

Chapter LIII. The King.

The first moment of surprise over, D'Artagnan reperused Athos's note. "It is strange," said he, "that the king should send for me."

"Why so?" said Raoul; "do you not think, monsieur, that the king must regret such a servant as you?"

"Oh, oh!" cried the officer, laughing with all his might; "you are poking fun at me, Master Raoul. If the king had regretted me, he would not have let me leave him. No, no; I see in it something better, or worse, if you like."

"Worse! What can that be, monsieur le chevalier?"

"You are young, you are a boy, you are admirable. Oh, how I should like to be as you are! To be but twenty-four, with an unfortunate brow, under which the brain is void of everything but women, love, and good intentions. Oh, Raoul, as long as you have not received the smiles of kings, the confidence of queens; as long as you have not had two cardinals killed under you, the one a tiger, the other a fox; as long as you have not--But what is the good of all this trifling? We must part, Raoul."

"How you say the word! What a serious face!"

"Eh! but the occasion is worthy of it. Listen to me. I have a very good recommendation to tender you."

"I am all attention, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"You will go and inform your father of my departure."

"Your departure?"

"Pardieu! You will tell him I am gone into England; and that I am living in my little country-house."

"In England, you!--And the king's orders?"

"You get more and more silly: do you imagine that I am going to the Louvre, to place myself at the disposal of that little crowned wolf-cub?"

"The king a wolf-cub? Why, monsieur le chevalier, you are mad!"

"On the contrary, I never was so sane. You do not know what he wants to

do with me, this worthy son of Louis le Juste!--But, mordieux! that is policy. He wishes to ensconce me snugly in the Bastile--purely and simply, look you!"

"What for?" cried Raoul, terrified at what he heard.

"On account of what I told him one day at Blois. I was warm; he remembers it."

"You told him what?"

"That he was mean, cowardly, and silly."

"Good God!" cried Raoul, "is it possible that such words should have issued from your mouth?"

"Perhaps I don't give the letter of my speech, but I give the sense of it."

"But did not the king have you arrested immediately?"

"By whom? It was I who commanded the musketeers; he must have commanded me to convey myself to prison; I would never have consented: I would have resisted myself. And then I went into England--no more D'Artagnan. Now, the cardinal is dead, or nearly so, they learn that I am in Paris, and they lay their hands on me."

"The cardinal was your protector?"

"The cardinal knew me; he knew certain particularities of me; I also knew some of his; we appreciated each other mutually. And then, on rendering his soul to the devil, he would recommend Anne of Austria to make me the inhabitant of a safe place. Go, then, and find your father, relate the fact to him--and adieu!"

"My dear Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Raoul, very much agitated, after having looked out the window, "you cannot even fly!"

"Why not?"

"Because there is below an officer of the Swiss guards waiting for you."

"Well?"

"Well, he will arrest you."

D'Artagnan broke into a Homeric laugh.

"Oh! I know very well that you will resist, that you will fight, even; I know very well that you will prove the conqueror; but that amounts to rebellion, and you are an officer yourself, knowing what discipline is."

"Devil of a boy, how logical that is!" grumbled D'Artagnan.

"You approve of it, do you not?"

"Yes, instead of passing into the street, where that idiot is waiting for me, I will slip quietly out at the back. I have a horse in the stable, and a good one. I will ride him to death; my means permit me to do so, and by killing one horse after another, I shall arrive at Boulogne in eleven hours; I know the road. Only tell your father one thing."

"What is that?"

"That is--that the thing he knows about is placed at Planchet's house, except a fifth, and that--"

"But, my dear D'Artagnan, rest assured that if you fly, two things will be said of you."

"What are they, my dear friend?"

"The first, that you have been afraid."

"Ah! and who will dare to say that?"

"The king first."

"Well! but he will tell the truth,--I am afraid."

"The second, that you knew yourself guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Why, of the crimes they wish to impute to you."

"That is true again. So, then, you advise me to go and get myself made a prisoner in the Bastile?"

"M. le Comte de la Fere would advise you just as I do."

