DUMAS ALEXANDRE

LOUISE DE LA VALLIERE

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Содержание

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Introduction:

In the months of March-July in 1844, in the magazine Le Siecle, the first portion of a story appeared, penned by the celebrated playwright Alexandre Dumas. It was based, he claimed, on some manuscripts he had found a year earlier in the Bibliotheque Nationale while researching a history he planned to write on Louis XIV. They chronicled the adventures of a young man named D'Artagnan who, upon entering Paris, became almost immediately embroiled in court intrigues, international politics, and ill-fated affairs between royal lovers. Over the next six years, readers would enjoy the adventures of this youth and his three famous friends, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, as their exploits unraveled behind the scenes of some of the most momentous events in French and even English history.

Eventually these serialized adventures were published in novel form, and became the three D'Artagnan Romances known today. Here is a brief summary of the first two novels:

The Three Musketeers (serialized March – July, 1844): The year is 1625. The young D'Artagnan arrives in Paris at the tender age of 18, and almost immediately offends three musketeers,

Porthos, Aramis, and Athos. Instead of dueling, the four are attacked by five of the Cardinal's guards, and the courage of the youth is made apparent during the battle. The four become fast friends, and, when asked by D'Artagnan's landlord to find his missing wife, embark upon an adventure that takes them across both France and England in order to thwart the plans of the Cardinal Richelieu. Along the way, they encounter a beautiful young spy, named simply Milady, who will stop at nothing to disgrace Queen Anne of Austria before her husband, Louis XIII, and take her revenge upon the four friends.

Twenty Years After (serialized January – August, 1845): The year is now 1648, twenty years since the close of the last story. Louis XIII has died, as has Cardinal Richelieu, and while the crown of France may sit upon the head of Anne of Austria as Regent for the young Louis XIV, the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, her secret husband. D'Artagnan is now a lieutenant of musketeers, and his three friends have retired to private life. Athos turned out to be a nobleman, the Comte de la Fere, and has retired to his home with his son, Raoul de Bragelonne. Aramis, whose real name is D'Herblay, has followed his intention of shedding the musketeer's cassock for the priest's robes, and Porthos has married a wealthy woman, who left him her fortune upon her death. But trouble is stirring in both France and England. Cromwell menaces the institution of royalty itself while marching against Charles I, and at home the Fronde is threatening to tear France apart. D'Artagnan brings his friends

out of retirement to save the threatened English monarch, but Mordaunt, the son of Milady, who seeks to avenge his mother's death at the musketeers' hands, thwarts their valiant efforts. Undaunted, our heroes return to France just in time to help save the young Louis XIV, quiet the Fronde, and tweak the nose of Cardinal Mazarin.

The third novel, The Vicomte de Bragelonne (serialized October, 1847 – January, 1850), has enjoyed a strange history in its English translation. It has been split into three, four, or five volumes at various points in its history. The five-volume edition generally does not give titles to the smaller portions, but the others do. In the three-volume edition, the novels are entitled The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. For the purposes of this etext, I have chosen to split the novel as the four-volume edition does, with these titles: The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Ten Years Later, Louise de la Valliere, and The Man in the Iron Mask. In the first two etexts:

The Vicomte de Bragelonne (Etext 2609): It is the year 1660, and D'Artagnan, after thirty-five years of loyal service, has become disgusted with serving King Louis XIV while the real power resides with the Cardinal Mazarin, and has tendered his resignation. He embarks on his own project, that of restoring Charles II to the throne of England, and, with the help of Athos, succeeds, earning himself quite a fortune in the process. D'Artagnan returns to Paris to live the life of a rich citizen, and Athos, after negotiating the marriage of Philip, the king's

brother, to Princess Henrietta of England, likewise retires to his own estate, La Fere. Meanwhile, Mazarin has finally died, and left Louis to assume the reigns of power, with the assistance of M. Colbert, formerly Mazarin's trusted clerk. Colbert has an intense hatred for M. Fouquet, the king's superintendent of finances, and has resolved to use any means necessary to bring about his fall. With the new rank of intendant bestowed on him by Louis, Colbert succeeds in having two of Fouquet's loyal friends tried and executed. He then brings to the king's attention that Fouquet is fortifying the island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, and could possibly be planning to use it as a base for some military operation against the king. Louis calls D'Artagnan out of retirement and sends him to investigate the island, promising him a tremendous salary and his long-promised promotion to captain of the musketeers upon his return. At Belle-Isle, D'Artagnan discovers that the engineer of the fortifications is, in fact, Porthos, now the Baron du Vallon, and that's not all. The blueprints for the island, although in Porthos's handwriting, show evidence of another script that has been erased, that of Aramis. D'Artagnan later discovers that Aramis has become the bishop of Vannes, which is, coincidentally, a parish belonging to M. Fouquet. Suspecting that D'Artagnan has arrived on the king's behalf to investigate, Aramis tricks D'Artagnan into wandering around Vannes in search of Porthos, and sends Porthos on an heroic ride back to Paris to warn Fouquet of the danger. Fouquet rushes to the king, and gives him Belle-Isle as a present, thus

allaying any suspicion, and at the same time humiliating Colbert, just minutes before the usher announces someone else seeking an audience with the king.

Ten Years Later (Etext 2681): As 1661 approaches, Princess Henrietta of England arrives for her marriage, and throws the court of France into complete disorder. The jealousy of the Duke of Buckingham, who is in love with her, nearly occasions a war on the streets of Le Havre, thankfully prevented by Raoul's timely and tactful intervention. After the marriage, though, Monsieur Philip becomes horribly jealous of Buckingham, and has him exiled. Before leaving, however, the duke fights a duel with M. de Wardes at Calais. De Wardes is a malicious and spiteful man, the sworn enemy of D'Artagnan, and, by the same token, that of Athos, Aramis, Porthos, and Raoul as well. Both men are seriously wounded, and the duke is taken back to England to recover. Raoul's friend, the Comte de Guiche, is the next to succumb to Henrietta's charms, and Monsieur obtains his exile as well, though De Guiche soon effects a reconciliation. But then the king's eye falls on Madame Henrietta during the comte's absence, and this time Monsieur's jealousy has no recourse. Anne of Austria intervenes, and the king and his sister-in-law decide to pick a young lady with whom the king can pretend to be in love, the better to mask their own affair. They unfortunately select Louise de la Valliere, Raoul's fiancee. While the court is in residence at Fontainebleau, the king unwitting overhears Louise confessing her love for him while chatting with her friends

beneath the royal oak, and the king promptly forgets his affection for Madame. That same night, Henrietta overhears, at the same oak, De Guiche confessing his love for her to Raoul. The two embark on their own affair. A few days later, during a rainstorm, Louis and Louise are trapped alone together, and the whole court begins to talk of the scandal while their love affair blossoms. Aware of Louise's attachment, the king arranges for Raoul to be sent to England for an indefinite period.

Meanwhile, the struggle for power continues between Fouquet and Colbert. Although the Belle-Isle plot backfired, Colbert prompts the king to ask Fouquet for more and more money, and without his two friends to raise it for him, Fouquet is sorely pressed. The situation gets so bad that his new mistress, Madame de Belliere, must resort to selling all her jewels and her gold and silver plate. Aramis, while this is going on, has grown friendly with the governor of the Bastile, M. de Baisemeaux, a fact that Baisemeaux unwittingly reveals to D'Artagnan while inquiring of him as to Aramis's whereabouts. This further arouses the suspicions of the musketeer, who was made to look ridiculous by Aramis. He had ridden overnight at an insane pace, but arrived a few minutes after Fouquet had already presented Belle-Isle to the king. Aramis learns from the governor the location of a mysterious prisoner, who bears a remarkable resemblance to Louis XIV – in fact, the two are identical. He uses the existence of this secret to persuade a dying Franciscan monk, the general of the society of the Jesuits, to name him, Aramis,

the new general of the order. On Aramis's advice, hoping to use Louise's influence with the king to counteract Colbert's influence, Fouquet also writes a love letter to La Valliere, unfortunately undated. It never reaches its destination, however, as the servant ordered to deliver it turns out to be an agent of Colbert's.

Porthos, in the meantime, has been recovering from his midnight ride from Belle-Isle at Fouquet's residence at Saint-Mande. Athos has retired, once again to La Fere. D'Artagnan, little amused by the court's activities at Fontainebleau, and finding himself with nothing to do, has returned to Paris, and we find him again in Planchet's grocery shop.

And so, the story continues in this, the third etext of The Vicomte de Bragelonne. Enjoy!

John Bursey

Chapter I. Malaga

During all these long and noisy debates between the opposite ambitions of politics and love, one of our characters, perhaps the one least deserving of neglect, was, however, very much neglected, very much forgotten, and exceedingly unhappy. In fact, D'Artagnan – D'Artagnan, we say, for we must call him by his name, to remind our readers of his existence – D'Artagnan, we repeat, had absolutely nothing whatever to do, amidst these brilliant butterflies of fashion. After following the king during two whole days at Fontainebleau, and critically observing the various pastoral fancies and heroi-comic transformations of his sovereign, the musketeer felt that he needed something more than this to satisfy the cravings of his nature. At every moment assailed by people asking him, "How do you think this costume suits me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he would reply to them in quiet, sarcastic tones, "Why, I think you are quite as well-dressed as the best-dressed monkey to be found in the fair at Saint-Laurent." It was just such a compliment D'Artagnan would choose where he did not feel disposed to pay any other: and, whether agreeable or not, the inquirer was obliged to be satisfied with it. Whenever any one asked him, "How do you intend to dress yourself this evening?" he replied, "I shall undress myself;" at which the ladies all laughed, and a few of them blushed. But after a couple of days passed in this manner, the musketeer, perceiving that nothing

serious was likely to arise which would concern him, and that the king had completely, or, at least, appeared to have completely forgotten Paris, Saint-Mande, and Belle-Isle – that M. Colbert's mind was occupied with illuminations and fireworks – that for the next month, at least, the ladies had plenty of glances to bestow, and also to receive in exchange – D'Artagnan asked the king for leave of absence for a matter of private business. At the moment D'Artagnan made his request, his majesty was on the point of going to bed, quite exhausted from dancing.

"You wish to leave me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" inquired the king, with an air of astonishment; for Louis XIV. could never understand why any one who had the distinguished honor of being near him could wish to leave him.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "I leave you simply because I am not of the slightest service to you in anything. Ah! if I could only hold the balancing-pole while you were dancing, it would be a very different affair."

"But, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, gravely, "people dance without balancing-poles."

"Ah! indeed," said the musketeer, continuing his imperceptible tone of irony, "I had no idea such a thing was possible."

"You have not seen me dance, then?" inquired the king.

"Yes; but I always thought dancers went from easy to difficult acrobatic feats. I was mistaken; all the more greater reason, therefore, that I should leave for a time. Sire, I repeat, you have no

present occasion for my services; besides, if your majesty should have any need of me, you would know where to find me."

"Very well," said the king, and he granted him leave of absence.

We shall not look for D'Artagnan, therefore, at Fontainebleau, for to do so would be useless; but, with the permission of our readers, follow him to the Rue des Lombards, where he was located at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, in the house of our old friend Planchet. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the weather was exceedingly warm; there was only one window open, and that one belonging to a room on the *entresol*. A perfume of spices, mingled with another perfume less exotic, but more penetrating, namely, that which arose from the street, ascended to salute the nostrils of the musketeer. D'Artagnan, reclining in an immense straight-backed chair, with his legs not stretched out, but simply placed upon a stool, formed an angle of the most obtuse form that could possibly be seen. Both his arms were crossed over his head, his head reclining upon his left shoulder, like Alexander the Great. His eyes, usually so quick and intelligent in their expression, were now half-closed, and seemed fastened, as it were, upon a small corner of blue sky that was visible behind the opening of the chimneys; there was just enough blue, and no more, to fill one of the sacks of lentils, or haricots, which formed the principal furniture of the shop on the ground floor. Thus extended at his ease, and sheltered in his place of observation behind the window, D'Artagnan seemed

as if he had ceased to be a soldier, as if he were no longer an officer belonging to the palace, but was, on the contrary, a quiet, easy-going citizen in a state of stagnation between his dinner and supper, or between his supper and his bed; one of those strong, ossified brains, which have no more room for a single idea, so fiercely does animal matter keep watch at the doors of intelligence, narrowly inspecting the contraband trade which might result from the introduction into the brain of a symptom of thought. We have already said night was closing in, the shops were being lighted, while the windows of the upper apartments were being closed, and the rhythmic steps of a patrol of soldiers forming the night watch could be heard retreating. D'Artagnan continued, however, to think of nothing, except the blue corner of the sky. A few paces from him, completely in the shade, lying on his stomach, upon a sack of Indian corn, was Planchet, with both his arms under his chin, and his eyes fixed on D'Artagnan, who was either thinking, dreaming, or sleeping, with his eyes open. Planchet had been watching him for a tolerably long time, and, by way of interruption, he began by exclaiming, "Hum! hum!" But D'Artagnan did not stir. Planchet then saw that it was necessary to have recourse to more effectual means still: after a prolonged reflection on the subject, the most ingenious means that suggested itself to him under the present circumstances, was to let himself roll off the sack on to the floor, murmuring, at the same time, against himself, the word "stupid." But, notwithstanding the noise produced by Planchet's fall,

D'Artagnan, who had in the course of his existence heard many other, and very different falls, did not appear to pay the least attention to the present one. Besides, an enormous cart, laden with stones, passing from the Rue Saint-Mederic, absorbed, in the noise of its wheels, the noise of Planchet's tumble. And yet Planchet fancied that, in token of tacit approval, he saw him imperceptibly smile at the word "stupid." This emboldened him to say, "Are you asleep, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"No, Planchet, I am not *even* asleep," replied the musketeer.

"I am in despair," said Planchet, "to hear such a word as *even*."

"Well, and why not; is it not a grammatical word, Monsieur Planchet?"

"Of course, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Well!"

"Well, then, the word distresses me beyond measure."

"Tell me why you are distressed, Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"If you say that you are not *even* asleep, it is as much as to say that you have not even the consolation of being able to sleep; or, better still, it is precisely the same as telling me that you are getting bored to death."

"Planchet, you know that I am never bored."

"Except to-day, and the day before yesterday."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, it is a week since you returned here from Fontainebleau; in other words, you have no longer your orders to issue, or your men to review and maneuver. You need

the sound of guns, drums, and all that din and confusion; I, who have myself carried a musket, can easily believe that."

"Planchet," replied D'Artagnan, "I assure you I am not bored in the least in the world."

"In that case, what are you doing, lying there, as if you were dead?"

"My dear Planchet, there was, once upon a time, at the siege of La Rochelle, when I was there, when you were there, when we both were there, a certain Arab, who was celebrated for the manner in which he adjusted culverins. He was a clever fellow, although of a very odd complexion, which was the same color as your olives. Well, this Arab, whenever he had done eating or working, used to sit down to rest himself, as I am resting myself now, and smoked I cannot tell you what sort of magical leaves, in a large amber-mouthed tube; and if any officers, happening to pass, reproached him for being always asleep, he used quietly to reply: 'Better to sit down than to stand up, to lie down than to sit down, to be dead than to lie down.' He was an acutely melancholy Arab, and I remember him perfectly well, form the color of his skin, and the style of his conversation. He used to cut off the heads of Protestants with the most singular gusto!"

"Precisely; and then used to embalm them, when they were worth the trouble; and when he was thus engaged with his herbs and plants about him, he looked like a basket-maker making baskets."

"You are quite right, Planchet, he did."

"Oh! I can remember things very well, at times!"

"I have no doubt of it; but what do you think of his mode of reasoning?"

"I think it good in one sense, but very stupid in another."

"Expound your meaning, M. Planchet."

"Well, monsieur, in point of fact, then, 'better to sit down than to stand up,' is plain enough, especially when one may be fatigued," and Planchet smiled in a roguish way; "as for 'better to be lying down,' let that pass, but as for the last proposition, that it is 'better to be dead than alive,' it is, in my opinion, very absurd, my own undoubted preference being for my bed; and if you are not of my opinion, it is simply, as I have already had the honor of telling you, because you are boring yourself to death."

"Planchet, do you know M. La Fontaine?"

"The chemist at the corner of the Rue Saint-Mederic?"

"No, the writer of fables."

"Oh! *Maitre Corbeau!*"

"Exactly; well, then, I am like his hare."

"He has got a hare also, then?"

"He has all sorts of animals."

"Well, what does his hare do, then?"

"M. La Fontaine's hare thinks."

"Ah, ah!"

"Planchet, I am like that hare – I am thinking."

"You are thinking, you say?" said Planchet, uneasily.

"Yes; your house is dull enough to drive people to think; you

will admit that, I hope."

"And yet, monsieur, you have a look-out upon the street."

"Yes; and wonderfully interesting that is, of course."

"But it is no less true, monsieur, that, if you were living at the back of the house, you would bore yourself – I mean, you would think – more than ever."

"Upon my word, Planchet, I hardly know that."

"Still," said the grocer, "if your reflections are at all like those which led you to restore King Charles II. – " and Planchet finished by a little laugh which was not without its meaning.

"Ah! Planchet, my friend," returned D'Artagnan, "you are getting ambitious."

"Is there no other king to be restored, M. d'Artagnan – no second Monk to be packed up, like a salted hog, in a deal box?"

"No, my dear Planchet; all the kings are seated on their respective thrones; less comfortably so, perhaps, than I am upon this chair; but, at all events, there they are." And D'Artagnan sighed deeply.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Planchet, "you are making me very uneasy."

"You are very good, Planchet."

"I begin to suspect something."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you are getting thin."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, striking his chest which sounded like an empty cuirass, "it is impossible, Planchet."

"Ah!" said Planchet, slightly overcome; "if you were to get thin in my house – "

"Well?"

"I should do something rash."

"What would you do? Tell me."

"I should look out for the man who was the cause of all your anxieties."

"Ah! according to your account, I am anxious now."

"Yes, you are anxious; and you are getting thin, visibly getting thin. *Malaga!* if you go on getting thin, in this way, I will take my sword in my hand, and go straight to M. d'Herblay, and have it out with him."

"What!" said M. d'Artagnan, starting in his chair; "what's that you say? And what has M. d'Herblay's name to do with your groceries?"

"Just as you please. Get angry if you like, or call me names, if you prefer it; but, the deuce is in it. *I know what I know*."

D'Artagnan had, during this second outburst of Planchet's, so placed himself as not to lose a single look of his face; that is, he sat with both his hands resting on both his knees, and his head stretched out towards the grocer. "Come, explain yourself," he said, "and tell me how you could possibly utter such a blasphemy. M. d'Herblay, your old master, my friend, an ecclesiastic, a musketeer turned bishop – do you mean to say you would raise your sword against him, Planchet?"

"I could raise my sword against my own father, when I see you

in such a state as you are now."

"M. d'Herblay, a gentleman!"

"It's all the same to me whether he's a gentleman or not. He gives you the blue devils, that is all I know. And the blue devils make people get thin. *Malaga!* I have no notion of M. d'Artagnan leaving my house thinner than when he entered it."

"How does he give me the blue devils, as you call it? Come, explain, explain."

"You have had the nightmare during the last three nights."

"I?"

"Yes, you; and in your nightmare you called out, several times, 'Aramis, deceitful Aramis!'"

"Ah! I said that, did I?" murmured D'Artagnan, uneasily.

"Yes, those very words, upon my honor."

"Well, what else? You know the saying, Planchet, 'dreams go by contraries.'"

"Not so; for every time, during the last three days, when you went out, you have not once failed to ask me, on your return, 'Have you seen M. d'Herblay?' or else 'Have you received any letters for me from M. d'Herblay?'"

"Well, it is very natural I should take an interest in my old friend," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; but not to such an extent as to get thin on that account."

"Planchet, I'll get fatter; I give you my word of honor I will."

"Very well, monsieur, I accept it; for I know that when you

give your word of honor, it is sacred."

"I will not dream of Aramis any more; and I will never ask you again if there are any letters from M. d'Herblay; but on condition that you explain one thing to me."

"Tell me what it is, monsieur?"

"I am a great observer; and just now you made use of a very singular oath, which is unusual for you."

"You mean *Malaga!* I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"It is the oath I have used ever since I have been a grocer."

"Very proper, too; it is the name of a dried grape, or raisin, I believe?"

"It is my most ferocious oath; when I have once said *Malaga!* I am a man no longer."

"Still, I never knew you use that oath before."

"Very likely not, monsieur. I had a present made me of it," said Planchet; and, as he pronounced these words, he winked his eye with a cunning expression, which thoroughly awakened D'Artagnan's attention.

"Come, come, M. Planchet."

"Why, I am not like you, monsieur," said Planchet. "I don't pass my life in thinking."

"You do wrong, then."

"I mean in boring myself to death. We have but a very short time to live – why not make the best of it?"

"You are an Epicurean philosopher, I begin to think,

Planchet."

"Why not? My hand is still as steady as ever; I can write, and can weigh out my sugar and spices; my foot is firm; I can dance and walk about; my stomach has its teeth still, for I eat and digest very well; my heart is not quite hardened. Well, monsieur?"

"Well, what, Planchet?"

"Why, you see – " said the grocer, rubbing his hands together.

D'Artagnan crossed one leg over the other, and said, "Planchet, my friend, I am unnerved with extreme surprise; for you are revealing yourself to me under a perfectly new light."

Planchet, flattered in the highest degree by this remark, continued to rub his hands very hard together. "Ah, ah," he said, "because I happen to be only slow, you think me, perhaps, a positive fool."

"Very good, Planchet; very well reasoned."

"Follow my idea, monsieur, if you please. I said to myself," continued Planchet, "that, without enjoyment, there is no happiness on this earth."

"Quite true, what you say, Planchet," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"At all events, if we cannot obtain pleasure – for pleasure is not so common a thing, after all – let us, at least, get consolations of some kind or another."

"And so you console yourself?"

"Exactly so."

"Tell me how you console yourself."

"I put on a buckler for the purpose of confronting *ennui*. I

place my time at the direction of patience; and on the very eve of feeling I am going to get bored, I amuse myself."

"And you don't find any difficulty in that?"

"None."

"And you found it out quite by yourself?"

"Quite so."

"It is miraculous."

"What do you say?"

"I say, that your philosophy is not to be matched in the Christian or pagan world, in modern days or in antiquity!"

"You think so? – follow my example, then."

"It is a very tempting one."

"Do as I do."

"I could not wish for anything better; but all minds are not of the same stamp; and it might possibly happen that if I were required to amuse myself in the manner you do, I should bore myself horribly."

"Bah! at least try first."

"Well, tell me what you do."

"Have you observed that I leave home occasionally?"

"Yes."

"In any particular way?"

"Periodically."

"That's the very thing. You have noticed it, then?"

"My dear Planchet, you must understand that when people see each other every day, and one of the two absents himself, the

other misses him. Do you not feel the want of my society when I am in the country?"

"Prodigiously; that is to say, I feel like a body without a soul."

"That being understood then, proceed."

"What are the periods when I absent myself?"

"On the fifteenth and thirtieth of every month."

"And I remain away?"

"Sometimes two, sometimes three, and sometimes four days at a time."

"Have you ever given it a thought, why I was absent?"

"To look after your debts, I suppose."

"And when I returned, how did you think I looked, as far as my face was concerned?"

"Exceedingly self-satisfied."

"You admit, you say, that I always look satisfied. And what have you attributed my satisfaction to?"

"That your business was going on very well; that your purchases of rice, prunes, raw sugar, dried apples, pears, and treacle were advantageous. You were always very picturesque in your notions and ideas, Planchet; and I was not in the slightest degree surprised to find you had selected grocery as an occupation, which is of all trades the most varied, and the very pleasantest, as far as the character is concerned; inasmuch as one handles so many natural and perfumed productions."

"Perfectly true, monsieur; but you are very greatly mistaken."

"In what way?"

