TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

The three friends hastened on, but in a short time were obliged to slacken their pace. The Cardinal could not keep up with them, though with every wish to do so. Suddenly D’Artagnan touched something warm, and which moved.

"Stop! a horse!" he cried: "I have found a horse!"

"And I, likewise," said Athos.

"I, too," said Porthos, who, faithful to the instructions, still held the Cardinal’s arm.

"There’s luck, my boy! just as you were complaining of being tired, and obliged to walk."

But, as he spoke, the barrel of a pistol was presented at his breast, and these words were pronounced:

"Touch it not!"

"Grimaud!" he cried! Grimaud! what art thou about? went thou sent by Heaven?"

"No, sir," said the honest servant; "it was Monsieur Aramis who told me to take care of the horses."

"Is Aramis here?"

"Yes, sir; he has been here since yesterday."

"What are you doing?"

"On the watch——?"

"What! Aramis here?" cried Athos.

"At the lesser gate of the castle; he’s posted there."

"Are you a large party?"

"Sixty."

"Let him know."

"This moment, sir."

And, believing that no one could execute the commission better than he could, Grimaud set off at full speed; whilst, enchanted at being all together again, the three friends awaited his return.

There was no one in the whole group in ill humor, except Cardinal Mazarin.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

IN WHICH WE BEGIN TO THINK THAT Porthos WILL BE AT LAST A BARON, AND D’Artagnan A CAPTAIN.

At the expiration of ten minutes Aramis arrived, accompanied by Grimaud, and eight or ten followers. He was much delighted, and threw himself into his friends’ arms.

"You are then free, brothers! free without my aid!"

"Do not be unhappy, dear friend, on that account; if you have done nothing as yet, you will do something soon," replied Athos.

"I had well conceived my plans," pursued Aramis; "the Con-ductor gave me sixty men: twenty guard the walls of the park, twenty the road from Mount to Saint Germain; twenty are dispersed in the woods. I lay in ambush with my sixty men; I encircled the castle; the riding horses I intrusted to Grimaud, and I awaited your coming out, which I did not expect till to-morrow, and I hoped to free you without a skirmish. You are free to-night, with
out fighting, so much the better; how could you escape that scoundrel, Mazarin?"
"I am thanks to him," said D’Artagnan, "that we made our escape, and—"
"Impossible!"
"Yes, indeed, it is owing to him that we are at liberty."
"Well!" exclaimed Aramis, "this will reconcile me to him; but I wish he were here that I might tell him that I did not believe him capable of so noble an act."
"My lord," said D’Artagnan, "no longer able to contain himself, "allow me to introduce to you the Chevalier d’Herblay, who wishes—as you may have heard—to offer his congratulations to your Eminence."
And he retired, discovering Mazarin—who was in great confusion—to the astonished gaze of Aramis.
"Ho! ho!" exclaimed the latter, "the Cardinal! a fine prize! halloo! halloo! friends! to horse! to horse!
Several horsemen ran quickly to him.
"Zounds!" cried Aramis, "I may have done some good: then my lord, deserve to receive my most respectful homage! I will lay a wager that it is that Saint Christopher, Porthos, who performed this feat! Apropos! I forgot—" and he gave some orders, in a low voice, to one of the horsemen.
"I think it will be wise to set off," said D’Artagnan.
"Yes; but I am expecting some one, a friend of Athos."
"A friend!" exclaimed the count.
"And here he is, galloping away through the bushes."
"The count! the count!" cried a young voice, which made Athos start.
"Hallo! Hallo!" he ejaculated.
For a moment, the young man forgot his habitual reserve—he threw himself on his father’s neck.
"Look, my lord Cardinal," said Aramis, "would it not have been a pity to have separated those who love each other as we love? Gentlemen," he continued, addressing the cavaliers, who became more and more numerous every instant; "gentlemen, encircle his Eminence, that you may shew him the greater honor. He will, indeed, give us the favor of his company; you will, I hope, be grateful for it; Porthos, do not lose sight of his Eminence."
Aramis then joined Athos and D’Artagnan, who were consulting together.
"Come," said D’Artagnan, after a conference of five minutes’ duration, "let us begin our journey."
"Where are we to go?" asked Porthos.
"To your house, dear Porthos, at Pierrefonds; your fine château is worthy of affording a princely hospitality to his Eminence; it is, also, well situated: neither too near Paris, nor too far from it; we can establish a communication between it and the capital with great facility. Come, my lord, you shall there be treated like a prince, as you are."
"A fallen prince!" exclaimed Mazarin piously.
"The chances of war," said Athos, "are many, but be assured we shall not take an improper advantage of them."
"No, but we shall make use of them," interposed D’Artagnan.

