

Chapter 9. The Abbe D'Herblay.

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

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

"Ah," said D'Artagnan, "is that the way you return to your apartment?"

"After nine at night, pardieu!" said Aramis, "the rule of the convent is very severe."

"Pardon me, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "I think you said 'pardieu!'"

"Do you think so?" said Aramis, smiling; "it is possible. You have no idea, my dear fellow, how one acquires bad habits in these cursed convents, or what evil ways all these men of the church have, with whom I am obliged to live. But will you not go up?"

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

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

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

"I beg your pardon," said Aramis, noticing his awkwardness; "if I had known that I was to have the honor of your visit I should have procured the gardener's ladder; but for me alone this is good enough."

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

"Take them to yonder shed, my friend," said Aramis, pointing to a low building on the plain; "there you will find hay and straw for them; then come back here and clap your hands three times, and we will give you wine and food. Marry, forsooth, people don't die of hunger here."

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

Never was there an apartment at the same time more warlike and more elegant. At each corner were arranged trophies, presenting to view swords of all sorts, and on the walls hung four great pictures

representing in their ordinary military costume the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Cardinal de Richelieu, the Cardinal de la Valette, and the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Exteriorly, nothing in the room showed that it was the habitation of an abbe. The hangings were of damask, the carpets from Alencon, and the bed, especially, had more the look of a fine lady's couch, with its trimmings of fine lace and its embroidered counterpane, than that of a man who had made a vow that he would endeavor to gain Heaven by fasting and mortification.

"You are examining my den," said Aramis. "Ah, my dear fellow, excuse me; I am lodged like a Chartreux. But what are you looking for?"

"I am looking for the person who let down the ladder. I see no one and yet the ladder didn't come down of itself."

"No, it is Bazin."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"But," continued Aramis, "Bazin is a well trained servant, and seeing that I was not alone he discreetly retired. Sit down, my dear friend, and let us talk." And Aramis pushed forward a large easy-chair, in which D'Artagnan stretched himself out.

"In the first place, you will sup with me, will you not?" asked Aramis.

"Yes, if you really wish it," said D'Artagnan, "and even with great pleasure, I confess; the journey has given me a devil of an appetite."

"Ah, my poor friend!" said Aramis, "you will find meagre fare; you were not expected."

"Am I then threatened with the omelet of Crevecoeur?"

"Oh, let us hope," said Aramis, "that with the help of God and of Bazin we shall find something better than that in the larder of the worthy Jesuit fathers. Bazin, my friend, come here."

The door opened and Bazin entered; on perceiving the musketeer he uttered an exclamation that was almost a cry of despair.

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

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

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

Bazin bowed low, sighed, and left the room.

"Now we are alone, dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "tell me how the devil you managed to alight upon the back of Planchet's horse."

"I'faith!" answered Aramis, "as you see, from Heaven."

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

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

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

Aramis burst into a fit of laughter.

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

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

"Yes," replied Aramis, with an absent air; "yes, that poor duchess! I once loved her much, and to do her justice, she was very useful to us. Eventually she was obliged to leave France. He was a relentless enemy, that damned cardinal," continued Aramis, glancing at the portrait of the old minister. "He had even given orders to arrest her and would have cut off her head had she not escaped with her waiting-maid--poor Kitty! I have heard that she met with a strange adventure in I don't know what village, with I don't know what cure, of whom she asked hospitality and who, having but one chamber, and taking her for a cavalier, offered to share it with her. For she had a wonderful way of dressing as a man, that dear Marie; I know only one other woman who can do it as well. So they made this song about her: 'Laboissiere, dis moi.' You know it, don't you?"

"No, sing it, please."

Aramis immediately complied, and sang the song in a very lively manner.

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

"My dear D'Artagnan," replied Aramis, "you understand, when I was a musketeer I mounted guard as seldom as I could; now when I am an abbe I

say as few masses as I can. But to return to our duchess."

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

"Have I not already told you that there is nothing between me and the Duchess de Longueville? Little flirtations, perhaps, and that's all. No, I spoke of the Duchess de Chevreuse; did you see her after her return from Brussels, after the king's death?"

"Yes, she is still beautiful."

