overcome. Porthos rubbed his hands in feverish impatience. Aramis bit his lips till the blood came.

D'Artagnan alone was calm, at least in appearance.

"Monseigneur Mordaunt," he said, "since after running after one another so long, chance has at last brought us together, let us have a little conversation, if you please."

CHAPTER LXVII.

CONVERSATIONAL.

Tricorne Mordaunt had been so completely taken by surprise, and had mounted the stairs under the impression of utter confusion, when once seated he recovered himself, as it were, and prepared to seize any possible opportunity of escaping. His eye wandered to a long stout sword on his flank, and he instinctively slipped it round within reach of his right hand.

D'Artagnan was waiting for a reply to his remark, and said nothing. Aramis muttered to himself, "We shall hear nothing but the usual commonplace things."

Porthos sucked his mustache, muttering, "A good deal of ceremony here about crushing an adder." Athos shrunk into his corner, pale and motionless as a bas-relief.

The silence, however, could not last forever. So D'Artagnan began:

"Sir," he said, with desperate politeness, "It seems to me that you change your costume almost as rapidly as I have seen the Italian manners do, whom the Cardinal Mazarin brought over from Bergamo, and whom he doubtless took you to see, during your travels in France."

Mordaunt did not reply.

"Just now," D'Artagnan continued, "you were disguised—I mean to say, attired—as a murderer, and now—"

"And now I look very much like a man who is going to be murdered."

"Oh! sir," answered D'Artagnan, "how can you talk like that, when you are in the company of gentlemen, and have such an excellent sword at your side."

"No sword is good enough to be of any use against four swords and four daggers."

"Well, that is scarcely the question. I had the honor of asking you why you altered your costume. Surely the mask and beard suited you very well, and as to the ax, I do not think it would be out of keeping even at this moment."

"Because, remembering the scene at Armentières, I thought I should find four axes for one, as I was to meet four executioners."

"Sir," replied D'Artagnan, in the calmest manner possible, "you are very young. I shall therefore overlook your frivolous remarks. What took place at Armentières has no connection whatever with the present occasion. We could scarcely have requested your mother to take a sword and fight with us."

"Aha! It's a duel then?" cried Mordaunt, as if disposed to reply at once to the provocation.
Porthos rose, always ready for this kind of adventure.

"Pardon me," said D'Artagnan. "Do not let us be in a hurry. We will arrange the matter rather better. Confess, Monsieur Mor-
daut, that you are anxious to kill some of us."

"Ah!" replied Mordaunt.

"Then, my dear sir, I am convinced that these gentlemen return
your kind wishes, and will be delighted to kill you also. Of course
they will do so as honorable gentlemen, and the best proof I can
furnish is this ——"

So saying, he threw his hat on the ground, pushed back his chair
to the wall, and bowed to Mordaunt with true French grace.

"At your service, sir," he continued. "My sword is shorter
than yours, it's true, but hail! I hope the arm will make up for the
sword."

"Halt!" cried Porthos, coming forward. "I begin, and that's
logic."

"Allow me, Porthos," said Aramis.

Athos did not move. You might have taken him for a statue.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "you shall have your turn
Monsieur Mordaunt dislikes you sufficiently not to refuse you after-
ward. You can see it in his eye. So pray keep your places, like
Athos, whose calmness is most fadable. Besides, we will have no
words about it. I have a particular business to settle with this
gentleman, and I shall and will begin."

Porthos and Aramis drew back disappointed; and, drawing his
sword, D'Artagnan turned to his adversary:

"Sir, I am waiting for you."

"And for my part, gentlemen, I admire you. You are disputing
which shall fight me first, and you do not consult me, who am
most concerned in the matter. I hate you all, but not equally. I
claim the right to choose my opponent. If you refuse this right,
you may kill me, for I shall not fight."

"It is but fair," said Porthos and Aramis, hoping he would
choose one of them.

"Well, then," said Mordaunt, "I choose for my adversary the
man who, not thinking himself worthy to be called Comte de la
Fere, calls himself Athos."

