Chapter XI. Mazarin's Policy.

Instead of the hesitation with which he had accosted the cardinal a quarter of an hour before, there might be read in the eyes of the young king that will against which a struggle might be maintained, and which might be crushed by its own impotence, but which, at least, would preserve, like a wound in the depth of the heart, the remembrance of its defeat.

"This time, my lord cardinal, we have to deal with something more easily found than a million."

"Do you think so, sire?" said Mazarin, looking at the king with that penetrating eye which was accustomed to read to the bottom of hearts.

"Yes, I think so; and when you know the object of my request--"

"And do you think I do not know it, sire?"

"You know what remains for me to say to you?"

"Listen, sire; these are King Charles's own words--"

"Oh, impossible!"

"Listen. 'And if that miserly, beggarly Italian,' said he--"

"My lord cardinal!"

"That is the sense, if not the words. Eh! Good heavens! I wish him no ill on that account; one is biased by his passions. He said to you: 'If that vile Italian refuses the million we ask of him, sire,--if we are forced, for want of money, to renounce diplomacy, well, then, we will ask him to grant us five hundred gentlemen.'"

The king started, for the cardinal was only mistaken in the number.

"Is not that it, sire?" cried the minister, with a triumphant accent. "And then he added some fine words: he said, 'I have friends on the other side of the channel, and these friends only want a leader and a banner. When they see me, when they behold the banner of France, they will rally around me, for they will comprehend that I have your support. The colors of the French uniform will be worth as much to me as the million M. de Mazarin refuses us,'--for he was pretty well assured I should refuse him that million.--'I shall conquer with these five hundred gentlemen, sire, and all the honor will be yours.' Now, that is what he said, or to that purpose, was it not?--turning those plain words

into brilliant metaphors and pompous images, for they are fine talkers in that family! The father talked even on the scaffold."

The perspiration of shame stood on the brow of Louis. He felt that it was inconsistent with his dignity to hear his brother thus insulted, but he did not yet know how to act with him to whom every one yielded, even his mother. At last he made an effort.

"But," said he, "my lord cardinal, it is not five hundred men, it is only two hundred."

"Well, but you see I guessed what he wanted."

"I never denied that you had a penetrating eye, and that was why I thought you would not refuse my brother Charles a thing so simple and so easy to grant him as what I ask of you in his name, my lord cardinal, or rather in my own."

"Sire," said Mazarin, "I have studied policy thirty years; first, under the auspices of M. le Cardinal Richelieu; and then alone. This policy has not always been over-honest, it must be allowed, but it has never been unskillful. Now that which is proposed to your majesty is dishonest and unskillful at the same time."

"Dishonest, monsieur!"

"Sire, you entered into a treaty with Cromwell."

"Yes, and in that very treaty Cromwell signed his name above mine."

"Why did you sign yours so lo down, sire? Cromwell found a good place, and he took it; that was his custom. I return, then, to M. Cromwell. You have a treaty with him, that is to say, with England, since when you signed that treaty M. Cromwell was England."

"M. Cromwell is dead."

"Do you think so, sire?"

"No doubt he is, since his son Richard has succeeded him, and has abdicated."

"Yes, that is it exactly. Richard inherited after the death of his father, and England at the abdication of Richard. The treaty formed part of the inheritance, whether in the hands of M. Richard or in the hands of England. The treaty is, then, still as good, as valid as ever. Why should you evade it, sire? What is changed? Charles wants to-day what we were not willing to grant him ten years ago; but that was foreseen and provided against. You are the ally of England, sire, and not of Charles

II. It was doubtless wrong, from a family point of view, to sign a treaty with a man who had cut off the head of the king your father's brother-in-law, and to contract an alliance with a parliament which they call yonder the Rump Parliament; it was unbecoming, I acknowledge, but it was not unskillful from a political point of view, since, thanks to that treaty, I saved your majesty, then a minor, the trouble and danger of a foreign war, which the Fronde--you remember the Fronde, sire?"--the young king hung his head--"which the Fronde might have fatally complicated. And thus I prove to your majesty that to change our plan now, without warning our allies, would be at once unskillful and dishonest. We should make war with the aggression on our side; we should make it, deserving to have it made against us; and we should have the appearance of fearing it whilst provoking it, for a permission granted to five hundred men, to two hundred men, to fifty men, to ten men, is still a permission. One Frenchman, that is the nation; one uniform, that is the army. Suppose, sire, for example, that you should have war with Holland, which, sooner or later, will certainly happen; or with Spain, which will perhaps ensue if your marriage fails" (Mazarin stole a furtive glance at the king), "and there are a thousand causes that might yet make your marriage fail,--well, would you approve of England's sending to the United Provinces or to Spain a regiment, a company, a squadron even, of English gentlemen? Would you think that they kept within the limits of their treaty of alliance?"

Louis listened; it seemed so strange to him that Mazarin should invoke good faith, and he the author of so many political tricks, called Mazarinades. "And yet," said the king, "without manifest of my authorization, I cannot prevent gentlemen of my states from passing over into England, if such should be their good pleasure."

