship saw at once that she must relieve him from this embarrassment. She ran to the table, and seized the knife, which he had placed there.

"And by what right would you prevent my death?" said she.

"Great God!" exclaimed Felton, as he saw the knife glittering in her hand.

At this moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded down the corridor.

The baron, attracted by the noise, stood, in his dressing-gown, and with his sword under his arm, upon the threshold of the door.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "here we are at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has presented all the phases that I indicated. But don't concern yourself—no blood will be spilled."

Her ladyship felt that she was ruined, unless she gave

to Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

“ You deceive yourself, my lord ! Blood will be spilled ; and may that blood return on those who cause it to flow ! ”

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed towards her ; but he was too late—she had dealt the blow.

The knife had, however, fortunately—we ought to say skilfully—encountered the steel busk, by which, as by a cuirass, the chests of women were at that period defended, and, glancing aside, had torn the robe, and penetrated diagonally between the flesh and the ribs. The lady’s dress was, nevertheless, instantaneously stained with blood, and she fell back, apparently insensible.

Felton snatched away the knife.

“ See, my lord,” said he, with a gloomy look ; “ this woman, who was under my guard, has slain herself ! ”

“ Make yourself easy, Felton,” replied Lord de Winter ; “ she is not dead : demons do not die so simply. Make yourself easy, and go and wait for me in my apartment.”

“ But, my lord——”

“ Go, I command you ! ”

This order from his superior, Felton obeyed ; but, as he went out, he placed the knife in his bosom.

As for Lord de Winter, he contented himself with summoning the woman who waited upon her ladyship ; and when she came, having recommended the prisoner, who was still insensible, to her care, he left them together.

Nevertheless, as the wound might, after all, in spite of his suspicions, be really serious, he immediately despatched a man on horseback for a surgeon.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

As Lord de Winter had suspected, her ladyship was not very dangerously wounded. As soon, therefore, as she found herself alone with the attendant whom the baron had summoned, and who hastened to undress her, she opened her eyes. It was, however, necessary to counterfeit weakness and pain ; and, to an actress like her ladyship, this was no difficult matter. So completely, indeed, was the poor woman the dupe of her prisoner, that, against her entreaties, she persisted in watching over her throughout the night.

But the presence of this woman was no impediment to her ladyship's thoughts. There could be no longer any doubt that Felton was converted—that Felton was hers ; and that, had an angel appeared to the young man to accuse her, he would certainly have taken him, in his present state of mind, for an envoy of the Evil One. Her ladyship smiled at this idea, for Felton was henceforth her only hope, her sole means of safety.

Yet Lord de Winter might have suspected him, and Felton might now perhaps himself be watched.

About four o'clock in the morning the surgeon arrived, but her ladyship's wound had already closed. He therefore could determine neither its direction nor its depth ; but, from the pulse of his patient, he concluded that the case was not very serious.

In the morning, under the pretence that she had not slept during the night, and had need of repose, her ladyship dismissed the woman who had watched beside her bed. She entertained a hope that Felton would visit her at breakfast time. But Felton came not. Had her secret fears, then, been realised ? Had Felton become suspected by the baron, and would he fail her, now, at the decisive moment ? She had only one day remaining.

Lord de Winter had fixed her embarkation for the twenty-third, and this was the morning of the twenty-second. Nevertheless, she still waited in tolerable patience till the hour of dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, her dinner was brought to her at the usual time; and her ladyship then perceived with alarm that the uniform of the soldiers who guarded her was different.

She hazarded a question as to what had become of Felton. The answer was, that Felton had departed, on horseback, an hour before. She inquired whether the baron was still at the castle; and the soldier replied that he was, and had ordered him to let him know if the prisoner should express a wish to speak to him.

Her ladyship said she was too weak at present, and that her only wish was to remain alone.

The soldier then quitted the room, leaving the dinner served on the table.

Felton, then, had been sent away, and the marines who guarded her were changed. It was obvious, therefore, that Felton was suspected. This was the last blow inflicted on the prisoner.

As soon as she was left alone, her ladyship arose. That bed, to which she had confined herself in order that it might be thought her wound was serious, scorched her like a glowing furnace. She cast a glance at the door: a board had been nailed over the wicket. The baron, no doubt, feared that she might, through this opening, still find some diabolical means of seducing her guards. Her ladyship smiled with joy. She could now give way to her emotions without observation. She roamed about her chamber with all the violence of a raving lunatic, or a tigress imprisoned in her iron cage. Had the knife still been there, she would certainly have resolved to kill, not herself, but the baron.

At six o'clock Lord de Winter entered. He was armed to the very teeth. This man, in whom her ladyship had hitherto seen only an elegant and polished gentleman

had now become an inexorable gaoler. He seemed to expect everything, to conjecture everything, to anticipate everything. A single glance at her ladyship told him what was passing in her soul.

“So,” said he, “you will not kill me to-day, for you are without a weapon; and, moreover, I am on my guard. You had begun to corrupt my poor Felton: he has already felt your infernal influence: but I wish to save him, and you shall see him no more. It is all ended now: you may pack your clothes, for, to-morrow, you will set out. I had fixed the embarkation for the 24th, but I have reflected that the sooner it takes place the surer it will be. By twelve o’clock to-morrow, I shall receive the order for your banishment, signed by Buckingham. If you say one single word, to any one whatever, before you are on board the vessel, my serjeant will blow out your brains: he has received his orders to do so. If, when on board, you speak to any one without the captain’s permission, the captain will have you cast into the sea. This is all determined on. And now, farewell till our next meeting: I have nothing more to say to you to-day. I shall see you again to-morrow, to take leave of you.”

At these words, the baron left the room.

Her ladyship had listened to this threatening tirade with a smile of scorn upon her lips, but with fury in her heart.

The supper was brought in. Her ladyship felt that she needed strength, for she knew not what might be the events of that night, which was now approaching in gloom. Huge clouds were already careering in the skies, and distant flashes announced a tempest. About ten o’clock the storm burst forth; and her ladyship found some consolation in seeing Nature partake of the commotion in her own breast. The thunder bellowed in the air like the angry passions in her soul; and it seemed to her as if the passing gusts disturbed her brow, as they did the trees of which they bent down the branches and

swept off the leaves. She howled like the tempest, but her voice was unheard amidst the vast voice of Nature, which also appeared to be herself groaning in despair.

From time to time she looked at a ring which she wore upon her finger. The bezel of this ring contained a subtle and violent poison—this was her last resource!

Suddenly she heard something strike against the window; and, by the light of the gleaming flash, she saw the countenance of a man appear behind its bars. She ran to the window and opened it.

“Felton!” she exclaimed, “I am saved!”

“Yes,” said Felton, “but silence! silence! I must have time to file your bars: only be careful that we are not perceived through the wicket.”

“Oh! it is a token that the Lord is on our side, Felton,” replied her ladyship; “they have closed up the wicket with a board!”

“Good!” said Felton. “Our God has deprived them of their senses!”

“But what must I do?” inquired her ladyship.

“Nothing—nothing! only shut your window. Go to bed; or, at least, lie down with your clothes on; and, when I have finished, I will tap upon the glass. But will you be able to accompany me?”

“Oh, yes!”

“But your wound?”

“It pains me, but does not prevent me walking.”

“Be ready, then, at the first signal.”

Her ladyship closed the window, put out her lamp as Felton had advised, and threw herself upon the bed. Amidst the raging of the storm, she heard the grating of the file against the bars, and by the light of every flash she beheld the form of Felton behind the glass.

She passed an hour, in almost breathless suspense; icy drops stood upon her brow; and at every sound that issued from the corridor, her heart was convulsed with frightful agony. There are hours which seem prolonged into years. At the expiration of this time, Felton again

tapped. Her ladyship bounded from her bed, and opened the window: the removal of two bars had formed an opening large enough to admit a man.

“Are you ready?” demanded Felton.

“Yes. Must I carry anything away with me?”

“Money—if you have any.”

“Fortunately, they have left me what I had.”

“So much the better; for I have used all mine in chartering a vessel.”

“Here!” said her ladyship, placing in Felton’s hand a bag of gold.

Felton took the bag, and threw it to the foot of the wall.

“Now,” said he, “will you come?”

“Here I am.”

Her ladyship mounted on a chair, and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time, a sentiment of fear reminded her that she was a woman. The void terrified her.

“I was afraid you would be terrified,” said Felton.

“It is nothing—it is nothing,” exclaimed her ladyship: “I will descend with my eyes shut.”

“Have you confidence in me?” said Felton.

“Need you ask me!”

“Then put your two hands together, and cross them. That’s right.”

Felton fastened the two wrists with his handkerchief, and then bound a cord above the handkerchief.

“What are you doing?” demanded her ladyship, in surprise.

“Place your arms round my neck, and do not be afraid.”

“But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces.”

“Do not alarm yourself; I am a sailor.”

There was not a moment to be lost. Her ladyship passed her arms around Felton’s neck, and allowed herself to glide through the window.

Felton began to descend the ladder, slowly, step by step. In spite of the weight of the two bodies, the blast of the hurricane swung them in the air. Suddenly Felton paused.

"What is the matter?" demanded her ladyship.

"Silence!" said Felton, "I hear footsteps!"

"We are discovered!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"No," said Felton, "it is nothing."

"But what is that noise?"

"It is the patrol, who are about to pass on their round."

"And which way do they go?"

"Immediately beneath us."

"Then we shall be discovered."

"No—if there should be no lightning."

"They will strike against the bottom of the ladder."

"Fortunately, it is too short by six feet."

"There they are! My God!"

"Silence!"

They both remained suspended—motionless, and scarcely even venturing to breathe—at a height of twenty feet in the air, whilst the soldiers passed beneath them, laughing and talking. It was a fearful moment for the fugitives! the patrol passed by. They heard the sound of their retreating steps, and the murmur of their voices, which became gradually weaker in the distance.

"Now," said Felton, "we are saved!"

Her ladyship breathed a sigh, and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. Having reached the bottom of the ladder, and finding no further support for his feet, he now descended by his hands, until he clung to the last step, when, suspending himself by the strength of his wrists, he found that his feet touched the ground. He picked up the bag of gold, which he took between his teeth; and raising her ladyship in his arms, retreated rapidly in a direction opposite to that which the patrol had taken. Leaving the circuit of the guard he plunged

down amidst the rocks ; and, when he had reached the seashore, he whistled. His signal was replied to in a similar manner ; and, in five minutes afterwards, a boat appeared, manned by four men.

The boat approached the shore ; but there was too great a depth of water for it to be grounded. Felton waded into the sea up to his waist, not wishing to entrust his precious burden to any other hands. Fortunately the tempest was beginning to abate, although the sea was still violent. The little boat bounded on the waves like a nutshell.

“ To the sloop ! ” said Felton, “ and pull quickly.”

The four men bent themselves to their work ; but the sea was too heavy for their oars to make much way. Nevertheless, they began to leave the castle behind them ; and that was the principal point. The night was profoundly dark, and it was already almost impossible for them to perceive the shore ; much less could any one upon the shore be able to perceive their boat. A black speck was rocking on the sea. It was the sloop.

Whilst the boat was advancing towards it with all the force of its four rowers, Felton unbound the cord and the handkerchief which confined her ladyship's hands. Then, when these were once more at liberty, he took some sea-water and sprinkled it upon her face. Her ladyship heaved a sigh, and opened her eyes.

“ Where am I ? ” said she.

“ Saved,” replied the young officer.

“ Oh ! saved ! saved ! ” exclaimed she. “ Yes, I see the heavens and the ocean ! This air which I breathe is that of liberty ! Ah !—Thanks, Felton, thanks ! ”

The young man pressed her to his heart.

“ But what is the matter with my hands ? ” asked her ladyship ; “ my wrists feel as though they had been crushed in a vice.”

She lifted up her arms : her wrists were indeed horribly lacerated.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at those beautiful hands, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Oh! it is nothing—it is nothing!" exclaimed her ladyship. "I remember now."

Her ladyship looked around her for something.

"It is there," said Felton, pointing to the bag of gold.

They neared the sloop. The seamen on watch hailed the boat, from which an answer was returned.

"What vessel is this?" demanded her ladyship.

"That which I have chartered for you."

"And whither will it take me?"

"Wheresoever you please, after you have landed me at Portsmouth."

"What have you to do at Portsmouth?" demanded her ladyship.

"To execute the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" inquired her ladyship.

"Do you not understand, then?" replied Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beg of you!"

"As he distrusted me, he determined to guard you himself; and has sent me, in his stead, to procure Buckingham's signature to the order for your transportation."

"But, if he suspected you, how came he to intrust you with this order?"

"He supposed me ignorant of its purport, as he had told me nothing respecting it. I had, however, received my information from you."

"True! And you are going to Portsmouth?"

"I have no time to lose: to-morrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham departs on that date with the fleet."

"Departs to-morrow! Where is he going?"

"To La Rochelle."

"He must not go!" exclaimed her ladyship, forgetting her habitual presence of mind.

"Make yourself easy," answered Felton, "he will not go!"

Her ladyship trembled with delight. She had just penetrated the most secret depths of the young man's heart, and had there seen the death of Buckingham ineffaceably registered.

"Felton," whispered she, "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus. Should you die, I shall die with you! I can say no more."

"Hush," said Felton, "we have reached the vessel."

They were, in fact, beside the sloop. Felton ascended the ladder, and gave his hand to her ladyship, whilst the sailors supported her, for the sea was still agitated. In a moment afterwards, they were upon the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "here is the lady of whom I spoke to you. You must take her, safe and sound, to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," replied the captain.

"I have already paid you five hundred of them."

"Right," said the captain.

"And here are the other five hundred," added her ladyship, putting her hand to the bag of gold.

"No," said the captain, "I have but one word, and that I gave to this young man. The other five hundred pistoles are not my due until we make Boulogne."

"And shall we make it?"

"Safe and sound," replied the captain, "as sure as my name is Jack Butler."

"Well!" said her ladyship, "if you keep your word, instead of five hundred, I will give you a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah, for you, then, my pretty lady!" exclaimed the captain, "and may fortune often send me such passengers as your ladyship."

"In the meantime," said Felton, "run into Chichester Bay, just by Portsmouth. You remember that it was agreed you should take us there first?"

The captain replied by issuing orders for the necessary evolutions, and, towards seven o'clock in the morning, the little vessel hove-to in the appointed bay.

During this passage Felton related everything to her ladyship: how, instead of going to London, he had chartered this little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall, by placing, in the interstices of the stones, as he ascended, cramp-irons to support his feet; and how at last, having reached the bars of her window, he had secured the ladder to them. Her ladyship was well aware of the remainder.

On her side, her ladyship endeavoured to encourage Felton in his design; but, at the first words she uttered, she clearly perceived that it was necessary rather to moderate than to excite the young fanatic.

It was agreed that her ladyship should wait for Felton until ten o'clock; and if he should not have returned by that hour, she was to set sail.

In the latter case, and supposing him to be afterwards at liberty, he was to rejoin her in France, at the Carmelite Convent of Bethune.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT HAPPENED AT PORTSMOUTH, ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1628.

FELTON took leave of her ladyship, just as a brother who is going out for a mere walk takes leave of his sister, by kissing her hand. His whole manners and appearance indicated a state of ordinary tranquillity; except that a strange gleam, like the brilliancy of fever, beamed from his eyes. His forehead was even more calm than usual; his teeth were firmly closed; and his speech had a short and abrupt tone, which seemed to denote that his thoughts were intent upon some gloomy purpose.

As long as he remained in the boat which took him ashore, he had kept his face turned towards her ladyship, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Neither of them now entertained much fear of being

pursued. Her ladyship's apartment was never entered before nine o'clock in the morning, and it took some hours to travel from the castle to London.

Felton set his foot on shore, climbed the rising ground which led to the top of the cliff, saluted her ladyship for the last time, and took his way towards the town. After a hundred steps, as the path descended as it proceeded, he could no longer see more than the mast of the vessel.

He hastened as fast as possible in the direction of Portsmouth, which, through the morning mist, he could discern in the distance. Beyond the town, the sea was covered with innumerable ships, whose masts, like a forest of poplars stripped of their leaves by winter, were bending before the breath of the wind.

During this rapid walk, Felton resolved in his mind all the accusations, whether true or false, with which ten years of ascetic meditation, and a long intercourse with the puritans, had furnished him against the royal favourite. When he compared the public crimes of this minister—crimes which were notorious, and, in a manner, European—with those private and unknown vices of which her ladyship had accused him, Felton found that the most culpable of the two beings whom Buckingham united in himself, was the one whose life was hidden from the world. His own love, so singular, and fresh, and ardent, made him see the infamous and imaginary accusations of her ladyship, as one sees, through a microscope, the form of frightful monsters, atoms of insects, otherwise imperceptible. The rapidity of his progress, also, inflamed his blood. The idea that he left behind him, exposed to a dreadful vengeance, the woman whom he loved, or, rather, adored as a saint—his past emotions, and his present fatigue—all tended to excite and elevate his soul above the feelings of humanity.