"Pardieu! I know he would," said D'Artagnan thoughtfully. "You are right, I shall not escape. But if they cast me into the Bastile?"

"We will get you out again," said Raoul, with a quiet, calm air.

"Mordioux! You said that after a brave fashion, Raoul," said D'Artagnan, seizing his hand; "that savors of Athos, distinctly. Well, I will go, then. Do not forget my last word."

"Except a fifth," said Raoul.

"Yes, you are a fine boy! and I wish you to add one thing to that last word."

"Speak, chevalier!"

"It is that if you cannot get me out of the Bastile, and I remain there--Oh! that will be so, and I shall be a detestable prisoner; I, who have been a passable man,--in that case, I give three-fifths to you, and the fourth to your father."

"Chevalier!"

"Mordioux! If you will have some masses said for me, you are welcome."

That being said, D'Artagnan took his belt from the hook, girded on his sword, took a hat the feather of which was fresh, and held his hand out to Raoul, who threw himself into his arms. When in the shop, he cast a quick glance at the shop-lads, who looked upon the scene with a pride mingled with some inquietude; then plunging his hands into a chest of currants, he went straight to the officer who was waiting for him at the door.

"Those features! Can it be you, Monsieur de Friedisch?" cried D'Artagnan, gayly. "Eh! eh! what, do we arrest our friends?"

"Arrest!" whispered the lads among themselves.

"Ja, it is I, Monsieur d'Artagnan! Good-day to you!" said the Swiss, in his mountain patois.

"Must I give you up my sword? I warn you that it is long and heavy; you had better let me wear it to the Louvre: I feel quite lost in the streets without a sword, and you would be more at a loss than I should, with two."

"The king has given me no orders about it," replied the Swiss, "so keep your sword."

"Well, that is very polite on the part of the king. Let us go, at once."

Monsieur Friedisch was not a talker, and D'Artagnan had too many things to think about to say much. From Planchet's shop to the Louvre was not far,--they arrived in ten minutes. It was a dark night. M. de Friedisch

wanted to enter by the wicket. "No," said D'Artagnan, "you would lose time by that; take the little staircase."

The Swiss did as D'Artagnan advised, and conducted him to the vestibule of the king's cabinet. When arrived there, he bowed to his prisoner, and, without saying anything, returned to his post. D'Artagnan had not had time to ask why his sword was not taken from him, when the door of the cabinet opened, and a valet de chambre called, "M. d'Artagnan!" The musketeer assumed his parade carriage, and entered, with his large eyes wide open, his brow calm, his moustache stiff. The king was seated at a table writing. He did not disturb himself when the step of the musketeer resounded on the floor; he did not even turn his head. D'Artagnan advanced as far as the middle of the room, and seeing that the king paid no attention to him, and suspecting, besides, that this was nothing but affectation, a sort of tormenting preamble to the explanation that was preparing, he turned his back on the prince, and began to examine the frescoes on the cornices, and the cracks in the ceiling. This maneuver was accompanied by a little tacit monologue. "Ah! you want to humble me, do you?--you, whom I have seen so young--you, whom I have saved as I would my own child,--you, whom I have served as I would a God--that is to say, for nothing. Wait awhile! wait awhile! you shall see what a man can do who has suffered the air of the fire of the Huguenots, under the beard of monsieur le cardinal--the true cardinal." At this moment Louis turned round.

"Ah! are you there, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" said he.

D'Artagnan saw the movement and imitated it. "Yes, sire," said he.

"Very well; have the goodness to wait till I have cast this up."

D'Artagnan made no reply; he only bowed. "That is polite enough," thought he; "I have nothing to say."

Louis made a violent dash with his pen, and threw it angrily away.

"Ah! go on, work yourself up!" thought the musketeer; "you will put me at my ease. You shall find I did not empty the bag, the other day, at Blois."

Louis rose from his seat, passed his hand over his brow, then, stopping opposite to D'Artagnan, he looked at him with an air at once imperious and kind, "What the devil does he want with me? I wish he would begin!" thought the musketeer.

