On his part Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? Nobody knew. Kitty, who was to set out that evening for Tours, was waiting in the next chamber.

Athos sipped the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime d'Artagnan was defiling with his company. Arriving at the Faubourg St. Antoine, he turned round to look gaily at the Bastille; but as it was the Bastille alone he looked at, he did not observe Milady, who, mounted upon a light chestnut horse, designated him with her finger to two ill-looking men who came close up to the ranks to take notice of him. To a look of interrogation which they made, Milady replied by a sign that it was he. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she started her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company, and on leaving the Faubourg St. Antoine, mounted two horses properly equipped, which a servant without livery had waiting for them.

Chapter XLI

The Siege of La Rochelle

The Siege of La Rochelle was one of the great political events of the reign of Louis XIII, and one of the great military enterprises of the cardinal. It is, then, interesting and even necessary that we should say a few words about it, particularly as many details of this siege are connected in too important a manner with the story we have undertaken to relate to allow us to pass it over in silence.

The political plans of the cardinal when he undertook this siege were extensive. Let us unfold them first, and then pass on to the private plans which perhaps had not less influence upon his Eminence than the others.

Of the important cities given up by Henry IV to the Huguenots as places of safety, there only remained La Rochelle. It became necessary, therefore, to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism—a dangerous leaven with which the ferments of civil revolt and foreign war were constantly mingling.

Spaniards, Englishmen, and Italian malcontents, adventurers of all nations, and soldiers of fortune of every sect, flocked at the first summons under the standard of the Protestants, and organized themselves like a vast association, whose branches diverged freely over all parts of Europe.

La Rochelle, which had derived a new importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist cities, was, then, the focus of dissensions and ambition. Moreover, its port was the last in the kingdom of France open to the English, and by closing it against England, our eternal enemy, the cardinal completed the work of Joan of Arc and the Duc de Guise.

Thus Bassompierre, who was at once Protestant and Catholic—Protestant by conviction and Catholic as commander of the order of the Holy Ghost; Bassompierre, who was a German by birth and a Frenchman at heart—in short, Bassompierre, who had a distinguished command at the siege of La Rochelle, said, in charging at the head of several other Protestant nobles like himself, 'You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take La Rochelle.'

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonade of the Isle of Ré presaged to him the dragonnades of the Cévennes; the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

We have hinted that by the side of these views of the leveling and simplifying minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is forced to recognize the lesser motives of the amorous man and jealous rival.

Richelieu, as everyone knows, had loved the queen. Was this love a simple political affair, or was it naturally one of those profound passions which Anne of Austria inspired in those who approached her? That we are not able to say; but at all events, we have seen, by the anterior developments of this story, that Buckingham had the advantage over him, and in two or three circumstances, particularly that of the diamond studs, had, thanks to the devotedness of the three Musketeers and the courage and conduct of d'Artagnan, cruelly mystified him.

It was, then, Richelieu's object, not only to get rid of an enemy of France, but to avenge himself on a rival; but this vengeance must be grand and striking and worthy in every way of a man who held in his hand, as his weapon for combat, the forces of a kingdom.

Richelieu knew that in combating England he combated Buckingham; that in triumphing over England he triumphed over Buckingham—in short, that in humiliating England in the eyes of Europe he humiliated Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his side Buckingham, in pretending to maintain the honour of England, was moved by interests exactly like those of the cardinal. Buckingham also was pursuing a private vengeance. Buckingham could not under any pretense be admitted into France as an ambassador; he wished to enter it as a conqueror.

M. Dessessart. Each of the captains then led his company to the Louvre, where the king held his review.

The king was dull and appeared ill, which detracted a little from his usual lofty bearing. In fact, the evening before, a fever had seized him in the midst of the Parliament, while he was holding his Bed of Justice. He had, not the less, decided upon setting out that same evening; and in spite of the remonstrances that had been offered to him, he persisted in having the review, hoping by setting it at defiance to conquer the disease which began to lay hold upon him.

The review over, the Guards set forward alone on their march, the Musketeers waiting for the king, which allowed Porthos time to go and take a turn in his superb equipment in the Rue aux Ours.