The rest of the night was employed by those cavaliers in traveling, with the wonderful rapidity of former days. Mazarin, continuing solemn and positive, permitted himself to be dragged along in this way, which was like a race of phantoms. At dawn, twelve leagues had been passed without stopping; half the escort were exhausted, and several horses fell down.

"Horses, now-a-days, are not what they were formerly," observed Perthes; "everything degenerates."

In about ten minutes the escort stopped at Ermenonville, but the four friends went on with fresh ardor, guarding Mazarin carefully. At noon they rode into the avenue of Pierrefonds.

"We are four of us," said D’Artagnan, "we must relieve each other in mounting guard over my lord, and each of us must watch for three hours at a time.Athos is going to examine the castle, which it will be necessary to render impregnable in case of a siege; Perceval will see to the provision; and Aramis to the troops of the garrison. That is to say, Athos will be chief engineer, Perceval pare czygor in general, and Aramis governor of the fortress."

Meanwhile, they gave up to Mazarin the handsomest room in the château.

"Gentlemen," he said, when he was in his room, "you do not expect, I presume, to keep me here a long time incognito?"

"No, my lord," replied the Gascon, "on the contrary, we think of announcing very soon that we have you here."

"Then you will be besieged."

"We expect it."

"And what shall you do?"

"Defend ourselves. Were the late Cardinal Richelieu alive, he would tell you a certain story of the Bastion Saint-Gervais, which we four, with our four lackeys and twelve dead men, held out against a whole army."

"Such feats, sir, are done once, and are never repeated."

"However, now-a-days, there’s no need of so much heroism. To-morrow, the army of Paris will be summoned—the day after it will be here! The field of battle, instead, therefore, of being at St. Denis, or at Chevry, will be near Compiègne, or Villers-Cotterets."

"The prince will beat you, as he has always done."

"‘Tis possible, my lord; but before an engagement we shall move away your Eminence to another castle belonging to our friend Du Valion, who has three. We will not expose your Eminence to the chances of war."

"Come," answered Mazarin, "I see it will be necessary for me to capitulate."

"Before a siege?"

"Yes; the conditions will be better than afterward."

"Ah, my lord! as to conditions, you would soon see how moderate and reasonable we are!"

"Come, now, pray what are your conditions? I wish to know whether I am among enemies or friends."

"Friends, my lord! friends!"
"Well, then, tell me at once what you want, that I may see if an arrangement be possible. Speak, Count de la Fore!"

"My lord," replied Athos, "for myself I have nothing to ask for France, were I to specify, I should have too much. I beg you excuse me, and propose to the chevalier."

And Athos, bowing, retired, and remained leaning against the mantled piece, merely as a spectator of the scene.

"Speak then, chevalier!" said the Cardinal. "What do you want? Nothing ambiguous, if you please. Be clear, short, and precise."

"As for me," replied Aramis, "I have in my pocket that programme of the conditions which the deputation—which I formed one—sent yesterday to St. Germain to impose on you. Let us consider the debts and claims the first. The demands in that programme must be granted."

"We were almost agreed as to those," replied Mazarin; "let us pass on to private and personal stipulations."

"You suppose, then, that there will be none?" asked Aramis, smiling.

"I do not suppose that you will all be so disinterested as Monsieur de la Fore," replied the Cardinal, bowing to Athos.

"My lord, you are right! The count has a mind far above vulgar desires and human passions! He is a proud soul—he is a man by himself! You are right—he is worth us all—and we owe it to you!"

"Aramis," said Athos, "are you jesting?"

"No, no, dear friend; I state only what we all know. You are right; it is not you alone this matter concerns, but my lord and his unworthy servant, myself."

"Well, then, what do you require besides the general conditions before recited?"

"I require, my lord, that Normandy should be given to Madame de Longueville, with five hundred thousand francs, and full absolution. I require that his Majesty should delign to be godfather to the child she has just borne; and that my lord, after having been present at the christening, should go to proffer his homage to our Holy Father, the Pope."

"That is, that you wish me to lay aside my ministerial functions, to quit France, and be an exile."

"I wish his Eminence to become Pope on the first opportunity, allowing me then the right of demanding full indulgences for myself and my friends."

Mazarin made a grimace, which was quite indescribable, and then turned to D'Artagnan.

"And you, sir?" he said.

"I, my lord," answered the Gascon, "I differ from Monsieur D'Hérelly totally in the last point, though I agree with him in the first. Far from wishing my lord to quit Paris, I hope he will stay there and continue to be prime minister, as he is a great statesman. I shall try, also, to help him put down the French; but on one condition—that he sometimes remembers the king's faithful servants, and gives the first vacant company of musketeers to some one I can mention to him. And you, Monsieur du Vallon—"
"Yes, you, sir! Speak, if you please," said Mazarin.