"You should compel them to return, sire, or at least protest against their presence as enemies in a allied country."

"But come, my lord cardinal, you who are so profound a genius, try if you cannot find a means to assist this poor king, without compromising ourselves."

"And that is exactly what I am not willing to do, my dear sire," said Mazarin. "If England were to act exactly according to my wishes, she could not act better than she does; if I directed the policy of England from this place, I should not direct it otherwise. Governed as she is governed, England is an eternal nest of contention for all Europe. Holland protects Charles II., let Holland do so; they will quarrel, they will fight. Let them destroy each other's navies, we can construct ours with the wrecks of their vessels; when we shall save our money to buy nails."

"Oh, how paltry and mean is all this that you are telling me, monsieur le cardinal!"

"Yes, but nevertheless it is true, sire; you must confess that. Sill further. Suppose I admit, for a moment, the possibility of breaking your word, and evading the treaty--such a thing as sometimes happens, but that is when some great interest is to be promoted by it, or when the treaty is found to be too troublesome--well, you will authorize the engagement asked of you: France--her banner, which is the same thing--will cross the Straits and will fight; France will be conquered."

"Why so?"

"Ma foi! we have a pretty general to fight under--this Charles II.! Worcester gave us proofs of that."

"But he will no longer have to deal with Cromwell, monsieur."

"But he will have to deal with Monk, who is quite as dangerous. The brave brewer of whom we are speaking, was a visionary; he had moments of exaltation, of inflation, during which he ran over like an over-filled cask; and from the chinks there always escaped some drops of his thoughts, and by the sample the whole of his thought was to be made out. Cromwell has thus allowed us more than ten times to penetrate into his very soul, when one would have conceived that soul to be enveloped in triple brass, as Horace had it. But Monk! Oh, sire, God defend you from ever having anything to transact politically with Monk. It is he who has given me, in one year, all the gray hairs I have. Monk is no fanatic; unfortunately he is a politician; he does not overflow, he keeps close together. For ten years he has had his eyes fixed upon one object, and nobody has yet been able to ascertain what. Every morning, as Louis XI. advised, he burns his nightcap. Therefore, on the day when this plan, slowly and solitarily ripened, shall break forth, it will break forth with all the conditions of success which always accompany an unforeseen event. That is Monk, sire, of whom, perhaps, you have never even heard--of whom, perhaps, you did not even know the name, before your brother, Charles II., who knows what he is, pronounced it before you. He is a marvel of depth and tenacity, the two only things against which intelligence and ardor are blunted. Sire, I had ardor when I was young; I always was intelligent. I may safely boast of it, because I am reproached with it. I have done very well with these two qualities, since, from the son of a fisherman of Piscina, I have become prime minister to the king of France; and in that position your majesty will perhaps acknowledge I have rendered some service to the throne of your majesty. Well, sire, if I had met with Monk on my way, instead of Monsieur de Beaufort, Monsieur de Retz, or Monsieur le Prince--well, we should have been ruined. If you engage yourself rashly, sire, you will fall into the talons of this politic soldier. The casque of Monk, sire, is an iron coffer, and no one has the key of it. Therefore, near him, or rather before him, I bow, sire, for I have nothing but a velvet cap."

"What do you think Monk wishes to do, then?"

"Eh! sire, if I knew that, I would not tell you to mistrust him, for I should be stronger than he; but with him, I am afraid to guess--to guess!--you understand my word?--for if I thought I had guessed, I should stop at an idea, and, in spite of myself, should pursue that idea. Since that man has been in power yonder, I am like one of the damned in Dante whose neck Satan has twisted, and who walk forward looking around behind them. I am traveling towards Madrid, but I never lose sight of London. To guess, with that devil of a man, is to deceive one's self and to deceive one's self is to ruin one's self. God keep me from ever seeking to guess what he aims at; I confine myself to watching what he does, and that is well enough. Now I believe--you observe the meaning of the word I believe?--I believe, with respect to Monk, ties one to nothing--I believe that he has a strong inclination to succeed Cromwell. Your Charles II. has already caused proposals to be made to him by ten persons; he has satisfied himself with driving these ten meddlers from his presence, without saying anything to them but, 'Begone, or I will have you hung.' That man is a sepulcher! At this moment Monk is affecting devotion to the Rump Parliament; of this devotion, I am not the dupe. Monk has no wish to be assassinated,--an assassination would stop him in the middle of his operations; and his work must be accomplished;--so I believe--but do not believe what I believe, sire: for as I say I believe from habit--I believe that Monk is keeping on friendly terms with the parliament till the day comes for dispersing it. You are asked for swords, but they are to fight against Monk. God preserve you from fighting against Monk, sire; for Monk would beat us, and I should never console myself after being beaten by Monk. I should say to myself, Monk has foreseen that victory ten years. For God's sake, sire, out of friendship for you, if not out of consideration for himself, let Charles II. keep quiet. Your majesty will give him a little income here; give him one of your chateaux. Yes, yes--wait awhile. But I forget the treaty--that famous treaty of which we were just now speaking. Your majesty has not even the right to give him a chateau."

