'Aramis, Aramis!' cried d'Artagnan, looking at his friend with an air of doubt.

'Dust I am, and to dust I return. Life is full of humiliations and sorrows,' continued he, becoming still more melancholy; 'all the ties which attach him to life break in the hand of man, particularly the golden ties. Oh, my dear d'Artagnan,' resumed Aramis, giving to his voice a slight tone of bitterness, 'trust me! Conceal your wounds when you have any; silence is the last joy of the unhappy. Beware of giving anyone the clue to your griefs; the curious suck our tears as flies suck the blood of a wounded hart.'

'Alas, my dear Aramis,' said d'Artagnan, in his turn heaving a profound sigh, 'that is my story you are relating!'

'How?'

'Yes; a woman whom I love, whom I adore, has just been torn from me by force. I do not know where she is or whither they have conducted her. She is perhaps a prisoner; she is perhaps dead!'

'Yes, but you have at least this consolation, that you can say to yourself she has not quit you voluntarily, that if you learn no news of her, it is because all communication with you is interdicted; while I— '

'Well?'

'Nothing,' replied Aramis, 'nothing.'

'So you renounce the world, then, forever; that is a settled thing—a resolution registered!'

'Forever! You are my friend today; tomorrow you will be no more to me than a shadow, or rather, even, you will no longer exist. As for the world, it is a sepulchre and nothing else.'

'The devil! All this is very sad which you tell me.'

'What will you? My vocation commands me; it carries me away.'

D'Artagnan smiled, but made no answer.

Aramis continued, 'And yet, while I do belong to the earth, I wish to speak of you—of our friends.'

'And on my part,' said d'Artagnan, 'I wished to speak of you, but I find you so completely detached from everything! To love you cry, "Fie! Friends are shadows! The world is a sepulchre!"'

'Alas, you will find it so yourself,' said Aramis, with a sigh.

'Well, then, let us say no more about it,' said d'Artagnan; 'and let us burn this letter, which, no doubt, announces to you some fresh infidelity of your *grisette* or your chambermaid.'

'What letter?' cried Aramis, eagerly.

'A letter which was sent to your abode in your absence, and which was given to me for you.'

'But from whom is that letter?'

'Oh, from some heartbroken waiting woman, some desponding *grisette;* from Madame de Chevreuse's chambermaid, perhaps, who was obliged to return to Tours with her mistress, and who, in order to appear smart and attractive, stole some perfumed paper, and sealed her letter with a duchess's coronet.'

'What do you say?'

'Hold! I must have lost it,' said the young man maliciously, pretending to search for it. 'But fortunately the world is a sepulchre; the men, and consequently the women, are but shadows, and love is a sentiment to which you cry, "Fie! Fie!"'

'D'Artagnan, d'Artagnan,' cried Aramis, 'you are killing me!'

'Well, here it is at last!' said d'Artagnan, as he drew the letter from his pocket.

Aramis made a bound, seized the letter, read it, or rather devoured it, his countenance radiant.

'This same waiting maid seems to have an agreeable style,' said the messenger, carelessly.

'Thanks, d'Artagnan, thanks!' cried Aramis, almost in a state of delirium. 'She was forced to return to Tours; she is not faithless; she still loves me! Come, my friend, come, let me embrace you. Happiness almost stifles me!'

The two friends began to dance around the venerable St. Chrysostom, kicking about famously the sheets of the thesis, which had fallen on the floor.

At that moment Bazin entered with the spinach and the omelet.

'Be off, you wretch!' cried Aramis, throwing his skullcap in his face. 'Return whence you came; take back those horrible vegetables, and that poor kickshaw! Order a larded hare, a fat capon, mutton leg dressed with garlic, and four bottles of old Burgundy.'

Bazin, who looked at his master, without comprehending the cause of this change, in a melancholy manner, allowed the omelet to slip into the spinach, and the spinach onto the floor.

'Now this is the moment to consecrate your existence to the King of kings,' said d'Artagnan, 'if you persist in offering him a civility. *Non inutile desiderium oblatione*.'