"As to me," answered Porthos, "I wish my lord Cardinal—to do honor to my house, which has given him an asylum—would, in remembrance of this adventure, erect my estate into a barony, with a promise to confer that order on one of my friends, whenever his majesty next creates peers."

Mazarin bit his lip.

"All that," he said, "appears to me to be ill connected, gentlemen; for if I adversary some, I shall displease others. If I stay in Paris, I cannot go to Rome; and if I become Pope, I could not continue to be Prime Minister; and it is only by continuing Prime Minister that I can make Monsieur d'Artagnan a captain, and Monsieur du Vallon a baron."

"True," said Aramis, "so as I am in the minority, I give up my proposal.

"Well, then, gentlemen, take care of your own concerns, and let France settle matters as she will with me," resumed Mazarin.

"Hot hot" replied Aramis. "The Frenchmen will have a treaty, and your Eminence must sign it before us, promising, at the same time, to obtain the queen's consent to it—here is the treaty—may it please your Eminence, read and sign it."

"I know it," answered Mazarin.

"Then sign it."

"But, suppose I refuse?"

"Then," said d'Artagnan, "your Eminence must expect the consequences of a refusal."

"Would you dare to touch a Cardinal?"

"You have dared, my lord, to imprison her Majesty's Mus- ketiers."

"The queen will revenge me, gentlemen."

"I do not think so, although inclination might lead her to do so, but we shall take your Eminence to Paris—and the Parisians will defend us; therefore, sign this treaty, I beg of you."

"Suppose the queen should refuse to ratify it?"

"Ah! nonsense!" cried d'Artagnan, "I can manage so that her Majesty will receive me well; I know one method."

"What?"

"I shall take her Majesty the letter in which you tell her that the finances are exhausted."

"And then?" asked Mazarin, turning pale.

"When I see her Majesty embarrassed, I shall conduct her to Rueil, make her enter the orangery, and show her a certain spring which turns a box."

"Enough, sir," muttered the Cardinal, "you have said enough—where is the treaty?"

"Here it is," replied Aramis. "Sign, my lord," and he gave him a pen.

Mazarin arose—walked some moments, thoughtful, but not dejected.

"And when I have signed," he said, "what is to be my guarantee?"

"My word of honor, sir," said Athos.

Mazarin started—turned toward the Count de la Fore—and look
ing for an instant at his noble and honest countenance, took the
pen.
"It is sufficient, count," he said, and he signed the treaty.
"And now, Monsieur D'Artagnan," he said, "prepare to set off
for Saint Germain, and to take a letter from me to the queen."

CHAPTER LXXXVI.
SHOWS HOW WITH A TURBAN AND A PEN MORE IS EFFECTED THAN
BY THIS SWORD.

D'ARTAGNAN knew his part well; he was aware that opportunity
has a facebook only for him who will take it, and he was not a man
to let it go by him without seizing it. He soon arranged a prompt
and certain manner of traveling, by sending relays of horses to
Chantilly, so that he could be in Paris in five or six hours.

Nothing was known at St. Germain about Mazarin's disapper-
ance, except by the queen, who concealed to her friends even her
uneasiness. She had heard all about the two soldiers who were
found bound and gagged. Biron, who knew more about the
affair than anybody, had, in fact, gone to acquaint the queen of
the circumstances which had occurred. Anne had enforced the utmost
secrecy, and had disclosed the event to no one except the Prince de
Condé, who had sent five or six horsemen into the environs of St.
Germain with orders to bring any suspicious person who was going
away from the court, in whatsoever direction it might be.

On entering the court of the palace, D'Artagnan encountered
Biron, to whose instrumentality he owed a prompt introduction
to the queen's presence. He approached the sovereign with every
mark of profound respect, and, having fallen on his knees, presented
to her the Cardinal's letter.

It was, however, merely a letter of introduction. The queen read
it, recognized the writing, and, since there were no details in it of
what had occurred, asked for particulars. D'Artagnan related
everything with that simple and ingenious air which he knew how
to assume on some occasions. The queen, as she went on, looked at
him with increasing astonishment. She could not comprehend how
a man could conceive such an enterprise, and still less how he could
have the audacity to disclose it to her whose interest, and almost
duty, it was to punish him.

"How, sir!" she cried, as D'Artagnan finished, "you dare to tell
me the details of your crime—to give me an account of your treason!"
"Your Majesty, on your side," said D'Artagnan, "is as much
mistaken as to our intentions as the Cardinal Mazarin has always
been."

"You are in error, sir," answered the queen. "I am so little
mistaken that in ten minutes you shall be arrested, and in an hour
I shall set off to relieve my minister."

"I am sure your Majesty will not commit such an act of impu-
dence, first, because it would be useless, and would produce the most
serious results. Before he could be set free, the Cardinal would be
dead; and, indeed, so convinced is he of this, that he entreated me,