

Chapter 81. Cardinal Mazarin as King.

The arrest produced no sensation, indeed was almost unknown, and scarcely interrupted the course of events. To the deputation it was formally announced that the queen would receive it.

Accordingly, it was admitted to the presence of Anne, who, silent and lofty as ever, listened to the speeches and complaints of the deputies; but when they had finished their harangues not one of them could say, so calm remained her face, whether or no she had heard them.

On the other hand, Mazarin, present at that audience, heard very well what those deputies demanded. It was purely and simply his removal, in terms clear and precise.

The discourse being finished, the queen remained silent.

"Gentlemen," said Mazarin, "I join with you in supplicating the queen to put an end to the miseries of her subjects. I have done all in my power to ameliorate them and yet the belief of the public, you say, is that they proceed from me, an unhappy foreigner, who has been unable to please the French. Alas! I have never been understood, and no wonder. I succeeded a man of the most sublime genius that ever upheld the sceptre of France. The memory of Richelieu annihilates me. In vain--were I an ambitious man--should I struggle against such remembrances as he has

left; but that I am not ambitious I am going to prove to you. I own myself conquered. I shall obey the wishes of the people. If Paris has injuries to complain of, who has not some wrongs to be redressed? Paris has been sufficiently punished; enough blood has flowed, enough misery has humbled a town deprived of its king and of justice. 'Tis not for me, a private individual, to disunite a queen from her kingdom. Since you demand my resignation, I retire."

"Then," said Aramis, in his neighbor's ear, "the conferences are over. There is nothing to do but to send Monsieur Mazarin to the most distant frontier and to take care that he does not return even by that, nor any other entrance into France."

"One instant, sir," said the man in a gown, whom he addressed; "a plague on't! how fast you go! one may soon see that you're a soldier. There's the article of remunerations and indemnifications to be discussed and set to rights."

"Chancellor," said the queen, turning to Seguier, our old acquaintance, "you will open the conferences. They can take place at Rueil. The cardinal has said several things which have agitated me, therefore I will not speak more fully now. As to his going or staying, I feel too much gratitude to the cardinal not to leave him free in all his actions; he shall do what he wishes to do."

A transient pallor overspread the speaking countenance of the prime minister; he looked at the queen with anxiety. Her face was so passionless, that he, as every one else present, was incapable of

reading her thoughts.

"But," added the queen, "in awaiting the cardinal's decision let there be, if you please, a reference to the king only."

The deputies bowed and left the room.

"What!" exclaimed the queen, when the last of them had quitted the apartment, "you would yield to these limbs of the law--these advocates?"

"To promote your majesty's welfare, madame," replied Mazarin, fixing his penetrating eyes on the queen, "there is no sacrifice that I would not make."

Anne dropped her head and fell into one of those reveries so habitual with her. A recollection of Athos came into her mind. His fearless deportment, his words, so firm, yet dignified, the shades which by one word he had evoked, recalled to her the past in all its intoxication of poetry and romance, youth, beauty, the eclat of love at twenty years of age, the bloody death of Buckingham, the only man whom she had ever really loved, and the heroism of those obscure champions who had saved her from the double hatred of Richelieu and the king.

Mazarin looked at her, and whilst she deemed herself alone and freed from the world of enemies who sought to spy into her secret thoughts, he read her thoughts in her countenance, as one sees in a transparent lake clouds pass--reflections, like thoughts, of the heavens.

"Must we, then," asked Anne of Austria, "yield to the storm, buy peace, and patiently and piously await better times?"

Mazarin smiled sarcastically at this speech, which showed that she had taken the minister's proposal seriously.

Anne's head was bent down--she had not seen the Italian's smile; but finding that her question elicited no reply she looked up.

"Well, you do not answer, cardinal, what do you think about it?"

"I am thinking, madame, of the allusion made by that insolent gentleman, whom you have caused to be arrested, to the Duke of Buckingham--to him whom you allowed to be assassinated--to the Duchess de Chevreuse, whom you suffered to be exiled--to the Duc de Beaufort, whom you imprisoned; but if he made allusion to me it was because he is ignorant of the relation in which I stand to you."

Anne drew up, as she always did, when anything touched her pride. She blushed, and that she might not answer, clasped her beautiful hands till her sharp nails almost pierced them.

"That man has sagacity, honor and wit, not to mention likewise that he is a man of undoubted resolution. You know something about him, do you not, madame? I shall tell him, therefore, and in doing so I shall confer a personal favor on him, how he is mistaken in regard to me. What is proposed to me would be, in fact, almost an abdication, and an abdication requires reflection."

"An abdication?" repeated Anne; "I thought, sir, that it was kings alone who abdicated!"

"Well," replied Mazarin, "and am I not almost a king--king, indeed, of France? Thrown over the foot of the royal bed, my simar, madame, looks not unlike the mantle worn by kings."

This was one of the humiliations which Mazarin made Anne undergo more frequently than any other, and one that bowed her head with shame. Queen Elizabeth and Catherine II. of Russia are the only two monarchs of their set on record who were at once sovereigns and lovers. Anne of Austria looked with a sort of terror at the threatening aspect of the cardinal--his physiognomy in such moments was not destitute of a certain grandeur.

"Sir," she replied, "did I not say, and did you not hear me say to those people, that you should do as you pleased?"

"In that case," said Mazarin, "I think it must please me best to remain; not only on account of my own interest, but for your safety."

"Remain, then, sir; nothing can be more agreeable to me; only do not allow me to be insulted."

"You are referring to the demands of the rebels and to the tone in which they stated them? Patience! They have selected a field of battle on which I am an abler general than they--that of a conference. No, we

shall beat them by merely temporizing. They want food already. They will be ten times worse off in a week."

"Ah, yes! Good heavens! I know it will end in that way; but it is not they who taunt me with the most wounding reproaches, but----"

"I understand; you mean to allude to the recollections perpetually revived by these three gentlemen. However, we have them safe in prison, and they are just sufficiently culpable for us to keep them in prison as long as we find it convenient. One only is still not in our power and braves us. But, devil take him! we shall soon succeed in sending him to join his boon companions. We have accomplished more difficult things than that. In the first place I have as a precaution shut up at Rueil, near me, under my own eyes, within reach of my hand, the two most intractable ones. To-day the third will be there also."

"As long as they are in prison all will be well," said Anne, "but one of these days they will get out."

"Yes, if your majesty releases them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Anne, following the train of her own thoughts on such occasions, "one regrets Paris!"

"Why so?"

"On account of the Bastille, sir, which is so strong and so secure."

"Madame, these conferences will bring us peace; when we have peace we shall regain Paris; with Paris, the Bastile, and our four bullies shall rot therein."

Anne frowned slightly when Mazarin, in taking leave, kissed her hand.

Mazarin, after this half humble, half gallant attention, went away. Anne followed him with her eyes, and as he withdrew, at every step he took, a disdainful smile was seen playing, then gradually burst upon her lips.

"I once," she said, "despised the love of a cardinal who never said 'I shall do,' but, 'I have done so and so.' That man knew of retreats more secure than Rueil, darker and more silent even than the Bastile. Degenerate world!"