The procurator's wife saw him pass in his new uniform and on his fine horse. She loved Porthos too dearly to allow him to part thus; she made him a sign to dismount and come to her. Porthos was magnificent; his spurs jingled, his cuirass glittered, his sword knocked proudly against his ample limbs. This time the clerks evinced no inclination to laugh, such a real ear clipper did Porthos appear.

The Musketeer was introduced to M. Coquenard, whose little gray eyes sparkled with anger at seeing his cousin all blazing new. Nevertheless, one thing afforded him inward consolation; it was expected by everybody that the campaign would be a severe one. He whispered a hope to himself that this beloved relative might be killed in the field.

Porthos paid his compliments to M. Coquenard and bade him farewell. M. Coquenard wished him all sorts of prosperities. As to Mme. Coquenard, she could not restrain her tears; but no evil impressions were taken from her grief as she was known to be very much attached to her relatives, about whom she was constantly having serious disputes with her husband.

But the real adieux were made in Mme. Coquenard's chamber; they were heartrending.

As long as the procurator's wife could follow him with her eyes, she waved her handkerchief to him, leaning so far out of the window as to lead people to believe she wished to precipitate herself. Porthos received all these attentions like a man accustomed to such demonstrations, only on turning the corner of the street he lifted his hat gracefully, and waved it to her as a sign of adieu.

Athos crossed his mind; if he made the compact with the cardinal which he required, Athos would no more give him his hand—Athos would renounce him.

It was this fear that restrained him, so powerful is the influence of a truly great character on all that surrounds it.

D'Artagnan descended by the staircase at which he had entered, and found Athos and the four Musketeers waiting his appearance, and beginning to grow uneasy. With a word, d'Artagnan reassured them; and Planchet ran to inform the other sentinels that it was useless to keep guard longer, as his master had come out safe from the Palais-Cardinal.

Returned home with Athos, Aramis and Porthos inquired eagerly the cause of the strange interview; but d'Artagnan confined himself to telling them that M. de Richelieu had sent for him to propose to him to enter into his guards with the rank of ensign, and that he had refused.

'And you were right,' cried Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie and answered nothing. But when they were alone he said, 'You have done that which you ought to have done, d'Artagnan; but perhaps you have been wrong.'

D'Artagnan sighed deeply, for this voice responded to a secret voice of his soul, which told him that great misfortunes awaited him.

The whole of the next day was spent in preparations for departure. D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Tréville. At that time it was believed that the separation of the Musketeers and the Guards would be but momentary, the king holding his Parliament that very day and proposing to set out the day after. M. de Tréville contented himself with asking d'Artagnan if he could do anything for him, but d'Artagnan answered that he was supplied with all he wanted.

That night brought together all those comrades of the Guards of M. Dessessart and the company of Musketeers of M. de Tréville who had been accustomed to associate together. They were parting to meet again when it pleased God, and if it pleased God. That night, then, was somewhat riotous, as may be imagined. In such cases extreme preoccupation is only to be combated by extreme carelessness.

At the first sound of the morning trumpet the friends separated; the Musketeers hastening to the hôtel of M. de Tréville, the Guards to that of

It resulted from this that the real stake in this game, which two most powerful kingdoms played for the good pleasure of two amorous men, was simply a kind look from Anne of Austria.

The first advantage had been gained by Buckingham. Arriving unexpectedly in sight of the Isle of Ré with ninety vessels and nearly twenty thousand men, he had surprised the Comte de Toiras, who commanded for the king in the Isle, and he had, after a bloody conflict, effected his landing.

Allow us to observe in passing that in this fight perished the Baron de Chantal; that the Baron de Chantal left a little orphan girl eighteen months old, and that this little girl was afterward Mme. de Sévigné.

The Comte de Toiras retired into the citadel St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a little fort called the fort of La Prée.

This event had hastened the resolutions of the cardinal; and till the king and he could take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was determined, he had sent Monsieur to direct the first operations, and had ordered all the troops he could dispose of to march toward the theater of war. It was of this detachment, sent as a vanguard, that our friend d'Artagnan formed a part.

The king, as we have said, was to follow as soon as his Bed of Justice had been held; but on rising from his Bed of Justice on the twenty-eighth of June, he felt himself attacked by fever. He was, notwithstanding, anxious to set out; but his illness becoming more serious, he was forced to stop at Villeroy.

