adversaries whose address and resolution your Eminence is fearful of.

"Oh!" cried Athos.

"Well," said Aramis, "why think you about these two enemies when it requires, besides Conminges' troop, ten good soldiers to guard; are they not as like two drops of water to D'Artagnan and Portebois?"

"We'll search Paris all to-day," said Athos, "and if we have no news this evening, we will return to the road to Picardy; and I feel no doubt that, thanks to D'Artagnan's ready invention, we shall then find some clue which will solve our doubts."

It was, then, with a sentiment of uneasiness whether Planchet, who alone could give them information, was alive or not, that the friends returned to the Place Royale; to their great surprise they found all the citizens still encamped there, drinking and bantering each other; although, doubtless, in truth by their families, who thought they were at Charenton in the thick of the firing.

Athos and Aramis again questioned Planchet, but he had seen nothing of D'Artagnan; they wished to take Planchet with them, but he could not leave his troop, who, at five o'clock, returned home, saying, that they were returning from the battle, whereas they had never lost sight of the equestrian statue in bronze of Louis XIII.

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CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE ROAD TO PICARDY.

In leaving Paris, Athos and Aramis well knew that they would be encountering great danger; but no one can imagine how such men look at a question of personal risk. Paris, however, it was not tranquil; food began to be scarce; and wheresoever any of the Prince de Confl's generals wanted to succeed him in his command, some lieu "encontre," which he always put a stop to instantly, took place.

In one of these risings, the Duc de Beaufort pillaged the house and library of Mazarin, in order to give the populace, as he said, something to gnaw at. Athos and Aramis left Paris after this "coup-d'etat," which took place on the very evening of the day in which the Parisians had been beaten at Charenton.

They quitted Paris, beholding it abandoned to extreme want bordering on famine. Agitated by fear, torn by faction. Parisians and Prondeurs as they were, the two friends expected to find the same misery, the same fears, the same intrigue in the enemy's camp: but what was their surprise, after passing St. Denis, to hear that at St. Germain, people were singing and laughing, and leading a cheerful life. The two gentlemen traveled by byways, in order not to encounter Mazurins who were scattered about the back of France, and also to escape the Prondeurs, who were in possession of Normandy, and who never failed to conduct them to the Duc de Longueville, in order that he might know whether they were friends or enemies. Having escaped these dangers, they retraced by the main road to Boulogne, at Abbeville, and followed it step by step—examining every track.
Nevertheless, they were still in a state of uncertainty. Several inns were visited by them, several innkeepers questioned, without a single clue being given to guide their inquiries. When at Montrouge, Athos felt upon the table that something rough was touching his delicate fingers. He turned up the cloth, and found these hieroglyphics carved upon the wood with a knife:

"Fort . . . D'Art . . . 2nd February."

"Fins is capital!" said Athos to Aramis, "we were to have slept here, but we cannot, we must push on." They rode forward, and reached Abbeville. There, the great number of inns puzzled them; they could not go to all; how could they guess in which he whom they were seeking had stayed?

"Trust me," said Aramis, "do not expect to find anything in Abbeville. If we had only been looking for Porthos, Porthos would have fixed himself in one of the finest hotels, and we could easily have traced him. But D'Artagnan is devoid of such weaknesses. Porthos would have found it very difficult even to make him see that he was dying of hunger; he has gone on his road as inexorable as fate, and we must seek him somewhere else."

They continued their route; it had now become a weary and almost hopeless task; and had it not been for the threefold motives of honor, friendship, and gratitude, implanted in their hearts, these two travelers would have given up, many a time, their rides over the road, their interrogatories of the passersby, and their close inspection of faces.

They proceeded to Compiègne.

