

## Chapter 47

### The Orderly Clerk.

The king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, and feeling that he had become, during the last two hours, the confidant of the king, began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner: and, from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather, where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of Guiche for Madame, that of La Valliere for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for himself, was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, Saint-Aignan was the model of courtiers, past, present, and to come; and, moreover, showed himself such an excellent narrator, and so discerningly appreciative that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Valliere. While the king no longer experienced for Madame any remains of the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this same eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, great gratification for his vanity, from which he could not free himself. He experienced this pleasure then, but nothing more, and his heart was not, for a single

moment, alarmed at what Madame might, or might not, think of his adventure. When, however, Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, "Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Valliere is, do you not?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she is everything that woman can wish to be - that is to say, beloved by your majesty; I mean, that she will be everything your majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow; as you have remarked, that is my affair. But tell me what others say of her."

"They say she is well conducted."

"Oh!" said the king, smiling, "that is mere report."

"But rare enough, at court, sire, to believe when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right. Is she well born?"

"Excellently; the daughter of the Marquis de la Valliere, and step-

daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."

"Ah, yes! my aunt's major-domo; I remember; and I remember now that I saw

her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her the attention she deserved."

"Oh, sire! I trust that your majesty will now repair time lost."

"And the report - you tell me - is, that Mademoiselle de la Valliere never had a lover."

"In any case, I do not think your majesty would be much alarmed at the rivalry."

"Yet, stay," said the king, in a very serious tone of voice.

"Your majesty?"

"I remember."

"Ah!"

"If she has no lover, she has, at least, a betrothed."

"A betrothed!"

"What! Count, do you not know that?"

"No."

"You, the man who knows all the news?"

"Your majesty will excuse me. You know this betrothed, then?"

"Assuredly! his father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract: it is - " The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped, and knitted his brows.

"It is - " repeated Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance he had some trouble to disguise.

"Can I put your majesty in the way?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

"No; for I no longer remember to whom I intended to refer; indeed, I only remember very indistinctly, that one of the maids of honor was to marry - the name, however, has escaped me."

"Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?" inquired

Saint-Aignan.

"Very likely," said the king.

"In that case, the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten suitors away."

"At all events," said the king, "I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Valliere. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me every information about her."

"Yes, sire, and when shall I have the honor of seeing your majesty again, to give you the latest news?"

"Whenever you have procured it."

"I shall obtain it speedily, then, if the information can be as quickly obtained as my wish to see your majesty again."

"Well said, count! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?"

"None, sire."

"Madame did not get angry, then?"

"I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually."

"That's well; but I think I hear voices in the ante-rooms - no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan." The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, "Sire, it is M. Fouquet who has this moment arrived, by your majesty's orders, he says. He presented himself, but, because of the lateness of the hour, he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced."

"M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o'clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau the following day, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at two o'clock in the morning! This is, indeed, zeal!" exclaimed the king, delighted to see himself so promptly obeyed. "On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow."

The king placed his finger on his lips; and Saint-Aignan, his heart brimful of happiness, hastily withdrew, telling the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who, thereupon, entered the king's apartment. Louis rose to receive him.

"Good evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously; "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"

"At nine in the evening, sire."

"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your rooms at Saint-Mande during the last three or four days."

"It is perfectly true, your majesty, that I have kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I had a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with a most gracious air.

"Your majesty overwhelms me, and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will you permit me to remind you of the promise made to grant an audience?"

"Ah, yes! some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, sire. The hour is, perhaps, badly chosen; but the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable, and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese - "

"Who is it, then?"

"The bishop of Vannes, whose appointment your majesty, at my recommendation, deigned, three months since, to sign."

"That is very possible," said the king, who had signed without reading; "and he is here?"

"Yes, sire; Vannes is an important diocese; the flock belonging to this pastor needed his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish, at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d'Herblay is unequalled in such kind of missions."

"M. d'Herblay!" said the king, musingly, as if his name, heard long since, was not, however, unknown to him.

"Oh!" said Fouquet, promptly, "your majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and valuable servants?"

"No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?"

"He has this very day received letters which will, perhaps, compel him to leave, so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your majesty."

"Is he waiting?"

"He is here, sire."



"Let him enter."