Now, whenever the king halted, the Musketeers halted. It followed that d'Artagnan, who was as yet purely and simply in the Guards, found himself, for the time at least, separated from his good friends—Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This separation, which was no more than an unpleasant circumstance, would have certainly become a cause of serious uneasiness if he had been able to guess by what unknown dangers he was surrounded.

He, however, arrived without accident in the camp established before La Rochelle, on the tenth of the month of September of the year 1627.

Everything was in the same state. The Duke of Buckingham and his English, masters of the Isle of Ré, continued to besiege, but without

success, the citadel St. Martin and the fort of La Prée; and hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced, two or three days before, about a fort which the Duc d'Angoulême had caused to be constructed near the city.

The Guards, under the command of M. Dessessart, took up their quarters at the Minimes; but, as we know, d'Artagnan, possessed with ambition to enter the Musketeers, had formed but few friendships among his comrades, and he felt himself isolated and given up to his own reflections.

His reflections were not very cheerful. From the time of his arrival in Paris, he had been mixed up with public affairs; but his own private affairs had made no great progress, either in love or fortune. As to love, the only woman he could have loved was Mme. Bonacieux; and Mme. Bonacieux had disappeared, without his being able to discover what had become of her. As to fortune, he had made—he, humble as he was—an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom trembled the greatest men of the kingdom, beginning with the king.

That man had the power to crush him, and yet he had not done so. For a mind so perspicuous as that of d'Artagnan, this indulgence was a light by which he caught a glimpse of a better future.

Then he had made himself another enemy, less to be feared, he thought; but nevertheless, he instinctively felt, not to be despised. This enemy was Milady.

In exchange for all this, he had acquired the protection and good will of the queen; but the favour of the queen was at the present time an additional cause of persecution, and her protection, as it was known, protected badly—as witness Chalais and Mme. Bonacieux.

What he had clearly gained in all this was the diamond, worth five or six thousand livres, which he wore on his finger; and even this diamond—supposing that d'Artagnan, in his projects of ambition, wished to keep it, to make it someday a pledge for the gratitude of the queen—had not in the meanwhile, since he could not part with it, more value than the gravel he trod under his feet.

We say the gravel he trod under his feet, for d'Artagnan made these reflections while walking solitarily along a pretty little road which led from the camp to the village of Angoutin. Now, these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline

'That is to say, you refuse to serve me, monsieur,' said the cardinal, with a tone of vexation, through which, however, might be seen a sort of esteem; 'remain free, then, and guard your hatreds and your sympathies.'

'Monseigneur— '

'Well, well,' said the cardinal, 'I don't wish you any ill; but you must be aware that it is quite trouble enough to defend and recompense our friends. We owe nothing to our enemies; and let me give you a piece of advice; take care of yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for from the moment I withdraw my hand from behind you, I would not give an *obolus* for your life.'

'I will try to do so, monseigneur,' replied the Gascon, with a noble confidence.

'Remember at a later period and at a certain moment, if any mischance should happen to you,' said Richelieu, significantly, 'that it was I who came to seek you, and that I did all in my power to prevent this misfortune befalling you.'

'I shall entertain, whatever may happen,' said d'Artagnan, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing, 'an eternal gratitude toward your Eminence for that which you now do for me.'

'Well, let it be, then, as you have said, Monsieur d'Artagnan; we shall see each other again after the campaign. I will have my eye upon you, for I shall be there,' replied the cardinal, pointing with his finger to a magnificent suit of armor he was to wear, 'and on our return, well—we will settle our account!'

'Ah, monseigneur,' cried d'Artagnan, 'spare me the weight of your displeasure. Remain neutral monseigneur, if you find that I act as becomes a gallant man.'

'Young man,' said Richelieu, 'if I shall be able to say to you at another time what I have said to you today, I promise you to do so.'

This last expression of Richelieu's conveyed a terrible doubt; it alarmed d'Artagnan more than a menace would have done, for it was a warning. The cardinal, then, was seeking to preserve him from some misfortune which threatened him. He opened his mouth to reply, but with a haughty gesture the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan went out, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he felt inclined to return. Then the noble and severe countenance of

'Monseigneur, your Eminence has ill understood my words.'

