TWO YEARS AFTER.

"In short," said D’Artagnan, "this has been the will of God."
"It is not I who killed him," added Athos in a soft, low tone.
"It is destiny."

CHAPTER LXXII.

HOW MUSQUETON, AFTER BEING VERY NEARLY ROASTED, HAD A NARROW ESCAPE OF BEING EATEN.

A deep silence reigned for a long time in the boat, after the fearful scene just described.

The moon, which had shone for a short time, disappeared behind the clouds; every object was again plunged in that obscurity so awful in deserts, and still more so in that liquid desert, the ocean, and nothing was heard, save the whistling of the west wind driving along the tops of the crested billows.

Porthos was the first to speak.

"I have seen," he said, "many things; but nothing that ever agitated me so much as what I have just witnessed. Nevertheless, even in my present state of perturbation, I protest I feel happy. I have a hundred pounds’ weight less upon my chest. I breathe more freely." In fact, Porthos breathed so loud as to do credit to the powerful play of his lungs.

"For my part," observed Aramis, "I cannot say the same as you do, Porthos. I am still terrified to such a degree that I scarcely believe my eyes. I look around the boat, expecting, every moment, to see that poor wretch holding in his hands the poniard which was plunged into his heart."

"Oh! I am quite easy," replied Porthos. "The poniard was pointed at the sixth rib, and buried up to the hilt in his body. I do not reproach you, Athos, for what you have done; quite the contrary; when once a blow, that is the way to strike. So now, I breathe again, I am happy!"

"Don’t be in haste to celebrate a victory, Porthos," interposed D’Artagnan; "never have we incurred a greater danger than we are now encountering. A man may subdue a man—he can’t conquer an element. We are now on the sea, at night, without any pilot, in a frail boat; should a blast of wind upset the boat, we are lost."

Musqueton heaved a deep sigh.

"You are ungrateful, D’Artagnan," said Athos; "yes, ungrateful to Providence—to whom we owe our safety in a miraculous manner. Let us sail before the wind, and, unless it changes, we shall be drifted either to Calais or Boulogne. Should our bark be upset, we are five of us good swimmers, and able enough to turn it over again; or, if not, to hold on by it. Now we are on the very road which all the vessels between Dover and Calais take; it’s impossible but that we should meet with a fisherman who will pick us up."

"But should we not find any fisherman, and should the wind shift to the north?"

"Then," said Athos, "it would be quite another thing; and we should never see land until we were on the other side of the Atlantic."

""
"Which implies that we may die of hunger," said Aramis.
"'Tis more than probable," answered the Comte de la Fere.
Musqueton sighed again, more deeply than before.
"What is the matter? what ails you?" asked Porthos.
"I am cold, sir," said Musqueton.
"Impossible! your body is covered with a coating of fat; which preserves it from the cold air."
"Ah! sir, 'tis that very coating of fat which alarms me."
"How is that, Musqueton?"
"Ah! your honor! in the library of the Château of Bradeau there's a number of books of travels."
"What then?"
"Amongst them the voyages of Jean Mosquet in the time of Henry IV."
"Well?"
"In these books, your honor, 'tis told how hungry voyagers, drifted out to sea, have a bad habit of eating each other, and beginning by--"
"By the fittest among them!" cried D'Artagnan, unable in spite of the gravity of the occasion to help laughing.
"Yes, sir," answered Musqueton; but, perceiving me to say, I see nothing laughable in it, however," he added, turning to Porthos.
"I should not regret dying, sir, were I sure that by doing so I might still be useful to you."
"Monseur," replied Porthos, much affected, "should we ever see my castle of Pierrefonds again, you shall have as your own, and for your descendants, the vineyard which surrounds the farm."
"And you should call it--Monseur," added Aramis, "the vineyard of self-sacrifice, to transmit to latest ages the recollection of your devotion to your master."
"One may readily conceive that during these jokes, which were intended chiefly to divert Athos from the scene which had just taken place, the servants, with the exception of Grimaud, were not absent. Suddenly Musqueton uttered a cry of delight, in taking from beneath one of the benches a bottle of wine; and, on looking more closely still in the same place, he discovered a dozen similar bottles, some bread, and a piece of salted beef."
"Oh, sir!" he cried, passing the bottle to Porthos, "we are saved—the hawk is supplied with provisions."
"This intelligence restored every one, save Athos, to gaiety.
"Zounds!" exclaimed Porthos, "'tis astonishing how empty violent agitation makes the stomach."
And he drank off one bottle at a draught, and ate a good third of the bread and salted meat.
"Now," said Athos, "sleep, or try to sleep, my friends, I will watch."