"In thinking that I leave here every fortnight, to collect my money or to make purchases. Ho, ho! how could you possibly have thought such a thing? Ho, ho, ho!" And Planchet began to laugh in a manner that inspired D'Artagnan with very serious misgivings as to his sanity.

"I confess," said the musketeer, "that I do not precisely catch your meaning."

"Very true, monsieur."

"What do you mean by 'very true'?"

"It must be true, since you say it; but pray, be assured that it in no way lessens my opinion of you."

"Ah, that is lucky."

"No; you are a man of genius; and whenever the question happens to be of war, tactics, surprises, or good honest blows to be dealt with, why, kings are marionettes, compared to you. But for the consolations of the mind, the proper care of the body, the agreeable things of like, if one may say so – ah! monsieur, don't talk to me about men of genius; they are nothing short of executioners."

"Good," said D'Artagnan, really fidgety with curiosity, "upon my word you interest me in the highest degree."

"You feel already less bored than you did just now, do you not?"

"I was not bored; yet since you have been talking to me, I feel more animated."

"Very good, then; that is not a bad beginning. I will cure you,

rely upon that."

"There is nothing I should like better."

"Will you let me try, then?"

"Immediately, if you like."

"Very well. Have you any horses here?"

"Yes; ten, twenty, thirty."

"Oh, there is no occasion for so many as that, two will be quite sufficient."

"They are quite at your disposal, Planchet."

"Very good; then I shall carry you off with me."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"Ah, you are asking too much."

"You will admit, however, that it is important I should know where I am going."

"Do you like the country?"

"Only moderately, Planchet."

"In that case you like town better?"

"That is as may be."

"Very well; I am going to take you to a place, half town and half country."

"Good."

"To a place where I am sure you will amuse yourself."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and more wonderful still, to a place from which you

have just returned for the purpose only, it would seem, of getting bored here."

"It is to Fontainebleau you are going, then?"

"Exactly; to Fontainebleau."

"And, in Heaven's name, what are you going to do at Fontainebleau?"

Planchet answered D'Artagnan by a wink full of sly humor.

"You have some property there, you rascal."

"Oh, a very paltry affair; a little bit of a house – nothing more."

"I understand you."

"But it is tolerable enough, after all."

"I am going to Planchet's country-seat!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Whenever you like."

"Did we not fix to-morrow?"

"Let us say to-morrow, if you like; and then, besides, to-morrow is the 14th, that is to say, the day before the one when I am afraid of getting bored; so we will look upon it as an understood thing."

"Agreed, by all means."

"You will lend me one of your horses?"

"The best I have."

"No; I prefer the gentlest of all; I never was a very good rider, as you know, and in my grocery business I have got more awkward than ever; besides – "

"Besides what?"

"Why," added Planchet, "I do not wish to fatigue myself."

"Why so?" D'Artagnan ventured to ask.

"Because I should lose half the pleasure I expect to enjoy," replied Planchet. And thereupon he rose from his sack of Indian corn, stretching himself, and making all his bones crack, one after the other, with a sort of harmony.

"Planchet! Planchet!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "I do declare that there is no sybarite upon the face of the globe who can for a moment be compared to you. Oh, Planchet, it is very clear that we have never yet eaten a ton of salt together."

"Why so, monsieur?"

"Because, even now I can scarcely say I know you," said D'Artagnan, "and because, in point of fact, I return to the opinion which, for a moment, I had formed of you that day at Boulogne, when you strangled, or did so as nearly as possible, M. de Wardes's valet, Lubin; in plain language, Planchet, that you are a man of great resources."

Planchet began to laugh with a laugh full of self-conceit; bade the musketeer good-night, and went down to his back shop, which he used as a bedroom. D'Artagnan resumed his original position upon his chair, and his brow, which had been unruffled for a moment, became more pensive than ever. He had already forgotten the whims and dreams of Planchet. "Yes," said he, taking up again the thread of his thoughts, which had been broken by the whimsical conversation in which we have just permitted our readers to participate. "Yes, yes, those three points

include everything: First, to ascertain what Baisemeaux wanted with Aramis; secondly, to learn why Aramis does not let me hear from him; and thirdly, to ascertain where Porthos is. The whole mystery lies in these three points. Since, therefore," continued D'Artagnan, "our friends tell us nothing, we must have recourse to our own poor intelligence. I must do what I can, *mordioux*, or rather *Malaga*, as Planchet would say."

Chapter II. A Letter from M. Baisemeaux

D'Artagnan, faithful to his plan, went the very next morning to pay a visit to M. de Baisemeaux. It was cleaning up or tidying day at the Bastile; the cannons were furbished up, the staircases scraped and cleaned; and the jailers seemed to be carefully engaged in polishing the very keys. As for the soldiers belonging to the garrison, they were walking about in different courtyards, under the pretense that they were clean enough. The governor, Baisemeaux, received D'Artagnan with more than ordinary politeness, but he behaved towards him with so marked a reserve of manner, that all D'Artagnan's tact and cleverness could not get a syllable out of him. The more he kept himself within bounds, the more D'Artagnan's suspicion increased. The latter even fancied he remarked that the governor was acting under the influence of a recent recommendation. Baisemeaux had not been at the Palais Royal with D'Artagnan the same cold and impenetrable man which the latter now found in the Baisemeaux of the Bastile. When D'Artagnan wished to make him talk about the urgent money matters which had brought Baisemeaux in search of D'Artagnan, and had rendered him expansive, notwithstanding what had passed on that evening, Baisemeaux pretended that he had some orders to give in the

prison, and left D'Artagnan so long alone waiting for him, that our musketeer, feeling sure that he should not get another syllable out of him, left the Bastile without waiting until Baisemeaux returned from his inspection. But D'Artagnan's suspicions were aroused, and when once that was the case, D'Artagnan could not sleep or remain quiet for a moment. He was among men what the cat is among quadrupeds, the emblem of anxiety and impatience, at the same moment. A restless cat can no more remain the same place than a silk thread wafted idly to and fro with every breath of air. A cat on the watch is as motionless as death stationed at its place of observation, and neither hunger nor thirst can draw it from its meditations. D'Artagnan, who was burning with impatience, suddenly threw aside the feeling, like a cloak which he felt too heavy on his shoulders, and said to himself that that which they were concealing from him was the very thing it was important he should know; and, consequently, he reasoned that Baisemeaux would not fail to put Aramis on his guard, if Aramis had given him any particular recommendation, and this was, in fact, the very thing that happened.

Baisemeaux had hardly had time to return from the donjon, than D'Artagnan placed himself in ambuscade close to the Rue de Petit-Musc, so as to see every one who might leave the gates of the Bastile. After he had spent an hour on the look-out from the "Golden Portcullis," under the pent-house of which he could keep himself a little in the shade, D'Artagnan observed a soldier leave the Bastile. This was, indeed, the surest indication

he could possibly have wished for, as every jailer or warder has certain days, and even certain hours, for leaving the Bastile, since all are alike prohibited from having either wives or lodgings in the castle, and can accordingly leave without exciting any curiosity; but a soldier once in barracks is kept there for four and twenty hours when on duty, – and no one knew this better than D'Artagnan. The guardsman in question, therefore, was not likely to leave his regimentals, except on an express and urgent order. The soldier, we were saying, left the Bastile at a slow and lounging pace, like a happy mortal, in fact, who, instead of mounting sentry before a wearisome guard-house, or upon a bastion no less wearisome, has the good luck to get a little liberty, in addition to a walk – both pleasures being luckily reckoned as part of his time on duty. He bent his steps towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, enjoying the fresh air and the warmth of the sun, and looking at all the pretty faces he passed. D'Artagnan followed him at a distance; he had not yet arranged his ideas as what was to be done. "I must, first of all," he thought, "see the fellow's face. A man seen is a man judged." D'Artagnan increased his pace, and, which was not very difficult, by the by, soon got in advance of the soldier. Not only did he observe that his face showed a tolerable amount of intelligence and resolution, but he noticed also that his nose was a little red. "He has a weakness for brandy, I see," said D'Artagnan to himself. At the same moment that he remarked his red nose, he saw that the soldier had a white paper in his belt.

"Good, he has a letter," added D'Artagnan. The only difficulty was to get hold of the letter. But a common soldier would, of course, be only too delighted at having been selected by M. de Baisemeaux as a special messenger, and would not be likely to sell his message. As D'Artagnan was biting his nails, the soldier continued to advance more and more into the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. "He is certainly going to Saint-Mande," he said to himself, "and I shall not be able to learn what the letter contains." It was enough to drive him wild. "If I were in uniform," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would have this fellow seized, and his letter with him. I could easily get assistance at the very first guard-house; but the devil take me if I mention my name in an affair of this kind. If I were to treat him to something to drink, his suspicions would be roused; and besides, he might drink me drunk. *Mordioux!* my wits seem to have left me," said D'Artagnan; "it is all over with me. Yet, supposing I were to attack this poor devil, make him draw his sword and kill him for the sake of his letter? No harm in that, if it were a question of a letter from a queen to a nobleman, or a letter from a cardinal to a queen; but what miserable intrigues are those of Messieurs Aramis and Fouquet with M. Colbert. A man's life for that? No, no, indeed; not even ten crowns." As he philosophized in this manner, biting first his nails, and then his mustaches, he perceived a group of archers and a commissary of the police engaged in carrying away a man of very gentlemanly exterior, who was struggling with all his might against them. The archers

had torn his clothes, and were dragging him roughly away. He begged they would lead him along more respectfully, asserting that he was a gentleman and a soldier. And observing our soldier walking in the street, he called out, "Help, comrade."

The soldier walked on with the same step towards the man who had called out to him, followed by the crowd. An idea suddenly occurred to D'Artagnan; it was his first one, and we shall find it was not a bad one either. During the time the gentleman was relating to the soldier that he had just been seized in a house as a thief, when the truth was he was only there as a lover; and while the soldier was pitying him, and offering him consolation and advice with that gravity which a French soldier has always ready whenever his vanity or his *esprit de corps* is concerned, D'Artagnan glided behind the soldier, who was closely hemmed in by the crowd, and with a rapid sweep, like a sabre slash, snatched the letter from his belt. As at this moment the gentleman with the torn clothes was pulling about the soldier, to show how the commissary of police had pulled him about, D'Artagnan effected his pillage of the letter without the slightest interference. He stationed himself about ten paces distant, behind the pillar of an adjoining house, and read on the address, "To Monsieur du Vallon, at Monsieur Fouquet's, Saint-Mande."

"Good!" he said, and then he unsealed, without tearing the letter, drew out the paper, which was folded in four, from the inside; which contained only these words:

"DEAR MONSIEUR DU VALLON, – Will you be good enough to tell Monsieur d'Herblay that *he* has been to the Bastile, and has been making inquiries.

"Your devoted

"DE BAISEMEAUX."

"Very good! all right!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "it is clear enough now. Porthos is engaged in it." Being now satisfied of what he wished to know: "*Mordioux!*" thought the musketeer, "what is to be done with that poor devil of a soldier? That hot-headed, cunning fellow, De Baisemeaux, will make him pay dearly for my trick, – if he returns without the letter, what will they do to him? Besides, I don't want the letter; when the egg has been sucked, what is the good of the shell?" D'Artagnan perceived that the commissary and the archers had succeeded in convincing the soldier, and went on their way with the prisoner, the latter being still surrounded by the crowd, and continuing his complaints. D'Artagnan advanced into the very middle of the crowd, let the letter fall, without any one having observed him, and then retreated rapidly. The soldier resumed his route towards Saint-Mande, his mind occupied with the gentleman who had implored his protection. Suddenly he thought of his letter, and, looking at his belt, saw that it was no longer there. D'Artagnan derived no little satisfaction from his sudden, terrified cry. The poor soldier in the greatest anguish of mind looked round him on every side, and at last, about twenty paces behind him, he perceived the lucky envelope. He pounced on it like a falcon

on its prey. The envelope was certainly a little dirty, and rather crumpled, but at all events the letter itself was found. D'Artagnan observed that the broken seal attracted the soldier's attention a good deal, but he finished apparently by consoling himself, and returned the letter to his belt. "Go on," said D'Artagnan, "I have plenty of time before me, so you may precede me. It appears that Aramis is not in Paris, since Baisemeaux writes to Porthos. Dear Porthos, how delighted I shall be to see him again, and to have some conversation with him!" said the Gascon. And, regulating his pace according to that of the soldier, he promised himself to arrive a quarter of an hour after him at M. Fouquet's.

Chapter III. In Which the Reader will be Delighted to Find that Porthos Has Lost Nothing of His Muscularity

D'Artagnan had, according to his usual style, calculated that every hour is worth sixty minutes, and every minute worth sixty seconds. Thanks to this perfectly exact calculation of minutes and seconds, he reached the superintendent's door at the very moment the soldier was leaving it with his belt empty. D'Artagnan presented himself at the door, which a porter with a profusely embroidered livery held half opened for him. D'Artagnan would very much have liked to enter without giving his name, but this was impossible, and so he gave it. Notwithstanding this concession, which ought to have removed every difficulty in the way, at least D'Artagnan thought so, the *concierge* hesitated; however, at the second repetition of the title, captain of the king's guards, the *concierge*, without quite leaving the passage clear for him, ceased to bar it completely. D'Artagnan understood that orders of the most positive character had been given. He decided, therefore, to tell a falsehood, – a circumstance, moreover, which did not seriously affect his peace of mind, when he saw that beyond the falsehood the safety of the state itself, or even purely and simply his own individual personal interest, might be at stake. He moreover added to the declarations

he had already made, that the soldier sent to M. du Vallon was his own messenger, and that the only object that letter had in view was to announce his intended arrival. From that moment, no one opposed D'Artagnan's entrance any further, and he entered accordingly. A valet wished to accompany him, but he answered that it was useless to take that trouble on his account, inasmuch as he knew perfectly well where M. du Vallon was. There was nothing, of course, to say to a man so thoroughly and completely informed on all points, and D'Artagnan was permitted, therefore, to do as he liked. The terraces, the magnificent apartments, the gardens, were all reviewed and narrowly inspected by the musketeer. He walked for a quarter of an hour in this more than royal residence, which included as many wonders as articles of furniture, and as many servants as there were columns and doors. "Decidedly," he said to himself, "this mansion has no other limits than the pillars of the habitable world. Is it probable Porthos has taken it into his head to go back to Pierrefonds without even leaving M. Fouquet's house?" He finally reached a remote part of the chateau inclosed by a stone wall, which was covered with a profusion of thick plants, luxuriant in blossoms as large and solid as fruit. At equal distances on the top of this wall were placed various statues in timid or mysterious attitudes. These were vestals hidden beneath the long Greek peplum, with its thick, sinuous folds; agile nymphs, covered with their marble veils, and guarding the palace with their fugitive glances. A statue of Hermes, with his finger on his lips; one of Iris,

with extended wings; another of Night, sprinkled all over with poppies, dominated the gardens and outbuildings, which could be seen through the trees. All these statues threw in white relief their profiles upon the dark ground of the tall cypresses, which darted their somber summits towards the sky. Around these cypresses were entwined climbing roses, whose flowering rings were fastened to every fork of the branches, and spread over the lower boughs and the various statues, showers of flowers of the rarest fragrance. These enchantments seemed to the musketeer the result of the greatest efforts of the human mind. He felt in a dreamy, almost poetical, frame of mind. The idea that Porthos was living in so perfect an Eden gave him a higher idea of Porthos, showing how tremendously true it is, that even the very highest orders of minds are not quite exempt from the influence of surroundings. D'Artagnan found the door, and on, or rather in the door, a kind of spring which he detected; having touched it, the door flew open. D'Artagnan entered, closed the door behind him, and advanced into a pavilion built in a circular form, in which no other sound could be heard but cascades and the songs of birds. At the door of the pavilion he met a lackey.

"It is here, I believe," said D'Artagnan, without hesitation, "that M. le Baron du Vallon is staying?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered the lackey.

"Have the goodness to tell him that M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of the king's musketeers, is waiting to see him."

D'Artagnan was introduced into the *salon*, and had not long to remain in expectation: a well-remembered step shook the floor of the adjoining room, a door opened, or rather flew open, and Porthos appeared and threw himself into his friend's arms with a sort of embarrassment which did not ill become him. "You here?" he exclaimed.

"And you?" replied D'Artagnan. "Ah, you sly fellow!"

"Yes," said Porthos, with a somewhat embarrassed smile; "yes, you see I am staying in M. Fouquet's house, at which you are not a little surprised, I suppose?"

"Not at all; why should you not be one of M. Fouquet's friends? M. Fouquet has a very large number, particularly among clever men."

Porthos had the modesty not to take the compliment to himself. "Besides," he added, "you saw me at Belle-Isle."

"A greater reason for my believing you to be one of M. Fouquet's friends."

"The fact is, I am acquainted with him," said Porthos, with a certain embarrassment of manner.

"Ah, friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how treacherously you have behaved towards me."

"In what way?" exclaimed Porthos.

"What! you complete so admirable a work as the fortifications of Belle-Isle, and you did not tell me of it!" Porthos colored. "Nay, more than that," continued D'Artagnan, "you saw me out yonder, you know I am in the king's service, and yet you could

not guess that the king, jealously desirous of learning the name of the man whose abilities had wrought a work of which he heard the most wonderful accounts, – you could not guess, I say, that the king sent me to learn who this man was?"

"What! the king sent you to learn – "

"Of course; but don't let us speak of that any more."

"Not speak of it!" said Porthos; "on the contrary, we will speak of it; and so the king knew that we were fortifying Belle-Isle?"

"Of course; does not the king know everything?"

"But he did not know who was fortifying it?"

"No, he only suspected, from what he had been told of the nature of the works, that it was some celebrated soldier or another."

"The devil!" said Porthos, "if I had only known that!"

"You would not have run away from Vannes as you did, perhaps?"

"No; what did you say when you couldn't find me?"

"My dear fellow, I reflected."

"Ah, indeed; you reflect, do you? Well, and what did that reflection lead to?"

"It led me to guess the whole truth."

"Come, then, tell me what did you guess after all?" said Porthos, settling himself into an armchair, and assuming the airs of a sphinx.

"I guessed, in the first place, that you were fortifying Belle-Isle."

"There was no great difficulty in that, for you saw me at work."

"Wait a minute; I also guessed something else, – that you were fortifying Belle-Isle by M. Fouquet's orders."

"That's true."

"But even that is not all. Whenever I feel myself in trim for guessing, I do not stop on my road; and so I guessed that M. Fouquet wished to preserve the most absolute secrecy respecting these fortifications."

"I believe that was his intention, in fact," said Porthos.

"Yes, but do you know why he wished to keep it secret?"

"In order it should not become known, perhaps," said Porthos.

"That was his principal reason. But his wish was subservient to a bit of generosity – "

"In fact," said Porthos, "I have heard it said that M. Fouquet was a very generous man."

"To a bit of generosity he wished to exhibit towards the king."

"Oh, oh!"

"You seem surprised at that?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't guess?"

"No."

"Well, I know it, then."

"You are a wizard."

"Not at all, I assure you."

"How do you know it, then?"

"By a very simple means. I heard M. Fouquet himself say so

to the king."

"Say what to the king?"

"That he fortified Belle-Isle on his majesty's account, and that he had made him a present of Belle Isle."

"And you heard M. Fouquet say that to the king?"

"In those very words. He even added: 'Belle-Isle has been fortified by an engineer, one of my friends, a man of a great deal of merit, whom I shall ask your majesty's permission to present to you.'

"'What is his name?' said the king.

"'The Baron du Vallon,' M. Fouquet replied.

"'Very well,' returned his majesty, 'you will present him to me.'"

"The king said that?"

"Upon the word of a D'Artagnan!"

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos. "Why have I not been presented, then?"

"Have they not spoken to you about this presentation?"

"Yes, certainly; but I am always kept waiting for it."

"Be easy, it will be sure to come."

"Humph! humph!" grumbled Porthos, which D'Artagnan pretended not to hear; and, changing the conversation, he said, "You seem to be living in a very solitary place here, my dear fellow?"

"I always preferred retirement. I am of a melancholy disposition," replied Porthos, with a sigh.

"Really, that is odd," said D'Artagnan, "I never remarked that before."

"It is only since I have taken to reading," said Porthos, with a thoughtful air.

"But the labors of the mind have not affected the health of the body, I trust?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"Your strength is as great as ever?"

"Too great, my friend, too great."

"Ah! I had heard that, for a short time after your arrival – "

"That I could hardly move a limb, I suppose?"

"How was it?" said D'Artagnan, smiling, "and why was it you could not move?"

Porthos, perceiving that he had made a mistake, wished to correct it. "Yes, I came from Belle-Isle upon very hard horses," he said, "and that fatigued me."

"I am no longer astonished, then, since I, who followed you, found seven or eight lying dead on the road."

"I am very heavy, you know," said Porthos.

"So that you were bruised all over."

"My marrow melted, and that made me very ill."

"Poor Porthos! But how did Aramis act towards you under those circumstances?"

"Very well, indeed. He had me attended to by M. Fouquet's own doctor. But just imagine, at the end of a week I could not breathe any longer."

"What do you mean?"

"The room was too small; I had absorbed every atom of air."

"Indeed?"

"I was told so, at least; and so I was removed into another apartment."

"Where you were able to breathe, I hope and trust?"

"Yes, more freely; but no exercise – nothing to do. The doctor pretended that I was not to stir; I, on the contrary, felt that I was stronger than ever; that was the cause of a very serious accident."

"What accident?"

"Fancy, my dear fellow, that I revolted against the directions of that ass of a doctor, and I resolved to go out, whether it suited him or not: and, consequently, I told the valet who waited on me to bring me my clothes."

"You were quite naked, then?"

"Oh, no! on the contrary, I had a magnificent dressing-gown to wear. The lackey obeyed; I dressed myself in my own clothes, which had become too large for me; but a strange circumstance had happened, – my feet had become too large."

"Yes, I quite understand."

"And my boots too small."

"You mean your feet were still swollen?"

"Exactly; you have hit it."

"*Pardieu!* And is that the accident you were going to tell me about?"

"Oh, yes; I did not make the same reflection you have done. I

said to myself: 'Since my feet have entered my boots ten times, there is no reason why they should not go in the eleventh.'"

"Allow me to tell you, my dear Porthos, that on this occasion you failed in your logic."

"In short, then, they placed me opposite to a part of the room which was partitioned; I tried to get my boot on; I pulled it with my hands, I pushed with all the strength of the muscles of my leg, making the most unheard-of efforts, when suddenly the two tags of my boot remained in my hands, and my foot struck out like a ballista."

"How learned you are in fortification, dear Porthos."

"My foot darted out like a ballista, and came against the partition, which it broke in; I really thought that, like Samson, I had demolished the temple. And the number of pictures, the quantity of china, vases of flowers, carpets, and window-panes that fell down were really wonderful."

"Indeed!"

"Without reckoning that on the other side of the partition was a small table laden with porcelain – "

"Which you knocked over?"

"Which I dashed to the other side of the room," said Porthos, laughing.

"Upon my word, it is, as you say, astonishing," replied D'Artagnan, beginning to laugh also; whereupon Porthos laughed louder than ever.

"I broke," said Porthos, in a voice half-choked from his

increasing mirth, “more than three thousand francs worth of china – ha, ha, ha!”

“Good!” said D’Artagnan.

“I smashed more than four thousand francs worth of glass! – ho, ho, ho!”

“Excellent.”

“Without counting a luster, which fell on my head and was broken into a thousand pieces – ha, ha, ha!”

“Upon your head?” said D’Artagnan, holding his sides.

“On top.”

“But your head was broken, I suppose?”

“No, since I tell you, on the contrary, my dear fellow, that it was the luster which was broken, like glass, which, in point of fact, it was.”

“Ah! the luster was glass, you say.”

“Venetian glass! a perfect curiosity, quite matchless, indeed, and weighed two hundred pounds.”

“And it fell upon your head!”

