'Bills upon his Majesty's private treasury,' answered d'Artagnan, who, reckoning upon entering into the king's service in consequence of this recommendation, believed he could make this somewhat hazardous reply without telling of a falsehood.

'The devil!' cried the host, at his wits' end.

'But it's of no importance,' continued d'Artagnan, with natural assurance; 'it's of no importance. The money is nothing; that letter was everything. I would rather have lost a thousand pistoles than have lost it.' He would not have risked more if he had said twenty thousand; but a certain juvenile modesty restrained him.

A ray of light all at once broke upon the mind of the host as he was giving himself to the devil upon finding nothing.

'That letter is not lost!' cried he.

'What!' cried d'Artagnan.

'No, it has been stolen from you.'

'Stolen? By whom?'

'By the gentleman who was here yesterday. He came down into the kitchen, where your doublet was. He remained there some time alone. I would lay a wager he has stolen it.'

'Do you think so?' answered d'Artagnan, but little convinced, as he knew better than anyone else how entirely personal the value of this letter was, and saw nothing in it likely to tempt cupidity. The fact was that none of his servants, none of the travellers present, could have gained anything by being possessed of this paper.

'Do you say,' resumed d'Artagnan, 'that you suspect that impertinent gentleman?'

'I tell you I am sure of it,' continued the host. 'When I informed him that your lordship was the *protégé* of Monsieur de Tréville, and that you even had a letter for that illustrious gentleman, he appeared to be very much disturbed, and asked me where that letter was, and immediately came down into the kitchen, where he knew your doublet was.'

'Then that's my thief,' replied d'Artagnan. 'I will complain to Monsieur de Tréville, and Monsieur de Tréville will complain to the king.' He then drew two crowns majestically from his purse and gave them to the host, who accompanied him, cap in hand, to the gate, and remounted his yellow horse, which bore him without any further accident to the gate of

St. Antoine at Paris, where his owner sold him for three crowns, which was a very good price, considering that d'Artagnan had ridden him hard during the last stage. Thus the dealer to whom d'Artagnan sold him for the nine livres did not conceal from the young man that he only gave that enormous sum for him on the account of the originality of his colour.

Thus d'Artagnan entered Paris on foot, carrying his little packet under his arm, and walked about till he found an apartment to be let on terms suited to the scantiness of his means. This chamber was a sort of garret, situated in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, near the Luxembourg.

As soon as the earnest money was paid, d'Artagnan took possession of his lodging, and passed the remainder of the day in sewing onto his doublet and hose some ornamental braiding which his mother had taken off an almost-new doublet of the elder M. d'Artagnan, and which she had given her son secretly. Next he went to the Quai de Feraille to have a new blade put to his sword, and then returned toward the Louvre, inquiring of the first Musketeer he met for the situation of the hôtel of M. de Tréville, which proved to be in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier; that is to say, in the immediate vicinity of the chamber hired by d'Artagnan—a circumstance which appeared to furnish a happy augury for the success of his journey.

After this, satisfied with the way in which he had conducted himself at Meung, without remorse for the past, confident in the present, and full of hope for the future, he retired to bed and slept the sleep of the brave.

This sleep, provincial as it was, brought him to nine o'clock in the morning; at which hour he rose, in order to repair to the residence of M. de Tréville, the third personage in the kingdom, in the paternal estimation.

a spit, his wife a broom handle, and the servants the same sticks they had used the day before.

'My letter of recommendation!' cried d'Artagnan, 'my letter of recommendation! or, the holy blood, I will spit you all like ortolans!'

Unfortunately, there was one circumstance which created a powerful obstacle to the accomplishment of this threat; which was, as we have related, that his sword had been in his first conflict broken in two, and which he had entirely forgotten. Hence, it resulted when d'Artagnan proceeded to draw his sword in earnest, he found himself purely and simply armed with a stump of a sword about eight or ten inches in length, which the host had carefully placed in the scabbard. As to the rest of the blade, the master had slyly put that on one side to make himself a larding pin.