On entering Portsmouth, he found the whole population astir. The drums were beating in the streets and in the harbour, and the troops about to be embarked were descending towards the sea. Felton arrived at the

Admiralty-house, covered with dust, and wet with perspiration. His usually pale face was purple with heat and anger. The sentinel wished to stop him; but Felton called for the officer on guard, and drew from his pocket the letter which he carried.

“An express from Lord de Winter,” said he.

At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of Buckingham's most intimate friends, the officer gave an order for the admission of Felton, who, moreover, wore the uniform of a naval officer himself.

Felton rushed into the house, but, the moment he reached the hall, another man also entered, covered with dust, and out of breath; having left at the door a post-horse, which, on reaching it, had fallen on its knees. Both individuals addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential valet, at the same moment. Felton named the Baron de Winter. The stranger refused to mention any name, and declared that he could make himself known to no one but the duke. Both insisted on being allowed priority of admission. Patrick, who knew that Lord de Winter was connected, both by profession and friendship, with his grace, gave the preference to him who came in his name. The other was obliged to wait, and it was easy enough to see how heartily he cursed the delay.

The valet conducted Felton through a large room, in which were waiting the deputies from La Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise; and introduced him into a cabinet, where Buckingham, having just left the bath, was finishing his toilet, to which, now, as ever, he accorded extreme attention.

“Lieutenant Felton,” said Patrick, “from Lord de Winter.”

“From Lord de Winter?” repeated Buckingham. “Show him in.”

Felton entered. At this moment Buckingham threw upon a sofa a rich dressing-gown, brocaded with gold, and put on a doublet of blue velvet, entirely embroidered with pearls.

"Why did the baron not come himself?" demanded Buckingham. "I expected him this morning."

"He desired me to inform your grace," replied Felton, "that he very much regretted not having that honour; but that he was prevented by the watch which he is obliged to keep at the castle."

"Oh, yes," said Buckingham; "I know about that: he has a lady-prisoner there."

"It is, in fact, about that prisoner that I wish to speak to your grace," replied Felton.

"Well, proceed."

"What I have to say to you, my lord, must be heard by yourself alone."

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham, "but keep within earshot: I will call you presently."

Patrick left the room.

"We are alone, sir," said Buckingham. "Speak."

"My lord," replied Felton, "the Baron de Winter lately wrote to your grace requesting you to sign an order for the transportation of a young woman, named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir; and I replied, that he should either bring or send me the order, and I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it me," said the duke.

Taking the paper from Felton's hands, his grace cast a rapid glance over its contents. Then, perceiving it was really that which had been referred to, he laid it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Felton, interrupting the duke, "but, is your grace aware that Charlotte Backson is not the real name of this female?"

"Yes, sir, I know that," replied the duke, dipping his pen into the ink.

"Then your grace is acquainted with her real name?" demanded Felton, in an abrupt tone.

"I do know it."

The duke put the pen to the paper. Felton became pale.

“And, knowing this real name,” resumed Felton, “will your grace still sign the paper?”

“Certainly,” said Buckingham, “and rather twice than once.”

“I cannot believe,” continued Felton, in a voice which became more and more abrupt and reproachful, “that your grace is aware that this refers to Lady de Winter.”

“I am perfectly aware of it, although I am astonished that you should be.”

“And your grace will sign this order without remorse?”

Buckingham looked haughtily at the speaker.

“Do you happen to know, sir,” said he, “that you are asking me some strange questions, and that I am very foolish to answer them!”

“Answer them, my lord!” said Felton; “your position is perhaps more serious than you suppose.”

Buckingham thought that as the young man came from Lord de Winter, he probably spoke in his name: he therefore restrained himself.

“Without any remorse whatever,” said he; “and the baron knows, as well as I do, that her ladyship is a great criminal, to whom it is almost a favour to reduce her punishment to transportation.”

The duke again put his pen to the paper.

“You shall not sign that order, my lord,” said Felton, making a step towards the duke.

“I shall not sign this order?” exclaimed Buckingham; “and why not?”

“Because you will consult your own conscience, and will render justice to the lady.”

“It would be bare justice, if she were sent to Tyburn,” said the duke; “her ladyship is an infamous creature.”

“My lord, her ladyship is an angel! You know it well, and I demand her liberty.”

“Ah!” said Buckingham, “are you mad, thus to speak to me!”

“Excuse me, my lord; I speak as I am able—I restrain

myself. Yet, my lord, think of what you are about to do : beware lest the cup should overflow——”

“What does he mean?—God forgive me,” exclaimed Buckingham. “I verily believe he threatens me !”

“No, my lord—I implore you still, and I warn you :—one drop of water is sufficient to make the full vase overflow—a slight fault is sufficient to draw down vengeance, upon the head which has been spared to this day, in spite of so many crimes.”

“Mr. Felton,” said Buckingham, “you will leave this room, and immediately place yourself under arrest.”

“And you, my lord, will hear me to the end. You have seduced this young girl, you have violated and polluted her!—repair your crimes towards her, let her depart freely, and I will exact nothing more of you.”

“You will *exact* nothing more !” cried Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling on each syllable of the words which he had just pronounced.

“My lord,” continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke—“my lord, be careful : the whole of England is wearied by your iniquities ; my lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped ; my lord, you are an abomination to God and man. God will punish you in eternity, and I will punish you now.”

“Ah ! This is rather too much !” exclaimed Buckingham, making a step towards the door.

Felton opposed his progress.

“I humbly entreat you,” said he, “to sign an order for the liberation of Lady de Winter. Reflect that it is the woman whom you have dishonoured.”

“Leave the room, sir !” said Buckingham, “or I will call my servants to eject you !”

“You will not call them,” replied Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell, which was placed upon a stand inlaid with silver : “take care, my lord, for you are now in God’s hands !”

“In the devil’s hands, you mean !” exclaimed

Buckingham, elevating his voice so as to attract the attention of those without, without exactly calling them.

“Sign, my lord—sign the liberation of Lady de Winter!” said Felton, pushing a paper towards the duke.

“Under compulsion? You are making a fool of yourself! Hollo, there! Patrick!”

“Sign, my lord!”

“Never!”

“Never?”

“Help!” cried the duke, at the same time leaping towards his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it: the open knife with which her ladyship had wounded herself was concealed under his doublet, and in one bound he was upon the duke.

At that same moment Patrick entered the room, exclaiming—

“My lord, a letter from France.”

“From France!” cried Buckingham, forgetting everything as he imagined from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of the moment, and buried the knife up to its handle in the duke’s side.

“Ah, traitor!” exclaimed Buckingham, “thou hast slain me!”

“Murder!” shouted Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes around, and, seeing the door free, he rushed into the adjoining room, where, as we have said, the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting, passed through it still running, and hurried towards the staircase. But, upon the first step, he met Lord de Winter, who—on seeing him wild-looking, and livid, and with blood upon his hands and face—rushed upon him, and exclaimed—

“I knew it—I foresaw it! One minute too late! Alas, alas! how unfortunate is my lot!”

Felton did not attempt to resist, and Lord de Winter handed him over to the guards, who, in the meantime, conducted him to a little terrace overlooking the sea.

His lordship himself hastened into Buckingham's cabinet.

On hearing the duke's cry, and Patrick's shout, the man whom Felton had met in the antechamber rushed into his grace's room. He found the duke reclining on a sofa, pressing the wound with his convulsed hand.

"La Porte," said the duke, in a dying voice—"La Porte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, your grace," replied the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, "but, I fear, I come too late."

"Hush! La Porte—you might be overheard. Patrick, let no one enter. Oh, I shall not know what she says to me. My God! I am dying!"

The duke fainted.

Nevertheless, Lord de Winter, the deputies, the chiefs of the expedition, and the officers of Buckingham's household, had already forced their way into the room. Cries of despair resounded on every side. The tidings which had filled the house with lamentation and groans, soon spread, and became generally known throughout the town; whilst the report of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had occurred.

Lord de Winter tore his hair. "One minute too late!" exclaimed he. "One minute too late! Oh, my God! my God! what a misfortune!"

He had, in fact, at seven o'clock in the morning, received information that a rope-ladder had been found suspended from one of the windows of the castle; and instantly hastening to her ladyship's chamber, he had found it empty, the window open, and the bars filed through. Remembering, then, the verbal warning which d'Artagnan had sent to him by his messenger, he had trembled for the duke; and, without a moment's delay, he had mounted the first horse available, and galloped at full speed to Portsmouth, dismounted in the courtyard, and hastily ascended the staircase where, as we have already said, he encountered Felton on the topmost step.

But the Duke was not yet dead. He recovered his

senses, again unclosed his eyes, and hope revived in all their hearts.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “leave me alone with Patrick and La Porte. Ah, it is you, de Winter! You sent me a strange madman, this morning! See what he has done to me!”

“Oh, my lord!” exclaimed the baron—“oh, my lord, never shall I forgive myself for it!”

“And there you would be wrong, de Winter,” said Buckingham, giving him his hand. “I know not any man who is worthy to be regretted by another throughout the whole of his life. But leave us, I beseech you!”

The baron left the room, sobbing.

There remained in the cabinet only the wounded duke, La Porte, and Patrick. A surgeon had been summoned, but could not be found.

“You will live, my lord—you will live!” repeated the messenger of Anne of Austria, kneeling before the duke.

“What has she written to me?” said Buckingham feebly, as the blood gushed from him, and he subdued, in order to speak of her he loved, his enormous pains: “what has she written to me? Read me her letter.”

“Oh, my lord!” exclaimed La Porte.

“Well, La Porte, do you not see that I have no time to lose?”

La Porte instantly broke the seal, and held the parchment before the duke’s eyes; but Buckingham in vain attempted to decipher the writing.

“Read it, then,” said he; “read it—read quickly; for I can no longer see! Read it—for I shall soon be no longer able to hear, and shall die without knowing what she has written to me.”

La Porte no longer hesitated. The letter was as follows:—

“MY LORD,

“By all that I have suffered through you, and for you, since I have known you, I conjure you, if you have any regard to my repose, to put an end to those vast preparations which

you are making against France, and to relinquish a war, of which, it is openly said, religion is the avowed, and your love of me the secret, cause. That war may not only bring great calamities on France and England, but even upon yourself, my lord—misfortunes for which I could never be consoled. Be careful of your own life, which is threatened, and which will be dear to me, from the moment when I shall no longer be obliged to consider you an enemy.—Yours affectionately,

“ANNE.”

Buckingham roused all his fast-failing energies to listen to this letter; and when it was ended, as if he had experienced a bitter disappointment—

“And have you nothing more to tell me—no verbal message, La Porte?” demanded he.

“Yes, my lord; the queen charged me to bid you be upon your guard, for she had been warned that you were to be assassinated!”

“And is that all? Is that all?” resumed Buckingham impatiently.

“She charged me also to tell you that she always loved you.”

“Ah!” said Buckingham. “God be praised! My death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger!”

“Patrick,” continued the duke, “bring me the casket which contained the diamond studs.”

Patrick brought the object he demanded, which La Porte recognised as having belonged to the queen.

“Now, the white satin bag, on which her initials are embroidered in pearls.”

Patrick again obeyed.

“Here, La Porte,” said Buckingham, “here are the only tokens which I have received from her—this silver casket, and these two letters. You will restore them to her majesty; and, for a last souvenir”—he looked around him for some precious object—“you will add them——”

He still strove to find some gift; but his eyes, dimmed by death, encountered nothing but the knife which had

fallen from Felton's hand, with the crimson blood still reeking on its blade.

"And you will add to them this knife," said the duke, pressing La Porte's hand.

He was still able to place the satin bag in the casket, and to drop the knife upon it, as he made a sign to La Porte, that he could no longer speak. Then, in a last convulsion, against which he was no longer able to contend, he glided from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham endeavoured to smile once more, but death arrested the thought, which remained engraven on his forehead and lips like a last farewell of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, completely bewildered. He had already been on board the admiral's ship, whence he had been so hastily summoned. He approached the duke, took his hand, held it for a moment in his own, and then let it fall again.

"It is all in vain," said he—"he is dead!"

"Dead! dead!" echoed Patrick.

At this cry the whole crowd re-entered the apartment, and there was nothing to be seen but consternation and confusion.

As soon as Lord de Winter knew that Buckingham had expired, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace.

"Wretch!" said he to the young man, who, since Buckingham's death, had recovered that tranquillity and coolness which were never more to abandon him—"wretch! what have you done?"

"I have avenged myself!" he replied.

"Yourself!" cried the baron; "say, rather, that you have been the instrument of that cursed woman; but, I swear to you, that it shall be her last crime."

"I do not know what you mean," replied Felton calmly, "and I am quite ignorant of what woman you are speaking, my lord. I have killed the Duke of Buckingham, because he twice refused to make me a captain at

your request. I have punished him for his injustice—for no other reason!”

De Winter looked, in his astonishment, at the men who were binding Felton, and knew not what to think of such insensibility.

One single idea, however, still left a cloud upon Felton's brow. At every step that he heard, the simple puritan thought he recognised the step and voice of her ladyship, who had come to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and to perish with him.

Suddenly he started. His glance was fixed upon a point on the sea, which the terrace where he stood completely overlooked. With the eagle eye of a sailor, he had discovered there, where another could only have seen a speck upon the ocean, the sail of a sloop, which was bearing on towards the shores of France. He grew pale, pressed his hand upon his heart, which was bursting, and at once comprehended the whole extent of the treachery.

“Grant me one last favour?” said he to the baron.

“What is it?” demanded the latter.

“What time is it?”

The baron drew out his watch. “It wants ten minutes to nine,” said he.

Her ladyship, then, had anticipated the time of her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed.

The boat was now visible, under a blue sky, at a great distance from the shore.

“It was God's will!” said Felton, with the resignation of a fatalist, but still unable to tear his eyes from that barque, on board of which he doubtless believed that he could distinguish the fair vision of her for whom he was about to sacrifice his life.

De Winter followed his glances, scrutinised his emotions, and comprehended all that had occurred.

“Be punished *alone*, wretch, in the first place!” said

his lordship, to Felton, who allowed himself to be dragged away, with his eyes still turned towards the sea; "but I swear to you, by the memory of my brother, whom I so truly loved, that your accomplice is not saved."

Felton held down his head without uttering a word.

As for de Winter, he hastily descended the stairs, and betook himself to the harbour.

CHAPTER LX.

IN FRANCE.

THE first apprehension of the king of England, Charles I., on hearing of the Duke of Buckingham's death, was, lest intelligence so terrible might discourage the Rochellois: hence he endeavoured, says Richelieu in his Memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and being scrupulously careful that no vessel should leave until after the departure of the army which Buckingham had been preparing, and whose embarkation he now undertook to superintend in person. He even enforced this order with so much strictness as to detain in England the Danish ambassador, who had already taken leave; and the ambassador from Holland, who was to take back into Flushing those Dutch Indiamen whose restitution Charles had procured.

But, as the king had not thought of issuing this order until five hours after the event, two ships had already left the port: one bearing, as we know, her ladyship, who, already suspecting what had happened, was confirmed in her belief by seeing the black flag unfolding itself from the mast of the admiral's ship.

As for the second vessel, we shall hereafter be told whom it carried, and how it got away.

During this interval, nothing extraordinary had occurred at the camp before La Rochelle; except that the king, who was, as usual, bored, and perhaps more so at the

camp than elsewhere, resolved to go *incognito* to enjoy the fêtes of Saint-Louis at Saint-Germain, and requested the cardinal to provide for him an escort of twenty musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes was wearied by the gloominess of the king, willingly gave this leave of absence to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return by the twelfth of September.

When M. de Treville was informed of this journey by his eminence, he prepared his baggage; and as, without knowing the cause, he was fully aware of the earnest desire, or rather the imperious necessity, that the four friends had for visiting Paris, he marked them out as part of the escort. The four young men received the intelligence a quarter of an hour after M. de Treville, as they were the very first persons to whom he communicated it; and then it was that d'Artagnan fully appreciated the favour which the cardinal had conferred upon him in promoting him to the musketeers; since, but for that circumstance, he would have been compelled to remain at the camp, whilst his companions departed.

It will be seen, hereafter, that this anxiety to return to Paris was occasioned by the danger which Madame Bonancieux was likely to incur from encountering her mortal enemy, Lady de Winter, at the convent of Bethune. Thus, as we have said, Aramis had written immediately to Marie Michon—that seamstress of Tours who had such exalted acquaintances—that she might solicit from the queen an order empowering Madame Bonancieux to leave the convent, and to take refuge either in Lorraine or Belgium. The answer was not long delayed, for in eight or ten days Aramis had received this letter:—

“My dear Cousin,

“I send the order empowering our little servant to withdraw from the convent of Bethune, where you think that the air does not agree with her. My sister sends you this order with great pleasure, for she is much attached to this little girl, whom she hopes to benefit in the end. I embrace you.

“MARIE MICHON.”

