Chapter LX. The Last Canto of the Poem.

On the morrow, all the noblesse of the provinces, of the environs, and wherever messengers had carried the news, might have been seen arriving in detachments. D'Artagnan had shut himself up, without being willing to speak to anybody. Two such heavy deaths falling upon the captain, so closely after the death of Porthos, for a long time oppressed that spirit which had hitherto been so indefatigable and invulnerable. Except Grimaud, who entered his chamber once, the musketeer saw neither servants nor guests. He supposed, from the noises in the house, and the continual coming and going, that preparations were being made for the funeral of the comte. He wrote to the king to ask for an extension of his leave of absence. Grimaud, as we have said, had entered D'Artagnan's apartment, had seated himself upon a joint-stool near the door, like a man who meditates profoundly; then, rising, he made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him. The latter obeyed in silence. Grimaud descended to the comte's bed-chamber, showed the captain with his finger the place of the empty bed, and raised his eyes eloquently towards Heaven.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "yes, good Grimaud--now with the son he loved so much!"

Grimaud left the chamber, and led the way to the hall, where, according to the custom of the province, the body was laid out, previously to being put away forever. D'Artagnan was struck at seeing two open coffins in the hall. In reply to the mute invitation of Grimaud, he approached, and saw in one of them Athos, still handsome in death, and, in the other, Raoul with his eyes closed, his cheeks pearly as those of the Palls of Virgil, with a smile on his violet lips. He shuddered at seeing the father and son, those two departed souls, represented on earth by two silent, melancholy bodies, incapable of touching each other, however close they might be.

"Raoul here!" murmured he. "Oh! Grimaud, why did you not tell me this?"

Grimaud shook his head, and made no reply; but taking D'Artagnan by the hand, he led him to the coffin, and showed him, under the thin winding-sheet, the black wounds by which life had escaped. The captain turned away his eyes, and, judging it was useless to question Grimaud, who would not answer, he recollected that M. de Beaufort's secretary had written more than he, D'Artagnan, had had the courage to read. Taking up the recital of the affair which had cost Raoul his life, he found these words, which ended the concluding paragraph of the letter:

"Monseigneur le duc has ordered that the body of monsieur le vicomte should be embalmed, after the manner practiced by the Arabs when they wish their dead to be carried to their native land; and monsieur le duc has appointed relays, so that the same confidential servant who brought up the young man might take back his remains to M. le Comte de la Fere."

"And so," thought D'Artagnan, "I shall follow thy funeral, my dear boy--I, already old--I, who am of no value on earth--and I shall scatter dust upon that brow I kissed but two months since. God has willed it to be so. Thou hast willed it to be so, thyself. I have no longer the right even to weep. Thou hast chosen death; it seemed to thee a preferable gift to life."

At length arrived the moment when the chill remains of these two gentlemen were to be given back to mother earth. There was such an affluence of military and other people that up to the place of the sepulture, which was a little chapel on the plain, the road from the city was filled with horsemen and pedestrians in mourning. Athos had chosen for his resting-place the little inclosure of a chapel erected by himself near the boundary of his estates. He had had the stones, cut in 1550, brought from an old Gothic manor-house in Berry, which had sheltered his early youth. The chapel, thus rebuilt, transported, was pleasing to the eye beneath its leafy curtains of poplars and sycamores. It was ministered in every Sunday, by the cure of the neighboring bourg, to whom Athos paid an allowance of two hundred francs for this service; and all the vassals of his domain, with their families, came thither to hear mass, without having any occasion to go to the city.

Behind the chapel extended, surrounded by two high hedges of hazel, elder and white thorn, and a deep ditch, the little inclosure--uncultivated, though gay in its sterility; because the mosses there grew thick, wild heliotrope and ravenelles there mingled perfumes, while from beneath an ancient chestnut issued a crystal spring, a prisoner in its marble cistern, and on the thyme all around alighted thousands of bees from the neighboring plants, whilst chaffinches and redthroats sang cheerfully among the flower-spangled hedges. It was to this place the somber coffins were carried, attended by a silent and respectful crowd. The office of the dead being celebrated, the last adieux paid to the noble departed, the assembly dispersed, talking, along the roads, of the virtues and mild death of the father, of the hopes the son had given, and of his melancholy end upon the arid coast of Africa.

Little by little, all noises were extinguished, like the lamps illuminating the humble nave. The minister bowed for the last time to the altar and the still fresh graves; then, followed by his assistant, he slowly took the road back to the presbytery. D'Artagnan, left alone, perceived that night was coming on. He had forgotten the hour, thinking only of the dead. He arose from the oaken bench on which he was seated in the chapel, and wished, as the priest had done, to go and bid a last adieu to the double grave which contained his two lost friends.

A woman was praying, kneeling on the moist earth. D'Artagnan stopped at the door of the chapel, to avoid disturbing her, and also to endeavor to

find out who was the pious friend who performed this sacred duty with so much zeal and perseverance. The unknown had hidden her face in her hands, which were white as alabaster. From the noble simplicity of her costume, she must be a woman of distinction. Outside the inclosure were several horses mounted by servants; a travelling carriage was in waiting for this lady. D'Artagnan in vain sought to make out what caused her delay. She continued praying, and frequently pressed her handkerchief to her face, by which D'Artagnan perceived she was weeping. He beheld her strike her breast with the compunction of a Christian woman. He heard her several times exclaim as from a wounded heart: "Pardon! pardon!" And as she appeared to abandon herself entirely to her grief, as she threw herself down, almost fainting, exhausted by complaints and prayers, D'Artagnan, touched by this love for his so much regretted friends, made a few steps towards the grave, in order to interrupt the melancholy colloquy of the penitent with the dead. But as soon as his step sounded on the gravel, the unknown raised her head, revealing to D'Artagnan a face aflood with tears, a well-known face. It was Mademoiselle de la Valliere! "Monsieur d'Artagnan!" murmured she.

"You!" replied the captain, in a stern voice, "you here!--oh! madame, I should better have liked to see you decked with flowers in the mansion of the Comte de la Fere. You would have wept less--and they too--and I!"

"Monsieur!" said she, sobbing.

"For it was you," added this pitiless friend of the dead,--"it was you who sped these two men to the grave."

"Oh! spare me!"

"God forbid, madame, that I should offend a woman, or that I should make her weep in vain; but I must say that the place of the murderer is not upon the grave of her victims." She wished to reply.

"What I now tell you," added he, coldly, "I have already told the king."