"Yes," said Aramis, "I saw her also at that time. I gave her good advice, by which she did not profit. I ventured to tell her that Mazarin was the lover of Anne of Austria. She wouldn't believe me, saying that she knew Anne of Austria, who was too proud to love such a worthless coxcomb. After that she plunged into the cabal headed by the Duke of Beaufort; and the 'coxcomb' arrested De Beaufort and banished Madame de Chevreuse."

"You know," resumed D'Artagnan, "that she has had leave to return to France?"

"Yes she is come back and is going to commit some fresh folly or another."

"Oh, but this time perhaps she will follow your advice."

"Oh, this time," returned Aramis, "I haven't seen her; she is much

changed."

"In that respect unlike you, my dear Aramis, for you are still the same; you have still your beautiful dark hair, still your elegant figure, still your feminine hands, which are admirably suited to a prelate."

"Yes," replied Aramis, "I am extremely careful of my appearance. Do you know that I am growing old? I am nearly thirty-seven."

"Mind, Aramis"--D'Artagnan smiled as he spoke--"since we are together again, let us agree on one point: what age shall we be in future?"

"How?"

"Formerly I was your junior by two or three years, and if I am not mistaken I am turned forty years old."

"Indeed! Then 'tis I who am mistaken, for you have always been a good chronologist. By your reckoning I must be forty-three at least. The devil I am! Don't let it out at the Hotel Rambouillet; it would ruin me," replied the abbe.

"Don't be afraid," said D'Artagnan. "I never go there."

"Why, what in the world," cried Aramis, "is that animal Bazin doing? Bazin! Hurry up there, you rascal; we are mad with hunger and thirst!"

Bazin entered at that moment carrying a bottle in each hand.

"At last," said Aramis, "we are ready, are we?"

"Yes, monsieur, quite ready," said Bazin; "but it took me some time to bring up all the----"

"Because you always think you have on your shoulders your beadle's robe, and spend all your time reading your breviary. But I give you warning that if in polishing your chapel utensils you forget how to brighten up my sword, I will make a great fire of your blessed images and will see that you are roasted on it."

Bazin, scandalized, made a sign of the cross with the bottle in his hand. D'Artagnan, more surprised than ever at the tone and manners of the Abbe d'Herblay, which contrasted so strongly with those of the Musketeer Aramis, remained staring with wide-open eyes at the face of his friend.

Bazin quickly covered the table with a damask cloth and arranged upon it so many things, gilded, perfumed, appetizing, that D'Artagnan was quite overcome.

"But you expected some one then?" asked the officer.

"Oh," said Aramis, "I always try to be prepared; and then I knew you were seeking me."

"From whom?"

"From Master Bazin, to be sure; he took you for the devil, my dear fellow, and hastened to warn me of the danger that threatened my soul if I should meet again a companion so wicked as an officer of musketeers."

"Oh, monsieur!" said Bazin, clasping his hands supplicatingly.

"Come, no hypocrisy! you know that I don't like it. You will do much better to open the window and let down some bread, a chicken and a bottle of wine to your friend Planchet, who has been this last hour killing himself clapping his hands."

Planchet, in fact, had bedded and fed his horses, and then coming back under the window had repeated two or three times the signal agreed upon.

Bazin obeyed, fastened to the end of a cord the three articles designated and let them down to Planchet, who then went satisfied to his shed.

"Now to supper," said Aramis.

The two friends sat down and Aramis began to cut up fowls, partridges and hams with admirable skill.

"The deuce!" cried D'Artagnan; "do you live in this way always?"

"Yes, pretty well. The coadjutor has given me dispensations from fasting on the jours maigres, on account of my health; then I have engaged as

my cook the cook who lived with Lafollone--you know the man I mean?--the friend of the cardinal, and the famous epicure whose grace after dinner used to be, 'Good Lord, do me the favor to cause me to digest what I have eaten.'"

"Nevertheless he died of indigestion, in spite of his grace," said D'Artagnan.

"What can you expect?" replied Aramis, in a tone of resignation. "Every man that's born must fulfil his destiny."

"If it be not an indelicate question," resumed D'Artagnan, "have you grown rich?"

"Oh, Heaven! no. I make about twelve thousand francs a year, without counting a little benefice of a thousand crowns the prince gave me."

