And Phoebus, with Aramis behind him, set off at full gallop, followed by D'Artagnan, who began to think he was dreaming some incoherent and fantastic dream.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Abbé D'Hervilly.

At the extremity of the village Phoebus turned to the left, in obedience to the orders of Aramis, and stopped underneath the window which had light in it. Aramis alighted, and knocked three times with his hands. Immediately the window was opened, and a ladder of rope was let down from it.

"My friend," said Aramis, "if you like to ascend, I shall be delighted to receive you."

"Pass on before me, I beg of you."

"As the late Cardinal used to say to the late king—only to show you the way, sire." And Aramis ascended the ladder quickly, and reached the window in an instant.

D'Artagnan followed, but less nimbly, showing plainly that this mode of ascent was not one to which he was accustomed.

"Sir," said Phoebus, when he saw D'Artagnan on the summit of the ladder, "this way is easy for Monsieur Aramis, and even for you; in case of necessity I might also climb up, but my two horses cannot mount the ladder."

"Take them to yonder shed, my friend," said Aramis, pointing to a building in the plain, "there you will find hay and straw for them; then come back here, and knock thrice, and we will give you out some provisions. Merry, forsooth, people don't die of hunger here."

And Aramis, drawing in the ladder, closed the window. D'Artagnan then looked around him attentively.

Never was there an apartment at the same time more warlike and more elegant. At each corner there were trophies, presenting to the view swords of all sorts, and four great pictures representing in their ordinary military costume the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Cardinal de Richelieu, the Cardinal de la Valette, and the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Exterioiy, nothing in the room showed that it was the habitation of an abbé. The hangings were of damask, the carpets came from Alençon, and the bed, more especially, had more the look of a fine lady's couch, with its trimmings of fine lace, and its embroidered counterpanes, than that of a man who had made a vow that he would continue to gain heaven by fasting and mortification.

Whilst D'Artagnan was engaged in contemplation the door opened and Bazin entered, on perceiving the Musketeer he uttered an exclamation which was almost a cry of despair.

"My dear Bazin," said D'Artagnan, "I am delighted to see with what wonderful comporture you tell a lie even in church!"

"Sir," replied Bazin, "I have been taught by the good Jesuit fathers, that it is permitted to tell a falsehood when it is told in a good cause."

"So far well," said Aramis; "we are dying of hunger. Serve
us up the best supper you can, and especially give us some good wine."

D'Artagnan bowed low, and left the room.

"Now we are alone, dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "tell me how the devil did you manage to light upon the back of Porthet's horse?"

"Eh! faith!" answered Aramis, "as you see, from heaven."

"From heaven!" replied D'Artagnan, shaking his head: "you have no more the appearance of coming from thence than you have of going there."

"My friend," said Aramis, with a look of imbecility on his face which D'Artagnan had never observed whilst he was in the Musketeers, "if I did not come from heaven, at least I was leaving paradise, which is almost the same."

"Here, then, is a puzzle for the learned," observed D'Artagnan; "until now they have never been able to agree as to the situation of paradise; some place it on Mount Ararat, others between the Tigris and the Euphrates; it seems that they have been looking very far off for it, while it was actually very near. Paradise is at Noisy le Sec, upon the site of the archbishop's château. People do not go out from it by the door, but by the window; one doesn't descend here by the marble steps of a peristyle, but by the branches of a lime tree; and the angel with a flaming sword who guards this elysium, seems to have changed his celestial name of Gabriel into that of the more terrestrial one of the Prince de Marsilier."

Aramis burst out into a fit of laughter.

"You were always a merry companion, my dear D'Artagnan," he said, "and your witty Gascon fancy has not deserted you. Yes, there is something in what you say; nevertheless, do not believe that it is Madame de Longueville with whom I am in love."

"A plague on't! I shall not do so. After having been so long in love with Madame de Chevreuse, you would not lay your heart at the feet of her mortal enemy!"

"Yes," replied Aramis, with an absent air: "yes, that poor duchess! I once loved her much, and, to do her justice, she was very useful to us. Eventually she was obliged to leave France. He was a relentless enemy, that damned Cardinal," continued Aramis, glancing at the portrait of the old minister. "He had even given orders to arrest her, and would have cut off her head, had she not escaped with her waiting-maid—poor Kitty! The duchess escaped in man's clothes, and a couple was made upon her"—and Aramis burst out a few lines of a well-known song of the day.