"Monsieur," said the king, "you know, without doubt, that monsieur le cardinal is dead?"

"I suspected so, sire."

"You know that, consequently, I am master in my own kingdom?"

"That is not a thing that dates from the death of monsieur le cardinal, sire; a man is always master in his own house, when he wishes to be so."

"Yes; but do you not remember all you said to me at Blois?"

"Now we come to it," thought D'Artagnan; "I was not deceived. Well, so much the better, it is a sign that my scent is tolerably keen yet."

"You do not answer me," said Louis.

"Sire, I think I recollect."

"You only think?"

"It is so long ago."

"If you do not remember, I do. You said to me,--listen with attention."

"Ah! I shall listen with all my ears, sire; for it is very likely the conversation will turn in a fashion very interesting to me."

Louis once more looked at the musketeer. The latter smoothed the feather of his hat, then his mustache, and waited bravely. Louis XIV. continued: "You quitted my service, monsieur, after having told me the whole truth?"

"Yes, sire."

"That is, after having declared to me all you thought to be true, with regard to my mode of thinking and acting. That is always a merit. You began by telling me that you had served my family thirty years, and were fatigued."

"I said so; yes, sire."

"And you afterwards admitted that that fatigue was a pretext, and that discontent was the real cause."

"I was discontented, in fact; but that discontent has never betrayed itself, that I know of, and if, like a man of heart, I have spoken out before your majesty, I have not even thought of the matter before anybody else."

"Do not excuse yourself, D'Artagnan, but continue to listen to me. When making me the reproach that you were discontented, you received in reply a promise:--'Wait.'--Is that not true?"

"Yes, sire, as true as what I told you."

"You answered me, 'Hereafter! No, now, immediately.' Do not excuse yourself, I tell you. It was natural, but you had no charity for your poor prince, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Sire!--charity for a king, on the part of a poor soldier!"

"You understand me very well; you knew that I stood in need of it; you knew very well that I was not master; you knew very well that my hope was in the future. Now, you answered me when I spoke of the future, 'My discharge,--and that directly.'"

"That is true," murmured D'Artagnan, biting his mustache.

"You did not flatter me when I was in distress," added Louis.

"But," said D'Artagnan, raising his head nobly, "if I did not flatter your majesty when poor, neither did I betray you. I have shed my blood for nothing; I have watched like a dog at a door, knowing full well that neither bread nor bone would be thrown to me. I, although poor likewise, asked nothing of your majesty but the discharge you speak of."

"I know you are a brave man, but I was a young man, and you ought to have had some indulgence for me. What had you to reproach the king with?--that he left King Charles II. without assistance?--let us say further--that he did not marry Mademoiselle de Mancini?" When saying these words, the king fixed upon the musketeer a searching look.

"Ah! ah!" thought the latter, "he is doing far more than remembering, he divines. The devil!"

"Your sentence," continued Louis, "fell upon the king and fell upon the man. But, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that weakness, for you considered it a weakness?"--D'Artagnan made no reply--"you reproached me also with regard to monsieur, the defunct cardinal. Now, monsieur le cardinal, did he not bring me up, did he not support me?--elevating himself and supporting himself at the same time, I admit; but the benefit was discharged. As an ingrate or an egotist, would you, then, have better loved or served me?"

"Sire!"

"We will say no more about it, monsieur; it would only create in you too many regrets, and me too much pain."

D'Artagnan was not convinced. The young king, in adopting a tone of hauteur with him, did not forward his purpose.

"You have since reflected?" resumed Louis.

"Upon what, sire?" asked D'Artagnan, politely.

"Why, upon all that I have said to you, monsieur."

"Yes, sire, no doubt--"

"And you have only waited for an opportunity of retracting your words?"

"Sire!"

"You hesitate, it seems."

"I do not understand what your majesty did me the honor to say to me."

Louis's brow became cloudy.

"Have the goodness to excuse me, sire; my understanding is particularly thick; things do not penetrate it without difficulty; but it is true, once they get in, they remain there."

"Yes, yes; you appear to have a memory."

"Almost as good a one as your majesty's."

