"Unruly," Comingsos smiled; "you wish to made me afraid, I suppose." When he came here, Monsieur D'Artagnan provoked and braved all the soldiers and inferior officers, in order, I suppose, to have his sword back—that mood lasted some time—but now, he's as gentle as a lamb, and sings Gascon songs, which makes one die with laughing."

"And Du Vallon?" asked Athos.

"Ah, he's quite another sort of person—a formidable gentleman, indeed. The first day he broke all the doors in, with a single push of his shoulder, and I expected to see him leave Paris, in the same way as Samson left Gaza. But his temper cooled down like his friend's—he not only gets used to his captivity, but jokes about it."

"So much the better," said Athos; and, on reflection, he felt convinced that this improvement in the spirits of the two captives proceeded from some plan formed by D'Artagnan for their escape.

CHAPTER LXXI.

STRENGTH AND SAGACITY.

Now let us pass the orangery, to the hunting lodge. At the extremity of the court-yard, where close to a portico formed of Jouve columns, there were dog kennels, rose an oblong building, the pavillon of the orangery, a half-circle, inclosing the court of honor. It was in this pavillon, on the ground-floor, that D'Artagnan and Porthos were confined, suffering the hours of a long imprisonment in a manner suitable to each different temperament.

D'Artagnan was walking about like a tiger, his eye fixed growling as he paced along by the bars of a window looking upon the yard of servants' offices.

Porthos was rumination over an excellent dinner which had been served up to him.

The one seemed to be deprived of reason, yet he was meditating.

The other seemed to meditate, yet he was sleeping. But his sleep was a nightmare, which might be guessed by the incoherent manner in which he snored.

"Look," said D'Artagnan, "day is declining. It must be nearly four o'clock. We have been in this place nearly eighty-three hours."

"Hem!" muttered Porthos, with a kind of pretext of answering.

"Did you hear, eternal sleeper?" cried D'Artagnan, irritated that any one could doze during the day, when he had the greatest difficulty in sleeping during the night.

"What?" said Porthos.

"I say we have been here eighty three hours,"

"Is your fault," answered Porthos.

"How, my fault?"

"Yes, I offered to you escape."

"By tearing down an iron bar, and pushing in a door, Porthos.

People like us cannot just go out as they like; besides, going out of this room is not everything."
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Well, then, let us kill the sentinel, and then we shall have arms."

"Yes, but before we can kill him—and he is hard to kill that Swiss—he will shriek out, and the whole picket will come, and we shall be taken like foals; we, who are lions, and thrown into some dungeon, where we shall not even have the consolation of seeing this frightful gray sky of Nueil, which is no more like the sky of Tarbes than the moon to the sun. Lack-a-day! if we only had some one to instruct us about the physical and moral topography of this castle. And when one thinks that for twenty years—during which time I did not know what to do with myself—it never occurred to me to come to study Nueil. And after all, it's impossible but that Master Arnaud, that Atheist, that wise gentleman, should not discover our retreat; then, faith, it will be time to act."

"Yes, more especially as it is not very disagreeable here, with one exception."

"What?"

"Did you observe, D'Artagnan, that three days running they have brought us boiled mutton?"

"No; but if that occurs a fourth time, I shall complain of it, so never mind."

"And then I feel the loss of my house; 'tis a long time since I visited my castles."

"Forget them for a time; we shall return to them, unless Mazarin faxes them to the ground."

"Do you think that likely?"

"No—the other Cardinal would have done so; but this one is too low a fellow to risk it."

"You console me, D'Artagnan."

The two prisoners were at this point of their conversation, when Comminges entered, preceded by a servant and by two men, who brought supper in a basket with two handles, filled with basins and plates.

"What!" exclaimed Porthos. "Mutton again?"

"My dear Monsieur de Comminges," said D'Artagnan, "you will find my friend, Du Vallon, will go to the most fatal lengths if Monsieur Mazarin continues to provide us with this sort of meat; mutton every day."

"I declare," said Porthos, "I shall eat nothing, if they do not take it away."

"Take away the mutton," said Comminges. "I wish Monsieur Du Vallon to sup well, more especially as I have news to give him which will improve his appetite."

"Is Mazarin to be put to death?" asked Porthos.

"No; I am sorry to tell you he is perfectly well."

"So much the worse," said Porthos.

"Should you be very glad to hear that the Count de la Fere was well?" asked De Comminges.

D'Artagnan's small eyes were opened to the utmost.

"Glad!" he cried; "I should be more than glad! Happy—beyond measure!"

"Well, I am desired by him to give you his compliments, and to say that he is in good health."
"Then you have seen him?"
"Certainly I have."
"Where? If it is not impertinent."
"Near here," replied De Comminges, smiling, "so near that if the windows which look on the orangery were not stopped up you might see the place where he is."
"He is wandering about the environs of the castle," thought D'Artagnan. Then he said aloud:
"You met him, I dare say, in the park—hunting, perhaps?"
"No, nearer, nearer still. Look behind this wall," said De Comminges, knocking against the wall.
"Behind this wall? What is there, then, behind this wall? I was brought here by night, so devil take me if I know where I am. The count is then in the château?"
"Yes."
"For what reason?"
"The same as yourself."
"Athos is, then, a prisoner?"
"You know well," replied De Comminges, "that there are no prisoners at Rueil, because there is no prison."
"Don't let us play upon words, sir. Athos has been arrested."
"Yesterday, at Saint Germain, as he came out from the presence of the queen."

