TWENTY YEARS AFTER

The duke ran on to the rampart, and perceived, on the other side of the ditch, three cavaliers with two riding horses. The duke exchanged a signal with them. It was well for him that they were there.

Grimaud, meantime, waithd the means of escape.

This was not, however, a rope-holder, but a ball of silk cord, with a narrow board which was to pass between the legs and so un-bind itself by the weight of the person who sat astride upon the board.

"Go!" said the duke.

"The first, my lord!" inquired Grimaud.

"Certainly. If I am caught, I risk nothing but being taken back again to prison. If they catch thee, thou wilt be hung." "True," replied Grimaud.

And, instantly, Grimaud sitting upon the board, as on horseback, commenced his perilous descent.

The duke followed him with his eyes, with involuntary terror.

He had gone down about three-quarters of the length of the wall, when the cord broke. Grimaud fell precipitately into the moat.

The duke uttered a cry, but Grimaud did not give a single moan.

He must have been dreadfully hurt, for he did not stir from the place where he fell.

Immediately one of the men who were waiting slipped down into the moat, tied under Grimaud's shoulders the end of a cord, and the other two, who held the other end, drew Grimaud to them.

"Descend, my lord," said the man in the moat. "There are only fifteen feet more from the top down here, and the grass is soft."

The duke had already begun to descend. His task was the more difficult, as there was no board to support him. He was obliged to let himself down by his hands, and from a height of fifty feet. But, as we have said, he was active, strong, and full of presence of mind.

In less than five minutes he arrived at the end of the cord. He was then only fifteen feet from the ground, as the gentleman below had told him. He let go the rope, and fell upon his feet, without receiving any injury.

He instantly began to climb up the slope of the moat, on the top of which he met De Rochefort. The other two gentlemen were unknown to him. Grimaud, in a swoon, was tied on to a horse.

"Gentlemen," said the duke, "I shall thank you later; now we have not a moment to lose. Oh, then! out those who love me, fol-low me!"

And he jumped on his horse, and set off on a full gallop, drawing in the fresh air, and crying out, with an expression of face which it would be impossible to describe:

"Free! free! free!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TIMELY ARRIVAL OF D'ARTAGNAN IN PARIS.

At Blois, D'Artagnan received the money paid to him by Mazarin for any future service he might render the Cardinal.

From Blois to Paris was a journey of four days for ordinary trav-ellers, but D'Artagnan arrived on the third day at the Barrière Saint
Denis. In turning the corner of the Rue Montmartre, in order to reach the Rue Tiquetonne and the Hôtel de la Chevre d'Or, where he had appointed Portos to meet him, he saw, at one of the windows of the hotel, his friend Portos, dressed in a sky-blue waistcoat, embroidered with silver, and gaping, till he showed all down his throat; whilst the people passing by admiringly gazed at this gentleman, so handsome and so rich, who seemed to envy of his riches and his greatness.

Portos, seeing D'Artagnan, hastened to receive him on the threshold of the hotel.

"Ah, my dear friend!" he cried, "what bad stabling for my horses here!"

"Indeed!" said D'Artagnan; "I am most unhappy to hear it, on account of these fine animals."

"And I also—was also very wretchedly off," he answered, moving backward and forward as he spoke—"I had it not been for the hostess;" he added, with his air of vulgar self-complacency, "who is very agreeable, and understands a joke, I should have got a lodging elsewhere.

"Yes, I understand," said D'Artagnan, "the air of La Rue Tiquetonne is not like that of Pierrefonds; but console yourself, I shall soon conduct you to one much better."

Then taking Portos aside,

"My dear Du Vallon," he said, "here you are in full dress, most fortunately, for I shall take you directly to the Cardinal's."

"Gracious me!—really!" cried Portos, opening his great wondering eyes.

"Yes, my friend."

"A presentation?—indeed!"

"Does that alarm you?"

"No; but it agitates me."

"Oh! don't be distressed; you have not to deal with the other Cardinal; and this one will not oppress you by his dignity."

