TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Can I do anything for you, gentlemen?" asked the duke.
"Be a witness that we have done what we have done."
"That shall be done, be assured. About we shall meet soon, I trust; in Paris, where you shall have your revenge. The duke, as he spoke, kissed his hand, spurred his horse into a gallop, and disappeared; followed by his troop, who were soon lost in distance and darkness.

D'Artagnan and Porthos were now alone with a man who held their two horses; they thought it was Musqueton, and went up to him.

"What do I see?" cried the lieutenant. "Grimald, is it thou?"
Grimald signified that he was not mistaken.
"And whose horses are these?" cried D'Artagnan.
"Who has given them to us?" said Porthos.
"The Count de la Fère."
"Ah, shrewd fellow!" muttered D'Artagnan; "you think of every one; you are indeed a gentleman! Where art thou bound to Grimald?"

"To join the Vicomte de Bragelonne in Flanders, your honor."
They were taking the road toward Paris, when grumans, which seemed to proceed from a ditch, attracted their attention.
"What is that?" asked D'Artagnan.
"It is I, Musqueton," said a mournful voice, while a sort of a shadow arose out of the side of the road.

Musqueton ran to him. "Art thou dangerously wounded, my dear Musqueton?" he said.
"No, sir, but I am severely wounded."
"What can we do?" said D'Artagnan; "we must return to Paris."
"I will take care of Musqueton," said Grimald; and he gave his arm to his old comrade, whose eyes were full of tears, and Grimald could not tell whether the tears were caused by his wounds, or by the pleasure of seeing him again.
D'Artagnan and Porthos went on, meantime, to Paris. They were passed by a sort of courier, covered with dust, the bearer of a letter from the duke to the Cardinal, giving testimony to the valor of D'Artagnan and Porthos.

Mazarin had passed a very bad night, when this letter was brought to him, announcing that the duke was free, and that he should henceforth raise up a mortal estré against him.
"What consoles me," said the Cardinal, after reading the letter, "is, that at least, in this chase, D'Artagnan has done me one good turn, he has destroyed Bruscel. This Guise is a precious fellow—even his missteps are useful."

The Cardinal referred to that man whom D'Artagnan upset at the corner of the Cimetière Saint Jean in Paris, and who was no other than the Councillor Broussel.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FOUR OLD FRIENDS PREPARE TO MEET AGAIN.

"Well," said Porthos, seated in the court-yard of the Hôtel de la Chevrette, to D'Artagnan, who, with a long and melancholy
faced, had returned from the Palace Royal; "did he receive you
ungraciously, my dear friend?"

"D'Artagnan! a hideous brute, that Cardinal. What are you
calling there, Porthos?"

"I am dipping a biscuit into a glass of Spanish wine—do the
same."

"You are right. Gimblett, a glass of wine."

"Well, how has all gone off?"

"Zounds! you know there's only one way of saying things; so I
went in and I said, 'My lord, we were not the strongest party.'

"'Yes, I know that,' he said, 'but tell me the particulars.'

"You know, Porthos, I could not give him the particulars with¬
out naming our friends—to name them would be to commit them
to ruin, so I merely said there were fifty and we were two."

"There was string, nevertheless, I heard,' he said; 'and your
swords, they saw the light of day, I presume?"

"That is, the night, my lord,' I answered.

"Ah! cried the Cardinal, 'I thought you were a Gascon, my
friend?'

"'I am only a Gascon,' said I, 'when I succeed.' So the answer
pleased, and he laughed."

"Well, not so bad a reception as I thought," remarked Porthos.

"No, no, but 'tis the manner in which he spoke. Gimblett,
another bottle of wine—'tis almost incredible what a quantity of
wine these biscuits will hold!'"

"Hem!—didn't he mention me?" inquired Porthos.

"Ait! yes, indeed!" cried D'Artagnan, who was afraid of dis¬
heartening his friend by telling him that the Cardinal had not
breathed a word about him: 'yes, surely, he said—'

"He said?" repeated Porthos.

"Stop, I want to remember his exact words. He said, as to your
friend, tell him he may sleep in peace."

"Good, very good," said Porthos; "that means as clear as day¬
light that he intends still to make me a Baron."

