TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Say at once that you are on the side of M. de Beaufort—that will be the most surest line of conduct," said Mazarin.

"My lord, I have been so long shut up, that I am only of one party—I am for fresh air. Employ me in any other way; employ me even actively—but let it be on the high roads."

"My dear M. de Rochefort," Mazarin replied in a tone of raillery, "you think yourself still a young man—your spirit is still juvenile, but your strength fails you. Believe me, you ought now to take rest. Here!"

"You decide, then, nothing about me, my lord?"

"On the contrary, I have come to a decision about you."

Bernard came into the room.

"Call an officer of justice," he said; "and stay close to me," he added, in a low tone.

The officer entered—Mazarin wrote a few words, which he gave to the man—then he left.

"Adieu, M. de Rochefort," he said.

Rochefort bowed.

"I see, my lord, that I am to be taken back to the Bastile."

"You are sagacious."

"I shall return thither, my lord, but you are wrong not to employ me."

"You're the friend of my greatest foe? don't suppose that you are the only person who can serve me, M. de Rochefort. I shall find many as able men as you are."

"I wish you may, my lord," replied De Rochefort.

He was then reconducted by the little staircase, instead of passing through the ante-chamber where D'Artagnan was waiting. In the court-yard the carriages and the four Musketeers were ready, but he looked around in vain for his friend.

"Ah!" he muttered to himself, "things are changed indeed!" yet he jumped into the carriage with the alacrity of a man of five and twenty.

CHAPTER IV.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA AT THE AGE OF FORTY-SIX.

When left alone with Bernouin, Mazarin was, for some minutes, lost in thought. He had gained much information, but not enough.

"My lord, have you any commands?" asked Bernouin.

"Yes, yes," replied Mazarin. "Light me; I am going to the queen."

Bernouin took up a candlestick, and led the way.

There was a secret communication between the Cardinal's apartments and those of the queen; and through this corridor the Mazarin passed whenever he wished to visit Anne of Austria.

In the bedroom in which this passage ended, Bernouin encountered Madame de Beauvais, like himself intrusted with the secret of these subterranean love affairs; and Madame de Beauvais made to

*This secret passage is still to be seen in the Panis Royal.
prepare Anne of Austria, who was in her oratory with the young king, Louis XIV., to receive the Cardinal.

Anne, reclining in a large easy chair, her head supported by her hand, her elbow resting on a table near her, was looking at her son, who was turning over the leaves of a book filled with pictures of battles. This celebrated woman fully understood the art of being dull with dignity. It was her practice to pass hours either in her oratory or in her room, without either reading or praying.

When Madame de Beauvais appeared at the door, and announced the Cardinal, the child, who had been engrossed in the pages of Qulatus Curtius, enlivened as they were by engravings of Alexander's feats of arms, straightened, and looked at his mother.

"Why," he said, "do you enter without asking first for an audience?"

Anne colored slightly.

"The prime minister," she said, "is obliged, in these unsettled times, to inform the queen of all that is happening from time to time, without exciting the curiosity or remark of the court."

But Richelieu never came in this manner," said the pertinacious boy.

"How can you remember what Monsieur de Richelieu did? You were too young to know that."

"I do not remember what he did, but I have inquired, and I have been told all about it."

At this very moment Mazarin entered. The king rose immediately, took his book, crossed it, and went to lay it down on the table, near which he continued standing, in order that Mazarin might be obliged to stand also.

Mazarin contemplated these proceedings with a thoughtful glance. They explained what had occurred that evening.

He bowed respectfully to the king, who gave him a somewhat cavalier reception, but a look from his mother removed him for the moment which, from his infancy, Louis XIV. had entertained toward Mazarin, and he endeavored to receive with a smile the minister's homage.

"It is time that the king should retire to rest," said the queen, speaking to Madame de Beauvais—for Anne was surprised at this early visit from Mazarin, who scarcely ever came into her apartments until every one had withdrawn for the night.

The queen had several times already told her son that he ought to go to bed: and several times, Louis had coaxingly insisted on staying where he was; but now he made no reply, but turned pale, and bit his lips with anger.

In a few minutes Laporte came into the room. The child went directly to him without kissing his mother.

"Well, Louis," said Anne, "why do you not kiss me?"

"I thought you were angry with me, madame; you sent me away."

"I do not send you away; but you have had the small-pox, and I am afraid that sitting up late may tire you."

"You had no fears of my being tired when you ordered me to go to the palace to-day to pass the odious decrees, which have raised up murmurs among the people."
"Sire!" interposed Laporte in order to turn the subject—"to whom does your majesty wish me to give the candle?"

"To any one, Laporte,"' the child said; and then added, in a loud voice, "to any one but Mancini."