Athos began to despair. His noble nature felt that their ignorance was a sort of reflection upon them. They had not looked well enough for their lost friends. They had not shown sufficient pertinacity in their inquiries. They were willing and ready to retrace their steps, when, in crossing the suburbs which lead to the gates of the town, upon a white wall which was at the corner of a street turning round the rampart, Athos cast his eyes upon a drawing in black chalk, which represented, with the graveness of a first attempt, two cavaliers riding furiously, and carrying a roll of paper, on which were written these words: "They are following us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Athos, "here it is as clear as day; pursued as he was, D'Artagnan would not have tarried here five minutes had he been pressed very closely, which gives us hopes that he may have succeeded in escaping."

Aramis shook his head.

"Had he escaped we should either have seen him, or have heard him spoken of."

"You are right, Aramis, let us travel on."

To describe the impatience and uneasiness of these two gentlemen would be impossible. Aulnoy took possession of the tender and constant heart of Athos; and impatience was the torment of the impulsive Aramis. They galloped on for two or three hours with the frenzy of two knights in pursuit. All at once, in a narrow pass they perceived that the road was partially barricaded by an enormous stone. It had evidently been rolled across the pass by some arm of gigantic power.

Aramis stopped.
"Oh!" he said, looking at the stone, "this is the work either of Ajax, or of Blixa. Let us get down, count, and examine this rock."

They both alighted. The stone had been brought with the evident intention of barricading the road; but some one, having perceived the obstacle, had partially turned it aside.

With the assistance of Blixa and Grimaud, the friends succeeded in turning the stone over. Upon the side next the ground was written:

"Eight of the Light Dragoons are pursuing us. If we reach Compiègne, we shall stop at the Peacock. It is kept by a friend of ours."

"This is something positive," said Athos, "let us go to the Peacock."

"Yes," answered Aramis, "but if we are to get there, we must rest our horses, for they are almost broken-winded."

Aramis was right; they stopped at the first tavern, and made each horse swallow a double quantity of corn steeped in wine; they gave them three hours' rest, and then set off again. The men themselves were almost killed with fatigue, but hope supported them.

In six hours they reached Compiègne, and alighted at the Peacock. The host proved to be a worthy man, as bold as a Chinaman. They asked him if some time ago he had not received in his house two gentlemen who were pursued by Dragoons; without answering, he went out and brought in the blade of a rapier.

"Do you know that?" he asked.

Athos merely glanced at it.

"This is D'Artagnan's sword," he said.

"Does it belong to the smaller, or to the larger of the two?" asked the host.

"To the smaller."

"I see that you are the friends of these gentlemen."

"Well, what has happened to them?"

"They were pursued by eight of the Light Dragoons, who rode into the court-yard before they had time to close the gate; but these men would not have succeeded in taking them prisoners, had not they been assisted by twenty soldiers of the regiment of Italians in the king's service, who are in garrison in this town——so that your friends were overpowered by numbers."

"Arrested, were they?" asked Athos: "is it known why?"

"No, sir, they were carried off directly, and had not time to tell me why; but, as soon as they were gone, I found this broken blade of a sword—as I was helping him raising up two dead men, and five or six wounded ones."

"It is still a consolation that they were not wounded," said Aramis.

"Where were they taken?" asked Athos.

"Toward the town of Louvres," was the reply.

The two friends, having agreed to leave Blixa and Grimaud at Compiègne with the horses, resolved to take post-horses; and having snatched a hasty dinner, they continued their journey to Louvres.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

Here they found only one inn, in which was drunk a liquor which still preserves its reputation in our own time, and which is still made in that town.

"Let us slight here," said Athos. "D'Artagnan will not have lost an opportunity of drinking a glass of this liquor, and, at the same time, leaving some trace of himself."

They went into the town, and asked for two glasses of liquor, at the counter—as their friends must have done before them. The counter was covered generally with a plate of new tea; upon this plate was written with the point of a large pen; "Rueil... D..."

"They went to Rueil," cried Aramis.

"Let us go to Rueil," said Athos. "Had I been as great a friend of Joseph as I am of D'Artagnan, I should have followed him even into the whole itself; and you would have done the same, Aramis."

"Certainly—but you make no better than I am, dear count. Had I been alone, I should scarcely have gone to Rueil without great caution."