"Bravo!" cried D'Artagnan, "you sing charmingly, dear Aramis. I do not perceive that singing masses has altered your voice."

"My dear D'Artagnan," replied Aramis, "you understand, when I was a Musketeer I mounted guard as seldom as I could; now, when I am an abbé, I say as few masses as I can. But to return to our duchess."

"Which? the Duchess de Chevreuse or the Duchess de Longueville?"

"Have I not already told you that there is nothing between us and the Duchess de Longueville? little rivalries, perhaps, but..."
that's all. No, I spoke of the Duchess de Chevrevusa; did you see
her after her return from Brussels, after the King's death?"
"Yes, she is still beautiful."
"Yes," said Aramis, "I saw her also at that time. I gave her
good advice, by which she did not profit. I ventured to tell her
that Mazarin was the lover of Anne of Austria. She wouldn't be
here now, saying that she knew Anne of Austria, who was too
proud to love such a worthless coxcomb. She since plunged into
the cabal headed by the Duke of Beaufort and the 'coxcomb,'
arrested De Beaufort, and banished Madame de Chevreuse."
"You know," resumed D'Artagnan, "that she has had leave to
return to France?"
"Yes, she is come back, and is going to commit some fresh folly
or another; she is much changed."
"In that respect unlike you, my dear Aramis, for you are still
the same; you have still your beautiful dark hair, still your elegant
figure, still your feminine hands, which are admirably suited to a
piedate."
"Yes," replied Aramis, "I am extremely careful of my appear-
ance. Do you know that I am growing old; I am nearly thirty-
seven."
"Mind, Aramis," said D'Artagnan, laughing as he spoke—"since we
are together again, let us agree on one point—what age shall we be
in future?"
"How?
"Formerly, I was your junior by two or three years, and, if I am
not mistaken, I am turned forty years old."
"Indeed! Then 'tis I who am mistaken, for you have always
been a good chronologist. By your reckoning I must be forty three
at least. The devil I say? Don't let it out at the Hotel Rainboi-
let, it would ruin me," replied the abbé.
"Don't be afraid, I shall not," said D'Artagnan.
And now let us go to supper," said Aramis, seeing that Bazin
had returned and prepared the table.

The two friends sat down, and Aramis began to cut up fowls,
partridges, and ham with admirable skill.
"The dinner? cried D'Artagnan; "do you live in this way
always?"
"Yes, pretty well. The Conjuror has given me dispensations
from fasting on the jours maîtres, on account of my health; then I
have engaged as my cook, the cook who lived with Lafollone—you
know whom I mean?—the friend of the Cardinal, and the famous
ericrue whose grace after dinner used to be—" Good Lord, do me
the favor to make me digest what I have eaten!"
"Nevertheless, he died of indigestion, in spite of his grace,"
said D'Artagnan.
"What can you expect?" replied Aramis, in a tone of resigna-
tion, "a man must fulfill his destiny."
"If it be not an invidious question," resumed D'Artagnan, "are
you grown rich?"
"Oh, Heaven! no! I make about twelve thousand francs a year
without counting a little benefits which the prince gave me."
"And how do you make your twelve thousand francs—by your
income?"

"No, I've given up poetry, except now and then to write a drink-
ing song, some joy sonnet, or some innocent elegy; I make ser-
mons, my friend."

"How! sermons? Do you preach them?"

"No; I sell them to those of my cloth who wish to become great
writers."

"Ah, indeed! and you have not been tempted by the hopes of
reputation yourself?"

"I should, my dear D'Artagnan, have been so, but nature said
'No.' When I am in the pulpit, if, by chance, a pretty woman
looks at me, I look at her again; if she smiles, I smile also. Then
I speak at random; instead of preaching about the torments of hell,
I talk of the joys of paradise. An event took place in the Church
of St. Louis au Marais. A gentleman laughed in my face. I
stopped short to tell him that he was a fool; the congregation went
out to get stones to stone me with; but whilst they were away I
found means to reconcile the priests who were present, so that my
face was pelted instead of me. 'Tis true that he came the next morn-
ing to my house, thinking that he had to do with an abbé—like all
other abbés."

"And what was the end of the affair?"

"We met in the Place Royale—Egad, you know about it."

"Was I not your second?" cried D'Artagnan.

"You were—you know how I settled the matter."

"Did he die?"

"I don't know. But, at all events, I gave him absolution 'in
articulo mortis.' 'Tis enough to kill the body, without killing the
soul."