But this deception would probably not have stopped our fiery young man if the host had not reflected that the reclamation which his guest made was perfectly just.

'But, after all,' said he, lowering the point of his spit, 'where is this letter?'

'Yes, where is this letter?' cried d'Artagnan. 'In the first place, I warn you that that letter is for Monsieur de Tréville, and it must be found, or if it is not found, he will know how to find it.'

His threat completed the intimidation of the host. After the king and the cardinal, M. de Tréville was the man whose name was perhaps most frequently repeated by the military, and even by citizens. There was, to be sure, Father Joseph, but his name was never pronounced but with a subdued voice, such was the terror inspired by his Gray Eminence, as the cardinal's familiar was called.

Throwing down his spit, and ordering his wife to do the same with her broom handle, and the servants with their sticks, he set the first example of commencing an earnest search for the lost letter.

'Does the letter contain anything valuable?' demanded the host, after a few minutes of useless investigation.

'Zounds! I think it does indeed!' cried the Gascon, who reckoned upon this letter for making his way at court. 'It contained my fortune!'

'Bills upon Spain?' asked the disturbed host.

young man, as the heron of the fable did with the snail he had despised the evening before.

'Yes, a base coward,' murmured d'Artagnan; 'but she—she was very beautiful.'

'What *she?*' demanded the host.

'Milady,' faltered d'Artagnan, and fainted a second time.

'Ah, it's all one,' said the host; 'I have lost two customers, but this one remains, of whom I am pretty certain for some days to come. There will be eleven crowns gained.'

It is to be remembered that eleven crowns was just the sum that remained in d'Artagnan's purse.

The host had reckoned upon eleven days of confinement at a crown a day, but he had reckoned without his guest. On the following morning at five o'clock d'Artagnan arose, and descending to the kitchen without help, asked, among other ingredients the list of which has not come down to us, for some oil, some wine, and some rosemary, and with his mother's recipe in his hand composed a balsam, with which he anointed his numerous wounds, replacing his bandages himself, and positively refusing the assistance of any doctor, d'Artagnan walked about that same evening, and was almost cured by the morrow.

But when the time came to pay for his rosemary, this oil, and the wine, the only expense the master had incurred, as he had preserved a strict abstinence—while on the contrary, the yellow horse, by the account of the hostler at least, had eaten three times as much as a horse of his size could reasonably be supposed to have done—D'Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his little old velvet purse with the eleven crowns it contained; for as to the letter addressed to M. de Tréville, it had disappeared.

The young man commenced his search for the letter with the greatest patience, turning out his pockets of all kinds over and over again, rummaging and rerummaging in his valise, and opening and reopening his purse; but when he found that he had come to the conviction that the letter was not to be found, he flew, for the third time, into such a rage as was near costing him a fresh consumption of wine, oil, and rosemary—for upon seeing this hot-headed youth become exasperated and threaten to destroy everything in the establishment if his letter were not found, the host seized

Chapter II

The Antechamber of M. de Tréville

M. de Troisville, as his family was still called in Gascony, or M. de Tréville, as he has ended by styling himself in Paris, had really commenced life as d'Artagnan now did; that is to say, without a sou in his pocket, but with a fund of audacity, shrewdness, and intelligence which makes the poorest Gascon gentleman often derive more in his hope from the paternal inheritance than the richest Perigordian or Berrichan gentleman derives in reality from his. His insolent bravery, his still more insolent success at a time when blows poured down like hail, had borne him to the top of that difficult ladder called Court Favour, which he had climbed four steps at a time.

