"Grimaud, my friend," said the viscount, "will you leave me thus, in such anxiety? Speak, speak to Heaven's name!"

"I can tell you but one thing, sir; for the secret you wish to know is not my own. You met this man, did you not?"

"Yes."

"You conducted him to the wounded man, and you had time to observe him, and, perhaps, you would know him again were you to meet him."

"Yes! yes!" exclaimed both the young men.

"Very well; if ever you meet him again, wherever it may be, whether on the high-road or in the street, or in a church, anywhere that he or you may be, put your foot on his neck, and crush him without pity, without mercy, as you would crush a viper, a snake, an ass; destroy him, and leave him not till he is dead—the lives of five men are not safe, in my opinion, as long as he lives!"

And without adding another word, Grimaud, profiting by the astonishment and terror into which he had thrown his auditors, rushed from the room. Ten minutes later the gallop of a horse was heard on the road—it was Grimaud, on his way to Paris. When once in the saddle, Grimaud reflected upon two things; the first, that at the pace he was going his horse would not carry him ten miles, and, secondly, that he had no money. But Grimaud's imagination was more prolific than his speech, and, therefore, at the first halt, he sold his steed, and with the money obtained from the purchaser he took post-horses.

CHAPTER XXXII.
A DINNER IN THE OLD STYLE.

The second interview between the former Musketeers had not been so pompous and stiff as the first. Athos, with his superior understanding, wisely deemed that the table would be the most speedy and complete point of reunion, and at the moment when his friends, doubtful of his deportment and his sobriety, dared scarcely speak of some of their former good dinners, he was the first to propose that they should all assemble round some well-spread table, and abandon themselves unrestrained to their own natural character and manners—a freedom which had formerly contributed so much to the good understanding between them, as to give them the name of the insiprables. For different reasons this was an agreeable proposition for them all, and it was therefore agreed that each should leave a very exact address, and that upon the request of any of the associates, a meeting should be convened at a famous eating house in the Rue de la Monnaie, of the sign of the Hermitage; the first rendezvous was fixed for the following Wednesday, at eight o'clock in the evening precisely.

On that day, in fact, the four friends arrived punctually at the said hour, each from his own abode. Porthos had been trying a new horse; D'Artagnan came from being on guard at the Louvre, Aramis had been to visit one of his penitents in the neighborhood; and Athos, whose domicile was established in the Rue Guenegeaud, found himself close at hand. They were, therefore, somewhat sur-
prised to meet all together at the door of the Hermitage; Athos starting out from the Pont Neuf, Porthos by the Rue du Roi, D'Artagnan by the Rue des Fosses St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and Aramis by the Rue de Bethlay.

The first words exchanged between the four friends, on account of the ceremony which each of them mingled with their demonstration, were somewhat forced, and even the expect began with a kind of stiffness. Athos perceived this embarrassment, and, by way of supplying a prompt remedy, called for four bottles of champagne.

At this order, given in Athos's habitually calm manner, the face of the Gascon relaxed, and Porthos's brow was smooth. Aramis was astonished. He knew that Athos not only never drank, but that more, he had a kind of repugnance to wine. This astonishment was doubled when Aramis saw Athos fill a bumper and drink with his former enthusiasm. His companions followed his example. In an instant the four bottles were empty, and this excellent specific succeeded in dispersing even the slightest cloud which might have rested on their spirits. Now the four friends began to speak loud, scarcely waiting till one had finished before another to begin, and to assume each his favorite attitude on or at the table. Soon—strange fact—Aramis unsheathed two buttons of his doublet, seeing which, Porthos unhoisted his entire.

Battles, long journeys, blows given and received, sufficed for the first subject of conversation; which then turned upon the silent struggles sustained against him who was now called the great Cardinal.

"Faith," said Aramis, laughing, "we have praised the dead enough, let us revile the living a little; I should like to say something evil of Mazarin; is it allowed?"

"Go on—go on," replied D'Artagnan, laughing heartily; "relate your story, and I will applaud if it is a good one."

"A great prince," said Aramis, "with whom Mazarin sought an alliance, was invited by him to send him a list of the conditions on which he would do him the honor to negotiate with him. The prince, who had a great repugnance to treat with such an ill-bred fellow, made his list against the grain, and sent it. In this list there were three conditions which displeased Mazarin, and he offered the prince ten thousand crowns to renounce them.

"Ah, ah, ah!" exclaimed the three friends, "not a bad bargain; and there was no fear of being taken at his word; what did the prince then?"

"The prince immediately sent fifty thousand francs to Mazarin begging him never to write to him again, and offered twenty thousand francs more, on condition that he would never speak to him what did Mazarin do?"

"He stormed!" suggested Athos. "He beat the messenger!" cried Porthos.

"He accepted the money!" said D'Artagnan.