To this letter was appended an order in these terms:—

“The superior of the convent of Bethune will deliver into the hands of the bearer of this note, the novice who entered her convent under my recommendation and patronage.

“ANNE.

“At the Louvre, August 10, 1628.”

It may be well imagined how much this relationship between Aramis and a seamstress at Tours, who called the queen her sister, enlivened the young men; but Aramis, after having two or three times blushed up to the whites of his eyes at the coarse jokes of Porthos, had begged his friends not to revert to the subject, declaring that if another word were said about it, he would not again employ his cousin as an agent in affairs of the kind.

So nothing more about Marie Michon was said between the four musketeers, who had, moreover, obtained what they wanted—the order to withdraw Madame Bonancieux from the convent of Bethune. It is true that this order would be of no great advantage to them, whilst they continued in the camp at La Rochelle, that is to say, at the other extremity of France. D'Artagnan was about to ask leave of absence from M. de Treville, plainly confiding to him how important it was that he should depart; when the intelligence reached him, as well as his three companions, that the king was about to proceed to Paris with an escort of twenty musketeers, of which they were to form a part. Great was their joy. Their servants were sent forward with the baggage, and they themselves set out in the morning of the sixteenth.

The cardinal attended the king from Surgères to Mauzes, where the king and his minister took leave of each other with great professions of friendship. Nevertheless, the king, although he travelled very fast, since he wished to reach Paris by the twenty-third, was so anxious for amusement, that he halted from time to time to hunt the magpie—a pastime for which he had acquired a taste from de Luynes, the first husband of Madame de

Chevreuse, and for which he had always preserved a great liking. Sixteen of the twenty musketeers much enjoyed this sport when it occurred; but four of them cursed it most heartily. D'Artagnan more especially had a perpetual humming in his ears; which Porthos thus explained—

“A woman of the highest rank assured me that it is a sign that some one is talking about you, somewhere.”

On the night of the twenty-third, the escort at length passed through Paris. The king thanked M. de Treville, and allowed him to grant four days' leave of absence to his men, on condition that not one of the favoured individuals should appear at any public place, under pain of the Bastile.

The first four leaves were granted, as may be imagined, to our four friends; and, more than that, Athos persuaded M. de Treville to extend it to six days instead of four, and managed to cram two more nights into these six days; for they set off on the twenty-fourth, at five o'clock in the evening, and M. de Treville had the complaisance to post-date the leave to the morning of the twenty-fifth.

“Oh, Mon Dieu!” said d'Artagnan, who, as we are well aware, never foresaw difficulty, “it appears to me that we are making a great disturbance about a very simple matter. In two days, by foundering two or three horses, which I should not care about, since I have plenty of money, I could be at Bethune. I should then deliver the queen's letter to the abbess, and could bring back the dear treasure which I am seeking—not to Lorraine, not to Belgium, but to Paris, where she might be much more securely concealed, particularly whilst the cardinal remains at La Rochelle. Then, when the campaign is once ended, partly from the protection of her cousin and partly from what we have ourselves personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen whatever we desire. Remain, therefore, here: do not fatigue yourselves uselessly. I and Planchet shall be quite sufficient for so simple an expedition.”

To this, Athos quietly replied—

“And we, also, have got some money; for I have not yet quite drunk the remains of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not quite eaten them up. So we may as well founder four horses as one. But remember, d’Artagnan,” he added, in a voice so sad that his accent made the young man shudder—“remember that Bethune is a town where the cardinal has made an appointment with a woman, who, wherever she goes, brings misfortune with her. If you had only four men to deal with, d’Artagnan, I should let you go alone. But you have to deal with this woman, so let all four of us go; and God grant that, with our four valets, we may be in sufficient number.”

“You quite terrify me, Athos!” exclaimed d’Artagnan; “what, then, do you dread?”

“Everything!” replied Athos.

D’Artagnan looked into the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, bore the impress of profound anxiety; and they continued their journey at the utmost speed of their horses, but without uttering another word.

On the evening of the twenty-sixth, as they were entering Arras, and just as d’Artagnan had dismounted at the tavern of the Golden Harrow, to drink a glass of wine, a cavalier came out of the yard of the change-house, where he had just changed his horse, and proceeded at full gallop on the road to Paris. At the moment that he issued from the great gate into the street, the wind opened the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was the month of August, and lifted up his hat, which he caught and pushed violently down upon his forehead.

D’Artagnan, whose looks were fixed upon this man, turned very pale, and let fall his glass.

“What is the matter, sir?” cried Planchet. “Oh! here, here. Make haste, gentlemen, my master is ill!”

The three friends hastened in, and found d'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, was running to his horse. They stopped him on the threshold of the door.

"Hollo! where the plague are you going in this manner?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, pale with passion, and with the perspiration in beads on his brow—"it is he! let me get at him."

"But who do you mean!" demanded Athos.

"He! that man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always seen when I was threatened with some misfortune—he who accompanied that horrible woman, when I met her the first time—he whom I was seeking when I affronted our friend Athos—he whom I saw the very morning of the day when Madame Bonancieux was abducted—the Man of Meung, in fact! I saw him—it is he! I recognised him when the wind opened his cloak."

"The devil!" said Athos, musing.

"To horse, gentlemen—to horse! Let us pursue him—we must catch him!"

"My dear fellow," said Aramis, "consider that he is going exactly the opposite road to ours; that he has a fresh horse, whilst our horses are done; and that, consequently, we should knock up our horses without even a chance of overtaking him."

"Hollo, sir!" cried out a stable-boy, running after the stranger—"Hollo, sir! here is a paper which fell out of your hat. Hollo, sir! Hollo!"

"My friend," said d'Artagnan, "half a pistole for that paper?"

"Faith, sir, with the greatest pleasure: here it is."

The stable-boy, delighted with the good day's work he had made of it, returned into the yard of the hotel, and d'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Well?" inquired his friends, listening.

"Only one word!" said d'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Aramis, "but that word is the name of a town."

"*Armentières*," read Porthos—"Armentières? I do not know the place."

"And this name of a town is written in her hand," said Athos.

"Come, come, let us take great care of this paper," said d'Artagnan; "perhaps I shall not have thrown away my half pistole. To horse, my friends—to horse!"

The four companions went off at a gallop, on the road to Bethune.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CARMELITE CONVENT OF BETHUNE.

GREAT criminals are endowed with a kind of predestination which enables them to surmount every obstacle, and to escape every danger, until the moment on which a wearied providence has fixed for the shipwreck of their unhallowed fortunes.

Thus was it with her ladyship. She passed between the cruisers of two nations, and landed at Boulogne without mishap.

When she disembarked at Portsmouth, her ladyship had been an Englishwoman, driven from Rochelle by the persecutions of France. When she came on shore at Boulogne, after a voyage of two days, she represented herself as a Frenchwoman, whom the English annoyed at Portsmouth, on account of the hatred which they entertained for France.

Her ladyship had, moreover, the best of passports—beauty—aided by the liberality with which she scattered her pistoles. Freed from the customary formalities, by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hands, she only remained at Boulogne a sufficient time to put into the post a letter written in these terms :—

“To his Eminence the Lord Cardinal Richelieu, at his camp before La Rochelle.”

“My lord, your eminence may be assured that his grace the Duke of Buckingham will not set out for France.

LADY DE * * * *

“Boulogne, August 25th--Evening.

“P.S.—According to your eminence’s desire, I am proceeding to the Carmelite convent, at Bethune, where I shall await your orders.”

In fact, her ladyship began her journey on the same night. Darkness overtook her, and she stopped, and slept at a tavern on the road; at five o’clock the next morning, she resumed her journey, and in three hours reached Bethune. She inquired her way to the convent of the Carmelites, and immediately entered it. The abbess came to meet her, and when her ladyship showed the cardinal’s order, a chamber was immediately prepared for her, and breakfast served.

The scenes of the past had all faded from this woman’s sight, and, with her eyes fixed upon the future, she only saw the high fortune which was reserved for her by that cardinal whom she had so well served, without his name being at all compromised by the bloody deed. The ever-changing passions which consumed her, gave to her life the appearance of the clouds which ascend into the sky, reflecting sometimes the azure tint, sometimes the lurid, and sometimes the blackness of the storm, yet leaving no traces but those of devastation and of death.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There are but few amusements in the cloister, and the good superior was in haste to strike up acquaintance with her new boarder.

Her ladyship wished to please the abbess, and this was a very easy task for a woman so truly superior: she endeavoured to be amiable, and became charming; so that her entertainer was seduced by her varied conversation, as well as by the graces which appeared in all her person.

The abbess, who was of a noble family, loved more especially that gossip of the court which so rarely reaches the extremities of the kingdom, and which has, especially, so much difficulty in passing through the walls of a convent, on whose threshold all worldly sounds should cease.

Her ladyship, however, was well versed in all the intrigues of the aristocracy, in whose midst she had constantly lived for five or six years; she therefore set about amusing the good abbess with an account of all the worldly practices of the French court, mixed up with the excessive devotions of the king. She gave her also the chronicle of scandals concerning those lords and ladies of the court, with whose names the abbess was familiar, and touched lightly on the amours of the queen and Buckingham—talking, herself, a great deal, that she might thus induce the abbess to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening, and smiling, without replying. Nevertheless, as her ladyship perceived that these sort of stories amused her greatly, she continued them; only she diverted the conversation to the cardinal. On this point, however, she was slightly embarrassed, as she knew not whether the abbess was royalist or cardinalist. She therefore kept prudently to a middle path. The abbess, on her part, maintained a still more prudent reserve, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head as often as the traveller mentioned the cardinal's name.

Her ladyship soon began to think that she should find this convent very tiresome. She resolved, therefore, to hazard something, in order to know what course to steer. Wishing to ascertain how far the discretion of the abbess would extend, she began to speak unfavourably, at first by hints, and then most circumstantially, of the cardinal: relating the amours of that minister with Madame d'Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and some other women of gallantry.

The abbess listened more attentively, gradually became more animated, and smiled.

“Good,” thought her ladyship, “she begins to relish my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she is, at any rate, no very fanatical one.”

She then dwelt upon the persecution which the cardinal conducted against his enemies. The abbess merely crossed herself, without approving or blaming. This confirmed her ladyship in the belief that the good superior was more of a royalist than a cardinalist; so she continued her remarks, becoming more and more severe.

“I am very ignorant on all such matters,” said the abbess at last; “but remote as we are from the court, secluded as we find ourselves from intercourse with the world, we have most melancholy proofs of the truth of what you have been just relating, and one of our boarders has suffered severely from the vengeance and persecutions of the cardinal.”

“One of your boarders?” said her ladyship. “Oh! poor creature—how I pity her!”

“And you are right, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, threats, ill-treatment—all these she has endured. But, after all,” continued the abbess, “the cardinal had perhaps plausible reasons for acting thus; and, although she has the aspect of an angel, we must not always judge of people by their aspects.”

“Good!” said her ladyship to herself: “who knows—I may perhaps make some discovery here. I am just in the humour for it.”

She then set herself to communicate to her countenance an expression of the most perfect candour.

“Alas!” said she, “I know that: they tell us that we must not trust to physiognomies. But what can we trust to, if not to the most beautiful of the Lord’s works? As for me, I shall probably be deceived throughout my whole life, for I always confide in that person whose face inspires me with sympathy.”

“You would be induced, then, to believe that this young woman was innocent?” said the abbess.

"The cardinal does not merely punish crimes," replied her ladyship; "there are certain virtues which he visits more severely than sins."

"You will allow me, madam, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

"At what?" asked her ladyship, with apparent simplicity.

"At the language which you use."

"And what do you find astonishing in that language!" demanded her ladyship, with a smile.

"You are the cardinal's friend, since he has sent you here; and yet——"

"And yet I speak ill of him," replied her ladyship, expressing the abbess's thought.

"At least, you do not speak much good of him."

"It is because I am not his friend, but his victim," said her ladyship, sighing.

"And yet that letter, by which he has recommended you to me——"

"Is an order to me to keep myself in a sort of prison, from which he will remove me through some of his satellites."

"But why did you not escape?"

"Where should I go? Do you believe that there is a spot upon the earth which the cardinal cannot reach, if he pleases to take the trouble to stretch out his hand? If I were a man, it might, perchance, be possible; but being a woman—what would you have a woman do? This young boarder of yours—has she attempted to escape?"

"No, truly: but her case is different. I fancy that she is kept in France by some love affair."

"Then," said her ladyship, with a sigh, "loving, she is not altogether unhappy."

"So," said the abbess, looking with increasing interest at her ladyship, "it is another poor persecuted creature that I see?"

"Alas! yes," said her ladyship.

The abbess looked at her ladyship for an instant with some inquietude, as if a new thought were just arising in her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our most holy faith?" said she, stammering.

"I!" cried her ladyship. "I a Protestant? Oh, no! I call the God who now hears us to witness that I am, indeed, a zealous Catholic."

"Then, madam," replied the abbess, smiling, "be of good cheer: the house in which you are shall not be a very severe prison to you, and we will do all we can to soften your captivity. Moreover, you shall see that young woman, who is, no doubt, persecuted on account of some court intrigue: she is so amiable, and so gracious, that she is sure to please you."

"What is her name?"

"She has been recommended to me, under the name of Kitty, by a person of the highest rank. I have not endeavoured to find out her second name."

"Kitty!" exclaimed her ladyship, "are you quite sure?"

"Yes, madam; at least she so calls herself. Do you suppose you know her?"

Her ladyship smiled as the idea suggested itself to her that this female might possibly be her former attendant. With her recollection of the young woman, there was associated a sentiment of anger, and a desire for revenge, which somewhat disturbed the serenity of her ladyship's features; but they soon resumed that expression of calmness and benevolence which this woman with a hundred faces had for the time adopted.

"But when may I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" demanded her ladyship.

"This evening," replied the abbess; "nay, even to-day. But as you say you have been travelling for four days, and arose this morning at five o'clock, you must

now be in want of rest : lie down, therefore, and sleep ; and we will awake you at dinner-time."

Although her ladyship could have very well dispensed with sleep, supported as she was by the excitement which a new adventure kindled in her heart, so eager after intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the abbess. During the previous twelve or fourteen days, she had experienced so many different emotions, that, though her iron constitution was still able to endure fatigue, her mind required some repose. She therefore took leave of the abbess, and lay down in peace, comforted by the ideas of vengeance to which the name of Kitty had so naturally led her. She remembered the almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had made to her, on condition of the success of her enterprise. She *had* succeeded ; and she might, therefore, avenge herself on d'Artagnan.

One thing alone alarmed her ladyship, and that was, the recollection of her husband, the Count de la Fère, whom she had believed to be dead, or, at least, expatriated, and whom she now found in Athos, the dearest friend of d'Artagnan. But, if he was d'Artagnan's friend, he must have assisted him in all those plots, by the aid of which the queen hath thwarted the designs of his eminence ; if he was d'Artagnan's friend, he must be the cardinal's enemy, and she should undoubtedly be able to envelop him in that vengeance, in the folds of which she hoped to stifle the young musketeer.

All these hopes formed agreeable thoughts to her ladyship, and, lulled by them, she soon slept. She was awakened by a soft voice, which sounded at the foot of her bed. On opening her eyes, she saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with fair hair, and a delicate complexion, who fixed on her a look full of kindly curiosity. The countenance of this young woman was entirely unknown to her. As they exchanged the usual courtesies, they examined each other with scrupulous attention. Both were very beautiful, yet

quite unlike each other in their kinds of beauty; and her ladyship smiled on observing that she had herself much more of a high-bred air and aristocratic manners. It is true that the dress of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very favourable to success in a competition of the sort.

The abbess presented them to one another; and then, as her own duties demanded her attendance in the chapel, she left them alone together. The novice, seeing her ladyship in bed, would have followed the abbess; but her ladyship detained her.

“What, madam,” said she, “I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, which I have hoped to enjoy during the time that I may remain here?”

“No, madam,” replied the novice, “but as you are fatigued, I feared that my visit had been badly timed.”

“Well!” said her ladyship, “what should those who sleep desire? A pleasant awakening. That is just what you have given me; so let me enjoy it at my ease!”

And, taking her hand, she drew her to a chair near the bed.

“Mon Dieu!” said the novice, seating herself, “how unfortunate I am. Here have I been in this house for six months, without even the shadow of an amusement. You arrive: your presence would provide me with most charming company; and now, according to all probability, I shall immediately leave the convent.”

“What,” said her ladyship, “are you going away soon?”

“At least I hope so,” replied the novice, with an expression of joy which she did not in the least attempt to disguise.

“I think I heard that you had suffered from the persecutions of the cardinal,” said her ladyship. “That is another bond of sympathy between us.”

“What our good mother has told me is true then, and you are also one of the cardinal’s victims?”

“Hush!” said her ladyship; “even here do not let us speak thus of him. All my misfortunes have arisen from having spoken scarcely more than you have just said, before a woman whom I thought my friend, and who betrayed me. And are you, also, the victim of treachery?”