He was the friend of the king, who honoured highly, as everyone knows, the memory of his father, Henry IV. The father of M. de Tréville had served him so faithfully in his wars against the league that in default of money—a thing to which the Béarnais was accustomed all his life, and who constantly paid his debts with that of which he never stood in need of borrowing, that is to say, with ready wit—in default of money, we repeat, he authorized him, after the reduction of Paris, to assume for his arms a golden lion passant upon gules, with the motto *Fidelis et fortis*. This was a great matter in the way of honour, but very little in the way of wealth; so that when the illustrious companion of the great Henry died, the only inheritance he was able to leave his son was his sword and his motto. Thanks to this double gift and the spotless name that accompanied it, M. de Tréville was admitted into the household of the young prince where he

made such good use of his sword, and was so faithful to his motto, that Louis XIII, one of the good blades of his kingdom, was accustomed to say that if he had a friend who was about to fight, he would advise him to choose as a second, himself first, and Tréville next—or even, perhaps, before himself.

Thus Louis XIII had a real liking for Tréville—a royal liking, a self-interested liking, it is true, but still a liking. At that unhappy period it was an important consideration to be surrounded by such men as Tréville. Many might take for their device the epithet *strong*, which formed the second part of his motto, but very few gentlemen could lay claim to the *faithful*, which constituted the first. Tréville was one of these latter. His was one of those rare organizations, endowed with an obedient intelligence like that of the dog; with a blind valour, a quick eye, and a prompt hand; to whom sight appeared only to be given to see if the king were dissatisfied with anyone, and the hand to strike this displeasing personage, whether a Besme, a Maurevers, a Poltiot de Méré, or a Vitry. In short, up to this period nothing had been wanting to Tréville but opportunity; but he was ever on the watch for it, and he faithfully promised himself that he would not fail to seize it by its three hairs whenever it came within reach of his hand. At last Louis XIII made Tréville the captain of his Musketeers, who were to Louis XIII in devotedness, or rather in fanaticism, what his Ordinaries had been to Henry III, and his Scotch Guard to Louis XI.

On his part, the cardinal was not behind the king in this respect. When he saw the formidable and chosen body with which Louis XIII had surrounded himself, this second, or rather this first king of France, became desirous that he, too, should have his guard. He had his Musketeers therefore, as Louis XIII had his, and these two powerful rivals vied with each other in procuring, not only from all the provinces of France, but even from all foreign states, the most celebrated swordsmen. It was not uncommon for Richelieu and Louis XIII to dispute over their evening game of chess upon the merits of their servants. Each boasted the bearing and the courage of his own people. While exclaiming loudly against duels and brawls, they excited them secretly to quarrel, deriving an immoderate satisfaction or genuine regret from the success or defeat of their own combatants. We learn this from the memoirs of a man who was concerned in some few of these defeats and in many of these victories.

and hands of alabaster. She was talking with great animation with the stranger.

'His Eminence, then, orders me— ' said the lady.

'To return instantly to England, and to inform him as soon as the duke leaves London.'

'And as to my other instructions?' asked the fair traveller.

'They are contained in this box, which you will not open until you are on the other side of the Channel.'

'Very well; and you—what will you do?'

'I—I return to Paris.'

'What, without chastising this insolent boy?' asked the lady.

The stranger was about to reply; but at the moment he opened his mouth, d'Artagnan, who had heard all, precipitated himself over the threshold of the door.

'This insolent boy chastises others,' cried he; 'and I hope that this time he whom he ought to chastise will not escape him as before.'

'Will not escape him?' replied the stranger, knitting his brow.

'No; before a woman you would dare not fly, I presume?'

'Remember,' said Milady, seeing the stranger lay his hand on his sword, 'the least delay may ruin everything.'

'You are right,' cried the gentleman; 'begone then, on your part, and I will depart as quickly on mine.' And bowing to the lady, he sprang into his saddle, while her coachman applied his whip vigorously to his horses. The two interlocutors thus separated, taking opposite directions, at full gallop.

'Pay him, booby!' cried the stranger to his servant, without checking the speed of his horse; and the man, after throwing two or three silver pieces at the foot of mine host, galloped after his master.

