

Chapter XLVI. The Son of Biscarrat.

The Bretons of the Isle were very proud of this victory; Aramis did not encourage them in the feeling.

"What will happen," said he to Porthos, when everybody was gone home, "will be that the anger of the king will be roused by the account of the resistance; and that these brave people will be decimated or shot when they are taken, which cannot fail to take place."

"From which it results, then," said Porthos, "that what we have done is of not the slightest use."

"For the moment it may be," replied the bishop, "for we have a prisoner from whom we shall learn what our enemies are preparing to do."

"Yes, let us interrogate the prisoner," said Porthos, "and the means of making him speak are very simple. We are going to supper; we will invite him to join us; as he drinks he will talk."

This was done. The officer was at first rather uneasy, but became reassured on seeing what sort of men he had to deal with. He gave, without having any fear of compromising himself, all the details imaginable of the resignation and departure of D'Artagnan. He explained how, after that departure, the new leader of the expedition had ordered a surprise upon Belle-Isle. There his explanations stopped. Aramis and Porthos exchanged a glance that evinced their despair. No more dependence to be placed now on D'Artagnan's fertile imagination--no further resource in the event of defeat. Aramis, continuing his interrogations, asked the prisoner what the leaders of the expedition contemplated doing with the leaders of Belle-Isle.

"The orders are," replied he, "to kill during combat, or hang afterwards."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other again, and the color mounted to their faces.

"I am too light for the gallows," replied Aramis; "people like me are not hung."

"And I am too heavy," said Porthos; "people like me break the cord."

"I am sure," said the prisoner, gallantly, "that we could have guaranteed you the exact kind of death you preferred."

"A thousand thanks!" said Aramis, seriously. Porthos bowed.

"One more cup of wine to your health," said he, drinking himself. From one subject to another the chat with the officer was prolonged. He was an intelligent gentleman, and suffered himself to be led on by the charm of Aramis's wit and Porthos's cordial bonhomie.

"Pardon me," said he, "if I address a question to you; but men who are in their sixth bottle have a clear right to forget themselves a little."

"Address it!" cried Porthos; "address it!"

"Speak," said Aramis.

"Were you not, gentlemen, both in the musketeers of the late king?"

"Yes, monsieur, and amongst the best of them, if you please," said Porthos.

"That is true; I should say even the best of all soldiers, messieurs, if I did not fear to offend the memory of my father."

"Of your father?" cried Aramis.

"Do you know what my name is?"

"Ma foi! no, monsieur; but you can tell us, and--"

"I am called Georges de Biscarrat."

"Oh!" cried Porthos, in his turn. "Biscarrat! Do you remember that name, Aramis?"

"Biscarrat!" reflected the bishop. "It seems to me--"

"Try to recollect, monsieur," said the officer.

"Pardieu! that won't take me long," said Porthos. "Biscarrat--called Cardinal--one of the four who interrupted us on the day on which we formed our friendship with D'Artagnan, sword in hand."

"Precisely, gentlemen."

"The only one," cried Aramis, eagerly, "we could not scratch."

"Consequently, a capital blade?" said the prisoner.

"That's true! most true!" exclaimed both friends together. "Ma foi! Monsieur Biscarrat, we are delighted to make the acquaintance of such a brave man's son."

Biscarrat pressed the hands held out by the two musketeers. Aramis looked at Porthos as much as to say, "Here is a man who will help us," and without delay,--"Confess, monsieur," said he, "that it is good to have once been a good man."

"My father always said so, monsieur."

"Confess, likewise, that it is a sad circumstance in which you find yourself, of falling in with men destined to be shot or hung, and to learn that these men are old acquaintances, in fact, hereditary friends."

"Oh! you are not reserved for such a frightful fate as that, messieurs and friends!" said the young man, warmly.

"Bah! you said so yourself."

"I said so just now, when I did not know you; but now that I know you, I say--you will evade this dismal fate, if you wish!"

"How--if we wish?" echoed Aramis, whose eyes beamed with intelligence as he looked alternately at the prisoner and Porthos.

"Provided," continued Porthos, looking, in his turn, with noble intrepidity, at M. Biscarrat and the bishop--"provided nothing disgraceful be required of us."

"Nothing at all will be required of you, gentlemen," replied the officer--"what should they ask of you? If they find you they will kill you, that is a predetermined thing; try, then, gentlemen, to prevent their finding you."

"I don't think I am mistaken," said Porthos, with dignity; "but it appears evident to me that if they want to find us, they must come and seek us here."

"In that you are perfectly right, my worthy friend," replied Aramis, constantly consulting with his looks the countenance of Biscarrat, who had grown silent and constrained. "You wish, Monsieur de Biscarrat, to say something to us, to make us some overture, and you dare not--is that true?"

"Ah! gentlemen and friends! it is because by speaking I betray the watchword. But, hark! I hear a voice that frees mine by dominating it."

"Cannon!" said Porthos.

"Cannon and musketry, too!" cried the bishop.