'You want a pretext, do you not? I comprehend. Well, you have this excuse: advancement, the opening campaign, the opportunity which I offer you—so much for the world. As regards yourself, the need of protection; for it is fit you should know, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that I have received heavy and serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your days and nights wholly to the king's service.'

D'Artagnan coloured.

'In fact,' said the cardinal, placing his hand upon a bundle of papers, 'I have here a whole pile which concerns you. I know you to be a man of resolution; and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to ill, might be very advantageous to you. Come; reflect, and decide.'

'Your goodness confounds me, monseigneur,' replied d'Artagnan, 'and I am conscious of a greatness of soul in your Eminence that makes me mean as an earthworm; but since Monseigneur permits me to speak freely— '

D'Artagnan paused.

'Yes; speak.'

'Then, I will presume to say that all my friends are in the king's Musketeers and Guards, and that by an inconceivable fatality my enemies are in the service of your Eminence; I should, therefore, be ill received here and ill regarded there if I accepted what Monseigneur offers me.'

'Do you happen to entertain the haughty idea that I have not yet made you an offer equal to your value?' asked the cardinal, with a smile of disdain.

'Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too kind to me; and on the contrary, I think I have not proved myself worthy of your goodness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to be resumed, monseigneur. I shall serve under the eye of your Eminence, and if I have the good fortune to conduct myself at the siege in such a manner as merits your attention, then I shall at least leave behind me some brilliant action to justify the protection with which you honour me. Everything is best in its time, monseigneur. Hereafter, perhaps, I shall have the right of *giving* myself; at present I shall appear to sell myself.'

when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he thought he saw the barrel of a musket glitter from behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and a prompt understanding. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself, and that he who bore it had not concealed himself behind a hedge with any friendly intentions. He determined, therefore, to direct his course as clear from it as he could when, on the opposite side of the road, from behind a rock, he perceived the extremity of another musket.

This was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man cast a glance at the first musket and saw, with a certain degree of inquietude, that it was leveled in his direction; but as soon as he perceived that the orifice of the barrel was motionless, he threw himself upon the ground. At the same instant the gun was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball pass over his head.

No time was to be lost. D'Artagnan sprang up with a bound, and at the same instant the ball from the other musket tore up the gravel on the very spot on the road where he had thrown himself with his face to the ground.

D'Artagnan was not one of those foolhardy men who seek a ridiculous death in order that it may be said of them that they did not retreat a single step. Besides, courage was out of the question here; d'Artagnan had fallen into an ambush.

'If there is a third shot,' said he to himself, 'I am a lost man.'

He immediately, therefore, took to his heels and ran toward the camp, with the swiftness of the young men of his country, so renowned for their agility; but whatever might be his speed, the first who fired, having had time to reload, fired a second shot, and this time so well aimed that it struck his hat, and carried it ten paces from him.

As he, however, had no other hat, he picked up this as he ran, and arrived at his quarters very pale and quite out of breath. He sat down without saying a word to anybody, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes:

The first and the most natural was that it might be an ambuscade of the Rochellais, who might not be sorry to kill one of his Majesty's Guards, because it would be an enemy the less, and this enemy might have a well-furnished purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole made by the ball, and shook his head. The ball was not a musket ball—it was an arquebus ball. The accuracy of the aim had first given him the idea that a special weapon had been employed. This could not, then, be a military ambuscade, as the ball was not of the regular caliber.

This might be a kind remembrance of Monsieur the Cardinal. It may be observed that at the very moment when, thanks to the ray of the sun, he perceived the gun barrel, he was thinking with astonishment on the forbearance of his Eminence with respect to him.

But d'Artagnan again shook his head. For people toward whom he had but to put forth his hand, his Eminence had rarely recourse to such means.

It might be a vengeance of Milady; that was most probable.

He tried in vain to remember the faces or dress of the assassins; he had escaped so rapidly that he had not had leisure to notice anything.

'Ah, my poor friends!' murmured d'Artagnan; 'where are you? And that you should fail me!'

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he started up, imagining that a man was approaching his bed for the purpose of stabbing him. Nevertheless, day dawned without darkness having brought any accident.

But d'Artagnan well suspected that that which was deferred was not relinquished.