'Base coward! false gentleman!' cried d'Artagnan, springing forward, in his turn, after the servant. But his wound had rendered him too weak to support such an exertion. Scarcely had he gone ten steps when his ears began to tingle, a faintness seized him, a cloud of blood passed over his eyes, and he fell in the middle of the street, crying still, 'Coward! coward! coward!'

'He is a coward, indeed,' grumbled the host, drawing near to d'Artagnan, and endeavouring by this little flattery to make up matters with the

'It is done; as your Excellency may have observed, your horse is in the great gateway, ready saddled for your departure.'

'That is well; do as I have directed you, then.'

'What the devil!' said the host to himself. 'Can he be afraid of this boy?' But an imperious glance from the stranger stopped him short; he bowed humbly and retired.

'It is not necessary for Milady[1] to be seen by this fellow,' continued the stranger. 'She will soon pass; she is already late. I had better get on horseback, and go and meet her. I should like, however, to know what this letter addressed to Tréville contains.' And the stranger, muttering to himself, directed his steps toward the kitchen.

In the meantime, the host, who entertained no doubt that it was the presence of the young man that drove the stranger from his hostelry, re-ascended to his wife's chamber, and found d'Artagnan just recovering his senses. Giving him to understand that the police would deal with him pretty severely for having sought a quarrel with a great lord—for in the opinion of the host the stranger could be nothing less than a great lord—he insisted that notwithstanding his weakness d'Artagnan should get up and depart as quickly as possible. D'Artagnan, half stupefied, without his doublet, and with his head bound up in a linen cloth, arose then, and urged by the host, began to descend the stairs; but on arriving at the kitchen, the first thing he saw was his antagonist talking calmly at the step of a heavy carriage, drawn by two large Norman horses.

His interlocutor, whose head appeared through the carriage window, was a woman of from twenty to two-and-twenty years. We have already observed with what rapidity d'Artagnan seized the expression of a countenance. He perceived then, at a glance, that this woman was young and beautiful; and her style of beauty struck him more forcibly from its being totally different from that of the southern countries in which d'Artagnan had hitherto resided. She was pale and fair, with long curls falling in profusion over her shoulders, had large, blue, languishing eyes, rosy lips,

[1]We are well aware that this term, milady, is only properly used when followed by a family name. But we find it thus in the manuscript, and we do not choose to take upon ourselves to alter it.

Tréville had grasped the weak side of his master; and it was to this address that he owed the long and constant favour of a king who has not left the reputation behind him of being very faithful in his friendships. He paraded his Musketeers before the Cardinal Armand Duplessis with an insolent air which made the gray moustache of his Eminence curl with ire. Tréville understood admirably the war method of that period, in which he who could not live at the expense of the enemy must live at the expense of his compatriots. His soldiers formed a legion of devil-may-care fellows, perfectly undisciplined toward all but himself.

Loose, half-drunk, imposing, the king's Musketeers, or rather M. de Tréville's, spread themselves about in the cabarets, in the public walks, and the public sports, shouting, twisting their moustaches, clanking their swords, and taking great pleasure in annoying the Guards of the cardinal whenever they could fall in with them; then drawing in the open streets, as if it were the best of all possible sports; sometimes killed, but sure in that case to be both wept and avenged; often killing others, but then certain of not rotting in prison, M. de Tréville being there to claim them. Thus M. de Tréville was praised to the highest note by these men, who adored him, and who, ruffians as they were, trembled before him like scholars before their master, obedient to his least word, and ready to sacrifice themselves to wash out the smallest insult.

