

IMPERIAL ELECTION

Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661)

to John Thurloe (1616–1668), English Secretary of State

With the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III (1608–1657), it seemed possible to break the longstanding Hapsburg monopoly of the imperial dignity. The youth and inexperience of his seventeen-year-old heir, Leopold, offered an opportunity which Cardinal Mazarin, the French chief minister, seized. Mazarin wrote to John Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State, to persuade the English Commonwealth to oppose Leopold's bid.

1657

In the present juncture of affairs in the Roman Empire, it were very much to be wished, since the English nation, and their present head, the Lord Protector, have made so many solemn protestations how sincerely and tenderly they own the common cause of the Gospel and mind the deliverance of those that are molested in their consciences and persecuted for the true religion, with the suppression of all Popish tyranny and restoring of true Christian liberty throughout all Christendom, that they would seriously take notice now of the present great occasion to improve all those glorious designs by endeavouring together with, or by means of, others that the Imperial Crown may be set, if not altogether upon a Protestant head, yet at least wise (for to divert the same from the House of Austria, and to cut off once their prescription to the succession) on such a Catholic prince as may be least affected to the Popish superstitions and Jesuitical maxims, and become in some sort engaged unto His Highness the Lord Protector himself upon that score, as having not hindered, but rather furthered and advanced his election.

We shall not need to introduce here the most considerable heads among the Protestants, the King of Sweden, the Princes Electors of Brandenburg and Heidelberg. Otherwise than that, there is no scruple at all to be made but they will most earnestly and zealously lay hold on the present occasion and employ their utmost for the maintenance of the common interest. If so, the two former of these may be relieved a little by those which are no less highly concerned in this affair, so as to be able to lay by a while the war wherein they are engaged, and to bend all their minds and means and endeavours wholly and solely to the scope aforesaid.

In my mind, England has great cause to engage in this honourable enterprise. For first, by the aforesaid solemn protestations, and the good beginning of the real performance thereof in Piedmont and Switzerland, they stand in a manner actually engaged already and ought now to improve it so much the more, because that which they did was but of a particular concernment, whereas this concerns the general, whereby not only more countries and nations, but in time the cause and interest of all true professors of the Gospel, through God's undoubted blessing, will be much advanced.

Secondly it is very considerable that on this present Imperial election there depend much of their own quiet and security, not only for the known reason that the House of Austria is a branch of the House of Spain and one of the principal pillars of Popery, which evermore endeavoured to support the same, as with cruel persecution of the poor Protestants in their hereditary dominions, so especially of later times, by those long and bloody most destructive wars in Germany and their endless mischievous practices in all parts throughout Christendom. But also that the same House by this advantage of their Imperial authority had the power and means in the year 1639 to entertain no less than fourscore thousand well-appointed armed men in the Empire, and the several Circles thereof, besides the considerable armies they employed at the same time abroad in Italy and Alsace against France, and from time to time one army after another against Bohemia, Denmark, Sweden, and their confederates.

Having been able so to manage their game all along that, notwithstanding all oppositions and advantages otherwise against them, after a war of 30 years the Protestants' cause got little or nothing at all, but they, besides the continuance of their uncontrolled liberty of proceeding against the Protestants in their own countries as they

pleased themselves, gained many cities and countries—nay, whole kingdoms to boot—in hereditary possession by it.

And these are they who in the first place have the power in their hands to ruin and subdue all the friends and allies of the English nation, one after another, whereby they shall not want means and conveniences in time to incommode and disturb them nearer home still, as indeed in the year aforesaid, when they imagined they had gotten the game absolutely into their own hands, they showed it palpably enough therein that by their Generalissimo, the Duke of Friedland, they already arrogated unto themselves the dominion of the ocean and were projecting and framing such a formidable Company on the East Sea (whereof the contrivance is yet to be seen) that, had not God blown upon the design and broken it as He did, they would in all likelihood have made it soon appear that the great and deep trench surrounding England would hardly have secured them long within it.

And what I pray, may not this very House be able still to effect, having the free command of levying what forces and armies they please throughout all Germany, chiefly in all the Imperial cities, without any let or hindrance, and a thousand ways besides of raising monies, especially if in the present juncture they should prevail with the United Provinces to engage them either openly or covertly on their side, upon the advantage of their jealousies and variances with England, Sweden, and France? Who can foresee the end of the war while the King of Spain, by the Emperor's means, can have his supplies of men still out of Germany, even as many as he pleases. Or how can that potentate want monies that has still men enough at command to multiply his conquests? Should England, after so long a war whereby—and the still necessary entertainment and employment of so great forces by sea and by land—there cannot but be great waste of supplies in both kinds, be content to see their enemies furnished still, and want no recruits for either? To say nothing now how much the House of Austria continuing in the Empire may incommode and prejudice the English nation by forbidding or overcharging their commerce in the Empire, and many other ways.

