

Chapter XIX. The Shadow of M. Fouquet.

D'Artagnan, still confused and oppressed by the conversation he had just had with the king, could not resist asking himself if he were really in possession of his senses, if he were really and truly at Vaux; if he, D'Artagnan, were really the captain of the musketeers, and M. Fouquet the owner of the chateau in which Louis XIV. was at that moment partaking of his hospitality. These reflections were not those of a drunken man, although everything was in prodigal profusion at Vaux, and the surintendant's wines had met with a distinguished reception at the fete. The Gascon, however, was a man of calm self-possession; and no sooner did he touch his bright steel blade, than he knew how to adopt morally the cold, keen weapon as his guide of action.

"Well," he said, as he quitted the royal apartment, "I seem now to be mixed up historically with the destinies of the king and of the minister; it will be written, that M. d'Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, placed his hand on the shoulder of M. Nicolas Fouquet, the surintendant of the finances of France. My descendants, if I have any, will flatter themselves with the distinction which this arrest will confer, just as the members of the De Luynes family have done with regard to the estates of the poor Marechal d'Ancre. But the thing is, how best to execute the king's directions in a proper manner. Any man would know how to say to M. Fouquet, 'Your sword, monsieur.' But it is not every one who would be able to take care of M. Fouquet without others knowing anything about it. How am I to manage, then, so that M. le surintendant pass from the height of favor to the direst disgrace; that Vaux be turned into a dungeon for him; that after having been steeped to his lips, as it were, in all the perfumes and incense of Ahasuerus, he is transferred to the gallows of Haman; in other words, of Enguerrand de Marigny?" And at this reflection, D'Artagnan's brow became clouded with perplexity. The musketeer had certain scruples on the matter, it must be admitted. To deliver up to death (for not a doubt existed that Louis hated Fouquet mortally) the man who had just shown himself so delightful and charming a host in every way, was a real insult to one's conscience. "It almost seems," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that if I am not a poor, mean, miserable fellow, I should let M. Fouquet know the opinion the king has about him. Yet, if I betray my master's secret, I shall be a false-hearted, treacherous knave, a traitor, too, a crime provided for and punishable by military laws--so much so, indeed, that twenty times, in former days when wars were rife, I have seen many a miserable fellow strung up to a tree for doing, in but a small degree, what my scruples counsel me to undertake upon a great scale now. No, I think that a man of true readiness of wit ought to get out of this difficulty with more skill than that. And now, let us admit that I do possess a little readiness of invention; it is not at all certain, though, for, after having for forty years absorbed so large a quantity, I shall be lucky if there were to be a pistole's-worth left." D'Artagnan buried his head in his hands, tore at his mustache

in sheer vexation, and added, "What can be the reason of M. Fouquet's disgrace? There seem to be three good ones: the first, because M. Colbert doesn't like him; the second, because he wished to fall in love with Mademoiselle de la Valliere; and lastly, because the king likes M. Colbert and loves Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Oh! he is lost! But shall I put my foot on his neck, I, of all men, when he is falling a prey to the intrigues of a pack of women and clerks? For shame! If he be dangerous, I will lay him low enough; if, however, he be only persecuted, I will look on. I have come to such a decisive determination, that neither king nor living man shall change my mind. If Athos were here, he would do as I have done. Therefore, instead of going, in cold blood, up to M. Fouquet, and arresting him off-hand and shutting him up altogether, I will try and conduct myself like a man who understands what good manners are. People will talk about it, of course; but they shall talk well of it, I am determined." And D'Artagnan, drawing by a gesture peculiar to himself his shoulder-belt over his shoulder, went straight off to M. Fouquet, who, after he had taken leave of his guests, was preparing to retire for the night and to sleep tranquilly after the triumphs of the day. The air was still perfumed, or infected, whichever way it may be considered, with the odors of the torches and the fireworks. The wax-lights were dying away in their sockets, the flowers fell unfastened from the garlands, the groups of dancers and courtiers were separating in the salons. Surrounded by his friends, who complimented him and received his flattering remarks in return, the surintendant half-closed his wearied eyes. He longed for rest and quiet; he sank upon the bed of laurels which had been heaped up for him for so many days past; it might almost have been said that he seemed bowed beneath the weight of the new debts which he had incurred for the purpose of giving the greatest possible honor to this fete. Fouquet had just retired to his room, still smiling, but more than half-asleep. He could listen to nothing more, he could hardly keep his eyes open; his bed seemed to possess a fascinating and irresistible attraction for him. The god Morpheus, the presiding deity of the dome painted by Lebrun, had extended his influence over the adjoining rooms, and showered down his most sleep-inducing poppies upon the master of the house. Fouquet, almost entirely alone, was being assisted by his valet de chambre to undress, when M. d'Artagnan appeared at the entrance of the room. D'Artagnan had never been able to succeed in making himself common at the court; and notwithstanding he was seen everywhere and on all occasions, he never failed to produce an effect wherever and whenever he made his appearance. Such is the happy privilege of certain natures, which in that respect resemble either thunder or lightning; every one recognizes them; but their appearance never fails to arouse surprise and astonishment, and whenever they occur, the impression is always left that the last was the most conspicuous or most important.