M. de Tréville employed this powerful weapon for the king, in the first place, and the friends of the king—and then for himself and his own friends. For the rest, in the memoirs of this period, which has left so many memoirs, one does not find this worthy gentleman blamed even by his enemies; and he had many such among men of the pen as well as among men of the sword. In no instance, let us say, was this worthy gentleman accused of deriving personal advantage from the cooperation of his minions. Endowed with a rare genius for intrigue which rendered him the equal of the ablest intriguers, he remained an honest man. Still further, in spite of sword thrusts which weaken, and painful exercises which fatigue, he had become one of the most gallant frequenters of revels, one of the most insinuating lady's men, one of the softest whisperers of interesting nothings of his day; the *bonnes fortunes* of de Tréville were talked of as those of M. de Bassompierre had been talked of twenty years before, and that was not saying a little. The captain of the Musketeers

was therefore admired, feared, and loved; and this constitutes the zenith of human fortune.

Louis XIV absorbed all the smaller stars of his court in his own vast radiance; but his father, a sun *pluribus impar*, left his personal splendour to each of his favourites, his individual value to each of his courtiers. In addition to the levees of the king and the cardinal, there might be reckoned in Paris at that time more than two hundred smaller but still noteworthy levees. Among these two hundred levees, that of Tréville was one of the most sought.

The court of his hôtel, situated in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, resembled a camp from by six o'clock in the morning in summer and eight o'clock in winter. From fifty to sixty Musketeers, who appeared to replace one another in order always to present an imposing number, paraded constantly, armed to the teeth and ready for anything. On one of those immense staircases, upon whose space modern civilization would build a whole house, ascended and descended the office seekers of Paris, who ran after any sort of favour—gentlemen from the provinces anxious to be enrolled, and servants in all sorts of liveries, bringing and carrying messages between their masters and M. de Tréville. In the antechamber, upon long circular benches, reposed the elect; that is to say, those who were called. In this apartment a continued buzzing prevailed from morning till night, while M. de Tréville, in his office contiguous to this antechamber, received visits, listened to complaints, gave his orders, and like the king in his balcony at the Louvre, had only to place himself at the window to review both his men and arms.

The day on which d'Artagnan presented himself the assemblage was imposing, particularly for a provincial just arriving from his province. It is true that this provincial was a Gascon; and that, particularly at this period, the compatriots of d'Artagnan had the reputation of not being easily intimidated. When he had once passed the massive door covered with long square-headed nails, he fell into the midst of a troop of swordsmen, who crossed one another in their passage, calling out, quarrelling, and playing tricks one with another. In order to make one's way amid these turbulent and conflicting waves, it was necessary to be an officer, a great noble, or a pretty woman.

'Yes; he struck his pocket and said, "We shall see what Monsieur de Tréville will think of this insult offered to his *protégé*."'

'Monsieur de Tréville?' said the stranger, becoming attentive, 'he put his hand upon his pocket while pronouncing the name of Monsieur de Tréville? Now, my dear host, while your young man was insensible, you did not fail, I am quite sure, to ascertain what that pocket contained. What was there in it?'

'A letter addressed to Monsieur de Tréville, captain of the Musketeers.'

'Indeed!'

'Exactly as I have the honour to tell your Excellency.'

The host, who was not endowed with great perspicacity, did not observe the expression which his words had given to the physiognomy of the stranger. The latter rose from the front of the window, upon the sill of which he had leaned with his elbow, and knitted his brow like a man disquieted.

'The devil!' murmured he, between his teeth. 'Can Tréville have set this Gascon upon me? He is very young; but a sword thrust is a sword thrust, whatever be the age of him who gives it, and a youth is less to be suspected than an older man,' and the stranger fell into a reverie which lasted some minutes. 'A weak obstacle is sometimes sufficient to overthrow a great design.'

'Host,' said he, 'could you not contrive to get rid of this frantic boy for me? In conscience, I cannot kill him; and yet,' added he, with a coldly menacing expression, 'he annoys me. Where is he?'

'In my wife's chamber, on the first flight, where they are dressing his wounds.'

'His things and his bag are with him? Has he taken off his doublet?'

'On the contrary, everything is in the kitchen. But if he annoys you, this young fool— '

'To be sure he does. He causes a disturbance in your hostelry, which respectable people cannot put up with. Go; make out my bill and notify my servant.'