A long silence ensued after this disclosure. Aramis was the first
to break it.

"What are you thinking of, D'Artagnan?" he began.

"I was thinking, my good friend, that when you were a Musketeer
you turned your thoughts incessantly to the Church, and now
that you are an abbé you are perpetually longing to be a musketeer."

"The true—man, as you know, said Aramis, 'is a strange ani-
mal, made up of contradictions. Since I became an abbé I dream
of nothing but battles. I practice shooting all day long, with an
excellent master whom we have here."

"How? here?"

"Yes, in this convent—we have always a 'a maître d'armes in
a convent of Jesuits."

"Then you would have killed the Prince de Marsillac if he had
attacked you singly?"

"Certainly," replied Aramis, "with the greatest ease."

"Well, dear Aramis, you ask me why I have been searching for
you. I sought you in order to offer you a way of killing Monsieur
de Marsillac whenever you please—prince though he may be. Are
you ambitious?"

"As ambitious as Alexander."

"Well, my friend, I bring you the means of being rich, powerful,
and free, if you wish. Have you, my dear Aramis, thought some
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

thence to those happy days of our youth that we passed laughing, drinking, and fighting each other for play.

"Certainly—and more than once regretted them; 'twas a happy time."

"Well, these happy days may return; I am commissioned to find out my companions, and I begin by you, who were the very soul of our society."

Aramis bowed, rather with respect than pleasure, at the compliment.

"To meddle in politics," he exclaimed, in a languid voice, leaning back in his easy-chair. "Ah! dear D'Artagnan! see how regularly I live, and how easy I am here—we have experienced the ingratitude of 'the great,' as you know."

"'Tis true," replied D'Artagnan. "Yet the great sometimes repent of their ingratitude."

"In that case, it would be quite another thing. Come! let's be merciful to every sinner! besides, you are right in another respect, which is, in thinking that if we were to meddle in politics, there could not be a better time than this."

"How can you know that? You who never interest yourself in politics?"

"Ah! without caring about them myself, I live among those who are much occupied in them. Poet as I am, I am intimate with Mazarin—who is devoted to the Prince de Condé, and with Monsieur de Bais-Robert, who, since the death of Cardinal Richelieu, is of all or any party, so that political discussions have not altogether been uninteresting to me."

"I have no doubt of it," said D'Artagnan.

"Now, my dear friend, don't look upon all I tell you as merely the statement of a monk—but of a man who resembles an echo—repeating simply what he hears. I understand that Mazarin is, at this very moment, extremely uneasy as to the state of affairs; that his orders are not respected like those of our formerasurer, the deceased Cardinal, whose portrait you see here—for whatever may be thought of him, it must be allowed that Richelieu was a great man."

"I shall not contradict you there," said D'Artagnan.

"My first impressions were favorable to the minister; but, as I am very ignorant of these sort of things, and as the humility which I profess obliges me not to rest on my own judgment, but to ask the opinion of others, I have inquired—Eh!—my friend."

Aramis paused.

"Well?—what?" asked his friend.

"Well—I must mortify myself. I must confess that I was mistaken. Monsieur de Mazarin is not a man of genius, as I thought; he is a man of no origin—once a servant of Cardinal Bentivoglio, and he got on by intrigue. He is an upstart, a man of no name, who will only be the tool of a party in France. He will possess wealth, he will injure the king's revenue, and pay to himself the pensions which Richelieu paid to others. He is neither a gentleman in manner nor in feeling, but a sort of buffoon, a punchinello, a pantaloon. Do you know him?—I do not."
"Henri!" said D'Artagnan, "there is some truth in what you say; but you speak of him, not of his party, nor of his resources."

"It is true—the queen is for him,"

"Something in his favor."

"But he will never have the king."

"A mere child."

"A child who will be of age in four years. Then he has neither the parliament nor the people with him—they represent the wealth of the country: nor the nobles, nor the princes—who are the military power of France: but perhaps I am wrong in speaking thus to you, who have evidently a leaning to Mazarin."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan; "not in the least."

"You spoke of a mission."

"Did I? I was wrong then—no, I said what you say—there is a crisis at hand. Well! let's fly the feather before the wind; let us join with that side to which the wind will carry us, and resume our adventurous life. We were once four valiant knights—four hearts fondly united; let us unite again, not as hearts, which have never been severed, but as courage and our fortunes. Here's a good opportunity for getting something better than a diamond."