“Upon my head. Just imagine, a globe of crystal, gilded all over, the lower part beautifully encrusted, perfumes burning at the top, with jets from which flame issued when they were lighted.”

“I quite understand, but they were not lighted at the time, I suppose?”

“Happily not, or I should have been grilled prematurely.”

“And you were only knocked down flat, instead?”

"Not at all."

"How, 'not at all?'"

"Why, the luster fell on my skull. It appears that we have upon the top of our heads an exceedingly thick crust."

"Who told you that, Porthos?"

"The doctor. A sort of dome which would bear Notre-Dame."

"Bah!"

"Yes, it seems that our skulls are made in that manner."

"Speak for yourself, my dear fellow, it is your own skull that is made in that manner, and not the skulls of other people."

"Well, that may be so," said Porthos, conceitedly, "so much, however, was that the case, in my instance, that no sooner did the luster fall upon the dome which we have at the top of our head, than there was a report like a cannon, the crystal was broken to pieces, and I fell, covered from head to foot."

"With blood, poor Porthos!"

"Not at all; with perfumes, which smelt like rich creams; it was delicious, but the odor was too strong, and I felt quite giddy from it; perhaps you have experienced it sometimes yourself, D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, in inhaling the scent of the lily of the valley; so that, my poor friend, you were knocked over by the shock and overpowered by the perfumes?"

"Yes; but what is very remarkable, for the doctor told me he had never seen anything like it – "

"You had a bump on your head I suppose?" interrupted

D'Artagnan.

"I had five."

"Why five?"

"I will tell you; the luster had, at its lower extremity, five gilt ornaments; excessively sharp."

"Oh!"

"Well, these five ornaments penetrated my hair, which, as you see, I wear very thick."

"Fortunately so."

"And they made a mark on my skin. But just notice the singularity of it, these things seem really only to happen to me! Instead of making indentations, they made bumps. The doctor could never succeed in explaining that to me satisfactorily."

"Well, then, I will explain it to you."

"You will do me a great service if you will," said Porthos, winking his eyes, which, with him, was sign of the profoundest attention.

"Since you have been employing your brain in studies of an exalted character, in important calculations, and so on, the head has gained a certain advantage, so that your head is now too full of science."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. The result is, that, instead of allowing any foreign matter to penetrate the interior of the head, your bony box or skull, which is already too full, avails itself of the openings which are made in allowing this excess to escape."

"Ah!" said Porthos, to whom this explanation appeared clearer than that of the doctor.

"The five protuberances, caused by the five ornaments of the luster, must certainly have been scientific globules, brought to the surface by the force of circumstances."

"In fact," said Porthos, "the real truth is, that I felt far worse outside my head than inside. I will even confess, that when I put my hat upon my head, clapping it on my head with that graceful energy which we gentlemen of the sword possess, if my fist was not very gently applied, I experienced the most painful sensations."

"I quite believe you, Porthos."

"Therefore, my friend," said the giant, "M. Fouquet decided, seeing how slightly built the house was, to give me another lodging, and so they brought me here."

"It is the private park, I think, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Where the rendezvous are made; that park, indeed, which is so celebrated in some of those mysterious stories about the superintendent?"

"I don't know; I have had no rendezvous or heard mysterious stories myself, but they have authorized me to exercise my muscles, and I take advantage of the permission by rooting up some of the trees."

"What for?"

"To keep my hand in, and also to take some birds' nests; I find

it more convenient than climbing."

"You are as pastoral as Tyrcis, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, I like the small eggs; I like them very much better than larger ones. You have no idea how delicate an *omelette* is, if made of four or five hundred eggs of linnets, chaffinches, starlings, blackbirds, and thrushes."

"But five hundred eggs is perfectly monstrous!"

"A salad-bowl will hold them easily enough," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan looked at Porthos admiringly for full five minutes, as if he had seen him for the first time, while Porthos spread his chest out joyously and proudly. They remained in this state several minutes, Porthos smiling, and D'Artagnan looking at him. D'Artagnan was evidently trying to give the conversation a new turn. "Do you amuse yourself much here, Porthos?" he asked at last, very likely after he had found out what he was searching for.

"Not always."

"I can imagine that; but when you get thoroughly bored, by and by, what do you intend to do?"

"Oh! I shall not be here for any length of time. Aramis is waiting until the last bump on my head disappears, in order to present me to the king, who I am told cannot endure the sight of a bump."

"Aramis is still in Paris, then?"

"No."

"Whereabouts is he, then?"

"At Fontainebleau."

"Alone?"

"With M. Fouquet."

"Very good. But do you happen to know one thing?"

"No, tell it me, and then I shall know."

"Well, then, I think Aramis is forgetting you."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes; for at Fontainebleau yonder, you must know, they are laughing, dancing, banqueting, and drawing the corks of M. de Mazarin's wine in fine style. Are you aware that they have a ballet every evening there?"

"The deuce they have!"

"I assure you that your dear Aramis is forgetting you."

"Well, that is not at all unlikely, and I have myself thought so sometimes."

"Unless he is playing you a trick, the sly fellow!"

"Oh!"

"You know that Aramis is as sly as a fox."

"Yes, but to play *me* a trick – "

"Listen: in the first place, he puts you under a sort of sequestration."

"He sequestrates me! Do you mean to say I am sequestrated?"

"I think so."

"I wish you would have the goodness to prove that to me."

"Nothing easier. Do you ever go out?"

"Never."

"Do you ever ride on horseback?"

"Never."

"Are your friends allowed to come and see you?"

"Never."

"Very well, then; never to go out, never to ride on horseback, never to be allowed to see your friends, that is called being sequestrated."

"But why should Aramis sequestrate me?" inquired Porthos.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "be frank, Porthos."

"As gold."

"It was Aramis who drew the plan of the fortifications at Belle-Isle, was it not?"

Porthos colored as he said, "Yes; but that was all he did."

"Exactly, and my own opinion is that it was no very great affair after all."

"That is mine, too."

"Very good; I am delighted we are of the same opinion."

"He never even came to Belle-Isle," said Porthos.

"There now, you see."

"It was I who went to Vannes, as you may have seen."

"Say rather, as I did see. Well, that is precisely the state of the case, my dear Porthos. Aramis, who only drew the plans, wishes to pass himself off as the engineer, whilst you, who, stone by stone, built the wall, the citadel, and the bastions, he wishes to reduce to the rank of a mere builder."

"By builder, you mean mason, perhaps?"

"Mason; the very word."

"Plasterer, in fact?"

"Hodman?"

"Exactly."

"Oh, oh! my dear Aramis, you seem to think you are only five and twenty years of age still."

"Yes, and that is not all, for he believes you are fifty."

"I should have amazingly liked to have seen him at work."

"Yes, indeed."

"A fellow who has got the gout?"

"Yes."

"Who has lost three of his teeth?"

"Four."

"While I, look at mine." And Porthos, opening his large mouth very wide, displayed two rows of teeth not quite as white as snow, but even, hard, and sound as ivory.

"You can hardly believe, Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "what a fancy the king has for good teeth. Yours decide me; I will present you to the king myself."

"You?"

"Why not? Do you think I have less credit at court than Aramis?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you think I have the slightest pretensions upon the fortifications at Belle-Isle?"

"Certainly not."

"It is your own interest alone which would induce me to do it."

"I don't doubt it in the least."

"Well, I am the intimate friend of the king; and a proof of that is, that whenever there is anything disagreeable to tell him, it is I who have to do it."

"But, dear D'Artagnan, if you present me – "

"Well!"

"Aramis will be angry."

"With me?"

"No, with *me*."

"Bah! whether he or I present you, since you are to be presented, what does it matter?"

"They were going to get me some clothes made."

"Your own are splendid."

"Oh! those I had ordered were far more beautiful."

"Take care: the king likes simplicity."

"In that case, I will be simple. But what will M. Fouquet say, when he learns that I have left?"

"Are you a prisoner, then, on parole?"

"No, not quite that. But I promised him I would not leave without letting him know."

"Wait a minute, we shall return to that presently. Have you anything to do here?"

"I, nothing: nothing of any importance, at least."

"Unless, indeed, you are Aramis's representative for something of importance."

"By no means."

"What I tell you – pray, understand that – is out of interest for you. I suppose, for instance, that you are commissioned to send messages and letters to him?"

"Ah! letters – yes. I send certain letters to him."

"Where?"

"To Fontainebleau."

"Have you any letters, then?"

"But – "

"Nay, let me speak. Have you any letters, I say?"

"I have just received one for him."

"Interesting?"

"I suppose so."

"You do not read them, then?"

"I am not at all curious," said Porthos, as he drew out of his pocket the soldier's letter which Porthos had not read, but D'Artagnan had.

"Do you know what to do with it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Of course; do as I always do, send it to him."

"Not so."

"Why not? Keep it, then?"

"Did they not tell you that this letter was important?"

"Very important."

"Well, you must take it yourself to Fontainebleau."

"To Aramis?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

"And since the king is there – "

"You will profit by that."

"I shall profit by the opportunity to present you to the king."

"Ah! D'Artagnan, there is no one like you for expedients."

"Therefore, instead of forwarding to our friend any messages, which may or may not be faithfully delivered, we will ourselves be the bearers of the letter."

"I had never even thought of that, and yet it is simple enough."

"And therefore, because it is urgent, Porthos, we ought to set off at once."

"In fact," said Porthos, "the sooner we set off the less chance there is of Aramis's letter being delayed."

"Porthos, your reasoning is always accurate, and, in your case, logic seems to serve as an auxiliary to the imagination."

"Do you think so?" said Porthos.

"It is the result of your hard reading," replied D'Artagnan. "So come along, let us be off."

"But," said Porthos, "my promise to M. Fouquet?"

"Which?"

"Not to leave Saint-Mande without telling him of it."

"Ah! Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "how very young you still are."

"In what way?"

"You are going to Fontainebleau, are you not, where you will find M. Fouquet?"

"Yes."

"Probably in the king's palace?"

"Yes," repeated Porthos, with an air full of majesty.

"Well, you will accost him with these words: 'M. Fouquet, I have the honor to inform you that I have just left Saint-Mande.'"

"And," said Porthos, with the same majestic mien, "seeing me at Fontainebleau at the king's, M. Fouquet will not be able to tell me I am not speaking the truth."

"My dear Porthos, I was just on the point of opening my lips to make the same remark, but you anticipate me in everything. Oh! Porthos, how fortunately you are gifted! Years have made not the slightest impression on you."

"Not over-much, certainly."

"Then there is nothing more to say?"

"I think not."

"All your scruples are removed?"

"Quite so."

"In that case I shall carry you off with me."

"Exactly; and I will go and get my horse saddled."

"You have horses here, then?"

"I have five."

"You had them sent from Pierrefonds, I suppose?"

"No, M. Fouquet gave them to me."

"My dear Porthos, we shall not want five horses for two persons; besides, I have already three in Paris, which would make eight, and that will be too many."

"It would not be too many if I had some of my servants here; but, alas! I have not got them."

"Do you regret them, then?"

"I regret Mousqueton; I miss Mousqueton."

"What a good-hearted fellow you are, Porthos," said D'Artagnan; "but the best thing you can do is to leave your horses here, as you have left Mousqueton out yonder."

"Why so?"

"Because, by and by, it might turn out a very good thing if M. Fouquet had never given you anything at all."

"I don't understand you," said Porthos.

"It is not necessary you should understand."

"But yet – "

"I will explain to you later, Porthos."

"I'll wager it is some piece of policy or other."

"And of the most subtle character," returned D'Artagnan.

Porthos nodded his head at this word policy; then, after a moment's reflection, he added, "I confess, D'Artagnan, that I am no politician."

"I know that well."

"Oh! no one knows what you told me yourself, you, the bravest of the brave."

"What did I tell you, Porthos?"

"That every man has his day. You told me so, and I have experienced it myself. There are certain days when one feels less pleasure than others in exposing one's self to a bullet or a sword-

thrust."

"Exactly my own idea."

"And mine, too, although I can hardly believe in blows or thrusts that kill outright."

"The deuce! and yet you have killed a few in your time."

"Yes; but I have never been killed."

"Your reason is a very good one."

"Therefore, I do not believe I shall ever die from a thrust of a sword or a gun-shot."

"In that case, then, you are afraid of nothing. Ah! water, perhaps?"

"Oh! I swim like an otter."

"Of a quartan fever, then?"

"I have never had one yet, and I don't believe I ever shall; but there is one thing I will admit," and Porthos dropped his voice.

"What is that?" asked D'Artagnan, adopting the same tone of voice as Porthos.

"I must confess," repeated Porthos, "that I am horribly afraid of politics."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Upon my word, it's true," said Porthos, in a stentorian voice. "I have seen his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Richelieu, and his eminence Monsieur le Cardinal de Mazarin; the one was a red politician, the other a black politician; I never felt very much more satisfied with the one than with the other; the first struck off the heads of M. de Marillac, M. de Thou, M. de Cinq-

Mars, M. Chalais, M. de Bouteville, and M. de Montmorency; the second got a whole crowd of Frondeurs cut in pieces, and we belonged to them."

"On the contrary, we did not belong to them," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! indeed, yes; for if I unsheathed my sword for the cardinal, I struck it for the king."

"My good Porthos!"

"Well, I have done. My dread of politics is such, that if there is any question of politics in the matter, I should greatly prefer to return to Pierrefonds."

"You would be quite right, if that were the case. But with me, my dear Porthos, no politics at all, that is quite clear. You have labored hard in fortifying Belle-Isle; the king wished to know the name of the clever engineer under whose directions the works were carried out; you are modest, as all men of true genius are; perhaps Aramis wishes to put you under a bushel. But I happen to seize hold of you; I make it known who you are; I produce you; the king rewards you; and that is the only policy I have to do with."

"And the only one I will have to do with either," said Porthos, holding out his hand to D'Artagnan.

But D'Artagnan knew Porthos's grasp; he knew that, once imprisoned within the baron's five fingers, no hand ever left it without being half-crushed. He therefore held out, not his hand, but his fist, and Porthos did not even perceive the difference.

The servants talked a little with each other in an undertone, and whispered a few words, which D'Artagnan understood, but which he took very good care not to let Porthos understand. "Our friend," he said to himself, "was really and truly Aramis's prisoner. Let us now see what the result will be of the liberation of the captive."

Chapter IV. The Rat and the Cheese

D'Artagnan and Porthos returned on foot, as D'Artagnan had set out. When D'Artagnan, as he entered the shop of the Pilon d'Or, announced to Planchet that M. du Vallon would be one of the privileged travelers, and as the plume in Porthos's hat made the wooden candles suspended over the front jingle together, a melancholy presentiment seemed to eclipse the delight Planchet had promised himself for the morrow. But the grocer had a heart of gold, ever mindful of the good old times – a trait that carries youth into old age. So Planchet, notwithstanding a sort of internal shiver, checked as soon as experienced, received Porthos with respect, mingled with the tenderest cordiality. Porthos, who was a little cold and stiff in his manners at first, on account of the social difference existing at that period between a baron and a grocer, soon began to soften when he perceived so much good-feeling and so many kind attentions in Planchet. He was particularly touched by the liberty which was permitted him to plunge his great palms into the boxes of dried fruits and preserves, into the sacks of nuts and almonds, and into the drawers full of sweetmeats. So that, notwithstanding Planchet's pressing invitations to go upstairs to the *entresol*, he chose as his favorite seat, during the evening which he had to spend at Planchet's house, the shop itself, where his fingers could always fish up whatever his nose detected. The delicious figs from

Provence, filberts from the forest, Tours plums, were subjects of his uninterrupted attention for five consecutive hours. His teeth, like millstones, cracked heaps of nuts, the shells of which were scattered all over the floor, where they were trampled by every one who went in and out of the shop; Porthos pulled from the stalk with his lips, at one mouthful, bunches of the rich Muscatel raisins with their beautiful bloom, half a pound of which passed at one gulp from his mouth to his stomach. In one of the corners of the shop, Planchet's assistants, huddled together, looked at each other without venturing to open their lips. They did not know who Porthos was, for they had never seen him before. The race of those Titans who had worn the cuirasses of Hugh Capet, Philip Augustus, and Francis I. had already begun to disappear. They could hardly help thinking he might be the ogre of the fairy tale, who was going to turn the whole contents of Planchet's shop into his insatiable stomach, and that, too, without in the slightest degree displacing the barrels and chests that were in it. Cracking, munching, chewing, nibbling, sucking, and swallowing, Porthos occasionally said to the grocer:

"You do a very good business here, friend Planchet."

"He will very soon have none at all to do, if this sort of thing continues," grumbled the foreman, who had Planchet's word that he should be his successor. In the midst of his despair, he approached Porthos, who blocked up the whole of the passage leading from the back shop to the shop itself. He hoped that Porthos would rise and that this movement would distract his

devouring ideas.

"What do you want, my man?" asked Porthos, affably.

"I should like to pass you, monsieur, if it is not troubling you too much."

"Very well," said Porthos, "it does not trouble me in the least."

At the same moment he took hold of the young fellow by the waistband, lifted him off the ground, and placed him very gently on the other side, smiling all the while with the same affable expression. As soon as Porthos had placed him on the ground, the lad's legs so shook under him that he fell back upon some sacks of corks. But noticing the giant's gentleness of manner, he ventured again, and said:

"Ah, monsieur! pray be careful."

"What about?" inquired Porthos.

"You are positively putting a fiery furnace into your body."

"How is that, my good fellow?"

"All those things are very heating to the system!"

"Which?"

"Raisins, nuts, and almonds."

"Yes; but if raisins, nuts, and almonds are heating – "

"There is no doubt at all of it, monsieur."

"Honey is very cooling," said Porthos, stretching out his hand toward a small barrel of honey which was open, and he plunged the scoop with which the wants of the customers were supplied into it, and swallowed a good half-pound at one gulp.

"I must trouble you for some water now, my man," said

Porthos.

"In a pail, monsieur?" asked the lad, simply.

"No, in a water-bottle; that will be quite enough;" and raising the bottle to his mouth, as a trumpeter does his trumpet, he emptied the bottle at a single draught.

Planchet was agitated in every fibre of propriety and self-esteem. However, a worthy representative of the hospitality which prevailed in early days, he feigned to be talking very earnestly with D'Artagnan, and incessantly repeated: – "Ah! monsieur, what a happiness! what an honor!"

"What time shall we have supper, Planchet?" inquired Porthos, "I feel hungry."

The foreman clasped his hands together. The two others got under the counters, fearing Porthos might have a taste for human flesh.

"We shall only take a sort of snack here," said D'Artagnan; "and when we get to Planchet's country-seat, we will have supper."

"Ah, ah! so we are going to your country-house, Planchet," said Porthos; "so much the better."

"You overwhelm me, monsieur le baron."

The "monsieur le baron" had a great effect upon the men, who detected a personage of the highest quality in an appetite of that kind. This title, too, reassured them. They had never heard that an ogre was ever called "monsieur le baron".

"I will take a few biscuits to eat on the road," said Porthos,

carelessly; and he emptied a whole jar of aniseed biscuits into the huge pocket of his doublet.

"My shop is saved!" exclaimed Planchet.

"Yes, as the cheese was," whispered the foreman.

"What cheese?"

"The Dutch cheese, inside which a rat had made his way, and we found only the rind left."

Planchet looked all round his shop, and observing the different articles which had escaped Porthos's teeth, he found the comparison somewhat exaggerated. The foreman, who remarked what was passing in his master's mind, said, "Take care; he is not gone yet."

"Have you any fruit here?" said Porthos, as he went upstairs to the *entresol*, where it had just been announced that some refreshment was prepared.

"Alas!" thought the grocer, addressing a look at D'Artagnan full of entreaty, which the latter half understood.

As soon as they had finished eating they set off. It was late when the three riders, who had left Paris about six in the evening, arrived at Fontainebleau. The journey passed very agreeably. Porthos took a fancy to Planchet's society, because the latter was very respectful in his manners, and seemed delighted to talk to him about his meadows, his woods, and his rabbit-warrens. Porthos had all the taste and pride of a landed proprietor. When D'Artagnan saw his two companions in earnest conversation, he took the opposite side of the road, and letting his bridle drop

upon his horse's neck, separated himself from the whole world, as he had done from Porthos and from Planchet. The moon shone softly through the foliage of the forest. The breezes of the open country rose deliciously perfumed to the horse's nostrils, and they snorted and pranced along delightedly. Porthos and Planchet began to talk about hay-crops. Planchet admitted to Porthos that in the advanced years of his life, he had certainly neglected agricultural pursuits for commerce, but that his childhood had been passed in Picardy in the beautiful meadows where the grass grew as high as the knees, and where he had played under the green apple-trees covered with red-cheeked fruit; he went on to say, that he had solemnly promised himself that as soon as he should have made his fortune, he would return to nature, and end his days, as he had begun them, as near as he possibly could to the earth itself, where all men must sleep at last.

"Eh, eh!" said Porthos; "in that case, my dear Monsieur Planchet, your retirement is not far distant."

"How so?"

"Why, you seem to be in the way of making your fortune very soon."

"Well, we are getting on pretty well, I must admit," replied Planchet.

"Come, tell me what is the extent of your ambition, and what is the amount you intend to retire upon?"

"There is one circumstance, monsieur," said Planchet, without answering the question, "which occasions me a good deal of

anxiety."

"What is it?" inquired Porthos, looking all round him as if in search of the circumstance that annoyed Planchet, and desirous of freeing him from it.

"Why, formerly," said the grocer, "you used to call me Planchet quite short, and you would have spoken to me then in a much more familiar manner than you do now."

"Certainly, certainly, I should have said so formerly," replied the good-natured Porthos, with an embarrassment full of delicacy; "but formerly – "

"Formerly I was M. d'Artagnan's lackey; is not that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well if I am not quite his lackey, I am as much as ever I was his devoted servant; and more than that, since that time – "

"Well, Planchet?"

"Since that time, I have had the honor of being in partnership with him."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos. "What, has D'Artagnan gone into the grocery business?"

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, whom these words had drawn out of his reverie, and who entered into the conversation with that readiness and rapidity which distinguished every operation of his mind and body. "It was not D'Artagnan who entered into the grocery business, but Planchet who entered into a political affair with me."

"Yes," said Planchet, with mingled pride and satisfaction, "we transacted a little business which brought me in a hundred thousand francs and M. d'Artagnan two hundred thousand."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos, with admiration.

"So that, monsieur le baron," continued the grocer, "I again beg you to be kind enough to call me Planchet, as you used to do; and to speak to me as familiarly as in old times. You cannot possibly imagine the pleasure it would give me."

"If that be the case, my dear Planchet, I will do so, certainly," replied Porthos. And as he was quite close to Planchet, he raised his hand, as if to strike him on the shoulder, in token of friendly cordiality; but a fortunate movement of the horse made him miss his aim, so that his hand fell on the crupper of Planchet's horse, instead; which made the animal's legs almost give way.

D'Artagnan burst out laughing, as he said, "Take care, Planchet; for if Porthos begins to like you so much, he will caress you, and if he caresses you he will knock you as flat as a pancake. Porthos is still as strong as ever, you know."

"Oh," said Planchet, "Mousqueton is not dead, and yet monsieur le baron is very fond of him."

"Certainly," said Porthos, with a sigh which made all the three horses rear; "and I was only saying, this very morning, to D'Artagnan, how much I regretted him. But tell me, Planchet?"

"Thank you, monsieur le baron, thank you."

"Good lad, good lad! How many acres of park have you got?"

"Of park?"

"Yes; we will reckon up the meadows presently, and the woods afterwards."

"Whereabouts, monsieur?" "At your chateau."

"Oh, monsieur le baron, I have neither chateau, nor park, nor meadows, nor woods."

"What have you got, then?" inquired Porthos, "and why do you call it a country-seat?"

"I did not call it a country-seat, monsieur le baron," replied Planchet, somewhat humiliated, "but a country-box."

"Ah, ah! I understand. You are modest."

"No, monsieur le baron, I speak the plain truth. I have rooms for a couple of friends, that's all."

