

CHAPTER XVII.

LETTERS OF JOHN FINCHAM, OF OUTWELL, ESQUIRE, AND J.P. OF THE ISLE OF ELY, UNDER CONFINEMENT IN A FRENCH PRISON, TEMP. CHARLES I.

In the year 1628, during the unfortunate war with France, Mr. Fincham, of Outwell, was employed in that country on some secret state business. He was arrested and confined in the Bastille prison at Paris, where he was very cruelly and shamefully treated. Amongst the state papers of that period are some important and interesting letters relating to this matter. Passing by some formal communications with Sir John Coke, Knight, then one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, I will only notice a brief series of a more domestic character, in the hand-writing of Mr. Fincham, which went most of them through the hands of the Bishop of London, William Laud, afterwards the celebrated Archbishop of Canterbury. The Bishop's letter to the Secretary it will be sufficient to epitomize, -- the others are given in full.

No. 95. *The Bishop of London to Secretary Coke.*¹

London House,
Dec. 28, 1629.

The Bishop has received letters from Dr. Dee, the Ambassador's Chaplain in France, who enclosed three others from an English gentleman there imprisoned. Why the Doctor

¹ State Papers, Domestic, vol. 153, p. 127. *Public Record Office*. I am unable to say whether Sir John Coke, Knight, was of the Leicester (Norfolk) family, and related to the highly distinguished and eminent Sir Edward Coke, H. M. Chief Justice of the Common Pleas at this time.

sent these letters the Bishop does not know. He is not acquainted with the writer of them. He sends them to the Secretary, partly because he is named in them, and there are some things in them which a Secretary of State may make use of &c., &c.

No. 95. (1). *John Fincham to Dr. Dee and Mr. Neve.*

Rigt worshipfull.

I beseech you most humbly to pardon my boldnes and importunities, for my afflictions and most cruell and unjust persecutions have been so long so many and so great, as I am wholly overthrown by them, both in my health estate and reputation, and all by false and vowed enemies, and they dayly encreasing with my miseries have brought me into a desperate estate, if the Lord's mercy be not the greater towards me ; in truth what I have and doe continually suffer is intollerable, unspeakable, yea and incredible, but to us that dayly feele it. I most humbly crave your favours and assistance in being continall suitors for my present libertie with my Lord Ambassadour, whoe if his Excellency would vouch safe to request my libertie earnestly of the King of Fra : it would be presently granted him, as well as the liberties of others wch be forth of prison. If ever I offended the King of France¹ or his state, I desire to have a condigne punishment, and yt my proces may be made. I humbly cry for justice here in France, and renounce all mercy, but in the bastille here is neither the one nor other to be had. --I was sent into France by a person of state and authoritie in England for his Maties. service, not haveing any occasion to leave my poore and distressed wife and children, but only by the command of higher powers, to wch I most promptly obeyd, as in my duty I was bound ; and yet I being here arrived in the time of warr and danger, would not have long resided in France, had I not been assured of my safety by the Queen Mother [Marie de Medicis], as Card. Berule and Count du Tilliere both assured me, of her part; but I finde

¹ Louis XIII.

a cruell difference between promises and deeds, against all lawe justice and equitie. -- I am a subject of the King of England's, and being a prisoner in France, I must either be a prisoner of state, or warr, both wch are accoustomed among all nations to be sett at liberte upon the conclusion of a generall peace between two crownes. I know not wherein I have offended the King of France, (I am sure I have not), and correction without instruction is accounted tyranny. Most worthy and worshipfull gentlemen, I doe crave at your hands yt ye would be pleased to present my most humble services and sufferinges to his Excellency, and on my knees with erected hands and teares in my eyes that he would vouchsafe to have present pittie and mercy upon me, my miseries, my pore disconsolate wife and children, which cruelly suffer by my most unjust imprisonment ; and lett not I beseech you the bruit¹ of my religion be an impeachment of my liberte ; for my religion, as also my endeavours to his Maties. service, yea and the many effects thereof, is well knowne to my Lord's Grace of Canterbury, and Sr. John Cooke Secretary of State ; and so I entreat you to acquaint my Lord Ambassador, as an assured verete, of my true and sincere religioun and service towards God my Kinge and country ; and if it be my unparalleled hard fortune to remaine in this hell upon earth, after your departures out of France, I entreat you both to acquaint my Lord's Grace of Canterbury,² as allso Mr. Secretary Cooke, wth. my miserie ;

¹ Bruit, bru-it, Fr. -- *rumour, report*, twice used in the Bible, viz., Jer. x 22 ; Nahum iii. 19 ; which latter passage represents exactly the fears entertained by the imprisoned patriot, "all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee."

