# Twenty years after

Alexandre Dumas; Auguste Maquet

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*Alexandre Dumas; Auguste Maquet*

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Twenty Years After

By Alexandre Dumas, Père

Second Volume of the D'Artagnan Series

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TITLE PG EBOOK# DATES VOLUME CHAPTERS Ten Years Later 1258 1660–1661 3 1–104

## CONTENTS

Chapter I. The Shade of Cardinal Richelieu.
Chapter II. A Nightly Patrol.

Chapter III. Dead Animosities.
Chapter IV. Anne of Austria at the Age of Forty-six.
Chapter V. The Gascon and the Italian.
Chapter VI. D’Artagnan in his Fortieth Year.
Chapter VII. Touches upon the Strange Effects a Half-pistole may have.
Chapter VIII. D’Artagnan, Going to a Distance to discover Aramis.
Chapter IX. The Abbé D’Herblay.
Chapter X. Monsieur Porthos du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds.
Chapter XI. Wealth does not necessarily produce Happiness.
Chapter XII. Porthos was Discontented with his Condition.
Chapter XIII. Two Angelic Faces.
Chapter XIV. The Castle of Bragelonne.
Chapter XV. Athos as a Diplomatist.
Chapter XVI. The Duc de Beaufort.
Chapter XVII. Duc de Beaufort amused his Leisure Hours in the Donjon of Vincennes.
Chapter XVIII. Grimaud begins his Functions.
Chapter XIX. Pâtés made by the Successor of Father Marteau are described.
Chapter XX. One of Marie Michon’s Adventures.
Chapter XXI. The Abbé Scarron.
Chapter XXII. Saint Denis.
Chapter XXIII. One of the Forty Methods of Escape of the Duc de Beaufort.
Chapter XXIV. The timely Arrival of D’Artagnan in Paris.
Chapter XXV. An Adventure on the High Road.
Chapter XXVI. The Rencontre.
Chapter XXVII. The four old Friends prepare to meet again.

Chapter XXVIII. The Place Royale.
Chapter XXIX. The Ferry across the Oise.
Chapter XXX. Skirmishing.
Chapter XXXI. The Monk.
Chapter XXXII. The Absolution.
Chapter XXXIII. Grimaud Speaks.
Chapter XXXIV. On the Eve of Battle.
Chapter XXXV. A Dinner in the Old Style.
Chapter XXXVI. A Letter from Charles the First.
Chapter XXXVII. Cromwell’s Letter.
Chapter XXXVIII. Henrietta Maria and Mazarin.
Chapter XXXIX. How, sometimes, the Unhappy mistake Chance for Providence.
Chapter XL. Uncle and Nephew.
Chapter XLI. Paternal Affection.
Chapter XLII. Another Queen in Want of Help.
Chapter XLIII. In which it is proved that first Impulses are oftentimes the best.
Chapter XLIV. Te Deum for the Victory of Lens.
Chapter XLV. The Beggar of St. Eustache.
Chapter XLVI. The Tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie.
Chapter XLVII. The Riot.
Chapter XLVIII. The Riot becomes a Revolution.
Chapter XLIX. Misfortune refreshes the Memory.
Chapter L. The Interview.
Chapter LI. The Flight.
Chapter LII. The Carriage of Monsieur le Coadjuteur.
Chapter LIII. How D’Artagnan and Porthos earned by selling Straw.

Chapter LIV. In which we hear Tidings of Aramis.
Chapter LV. The Scotchman.
Chapter LVI. The Avenger.
Chapter LVII. Oliver Cromwell.
Chapter LVIII. Jesus Seigneur.
Chapter LIX. Noble Natures never lose Courage, nor good Stomachs their Appetites.
Chapter LX. Respect to Fallen Majesty.
Chapter LXI. D’Artagnan hits on a Plan.
Chapter LXII. London.
Chapter LXIII. The Trial.
Chapter LXIV. Whitehall.
Chapter LXV. The Workmen.
Chapter LXVI. Remember!
Chapter LXVII. The Man in the Mask.
Chapter LXVIII. Cromwell’s House.
Chapter LXIX. Conversational.
Chapter LXX. The Skiff “Lightning.”
Chapter LXXI. Port Wine.
Chapter LXXII. End of the Port Wine Mystery.
Chapter LXXIII. Fatality.
Chapter LXXIV. How Mousqueton had a Narrow Escape of being eaten.
Chapter LXXV. The Return.
Chapter LXXVI. The Ambassadors.
Chapter LXXVII. The three Lieutenants of the Generalissimo.
Chapter LXXVIII. The Battle of Charenton.
Chapter LXXIX. The Road to Picardy.

Chapter LXXX. The Gratitude of Anne of Austria.
Chapter LXXXI. Cardinal Mazarin as King.
Chapter LXXXII. Precautions.
Chapter LXXXIII. Strength and Sagacity.
Chapter LXXXIV. Strength and Sagacity—Continued.
Chapter LXXXV. The Oubliettes of Cardinal Mazarin.
Chapter LXXXVI. Conferences.
Chapter LXXXVII. Thinking that Porthos will be at last a Baron, and D'Artagnan a Captain.
Chapter LXXXVIII. Shows how with Threat and Pen more is effected than by the Sword.
Chapter LXXXIX. Difficult for Kings to return to the Capitals of their Kingdoms.
Chapter XC. Conclusion.

