

MAZARIN

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Mazarin by Arthur Hassell

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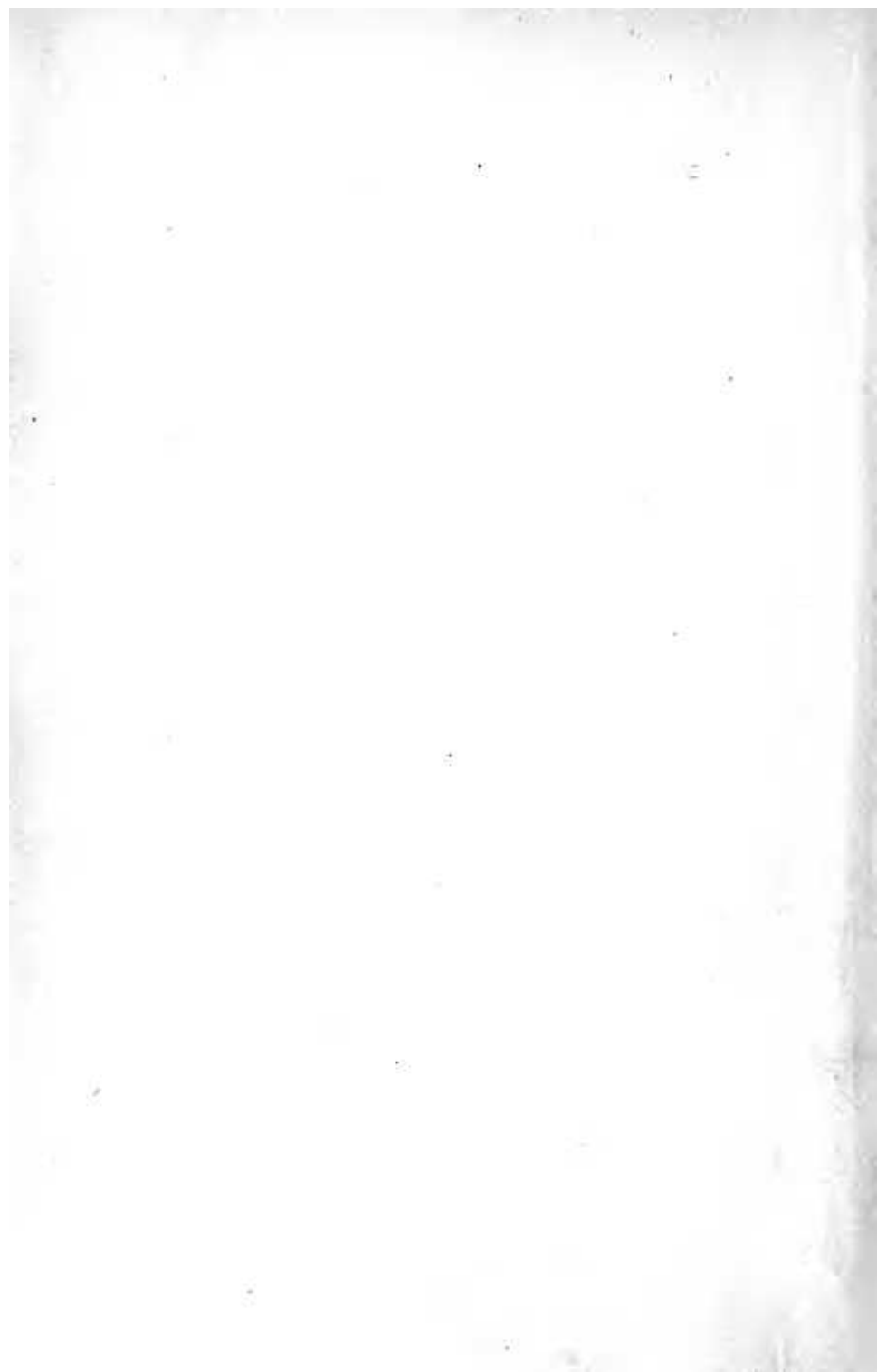
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CENSORI DIGNISSIMO
ERGA SOLOECISMOS VEL AMICORUM INEXORABILI
AMICOS ERGA
SI QUIS ALIUS
COMI JUCUNDO CONSTANTI



