Chapter 88. Shows how with Threat and Pen more is effected than by the Sword.

D'Artagnan knew his part well; he was aware that opportunity has a forelock only for him who will take it and he was not a man to let it go by him without seizing it. He soon arranged a prompt and certain manner of traveling, by sending relays of horses to Chantilly, so that he might be in Paris in five or six hours. But before setting out he reflected that for a lad of intelligence and experience he was in a singular predicament, since he was proceeding toward uncertainty and leaving certainty behind him.

"In fact," he said, as he was about to mount and start on his dangerous mission, "Athos, for generosity, is a hero of romance; Porthos has an excellent disposition, but is easily influenced; Aramis has a hieroglyphic countenance, always illegible. What will come out of those three elements when I am no longer present to combine them? The deliverance of the cardinal, perhaps. Now, the deliverance of the cardinal would be the ruin of our hopes; and our hopes are thus far the only recompense we have for labors in comparison with which those of Hercules were pygmean."

He went to find Aramis.

"You, my dear Chevalier d'Herblay," he said, "are the Fronde incarnate. Mistrust Athos, therefore, who will not prosecute the affairs of any

one, even his own. Mistrust Porthos, especially, who, to please the count whom he regards as God on earth, will assist him in contriving Mazarin's escape, if Mazarin has the wit to weep or play the chivalric."

Aramis smiled; his smile was at once cunning and resolute.

"Fear nothing," he said; "I have my conditions to impose. My private ambition tends only to the profit of him who has justice on his side."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan: "in this direction I am satisfied." He pressed Aramis's hand and went in search of Porthos.

"Friend," he said, "you have worked so hard with me toward building up our fortune, that, at the moment when we are about to reap the fruits of our labours, it would be a ridiculous piece of silliness in you to allow yourself to be controlled by Aramis, whose cunning you know--a cunning which, we may say between ourselves, is not always without egotism; or by Athos, a noble and disinterested man, but blase, who, desiring nothing further for himself, doesn't sympathize with the desires of others. What should you say if either of these two friends proposed to you to let Mazarin go?"

"Why, I should say that we had too much trouble in taking him to let him off so easily."

"Bravo, Porthos! and you would be right, my friend; for in losing him you would lose your barony, which you have in your grasp, to say nothing of the fact that, were he once out of this, Mazarin would have you

hanged."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I would kill him rather than let him go."

"And you would act rightly. There is no question, you understand, provided we secure our own interests, of securing those of the Frondeurs; who, besides, don't understand political matters as we old soldiers do."

"Never fear, dear friend," said Porthos. "I shall see you through the window as you mount your horse; I shall follow you with my eyes as long as you are in sight; then I shall place myself at the cardinal's door--a door with glass windows. I shall see everything, and at the least suspicious sign I shall begin to exterminate."

"Bravo!" thought D'Artagnan; "on this side I think the cardinal will be well guarded." He pressed the hand of the lord of Pierrefonds and went in search of Athos.

"My dear Athos," he said, "I am going away. I have only one thing to say to you. You know Anne of Austria; the captivity of Mazarin alone guarantees my life; if you let him go I am a dead man."

"I needed nothing less than that consideration, my dear D'Artagnan, to

persuade myself to adopt the role of jailer. I give you my word that you will find the cardinal where you leave him."

"This reassures me more than all the royal signatures," thought D'Artagnan. "Now that I have the word of Athos I can set out."

D'Artagnan started alone on his journey, without other escort than his sword, and with a simple passport from Mazarin to secure his admission to the queen's presence. Six hours after he left Pierrefonds he was at Saint Germain.

The disappearance of Mazarin was not as yet generally known. Anne of Austria was informed of it and concealed her uneasiness from every one. In the chamber of D'Artagnan and Porthos the two soldiers had been found bound and gagged. On recovering the use of their limbs and tongues they could, of course, tell nothing but what they knew--that they had been seized, stripped and bound. But as to what had been done by Porthos and D'Artagnan afterward they were as ignorant as all the inhabitants of the chateau.

Bernouin alone knew a little more than the others. Bernouin, seeing that his master did not return and hearing the stroke of midnight, had made an examination of the orangery. The first door, barricaded with furniture, had aroused in him certain suspicions, but without communicating his suspicions to any one he had patiently worked his way into the midst of all that confusion. Then he came to the corridor, all the doors of which he found open; so, too, was the door of Athos's chamber and that of the park. From the latter point it was easy to

follow tracks on the snow. He saw that these tracks tended toward the wall; on the other side he found similar tracks, then footprints of horses and then signs of a troop of cavalry which had moved away in the direction of Enghien. He could no longer cherish any doubt that the cardinal had been carried off by the three prisoners, since the prisoners had disappeared at the same time; and he had hastened to Saint Germain to warn the queen of that disappearance.

