Chapter 28

The Ambassadors.

D'Artagnan had, with very few exceptions, learned almost all of the particulars of what we have just been relating; for among his friends he reckoned all the useful, serviceable people in the royal household, - officious attendants who were proud of being recognized by the captain of the musketeers, for the captain's influence was very great; and then, in addition to any ambitious vies they may have imagined he could promote, they were proud of being regarded as worth being spoken to by a man as brave as D'Artagnan. In this manner D'Artagnan learned every morning what he had not been able either to see or to ascertain the night before, from the simple fact of his not being ubiquitous; so that, with the information he had been able by his own means to pick up during the day, and with what he had gathered from others, he succeeded in making up a bundle of weapons, which he was in the prudent habit of using only when occasion required. In this way, D'Artagnan's two eyes rendered him the same service as the hundred eyes of Argus. Political secrets, bedside revelations, hints or scraps of conversation dropped by the courtiers on the threshold of the royal ante-chamber, in this way D'Artagnan managed to ascertain, and to store away everything in the vast and impenetrable mausoleum of his memory, by the side of those royal secrets so dearly bought and faithfully preserved. He therefore knew of the king's interview with Colbert, and of the appointment made for the ambassadors in the morning, and, consequently, that the question of the medals would be brought up for debate; and, while he was arranging and constructing

the conversation upon a few chance words which had reached his ears, he returned to his post in the royal apartments, so as to be there at the very moment the king awoke. It happened that the king rose very early, - proving thereby that he, too, on his side, had slept but indifferently. Towards seven o'clock, he half-opened his door very gently. D'Artagnan was at his post. His majesty was pale, and seemed wearied; he had not, moreover, quite finished dressing.

"Send for M. de Saint-Aignan," he said.

Saint-Aignan was probably awaiting a summons, for the messenger, when he

reached his apartment, found him already dressed. Saint-Aignan hastened to the king in obedience to the summons. A moment afterwards the king and Saint-Aignan passed by together - the king walking first. D'Artagnan went to the window which looked out upon the courtyard; he had no need to put himself to the trouble of watching in what direction the king went, for he had no difficulty in guessing beforehand where his majesty was going. The king, in fact, bent his steps towards the apartments of the maids of honor, - a circumstance which in no way astonished D'Artagnan, for he more than suspected, although La Valliere had not breathed a syllable on the subject, that the king had some kind of reparation to make. Saint-Aignan followed him as he had done the previous evening, rather less uneasy in his mind, though still slightly agitated, for he fervently trusted that at seven o'clock in the morning there might be only himself and the king awake amongst the august guests at the palace.

D'Artagnan stood at the window, careless and perfectly calm in his manner. One could almost have sworn that he noticed nothing, and was utterly ignorant who were these two hunters after adventures, passing like shadows across the courtyard, wrapped up in their cloaks. And yet, all the while that D'Artagnan appeared not to be looking at them at all, he did not for one moment lose sight of them, and while he whistled that old march of the musketeers, which he rarely recalled except under great emergencies, he conjectured and prophesied how terrible would be the storm which would be raised on the king's return. In fact, when the king entered La Valliere's apartment and found the room empty and the bed untouched, he began to be alarmed, and called out to Montalais, who immediately answered the summons; but her astonishment was equal to the king's. All that she could tell his majesty was, that she had fancied she had heard La Valliere's weeping during a portion of the night, but, knowing that his majesty had paid her a visit, she had not dared to inquire what was the matter.

"But," inquired the king, "where do you suppose she is gone?"

"Sire," replied Montalais, "Louise is of a very sentimental disposition, and as I have often seen her rise at daybreak in order to go out into the garden, she may, perhaps, be there now."

This appeared probable, and the king immediately ran down the staircase in search of the fugitive. D'Artagnan saw him grow very pale, and talking in an excited manner with his companion, as he went towards the

gardens; Saint-Aignan following him, out of breath. D'Artagnan did not stir from the window, but went on whistling, looking as if he saw nothing, yet seeing everything. "Come, come," he murmured, when the king disappeared, "his majesty's passion is stronger than I thought; he is now doing, I think, what he never did for Mademoiselle de Mancini."