“No,” said the novice, “but of my devotion to a woman whom I loved, for whom I would have died, and for whom I would die now.”

“And who deserted you in your distress? I know she did!”

“I was unjust enough to believe so; but within the last two or three days I have had proof to the contrary, and I thank God for it: I should have deeply grieved at the conviction that she had forgotten me. But you, madam—you seem to be free, and to be able to escape, if you should have any inclination to do so.”

“And where could I go, without friends, without money, in a part of France which I do not know, where——”

“Oh! as to friends,” said the novice, “you will find them wherever you please: you look so good, and you are so beautiful.”

“That is no reason,” said her ladyship, softening her smile so as to give to it an angelical expression, “why I should not be forsaken and persecuted.”

“Listen,” said the novice; “you must trust in Heaven: there always comes a moment when the good that we have done pleads for us before God’s throne. Besides, it is perhaps a piece of good fortune for you, that—humble and powerless as I am—you should have met me here; for, if I should get away, I have some influential friends, who, having exerted themselves for me, may do the same for you.”

“Oh! when I say that I was solitary and forsaken,” said her ladyship, hoping to make the novice speak more plainly by speaking herself: “it is not that I have not some lofty acquaintances also; but these acquaintances all tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does

not defend me against this terrible minister; and I have proofs that her majesty, in spite of her excellent heart, has been more than once obliged to abandon, to his eminence's rage, persons who had faithfully served her."

"Believe me, madam, it may have appeared that the queen forsook her friends; but we must not believe the appearance: the more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and, often at the very moment when they suppose her the least mindful of them, they receive an evidence of her kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said her ladyship, "I believe it: the queen is so good!"

"Oh! you know her, then—this beautiful and noble queen—since you speak of her thus!" exclaimed the novice enthusiastically.

"That is to say," replied her ladyship, rather forced back into her intrenchments, "I have not the honour of knowing her personally, but I know many of her most intimate friends. I know M. de Putange; I knew M. Dujart in England; and I know M. de Treville."

"M. de Treville!" exclaimed the novice; "do you know M. de Treville?"

"Yes, intimately."

"The captain of the king's musketeers?"

"Yes, the captain of the king's musketeers!"

"Oh! then you will see presently, that we must be acquaintances—almost friends. If you know M. de Treville, you must have been at his house?"

"Often," said her ladyship, who, having entered on this path, and finding falsehood profitable, determined to pursue it to the end.

"At his house you must have seen some of his musketeers?"

"All of them whom he is in the habit of receiving," replied her ladyship, who began to take a real interest in the conversation.

"Name some of those that you know," said the novice, "and you will see that they are amongst my friends."

“Why,” said her ladyship, somewhat confused, “I know M. de Louvigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Ferusac.”

The novice let her go on, but, seeing her pause, said—
“Do you not know a gentleman named Athos?”

Her ladyship became as pale as the sheets on which she was reclining, and, mistress as she was of her emotions, she could not help uttering a cry, as she seized the hand of the novice, and fastened her gaze upon her.

“Ah! what is the matter with you? Oh! Mon Dieu!” said the poor young woman, “have I said anything to offend you?”

“No, but I was struck by the name; for I have been acquainted with this gentleman, also; and it seemed strange that I should meet with any one who knew him well.”

“Oh, yes, very well; and his friends, also, M. Porthos, and M. Aramis.”

“Really? And I know them, too,” exclaimed her ladyship, who felt a cold shudder penetrating to her heart.

“Well, if you are acquainted with them, you ought to know that they are good and brave companions. Why do you not apply to them, if you want protection?”

“That is to say,” stammered her ladyship, “I am not very intimate with any one of them. I know them from having heard them spoken of by one of their friends, M. d’Artagnan.”

“You know M. d’Artagnan!” exclaimed the novice, in turn, seizing her ladyship’s hand, and devouring her with her looks. Then remarking the strange expression of her ladyship’s countenance—“Pardon me, madam: you know him, but in what character?”

“Why,” replied her ladyship, in some embarrassment, “in the character of a friend.”

“You deceive me, madam,” said the novice; “you have been his mistress.”

“It is you who have been that,” said her ladyship, in turn.

“I—I!” said the novice.

“Yes, you:—I know you now—you are Madame Bonancieux.”

The young woman drew herself back, overwhelmed with astonishment and terror.

“Oh! do not deny it; but pray answer,” said her ladyship.

“Well! yes, madam, I love him,” said the novice. “Are we rivals?”

Her ladyship’s face was irradiated by a light so wild, that, under any other circumstances, Madame Bonancieux would have fled from her in terror; but she was not entirely absorbed by jealousy.

“Come, tell me, madam,” said Madame Bonancieux, with an energy of which she would have been thought incapable, “have you been his mistress?”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone which prohibited any doubt of her honesty; “never! never!”

“I believe you,” said Madame Bonancieux; “but why did you cry out so?”

“What, do you not understand?” said her ladyship, who had already recovered from her confusion, and had resumed all her presence of mind.

“How should I understand? I know nothing——”

“Do you not understand that M. d’Artagnan, being my friend, made me his confidante?”

“Really!”

“Do you not understand that I am acquainted with everything that has taken place: your abduction from the little house at St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their researches ever since that time? Is it strange for me to be astonished on finding myself, without being aware of it, by the side of you, of whom we have so often talked together—of you, whom he loves with all the strength of his soul—of you, whom he made me love before I beheld you! Ah, dear Constance, I find you at last—at last I see you!”

Her ladyship held out her arms towards Madame Bonancieux, who, convinced by what she had just heard,

now saw in this woman, whom she had an instant before regarded as a rival, only a sincere and a devoted friend.

“Oh, pardon me, pardon me!” said she, allowing herself to sink upon her ladyship’s shoulder, “I love him so much!”

These two women held each other for an instant thus embraced. Certainly, if her ladyship’s strength had been but equal to her hatred, Madame Bonancieux would not have left her arms alive. But, not being able to stifle her, she smiled.

“Oh, dear little pretty thing!” said her ladyship, “how delighted I am to see you! Let me look at you!” And, as she uttered these words, she did in fact devour her with her looks. “Yes, it is certainly you. Ah! after what he told me of you, I recognise you now—I recognise you perfectly well.”

The poor young woman could not suspect the horrid cruelty that was raging behind the ramparts of that unruffled brow, or behind those eyes in which she only read the interest of compassion.

“Then you know what I have suffered,” said Madame Bonancieux, “since he has told you what he himself endured. But to suffer for him is a joy.”

Her ladyship replied mechanically—“Yes, it is a joy.” But she was thinking of something else.

“And then,” continued Madame Bonancieux, “my punishment draws near its end. To-morrow—this very evening, perhaps—I shall see him once more; and then the past will be forgotten.”

“This evening? To-morrow?” exclaimed her ladyship, aroused from her reverie by these words: “what can you mean? Do you expect to hear anything of him?”

“I expect him—himself.”

“Himself? D’Artagnan here?”

“Yes, himself.”

“But it is impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle, with the cardinal; he will not return to Paris until after the town is taken.”

“You think so; but is there anything impossible to my d’Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?”

“Oh, I cannot believe you!”

“Well, then, read!” said this unfortunate young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, showing a letter to her ladyship.

“The writing of Madame de Chevreuse,” said her ladyship to herself. “Ah! I was quite sure that there were some communications in that quarter.” And she eagerly read these lines:—

“My dear child, be ready. *Our friend* will soon see you, and he will only come to snatch you from the prison where it was necessary for your own safety to conceal you. So prepare for your departure, and never despair of us. Our brave Gascon has just shown himself as brave and as faithful as ever: tell him that there is much gratitude to him in a certain quarter for the warning which he gave.”

“Yes, yes,” said her ladyship, “the letter is very precise. And do you know what this warning was?”

“No: I only suspect that he must have warned the queen of some new machination of the cardinal.”

“Yes, that is it, beyond a doubt,” said her ladyship, returning the letter, and letting her head fall pensively on her breast.

At that moment the gallop of a horse was heard.

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, rushing to the window, “can this be he?”

Her ladyship remained in her bed, petrified by the surprise. So many unexpected things had suddenly happened to her, that, for the first time, her head failed her.

“He! he!” muttered she, “and if it should be?” And she continued in bed, with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

“Alas! no,” said Madame Bonancieux. “It is a man whom I do not know. But he seems to be coming here. Yes, he is riding more slowly; he stops at the gate; he rings.”

Her ladyship sprang out of the bed. “You are quite sure that it is not he?”

“Oh! yes, certain.”

“Perhaps you do not see him distinctly.”

“Oh! should I see only the plume in his hat, or the skirt of his cloak, I should not fail to recognise him!”

Her ladyship was dressing all the time.—“No matter; the man is coming here, you say?”

“Yes, he has come in.”

“It must be either for you or for me.”

“Oh, Mon Dieu! how agitated you are!”

“Yes; I confess that I have not your confidence; I dread everything from the cardinal.”

“Hush!” said Madame Bonancieux; “someone is coming.”

The door opened, and the abbess entered.

“Did you come from Boulogne?” demanded she, of her ladyship.

“Yes, madam,” replied the latter, endeavouring to resume her composure: “who wants me?”

“A man, who will not give his name, but who comes from the cardinal.”

“And who wants to speak to me?” demanded her ladyship.

“Who wants to speak with a lady who has just arrived from Boulogne.”

“Then show him in, madam, I beg of you.”

“Oh! my God! my God!” said Madame Bonancieux, “can it be any bad news?”

“I fear so.”

“I leave you with this stranger; but, as soon as he shall have gone, I will return, if you will allow me.”

“Yes; I beseech you to do so!”

The abbess and Madame Bonancieux left the room. Her ladyship remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. A moment afterwards, the jingling sound of spurs was heard on the stairs; then, the steps came nearer; then the door was opened, and a man appeared. Her ladyship uttered a cry of joy. This man was the Count de Rochefort, the familiar of his eminence.

CHAPTER LXII.

TWO KINDS OF DEMONS.

"Ah!" exclaimed both Rochefort and her ladyship at the same instant, "it is you!"

"Yes, it is I."

"And you come from——" demanded her ladyship.

"From La Rochelle. And you?"

"From England."

"And Buckingham——"

"Is dead, or dangerously wounded. As I was leaving, without having obtained anything from him, a fanatic had just assassinated him."

"Ah!" said Rochefort, smiling, "that was a very fortunate chance, which will please his eminence much. Have you informed him of it?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?"

"His eminence, being uneasy, has sent me to look for you."

"I only arrived yesterday."

"And what have you been doing since?"

"I have not been wasting my time."

"Oh! I do not doubt you."

"Do you know whom I have met with here?"

"No."

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"That young woman whom the queen took from prison."

"What! the mistress of young d'Artagnan?"

"Yes, Madame Bonancieux, whose refuge the cardinal could not discover."

"Well, then," said Rochefort, "this is a chance quite fit to pair with the other. Verily, the cardinal is a fortunate man."

"Fancy my astonishment," continued her ladyship,

“when I found myself face to face with this woman.”

“Does she know you?”

“No.”

“Then she looks upon you as a stranger?”

Her ladyship smiled. “I am her dearest friend.”

“Upon my honour,” said Rochefort, “my dear countess, it is only you who can perform this sort of miracles.”

“And well it is that I can, chevalier,” said her ladyship, “for do you know what is about to happen.”

“No.”

“They are coming for her to-morrow, or the next day, with an order from the queen.”

“Really! And who do you mean by they?”

“D’Artagnan and his friends.”

“Verily, they will go such a length that we shall be obliged to put them into the Bastile.”

“And why has it not been done already?”

“How can I tell? Because the cardinal evinces a weakness toward these men which I cannot comprehend.”

“Really! Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort: tell him that our conversation at the Red Dove-Cot was overheard by these four men—tell him that, after his departure, one of them came up and took from me by force the passport he had given me—tell him that they gave Lord de Winter notice of my voyage to England—that, this time again, they nearly prevented the success of my undertaking, as they did in the affair of the diamond studs—tell him that amongst these four men, only two are to be feared, d’Artagnan and Athos—tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse: he must be allowed to live, for his secret is known, and he may be made useful; and as for the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a fop, a ninny, not worth giving one’s self the smallest trouble about.”

“But these four men ought to be, at this moment, at the siege of La Rochelle.”

“I thought so too; but a letter which Madame

Bonancieux has received from Madame de Chevreuse, and which she had the imprudence to communicate to me, leads me to believe that these four men are now on their way to abduct her."

"The devil! What must we do?"

"What did the cardinal say to you about me?"

"That I was to take your despatches, whether verbal or written, and to return by post. When he knows what you have done, he will give you further directions."

"I must remain here, then?"

"Here, or in the neighbourhood."

"You cannot take me with you?"

"No, the order is explicit. In the environs of the camp you might be recognised; and you can understand that your presence might compromise his eminence, especially after what has just happened in England. Only tell me beforehand where you will await the cardinal's orders, that I may know where to find you."

"Listen; it is very probable that I cannot remain here."

"Why?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any moment."

"True. But then this little woman will escape his eminence."

"Bah!" said her ladyship, with a smile peculiar to herself, "you forget that I am her best friend."

"Ah! there is something in that. Then I may tell the cardinal, with regard to this woman——"

"That he may make himself easy."

"Is that all? Will he know what that means?"

"He will guess it."

"And now, let us see, what ought I to do?"

"You must set off this instant. It appears to me that the news you carry is well worth the trouble of a little haste."

"My carriage broke down on entering Lilliers."

"Excellent."

"What do you mean by *excellent*?"

"Why, that I want your carriage."

"And how am I to travel, then?"

"On post-horses"

"You talk of it very unconcernedly; a hundred and eighty leagues."

"What do they signify?"

"Well, it shall be done. What next?"

"On passing through Lilliers you will send your carriage to me, with directions to your lackey to attend to my commands."

"Very well!"

"You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal in your possession."

"Yes, I have my full powers."

"You will show that to the abbess, and you will tell her that I shall be sent for either to-day or to-morrow, and that I must accompany the person sent in your name."

"Very well!"

"Do not forget to speak harshly of me, when you talk to the abbess."

"Why so?"

"I am one of the cardinal's victims. I must inspire some confidence in that poor little Madame Bonancieux."

"Right. And now will you make me a report of all that has occurred?"

"I have already told you the events, and you have a good memory; so repeat what I have told you. A paper may be lost."

"You are right; only let me know where you are to be found, that I may not have to run about the country in vain."

"Ah! there is something in that. Wait."

"Do you require a map?"

"Oh, I know this country well."

"You? When did you ever visit it?"

"I was brought up here."

“Indeed!”

“It is some advantage, you see, to have been brought up somewhere.”

“You will wait for me, then—?”

“Let me consider a moment—ah! yes, at Armentières.”

“And where is Armentières?”

“It is a little village, on the Lys. I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in another country.”

“Capital; but you must remember that you are only to cross the river in case of danger.”

“That is understood.”

“And, in that case, how shall I discover where you are?”

“You do not want your servant? Is he one on whom you can depend?”

“Entirely!”

“Give him to me: no one knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will conduct you to me.”

“And you say that you will wait for me at Armentières?”

“Yes. At Armentières!”

“Write the name for me on a slip of paper, lest I should forget it. The name of a village will not compromise any one, will it?”

“Ah! who knows? But never mind,” said her ladyship, writing the name on a half sheet of paper, “I will run the hazard.”

“Good,” said Rochefort, taking from her ladyship’s hands the paper, which he folded, and stuffed into the lining of his hat. “And I shall, besides, do like the children, and, as a safeguard against the loss of the paper, I shall repeat the name all the way I go. Now, is that all?”

“I think so.”

“Let us see:—Buckingham dead, or grievously wounded—your conversation with the cardinal, overheard by the musketeers—Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth—d’Artagnan and Athos to the Bastile—Aramis, the lover of Madame de Chevreuse—Porthos a fool—Madame Bonancieux discovered—to

send you the carriage as soon as possible—to put my lackey under your orders—to make you out a victim of the cardinal, that the abbess may have no suspicion—Armentieres, on the banks of the Lys : is that right?”

“Verily, my dear chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. But, by the way, add one thing.”

“And what is that?”

“I saw some very pretty woods, which must join the gardens of the convent. Say that I may be allowed to walk in these woods. Who knows?—I may perhaps be obliged to escape by some back door.”

“You think of everything.”

“And you forget one thing.”

“What is that?”

“To ask me whether I want any money.”

“Exactly ; how much will you have?”

“All the gold you may have about you.”

“I have nearly five hundred pistoles.”

“I have about as many. With a thousand pistoles, one may face anything. Empty your pockets.”

“There.”

“Excellent. And when do you set off?”

“In one hour : just time enough to eat a morsel, whilst I send to fetch a post-horse.”

“Excellent. Adieu, count.”

“Adieu, countess.”

“My compliments to the cardinal.”

“My compliments to Satan !”

Her ladyship and Rochefort exchanged smiles, and separated.