She clasped her hands. "I know," said she, "I have caused the death of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Ah! you know it?"

"The news arrived at court yesterday. I have traveled during the night forty leagues to come and ask pardon of the comte, whom I supposed to be still living, and to pray God, on the tomb of Raoul, that he would send me all the misfortunes I have merited, except a single one. Now, monsieur, I know that the death of the son has killed the father; I have two crimes to reproach myself with; I have two punishments to expect from Heaven."

"I will repeat to you, mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan, "what M. de Bragelonne said of you, at Antibes, when he already meditated death: 'If pride and coquetry have misled her, I pardon her while despising her. If love has produced her error, I pardon her, but I swear that no one could have loved her as I have done.'"

"You know," interrupted Louise, "that of my love I was about to sacrifice myself; you know whether I suffered when you met me lost, dying, abandoned. Well! never have I suffered so much as now; because then I hoped, desired,--now I have no longer anything to wish for; because this death drags all my joy into the tomb; because I can no longer dare to love without remorse, and I feel that he whom I love--oh! it is but just!--will repay me with the tortures I have made others undergo."

D'Artagnan made no reply; he was too well convinced that she was not mistaken.

"Well, then," added she, "dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, do not overwhelm me to-day, I again implore you! I am like the branch torn from the trunk, I no longer hold to anything in this world--a current drags me on, I know not whither. I love madly, even to the point of coming to tell it, wretch that I am, over the ashes of the dead, and I do not blush for it--I have no remorse on this account. Such love is a religion. Only, as hereafter you will see me alone, forgotten, disdained; as you will see me punished, as I am destined to be punished, spare me in my ephemeral happiness, leave it to me for a few days, for a few minutes. Now, even at the moment I am speaking to you, perhaps it no longer exists. My God! this double murder is perhaps already expiated!"

While she was speaking thus, the sound of voices and of horses drew the attention of the captain. M. de Saint-Aignan came to seek La Valliere. "The king," he said, "is a prey to jealousy and uneasiness." Saint-Aignan did not perceive D'Artagnan, half concealed by the trunk of a chestnut-tree which shaded the double grave. Louise thanked Saint-Aignan, and dismissed him with a gesture. He rejoined the party outside the inclosure.

"You see, madame," said the captain bitterly to the young woman,--"you see your happiness still lasts."

The young woman raised her head with a solemn air. "A day will come," said she, "when you will repent of having so misjudged me. On that day, it is I who will pray God to forgive you for having been unjust towards me. Besides, I shall suffer so much that you yourself will be the first to pity my sufferings. Do not reproach me with my fleeting happiness, Monsieur d'Artagnan; it costs me dear, and I have not paid all my debt." Saying these words, she again knelt down, softly and affectionately.

"Pardon me the last time, my affianced Raoul!" said she. "I have broken our chain; we are both destined to die of grief. It is thou who departest first; fear nothing, I shall follow thee. See, only, that I have not been base, and that I have come to bid thee this last adieu. The Lord is my witness, Raoul, that if with my life I could have redeemed thine, I would have given that life without hesitation. I could not give my love. Once more, forgive me, dearest, kindest friend."

She strewed a few sweet flowers on the freshly sodded earth; then, wiping the tears from her eyes, the heavily stricken lady bowed to D'Artagnan, and disappeared.

The captain watched the departure of the horses, horsemen, and carriage, then crossing his arms upon his swelling chest, "When will it be my turn to depart?" said he, in an agitated voice. "What is there left for man after youth, love, glory, friendship, strength, and wealth have disappeared? That rock, under which sleeps Porthos, who possessed all I have named; this moss, under which repose Athos and Raoul, who possessed much more!"

He hesitated for a moment, with a dull eye; then, drawing himself up, "Forward! still forward!" said he. "When it is time, God will tell me, as he foretold the others."

He touched the earth, moistened with the evening dew, with the ends of his fingers, signed himself as if he had been at the benitier in church, and retook alone--ever alone--the road to Paris.

Epilogue.

Four years after the scene we have just described, two horsemen, well mounted, traversed Blois early in the morning, for the purpose of arranging a hawking party the king had arranged to make in that uneven plain the Loire divides in two, which borders on the one side Meung, on the other Amboise. These were the keeper of the king's harriers and the master of the falcons, personages greatly respected in the time of Louis XIII., but rather neglected by his successor. The horsemen, having reconnoitered the ground, were returning, their observations made, when they perceived certain little groups of soldiers, here and there, whom the sergeants were placing at distances at the openings of the inclosures. These were the king's musketeers. Behind them came, upon a splendid horse, the captain, known by his richly embroidered uniform. His hair was gray, his beard turning so. He seemed a little bent, although sitting and handling his horse gracefully. He was looking about him watchfully.

"M. d'Artagnan does not get any older," said the keeper of the harriers

to his colleague the falconer; "with ten years more to carry than either of us, he has the seat of a young man on horseback."

"That is true," replied the falconer. "I don't see any change in him for the last twenty years."

But this officer was mistaken; D'Artagnan in the last four years had lived a dozen. Age had printed its pitiless claws at each angle of his eyes; his brow was bald; his hands, formerly brown and nervous, were getting white, as if the blood had half forgotten them.

D'Artagnan accosted the officers with the shade of affability which distinguishes superiors, and received in turn for his courtesy two most respectful bows.

"Ah! what a lucky chance to see you here, Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the falconer.

"It is rather I who should say that, messieurs," replied the captain, "for nowadays, the king makes more frequent use of his musketeers than of his falcons."

"Ah! it is not as it was in the good old times," sighed the falconer. "Do you remember, Monsieur d'Artagnan, when the late king flew the pie in the vineyards beyond Beaugence? Ah! dame! you were not the captain of the musketeers at that time, Monsieur d'Artagnan." [7]

"And you were nothing but under-corporal of the tiercelets," replied D'Artagnan, laughing. "Never mind that, it was a good time, seeing that it is always a good time when we are young. Good day, monsieur the keeper of the harriers."

"You do me honor, monsieur le comte," said the latter. D'Artagnan made no reply. The title of comte had hardly struck him; D'Artagnan had been a comte four years.

"Are you not very much fatigued with the long journey you have taken, monsieur le capitaine?" continued the falconer. "It must be full two hundred leagues from hence to Pignerol."

"Two hundred and sixty to go, and as many to return," said D'Artagnan, quietly.

"And," said the falconer, "is he well?"

"Who?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why, poor M. Fouquet," continued the falconer, in a low voice. The keeper of the harriers had prudently withdrawn.