D'Artagnan remained all day in his quarters, assigning as a reason to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o'clock the next morning, the drums beat to arms. The Duc d'Orléans visited the posts. The guards were under arms, and d'Artagnan took his place in the midst of his comrades.

Monsieur passed along the front of the line; then all the superior officers approached him to pay their compliments, M. Dessessart, captain of the Guards, as well as the others.

At the expiration of a minute or two, it appeared to d'Artagnan that M. Dessessart made him a sign to approach. He waited for a fresh gesture on the part of his superior, for fear he might be mistaken; but this gesture being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive orders.

me some thanks. You must yourself have remarked how much you have been considered in all the circumstances.'

D'Artagnan bowed with respect.

'That,' continued the cardinal, 'arose not only from a feeling of natural equity, but likewise from a plan I have marked out with respect to you.'

D'Artagnan became more and more astonished.

'I wished to explain this plan to you on the day you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing is lost by this delay, and you are now about to hear it. Sit down there, before me, d'Artagnan; you are gentleman enough not to listen standing.' And the cardinal pointed with his finger to a chair for the young man, who was so astonished at what was passing that he awaited a second sign from his interlocutor before he obeyed.

'You are brave, Monsieur d'Artagnan,' continued his Eminence; 'you are prudent, which is still better. I like men of head and heart. Don't be afraid,' said he, smiling. 'By men of heart I mean men of courage. But young as you are, and scarcely entering into the world, you have powerful enemies; if you do not take great heed, they will destroy you.'

'Alas, monseigneur!' replied the young man, 'very easily, no doubt, for they are strong and well supported, while I am alone.'

'Yes, that's true; but alone as you are, you have done much already, and will do still more, I don't doubt. Yet you have need, I believe, to be guided in the adventurous career you have undertaken; for, if I mistake not, you came to Paris with the ambitious idea of making your fortune.'

'I am at the age of extravagant hopes, monseigneur,' said d'Artagnan.

'There are no extravagant hopes but for fools, monsieur, and you are a man of understanding. Now, what would you say to an ensign's commission in my Guards, and a company after the campaign?'

'Ah, monseigneur.'

'You accept it, do you not?'

'Monseigneur,' replied d'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

'How? You refuse?' cried the cardinal, with astonishment.

'I am in his Majesty's Guards, monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied.'

'But it appears to me that my Guards—mine—are also his Majesty's Guards; and whoever serves in a French corps serves the king.'

'The letter was lost,' replied his Eminence; 'yes, I know that. But Monsieur de Tréville is a skilled physiognomist, who knows men at first sight; and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, Monsieur Dessessart, leaving you to hope that one day or other you should enter the Musketeers.'

'Monseigneur is correctly informed,' said d'Artagnan.

'Since that time many things have happened to you. You were walking one day behind the Chartreux, when it would have been better if you had been elsewhere. Then you took with your friends a journey to the waters of Forges; they stopped on the road, but you continued yours. That is all very simple: you had business in England.'

'Monseigneur,' said d'Artagnan, quite confused, 'I went— '

'Hunting at Windsor, or elsewhere—that concerns nobody. I know, because it is my office to know everything. On your return you were received by an august personage, and I perceive with pleasure that you preserve the souvenir she gave you.'

D'Artagnan placed his hand upon the queen's diamond, which he wore, and quickly turned the stone inward; but it was too late.

'The day after that, you received a visit from Cavois,' resumed the cardinal. 'He went to desire you to come to the palace. You have not returned that visit, and you were wrong.'

'Monseigneur, I feared I had incurred disgrace with your Eminence.'

'How could that be, monsieur? Could you incur my displeasure by having followed the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done? It is the people who do not obey that I punish, and not those who, like you, obey—but too well. As a proof, remember the date of the day on which I had you bidden to come to me, and seek in your memory for what happened to you that very night.'

That was the very evening when the abduction of Mme. Bonacieux took place. D'Artagnan trembled; and he likewise recollected that during the past half hour the poor woman had passed close to him, without doubt carried away by the same power that had caused her disappearance.