Athos sprang up, but after an instant of motionless silence, he
said, to the astonishment of his friends, "Monsieur Mordaunt, a
duel between us is impossible. Give this honor to somebody else."

And he sat down.

"Ah!" said Mordaunt, with a sneer, "there's one who is afraid!"

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, bounding toward him, "who says
that Athos is afraid?"

"Let him go on, D'Artagnan," said Athos, with a smile of ser-

"Is it your decision, Athos?" resumed the Gascon.

"Yes, irrevocably."

"You hear, sir," said D'Artagnan, turning to Mordaunt,

"choose one of us to replace the Comte de la Fere."

"As long as I don't fight with him, it is the same to me with
whom I fight. Put your names into a hat and draw lots."

"At least that will conclude us all," said Aramis.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"I should never have thought of that," said Porthos, "and yet it's a very simple plan."

Aramis went to Cromwell's desk, and wrote the three names on a slip of paper, which he threw into a hat.

Mordaunt drew one and threw it on the table.

"Ah! serpent," muttered D'Artagnan; "I would give my chance of a captaincy in the Monarchies for that to be my name."

Aramis opened the paper, and in a voice trembling with hate and vengeance, read "D'Artagnan."

The Gascon uttered a cry of joy, and turning to Mordaunt:

"I hope, sir," said he, "you have no objection to make."

"None whatever," replied the other, drawing his sword and resting the point on his boot.

The moment that D'Artagnan saw that his wish was accomplished, and his man would not escape him, he recovered his usual tranquillity. He turned up his cuffs neatly, and rubbed the sole of his right boot on the floor, but did not fail, however, to remark that Mordaunt was hooting about him in a singular manner.

"Are you ready, sir?" he said at last.

"I was waiting for you, sir," said Mordaunt, raising his head and casting at his opponent a look which it would be impossible to describe.

"Well, then," said the Gascon, "take care of yourself, for I am not a bad hand at the rapier."

"Nor I either."

"So much the better. That sets my mind at rest. Defend yourself."

"One minute," said the young man, "give me your word, gentlemen, that you will not attack me otherwise than one after the other."

"Is it to have the pleasure of insulting us that you say that, little serpent?"

"No, but to set my mind at rest, as you said just now."

"It is for something else than that, I imagine," muttered D'Artagnan, shaking his head, doubtfully.

"On the honor of gentlemen," said Aramis and Porthos.

"In that case, gentlemen, have the kindness to retire into the corner and leave us alone. We shall want it."

"Yes, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "we must not leave this person the slightest pretext for behaving badly, which, with all due respect, I fancy he is anxious to do."

This new attack made no impression on Mordaunt. The space was cleared, the two ladies placed on Cromwell's desk, in order that the combatsants might have as much light as possible; and the swords crossed.

D'Artagnan was too good a swordsman to trifile with his opponent. He made a rapid and brilliant feint, which Mordaunt parried.

"Ahah!" he cried, with a smile of satisfaction.

And without losing a minute, thinking he saw an opening, he thrust his right in and forced Mordaunt to parry a counter en couteau fine that the point of the weapon might have turned within a wedding ring.

This time it was Mordaunt who smiled.
"Ah, sir," said D'Artagnan, "you have a wicked smile. It must have been the devil who taught it you, was it not?"

Mordaunt replied by trying his opponent's weapon with an amount of strength which the Gascon was astonished to find in a form apparently so weak; but thanks to a parry no less clever than that which Mordaunt had just achieved, he succeeded in meeting his sword, which still along his own without touching his chest.

Mordaunt rapidly sprung back a step.

"Aha! you lose ground, you are turning! Well, as you please, I even gain something by it, for I no longer see that wicked smile of yours. You have no idea what a false look you have, particularly when rose are afraid. Look at my eyes, and you will see what a looking-glass never showed you—a frank and honorable countenance."

To this flow of words, not perhaps in the best taste, but characteristic of D'Artagnan, whose principal object was to divert his opponent's attention, Mordaunt did not reply, but continuing to turn round, he succeeded in changing places with D'Artagnan.

