"Assuredly," said D'Artagnan; "I like this piece of prose, and the Cardinal writes better than I thought. Come, Pincet, let us pay a visit to the king's treasurer, and then set off."

"Toward Paris, sir?"

"Toward Paris."

And both set out as hard a trot as their horses could go.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DUC DE BEAUFORT.

The circumstances which had hastened the return of D'Artagnan to Paris were the following.

One evening, when Mazarin, according to custom, went to visit the queen, in passing the guard-chamber he heard loud voices there; wishing to know on what the soldiers were conversing, he approached with his wonted stealthy and wolf-like step—pushed open the door, and put his head close to the chink.

There was a dispute among the guards.

"I tell you," one of them was saying, "that if Coyseel predicted that, 'is as good as true; I know nothing about it, but I have heard say that he's not only an astrologer, but a magician."

"Deny take it, friend—if he's one of thy friends, thou wilt ruin him in saying so."

"Why?"

"Because he may be tried for it."

"Ah! absurd! they don't burn sorcerers nowadays."

"No! 'Tis not a long time since the late Cardinal burnt Urban Grandier, though."

"My friend, Urban Grandier wasn't a sorcerer, he was a learned man. He didn't predict the future; he knew the past—often a much worse thing."

Mazarin nodded an assent; but, wishing to know what the prediction was about which they disputed, he remained in the same place.

"I don't say," resumed the guard, "that Coyseel is not a sorcerer—but I say that if his prophecy gets wind, it's a sure way to prevent it's coming true."

"How so?"

"Why, in this way—if Coyseel says loud enough for the Cardinal to hear him, on such or such a day such a prisoner will escape, 'tis plain that the Cardinal will take measures of precaution, and that the prisoner will not escape."

"Good Lord!" said another guard, who appeared asleep on a bench but who had not lost a syllable of the conversation, "do you suppose that men can escape their destiny? If it is written yonder, in heaven, that the Duc de Beaufort is to escape, he will escape; and all the precautions of the Cardinal will not hinder it."

Mazarin started. He was an Italian, and therefore superstitious; he walked straight into the midst of the guards, who, on seeing him, were silent.

"What were you saying?" he asked, with his flattering manner, "that Monsieur de Beaufort had escaped—did you say?"
"Oh, no, my lord!" said the incredulous soldier. "He's with guarded now; we said, only, that he would escape."

"Who said so?"

"Repeat your story, Saint Laurent," replied the man, turning to the originator of the tale.

"My lord," said the guard, "I have simply mentioned the prophecy that I heard from a man named Coyse, who believes that, he ever so closely guarded, the Duke of Beaufort will escape before Whitsun tide."

"Coyse is a madman!" returned the Cardinal.

"No," replied the soldier, earnestly in his credulity; "he has foretold many things which have come to pass—for instance, that the queen would have a son; that Monsieur Coligny would be killed in a duel with the Duc de Guise; and finally, that the Condéjor would be made Cardinal. Well! the queen has not only one son, but two; then, Monsieur de Coligny was killed, and—"

"Yes," said Mazarin: "but the Condéjor is not yet made a Cardinal!"

"No, my lord—but he will be," answered the guard.

Mazarin made a grimace, as if he meant to say—"But he does not wear the Cardinal's cap;" then he added:

"So, my friend, it's your opinion that Monsieur de Beaufort will escape?"

"That's my idea, my lord; and if your Eminence were to offer to make me at this moment governor of the castle of Vincennes, I should refuse it. After Whitsun tide it would be another thing."

There is nothing so convincing as a firm conviction. It has an effect upon the most incredulous; and, far from being incredulous, Mazarin was superstitious. He went away thoughtful and anxious, and returned to his own room, where he summoned Bernouin, and desired him to fetch there the next morning the special guard, whom he had placed near Monsieur de Beaufort, and to awaken him, whenever he should arrive on the following morning.

The guard had, in fact, touched the Cardinal in the tenderest point. During the whole five years in which the Duc de Beaufort had been in prison, not a day had passed in which the Cardinal had not felt a secret dread of his escape. It was not possible, as he knew well, to confide for the whole of his life, the grandson of Henry IV., especially when this young prince was scarcely thirty years of age. But, however, and whenever he did escape, what terror he must have cherished against him to whom he owed his long imprisonment; who had taken him rich, brave, glorious, beloved by women, feared by men, to cast off from his life its happiest years; for it is not existence, it is merely life, in prison! Meanwhile, Mazarin redoubled the surveillance over the duke. But, like the miser in the fable, he could not sleep near his treasure. Often he awoke in the night, suddenly, dreaming that he had been robbed of Monsieur de Beaufort. Then he inquired about him, and had the vexation of hearing that the prisoner played, drank, sang—but that whilst playing, drinking, singing, he often stopped short, to vow that Mazarin should pay dear for all the amusement which he had forced him to enter into at Vincennes.

