

savage with the despair of the governor, who was disputing every inch of ground.

D'Artagnan, to bring the affair to an end, and silence the fire, which never stopped, sent a fresh column, which penetrated like a wimble through the posts that were yet solid, and the terrified besieged could soon be seen, in the midst of the fire, on the ramparts, pursued by the besiegers.

Just at the moment when the triumphant general was having time to breathe, he heard a voice at his side, which said :

"On the part of M. Colbert, if you please, monsieur."

He broke the seal of a letter containing these words :

"*M. D'ARTAGNAN: The King charges me to inform you that he has named you Marshal of France, in reward of the good service and the honor you have done his arms.*

"*The King is delighted, monsieur, with the captures you have made already ; he commands you especially to finish the siege you have begun, with good fortune for yourself and success for him.*"

D'Artagnan was standing, his face heated, his eyes sparkling. He looked up to see the progress made by his troops on the walls, which were still enveloped in volumes of red and black smoke.

"It is nearly all over," said he to the messenger. "The town will surrender in a quarter of an hour."

He continued his reading :

"*The casket, M. d'Artagnan, is my own gift. You will not be sorry to observe that, while your warriors draw their swords to defend the King, I am giving life to those peaceful arts that are destined to adorn the rewards worthy of you.*

"*I recommend myself to your friendship, M. le Maréchal, and beg you to believe in mine.*

"COLBERT."

Intoxicated with joy, D'Artagnan beckoned to the messenger, who approached with the casket in his hands. But at the very moment the marshal was about to examine it, a powerful explosion resounded on the ramparts and drew his attention to the quarter in which it occurred.

"It is strange," he said, "that I do not see the royal flag