"But in that case, whereabouts do your friends walk?"

"In the first place, they can walk about the king's forest, which is very beautiful."

"Yes, I know the forest is very fine," said Porthos; "nearly as beautiful as my forest at Berry."

Planchet opened his eyes very wide. "Have you a forest of the same kind as the forest at Fontainebleau, monsieur le baron?" he stammered out.

"Yes; I have two, indeed, but the one at Berry is my favorite."

"Why so?" asked Planchet.

"Because I don't know where it ends; and, also, because it is full of poachers."

"How can the poachers make the forest so agreeable to you?"

"Because they hunt my game, and I hunt them – which, in

these peaceful times, is for me a sufficiently pleasing picture of war on a small scale."

They had reached this turn of conversation, when Planchet, looking up, perceived the houses at the commencement of Fontainebleau, the lofty outlines of which stood out strongly against the misty visage of the heavens; whilst, rising above the compact and irregularly formed mass of buildings, the pointed roofs of the chateau were clearly visible, the slates of which glistened beneath the light of the moon, like the scales of an immense fish. "Gentlemen," said Planchet, "I have the honor to inform you that we have arrived at Fontainebleau."

Chapter V. Planchet's Country-House

The cavaliers looked up, and saw that what Planchet had announced to them was true. Ten minutes afterwards they were in the street called the Rue de Lyon, on the opposite side of the hostelry of the Beau Paon. A high hedge of bushy elders, hawthorn, and wild hops formed an impenetrable fence, behind which rose a white house, with a high tiled roof. Two of the windows, which were quite dark, looked upon the street. Between the two, a small door, with a porch supported by a couple of pillars, formed the entrance to the house. The door was gained by a step raised a little from the ground. Planchet got off his horse, as if he intended to knock at the door; but, on second thoughts, he took hold of his horse by the bridle, and led it about thirty paces further on, his two companions following him. He then advanced about another thirty paces, until he arrived at the door of a cart-house, lighted by an iron grating; and, lifting up a wooden latch, pushed open one of the folding-doors. He entered first, leading his horse after him by the bridle, into a small courtyard, where an odor met them which revealed their close vicinity to a stable. "That smells all right," said Porthos, loudly, getting off his horse, "and I almost begin to think I am near my own cows at Pierrefonds."

"I have only one cow," Planchet hastened to say modestly.

"And I have thirty," said Porthos; "or rather, I don't exactly

know how many I have."

When the two cavaliers had entered, Planchet fastened the door behind them. In the meantime, D'Artagnan, who had dismounted with his usual agility, inhaled the fresh perfumed air with the delight a Parisian feels at the sight of green fields and fresh foliage, plucked a piece of honeysuckle with one hand, and of sweet-briar with the other. Porthos clawed hold of some peas which were twined round poles stuck into the ground, and ate, or rather browsed upon them, shells and all: and Planchet was busily engaged trying to wake up an old and infirm peasant, who was fast asleep in a shed, lying on a bed of moss, and dressed in an old stable suit of clothes. The peasant, recognizing Planchet, called him "the master," to the grocer's great satisfaction. "Stable the horses well, old fellow, and you shall have something good for yourself," said Planchet.

"Yes, yes; fine animals they are too," said the peasant. "Oh! they shall have as much as they like."

"Gently, gently, my man," said D'Artagnan, "we are getting on a little too fast. A few oats and a good bed – nothing more."

"Some bran and water for my horse," said Porthos, "for it is very warm, I think."

"Don't be afraid, gentlemen," replied Planchet; "Daddy Celestin is an old gendarme, who fought at Ivry. He knows all about horses; so come into the house." And he led the way along a well-sheltered walk, which crossed a kitchen-garden, then a small paddock, and came out into a little garden behind the

house, the principal front of which, as we have already noticed, faced the street. As they approached, they could see, through two open windows on the ground floor, which led into a sitting-room, the interior of Planchet's residence. This room, softly lighted by a lamp placed on the table, seemed, from the end of the garden, like a smiling image of repose, comfort, and happiness. In every direction where the rays of light fell, whether upon a piece of old china, or upon an article of furniture shining from excessive neatness, or upon the weapons hanging against the wall, the soft light was softly reflected; and its rays seemed to linger everywhere upon something or another, agreeable to the eye. The lamp which lighted the room, whilst the foliage of jasmine and climbing roses hung in masses from the window-frames, splendidly illuminated a damask table-cloth as white as snow. The table was laid for two persons. Amber-colored wine sparkled in a long cut-glass bottle; and a large jug of blue china, with a silver lid, was filled with foaming cider. Near the table, in a high-backed armchair, reclined, fast asleep, a woman of about thirty years of age, her face the very picture of health and freshness. Upon her knees lay a large cat, with her paws folded under her, and her eyes half-closed, purring in that significant manner which, according to feline habits, indicates perfect contentment. The two friends paused before the window in complete amazement, while Planchet, perceiving their astonishment, was in no little degree secretly delighted at it.

"Ah! Planchet, you rascal," said D'Artagnan, "I now

understand your absences."

"Oh, oh! there is some white linen!" said Porthos, in his turn, in a voice of thunder. At the sound of this gigantic voice, the cat took flight, the housekeeper woke up with a start, and Planchet, assuming a gracious air, introduced his two companions into the room, where the table was already laid.

"Permit me, my dear," he said, "to present to you Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan, my patron." D'Artagnan took the lady's hand in his in the most courteous manner, and with precisely the same chivalrous air as he would have taken Madame's.

"Monsieur le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," added Planchet. Porthos bowed with a reverence which Anne of Austria would have approved of.

It was then Planchet's turn, and he unhesitatingly embraced the lady in question, not, however, until he had made a sign as if requesting D'Artagnan's and Porthos's permission, a permission as a matter of course frankly conceded. D'Artagnan complimented Planchet, and said, "You are indeed a man who knows how to make life agreeable."

"Life, monsieur," said Planchet, laughing, "is capital which a man ought to invest as sensibly as he possibly can."

"And you get very good interest for yours," said Porthos, with a burst of laughter like a peal of thunder.

Planchet turned to his housekeeper. "You have before you," he said to her, "the two gentlemen who influenced the greatest, gayest, grandest portion of my life. I have spoken to you about

them both very frequently."

"And about two others as well," said the lady, with a very decided Flemish accent.

"Madame is Dutch?" inquired D'Artagnan. Porthos curled his mustache, a circumstance which was not lost upon D'Artagnan, who noticed everything.

"I am from Antwerp," said the lady.

"And her name is Madame Getcher," said Planchet.

"You should not call her madame," said D'Artagnan.

"Why not?" asked Planchet.

"Because it would make her seem older every time you call her so."

"Well, I call her Truchen."

"And a very pretty name too," said Porthos.

"Truchen," said Planchet, "came to me from Flanders with her virtue and two thousand florins. She ran away from a brute of a husband who was in the habit of beating her. Being myself a Picard born, I was always very fond of the Artesian women, and it is only a step from Artois to Flanders; she came crying bitterly to her godfather, my predecessor in the Rue des Lombards; she placed her two thousand florins in my establishment, which I have turned to very good account, and which have brought her in ten thousand."

"Bravo, Planchet."

"She is free and well off; she has a cow, a maid servant and old Celestin at her orders; she mends my linen, knits my winter

stockings; she only sees me every fortnight, and seems to make herself in all things tolerably happy.

"And indeed, gentlemen, I *am* very happy and comfortable," said Truchen, with perfect ingenuousness.

Porthos began to curl the other side of his mustache. "The deuce," thought D'Artagnan, "can Porthos have any intentions in that quarter?"

In the meantime Truchen had set her cook to work, had laid the table for two more, and covered it with every possible delicacy that could convert a light supper into a substantial meal, a meal into a regular feast. Fresh butter, salt beef, anchovies, tunny, a shopful of Planchet's commodities, fowls, vegetables, salad, fish from the pond and the river, game from the forest – all the produce, in fact, of the province. Moreover, Planchet returned from the cellar, laden with ten bottles of wine, the glass of which could hardly be seen for the thick coating of dust which covered them. Porthos's heart began to expand as he said, "I am hungry," and he sat himself beside Madame Truchen, whom he looked at in the most killing manner. D'Artagnan seated himself on the other side of her, while Planchet, discreetly and full of delight, took his seat opposite.

"Do not trouble yourselves," he said, "if Truchen should leave the table now and then during supper; for she will have to look after your bedrooms."

In fact, the housekeeper made her escape quite frequently, and they could hear, on the first floor above them, the creaking of

the wooden bedsteads and the rolling of the castors on the floor. While this was going on, the three men, Porthos especially, ate and drank gloriously, – it was wonderful to see them. The ten full bottles were ten empty ones by the time Truchen returned with the cheese. D'Artagnan still preserved his dignity and self-possession, but Porthos had lost a portion of his; and the mirth soon began to grow somewhat uproarious. D'Artagnan recommended a new descent into the cellar, and, as Planchet no longer walked with the steadiness of a well-trained foot-soldier, the captain of the musketeers proposed to accompany him. They set off, humming songs wild enough to frighten anybody who might be listening. Truchen remained behind at table with Porthos. While the two wine-bibbers were looking behind the firewood for what they wanted, a sharp report was heard like the impact of a pair of lips on a lady's cheek.

"Porthos fancies himself at La Rochelle," thought D'Artagnan, as they returned freighted with bottles. Planchet was singing so loudly that he was incapable of noticing anything. D'Artagnan, whom nothing ever escaped, remarked how much redder Truchen's left cheek was than her right. Porthos was sitting on Truchen's left, and was curling with both his hands both sides of his mustache at once, and Truchen was looking at him with a most bewitching smile. The sparkling wine of Anjou very soon produced a remarkable effect upon the three companions. D'Artagnan had hardly strength enough left to take a candlestick to light Planchet up his own staircase. Planchet

was pulling Porthos along, who was following Truchen, who was herself jovial enough. It was D'Artagnan who found out the rooms and the beds. Porthos threw himself into the one destined for him, after his friend had undressed him. D'Artagnan got into his own bed, saying to himself, "*Mordioux!* I had made up my mind never to touch that light-colored wine, which brings my early camp days back again. Fie! fie! if my musketeers were only to see their captain in such a state." And drawing the curtains of his bed, he added, "Fortunately enough, though, they will not see me."

"The country is very amusing," said Porthos, stretching out his legs, which passed through the wooden footboard, and made a tremendous crash, of which, however, no one in the house was capable of taking the slightest notice. By two o'clock in the morning every one was fast asleep.

Chapter VI. Showing What Could Be Seen from Planchet's House

The next morning found the three heroes sleeping soundly. Truchen had closed the outside blinds to keep the first rays of the sun from the leaden-lidded eyes of her guests, like a kind, good housekeeper. It was still perfectly dark, then, beneath Porthos's curtains and under Planchet's canopy, when D'Artagnan, awakened by an indiscreet ray of light which made its way through a peek-hole in the shutters, jumped hastily out of bed, as if he wished to be the first at a forlorn hope. He took by assault Porthos's room, which was next to his own. The worthy Porthos was sleeping with a noise like distant thunder; in the dim obscurity of the room his gigantic frame was prominently displayed, and his swollen fist hung down outside the bed upon the carpet. D'Artagnan awoke Porthos, who rubbed his eyes in a tolerably good humor. In the meantime Planchet was dressing himself, and met at their bedroom doors his two guests, who were still somewhat unsteady from their previous evening's entertainment. Although it was yet very early, the whole household was already up. The cook was mercilessly slaughtering in the poultry-yard; Celestin was gathering white cherries in the garden. Porthos, brisk and lively as ever, held out his hand to Planchet's, and D'Artagnan requested permission

to embrace Madame Truchen. The latter, to show that she bore no ill-will, approached Porthos, upon whom she conferred the same favor. Porthos embraced Madame Truchen, heaving an enormous sigh. Planchet took both his friends by the hand.

"I am going to show you over the house," he said; "when we arrived last night it was as dark as an oven, and we were unable to see anything; but in broad daylight, everything looks different, and you will be satisfied, I hope."

"If we begin by the view you have here," said D'Artagnan, "that charms me beyond everything; I have always lived in royal mansions, you know, and royal personages have tolerably sound ideas upon the selection of points of view."

"I am a great stickler for a good view myself," said Porthos. "At my Chateau de Pierrefonds, I have had four avenues laid out, and at the end of each is a landscape of an altogether different character from the others."

"You shall see *my* prospect," said Planchet; and he led his two guests to a window.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "this is the Rue de Lyon."

"Yes, I have two windows on this side, a paltry, insignificant view, for there is always that bustling and noisy inn, which is a very disagreeable neighbor. I had four windows here, but I bricked up two."

"Let us go on," said D'Artagnan.

They entered a corridor leading to the bedrooms, and Planchet pushed open the outside blinds.

"Hollo! what is that out yonder?" said Porthos.

"The forest," said Planchet. "It is the horizon, – a thick line of green, which is yellow in the spring, green in the summer, red in the autumn, and white in the winter."

"All very well, but it is like a curtain, which prevents one seeing a greater distance."

"Yes," said Planchet; "still, one can see, at all events, everything that intervenes."

"Ah, the open country," said Porthos. "But what is that I see out there, – crosses and stones?"

"Ah, that is the cemetery," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Precisely," said Planchet; "I assure you it is very curious. Hardly a day passes that some one is not buried there; for Fontainebleau is by no means an inconsiderable place. Sometimes we see young girls clothed in white carrying banners; at others, some of the town-council, or rich citizens, with choristers and all the parish authorities; and then, too, we see some of the officers of the king's household."

"I should not like that," said Porthos.

"There is not much amusement in it, at all events," said D'Artagnan.

"I assure you it encourages religious thoughts," replied Planchet.

"Oh, I don't deny that."

"But," continued Planchet, "we must all die one day or another, and I once met with a maxim somewhere which I have

remembered, that the thought of death is a thought that will do us all good."

"I am far from saying the contrary," said Porthos.

"But," objected D'Artagnan, "the thought of green fields, flowers, rivers, blue horizons, extensive and boundless plains, is not likely to do us good."

"If I had any, I should be far from rejecting them," said Planchet; "but possessing only this little cemetery, full of flowers, so moss-grown, shady, and quiet, I am contented with it, and I think of those who live in town, in the Rue des Lombards, for instance, and who have to listen to the rumbling of a couple of thousand vehicles every day, and to the soulless tramp, tramp, tramp of a hundred and fifty thousand foot-passengers."

"But living," said Porthos; "living, remember that."

"That is exactly the reason," said Planchet, timidly, "why I feel it does me good to contemplate a few dead."

"Upon my word," said D'Artagnan, "that fellow Planchet is born a philosopher as well as a grocer."

"Monsieur," said Planchet, "I am one of those good-humored sort of men whom Heaven created for the purpose of living a certain span of days, and of considering all good they meet with during their transitory stay on earth."

D'Artagnan sat down close to the window, and as there seemed to be something substantial in Planchet's philosophy, he mused over it.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Planchet, "if I am not mistaken, we are

going to have a representation now, for I think I heard something like chanting."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "I hear singing too."

"Oh, it is only a burial of a very poor description," said Planchet, disdainfully; "the officiating priest, the beadle, and only one chorister boy, nothing more. You observe, messieurs, that the defunct lady or gentleman could not have been of very high rank."

"No; no one seems to be following the coffin."

"Yes," said Porthos; "I see a man."

"You are right; a man wrapped in a cloak," said D'Artagnan.

"It's not worth looking at," said Planchet.

"I find it interesting," said D'Artagnan, leaning on the window-sill.

"Come, come, you are beginning to take a fancy to the place already," said Planchet, delightedly; "it is exactly my own case. I was so melancholy at first that I could do nothing but make the sign of the cross all day, and the chants were like so many nails being driven into my head; but now, they lull me to sleep, and no bird I have ever seen or heard can sing better than those which are to be met with in this cemetery."

"Well," said Porthos, "this is beginning to get a little dull for me, and I prefer going downstairs."

Planchet with one bound was beside his guest, whom he offered to lead into the garden.

"What!" said Porthos to D'Artagnan, as he turned round, "are

you going to remain here?"

"Yes, I will join you presently."

"Well, M. D'Artagnan is right, after all," said Planchet: "are they beginning to bury yet?"

"Not yet."

"Ah! yes, the grave-digger is waiting until the cords are fastened round the bier. But, see, a woman has just entered the cemetery at the other end."

"Yes, yes, my dear Planchet," said D'Artagnan, quickly, "leave me, leave me; I feel I am beginning already to be much comforted by my meditations, so do not interrupt me."

Planchet left, and D'Artagnan remained, devouring with his eager gaze from behind the half-closed blinds what was taking place just before him. The two bearers of the corpse had unfastened the straps by which they carried the litter, and were letting their burden glide gently into the open grave. At a few paces distant, the man with the cloak wrapped round him, the only spectator of this melancholy scene, was leaning with his back against a large cypress-tree, and kept his face and person entirely concealed from the grave-diggers and the priests; the corpse was buried in five minutes. The grave having been filled up, the priests turned away, and the grave-digger having addressed a few words to them, followed them as they moved away. The man in the mantle bowed as they passed him, and put a piece of gold into the grave-digger's hand.

"*Mordioux!*" murmured D'Artagnan; "it is Aramis himself."

Aramis, in fact, remained alone, on that side at least; for hardly had he turned his head when a woman's footsteps, and the rustling of her dress, were heard in the path close to him. He immediately turned round, and took off his hat with the most ceremonious respect; he led the lady under the shelter of some walnut and lime trees, which overshadowed a magnificent tomb.

"Ah! who would have thought it," said D'Artagnan; "the bishop of Vannes at a rendezvous! He is still the same Abbe Aramis as he was at Noisy-le-Sec. Yes," he added, after a pause; "but as it is in a cemetery, the rendezvous is sacred." But he almost laughed.

The conversation lasted for fully half an hour. D'Artagnan could not see the lady's face, for she kept her back turned towards him; but he saw perfectly well, by the erect attitude of both the speakers, by their gestures, by the measured and careful manner with which they glanced at each other, either by way of attack or defense, that they must be conversing about any other subject than of love. At the end of the conversation the lady rose, and bowed profoundly to Aramis.

"Oh, oh," said D'Artagnan; "this rendezvous finishes like one of a very tender nature though. The cavalier kneels at the beginning, the young lady by and by gets tamed down, and then it is she who has to supplicate. Who is this lady? I would give anything to ascertain."

This seemed impossible, however, for Aramis was the first to leave; the lady carefully concealed her head and face, and then

immediately departed. D'Artagnan could hold out no longer; he ran to the window which looked out on the Rue de Lyon, and saw Aramis entering the inn. The lady was proceeding in quite an opposite direction, and seemed, in fact, to be about to rejoin an equipage, consisting of two led horses and a carriage, which he could see standing close to the borders of the forest. She was walking slowly, her head bent down, absorbed in the deepest meditation.

"*Mordioux! Mordioux!* I must and will learn who that woman is," said the musketeer again; and then, without further deliberation, he set off in pursuit of her. As he was going along, he tried to think how he could possibly contrive to make her raise her veil. "She is not young," he said, "and is a woman of high rank in society. I ought to know that figure and peculiar style of walk." As he ran, the sound of his spurs and of his boots upon the hard ground of the street made a strange jingling noise; a fortunate circumstance in itself, which he was far from reckoning upon. The noise disturbed the lady; she seemed to fancy she was being either followed or pursued, which was indeed the case, and turned round. D'Artagnan started as if he had received a charge of small shot in his legs, and then turning suddenly round as if he were going back the same way he had come, he murmured, "Madame de Chevreuse!" D'Artagnan would not go home until he had learnt everything. He asked Celestin to inquire of the grave-digger whose body it was they had buried that morning.

"A poor Franciscan mendicant friar," replied the latter, "who

had not even a dog to love him in this world, and to accompany him to his last resting-place."

"If that were really the case," thought D'Artagnan, "we should not have found Aramis present at his funeral. The bishop of Vannes is not precisely a dog as far as devotion goes: his scent, however, is quite as keen, I admit."

Chapter VII. How Porthos, Truchen, and Planchet Parted with Each Other on Friendly Terms, Thanks to D'Artagnan

There was good living in Planchet's house. Porthos broke a ladder and two cherry-trees, stripped the raspberry-bushes, and was only unable to succeed in reaching the strawberry-beds on account, as he said, of his belt. Truchen, who had become quite sociable with the giant, said that it was not the belt so much as his corporation; and Porthos, in a state of the highest delight, embraced Truchen, who gathered him a pailful of the strawberries, and made him eat them out of her hands. D'Artagnan, who arrived in the midst of these little innocent flirtations, scolded Porthos for his indolence, and silently pitied Planchet. Porthos breakfasted with a very good appetite, and when he had finished, he said, looking at Truchen, "I could make myself very happy here." Truchen smiled at his remark, and so did Planchet, but not without embarrassment.

D'Artagnan then addressed Porthos: "You must not let the delights of Capua make you forget the real object of our journey to Fontainebleau."

"My presentation to the king?"

"Certainly. I am going to take a turn in the town to get everything ready for that. Do not think of leaving the house, I beg."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Porthos.

Planchet looked at D'Artagnan nervously.

"Will you be away long?" he inquired.

"No, my friend; and this very evening I will release you from two troublesome guests."

"Oh! Monsieur d'Artagnan! can you say – "

"No, no; you are a noble-hearted fellow, but your house is very small. Such a house, with half a dozen acres of land, would be fit for a king, and make him very happy, too. But you were not born a great lord."

"No more was M. Porthos," murmured Planchet.

"But he has become so, my good fellow; his income has been a hundred thousand francs a year for the last twenty years, and for the last fifty years Porthos has been the owner of a couple of fists and a backbone, which are not to be matched throughout the whole realm of France. Porthos is a man of the very greatest consequence compared to you, and… well, I need say no more, for I know you are an intelligent fellow."

"No, no, monsieur, explain what you mean."

"Look at your orchard, how stripped it is, how empty your larder, your bedstead broken, your cellar almost exhausted, look too… at Madame Truchen – "

"Oh! my goodness gracious!" said Planchet.

"Madame Truchen is an excellent person," continued D'Artagnan, "but keep her for yourself, do you understand?" and he slapped him on the shoulder.

Planchet at this moment perceived Porthos and Truchen sitting close together in an arbor; Truchen, with a grace of manner peculiarly Flemish, was making a pair of earrings for Porthos out of a double cherry, while Porthos was laughing as amorously as Samson in the company of Delilah. Planchet pressed D'Artagnan's hand, and ran towards the arbor. We must do Porthos the justice to say that he did not move as they approached, and, very likely, he did not think he was doing any harm. Nor indeed did Truchen move either, which rather put Planchet out; but he, too, had been so accustomed to see fashionable folk in his shop, that he found no difficulty in putting a good countenance on what seemed disagreeable or rude. Planchet seized Porthos by the arm, and proposed to go and look at the horses, but Porthos pretended he was tired. Planchet then suggested that the Baron du Vallon should taste some noyeau of his own manufacture, which was not to be equaled anywhere; an offer the baron immediately accepted; and, in this way, Planchet managed to engage his enemy's attention during the whole of the day, by dint of sacrificing his cellar, in preference to his *amour propre*. Two hours afterwards D'Artagnan returned.

"Everything is arranged," he said; "I saw his majesty at the very moment he was setting off for the chase; the king expects us this evening."