"What! M. d'Artagnan?" said Fouquet, who had already taken his right arm out of the sleeve of his doublet.

"At your service," replied the musketeer.

"Come in, my dear M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you."

"Have you come to criticise the fete? You are ingenious enough in your criticisms, I know."

"By no means."

"Are not your men looked after properly?"

"In every way."

"You are not comfortably lodged, perhaps?"

"Nothing could be better."

"In that case, I have to thank you for being so amiably disposed, and I must not fail to express my obligations to you for all your flattering kindness."

These words were as much as to say, "My dear D'Artagnan, pray go to bed, since you have a bed to lie down on, and let me do the same."

D'Artagnan did not seem to understand it.

"Are you going to bed already?" he said to the superintendent.

"Yes; have you anything to say to me?"

"Nothing, monsieur, nothing at all. You sleep in this room, then?"

"Yes; as you see."

"You have given a most charming fete to the king."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh! beautiful!"

"Is the king pleased?"

"Enchanted."

"Did he desire you to say as much to me?"

"He would not choose so unworthy a messenger, monseigneur."

"You do not do yourself justice, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Is that your bed, there?"

"Yes; but why do you ask? Are you not satisfied with your own?"

"My I speak frankly to you?"

"Most assuredly."

"Well, then, I am not."

Fouquet started; and then replied, "Will you take my room, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"What! deprive you of it, monseigneur? never!"

"What am I to do, then?"

"Allow me to share yours with you."

Fouquet looked at the musketeer fixedly. "Ah! ah!" he said, "you have just left the king."

"I have, monseigneur."

"And the king wishes you to pass the night in my room?"

"Monseigneur--"

"Very well, Monsieur d'Artagnan, very well. You are the master here."

"I assure you, monseigneur, that I do not wish to abuse--"

Fouquet turned to his valet, and said, "Leave us." When the man had left, he said to D'Artagnan, "You have something to say to me?"

"I?"

"A man of your superior intelligence cannot have come to talk with a man like myself, at such an hour as the present, without grave motives."

"Do not interrogate me."

"On the contrary. What do you want with me?"

"Nothing more than the pleasure of your society."

"Come into the garden, then," said the superintendent suddenly, "or into the park."

"No," replied the musketeer, hastily, "no."

"Why?"

"The fresh air--"

"Come, admit at once that you arrest me," said the superintendent to the captain.

"Never!" said the latter.

"You intend to look after me, then?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I do, upon my honor."

"Upon your honor--ah! that is quite another thing! So I am to be arrested in my own house."

"Do not say such a thing."

"On the contrary, I will proclaim it aloud."

"If you do so, I shall be compelled to request you to be silent."

"Very good! Violence towards me, and in my own house, too."

"We do not seem to understand one another at all. Stay a moment; there is a chess-board there; we will have a game, if you have no objections."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I am in disgrace, then?"

"Not at all; but--"

"I am prohibited, I suppose, from withdrawing from your sight."

"I do not understand a word you are saying, monseigneur; and if you wish me to withdraw, tell me so."

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, your mode of action is enough to drive me mad; I was almost sinking for want of sleep, but you have completely awakened me."

"I shall never forgive myself, I am sure; and if you wish to reconcile me with myself, why, go to sleep in your bed in my presence; and I shall be delighted."

"I am under surveillance, I see."

"I will leave the room if you say any such thing."

"You are beyond my comprehension."

"Good night, monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to withdraw.

Fouquet ran after him. "I will not lie down," he said. "Seriously, and since you refuse to treat me as a man, and since you finesse with me, I will try and set you at bay, as a hunter does a wild boar."