In an hour afterwards, Rochefort set out at full speed ; and five hours afterwards, he passed through Arras. Our readers already know how he was recognised by d'Artagnan, and how that recognition, by exciting the fears of our four musketeers, had given a new activity to their journey.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A DROP OF WATER.

SCARCELY had Rochefort left, before Madame Bonancieux returned. She found her ladyship with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you feared has happened. This evening, or to-morrow, the cardinal will send for you."

"How do you know that?" asked her ladyship.

"I heard it from the lips of the messenger himself."

"Come and sit down by me," said her ladyship; "but first let me be sure that no one overhears us."

"And why all these precautions?"

"You will soon know."

Her ladyship arose, went to the door, opened it, looked along the corridor, and then came back, and seated herself again by the side of Madame Bonancieux.

"Then," said she again, "he played his part well."

"Who did?"

"He who introduced himself to the abbess as the envoy of the cardinal."

"Was it, then, a part that he was playing?"

"Yes, my child."

"Then that man is not——"

"That man," said her ladyship, dropping her voice, "is my brother."

"Your brother?" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux.

"Nobody but you knows this secret, my child; if you should entrust it to anybody in the world, I should be ruined, and you also, perhaps."

"Oh, mon Dieu!"

"Listen: this is what has taken place. My brother, who was coming to my aid, to take me away from here, by force if necessary, met the cardinal's emissary, who was on his way to fetch me. He followed him. On

arriving at a retired and solitary spot, he drew his sword, and commanded the messenger to deliver to him the papers which he carried. The messenger endeavoured to defend himself, and my brother slew him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonancieux, shuddering.

"There was no alternative, remember. My brother then determined to make use of craft instead of force. He took the papers, presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal himself, and, in an hour or two, a carriage will come to take me away in his eminence's name."

"I understand: it is your brother who will send this carriage."

"Of course. But that is not all: that letter which you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame Chevreuse——"

"Well?"

"Is a forgery?"

"What?"

"Yes, a forgery: it is a snare, that you may make no resistance when they come to fetch you."

"But it is d'Artagnan who will come."

"Undeceive yourself: d'Artagnan and his friends are at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met with some of the cardinal's agents, disguised in the uniform of musketeers. They were to call you out to the gate; you would have believed that you were in the company of friends; and they were to carry you off, and convey you to Paris."

"Oh! my God! my head fails in the midst of such a chaos of iniquities. I feel that if it lasts long," said Madame Bonancieux, putting her hands to her head, "I shall go mad."

"Listen: I hear the step of a horse: it is that of my brother, who is going away. I must take a last farewell of him. Come."

Her ladyship opened the window, and made a sign to

Madame Bonancieux to join her. The young woman joined her; and Rochefort passed by at a gallop.

“Good-bye, brother!” said her ladyship.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and, as he went rapidly past, made a friendly farewell salute with his hand.

“That kind George!” said she, closing the window, with an expression of countenance full of affection and melancholy.

She then returned, and sat down in her place, as though plunged in reflections of a personal kind.

“Dear lady!” said Madame Bonancieux, “pardon me for interrupting you; but what do you advise me to do? You have more experience than I have: speak, and I will listen.”

“In the first place,” said her ladyship, “I might possibly be deceived, and d’Artagnan and his friends may really be coming to your assistance.”

“Oh! that would be too fortunate,” said Madame Bonancieux, “and I fear that so much happiness is not reserved for me.”

“Then, do you see, it would be merely a question of time, a kind of race, as to which would arrive first. If it should be your friends who made best haste, why, then, you would be saved; but, if it were the cardinal’s satellites, then you would be ruined.”

“Oh! yes, yes! ruined without mercy. But what must I do—what must I do?”

“There is one very simple and very natural plan.”

“And what is that? Tell me?”

“It would be to wait, concealed in the neighbourhood; and so to make yourself sure who the men were who came to seek you.”

“But where can I wait?”

“Oh! that is not a matter of difficulty. I, myself, must wait, and conceal myself at a few leagues’ distance from here, until my brother comes to meet me. Well, then, I will take you with me—we will hide and wait together.”

“But I shall not be allowed to leave this place: I am almost regarded as a prisoner here.”

“As it is supposed that I leave on account of an order from the cardinal, it will not be believed that you are very anxious to follow me.”

“Well?”

“Very well. The carriage being at the door, you will bid me adieu, and you will get upon the steps to embrace me for the last time. My brother’s servant, who is coming to fetch me, being forewarned, will give a signal to the postillion, and we shall set off at full gallop.”

“But d’Artagnan—if he should come?”

“Shall we not know it?”

“How?”

“Nothing is more easy. We will send this servant of my brother’s, in whom I have told you that I have the greatest confidence, back to Bethune; and he shall disguise himself, and find a lodging opposite the convent. If it should be the cardinal’s emissaries who come, he will not stir; if it should be M. d’Artagnan and his friends, he will lead them to where we are.”

“He knows them, then?”

“Certainly; has he not seen M. d’Artagnan at my house?”

“Oh! yes, yes, you are right. Thus, all will go on well. But do not let us go too far away from here.”

“Seven or eight leagues at the most. We will keep upon the frontiers, and, upon the first alarm, quit France.”

“What must we do in the meantime?”

“Wait.”

“But if they should come?”

“My brother’s carriage will arrive before them.”

“Suppose I should be away from you when it arrives—at dinner, or at supper, for example?”

“Tell our good abbess, that, in order that we may be as little apart as possible, you request her to allow you to take your meals with me.”

“Will she permit it?”

“What objection can there be to it? Go down now to her, and make your request. I feel my head a little heavy, and so I shall take a turn in the garden.”

“And where may I see you again?”

“Here, in one hour from this time.”

“Here, in one hour! Oh! you are very kind, and I thank you.”

“How should I avoid being interested in you? Even if you had not been beautiful and charming, are you not the friend of one of my best friends?”

“Dear d’Artagnan! Oh, how he will thank you!”

“I hope so. Come, it is all arranged; let us go down.”

“You are going to the garden? Proceed along this corridor: a little staircase leads you to it.”

“Good. Thank you.”

And the two ladies separated, exchanging charming smiles.

Her ladyship had spoken the truth; her head was heavy, for her projects, badly arranged, clashed against each other as in chaos. She had need to be alone that she might put a little order into her ideas. She saw dimly into the future; but it required some moments of silence and tranquillity to give to this confused assemblage of conceptions a definite form, and a decided plan. What was now most urgent was, to carry off Madame Bonancieux, and put her in a place of security; and then, should her game fail, to use her as a hostage. Her ladyship began to dread the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies were quite as persevering as she herself was unrelenting. Besides, she felt, as one feels the approach of a storm, that the issue was near, and would not fail to be fearful.

The principal point for her was, as we have said, to get possession of Madame Bonancieux. By this means she would hold in her hands the life of d’Artagnan; or more even than his life, for she would hold that of the woman he loved. In case of unprosperous fortune, it

was a means of opening negotiations, and of securing favourable terms.

Now, it was certain that Madame Bonancieux would follow her without distrust; and let Madame Bonancieux be but once concealed with her at Armentières, it would be easy to make her believe that d'Artagnan had never visited Bethune. In a fortnight, at most, Rochefort would return. During that time she would meditate on what she must do to avenge herself on the four friends. She should not be impatient: for she should have the sweetest occupation that events can ever give to a woman of her character—a hearty vengeance to complete!

Whilst thus meditating, she cast her eyes around her, and mapped out in her mind the topography of the garden. Her ladyship was like a good general, who foresees at the same time both victory and defeat, and who is quite ready, according to the chances of the battle, either to advance or to retire.

At the expiration of an hour, she heard a soft voice calling her. It was that of Madame Bonancieux. The good abbess had consented to everything, and, to begin, they were just about to sup together. On entering the court, they heard the sound of a carriage, which was stopping at the gate. Her ladyship listened.

“Do you hear?” said she.

“Yes; the rolling of a carriage.”

“It is that which my brother sends for us.”

“Oh! mon Dieu!”

“Come, have courage!”

There was a ring at the convent gate. Her ladyship was not mistaken.

“Go up into your room,” said she to Madame Bonancieux; “you must have some trinkets that you would like to carry with you.”

“I have d'Artagnan's letters,” replied she.

“Well! go for them, and come back to me in my room. We will sup hastily; for, as we shall perhaps

have to travel a part of the night, we must recruit our strength."

"Great God!" said Madame Bonancieux, placing her hands upon her heart; "I am choking—I cannot walk."

"Courage—come, take courage! Think that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe, and think that what you are about to do is done for his sake."

"Oh, yes—all, all for him! You have restored my courage by that single word. Go; I will rejoin you."

Her ladyship went hastily up to her own room, where she found Rochefort's valet, and gave him his instructions. He was to wait for her at the gate: if, by chance, the musketeers should arrive, he was to go off at a gallop, make the circuit of the convent, and wait for her at a little village, which was situated on the other side of the wood. In that case, her ladyship would walk through the garden, and reach the village on foot: we have already said that she was perfectly well acquainted with this part of France. If the musketeers should not make their appearance, everything would be conducted as had been previously arranged. Madame Bonancieux was to get into the carriage, on the pretext of wishing her, once more, adieu, and she would then escape with her.

Madame Bonancieux came in; and, to remove all suspicion if she had any, her ladyship repeated to the valet, in her presence, the latter part of his instructions. Her ladyship then made some inquiries about the carriage: it was a chaise, drawn by three horses, and driven by a postillion. The valet was to precede it as a courier.

Her ladyship was altogether wrong in fearing that suspicion troubled Madame Bonancieux. The poor young woman was too honest herself to suspect another of so black a perfidy. Besides, the name of Lady de Winter, which she had heard mentioned by the abbess, was entirely unknown to her; and she had not imagined that a woman had performed so large and fatal a part in bringing about the misfortunes of her life.

“You see,” said her ladyship, when the valet had left the room, “that everything is ready. The abbess has not the slightest suspicion, and fully believes that I am sent for by the cardinal. The man has gone out to give his final orders: eat something, however little; drink a thimbleful of wine; and let us be off.”

“Yes,” said Madame Bonancieux mechanically, “yes, let us be off.”

Her ladyship made her a sign to sit down—poured out for her a small glass of Spanish wine, and helped her to a part of the breast of a chicken.

“There,” said she, “everything is propitious: here is the night approaching; at daybreak we shall have reached his retreat, and no one will suspect where we are. Come, have courage, and take something.”

Madame Bonancieux ate two or three mouthfuls, mechanically, and just put her lips to the wine.

“Come, come,” said her ladyship, lifting her own glass towards her mouth, “do as I do.”

But, at the moment she was about to drink, her hand was suddenly arrested. Her ears caught the distant sound of an approaching gallop on the road; and then, almost at the same instant, she seemed to hear the neighing of horses. This sound destroyed her exultation, as the uproar of a storm awakens us from a delightful dream. She grew pale, and ran to the window; whilst Madame Bonancieux, who had got up, trembled so as to be obliged to support herself with a chair for fear of falling. Nothing had become yet visible, but the galloping was more distinctly heard.

“Oh, my God!” said Madame Bonancieux, “what can that noise be?”

“That of our friends or our enemies,” said her ladyship, with a terrible composure. “Remain where you are, and I will go and ascertain.”

Madame Bonancieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue. The sound became more audible. The horses could not be more than a hundred

and fifty yards off, but were not yet visible, on account of a turning in the road. Still the noise was now so distinct, that the number of the horses might have been counted by the clattering of their iron hoofs.

Her ladyship gazed with the most intense attention: there was just light enough to recognise those who were approaching. Suddenly, at the turn of the road, she saw the glitter of laced hats, and the waving of plumes; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen. One of them was two lengths in advance of his companions. Her ladyship gave utterance to a howl. In the foremost rider she recognised d'Artagnan.

"Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, "what is the matter?"

"It is the uniform of the cardinal's guards: there is not a moment to be lost," exclaimed her ladyship. "Let us fly! let us fly!"

"Yes, yes, let us fly," repeated Madame Bonancieux, but without the power of moving one step, rooted as she was to her place by terror.

The horsemen were heard passing under the window.

"Come along! come along!" said her ladyship, endeavouring to drag the young woman by the arm. "Thanks to the garden, we may yet escape, for I have got the key. But, let us make haste: in less than five minutes it will be too late!"

Madame Bonancieux attempted to walk, but, after taking two steps, fell upon her knees.

Her ladyship attempted to lift her up and carry her, but she found herself unable. At this moment they heard the wheels of the carriage, which, on the appearance of the musketeers, went off at a gallop; and then three or four shots resounded.

"For the last time, will you come?" exclaimed her ladyship.

"Oh! my God! my God! you see that my strength is all gone: you see that I cannot walk! Fly, and save yourself."

“Fly alone! Leave you here! No, no—never!” exclaimed her ladyship.

Suddenly a livid lightning flashed from her eyes: she ran to the table, and poured into Madame Bonancieux’s glass the contents of the hollow part of a ring, which she opened with singular dexterity. It was a red particle, which was immediately dissolved. Then, taking the glass, with a firm hand—

“Drink,” said she hastily; “this wine will give you strength—drink!”

She put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

“Ah! it was not thus that I wished to avenge myself,” said her ladyship, putting the glass upon the table, with an infernal smile; “but, faith! we must do the best we can!” and she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonancieux saw her escape, without being able to follow her. She was like those who dream that they are pursued, yet feel a perfect inability to move. A few minutes elapsed, and then a frightful noise was heard at the gate. At every instant Madame Bonancieux expected to see the reappearance of her ladyship, but she did not return. Many times—from terror, no doubt—the cold drops stood upon her burning brow.

At length she heard the rattling of the grated doors, which were being opened; the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs; and there was a loud murmur of many approaching voices, in the midst of which she fancied that she heard her own name mentioned. Suddenly she uttered a loud scream of joy, and rushed towards the door—she had recognised the voice of d’Artagnan.

“D’Artagnan! d’Artagnan!” she exclaimed; “is it you? Here! here!”

“Constance! Constance!” replied the young man. “Mon Dieu! where are you?”

At the same moment the door of the cell was burst in, rather than opened. Many men rushed into the

room. Madame Bonancieux had fallen on a chair, without the power of motion. D'Artagnan cast away a still smoking pistol, which he held in his hand, and fell upon his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his pistol in his belt; and Porthos and Aramis returned the swords, which they had drawn, into their sheaths.

"Oh! d'Artagnan, my beloved d'Artagnan! you come at last! You did not deceive me: it is really you!"

"Yes, yes, Constance, we are at last united!"

"Oh! *she* told me, in vain, that you would never come. I always secretly expected it. I did not wish to fly. Oh, how wisely I have chosen! how happy I am!"

At this word *she*, Athos, who had quietly sat down, suddenly arose.

"*She?* Who is *she?*" demanded d'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion—she who, through affection for me, wished to withdraw me from my persecutors—she who, taking you for the cardinal's guards, has just fled."

"Your companion!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, becoming paler than the white veil of his mistress; "of what companion are you talking?"

"Of her whose carriage was at the door—of a woman who called herself your friend, d'Artagnan—of a woman to whom you confided all our secrets."

"Her name?" exclaimed d'Artagnan; "do you not know her name?"

"Yes, I do; they mentioned it before me. Wait—but it is very strange—oh, my God! my head becomes confused—I cannot see anything——"

"Come here, my friends! come here!—her hands are icy," exclaimed d'Artagnan—"she is very ill. Great God! she is becoming unconscious."

Whilst Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his lungs, Aramis ran for a glass of water; but he stopped on beholding the fearful alteration in the countenance of Athos, who was standing before the

table with his hair on end, and his features frozen with terror, looking into one of the glasses, and seeming to be a prey to the most horrible suspicion.

“Oh!” said Athos, “oh, no! it is impossible! Such a crime would never be permitted by the Almighty!”

“Some water! some water!” cried d’Artagnan; “some water!”

“Oh! poor woman! poor woman!” murmured Athos in a faltering voice.

Madame Bonancieux opened her eyes once more, at the caresses of d’Artagnan.

“She is recovering her senses!” exclaimed the young man; “oh, my God, my God! I thank thee.”

“Madam,” said Athos, “in the name of Heaven, to whom does this empty glass belong?”

“To me, sir,” replied the young woman, in a failing voice.

“But who poured out the wine which it contained?”

“She did.”

“But who is *she*?”

“Ah, I remember now,” said Madame Bonancieux—“Lady de Winter.”

The four friends uttered one unanimous cry; but the voice of Athos overpowered all the others. At the same moment Madame Bonancieux became livid; a deadly spasm assailed her; and she fell panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D’Artagnan grasped the hands of Athos in indescribable anguish. “Ah!” said he, “what do you believe——” His voice was choked by sobs.

“I believe the worst,” replied Athos, biting his lips until they bled.

“D’Artagnan!” exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, “where are you? Don’t leave me—you see that I am about to die!”