"The king expects *me!*" cried Porthos, drawing himself up. It is a sad thing to have to confess, but a man's heart is like an ocean billow; for, from that very moment Porthos ceased to look at Madame Truchen in that touching manner which had so softened her heart. Planchet encouraged these ambitious leanings as best as he could. He talked over, or rather gave exaggerated accounts of all the splendors of the last reign, its battles, sieges, and grand court ceremonies. He spoke of the luxurious display which the English made; the prizes the three brave companions carried off; and how D'Artagnan, who at the beginning had been the humblest of the four, finished by becoming the leader. He fired Porthos with a generous feeling of enthusiasm by reminding him of his early youth now passed away; he boasted as much as he could of the moral life this great lord had led, and how religiously he respected the ties of friendship; he was eloquent, and skillful in his choice of subjects. He tickled Porthos, frightened Truchen, and made D'Artagnan think. At six o'clock, the musketeer ordered the horses to be brought round, and told Porthos to get ready. He thanked Planchet for his kind hospitality, whispered a few words about a post he might succeed in obtaining for him at court, which immediately raised Planchet in Truchen's estimation, where the poor grocer – so good, so generous, so devoted – had become much lowered ever since the appearance and comparison with him of the two great gentlemen. Such, however, is a woman's nature; they are anxious to possess what they have not got, and disdain it as soon as it is acquired. After

having rendered this service to his friend Planchet, D'Artagnan said in a low tone of voice to Porthos: "That is a very beautiful ring you have on your finger."

"It is worth three hundred pistoles," said Porthos.

"Madame Truchen will remember you better if you leave her that ring," replied D'Artagnan, a suggestion which Porthos seemed to hesitate to adopt.

"You think it is not beautiful enough, perhaps," said the musketeer. "I understand your feelings; a great lord such as you would not think of accepting the hospitality of an old servant without paying him most handsomely for it: but I am sure that Planchet is too good-hearted a fellow to remember that you have an income of a hundred thousand francs a year."

"I have more than half a mind," said Porthos, flattered by the remark, "to make Madame Truchen a present of my little farm at Bracieux; it has twelve acres."

"It is too much, my good Porthos, too much just at present… Keep it for a future occasion." He then took the ring off Porthos's finger, and approaching Truchen, said to her: – "Madame, monsieur le baron hardly knows how to entreat you, out of your regard for him, to accept this little ring. M. du Vallon is one of the most generous and discreet men of my acquaintance. He wished to offer you a farm that he has at Bracieux, but I dissuaded him from it."

"Oh!" said Truchen, looking eagerly at the diamond.

"Monsieur le baron!" exclaimed Planchet, quite overcome.

"My good friend," stammered out Porthos, delighted at having been so well represented by D'Artagnan. These several exclamations, uttered at the same moment, made quite a pathetic winding-up of a day which might have finished in a very ridiculous manner. But D'Artagnan was there, and, on every occasion, wheresoever D'Artagnan exercised any control, matters ended only just in the very way he wished and willed. There were general embracings; Truchen, whom the baron's munificence had restored to her proper position, very timidly, and blushing all the while, presented her forehead to the great lord with whom she had been on such very pretty terms the evening before. Planchet himself was overcome by a feeling of genuine humility. Still, in the same generosity of disposition, Porthos would have emptied his pockets into the hands of the cook and of Celestin; but D'Artagnan stopped him.

"No," he said, "it is now my turn." And he gave one pistole to the woman and two to the man; and the benedictions which were showered down upon them would have rejoiced the heart of Harpagon himself, and have rendered even him a prodigal.

D'Artagnan made Planchet lead them to the chateau, and introduced Porthos into his own apartment, where he arrived safely without having been perceived by those he was afraid of meeting.

Chapter VIII. The Presentation of Porthos at Court

At seven o'clock the same evening, the king gave an audience to an ambassador from the United Provinces, in the grand reception-room. The audience lasted a quarter of an hour. His majesty afterwards received those who had been recently presented, together with a few ladies, who paid their respects first. In one corner of the salon, concealed behind a column, Porthos and D'Artagnan were conversing together, waiting until their turn arrived.

"Have you heard the news?" inquired the musketeer of his friend.

"No!"

"Well, look, then." Porthos raised himself on tiptoe, and saw M. Fouquet in full court dress, leading Aramis towards the king.

"Aramis!" said Porthos.

"Presented to the king by M. Fouquet."

"Ah!" ejaculated Porthos.

"For having fortified Belle-Isle," continued D'Artagnan.

"And I?"

"You – oh, you! as I have already had the honor of telling you, are the good-natured, kind-hearted Porthos; and so they begged you to take care of Saint-Mande a little."

"Ah!" repeated Porthos.

"But, happily, I was there," said D'Artagnan, "and presently it will be *my* turn."

At this moment Fouquet addressed the king.

"Sire," he said, "I have a favor to solicit of your majesty. M. d'Herblay is not ambitious, but he knows when he can be of service. Your majesty needs a representative at Rome, who would be able to exercise a powerful influence there; may I request a cardinal's hat for M. d'Herblay?" The king started. "I do not often solicit anything of your majesty," said Fouquet.

"That is a reason, certainly," replied the king, who always expressed any hesitation he might have in that manner, and to which remark there was nothing to say in reply.

Fouquet and Aramis looked at each other. The king resumed: "M. d'Herblay can serve us equally well in France; an archbishopric, for instance."

"Sire," objected Fouquet, with a grace of manner peculiarly his own, "your majesty overwhelms M. d'Herblay; the archbishopric may, in your majesty's extreme kindness, be conferred in addition to the hat; the one does not exclude the other."

The king admired the readiness which he displayed, and smiled, saying: "D'Artagnan himself could not have answered better." He had no sooner pronounced the name than D'Artagnan appeared.

"Did your majesty call me?" he said.

Aramis and Fouquet drew back a step, as if they were about to retire.

"Will your majesty allow me," said D'Artagnan quickly, as he led forward Porthos, "to present to your majesty M. le Baron du Vallon, one of the bravest gentlemen of France?"

As soon as Aramis saw Porthos, he turned as pale as death, while Fouquet clenched his hands under his ruffles. D'Artagnan smiled blandly at both of them, while Porthos bowed, visibly overcome before the royal presence.

"Porthos here?" murmured Fouquet in Aramis's ear.

"Hush! deep treachery at work," hissed the latter.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "it is more than six years ago I ought to have presented M. du Vallon to your majesty; but certain men resemble stars, they move not one inch unless their satellites accompany them. The Pleiades are never disunited, and that is the reason I have selected, for the purpose of presenting him to you, the very moment when you would see M. d'Herblay by his side."

Aramis almost lost countenance. He looked at D'Artagnan with a proud, haughty air, as though willing to accept the defiance the latter seemed to throw down.

"Ah! these gentlemen are good friends, then?" said the king.

"Excellent friends, sire; the one can answer for the other. Ask M. de Vannes now in what manner Belle-Isle was fortified?" Fouquet moved back a step.

"Belle-Isle," said Aramis, coldly, "was fortified by that

gentleman," and he indicated Porthos with his hand, who bowed a second time. Louis could not withhold his admiration, though at the same time his suspicions were aroused.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "but ask monsieur le baron whose assistance he had in carrying the works out?"

"Aramis's," said Porthos, frankly; and he pointed to the bishop.

"What the deuce does all this mean?" thought the bishop, "and what sort of a termination are we to expect to this comedy?"

"What!" exclaimed the king, "is the cardinal's, I mean this bishop's, name *Aramis?*"

"His *nom de guerre*," said D'Artagnan.

"My nickname," said Aramis.

"A truce to modesty!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "beneath the priest's robe, sire, is concealed the most brilliant officer, a gentleman of the most unparalleled intrepidity, and the wisest theologian in your kingdom."

Louis raised his head. "And an engineer, also, it appears," he said, admiring Aramis's calm, imperturbable self-possession.

"An engineer for a particular purpose, sire," said the latter.

"My companion in the musketeers, sire," said D'Artagnan, with great warmth of manner, "the man who has more than a hundred times aided your father's ministers by his advice – M. d'Herblay, in a word, who, with M. du Vallon, myself, and M. le Comte de la Fere, who is known to your majesty, formed that quartette which was a good deal talked about during the late

king's reign, and during your majesty's minority."

"And who fortified Belle-Isle?" the king repeated, in a significant tone.

Aramis advanced and bowed: "In order to serve the son as I served the father."

D'Artagnan looked very narrowly at Aramis while he uttered these words, which displayed so much true respect, so much warm devotion, such entire frankness and sincerity, that even he, D'Artagnan, the eternal doubter, he, the almost infallible in judgment, was deceived by it. "A man who lies cannot speak in such a tone as that," he said.

Louis was overcome by it. "In that case," he said to Fouquet, who anxiously awaited the result of this proof, "the cardinal's hat is promised. Monsieur d'Herblay, I pledge you my honor that the first promotion shall be yours. Thank M. Fouquet for it." Colbert overheard these words; they stung him to the quick, and he left the salon abruptly. "And you, Monsieur du Vallon," said the king, "what have you to ask? I am truly pleased to have it in my power to acknowledge the services of those who were faithful to my father."

"Sire – " began Porthos, but he was unable to proceed with what he was going to say.

"Sire," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this worthy gentleman is utterly overpowered by your majesty's presence, he who so valiantly sustained the looks and the fire of a thousand foes. But, knowing what his thoughts are, I – who am more accustomed

to gaze upon the sun – can translate them: he needs nothing, absolutely nothing; his sole desire is to have the happiness of gazing upon your majesty for a quarter of an hour."

"You shall sup with me this evening," said the king, saluting Porthos with a gracious smile.

Porthos became crimson from delight and pride. The king dismissed him, and D'Artagnan pushed him into the adjoining apartment, after he had embraced him warmly.

"Sit next to me at table," said Porthos in his ear.

"Yes, my friend."

"Aramis is annoyed with me, I think."

"Aramis has never liked you so much as he does now. Fancy, it was I who was the means of his getting the cardinal's hat."

"Of course," said Porthos. "By the by, does the king like his guests to eat much at his table?"

"It is a compliment to himself if you do," said D'Artagnan, "for he himself possesses a royal appetite."

Chapter IX. Explanations

Aramis cleverly managed to effect a diversion for the purpose of finding D'Artagnan and Porthos. He came up to the latter, behind one of the columns, and, as he pressed his hand, said, "So you have escaped from my prison?"

"Do not scold him," said D'Artagnan; "it was I, dear Aramis, who set him free."

"Ah! my friend," replied Aramis, looking at Porthos, "could you not have waited with a little more patience?"

D'Artagnan came to the assistance of Porthos, who already began to breathe hard, in sore perplexity.

"You see, you members of the Church are great politicians; we mere soldiers come at once to the point. The facts are these: I went to pay Baisemeaux a visit – "

Aramis pricked up his ears at this announcement.

"Stay!" said Porthos; "you make me remember that I have a letter from Baisemeaux for you, Aramis." And Porthos held out the bishop the letter we have already seen. Aramis begged to be allowed to read it, and read it without D'Artagnan feeling in the slightest degree embarrassed by the circumstance that he was so well acquainted with the contents of it. Besides, Aramis's face was so impenetrable, that D'Artagnan could not but admire him more than ever; after he had read it, he put the letter into his pocket with the calmest possible air.

"You were saying, captain?" he observed.

"I was saying," continued the musketeer, "that I had gone to pay Baisemeaux a visit on his majesty's service."

"On his majesty's service?" said Aramis.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "and, naturally enough, we talked about you and our friends. I must say that Baisemeaux received me coldly; so I soon took my leave of him. As I was returning, a soldier accosted me, and said (no doubt as he recognized me, notwithstanding I was in private clothes), 'Captain, will you be good enough to read me the name written on this envelope?' and I read, 'To Monsieur du Vallon, at M. Fouquet's house, Saint-Mande.' The deuce, I said to myself, Porthos has not returned, then, as I fancied, to Bell-Isle, or to Pierrefonds, but is at M. Fouquet's house, at Saint-Mande; and as M. Fouquet is not at Saint-Mande, Porthos must be quite alone, or, at all events, with Aramis; I will go and see Porthos, and I accordingly went to see Porthos."

"Very good," said Aramis, thoughtfully.

"You never told me that," said Porthos.

"I had no time, my friend."

"And you brought back Porthos with you to Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, to Planchet's house."

"Does Planchet live at Fontainebleau?" inquired Aramis.

"Yes, near the cemetery," said Porthos, thoughtlessly.

"What do you mean by 'near the cemetery?'" said Aramis, suspiciously.

"Come," thought the musketeer, "since there is to be a squabble, let us take advantage of it."

"Yes, the cemetery," said Porthos. "Planchet is a very excellent fellow, who makes very excellent preserves; but his house has windows which look out upon the cemetery. And a confoundedly melancholy prospect it is! So this morning – "

"This morning?" said Aramis, more and more excited.

D'Artagnan turned his back to them, and walked to the window, where he began to play a march upon one of the panes of glass.

"Yes, this morning we saw a man buried there."

"Ah!"

"Very depressing, was it not? I should never be able to live in a house where burials can always be seen from the window. D'Artagnan, on the contrary, seems to like it very much."

"So D'Artagnan saw it as well?"

"Not simply *saw* it; he literally never took his eyes off the whole time."

Aramis started, and turned to look at the musketeer, but the latter was engaged in earnest conversation with Saint-Aignan. Aramis continued to question Porthos, and when he had squeezed all the juice out of this enormous lemon, he threw the peel aside. He turned towards his friend D'Artagnan, and clapping him on the shoulder, when Saint-Aignan had left him, the king's supper having been announced, said, "D'Artagnan."

"Yes, my dear fellow," he replied.

"We do not sup with his majesty, I believe?"

"Well? —*we* do."

"Can you give me ten minutes' conversation?"

"Twenty, if you like. His majesty will take quite that time to get properly seated at table."

"Where shall we talk, then?"

"Here, upon these seats if you like; the king has left, we can sit down, and the apartment is empty."

"Let us sit down, then."

They sat down, and Aramis took one of D'Artagnan's hands in his.

"Tell me, candidly, my dear friend, whether you have not counseled Porthos to distrust me a little?"

"I admit, I have, but not as you understand it. I saw that Porthos was bored to death, and I wished, by presenting him to the king, to do for him, and for you, what you would never do for yourselves."

"What is that?"

"Speak in your own praise."

"And you have done it most nobly; I thank you."

"And I brought the cardinal's hat a little nearer, just as it seemed to be retreating from you."

"Ah! I admit that," said Aramis, with a singular smile, "you are, indeed, not to be matched for making your friends' fortunes for them."

"You see, then, that I only acted with the view of making

Porthos's fortune for him."

"I meant to have done that myself; but your arm reaches farther than ours."

It was now D'Artagnan's turn to smile.

"Come," said Aramis, "we ought to deal truthfully with each other. Do you still love me, D'Artagnan?"

"The same as I used to do," replied D'Artagnan, without compromising himself too much by this reply.

"In that case, thanks; and now, for the most perfect frankness," said Aramis; "you visited Belle-Isle on behalf of the king?"

"*Pardieu!*"

"You wished to deprive us of the pleasure of offering Bell-Isle completely fortified to the king."

"But before I could deprive you of that pleasure, I ought to have been made acquainted with your intention of doing so."

"You came to Belle-Isle without knowing anything?"

"Of you! yes. How the devil could I imagine that Aramis had become so clever an engineer as to be able to fortify like Polybius, or Archimedes?"

"True. And yet you smelt me out over yonder?"

"Oh! yes."

"And Porthos, too?"

"I did not divine that Aramis was an engineer. I was only able to guess that Porthos might have become one. There is a saying, one becomes an orator, one is born a poet; but it has never been said, one is born Porthos, and one becomes an engineer."

"Your wit is always amusing," said Aramis, coldly.

"Well, I will go on."

"Do. When you found out our secret, you made all the haste you could to communicate it to the king."

"I certainly made as much haste as I could, since I saw that you were making still more. When a man weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, as Porthos does, rides post; when a gouty prelate – I beg your pardon, but you yourself told me you were so – when a prelate scours the highway – I naturally suppose that my two friends, who did not wish to be communicative with me, had certain matters of the highest importance to conceal from me, and so I made as much haste as my leanness and the absence of gout would allow."

"Did it not occur to you, my dear friend, that you might be rendering Porthos and myself a very sad service?"

"Yes, I thought it not unlikely; but you and Porthos made me play a very ridiculous part at Belle-Isle."

"I beg your pardon," said Aramis.

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan.

"So that," pursued Aramis, "you now know everything?"

"No, indeed."

"You know I was obliged to inform M. Fouquet of what had happened, in order that he would be able to anticipate what you might have to tell the king?"

"That is rather obscure."

"Not at all: M. Fouquet has his enemies – you will admit that,

I suppose."

"Certainly."

"And one in particular."

"A dangerous one?"

"A mortal enemy. Well, in order to counteract that man's influence, it was necessary that M. Fouquet should give the king a proof of his great devotion to him, and of his readiness to make the greatest sacrifices. He surprised his majesty by offering him Belle-Isle. If you had been the first to reach Paris, the surprise would have been destroyed, it would have looked as if we had yielded to fear."

"I understand."

"That is the whole mystery," said Aramis, satisfied that he had at last quite convinced the musketeer.

"Only," said the latter, "it would have been more simple to have taken me aside, and said to me, 'My dear D'Artagnan, we are fortifying Belle-Isle, and intend to offer it to the king. Tell us frankly, for whom you are acting. Are you a friend of M. Colbert, or of M. Fouquet?' Perhaps I should not have answered you, but you would have added, – 'Are you my friend?' I should have said 'Yes.'" Aramis hung down his head. "In this way," continued D'Artagnan, "you would have paralyzed my movements, and I should have gone to the king, and said, 'Sire, M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, and exceedingly well, too; but here is a note, which the governor of Belle-Isle gave me for your majesty;' or, 'M. Fouquet is about to wait upon your majesty to explain his

intentions with regard to it.' I should not have been placed in an absurd position; you would have enjoyed the surprise so long planned, and we should not have had any occasion to look askant at each other when we met."

"While, on the contrary," replied Aramis, "you have acted altogether as one friendly to M. Colbert. And you really are a friend of his, I suppose?"

"Certainly not, indeed!" exclaimed the captain. "M. Colbert is a mean fellow, and I hate him as I used to hate Mazarin, but without fearing him."

"Well, then," said Aramis, "I love M. Fouquet, and his interests are mine. You know my position. I have no property or means whatever. M. Fouquet gave me several livings, a bishopric as well; M. Fouquet has served and obliged me like the generous-hearted man he is, and I know the world sufficiently well to appreciate a kindness when I meet with one. M. Fouquet has won my regard, and I have devoted myself to his service."

"You could not possibly do better. You will find him a very liberal master."

Aramis bit his lips; and then said, "The best a man could possibly have." He then paused for a minute, D'Artagnan taking good care not to interrupt him.

"I suppose you know how Porthos got mixed up in all this?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "I am curious, of course, but I never question a friend when he wishes to keep a secret from me."

"Well, then, I will tell you."

"It is hardly worth the trouble, if the confidence is to bind me in any way."

"Oh! do not be afraid.; there is no man whom I love better than Porthos, because he is so simple-minded and good-natured. Porthos is so straightforward in everything. Since I have become a bishop, I have looked for these primeval natures, which make me love truth and hate intrigue."

D'Artagnan stroked his mustache, but said nothing.

"I saw Porthos and again cultivated his acquaintance; his own time hanging idly on his hands, his presence recalled my earlier and better days without engaging me in any present evil. I sent for Porthos to come to Vannes. M. Fouquet, whose regard for me is very great, having learnt that Porthos and I were attached to each other by old ties of friendship, promised him increase of rank at the earliest promotion, and that is the whole secret."

"I shall not abuse your confidence," said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of that, my dear friend; no one has a finer sense of honor than yourself."

"I flatter myself that you are right, Aramis."

"And now" – and here the prelate looked searchingly and scrutinizingly at his friend – "now let us talk of ourselves and for ourselves; will you become one of M. Fouquet's friends? Do not interrupt me until you know what that means."

"Well, I am listening."

"Will you become a marechal of France, peer, duke, and the possessor of a duchy, with a million of francs?"

"But, my friend," replied D'Artagnan, "what must one do to get all that?"

"Belong to M. Fouquet."

"But I already belong to the king."

"Not exclusively, I suppose."

"Oh! a D'Artagnan cannot be divided."

"You have, I presume, ambitions, as noble hearts like yours have."

"Yes, certainly I have."

"Well?"

"Well! I wish to be a marechal; the king will make me marechal, duke, peer; the king will make me all that."

Aramis fixed a searching look upon D'Artagnan.

"Is not the king master?" said D'Artagnan.

"No one disputes it; but Louis XIII. was master also."

"Oh! my dear friend, between Richelieu and Louis XIII. stood no D'Artagnan," said the musketeer, very quietly.

"There are many stumbling-blocks round the king," said Aramis.

"Not for the king's feet."

"Very likely not; still – "

"One moment, Aramis; I observe that every one thinks of himself, and never of his poor prince; I will maintain myself maintaining him."

"And if you meet with ingratitude?"

"The weak alone are afraid of that."

"You are quite certain of yourself?"

"I think so."

"Still, the king may some day have no further need for you!"

"On the contrary, I think his need of me will soon be greater than ever; and hearken, my dear fellow, if it became necessary to arrest a new Conde, who would do it? This – this alone in France!" and D'Artagnan struck his sword, which clanked sullenly on the tesselated floor.

"You are right," said Aramis, turning very pale; and then he rose and pressed D'Artagnan's hand.

"That is the last summons for supper," said the captain of the musketeers; "will you excuse me?"

Aramis threw his arm round the musketeer's neck, and said, "A friend like you is the brightest jewel in the royal crown." And they immediately separated.

"I was right," mused D'Artagnan; "there is, indeed, something strangely serious stirring."

"We must hasten the explosion," breathed the coming cardinal, "for D'Artagnan has discovered the existence of a plot."

Chapter X. Madame and De Guiche

It will not be forgotten how Comte de Guiche left the queen-mother's apartments on the day when Louis XIV. presented La Valliere with the beautiful bracelets he had won in the lottery. The comte walked to and fro for some time outside the palace, in the greatest distress, from a thousand suspicions and anxieties with which his mind was beset. Presently he stopped and waited on the terrace opposite the grove of trees, watching for Madame's departure. More than half an hour passed away; and as he was at that moment quite alone, the comte could hardly have had any very diverting ideas at his command. He drew his tables from his pocket, and, after hesitating over and over again, determined to write these words: – "Madame, I implore you to grant me one moment's conversation. Do not be alarmed at this request, which contains nothing in any way opposed to the profound respect with which I subscribe myself, etc., etc." He had signed and folded this singular love-letter, when he suddenly observed several ladies leaving the chateau, and afterwards several courtiers too; in fact, almost every one that formed the queen's circle. He saw La Valliere herself, then Montalais talking with Malicorne; he watched the departure of the very last of the numerous guests that had a short time before thronged the queen-mother's cabinet.

Madame herself had not yet passed; she would be obliged, however, to cross the courtyard in order to enter her own

apartments; and, from the terrace where he was standing, De Guiche could see all that was going on in the courtyard. At last he saw Madame leave, attended by a couple of pages, who were carrying torches before her. She was walking very quickly; as soon as she reached the door, she said:

"Let some one go and look for De Guiche: he has to render an account of a mission he had to discharge for me; if he should be disengaged, request him to be good enough to come to my apartment."

De Guiche remained silent, hidden in the shade; but as soon as Madame had withdrawn, he darted from the terrace down the steps and assumed a most indifferent air, so that the pages who were hurrying towards his rooms might meet him.

"Ah! it is Madame, then, who is seeking me!" he said to himself, quite overcome; and he crushed in his hand the now worse than useless letter.

"M. le comte," said one of the pages, approaching him, "we are indeed most fortunate in meeting you."

"Why so, messieurs?"

"A command from Madame."

"From Madame!" said De Guiche, looking surprised.

"Yes, M. le comte, her royal highness has been asking for you; she expects to hear, she told us, the result of a commission you had to execute for her. Are you at liberty?"

"I am quite at her royal highness's orders."

"Will you have the goodness to follow us, then?"

When De Guiche entered the princess's apartments, he found her pale and agitated. Montalais was standing at the door, evidently uneasy about what was passing in her mistress's mind. De Guiche appeared.

