

Chapter 38. Henrietta Maria and Mazarin.

The cardinal rose, and advanced in haste to receive the queen of England. He showed the more respect to this queen, deprived of every mark of pomp and stripped of followers, as he felt some self-reproach for his own want of heart and his avarice. But supplicants for favor know how to accommodate the expression of their features, and the daughter of Henry IV. smiled as she advanced to meet a man she hated and despised.

"Ah!" said Mazarin to himself, "what a sweet face; does she come to borrow money of me?"

And he threw an uneasy glance at his strong box; he even turned inside the bevel of the magnificent diamond ring, the brilliancy of which drew every eye upon his hand, which indeed was white and handsome.

"Your eminence," said the august visitor, "it was my first intention to speak of the matters that have brought me here to the queen, my sister, but I have reflected that political affairs are more especially the concern of men."

"Madame," said Mazarin, "your majesty overwhelms me with flattering distinction."

"He is very gracious," thought the queen; "can he have guessed my errand?"

"Give," continued the cardinal, "your commands to the most respectful of your servants."

"Alas, sir," replied the queen, "I have lost the habit of commanding and have adopted instead that of making petitions. I am here to petition you, too happy should my prayer be favorably heard."

"I am listening, madame, with the greatest interest," said Mazarin.

"Your eminence, it concerns the war which the king, my husband, is now sustaining against his rebellious subjects. You are perhaps ignorant that they are fighting in England," added she, with a melancholy smile, "and that in a short time they will fight in a much more decided fashion than they have done hitherto."

"I am completely ignorant of it, madame," said the cardinal, accompanying his words with a slight shrug of the shoulders; "alas, our own wars quite absorb the time and the mind of a poor, incapable, infirm old minister like me."

"Well, then, your eminence," said the queen, "I must inform you that Charles I., my husband, is on the eve of a decisive engagement. In case of a check" (Mazarin made a slight movement), "one must foresee everything; in the case of a check, he desires to retire into France and to live here as a private individual. What do you say to this project?"

The cardinal had listened without permitting a single fibre of his face to betray what he felt, and his smile remained as it ever was--false and flattering; and when the queen finished speaking, he said:

"Do you think, madame, that France, agitated and disturbed as it is, would be a safe retreat for a dethroned king? How will the crown, which is scarce firmly set on the head of Louis XIV., support a double weight?"

"The weight was not so heavy when I was in peril," interrupted the queen, with a sad smile, "and I ask no more for my husband than has been done for me; you see that we are very humble monarchs, sir."

"Oh, you, madame," the cardinal hastened to say, in order to cut short the explanation he foresaw was coming, "with regard to you, that is another thing. A daughter of Henry IV., of that great, that sublime sovereign----"

"All which does not prevent you refusing hospitality to his son-in-law, sir! Nevertheless, you ought to remember that that great, that sublime monarch, when proscribed at one time, as my husband may be, demanded aid from England and England accorded it to him; and it is but just to say that Queen Elizabeth was not his niece."

"Peccato!" said Mazarin, writhing beneath this simple eloquence, "your majesty does not understand me; you judge my intentions wrongly, and that is partly because, doubtless, I explain myself in French."

"Speak Italian, sir. Ere the cardinal, your predecessor, sent our mother, Marie de Medicis, to die in exile, she taught us that language. If anything yet remains of that great, that sublime king, Henry, of whom you have just spoken, he would be much surprised at so little pity for his family being united to such a profound admiration of himself."

The perspiration stood in large drops on Mazarin's brow.

"That admiration is, on the contrary, so great, so real, madame," returned Mazarin, without noticing the change of language offered to him by the queen, "that if the king, Charles I.--whom Heaven protect from evil!--came into France, I would offer him my house--my own house; but, alas! it would be but an unsafe retreat. Some day the people will burn that house, as they burned that of the Marechal d'Ancre. Poor Concino Concini! And yet he but desired the good of the people."

"Yes, my lord, like yourself!" said the queen, ironically.

Mazarin pretended not to understand the double meaning of his own sentence, but continued to compassionate the fate of Concino Concini.

"Well then, your eminence," said the queen, becoming impatient, "what is your answer?"

"Madame," cried Mazarin, more and more moved, "will your majesty permit me to give you counsel?"

"Speak, sir," replied the queen; "the counsels of so prudent a man as yourself ought certainly to be available."

"Madame, believe me, the king ought to defend himself to the last."

"He has done so, sir, and this last battle, which he encounters with resources much inferior to those of the enemy, proves that he will not yield without a struggle; but in case he is beaten?"