Anne had enforced the utmost secrecy and had disclosed the event to no one except the Prince de Conde, who had sent five or six hundred horsemen into the environs of Saint Germain with orders to bring in any suspicious person who was going away from Rueil, in whatsoever direction it might be.

Now, since D'Artagnan did not constitute a body of horsemen, since he was alone, since he was not going away from Rueil and was going to Saint Germain, no one paid any attention to him and his journey was not obstructed in any way.

On entering the courtyard of the old chateau the first person seen by our ambassador was Maitre Bernouin in person, who, standing on the threshold, awaited news of his vanished master.

At the sight of D'Artagnan, who entered the courtyard on horseback, Bernouin rubbed his eyes and thought he must be mistaken. But D'Artagnan made a friendly sign to him with his head, dismounted, and throwing his bridle to a lackey who was passing, he approached the valet-de-chambre with a smile on his lips.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the latter, like a man who has the nightmare and talks in his sleep, "Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

"Himself, Monsieur Bernouin."

"And why have you come here?"

"To bring news of Monsieur de Mazarin--the freshest news there is."

"What has become of him, then?"

"He is as well as you and I."

"Nothing bad has happened to him, then?"

"Absolutely nothing. He felt the need of making a trip in the Ile de France, and begged us--the Comte de la Fere and Monsieur du Vallon--to accompany him. We were too devoted servants to refuse him a request of that sort. We set out last evening and here we are."

"Here you are."

"His eminence had something to communicate to her majesty, something secret and private--a mission that could be confided only to a sure man--and so has sent me to Saint Germain. And therefore, my dear Monsieur Bernouin, if you wish to do what will be pleasing to your master, announce to her majesty that I have come, and tell her with what

purpose."

Whether he spoke seriously or in jest, since it was evident that under existing circumstances D'Artagnan was the only man who could relieve the queen's uneasiness, Bernouin went without hesitation to announce to her this strange embassy; and as he had foreseen, the queen gave orders to introduce Monsieur d'Artagnan at once.

D'Artagnan approached the sovereign with every mark of profound respect, and having fallen on his knees presented to her the cardinal's letter

It was, however, merely a letter of introduction. The queen read it, recognized the writing, and, since there were no details in it of what had occurred, asked for particulars. D'Artagnan related everything with that simple and ingenuous air which he knew how to assume on occasions. The queen, as he went on, looked at him with increasing astonishment. She could not comprehend how a man could conceive such an enterprise and still less how he could have the audacity to disclose it to her whose interest and almost duty it was to punish him.

"How, sir!" she cried, as D'Artagnan finished, "you dare to tell me the details of your crime--to give me an account of your treason!"

"Pardon, madame, but I think that either I have expressed myself badly or your majesty has imperfectly understood me. There is here no question of crime or treason. Monsieur de Mazarin held us in prison, Monsieur du Vallon and myself, because we could not believe that he had sent us to England to quietly look on while they cut off the head of Charles I.,

brother-in-law of the late king, your husband, the consort of Madame Henrietta, your sister and your guest, and because we did all that we could do to save the life of the royal martyr. We were then convinced, my friend and I, that there was some error of which we were the victims, and that an explanation was called for between his eminence and ourselves. Now, that an explanation may bear fruit, it is necessary that it should be quietly conducted, far from noise and interruption. We have therefore taken away monsieur le cardinal to my friend's chateau and there we have come to an understanding. Well, madame, it proved to be as we had supposed; there was a mistake. Monsieur de Mazarin had thought that we had rendered service to General Cromwell, instead of King Charles, which would have been a disgrace, rebounding from us to him, and from him to your majesty--a dishonor which would have tainted the royalty of your illustrious son. We were able to prove the contrary, and that proof we are ready to give to your majesty, calling in support of it the august widow weeping in the Louvre, where your royal munificence has provided for her a home. That proof satisfied him so completely that, as a sign of satisfaction, he has sent me, as your majesty may see, to consider with you what reparation should be made to gentlemen unjustly treated and wrongfully persecuted."

"I listen to you, and I wonder at you, sir," said the queen. "In fact, I have rarely seen such excess of impudence."