"It is the same thing—you understand me, D'Artagnan—a court."

"There's no court now. Ahas!"

"The queen!"

"I was going to say, there's no longer a queen. The queen! Be assured we shall not see her."

"But you, my friend; are you not going to change your dress?"

"No, I shall go as I am. This traveling dress will show the Cardinal my haste to obey his commands."

They set out on Vaucouleurs and Bayard, followed by Musqueton an Phoebus, and arrived at the Palais Royal at about a quarter to seven. The streets were crowded, for it was the day of Pentecost—and the crowd looked in wonder at these two cavaliers; one as fresh as if he had come out of a handbag; the other so covered with dust, that he looked as if he had come from a field of battle.

Musqueton also attracted attention; and as the romance of Don Quixote was then the fashion, they said that he was Sancho, who, after having lost one master, had found two.

On reaching the palace, D'Artagnan sent into his Eminence the letter in which he had been ordered to return without delay. He was soon ordered to enter into the presence of the Cardinal.
"Courage!" he whispered to Porthos, as they proceeded. "Do not be intimidated. Believe me, the eye of the eagle is closed forever. We have only the vulture to deal with. Hold yourself up as stiff as on the day of the baptism of Saint Gervais; and do not bend too low to this Italian; that might give him a poor idea of us."

"Good!" answered Porthos. "Good!"

Mazarin was in his study, working at a list of pensions and benefices, of which he was trying to reduce the number. He saw D'Artagnan and Porthos enter with pleasure, yet showed no joy in his countenance.

"Ah! you, is it? Monsieur le Lieutenant, you have been very prompt. "Tis well. Welcome to ye."

"Thanks, my lord. Here I am at your Eminence's service, as well as Monsieur du Vallon, one of my old friends, who used to conceal his nobility under the name of Porthos."

Porthos bowed to the Cardinal.

"A magnificent cavalier," remarked Mazarin.

Porthos turned his head to the right, and to the left, and drew himself up with a movement full of dignity.

"The best swordsman in the kingdom, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

Porthos bowed to his friend.

Mazarin was as fond of fine soldiers as, in later times, Frederick of Prussia used to be. He admired the strong hands, the broad shoulders, and steady eye of Porthos. He seemed to see before him the salvation of his administration, and of the kingdom, sculptured in flesh and bone. He remembered that the old association of Musketeers was composed of four persons.

"And your two other friends?" he asked.

Porthos opened his mouth, thinking it a good opportunity to put in a word in his turn; D'Artagnan checked him by a glance from the corner of his eye.

"They are prevented, at this moment, but will join us later."

Mazarin coughed a little.

"And this gentleman, being disengaged, takes to the service willingly?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord, and from complete devotion to the cause, for Monsieur de Bracieux is rich."

"Fifty thousand francs a year," said Porthos.

These were the first words he had spoken.

"From pure zeal?" resumed Mazarin, with his artful smile; "from pure zeal and devotion, then?"

"My lord has, perhaps, no faith in that word," said D'Artagnan.

"Have you, Monsieur le Gascon?" asked Mazarin, supporting his elbows on his desk, and his chin on his hands.

"I," replied the Gascon, "I believe in devotion as a word at one's baptism, for instance, which naturally comes before one's proper name; every one is naturally more or less devout, certainly; but there should be, at the end of one's devotion, something to gain."

"Your friend, therefore, what does he wish for as the reward of his devotion?"

D'Artagnan was about to explain that the aim and end of the zen: Attendance
of Porthos, was, that one of his captains should be erected into a barony, when a great noise was heard in the ante-chamber; at the same time the door of the study was burst open, and a man, covered with dust, rushed into it, exclaiming:

"My lord the Cardinal! my lord the Cardinal!"

Mazarin thought that some one was going to assassinate him, and he drew back, pushing his chair on the casters. D'Artagnan and Porthos moved so as to plant themselves between the person entering and the Cardinal.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Mazarin, "what's the matter? and why do you rush in here, as if you were just going into a market-place?"

