

## Chapter 36. A Letter from Charles the First.

The reader must now cross the Seine with us and follow us to the door of the Carmelite Convent in the Rue Saint Jacques. It is eleven o'clock in the morning and the pious sisters have just finished saying mass for the success of the armies of King Charles I. Leaving the church, a woman and a young girl dressed in black, the one as a widow and the other as an orphan, have re-entered their cell.

The woman kneels on a prie-dieu of painted wood and at a short distance from her stands the young girl, leaning against a chair, weeping.

The woman must have once been handsome, but traces of sorrow have aged her. The young girl is lovely and her tears only embellish her; the lady appears to be about forty years of age, the girl about fourteen.

"Oh, God!" prayed the kneeling suppliant, "protect my husband, guard my son, and take my wretched life instead!"

"Oh, God!" murmured the girl, "leave me my mother!"

"Your mother can be of no use to you in this world, Henrietta," said the lady, turning around. "Your mother has no longer either throne or husband; she has neither son, money nor friends; the whole world, my poor child, has abandoned your mother!" And she fell back, weeping, into

her daughter's arms.

"Courage, take courage, my dear mother!" said the girl.

"Ah! 'tis an unfortunate year for kings," said the mother. "And no one thinks of us in this country, for each must think about his own affairs. As long as your brother was with me he kept me up; but he is gone and can no longer send us news of himself, either to me or to your father. I have pledged my last jewels, sold your clothes and my own to pay his servants, who refused to accompany him unless I made this sacrifice. We are now reduced to live at the expense of these daughters of Heaven; we are the poor, succored by God."

"But why not address yourself to your sister, the queen?" asked the girl.

"Alas! the queen, my sister, is no longer queen, my child. Another reigns in her name. One day you will be able to understand how all this is."

"Well, then, to the king, your nephew. Shall I speak to him? You know how much he loves me, my mother.

"Alas! my nephew is not yet king, and you know Laporte has told us twenty times that he himself is in need of almost everything."

"Then let us pray to Heaven," said the girl.

The two women who thus knelt in united prayer were the daughter and grand-daughter of Henry IV., the wife and daughter of Charles I.

They had just finished their double prayer, when a nun softly tapped at the door of the cell.

"Enter, my sister," said the queen.

"I trust your majesty will pardon this intrusion on her meditations, but a foreign lord has arrived from England and waits in the parlor, demanding the honor of presenting a letter to your majesty."

"Oh, a letter! a letter from the king, perhaps. News from your father, do you hear, Henrietta? And the name of this lord?"

"Lord de Winter."

"Lord de Winter!" exclaimed the queen, "the friend of my husband. Oh, bid him enter!"

And the queen advanced to meet the messenger, whose hand she seized affectionately, whilst he knelt down and presented a letter to her, contained in a case of gold.

"Ah! my lord!" said the queen, "you bring us three things which we have not seen for a long time. Gold, a devoted friend, and a letter from the king, our husband and master."

De Winter bowed again, unable to reply from excess of emotion.

On their side the mother and daughter retired into the embrasure of a window to read eagerly the following letter:

"Dear Wife,--We have now reached the moment of decision. I have concentrated here at Naseby camp all the resources Heaven has left me, and I write to you in haste from thence. Here I await the army of my rebellious subjects. I am about to struggle for the last time with them. If victorious, I shall continue the struggle; if beaten, I am lost. I shall try, in the latter case (alas! in our position, one must provide for everything), I shall try to gain the coast of France. But can they, will they receive an unhappy king, who will bring such a sad story into a country already agitated by civil discord? Your wisdom and your affection must serve me as guides. The bearer of this letter will tell you, madame, what I dare not trust to pen and paper and the risks of transit. He will explain to you the steps that I expect you to pursue. I charge him also with my blessing for my children and with the sentiments of my soul for yourself, my dearest sweetheart."

The letter bore the signature, not of "Charles, King," but of "Charles--still king."

"And let him be no longer king," cried the queen. "Let him be conquered,

exiled, proscribed, provided he still lives. Alas! in these days the throne is too dangerous a place for me to wish him to retain it. But my lord, tell me," she continued, "hide nothing from me--what is, in truth, the king's position? Is it as hopeless as he thinks?"