"No," replied D'Artagnan, "the poor man frets terribly; he cannot comprehend how imprisonment can be a favor; he says that parliament absolved him by banishing him, and banishment is, or should be, liberty. He cannot imagine that they had sworn his death, and that to save his life from the claws of parliament was to be under too much obligation to Heaven."

"Ah! yes; the poor man had a close chance of the scaffold," replied the falconer; "it is said that M. Colbert had given orders to the governor of the Bastile, and that the execution was ordered."

"Enough!" said D'Artagnan, pensively, and with a view of cutting short the conversation.

"Yes," said the keeper of the harriers, drawing towards them, "M. Fouquet is now at Pignerol; he has richly deserved it. He had the good fortune to be conducted there by you; he robbed the king sufficiently."

D'Artagnan launched at the master of the dogs one of his crossest looks, and said to him, "Monsieur, if any one told me you had eaten your dogs' meat, not only would I refuse to believe it; but still more, if you were condemned to the lash or to jail for it, I should pity you and would not allow people to speak ill of you. And yet, monsieur, honest man as you may be, I assure you that you are not more so than poor M. Fouquet was."

After having undergone this sharp rebuke, the keeper of the harriers hung his head, and allowed the falconer to get two steps in advance of him nearer to D'Artagnan.

"He is content," said the falconer, in a low voice, to the musketeer; "we all know that harriers are in fashion nowadays; if he were a falconer he would not talk in that way."

D'Artagnan smiled in a melancholy manner at seeing this great political question resolved by the discontent of such humble interest. He for a moment ran over in his mind the glorious existence of the surintendant, the crumbling of his fortunes, and the melancholy death that awaited him; and to conclude, "Did M. Fouquet love falconry?" said he.

"Oh, passionately, monsieur!" repeated the falconer, with an accent of bitter regret and a sigh that was the funeral oration of Fouquet.

D'Artagnan allowed the ill-humor of the one and the regret of the other to pass, and continued to advance. They could already catch glimpses of the huntsmen at the issue of the wood, the feathers of the outriders passing like shooting stars across the clearings, and the white horses skirting the bosky thickets looking like illuminated apparitions.

"But," resumed D'Artagnan, "will the sport last long? Pray, give us a good swift bird, for I am very tired. Is it a heron or a swan?"

"Both, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the falconer; "but you need not be alarmed; the king is not much of a sportsman; he does not take the field on his own account, he only wishes to amuse the ladies."

The words "to amuse the ladies" were so strongly accented they set D'Artagnan thinking.

"Ah!" said he, looking keenly at the falconer.

The keeper of the harriers smiled, no doubt with a view of making it up with the musketeer.

"Oh! you may safely laugh," said D'Artagnan; "I know nothing of current news; I only arrived yesterday, after a month's absence. I left the court mourning the death of the queen-mother. The king was not willing to take any amusement after receiving the last sigh of Anne of Austria; but everything comes to an end in this world. Well! then he is no longer sad? So much the better." [8]

"And everything begins as well as ends," said the keeper with a coarse laugh.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, a second time,--he burned to know, but dignity would not allow him to interrogate people below him,--"there is something beginning, then, it seems?"

The keeper gave him a significant wink; but D'Artagnan was unwilling to learn anything from this man.

"Shall we see the king early?" asked he of the falconer.

"At seven o'clock, monsieur, I shall fly the birds."

"Who comes with the king? How is Madame? How is the queen?"

"Better, monsieur."

"Has she been ill, then?"

"Monsieur, since the last chagrin she suffered, her majesty has been unwell."

"What chagrin? You need not fancy your news is old. I have but just returned."

"It appears that the queen, a little neglected since the death of her

mother-in-law, complained to the king, who answered her,--'Do I not sleep at home every night, madame? What more do you expect?'"

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan,--"poor woman! She must heartily hate Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

"Oh, no! not Mademoiselle de la Valliere," replied the falconer.

"Who then--" The blast of a hunting-horn interrupted this conversation. It summoned the dogs and the hawks. The falconer and his companions set off immediately, leaving D'Artagnan alone in the midst of the suspended sentence. The king appeared at a distance, surrounded by ladies and horsemen. All the troop advanced in beautiful order, at a foot's pace, the horns of various sorts animating the dogs and horses. There was an animation in the scene, a mirage of light, of which nothing now can give an idea, unless it be the fictitious splendor of a theatric spectacle. D'Artagnan, with an eye a little, just a little, dimmed by age, distinguished behind the group three carriages. The first was intended for the queen; it was empty. D'Artagnan, who did not see Mademoiselle de la Valliere by the king's side, on looking about for her, saw her in the second carriage. She was alone with two of her women, who seemed as dull as their mistress. On the left hand of the king, upon a high-spirited horse, restrained by a bold and skillful hand, shone a lady of most dazzling beauty. The king smiled upon her, and she smiled upon the king. Loud laughter followed every word she uttered.

"I must know that woman," thought the musketeer; "who can she be?" And he stooped towards his friend, the falconer, to whom he addressed the question he had put to himself.

The falconer was about to reply, when the king, perceiving D'Artagnan, "Ah, comte!" said he, "you are amongst us once more then! Why have I not seen you?"

"Sire," replied the captain, "because your majesty was asleep when I arrived, and not awake when I resumed my duties this morning."

"Still the same," said Louis, in a loud voice, denoting satisfaction. "Take some rest, comte; I command you to do so. You will dine with me to-day."

A murmur of admiration surrounded D'Artagnan like a caress. Every one was eager to salute him. Dining with the king was an honor his majesty was not so prodigal of as Henry IV. had been. The king passed a few steps in advance, and D'Artagnan found himself in the midst of a fresh group, among whom shone Colbert.

"Good-day, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the minister, with marked

affability, "have you had a pleasant journey?"

"Yes, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing to the neck of his horse.

"I heard the king invite you to his table for this evening," continued the minister; "you will meet an old friend there."

"An old friend of mine?" asked D'Artagnan, plunging painfully into the dark waves of the past, which had swallowed up for him so many friendships and so many hatreds.

"M. le Duc d'Almeda, who is arrived this morning from Spain."

"The Duc d'Almeda?" said D'Artagnan, reflecting in vain.

"Here!" cried an old man, white as snow, sitting bent in his carriage, which he caused to be thrown open to make room for the musketeer.

"Aramis!" cried D'Artagnan, struck with profound amazement. And he felt, inert as it was, the thin arm of the old nobleman hanging round his neck.