'Go to the devil with your Latin. Let us drink, my dear d'Artagnan, *morbleu!* Let us drink while the wine is fresh! Let us drink heartily, and while we do so, tell me a little of what is going on in the world yonder.'

not disturb yourselves; allow me time just to kill this gentleman, and I will return and finish the last couplet."

We went out. I took him to the Rue Payenne, to exactly the same spot where, a year before, at the very same hour, he had paid me the compliment I have related to you. It was a superb moonlight night. We immediately drew, and at the first pass I laid him stark dead.'

'The devil!' cried d'Artagnan.

'Now,' continued Aramis, 'as the ladies did not see the singer come back, and as he was found in the Rue Payenne with a great sword wound through his body, it was supposed that I had accommodated him thus; and the matter created some scandal which obliged me to renounce the cassock for a time. Athos, whose acquaintance I made about that period, and Porthos, who had in addition to my lessons taught me some effective tricks of fence, prevailed upon me to solicit the uniform of a Musketeer. The king entertained great regard for my father, who had fallen at the siege of Arras, and the uniform was granted. You may understand that the moment has come for me to re-enter the bosom of the Church.'

'And why today, rather than yesterday or tomorrow? What has happened to you today, to raise all these melancholy ideas?'

'This wound, my dear d'Artagnan, has been a warning to me from heaven.'

'This wound? Bah, it is now nearly healed, and I am sure it is not that which gives you the most pain.'

'What, then?' said Aramis, blushing.

'You have one at heart, Aramis, one deeper and more painful—a wound made by a woman.'

The eye of Aramis kindled in spite of himself.

'Ah,' said he, dissembling his emotion under a feigned carelessness, 'do not talk of such things, and suffer love pains? *Vanitas vanitatum!* According to your idea, then, my brain is turned. And for whom—for some *grisette*, some chambermaid with whom I have trifled in some garrison? Fie!'

'Pardon, my dear Aramis, but I thought you carried your eyes higher.'

'Higher? And who am I, to nourish such ambition? A poor Musketeer, a beggar, an unknown—who hates slavery, and finds himself ill-placed in the world.'

of compliments, and leaning on my shoulder, was reading them a second time with me. Her pose, which I must admit was rather free, wounded this officer. He said nothing; but when I went out he followed, and quickly came up with me. "Monsieur the Abbé," said he, "do you like blows with a cane?" "I cannot say, monsieur," answered I; "no one has ever dared to give me any." "Well, listen to me, then, Monsieur the Abbé! If you venture again into the house in which I have met you this evening, I will dare it myself." I really think I must have been frightened. I became very pale; I felt my legs fail me; I sought for a reply, but could find none—I was silent. The officer waited for his reply, and seeing it so long coming, he burst into a laugh, turned upon his heel, and re-entered the house. I returned to the seminary.

I am a gentleman born, and my blood is warm, as you may have remarked, my dear d'Artagnan. The insult was terrible, and although unknown to the rest of the world, I felt it live and fester at the bottom of my heart. I informed my superiors that I did not feel myself sufficiently prepared for ordination, and at my request the ceremony was postponed for a year. I sought out the best fencing master in Paris, I made an agreement with him to take a lesson every day, and every day for a year I took that lesson. Then, on the anniversary of the day on which I had been insulted, I hung my cassock on a peg, assumed the costume of a cavalier, and went to a ball given by a lady friend of mine and to which I knew my man was invited. It was in the Rue des France-Bourgeois, close to La Force. As I expected, my officer was there. I went up to him as he was singing a love ditty and looking tenderly at a lady, and interrupted him exactly in the middle of the second couplet. "Monsieur," said I, "does it still displease you that I should frequent a certain house of La Rue Payenne? And would you still cane me if I took it into my head to disobey you?" The officer looked at me with astonishment, and then said, "What is your business with me, monsieur? I do not know you." "I am," said I, "the little abbé who reads *Lives of the Saints*, and translates Judith into verse." "Ah, ah! I recollect now," said the officer, in a jeering tone; "well, what do you want with me?" "I want you to spare time to take a walk with me." "Tomorrow morning, if you like, with the greatest pleasure." "No, not tomorrow morning, if you please, but immediately." "If you absolutely insist." "I do insist upon it." "Come, then. Ladies," said the officer, "do

Chapter XXVII

The Wife of Athos

'We have now to search for Athos,' said d'Artagnan to the vivacious Aramis, when he had informed him of all that had passed since their departure from the capital, and an excellent dinner had made one of them forget his thesis and the other his fatigue.

