TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Bravo!" said Aramis; "but how did you manage it?"
"Like everything else—with money; it cost me dear,"
"How much?" asked Athos.
"Five hundred pounds,"
"And where did you get all that from?" said Athos.
"The queen's famous diamond," answered D'Artagnan, with a sigh.
"Ah, true," said Aramis, "I recognized it on your finger."
"You bought it back, then, from M. des Essarts?" asked Portos.
"Yes, but it was fate that I should not keep it,"
"Well, so much for the executioner," said Athos; "but, unfortunately, every executioner has his assistant, his man, or whoever you call him."
"And this one had his," said D'Artagnan; "but, as good luck would have it, just as I thought I should have two affairs to manage, my friend was brought home with a broken leg. In the excess of his zeal he had accompanied the cart containing the scaffolding as far as the king's window, and one of the planks fell on his leg and broke it."
"Ah!" cried Aramis, "that accounts for the cry that I heard."
"Probably," said D'Artagnan; "but as he is a thoughtful young man, he promised to send four expert workmen in his place to help close a breach at the scaffold, and wrote, the moment he was brought home, to Master Tom Lowe, an assistant carpenter and friend of his, to go down to Whitehall, with three of his friends. Here's the letter he sent by a messenger for sixpence, who sold it to me for a guinea."
"And what on earth are you going to do with it?" asked Athos.
"Can't you guess, my dear Athos? You, who speak English like John Bull himself, are Master Tom Lowe, we, your three companions. Do you understand now?"

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE WORKMEN.

Toward midnight Charles heard a great noise beneath his window. It arose from blows of the hammer and hatchet, clanking of pincers and ringing of saws.

Lying vexed upon his bed, this noise awoke him with a start, and found a gloomy echo in his heart. He could not endure it, and sent Parry to ask the sentinel to beg the workmen to strike more gently, and not disturb the last shudder of one who had been their king. The sentinel was unwilling to leave his post, but allowed Parry to pass.

Arriving at the window Parry found an unfinished scaffold, over which they were nailing a covering of black serge. Raised to the height of twenty feet, so as to be on a level with the window, it had two lower stories. Parry, disdainful as was this sight to him, sought for those among some eight or ten workmen, who were making the most noise; and fixed on two men, who were loosening the last hooks of the iron balcony.
“My friends,” said Parry, when he had mounted the scaffold and stood beside them, “would you work a little more quietly? The king wishes to get a sleep.” One of the two, who was standing up, was of gigantic size, and was driving a pick with all his might into the wall, while the other, kneeling beside him, was collecting the pieces of stone. The face of the first was lost to Parry in the darkness, but as the second turned round and placed his finger on his lips, Parry started back in amazement.

“Very well, very well,” said the workman, aloud, in excellent English. “Tell the king that, if he sleeps badly to-night, he will sleep better to-morrow night.”

These blunt words, so terrible if taken literally, were received by the other workmen with a roar of laughter. But Parry withdrew thinking he was dreaming.

“Sir,” said he to the king, when he had returned, “do you know who these workmen are who are making so much noise?”

“Ah! how would you have me know?”

Parry bent his head and whispered the king: “It is the Count de la Fère and his friends.”

“Raising my scaffold!” cried the king, astonished.

“Yes, and at the same time making a hole in the wall.”

The king clapped his hands, and raised his eyes to heaven; then, leaping down from his bed, he went to the window, and, pulling aside the curtain, tried to distinguish the figures outside, but in vain.

Parry was not wrong. It was Athos whom he had recognized, and it was Porthos who was boring a hole through the wall.

This hole communicated with a kind of low loft—the space between the floor of the king’s room and the ceiling of the one below it. Their plan was to pass through the hole they were making into this loft, and cut out from below a piece of the flooring of the king’s room, so as to form a kind of trap-door.

Through this the king was to escape the next night, and, hidden by the black covering of the scaffold, was to change his dress for that of a workman, slip out with his deliverer, pass the sentinels, who would expect nothing, and so reach the skiff that was waiting for him at Grenville.

Day glided the time of the horses. The hole was finished, and Athos passed through it, carrying the clothes destined for the king wrapped in a piece of black cloth, and the tools with which he was to open a communication with the king’s room.

D’Artagnan returned to change his workman’s clothes for his chestnut-colored suit, and Porthos to put on his red doublet. As for Aramis, he went off to the bishop’s palace to see if he could possibly pass in with Juxon to the king’s presence. All three agreed to meet at noon in Whitehall-place to see how things went on.

Aramis found his two friends engaged with a bottle of port and a cold chicken, and explained the arrangement to them.

“Bravo!” said Porthos; “besides, we shall be there at the time of the flight. What with D’Artagnan, Grimaud, and Monseguet, we can manage to dispatch eight of them. I say nothing about Blaisois, for he is only fit to hold the horses. Two minutes a man makes four minutes. Monseguet will lose another that’s five, and in five minutes they can have galloped a quarter of a league.”
Aramis swallowed a hasty mouthful, drank off a glass of wine, and changed his clothes.