"Your majesty, on your side," said D'Artagnan, "is as much mistaken as to our intentions as the Cardinal Mazarin has always been."

"You are in error, sir," answered the queen. "I am so little mistaken

that in ten minutes you shall be arrested, and in an hour I shall set off at the head of my army to release my minister."

"I am sure your majesty will not commit such an act of imprudence, first, because it would be useless and would produce the most disastrous results. Before he could be possibly set free the cardinal would be dead; and indeed, so convinced is he of this, that he entreated me, should I find your majesty disposed to act in this way, to do all I could to induce you to change your resolution."

"Well, then, I will content myself with arresting you!"

"Madame, the possibility of my arrest has been foreseen, and should I not have returned by to-morrow, at a certain hour the next day the cardinal will be brought to Paris and delivered to the parliament."

"It is evident, sir, that your position has kept you out of relation to men and affairs; otherwise you would know that since we left Paris monsieur le cardinal has returned thither five or six times; that he has there met De Beaufort, De Bouillon, the coadjutor and D'Elbeuf and that not one of them had any desire to arrest him."

"Your pardon, madame, I know all that. And therefore my friends will conduct monsieur le cardinal neither to De Beaufort, nor to De Bouillon, nor to the coadjutor, nor to D'Elbeuf. These gentlemen wage war on private account, and in buying them up, by granting them what they wished, monsieur le cardinal has made a good bargain. He will be delivered to the parliament, members of which can, of course, be bought,

but even Monsieur de Mazarin is not rich enough to buy the whole body."

"I think," returned Anne of Austria, fixing upon him a glance, which in any woman's face would have expressed disdain, but in a queen's, spread terror to those she looked upon, "nay, I perceive you dare to threaten the mother of your sovereign."

"Madame," replied D'Artagnan, "I threaten simply and solely because I am obliged to do so. Believe me, madame, as true a thing as it is that a heart beats in this bosom--a heart devoted to you--believe that you have been the idol of our lives; that we have, as you well know--good Heaven!--risked our lives twenty times for your majesty. Have you, then, madame, no compassion for your servants who for twenty years have vegetated in obscurity, without betraying in a single sigh the solemn and sacred secrets they have had the honor to share with you? Look at me, madame--at me, whom you accuse of speaking loud and threateningly. What am I? A poor officer, without fortune, without protection, without a future, unless the eye of my queen, which I have sought so long, rests on me for a moment. Look at the Comte de la Fere, a type of nobility, a flower of chivalry. He has taken part against his queen, or rather, against her minister. He has not been unreasonably exacting, it seems to me. Look at Monsieur du Vallon, that faithful soul, that arm of steel, who for twenty years has awaited the word from your lips which will make him in rank what he is in sentiment and in courage. Consider, in short, your people who love you and who yet are famished, who have no other wish than to bless you, and who, nevertheless--no, I am wrong, your subjects, madame, will never curse you; say one word to them and all will be ended--peace succeed war, joy tears, and happiness to

misfortune!"

Anne of Austria looked with wonderment on the warlike countenance of D'Artagnan, which betrayed a singular expression of deep feeling.

"Why did you not say all this before you took action, sir?" she said.

"Because, madame, it was necessary to prove to your majesty one thing of which you doubted---that is, that we still possess amongst us some valor and are worthy of some consideration at your hands."

"And that valor would shrink from no undertaking, according to what I see."

"It has hesitated at nothing in the past; why, then, should it be less daring in the future?"

"Then, in case of my refusal, this valor, should a struggle occur, will even go the length of carrying me off in the midst of my court, to deliver me into the hands of the Fronde, as you propose to deliver my minister?"

"We have not thought about it yet, madame," answered D'Artagnan, with that Gascon effrontery which had in him the appearance of naivete; "but if we four had resolved upon it we should do it most certainly."

"I ought," muttered Anne to herself, "by this time to remember that these men are giants."

"Alas, madame!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this proves to me that not till to-day has your majesty had a just idea of us."

"Perhaps," said Anne; "but that idea, if at last I have it----"

"Your majesty will do us justice. In doing us justice you will no longer treat us as men of vulgar stamp. You will see in me an ambassador worthy of the high interests he is authorized to discuss with his sovereign."

"Where is the treaty?"

"Here it is."

Anne of Austria cast her eyes upon the treaty that D'Artagnan presented to her.

"I do not see here," she said, "anything but general conditions; the interests of the Prince de Conti or of the Ducs de Beaufort, de Bouillon and d'Elbeuf and of the coadjutor, are herein consulted; but with regard to yours?"