'Do you think, then, that any harm can have happened to him?' asked Aramis. 'Athos is so cool, so brave, and handles his sword so skilfully.'

'No doubt. Nobody has a higher opinion of the courage and skill of Athos than I have; but I like better to hear my sword clang against lances than against staves. I fear lest Athos should have been beaten down by serving men. Those fellows strike hard, and don't leave off in a hurry. This is why I wish to set out again as soon as possible.'

'I will try to accompany you,' said Aramis, 'though I scarcely feel in a condition to mount on horseback. Yesterday I undertook to employ that cord which you see hanging against the wall, but pain prevented my continuing the pious exercise.'

'That's the first time I ever heard of anybody trying to cure gunshot wounds with cat-o'-nine-tails; but you were ill, and illness renders the head weak, therefore you may be excused.'

'When do you mean to set out?'

'Tomorrow at daybreak. Sleep as soundly as you can tonight, and tomorrow, if you can, we will take our departure together.'

'Till tomorrow, then,' said Aramis; 'for iron-nerved as you are, you must need repose.'

The next morning, when d'Artagnan entered Aramis's chamber, he found him at the window.

'What are you looking at?' asked d'Artagnan.

'My faith! I am admiring three magnificent horses which the stable boys are leading about. It would be a pleasure worthy of a prince to travel upon such horses.'

'Well, my dear Aramis, you may enjoy that pleasure, for one of those three horses is yours.'

'Ah, bah! Which?'

'Whichever of the three you like, I have no preference.'

'And the rich caparison, is that mine, too?'

'Without doubt.'

'You laugh, d'Artagnan.'

'No, I have left off laughing, now that you speak French.'

'What, those rich holsters, that velvet housing, that saddle studded with silver—are they all for me?'

'For you and nobody else, as the horse which paws the ground is mine, and the other horse, which is caracoling, belongs to Athos.'

'*Peste!* They are three superb animals!'

'I am glad they please you.'

'Why, it must have been the king who made you such a present.'

'Certainly it was not the cardinal; but don't trouble yourself whence they come, think only that one of the three is your property.'

'I choose that which the red-headed boy is leading.'

'It is yours!'

'Good heaven! That is enough to drive away all my pains; I could mount him with thirty balls in my body. On my soul, handsome stirrups! *Holà*, Bazin, come here this minute.'

Bazin appeared on the threshold, dull and spiritless.

'That last order is useless,' interrupted d'Artagnan; 'there are loaded pistols in your holsters.'

Bazin sighed.

'Come, Monsieur Bazin, make yourself easy,' said d'Artagnan; 'people of all conditions gain the kingdom of heaven.'

'Monsieur was already such a good theologian,' said Bazin, almost weeping; 'he might have become a bishop, and perhaps a cardinal.'

Latin I have ever known. Then I confess to you that I have eaten nothing since ten o'clock this morning, and I am devilish hungry.'

'We will dine directly, my friend; only you must please to remember that this is Friday. Now, on such a day I can neither eat flesh nor see it eaten. If you can be satisfied with my dinner—it consists of cooked tetragones and fruits.'

'What do you mean by tetragones?' asked d'Artagnan, uneasily.

'I mean spinach,' replied Aramis; 'but on your account I will add some eggs, and that is a serious infraction of the rule—for eggs are meat, since they engender chickens.'

'This feast is not very succulent; but never mind, I will put up with it for the sake of remaining with you.'

'I am grateful to you for the sacrifice,' said Aramis; 'but if your body be not greatly benefited by it, be assured your soul will.'

'And so, Aramis, you are decidedly going into the Church? What will our two friends say? What will Monsieur de Tréville say? They will treat you as a deserter, I warn you.'