"Well, madame, in that case, my advice--I know that I am very bold to offer advice to your majesty--my advice is that the king should not leave his kingdom. Absent kings are very soon forgotten; if he passes over into France his cause is lost."

"But," persisted the queen, "if such be your advice and you have his interest at heart, send him help of men and money, for I can do nothing for him; I have sold even to my last diamond to aid him. If I had had a single ornament left, I should have bought wood this winter to make a fire for my daughter and myself."

"Oh, madame," said Mazarin, "your majesty knows not what you ask. On the day when foreign succor follows in the train of a king to replace him on his throne, it is an avowal that he no longer possesses the help and love of his own subjects."

"To the point, sir," said the queen, "to the point, and answer me, yes or no; if the king persists in remaining in England will you send him succor? If he comes to France will you accord him hospitality? What do

you intend to do? Speak."

"Madame," said the cardinal, affecting an effusive frankness of speech, "I shall convince your majesty, I trust, of my devotion to you and my desire to terminate an affair which you have so much at heart. After which your majesty will, I think, no longer doubt my zeal in your behalf."

The queen bit her lips and moved impatiently on her chair.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" she, said at length; "come, speak."

"I will go this instant and consult the queen, and we will refer the affair at once to parliament."

"With which you are at war--is it not so? You will charge Broussel to report it. Enough, sir, enough. I understand you or rather, I am wrong. Go to the parliament, for it was from this parliament, the enemy of monarchs, that the daughter of the great, the sublime Henry IV., whom you so much admire, received the only relief this winter which prevented her from dying of hunger and cold!"

And with these words Henrietta rose in majestic indignation, whilst the cardinal, raising his hands clasped toward her, exclaimed, "Ah, madame, madame, how little you know me, mon Dieu!"

But Queen Henrietta, without even turning toward him who made these hypocritical pretensions, crossed the cabinet, opened the door for

herself and passing through the midst of the cardinal's numerous guards, courtiers eager to pay homage, the luxurious show of a competing royalty, she went and took the hand of De Winter, who stood apart in isolation. Poor queen, already fallen! Though all bowed before her, as etiquette required, she had now but a single arm on which she could lean.

"It signifies little," said Mazarin, when he was alone. "It gave me pain and it was an ungracious part to play, but I have said nothing either to the one or to the other. Bernouin!"

Bernouin entered.

"See if the young man with the black doublet and the short hair, who was with me just now, is still in the palace."

Bernouin went out and soon returned with Comminges, who was on guard.

"Your eminence," said Comminges, "as I was re-conducting the young man for whom you have asked, he approached the glass door of the gallery, and gazed intently upon some object, doubtless the picture by Raphael, which is opposite the door. He reflected for a second and then descended the stairs. I believe I saw him mount a gray horse and leave the palace court. But is not your eminence going to the queen?"

"For what purpose?"

"Monsieur de Guitant, my uncle, has just told me that her majesty had

received news of the army."

"It is well; I will go."

Comminges had seen rightly, and Mordaunt had really acted as he had related. In crossing the gallery parallel to the large glass gallery, he perceived De Winter, who was waiting until the queen had finished her negotiation.

At this sight the young man stopped short, not in admiration of Raphael's picture, but as if fascinated at the sight of some terrible object. His eyes dilated and a shudder ran through his body. One would have said that he longed to break through the wall of glass which separated him from his enemy; for if Comminges had seen with what an expression of hatred the eyes of this young man were fixed upon De Winter, he would not have doubted for an instant that the Englishman was his eternal foe.

But he stopped, doubtless to reflect; for instead of allowing his first impulse, which had been to go straight to Lord de Winter, to carry him away, he leisurely descended the staircase, left the palace with his head down, mounted his horse, which he reined in at the corner of the Rue Richelieu, and with his eyes fixed on the gate, waited until the queen's carriage had left the court.

He had not long to wait, for the queen scarcely remained a quarter of an hour with Mazarin, but this quarter of an hour of expectation appeared a century to him. At last the heavy machine, which was called a chariot in

those days, came out, rumbling against the gates, and De Winter, still on horseback, bent again to the door to converse with her majesty.

The horses started on a trot and took the road to the Louvre, which they entered. Before leaving the convent of the Carmelites, Henrietta had desired her daughter to attend her at the palace, which she had inhabited for a long time and which she had only left because their poverty seemed to them more difficult to bear in gilded chambers.

Mordaunt followed the carriage, and when he had watched it drive beneath the sombre arches he went and stationed himself under a wall over which the shadow was extended, and remained motionless, amidst the moldings of Jean Goujon, like a bas-relievo, representing an equestrian statue.