"My lord," replied the messenger, "I wish to speak to your Eminence in secret. I am Monsieur du Puis, an officer in the guards, on duty at the dungeon of Vincennes."

Mazarin, perceiving by the paleness and agitation of the messenger, that he had something of importance to say, made a sign that D'Artagnan and Porthos should retire.

"When they were alone:"

"What I have to say is, my lord, that the Duc de Beaufort has contrived to escape from the Château de Vincennes."

Mazarin uttered a cry, and became paler than he who brought this news. He fell, almost fainting, back in his chair.

"Escaped? Monsieur de Beaufort escaped?"

"My lord, I saw him run off from the top of the terrace."

"And you did not fire on him?"

"He was beyond reach of a shot."

"Monsieur de Chavigny—where was he?"

"Absent."

"And La Rame?"

"He was found locked up in the prisoner's room, a gag in his mouth, and a poulard near him."

"But the man who was under him?"

"Was an accomplice of the duke's, and escaped with him."

Mazarin groaned.

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, advancing toward the Cardinal, "it seems to me that your Eminence is losing precious time. It may still be possible to trace the prisoner. France is large; the nearest frontier is sixty leagues distant."

"And who is to pursue him?" cried Mazarin.

"If your lord orders me to pursue the devil, I would do so, and seize him by the horns and bring him back again."

"And I, too," said Porthos.

"Go then; take what guards you find here, and pursue him."

"You command us, my lord, to do so?"

"And I sign my orders," said Mazarin, taking a piece of paper, and writing some lines: "Monsieur du Puis, your barony is on the back of the Duc de Beaufort's horse; you have nothing to do but to overtake it. As for you, my dear lieutenant, I promise you nothing; but if you bring him back to me, dead or alive, you shall ask all you wish."

"To horse, Porthos!" said D'Artagnan, taking his friend by the hand.

"Here I am," replied Porthos, with his sublime composure.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

They descended the great staircase, taking with them all the guards that they found on their road, and crying out, "To horse! To horse!" and they spurred on their horses, which set off along the Rue St. Honore with the speed of a whirlwind.

"Well, baron! I promised you some good exercise!" said the Gascon.

"Yes, my captain."

As they went, the citizens, awakened, left their doors, and the fierce dogs followed the cavaliers, barking. At the corner of the Cimetière Saint Jean, D'Artagnan upset a man; it was too slight an occurrence to delay people so eager to get on. The troop continued its course as if their steeds were winged.

And there are no unimportant events in this world! and we shall see that this apparently slight one was near endangering the monarchy.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE HIGH ROAD.

The Musketeers rode the whole length of the Faubourg St. Antoine, and of the road to Vincennes, and soon found themselves out of the town, then in a forest, and then in sight of a village.

From the top of an eminence D'Artagnan perceived a group of people collected on the other side of the moat, in front of that part of the donjon which looks toward Saint Honore. He rode on, convinced that he should in that direction gain intelligence of the fugitive; and he learned from the people that composed that group, that the duke had been pursued without success; that his party consisted of four able men, and one wounded, and that they were two hours and a quarter in advance of their pursuers.

"Only four!" cried D'Artagnan, looking at Porthos; "baron, only four of them!"

Porthos smiled.

"And only two hours and a quarter before us, and we so well mounted, Porthos!"

Porthos smiled, and thought of all that was awaiting his poor horses.

The troop then pursued their course with their wonted ardor; but some of them could no longer sustain this rapidity; three of them stopped after an hour's march, and one fell down.

"D'Artagnan, who never turned his head, did not perceive it. Porthos told him of it in his calm manner.

"If we can only keep two," said D'Artagnan, "it will be enough, since the duke's troop are only four in number."

And he spurred his horse on.

At the end of another two hours the horses had gone twelve leagues without stopping; their legs began to tremble; and the foam that they shed whitened the doublets of their masters.

"Let us rest here an instant to give these miserable creatures breathing time," said Porthos.

"Let us rather kill them! yes, kill them!" cried D'Artagnan; "I