'I do not enter the Church; I re-enter it. I deserted the Church for the world, for you know that I forced myself when I became a Musketeer.'

'I? I know nothing about it.'

'You don't know I quit the seminary?'

'Not at all.'

'This is my story, then. Besides, the Scriptures say, "Confess yourselves to one another," and I confess to you, d'Artagnan.'

'And I give you absolution beforehand. You see I am a good sort of a man.'

'Do not jest about holy things, my friend.'

'Go on, then, I listen.'

'I had been at the seminary from nine years old; in three days I should have been twenty. I was about to become an abbé, and all was arranged. One evening I went, according to custom, to a house which I frequented with much pleasure: when one is young, what can be expected?—one is weak. An officer who saw me, with a jealous eye, reading the *Lives of the Saints* to the mistress of the house, entered suddenly and without being announced. That evening I had translated an episode of Judith, and had just communicated my verses to the lady, who gave me all sorts

'Work slowly,' said the curate; 'we leave you in an excellent tone of mind.'

'Yes, the ground is all sown,' said the Jesuit, 'and we have not to fear that one portion of the seed may have fallen upon stone, another upon the highway, or that the birds of heaven have eaten the rest, *aves cœli comederunt illam*.'

'Plague stifle you and your Latin!' said d'Artagnan, who began to feel all his patience exhausted.

'Farewell, my son,' said the curate, 'till tomorrow.'

'Till tomorrow, rash youth,' said the Jesuit. 'You promise to become one of the lights of the Church. Heaven grant that this light prove not a devouring fire!'

D'Artagnan, who for an hour past had been gnawing his nails with impatience, was beginning to attack the quick.

The two men in black rose, bowed to Aramis and d'Artagnan, and advanced toward the door. Bazin, who had been standing listening to all this controversy with a pious jubilation, sprang toward them, took the breviary of the curate and the missal of the Jesuit, and walked respectfully before them to clear their way.

Aramis conducted them to the foot of the stairs, and then immediately came up again to d'Artagnan, whose senses were still in a state of confusion.

When left alone, the two friends at first kept an embarrassed silence. It however became necessary for one of them to break it first, and as d'Artagnan appeared determined to leave that honour to his companion, Aramis said, 'you see that I am returned to my fundamental ideas.'

'Yes, efficacious grace has touched you, as that gentleman said just now.'

'Oh, these plans of retreat have been formed for a long time. You have often heard me speak of them, have you not, my friend?'

'Yes; but I confess I always thought you jested.'

'With such things! Oh, d'Artagnan!'

'The devil! Why, people jest with death.'

'And people are wrong, d'Artagnan; for death is the door which leads to perdition or to salvation.'

'Granted; but if you please, let us not theologize, Aramis. You must have had enough for today. As for me, I have almost forgotten the little

'Well, but my poor Bazin, reflect a little. Of what use is it to be a churchman, pray? You do not avoid going to war by that means; you see, the cardinal is about to make the next campaign, helm on head and partisan in hand. And Monsieur de Nogaret de la Valette, what do you say of him? He is a cardinal likewise. Ask his lackey how often he has had to prepare lint of him.'

'Alas!' sighed Bazin. 'I know it, monsieur; everything is turned topsy-turvy in the world nowadays.'

While this dialogue was going on, the two young men and the poor lackey descended.

'Hold my stirrup, Bazin,' cried Aramis; and Aramis sprang into the saddle with his usual grace and agility, but after a few vaults and curvets of the noble animal his rider felt his pains come on so insupportably that he turned pale and became unsteady in his seat. D'Artagnan, who, foreseeing such an event, had kept his eye on him, sprang toward him, caught him in his arms, and assisted him to his chamber.

'That's all right, my dear Aramis, take care of yourself,' said he; 'I will go alone in search of Athos.'

'You are a man of brass,' replied Aramis.

'No, I have good luck, that is all. But how do you mean to pass your time till I come back? No more theses, no more glosses upon the fingers or upon benedictions, hey?'

Aramis smiled. 'I will make verses,' said he.