D’Artagnan let go the hands of Athos, which he had pressed convulsively, and ran to her. Her countenance, before so beautiful, was now entirely distorted; her

glassy eyes no longer saw, a convulsive shuddering agitated her whole frame; and icy drops were streaming from her brow.

“In the name of Heaven, run—Aramis—Porthos—and obtain some assistance!”

“All is useless!” said Athos; “all is useless! To the poison which *she* pours, there is no antidote.”

“Yes, yes—help! help!” murmured Madame Bonancieux. Then, collecting all her strength, she took the hand of the young man between her two hands, looked at him for an instant as though her whole soul were in that last look, and, with a sobbing cry, she pressed her lips upon his.

“Constance! Constance!” exclaimed d’Artagnan.

One sigh came from her lips, breathing over those of d’Artagnan; and that sigh was the passage of her loving soul to eternity.

D’Artagnan held only a lifeless body in his arms. He uttered a cry, and fell beside his mistress, as pale and motionless as herself.

Porthos wept; Aramis raised his hand to heaven; Athos crossed himself.

At that moment a man appeared at the door, almost as pale as those who were in the chamber. He looked around him, and saw Madame Bonancieux dead, and d’Artagnan unconscious. He entered just at the moment of that stupor which succeeds great catastrophes.

“I was not mistaken,” said he; “that is M. d’Artagnan; and you are his three friends, Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.”

They whose names had been pronounced, looked at the stranger with astonishment, and all thought that they recognised him.

“Gentlemen,” said the newcomer, “you, like myself, are seeking a woman, who,” added he, with a terrible smile, “must have been present here—for I see a dead body.”

The three friends remained speechless; but the voice,

as well as the countenance, recalled to their memory some one they had previously seen, although they could not recollect under what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you will not recognise a man whose life you have probably twice saved, I must needs give my name. I am Lord de Winter, the brother-in-law of that woman."

The three friends uttered an exclamation of surprise. Athos arose, and offered him his hand.

"Welcome, my lord," said he; "you are one of us."

"I left Portsmouth five hours after her," said Lord de Winter; "reached Boulogne three hours after her; I only missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer; but at St. Lilliers I lost all trace of her. I wandered about at chance, inquiring of everybody, when I saw you pass at a gallop. I recognised M. d'Artagnan, and called out to you; but you did not answer me. I attempted to keep up with you, but my horse was too tired to go at the same pace as yours did; and yet, in spite of all your haste, it seems that you, also, have arrived too late."

"The proof is before you," said Athos, pointing to Madame Bonancieux, who was lying dead, and to d'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were endeavouring to restore to consciousness.

"Are they both dead?" demanded Lord de Winter coldly.

"No, happily," replied Athos; "M. d'Artagnan has only fainted."

"Ah! so much the better," said Lord de Winter.

In fact, at that moment, d'Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on the body of his mistress.

Athos arose, walked toward his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and then, whilst d'Artagnan broke out into sobs, said to him, in his noble and persuasive tones—

"My friend, be a man! Women weep for the dead—men avenge them!"

“Oh, yes, yes!” cried d’Artagnan, “if it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you.”

Athos took advantage of this momentary strength, which the hope of vengeance had given to his unfortunate friend, to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to fetch the abbess. The two friends met her in the corridor, already much confounded and disturbed by so many events. She called some of the sisters, who, contrary to their conventual habits, found themselves in the presence of five men.

“Madame,” said Athos, putting his arm under that of d’Artagnan, “we leave to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. She was an angel upon earth, before she became a saint in heaven. Treat her as if she had been one of your sisters: we will return some day to pray for her soul.”

D’Artagnan hid his face against Athos’s breast, and sobbed violently.

“Weep,” said Athos; “weep, heart full of love, and youth, and life. Alas! would that I could weep as you do!” And he led his friend away—affectionately as a father, consolingly as a priest, and firmly, as a man who had himself suffered much.

All five, followed by their servants leading their horses, then went towards the town of Bethune, where the suburbs were within sight; and they stopped at the first hotel they found.

“But,” asked d’Artagnan, “are we not going to follow that woman?”

“By and by,” said Athos; “but I have some preparations to make.”

“She will escape,” said the young man—“she will escape, Athos, and it will be your fault.”

“I will answer for her,” said Athos.

D’Artagnan had such perfect confidence in his friend’s promise, that he bowed his head, and entered the hotel without making the least reply. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, at a loss to understand the meaning

of Athos. Lord de Winter thought that he sought only to soothe the grief of d'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained that there were five unoccupied chambers in the hotel, "let each of us retire to his room. D'Artagnan ought to be alone to weep, and to sleep. I take charge of everything; make yourselves perfectly easy."

"It appears to me, however," said Lord de Winter, "that if any measures are to be taken against the countess, the concern is mine, seeing that she is my sister-in-law."

"And," said Athos, "she is my wife!"

D'Artagnan started, for he was satisfied that Athos was sure of his revenge, to reveal such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at one another in consternation; and Lord de Winter thought that Athos had gone mad.

"Retire, then," said Athos, "and leave me to act. You see that, in my capacity of husband, this affair belongs to me. Only, d'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me that paper which fell from the man's hat, and on which the name of a village is written."

"Ah!" cried d'Artagnan, "I understand: that name is written by her hand——"

"You see," said Athos, "that there is still a God in heaven."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK.

THE despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief, which made the brilliant qualities of the man even more lucid. Entirely engrossed by one thought—that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had undertaken—he was the last to retire into his chamber, where he requested the landlord to bring him a map of the province; and then he bent himself over it, examined the lines traced on it, and, ascertaining

that four different roads led from Bethune to Armentières, he ordered the valets to be called.

Planchet, Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin entered, and received the clear, precise, and serious directions of Athos. At break of day, the next morning, they were to set off, and proceed to Armentières, each by a different road. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that which had been taken by the carriage at which the three friends had fired, and which was attended, as may be remembered, by the lackey of Count Rochefort.

Athos intrusted the valets with this duty, first, because since these men had been in his service or in that of his friends, he had perceived in each of them some different and useful quality; and, next, because servants awaken less suspicion than their masters in the minds of the peasants, and excite more sympathy in the minds of those whom they address. And, lastly, her ladyship knew the masters, whilst she did not know the servants, who, on the other hand, knew her ladyship well. They were all four to be at an appointed place at eleven o'clock the next day. If they had discovered her ladyship's retreat, three of the four were to remain to watch her, and the fourth was to return to Bethune, to inform Athos, and to guide the three friends.

These arrangements being made, the valets withdrew.

Athos then arose from his seat, girded on his sword, wrapped himself up in his cloak, and left the hotel. It was about ten o'clock; and at ten at night, in the provinces, the streets are but little frequented. Nevertheless, Athos evidently was looking out for some one, of whom he could ask a question. At last, he met a late passenger, went up to him, and spoke a few words. The man he addressed started back in fear; but yet he answered the inquiry of the musketeer by a sign. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but he refused it. Athos then proceeded down the street which the man had indicated with his finger; but,

reaching a spot where several streets met, he stopped again in visible embarrassment. But, as this was a more likely place than any other for some one to be seen, Athos waited there. In fact, in an instant after, a watchman passed. Athos repeated the question he had already asked of the person he had first met. The watchman showed the same terror, and also refused to accompany him; but he pointed to the road he was to take. Athos walked in the direction indicated, and soon reached the suburbs of the town, in the opposite direction to that from which he and his companions had entered. There, he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed, and stopped for the third time. Fortunately, a beggar who was passing by, came up to solicit alms. Athos offered him a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated an instant, but, at the sight of the piece of silver shining in the darkness, assented, and walked before Athos. Having reached the corner of the street, he pointed out, at a distance, a small, isolated, melancholy-looking house, to which Athos proceeded; whilst the beggar, who had received his fee, took himself off at his utmost speed.

Athos walked quite around this house before he could distinguish the door amid the red colour with which the hut was painted. No light pierced through the crevices of the shutters; no sound gave reason to suppose it was inhabited; it was sad and silent as a tomb. Athos knocked three times before any answer was returned. At the third knock, however, steps were heard approaching, the door was partially unclosed, and a man of tall stature, and pale complexion, and with black beard and hair, appeared. Athos exchanged a few words with him in a whisper, and then the tall man made a sign to the musketeer that he might enter. Athos immediately availed himself of the permission, and the door closed behind him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much difficulty, took him

into a laboratory, where he was engaged in joining together, with iron wires, the clattering bones of a skeleton. All the body was already adjusted, and the head alone was lying on the table. All the furniture indicated that the owner of the room in which they were was engaged in natural science. There were bottles, filled with serpents, labelled according to their kinds; and dried lizards, shining like emeralds, set in large frames of black wood. And, lastly, boxes of wild, sweet-smelling plants, gifted undoubtedly with virtues unknown to mankind in general, were fastened to the ceiling, and hung down the corners of the room. But there was no family, no servant: the tall man inhabited the house alone.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance on the objects we have just described, and, on the invitation of the man whom he had come to seek, sat down opposite him. He then explained the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him; but, scarcely had he stated his demand, before the stranger, who had remained standing before the musketeer, started back in affright, and refused. Athos then drew from his pocket a small paper, on which two lines and a signature were written, accompanied by a seal, and presented it to him who had shown these signs of repugnance so prematurely. The tall man had scarcely read the two lines, and seen the signature, and recognised the seal, before he bowed his head as a token that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was prepared to obey. Athos demanded nothing more: he arose, left the house, returned by the road he had come, and, re-entering the hotel, shut himself up in his own chamber.

At daybreak, d'Artagnan entered his room, and asked him what they were to do.

"Wait," replied Athos.

A few moments after, the superior of the convent sent to inform the musketeers that the funeral would take place at midday. As for the murderess, no tidings of her had been heard. It was, however, clear that she

must have fled through the garden, on whose gravel paths the traces of her steps could be discerned, and whose door had been found locked, with the key missing.

At the appointed hour, Lord de Winter and the four friends proceeded to the convent. The bells were sounding, the chapel was open, and the grating of the choir alone was closed. In the midst of the choir the body of the victim, clothed in the dress of a novice, lay exposed. On every side of the choir, and behind the grating leading to the convent, the whole community of the Carmelites was assembled, listening to the sacred service, and mingling their strains with the songs of the priests, without seeing the laity, or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel d'Artagnan felt his resolution wavering again, and turned to look for Athos; but he had disappeared. Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had been shown into the garden, and there, on the gravel, following the light steps of that woman who had left a track of blood wherever she had passed, he proceeded onwards until he reached the door which opened on the wood. He had this door unclosed, and he plunged into the forest. But, there, all his suspicions were confirmed. The road by which the carriage had disappeared skirted the wood. Athos followed the road for some distance, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Slight spots of blood, which proceeded from a wound inflicted either on the courier or on one of the horses, were perceptible on the road. About three-quarters of a league off, and fifty paces from Festubert, a large spot of blood was visible, and the ground was trodden by horses. Between the wood and this denunciatory spot, and rather behind the trampled earth, traces of the same small steps as those in the garden were distinguished. The carriage, therefore, had waited here; and here her ladyship had left the wood, and got into it.

Satisfied with this discovery, which confirmed all his conjectures, Athos returned to the hotel, where he found Planchet impatiently awaiting him. Everything had

happened exactly as Athos had foreseen. Planchet had followed the path she had taken ; had, like Athos, observed the marks of blood ; like Athos, he, too, had discerned the spot where the carriage stopped. But he had gone on farther than Athos ; so that, in the village of Festubert, whilst drinking in a tavern, he had, without the trouble of inquiry, learned that, at half-past eight yesterday evening, a wounded man, who attended a lady travelling in a post-carriage, had been obliged to stop, from inability to proceed farther. The accident had been imputed to robbers, who had stopped the carriage in the wood. The man had remained in the village, but the woman had exchanged horses, and proceeded on her journey.

Planchet hunted out the postillion who had driven the carriage, and found him. He had taken the lady to Fontenelles, and from Fontenelles she had gone on toward Armentières. Planchet had taken a cross-road, and at half-past seven in the morning he was at Armentières. There was only one hotel there, and Planchet presented himself at it as a servant who was looking out for a situation. He had not talked ten minutes with the servants of the inn, before he ascertained that a woman had arrived alone at ten o'clock the night before, had hired a room, had sent for the landlord, and had told him that she wished to remain for some time in the neighbourhood. Planchet wanted to know nothing more. He hastened to the place of appointment, found the three other valets at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the outlets from the hotel, and returned to Athos, who had just finished receiving this information from Planchet when his friends returned.

All their faces were indicative of gloom—even the gentle countenance of Aramis.

“What must we do?” said d’Artagnan.

“Wait!” replied Athos.

Each retired to his own chamber.

At eight o'clock in the evening, Athos ordered the

horses to be saddled, and sent word to Lord de Winter and his friends to prepare for the expedition. In an instant all the five were ready. Each looked at his arms, and put them in order. Athos came down last, and found d'Artagnan already mounted, and impatient.

"Patience," said Athos; "there is still some one wanting."

The four horsemen looked around them in astonishment, for they inquired in vain, in their own minds, who could be the one still wanting.

At this moment Planchet led up Athos's horse. The musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," said he; "I shall be back directly." And he went off at a gallop.

A quarter of an hour afterwards he returned, accompanied by a man who wore a mask, and was wrapped in a red cloak. Lord de Winter and the three musketeers questioned each other by their glances, but none of them could give any information to the others, for all were ignorant about this man. And yet they concluded that it was as it ought to be, since it was Athos who had so arranged it.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade began its march, taking the same road that the carriage had followed. There was something mournful in the sight of these six men, riding in silence, each buried in his own thoughts, melancholy as despair, gloomy as revenge.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE JUDGMENT.

It was a dark and stormy night. Large clouds careered along the heavens, veiling the brightness of the stars. The moon would not arise till midnight. Sometimes, by the light of a flash that shone along the horizon, the road became perceptible, stretching itself, white

and solitary, before them; and then, the flash extinguished, everything again was gloom. At every instant Athos was obliged to check d'Artagnan, who was always at the head of the little troop, and to compel him to take his place in the rank, which, a moment afterwards, he quitted again. He had only one thought—to go forward—and he went.

They passed in silence through the village of Festubert, where the wounded servant had been left, and then they skirted the village of Richebourg. Having reached Herlier, Planchet, who guided the party, turned to the left.

On several occasions, either Lord de Winter, or Porthos, or Aramis, had endeavoured to address some remark to the man in the red cloak; but, at each interrogation, he had bowed his head without reply. The travellers had thus comprehended that there was some reason for the stranger's silence, and they had ceased to address him.

The storm, too, became more violent: flashes rapidly succeeded one another; the thunder began to roll; and the wind, the precursor of the hurricane, whistled through the plumes and hair of the horsemen. The cavalcade broke into a fast trot. A little way beyond Fromelles, the storm burst forth. There were still three leagues to travel; and they rode them amidst torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan had taken off his hat, and did not wear his cloak. He found some pleasure in letting the water flow over his burning brow, and over his body, agitated by the heats of fever.

At the moment that the little troop had passed beyond Goskal, and was just arriving at the change-house, a man who, in the darkness, had been confounded with the trunk of a tree under which he had sheltered himself, advanced into the middle of the road, placing his finger on his lips. Athos recognised Grimaud.

“What is the matter now?” exclaimed d'Artagnan.
“Can she have quitted Armentières?”

Grimaud gave an affirmative nod of the head. D'Artagnan ground his teeth.

"Silence, d'Artagnan!" said Athos: "I have taken charge of everything, and it is my business, therefore, to question Grimaud."

"Where is she?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud stretched forth his hand in the direction of the Lys.

"Is it far from here?"

Grimaud presented his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud made a sign that she was.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is half a league from this place, in the direction of the river."

"Good!" said d'Artagnan; "lead us on, Grimaud."

Grimaud took a cross-road, and guided the cavalcade. At the end of about five hundred yards they found a stream, which they forded. By the light of a flash, they perceived the village of Erquinheim.

"Is it there?" demanded d'Artagnan.

Grimaud shook his head negatively.

"Silence there!" said Athos.

The troop proceeded on its way. Another flash blazed forth; and, by the bluish glare of the serpentine flame, a small solitary house was perceptible on the bank of the river, not far from a ferry. There was a light at one window.

"We are there," said Athos.

At that moment a man, who was lying down in a ditch, arose. It was Mousqueton. He pointed with his finger to the window with the light. "She is there," said he.

"And Bazin?" demanded Athos.

"While I watched the window, he watched the door."

"Good!" said Athos; "you are all faithful servants."

Athos leaped from his horse, of which he gave the bridle into the hands of Grimaud, and advanced in the direction of the window, after having made a sign to the remainder of the troop to proceed towards the

door. The small house was surrounded by a quick set hedge of two or three feet in height. Athos sprang over the hedge, and went up to the window, which had no shutters on the outside, but whose short curtains were closely drawn. He climbed upon the ledge of the stone, that his eye might be above the level of the curtains. By the light of a lamp, he could perceive a woman, covered by a dark-coloured cloak, seated on a stool before an expiring fire. Her elbows were placed upon a mean table, and she rested her head on hands which were as white as ivory. Her face was not visible, but an ominous smile arose upon the lips of Athos. He was not mistaken. He had, in truth, found the woman that he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed. Her ladyship raised her head, saw the pale face of Athos staring through the window, and screamed aloud.