"Ah! is that you, Monsieur de Guiche?" said Madame; "come in, I beg. Mademoiselle de Montalais, I do not require your attendance any longer."

Montalais, more puzzled than ever, courtesied and withdrew. De Guiche and the princess were left alone. The comte had every advantage in his favor; it was Madame who had summoned him to a rendezvous. But how was it possible for the comte to make use of this advantage? Madame was so whimsical, and her disposition so changeable. She soon allowed this to be perceived, for, suddenly, opening the conversation, she said: "Well! have you nothing to say to me?"

He imagined she must have guessed his thoughts; he fancied (for those who are in love are thus constituted, being as credulous and blind as poets or prophets), he fancied she knew how ardent was his desire to see her, and also the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Yes, Madame," he said, "and I think it very singular."

"The affair of the bracelets," she exclaimed, eagerly, "you mean that, I suppose?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And you think the king is in love; do you not?"

Guiche looked at her for some time; her eyes sank under his

gaze, which seemed to read her very heart.

"I think," he said, "that the king may possibly have had an idea of annoying some one; were it not for that, the king would hardly show himself so earnest in his attentions as he is; he would not run the risk of compromising, from mere thoughtlessness of disposition, a young girl against whom no one has been hitherto able to say a word."

"Indeed! the bold, shameless girl," said the princess, haughtily.

"I can positively assure your royal highness," said De Guiche, with a firmness marked by great respect, "that Mademoiselle de la Valliere is beloved by a man who merits every respect, for he is a brave and honorable gentleman."

"Bragelonne?"

"My friend; yes, Madame."

"Well, and though he is your friend, what does that matter to the king?"

"The king knows that Bragelonne is affianced to Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and as Raoul has served the king most valiantly, the king will not inflict an irreparable injury upon him."

Madame began to laugh in a manner that produced a sinister impression upon De Guiche.

"I repeat, Madame, I do not believe the king is in love with Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and the proof that I do not believe it is, that I was about to ask you whose *amour propre* it is likely

the king is desirous of wounding? You, who are well acquainted with the whole court, can perhaps assist me in ascertaining that; and assuredly, with greater certainty, since it is everywhere said that your royal highness is on very friendly terms with the king."

Madame bit her lips, and, unable to assign any good and sufficient reasons, changed the conversation. "Prove to me," she said, fixing on him one of those looks in which the whole soul seems to pass into the eyes, "prove to me, I say, that you intended to interrogate me at the very moment I sent for you."

De Guiche gravely drew from his pocket the now crumpled note that he had written, and showed it to her.

"Sympathy," she said.

"Yes," said the comte, with an indescribable tenderness of tone, "sympathy. I have explained to you how and why I sought you; you, however, have yet to tell me, Madame, why you sent for me."

"True," replied the princess. She hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Those bracelets will drive me mad."

"You expected the king would offer them to you," replied De Guiche.

"Why not?"

"But before you, Madame, before you, his sister-in-law, was there not the queen herself to whom the king should have offered them?"

"Before La Valliere," cried the princess, wounded to the quick, "could he not have presented them to me? Was there not

the whole court, indeed, to choose from?"

"I assure you, Madame," said the comte, respectfully, "that if any one heard you speak in this manner, if any one were to see how red your eyes are, and, Heaven forgive me, to see, too, that tear trembling on your eyelids, it would be said that your royal highness was jealous."

"Jealous!" said the princess, haughtily, "jealous of La Valliere!"

She expected to see De Guiche yield beneath her scornful gesture and her proud tone; but he simply and boldly replied, "Jealous of La Valliere; yes, Madame."

"Am I to suppose, monsieur," she stammered out, "that your object is to insult me?"

"It is not possible, Madame," replied the comte, slightly agitated, but resolved to master that fiery nature.

"Leave the room!" said the princess, thoroughly exasperated, De Guiche's coolness and silent respect having made her completely lose her temper.

De Guiche fell back a step, bowed slowly, but with great respect, drew himself up, looking as white as his lace cuffs, and, in a voice slightly trembling, said, "It was hardly worth while to have hurried here to be subjected to this unmerited disgrace." And he turned away with hasty steps.

He had scarcely gone half a dozen paces when Madame darted like a tigress after him, seized him by the cuff, and making him turn round again, said, trembling with passion as she did so, "The

respect you pretend to have is more insulting than the insult itself. Insult me, if you please, but at least speak."

"Madame," said the comte, gently, as he drew his sword, "thrust this blade into my heart, rather than kill me by degrees."

At the look he fixed upon her, – a look full of love, resolution, and despair, even, – she knew how readily the comte, so outwardly calm in appearance, would pass his sword through his own breast if she added another word. She tore the blade from his hands, and, pressing his arm with a feverish impatience, which might pass for tenderness, said, "Do not be too hard upon me, comte. You see how I am suffering, and yet you have no pity for me."

Tears, the cries of this strange attack, stifled her voice. As soon as De Guiche saw her weep, he took her in his arms and carried her to an armchair; in another moment she would have been suffocated.

"Oh, why," he murmured, as he knelt by her side, "why do you conceal your troubles from me? Do you love any one – tell me? It would kill me, I know, but not until I should have comforted, consoled, and served you even."

"And do you love me to that extent?" she replied, completely conquered.

"I do indeed love you to that extent, Madame."

She placed both her hands in his. "My heart is indeed another's," she murmured in so low a tone that her voice could hardly be heard; but he heard it, and said, "Is it the king you

love?"

She gently shook her head, and her smile was like a clear bright streak in the clouds, through which after the tempest has passed one almost fancies Paradise is opening. "But," she added, "there are other passions in a high-born heart. Love is poetry; but the real life of the heart is pride. Comte, I was born on a throne, I am proud and jealous of my rank. Why does the king gather such unworthy objects round him?"

"Once more, I repeat," said the comte, "you are acting unjustly towards that poor girl, who will one day be my friend's wife."

"Are you simple enough to believe that, comte?"

"If I did not believe it," he said, turning very pale, "Bragelonne should be informed of it to-morrow; indeed he should, if I thought that poor La Valliere had forgotten the vows she had exchanged with Raoul. But no, it would be cowardly to betray a woman's secret; it would be criminal to disturb a friend's peace of mind."

"You think, then," said the princess, with a wild burst of laughter, "that ignorance is happiness?"

"I believe it," he replied.

"Prove it to me, then," she said, hurriedly.

"It is easily done, Madame. It is reported through the whole court that the king loves you, and that you return his affection."

"Well?" she said, breathing with difficulty.

"Well; admit for a moment that Raoul, my friend, had come and said to me, 'Yes, the king loves Madame, and has made an

impression upon her heart,' I possibly should have slain Raoul."

"It would have been necessary," said the princess, with the obstinacy of a woman who feels herself not easily overcome, "for M. de Bragelonne to have had proofs before he ventured to speak to you in that manner."

"Such, however, is the case," replied De Guiche, with a deep sigh, "that, not having been warned, I have never examined into the matter seriously; and I now find that my ignorance has saved my life."

"So, then, you drive selfishness and coldness to that extent," said Madame, "that you would let this unhappy young man continue to love La Valliere?"

"I would, until La Valliere's guilt were revealed."

"But the bracelets?"

"Well, Madame, since you yourself expected to receive them from the king, what can I possibly say?"

The argument was a telling one, and the princess was overwhelmed by it, and from that moment her defeat was assured. But as her heart and mind were instinct with noble and generous feelings, she understood De Guiche's extreme delicacy. She saw that in his heart he really suspected that the king was in love with La Valliere, and that he did not wish to resort to the common expedient of ruining a rival in the mind of a woman, by giving the latter the assurance and certainty that this rival's affections were transferred to another woman. She guessed that his suspicions of La Valliere were aroused, and that, in order to

leave himself time for his convictions to undergo a change, so as not to ruin Louise utterly, he was determined to pursue a certain straightforward line of conduct. She could read so much real greatness of character, and such true generosity of disposition in her lover, that her heart really warmed with affection towards him, whose passion for her was so pure and delicate. Despite his fear of incurring her displeasure, De Guiche, by retaining his position as a man of proud independence of feeling and deep devotion, became almost a hero in her estimation, and reduced her to the state of a jealous and little-minded woman. She loved him for this so tenderly, that she could not refuse to give him a proof of her affection.

"See how many words we have wasted," she said, taking his hand, "suspicions, anxieties, mistrust, sufferings – I think we have enumerated all those words."

"Alas! Madame, yes."

"Efface them from your heart as I drive them from mine. Whether La Valliere does or does not love the king, and whether the king does or does not love La Valliere – from this moment you and I will draw a distinction in the two characters I have to perform. You open your eyes so wide that I am sure you hardly understand me."

"You are so impetuous, Madame, that I always tremble at the fear of displeasing you."

"And see how he trembles now, poor fellow," she said, with the most charming playfulness of manner. "Yes, monsieur, I have

two characters to perform. I am the sister of the king, the sister-in-law of the king's wife. In this character ought I not to take an interest in these domestic intrigues? Come, tell me what you think?"

"As little as possible, Madame."

"Agreed, monsieur; but it is a question of dignity; and then, you know, I am the wife of the king's brother." De Guiche sighed. "A circumstance," she added, with an expression of great tenderness, "which will remind you that I am always to be treated with the profoundest respect." De Guiche fell at her feet, which he kissed, with the religious fervor of a worshipper. "And I begin to think that, really and truly, I have another character to perform. I was almost forgetting it."

"Name it, oh! name it," said De Guiche.

"I am a woman," she said, in a voice lower than ever, "and I love." He rose, she opened her arms, and their lips met. A footstep was heard behind the tapestry, and Mademoiselle de Montalais appeared.

"What do you want?" said Madame.

"M. de Guiche is wanted," replied Montalais, who was just in time to see the agitation of the actors of these four characters; for De Guiche had consistently carried out his part with heroism.

Chapter XI. Montalais and Malicorne

Montalais was right. M. de Guiche, thus summoned in every direction, was very much exposed, from such a multiplication of business, to the risk of not attending to any. It so happened that, considering the awkwardness of the interruption, Madame, notwithstanding her wounded pride, and secret anger, could not, for the moment at least, reproach Montalais for having violated, in so bold a manner, the semi-royal order with which she had been dismissed on De Guiche's entrance. De Guiche, also, lost his presence of mind, or, it would be more correct to say, had already lost it, before Montalais's arrival, for, scarcely had he heard the young girl's voice, than, without taking leave of Madame, as the most ordinary politeness required, even between persons equal in rank and station, he fled from her presence, his heart tumultuously throbbing, and his brain on fire, leaving the princess with one hand raised, as though to bid him adieu. Montalais was at no loss, therefore, to perceive the agitation of the two lovers – the one who fled was agitated, and the one who remained was equally so.

"Well," murmured the young girl, as she glanced inquisitively round her, "this time, at least, I think I know as much as the most curious woman could possibly wish to know." Madame felt so embarrassed by this inquisitorial look, that, as if she heard Montalais's muttered side remark, she did not speak a word to

her maid of honor, but, casting down her eyes, retired at once to her bedroom. Montalais, observing this, stood listening for a moment, and then heard Madame lock and bolt her door. By this she knew that the rest of the evening was at her own disposal; and making, behind the door which had just been closed, a gesture which indicated but little real respect for the princess, she went down the staircase in search of Malicorne, who was very busily engaged at that moment in watching a courier, who, covered with dust, had just left the Comte de Guiche's apartments. Montalais knew that Malicorne was engaged in a matter of some importance; she therefore allowed him to look and stretch out his neck as much as he pleased; and it was only when Malicorne had resumed his natural position, that she touched him on the shoulder. "Well," said Montalais, "what is the latest intelligence you have?"

"M. de Guiche is in love with Madame."

"Fine news, truly! I know something more recent than that."

"Well, what do you know?"

"That Madame is in love with M. de Guiche."

"The one is the consequence of the other."

"Not always, my good monsieur."

"Is that remark intended for me?"

"Present company always excepted."

"Thank you," said Malicorne. "Well, and in the other direction, what is stirring?"

"The king wished, this evening, after the lottery, to see

Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Well, and he has seen her?"

"No, indeed!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"The door was shut and locked."

"So that – "

"So that the king was obliged to go back again, looking very sheepish, like a thief who has forgotten his crowbar."

"Good."

"And in the third place?" inquired Montalais.

"The courier who has just arrived for De Guiche came from M. de Bragelonne."

"Excellent," said Montalais, clapping her hands together.

"Why so?"

"Because we have work to do. If we get weary now, something unlucky will be sure to happen."

"We must divide the work, then," said Malicorne, "in order to avoid confusion."

"Nothing easier," replied Montalais. "Three intrigues, carefully nursed, and carefully encouraged, will produce, one with another, and taking a low average, three love letters a day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Malicorne, shrugging his shoulders, "you cannot mean what you say, darling; three letters a day, that may do for sentimental common people. A musketeer on duty, a young girl in a convent, may exchange letters with their lovers once a day, perhaps, from the top of a ladder, or through a hole

in the wall. A letter contains all the poetry their poor little hearts have to boast of. But the cases we have in hand require to be dealt with very differently."

"Well, finish," said Montalais, out of patience with him. "Some one may come."

"Finish! Why, I am only at the beginning. I have still three points as yet untouched."

"Upon my word, he will be the death of me, with his Flemish indifference," exclaimed Montalais.

"And you will drive me mad with your Italian vivacity. I was going to say that our lovers here will be writing volumes to each other. But what are you driving at?"

"At this. Not one of our lady correspondents will be able to keep the letters they may receive."

"Very likely."

"M. de Guiche will not be able to keep his either."

"That is probable."

"Very well, then; I will take care of all that."

"That is the very thing that is impossible," said Malicorne.

"Why so?"

"Because you are not your own mistress; your room is as much La Valliere's as yours; and there are certain persons who will think nothing of visiting and searching a maid of honor's room; so that I am terribly afraid of the queen, who is as jealous as a Spaniard; of the queen-mother, who is as jealous as a couple of Spaniards; and, last of all, of Madame herself, who has jealousy

enough for ten Spaniards."

"You forgot some one else."

"Who?"

"Monsieur."

"I was only speaking of the women. Let us add them up, then: we will call Monsieur, No. 1."

"De Guiche?"

"No. 2."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"No. 3."

"And the king, the king?"

"No. 4. Of course the king, who not only will be more jealous, but more powerful than all the rest put together. Ah, my dear!"

"Well?"

"Into what a wasp's nest you have thrust yourself!"

"And as yet not quite far enough, if you will follow me into it."

"Most certainly I will follow you where you like. Yet – "

"Well, yet – "

"While we have time, I think it will be prudent to turn back."

"But I, on the contrary, think the wisest course to take is to put ourselves at once at the head of all these intrigues."

"You will never be able to do it."

"With you, I could superintend ten of them. I am in my element, you must know. I was born to live at the court, as the salamander is made to live in the fire."

"Your comparison does not reassure me in the slightest degree

in the world, my dear Montalais. I have heard it said, and by learned men too, that, in the first place, there are no salamanders at all, and that, if there had been any, they would have been infallibly baked or roasted on leaving the fire."

"Your learned men may be very wise as far as salamanders are concerned, but they would never tell you what I can tell you; namely, that Aure de Montalais is destined, before a month is over, to become the first diplomatist in the court of France."

"Be it so, but on condition that I shall be the second."

"Agreed; an offensive and defensive alliance, of course."

"Only be very careful of any letters."

"I will hand them to you as I receive them."

"What shall we tell the king about Madame?"

"That Madame is still in love with his majesty."

"What shall we tell Madame about the king?"

"That she would be exceedingly wrong not to humor him."

"What shall we tell La Valliere about Madame?"

"Whatever we choose, for La Valliere is in our power."

"How so?"

"Every way."

"What do you mean?"

"In the first place, through the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Explain yourself."

"You do not forget, I hope, that Monsieur de Bragelonne has written many letters to Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"I forget nothing."

"Well, then, it was I who received, and I who intercepted those letters."

"And, consequently, it is you who have them still?"

"Yes."

"Where, – here?"

"Oh, no; I have them safe at Blois, in the little room you know well enough."

"That dear little room, – that darling little room, the antechamber of the palace I intend you to live in one of these days. But, I beg your pardon, you said that all those letters are in that little room?"

"Yes."

"Did you not put them in a box?"

"Of course; in the same box where I put all the letters I received from you, and where I put mine also when your business or your amusements prevented you from coming to our rendezvous."

"Ah, very good," said Malicorne.

"Why are you satisfied?"

"Because I see there is a possibility of not having to run to Blois after the letters, for I have them here."

"You have brought the box away?"

"It was very dear to me, because it belonged to you."

"Be sure and take care of it, for it contains original documents that will be of priceless value by and by."

"I am perfectly well aware of that indeed, and that is the very

reason why I laugh as I do, and with all my heart, too."

"And now, one last word."

"Why *last?*"

"Do we need any one to assist us?"

"No one."

"Valets or maid-servants?"

"Bad policy. You will give the letters, – you will receive them. Oh! we must have no pride in this affair, otherwise M. Malicorne and Mademoiselle Aure, not transacting their own affairs themselves, will have to make up their minds to see them done by others."

"You are quite right; but what is going on yonder in M. de Guiche's room?"

"Nothing; he is only opening his window."

"Let us be gone." And they both immediately disappeared, all the terms of the contract being agreed on.

The window just opened was, in fact, that of the Comte de Guiche. It was not alone with the hope of catching a glimpse of Madame through her curtains that he seated himself by the open window for his preoccupation of mind had at that time a different origin. He had just received, as we have already stated, the courier who had been dispatched to him by Bragelonne, the latter having written to De Guiche a letter which had made the deepest impression upon him, and which he had read over and over again. "Strange, strange!" he murmured. "How irresponsible are the means by which destiny hurries men onward to their fate!"

Leaving the window in order to approach nearer to the light, he once more read the letter he had just received: —

"CALAIS.

"MY DEAR COUNT, – I found M. de Wardes at Calais; he has been seriously wounded in an affair with the Duke of Buckingham. De Wardes is, as you know, unquestionably brave, but full of malevolent and wicked feelings. He conversed with me about yourself, for whom, he says, he has a warm regard, also about Madame, whom he considers a beautiful and amiable woman. He has guessed your affection for a certain person. He also talked to me about the lady for whom I have so ardent a regard, and showed the greatest interest on my behalf in expressing a deep pity for me, accompanied, however, by dark hints which alarmed me at first, but which I at last looked upon as the result of his usual love of mystery. These are the facts: he had received news of the court; you will understand, however, that it was only through M. de Lorraine. The report goes, so says the news, that a change has taken place in the king's affections. You know whom that concerns. Afterwards, the news continues, people are talking about one of the maids of honor, respecting whom various slanderous reports are being circulated. These vague phrases have not allowed me to sleep. I have been deploring, ever since yesterday, that my diffidence and vacillation of purpose, notwithstanding a certain obstinacy of character I may possess, have left me unable to reply to these insinuations. In a word, M. de Wardes was setting off for Paris,

and I did not delay his departure with explanations; for it seemed rather hard, I confess, to cross-examine a man whose wounds are hardly yet closed. In short, he travelled by short stages, as he was anxious to leave, he said, in order to be present at a curious spectacle the court cannot fail to offer within a short time. He added a few congratulatory words accompanied by vague sympathizing expressions. I could not understand the one any more than the other. I was bewildered by my own thoughts, and tormented by a mistrust of this man, – a mistrust which, you know better than any one else, I have never been able to overcome. As soon as he left, my perceptions seemed to become clearer. It is hardly possible that a man of De Wardes's character should not have communicated something of his own malicious nature to the statements he made to me. It is not unlikely, therefore, that in the strange hints De Wardes threw out in my presence, there may be a mysterious signification, which I might have some difficulty in applying either to myself or to some one with whom you are acquainted. Being compelled to leave as soon as possible, in obedience to the king's commands, the idea did not occur to me of running after De Wardes in order to ask him to explain his reserve; but I have dispatched a courier to you with this letter, which will explain in detail my various doubts. I regard you as myself; you have reflected and observed; it will be for you to act. M. de Wardes will arrive very shortly; endeavor to learn what he meant, if you do not already know. M. de Wardes, moreover, pretended that the Duke of Buckingham

left Paris on the very best of terms with Madame. This was an affair which would have unhesitatingly made me draw my sword, had I not felt that I was under the necessity of dispatching the king's mission before undertaking any quarrel whatsoever. Burn this letter, which Olivain will hand you. Whatever Olivain says, you may confidently rely on. Will you have the goodness, my dear comte, to recall me to the remembrance of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, whose hands I kiss with the greatest respect.

"Your devoted

"DE BRAGELONNE.

"P. S. – If anything serious should happen – we should be prepared for everything, dispatch a courier to me with this one single word, 'come,' and I will be in Paris within six and thirty hours after the receipt of your letter."

De Guiche sighed, folded up the letter a third time, and, instead of burning it, as Raoul had recommended him to do, placed it in his pocket. He felt it needed reading over and over again.

"How much distress of mind, yet what sublime confidence, he shows!" murmured the comte; "he has poured out his whole soul in this letter. He says nothing of the Comte de la Fere, and speaks of his respect for Louise. He cautions me on my own account, and entreats me on his. Ah!" continued De Guiche, with a threatening gesture, "you interfere in my affairs, Monsieur de Wardes, do you? Very well, then; I will shortly occupy myself with yours. As for you, poor Raoul, – you who intrust your heart to my keeping,

be assured I will watch over it."

With this promise, De Guiche begged Malicorne to come immediately to his apartments, if possible. Malicorne acknowledged the invitation with an activity which was the first result of his conversation with Montalais. And while De Guiche, who thought that his motive was undiscovered, cross-examined Malicorne, the latter, who appeared to be working in the dark, soon guessed his questioner's motives. The consequence was, that, after a quarter of an hour's conversation, during which De Guiche thought he had ascertained the whole truth with regard to La Valliere and the king, he had learned absolutely nothing more than his own eyes had already acquainted him with, while Malicorne learned, or guessed, that Raoul, who was absent, was fast becoming suspicious, and that De Guiche intended to watch over the treasure of the Hesperides. Malicorne accepted the office of dragon. De Guiche fancied he had done everything for his friend, and soon began to think of nothing but his personal affairs. The next evening, De Wardes's return and first appearance at the king's reception were announced. When that visit had been paid, the convalescent waited on Monsieur; De Guiche taking care, however, to be at Monsieur's apartments before the visit took place.

Chapter XII. How De Wardes Was Received at Court

Monsieur had received De Wardes with that marked favor light and frivolous minds bestow on every novelty that comes in their way. De Wardes, who had been absent for a month, was like fresh fruit to him. To treat him with marked kindness was an infidelity to old friends, and there is always something fascinating in that; moreover, it was a sort of reparation to De Wardes himself. Nothing, consequently, could exceed the favorable notice Monsieur took of him. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who feared this rival but a little, but who respected a character and disposition only too parallel to his own in every particular, with the addition of a bull-dog courage he did not himself possess, received De Wardes with a greater display of regard and affection than even Monsieur had done. De Guiche, as we have said, was there also, but kept in the background, waiting very patiently until all these interchanges were over. De Wardes, while talking to the others, and even to Monsieur himself, had not for a moment lost sight of De Guiche, who, he instinctively felt, was there on his account. As soon as he had finished with the others, he went up to De Guiche. They exchanged the most courteous compliments, after which De Wardes returned to Monsieur and the other gentlemen.

In the midst of these congratulations Madame was announced. She had been informed of De Wardes's arrival, and knowing all the details of his voyage and duel, she was not sorry to be present at the remarks she knew would be made, without delay, by one who, she felt assured, was her personal enemy. Two or three of her ladies accompanied her. De Wardes saluted Madame in the most graceful and respectful manner, and, as a commencement of hostilities, announced, in the first place, that he could furnish the Duke of Buckingham's friends with the latest news about him. This was a direct answer to the coldness with which Madame had received him. The attack was a vigorous one, and Madame felt the blow, but without appearing to have even noticed it. He rapidly cast a glance at Monsieur and at De Guiche, – the former colored, and the latter turned very pale. Madame alone preserved an unmoved countenance; but, as she knew how many unpleasant thoughts and feelings her enemy could awaken in the two persons who were listening to him, she smilingly bent forward towards the traveler, as if to listen to the news he had brought – but he was speaking of other matters. Madame was brave, even to imprudence; if she were to retreat, it would be inviting an attack; so, after the first disagreeable impression had passed away, she returned to the charge.