"You are right, D'Artagnan; I held a similar project, but, as I have not your fruitful and vigorous imagination, the idea was suggested to me. Every one now-a-days wants auxiliaries; prepositions have been made to me, and I confess to you frankly, that the Condé has made me speak out."

"The Prince de Conti! the Cardinal's enemy?"

"No; the king's friend."

"But the king is with Mazarin."

"He is, but not willingly—in appearance, not heart; and that is exactly the same that the king's enemies prepare for a poor child."

"Ah! but this is, indeed, civil war, which you propose to me, dear Aramis."

"War for the king."

"Yet the king will be at the head of the army on Mazarin's side."

"But his heart will be in the army commanded by the D'Artagnan."

"Monsieur de Beaufort? He is at Vincennes."

"Did I name Monsieur de Beaufort?" said Aramis.

"Monsieur de Beaufort or some one else. The prince, perhaps.

But Monsieur de Conti is going to be made a Cardinal."

"Are there not warlike Cardinals?" said Aramis.

"Do you see my great advantage in adhering to this party?"

asked D'Artagnan.

"I foresee in it the aid of powerful princes."

"With the enmity of the government."

"Counteracted by parliament and insurrections."

"That may be done if they can separate the king from his mother."

"That may be done," said Aramis.

"Never!" cried D'Artagnan. "You, Aramis, know Anne of Austria better than I do. Do you think she will ever forget that her son is her safeguard, her shield, the pledge for her dignity, for her fortune and her life? Should she forsake Mazarin, she must join her son, and go over to the prince's side; but you know better
than I do, that there are certain reasons why she can never abandon Mazarin."
"Perhaps you are right," said Aramis, thoughtfully; "therefore I shall not pledge myself."
"To them, or to us, do you mean, Aramis?"
"To none, I am a priest," resumed Aramis. "What have I to do with politics? I am not obliged to read any breviary. I have a little circle of holy nuns and pretty women; everything goes on smoothly; so certainly, dear friend, I shall not meddle in politics."
"Well, listen, my dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan; "your philosophy convinces me, on my honor. I don't know what devil of an insect stung me, and made me ambitious. I have a post by which I live; at the death of Monsieur de Treville, who is old, I may be a captain, which is a very pretty position for a poor Gascon. Instead of running after adventures, I shall accept an invitation from Porthos: I shall go and shoot on his estate. You know he has estates—Porthos?"
"I should think so, indeed. Ten leagues of wood, of marsh land and valleys; he is lord of the hill and the plain, and is now carrying on a suit for his feudal rights against the Bishop of Noyon!"
"Good," said Aramis to himself. "That's what I wanted to know. Porthos is in Picardy?"
Then aloud:
"And he has taken his ancient name of Vallon?"
"To which he adds that of Brascles—an estate which has been a barony, by my truth."
"So that Porthos will be a baron,"
"I don't doubt it. The Baroness Porthos will be particularly charming."
And the two friends began to laugh.
"So," D'Artagnan resumed, "you will not become a partisan of Mazarin's?"
"Nor you of the Prince de Condé?"
"No, let us belong to no party, but remain friends; let us be neither Cardinals nor Frondeurs."
"Adieu, then," said D'Artagnan, pouring out a glass of wine.
"To old times," he said.
"Yes," returned Aramis. "Unhappily, these times are past."
"Nonsense! They will return," said D'Artagnan. "At all events, if you want me, remember the Rue Triguetonne, hotel de la Chevrette."
"And I shall be at the convent of Leslies: from six in the morning to eight at night come by the door. From eight in the evening until six in the morning come in by the window. Go then, my friend," he added, "follow your career; Fortune smiles on you, do not let her flee from you. As for me, I remain in my humility and my indolence. Adieu!"
"Thus, as quite decided," said D'Artagnan, "that what I have to offer to you does not suit you?"
"On the contrary, it would suit me were I like any other man," rejoined Aramis; "but I repeat, I am made up of contradictions. What I hate to day, I adore to-morrow, and vice versa. You see that I cannot, like you, for instance, settle on any fixed plan."
"Thou liest, subtle one," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Thou alone, on the contrary, knowest how to choose thy object, and to gain it stealthily."

The friends embraced. They descended into the plain by the ladder. Planchet met them close by the shed. D'Artagnan jumped on his saddled, thorn the old companions in arms, again sleek hands. D'Artagnan and Planchet spurred on their horses and took the road to Paris.