## Chapter I. The Shade of Cardinal Richelieu.

In a splendid chamber of the Palais Royal, formerly styled the Palais Cardinal, a man was sitting in deep reverie, his head supported on his hands, leaning over a gilt and inlaid table which was covered with letters and papers. Behind this figure glowed a vast fireplace alive with leaping flames; great logs of oak blazed and crackled on the polished brass andirons whose flicker shone upon the superb habiliments of the lonely tenant of the room, which was illumined grandly by twin candelabra rich with wax-lights.

Any one who happened at that moment to contemplate that red simar—the gorgeous robe of office—and the rich lace, or who gazed on that pale brow, bent in anxious meditation, might, in the solitude of that apartment, combined with the silence of the ante-chambers

and the measured paces of the guards upon the landing-place, have fancied that the shade of Cardinal Richelieu lingered still in his accustomed haunt.

It was, alas! the ghost of former greatness. France enfeebled, the authority of her sovereign contemned, her nobles returning to their former turbulence and insolence, her enemies within her frontiers—all proved the great Richelieu no longer in existence.

In truth, that the red simar which occupied the wonted place was his no longer, was still more strikingly obvious from the isolation which seemed, as we have observed, more appropriate to a phantom than a living creature—from the corridors deserted by courtiers, and courts crowded with guards—from that spirit of bitter ridicule, which, arising from the streets below, penetrated through the very casements of the room, which resounded with the murmurs of a whole city leagued against the minister; as well as from the distant and incessant sounds of guns firing—let off, happily, without other end or aim, except to show to the guards, the Swiss troops and the military who surrounded the Palais Royal, that the people were possessed of arms.

The shade of Richelieu was Mazarin. Now Mazarin was alone and defenceless, as he well knew.

“Foreigner!” he ejaculated, “Italian! that is their mean yet mighty byword of reproach—the watchword with which they assassinated, hanged, and made away with Concini; and if I gave them their way they would assassinate, hang, and make away with me in the same manner, although they have nothing to complain of except a tax or two now and then. Idiots! ignorant of their real enemies, they do not perceive that it is not the Italian who speaks French badly, but those

who can say fine things to them in the purest Parisian accent, who are their real foes.

“Yes, yes,” Mazarin continued, whilst his wonted smile, full of subtlety, lent a strange expression to his pale lips; “yes, these noises prove to me, indeed, that the destiny of favorites is precarious; but ye shall know I am no ordinary favorite. No! The Earl of Essex, ’tis true, wore a splendid ring, set with diamonds, given him by his royal mistress, whilst I—I have nothing but a simple circlet of gold, with a cipher on it and a date; but that ring has been blessed in the chapel of the Palais Royal,* so they will never ruin me, as they long to do, and whilst they shout, ‘Down with Mazarin!’ I, unknown, and unperceived by them, incite them to cry out, ‘Long live the Duke de Beaufort’ one day; another, ‘Long live the Prince de Condé;’ and again, ‘Long live the parliament!’” And at this word the smile on the cardinal’s lips assumed an expression of hatred, of which his mild countenance seemed incapable. “The parliament! We shall soon see how to dispose,” he continued, “of the parliament! Both Orléans and Montargis are ours. It will be a work of time, but those who have begun by crying out: Down with Mazarin! will finish by shouting out, Down with all the people I have mentioned, each in his turn.

* It is said that Mazarin, who, though a cardinal, had not taken such vows as to prevent it, was secretly married to Anne of Austria.—La Porte’s Memoirs.

“Richelieu, whom they hated during his lifetime and whom they now praise after his death, was even less popular than I am. Often he was driven away, oftener still had he a dread of being sent away. The queen will never banish me, and even were I obliged to yield to the

populace she would yield with me; if I fly, she will fly; and then we shall see how the rebels will get on without either king or queen.

“Oh, were I not a foreigner! were I but a Frenchman! were I but of gentle birth!”

The position of the cardinal was indeed critical, and recent events had added to his difficulties. Discontent had long pervaded the lower ranks of society in France. Crushed and impoverished by taxation—imposed by Mazarin, whose avarice impelled him to grind them down to the very dust—the people, as the Advocate-General Talon described it, had nothing left to them except their souls; and as those could not be sold by auction, they began to murmur. Patience had in vain been recommended to them by reports of brilliant victories gained by France; laurels, however, were not meat and drink, and the people had for some time been in a state of discontent.

Had this been all, it might not, perhaps, have greatly signified; for when the lower classes alone complained, the court of France, separated as it was from the poor by the intervening classes of the gentry and the _bourgeoisie_, seldom listened to their voice; but unluckily, Mazarin had had the imprudence to attack the magistrates and had sold no less than twelve appointments in the Court of Requests, at a high price; and as the officers of that court paid very dearly for their places, and as the addition of twelve new colleagues would necessarily lower the value of each place, the old functionaries formed a union amongst themselves, and, enraged, swore on the Bible not to allow of this addition to their number, but to resist all the persecutions which might ensue; and should any one of them chance to forfeit his post by this resistance, to combine to indemnify him for

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