Now Mancini was a nephew of Mazarin's, and was as much hated by Louis as the Cardinal himself, although placed near his person by the minister.

And the king went out of the room, without either embracing his mother, or even bowing to the Cardinal.

"Good," said Mazarin. "I am glad to see that his majesty is brought up with a hatred of disaffection."

The queen, however, asked, with some impatience, what important business had brought the Cardinal there that evening.

Mazarin sank into a chair, with the deepest melancholy painted on his countenance.

"It is likely," he replied, "that we shall soon be obliged to separate, unless you love me well enough to follow me into Italy."

"Why?" cried the queen; "how is that?"

"Because, as they say in the opera of 'Thibault,' 'The whole world conspires to break our bones.'"

"You jest, sir!" answered the queen, endeavoring to assume something of her former dignity.

"Alas! I do not, madame," rejoined Mazarin, "Mark well what I say. The whole world conspires to break our bones. Now as you are one of the whole world, I mean to say that you also desert me."

"Cardinal!"

"Heaven's! did I not see you the other day smile on the Duke of Orleans? or rather at what he said?"

"And what was he saying?"

"He said this, madame. 'Mazarin is a stumbling-block. Send him away, and all will be well.'"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Oh, madame—you are the queen!"

"Queen, forsooth! when I am at the mercy of every scribbler in the Palais Royal, who covers waste paper with nonsense, or of every country squire in the kingdom."

"Nevertheless, you have still the power of building from your presence those whom you do not like!"

"That is to say, whom you do not like," returned the queen.

"I!—persons whom I do not like!"

"Yes, indeed. Who sent away Madame de Chevreuse?"

"A woman of intrigue, who wanted to keep up against me the spirit of casal which she had raised against M. de Richelieu."

"Then who dismissed Madame de Hautefort?"

"A prude, who told you every night, as she undressed you, that it was a sin to love a priest; just as if one were a priest, because one happens to be a cardinal."

"Who ordered Meneur de Beaufort to be arrested?"

"An incendiary, the burden of whose song was his intention to assassinate me. My enemy, madame, ought to be yours, and your friends my friends."

"My friends, sir!" The queen shook her head. "Alas! I have
none. In vain do I look about me for friends. I have no influence over any one. Monsieur is led by his favorite to-day, Choisy; to-morrow it will be La Riviere or some one else. The prince is led by Madame de Longueville, who is, in her turn, led by the Prince de Marsillac, her lover. Monsieur de Conti is under the influence of the deputy, who is the slave of Madame de Guermance."

"Do you know Monsieur de Rochfoucauld?" said Mazarin.

"One of my bitterest enemies—the faithful friend of Cardinal Richelieu."

"I know that, and we sent him to the Bastille," said Mazarin.

"Is he at liberty?" asked the queen.

"No; still there—but I only speak of him in order that I may introduce the name of another man. Do you know Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he added, looking steadfastly at the Queen.

Anne of Austria received the blow with a beating heart.

"Has the Gascon been inquired after?" she murmured; then said aloud:

"D'Artagnan! stop an instant, that name is certainly familiar to me. D'Artagnan! there was a Musketeer who was in love with one of my women; poor young creature! she was poisoned on my account."

"That's all you know of him?" asked Mazarin.

The queen looked at him, surprised.

"You seem, sir," she remarked, "to be making me undergo a course of interrogation."

"--Which you answer according to your fancy," replied Mazarin.

"Tell me your wishes, and I will comply with them."

The queen spoke with some impatience.

"Well, then, madame, not a day passes in which I do not suffer affronts from your princes and your lordly servants; every one of them automata who do not perceive that I held the spring which makes them move, nor do they see that beneath my quiet demeanor there is the soul of an injured and irritated man, who has sworn to himself to master them one of these days. We have arrested Monsieur de Beaufort, but he is the least dangerous among them. There is the Prince de Conde—"

"The hero of Rocroy. Do you think of him?"

"Yes, madame, often and often, but jalousias, as we say in Italy; next, after Monsieur de Conde, comes the Duke of Orleans."

"What are you saying? The first prince of the blood, the king's uncle?"

"Not not the first prince of the blood, not the king's uncle, but the base conspirator, the soul of every cabal, who pretends to lead the brave people who are weak enough to believe in the honor of a prince of the blood—not the prince nearest to the throne, not the king's uncle, I repeat, but the murderer of Chalais, of Montmorency, and of Cinq-Mars, who is playing now the same game that he played long ago. But he is mistaken; I shall not leave so near the queen, that source of discord with which the deceased cardinal so often caused the anger of the king to boil over."

*The Duke of Orleans.*
Anne blushed, and buried her face in her hands.

"What am I to do?" she said, bowed down beneath the voice of her tyrant.