'What, monsieur, will you leave us so soon?'

'You know that very well, as I gave my order to saddle my horse. Have they not obeyed me?'

'Another gasconade!' murmured the gentleman. 'By my honour, these Gascons are incorrigible! Keep up the dance, then, since he will have it so. When he is tired, he will perhaps tell us that he has had enough of it.'

But the stranger knew not the headstrong personage he had to do with; d'Artagnan was not the man ever to cry for quarter. The fight was therefore prolonged for some seconds; but at length d'Artagnan dropped his sword, which was broken in two pieces by the blow of a stick. Another blow full upon his forehead at the same moment brought him to the ground, covered with blood and almost fainting.

It was at this moment that people came flocking to the scene of action from all sides. The host, fearful of consequences, with the help of his servants carried the wounded man into the kitchen, where some trifling attentions were bestowed upon him.

As to the gentleman, he resumed his place at the window, and surveyed the crowd with a certain impatience, evidently annoyed by their remaining undispersed.

'Well, how is it with this madman?' exclaimed he, turning round as the noise of the door announced the entrance of the host, who came in to inquire if he was unhurt.

'Your Excellency is safe and sound?' asked the host.

'Oh, yes! Perfectly safe and sound, my good host; and I wish to know what has become of our young man.'

'He is better,' said the host, 'he fainted quite away.'

'Indeed!' said the gentleman.

'But before he fainted, he collected all his strength to challenge you, and to defy you while challenging you.'

'Why, this fellow must be the devil in person!' cried the stranger.

'Oh, no, your Excellency, he is not the devil,' replied the host, with a grin of contempt; 'for during his fainting we rummaged his valise and found nothing but a clean shirt and eleven crowns—which however, did not prevent his saying, as he was fainting, that if such a thing had happened in Paris, you should have cause to repent of it at a later period.'

'Then,' said the stranger coolly, 'he must be some prince in disguise.'

'I have told you this, good sir,' resumed the host, 'in order that you may be on your guard.'

'Did he name no one in his passion?'

It was, then, into the midst of this tumult and disorder that our young man advanced with a beating heart, ranging his long rapier up his lanky leg, and keeping one hand on the edge of his cap, with that half-smile of the embarrassed provincial who wishes to put on a good face. When he had passed one group he began to breathe more freely; but he could not help observing that they turned round to look at him, and for the first time in his life d'Artagnan, who had till that day entertained a very good opinion of himself, felt ridiculous.

Arrived at the staircase, it was still worse. There were four Musketeers on the bottom steps, amusing themselves with the following exercise, while ten or twelve of their comrades waited upon the landing place to take their turn in the sport.

One of them, stationed upon the top stair, naked sword in hand, prevented, or at least endeavoured to prevent, the three others from ascending.

These three others fenced against him with their agile swords.

D'Artagnan at first took these weapons for foils, and believed them to be buttoned; but he soon perceived by certain scratches that every weapon was pointed and sharpened, and that at each of these scratches not only the spectators, but even the actors themselves, laughed like so many madmen.

He who at the moment occupied the upper step kept his adversaries marvellously in check. A circle was formed around them. The conditions required that at every hit the man touched should quit the game, yielding his turn for the benefit of the adversary who had hit him. In five minutes three were slightly wounded, one on the hand, another on the ear, by the defender of the stair, who himself remained intact—a piece of skill which was worth to him, according to the rules agreed upon, three turns of favour.

However difficult it might be, or rather as he pretended it was, to astonish our young traveller, this pastime really astonished him. He had seen in his province—that land in which heads become so easily heated—a few of the preliminaries of duels; but the daring of these four fencers appeared to him the strongest he had ever heard of even in Gascony. He believed himself transported into that famous country of giants into which Gulliver afterward went and was so frightened; and yet he had not gained the goal, for there were still the landing place and the antechamber.