"You have guessed it," answered Aramis; and they all laughed so heartily, that the host appeared in order to inquire whether these gentlemen wanted anything; he thought they were fighting.

At last their hilarity was calmed, and:

"Faith!" exclaimed D'Artagnan to his two friends, "you may
well wish ill to Mazarin; for I assure you, on his side, he wishes you no good."

"Poo! really?" asked Athos. "If I thought that the fellow knew me by my name, I would be re-baptized, for fear I should be the least to know him."

"He knows you better by your actions than by your name; he is quite aware that there are two gentlemen who have greatly aided the escape of Monsieur de Beaufort, and he has instigated an active search for them, I can answer for it."

"By whom?"

"By me; and this morning he sent for me to ask me if I had obtained any information."

"And what did you reply?"

"That I had none yet, but that I was to dine to-day with two gentlemen, who would be able to give me some."

"You told him that?" said Porthos, his broad smile spreading over his honest face, "brave! and you are not afraid of that, Athos?"

"No," replied Athos, "it is not the search of Mazarin that I fear."

"Now," said Aramis, "tell me a little what you do fear."

"Nothing for the present, at least, in good earnest."

"And with regard to the past?" asked Porthos.

"Oh! the past is another thing," said Athos, sighing; "the past and the future."

"Are you afraid for your young Ranol?" asked Aramis.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "one is never killed in a first engagement."

"Nor in the second," said Aramis.

"Nor in the third," returned Porthos; "and even when one is killed, one rises again, the proof of which is, that here we are!"

"No," said Athos, "it is not Ranol about whom I am anxious, for I trust he will conduct himself like a gentleman; and if he is killed—well—he will die bravely; but hold—should such a misfortune happen—well——" Athos passed his hand across his pale brow.

"Well?" asked Aramis.

"Well, I shall look upon it as an expiration."

"Ooh! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "I know what you mean."

"And I, too," added Aramis; "but you must not think of that, Athos; what is past, is past."

"I don't understand," said Porthos.

"The affair at Armentières," whispered D'Artagnan.

"The affair at Armentières?" asked he again.

"Mildly."

"Oh, yes!" said Porthos; "true, I had forgotten it!"

Athos looked at him intently.

"You have forgotten it, Porthos?" said he.

"Faith! yes, it is so long ago," answered Porthos.

"This thing does not, then, weigh on your conscience?"

"Faith, no."

"And you, D'Artagnan?"

"I—-I own that when my mind returns to that terrible period, I have no recollection of anything but the stiffened corpse of that poor Madame Bonacieux. Yes, yes," murmured he, "I have
often felt regret for the victim, but never any remorse for the assassin."

Athos shook his head doubtfully.

"Consider," said Aramis, "if you admit divine justice, and its participation in the things of this world, that woman was punished by the will of heaven. We were but the instruments—that is all."

"But as to free will, Aramis?"

"How acts the judge? He has a free will, and he condemns fearlessly. What does the executioner? he is master of his arm, and yet he strikes without remorse."

"The executioner!" muttered Athos, as if arrested by some recollection.

"I know that it is terrible," said D'Artagnan; "but when I reflect that we have killed English, Rochelais, Spaniards, nay, even French, who never did us any other harm but to aim at and to miss us, whose only fault was to cross swords with us, and not to be able to ward us off quick enough—I can, on my honor, find an excuse for my share of the murder of that woman."

"As for me," said Porthos, "now that you have reminded me of it, Athos, I have the scene again before me, as if I was there. Madam was there, as it were in your place." (Aramis changed color.)

"1—I was where D'Artagnan stood. I wore a short sword which cut like a Damascus—you remember it, Aramis, for you—"

"And you, Aramis?"

"Well, I think of it sometimes," said Aramis. "And I swear to you all three, that had the executioner of Bethune—was he not of Bethune?—yes, eagles of Bethune—not been there, I would have cut off the head of that infamous being without remembering who I am, and even remembering it. She was a bad woman."

"And then," resumed Aramis, with the tone of philosophical indifference which he had assumed since he had belonged to the church, and in which there was more atheism than confidence in God, "what is the use of thinking of all that? At the last hour we must confess this action, and God knows better than we can whether it is a crime, a fault, or a meritorious action. I repent of it? Egad! no. By honor, and by the holy cross, I only regret it because she was a woman."

"The most satisfactory part of the matter," said D'Artagnan, "is that there remains no trace of it."

"She had a son," observed Athos.

"Oh! yes: I know that," said D'Artagnan; "and you mentioned it to me; but who knows what has become of him? If the serpent be dead, why not its brood? Do you think that old uncle De Winter would have brought up that young viper? De Winter, probably, condemned the son as he had done the mother."

"Then," said Athos, "woe to De Winter, for the child had done no harm."

"May the devil take me, if the child be not dead," said Porthos.