² This was Archbishop Abbot, Laud's immediate predecessor, who had recently been in greater trouble than poor Mr. Fincham himself, though not deprived of his personal liberty. The circumstances are so extraordinary, that the reader will excuse the digression in briefly referring to them. Whilst taking a journey into Hampshire, the Archbishop was invited by Lord Zouch to hunt in Brams-hill Park. Pretending to be a woodman, he took up a cross-bow to make a shot at a buck, but unhappily hit the keeper, who had run in among the herd of deer to bring them up to a fairer mark. The arrow pierced the left arm, and dividing the larger vessels, immediate death ensued. This untoward event caused the greatest consternation, -- the like had never happened in the Church of England. It was a sore affliction to many good men, who lamented the scandal which must inevitably fall upon the Church, for in the eye of general councils and the canon law the Archbishop was tainted, and incapable of performing any sacred function. Amongst other difficulties,

and to implore earnestly their favours and assistance for the present procuring of my liberty, by his Maties. letters in my behalf to his Ambassadour yt shall be for the time present ; and allso yt you would be pleased to advise my pore wife the best meanes whereby sche may procure my liberty, by petitions or otherwise ; you shall heare of her being at my brother's in Paul's churchyard, at the signe of the Castle, a woollen draper ; or at my sister Grovenor's in Lombard street, at the three swans, her husband being a mercer. I will end as I began, humbly craveing your favours, intercessions, and pardon, for a pore gentleman your countryman and most faithfull loveinge and humble servant,

Jo : FINCHAM.

From ye base bastill,
this 15 of December, 1629.

Would either of you vouchsafe to send me but 3 lines in answere hereof by this bearer, sealed with 2 seales as this is, what your assured knowledg is of my liberty, it would be an unspeakable comfort to me with an assurance of the fidelity of this bearer. For theis 18 months I have been close prisoner, I have never received any messuag or lettre from any frend I have, nor permitted ever to write to any, butt by stealth, to my great charges and care, and in the most of them I have been betrayed. If either of you would be pleased to desire Mr. Humfry Cross, messenger to my Lo. of Canterbury, to solícite my liberty, he would doo it, he dwells in the old baly nere St. Pulcher's Church. [Old Bailey, St. Sepulchre's].

Indorsed. To my right worll, my most worthy frendes, Mr. Doctor Dee and Mr. Neve, give this I pray you with all speed.

Good Sir, I beseech you to reade seale and send this inclosed with all speed you can possibly, and to give 2 carde [illegible] to this bearer, and I will truly repay it you.

Sirs, I have neither woollen lininge nor mony, for had I, I would not be thus bold nor importunate, which you pardon me I humbly beseech you.

four Bishops elect refused to be consecrated by him. It was not until after some months' delay that the Archbishop obtained the King's pardon, and a dispensation in full form from a Commission of Bishops and Civilians. He was nevertheless after this suspended, and restored to favor again about Christmas, 1628, at the request of the House of Lords. -- Rose, *Biograph. Dict.*, vol. i, p. 23.

No. 95. (2). *The same to Dr. Dee.*

Sir,

I beseech you to present my most humble service and duty to my Lord Ambassadour, beseeching his Excellency to have present pittie upon me, and my most cruell and unjust suffering ; and did his Exc. know the importance and necessity of my present liberte, I should not have been here one month after his arrivall, and of this I am most assured. Tell his Exc. yt I humbly crave he would tell ye King of France, or Card. Richlieu, yt if I have offended the King of France, or his estate, or the queen mother, or Card. Richlieu, eyther in word or deed, yt my proces may be presently made, and I suffer condigne punishmt, a thinge most juste, which I infinitely desire ; or if I have offended ye Kinge of England, or his estate, yt I may be sent into England, and punished accordinge to my deserts ; butt if upon suspitions most light and unjust I have offended the false subjects of the Kinge of England, I am not hear to answer for it, nor much less to be thus cruelly punished most unjustly by the Kinge of France, or his cardnall, whome I never wittingly or willingly offended in all my life, as I am a Xtien, to my knowledge. I have presumed to write diverse letters to his Exc. as allso to send into England by Sr. Tho. Ditchington, and Monsr. le Roque, my fellowe prisoners and camerade ; butt whether his Excell. have received them or no I knowe not, for never have I received any answer nor comfort as yett of them. the lord of heaven send me some good consolation, for my miseries have been and are so many and great, as I am reduced into a most miserable and desperate estate. I and my man be allmost naked for want of cloathes and lininge or mony, and which is worse, without any reliefe or hope therof, yt wee are ready to starve wth cold. for Christ Jesus sake have mercy upon your pore contryman and most humble and faithfull servant,

Jo: FINCHAM.

And voutchsafe I most humble entreat you to send me butt 3 lines in answeare, by this bearer, at this present. 18 Dec : 1629.