"Bah!" cried D'Artagnan, pretending to smile.

"I shall order my horses, and set off for Paris," said Fouquet, sounding the captain of the musketeers.

"If that be the case, monseigneur, it is very difficult."

"You will arrest me, then?"

"No, but I shall go along with you."

"That is quite sufficient, Monsieur d'Artagnan," returned Fouquet, coldly. "It was not for nothing you acquired your reputation as a man of intelligence and resource; but with me all this is quite superfluous. Let us come to the point. Do me a service. Why do you arrest me? What have I done?"

"Oh! I know nothing about what you may have done; but I do not arrest you--this evening, at least!"

"This evening!" said Fouquet, turning pale, "but to-morrow?"

"It is not to-morrow just yet, monseigneur. Who can ever answer for the morrow?"

"Quick, quick, captain! let me speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Alas! that is quite impossible, monseigneur. I have strict orders to see that you hold no communication with any one."

"With M. d'Herblay, captain--with your friend!"

"Monseigneur, is M. d'Herblay the only person with whom you ought to be prevented holding any communication?"

Fouquet colored, and then assuming an air of resignation, he said: "You are right, monsieur; you have taught me a lesson I ought not to have

evoked. A fallen man cannot assert his right to anything, even from those whose fortunes he may have made; for a still stronger reason, he cannot claim anything from those to whom he may never have had the happiness of doing a service."

"Monseigneur!"

"It is perfectly true, Monsieur d'Artagnan; you have always acted in the most admirable manner towards me--in such a manner, indeed, as most becomes the man who is destined to arrest me. You, at least, have never asked me anything."

"Monsieur," replied the Gascon, touched by his eloquent and noble tone of grief, "will you--I ask it as a favor--pledge me your word as a man of honor that you will not leave this room?"

"What is the use of it, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, since you keep watch and ward over me? Do you suppose I should contend against the most valiant sword in the kingdom?"

"It is not that, at all, monseigneur; but that I am going to look for M. d'Herblay, and, consequently, to leave you alone."

Fouquet uttered a cry of delight and surprise.

"To look for M. d'Herblay! to leave me alone!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.

"Which is M. d'Herblay's room? The blue room is it not?"

"Yes, my friend, yes."

"Your friend! thank you for that word, monseigneur; you confer it upon me to-day, at least, if you have never done so before."

"Ah! you have saved me."

"It will take a good ten minutes to go from hence to the blue room, and to return?" said D'Artagnan.

"Nearly so."

"And then to wake Aramis, who sleeps very soundly, when he is asleep, I put that down at another five minutes; making a total of fifteen minutes' absence. And now, monseigneur, give me your word that you will not in any way attempt to make your escape, and that when I return I shall find you here again."

"I give it, monsieur," replied Fouquet, with an expression of the

warmest and deepest gratitude.

D'Artagnan disappeared. Fouquet looked at him as he quitted the room, waited with a feverish impatience until the door was closed behind him, and as soon as it was shut, flew to his keys, opened two or three secret doors concealed in various articles of furniture in the room, looked vainly for certain papers, which doubtless he had left at Saint-Mande, and which he seemed to regret not having found in them; then hurriedly seizing hold of letters, contracts, papers, writings, he heaped them up into a pile, which he burnt in the extremest haste upon the marble hearth of the fireplace, not even taking time to draw from the interior of it the vases and pots of flowers with which it was filled. As soon as he had finished, like a man who has just escaped an imminent danger, and whose strength abandons him as soon as the danger is past, he sank down, completely overcome, on a couch. When D'Artagnan returned, he found Fouquet in the same position; the worthy musketeer had not the slightest doubt that Fouquet, having given his word, would not even think of failing to keep it, but he had thought it most likely that Fouquet would turn his (D'Artagnan's) absence to the best advantage in getting rid of all the papers, memorandums, and contracts, which might possibly render his position, which was even now serious enough, more dangerous than ever. And so, lifting up his head like a dog who has regained the scent, he perceived an odor resembling smoke he had relied on finding in the atmosphere, and having found it, made a movement of his head in token of satisfaction. As D'Artagnan entered, Fouquet, on his side, raised his head, and not one of D'Artagnan's movements escaped him. And then the looks of the two men met, and they both saw that they had understood each other without exchanging a syllable.

