

## Chapter XII. The Wine of Melun.

The king had, in point of fact, entered Melun with the intention of merely passing through the city. The youthful monarch was most eagerly anxious for amusements; only twice during the journey had he been able to catch a glimpse of La Valliere, and, suspecting that his only opportunity of speaking to her would be after nightfall, in the gardens, and after the ceremonial of reception had been gone through, he had been very desirous to arrive at Vaux as early as possible. But he reckoned without his captain of the musketeers, and without M. Colbert. Like Calypso, who could not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses, our Gascon could not console himself for not having guessed why Aramis had asked Percerin to show him the king's new costumes. "There is not a doubt," he said to himself, "that my friend the bishop of Vannes had some motive in that;" and then he began to rack his brains most uselessly. D'Artagnan, so intimately acquainted with all the court intrigues, who knew the position of Fouquet better than even Fouquet himself did, had conceived the strangest fancies and suspicions at the announcement of the fete, which would have ruined a wealthy man, and which became impossible, utter madness even, for a man so poor as he was. And then, the presence of Aramis, who had returned from Belle-Isle, and been nominated by Monsieur Fouquet inspector-general of all the arrangements; his perseverance in mixing himself up with all the surintendant's affairs; his visits to Baisemeaux; all this suspicious singularity of conduct had excessively troubled and tormented D'Artagnan during the last two weeks.

"With men of Aramis's stamp," he said, "one is never the stronger except sword in hand. So long as Aramis continued a soldier, there was hope of getting the better of him; but since he has covered his cuirass with a stole, we are lost. But what can Aramis's object possibly be?" And D'Artagnan plunged again into deep thought. "What does it matter to me, after all," he continued, "if his only object is to overthrow M. Colbert? And what else can he be after?" And D'Artagnan rubbed his forehead--that fertile land, whence the plowshare of his nails had turned up so many and such admirable ideas in his time. He, at first, thought of talking the matter over with Colbert, but his friendship for Aramis, the oath of earlier days, bound him too strictly. He revolted at the bare idea of such a thing, and, besides, he hated the financier too cordially. Then, again, he wished to unburden his mind to the king; but yet the king would not be able to understand the suspicions which had not even a shadow of reality at their base. He resolved to address himself to Aramis, direct, the first time he met him. "I will get him," said the musketeer, "between a couple of candles, suddenly, and when he least expects it, I will place my hand upon his heart, and he will tell me--What will he tell me? Yes, he will tell me something, for mordieux! there is something in it, I know."

Somewhat calmer, D'Artagnan made every preparation for the journey, and

took the greatest care that the military household of the king, as yet very inconsiderable in numbers, should be well officered and well disciplined in its meager and limited proportions. The result was that, through the captain's arrangements, the king, on arriving at Melun, saw himself at the head of both the musketeers and Swiss guards, as well as a picket of the French guards. It might almost have been called a small army. M. Colbert looked at the troops with great delight: he even wished they had been a third more in number.

"But why?" said the king.

"In order to show greater honor to M. Fouquet," replied Colbert.

"In order to ruin him the sooner," thought D'Artagnan.

When this little army appeared before Melun, the chief magistrates came out to meet the king, and to present him with the keys of the city, and invited him to enter the Hotel de Ville, in order to partake of the wine of honor. The king, who expected to pass through the city and to proceed to Vaux without delay, became quite red in the face from vexation.

"Who was fool enough to occasion this delay?" muttered the king, between his teeth, as the chief magistrate was in the middle of a long address.

"Not I, certainly," replied D'Artagnan, "but I believe it was M. Colbert."

Colbert, having heard his name pronounced, said, "What was M. d'Artagnan good enough to say?"

"I was good enough to remark that it was you who stopped the king's progress, so that he might taste the vin de Brie. Was I right?"

"Quite so, monsieur."

"In that case, then, it was you whom the king called some name or other."

"What name?"

"I hardly know; but wait a moment--idiot, I think it was--no, no, it was fool or dolt. Yes; his majesty said that the man who had thought of the vin de Melun was something of the sort."

D'Artagnan, after this broadside, quietly caressed his mustache; M. Colbert's large head seemed to become larger and larger than ever. D'Artagnan, seeing how ugly anger made him, did not stop half-way. The orator still went on with his speech, while the king's color was visibly increasing.

"Mordioux!" said the musketeer, coolly, "the king is going to have an attack of determination of blood to the head. Where the deuce did you get hold of that idea, Monsieur Colbert? You have no luck."

"Monsieur," said the financier, drawing himself up, "my zeal for the king's service inspired me with the idea."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur, Melun is a city, an excellent city, which pays well, and which it would be imprudent to displease."