He smiled more and more, and his smile began to make the Gascon anxious.

"Come, come," cried D'Artagnan, "we must finish with this," and in his turn he pressed Mordaunt hard, who continued to lose ground, but evidently on purpose, and without letting his sword leave the line for a moment. However, as they were fighting in a room, and had not space to go on like that forever, Mordaunt's foot at last touched the wall, against which he rested his left hand.

"Ah, this time you cannot lose ground, my fine friend!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Gentlemen, did you ever see a scorpion pinned to a wall? No. Well, then, you shall see it now."

In a second D'Artagnan had made three terrible thrusts at Mordaunt, all of which touched, but only pricked him. The three friends looked on, panting and astonished. At last D'Artagnan, having got up too close, stepped back to preserve a fourth thrust, but the moment when, after a line, quick feint, he was attacking as sharply as lightning, the wall seemed to give way, Mordaunt disappeared through the opening and D'Artagnan's sword caught between the panels, shivered like glass. D'Artagnan sprang back; the wall had closed again.

Mordaunt, in fact, while defending himself, had maneuvered so as to reach the secret door by which Cromwell had left, had felt for the knob with his left hand, pressed it, and disappeared.

The Gascon uttered a furious imprecation, which was answered by a wild laugh on the other side of the iron panel.

"Help me, gentlemen," cried D'Artagnan, "we must break in this door."

"He escapes us," growled Phoebus, pushing his huge shoulder against the hinges, but in vain. "Steady, he escapes us."

"So much the better," muttered Athos.

"I thought as much," said D'Artagnan, wasting his strength in useless efforts. "Zounds, I thought as much, when the wretch kept moving round the room. I thought he was up to something."

"It's a mistake, which his friend, the devil, sends us," said Aramis.
“It’s a piece of good fortune sent from heaven,” said Athos, cordially pleased.

“Really?” said D’Artagnan, abandoning the attempt to burst open the panel after several ineffectual attempts. “Athos, I cannot imagine how you can talk to us in that way. You cannot understand the position we are in. In this kind of game, not to kill, is to let one’s self be killed. This wretched fellow will be sending us a hundred Iron-sided beasts who will pick us off like berries in this place. Como, come, we must be off. If we stay here five minutes more, there’s an end of us.”

“Yes, you are right.”

“But where shall we go to?” asked Porthos.

“Toward the hotel, to be sure, to get our baggage and horses; and from there, if it please God, to France, where, at least, I understand the architecture of the houses.”

So, setting the action to the word, D’Artagnan thrust the remains of his sword into its scabbard, picked up his hat, and ran down the stairs, followed by the others.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE SHIP “LIGHTNING.”

Mordaunt glided through the subterranean passage, and, gaining the neighboring house, stopped to take breath.

“Good,” said he, “a mere nothing. Scratches, that is all. Now to my work.”

He walked on at a quick pace, till he reached a neighboring cavalry barrack, where he happened to be known. Here he borrowed a horse, the best in the stables, and in a quarter of an hour was at Greenwich.

“I see, well,” said he, as he reached the river bank. “I am half an hour before them. Now,” he added, rising in the stirrups, and looking about him, “which, I wonder, is the Lightning?”

At this moment, as if in reply to his words, a man lying on a heap of cables rose and advanced a few steps toward him. Mordaunt drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tying a knot at each corner—the signal agreed upon—waved it in the air, and the man came up to him. He was wrapped in a large rough cape, which concealed his form and partly his face.

“Do you wish to go on the water, sir?” said the sailor.

“Yes, just so. Along the Isle of Dogs.”

“And perhaps you have a preference for one boat more than another. You would like one that sails as rapidly——”

“As lightning,” interrupted Mordaunt.

“Then mine is the boat you want, sir. I’m your man.”

“I begin to think so, particularly if you have not forgotten a certain signal.”

“Here it is, sir,” said the sailor, and the man took from his coat a handkerchief, tied at each corner.

“Good, quite right!” cried Mordaunt, springing off his horse.

“There’s no time to lose; now, take my horse to the nearest inn, and conduct me to your vessel.”