

## Chapter 46

### Aramis's Correspondence.

When De Guiche's affairs, which had been suddenly set to right without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed the unexpected aspect we have seen, Raoul, in obedience to the request of the princess, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation, the results of which he was far from guessing; and he soon after joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower-gardens. During this time, the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's letter with surprise, for it informed him by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais, and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to inform De Guiche and Monsieur, whatever there might be in the affair likely to be most disagreeable to both of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders at the last paragraph, and, in fact, De Wardes was out of date, as we have seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone, "It is really incredible; and yet poor De Wardes is not deficient in ability; but the truth is, it is not very apparent, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and yet he writes such silly stuff as that. If it had not been for that miserable letter, which has no meaning at all

in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps have been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for many days to come."

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished; well, the scent is lost, and unless some extraordinary chance - " And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, greatly out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius was at his orders, he perceived returning towards the chateau, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had struck his attention half an hour previously.

"Admirable!" he thought, striking his hands together, "this is my providential mysterious affair." And he started out precipitately, along the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle, and her companion. But as he arrived at the door of the little court, he nearly knocked against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her, not five minutes before, with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not be far off. Consequently,

he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then when she had advanced a few steps, with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily round on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time; the gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was hurrying towards one of the wings of the chateau, behind which he was on the point of disappearing. There was not an instant to lose; the chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he approached.

It was evident, however, that as the man pursued was walking quietly, in a pensive manner, with his head bent down, either beneath the weight of grief or happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless, indeed, he were to enter by some door or another, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this, certainly, would have happened, if, at the very moment he turned the angle, the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves wheeling in the opposite direction. The chevalier was ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when, looking up, he recognized the superintendent. Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was the bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged out of politeness to make his

own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a few paces; and as Monsieur Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, the chevalier did what the king himself would have done, namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then, almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, De Lorraine saw, with the most unfeigned displeasure, the figure of his unknown becoming dimmer in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and, once resigned, gave his entire attention to Fouquet: - "You arrive late, monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that, having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so; but I came as soon as I was free."

"Is Paris quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well."

"Ah! I understand you wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our \_fetes\_."

I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you, therefore, to inform me if the king is in the chateau or not, if I am likely to be able to see him this evening, or if I shall have to wait until to-morrow."

"We have lost sight of his majesty during the last half-hour nearly," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments?" inquired Fouquet.

"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I just now met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you a moment ago encountered was the king himself - " and the chevalier paused, hoping that, in this manner, he might learn who it was he had been hurrying after. But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, "No, monsieur, it was not the king."

The chevalier, disappointed in his expectation, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the center of a group, he said to the superintendent: "Stay, monsieur; there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."

"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented him from seeing through the darkness.

"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands, is M. Colbert?"

"M. Colbert himself. He is giving orders personally to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations."

"Thank you," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head, which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having, on the contrary, learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and silence.

"What!" he said to him, "the fellow's name alone seemed to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that man is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, have you faith in your good star?"

"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied, in a trembling voice. "You, my dear D'Herblay, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes! I repeat it once more, I am too full of happiness! so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have... I have risen so high... You know my motto: '\_Quo non ascendam?\_' I have risen so high that nothing is left me but to descend from my elevation. I cannot believe in the progress of a success already more than human."

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon him. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably fear for your grace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend; I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances that befall you, in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."

"Bah! in confession."

"Oh! I should blush too much if you were my confessor." And Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without further betrayal of his thoughts than a placid smile.

"Well," he said, "discretion is a great virtue."

"Silence," said Fouquet; "yonder venomous reptile has recognized us, and is crawling this way."

"Colbert?"

"Yes; leave me, D'Herblay; I do not wish that fellow to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to \_you\_."

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, "What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?"

"Yes, but I may not always be here," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"On that day, then, if that day should ever dawn," said Aramis, tranquilly, "we will think over a means of dispensing with the friendship, or of braving the dislike of M. Colbert. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this reptile, as you did him the honor of styling him, a conversation the need for which I do not perceive, why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?"



"To Madame," said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his  
\_souvenirs\_. "Yes, certainly, to Madame. "

"You remember," continued Aramis, "that we have been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his majesty's friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and, for our sakes, treat this ally with consideration."

"But," said Fouquet, "are you quite sure that it is upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?"

"If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police."

"Very well! I will go there at once, and, at all events, I shall have a means of introduction in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set with diamonds."

"I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal."

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier.

"For you, monseigneur," said the courier aloud, presenting a letter to

Fouquet.

"For your grace," said the lackey in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch in his hand, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop of Vannes, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight. Those who love, or who are beloved, will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which, however, contained only these words: "It is but an hour since I quitted you, it is an age since I told you how much I love you." And that was all. Madame de Belliere had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest his remembrance of her might be effaced for too long a period from the heart she regretted, she dispatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold. As for Aramis, he, on his side, was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and reflection, the following letter:

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy; a woman loves him. He learned it accidentally, as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions; and his majesty has entirely abandoned himself to his new caprice. The girl's name is Mademoiselle de la Valliere, and she is sufficiently pretty to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Valliere."

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the letter and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still delightedly inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

"Monseigneur," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked.

"An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl of the name of La Valliere?"

"Not at all."

"Reflect a little."

"Ah! yes, I believe so; one of Madame's maids of honor."

"That must be the one."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, monseigneur, it is to that young girl that you must pay your visit this evening."

"Bah! why so?"

"Nay, more than that, it is to her you must present your cameos."

"Nonsense."

"You know, monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly."

"But this is unforeseen - "

"That is my affair. Pay your court in due form, and without loss of time, to Mademoiselle de la Valliere. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Belliere that your devotion is altogether politic."

"What do you mean, my dear D'Herblay, and whose name have you just pronounced?"

"A name which ought to convince you that, as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be just as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Valliere."

"I will pay my court to whomsoever you like," replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

"Come, come, descend again to the earth, traveler in the seventh heaven," said Aramis; "M. Colbert is approaching. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see, how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is

decidedly becoming powerful." In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom complimented him upon the arrangements of the \_fete\_: all of which so puffed him up that he could hardly contain himself.

"If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wanted to make itself as big as the Ox.'"

Colbert arrived in the center of the circle blazing with light; Fouquet awaited his approach, unmoved and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility.

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone of voice to the superintendent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps." Colbert was the first to salute them, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

"Well, monseigneur, what do your eyes say? Have we shown our good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh!" said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence. We are poor, we servants of the king, and Fontainebleau is no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."

"Quite true," replied Fouquet coolly.

"But what can we do, monseigneur?" continued Colbert, "we have done our best on slender resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, monseigneur, if you were to offer to his majesty a *\_fete\_* in your wonderful gardens - in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions of francs."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

"An additional reason," returned Colbert; "it would, indeed, be truly magnificent."

"But do you suppose, monsieur, that his majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"

"I have no doubt whatever of it," cried Colbert, hastily; "I will guarantee that he does."

"You are exceedingly kind," said Fouquet. "I may depend on it, then?"

"Yes, monseigneur; yes, certainly."

"Then I will consider the matter," yawned Fouquet.

"Accept, accept," whispered Aramis, eagerly.

"You will consider?" repeated Colbert.

"Yes," replied Fouquet; "in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king."

"This very evening, monseigneur, this very evening."

"Agreed," said the superintendent. "Gentlemen, I should wish to issue my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes, the king is in his own palace; it is by his majesty, therefore, that you must be invited."

A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

"Proud and dauntless man," thought Colbert, "you accept, and yet you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," whispered Fouquet, in a low tone, to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter, whilst Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king was still visible.