Colbert, after having observed them in silence for a few moments, urged his horse forward, and left the two old friends together.

"And so," said the musketeer, taking Aramis's arm, "you, the exile, the rebel, are again in France?"

"Ah! and I shall dine with you at the king's table," said Aramis, smiling. "Yes, will you not ask yourself what is the use of fidelity in this world? Stop! let us allow poor La Valliere's carriage to pass. Look, how uneasy she is! How her eyes, dim with tears, follow the king, who is riding on horseback yonder!"

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, now Madame de Montespan," replied
Aramis.

"She is jealous. Is she then deserted?"

"Not quite yet, but it will not be long before she is." [9]

They chatted together, while following the sport, and Aramis's coachman drove them so cleverly that they arrived at the instant when the falcon, attacking the bird, beat him down, and fell upon him. The king alighted; Madame de Montespan followed his example. They were in front of an isolated chapel, concealed by huge trees, already despoiled of their

leaves by the first cutting winds of autumn. Behind this chapel was an inclosure, closed by a latticed gate. The falcon had beaten down his prey in the inclosure belonging to this little chapel, and the king was desirous of going in to take the first feather, according to custom. The cortege formed a circle round the building and the hedges, too small to receive so many. D'Artagnan held back Aramis by the arm, as he was about, like the rest, to alight from his carriage, and in a hoarse, broken voice, "Do you know, Aramis," said he, "whither chance has conducted us?"

"No," replied the duke.

"Here repose men that we knew well," said D'Artagnan, greatly agitated.

Aramis, without divining anything, and with a trembling step, penetrated into the chapel by a little door which D'Artagnan opened for him. "Where are they buried?" said he.

"There, in the inclosure. There is a cross, you see, beneath yon little cypress. The tree of grief is planted over their tomb; don't go to it; the king is going that way; the heron has fallen just there."

Aramis stopped, and concealed himself in the shade. They then saw, without being seen, the pale face of La Valliere, who, neglected in her carriage, at first looked on, with a melancholy heart, from the door, and then, carried away by jealousy, advanced into the chapel, whence, leaning against a pillar, she contemplated the king smiling and making signs to Madame de Montespan to approach, as there was nothing to be afraid of. Madame de Montespan complied; she took the hand the king held out to her, and he, plucking out the first feather from the heron, which the falconer had strangled, placed it in his beautiful companion's hat. She, smiling in her turn, kissed the hand tenderly which made her this present. The king grew scarlet with vanity and pleasure; he looked at Madame de Montespan with all the fire of new love.

"What will you give me in exchange?" said he.

She broke off a little branch of cypress and offered it to the king, who looked intoxicated with hope.

"Humph!" said Aramis to D'Artagnan; "the present is but a sad one, for that cypress shades a tomb."

"Yes, and the tomb is that of Raoul de Bragelonne," said D'Artagnan aloud; "of Raoul, who sleeps under that cross with his father."

A groan resounded--they saw a woman fall fainting to the ground. Mademoiselle de la Valliere had seen all, heard all.

"Poor woman!" muttered D'Artagnan, as he helped the attendants to carry back to her carriage the lonely lady whose lot henceforth in life was suffering.

That evening D'Artagnan was seated at the king's table, near M. Colbert and M. le Duc d'Almeda. The king was very gay. He paid a thousand little attentions to the queen, a thousand kindnesses to Madame, seated at his left hand, and very sad. It might have been supposed that time of calm when the king was wont to watch his mother's eyes for the approval or disapproval of what he had just done.

Of mistresses there was no question at this dinner. The king addressed Aramis two or three times, calling him M. l'ambassadeur, which increased the surprise already felt by D'Artagnan at seeing his friend the rebel so marvelously well received at court.

The king, on rising from table, gave his hand to the queen, and made a sign to Colbert, whose eye was on his master's face. Colbert took D'Artagnan and Aramis on one side. The king began to chat with his sister, whilst Monsieur, very uneasy, entertained the queen with a preoccupied air, without ceasing to watch his wife and brother from the corner of his eye. The conversation between Aramis, D'Artagnan, and Colbert turned upon indifferent subjects. They spoke of preceding ministers; Colbert related the successful tricks of Mazarin, and desired those of Richelieu to be related to him. D'Artagnan could not overcome his surprise at finding this man, with his heavy eyebrows and low forehead, display so much sound knowledge and cheerful spirits. Aramis was astonished at that lightness of character which permitted this serious man to retard with advantage the moment for more important conversation, to which nobody made any allusion, although all three interlocutors felt its imminence. It was very plain, from the embarrassed appearance of Monsieur, how much the conversation of the king and Madame annoyed him. Madame's eyes were almost red: was she going to complain? Was she going to expose a little scandal in open court? The king took her on one side, and in a tone so tender that it must have reminded the princess of the time when she was loved for herself:

"Sister," said he, "why do I see tears in those lovely eyes?"

"Why--sire--" said she.

"Monsieur is jealous, is he not, sister?"

She looked towards Monsieur, an infallible sign that they were talking about him.

"Yes," said she.

"Listen to me," said the king; "if your friends compromise you, it is not Monsieur's fault."

He spoke these words with so much kindness that Madame, encouraged, having borne so many solitary griefs so long, was nearly bursting into tears, so full was her heart.

"Come, come, dear little sister," said the king, "tell me your griefs; on the word of a brother, I pity them; on the word of a king, I will put an end to them."

She raised her glorious eyes and, in a melancholy tone:

"It is not my friends who compromise me," said she; "they are either absent or concealed; they have been brought into disgrace with your majesty; they, so devoted, so good, so loyal!"

"You say this on account of De Guiche, whom I have exiled, at Monsieur's desire?"

"And who, since that unjust exile, has endeavored to get himself killed once every day."

"Unjust, say you, sister?"

"So unjust, that if I had not had the respect mixed with friendship that I have always entertained for your majesty--"

"Well!"

"Well! I would have asked my brother Charles, upon whom I can always--"

The king started. "What, then?"

"I would have asked him to have had it represented to you that Monsieur and his favorite M. le Chevalier de Lorraine ought not with impunity to constitute themselves the executioners of my honor and my happiness."

"The Chevalier de Lorraine," said the king; "that dismal fellow?"

"Is my mortal enemy. Whilst that man lives in my household, where Monsieur retains him and delegates his power to him, I shall be the most miserable woman in the kingdom."

"So," said the king, slowly, "you call your brother of England a better friend than I am?"

"Actions speak for themselves, sire."