In a few moments, notwithstanding their wet clothes, the icy blast that blew, and the previous scene, these hardy adventurers, with their iron frames, fitted for every hardship, threw themselves down, intending to profit by the advice of Athos, who sat at the helm, penive and watchful, guiding the little bark in the way it was to go, his eyes fixed on the heavens, as if he sought to discern, not only
the road to France, but the benign aspect of protecting Providence.
After some hours of repose, the sleepers were aroused by Athos.
Dawn had shed its light upon the blue ocean, and, at the distance of
a musket’s shot from them, was seen a dark mass, above which was
displayed a triangular sail; then masters and servants joined in a
fervent cry to the crew of that vessel, to hear them, and to save.
"A bark!" all cried together.
It was, in fact, a small craft from Dunkirk, which was sailing to-
ward Boulogne.
A quarter of an hour afterward, the boat of this craft took them
on board the little vessel. Grimaud offered twenty guineas to the
captain from his master, and, at nine o’clock in the morning, having
a fair wind, our Frenchmen set foot on their native land.
"Great love strong one feels here!" said Porthos, almost bury-
ing his large feet in the sand. "Zounds! I could defy a whole
nation!"
"Be quiet, Porthos," said D’Artagnan, "we are observed."
"We are admired, I’faith," answered Porthos.
"These people, who are looking at us, are only merchants," said
Athos, "and are looking more at the cargo than at us."
"I shall not trust to that," said the lieutenant, "and I shall
make for the Dunes as soon as possible."
The party followed him, and soon disappeared with him behind
the hillocks of sand unobserved. Here, after a short conference,
they proposed to separate.
"And why separate?" asked Athos.
"Because," answered Gascon, "we were sent by Cardinal Mazarin
to fight for Cromwell; instead of fighting for Cromwell, we have
served Charles I., not the same thing at all. In returning with the
Comte de la Fere, and Monsieur d’Harblay, our crime would be
confirmed. We have escaped Cromwell, Mazarin, and the sea,
but we should not escape from Mazarin."
"You forget," replied Athos, "that we consider ourselves as
your prisoners, and not free from the engagement we entered into."
"Truly, Athos," interrupted D’Artagnan, "I am vexed that such
a man as you are should talk nonsense which schoolboys would be
ashamed of. Chevalier," he continued, addressing Aramis, who,
leaning proudly on his sword, seemed to agree with his companion,
"Chevalier, Porthos and I run no risk; besides, should any ill-luck
happen to two of us, will it not be much better that the other two
should be spared to assist those who may be apprehended? Besides,
who knows whether, divided, we might not obtain a pardon—you
from the queen, we from Mazarin—which, were we all four to-
gether, would never be granted. Come, Athos, and Aramis, go to
the right; Porthos come with me to the left; these gentlemen should
die off toward Normandy, we will, by the nearest road, reach
Paris."
He then gave his friends minute directions as to their route.
"Aha! my dear friend," cried Athos, "how I should admire the
resources of your mind, did I not stop to adore those of your heart."
And he gave him his hand.

* Sandy hils about Dunkirk, from which it derives its name.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Is the fox a genius, Athos?" asked the Gascon. "No! he knows how to crunch fowls, to dodge the huntsman, and to find his way home by day or by night, that's all. Well, is all said?"

"All."

"Then let's count our money, and divide it. Ah! hurr! there's the sun! Good-morrow, my friend, the sun! 'tis a long time since I saw you!"

"Come, come, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "do not affect to be strong-minded; there are tears in your eyes; let us be open to each other, and sincere."

"What?" cried the Gascon. "do you think, Athos, we can take leave, calmly, of two friends, at a time not free from danger to you and Aramis?"

"No," answered Athos; "embrace me, my son."

"Zounds!" said Portos, sobbing, "I believe I'm crying; but how foolish it is!"

Then they embraced. At that moment their fraternal bond of union was closer than ever, and when they parted, each to take the route agreed on, they turned back to utter to each other affectuate expressions, which the echoes of the Dunes repeated. At last they lost sight of each other; Portos and D'Artagnan taking the road to Paris, followed by Musqueton, who, after having been too cold all night, found himself, at the end of half an hour, far too warm.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE RETURN.

During the six months that Athos and Aramis had been absent from France, the Parisians, finding themselves one morning without either a queen or a king, were greatly annoyed at being thus deserted, and the absence of Mazarin so much desired, did not compensate for that of the two august fugitives.

The first feeling which pervaded Paris on hearing of the flight to Saint Germain, was that sort of affright which seizes children when they awake in the night and find themselves alone. A deputation was therefore sent to the queen to entreat her to return soon to Paris; but she not only declined to receive the deputies, but sent an intimation by Chancellor Segur, implying that if the Parliament did not humbly submit before her Majesty by negativing all the questions that had been the cause of the quarrel, Paris would be besieged the next day.

This threatening answer, unluckily for the court, produced quite a different effect to that which was intended. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, supported by the citizens, replied by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin was the cause of all the discontent; denounced him as the enemy both of the king and the state; and ordered him to retire from the court that very day, and from France within a week afterward, and enjoining, in case of disobedience on his part, all the subjects of the king to pursue and take him.

Mazarin being thus out of the protection of the law, preparations on both sides were commenced: the queen, to attack Paris—the