The arms of D'Artagnan fell powerless by his side. One might have supposed him thunderstruck; a paleness ran like a cloud over his dark skin, but disappeared immediately.
"A prisoner?" he reiterated.
"A prisoner," repeated Porthos, quite dejected.
Suddenly D'Artagnan looked up, and in his eyes there was a gleam which scarcely even Porthos observed; but it died away, and he remained more sorrowful than before.
"Come, come," said Comminges, who, since D'Artagnan, on the day of Broussel's arrest, had saved him from the hands of the Parisians, had entertained a real affection for him; "don't be unhappy; I never thought of bringing you bad news. Laugh at the misfortune which has befallen your friend and Monsieur du Valion, instead of being in the depths of despair about it."

But D'Artagnan was still in a desponding mood.
"And how did he look?" asked Porthos, who, perceiving that D'Artagnan had allowed the conversation to drop, profited by it to put in his word.
"Very well, indeed, sir," replied Comminges; "at first, like you, he seemed distressed; but when he heard that the Cardinal was going to pay him a visit this very evening—"
"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan; "the Cardinal going to visit the Count de la Fere?"
"Yes, and the count desired me to tell you that he should take advantage of this visit to plead for you and for himself."
"Ah! the dear count!" said D'Artagnan.
"A fine thing, indeed!" granted Porthos. "A great favor! Zounds! Monsieur le Count de la Fere, whose family is allied to the Montmorency and the Rohan, is well worthy of Monsieur Mazarin's civilities."
"Never mind!" said D'Artagnan, in his calmest tone, and looking, but in vain, at Porthos, to see if he comprehended all the importance of this visit. "'Tis then Monsieur Mazarin's custom to walk in his orangery?" he added.

"He shuts himself up there every evening, and there, 'tis said, ponders over state affairs."

"Let the Cardinal take care of going alone to visit the Count de la Fère," said D'Artagnan; "for the count must be furious."

Comminges began to laugh. "Really, to hear you talk, one would suppose you were a cannibal. The count is an affable man; besides, he is unarmed; at the first word from his Eminence the two soldiers about him would run to him."

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "I've one last favor to ask of you, Monsieur de Comminges."

"At your service, sir."

"You will see the count again?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you remember us to him, and ask him to solicit one favor for me—that his Eminence should do me the honor to give me a hearing; that is all I want."

"Oho!" muttered Porthos, shaking his head; "never should I have thought this of him! How misfortune humbles a man!"

"That shall be done," answered De Comminges.

"Tell the count that I am well, that you found me sad, but resigned."

"I am pleased, sir, to hear that."

"And the same, also, for Monsieur du Valençay."

"Not for me!" cried Porthos; "I am not at all resigned."

"He will be as monsieur; I know him better than he knows himself. Be silent, dear Du Valençay, and resign yourself."

"Alléluie, gentlemen," said De Comminges; "sleep well!"

"We will try." De Comminges went away, D'Artagnan remaining apparently in the same attitude of humble resignation; but scarcely had he departed than he turned, and clasped Porthos in his arms, with an expression not to be doubted.

"Oho!" cried Porthos; "what's the matter now? Are you mad, my dear friend?"

"What's the matter?" returned D'Artagnan; "we are saved!"

"I don't see that at all," answered Porthos. "I think we are all taken prisoners, except Aramis, and that our chances of going out are lessened since we were entangled in Mazarin's witchcraft."

"Which is far too strong for two of us, but not strong enough for three of us," returned D'Artagnan.

"I don't understand," said Porthos.

"Never mind; let's sit down to table, and take something to strengthen us for the night."

"What are we to do, then, to-night?"

"To travel—perhaps."

"But—"

"Sit down, dear friend, to table. Whilst we are eating, ideas flow easily. After supper, when they are perfected, I will communicate my plans to you."
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

So Porthos sat down to table without another word, and ate with an appetite that did honor to the confidence which D'Artagnan's imagination had inspired him with.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

STRENGTH AND SACRIFICE—CONTINUED.

Supper was eaten in silence, but not in sadness; for from time to time one of those sweet smiles which were habitual to him in his moments of good-humor illumined the face of D'Artagnan. Not one of these smiles was lost on Porthos; and at every one, he uttered an exclamation which betrayed to his friend that he had not lost sight of the idea which possessed his brain.

At dessert D'Artagnan reposed in his chair, crossed one leg over another, and lounged about like a man perfectly at his ease.

"Well?" he said, at last.

"Well?" repeated Porthos.

"You were saying, my dear friend——"

"No; I said nothing."

"Well, you were saying you wished to leave this place."

"Ah, indeed! will it not wind:"

"To go away were you would not mind, you added, knocking down a door or a wall."

"'Tis true, I said so, and I say it again."

"At what o'clock did we see, pray, the two Swiss guards walk last night?"

"An hour after sunset."

"If they go out to-day as they did yesterday, we shall have the honor, then, of seeing them in half an-hour?"

"In a quarter of an hour at most!"

"Your arm is still strong enough, is it not, Porthos?"

Porthos unbuttoned his sleeve, raised his shirt, and looked complacently on his strong arm, as large as the leg of any ordinary man.

"Yes, indeed," he said, "pretty good."

"So that you could without trouble convert these tongues into a hoop, and the shovels into a corkscrew?"

"Certainly." And the guest took up these two articles, and, without any apparent effort, produced in them the metamorphoses requested by his companion.

"There!" he cried.

"Capital!" exclaimed the Gascon. "Really, Porthos, you are a gifted individual!"

"I have heard speak," said Porthos, "of a certain Milo of Croté, who performed wonderful feats, such as bending his forehead with a cord and bursting it—of killing an ox with a blow of his fist, and carrying it home on his shoulders, etc. I used to learn all these feats by heart, yonder, down at Pierrefonds. And I have done all that he did except breaking a cord by the swelling of my temples."

"Because your strength is not in your head, Porthos," said his friend.