No. 95. (3). *The same to his Wife¹ and Children.*

Most dear and lovinge wife and children,

I admire at your silence, having been deprived of my company by most cruell imprisonment this 19 months, that you have not writt to me, nor endeavoured to procure my libertie, by the sollicitings of friends and acquaintance. I am only left alone in prison, all other, English Scotch and Dutch, being set at libertie, by reason of the peace between the 2 crownes. For the King of France or his state I never offended, in thought word nor deed ; for the King of England, if I have offended. I desire to be sent into my country, and to be punished according to my offence, for I am his subject, and not to the King of France. But I am assured I am punished here, upon the base and ungrateful information of certain trayterous and malicious English Priests and Jesuits, which have most untruly and unconscionably writt against me into france, both before my imprisonment and since, which God forgive them. They have and doe render me ill for good. For them I have lost my goods, my honor, and fortune, and for them and ther good I would and will expose my life in a good cause ; and they know my estate, my house, my table, yea my life, have ever been free and open, as any house in England. The more foole I, to be thus rewarded by them most ungrateful : In a word I have and doe suffer unmercifully and unspeakably, and in you and them do my libertie consist, by your earnest sollicitation. I never did them harm, nor thought them any, and therefore they are most cruell. I pray that I may convince them, by all that is good and holy, to sollicite and procure my present libertie, and to petition incessantly both the King and Queen of England, for whose cause I suffer, and for whose only service I came into France, that their majesties would be pleased to write to the King of France for my liberte for your good and consolation. And did the King of England know how necessary my liberte was, and how needful for his majesties service crown and dignity, I should not remain here one month, and so you may assure his majestic in the petition ; but I charge you shew this letter to no creature, nor impart this clause to no priest, nor Roman Catholic, as you love me or my liberte.

¹ His wife was Christiana daughter of Austin Whall, of Catton, Norfolk, Esq.

I have writt you many letters to this effect by many English people, but whether they have been delivered or no I do not know : in many of them I fear I have been betrayed to my grief, in sharpe and most cruell suffering. -- God forgive them, and give us his grace, that we may live in his fear and die in his favor, and let us pray one for another, and I charge you cease not to be a continual dayly sollicitor for your lovinge poore and loyall husband in chaynes,

Jo : FINCHAM

Dec. 21, 1629.

He obtained his release almost immediately afterwards, as appears by the following letter :-

*To the Secretary of State.*¹

Right Honorable,

In truth when and as often as I have wayted on your honor, since my coming home, I have thought to move you in beseching your honor to have consideration and commiseration of me and my sufferings, but when I have been with you, out of a respective [respectful] dutie and shamefastness, I have not named it to any purpose, but by circumstance and afar off : but indeed my present necessities and debts do so press me, as most unwillingly I am enforced most humbly to implore your honor's present aide and assistance : I am engaged and indebted first to monsieur Du-Pont 20L, which he brought and lent me in my necessity in the bastille, to clothe me and my man, for which kindness poore man he was two months after put into the bastille, where he remained six months to his utter undoing, he being now in England very poore. I borrowed also at my coming forth of the bastill 10L of Mr. Kirkham. at my Lord Ambassador's, to pay my man his wages, for the two years he was with me in prison, and to buy me boots and other things I wanted for my journey to London : and also I am indebted to Mr. Crew for all my charges between paris and London, which is 10L

¹ State Papers, Domestic, vol. 160, No. 50.

more. And all these do dayly call upon me for their moneys, besides my many other necessities which press me very much, and which I am ashamed to deliver, but only that in my absence my wife has been constrayned to sell her plate, for the maintenance of herself and children, all other friends dealing most unnaturally with her in my absence.

I will make bold to acquaint you with two of my great losses since my departure ; the one was certain lands I had mortgaged to Sir Giles Allington for 300L was by him sold away to others, not being redeemed in time, 300L to my loss. My second loss was a thousand pound [the property of a niece, his ward], through my absence, and my brother's negligence. I beseech your honor for the Lord's sake to pardon my boldness, and to preserve me the 140L which I claim humbly as due to me from his majestie, and which would be a great comfort and reliefe to us now in our necessities.

I also beseech your honor to remember me effectually with Mr. Barwell, to have some good employment in this generall draining [of the Fens], as Paymaster or Surveyor of the works, or some other profitable place. Before my goinge into France I was a Commissioner in the great commission of sewars, as also of the Peace for the Isle of Ely, but in my absence I am left out to my dishonor.

If I thought his majestie did earnestly desire [the arrest of] the Bishop of Chalcedon, I could work it in short time assuredly.

I pray your Honor not to acquaint the bearer with any of the contents hereof.

Good my Lorde, pardon your Honor's most humble and most faithful servant,

Jo : FINCHAM

Holborn, Feb : 9, 1629 [Civil year].