"And you would prefer going to ask assistance there--"

"To my own country!" said she with pride; "yes, sire."

"You are the grandchild of Henry IV. as well as myself, lady. Cousin and brother-in-law, does not that amount pretty well to the title of brother-germain?"

"Then," said Henrietta, "act!"

"Let us form an alliance."

"Begin."

"I have, you say, unjustly exiled De Guiche."

"Oh! yes," said she, blushing.

"De Guiche shall return." [10]

"So far, well."

"And now you say that I do wrong in having in your household the Chevalier de Lorraine, who gives Monsieur ill advice respecting you?"

"Remember well what I tell you, sire; the Chevalier de Lorraine some day--Observe, if ever I come to a dreadful end, I beforehand accuse the Chevalier de Lorraine; he has a spirit that is capable of any crime!"

"The Chevalier de Lorraine shall no longer annoy you--I promise you that." [11]

"Then that will be a true preliminary of alliance, sire,--I sign; but since you have done your part, tell me what shall be mine."

"Instead of embroiling me with your brother Charles, you must make him a more intimate friend than ever."

"That is very easy."

"Oh! not quite so easy as you may suppose, for in ordinary friendship people embrace or exercise hospitality, and that only costs a kiss or a return, profitable expenses; but in political friendship--"

"Ah! it's a political friendship, is it?"

"Yes, my sister; and then, instead of embraces and feasts, it is soldiers--it is soldiers all alive and well equipped--that we must serve up to our friends; vessels we must offer, all armed with cannons and

stored with provisions. It hence results that we have not always coffers in a fit condition for such friendships."

"Ah! you are quite right," said Madame; "the coffers of the king of England have been sonorous for some time."

"But you, my sister, who have so much influence over your brother, you can secure more than an ambassador could ever get the promise of."

"To effect that I must go to London, my dear brother."

"I have thought so," replied the king, eagerly; "and I have said to myself that such a voyage would do your health and spirits good."

"Only," interrupted Madame, "it is possible I should fail. The king of England has dangerous counselors."

"Counselors, do you say?"

"Precisely. If, by chance, your majesty had any intention--I am only supposing so--of asking Charles II. his alliance in a war--"

"A war?"

"Yes; well! then the king's counselors, who are in number seven--Mademoiselle Stewart, Mademoiselle Wells, Mademoiselle Gwyn, Miss Orchay, Mademoiselle Zunga, Miss Davies, and the proud Countess of Castlemaine--will represent to the king that war costs a great deal of money; that it is better to give balls and suppers at Hampton Court than to equip ships of the line at Portsmouth and Greenwich."

"And then your negotiations will fail?"

"Oh! those ladies cause all negotiations to fall through which they don't make themselves."

"Do you know the idea that has struck me, sister?"

"No; inform me what it is."

"It is that, searching well around you, you might perhaps find a female counselor to take with you to your brother, whose eloquence might paralyze the ill-will of the seven others."

"That is really an idea, sire, and I will search."

"You will find what you want."

"I hope so."

"A pretty ambassadress is necessary; an agreeable face is better than an ugly one, is it not?"

"Most assuredly."

"An animated, lively, audacious character."

"Certainly."

"Nobility; that is, enough to enable her to approach the king without awkwardness--not too lofty, so as not to trouble herself about the dignity of her race."

"Very true."

"And who knows a little English."

"Mon Dieu! why, some one," cried Madame, "like Mademoiselle de Keroualle, for instance!"

"Oh! why, yes!" said Louis XIV.; "you have hit the mark,--it is you who have found, my sister."

"I will take her; she will have no cause to complain, I suppose."

"Oh! no, I will name her seductrice plenipotentiaire at once, and will add a dowry to the title."

"That is well."

"I fancy you already on your road, my dear little sister, consoled for all your griefs."

"I will go, on two conditions. The first is, that I shall know what I am negotiating about."

"That is it. The Dutch, you know, insult me daily in their gazettes, and by their republican attitude. I do not like republics."

"That may easily be imagined, sire."

"I see with pain that these kings of the sea--they call themselves so--keep trade from France in the Indies, and that their vessels will soon occupy all the ports of Europe. Such a power is too near me, sister."

"They are your allies, nevertheless."

"That is why they were wrong in having the medal you have heard of struck; a medal which represents Holland stopping the sun, as Joshua did, with this legend: The sun had stopped before me. There is not much fraternity in that, is there?"

"I thought you had forgotten that miserable episode?"

"I never forget anything, sister. And if my true friends, such as your brother Charles, are willing to second me--" The princess remained pensively silent.

"Listen to me; there is the empire of the seas to be shared," said Louis XIV. "For this partition, which England submits to, could I not represent the second party as well as the Dutch?"

"We have Mademoiselle de Keroualle to treat that question," replied Madame.

"Your second condition for going, if you please, sister?"

"The consent of Monsieur, my husband."

"You shall have it."

"Then consider me already gone, brother."

On hearing these words, Louis XIV. turned round towards the corner of the room in which D'Artagnan, Colbert, and Aramis stood, and made an affirmative sign to his minister. Colbert then broke in on the conversation suddenly, and said to Aramis:

"Monsieur l'ambassadeur, shall we talk about business?"

D'Artagnan immediately withdrew, from politeness. He directed his steps towards the fireplace, within hearing of what the king was about to say to Monsieur, who, evidently uneasy, had gone to him. The face of the king was animated. Upon his brow was stamped a strength of will, the expression of which already met no further contradiction in France, and was soon to meet no more in Europe.

"Monsieur," said the king to his brother, "I am not pleased with M. le Chevalier de Lorraine. You, who do him the honor to protect him, must advise him to travel for a few months."

These words fell with the crush of an avalanche upon Monsieur, who adored his favorite, and concentrated all his affections in him.

"In what has the chevalier been inconsiderate enough to displease your majesty?" cried he, darting a furious look at Madame.

"I will tell you that when he is gone," said the king, suavely. "And also when Madame, here, shall have crossed over into England."

"Madame! in England!" murmured Monsieur, in amazement.

"In a week, brother," continued the king, "whilst we will go whither I will shortly tell you." And the king turned on his heel, smiling in his brother's face, to sweeten, as it were, the bitter draught he had given him.

During this time Colbert was talking with the Duc d'Almeda.

"Monsieur," said Colbert to Aramis, "this is the moment for us to come to an understanding. I have made your peace with the king, and I owed that clearly to a man of so much merit; but as you have often expressed friendship for me, an opportunity presents itself for giving me a proof of it. You are, besides, more a Frenchman than a Spaniard. Shall we secure--answer me frankly--the neutrality of Spain, if we undertake anything against the United Provinces?"