"We do ourselves justice, madame, even in assuming the high position that we have. We do not think ourselves worthy to stand near such great names."

"But you, I presume, have decided to assert your pretensions viva voce?"

"I believe you, madame, to be a great and powerful queen, and that it will be unworthy of your power and greatness if you do not recompense the arms which will bring back his eminence to Saint Germain."

"It is my intention so to do; come, let us hear you. Speak."

"He who has negotiated these matters (forgive me if I begin by speaking of myself, but I must claim that importance which has been given to me, not assumed by me) he who has arranged matters for the return of the cardinal, ought, it appears to me, in order that his reward may not be unworthy of your majesty, to be made commandant of the guards--an appointment something like that of captain of the musketeers."

"'Tis the appointment Monsieur de Treville held, you ask of me."

"The place, madame, is vacant, and although 'tis a year since Monsieur de Treville has left it, it has not been filled."

"But it is one of the principal military appointments in the king's household."

"Monsieur de Treville was but a younger son of a simple Gascon family, like me, madame; he occupied that post for twenty years."

"You have an answer ready for everything," replied the queen, and she took from her bureau a document, which she filled up and signed.

"Undoubtedly, madame," said D'Artagnan, taking the document and bowing,

"this is a noble reward; but everything in the world is unstable, and the man who happened to fall into disgrace with your majesty might lose this office to-morrow."

"What more do you want?" asked the queen, coloring, as she found that she had to deal with a mind as subtle as her own.

"A hundred thousand francs for this poor captain of musketeers, to be paid whenever his services shall no longer be acceptable to your majesty."

Anne hesitated.

"To think of the Parisians," soliloquized D'Artagnan, "offering only the other day, by an edict of the parliament, six hundred thousand francs to any man soever who would deliver up the cardinal to them, dead or alive--if alive, in order to hang him; if dead, to deny him the rites of Christian burial!"

"Come," said Anne, "'tis reasonable, since you only ask from a queen the sixth of what the parliament has proposed;" and she signed an order for a hundred thousand francs.

"Now, then," she said, "what next?"

"Madame, my friend Du Vallon is rich and has therefore nothing in the way of fortune to desire; but I think I remember that there was a question between him and Monsieur Mazarin as to making his estate a

barony. Nay, it must have been a promise."

"A country clown," said Anne of Austria, "people will laugh."

"Let them," answered D'Artagnan. "But I am sure of one thing--that those who laugh at him in his presence will never laugh a second time."

"Here goes the barony." said the queen; she signed a patent.

"Now there remains the chevalier, or the Abbe d'Herblay, as your majesty pleases."

"Does he wish to be a bishop?"

"No, madame, something easier to grant."

"What?"

"It is that the king should deign to stand godfather to the son of Madame de Longueville."

The queen smiled.

"Monsieur de Longueville is of royal blood, madame," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said the queen; "but his son?"

"His son, madame, must be, since the husband of the son's mother is."

"And your friend has nothing more to ask for Madame de Longueville?"

"No, madame, for I presume that the king, standing godfather to him, could do no less than present him with five hundred thousand francs, giving his father, also, the government of Normandy."

"As to the government of Normandy," replied the queen, "I think I can promise; but with regard to the present, the cardinal is always telling me there is no more money in the royal coffers."

"We shall search for some, madame, and I think we can find a little, and if your majesty approves, we will seek for some together."

"What next?"

"What next, madame?"

"Yes."

"That is all."

"Haven't you, then, a fourth companion?"

"Yes, madame, the Comte de la Fere."

"What does he ask?"

"Nothing."

"There is in the world, then, one man who, having the power to ask, asks--nothing!"

"There is the Comte de la Fere, madame. The Comte de la Fere is not a man."

"What is he, then?"

"The Comte de la Fere is a demi-god."

"Has he not a son, a young man, a relative, a nephew, of whom Comminges spoke to me as being a brave boy, and who, with Monsieur de Chatillon, brought the standards from Lens?"

"He has, as your majesty has said, a ward, who is called the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"If that young man should be appointed to a regiment what would his guardian say?"

"Perhaps he would accept."

"Perhaps?"

"Yes, if your majesty herself should beg him to accept."

"He must be indeed a strange man. Well, we will reflect and perhaps we will beg him. Are you satisfied, sir?"

"There is one thing the queen has not signed--her assent to the treaty."

"Of what use to-day? I will sign it to-morrow."