INTRODUCTION

It seems inevitable that Mazarin will always suffer by comparison with Richelieu. The latter, who has been described as the greatest political genius which France has ever produced, appeals to the imagination by the firmness and the success of his policy. The ability with which he managed the foreign affairs of France, and his creation of an administrative system which continued to the Revolution, place Richelieu in the foremost rank of French statesmen. And yet his successor, though less illustrious, equally deserves to stand among those who have contributed most to the greatness of France. What MM. Hanotaux and d'Avenel have done for Richelieu's memory has been done for Mazarin by M. Chéruel. He has made it impossible for us to regard Mazarin as a mere Italian adventurer, or to agree with Michelet that "he was an unprincipled actor, libertine, and gambler, who subordinated every question of State policy to the meanest regard for his personal interests; a miser whose glaring avarice was without a single redeeming quality." It must be remembered that Richelieu advised the choice of Mazarin as his successor, that during the last year of Richelieu's life Mazarin shared that statesman's secrets, and that on

the latter's death Mazarin was at once admitted to the Council of State. In M. Chéruel's opinion, and in that of all competent historians, Richelieu's choice was fully justified. Unlike Richelieu, Mazarin had an Italian's love of intrigue and diplomacy, and was always confident of his ability to bend his opponents to his will. The history of Mazarin from 1643 to 1661 is not only the history of France, but also the history of Europe. The difficulty, therefore, of writing an adequate biography of him is at once apparent. M. Chéruel's two great works which deal with the period comprise no less than seven volumes, which contain ample materials for forming an estimate of Mazarin's character and work. In that ✓ historian's opinion Mazarin was an indefatigable and patriotic minister whose fame principally rests upon his success in making France illustrious by her victories and diplomatic triumphs, and in leaving her on his death the leading power in Europe.

The multitude of Mazarinades which appeared, and the brilliant memoirs of the Fronde period, throw interesting side-lights on the shifting currents of public opinion in Paris during the stormy years between 1648 and 1653; but as real guides to an appreciation of Mazarin's character and aims they are utterly untrustworthy. More light is cast on the objects of the cardinal's policy and on his literary and artistic tastes by the invaluable collections of his own *Letters*, by the *Inventaire de tous les meubles du Cardinal Mazarin* (edited by the Duc d'Aumale), and by the *Palais Mazarin* by the Comte de Laborde. The perusal of the above will not only illustrate Mazarin's private life, but will fully justify the conclusions arrived at by M. Chéruel. Freed from

the influence of the pamphlets of the Fronde period, the student of Mazarin's life has now the means of estimating at their real worth Mazarin's services to his adopted country.

As a foreign politician and diplomatist Mazarin has had few equals among French statesmen, and he deserves full credit for his great diplomatic triumphs. The Peace of Westphalia, the League of the Rhine, the English Alliance, the Peace of the Pyrenees, and the Treaty of Oliva form a brilliant list of successes unequalled in the life of any French minister. So fully engrossed was he in the complicated struggle with the Emperor and Spain, that he neglected the internal affairs of France and underrated the strength of the opposition headed by the *parlement* of Paris. He paid dearly for that miscalculation, though it is questionable if, under the existing circumstances, success abroad was at that time compatible or possible with administrative reforms at home and a policy of severity towards the nobles. Be that as it may, no sooner had the storm in Paris broken out than Mazarin addressed himself with vigour to the task of repressing internal disorder. After a long and weary period, from 1648 to 1653, he succeeded, and the monarchy was once more supreme in France. The last eight years of his life were then devoted to recovering for France that position in Europe which during the Fronde troubles she had temporarily lost. In 1661 he died, having completed Richelieu's internal policy, and leaving that statesman's administrative system in full working order. The destruction of the Hapsburg schemes had also been effected, and on his death Mazarin left France in a stronger position than she had enjoyed

at any previous period in her history. Industrious, patient, subtle, and adroit, Mazarin proved to be one of the most sagacious and successful statesmen in French history. He was essentially a diplomatist, and his greatest triumphs were triumphs of diplomacy.

ARTHUR HASSALL.

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
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