

Chapter XLV. Confession of a Man of Wealth.

The Theatin entered deliberately, without being too much astonished at the noise and agitation which anxiety for the cardinal's health had raised in his household. "Come in, my reverend father," said Mazarin, after a last look at the ruelle, "come in and console me."

"That is my duty, my lord," replied the Theatin.

"Begin by sitting down, and making yourself comfortable, for I am going to begin with a general confession; you will afterwards give me a good absolution, and I shall believe myself more tranquil."

"My lord," said the father, "you are not so ill as to make a general confession urgent--and it will be very fatiguing--take care."

"You suspect, then, that it may be long, father?"

"How can I think it otherwise, when a man has lived so completely as your eminence has done?"

"Ah! that is true!--yes--the recital may be long."

"The mercy of God is great," snuffled the Theatin.

"Stop," said Mazarin; "there I begin to terrify myself with having allowed so many things to pass which the Lord might reprove."

"Is that not always so?" said the Theatin naively, removing further from the lamp his thin pointed face, like that of a mole. "Sinners are so forgetful beforehand, and scrupulous when it is too late."

"Sinners?" replied Mazarin. "Do you use that word ironically, and to reproach me with all the genealogies I have allowed to be made on my account--I--the son of a fisherman, in fact?"

[This is quite untranslatable--it being a play upon the words pecheur (with a grave over the first e), a sinner, and pecheur (with an accent circumflex over the first e), a fisherman. It is in very bad taste.--TRANS.]

"Hum!" said the Theatin.

"That is a first sin, father; for I have allowed myself made to descend from two old Roman consuls, S. Geganius Macerinus 1st, Macerinus 2d, and Proculus Macerinus 3d, of whom the Chronicle of Haolander speaks.

From Macerinus to Mazarin the proximity was tempting. Macerinus, a diminutive, means leanish, poorish, out of case. Oh! reverend father! Mazarini may now be carried to the augmentative Maigre, thin as Lazarus. Look!"--and he showed his fleshless arms.

"In your having been born of a family of fishermen I see nothing injurious to you; for--St. Peter was a fisherman; and if you are a prince of the church, my lord, he was the supreme head of it. Pass on, if you please."

"So much the more for my having threatened with the Bastille a certain Bounet, a priest of Avignon, who wanted to publish a genealogy of the Casa Mazarini much too marvelous."

"To be probable?" replied the Theatin.

"Oh! if I had acted up to his idea, father, that would have been the vice of pride--another sin."

"It was an excess of wit, and a person is not to be reproached with such sorts of abuses. Pass on, pass on!"

"I was all pride. Look you, father, I will endeavor to divide that into capital sins."

"I like divisions, when well made."

"I am glad of that. You must know that in 1630--alas! that is thirty-one years ago--"

"You were then twenty-nine years old, monseigneur."

"A hot-headed age. I was then something of a soldier, and I threw myself at Casal into the arquebusades, to show that I rode on horseback as well as an officer. It is true, I restored peace between the French and the Spaniards. That redeems my sin a little."

"I see no sin in being able to ride well on horseback," said the Theatin; "that is in perfect good taste, and does honor to our gown. As a Christian, I approve of your having prevented the effusion of blood; as a monk, I am proud of the bravery a monk has exhibited."

Mazarin bowed his head humbly. "Yes," said he, "but the consequences?"

"What consequences?"

"Eh! that damned sin of pride has roots without end. From the time that I threw myself in that manner between two armies, that I had smelt powder and faced lines of soldiers, I have held generals a little in

contempt."

"Ah!" said the father.

"There is the evil; so that I have not found one endurable since that time."

"The fact is," said the Theatin, "that the generals we have had have not been remarkable."

"Oh!" cried Mazarin, "there was Monsieur le Prince. I have tormented him thoroughly!"

"He is not much to be pitied: he has acquired sufficient glory, and sufficient wealth."

"That may be, for Monsieur le Prince; but M. Beaufort, for example--whom I held suffering so long in the dungeon of Vincennes?"

"Ah! but he was a rebel, and the safety of the state required that you should make a sacrifice. Pass on!"

"I believe I have exhausted pride. There is another sin which I am afraid to qualify."

"I can qualify it myself. Tell it."