Perceiving that he had been seen, Athos pushed the window with his hand and knee. It gave way; the panes were broken, and Athos, like a spectre of vengeance, leaped into the room. Her ladyship ran to the door and opened it. Paler, and more threatening than even Athos himself, d'Artagnan was standing on the sill. Her ladyship started back, and screamed. D'Artagnan, imagining that she had some means of flight, and fearing that she might escape them, drew a pistol from his belt. But Athos raised his hand.

"Replace your weapon, d'Artagnan," said he; "it is imperative that this woman should be judged, and not assassinated. Wait awhile, d'Artagnan, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed; for Athos had the solemn voice and the authoritative air of a judge commissioned by the Deity Himself. Behind d'Artagnan there came Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak. The four valets watched at the door and window. Her ladyship had sunk upon her seat, with her hands stretched out, as if to exorcise this terrible

apparition. On seeing her brother-in-law, she uttered a fearful scream.

"What do you want?" demanded her ladyship.

"We want," said Athos, "Anne de Breuil, who was called, first, the Countess de la Fère, then Lady de Winter, baroness of Sheffield."

"I am that person," murmured she, overwhelmed with surprise. "What do you want with me?"

"We want to judge you according to your crimes," said Athos. "You will be free to defend yourself; and to justify your conduct, if you can. M. d'Artagnan, you must be the first accuser."

D'Artagnan came forward. "Before God and men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonancieux, who died last night."

He turned towards Aramis and Porthos. "We can bear witness to it," said the two musketeers together.

D'Artagnan continued—

"Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having sought to poison me with some wine, which she sent me from Villeroi, with a forged letter, as if the wine had come from my friends. God preserved me; but a man named Brisemont was killed instead of me."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, as with one voice.

"Before God and before men," continued d'Artagnan, "I accuse this woman of having urged me to the murder of the Baron de Wardes; and, as no one is present to bear witness to it, I myself will attest it. I have done." And d'Artagnan crossed over to the other side of the room, with Porthos and Aramis.

"It is now for you to speak, my lord," said Athos.

The baron came forward in his turn: "Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" exclaimed all, with one accord.

"Yes," said the baron, "assassinated! From the

warning letter which you sent me, I caused this woman to be arrested, and put her under the custody of a faithful dependent. She corrupted that man; she placed the dagger in his hand; she made him kill the duke; and at this moment, perhaps, Felton has paid with his head for the crimes of this fury."

A shudder ran through the company at the revelation of these hitherto unsuspected crimes.

"This is not all," resumed Lord de Winter. "My brother, who had made you his heiress, died in three hours of a strange malady, which left livid spots on his body. Sister, how did your husband die?"

"Oh, horror!" exclaimed Porthos and Aramis.

"Assassin of Buckingham—assassin of Felton—assassin of my brother—I demand justice on you; and declare that, if it be not accorded to me, I will execute it myself!"

Lord de Winter ranged himself by the side of d'Artagnan, leaving his place open to another accuser.

Her ladyship's head sank upon her hands, and she endeavoured to recall her thoughts, which were confounded by a deadly vertigo.

"It is now my turn," said Athos, trembling as the lion trembles at the aspect of a serpent—"it is my turn. I married this woman when she was a young girl. I married her against the desire of all my family. I gave her my property; I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded—this woman bore the mark of a fleur-de-lis upon the left shoulder."

"Oh!" said her ladyship, rising, "I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced on me that infamous sentence—I defy you to find the man who executed it!"

"Silence!" exclaimed a voice. "It is for me to answer that!" And the man in the red cloak came forward.

"Who is that man? What is that man?" cried out her ladyship, suffocated with terror, and with her hair raising itself up on her head, as if it had been endowed with life.

Every eye was turned towards that man, for he was unknown to all except Athos. And even Athos looked at him with as much astonishment as the others, for he knew not how he could be connected with the horrible drama which was at that moment enacting there. After slowly and solemnly approaching her ladyship, till the table alone separated them, the stranger took off his mask.

Her ladyship looked for some time with increasing terror on that pale countenance, fringed with black hair, of which the only expression was that of a stern and frozen insensibility: then, suddenly rising, and retreating towards the wall—"Oh! no, no," exclaimed she, "no, it is an infernal apparition! it is not he! Help! help!" she screamed out, in a hoarse voice, still pressing against the wall, as if she could open a passage through it with her hands.

"But who are you?" exclaimed all the witnesses of this scene.

"Ask this woman," said the man in the red cloak, "for you see well that she has recognised me."

"The executioner of Lille! the executioner of Lille!" cried her ladyship, overcome by wild affright, and clinging to the wall with her hands for support.

All present recoiled, and the tall man stood alone in the middle of the room.

"Oh, mercy! mercy!" cried the miserable woman, falling on her knees.

The stranger paused for silence. "I told you truly that she had recognised me," said he. "Yes, I am the executioner of Lille, and here is my history."

All eyes were fixed upon this man, whose words were listened to with the most anxious avidity.

"This woman was formerly a young girl, as beautiful as she is at present. She was a nun, in a Benedictine convent at Templemar. A young priest, simple and ingenuous in his nature, performed service in the church of the convent: she attempted to seduce him, and

succeeded. She would have seduced a saint. The vows which they had both taken were sacred and irrevocable. She persuaded him to quit the country. But, to quit the country, to fly together, to get to some part of France where they might live in peace, because they would be unknown, they required money. Neither of them had any. The priest stole the sacred vessels, and sold them; but, just as they were making ready to escape, they were both arrested. In eight days more she had corrupted the gaoler's son, and saved herself. The young priest was condemned to be branded, and to ten years of the galleys. I was the executioner of Lille, as this woman says. I was obliged to brand the criminal, and that criminal was my own brother! I then swore that this woman, who had ruined him—who was more than his accomplice, since she had urged him to the crime—should at any rate partake his punishment. I suspected where she was concealed. I followed, and discovered her. I bound her, and imprinted the same brand on her that I had stamped upon my own brother.

“The next day, on my return to Lille, my brother also managed to escape. I was accused as his accomplice, and was condemned to remain in prison in his place, so long as he should continue at large. My poor brother was not aware of this sentence: he had rejoined this woman; and they fled together into Berri, where he obtained a small curacy. This woman passed for his sister. The owner of the estate to which the curacy belonged saw this pretended sister, and fell in love with her. His passion led him to propose to marry her. She left the man whom she had destroyed, and became the Countess de la Fère.”

All eyes were turned towards Athos, whose true name this was, and he made a sign that the executioner's tale was true.

“Then,” continued the latter, “maddened by despair, and resolved to terminate an existence of which the happiness and honour had been thus destroyed,

my poor brother returned to Lille; and learning the sentence which had condemned me in his place, he delivered himself up to justice, and hung himself the same night to the grating of his dungeon. After all, to be fair to them, they who had condemned me kept their word. Scarcely was the identity of the dead body proved, before my liberty was restored. These are the crimes of which I accuse her—these are the reasons why I branded her!”

“M. d’Artagnan,” said Athos, “what is the punishment that you demand for this woman?”

“The punishment of death,” replied d’Artagnan.

“My Lord de Winter,” continued Athos, “what punishment do you demand for this woman?”

“Death!” replied his lordship.

“Messieurs Porthos and Aramis,” said Athos, “you who are her judges—what punishment do you pronounce against this woman?”

“The punishment of death!” replied the two musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Her ladyship uttered a fearful cry, and dragged herself a few paces on her knees towards her judges.

Athos stretched out his hand towards her. “Anne de Breuil,” said he, “Countess de la Fère, Lady de Winter, your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know any prayer, repeat it; for you are condemned, and are about to die.”

At these words, which left no hope, her ladyship raised herself to her full height, and attempted to speak. But her voice failed her. She felt a strong and pitiless hand seize her by the hair, and drag her on, as irresistibly as Fate drags on mankind. She did not, therefore, even attempt to make any resistance, but left the cottage.

Lord de Winter and the four friends went out after her. The valets followed their masters, and the chamber was left empty, with its broken window, its open door, and the smoking lamp burning sadly on the table.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE EXECUTION.

It was almost midnight. The waning moon, as red as blood from the lingering traces of the storm, was rising behind the little village of Armentières, which exhibited, in that pale light, the gloomy outline of its houses, and the skeleton of its high ornamented steeple. In front, the Lys rolled along its waters like a river of molten fire; whilst, on its other bank, a dark mass of trees was sharply outlined upon a stormy sky, covered by large copper-coloured clouds, which created a sort of twilight in the middle of the night. To the left, arose an old deserted mill, of which the sails were motionless, and from the ruins of which an owl was uttering its sharp, monotonous, recurring screech. Here and there, in the plain, to the right and left of the path which the melancholy train was pursuing, there appeared a few short and stunted trees, which looked like distorted dwarfs crouched down to watch the men in that ill-omened hour.

From time to time, a brilliant flash opened up the horizon in its whole extent; playing above the black mass of trees, and coming, like a frightful scimitar, to divide the sky and water into equal parts. Not a breath of air was stirring in the heavy atmosphere. A silence as of death weighed down all nature. The earth was moist and slippery from the recent rain; and reanimated plants sent forth their perfumes with more vigorous energy.

Two of the servants, each holding an arm, were leading her ladyship along. The executioner walked behind. The four musketeers and Lord de Winter followed him in turn.

Planchet and Bazin brought up the rear.

The two valets led her ladyship toward the bank of the river. Her mouth was mute, but her eyes were inexpressibly eloquent, supplicating by turns each of

those on whom she looked. Finding herself a few paces in advance, she said to the valets—

“A thousand pistoles for each of you, if you will assist me to escape; but, if you give me up to your masters, I have some avengers near, who will make you pay dearly for my death.”

Grimaud hesitated, and Mousqueton trembled in every limb.

Athos, who had heard her ladyship's voice, came up immediately, as did also Lord de Winter.

“Send away these valets,” said he; “she has spoken to them, and they are no longer to be trusted.”

They called Planchet and Bazin, who took the places of Grimaud and Mousqueton.

Having reached the brink of the stream, the executioner came up, and bound her ladyship's hands and feet.

She then broke her silence to exclaim—“You are cowards—you are miserable assassins! You come, ten of you, to murder a poor woman! But beware! Though I am not assisted, I shall be avenged!”

“You are not a woman,” replied Athos coldly; “you do not belong to the human race: you are a demon, escaped from hell, and to hell we shall send you back.”

“Oh! you stainless gentleman,” said her ladyship, “remember that he amongst you who touches a hair of my head is himself a murderer.”

“The executioner can kill without being on that account a murderer, madam,” said the man in the cloak, striking his large sword. “He is the last judge on earth—that is all. *Nachrichter*, as our German neighbours say.”

And, as he was binding her whilst he uttered these words, her ladyship sent forth two or three wild screams, which had a startling, melancholy effect, as they were borne on the night, and lost themselves amidst the depths of the woods, like birds.

“But, if I am guilty—if I have committed the crimes of which you accuse me,” howled out her ladyship, “take

me before a regular tribunal. You are not judges—you have no power to condemn me!”

“I did propose Tyburn,” answered Lord de Winter; “why did you not accept my offer?”

“Because I do not wish to die!” exclaimed her ladyship, struggling—“because I am too young to die!”

“The woman whom you poisoned at Bethune was still younger than you are, madam—and yet she is dead,” said d’Artagnan.

“I will enter a convent—I will become a nun!” cried her ladyship.

“You were in a convent,” said the executioner, “and you left it to destroy my brother.”

Her ladyship uttered a cry of terror, and fell upon her knees. The executioner lifted her in his arms, and prepared to carry her to the boat.

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed she, “my God! are you going to drown me?”

These cries had something so heart-rending in them, that d’Artagnan, who was at first the most unrelenting in his pursuit of her ladyship, sank down upon the stump of a tree, letting his head fall on his bosom, and stopping his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet, in spite of all this, he still heard her menaces and cries. D’Artagnan was the youngest of all these men, and his heart failed him.

“Oh! I cannot bear this frightful spectacle,” said he; “I cannot consent that this woman should thus die.”

Her ladyship heard these words, and they gave her a new gleam of hope. — “D’Artagnan! d’Artagnan!” exclaimed she, “remember that I have loved you!”

The young man rose, and made a step towards her. But Athos drew his sword, and placed himself in his path.

“If you take one step more, d’Artagnan,” said he, “we must cross our swords together.”

D’Artagnan fell on his knees, and prayed.

“Come,” continued Athos, “executioner, do your duty!”



T.M.

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“The young man rose, and made a step towards her.”

“Willingly, my lord,” replied the executioner; “for as truly as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe that I act justly in exercising my office on this woman.”

“That is right.” Athos took one step towards her ladyship.—“I pardon you,” said he, “the evil you have done me. I forgive you for my future crushed, my honour lost, my love tainted, and my salvation for ever perilled, by the despair into which you have thrown me. Die in peace!”

Lord de Winter next came forward. “I pardon you,” said he, “the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, and the death of poor Felton. I forgive you your attempts on my own person. Die in peace!”

“As for me,” said d’Artagnan, “pardon me, madam, for having, by a deceit unworthy of a gentleman, provoked your rage; and, in exchange, I pardon you for the murder of my poor friend, and your cruel vengeance on myself. I pardon and I pity you. Die in peace!”

“*I am lost!*” murmured her ladyship, in English—“*I must die!*”

She then arose unaided, and threw around her one of those clear glances, which seemed to emanate from an eye of fire. But she could see nothing. She listened; but she heard nothing. There were none around her but her enemies.

“Where am I to die?” demanded she.

“On the other bank of the river,” replied the executioner.

He then placed her in the boat; and, as he was stepping in after her, Athos gave him a sum of money.

“Here,” said he, “here is the price of the execution, that it may be seen that we are really judges.”

“It is well,” said the executioner; “but let this woman now know that I am not executing my business, but my duty.” And he threw the money from him into the river.

“Mark,” said Athos, “this woman has a child, and yet she has not said one word about him.”

The boat proceeded towards the left bank of the Lys, carrying away the criminal and the executioner. All the others continued on the right bank, where they had sunk upon their knees. The boat glided slowly along the rope of the ferry, under the reflection of a pale mist, which skimmed the water at that moment.

It arrived at the other bank, and the two figures stood out in blackness on the red horizon.

During the passage, her ladyship had managed to loosen the cord that bound her feet, and, on reaching the bank, she leapt lightly on shore, and took to flight. But the ground was moist; and, at the top of the shelving bank, she slipped, and fell upon her knees. Probably a superstitious idea had struck her. She understood that Heaven refused to aid her, and remained in the attitude in which she had fallen—her head drooping, and her hands clasped together. Then, from the other shore, they could see the executioner slowly raise his two arms, a ray of the moon was reflected on the blade of his large sword, the two arms descended, they heard the whistling of the cimeter and the cry of the victim; and then a mutilated mass sank down beneath the blow. The executioner took off his red cloak, stretched it out on the ground, laid the body on it, and threw in the head, tied it by the four corners, swung it upon his shoulders, and again entered the boat. Having reached the middle of the Lys, he stopped the boat, and holding his burden over the river—

“Let the justice of God have its course!” he exclaimed, in a loud voice. And, so saying, he dropped the dead body into the deepest part of the waters, which closed above it.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CARDINAL.

THREE days afterwards, the four musketeers re-entered Paris. They were within the limit of their furlough, and, the same evening, they went to pay the usual visit to M. de Treville.

“Well, gentlemen,” inquired the brave captain, “have you found yourselves amused in your excursion?”

“Prodigiously so!” replied Athos, in his own name, and that of his companions.

On the sixth of the following month, the king, according to his promise to the cardinal to return to Rochelle, quitted Paris, still quite stunned by the news which was beginning to circulate in the city, that Buckingham had been assassinated.

Although warned of a danger in the path of a man whom she had so truly loved, yet the queen, when his death was announced to her, would not believe it: she had even the imprudence to exclaim—“It is false! He has just written to me.”

But the next day there was no refusing credence to this fatal news. La Porte, having, like every one else, been detained by the order of Charles I., at length arrived, and brought with him the last dying gift which Buckingham had sent to the queen.

The king's joy had been extreme. He did not take the slightest pains to disguise it, but manifested it affectedly before the queen. Louis XIII., like all men of weak hearts, was wanting in generosity. But the king soon again became melancholy and ill. His brow was not one of those that can continue long unruffled: he felt that, in returning to the camp, he returned to slavery; and yet he did return there. The cardinal was, to him, the fascinating serpent; and he was the bird that flies from bough to bough without a possibility of making his escape.