"Then give me quickly one solution. My time is valuable. What have you been doing since your discharge?"

"Making my fortune, sire."

"The expression is crude, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Your majesty takes it in bad part, certainly. I entertain nothing but the profoundest respect for the king; and if I have been impolite, which might be excused by my long sojourn in camps and barracks, your majesty is too much above me to be offended at a word that innocently escapes from a soldier."

"In fact, I know you performed a brilliant action in England, monsieur. I only regret that you have broken your promise."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Doubtless. You engaged your word not to serve any other prince on quitting my service. Now it was for King Charles II. that you undertook the marvelous carrying off of M. Monk."



"Pardon me, sire; it was for myself."

"And did you succeed?"

"Like the captains of the fifteenth century, coups-de-main and adventures."

"What do you call succeeding?--a fortune?"

"A hundred thousand crowns, sire, which I now possess--that is, in one week three times as much money as I ever had in fifty years."

"It is a handsome sum. But you are ambitious, I perceive."

"I, sire? The quarter of that would be a treasure; and I swear to you I have no thought of augmenting it."

"What! you contemplate remaining idle?"

"Yes, sire."

"You mean to drop the sword?"

"That I have already done."

"Impossible, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Louis, firmly.

"But, sire--"

"Well?"

"And why, sire?"

"Because it is my wish you should not!" said the young prince, in a voice so stern and imperious that D'Artagnan evinced surprise and even uneasiness.

"Will your majesty allow me one word of reply?" said he.

"Speak."

"I formed that resolution when I was poor and destitute."

"So be it. Go on."

"Now, when by my energy I have acquired a comfortable means of subsistence, would your majesty despoil me of my liberty? Your majesty would condemn me to the lowest, when I have gained the highest?"

"Who gave you permission, monsieur, to fathom my designs, or to reckon with me?" replied Louis, in a voice almost angry; "who told you what I shall do or what you will yourself do?"

"Sire," said the musketeer, quietly, "as far as I see, freedom is not the order of the conversation, as it was on the day we came to an explanation at Blois."

"No, monsieur; everything is changed."

"I tender your majesty my sincere compliments upon that, but--"

"But you don't believe it?"

"I am not a great statesman, and yet I have my eye upon affairs; it seldom fails; now, I do not see exactly as your majesty does, sire. The reign of Mazarin is over, but that of the financiers is begun. They have the money; your majesty will not often see much of it. To live under the paw of these hungry wolves is hard for a man who reckoned upon independence."

At this moment someone scratched at the door of the cabinet; the king raised his head proudly. "Your pardon, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said he; "it is M. Colbert, who comes to make me a report. Come in, M. Colbert."

D'Artagnan drew back. Colbert entered with papers in his hand, and went up to the king. There can be little doubt that the Gascon did not lose the opportunity of applying his keen, quick glance to the new figure which presented itself.

"Is the inquiry made?"

"Yes, sire."

"And the opinion of the inquisitors?"

"Is that the accused merit confiscation and death."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, without changing countenance, and casting an oblique look at D'Artagnan. "And your own opinion, M. Colbert?" said he.

Colbert looked at D'Artagnan in his turn. That imposing countenance checked the words upon his lips. Louis perceived this. "Do not disturb yourself," said he; "it is M. d'Artagnan,--do you not know M. d'Artagnan again?"

These two men looked at each other--D'Artagnan, with eyes open and bright as the day--Colbert, with his half closed, and dim. The frank intrepidity of the financier annoyed the other; the circumspection of

the financier disgusted the soldier. "Ah! ah! this is the gentleman who made that brilliant stroke in England," said Colbert. And he bowed slightly to D'Artagnan.

"Ah! ah!" said the Gascon, "this is the gentleman who clipped off the lace from the uniform of the Swiss! A praiseworthy piece of economy."

The financier thought to pierce the musketeer; but the musketeer ran the financier through.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," resumed the king, who had not remarked all the shades of which Mazarin would have missed not one, "this concerns the farmers of the revenue who have robbed me, whom I am hanging, and whose death-warrants I am about to sign."