"A great sin, reverend father!"

"We shall judge, monseigneur."

"You cannot fail to have heard of certain relations which I have had--with her majesty the queen-mother;--the malevolent--"

"The malevolent, my lord, are fools. Was it not necessary for the good of the state and the interests of the young king, that you should live in good intelligence with the queen? Pass on, pass on!"

"I assure you," said Mazarin, "you remove a terrible weight from my breast."

"These are all trifles!--look for something serious."

"I have had much ambition, father."

"That is the march of great minds and things, my lord."

"Even the longing for the tiara?"

"To be pope is to be the first of Christians. Why should you not desire that?"

"It has been printed that, to gain that object, I had sold Cambria to the Spaniards."

"You have, perhaps, yourself written pamphlets without severely persecuting pamphleteers."

"Then, reverend father, I have truly a clean breast. I feel nothing remaining but slight peccadilloes."

"What are they?"

"Play."

"That is rather worldly: but you were obliged by the duties of greatness to keep a good house."

"I like to win."

"No player plays to lose."

"I cheated a little."

"You took your advantage. Pass on."

"Well! reverend father, I feel nothing else upon my conscience. Give me absolution, and my soul will be able, when God shall please to call it, to mount without obstacle to the throne--"

The Theatin moved neither his arms nor his lips. "What are you waiting for, father?" said Mazarin.

"I am waiting for the end."

"The end of what?"

"Of the confession, monsieur."

"But I have ended."

"Oh, no; your eminence is mistaken."

"Not that I know of."

"Search diligently."

"I have searched as well as possible."

"Then I shall assist your memory."

"Do."

The Theatin coughed several times. "You have said nothing of avarice, another capital sin, nor of those millions," said he.

"What millions, father?"

"Why, those you possess, my lord."

"Father, that money is mine, why should I speak to you about that?"

"Because, you see, our opinions differ. You say that money is yours, whilst I--I believe it is rather the property of others."

Mazarin lifted his cold hand to his brow, which was beaded with perspiration. "How so?" stammered he.

"This way. Your excellency had gained much wealth--in the service of the king."

"Hum! much--that is, not too much."

"Whatever it may be, whence came that wealth?"

"From the state."

"The state; that is the king."

"But what do you conclude from that, father?" said Mazarin, who began to tremble.

"I cannot conclude without seeing a list of the riches you possess. Let us reckon a little, if you please. You have the bishopric of Metz?"

"Yes."

"The abbeys of St. Clement, St. Arnould, and St. Vincent, all at Metz?"

"Yes."

"You have the abbey of St. Denis, in France, magnificent property?"

"Yes, father."

"You have the abbey of Cluny, which is rich?"

"I have."

"That of St. Medard at Soissons, with a revenue of one hundred thousand livres?"

"I cannot deny it."

"That of St. Victor, at Marseilles,--one of the best in the south?"

"Yes father."

"A good million a year. With the emoluments of the cardinalship and the ministry, I say too little when I say two millions a year."

"Eh!"

"In ten years that is twenty millions--and twenty millions put out at fifty per cent. give, by progression, twenty-three millions in ten years."

"How well you reckon for a Theatin!"

"Since your eminence placed our order in the convent we occupy, near St. Germain des Pres, in 1644, I have kept the accounts of the society."

"And mine likewise, apparently, father."

"One ought to know a little of everything, my lord."

"Very well. Conclude, at present."

"I conclude that your baggage is too heavy to allow you to pass through the gates of Paradise."

"Shall I be damned?"

"If you do not make restitution, yes."

Mazarin uttered a piteous cry. "Restitution!--but to whom, good God?"

"To the owner of that money,--to the king."

"But the king did not give it all to me."

"One moment,--does not the king sign the ordonances?"

Mazarin passed from sighs to groans. "Absolution! absolution!" cried he.

"Impossible, my lord. Restitution! restitution!" replied the Theatin.

"But you absolve me from all other sins, why not from that?"

"Because," replied the father, "to absolve you for that motive would be a sin for which the king would never absolve me, my lord."

Thereupon the confessor quitted his penitent with an air full of compunction. He then went out in the same manner he had entered.

"Oh, good God!" groaned the cardinal. "Come here, Colbert, I am very, very ill indeed, my friend."