'Yes, I dare say; verses perfumed with the odour of the billet from the attendant of Madame de Chevreuse. Teach Bazin prosody; that will console him. As to the horse, ride him a little every day, and that will accustom you to his manoeuvres.'

'Oh, make yourself easy on that head,' replied Aramis. 'You will find me ready to follow you.'

They took leave of each other, and in ten minutes, after having commended his friend to the cares of the hostess and Bazin, d'Artagnan was trotting along in the direction of Amiens.

How was he going to find Athos? Should he find him at all? The position in which he had left him was critical. He probably had succumbed. This idea, while darkening his brow, drew several sighs from him, and caused him to formulate to himself a few vows of vengeance. Of all his

friends, Athos was the eldest, and the least resembling him in appearance, in his tastes and sympathies.

Yet he entertained a marked preference for this gentleman. The noble and distinguished air of Athos, those flashes of greatness which from time to time broke out from the shade in which he voluntarily kept himself, that unalterable equality of temper which made him the most pleasant companion in the world, that forced and cynical gaiety, that bravery which might have been termed blind if it had not been the result of the rarest coolness—such qualities attracted more than the esteem, more than the friendship of d'Artagnan; they attracted his admiration.

Indeed, when placed beside M. de Tréville, the elegant and noble courtier, Athos in his most cheerful days might advantageously sustain a comparison. He was of middle height; but his person was so admirably shaped and so well proportioned that more than once in his struggles with Porthos he had overcome the giant whose physical strength was proverbial among the Musketeers. His head, with piercing eyes, a straight nose, a chin cut like that of Brutus, had altogether an indefinable character of grandeur and grace. His hands, of which he took little care, were the despair of Aramis, who cultivated his with almond paste and perfumed oil. The sound of his voice was at once penetrating and melodious; and then, that which was inconceivable in Athos, who was always retiring, was that delicate knowledge of the world and of the usages of the most brilliant society—those manners of a high degree which appeared, as if unconsciously to himself, in his least actions.

If a repast were on foot, Athos presided over it better than any other, placing every guest exactly in the rank which his ancestors had earned for him or that he had made for himself. If a question in heraldry were started, Athos knew all the noble families of the kingdom, their genealogy, their alliances, their coats of arms, and the origin of them. Etiquette had no minutiæ unknown to him. He knew what were the rights of the great land owners. He was profoundly versed in hunting and falconry, and had one day when conversing on this great art astonished even Louis XIII himself, who took a pride in being considered a past master therein.

Like all the great nobles of that period, Athos rode and fenced to perfection. But still further, his education had been so little neglected, even with respect to scholastic studies, so rare at this time among gentlemen, that

'Repeat it! Repeat it!' cried d'Artagnan; 'it will make a little change.'

'Not so, for it is religious,' replied Aramis; 'it is theology in verse.'

'The devil!' said d'Artagnan.

'Here it is,' said Aramis, with a little look of diffidence, which, however, was not exempt from a shade of hypocrisy:

'Vous qui pleurez un passé plein de charmes,
Et qui trainez des jours infortunés,
Tous vos malheurs se verront terminés,
Quand à Dieu seul vous offrirez vos larmes,
Vous qui pleurez!'

'You who weep for pleasures fled,
While dragging on a life of care,
All your woes will melt in air,
If to God your tears are shed,
You who weep!'

D'Artagnan and the curate appeared pleased. The Jesuit persisted in his opinion. 'Beware of a profane taste in your theological style. What says Augustine on this subject: "*Severus sit clericorum verbo.*"'

'Yes, let the sermon be clear,' said the curate.

'Now,' hastily interrupted the Jesuit, on seeing that his acolyte was going astray, 'now your thesis would please the ladies; it would have the success of one of Monsieur Patru's pleadings.'

'Please God!' cried Aramis, transported.

'There it is,' cried the Jesuit; 'the world still speaks within you in a loud voice, *altisimâ voce*. You follow the world, my young friend, and I tremble lest grace prove not efficacious.'

'Be satisfied, my reverend father, I can answer for myself.'

'Mundane presumption!'