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

"Vannes!" he said: "you are bishop of Vannes, I believe?"

"Yes, sire."

"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?" Aramis bowed.

"Near the coast?" Aramis again bowed.

"A few leagues from Bell-Isle, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us poor Bretons, sire," replied Aramis: "six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance, if it be six leagues on land; and an immense distance, if it be leagues on the sea. Besides, I have the honor

to mention to your majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.

"Yes, it is said so," replied Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

"What do you mean by 'it is said so?'" exclaimed the king.

"He has, sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me."

"What may that be, sire?"

"That you should have at the head of the diocese a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle."

"Oh, sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."

"In what way, sire?"

"I will change your bishopric."

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

"What income does Vannes bring you in?" continued the king.

"Sixty thousand livres, sire," said Aramis.

"So trifling an amount as that; but you possess other property, Monsieur de Vannes?"

"I have nothing else, sire; only M. Fouquet pays me one thousand two hundred livres a year for his pew in the church."

"Well, M. d'Herblay, I promise you something better than that."

"Sire - "

"I will not forget you."

Aramis bowed, and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was accustomed to do towards women and members of the Church.

Aramis

gathered that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

"He is, indeed, a remarkable face," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he."

"His learning is not extensive, then?"

"He changed the sword for the crucifix, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again on another occasion - "

"I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."

"Of me, sire?"

"Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments."

"I cannot express to your majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me."

"I understand you, M. Fouquet. I confess, however, to have had certain

prejudices against you."

"In that case, I was indeed unhappy, sire."

"But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive - "

"I did, indeed, sire; but I awaited with resignation the day when the truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived."

"Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?"

"Alas! sire, I perceived it."

"And do you know the reason?"

"Perfectly well; your majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure."

"Not so; far from that."

"Or, rather an indifferent administrator. In a word, you thought that, as the people had no money, there would be none for your majesty either."

"Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived."

Fouquet bowed.

"And no disturbances, no complaints?"

"And money enough," said Fouquet.

"The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month."

"I have more, not only for all your majesty's requirements, but for all your caprices."

"I thank you, Monsieur Fouquet," replied the king, seriously. "I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything."

"I will avail myself of the interval to amass five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war."

"Five or six millions!"

"For the expenses of your majesty's household only, be it understood."

"You think war probable, M. Fouquet?"

"I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character."

The king blushed with pleasure.

"We have spent a great deal of money these few days past, Monsieur Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?"

"Sire, your majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million francs to lavish in those twenty years."

"That is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet," said the king.

"I will economize, sire. Besides, your majesty has two valuable servants in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your treasures - and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your majesty; and the other will economize money for you, and this will be M. Colbert's province."

"M. Colbert?" returned the king, astonished.

"Certainly, sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant."

At this commendation, bestowed by the traduced on the traducer, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look, anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much

generosity and address, he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"

"Yes, sire, I praise him; for, besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be devoted to your majesty's interests."

"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.

"Exactly, sire."

"Explain yourself."

"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he is the man who is needed to prevent it leaving."

"Nay, nay, monsieur le surintendant, you will presently say something which will correct this good opinion."

"Do you mean as far as administrative abilities are concerned, sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the slightest."

"Really?"



"Upon my honor, sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification attached to it in the present day; but, as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had addressed as the superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, that at this juncture served admirably to restore Fouquet to his place, and Colbert to his own.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was Colbert, however, that, notwithstanding his economy, had the arrangement of my *\_fetes\_* here at Fontainebleau; and I assure you, Monsieur Fouquet, that in now way has he checked the expenditure of money." Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

"Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves, in this respect, all the praise your majesty may bestow upon him."

The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." The king possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves, and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had, in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements; in other words, that the

magnificent *\_fetes\_* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or another might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by a person coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, only to find that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation, yet with extreme tact, inspired the king with the highest esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister. Fouquet took his leave at a quarter to three in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had received; and a good hour was employed by him in going over again in memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the bills of fare of the various banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all the offspring of the "Clerk Colbert's" invention. The result was, the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last eight days, and decided that faults could be found in his *\_fetes\_*. But Fouquet, by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity, had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter, by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred, had ever yet succeeded in hurting Fouquet.