

## Chapter 37. Cromwell's Letter.

At the very moment when the queen quitted the convent to go to the Palais Royal, a young man dismounted at the gate of this royal abode and announced to the guards that he had something of importance to communicate to Cardinal Mazarin. Although the cardinal was often tormented by fear, he was more often in need of counsel and information, and he was therefore sufficiently accessible. The true difficulty of being admitted was not to be found at the first door, and even the second was passed easily enough; but at the third watched, besides the guard and the doorkeepers, the faithful Bernouin, a Cerberus whom no speech could soften, no wand, even of gold, could charm.

It was therefore at the third door that those who solicited or were bidden to an audience underwent their formal interrogatory.

The young man having left his horse tied to the gate in the court, mounted the great staircase and addressed the guard in the first chamber.

"Cardinal Mazarin?" said he.

"Pass on," replied the guard.

The cavalier entered the second hall, which was guarded by the musketeers and doorkeepers.

"Have you a letter of audience?" asked a porter, advancing to the new arrival.

"I have one, but not one from Cardinal Mazarin."

"Enter, and ask for Monsieur Bernouin," said the porter, opening the door of the third room. Whether he only held his usual post or whether it was by accident, Monsieur Bernouin was found standing behind the door and must have heard all that had passed.

"You seek me, sir," said he. "From whom may the letter be you bear to his eminence?"

"From General Oliver Cromwell," said the new comer. "Be so good as to mention this name to his eminence and to bring me word whether he will receive me--yes or no."

Saying which, he resumed the proud and sombre bearing peculiar at that time to Puritans. Bernouin cast an inquisitorial glance at the person of the young man and entered the cabinet of the cardinal, to whom he transmitted the messenger's words.

"A man bringing a letter from Oliver Cromwell?" said Mazarin. "And what kind of a man?"

"A genuine Englishman, your eminence. Hair sandy-red--more red than sandy; gray-blue eyes--more gray than blue; and for the rest, stiff and proud."

"Let him give in his letter."

"His eminence asks for the letter," said Bernouin, passing back into the ante-chamber.

"His eminence cannot see the letter without the bearer of it," replied the young man; "but to convince you that I am really the bearer of a letter, see, here it is; and kindly add," continued he, "that I am not a simple messenger, but an envoy extraordinary."

Bernouin re-entered the cabinet, returning in a few seconds. "Enter, sir," said he.

The young man appeared on the threshold of the minister's closet, in one hand holding his hat, in the other the letter. Mazarin rose. "Have you, sir," asked he, "a letter accrediting you to me?"

"There it is, my lord," said the young man.

Mazarin took the letter and read it thus:

"Mr. Mordaunt, one of my secretaries, will remit this letter of introduction to His Eminence, the Cardinal Mazarin, in Paris. He is also

the bearer of a second confidential epistle for his eminence.

"Oliver Cromwell."

"Very well, Monsieur Mordaunt," said Mazarin, "give me this second letter and sit down."

The young man drew from his pocket a second letter, presented it to the cardinal, and took his seat. The cardinal, however, did not unseal the letter at once, but continued to turn it again and again in his hand; then, in accordance with his usual custom and judging from experience that few people could hide anything from him when he began to question them, fixing his eyes upon them at the same time, he thus addressed the messenger:

"You are very young, Monsieur Mordaunt, for this difficult task of ambassador, in which the oldest diplomatists often fail."

"My lord, I am twenty-three years of age; but your eminence is mistaken in saying that I am young. I am older than your eminence, although I possess not your wisdom. Years of suffering, in my opinion, count double, and I have suffered for twenty years."

"Ah, yes, I understand," said Mazarin; "want of fortune, perhaps. You are poor, are you not?" Then he added to himself: "These English Revolutionists are all beggars and ill-bred."

"My lord, I ought to have a fortune of six millions, but it has been taken from me."

"You are not, then, a man of the people?" said Mazarin, astonished.

"If I bore my proper title I should be a lord. If I bore my name you would have heard one of the most illustrious names of England."

"What is your name, then?" asked Mazarin.

"My name is Mordaunt," replied the young man, bowing.

Mazarin now understood that Cromwell's envoy desired to retain his incognito. He was silent for an instant, and during that time he scanned the young man even more attentively than he had done at first. The messenger was unmoved.

"Devil take these Puritans," said Mazarin aside; "they are carved from granite." Then he added aloud, "But you have relations left you?"

"I have one remaining. Three times I presented myself to ask his support and three times he ordered his servants to turn me away."

"Oh, mon Dieu! my dear Mr. Mordaunt," said Mazarin, hoping by a display of affected pity to catch the young man in a snare, "how extremely your history interests me! You know not, then, anything of your birth--you have never seen your mother?"

"Yes, my lord; she came three times, whilst I was a child, to my nurse's house; I remember the last time she came as well as if it were to-day."

"You have a good memory," said Mazarin.

"Oh! yes, my lord," said the young man, with such peculiar emphasis that the cardinal felt a shudder run through every vein.

"And who brought you up?" he asked again.

"A French nurse, who sent me away when I was five years old because no one paid her for me, telling me the name of a relation of whom she had heard my mother often speak."

"What became of you?"

"As I was weeping and begging on the high road, a minister from Kingston took me in, instructed me in the Calvinistic faith, taught me all he knew himself and aided me in my researches after my family."

"And these researches?"

"Were fruitless; chance did everything."

"You discovered what had become of your mother?"

"I learned that she had been assassinated by my relation, aided by four friends, but I was already aware that I had been robbed of my wealth and

degraded from my nobility by King Charles I."

"Oh! I now understand why you are in the service of Cromwell; you hate the king."

"Yes, my lord, I hate him!" said the young man.

