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Lettre de Rowland Strong à Émile Zola de février 1898

Auteur(s) : Strong, Rowland

Les folios

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3 Fichier(s)

Les mots clés

[affaire Dreyfus](#), [Journalisme](#)

Relations

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Présentation

GenreCorrespondance

Date d'envoi[1898-02-sd](#)

Adresse18, Charing Cross Road, London

Description & Analyse

DescriptionLettre du correspondant de la *Pall Mall Gazette* à propos d'une interview de Zola.

Information générales

Langue[Français](#)

CoteANG STRONG 1898_02_SD

Éléments codicologiques

- Un bifeuillet original avec en-tête imprimé.
- Un imprimé original.

SourceFonds Colin Burns (Centre Zola)

Informations éditoriales

Éditeur de la fiche Centre d'Étude sur Zola et le Naturalisme & Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes, CNRS-ENS ; projet EMAN (CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne Nouvelle).

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Notice créée par [Jean-Sébastien Macke](#) Notice créée le 18/08/2020 Dernière modification le 21/08/2020



Walsingham Hotel

Piccadilly W.

London

Cher Monsieur:

90

La devise étant

mise en marche est, en fin

portée. - Toutes mes félici-

tations mes meilleurs

vœux. Je suis si heureuse

que vous êtes rentré chez

vous. Un tel homme d'un

digne pays. - Car. - Votre

anglais, sauf à mon ami
Shepard, qui n'est pour rien
dans cette affaire.

Dans cet interview
on vous attribue l'intent
ion de faire supprimer

les attachés militaires
comme militaires.

En attendant votre
gracieuse réponse, et

en vous priant de
bien supposer que je

ne vous ai, pas
iérangé dans un

tel moment pour
une chose moins grave

Veuillez agréer, cher
maître, l'assurance

de mes meilleurs
sentiments

Rowland Strong
correspondant de la
"Pall Mall Gazette"

Monsieur Emile Zola.

PALL MALL GAZETTE.

INTERVIEW WITH M. ZOLA.

FROM A PARIS CORRESPONDENT.

Ties of personal friendship with Emile Zola and a sincere profession of affectionate esteem on the part of your correspondent have enabled him to succeed, where many another foreign correspondent had failed, in obtaining an appointment with the illustrious master for the express purpose of an interview to be published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. I had written to M. Zola before leaving London a week ago, advising him of my arrival and once here I wrote again; neither letter has reached 21 bis, Rue de Bruxelles, but a message sent by hand brought back the longed-for answer, fixing the meeting for 9 p.m., so as to "leave me in undisturbed possession of an hour or so," courteously explained M. Zola, the hours of the day belonging to his legal advisers. After a minimum of time devoted to greetings, we rushed at the subject at once.

"Am I anxious, meaning anxiety as fear or despondency? Not a bit. I am full of optimism. What happens now is certainly awful enough to strike anybody with terrified wonder; but it cannot last. France is too great, too generous, too magnanimous—our traditions of chivalry, our notion of what is right, our good sense, and our love of justice are sure to triumph in the end. Nobody and nothing will convince me that in less than five years there have been three trials, in which (1) an innocent man has been condemned, (2) a guilty one has been acquitted, and (3) I myself am going to be punished for having done no wrong, and France will put up quietly with such iniquities. No; public opinion, which is swayed now by passions hostile to our cause, will turn round the moment we shall be in a position to produce the truth, and I shall be sorry then for those whose opposition to our aim is now so bitter and so unjustified."

"Are you sure, then, of being condemned?"

"*Eh, mon Dieu, qui sait?* As I told you I am very optimistically disposed. I know full well it will not be a friendly gathering on the 7th of February, and I am prepared to meet with every obstacle in the way of producing my evidence; but I have been a jurymen myself, and I know also how one feels face to face with so grave a duty as sitting in judgment on a fellow-creature. One's sense of duty and the responsibilities of a verdict are guided solely by the innate honesty of every Frenchman, and cannot be influenced by chicanery or manoeuvres. If I am condemned it will be perhaps because all the proofs I expect will not be as yet at my disposal; but, after all, my fate is a secondary consideration. What I want is truth, and if my trial brings us only one step nearer it, very much will have been achieved already. What are my proofs? *Vous n'en demandez trop*, but they are proofs of the innocence of Dreyfus, proofs that I want made public for the sake of France, and not for the sake of individuals. What does it matter to me that the innocence of Dreyfus is perfectly well known to those who most oppose the revision of his trial? What I see is that the culpable blunders of a few have plunged my country into an abyss of mistakes, and that the majority of Frenchmen are a party to a terrible judicial error. My mission is to clear this atmosphere of injustice, and my ambition is to bring the current of public opinion in France to its normal state: love of truth, dignity, and self-possession."

"What may come out, then, from your trial?"

"The revision of the Dreyfus trial first of all, and in time the suppression of the posts of Military Attachés to the Embassies. The post is one of a salaried and openly acknowledged spy, and a shocking anomaly of all modern régimes. So long as there are Military Attachés the abominable dealings in State secrets and secrets of national defence will continue. I believe we shall score well on this point on February 7."

"But will they let you talk?"

"I trust the jury in case I am handicapped or hampered beyond legal limits; for, though accused, I have some rights all the same."

"And that truth?"

"My truth is so powerful that were I in possession of every link in my chain of evidence I do not know that I would care to exhibit it suddenly. You see what the popular *emballement* is. Well, imagine a train going full speed, say, seventy miles an hour, and a brake powerful enough to stop it at once; if you put on the brake, what happens? A smash, and that is what I am afraid of if the whole truth of the Dreyfus affair is known too suddenly. It will be best for all concerned if it dawns gradually; but once a single fact in favour of the unjustly condemned man is admitted, public opinion will do what it ought to, and France will awake from the nightmare the great, generous, chivalrous, and magnanimous nation she always has been and is still."

M. Zola here became too visibly moved for further questioning, and so, with the expression of every wish and admiration, your interviewer bowed himself out.