"And how do you make your twelve thousand francs? By your poems?"

"No, I have given up poetry, except now and then to write a drinking song, some gay sonnet or some innocent epigram; I compose sermons, my friend."

"What! sermons? Do you preach them?"

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

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

yourself?"

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

"And what was the end of the affair?"

"We met in the Place Royale--Egad! you know about it."

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

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

"Did he die?"

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

Bazin made a despairing sign which meant that while perhaps he approved

the moral he altogether disapproved the tone in which it was uttered.

"Bazin, my friend," said Aramis, "you don't seem to be aware that I can see you in that mirror, and you forget that once for all I have forbidden all signs of approbation or disapprobation. You will do me the favor to bring us some Spanish wine and then to withdraw. Besides, my friend D'Artagnan has something to say to me privately, have you not, D'Artagnan?"

D'Artagnan nodded his head and Bazin retired, after placing on the table the Spanish wine.

The two friends, left alone, remained silent, face to face. Aramis seemed to await a comfortable digestion; D'Artagnan, to be preparing his exordium. Each of them, when the other was not looking, hazarded a sly glance. It was Aramis who broke the silence.

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

"I was thinking, my dear old friend, that when you were a musketeer you turned your thoughts incessantly to the church, and now that you are an abbe you are perpetually longing to be once more a musketeer."

"'Tis true; man, as you know," said Aramis, "is a strange animal, made up of contradictions. Since I became an abbe I dream of nothing but battles."

"That is apparent in your surroundings; you have rapiers here of every

form and to suit the most exacting taste. Do you still fence well?"

"I--I fence as well as you did in the old time--better still, perhaps; I do nothing else all day."

"And with whom?"

"With an excellent master-at-arms that we have here."

"What! here?"

"Yes, here, in this convent, my dear fellow. There is everything in a Jesuit convent."

"Then you would have killed Monsieur de Marsillac if he had come alone to attack you, instead of at the head of twenty men?"

"Undoubtedly," said Aramis, "and even at the head of his twenty men, if I could have drawn without being recognized."

"God pardon me!" said D'Artagnan to himself, "I believe he has become more Gascon than I am!" Then aloud: "Well, my dear Aramis, do you ask me why I came to seek you?"

"No, I have not asked you that," said Aramis, with his subtle manner; "but I have expected you to tell me."

"Well, I sought you for the single purpose of offering you a chance to

kill Monsieur de Marsillac whenever you please, prince though he is."

"Hold on! wait!" said Aramis; "that is an idea!"

"Of which I invite you to take advantage, my friend. Let us see; with your thousand crowns from the abbey and the twelve thousand francs you make by selling sermons, are you rich? Answer frankly."

"I? I am as poor as Job, and were you to search my pockets and my boxes I don't believe you would find a hundred pistoles."

"Peste! a hundred pistoles!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "he calls that being as poor as Job! If I had them I should think myself as rich as Croesus." Then aloud: "Are you ambitious?"

"As Enceladus."

"Well, my friend, I bring you the means of becoming rich, powerful, and free to do whatever you wish."

The shadow of a cloud passed over Aramis's face as quickly as that which in August passes over the field of grain; but quick as it was, it did not escape D'Artagnan's observation.

"Speak on," said Aramis.

"One question first. Do you take any interest in politics?"

A gleam of light shone in Aramis's eyes, as brief as the shadow that had passed over his face, but not so brief but that it was seen by D'Artagnan.

"No," Aramis replied.

"Then proposals from any quarter will be agreeable to you, since for the moment you have no master but God?"

"It is possible."

"Have you, my dear Aramis, thought sometimes of those happy, happy, happy days of youth we passed laughing, drinking, and fighting each other for play?"

"Certainly, and more than once regretted them; it was indeed a glorious time."

"Well, those splendidly wild days may chance to come again; I am commissioned to find out my companions and I began by you, who were the very soul of our society."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My first impressions were favorable to the minister; I said to myself that a minister is never loved, but that with the genius this one was said to have he would eventually triumph over his enemies and would make himself feared, which in my opinion is much more to be desired than to be loved----"

D'Artagnan made a sign with his head which indicated that he entirely approved that doubtful maxim.