'I know myself, Father; my resolution is irrevocable.'

'Then you persist in continuing that thesis?'

'I feel myself called upon to treat that, and no other. I will see about the continuation of it, and tomorrow I hope you will be satisfied with the corrections I shall have made in consequence of your advice.'

'You approach that famous point of free will which is a mortal rock. You face the insinuations of the Pelagians and the semi-Pelagians.'

'But, my Reverend— ' replied Aramis, a little amazed by the shower of arguments that poured upon his head.

'How will you prove,' continued the Jesuit, without allowing him time to speak, 'that we ought to regret the world when we offer ourselves to God? Listen to this dilemma: God is God, and the world is the devil. To regret the world is to regret the devil; that is my conclusion.'

'And that is mine also,' said the curate.

'But, for heaven's sake— ' resumed Aramis.

'*Desideras diabolum*, unhappy man!' cried the Jesuit.

'He regrets the devil! Ah, my young friend,' added the curate, groaning, 'do not regret the devil, I implore you!'

D'Artagnan felt himself bewildered. It seemed to him as though he were in a madhouse, and was becoming as mad as those he saw. He was, however, forced to hold his tongue from not comprehending half the language they employed.

'But listen to me, then,' resumed Aramis with politeness mingled with a little impatience. 'I do not say I regret; no, I will never pronounce that sentence, which would not be orthodox.'

The Jesuit raised his hands toward heaven, and the curate did the same.

'No; but pray grant me that it is acting with an ill grace to offer to the Lord only that with which we are perfectly disgusted! Don't you think so, d'Artagnan?'

'I think so, indeed,' cried he.

The Jesuit and the curate quite started from their chairs.

'This is the point of departure; it is a syllogism. The world is not wanting in attractions. I quit the world; then I make a sacrifice. Now, the Scripture says positively, "Make a sacrifice unto the Lord."'

'That is true,' said his antagonists.

'And then,' said Aramis, pinching his ear to make it red, as he rubbed his hands to make them white, 'and then I made a certain *rondeau* upon it last year, which I showed to Monsieur Voiture, and that great man paid me a thousand compliments.'

'A *rondeau!*' said the Jesuit, disdainfully.

'A *rondeau!*' said the curate, mechanically.

he smiled at the scraps of Latin which Aramis sported and which Porthos pretended to understand. Two or three times, even, to the great astonishment of his friends, he had, when Aramis allowed some rudimental error to escape him, replaced a verb in its right tense and a noun in its case. Besides, his probity was irreproachable, in an age in which soldiers compromised so easily with their religion and their consciences, lovers with the rigorous delicacy of our era, and the poor with God's Seventh Commandment. This Athos, then, was a very extraordinary man.

And yet this nature so distinguished, this creature so beautiful, this essence so fine, was seen to turn insensibly toward material life, as old men turn toward physical and moral imbecility. Athos, in his hours of gloom—and these hours were frequent—was extinguished as to the whole of the luminous portion of him, and his brilliant side disappeared as into profound darkness.

Then the demigod vanished; he remained scarcely a man. His head hanging down, his eye dull, his speech slow and painful, Athos would look for hours together at his bottle, his glass, or at Grimaud, who, accustomed to obey him by signs, read in the faint glance of his master his least desire, and satisfied it immediately. If the four friends were assembled at one of these moments, a word, thrown forth occasionally with a violent effort, was the share Athos furnished to the conversation. In exchange for his silence Athos drank enough for four, and without appearing to be otherwise affected by wine than by a more marked constriction of the brow and by a deeper sadness.

D'Artagnan, whose inquiring disposition we are acquainted with, had not—whatever interest he had in satisfying his curiosity on this subject—been able to assign any cause for these fits, or for the periods of their recurrence. Athos never received any letters; Athos never had concerns which all his friends did not know.