In the third place it may be instanced that seeing the present constitution of the Empire not only stirs up France now to assay by all means how to advance their interest by it, but the States General also come into consideration about it because of their intercourse and correspondence with the Rhenish Catholic Electors and other princes, having such an influence there, and being able thereby to retard or advance conclusions much. Is not England much concerned then in point of reputation to avoid sitting still alone as an idle spectator, and rather to look about and try all means what they may do likewise by their friends in this great affair, and to what scope they may find opportunity to steer the business. It having always been held an eminent point of honour amongst all potentates to take notice and cognizance of all weighty affairs of Christendom, and to offer and impart their best advice and aid for the weal universal, and thereby with all to discern and consider the better their own and others' interwoven concernment, which lies often imperceptibly otherwise involved in such occurrences and not to be behind-hand with any occasion of taking the advantage then to make friends still, and more and more to intimidate enemies.

If England neglect this opportunity now, it must needs follow that whenever they may stand in need once of their neighbours and partners in religion in Germany, or shall otherwise have occasion to make use of them, it will be remembered then that there was a time when, notwithstanding several fair overtures and faithful advertisements made and presented there by the public ministers of such and such their principal leaders (as I make no question of the ministers their watchful discharge of their duty) no heed nor regard was taken of any, all the fair occasions were wittingly and willingly passed by, or let slip. In a word, the late predecessor's course and example was followed and insisted, who would scarce adventure an earnest word in the poor Palatinate's behalf, and thus their words would prove too true who cease not to object and maintain still, whatever be alleged to the contrary, that it is and will be in vain to look for anything from England for the relief of the Protestant affairs in Germany, besides a few complements and general condolings. And consequently the English addresses on like occasions, and what may befall them hereafter, could promise themselves no better entertainment abroad,

and the Protestants, instead of seeking and sticking to England, will rather choose to apply themselves to any other, even of meaner condition, being but active and real in performance.

But we assure ourselves of better success thence, especially being so satisfactorily informed that those former grand neglects have ever been very conscientiously resented by the succeeding authority, who therefore questionless will eschew all occasions of partaking in that sin of the Stuarts' family to abandon such an interest of religion.

As therefore now the present conjunctures are very considerable, it being come to pass by a most singular providence that the Empire is fallen suddenly destitute, not only of a Roman Emperor, but also of a King of the Romans, which happened scarce in an age, and is not like to happen soon again, the less then ought such an opportunity be left un-regarded and un-apprehended. And if England do not watch now, and use all means and ways to weaken and dis-furnish Spain by getting and keeping that House dis-invested of the Empire, they will find cause enough to rue it hereafter, when the Spanish and Catholic League shall get new strength and courage thereby to combine and join all their forces together against England, never leaving till they may invade, subdue, and ruin it. Against that England, I say, which of late time yet has so publicly and solemnly declared against them in point of religion, and thereby seized and laid hold on their very heart, as it were, in which regard and consideration England may well be looked upon as the head of all Protestants.

There remains only the question now, how should England act and proceed upon these emergencies to attain their scope with most advantage? To this I answer briefly (being scanted now of time) that I do hold the best and most expedient way, as things stand now, to consist in the ready and effectual imparting unto the King of Sweden and the Prince-Elector of Brandenburg such help and assistance as now they stand in need of, so to get and interest all the friends they can in Germany, and by securing the Prince-Elector at Heidelberg under hand of all friendship and good offices upon occasions, thereby to dispose and encourage him to the more cheerful opposing of the pretended election of the King of Hungary or Archduke Leopold. In the meantime, endeavors might be used by speedy embassies to renew good intelligence and constant friendship between Denmark and Sweden, Sweden and Holland, etc.

When these and the like things may be brought about without delay (these affairs suffering none at all), especially when care and courses shall be taken accordingly really to oblige Sweden and Brandenburg, then and not sooner, a solemn embassy might be dispatched into the Empire about the instruction whereof, if the well-intended advice of the foreign principally interested friends may be heard, there may be offered several particulars yet of singular weight and concernment.