"Oh! oh!" said D'Artagnan, starting.

"What did you say?"

"Oh! nothing, sire. This is no business of mine."

The king had already taken up the pen, and was applying it to the paper. "Sire," said Colbert in a subdued voice, "I beg to warn your majesty, that if an example be necessary, there will be difficulty in the execution of your orders."

"What do you say?" said Louis.

"You must not conceal from yourself," continued Colbert quietly, "that attacking the farmers-general is attacking the superintendence. The two unfortunate guilty men in question are the particular friends of a powerful personage, and the punishment, which otherwise might be comfortably confined to the Chatlet, will doubtless be a signal for disturbances!"

Louis colored and turned towards D'Artagnan, who took a slight bite at his mustache, not without a smile of pity for the financier, and for the king who had to listen to him so long. But Louis seized the pen, and with a movement so rapid that his hand shook, he affixed his signature at the bottom of the two papers presented by Colbert,--then looking the latter in the face,--"Monsieur Colbert," said he, "when you speak to me on business, exclude more frequently the word difficulty from your reasonings and opinions; as to the word impossibility, never pronounce it."

Colbert bowed, much humiliated at having to undergo such a lesson before the musketeer; he was about to go out, but, jealous to repair his check: "I forgot to announce to your majesty," said he, "that the confiscations

amount to the sum of five millions of livres."

"That's pretty well!" thought D'Artagnan.

"Which makes in my coffers?" said the king.

"Eighteen millions of livres, sire," replied Colbert, bowing.

"Mordioux!" growled D'Artagnan, "that's glorious!"

"Monsieur Colbert," added the king, "you will, if you please, go through the gallery where M. Lyonne is waiting, and will tell him to bring hither what he has drawn up--by my order."

"Directly, sire; if your majesty wants me no more this evening?"

"No, monsieur: good-night!" And Colbert went out.

"Now, let us return to our affair, M. d'Artagnan," said the king, as if nothing had happened. "You see that, with respect to money, there is already a notable change."

"Something to the tune of from zero to eighteen millions," replied the musketeer gayly. "Ah! that was what your majesty wanted the day King Charles II. came to Blois. The two states would not have been embroiled to-day; for I must say, that there also I see another stumbling-block."

"Well, in the first place," replied Louis, "you are unjust, monsieur; for, if Providence had made me able to give my brother the million that day, you would not have quitted my service, and, consequently, you would not have made your fortune, as you told me just now you have done. But, in addition to this, I have had another piece of good fortune; and my difference with Great Britain need not alarm you."

A valet de chambre interrupted the king by announcing M. Lyonne. "Come in, monsieur," said the king; "you are punctual; that is like a good servant. Let us see your letter to my brother Charles II."

D'Artagnan pricked up his ears. "A moment, monsieur," said Louis carelessly to the Gascon; "I must expedite to London my consent to the marriage of my brother, M. le Duc d'Anjou, with the Princess Henrietta Stuart."

"He is knocking me about, it seems," murmured D'Artagnan, whilst the king signed the letter, and dismissed M. de Lyonne; "but ma foi! the more he knocks me about in this manner, the better I like it."

The king followed M. de Lyonne with his eyes, till the door was closed behind him; he even made three steps, as if he would follow the

minister; but, after these three steps, stopping, passing, and coming back to the musketeer,--"Now, monsieur," said he, "let us hasten to terminate our affair. You told me the other day, at Blois, that you were not rich?"

"But I am now, sire."

"Yes, but that does not concern me; you have your own money, not mine; that does not enter into my account."

"I do not well understand what your majesty means."

"Then, instead of leaving you to draw out words, speak spontaneously. Should you be satisfied with twenty thousand livres a year as a fixed income?"

"But, sire" said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes to the utmost.

"Would you be satisfied with four horses furnished and kept, and with a supplement of funds such as you might require, according to occasions and needs, or would you prefer a fixed sum which would be, for example, forty thousand livres? Answer."

"Sire, your majesty--"

"Yes, you are surprised; that is natural, and I expected it. Answer me, come! or I shall think you have no longer that rapidity of judgment I have so much admired in you."