"Have you suffered much from your wounds, Monsieur de Wardes?" she inquired, "for we have been told that you had the misfortune to get wounded."

It was now De Wardes's turn to wince; he bit his lips, and

replied, “No, Madame, hardly at all.”

“Indeed! and yet in this terribly hot weather – ”

“The sea-breezes were very fresh and cool, Madame, and then I had one consolation.”

“Indeed! What was it?”

“The knowledge that my adversary’s sufferings were still greater than my own.”

“Ah! you mean he was more seriously wounded than you were; I was not aware of that,” said the princess, with utter indifference.

“Oh, Madame, you are mistaken, or rather you pretend to misunderstand my remark. I did not say that he was a greater sufferer in body than myself; but his heart was very seriously affected.”

De Guiche comprehended instinctively from what direction the struggle was approaching; he ventured to make a sign to Madame, as if entreating her to retire from the contest. But she, without acknowledging De Guiche’s gesture, without pretending to have noticed it even, and still smiling, continued:

“Is it possible,” she said, “that the Duke of Buckingham’s heart was touched? I had no idea, until now, that a heart-wound could be cured.”

“Alas! Madame,” replied De Wardes, politely, “every woman believes that; and it is this belief that gives them that superiority to man which confidence begets.”

“You misunderstand altogether, dearest,” said the prince, impatiently; “M. de Wardes means that the Duke of

Buckingham's heart had been touched, not by the sword, but by something sharper."

"Ah! very good, very good!" exclaimed Madame. "It is a jest of M. de Wardes's. Very good; but I should like to know if the Duke of Buckingham would appreciate the jest. It is, indeed, a very great pity he is not here, M. de Wardes."

The young man's eyes seemed to flash fire. "Oh!" he said, as he clenched his teeth, "there is nothing I should like better."

De Guiche did not move. Madame seemed to expect that he would come to her assistance. Monsieur hesitated. The Chevalier de Lorraine advanced and continued the conversation.

"Madame," he said, "De Wardes knows perfectly well that for a Buckingham's heart to be touched is nothing new, and what he has said has already taken place."

"Instead of an ally, I have two enemies," murmured Madame; "two determined enemies, and in league with each other." And she changed the conversation. To change the conversation is, as every one knows, a right possessed by princes which etiquette requires all to respect. The remainder of the conversation was moderate enough in tone; the principal actors had rehearsed their parts. Madame withdrew easily, and Monsieur, who wished to question her on several matters, offered her his hand on leaving. The chevalier was seriously afraid that an understanding might be established between the husband and wife if he were to leave them quietly together. He therefore made his way to Monsieur's apartments, in order to surprise him on his return, and to destroy

with a few words all the good impressions Madame might have been able to sow in his heart. De Guiche advanced towards De Wardes, who was surrounded by a large number of persons, and thereby indicated his wish to converse with him; De Wardes, at the same time, showing by his looks and by a movement of his head that he perfectly understood him. There was nothing in these signs to enable strangers to suppose they were otherwise than upon the most friendly footing. De Guiche could therefore turn away from him, and wait until he was at liberty. He had not long to wait; for De Wardes, freed from his questioners, approached De Guiche, and after a fresh salutation, they walked side by side together.

"You have made a good impression since your return, my dear De Wardes," said the comte.

"Excellent, as you see."

"And your spirits are just as lively as ever?"

"Better."

"And a very great happiness, too."

"Why not? Everything is so ridiculous in this world, everything so absurd around us."

"You are right."

"You are of my opinion, then?"

"I should think so! And what news do you bring us from yonder?"

"I? None at all. I have come to look for news here."

"But, tell me, you surely must have seen some people at

Boulogne, one of our friends, for instance; it is no great time ago."

"Some people – one of our friends – "

"Your memory is short."

"Ah! true; Bragelonne, you mean."

"Exactly so."

"Who was on his way to fulfil a mission, with which he was intrusted to King Charles II."

"Precisely. Well, then, did he not tell you, or did not you tell him – "

"I do not precisely know what I told him, I must confess: but I do know what I did *not* tell him." De Wardes was *finesse* itself. He perfectly well knew from De Guiche's tone and manner, which was cold and dignified, that the conversation was about to assume a disagreeable turn. He resolved to let it take what course it pleased, and to keep strictly on his guard.

"May I ask you what you did not tell him?" inquired De Guiche.

"All about La Valliere."

"La Valliere… What is it? and what was that strange circumstance you seem to have known over yonder, which Bragelonne, who was here on the spot, was not acquainted with?"

"Do you really ask me that in a serious manner?"

"Nothing more so."

"What! you, a member of the court, living in Madame's household, a friend of Monsieur's, a guest at their table, the favorite of our lovely princess?"

Guiche colored violently from anger. “What princess are you alluding to?” he said.

“I am only acquainted with one, my dear fellow. I am speaking of Madame herself. Are you devoted to another princess, then? Come, tell me.”

De Guiche was on the point of launching out, but he saw the drift of the remark. A quarrel was imminent between the two young men. De Wardes wished the quarrel to be only in Madame’s name, while De Guiche would not accept it except on La Valliere’s account. From this moment, it became a series of feigned attacks, which would have continued until one of the two had been touched home. De Guiche therefore resumed all the self-possession he could command.

“There is not the slightest question in the world of Madame in this matter, my dear De Wardes.” said Guiche, “but simply of what you were talking about just now.”

“What was I saying?”

“That you had concealed certain things from Bragelonne.”

“Certain things which you know as well as I do,” replied De Wardes.

“No, upon my honor.”

“Nonsense.”

“If you tell me what they are, I shall know, but not otherwise, I swear.”

“What! I who have just arrived from a distance of sixty leagues, and you who have not stirred from this place, who have

witnessed with your own eyes that which rumor informed me of at Calais! Do you now tell me seriously that you do not know what it is about? Oh! comte, this is hardly charitable of you."

"As you like, De Wardes; but I again repeat, I know nothing."

"You are truly discreet – well! – perhaps it is very prudent of you."

"And so you will not tell me anything, will not tell me any more than you told Bragelonne?"

"You are pretending to be deaf, I see. I am convinced that Madame could not possibly have more command over herself than *you* have."

"Double hypocrite," murmured Guiche to himself, "you are again returning to the old subject."

"Very well, then," continued De Wardes, "since we find it so difficult to understand each other about La Valliere and Bragelonne let us speak about your own affairs."

"Nay," said De Guiche, "I have no affairs of my own to talk about. You have not said anything about me, I suppose, to Bragelonne, which you cannot repeat to my face?"

"No; but understand me, Guiche, that however much I may be ignorant of certain matters, I am quite as conversant with others. If, for instance, we were conversing about the intimacies of the Duke of Buckingham at Paris, as I did during my journey with the duke, I could tell you a great many interesting circumstances. Would you like me to mention them?"

De Guiche passed his hand across his forehead, which was

covered in perspiration. “No, no,” he said, “a hundred times no! I have no curiosity for matters which do not concern me. The Duke of Buckingham is for me nothing more than a simple acquaintance, whilst Raoul is an intimate friend. I have not the slightest curiosity to learn what happened to the duke, while I have, on the contrary, the greatest interest in all that happened to Raoul.”

“In Paris?”

“Yes, in Paris, or Boulogne. You understand I am on the spot; if anything should happen, I am here to meet it; whilst Raoul is absent, and has only myself to represent him; so, Raoul’s affairs before my own.”

“But he will return?”

“Not, however, until his mission is completed. In the meantime, you understand, evil reports cannot be permitted to circulate about him without my looking into them.”

“And for a better reason still, that he will remain some time in London,” said De Wardes, chuckling.

“You think so,” said De Guiche, simply.

“Think so, indeed! do you suppose he was sent to London for no other purpose than to go there and return again immediately? No, no; he was sent to London to remain there.”

“Ah! De Wardes,” said De Guiche, grasping De Wardes’s hand, “that is a very serious suspicion concerning Bragelonne, which completely confirms what he wrote to me from Boulogne.”

De Wardes resumed his former coldness of manner: his love of raillery had led him too far, and by his own imprudence, he had laid himself open to attack.

"Well, tell me, what did he write to you about?" he inquired.

"He told me that you had artfully insinuated some injurious remarks against La Valliere, and that you had seemed to laugh at his great confidence in that young girl."

"Well, it is perfectly true I did so," said De Wardes, "and I was quite ready, at the time, to hear from the Vicomte de Bragelonne that which every man expects from another whenever anything may have been said to displease him. In the same way, for instance, if I were seeking a quarrel with you, I should tell you that Madame after having shown the greatest preference for the Duke of Buckingham, is at this moment supposed to have sent the handsome duke away for your benefit."

"Oh! that would not wound me in the slightest degree, my dear De Wardes," said De Guiche, smiling, notwithstanding the shiver that ran through his whole frame. "Why, such a favor would be too great a happiness."

"I admit that, but if I absolutely wished to quarrel with you, I should try and invent a falsehood, perhaps, and speak to you about a certain arbor, where you and that illustrious princess were together – I should speak also of certain gratifications, of certain kissings of the hand; and you who are so secret on all occasions, so hasty, so punctilious – "

"Well," said De Guiche, interrupting him, with a smile upon

his lips, although he almost felt as if he were going to die; "I swear I should not care for that, nor should I in any way contradict you; for you must know, my dear marquis, that for all matters which concern myself I am a block of ice; but it is a very different thing when an absent friend is concerned, a friend, who, on leaving, confided his interests to my safe-keeping; for such a friend, De Wardes, believe me, I am like fire itself."

"I understand you, Monsieur de Guiche. In spite of what you say, there cannot be any question between us, just now, either of Bragelonne or of this insignificant girl, whose name is La Valliere."

At this moment some of the younger courtiers were crossing the apartment, and having already heard the few words which had just been pronounced, were able also to hear those which were about to follow. De Wardes observed this, and continued aloud: – "Oh! if La Valliere were a coquette like Madame, whose innocent flirtations, I am sure, were, first of all, the cause of the Duke of Buckingham being sent back to England, and afterwards were the reason of your being sent into exile; for you will not deny, I suppose, that Madame's pretty ways really had a certain influence over you?"

The courtiers drew nearer to the speakers, Saint-Aignan at their head, and then Manicamp.

"But, my dear fellow, whose fault was that?" said De Guiche, laughing. "I am a vain, conceited fellow, I know, and everybody else knows it too. I took seriously that which was only intended

as a jest, and got myself exiled for my pains. But I saw my error. I overcame my vanity, and I obtained my recall, by making the *amende honorable*, and by promising myself to overcome this defect; and the consequence is, that I am so thoroughly cured, that I now laugh at the very thing which, three or four days ago, would have almost broken my heart. But Raoul is in love, and is loved in return; he cannot laugh at the reports which disturb his happiness – reports which you seem to have undertaken to interpret, when you know, marquis, as I do, as these gentlemen do, as every one does in fact, that all such reports are pure calumny."

"Calumny!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at seeing himself caught in the snare by De Guiche's coolness of temper.

"Certainly – calumny. Look at this letter from him, in which he tells me you have spoken ill of Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and where he asks me, if what you reported about this young girl is true or not. Do you wish me to appeal to these gentlemen, De Wardes, to decide?" And with admirable coolness, De Guiche read aloud the paragraph of the letter which referred to La Valliere. "And now," continued De Guiche, "there is no doubt in the world, as far as I am concerned, that you wished to disturb Bragelonne's peace of mind, and that your remarks were maliciously intended."

De Wardes looked round him, to see if he could find support from any one; but, at the idea that De Wardes had insulted, either directly or indirectly, the idol of the day, every one shook his

head; and De Wardes saw that he was in the wrong.

"Messieurs," said De Guiche, intuitively divining the general feeling, "my discussion with Monsieur de Wardes refers to a subject so delicate in its nature, that it is most important no one should hear more than you have already heard. Close the doors, then, I beg you, and let us finish our conversation in the manner which becomes two gentlemen, one of whom has given the other the lie."

"Messieurs, messieurs!" exclaimed those who were present.

"Is it your opinion, then, that I was wrong in defending Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" said De Guiche. "In that case, I pass judgment upon myself, and am ready to withdraw the offensive words I may have used to Monsieur de Wardes."

"The deuce! certainly not!" said Saint-Aignan. "Mademoiselle de la Valliere is an angel."

"Virtue and purity itself," said Manicamp.

"You see, Monsieur de Wardes," said De Guiche, "I am not the only one who undertakes the defense of that poor girl. I entreat you, therefore, messieurs, a second time, to leave us. You see, it is impossible we could be more calm and composed than we are."

It was the very thing the courtiers wished; some went out at one door, and the rest at the other, and the two young men were left alone.

"Well played," said De Wardes, to the comte.

"Was it not?" replied the latter.

"How can it be wondered at, my dear fellow; I have got quite

rusty in the country, while the command you have acquired over yourself, comte, confounds me; a man always gains something in women's society; so, pray accept my congratulations."

"I do accept them."

"And I will make Madame a present of them."

"And now, my dear Monsieur de Wardes, let us speak as loud as you please."

"Do not defy me."

"I do defy you, for you are known to be an evil-minded man; if you do that, you will be looked upon as a coward, too; and Monsieur would have you hanged, this evening, at his window-casement. Speak, my dear De Wardes, speak."

"I have fought already."

"But not quite enough, yet."

"I see, you would not be sorry to fight with me while my wounds are still open."

"No; better still."

"The deuce! you are unfortunate in the moment you have chosen; a duel, after the one I have just fought, would hardly suit me; I have lost too much blood at Boulogne; at the slightest effort my wounds would open again, and you would really have too good a bargain."

"True," said De Guiche; "and yet, on your arrival here, your looks and your arms showed there was nothing the matter with you."

"Yes, my arms are all right, but my legs are weak; and then, I

have not had a foil in my hand since that devil of a duel; and you, I am sure, have been fencing every day, in order to carry your little conspiracy against me to a successful issue."

"Upon my honor, monsieur," replied De Guiche, "it is six months since I last practiced."

"No, comte, after due reflection, I will not fight, at least, with you. I will await Bragelonne's return, since you say it is Bragelonne who finds fault with me."

"Oh no, indeed! You shall not wait until Bragelonne's return," exclaimed the comte, losing all command over himself, "for you have said that Bragelonne might, possibly, be some time before he returns; and, in the meanwhile, your wicked insinuations would have had their effect."

"Yet, I shall have my excuse. So take care."

"I will give you a week to finish your recovery."

"That is better. We will wait a week."

"Yes, yes, I understand; a week will give time to my adversary to make his escape. No, no; I will not give you one day, even."

"You are mad, monsieur," said De Wardes, retreating a step.

"And you are a coward, if you do not fight willingly. Nay, what is more, I will denounce you to the king, as having refused to fight, after having insulted La Valliere."

"Ah!" said De Wardes, "you are dangerously treacherous, though you pass for a man of honor."

"There is nothing more dangerous than the treachery, as you term it, of the man whose conduct is always loyal and upright."

"Restore me the use of my legs, then, or get yourself bled, till you are as white as I am, so as to equalize our chances."

"No, no; I have something better than that to propose."

"What is it?"

"We will fight on horseback, and will exchange three pistol-shots each. You are a first rate marksman. I have seen you bring down swallows with single balls, and at full gallop. Do not deny it, for I have seen you myself."

"I believe you are right," said De Wardes; "and as that is the case, it is not unlikely I might kill you."

"You would be rendering me a very great service, if you did."

"I will do my best."

"Is it agreed? Give me your hand upon it."

"There it is: but on one condition, however."

"Name it."

"That not a word shall be said about it to the king."

"Not a word, I swear."

"I will go and get my horse, then."

"And I, mine."

"Where shall we meet?"

"In the plain; I know an admirable place."

"Shall we go together?"

"Why not?"

And both of them, on their way to the stables, passed beneath Madame's windows, which were faintly lighted; a shadow could be seen behind the lace curtains. "There is a woman," said De

Wardes, smiling, “who does not suspect that we are going to fight – to die, perhaps, on her account.”

Chapter XIII. The Combat

De Wardes and De Guiche selected their horses, and saddled them with their own hands, with holster saddles. De Guiche, having two pairs of pistols, went to his apartments to get them; and after having loaded them, gave the choice to De Wardes, who selected the pair he had made use of twenty times before – the same, indeed, with which De Guiche had seen him kill swallows flying. "You will not be surprised," he said, "if I take every precaution. You know the weapons well, and, consequently, I am only making the chances equal."

"Your remark was quite useless," replied De Guiche, "and you have done no more than you are entitled to do."

"Now," said De Wardes, "I beg you to have the goodness to help me to mount; for I still experience a little difficulty in doing so."

"In that case, we had better settle the matter on foot."

"No; once in the saddle, I shall be all right."

"Very good, then; we will not speak of it again," said De Guiche, as he assisted De Wardes to mount his horse.

"And now," continued the young man, "in our eagerness to murder one another, we have neglected one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"That it is quite dark, and we shall almost be obliged to grope about, in order to kill."

"Oh!" said De Guiche, "you are as anxious as I am that everything should be done in proper order."

"Yes; but I do not wish people to say that you have assassinated me, any more than, supposing I were to kill you, I should myself like to be accused of such a crime."

"Did any one make a similar remark about your duel with the Duke of Buckingham?" said De Guiche; "it took place precisely under the same conditions as ours."

"Very true; but there was still light enough to see by; and we were up to our middles almost, in the water; besides, there were a good number of spectators on shore, looking at us."

De Guiche reflected for a moment; and the thought which had already presented itself to him became more confirmed – that De Wardes wished to have witnesses present, in order to bring back the conversation about Madame, and to give a new turn to the combat. He avoided saying a word in reply, therefore; and, as De Wardes once more looked at him interrogatively, he replied, by a movement of the head, that it would be best to let things remain as they were. The two adversaries consequently set off, and left the chateau by the same gate, close to which we may remember to have seen Montalais and Malicorne together. The night, as if to counteract the extreme heat of the day, had gathered the clouds together in masses which were moving slowly along from the west to the east. The vault above, without a clear spot anywhere visible, or without the faintest indication of thunder, seemed to hang heavily over the earth, and soon began, by the force of the

wind, to split into streamers, like a huge sheet torn to shreds. Large and warm drops of rain began to fall heavily, and gathered the dust into globules, which rolled along the ground. At the same time, the hedges, which seemed conscious of the approaching storm, the thirsty plants, the drooping branches of the trees, exhaled a thousand aromatic odors, which revived in the mind tender recollections, thoughts of youth, endless life, happiness, and love. "How fresh the earth smells," said De Wardes; "it is a piece of coquetry to draw us to her."

"By the by," replied De Guiche, "several ideas have just occurred to me; and I wish to have your opinion upon them."

"Relative to – "

"Relative to our engagement."

"It is quite some time, in fact, that we should begin to arrange matters."

"Is it to be an ordinary combat, and conducted according to established custom?"

"Let me first know what your established custom is."

"That we dismount in any particular open space that may suit us, fasten our horses to the nearest object, meet, each without our pistols in our hands, and afterwards retire for a hundred and fifty paces, in order to advance on each other."

"Very good; that is precisely the way in which I killed poor Follivent, three weeks ago, at Saint-Denis."

"I beg your pardon, but you forgot one circumstance."

"What is that?"

"That in your duel with Follivent you advanced towards each other on foot, your swords between your teeth, and your pistols in your hands."

"True."

"While now, on the contrary, as you cannot walk, you yourself admit that we shall have to mount our horses again, and charge; and the first who wishes to fire will do so."

"That is the best course, no doubt; but it is quite dark; we must make allowances for more missed shots than would be the case in the daytime."

"Very well; each will fire three times; the pair of pistols already loaded, and one reload."

"Excellent! Where shall our engagement take place?"

"Have you any preference?"

"No."

"You see that small wood which lies before us?"

"The wood which is called Rochin?"

"Exactly."

"You know it?"

"Perfectly."

"You know that there is an open glade in the center?"

"Yes."

"Well, this glade is admirably adapted for such a purpose, with a variety of roads, by-places, paths, ditches, windings, and avenues. We could not find a better spot."

"I am perfectly satisfied, if you are so. We are at our

destination, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes. Look at the beautiful open space in the center. The faint light which the stars afford seems concentrated in this spot; the woods which surround it seem, with their barriers, to form its natural limits."

"Very good. Do as you say."

"Let us first settle the conditions."

"These are mine; if you have any objection to make you will state it."

"I am listening."

"If the horse be killed, its rider will be obliged to fight on foot."

"That is a matter of course, since we have no change of horses here."

"But that does not oblige his adversary to dismount."

"His adversary will, in fact, be free to act as he likes."

"The adversaries, having once met in close contact, cannot quit each other under any circumstances, and may, consequently, fire muzzle to muzzle."

"Agreed."

"Three shots and no more will do, I suppose?"

"Quite sufficient, I think. Here are powder and balls for your pistols; measure out three charges, take three balls, I will do the same; then we will throw the rest of the powder and balls away."

"And we will solemnly swear," said De Wardes, "that we have neither balls nor powder about us?"

"Agreed; and I swear it," said De Guiche, holding his hand towards heaven, a gesture which De Wardes imitated.

"And now, my dear comte," said De Wardes, "allow me to tell you that I am in no way your dupe. You already are, or soon will be, the accepted lover of Madame. I have detected your secret, and you are afraid I shall tell others of it. You wish to kill me, to insure my silence; that is very clear; and in your place, I should do the same." De Guiche hung down his head. "Only," continued De Wardes, triumphantly, "was it really worth while, tell me, to throw this affair of Bragelonne's on my shoulders? But, take care, my dear fellow; in bringing the wild boar to bay, you enrage him to madness; in running down the fox, you endow him with the ferocity of the jaguar. The consequence is, that brought to bay by you, I shall defend myself to the very last."

"You will be quite right to do so."

"Yes; but take care; I shall work more harm than you think. In the first place, as a beginning, you will readily suppose that I have not been absurd enough to lock up my secret, or your secret rather, in my own breast. There is a friend of mine, who resembles me in every way, a man whom you know very well, who shares my secret with me; so, pray understand, that if you kill me, my death will not have been of much service to you; whilst, on the contrary, if I kill you – and everything is possible, you know – you understand?" De Guiche shuddered. "If I kill you," continued De Wardes, "you will have secured two mortal enemies to Madame, who will do their very utmost to ruin her."

"Oh! monsieur," exclaimed De Guiche, furiously, "do not reckon upon my death so easily. Of the two enemies you speak of, I trust most heartily to dispose of one immediately, and the other at the earliest opportunity."

The only reply De Wardes made was a burst of laughter, so diabolical in its sound, that a superstitious man would have been terrified. But De Guiche was not so impressionable as that. "I think," he said, "that everything is now settled, Monsieur de Wardes; so have the goodness to take your place first, unless you would prefer me to do so."