The return to La Rochelle was, therefore, profoundly melancholy. Our four friends, especially, excited the astonishment of their companions: they travelled side by side, with heavy eyes and heads depressed. Athos alone sometimes raised his broad forehead: a glance shot from his eye, a bitter smile passed across his lips, and then, like his comrades, he sank again into his reveries. As soon as they arrived in any town, when they had conducted the king to his apartments, the four friends withdrew, either to their own lodgings, or to some secluded tavern, where they neither played nor drank, but spoke in a low voice together, and looked attentively that none might hear them.

One day that the king had halted to hunt the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of joining in the sport, had stopped at a tavern by the road-side, a man, who was coming post-haste from La Rochelle, stopped at the door to drink a glass of wine, and looked into the chamber where the four musketeers were seated at a table.

“Hollo, M. d’Artagnan,” said he, “is it you that I see there?”

D’Artagnan raised his head, and uttered an exclamation of joy. This man, who now called him, was his phantom: it was the stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and of Arras. D’Artagnan drew his sword, and rushed toward the door. But on this occasion the stranger, instead of hastening away, jumped off his horse, and advanced to meet him.

“Ah! sir,” said the young man, “I meet you at last. This time you shall not escape me.”

“It is not my intention either, sir; for I am looking for you this time. In the king’s name, I arrest you!”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed d’Artagnan.

“I say that you must give up your sword to me, sir, and without resistance too. Your life depends upon it, I assure you.”

"Who are you, then?" demanded d'Artagnan, lowering his sword, but not yet giving it up.

"I am the chevalier de Rochefort," said the stranger, "the cardinal de Richelieu's master of the horse, and I am commanded to conduct you before his eminence."

"We are now returning to his eminence, sir," said Athos, coming forward, "and you must take M. d'Artagnan's word that he will go direct to La Rochelle."

"I must place him in the hands of the guards, who will conduct him back to the camp."

"We will serve as such, sir, on our words as gentlemen! But, on our words as gentlemen, also," continued Athos, frowning, "M. d'Artagnan shall not be taken from us."

De Rochefort threw a glance behind him, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the door; and he understood that he was entirely at the mercy of these four men. "Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will deliver up his sword, and add his word to yours, I will be contented with your promise of conducting him to the quarters of his eminence the cardinal."

"You have my word, sir, and here is my sword," said d'Artagnan.

"That suits me so much the better," said Rochefort, "as I must continue my journey."

"If it is to rejoin her ladyship," said Athos coolly, "it is useless; you will not find her."

"And what has become of her?" asked Rochefort anxiously.

"Return to the camp, and you will learn!"

Rochefort remained in thought for an instant; and then, as they were only one day's journey from Surgères, where the cardinal was to meet the king, he resolved to follow Athos's advice, and to return with them. Besides, this plan had the further advantage of enabling him, personally, to watch the prisoner. Thus they proceeded on their journey.

The next day, at three in the afternoon, they reached

Surgères. The cardinal was waiting there for Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged their caresses freely, and congratulated each other on the happy chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who was arming Europe against her. After this, the cardinal, who had been informed by Rochefort that d'Artagnan had been placed under arrest, and who was in haste to interrogate him, took leave of the king, inviting his majesty to go the next day to see the works at the embankment, which were at last complete.

On returning in the evening to his quarters, near the Pont de la Pierre, the cardinal found the three musketeers all armed; and d'Artagnan, who was without his sword, standing before the door of the house which he inhabited. On this occasion, as he had all his retinue about him, he looked sternly at them, and made a sign with his eye and hand for d'Artagnan to follow him. D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We will wait for you, d'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear.

His eminence knitted his brow, stopped for an instant, and then went on, without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered behind the cardinal, and Rochefort followed d'Artagnan: the door was guarded. His eminence entered the chamber which he made use of as a cabinet, and signed to Rochefort to introduce the young musketeer. Rochefort obeyed, and retired.

D'Artagnan stood alone before the cardinal. It was his second interview with Richelieu; and he afterwards confessed that he felt quite convinced that it was to be his last. Richelieu remained leaning upon the chimney-piece, and there was a table standing between him and d'Artagnan.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders."

"So I have been informed, my lord."

"Do you know why?"

"No, my lord; for the only thing for which I ought to be arrested is yet unknown to your eminence."

Richelieu looked earnestly at the young man.

"Hollo!" said he, "what does this mean?"

"If your eminence will first tell me the charges against me, I will afterwards tell you what I have done."

"There are crimes imputed to you which have cost the heads of people higher far than you are," replied the cardinal.

"And what are they, my lord?" demanded d'Artagnan, with a calmness which surprised even the cardinal himself.

"You are accused of corresponding with the enemies of the realm; of having pried into secrets of the state; and of having attempted to make your general's plans miscarry."

"And who is my accuser, my lord?" inquired d'Artagnan, who had no doubt that it was her ladyship; "a woman, branded by the justice of her country—a woman, who was married to one man in France, and to another in England—a woman, who poisoned her second husband, and attempted to poison me!"

"What are you saying, sir?" exclaimed the astonished cardinal; "and of what woman are you thus speaking?"

"Of Lady de Winter," replied d'Artagnan: "yes, of Lady de Winter—of whose crimes your eminence was undoubtedly ignorant, when you honoured her with your confidence."

"Sir," said the cardinal, "if Lady de Winter has been guilty of the crimes you have mentioned, she shall be punished."

"She has been punished, my lord!"

"And who has punished her?"

"We have."

"She is in prison, then?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the cardinal, who could not credit what he heard; "dead! Did you say that she was dead?"

“Three times she had endeavoured to kill me, and three times I forgave her; but she murdered the woman I loved; and then my friends and I seized her, tried her, and condemned her.”

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonancieux in the Carmelite convent at Bethune, the trial in the solitary house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder ran through the frame of the cardinal, who was not made to shudder easily. But suddenly, as if from the influence of some silent thought, his dark countenance became gradually clearer, and at last attained perfect serenity.

“So,” said he, in a voice, the gentleness of which contrasted strangely with the severity of his words, “you constituted yourselves the judges, without considering that those who are not legally appointed, and punish without authority, are assassins.”

“My lord, I swear to you that I have not for one instant thought of defending my head against your eminence. I will submit to whatever punishment your eminence may please to inflict. I do not cling to life sufficiently to fear death.”

“Yes, I know it: you are a man of courage, sir,” said the cardinal, in a voice almost affectionate. “I may therefore tell you beforehand, that you will be tried, and even condemned.”

“Another might reply to your eminence, that he had his pardon in his pocket. I content myself with saying—command, my lord, and I am ready.”

“Your pardon!” said Richelieu, in surprise.

“Yes, my lord,” replied d'Artagnan.

“And signed by whom? By the king?” The cardinal pronounced these words with a singular intonation of contempt.

“No; by your eminence.”

“By me? You are mad, sir!”

“Your eminence will undoubtedly recognise your own

writing?" And d'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious paper which Athos had extorted from her ladyship, and which he had given to d'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

The cardinal took the paper, and read in a very slow voice, and lingering over each syllable—

"It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

"RICHELIEU."

The cardinal, after having read these two lines, fell into a profound reverie, but did not return the paper to d'Artagnan.

"He is deciding by what kind of punishment I am to die," said the Gascon to himself. "Well, faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die." The young musketeer was in an excellent frame of mind for ending his career heroically.

Richelieu continued to meditate, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hand. At last he raised his head, and fixed his eagle eye upon that loyal, open, and intelligent countenance, and read upon that face, all furrowed with tears, the sufferings which d'Artagnan had endured within a month; and he then thought, for the third or fourth time, what futurity might have in store for such a youth, of barely twenty years of age, and what resources his activity, courage, and intelligence, might offer to a good master. On the other side, the crimes, the power, the almost infernal genius, of her ladyship had more than once alarmed him; and he felt a secret joy at being for ever freed from such a dangerous accomplice. He slowly tore up the paper which d'Artagnan had so generously returned to him.

"I am lost," said d'Artagnan, in his own heart.

The cardinal approached the table, and, without sitting down, wrote some words on a parchment, of which two-thirds were already filled up, and then affixed his seal.

"That is my condemnation," thought d'Artagnan;

“he spares me the misery of the Bastile, and the delays of a trial. It is really very kind of him.”

“Here, sir,” said the cardinal to the young man; “I took one *carte blanche* from you, and I give you another. The name is not inserted in the commission: you will add it yourself.”

D’Artagnan took the paper with hesitation, and cast his eyes upon it. It was the commission of a lieutenant in the musketeers. D’Artagnan fell at the cardinal’s feet.

“My lord,” said he, “my life is yours—make use of it henceforth; but this favour, which you bestow upon me, is beyond my merits. I have three friends who are more worthy of it.”

“You are a brave youth, d’Artagnan,” said the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, in his delight at having conquered that rebellious nature—“do what you like with this commission, as it is blank; only remember that it is to you I give it.”

“Your eminence may rest assured,” said d’Artagnan, “that I will never forget it.”

The cardinal turned, and said aloud—“Rochefort!”

The chevalier, who had undoubtedly been behind the door, immediately entered.

“Rochefort,” said the cardinal, “you see M. d’Artagnan: I receive him into the number of my friends. Embrace one another, and be wise if you wish to retain your heads.”

D’Artagnan and Rochefort embraced coldly, but the cardinal was watching them with his vigilant eye. They left the room at the same moment.

“We shall meet again,” they both said, “shall we not?”

“Whenever you please,” said d’Artagnan.

“The time will come,” replied Rochefort.

“Hum!” said Richelieu, opening the door.

The two men bowed to his eminence, smiled, and pressed each other’s hands.

“We began to be impatient,” said Athos.

“Here I am, my friends,” replied d’Artagnan.

“Free?”

“Not only free, but in favour.”

“You must tell us all about it.”

“Yes, this evening. But, for the present, let us separate.”

In fact, in the evening d'Artagnan went to Athos's lodgings, and found him emptying a bottle of Spanish wine, an occupation which he pursued religiously every night. He told him all that had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and drew the commission from his pocket.

“Here, dear Athos,” said he, “here is something which naturally belongs to you.”

Athos smiled, with his soft and gentle smile. “Friend,” said he, “for Athos it is too much—for the Count de la Fère, it is too little. Keep this commission: it belongs to you. Alas! you have bought it dearly enough!”

D'Artagnan left Athos's room, and went to Porthos.

He found him clothed in a most magnificent coat covered with splendid embroidery, and admiring himself in a mirror.

“Ah! is it you, my friend?” said Porthos; “how do you think this dress suits me?”

“Beautifully,” replied d'Artagnan; “but I am going to offer you one which will suit you still more.”

“What is it?” demanded Porthos.

“That of lieutenant of the musketeers.” And d'Artagnan, having related to Porthos his interview with the cardinal, drew the commission from his pocket, “Here,” said he, “fill in your name, and be a kind officer to me.”

Porthos glanced over the commission, and returned it, to the great astonishment of the young man.

“Yes,” said Porthos, “that would flatter me very much, but I could not long enjoy the favour. During our expedition to Bethune, the husband of my duchess died; so that, my dear boy, as the strong-box of the

defunct is holding out its arms to me, I marry the widow. You see I am fitting on my wedding garments. So keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow — keep it." And he returned it to d'Artagnan.

The young man then repaired to Aramis. He found him kneeling before an oratory, with his forehead leaning on an open book of prayers. He told him, also, of his interview with the cardinal, and, taking the commission from his pocket for the third time, said —

"You, our friend, our light, our invisible protector, accept this commission: you have merited it more than anybody by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such fortunate results."

"Alas! dear friend," said Aramis, "our last adventures have entirely disgusted me with the military life. My decision is, this time, irrevocable. After the siege, I shall enter the Lazaristes. Keep the commission, d'Artagnan. The profession of arms suits you: you will be a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, with an eye moist with gratitude, and brilliant with joy, returned to Athos, whom he found still seated at table, admiring his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

"Well," said he, "they have both refused it."

"It is, dear friend, because no one is more worthy of it than yourself."

He took a pen, wrote the name of d'Artagnan upon it, and gave it back to him.

"I shall no longer have my friends, then," said the young man. "Alas! nothing, henceforth, but bitter recollections." And he let his head fall between his hands, whilst two tears rolled along his cheeks.

"You are young," said Athos, "and your bitter recollections have time to change themselves to tender remembrances."

THE EPILOGUE.

LA ROCHELLE, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet, and of the succour which had been promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a year's siege. On the twenty-eighth of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king entered Paris on the twenty-third of December, the same year. He received a triumph, as though he had conquered an enemy instead of Frenchmen. He entered, under verdant arches, through the suburb of Saint-Jacques.

D'Artagnan took his promotion. Porthos quitted the service, and married Madame Coquenard, in the course of the following year. The strong-box, so much coveted, contained eight hundred thousand livres. Mousqueton had a superb livery, and enjoyed his life-long dream of riding behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey to Lorraine, suddenly disappeared, and ceased to write to his friends. They learned afterwards, through Madame de Chevreuse, that he had assumed the cowl in a monastery at Nancy. Bazin became a lay-brother.

Athos remained a musketeer, under d'Artagnan's command, until 1633; at which time, after a journey to Roussillon, he also left the service, under pretext of having succeeded to a small patrimony in the Blaisois. Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort; and wounded him three times.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth time," said he to Rochefort, as he stretched forth a hand to raise him up.

"It would be better for both of us to stop where we are," replied the wounded man. "Vive Dieu! I have been more your friend than you think; for, after our

first meeting, I could have got your head off by one word to the cardinal."

They embraced, but this time it was in sincerity, and without malice.

Planchet obtained, through Rochefort, the grade of sergeant in the regiment of Piedmont.

M. Bonancieux lived in great tranquillity, entirely ignorant of what had become of his wife, and not much disturbing himself about it. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the cardinal's recollection. The cardinal told him that he would so provide for him that he should never want for anything in future. In fact, the next day M. Bonancieux, having left home at seven o'clock in the evening, to go to the Louvre, was never seen again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs. The opinion of those who thought themselves the best informed was, that he was boarded and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous eminence.

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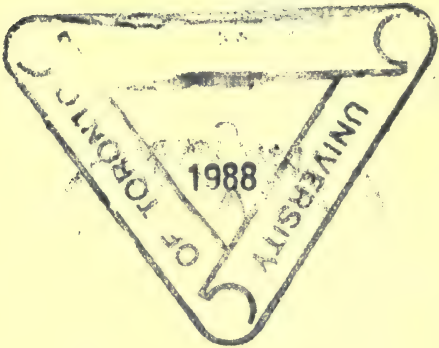
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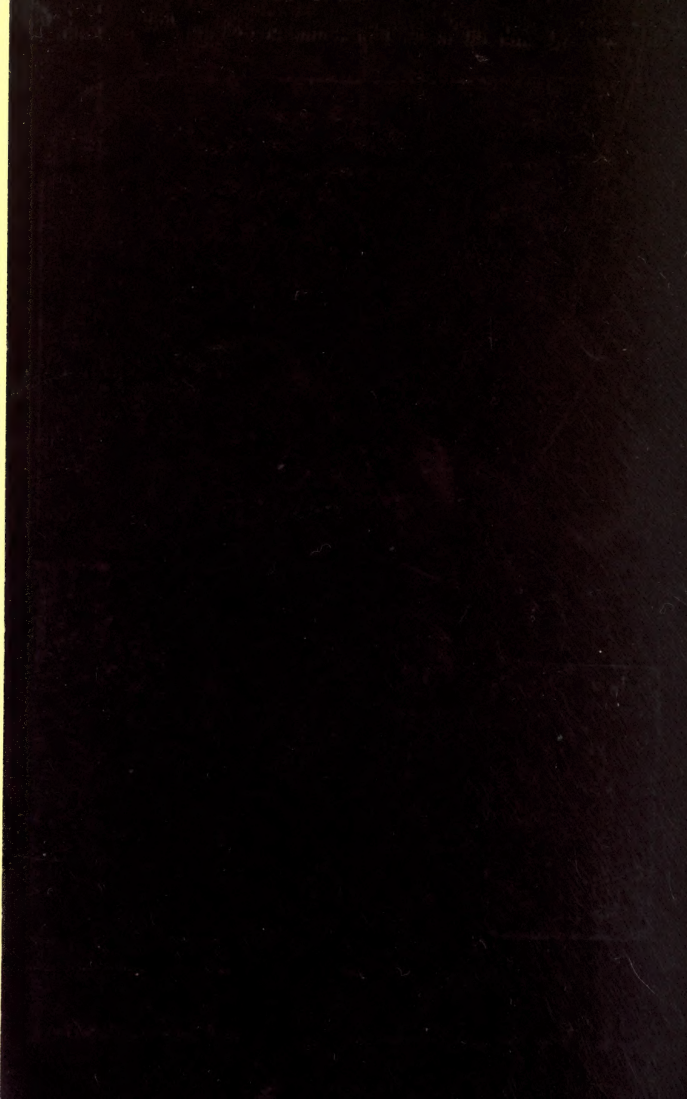
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