"It is certain, sire, that twenty thousand livres a year make a handsome sum; but--"

"No buts! Yes or no, is it an honorable indemnity?"

"Oh! very certainly."

"You will be satisfied with it? That is well. It will be better to reckon the extra expenses separately; you can arrange that with Colbert. Now let us pass to something more important."

"But, sire, I told your majesty--"

"That you wanted rest, I know you did: only I replied that I would not allow it--I am master, I suppose?"

"Yes, sire."

"That is well. You were formerly in the way of becoming captain of the musketeers?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, here is your commission signed. I place it in this drawer. The day on which you return from a certain expedition which I have to confide to you, on that day you may yourself take the commission from the drawer." D'Artagnan still hesitated, and hung down his head. "Come, monsieur," said the king, "one would believe, to look at you, that you did not know that at the court of the most Christian king, the captain-general of the musketeers takes precedence of the marechals of France."

"Sire, I know he does."

"Then, am I to think you do put no faith in my word?"

"Oh! sire, never--never dream of such a thing."

"I have wished to prove to you, that you, so good a servant, had lost a good master; am I anything like the master that will suit you?"

"I begin to think you are, sire."

"Then, monsieur, you will resume your functions. Your company is quite disorganized since your departure, and the men go about drinking and rioting in the cabarets, where they fight, in spite of my edicts, and those of my father. You will reorganize the service as soon as possible."

"Yes, sire."

"You will not again quit my person."

"Very well, sire."

"You will march with me to the army, you will encamp round my tent."

"Then, sire," said D'Artagnan, "if it is only to impose upon me a service like that, your majesty need not give me twenty thousand livres a year. I shall not earn them."

"I desire that you shall keep open house; I desire that you should keep a liberal table; I desire that my captain of musketeers should be a personage."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, bluntly; "I do not like easily found money; I like money won! Your majesty gives me an idle trade, which the first comer would perform for four thousand livres."

Louis XIV. began to laugh. "You are a true Gascon, Monsieur d'Artagnan; you will draw my heart's secret from me."

"Bah! has your majesty a secret, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well! then I accept the twenty thousand livres, for I will keep that secret, and discretion is above all price, in these times. Will your majesty speak now?"

"Boot yourself, Monsieur d'Artagnan, and to horse!"

"Directly, sire."

"Within two days."

"That is well, sire: for I have my affairs to settle before I set out; particularly if it is likely there should be any blows stirring."

"That may happen."

"We can receive them! But, sire, you have addressed yourself to avarice, to ambition; you have addressed yourself to the heart of M. d'Artagnan, but you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"You have said nothing to his vanity; when shall I be a knight of the king's orders?"

"Does that interest you?"

"Why, yes, sire. My friend Athos is quite covered with orders, and that dazzles me."

"You shall be a knight of my order a month after you have taken your commission of captain."

"Ah! ah!" said the officer, thoughtfully, "after the expedition."

"Precisely."

"Where is your majesty going to send me?"

"Are you acquainted with Bretagne?"

"No, sire."

"Have you any friends there?"

"In Bretagne? No, ma foi!"

"So much the better. Do you know anything about fortifications?"

"I believe I do, sire," said D'Artagnan, smiling.

"That is to say you can readily distinguish a fortress from a simple fortification, such as is allowed to chatelains or vassals?"

"I distinguish a fort from a rampart as I distinguish a cuirass from a raised pie-crust, sire. Is that sufficient?"

"Yes, monsieur. You will set out, then."

"For Bretagne?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Absolutely alone. That is to say, you must not even take a lackey with you."

"May I ask your majesty for what reason?"

"Because, monsieur, it will be necessary to disguise yourself sometimes, as the servant of a good family. Your face is very well known in France, M. d'Artagnan."

"And then, sire?"

"And then you will travel slowly through Bretagne, and will examine the fortifications of that country."

"The coasts?"

"Yes, and the isles; commencing by Belle-Ile-en-Mer."