On hearing at a distance, among the rocks, these sinister reports of a combat which they thought had ceased:

"What can that be?" asked Porthos.

"Eh! Pardieu!" cried Aramis; "that is just what I expected."

"What is that?"

"That the attack made by you was nothing but a feint; is not that true, monsieur? And whilst your companions allowed themselves to be repulsed, you were certain of effecting a landing on the other side of the island."

"Oh! several, monsieur."

"We are lost, then," said the bishop of Vannes, quietly.

"Lost! that is possible," replied the Seigneur de Pierrefonds, "but we are not taken or hung." And so saying, he rose from the table, went to the wall, and coolly took down his sword and pistols, which he examined with the care of an old soldier who is preparing for battle, and who feels that life, in a great measure, depends upon the excellence and right conditions of his arms.

At the report of the cannon, at the news of the surprise which might deliver up the island to the royal troops, the terrified crowd rushed precipitately to the fort to demand assistance and advice from their leaders. Aramis, pale and downcast, between two flambeaux, showed himself at the window which looked into the principal court, full of soldiers waiting for orders and bewildered inhabitants imploring succor.

"My friends," said D'Herblay, in a grave and sonorous voice, "M. Fouquet, your protector, your friend, your father, has been arrested by an order of the king, and thrown into the Bastille." A sustained yell of vengeful fury came floating up to the window at which the bishop stood, and enveloped him in a magnetic field.

"Avenge Monsieur Fouquet!" cried the most excited of his hearers, "death to the royalists!"

"No, my friends," replied Aramis, solemnly; "no, my friends; no resistance. The king is master in his kingdom. The king is the mandatory of God. The king and God have struck M. Fouquet. Humble yourselves before the hand of God. Love God and the king, who have struck M. Fouquet. But do not avenge your seigneur, do not think of avenging him. You would sacrifice yourselves in vain--you, your wives and children, your property, your liberty. Lay down your arms, my friends--lay down your arms! since the king commands you so to do--and retire peaceably to

your dwellings. It is I who ask you to do so; it is I who beg you to do so; it is I who now, in the hour of need, command you to do so, in the name of M. Fouquet."

The crowd collected under the window uttered a prolonged roar of anger and terror. "The soldiers of Louis XIV. have reached the island," continued Aramis. "From this time it would no longer be a fight betwixt them and you--it would be a massacre. Begone, then, begone, and forget; this time I command you, in the name of the Lord of Hosts!"

The mutineers retired slowly, submissive, silent.

"Ah! what have you just been saying, my friend?" said Porthos.

"Monsieur," said Biscarrat to the bishop, "you may save all these inhabitants, but thus you will neither save yourself nor your friend."

"Monsieur de Biscarrat," said the bishop of Vannes, with a singular accent of nobility and courtesy, "Monsieur de Biscarrat, be kind enough to resume your liberty."

"I am very willing to do so, monsieur; but--"

"That would render us a service, for when announcing to the king's lieutenant the submission of the islanders, you will perhaps obtain some grace for us on informing him of the manner in which that submission has been effected."

"Grace!" replied Porthos with flashing eyes, "what is the meaning of that word?"

Aramis touched the elbow of his friend roughly, as he had been accustomed to do in the days of their youth, when he wanted to warn Porthos that he had committed, or was about to commit, a blunder. Porthos understood him, and was silent immediately.

"I will go, messieurs," replied Biscarrat, a little surprised likewise at the word "grace" pronounced by the haughty musketeer, of and to whom, but a few minutes before, he had related with so much enthusiasm the heroic exploits with which his father had delighted him.

"Go, then, Monsieur Biscarrat," said Aramis, bowing to him, "and at parting receive the expression of our entire gratitude."

"But you, messieurs, you whom I think it an honor to call my friends, since you have been willing to accept that title, what will become of you in the meantime?" replied the officer, very much agitated at taking leave of the two ancient adversaries of his father.

"We will wait here."

"But, mon Dieu!--the order is precise and formal."

"I am bishop of Vannes, Monsieur de Biscarrat; and they no more shoot a bishop than they hang a gentleman."

"Ah! yes, monsieur--yes, monseigneur," replied Biscarrat; "it is true, you are right, there is still that chance for you. Then, I will depart, I will repair to the commander of the expedition, the king's lieutenant. Adieu! then, messieurs, or rather, to meet again, I hope."

The worthy officer, jumping upon a horse given him by Aramis, departed in the direction of the sound of cannon, which, by surging the crowd into the fort, had interrupted the conversation of the two friends with their prisoner. Aramis watched the departure, and when left alone with Porthos:

"Well, do you comprehend?" said he.

"Ma foi! no."

"Did not Biscarrat inconvenience you here?"

"No; he is a brave fellow."

"Yes; but the grotto of Locmaria--is it necessary all the world should know it?"

"Ah! that is true, that is true; I comprehend. We are going to escape by the cavern."

"If you please," cried Aramis, gayly. "Forward, friend Porthos; our boat awaits us. King Louis has not caught us--yet."