"Endeavor to remember the names of those faithful servants who crossed the Channel, in spite of Monsieur de Richelieu—tracking the roads along which they passed by their blood—to bring back to your majesty certain jewels given by her to Buckingham."

Anne arose, full of majesty, and, as if touched by a spring, started up, and looking at the Cardinal with the haughty dignity which, in the days of her youth, had made her so powerful—"You insult me, sir," she said.

"I wish," continued Mazarin, finishing, as it were, the speech which this sudden movement of the queen had cut short, "I wish, in fact, that you should now do for your husband what you formerly did for your lover."

"Again, that accusation?" cried the queen: "I thought that calumny was stilled, or extinct; you have spared me till now; but since you speak of it, once for all, I tell you—"

"Madame, what I wish is to know all," said Mazarin, astounded by this returning courage.

"I will tell you all," replied Anne. "Listen: there were in truth, at that epoch, four devoted hearts, four loyal spirits, four faithful swords who saved more than my life—my honor—"

"Ahi! you confess it," exclaimed Mazarin.

"Is it only the guilty whose honor is at the sport of others, sir, and cannot women be dishonored by appearances? However, I swear I was not guilty, I swear it by—"

The queen looked around her for some sacred object by which she could swear; and taking out of a cupboard, hidden in the tapestry, a small cof£er of rosewood, set in silver, and laying it on the altar;

"I swear," she said, "by these sacred relics that Buckingham was not my lover."

"What relics are those by which you swear?" asked Mazarin, smiling. "I am incredulous."

The queen untied from around her throat a small golden key which hung there, and presented it to the cardinal.

"Open," she said, "sir, and look for yourself."

Mazarin opened the cof£er: a knife, covered with rust, and two letters, one of which was stained with blood, alone met his gaze.

"What are these things?" he asked.

"What are these things?" replied Anne, with queen like dignity, and extending toward the open cof£er an arm, despite the lapse of years, still beautiful. "These two letters are the only letters that I ever wrote to him. That knife is the knife with which Felton stabbed him. Read the letters, and see if I have lied, or spoken the truth."

But Mazarin, notwithstanding this permission, instead of reading the letters, took the knife which the dying Buckingham had smeared with blood and sent by La Perouse to the queen. The blade was red, for the blood had become rust; after a momentary examination, during which the queen became as white as the cloth which covered the altar on which she was leaning, he put it back into the cof£er with an involuntary shudder.
"It is well, madame, I believe your oath."

"No, no, read," exclaimed the queen, indignantly; "read, I command you, for I am resolved that everything shall be finished to-night, and never will I recur to this subject again. Do you think," she said, with a ghastly smile, "that I shall be inclined to re-open this coffer to answer any future accusations?"

Mazarin, overcome by this determination, read the two letters. In one the queen asked for the ornaments back again. This letter had been conveyed by D'Artagnan, and had arrived in time. The other was that which Laporte had placed in the hands of the Duke of Buckingham, warning him that he was about to be assassinated; this had arrived too late.

"It is well, madame," said Mazarin; "nothing can be said to this testimony."

"Sir," replied the queen, closing the coffer, and leaning her hand upon it, "if there is anything to be said, it is that I have always been ungrateful to the brave men who saved me—that I have given nothing to that gallant officer, D'Artagnan, you were speaking of just now, but my hand to him, and this diamond."

As she spoke she extended her beautiful hand to the Cardinal, and showed him a superb diamond which sparkled on her finger.

"It appears," she resumed, "that he sold it—he sold it in order to save me another time—to be able to send a messenger to the duke to warn him of his danger—— He sold it to Monsieur des Essarts, on whose finger I remarked it. I bought it from him, but it belongs to D'Artagnan. Give it back to him, sir; and since you have such a man in your service, make him useful."

"And now," added the queen, her voice broken by her emotion, "have you any other question to ask me?"

"Nothing,"—the Cardinal spoke in his most conciliatory manner—" except to beg of you to forgive my unworthy suspicions. I love you so tenderly that I cannot help being jealous—even of the past."

A smile, which was indescribable, passed over the lips of the queen.

"Since you have no further interrogations to make, leave me, I beseech you," she said. "I wish, after such a scene, to be alone."

Mazarin bent low before her.

"I shall retire, madame; do you permit me to return?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

The Cardinal took the queen's hand, and pressed it, with an air of gallantry, to his lips. Scarcely had he left her than the queen went into her son's room, and inquired from Laporte if the king was in bed. Laporte pointed to the child who was asleep.

Anne ascended the steps nimbly of the bed, and kissed softly the plump forehead of her son; then she retired as silently as she came, merely saying to Laporte:

"Try, my dear Laporte, to make the king more courteous to Monsieur le Cardinal, to whom both he and I are under such obligations."