"Monsieur," replied Aramis, "the interest of Spain is clear. To embroil Europe with the Provinces would doubtless be our policy, but the king of France is an ally of the United Provinces. You are not ignorant, besides, that it would infer a maritime war, and that France is in no state to undertake this with advantage."

Colbert, turning round at this moment, saw D'Artagnan who was seeking some interlocutor, during this "aside" of the king and Monsieur. He called him, at the same time saying in a low voice to Aramis, "We may talk openly with D'Artagnan, I suppose?"

"Oh! certainly," replied the ambassador.

"We were saying, M. d'Almeda and I," said Colbert, "that a conflict with the United Provinces would mean a maritime war."

"That's evident enough," replied the musketeer.

"And what do you think of it, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"I think that to carry on such a war successfully, you must have very large land forces."

"What did you say?" said Colbert, thinking he had ill understood him.

"Why such a large land army?" said Aramis.

"Because the king will be beaten by sea if he has not the English with

him, and that when beaten by sea, he will soon be invaded, either by the Dutch in his ports, or by the Spaniards by land."

"And Spain neutral?" asked Aramis.

"Neutral as long as the king shall prove stronger," rejoined D'Artagnan.

Colbert admired that sagacity which never touched a question without enlightening it thoroughly. Aramis smiled, as he had long known that in diplomacy D'Artagnan acknowledged no superior. Colbert, who, like all proud men, dwelt upon his fantasy with a certainty of success, resumed the subject, "Who told you, M. d'Artagnan, that the king had no navy?"

"Oh! I take no heed of these details," replied the captain. "I am but an indifferent sailor. Like all nervous people, I hate the sea; and yet I have an idea that, with ships, France being a seaport with two hundred exits, we might have sailors."

Colbert drew from his pocket a little oblong book divided into two columns. On the first were the names of vessels, on the other the figures recapitulating the number of cannon and men requisite to equip these ships. "I have had the same idea as you," said he to D'Artagnan, "and I have had an account drawn up of the vessels we have altogether--thirty-five ships."

"Thirty-five ships! impossible!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Something like two thousand pieces of cannon," said Colbert. "That is what the king possesses at this moment. Of five and thirty vessels we can make three squadrons, but I must have five."

"Five!" cried Aramis.

"They will be afloat before the end of the year, gentlemen; the king will have fifty ship of the line. We may venture on a contest with them, may we not?"

"To build vessels," said D'Artagnan, "is difficult, but possible. As to arming them, how is that to be done? In France there are neither foundries nor military docks."

"Bah!" replied Colbert, in a bantering tone, "I have planned all that this year and a half past, did you not know it? Do you know M. d'Imfreville?"

"D'Imfreville?" replied D'Artagnan; "no."

"He is a man I have discovered; he has a specialty; he is a man of genius--he knows how to set men to work. It is he who has cast cannon

and cut the woods of Bourgogne. And then, monsieur l'ambassadeur, you may not believe what I am going to tell you, but I have a still further idea."

"Oh, monsieur!" said Aramis, civilly, "I always believe you."

"Calculating upon the character of the Dutch, our allies, I said to myself, 'They are merchants, they are friendly with the king; they will be happy to sell to the king what they fabricate for themselves; then the more we buy'--Ah! I must add this: I have Forant--do you know Forant, D'Artagnan?"

Colbert, in his warmth, forgot himself; he called the captain simply D'Artagnan, as the king did. But the captain only smiled at it.

"No," replied he, "I do not know him."

"That is another man I have discovered, with a genius for buying. This Forant has purchased for me 350,000 pounds of iron in balls, 200,000 pounds of powder, twelve cargoes of Northern timber, matches, grenades, pitch, tar--I know not what! with a saving of seven per cent upon what all those articles would cost me fabricated in France."

"That is a capital and quaint idea," replied D'Artagnan, "to have Dutch cannon-balls cast which will return to the Dutch."

"Is it not, with loss, too?" And Colbert laughed aloud. He was delighted with his own joke.

"Still further," added he, "these same Dutch are building for the king, at this moment, six vessels after the model of the best of their name. Destouches--Ah! perhaps you don't know Destouches?"

"No, monsieur."

"He is a man who has a sure glance to discern, when a ship is launched, what are the defects and qualities of that ship--that is valuable, observe! Nature is truly whimsical. Well, this Destouches appeared to me to be a man likely to prove useful in marine affairs, and he is superintending the construction of six vessels of seventy-eight guns, which the Provinces are building for his majesty. It results from this, my dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, that the king, if he wished to quarrel with the Provinces, would have a very pretty fleet. Now, you know better than anybody else if the land army is efficient."

D'Artagnan and Aramis looked at each other, wondering at the mysterious labors this man had undertaken in so short a time. Colbert understood them, and was touched by this best of flatteries.

"If we, in France, were ignorant of what was going on," said D'Artagnan, "out of France still less must be known."

"That is why I told monsieur l'ambassadeur," said Colbert, "that, Spain promising its neutrality, England helping us--"

"If England assists you," said Aramis, "I promise the neutrality of Spain."

"I take you at your word," Colbert hastened to reply with his blunt bonhomie. "And, a propos of Spain, you have not the 'Golden Fleece,' Monsieur d'Almeda. I heard the king say the other day that he should like to see you wear the grand cordon of St. Michael."

Aramis bowed. "Oh!" thought D'Artagnan, "and Porthos is no longer here! What ells of ribbons would there be for him in these largesses! Dear Porthos!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," resumed Colbert, "between us two, you will have, I wager, an inclination to lead your musketeers into Holland. Can you swim?" And he laughed like a man in high good humor.

"Like an eel," replied D'Artagnan.

"Ah! but there are some bitter passages of canals and marshes yonder, Monsieur d'Artagnan, and the best swimmers are sometimes drowned there."

"It is my profession to die for his majesty," said the musketeer. "Only, as it is seldom in war that much water is met with without a little fire, I declare to you beforehand, that I will do my best to choose fire. I am getting old; water freezes me--but fire warms, Monsieur Colbert."

And D'Artagnan looked so handsome still in quasi-juvenile strength as he pronounced these words, that Colbert, in his turn, could not help admiring him. D'Artagnan perceived the effect he had produced. He remembered that the best tradesman is he who fixes a high price upon his goods, when they are valuable. He prepared his price in advance.