"There is so much fog in that detestable country, at least so D'Artagnan declares."

Just as this conclusion arrived at by Porthos was about probably to bring back hilarity to the faces now more or less clouded, footsteps were heard on the stairs, and some one knocked at the door.
"Come in," cried Athos.

"Please your honors," said the host, "a person, in a great hurry, wishes to speak to one of you."

"To which of us?" asked all the four friends.

"To him who is called the Count de la Fere."

"It is I," said Athos; "and what is the name of the person?"

"Grimald."

"Ah!" exclaimed Athos, turning pale. "Returned already."

What has happened, then, to Branglana?"

"Let him enter," cried D'Artagnan. "Let him come up."

But Grimald had already mounted the staircase, and was waiting on the last step; so springing into the room he motioned the host to leave it. The door being closed, the four friends waited in expectation. Grimald's agitation, his pallor, the sweat which covered his face, the dust which soiled his clothes, all indicated that he was the messenger of some important and terrible news.

"Your honors," said he, "that woman had a child; that child has become a man; the tigress had a little one, the tiger has pounced himself; he is ready to spring upon you—beware!"

Athos glanced around at his friends with a melancholy smile.

Porthos turned to look at his sword, which was hung up against the wall; Aramis seated his knife; D'Artagnan rose.

"What do you mean, Grimald?" he exclaimed.

"That millady's son has left England; that he is in France, on his road to Paris, if he be not here already."

"The devil he is!" said Porthos. "Are you sure of it?"

"Certain," replied Grimald.

This announcement was received in silence. Grimald was so breathless, so exhausted, that he had fallen back upon a chair. Athos filled a glass with champagne, and gave it to him.

"Well, after all," said D'Artagnan, "supposing that he lives, that he comes to Paris, we have seen many other such. Let him come."

"Yes," echoed Porthos, stroking his sword suspended to the wall, "we can wait for him; let him come."

"Moreover, he is but a child," said Aramis.

Grimald rose.

"A child!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what he has done—this child? Disguised as a monk, he discovered the whole history in confession from the executioner of Betimna, and having confessed him, after having learnt everything from him, he gave him absolution by planting this dagger into his heart. See it is still red and wet, for it is not thirty hours ago since it was drawn from the wound."

And Grimald threw the dagger on the table.

D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Aramis rose, and in one spontaneous motion rushed to their swords. Athos alone remained seated, calm and thoughtful.

"And you say he is dressed as a monk, Grimald?"

"Yes, as an Augustinian monk."

"What sized man was he?"

"About my height," the host said; "thin, pale, with light blue eyes, and light hair."
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"And he did not see Raoul?" asked Athos.
"Yes, on the contrary, they met, and it was the viscount himself who conducted him to the bed of the dying man," Athos rose, in his turn, without speaking—went and unhooked his sword.
"Hail, sir," said D'Artagnan, trying to laugh; "do you know we look very much like silly women! How is it that we, four men, who have faced armies without blinching, begin to tremble at the sight of a child?"
"Yes," said Athos, "but this child comes in the name of Heaven."
And they hastily quitted the inn.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LETTER FROM CHARLES THE FIRST.

The reader must now cross the Seine with us, and follow us to the door of the Carmelite Convent in the Rue St. Jacques. It is eleven o'clock in the morning, and the pious sisters have just finished saying a mass for the success of the armies of King Charles I. Leaving the church, a woman and a young girl dressed in black, the one as a widow, and the other as an orphan, have re-entered their cell.
The woman kneels on a prie-Dieu of painted wood, and at a short distance from her stands the young girl, leaning against a chair, weeping.
The woman must have been handsome, but the traces of sorrow have aged her. The young girl is lovely, and her tears only embezzle her: the lady appears to be about forty years of age, the girl about fourteen.
"Oh, God!" prayed the kneeling suppliant, "protect my husband, guard my son, and take my wretched life instead!"
"Oh, God!" announced the girl, "leave me my mother!"
"Your mother can be of no use to you in this world, Henrietta," said the lady, turning round. "Your mother has no longer either throne or husband; nor son, nor money nor friends; the whole world, my poor child, has abandoned your mother!" And she fell back weeping, into her daughter's arms.
"Courage, take courage, my dear mother!" said the girl.
"Ah! 'tis an unfortunate year for kings," said the mother.
"And no one thinks of us in this country, for each must think of his own affairs. As long as your brother was with me he kept me up; but he is gone, and can no longer send us news of himself, either to me or to your father. I have pawned my last jewels, sold all your clothes and my own, to pay the servants, who refused to accompany him unless I made this sacrifice. We are now reduced to live at the expense of these daughters of Heaven—we are the poor succoured by God."
"But why not address yourself to your sister, the queen?" asked the girl.
"Alas! the queen, my sister, is no longer queen, my child. Another reigns in her name. One day you will be able to understand how this is."