'In short,' continued the cardinal, 'as I have heard nothing of you for some time past, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you owe

'Monsieur is about to ask for some men of good will for a dangerous mission, but one which will do honour to those who shall accomplish it; and I made you a sign in order that you might hold yourself in readiness.'

'Thanks, my captain!' replied d'Artagnan, who wished for nothing better than an opportunity to distinguish himself under the eye of the lieutenant general.

In fact the Rochellais had made a *sortie* during the night, and had retaken a bastion of which the royal army had gained possession two days before. The matter was to ascertain, by reconnoitering, how the enemy guarded this bastion.

At the end of a few minutes Monsieur raised his voice, and said, 'I want for this mission three or four volunteers, led by a man who can be depended upon.'

'As to the man to be depended upon, I have him under my hand, monsieur,' said M. Dessessart, pointing to d'Artagnan; 'and as to the four or five volunteers, Monsieur has but to make his intentions known, and the men will not be wanting.'

'Four men of good will who will risk being killed with me!' said d'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his comrades of the Guards immediately sprang forward, and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was deemed sufficient. D'Artagnan declined all others, being unwilling to take the first chance from those who had the priority.

It was not known whether, after the taking of the bastion, the Rochellais had evacuated it or left a garrison in it; the object then was to examine the place near enough to verify the reports.

D'Artagnan set out with his four companions, and followed the trench; the two Guards marched abreast with him, and the two soldiers followed behind.

They arrived thus, screened by the lining of the trench, till they came within a hundred paces of the bastion. There, on turning round, d'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared.

He thought that, beginning to be afraid, they had stayed behind, and he continued to advance.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves within about sixty paces of the bastion. They saw no one, and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three composing our forlorn hope were deliberating whether they should proceed any further, when all at once a circle of smoke enveloped the giant of stone, and a dozen balls came whistling around d'Artagnan and his companions.

They knew all they wished to know; the bastion was guarded. A longer stay in this dangerous spot would have been useless imprudence. D'Artagnan and his two companions turned their backs, and commenced a retreat which resembled a flight.

On arriving at the angle of the trench which was to serve them as a rampart, one of the Guardsmen fell. A ball had passed through his breast. The other, who was safe and sound, continued his way toward the camp.

D'Artagnan was not willing to abandon his companion thus, and stooped to raise him and assist him in regaining the lines; but at this moment two shots were fired. One ball struck the head of the already-wounded guard, and the other flattened itself against a rock, after having passed within two inches of d'Artagnan.

The young man turned quickly round, for this attack could not have come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The idea of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and with them he remembered the assassins of two evenings before. He resolved this time to know with whom he had to deal, and fell upon the body of his comrade as if he were dead.

He quickly saw two heads appear above an abandoned work within thirty paces of him; they were the heads of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan had not been deceived; these two men had only followed for the purpose of assassinating him, hoping that the young man's death would be placed to the account of the enemy.

As he might be only wounded and might denounce their crime, they came up to him with the purpose of making sure. Fortunately, deceived by d'Artagnan's trick, they neglected to reload their guns.

When they were within ten paces of him, d'Artagnan, who in falling had taken care not to let go his sword, sprang up close to them.

Chapter XL

A Terrible Vision

THE cardinal leaned his elbow on his manuscript, his cheek upon his hand, and looked intently at the young man for a moment. No one had a more searching eye than the Cardinal de Richelieu, and d'Artagnan felt this glance run through his veins like a fever.

He however kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand and awaiting the good pleasure of his Eminence, without too much assurance, but also without too much humility.

'Monsieur,' said the cardinal, 'are you a d'Artagnan from Béarn?'

'Yes, monseigneur,' replied the young man.

'There are several branches of the d'Artagnans at Tarbes and in its environs,' said the cardinal; 'to which do you belong?'

'I am the son of him who served in the Religious Wars under the great King Henry, the father of his gracious Majesty.'

'That is well. It is you who set out seven or eight months ago from your country to seek your fortune in the capital?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'You came through Meung, where something befell you. I don't very well know what, but still something.'

'Monseigneur,' said d'Artagnan, 'this was what happened to me— '

'Never mind, never mind!' resumed the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story as well as he who wished to relate it. 'You were recommended to Monsieur de Tréville, were you not?'

'Yes, monseigneur; but in that unfortunate affair at Meung— '