"So, then," said Colbert, "we go into Holland?"

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "only--"

"Only?" said M. Colbert.

"Only," repeated D'Artagnan, "there lurks in everything the question of interest, the question of self-love. It is a very fine title, that of captain of the musketeers; but observe this: we have now the king's

guards and the military household of the king. A captain of musketeers ought to command all that, and then he would absorb a hundred thousand livres a year for expenses."

"Well! but do you suppose the king would haggle with you?" said Colbert.

"Eh! monsieur, you have not understood me," replied D'Artagnan, sure of carrying his point. "I was telling you that I, an old captain, formerly chief of the king's guard, having precedence of the marechaux of France--I saw myself one day in the trenches with two other equals, the captain of the guards and the colonel commanding the Swiss. Now, at no price will I suffer that. I have old habits, and I will stand or fall by them."

Colbert felt this blow, but he was prepared for it.

"I have been thinking of what you said just now," replied he.

"About what, monsieur?"

"We were speaking of canals and marshes in which people are drowned."

"Well!"

"Well! if they are drowned, it is for want of a boat, a plank, or a stick."

"Of a stick, however short it may be," said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly," said Colbert. "And, therefore, I never heard of an instance of a marechal of France being drowned."

D'Artagnan became very pale with joy, and in a not very firm voice, "People would be very proud of me in my country," said he, "if I were a marechal of France; but a man must have commanded an expedition in chief to obtain the baton."

"Monsieur!" said Colbert, "here is in this pocket-book which you will study, a plan of campaign you will have to lead a body of troops to carry out in the next spring." [12]

D'Artagnan took the book, tremblingly, and his fingers meeting those of Colbert, the minister pressed the hand of the musketeer loyally.

"Monsieur," said he, "we had both a revenge to take, one over the other. I have begun; it is now your turn!"

"I will do you justice, monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, "and implore you to tell the king that the first opportunity that shall offer, he may

depend upon a victory, or to behold me dead--or both."

"Then I will have the fleurs-de-lis for your marechal's baton
prepared immediately," said Colbert.

On the morrow, Aramis, who was setting out for Madrid, to negotiate the
neutrality of Spain, came to embrace D'Artagnan at his hotel.

"Let us love each other for four," said D'Artagnan. "We are now but
two."

"And you will, perhaps, never see me again, dear D'Artagnan," said
Aramis; "if you knew how I have loved you! I am old, I am extinct--ah, I
am almost dead."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "you will live longer than I shall:
diplomacy commands you to live; but, for my part, honor condemns me to
die."

"Bah! such men as we are, monsieur le marechal," said Aramis, "only die
satisfied with joy in glory."

"Ah!" replied D'Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, "I assure you,
monsieur le duc, I feel very little appetite for either."

They once more embraced, and, two hours after, separated--forever.

The Death of D'Artagnan.

Contrary to that which generally happens, whether in politics or morals,
each kept his promises, and did honor to his engagements.

The king recalled M. de Guiche, and banished M. le Chevalier de
Lorraine; so that Monsieur became ill in consequence. Madame set out
for London, where she applied herself so earnestly to make her brother,
Charles II., acquire a taste for the political counsels of Mademoiselle
de Keroualle, that the alliance between England and France was signed,
and the English vessels, ballasted by a few millions of French gold,
made a terrible campaign against the fleets of the United Provinces.
Charles II. had promised Mademoiselle de Keroualle a little gratitude
for her good counsels; he made her Duchess of Portsmouth. Colbert had
promised the king vessels, munitions, victories. He kept his word, as
is well known. At length Aramis, upon whose promises there was least
dependence to be placed, wrote Colbert the following letter, on the
subject of the negotiations which he had undertaken at Madrid:

"MONSIEUR COLBERT,--I have the honor to expedite to you the R. P. Oliva,
general ad interim of the Society of Jesus, my provisional successor.

The reverend father will explain to you, Monsieur Colbert, that I preserve to myself the direction of all the affairs of the order which concern France and Spain; but that I am not willing to retain the title of general, which would throw too high a side-light on the progress of the negotiations with which His Catholic Majesty wishes to intrust me. I shall resume that title by the command of his majesty, when the labors I have undertaken in concert with you, for the great glory of God and His Church, shall be brought to a good end. The R. P. Oliva will inform you likewise, monsieur, of the consent His Catholic Majesty gives to the signature of a treaty which assures the neutrality of Spain in the event of a war between France and the United Provinces. This consent will be valid even if England, instead of being active, should satisfy herself with remaining neutral. As for Portugal, of which you and I have spoken, monsieur, I can assure you it will contribute with all its resources to assist the Most Christian King in his war. I beg you, Monsieur Colbert, to preserve your friendship and also to believe in my profound attachment, and to lay my respect at the feet of His Most Christian Majesty. Signed,

"LE DUC D'ALMEDA." [13]

Aramis had performed more than he had promised; it remained to be seen how the king, M. Colbert, and D'Artagnan would be faithful to each other. In the spring, as Colbert had predicted, the land army entered on its campaign. It preceded, in magnificent order, the court of Louis XIV., who, setting out on horseback, surrounded by carriages filled with ladies and courtiers, conducted the elite of his kingdom to this sanguinary fete. The officers of the army, it is true, had no other music save the artillery of the Dutch forts; but it was enough for a great number, who found in this war honor, advancement, fortune--or death.

M. d'Artagnan set out commanding a body of twelve thousand men, cavalry, and infantry, with which he was ordered to take the different places which form knots of that strategic network called La Frise. Never was an army conducted more gallantly to an expedition. The officers knew that their leader, prudent and skillful as he was brave, would not sacrifice a single man, nor yield an inch of ground without necessity. He had the old habits of war, to live upon the country, keeping his soldiers singing and the enemy weeping. The captain of the king's musketeers well knew his business. Never were opportunities better chosen, coups-de-main better supported, errors of the besieged more quickly taken advantage of.

The army commanded by D'Artagnan took twelve small places within a month. He was engaged in besieging the thirteenth, which had held out five days. D'Artagnan caused the trenches to be opened without appearing to suppose that these people would ever allow themselves to be taken.

The pioneers and laborers were, in the army of this man, a body full of ideas and zeal, because their commander treated them like soldiers, knew how to render their work glorious, and never allowed them to be killed if he could help it. It should have been seen with what eagerness the marshy glebes of Holland were turned over. Those turf-heaps, mounds of potter's clay, melted at the word of the soldiers like butter in the frying-pans of Friesland housewives.