On the landing they were no longer fighting, but amused themselves with stories about women, and in the antechamber, with stories about the court. On the landing d'Artagnan blushed; in the antechamber he trembled. His warm and fickle imagination, which in Gascony had rendered him formidable to young chambermaids, and even sometimes their mistresses, had never dreamed, even in moments of delirium, of half the amorous wonders or a quarter of the feats of gallantry which were here set forth in connection with names the best known and with details the least concealed. But if his morals were shocked on the landing, his respect for the cardinal was scandalized in the antechamber. There, to his great astonishment, d'Artagnan heard the policy which made all Europe tremble criticized aloud and openly, as well as the private life of the cardinal, which so many great nobles had been punished for trying to pry into. That great man who was so revered by d'Artagnan the elder served as an object of ridicule to the Musketeers of Tréville, who cracked their jokes upon his bandy legs and his crooked back. Some sang ballads about Mme. d'Aguillon, his mistress, and Mme. Cambalet, his niece; while others formed parties and plans to annoy the pages and guards of the cardinal duke—all things which appeared to d'Artagnan monstrous impossibilities.

Nevertheless, when the name of the king was now and then uttered unthinkingly amid all these cardinal jests, a sort of gag seemed to close for a moment on all these jeering mouths. They looked hesitatingly around them, and appeared to doubt the thickness of the partition between them and the office of M. de Tréville; but a fresh allusion soon brought back the conversation to his Eminence, and then the laughter recovered its loudness and the light was not withheld from any of his actions.

'Certes, these fellows will all either be imprisoned or hanged,' thought the terrified d'Artagnan, 'and I, no doubt, with them; for from the moment I have either listened to or heard them, I shall be held as an accomplice. What would my good father say, who so strongly pointed out to me the respect due to the cardinal, if he knew I was in the society of such pagans?'

We have no need, therefore, to say that d'Artagnan dared not join in the conversation, only he looked with all his eyes and listened with all his ears, stretching his five senses so as to lose nothing; and despite his confidence

'I do not often laugh, sir,' replied the stranger, 'as you may perceive by the expression of my countenance; but nevertheless I retain the privilege of laughing when I please.'

'And I,' cried d'Artagnan, 'will allow no man to laugh when it displeases me!'

'Indeed, sir,' continued the stranger, more calm than ever; 'well, that is perfectly right!' and turning on his heel, was about to re-enter the hostelry by the front gate, beneath which d'Artagnan on arriving had observed a saddled horse.

But, d'Artagnan was not of a character to allow a man to escape him thus who had the insolence to ridicule him. He drew his sword entirely from the scabbard, and followed him, crying, 'Turn, turn, Master Joker, lest I strike you behind!'

'Strike me!' said the other, turning on his heels, and surveying the young man with as much astonishment as contempt. 'Why, my good fellow, you must be mad!' Then, in a suppressed tone, as if speaking to himself, 'This is annoying,' continued he. 'What a godsend this would be for his Majesty, who is seeking everywhere for brave fellows to recruit for his Musketeers!'

He had scarcely finished, when d'Artagnan made such a furious lunge at him that if he had not sprung nimbly backward, it is probable he would have jested for the last time. The stranger, then perceiving that the matter went beyond raillery, drew his sword, saluted his adversary, and seriously placed himself on guard. But at the same moment, his two auditors, accompanied by the host, fell upon d'Artagnan with sticks, shovels and tongs. This caused so rapid and complete a diversion from the attack that d'Artagnan's adversary, while the latter turned round to face this shower of blows, sheathed his sword with the same precision, and instead of an actor, which he had nearly been, became a spectator of the fight—a part in which he acquitted himself with his usual impassiveness, muttering, nevertheless, 'A plague upon these Gascons! Replace him on his orange horse, and let him begone!'

'Not before I have killed you, poltroon!' cried d'Artagnan, making the best face possible, and never retreating one step before his three assailants, who continued to shower blows upon him.