At this moment nine o'clock struck. D'Artagnan started.

"Ah, yes," said Porthos, "there is nine o'clock. We have a
rendezvous, you remember, at the Place Royale."

"Ah! stop! hold your peace, Porthos—don't remind me of it,
'tis that which has made me so cross since yesterday. I shall not
go."

"Why?" asked Porthos.

"Why, suppose this appointment is only a blind? That there's
something hidden beneath it?"

D'Artagnan did not believe Athos to be capable of a deception,
but he sought an excuse for not going to the rendezvous.

"We must go," said the superb lord of Bracieux, "lest they
should say we were afraid. We who have faced fifty foes on the
high road can well meet two in the Place Royale."

"Yes, yes, but they took part with the princes without apprising
us of it—perhaps the duke may try to catch us in his turn."

"Nonsense! He had us in his power, and let us go. Besides we
can be on our guard—let us take arms, and let Porthos go with us
with his carbine."
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Planche is a Frencheur," answered D'Artagnan.

"Well take these civil ward one can no more reckon on one's friends than on one's footmen," said Portois; "ah! if Musquetaon were here! there's one who will never desert me!"

"So long as you are rich! Ah! my friend! It is not civil war that disturbs us. It is that we are, each of us, twenty years older. It is that the honest emotions of youth have given place to the suggestions of interest—the whims of ambition—to the counsels of selfishness. Yes, you are right—let us go, Portois! But let us go well armed—we are not yet to go they would say we were afraid.

"Hello! Planche! here! saddle our horses—take your carbine."

"Who are we going to attack, sir?"

"No one—a mere matter of precaution," answered the Gascon.

"You know, sir, that they wished to murder that good councilor Broussel, the father of the people?"

"Really, did they?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, but he has been avenged. He was carried home in the arms of the people. His house has been full ever since. He has received visits from the Comitate, from Madame de Louvoisville, and the Prince de Conil—Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Vendome have left their names at his door."

"How did you hear this?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"From a good source, sir—I heard it from Friquet."

"From Friquet? I know that man."

"A son of Monsieur de Broussel's servant, and a lad that I promise you, in a revolt, will not cast away his share to the dogs."

"Is he not a singing boy at Notre Dame?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, he's he, patronized by Bazin."

"Ah, yes, I know."

"What importance is this rephile of to you?" asked Portois.

"And?" replied D'Artagnan; "he has already given me good information, and he may do the same again."

Whilst all this was going on, Athos and Aramis were entering Paris by the Panbourg St. Antoine. They had taken some refreshment on the road, and hastened on that they might not fail at the rendezvous. Bazin was their only attendant; for Grimaud had stayed behind to take care of Mazarin. As they were passing onward, Athos proposed that they should lay aside their arms and military costume, and assume a dress suited to the city.

"Oh, no, dear count," cried Aramis, "is it not a warlike on

"counter that we are going to?"

"What do you mean, Aramis?"

"That the Place Royale is the termination to the main road to Vendome, and nothing else."

"How, our friends?"

"Are become our most dangerous enemies, Athos; let us be on our guard."

"Oh! my dear D'Herblay!"

"Who can say whether D'Artagnan may not have betrayed us to the Cardinal? who can tell whether Mazarin may not take advantage of this rendezvous and seize us?"

Athos folded his arms, and his noble head fell drooping on his chest.
"What do you expect, Athos?" pursued Aramis; "such are men, and, remember, they are not always only twenty years of age; let us take precautions, Athos."

"But suppose they come unarmed? what a disgrace to us."

"Oh, never fear! besides, if they do, we can make an excuse; we come straight from a journey, and are insurgents also."

"An excuse for us! to meet D'Artagnan with a false excuse! to have to make a false excuse to Porthos! Oh, Aramis!" continued Athos, shaking his head mournfully, "upon my soul, you make me the most miserable of men; you dishearten a heart not wholly dead to friendship. Go in whatever guise you will, for my part, I shall go unarmed."

"No, for I will not allow you to do so. 'Tis not one man, 'tis not Athos only. 'Tis not the Count de la Fere whom you will rain by this weakness, but a whole party to whom you belong, and who depend upon you."