M. d'Artagnan dispatched a courier to the king to give him an account of the last success, which redoubled the good humor of his majesty and his inclination to amuse the ladies. These victories of M. d'Artagnan gave so much majesty to the prince, that Madame de Montespan no longer called him anything but Louis the Invincible. So that Mademoiselle de la Valliere, who only called the king Louis the Victorious, lost much of his majesty's favor. Besides, her eyes were frequently red, and to an Invincible nothing is more disagreeable than a mistress who weeps while everything is smiling round her. The star of Mademoiselle de la Valliere was being drowned in clouds and tears. But the gayety of Madame de Montespan redoubled with the successes of the king, and consoled him for every other unpleasant circumstance. It was to D'Artagnan the king owed this; and his majesty was anxious to acknowledge these services; he wrote to M. Colbert:

"MONSIEUR COLBERT,--We have a promise to fulfil with M. d'Artagnan, who so well keeps his. This is to inform you that the time is come for performing it. All provisions for this purpose you shall be furnished with in due time. LOUIS."

In consequence of this, Colbert, detaining D'Artagnan's envoy, placed in the hands of that messenger a letter from himself, and a small coffer of ebony inlaid with gold, not very important in appearance, but which, without doubt, was very heavy, as a guard of five men was given to the messenger, to assist him in carrying it. These people arrived before the place which D'Artagnan was besieging towards daybreak, and presented themselves at the lodgings of the general. They were told that M. d'Artagnan, annoyed by a sortie which the governor, an artful man, had made the evening before, and in which the works had been destroyed and seventy-seven men killed, and the reparation of the breaches commenced, had just gone with twenty companies of grenadiers to reconstruct the works.

M. Colbert's envoy had orders to go and seek M. d'Artagnan, wherever he might be, or at whatever hour of the day or night. He directed his course, therefore, towards the trenches, followed by his escort, all on horseback. They perceived M. d'Artagnan in the open plain, with his gold-laced hat, his long cane, and gilt cuffs. He was biting his white mustache, and wiping off, with his left hand, the dust which the passing balls threw up from the ground they plowed so near him. They also saw, amidst this terrible fire, which filled the air with whistling hisses,

officers handling the shovel, soldiers rolling barrows, and vast fascines, rising by being either carried or dragged by from ten to twenty men, cover the front of the trench reopened to the center by this extraordinary effort of the general. In three hours, all was reinstated. D'Artagnan began to speak more mildly; and he became quite calm when the captain of the pioneers approached him, hat in hand, to tell him that the trench was again in proper order. This man had scarcely finished speaking, when a ball took off one of his legs, and he fell into the arms of D'Artagnan. The latter lifted up his soldier, and quietly, with soothing words, carried him into the trench, amidst the enthusiastic applause of the regiments. From that time it was no longer a question of valor--the army was delirious; two companies stole away to the advanced posts, which they instantly destroyed.

When their comrades, restrained with great difficulty by D'Artagnan, saw them lodged upon the bastions, they rushed forward likewise; and soon a furious assault was made upon the counterscarp, upon which depended the safety of the place. D'Artagnan perceived there was only one means left of checking his army--to take the place. He directed all his force to the two breaches, where the besieged were busy in repairing. The shock was terrible; eighteen companies took part in it, and D'Artagnan went with the rest, within half cannon-shot of the place, to support the attack by echelons. The cries of the Dutch, who were being poniarded upon their guns by D'Artagnan's grenadiers, were distinctly audible. The struggle grew fiercer with the despair of the governor, who disputed his position foot by foot. D'Artagnan, to put an end to the affair, and to silence the fire, which was unceasing, sent a fresh column, which penetrated like a very wedge; and he soon perceived upon the ramparts, through the fire, the terrified flight of the besieged, pursued by the besiegers.

At this moment the general, breathing feely and full of joy, heard a voice behind him, saying, "Monsieur, if you please, from M. Colbert."

He broke the seal of the letter, which contained these words:

"MONSIEUR D'ARTAGNAN:--The king commands me to inform you that he has
nominated you marechal of France, as a reward for your magnificent services, and the honor you do to his arms. The king is highly pleased, monsieur, with the captures you have made; he commands you, in particular, to finish the siege you have commenced, with good fortune to you, and success for him."

D'Artagnan was standing with a radiant countenance and sparkling eye. He looked up to watch the progress of his troops upon the walls, still enveloped in red and black volumes of smoke. "I have finished," replied he to the messenger; "the city will have surrendered in a quarter of an hour." He then resumed his reading:

"The coffret, Monsieur d'Artagnan, is my own present. You will not be sorry to see that, whilst you warriors are drawing the sword to defend the king, I am moving the pacific arts to ornament a present worthy of you. I commend myself to your friendship, monsieur le marechal, and beg you to believe in mine. COLBERT"

D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy, made a sign to the messenger, who approached, with his coffret in his hands. But at the moment the marechal was going to look at it, a loud explosion resounded from the ramparts, and called his attention towards the city. "It is strange," said D'Artagnan, "that I don't yet see the king's flag on the walls, or hear the drums beat the chamade." He launched three hundred fresh men, under a high-spirited officer, and ordered another breach to be made. Then, more tranquilly, he turned towards the coffret, which Colbert's envoy held out to him.--It was his treasure--he had won it.

D'Artagnan was holding out his hand to open the coffret, when a ball from the city crushed the coffret in the arms of the officer, struck D'Artagnan full in the chest, and knocked him down upon a sloping heap of earth, whilst the fleur-de-lised baton, escaping from the broken box, came rolling under the powerless hand of the marechal. D'Artagnan endeavored to raise himself. It was thought he had been knocked down without being wounded. A terrible cry broke from the group of terrified officers; the marechal was covered with blood; the pallor of death ascended slowly to his noble countenance. Leaning upon the arms held out on all sides to receive him, he was able once more to turn his eyes towards the place, and to distinguish the white flag at the crest of the principal bastion; his ears, already deaf to the sounds of life, caught feebly the rolling of the drum which announced the victory. Then, clasping in his nerveless hand the baton, ornamented with its fleurs-de-lis, he cast on it his eyes, which had no longer the power of looking upwards towards Heaven, and fell back, murmuring strange words, which appeared to the soldiers cabalistic--words which had formerly represented so many things on earth, and which none but the dying man any longer comprehended:

"Athos--Porthos, farewell till we meet again! Aramis, adieu forever!"

Of the four valiant men whose history we have related, there now remained but one. Heaven had taken to itself three noble souls. [14]