In a quarter of an hour the king again appeared: he had looked everywhere, was completely out of breath, and, as a matter of course, had not discovered anything. Saint-Aignan, who still followed him, was fanning himself with his hat, and in a gasping voice, asking for information about La Valliere from such of the servants as were about, in fact from every one he met. Among others he came across Manicamp, who had arrived from Fontainebleau by easy stages; for whilst others had performed the journey in six hours, he had taken four and twenty.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle de la Valliere?" Saint-Aignan asked him.

Whereupon Manicamp, dreamy and absent as usual, answered, thinking that
some one was asking him about De Guiche, "Thank you, the comte is a little better."

And he continued on his way until he reached the ante-chamber where D'Artagnan was, whom he asked to explain how it was that the king looked, as he thought, so bewildered; to which D'Artagnan replied that he was

quite mistaken, that the king, on the contrary, was as lively and merry as he could possibly be.

In the midst of all this, eight o'clock struck. It was usual for the king to take his breakfast at this hour, for the code of etiquette prescribed that the king should always be hungry at eight o'clock. His breakfast was laid upon a small table in his bedroom, and he ate very fast. Saint-Aignan, of whom he would not lose sight, waited on the king. He then disposed of several military audiences, during which he dispatched Saint-Aignan to see what he could find out. Then, still occupied, full of anxiety, still watching Saint-Aignan's return, who had sent out the servants in every direction, to make inquires, and who had also gone himself, the hour of nine struck, and the king forthwith passed into his large cabinet.

As the clock was striking nine the ambassadors entered, and as it finished, the two queens and Madame made their appearance. There were three ambassadors from Holland, and two from Spain. The king glanced at them, and then bowed; and, at the same moment, Saint-Aignan entered, - an entrance which the king regarded as far more important, in a different sense, however, than that of ambassadors, however numerous they might be, and from whatever country they came; and so, setting everything aside, the king made a sign of interrogation to Saint-Aignan, which the latter answered by a most decisive negative. The king almost entirely lost his courage; but as the queens, the members of the nobility who were present,

and the ambassadors, had their eyes fixed upon him, he overcame his emotion by a violent effort, and invited the latter to speak. Whereupon one of the Spanish deputies made a long oration, in which he boasted the advantages which the Spanish alliance would offer.

The king interrupted him, saying, "Monsieur, I trust that whatever is best for France must be exceedingly advantageous for Spain."

This remark, and particularly the peremptory tone in which it was pronounced, made the ambassadors pale, and brought the color into the cheeks of the two queens, who, being Spanish, felt wounded in their pride of relationship and nationality by this reply.

The Dutch ambassador then began to address himself to the king, and complained of the injurious suspicions which the king exhibited against the government of his country.

The king interrupted him, saying, "It is very singular, monsieur, that you should come with any complaint, when it is I rather who have reason to be dissatisfied; and yet, you see, I do not complain."

"Complain, sire, and in what respect?"

The king smiled bitterly. "Will you blame me, monsieur," he said, "if I should happen to entertain suspicions against a government which authorizes and protects international impertinence?"

"Sire!"

"I tell you," resumed the king, exciting himself by a recollection of his own personal annoyance, rather than from political grounds, "that Holland is a land of refuge for all who hate me, and especially for all who malign me."

"Oh, sire!"

"You wish for proofs, perhaps? Very good; they can be had easily enough. Whence proceed all those vile and insolent pamphlets which represent me as a monarch without glory and without authority? your printing-presses groan under their number. If my secretaries were here, I would mention the titles of the works as well as the names of the printers."

"Sire," replied the ambassador, "a pamphlet can hardly be regarded as the work of a whole nation. Is it just, is it reasonable, that a great and powerful monarch like your majesty should render a whole nation responsible for the crime of a few madmen, who are, perhaps, only scribbling in a garret for a few sous to buy bread for their family?"

"That may be the case, I admit. But when the mint itself, at Amsterdam, strikes off medals which reflect disgrace upon me, is that also the crime of a few madmen?"

"Medals!" stammered out the ambassador.

"Medals," repeated the king, looking at Colbert.

"Your majesty," the ambassador ventured, "should be quite sure - "

The king still looked at Colbert; but Colbert appeared not to understand him, and maintained an unbroken silence, notwithstanding the king's repeated hints. D'Artagnan then approached the king, and taking a piece of money out of his pocket, he placed it in the king's hands, saying, "_This_ is the medal your majesty alludes to."

The king looked at it, and with a look which, ever since he had become his own master, was ever piercing as the eagle's, observed an insulting device representing Holland arresting the progress of the sun, with this inscription: "_In conspectu meo stetit sol_."