"Alas! madame, more hopeless than he thinks. His majesty has so good a heart that he cannot understand hatred; is so loyal that he does not suspect treason! England is torn in twain by a spirit of disturbance which, I greatly fear, blood alone can exorcise."

"But Lord Montrose," replied the queen, "I have heard of his great and rapid successes of battles gained. I heard it said that he was marching to the frontier to join the king."

"Yes, madame; but on the frontier he was met by Lesly; he had tried victory by means of superhuman undertakings. Now victory has abandoned him. Montrose, beaten at Philiphaugh, was obliged to disperse the remains of his army and to fly, disguised as a servant. He is at Bergen, in Norway."

"Heaven preserve him!" said the queen. "It is at least a consolation to know that some who have so often risked their lives for us are safe. And now, my lord, that I see how hopeless the position of the king is, tell me with what you are charged on the part of my royal husband."

"Well, then, madame," said De Winter, "the king wishes you to try and discover the dispositions of the king and queen toward him."

"Alas! you know that even now the king is but a child and the queen a woman weak enough. Here, Monsieur Mazarin is everything."

"Does he desire to play the part in France that Cromwell plays in England?"

"Oh, no! He is a subtle, conscienceless Italian, who though he very likely dreams of crime, dares not commit it; and unlike Cromwell, who disposes of both Houses, Mazarin has had the queen to support him in his struggle with the parliament."

"More reason, then, he should protect a king pursued by parliament."

The queen shook her head despairingly.

"If I judge for myself, my lord," she said, "the cardinal will do nothing, and will even, perhaps, act against us. The presence of my daughter and myself in France is already irksome to him; much more so would be that of the king. My lord," added Henrietta, with a melancholy smile, "it is sad and almost shameful to be obliged to say that we have passed the winter in the Louvre without money, without linen, almost without bread, and often not rising from bed because we wanted fire."

"Horrible!" cried De Winter; "the daughter of Henry IV., and the wife of King Charles! Wherefore did you not apply, then, madame, to the first person you saw from us?"

"Such is the hospitality shown to a queen by the minister from whom a

king demands it."

"But I heard that a marriage between the Prince of Wales and Mademoiselle d'Orleans was spoken of," said De Winter.

"Yes, for an instant I hoped it was so. The young people felt a mutual esteem; but the queen, who at first sanctioned their affection, changed her mind, and Monsieur, the Duc d'Orleans, who had encouraged the familiarity between them, has forbidden his daughter to think any more about the union. Oh, my lord!" continued the queen, without restraining her tears, "it is better to fight as the king has done, and to die, as perhaps he will, than live in beggary like me."

"Courage, madame! courage! Do not despair! The interests of the French crown, endangered at this moment, are to discountenance rebellion in a neighboring nation. Mazarin, as a statesman, will understand the politic necessity."

"Are you sure," said the queen doubtfully, "that you have not been forestalled?"

"By whom?"

"By the Joices, the Prinns, the Cromwells?"

"By a tailor, a coachmaker, a brewer! Ah! I hope, madame, that the cardinal will not enter into negotiations with such men!"

"Ah! what is he himself?" asked Madame Henrietta.

"But for the honor of the king--of the queen."

"Well, let us hope he will do something for the sake of their honor," said the queen. "A true friend's eloquence is so powerful, my lord, that you have reassured me. Give me your hand and let us go to the minister; and yet," she added, "suppose he should refuse and that the king loses the battle?"

"His majesty will then take refuge in Holland, where I hear his highness the Prince of Wales now is."

"And can his majesty count upon many such subjects as yourself for his flight?"

"Alas! no, madame," answered De Winter; "but the case is provided for and I am come to France to seek allies."

"Allies!" said the queen, shaking her head.

"Madame," replied De Winter, "provided I can find some of my good old friends of former times I will answer for anything."

"Come then, my lord," said the queen, with the painful doubt that is felt by those who have suffered much; "come, and may Heaven hear you."