But after he had gone about two hundred steps, D'Artagnan stopped short, alighted, threw the bridle of his horse over the arm of Planchet, and took the pistols from his saddle-bow to fasten them to his girdle.

"What's the matter?" asked Planchet.

"This is the matter; be he ever so cunning, he shall never say that I was his dupe. Stand here, don't stir, turn your back to the road, and wait for me."

Having thus spoken, D'Artagnan cleared the ditch by the road side, and crossed the plain so as to wind round the village. He had observed between the house that Madame de Longueville inhabited and the convent of the Jesuits, an open space surrounded by a hedge.

The moon had now risen, and he could see well enough to retracing his road.

He reached the hedge, hid himself behind it: in passing by the house where the scene which we have related took place, he remarked that the window was again lighted up, and he was convinced that Aramis had not yet returned to his own apartment, and that when he did return there, it would not be alone.

In truth, in a few minutes he heard steps approaching, and low whispers.

Close to the hedge the steps stopped.

D'Artagnan knelt down near the thickest part of the hedge.

Two men—to the astonishment of D'Artagnan—appeared shortly; soon, however, his surprise vanished; for he heard the murmurs of a soft, harmonious voice; one of these two men was a woman disguised as a cavalier.

"Calm yourself, dear René," said the soft voice, "the same thing will never happen again. I have discovered a sort of subterranean passage which runs under the street, and we shall only have to raise one of the marble slabs before the door to open you another entrance and an outlet."

"Oh!" answered another voice, which D'Artagnan soon recognized as that of Aramis. "I swear to you, princess, that your reputation does not depend on precautions, and that I would risk my life rather than——"

"Yes, yes! I know you are as brave and venturesome as any man in the world, but you do not belong to me alone; you belong to all our party. Be prudent! be sensible!"

"I always obey, madame, when I am commanded by so gentle a voice."

He kissed her hand tenderly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the cavalier with the soft voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Aramis.
ARAMIS AND THE DUCHESS DE LONGUEVILLE.
"Do you not see that the wind has blown off my hat?"

Aramis rushed after the fugitive but, D'Artagnan took advantage of the circumstance to find a place in the hedge not so thick, where his glance could penetrate to the supposed cavalier. At that instant, the moon, inquisitive, perhaps, like D'Artagnan, came from behind a cloud, and by her light D'Artagnan recognized the large blue eyes, the golden hair, and the classic head of the Duchess de Longueville.

Aramis returned, laughing; one hat on his head, and the other in his hand; and he and his companion resumed their walk toward the convent.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, rising and brushing his knees; "now I have thee—thou art a Frondeur, and the lover of Madame de Longueville."

CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR PORTHOS DU VALLON DE BRACIEUX DE PIERREFONDS.

Thanks to what Aramis had told him, D'Artagnan, who knew already that Porthos called himself De Vallon, was now aware that he styled himself, from his estate, De Bracieux—and that he was, on account of this estate, engaged in a lawsuit with the Bishop of Noyon.

At eight o'clock in the evening, he and Planchet again left the hotel of the Cheverelle, quitting Paris by the Port Saint Denis.

Their route lay through Druantin—and then, taking one of two roads which branched off—towards Compiegne, when it was necessary to inquire the situation of the estate of Bracieux.

They traveled always at night; and having learned at Villars-Cottretes that Porthos was at the property which he had lately bought, called Pierrefonds, they set out, taking the road which leads from Villars-Cottretes to Compiegne.

The morning was beautiful; and in this early spring-time the birds sang on the trees, and the sunbeams shone through the misty glades, like curtains of golden gauze.

In other parts of the forest the light could scarcely penetrate through the foliage; and the stems of two old oak trees—the refuge of the squirrel, startled by the traveler—were in deep shadow.

There came up from all nature in the dawn of day a perfume of herbs, flowers, and leaves, which delighted the heart. D'Artagnan, sick of the closeness of Paris, thought that when a man had three names of his different estates joined one to another, he ought to be very happy in such a paradise; then he shook his head, saying, "If I were Porthos, and D'Artagnan came to make to me such a proposition as I am going to make to him, I know what I should say to it."

As to Planchet, he thought of nothing.

At the extremity of the wood D'Artagnan perceived the road which had been described to him; and at the end of the road he saw the towers of an immense feudal castle.

"Oh! oh!" he said, "I fancied this castle belonged to the