

out for five days. D'Artagnan had the trenches opened. Even his pioneers and laborers were full of emulation, ideas, and zeal, because he treated them like soldiers, knew how to make their task seem glorious to them, and never let them be killed except when he could not help it. So it was worth while seeing the fury with which they turned up the marshy soil of Holland. These mud-banks and heavy clays melted, as the soldiers used to say, like the butter in the vast frying-pans of the Friesland housewives.

D'Artagnan sent a courier to the King with despatches relating his last successes; this increased his Majesty's good humor and his inclination to amuse the ladies. These victories gave such majesty to the prince that Madame de Montespan never addressed him now but as Louis the Invincible. Consequently Mademoiselle de la Vallière, who called him only Louis the Victorious, lost much of his Majesty's favor. Besides, her eyes were often red, and nothing disgusts an Invincible so much as a weeping mistress, especially when all around the Invincible are smiling. The star of Mademoiselle de la Vallière was sinking below the horizon in clouds and tears. But the gayety of Madame de Montespan grew brighter with every fresh success, and consoled the monarch for every other unpleasantness, and all this was due to D'Artagnan.

His Majesty wished to recognize such services. He wrote to M. Colbert :

*"M. COLBERT: We have a promise to keep with M. d'Artagnan, who is keeping his. I wish to inform you that the hour has come to fulfil it. You shall be furnished with all due provisions for the purpose at the proper time."*

*"LOUIS."*

Colbert, then, who had D'Artagnan's messenger with him, handed this officer a letter and a little ebony box inlaid with gold, not very heavy in appearance, but doubtless very heavy in reality, since the messenger was given a guard of five men to enable him to carry it. These guards arrived in front of the fortress D'Artagnan was besieging, about daybreak, and made their appearance at the general's quarters. They were told that M. d'Artagnan, somewhat put out by the conduct of the governor, a sly rascal, who had made a sortie the night before, destroyed his works, killed seventy-seven of his men,