"Well!" asked Fouquet, the first to speak, "and M. d'Herblay?"

"Upon my word, monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "M. d'Herblay must be desperately fond of walking out at night, and composing verses by moonlight in the park of Vaux, with some of your poets, in all probability, for he is not in his own room."

"What! not in his own room?" cried Fouquet, whose last hope thus escaped him; for unless he could ascertain in what way the bishop of Vannes could assist him, he perfectly well knew that he could expect assistance from no other quarter.

"Or, indeed," continued D'Artagnan, "if he is in his own room, he has very good reasons for not answering."

"But surely you did not call him in such a manner that he could have heard you?"

"You can hardly suppose, monseigneur, that having already exceeded my orders, which forbade me leaving you a single moment--you can hardly

suppose, I say, that I should have been mad enough to rouse the whole house and allow myself to be seen in the corridor of the bishop of Vannes, in order that M. Colbert might state with positive certainty that I gave you time to burn your papers."

"My papers?"

"Of course; at least that is what I should have done in your place. When any one opens a door for me I always avail myself of it."

"Yes, yes, and I thank you, for I have availed myself of it."

"And you have done perfectly right. Every man has his own peculiar secrets with which others have nothing to do. But let us return to Aramis, monseigneur."

"Well, then, I tell you, you could not have called loud enough, or Aramis would have heard you."

"However softly any one may call Aramis, monseigneur, Aramis always hears when he has an interest in hearing. I repeat what I said before--Aramis was not in his own room, or Aramis had certain reasons for not recognizing my voice, of which I am ignorant, and of which you may be even ignorant yourself, notwithstanding your liege-man is His Greatness the Lord Bishop of Vannes."

Fouquet drew a deep sigh, rose from his seat, took three or four turns in his room, and finished by seating himself, with an expression of extreme dejection, upon his magnificent bed with velvet hangings, and costliest lace. D'Artagnan looked at Fouquet with feelings of the deepest and sincerest pity.

"I have seen a good many men arrested in my life," said the musketeer, sadly; "I have seen both M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Chalais arrested, though I was very young then. I have seen M. de Conde arrested with the princes; I have seen M. de Retz arrested; I have seen M. Broussel arrested. Stay a moment, monseigneur, it is disagreeable to have to say, but the very one of all those whom you most resemble at this moment was that poor fellow Broussel. You were very near doing as he did, putting your dinner napkin in your portfolio, and wiping your mouth with your papers. Mordioux! Monseigneur Fouquet, a man like you ought not to be dejected in this manner. Suppose your friends saw you?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," returned the surintendant, with a smile full of gentleness, "you do not understand me; it is precisely because my friends are not looking on, that I am as you see me now. I do not live, exist even, isolated from others; I am nothing when left to myself. Understand that throughout my whole life I have passed every moment of my time in making friends, whom I hoped to render my stay and support."

In times of prosperity, all these cheerful, happy voices--rendered so through and by my means--formed in my honor a concert of praise and kindly actions. In the least disfavor, these humbler voices accompanied in harmonious accents the murmur of my own heart. Isolation I have never yet known. Poverty (a phantom I have sometimes beheld, clad in rags, awaiting me at the end of my journey through life)--poverty has been the specter with which many of my own friends have trifled for years past, which they poetize and caress, and which has attracted me towards them. Poverty! I accept it, acknowledge it, receive it, as a disinherited sister; for poverty is neither solitude, nor exile, nor imprisonment. Is it likely I shall ever be poor, with such friends as Pelisson, as La Fontaine, as Moliere? with such a mistress as--Oh! if you knew how utterly lonely and desolate I feel at this moment, and how you, who separate me from all I love, seem to resemble the image of solitude, of annihilation--death itself."

"But I have already told you, Monsieur Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan, moved to the depths of his soul, "that you are woefully exaggerating. The king likes you."

"No, no," said Fouquet, shaking his head.

"M. Colbert hates you."

"M. Colbert! What does that matter to me?"

"He will ruin you."

"Ah! I defy him to do that, for I am ruined already."