"There, now! I, who do not pretend to be a financier, saw only one idea in your idea."

"What was that, monsieur?"

"That of causing a little annoyance to M. Fouquet, who is making himself quite giddy on his donjons yonder, in waiting for us."

This was a home-stroke, hard enough in all conscience. Colbert was completely thrown out of the saddle by it, and retired, thoroughly discomfited. Fortunately, the speech was now at an end; the king drank the wine which was presented to him, and then every one resumed the progress through the city. The king bit his lips in anger, for the evening was closing in, and all hope of a walk with La Valliere was at an end. In order that the whole of the king's household should enter Vaux, four hours at least were necessary, owing to the different arrangements. The king, therefore, who was boiling with impatience, hurried forward as much as possible, in order to reach it before nightfall. But, at the moment he was setting off again, other and fresh difficulties arose.

"Is not the king going to sleep at Melun?" said Colbert, in a low tone of voice, to D'Artagnan.

M. Colbert must have been badly inspired that day, to address himself in that manner to the chief of the musketeers; for the latter guessed that the king's intention was very far from that of remaining where he was. D'Artagnan would not allow him to enter Vaux except he were well and strongly accompanied; and desired that his majesty would not enter except with all the escort. On the other hand, he felt that these delays would irritate that impatient monarch beyond measure. In what way could he possibly reconcile these difficulties? D'Artagnan took up Colbert's remark, and determined to repeated it to the king.

"Sire," he said, "M. Colbert has been asking me if your majesty does not intend to sleep at Melun."

"Sleep at Melun! What for?" exclaimed Louis XIV. "Sleep at Melun! Who, in Heaven's name, can have thought of such a thing, when M. Fouquet is expecting us this evening?"

"It was simply," replied Colbert, quickly, "the fear of causing your majesty the least delay; for, according to established etiquette, you cannot enter any place, with the exception of your own royal residences, until the soldiers' quarters have been marked out by the quartermaster, and the garrison properly distributed."

D'Artagnan listened with the greatest attention, biting his mustache to conceal his vexation; and the queens were not less interested. They were fatigued, and would have preferred to go to rest without proceeding any farther; more especially, in order to prevent the king walking about in the evening with M. de Saint-Aignan and the ladies of the court, for, if etiquette required the princesses to remain within their own rooms, the ladies of honor, as soon as they had performed the services required of them, had no restrictions placed upon them, but were at liberty to walk about as they pleased. It will easily be conjectured that all these rival interests, gathering together in vapors, necessarily produced clouds, and that the clouds were likely to be followed by a tempest. The king had no mustache to gnaw, and therefore kept biting the handle of his whip instead, with ill-concealed impatience. How could he get out of it? D'Artagnan looked as agreeable as possible, and Colbert as sulky as he could. Who was there he could get in a passion with?

"We will consult the queen," said Louis XIV., bowing to the royal ladies. And this kindness of consideration softened Maria Theresa's heart, who, being of a kind and generous disposition, when left to her own free-will, replied:

"I shall be delighted to do whatever your majesty wishes."

"How long will it take us to get to Vaux?" inquired Anne of Austria, in slow and measured accents, placing her hand upon her bosom, where the seat of her pain lay.

"An hour for your majesty's carriages," said D'Artagnan; "the roads are tolerably good."

The king looked at him. "And a quarter of an hour for the king," he hastened to add.

"We should arrive by daylight?" said Louis XIV.

"But the billeting of the king's military escort," objected Colbert, softly, "will make his majesty lose all the advantage of his speed, however quick he may be."

"Double ass that you are!" thought D'Artagnan; "if I had any interest or motive in demolishing your credit with the king, I could do it in ten minutes. If I were in the king's place," he added aloud, "I should, in going to M. Fouquet, leave my escort behind me; I should go to him as a friend; I should enter accompanied only by my captain of the guards; I should consider that I was acting more nobly, and should be invested with a still more sacred character by doing so."

Delight sparkled in the king's eyes. "That is indeed a very sensible suggestion. We will go to see a friend as friends; the gentlemen who are with the carriages can go slowly: but we who are mounted will ride on." And he rode off, accompanied by all those who were mounted. Colbert hid his ugly head behind his horse's neck.

"I shall be quits," said D'Artagnan, as he galloped along, "by getting a little talk with Aramis this evening. And then, M. Fouquet is a man of honor. Mordieux! I have said so, and it must be so."

And this was the way how, towards seven o'clock in the evening, without announcing his arrival by the din of trumpets, and without even his advanced guard, without out-riders or musketeers, the king presented himself before the gate of Vaux, where Fouquet, who had been informed of his royal guest's approach, had been waiting for the last half-hour, with his head uncovered, surrounded by his household and his friends.