It could not be said that it was wine which produced this sadness; for in truth he only drank to combat this sadness, which wine however, as we have said, rendered still darker. This excess of bilious humour could not be attributed to play; for unlike Porthos, who accompanied the variations of chance with songs or oaths, Athos when he won remained as unmoved as when he lost. He had been known, in the circle of the Musketeers, to win in one night three thousand pistoles; to lose them even to the

gold-embroidered belt for gala days, win all this again with the addition of a hundred louis, without his beautiful eyebrow being heightened or lowered half a line, without his hands losing their pearly hue, without his conversation, which was cheerful that evening, ceasing to be calm and agreeable.

Neither was it, as with our neighbours, the English, an atmospheric influence which darkened his countenance; for the sadness generally became more intense toward the fine season of the year. June and July were the terrible months with Athos.

For the present he had no anxiety. He shrugged his shoulders when people spoke of the future. His secret, then, was in the past, as had often been vaguely said to d'Artagnan.

This mysterious shade, spread over his whole person, rendered still more interesting the man whose eyes or mouth, even in the most complete intoxication, had never revealed anything, however skilfully questions had been put to him.

'Well,' thought d'Artagnan, 'poor Athos is perhaps at this moment dead, and dead by my fault—for it was I who dragged him into this affair, of which he did not know the origin, of which he is ignorant of the result, and from which he can derive no advantage.'

'Without reckoning, monsieur,' added Planchet to his master's audibly expressed reflections, 'that we perhaps owe our lives to him. Do you remember how he cried, "On, d'Artagnan, on, I am taken"? And when he had discharged his two pistols, what a terrible noise he made with his sword! One might have said that twenty men, or rather twenty mad devils, were fighting.'

These words redoubled the eagerness of d'Artagnan, who urged his horse, though he stood in need of no incitement, and they proceeded at a rapid pace. About eleven o'clock in the morning they perceived Amiens, and at half past eleven they were at the door of the cursed inn.

D'Artagnan had often meditated against the perfidious host one of those hearty vengeances which offer consolation while they are hoped for. He entered the hostelry with his hat pulled over his eyes, his left hand on the pommel of the sword, and cracking his whip with his right hand.

'Do you remember me?' said he to the host, who advanced to greet him.

was but a servant, please to understand—Moses blessed with the hands; he held out both his arms while the Hebrews beat their enemies, and then he blessed them with his two hands. Besides, what does the Gospel say? *Imponite manus*, and not *manum*—place the *hands*, not the *hand*.'

'Place the *hands*,' repeated the curate, with a gesture.

'St. Peter, on the contrary, of whom the Popes are the successors,' continued the Jesuit; '*porrige digitos*—present the fingers. Are you there, now?'

'*Certes*,' replied Aramis, in a pleased tone, 'but the thing is subtle.'

'The *fingers*,' resumed the Jesuit, 'St. Peter blessed with the *fingers*. The Pope, therefore blesses with the fingers. And with how many fingers does he bless? With *three* fingers, to be sure—one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost.'

All crossed themselves. D'Artagnan thought it was proper to follow this example.

'The Pope is the successor of St. Peter, and represents the three divine powers; the rest—*ordines inferiores*—of the ecclesiastical hierarchy bless in the name of the holy archangels and angels. The most humble clerks such as our deacons and sacristans, bless with holy water sprinklers, which resemble an infinite number of blessing fingers. There is the subject simplified. *Argumentum omni denudatum ornamento*. I could make of that subject two volumes the size of this,' continued the Jesuit; and in his enthusiasm he struck a St. Chrysostom in folio, which made the table bend beneath its weight.

D'Artagnan trembled.

'*Certes*,' said Aramis, 'I do justice to the beauties of this thesis; but at the same time I perceive it would be overwhelming for me. I had chosen this text—tell me, dear d'Artagnan, if it is not to your taste—"*Non inutile est desiderium in oblatione*"; that is, "A little regret is not unsuitable in an offering to the Lord."'

'Stop there!' cried the Jesuit, 'for that thesis touches closely upon heresy. There is a proposition almost like it in the *Augustinus* of the heresiarch Jansenius, whose book will sooner or later be burned by the hands of the executioner. Take care, my young friend. You are inclining toward false doctrines, my young friend; you will be lost.'

'You will be lost,' said the curate, shaking his head sorrowfully.