"How is that?"

"Yes, yes; your majesty is bound not to grant hospitality to King Charles, and to compel him to leave France even. It was on this account we forced him to quit you, and yet here he is again. Sire, I hope you will give your brother to understand that he cannot remain with us; that it is impossible he should be allowed to compromise us; or I myself--"

"Enough, my lord," said Louis XIV., rising. "In refusing me a million, perhaps you may be right; your millions are your own. In refusing me two hundred gentlemen, you are still further in the right; for you are prime minister, and you have, in the eyes of France, the responsibility of peace and war. But that you should pretend to prevent me, who am king,

from extending my hospitality to the grandson of Henry IV., to my cousin-german, to the companion of my childhood--there your power stops, and there begins my will."

"Sire," said Mazarin, delighted at being let off so cheaply, and who had, besides, only fought so earnestly to arrive at that,--"sire, I shall always bend before the will of my king. Let my king, then, keep near him, or in one of his chateaux, the king of England; let Mazarin know it, but let not the minister know it."

"Good-night, my lord," said Louis XIV., "I go away in despair."

"But convinced, and that is all I desire, sire," replied Mazarin.

The king made no answer, and retired quite pensive, convinced, not of all Mazarin had told him, but of one thing which he took care not to mention to him; and that was, that it was necessary for him to study seriously both his own affairs and those of Europe, for he found them very difficult and very obscure. Louis found the king of England seated in the same place where he had left him. On perceiving him, the English prince arose; but at the first glance he saw discouragement written in dark letters upon his cousin's brow. Then, speaking first, as if to facilitate the painful avowal that Louis had to make to him,--

"Whatever it may be," said he, "I shall never forget all the kindness, all the friendship you have exhibited towards me."

"Alas!" replied Louis, in a melancholy tone, "only barren good-will, my brother."

Charles II. became extremely pale; he passed his cold hand over his brow, and struggled for a few instants against a faintness that made him tremble. "I understand," said he at last; "no more hope!"

Louis seized the hand of Charles II. "Wait, my brother," said he; "precipitate nothing; everything may change; hasty resolutions ruin all causes; add another year of trial, I implore you, to the years you have already undergone. You have, to induce you to act now rather than at another time, neither occasion nor opportunity. Come with me, my brother; I will give you one of my residences, whichever you prefer, to inhabit. I, with you, will keep my eyes upon events; we will prepare. Come, then, my brother, have courage!"

Charles II. withdrew his hand from that of the king, and drawing back, to salute him with more ceremony, "With all my heart, thanks!" replied he, "sire; but I have prayed without success to the greatest king on earth; now I will go and ask a miracle of God." And he went out without being willing to hear any more, his head carried loftily, his hand trembling, with a painful contraction of his noble countenance, and that

profound gloom which, finding no more hope in the world of men, appeared to go beyond it, and ask it in worlds unknown. The officer of musketeers, on seeing him pass by thus pale, bowed almost to his knees as he saluted him. He then took a flambeau, called two musketeers, and descended the deserted staircase with the unfortunate king, holding in his left hand his hat, the plume of which swept the steps. Arrived at the door, the musketeer asked the king which way he was going, that he might direct the musketeers.

"Monsieur," replied Charles II., in a subdued voice, "you who have known my father, say, did you ever pray for him? If you have done so, do not forget me in your prayers. Now, I am going alone, and beg of you not to accompany me, or have me accompanied any further."

The officer bowed and sent away the musketeers into the interior of the palace. But he himself remained an instant under the porch watching the departing Charles II., till he was lost in the turn of the next street. "To him as to his father formerly," murmured he, "Athos, if he were here, would say with reason,--'Salute fallen majesty!'" Then, reascending the staircase: "Oh! the vile service that I follow!" said he at every step. "Oh! my pitiful master! Life thus carried on is no longer tolerable, and it is at length time that I should do something! No more generosity, no more energy! The master has succeeded, the pupil is starved forever. Mordioux! I will not resist. Come, you men," continued he, entering the ante-chamber, "why are you all looking at me so? Extinguish these torches and return to your posts. Ah! you were guarding me? Yes, you watch over me, do you not, worthy fellows? Brave fools! I am not the Duc de Guise. Begone! They will not assassinate me in the little passage. Besides," added he, in a low voice, "that would be a resolution, and no resolutions have been formed since Monsieur le Cardinal Richelieu died. Now, with all his faults, that was a man! It is settled: to-morrow I will throw my cassock to the nettles."

Then, reflecting: "No," said he, "not yet! I have one great trial to make and I will make it; but that, and I swear it, shall be the last, Mordioux!"

He had not finished speaking when a voice issued from the king's chamber. "Monsieur le lieutenant!" said this voice.

"Here I am," replied he.

"The king desires to speak to you."

"Humph!" said the lieutenant; "perhaps of what I was thinking about." And he went into the king's apartment.