They then set off for Rueil. There the deputies of the Parliament had just arrived, in order to enter upon those famous conferences which were to last three weeks, and produced, eventually, that shameful peace, at the end of which the prince was arrested. Rueil was crowded with advocates, presidents, and counselors, who came from the Parliaments; and, on the side of the court, with officers and guards: it was, therefore, easy, in the midst of this confusion, to remain as much unobserved as might be wished: besides, the conferences implied a truce, and to arrest two gentlemen, even Provence, at this time, would have been an attack on the rights of the people.

The two friends mingled in the crowd, and fancied that every one was occupied with the same thought that tormented them.

But every one was engrossed by articles and reforms. It was the advice of Athos to go straight to the ministers.

"My friend," said Aramis, "take care, our safety proceeds from our obscurity. If we were to make ourselves known, we should be sent to rejoin our friends in some deep ditch, from which the devil himself cannot take us out. Let us try not to find them out by accident, but from our own notions. Arrested at Compiegne, they have been carried to Rueil; at Rueil they have been questioned by the Cardinal, who has either kept them near him, or sent them to St. Germain. As to the Bastille they are not there, though the Bastille is especially for the 'Provence.' They are not dead, for the death of D'Artagnan would make a sensation. Do not let us despise—but wait at Rueil, for my conviction is that they are at Rueil. But what asks you you are pale."

"It is this," answered Athos, with a trembling voice. "I remember that, at the Castle of Rueil, the Cardinal Richelieu had some horrible 'oubliettes' constructed."

"Oh! never fear," said Aramis. "Richelieu was a gentleman, our equal in birth, our superior in position. He, could, like the king, touch the greatest of us on the head, and in touching them, make the head shake on the shoulders. But Mazarin is a low-born rogue, who could only take us by the neck, like an archer. Be calm—for I am sure that D'Artagnan and Portos are alive and well."
"Well," resumed Athos, "I recur to my first proposal. I know no better means than to act with candor. I shall seek, not Mazarin, but the queen—and say to her, 'Madame, restore to us your two servants and our two friends.'" Aramis shook his head.

"This is a last resource; but let us not employ it till it is imperatively necessary; let us rather consult our resources."

They continued their inquiries, and at last met with a Light Dragoon, who had formed one of the guard which had escorted D'Artagnan to Raël, by which they knew that they had entered that town.

Aramis, however, peremptorily recurred to his proposed interview with the queen.

"I shall go," he said, "to the queen."

"Well, then," answered Aramis, "pray tell me a day or two beforehand, that I may take that opportunity of going to Paris."

"To whom?"

"Zound! how do I know? perhaps to Madame de Longueville. She is all powerful yonder; she will help me. But send me word should you be arrested, for then I will return directly."

"Why do you not take your chance, and be arrested with me?"

"No, I thank you."

"Should we, by being arrested, be all four together again, we should not, I am sure, be twenty-four hours in prison without getting free."

"My friend, since I killed Chatillon, the adored of the ladies of St. Germain, I have too great a celebrity not to fear a prison doubtly. The queen is likely to follow Mazarin's counsels, and to have me tried."

"Do you think that she loves this Italian so much as they say she does?"

"She loved an Englishman passionately."

"Well, my friend, she is a woman."

"No, no, you are deceived—she is a queen."

"Dear friend, I shall sacrifice myself, and go and see Anne of Austria."

"Adieu, Athos, I am going to raise an army."

"For what purpose?"

"To come back, and besiege Raël."

"Where shall we meet again?"

"At the foot of the Cardinal's gallows."

The two friends departed—Aramis to return to Paris, Athos to take some measure preparatory to an interview with the queen.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE GRATITUDE OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA.

Athos found much less difficulty than he had expected in obtaining an audience of Anne of Austria; it was granted, and was to take place, after her morning's "levee," at which, in accordance with the rights he derived from his birth, he was entitled to be present. A vast crowd filled the apartments of St. Germain; Anne had never,