"This, then," continued Aramis, "was my first opinion; but as I am very ignorant in matters of this kind and as the humility which I profess obliges me not to rest on my own judgment, but to ask the opinion of others, I have inquired--Eh!--my friend----"

Aramis paused.

"Well? what?" asked his friend.

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

"Hem!" said D'Artagnan, "there is some truth in what you say."

"Ah! it fills me with pride to find that, thanks to a common sort of penetration with which I am endowed, I am approved by a man like you, fresh from the court."

"But you speak of him, not of his party, his resources."

"It is true--the queen is for him."

"Something in his favor."

"But he will never have the king."

"A mere child."

"A child who will be of age in four years. Then he has neither the parliament nor the people with him--they represent the wealth of the country; nor the nobles nor the princes, who are the military power of France."

D'Artagnan scratched his ear. He was forced to confess to himself that this reasoning was not only comprehensive, but just.

"You see, my poor friend, that I am sometimes bereft of my ordinary thoughtfulness; perhaps I am wrong in speaking thus to you, who have evidently a leaning to Mazarin."

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

"You spoke of a mission."

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

"You are right, D'Artagnan; I held a similar project, but as I had not nor ever shall have your fruitful, vigorous imagination, the idea was suggested to me. Every one nowadays wants auxiliaries; propositions have been made to me and I confess to you frankly that the coadjutor has made me speak out."

"Monsieur de Gondy! the cardinal's enemy?"

"No; the king's friend," said Aramis; "the king's friend, you understand. Well, it is a question of serving the king, the gentleman's duty."

"But the king is with Mazarin."

"He is, but not willingly; in appearance, not heart; and that is exactly

the snare the king's enemies are preparing for the poor child."

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

"War for the king."

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

"But his heart will be in the army commanded by the Duc de Beaufort."

"Monsieur de Beaufort? He is at Vincennes."

"Did I say Monsieur de Beaufort? Monsieur de Beaufort or another. Monsieur de Beaufort or Monsieur le Prince."

"But Monsieur le Prince is to set out for the army; he is entirely devoted to the cardinal."

"Oh oh!" said Aramis, "there are questions between them at this very moment. And besides, if it is not the prince, then Monsieur de Gondy----"

"But Monsieur de Gondy is to be made a cardinal; they are soliciting the hat for him."

"And are there no cardinals that can fight? Come now, recall the four cardinals that at the head of armies have equalled Monsieur de Guebriant

and Monsieur de Gassion."

"But a humpbacked general!

"Under the cuirass the hump will not be seen. Besides, remember that Alexander was lame and Hannibal had but one eye."

"Do you see any great advantage in adhering to this party?" asked D'Artagnan.

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

"With the enmity of the government."

"Counteracted by parliament and insurrections."

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

"That may be done," said Aramis.

"Never!" cried D'Artagnan. "You, Aramis, know Anne of Austria better than I do. Do you think she will ever forget that her son is her safeguard, her shield, the pledge for her dignity, for her fortune and her life? Should she forsake Mazarin she must join her son and go over to the princes' side; but you know better than I do that there are certain reasons why she can never abandon Mazarin."

"Perhaps you are right," said Aramis, thoughtfully; "therefore I shall

not pledge myself."

"To them or to us, do you mean, Aramis?"

"To no one. I am a priest," resumed Aramis. "What have I to do with politics? I am not obliged to read any breviary. I have a jolly little circle of witty abbes and pretty women; everything goes on smoothly, so certainly, dear friend, I shall not meddle in politics."

"Well, listen, my dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan; "your philosophy convinces me, on my honor. I don't know what devil of an insect stung me and made me ambitious. I have a post by which I live; at the death of Monsieur de Treville, who is old, I may be a captain, which is a very snug berth for a once penniless Gascon. Instead of running after adventures I shall accept an invitation from Porthos; I shall go and shoot on his estate. You know he has estates--Porthos?"

"I should think so, indeed. Ten leagues of wood, of marsh land and valleys; he is lord of the hill and the plain and is now carrying on a suit for his feudal rights against the Bishop of Noyon!"

"Good," said D'Artagnan to himself. "That's what I wanted to know. Porthos is in Picardy."

Then aloud:

"And he has taken his ancient name of Vallon?"