At this singular confession of the superintendent, D'Artagnan cast his glance all round the room; and although he did not open his lips, Fouquet understood him so thoroughly, that he added: "What can be done with such wealth of substance as surrounds us, when a man can no longer cultivate his taste for the magnificent? Do you know what good the greater part of the wealth and the possessions which we rich enjoy, confer upon us? merely to disgust us, by their very splendor even, with everything which does not equal it! Vaux! you will say, and the wonders of Vaux! What of it? What boot these wonders? If I am ruined, how shall I fill with water the urns which my Naiads bear in their arms, or force the air into the lungs of my Tritons? To be rich enough, Monsieur d'Artagnan, a man must be too rich."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"Oh! I know very well what you think," replied Fouquet, quickly. "If Vaux were yours, you would sell it, and would purchase an estate in the country; an estate which should have woods, orchards, and land attached, so that the estate should be made to support its master. With forty

millions you might--"

"Ten millions," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Not a million, my dear captain. No one in France is rich enough to give two millions for Vaux, and to continue to maintain it as I have done; no one could do it, no one would know how."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "in any case, a million is not abject misery."

"It is not far from it, my dear monsieur. But you do not understand me. No; I will not sell my residence at Vaux; I will give it to you, if you like;" and Fouquet accompanied these words with a movement of the shoulders to which it would be impossible to do justice.

"Give it to the king; you will make a better bargain."

"The king does not require me to give it to him," said Fouquet; "he will take it away from me with the most absolute ease and grace, if it pleases him to do so; and that is the very reason I should prefer to see it perish. Do you know, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that if the king did not happen to be under my roof, I would take this candle, go straight to the dome, and set fire to a couple of huge chests of fusees and fireworks which are in reserve there, and would reduce my palace to ashes."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, negligently. "At all events, you would not be able to burn the gardens, and that is the finest feature of the place."

"And yet," resumed Fouquet, thoughtfully, "what was I saying? Great heavens! burn Vaux! destroy my palace! But Vaux is not mine; these wonderful creations are, it is true, the property, as far as sense of enjoyment goes, of the man who has paid for them; but as far as duration is concerned, they belong to those who created them. Vaux belongs to Lebrun, to Lenotre, to Pelisson, to Levau, to La Fontaine, to Moliere; Vaux belongs to posterity, in fact. You see, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that my very house has ceased to be my own."

"That is all well and good," said D'Artagnan; "the idea is agreeable enough, and I recognize M. Fouquet himself in it. That idea, indeed, makes me forget that poor fellow Broussel altogether; and I now fail to recognize in you the whining complaints of that old Frondeur. If you are ruined, monsieur, look at the affair manfully, for you too, mordioux! belong to posterity, and have no right to lessen yourself in any way. Stay a moment; look at me, I who seem to exercise in some degree a kind of superiority over you, because I am arresting you; fate, which distributes their different parts to the comedians of this world, accorded me a less agreeable and less advantageous part to fill than yours has been. I am one of those who think that the parts which kings and powerful nobles are called upon to act are infinitely of more worth

than the parts of beggars or lackeys. It is far better on the stage--on the stage, I mean, of another theater than the theater of this world--it is far better to wear a fine coat and to talk a fine language, than to walk the boards shod with a pair of old shoes, or to get one's backbone gently polished by a hearty dressing with a stick. In one word, you have been a prodigal with money, you have ordered and been obeyed--have been steeped to the lips in enjoyment; while I have dragged my tether after me, have been commanded and have obeyed, and have drudged my life away. Well, although I may seem of such trifling importance beside you, monseigneur, I do declare to you, that the recollection of what I have done serves me as a spur, and prevents me from bowing my old head too soon. I shall remain unto the very end a trooper; and when my turn comes, I shall fall perfectly straight, all in a heap, still alive, after having selected my place beforehand. Do as I do, Monsieur Fouquet, you will not find yourself the worse for it; a fall happens only once in a lifetime to men like yourself, and the chief thing is, to take it gracefully when the chance presents itself. There is a Latin proverb--the words have escaped me, but I remember the sense of it very well, for I have thought over it more than once--which says, 'The end crowns the work!'"

Fouquet rose from his seat, passed his arm round D'Artagnan's neck, and clasped him in a close embrace, whilst with the other hand he pressed his hand. "An excellent homily," he said, after a moment's pause.

"A soldier's, monseigneur."

"You have a regard for me, in telling me all that."

"Perhaps."

Fouquet resumed his pensive attitude once more, and then, a moment after, he said: "Where can M. d'Herblay be? I dare not ask you to send for him."

"You would not ask me, because I would not do it, Monsieur Fouquet. People would learn it, and Aramis, who is not mixed up with the affair, might possibly be compromised and included in your disgrace."