"Now," said he, "I'm off to the bishop's. Take care of the executioner, D'Artagnan."

"All right, Grimaud has relieved Musqueton, and has his foot on the cellar-door."

"Well, don't be inactive."

"Inactive, my dear fellow! Ask Porthos. I pass my life upon my legs, like a ballet-dancer."

Aramis again presented himself at the bishop's. Juxon consented the more readily to take him with him, as he would require an assistant priest, in case the king should wish to communicate. Dressed as Aramis had been the night before, the bishop got into his carriage, and the former, more disguised by his pelisse and sad countenance than his daemon's dress, got in by his side. The carriage stopped at the door of the palace.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning.

Nothing was changed. The ante-rooms were still full of soldiers, the passages still lined by guards. The king was already satisfied, but when he perceived Aramis his hopes turned to joy.

"Sire," said Aramis, the moment they were alone, "you are saved; the London executioner has vanished. His assistant broke his leg last night, beneath your Majesty's window—the cry we heard was his—and there is no executioner nearer at hand than Brest."

"But the Comte de la Fere?" asked the king.

"Two feet below you; take the poker from the fire-place, and strike three times on the floor. He will answer you."

The king did so, and the moment after, three dull knocks, answering the given signal, sounded beneath the floor.

"So," said Charles, "he who knocks down there—"

"Is the Comte de la Fere, sire," said Aramis. "He is preparing a path for your Majesty to escape by. Parry, for his part, will raise this slab of marble, and a passage will be opened."

"Oh, Juxon," said the king, seizing the bishop's two hands in his own, "promise that you will pray all your life for this gentleman, and for the other that you hear beneath your feet, and for two others again, who, wherever they may be, are vigilant, I am sure, for my safety."

"Sire," replied Juxon, "you shall be obeyed."

Meanwhile, the miner underneath was heard working away incessantly, when suddenly an unexpected noise resounded in the passage. Aramis seized the poker, and gave the signal to stop; the noise came nearer and nearer. It was that of a number of men steadily approaching. The four men stood motionless. All eyes were fixed on the door, which opened slowly, and with a kind of solemnity.

A parliamentary officer, clothed in black, and with a gravity that augured ill, entered, bowed to the king, and unrolling a parchment, read the sentence as is usually done to criminals before their execution.

"What is this?" said Aramis to Juxon. Juxon replied with a sign which meant that he knew as little as Aramis about it.
"Then it is for to-day?" asked the king.

"Was not your Majesty warned that it was to take place this morning?"

"Then I must die like a common criminal by the hand of the London executioner."

"The London executioner has disappeared, your Majesty, but a man has offered his services instead. The execution will therefore only be delayed long enough for you to arrange your spiritual and temporal affairs."

A slight moisture on his brow was the only trace of emotion that Charles exhibited, as he heard these tidings. But Aramis was vivid. His heart ceased beating; he closed his eyes, and bent upon the tides. Charles perceived it, and took his hand.

"Come, my friend," said he, "courage." Then he turned to the officer. "Sir, I am ready. I have little to delay you. Firstly, I wish to communicate; secondly, to embrace my children, and bid them farewell for the last time. Will this be permitted me?"

"Certainly," replied the officer, and left the room.

Aramis dug his nails into his flesh, and groaned aloud.

"Oh! my Lord Bishop," he cried, seizing Juxon's hand,

"where is God; where is God?"

"My son," replied the bishop, with firmness, "you see him not, because the passions of the world conceal him."

"Be seated, Juxon," said the king, falling upon his knees. "I have now to confess to you. Remain, sir," he added, to Aramis, who had moved to leave the room. "Remain, Pierre. I have nothing to say that cannot be said before all."

Juxon sat down, and the king, kneeling humbly before him, began his confession.

CHAPTER LXIV.

REMEMBER!

The populace was already assembled, when the confession terminated. The king's children then arrived—first, the Princess Elizabeth, a beautiful, fair-haired child, with tears in her eyes, and then the Duke of Gloucestor, a boy, eight or nine years old, whose tearless eyes and curling lip revealed a growing pride. He had wept all night long, but would not show his grief to the people.

Charles's heart melted within him. He turned to brush away a tear, and then summoning up all his firmness, drew his daughter toward him, recommending her to be pious, and resigned. Then he took the boy upon his knee.

"My son," he said to him, "you saw a great number of people in the streets as you came here. These men are going to behead your father. Do not forget that. Perhaps some day they will want to make you king, instead of the Prince of Wales, or the Duke of York, your elder brothers. But you are not the king, my son, and can never be so while they are alive. Swear to me, then, never to let them put the crown on your head. For one day—listen, my son—one day, if you do so, they will throw it all down, head and crown, too, and then you will not be able to die calm and remorseless, as I die. Swear, my son."