"To which he adds that of Bracieux, an estate which has been a barony, by my troth."

"So that Porthos will be a baron."

"I don't doubt it. The 'Baroness Porthos' will sound particularly charming."

And the two friends began to laugh.

"So," D'Artagnan resumed, "you will not become a partisan of Mazarin's?"

"Nor you of the Prince de Conde?"

"No, let us belong to no party, but remain friends; let us be neither Cardinalists nor Frondistes."

"Adieu, then." And D'Artagnan poured out a glass of wine.

"To old times," he said.

"Yes," returned Aramis. "Unhappily, those times are past."

"Nonsense! They will return," said D'Artagnan. "At all events, if you want me, remember the Rue Tiquetonne, Hotel de la Chevette."

"And I shall be at the convent of Jesuits; from six in the morning to eight at night come by the door. From eight in the evening until six in

the morning come in by the window."

"Adieu, dear friend."

"Oh, I can't let you go so! I will go with you." And he took his sword and cloak.

"He wants to be sure that I go away," said D'Artagnan to himself.

Aramis whistled for Bazin, but Bazin was asleep in the ante-chamber, and Aramis was obliged to shake him by the ear to awake him.

Bazin stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and tried to go to sleep again.

"Come, come, sleepy head; quick, the ladder!"

"But," said Bazin, yawning portentously, "the ladder is still at the window."

"The other one, the gardener's. Didn't you see that Monsieur d'Artagnan mounted with difficulty? It will be even more difficult to descend."

D'Artagnan was about to assure Aramis that he could descend easily, when an idea came into his head which silenced him.

Bazin uttered a profound sigh and went out to look for the ladder.

Presently a good, solid, wooden ladder was placed against the window.

"Now then," said D'Artagnan, "this is something like; this is a means of communication. A woman could go up a ladder like that."

Aramis's searching look seemed to seek his friend's thought even at the bottom of his heart, but D'Artagnan sustained the inquisition with an air of admirable simplicity. Besides, at that moment he put his foot on the first step of the ladder and began his descent. In a moment he was on the ground. Bazin remained at the window.

"Stay there," said Aramis; "I shall return immediately."

The two friends went toward the shed. At their approach Planchet came out leading the two horses.

"That is good to see," said Aramis. "There is a servant active and vigilant, not like that lazy fellow Bazin, who is no longer good for anything since he became connected with the church. Follow us, Planchet; we shall continue our conversation to the end of the village."

They traversed the width of the village, talking of indifferent things, then as they reached the last houses:

"Go, then, dear friend," said Aramis, "follow your own career. Fortune lavishes her smiles upon you; do not let her flee from your embrace. As for me, I remain in my humility and indolence. Adieu!"

"Thus 'tis quite decided," said D'Artagnan, "that what I have to offer

to you does not tempt you?"

"On the contrary, it would tempt me were I any other man," rejoined Aramis; "but I repeat, I am made up of contradictions. What I hate to-day I adore to-morrow, and vice versa. You see that I cannot, like you, for instance, settle on any fixed plan."

"Thou liest, subtle one," said D'Artagnan to himself. "Thou alone, on the contrary, knowest how to choose thy object and to gain it stealthily."

The friends embraced. They descended into the plain by the ladder. Planchet met them hard by the shed. D'Artagnan jumped into the saddle, then the old companions in arms again shook hands. D'Artagnan and Planchet spurred their steeds and took the road to Paris.

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

"What's the matter?" asked Planchet.

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

Having thus spoken, D'Artagnan cleared the ditch by the roadside and crossed the plain so as to wind around the village. He had observed

between the house that Madame de Longueville inhabited and the convent of the Jesuits, an open space surrounded by a hedge.

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

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

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

Close to the hedge the steps stopped.

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

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

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

"Oh!" answered another voice, which D'Artagnan instantly recognized as

that of Aramis. "I swear to you, princess, that if your reputation did not depend on precautions and if my life alone were jeopardized----"

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

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

He kissed her hand tenderly.

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

"What's the matter?" asked Aramis.

"Do you not see that the wind has blown off my hat?"

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

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

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, rising and brushing his knees; "now I have

thee--thou art a Frondeur and the lover of Madame de Longueville."