"Ah! which belongs to M. Fouquet!" said D'Artagnan, in a serious tone, raising his intelligent eye to Louis XIV.

"I fancy you are right, monsieur, and that Belle-Isle does belong to M. Fouquet, in fact."

"Then your majesty wishes me to ascertain if Belle-Isle is a strong place?"



"Yes."

"If the fortifications of it are new or old?"

"Precisely."

"And if the vassals of M. Fouquet are sufficiently numerous to form a garrison?"

"That is what I want to know; you have placed your finger on the question."

"And if they are not fortifying, sire?"

"You will travel about Bretagne, listening and judging."

"Then I am a king's spy?" said D'Artagnan, bluntly, twisting his mustache.

"No, monsieur."

"Your pardon sire; I spy on your majesty's account."

"You start on a voyage of discovery, monsieur. Would you march at the head of your musketeers, with your sword in your hand, to observe any spot whatever, or an enemy's position?"

At this word D'Artagnan started.

"Do you," continued the king, "imagine yourself to be a spy?"

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, but pensively; "the thing changes its face when one observes an enemy: one is but a soldier. And if they are fortifying Belle-Isle?" added he, quickly.

"You will take an exact plan of the fortifications."

"Will they permit me to enter?"

"That does not concern me; that is your affair. Did you not understand that I reserved for you a supplement of twenty thousand livres per annum, if you wished it?"

"Yes, sire; but if they are not fortifying?"

"You will return quietly, without fatiguing your horse."

"Sire, I am ready."

"You will begin to-morrow by going to monsieur le surintendant's to take the first quarter of the pension I give you. Do you know M. Fouquet?"

"Very little, sire; but I beg your majesty to observe that I don't think it immediately necessary that I should know him."

"Your pardon, monsieur; for he will refuse you the money I wish you to take; and it is that refusal I look for."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "Then, sire?"

"The money being refused, you will go and seek it at M. Colbert's. A propos, have you a good horse?"

"An excellent one, sire."

"How much did it cost you?"

"A hundred and fifty pistoles."

"I will buy it of you. Here is a note for two hundred pistoles."

"But I want a horse for my journey, sire."

"Well!"

"Well, and you take mine from me."

"Not at all. On the contrary, I give it you. Only as it is now mine and not yours, I am sure you will not spare it."

"Your majesty is in a hurry, then?"

"A great hurry."

"Then what compels me to wait two days?"

"Reasons known to myself."

"That's a different affair. The horse may make up the two days, in the eight he has to travel; and then there is the post."

"No, no, the post compromises, Monsieur d'Artagnan. Begone and do not forget you are my servant."

"Sire, it is not my duty to forget it! At what hour to-morrow shall I take my leave of your majesty?"

"Whence do you lodge?"

"I must henceforward lodge at the Louvre."

"That must not be now--keep your lodgings in the city: I will pay for them. As to your departure, it must take place at night; you must set out without being seen by any one, or, if you are seen, it must not be known that you belong to me. Keep your mouth shut, monsieur."

"Your majesty spoils all you have said by that single word."

"I asked where you lodged, for I cannot always send to M. le Comte de la Fere to seek you."

"I lodge with M. Planchet, a grocer, Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or."

"Go out but little, show yourself less, and await my orders."

"And yet, sire, I must go for the money."

"That is true, but when going to the superintendence, where so many people are constantly going, you must mingle with the crowd."

"I want the notes, sire, for the money."

"Here they are." The king signed them, and D'Artagnan looked on, to assure himself of their regularity.

"Adieu! Monsieur d'Artagnan," added the king; "I think you have perfectly understood me."

"If I understand that your majesty sends me to Belle-Ile-en-Mer, that is all."

"To learn?"

"To learn how M. Fouquet's works are going on; that is all."

"Very well: I admit you may be taken."

"And I do not admit it," replied the Gascon, boldly.

"I admit you may be killed," continued the king.

"That is not probable, sire."

"In the first case, you must not speak; in the second there must be no papers found upon you."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders without ceremony, and took leave of the king, saying to himself:--"The English shower continues--let us remain under the spout!"