Mazarin marked with surprise the diabolical expression with which the young man uttered these words. Just as, ordinarily, faces are colored by blood, his face seemed dyed by hatred and became livid.

"Your history is a terrible one, Mr. Mordaunt, and touches me keenly; but happily for you, you serve an all-powerful master; he ought to aid you in your search; we have so many means of gaining information."

"My lord, to a well-bred dog it is only necessary to show one end of a track; he is certain to reach the other."

"But this relation you mentioned--do you wish me to speak to him?" said Mazarin, who was anxious to make a friend about Cromwell's person.

"Thanks, my lord, I will speak to him myself. He will treat me better the next time I see him."

"You have the means, then, of touching him?"

"I have the means of making myself feared."

Mazarin looked at the young man, but at the fire which shot from his glance he bent his head; then, embarrassed how to continue such a conversation, he opened Cromwell's letter.

The young man's eyes gradually resumed their dull and glassy appearance and he fell into a profound reverie. After reading the first lines of the letter Mazarin gave a side glance at him to see if he was watching the expression of his face as he read. Observing his indifference, he shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Send on your business those who do theirs at the same time! Let us see what this letter contains."

We here present the letter verbatim:

"To his Eminence, Monseigneur le Cardinal Mazarini:

"I have wished, monseigneur, to learn your intentions relating to the existing state of affairs in England. The two kingdoms are so near that France must be interested in our situation, as we are interested in that of France. The English are almost of one mind in contending against the tyranny of Charles and his adherents. Placed by popular confidence at the head of that movement, I can appreciate better than any other its significance and its probable results. I am at present in the midst of war, and am about to deliver a decisive battle against King Charles. I shall gain it, for the hope of the nation and the Spirit of the Lord are



with me. This battle won by me, the king will have no further resources in England or in Scotland; and if he is not captured or killed, he will endeavor to pass over into France to recruit soldiers and to refurnish himself with arms and money. France has already received Queen Henrietta, and, unintentionally, doubtless, has maintained a centre of inextinguishable civil war in my country. But Madame Henrietta is a daughter of France and was entitled to the hospitality of France. As to King Charles, the question must be viewed differently; in receiving and aiding him, France will censure the acts of the English nation, and thus so essentially harm England, and especially the well-being of the government, that such a proceeding will be equivalent to pronounced hostilities."

At this moment Mazarin became very uneasy at the turn which the letter was taking and paused to glance under his eyes at the young man. The latter continued in thought. Mazarin resumed his reading:

"It is important, therefore, monseigneur, that I should be informed as to the intentions of France. The interests of that kingdom and those of England, though taking now diverse directions, are very nearly the same. England needs tranquillity at home, in order to consummate the expulsion of her king; France needs tranquillity to establish on solid foundations the throne of her young monarch. You need, as much as we do, that interior condition of repose which, thanks to the energy of our

government, we are about to attain.

"Your quarrels with the parliament, your noisy dissensions with the princes, who fight for you to-day and to-morrow will fight against you, the popular following directed by the coadjutor, President Blancmesnil, and Councillor Broussel--all that disorder, in short, which pervades the several departments of the state, must lead you to view with uneasiness the possibility of a foreign war; for in that event England, exalted by the enthusiasm of new ideas, will ally herself with Spain, already seeking that alliance. I have therefore believed, monseigneur, knowing your prudence and your personal relation to the events of the present time, that you will choose to hold your forces concentrated in the interior of the French kingdom and leave to her own the new government of England. That neutrality consists simply in excluding King Charles from the territory of France and in refraining from helping him--a stranger to your country--with arms, with money or with troops.

"My letter is private and confidential, and for that reason I send it to you by a man who shares my most intimate counsels. It anticipates, through a sentiment which your eminence will appreciate, measures to be taken after the events. Oliver Cromwell considered it more expedient to declare himself to a mind as intelligent as Mazarin's than to a queen admirable for firmness, without doubt, but too much guided by vain prejudices of birth and of divine right.

"Farewell, monseigneur; should I not receive a reply in the space of fifteen days, I shall presume my letter will have miscarried.

"Oliver Cromwell."

"Mr. Mordaunt," said the cardinal, raising his voice, as if to arouse the dreamer, "my reply to this letter will be more satisfactory to General Cromwell if I am convinced that all are ignorant of my having given one; go, therefore, and await it at Boulogne-sur-Mer, and promise me to set out to-morrow morning."

"I promise, my lord," replied Mordaunt; "but how many days does your eminence expect me to await your reply?"

"If you do not receive it in ten days you can leave."

Mordaunt bowed.

"That is not all, sir," continued Mazarin; "your private adventures have touched me to the quick; besides, the letter from Mr. Cromwell makes you an important person as ambassador; come, tell me, what can I do for you?"

Mordaunt reflected a moment and, after some hesitation, was about to speak, when Bernouin entered hastily and bending down to the ear of the cardinal, whispered:

"My lord, the Queen Henrietta Maria, accompanied by an English noble, is entering the Palais Royal at this moment."

Mazarin made a bound from his chair, which did not escape the attention of the young man and suppressed the confidence he was about to make.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "you have heard me? I fix on Boulogne because I presume that every town in France is indifferent to you; if you prefer another, name it; but you can easily conceive that, surrounded as I am by influences I can only muzzle by discretion, I desire your presence in Paris to be unknown."

"I go, sir," said Mordaunt, advancing a few steps to the door by which he had entered.

"No, not that way, I beg, sir," quickly exclaimed the cardinal, "be so good as to pass by yonder gallery, by which you can regain the hall. I do not wish you to be seen leaving; our interview must be kept secret."

Mordaunt followed Bernouin, who led him through the adjacent chamber and left him with a doorkeeper, showing him the way out.