So much did this one idea haunt the Cardinal even in his sleep,
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

That when, at seven in the morning, Bernonin came to answer him, his first words were: “Well—what’s the matter? Has Monsieur de Beaufort escaped from Vincennes?”

“I do not think so, my lord,” said Bernonin; “but you will hear about him, for La Ramee is here, and awaits the commands of your Eminence.”

“Tell him to come in,” said Mazarin, arranging his pillows, so that he might receive him sitting, in bed.

The officer entered—a large fat man, with a good physiognomy. His air of perfect security made Mazarin uneasy.

“Approach, sir,” said the Cardinal.

The officer obeyed.

“Do you know what they are saying here?”

“No, your Eminence.”

“Well, they say that Monsieur de Beaufort is going to escape from Vincennes, if he has not done so already.”

The officer’s face expressed complete superstition. He opened, at once, his great eyes and his little mouth, to inhale better the joke that his Eminence designed to address to him, and ended by a burst of laughter, so violent, that his great limbs shook in his hilarity as they would have done in a fever.

“Escape! my lord—escape! Your Eminence does not then know where Monsieur de Beaufort is?”

“Yes, sir; in the donjon of Vincennes.”

“Yes, sir; in a room, the walls of which are seven feet thick, with grated windows, each bar being as thick as my arm.”

“Sir,” replied Mazarin, “with perseverance one may penetrate through a wall—with a watch-spring one may saw through an iron bar.”

“Then my lord does not know that there are eight guards about him—four in his chamber, four in the ante-chamber—and they never leave him.”

“But he leaves his room, he plays at tennis at the Mall?”

“Sir, those amusements are allowed; but if your Eminence wishes it, we will discontinue the permission.”

“No, no,” cried Mazarin, fearing that should his prisoner ever leave his prison he would be the more exasperated against him, if he thus retracted his amusements—he then asked with whom he played.

“My lord—either with the officers of the guard, with the other prisoners, or with me.”

“Hum!” said the Cardinal, beginning to feel more comfortable.

“You mean to say, then, my dear Monsieur de Ramee—”

“That unless Monsieur de Beaufort can metamorphose himself into a little bird, I answer for him.”

“Take care—you assert a great deal,” said Mazarin. “M. de Beaufort told the guards who took him to Vincennes, that he had often thought what he should do in case he were put into prison, and that he had found out forty ways of escaping.”

“My lord—if among these forty there had been one good way he would have been out long ago.”

“Ours, come; not such a fool as I fancied!” thought Mazarin.

“But when you leave him, for instance?”
"Oh! when I leave him! I have, in my stead, a bold fellow, who
aspire to be His Majesty's special guard. I promise you, he keeps
a good watch over the prisoner. During the three weeks that he
has been with me, I have only had to reproach him with one thing
—being too severe with the prisoners."

"And who is this Carbonari?"

"A certain Monsieur Grimaud, my lord."

"And what was he before he went to Vincennes?"

"He was in the country, as I was told by the person who recom-
mended him to me."

"And who recommended this man to you?"

"The steward of the Duc de Grammont."

"He is not a gossip, I hope?"

"Lend a mercy, my lord! I thought for a long time that he was
dumb; he answers only by signs. It seems his former master ac-
customs him to that. The fact is, I fancy he got into some trouble
in the country from his stupidity, and that he wouldn't be sorry in
the royal livery to find impunity."

"Well, dear Monsieur la Ramee," replied the Cardinal, "let him
prove a true and thankful keeper, and we shall shut our eyes upon
his rural indiscretions, and put on his back an uniform to make him
respectable, and in the pockets of that uniform some pistoles to drink
to the king's health."

Mazarin was more in his promise—quite different to the virtuous
Monsieur Grimaud—so he praised La Ramee; for he said nothing
and did much.

It was now nine o'clock. The Cardinal, therefore, got up, per-
fumed himself, dressed, and went to the queen to tell her what had
detained him. The queen, who was secretly more afraid of Mon-
sieur de Beaumont than she was of the Cardinal himself, and who was
almost as superstitious as he was, made him repeat word for word
all La Ramee's praises of his deputy. Then, when the Cardinal had
ended—

"Ah! sir, why have we not a Grimaud near every prison?"

"Pardon!" replied Mazarin, with his Italian smile; "that may
happen one day; but in the meantime—"

"Well, in the meantime?"

"I shall still take precautions."

And he wrote to D'Artagnan to hasten his return.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESCRIBES HOW THE DUC DE BEAUMONT AMUSED HIS LEISUR-
E TIMES IN THE PRISON OF VINCENNES.

The captive, who was the source of so much alarm to the Cardi-
nal, and whose means of escape disturbed the repose of the whole
court, was wholly unconscious of the terror which he caused in the
Paris Royal.

He had found himself so strictly guarded, that he soon perceived
the futility of any attempt at escape. His vengeance, therefore,
consisted in uttering curses on the head of Mazarin; he even tried to