"Be it then so," replied Athos, sorrowfully.

And they pursued their road in mournful silence. Scarcely had they reached the Rue de la Mule—the iron gate of the Place Royale—than they perceived three cavaliers, D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Panachelet, the two former wrapped up in their military cloaks, under which their swords were hidden, and Panachelet, his musket by his side. They were waiting at the entrance of the Rue St. Catherine, and their horses were fastened to the rings of the arcade. Athos, therefore, commanded Bazin to fasten up his horse and that of Aramis in the same manner.

They then advanced, two and two, and saluted each other politely.

"Now where will it be agreeable to you that we hold our conference?" inquired Aramis, perceiving that people were stopping to look at them; supposing that they were going to engage in one of those far-famed duels still extant in the memory of the Parisians—and especially the inhabitants of the Place Royale.

"The gate is shut," said Aramis, "but if these gentlemen like a cool retreat, under the trees, and a perfect seclusion, I will get the key from the Hôtel de Rohan, and we shall be well situated."

D'Artagnan started a look into the obscurity of the place. Porthos ventured to put his head between the railings, to try if his glance could penetrate the gloom.

"If you prefer any other place," said Athos, in his persuasive voice, "choose for yourselves."

"This place, if Monsieur d'Herbry can procure the key, is the best that we can have," was the answer.

Aramis went off at once, begging Athos not to remain alone within reach of D'Artagnan and Porthos; a piece of advice which was received with a contemptuous smile.

Aramis returned soon with a man from the Hôtel de Rohan, who was saying to him:

"You swear, sir, that it is not so?"

"Stop," and Aramis gave him a louis d'or.

"Ah! you will not swear, my master," said the concierge, shaking his head.

"Well, one can never say what may happen; at present these gentlemen are our friends."
“Yes, certainly,” added Athos, “and the other two——”
“You hear that?” said D’Artagnan to Fortibus; “he won’t swear.”
“No?”
“No; caution, therefore.”
Athos did not lose sight of these two speakers. Aramis opened the gate, and faced round to order that D’Artagnan and Fortibus might enter. In passing through the gate, the hilt of the lieutenant’s sword was caught in the grafting, and he was obliged to pull off his cloak; in doing so, he showed the butts of his pistols, and a ray of the moon was reflected on the shining metal.
“Do you see?” whispered Aramis to Athos, touching his shoulder with one hand, and pointing with the other to the arms which the Gascon wore under his belt.
“Aha! I do!” replied Athos, with a deep sigh.
He entered third, and Aramis, who shut the gate after him, last. The two serving-men waited without, but, as if they, likewise, mistrusted each other, kept their respective distances.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
THE PLACE ROYAL.
They proceeded silently to the center of the Place; but as at this very moment the moon had just emerged from behind a cloud, it was considered that they might be observed if they remained on that spot, and they remained the shade of the lime trees.
There were benches here and there—the four gentlemen stopped near them; at a sign from Athos, Fortibus, and D’Artagnan sat down, the two others stood in the front of them.
After a few minutes of silent embarrassment, Athos spoke.
“Gentlemen,” he said, “our presence here is a proof of our former friendship; not one of us has failed at this rendezvous; not one has, therefore, to reproach himself.”
“Hear me, count,” replied D’Artagnan; “instead of making compliments to each other, let us explain our conduct to each other, like men of right and honest hearts.”
“I wish for nothing more; have you any cause of anger against me or Monsieur D’Herblay?” I asked, “If so, speak out,” answered Athos.
“I have,” replied D’Artagnan. “When I saw you at your château at Bragelonne, I made certain proposals to you, which you perfectly understood; instead of answering me as a friend, you played with me as a child: the friendship, therefore, that you boasted of was not broken yesterday by the shock of our swords, but by your dissimulation at your castle.”
“D’Artagnan!” said Athos reproachfully. “You asked for candor—there it is. You ask what I have against you—I say it. And I have the same sincerity to show you, if you wish, Monsieur D’Herblay: I acted in a similar way to you, and you also deceived me; I reproach you with nothing, however; it’s only because Monsieur de la Pere has spoken of friendship that I question your conduct.”
“And what do you find in it to blame?” asked Aramis, haughtily