"I will wait here till daylight," said Fouquet.

"Yes; that is best."

"What shall we do when daylight comes?"

"I know nothing at all about it, monseigneur."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, will you do me a favor?"

"Most willingly."

"You guard me, I remain; you are acting in the full discharge of your duty, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Very good, then; remain as close to me as my shadow if you like; and I infinitely prefer such a shadow to any one else."

D'Artagnan bowed to the compliment.

"But, forget that you are Monsieur d'Artagnan, captain of the musketeers; forget that I am Monsieur Fouquet, surintendant of the finances; and let us talk about my affairs."

"That is rather a delicate subject."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; but, for your sake, Monsieur Fouquet, I will do what may almost be regarded as an impossibility."

"Thank you. What did the king say to you?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! is that the way you talk?"

"The deuce!"

"What do you think of my situation?"

"I do not know."

"However, unless you have some ill feeling against me--"

"Your position is a difficult one."

"In what respect?"

"Because you are under your own roof."

"However difficult it may be, I understand it very well."

"Do you suppose that, with any one else but yourself, I should have shown so much frankness?"

"What! so much frankness, do you say? you, who refuse to tell me the

slightest thing?"

"At all events, then, so much ceremony and consideration."

"Ah! I have nothing to say in that respect."

"One moment, monseigneur: let me tell you how I should have behaved towards any one but yourself. It might be that I happened to arrive at your door just as your guests or your friends had left you--or, if they had not gone yet, I should wait until they were leaving, and should then catch them one after the other, like rabbits; I should lock them up quietly enough, I should steal softly along the carpet of your corridor, and with one hand upon you, before you suspected the slightest thing amiss, I should keep you safely until my master's breakfast in the morning. In this way, I should just the same have avoided all publicity, all disturbance, all opposition; but there would also have been no warning for M. Fouquet, no consideration for his feelings, none of those delicate concessions which are shown by persons who are essentially courteous in their natures, whenever the decisive moment may arrive. Are you satisfied with the plan?"

"It makes me shudder."

"I thought you would not like it. It would have been very disagreeable to have made my appearance to-morrow, without any preparation, and to have asked you to deliver up your sword."

"Oh! monsieur, I should have died of shame and anger."

"Your gratitude is too eloquently expressed. I have not done enough to deserve it, I assure you."

"Most certainly, monsieur, you will never get me to believe that."

"Well, then, monseigneur, if you are satisfied with what I have done, and have somewhat recovered from the shock which I prepared you for as much as I possibly could, let us allow the few hours that remain to pass away undisturbed. You are harassed, and should arrange your thoughts; I beg you, therefore, go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep, either on your bed, or in your bed; I will sleep in this armchair; and when I fall asleep, my rest is so sound that a cannon would not wake me."

Fouquet smiled. "I expect, however," continued the musketeer, "the case of a door being opened, whether a secret door, or any other; or the case of any one going out of, or coming into, the room--for anything like that my ear is as quick and sensitive as the ear of a mouse. Creaking noises make me start. It arises, I suppose, from a natural antipathy to anything of the kind. Move about as much as you like; walk up and down in any part of the room, write, efface, destroy, burn,--nothing like

that will prevent me from going to sleep or even prevent me from snoring, but do not touch either the key or the handle of the door, for I should start up in a moment, and that would shake my nerves and make me ill."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Fouquet, "you are certainly the most witty and the most courteous man I ever met with; and you will leave me only one regret, that of having made your acquaintance so late."

D'Artagnan drew a deep sigh, which seemed to say, "Alas! you have perhaps made it too soon." He then settled himself in his armchair, while Fouquet, half lying on his bed and leaning on his arm, was meditating on his misadventures. In this way, both of them, leaving the candles burning, awaited the first dawn of the day; and when Fouquet happened to sigh too loudly, D'Artagnan only snored the louder. Not a single visit, not even from Aramis, disturbed their quietude: not a sound even was heard throughout the whole vast palace. Outside, however, the guards of honor on duty, and the patrol of musketeers, paced up and down; and the sound of their feet could be heard on the gravel walks. It seemed to act as an additional soporific for the sleepers, while the murmuring of the wind through the trees, and the unceasing music of the fountains whose waters tumbled in the basin, still went on uninterruptedly, without being disturbed at the slight noises and items of little moment that constitute the life and death of human nature.