"I can assure her majesty that if she does not sign to-day she will not have time to sign to-morrow. Consent, then, I beg you, madame, to write at the bottom of this schedule, which has been drawn up by Mazarin, as you see:

"'I consent to ratify the treaty proposed by the Parisians.'"

Anne was caught, she could not draw back--she signed; but scarcely had she done so when pride burst forth and she began to weep.

D'Artagnan started on seeing these tears. Since that period of history queens have shed tears, like other women.

The Gascon shook his head, these tears from royalty melted his heart.

"Madame," he said, kneeling, "look upon the unhappy man at your feet. He begs you to believe that at a gesture of your majesty everything will be possible to him. He has faith in himself; he has faith in his friends; he wishes also to have faith in his queen. And in proof that he fears nothing, that he counts on nothing, he will restore Monsieur de Mazarin to your majesty without conditions. Behold, madame! here are the august

signatures of your majesty's hand; if you think you are right in giving them to me, you shall do so, but from this very moment you are free from any obligation to keep them."

And D'Artagnan, full of splendid pride and manly intrepidity, placed in Anne's hands, in a bundle, the papers that he had one by one won from her with so much difficulty.

There are moments--for if everything is not good, everything in this world is not bad--in which the most rigid and the coldest soul is softened by the tears of strong emotion, heart-arraigning sentiment: one of these momentary impulses actuated Anne. D'Artagnan, when he gave way to his own feelings--which were in accordance with those of the queen--had accomplished more than the most astute diplomacy could have attempted. He was therefore instantly recompensed, either for his address or for his sensibility, whichever it might be termed.

"You were right, sir," said Anne. "I misunderstood you. There are the acts signed; I deliver them to you without compulsion. Go and bring me back the cardinal as soon as possible."

"Madame," faltered D'Artagnan, "'tis twenty years ago--I have a good memory--since I had the honor behind a piece of tapestry in the Hotel de Ville, of kissing one of those lovely hands."

"There is the other," replied the queen; "and that the left hand should not be less liberal than the right," she drew from her finger a diamond similar to the one formerly given to him, "take and keep this ring in

remembrance of me.

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, rising, "I have only one thing more to wish, which is, that the next thing you ask from me, shall be--my life."

And with this conclusion--a way peculiar to himself--he rose and left the room.

"I never rightly understood those men," said the queen, as she watched him retiring from her presence; "and it is now too late, for in a year the king will be of age."

In twenty-four hours D'Artagnan and Porthos conducted Mazarin to the queen; and the one received his commission, the other his patent of nobility.

On the same day the Treaty of Paris was signed, and it was everywhere announced that the cardinal had shut himself up for three days in order to draw it up with the greatest care.

Here is what each of the parties concerned gained by that treaty:

Monsieur de Conti received Damvilliers, and having made his proofs as general, he succeeded in remaining a soldier, instead of being made cardinal. Moreover, something had been said of a marriage with Mazarin's niece. The idea was welcomed by the prince, to whom it was of little importance whom he married, so long as he married some one.

The Duc de Beaufort made his entrance at court, receiving ample reparation for the wrongs he had suffered, and all the honor due to his rank. Full pardon was accorded to those who had aided in his escape. He received also the office of admiral, which had been held by his father, the Duc de Vendome and an indemnity for his houses and castles, demolished by the Parliament of Bretagne.

The Duc de Bouillon received domains of a value equal to that of his principality of Sedan, and the title of prince, granted to him and to those belonging to his house.

The Duc de Longueville gained the government of Pont-de-l'Arche, five hundred thousand francs for his wife and the honor of seeing her son held at the baptismal font by the young king and Henrietta of England.

Aramis stipulated that Bazin should officiate at that ceremony and that Planchet should furnish the christening sugar plums.

The Duc d'Elbeuf obtained payment of certain sums due to his wife, one hundred thousand francs for his eldest son and twenty-five thousand for each of the three others.

The coadjutor alone obtained nothing. They promised, indeed, to negotiate with the pope for a cardinal's hat for him; but he knew how little reliance should be placed on such promises, made by the queen and Mazarin. Quite contrary to the lot of Monsieur de Conti, unable to be cardinal, he was obliged to remain a soldier.

And therefore, when all Paris was rejoicing in the expected return of the king, appointed for the next day, Gondy alone, in the midst of the general happiness, was dissatisfied; he sent for the two men whom he was wont to summon when in especially bad humor. Those two men were the Count de Rochefort and the mendicant of Saint Eustache. They came with their usual promptness, and the coadjutor spent with them a part of the night.