"In my presence the sun stands still," exclaimed the king, furiously. "Ah! you will hardly deny it now, I suppose."

"And the sun," said D'Artagnan, "is this," as he pointed to the panels of the cabinet, where the sun was brilliantly represented in every direction, with this motto, "_Nec pluribus impar_."

Transcriber's note: "[A sun] not eclipsed by many suns." Louis's

device. - JB

Louis's anger, increased by the bitterness of his own personal sufferings, hardly required this additional circumstance to foment it. Every one saw, from the kindling passion in the king's eyes, that an explosion was imminent. A look from Colbert kept postponed the bursting of the storm. The ambassador ventured to frame excuses by saying that the vanity of nations was a matter of little consequence; that Holland was proud that, with such limited resources, she had maintained her rank as a great nation, even against powerful monarchs, and that if a little smoke had intoxicated his countrymen, the king would be kindly disposed, and would even excuse this intoxication. The king seemed as if he would be glad of some suggestion; he looked at Colbert, who remained impassible; then at D'Artagnan, who simply shrugged his shoulders, a movement which was like the opening of the flood-gates, whereby the king's anger, which he had restrained for so long a period, now burst forth. As no one knew what direction his anger might take, all preserved a dead silence. The second ambassador took advantage of it to begin his excuses also. While he was speaking, and while the king, who had again gradually returned to his own personal reflections, was automatically listening to the voice, full of nervous anxiety, with the air of an absent man listening to the murmuring of a cascade, D'Artagnan, on whose left hand Saint-Aignan was standing, approached the latter, and, in a voice which was loud enough to reach the king's ears, said: "Have you heard the news?"

"What news?" said Saint-Aignan.

"About La Valliere."

The king started, and advanced his head.

"What has happened to La Valliere?" inquired Saint-Aignan, in a tone which can easily be imagined.

"Ah! poor girl! she is going to take the veil."

"The veil!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"The veil!" cried the king, in the midst of the ambassador's discourse; but then, mindful of the rules of etiquette, he mastered himself, still listening, however, with rapt attention.

"What order?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"The Carmelites of Chaillot."

"Who the deuce told you that?"

"She did herself."

"You have seen her, then?"

"Nay, I even went with her to the Carmelites."

The king did not lose a syllable of this conversation; and again he could hardly control his feelings.

"But what was the cause of her flight?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"Because the poor girl was driven away from the court yesterday," replied D'Artagnan.

He had no sooner said this, than the king, with an authoritative gesture, said to the ambassador, "Enough, monsieur, enough." Then, advancing towards the captain, he exclaimed:

"Who says Mademoiselle de la Valliere is going to take the religious vows?"

"M. d'Artagnan," answered the favorite.

"Is it true what you say?" said the king, turning towards the musketeer.

"As true as truth itself."

The king clenched his hands, and turned pale.

"You have something further to add, M. d'Artagnan?" he said.

"I know nothing more, sire."

"You added that Mademoiselle de la Valliere had been driven away from the court."

"Yes, sire."

"Is that true, also?"

"Ascertain for yourself, sire."

"And from whom?"

"Ah!" sighed D'Artagnan, like a man who is declining to say anything further.

The king almost bounded from his seat, regardless of ambassadors, ministers, courtiers, queens, and politics. The queen-mother rose; she had heard everything, or, if she had not heard everything, she had guessed it. Madame, almost fainting from anger and fear, endeavored to rise as the queen-mother had done; but she sank down again upon her chair, which by an instinctive movement she made roll back a few paces.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "the audience is over; I will communicate my

answer, or rather my will, to Spain and to Holland;" and with a proud, imperious gesture, he dismissed the ambassadors.

"Take care, my son," said the queen-mother, indignantly, "you are hardly master of yourself, I think."

"Ah! madame," returned the young lion, with a terrible gesture, "if I am not mater of myself, I will be, I promise you, of those who do me a deadly injury; come with me, M. d'Artagnan, come." And he quitted the room in the midst of general stupefaction and dismay. The king hastily descended the staircase, and was about to cross the courtyard.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your majesty mistakes the way."

"No; I am going to the stables."

"That is useless, sire, for I have horses ready for your majesty."

The king's only answer was a look, but this look promised more than the ambition of three D'Artagnans could have dared to hope.