"By no means," said De Wardes. "I shall be delighted to save you the slightest trouble." And spurring his horse to a gallop, he crossed the wide open space, and took his stand at that point of the circumference of the cross-road immediately opposite to where De Guiche was stationed. De Guiche remained motionless. At this distance of a hundred paces, the two adversaries were absolutely invisible to each other, being completely concealed by the thick shade of elms and chestnuts. A minute elapsed amidst the profoundest silence. At the end of the minute, each of them, in the deep shade in which he was concealed, heard the double click of the trigger, as they put the pistols on full cock. De Guiche, adopting the usual tactics, put his horse to a gallop, persuaded that he should render his safety doubly sure by the movement, as well as by the speed of the animal. He directed his course in a straight line towards the point where, in his opinion, De Wardes would be

stationed; and he expected to meet De Wardes about half-way; but in this he was mistaken. He continued his course, presuming that his adversary was impatiently awaiting his approach. When, however, he had gone about two-thirds of the distance, he beheld the trees suddenly illuminated and a ball flew by, cutting the plume of his hat in two. Nearly at the same moment, and as if the flash of the first shot had served to indicate the direction of the other, a second report was heard, and a second ball passed through the head of De Guiche's horse, a little below the ear. The animal fell. These two reports, proceeding from the very opposite direction in which he expected to find De Wardes, surprised him a great deal; but as he was a man of amazing self-possession, he prepared himself for his horse falling, but not so completely, however, that the toe of his boot escaped being caught under the animal as it fell. Very fortunately the horse in its dying agonies moved so as to enable him to release the leg which was less entangled than the other. De Guiche rose, felt himself all over, and found that he was not wounded. At the very moment he had felt the horse tottering under him, he placed his pistols in the holsters, afraid that the force of the fall might explode one at least, if not both of them, by which he would have been disarmed, and left utterly without defense. Once on his feet, he took the pistols out of the holsters, and advanced towards the spot where, by the light of the flash, he had seen De Wardes appear. De Wardes had, at the first shot, accounted for the maneuver, than which nothing could have been simpler.

Instead of advancing to meet De Guiche, or remaining in his place to await his approach, De Wardes had, for about fifteen paces, followed the circle of the shadow which hid him from his adversary's observation, and at the very moment when the latter presented his flank in his career, he had fired from the place where he stood, carefully taking aim, and assisted instead of being inconvenienced by the horse's gallop. It has been seen that, notwithstanding the darkness, the first ball passed hardly more than an inch above De Guiche's head. De Wardes had so confidently relied upon his aim, that he thought he had seen De Guiche fall; his astonishment was extreme when he saw he still remained erect in his saddle. He hastened to fire his second shot, but his hand trembled, and he killed the horse instead. It would be a most fortunate chance for him if De Guiche were to remain held fast under the animal. Before he could have freed himself, De Wardes would have loaded his pistol and had De Guiche at his mercy. But De Guiche, on the contrary, was up, and had three shots to fire. De Guiche immediately understood the position of affairs. It would be necessary to exceed De Wardes in rapidity of execution. He advanced, therefore, so as to reach him before he should have had time to reload his pistol. De Wardes saw him approaching like a tempest. The ball was rather tight, and offered some resistance to the ramrod. To load carelessly would be simply to lose his last chance; to take the proper care in loading meant fatal loss of time, or rather, throwing away his life. He made his horse bound on one side. De Guiche turned round

also, and, at the moment the horse was quiet again, fired, and the ball carried off De Wardes's hat from his head. De Wardes now knew that he had a moment's time at his own disposal; he availed himself of it in order to finish loading his pistol. De Guiche, noticing that his adversary did not fall, threw the pistol he had just discharged aside, and walked straight towards De Wardes, elevating the second pistol as he did so. He had hardly proceeded more than two or three paces, when De Wardes took aim at him as he was walking, and fired. An exclamation of anger was De Guiche's answer; the comte's arm contracted and dropped motionless by his side, and the pistol fell from his grasp. His anxiety was excessive. "I am lost," murmured De Wardes, "he is not mortally wounded." At the very moment, however, De Guiche was about to raise his pistol against De Wardes, the head, shoulders, and limbs of the comte seemed to collapse. He heaved a deep-drawn sigh, tottered, and fell at the feet of De Wardes's horse.

"That is all right," said De Wardes, and gathering up the reins, he struck his spurs into the horse's sides. The horse cleared the comte's motionless body, and bore De Wardes rapidly back to the chateau. When he arrived there, he remained a quarter of an hour deliberating within himself as to the proper course to be adopted. In his impatience to leave the field of battle, he had omitted to ascertain whether De Guiche were dead or not. A double hypothesis presented itself to De Wardes's agitated mind; either De Guiche was killed, or De Guiche was wounded only.

If he were killed, why should he leave his body in that manner to the tender mercies of the wolves; it was a perfectly useless piece of cruelty, for if De Guiche were dead, he certainly could not breathe a syllable of what had passed; if he were not killed, why should he, De Wardes, in leaving him there uncared for, allow himself to be regarded as a savage, incapable of one generous feeling? This last consideration determined his line of conduct.

De Wardes immediately instituted inquires after Manicamp. He was told that Manicamp had been looking after De Guiche, and, not knowing where to find him, had retired to bed. De Wardes went and awoke the sleeper, without any delay, and related the whole affair to him, which Manicamp listened to in perfect silence, but with an expression of momentarily increasing energy, of which his face could hardly have been supposed capable. It was only when De Wardes had finished, that Manicamp uttered the words, "Let us go."

As they proceeded, Manicamp became more and more excited, and in proportion as De Wardes related the details of the affair to him, his countenance assumed every moment a darker expression. "And so," he said, when De Wardes had finished, "you think he is dead?"

"Alas, I do."

"And you fought in that manner, without witnesses?"

"He insisted upon it."

"It is very singular."

"What do you mean by saying it is singular?"

"That it is very unlike Monsieur de Guiche's disposition."

"You do not doubt my word, I suppose?"

"Hum! hum!"

"You do doubt it, then?"

"A little. But I shall doubt it more than ever, I warn you, if I find the poor fellow is really dead."

"Monsieur Manicamp!"

"Monsieur de Wardes!"

"It seems you intend to insult me."

"Just as you please. The fact is, I never did like people who come and say, 'I have killed such and such a gentleman in a corner; it is a great pity, but I killed him in a perfectly honorable manner.' It has an ugly appearance, M. de Wardes."

"Silence! we have arrived."

In fact, the glade could now be seen, and in the open space lay the motionless body of the dead horse. To the right of the horse, upon the dark grass, with his face against the ground, the poor comte lay, bathed in his blood. He had remained in the same spot, and did not even seem to have made the slightest movement. Manicamp threw himself on his knees, lifted the comte in his arms, and found him quite cold, and steeped in blood. He let him gently fall again. Then, stretching out his hand and feeling all over the ground close to where the comte lay, he sought until he found De Guiche's pistol.

"By Heaven!" he said, rising to his feet, pale as death and with the pistol in his hand, "you are not mistaken, he is quite dead."

"Dead!" repeated De Wardes.

"Yes; and his pistol is still loaded," added Manicamp, looking into the pan.

"But I told you that I took aim as he was walking towards me, and fired at him at the very moment he was going to fire at me."

"Are you quite sure that you fought with him, Monsieur de Wardes? I confess that I am very much afraid it has been a foul assassination. Nay, nay, no exclamations! You have had your three shots, and his pistol is still loaded. You have killed his horse, and he, De Guiche, one of the best marksmen in France, has not touched even either your horse or yourself. Well, Monsieur de Wardes, you have been very unlucky in bringing me here; all the blood in my body seems to have mounted to my head; and I verily believe that since so good an opportunity presents itself, I shall blow your brains out on the spot. So, Monsieur de Wardes, recommend yourself to Heaven."

"Monsieur Manicamp, you cannot think of such a thing!"

"On the contrary, I am thinking of it very strongly."

"Would you assassinate me?"

"Without the slightest remorse, at least for the present."

"Are you a gentleman?"

"I have given a great many proofs of that."

"Let me defend my life, then, at least."

"Very likely; in order, I suppose, that you may do to me what you have done to poor De Guiche."

And Manicamp slowly raised his pistol to the height of

De Wardes's breast, and with arm stretched out, and a fixed, determined look on his face, took a careful aim.

De Wardes did not attempt a flight; he was completely terrified. In the midst, however, of this horrible silence, which lasted about a second, but which seemed an age to De Wardes, a faint sigh was heard.

"Oh," exclaimed De Wardes, "he still lives! Help, De Guiche, I am about to be assassinated!"

Manicamp fell back a step or two, and the two young men saw the comte raise himself slowly and painfully upon one hand. Manicamp threw the pistol away a dozen paces, and ran to his friend, uttering a cry of delight. De Wardes wiped his forehead, which was covered with a cold perspiration.

"It was just in time," he murmured.

"Where are you hurt?" inquired Manicamp of De Guiche, "and whereabouts are you wounded?"

De Guiche showed him his mutilated hand and his chest covered with blood.

"Comte," exclaimed De Wardes, "I am accused of having assassinated you; speak, I implore you, and say that I fought loyally."

"Perfectly so," said the wounded man; "Monsieur de Wardes fought quite loyally, and whoever says the contrary will make an enemy of me."

"Then, sir," said Manicamp, "assist me, in the first place, to carry this gentleman home, and I will afterwards give you every

satisfaction you please; or, if you are in a hurry, we can do better still; let us stanch the blood from the comte's wounds here, with your pocket-handkerchief and mine, and then, as there are two shots left, we can have them between us."

"Thank you," said De Wardes. "Twice already, in one hour, I have seen death too close at hand to be agreeable; I don't like his look at all, and I prefer your apologies."

Manicamp burst out laughing, and Guiche, too, in spite of his sufferings. The two young men wished to carry him, but he declared he felt quite strong enough to walk alone. The ball had broken his ring-finger and his little finger, and then had glanced along his side, but without penetrating deeply into his chest. It was the pain rather than the seriousness of the wound, therefore, which had overcome De Guiche. Manicamp passed his arm under one of the count's shoulders, and De Wardes did the same with the other, and in this way they brought him back to Fontainebleau, to the house of the same doctor who had been present at the death of the Franciscan, Aramis's predecessor.

Chapter XIV. The King's Supper

The king, while these matters were being arranged, was sitting at the supper-table, and the not very large number of guests for that day had taken their seats too, after the usual gesture intimating the royal permission. At this period of Louis XIV.'s reign, although etiquette was not governed by the strict regulations subsequently adopted, the French court had entirely thrown aside the traditions of good-fellowship and patriarchal affability existing in the time of Henry IV., which the suspicious mind of Louis XIII. had gradually replaced with pompous state and ceremony, which he despaired of being able fully to realize.

The king, therefore, was seated alone at a small separate table, which, like the desk of a president, overlooked the adjoining tables. Although we say a small table, we must not omit to add that this small table was the largest one there. Moreover, it was the one on which were placed the greatest number and quantity of dishes, consisting of fish, game, meat, fruit, vegetables, and preserves. The king was young and full of vigor and energy, very fond of hunting, addicted to all violent exercises of the body, possessing, besides, like all the members of the Bourbon family, a rapid digestion and an appetite speedily renewed. Louis XIV. was a formidable table-companion; he delighted in criticising his cooks; but when he honored them by praise and commendation, the honor was overwhelming. The king began by eating several

kinds of soup, either mixed together or taken separately. He intermixed, or rather separated, each of the soups by a glass of old wine. He ate quickly and somewhat greedily. Porthos, who from the beginning had, out of respect, been waiting for a jog of D'Artagnan's arm, seeing the king make such rapid progress, turned to the musketeer and said in a low voice:

"It seems as if one might go on now; his majesty is very encouraging, from the example he sets. Look."

"The king eats," said D'Artagnan, "but he talks at the same time; try and manage matters in such a manner that, if he should happen to address a remark to you, he will not find you with your mouth full – which would be very disrespectful."

"The best way, in that case," said Porthos, "is to eat no supper at all; and yet I am very hungry, I admit, and everything looks and smells most invitingly, as if appealing to all my senses at once."

"Don't think of not eating for a moment," said D'Artagnan; "that would put his majesty out terribly. The king has a saying, 'that he who works well, eats well,' and he does not like people to eat indifferently at his table."

"How can I avoid having my mouth full if I eat?" said Porthos.

"All you have to do," replied the captain of the musketeers, "is simply to swallow what you have in it, whenever the king does you the honor to address a remark to you."

"Very good," said Porthos; and from that moment he began to eat with a certain well-bred enthusiasm.

The king occasionally looked at the different persons who

were at table with him, and, *en connoisseur*, could appreciate the different dispositions of his guests.

"Monsieur du Vallon!" he said.

Porthos was enjoying a *salmi de lievre*, and swallowed half of the back. His name, pronounced in such a manner, made him start, and by a vigorous effort of his gullet he absorbed the whole mouthful.

"Sire," replied Porthos, in a stifled voice, but sufficiently intelligible, nevertheless.

"Let those *filets d'agneau* be handed to Monsieur du Vallon," said the king; "do you like brown meats, M. du Vallon?"

"Sire, I like everything," replied Porthos.

D'Artagnan whispered: "Everything your majesty sends me."

Porthos repeated: "Everything your majesty sends me," an observation which the king apparently received with great satisfaction.

"People eat well who work well," replied the king, delighted to have *en tete-a-tete* a guest who could eat as Porthos did. Porthos received the dish of lamb, and put a portion of it on his plate.

"Well?" said the king.

"Exquisite," said Porthos, calmly.

"Have you as good mutton in your part of the country, Monsieur du Vallon?" continued the king.

"Sire, I believe that from my own province, as everywhere else, the best of everything is sent to Paris for your majesty's use; but, on the other hand, I do not eat lamb in the same way your

majesty does."

"Ah, ah! and how do you eat it?"

"Generally, I have a lamb dressed whole."

"*Whole?*"

"Yes, sire."

"In what manner, Monsieur du Vallon?"

"In this, sire: my cook, who is a German, first stuffs the lamb in question with small sausages he procures from Strasburg, force-meat balls from Troyes, and larks from Pithiviers; by some means or other, which I am not acquainted with, he bones the lamb as he would do a fowl, leaving the skin on, however, which forms a brown crust all over the animal; when it is cut in beautiful slices, in the same way as an enormous sausage, a rose-colored gravy pours forth, which is as agreeable to the eye as it is exquisite to the palate." And Porthos finished by smacking his lips.

The king opened his eyes with delight, and, while cutting some of the *faisan en daube*, which was being handed to him, he said:

"That is a dish I should very much like to taste, Monsieur du Vallon. Is it possible! a whole lamb!"

"Absolutely an entire lamb, sire."

"Pass those pheasants to M. du Vallon; I perceive he is an amateur."

The order was immediately obeyed. Then, continuing the conversation, he said: "And you do not find the lamb too fat?"

"No, sire, the fat falls down at the same time as the gravy does, and swims on the surface; then the servant who carves removes

the fat with a spoon, which I have had expressly made for that purpose."

"Where do you reside?" inquired the king.

"At Pierrefonds, sire."

"At Pierrefonds; where is that, M. du Vallon – near Belle-Isle?"

"Oh, no, sire! Pierrefonds is in the Soissonnais."

"I thought you alluded to the lamb on account of the salt marshes."

"No, sire, I have marshes which are not salt, it is true, but which are not the less valuable on that account."

The king had now arrived at the *entrements*, but without losing sight of Porthos, who continued to play his part in the best manner.

"You have an excellent appetite, M. du Vallon," said the king, "and you make an admirable guest at table."

"Ah! sire, if your majesty were ever to pay a visit to Pierrefonds, we would both of us eat our lamb together; for your appetite is not an indifferent one by any means."

D'Artagnan gave Porthos a kick under the table, which made Porthos color up.

"At your majesty's present happy age," said Porthos, in order to repair the mistake he had made, "I was in the musketeers, and nothing could ever satisfy me then. Your majesty has an excellent appetite, as I have already had the honor of mentioning, but you select what you eat with quite too much refinement to be called

for one moment a great eater."

The king seemed charmed at his guest's politeness.

"Will you try some of these creams?" he said to Porthos.

"Sire, you majesty treats me with far too much kindness to prevent me speaking the whole truth."

"Pray do so, M. du Vallon."

"Will, sire, with regard to sweet dishes I only recognize pastry, and even that should be rather solid; all these frothy substances swell the stomach, and occupy a space which seems to me to be too precious to be so badly tenanted."

"Ah! gentlemen," said the king, indicating Porthos by a gesture, "here is indeed a model of gastronomy. It was in such a manner that our fathers, who so well knew what good living was, used to *eat*, while we," added his majesty, "do nothing but tantalize with our stomachs." And as he spoke, he took the breast of a chicken with ham, while Porthos attacked a dish of partridges and quails. The cup-bearer filled his majesty's glass. "Give M. du Vallon some of my wine," said the king. This was one of the greatest honors of the royal table. D'Artagnan pressed his friend's knee. "If you could only manage to swallow the half of that boar's head I see yonder," said he to Porthos, "I shall believe you will be a duke and peer within the next twelvemonth."

"Presently," said Porthos, phlegmatically; "I shall come to that by and by."

In fact it was not long before it came to the boar's turn, for the king seemed to take pleasure in urging on his guest; he did not

pass any of the dishes to Porthos until he had tasted them himself, and he accordingly took some of the boar's head. Porthos showed that he could keep pace with his sovereign; and, instead of eating the half, as D'Artagnan had told him, he ate three-fourths of it. "It is impossible," said the king in an undertone, "that a gentleman who eats so good a supper every day, and who has such beautiful teeth, can be otherwise than the most straightforward, upright man in my kingdom."

"Do you hear?" said D'Artagnan in his friend's ear.

"Yes; I think I am rather in favor," said Porthos, balancing himself on his chair.

"Oh! you are in luck's way."

The king and Porthos continued to eat in the same manner, to the great satisfaction of the other guests, some of whom, from emulation, had attempted to follow them, but were obliged to give up half-way. The king soon began to get flushed and the reaction of the blood to his face announced that the moment of repletion had arrived. It was then that Louis XIV., instead of becoming gay and cheerful, as most good livers generally do, became dull, melancholy, and taciturn. Porthos, on the contrary, was lively and communicative. D'Artagnan's foot had more than once to remind him of this peculiarity of the king. The dessert now made its appearance. The king had ceased to think anything further of Porthos; he turned his eyes anxiously towards the entrance-door, and he was heard occasionally to inquire how it happened that Monsieur de Saint-Aignan was so long in arriving.

At last, at the moment when his majesty was finishing a pot of preserved plums with a deep sigh, Saint-Aignan appeared. The king's eyes, which had become somewhat dull, immediately began to sparkle. The comte advanced towards the king's table, and Louis rose at his approach. Everybody got up at the same time, including Porthos, who was just finishing an almond-cake capable of making the jaws of a crocodile stick together. The supper was over.

Chapter XV. After Supper

The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining apartment. “What has detained you, comte?” said the king.

“I was bringing the answer, sire,” replied the comte.

“She has taken a long time to reply to what I wrote her.”

“Sire, your majesty deigned to write in verse, and Mademoiselle de la Valliere wished to repay your majesty in the same coin; that is to say, in gold.”

“Verses! Saint-Aignan,” exclaimed the king in ecstasy. “Give them to me at once.” And Louis broke the seal of a little letter, inclosing the verses which history has preserved entire for us, and which are more meritorious in invention than in execution. Such as they were, however, the king was enchanted with them, and exhibited his satisfaction by unequivocal transports of delight; but the universal silence which reigned in the rooms warned Louis, so sensitively particular with regard to good breeding, that his delight must give rise to various interpretations. He turned aside and put the note in his pocket, and then advancing a few steps, which brought him again to the threshold of the door close to his guests, he said, “M. du Vallon, I have seen you to-day with the greatest pleasure, and my pleasure will be equally great to see you again.” Porthos bowed as the Colossus of Rhodes would have done, and retired from the room with his face towards the

king. “M. d’Artagnan,” continued the king, “you will await my orders in the gallery; I am obliged to you for having made me acquainted with M. du Vallon. Gentlemen,” addressing himself to the other guests, “I return to Paris to-morrow on account of the departure of the Spanish and Dutch ambassadors. Until to-morrow then.”

The apartment was immediately cleared of the guests. The king took Saint-Aignan by the arm, made him read La Valliere’s verses over again, and said, “What do you think of them?”

“Charming, sire.”

“They charm me, in fact, and if they were known – ”

“Oh! the professional poets would be jealous of them; but it is not likely they will know anything about them.”

“Did you give her mine?”

“Oh! sire, she positively devoured them.”

“They were very weak, I am afraid.”

“That is not what Mademoiselle de la Valliere said of them.”

“Do you think she was pleased with them?”

“I am sure of it, sire.”

“I must answer, then.”

“Oh! sire, immediately after supper? Your majesty will fatigue yourself.”

“You are quite right; study after eating is notoriously injurious.”

“The labor of a poet especially so; and besides, there is great excitement prevailing at Mademoiselle de la Valliere’s.”

"What do you mean?"

"With her as with all the ladies of the court."

"Why?"

"On account of poor De Guiche's accident."

"Has anything serious happened to De Guiche, then?"

"Yes, sire, he has one hand nearly destroyed, a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying."

"Good heavens! who told you that?"

"Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumor soon reached us all."

"Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?"

"Ah! that is the very question, – how did it happen?"

"You say that in a very singular manner, Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he say himself?"

"He says nothing, sire; but others do."

"What others?"

"Those who brought him back, sire."

"Who are they?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows. M. de Manicamp is one of his friends."

"As everybody is, indeed," said the king.

"Oh! no!" returned Saint-Aignan, "you are mistaken sire; every one is not precisely a friend of M. de Guiche."

"How do you know that?"

"Does your majesty require me to explain myself?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, sire, I believe I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper was served."

"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."

"In that case, Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty commanded me to speak, and I spoke accordingly."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded?"

"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."

"This evening?"

"Yes, sire."

"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast. Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, Saint-Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, I assure you."

"Then, explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"

"Very likely, sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."

"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol, I should think."

"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed and that the horse is still to be found in the wide open glade in the forest."

"His horse? – Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt? – Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a syllable of what you have been telling me. Where did this affair happen?"

"At the Rond-point, in that part of the forest called the Bois-Rochin."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan." Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave this place by the little door of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will proceed to the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin. Do you know the spot?"

"Yes, sire. I have fought there twice."

"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.

"Under the edicts, sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual impassability.

"That is very different, monsieur. You will, therefore, go there, and will examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."

"Very good, sire."

"As a matter of course, it is your own opinion I require, and not that of any one else."

"You shall have it in an hour's time, sire."

"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever it may be."

"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh! that is a matter of course," said the king, laughing at the liberty, which he tolerated in no one but his captain of the musketeers. D'Artagnan left by the little staircase.

"Now, let my physician be sent for," said Louis. Ten minutes afterwards the king's physician arrived, quite out of breath.

"You will go, monsieur," said the king to him, "and accompany M. de Saint-Aignan wherever he may take you; you will render me an account of the state of the person you may see in the house you will be taken to." The physician obeyed without a remark, as at that time people began to obey Louis XIV., and left the room preceding Saint-Aignan.

"Do you, Saint-Aignan, send Manicamp to me, before the physician can possibly have spoken to him." And Saint-Aignan left in his turn.

Chapter XVI. Showing in What Way D'Artagnan Discharged the Mission with Which the King Had Intrusted Him

While the king was engaged in making these last-mentioned arrangements in order to ascertain the truth, D'Artagnan, without losing a second, ran to the stable, took down the lantern, saddled his horse himself, and proceeded towards the place his majesty had indicated. According to the promise he had made, he had not accosted any one; and, as we have observed, he had carried his scruples so far as to do without the assistance of the stable-helpers altogether. D'Artagnan was one of those who in moments of difficulty pride themselves on increasing their own value. By dint of hard galloping, he in less than five minutes reached the wood, fastened his horse to the first tree he came to, and penetrated to the broad open space on foot. He then began to inspect most carefully, on foot and with his lantern in his hand, the whole surface of the Rond-point, went forward, turned back again, measured, examined, and after half an hour's minute inspection, he returned silently to where he had left his horse, and pursued his way in deep reflection and at a foot-pace to Fontainebleau. Louis was waiting in his cabinet; he was

alone, and with a pencil was scribbling on paper certain lines which D'Artagnan at the first glance recognized as unequal and very much touched up. The conclusion he arrived at was, that they must be verses. The king raised his head and perceived D'Artagnan. "Well, monsieur," he said, "do you bring me any news?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.