CHAPTER V.

THE GASCON AND THE ITALIAN.

Meanwhile the Cardinal returned to his own room; and after asking Bernadin, who stood at the door, whether anything had occurred during his absence, and being answered in the negative, he desired that he might be left alone.

When he was alone, he opened the door of the corridor, and then that of the ante-chamber. There D'Artagnan was asleep upon a bench.

The Cardinal went up to him, and touched his shoulder.

D'Artagnan started, awakened himself, and, as he awoke, stood up exactly like a soldier under arms.

"Monsieur D'Artagnan," said the Cardinal, sitting down on a footstool, "you have always seemed to me to be a brave and an honorable man."

"Possibly," thought D'Artagnan; "but he has taken a long time to let me know his thoughts;" nevertheless he bent down to the very ground in gratitude for Mazarin's compliment.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," continued Mazarin, "you have performed splendid exploits in the last reign."

"Your Eminence is too good to remember that. It is true I fought with tolerable success."

"I don't speak of your warlike exploits, Monsieur," said Mazarin; "although they gained you much reputation, they were surpassed by others."

D'Artagnan pretended astonishment.

"Well, you do not reply?" resumed Mazarin.

"I am waiting, my lord, till you tell me of what exploits you speak."

"I speak of certain adventures. I speak of the adventure referring to the queen—of the ornaments of the journey you made with three of your friends."

"Ha, ho!" thought the Gascon; "is this a snare, or not? Let me be on my guard."

And he assumed a look of stupidity which Mendoza or Bellerose, two of the first actors of the day, might have envied him.

"Bravo," cried Mazarin; "they told me that you were the man I wanted. Come, let us see what you will do for me."

"Everything that your Eminence may please to command me," was the reply.

"You will do for me what you have done for the queen?"

"Certainly," D'Artagnan said to himself, "he wishes to make me speak out. He's not more cunning than De Richelieu was! Devil take him!" Then he said aloud:

"The queen, my lord? I don't comprehend."

"You don't comprehend that I want you and your three friends to be of use to me?"

"What friends, my lords?"
"Your three friends—the friends of former days."

"Of former days, my lord! In former days I had not only three friends, I had fifty—at twenty, one calls every one's friend."

"Well, sir," returned Mazarin: "prudence is a fine thing, but to-day you might regret having been too prudent."

"My lord, Pythagoras made his disciples keep silence for five years that they might learn to hold their tongues."

"But you have been silent for twenty years, sir. Speak, now, for the queen herself releases you from your promise."

"The queen!"

"Yes, the queen! And as a proof of what I say she commanded me to show you this diamond, which she thinks you know."

And so saying, Mazarin extended his hand to the officer, who, with a smile, recognized the ring which had been given to him by the queen on the night of the ball at the Hotel de Ville.

"'Tis true, I remember well that diamond."

"You see, then, that I speak to you in the queen's name. Answer me without acting as if you were on the stage—your interests are concerned in your doing so. Where are your friends?"

"I do not know, my lord. We have parted company this long time; all three have left the service."

"Where can you find them, then?"

"Wherever they are, that's my business."

"Well, now, what are your conditions if I employ you?"

"Money, my lord; as much money as what you wish me to undertake will require."

"This devil he does! Money! and a large sum!" said Mazarin.

"Pray, are you aware that the king has no money now in his treasury?"

"Do, then, as I did, my lord. Sell the crown diamonds. Trust me, don't let us try to do things cheaply. Great undertakings are badly done with small means."

"Well," returned Mazarin, "we will satisfy you."

"Richelieu," thought D'Artagnan, "would have given me five hundred pistoles in advance."

"You will then be at my service?" asked Mazarin.

"And what are we to do?"

"Make your mind easy; when the time for action comes, you shall be in full possession of what I require from you; wait till that time arrives, and find out your friends."

"My lord, possibly they are not in Paris. I must, perhaps, make a long journey to find them out. Traveling is dear, and I am a poor lieutenant in the Musketeers; besides, I have been in the service for twenty-two years, and have accumulated nothing but debts."

Mazarin remained some moments in deep thought, as if he combated with himself; then, going to a large cupboard closed with a triple lock, he took from it a bag of silver, and weighing it twice in his hands before he gave it to D'Artagnan:

"Take this," he said, with a sigh. "It is for your journey."

D'Artagnan bowed, and plunged the bag into the depth of an immense pocket.

"Well, then, all is settled; you are to set off," said the Cardinal.

"Yes, my lord."
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Apropos, what are the names of your friends?"

"The Count de la Fere, formerly styled Athos; Mousieur du Valion, whom we used to call Porthos; the Chevalier d'Herblay—now the Abbé d'Herblay—whom we used to call Aramis——""

The Cardinal smiled.

"Younger sons," he said, "who enlisted in the Musketeers under feigned names in order not to lower their family names. Long rapiers, but light purses, you know."

"If God willing, these rapiers should be devoted to the service of your Eminence," said D'Artagnan, "I shall venture to express a wish—which is, that, in its turn, the purse of your Eminence may become light, and theses heavy—for with these three men, your Eminence may rule all Europe, if you like."

"These Gueux," said the Cardinal, laughing, "almost beat the Italians in effrontery."

"At all events," answered D'Artagnan, with a smile similar to the Cardinal's, "they beat them when they draw their swords."

He then withdrew, and as he passed into the court-yard he stopped near a lamp, and divined eagerly into the bag of money.

"Crown pieces only, silver pieces! Inspected it. Ah, Mazarin! thou hast no confidence in me! so much the worse for thee—but harm may come of it!"

Meanwhile, the Cardinal was rubbing his hand in great satisfaction.

"A hundred pistoles! a hundred pistoles! for a hundred pistoles I have discovered a secret for which Richelieu would have paid a thousand crowns: without reckoning the value of that diamond)—he cast a complacent look at the ring, which he had kept, instead of restoring it to D'Artagnan—which is worth, at least, ten thousand francs."

He returned to his room, and, after depositing the ring in a casquet filled with brilliants of every sort—for the Cardinal was a connoisseur in precious stones—he called to Bernadou to address him, regardless of the noise, or of the firing of guns which continued to resound through Paris, although it was now nearly midnight.

CHAPTER VI.

D'ARTAGNAN IN HIS FORTYTHF YEAR.

Years have elapsed, many events have happened, alas! since, in our romance of "The Three Musketeers," we took leave of D'Artagnan, at No. 13, Rue des Fossés-Saint-Jacques. D'Artagnan had not failed in his career, but circumstances had been adverse to him. So long as he was surrounded by his friends, he retained his youth and the poetry of his character. He was one of those fine, ingenious natures which assimilate themselves easily to the dispositions of others. Athos imparted to him his greatness of soul; Porthos, his enthusiasm; Aramis, his elegance. Had D'Artagnan continued his intimacy with those three men, he would have become a superior character. Athos was the first to leave him, in order that he might retire to a small property which he had inherited near Blois. Porthos,