

Chapter XVI. "Remember!"

A horseman going rapidly along the road leading towards Blois, which he had left nearly half an hour before, passed the two travelers, and, though apparently in haste, raised his hat as he passed them. The king scarcely observed this young man, who was about twenty-five years of age, and who, turning round several times, made friendly signals to a man standing before the gate of a handsome white-and-red house; that is to say, built of brick and stone, with a slated roof, situated on the left hand of the road the prince was traveling.

This man, old, tall, and thin, with white hair,--we speak of the one standing by the gate;--this man replied to the farewell signals of the young one by signs of parting as tender as could have been made by a father. The young man disappeared at the first turn of the road, bordered by fine trees, and the old man was preparing to return to the house, when the two travelers, arriving in front of the gate, attracted his attention.

The king, as we have said, was riding with his head cast down, his arms inert, leaving his horse to go what pace he liked, whilst Parry, behind him, the better to imbibe the genial influence of the sun, had taken off his hat, and was looking about right and left. His eyes encountered those of the old man leaning against the gate; the latter, as if struck by some strange spectacle, uttered an exclamation, and made one step towards the two travelers. From Parry his eyes immediately turned towards the king, upon whom they rested for an instant. This examination, however rapid, was instantly reflected in a visible manner upon the features of the tall old man. For scarcely had he recognized the younger of the travelers--and we said recognized, for nothing but a perfect recognition could have explained such an act--scarcely, we say, had he recognized the younger of the two travelers, than he clapped his hands together, with respectful surprise, and, raising his hat from his head, bowed so profoundly that it might have been said he was kneeling. This demonstration, however absent, or rather, however absorbed was the king in his reflections, attracted his attention instantly; and checking his horse and turning towards Parry, he exclaimed, "Good God, Parry, who is that man who salutes me in such a marked manner? Can he know me, think you?"

Parry, much agitated and very pale, had already turned his horse towards the gate. "Ah, sire!" said he, stopping suddenly at five or six paces' distance from the still bending old man: "sire, I am seized with astonishment, for I think I recognize that brave man. Yes, it must be he! Will your majesty permit me to speak to him?"

"Certainly."

"Can it be you, Monsieur Grimaud?" asked Parry.

"Yes, it is I," replied the tall old man, drawing himself up, but without losing his respectful demeanor.

"Sire," then said Parry, "I was not deceived. This good man is the servant of the Comte de la Fere, and the Comte de la Fere, if you remember, is the worthy gentleman of whom I have so often spoken to your majesty that the remembrance of him must remain, not only in your mind, but in your heart."

"He who assisted my father at his last moments?" asked Charles, evidently affected at the remembrance.

"The same, sire."

"Alas!" said Charles; and then addressing Grimaud, whose penetrating and intelligent eyes seemed to search and divine his thoughts.--"My friend," said he, "does your master, Monsieur le Comte de la Fere, live in this neighborhood?"

"There," replied Grimaud, pointing with his outstretched arm to the white-and-red house behind the gate.

"And is Monsieur le Comte de la Fere at home at present?"

"At the back, under the chestnut trees."

"Parry," said the king, "I will not miss this opportunity, so precious for me, to thank the gentleman to whom our house is indebted for such a noble example of devotedness and generosity. Hold my horse, my friend, if you please." And, throwing the bridle to Grimaud, the king entered the abode of Athos, quite alone, as one equal enters the dwelling of another. Charles had been informed by the concise explanation of Grimaud,--"At the back, under the chestnut trees;" he left, therefore, the house on the left, and went straight down the path indicated. The thing was easy; the tops of those noble trees, already covered with leaves and flowers, rose above all the rest.

On arriving under the lozenges, by turns luminous and dark, which checkered the ground of this path according as the trees were more or less in leaf, the young prince perceived a gentleman walking with his arms behind him, apparently plunged in a deep meditation. Without doubt, he had often had this gentleman described to himself, for, without hesitating, Charles II. walked straight up to him. At the sound of his footsteps, the Comte de la Fere raised his head, and seeing an unknown man of noble and elegant carriage coming towards him, he raised his hat

and waited. At some paces from him, Charles II. likewise took off his hat. Then, as if in reply to the comte's mute interrogation,--

"Monsieur le Comte," said he, "I come to discharge a debt towards you. I have, for a long time, had the expression of a profound gratitude to bring you. I am Charles II., son of Charles Stuart, who reigned in England, and died on the scaffold."

On hearing this illustrious name, Athos felt a kind of shudder creep through his veins, but at the sight of the young prince standing uncovered before him, and stretching out his hand towards him, two tears, for an instant, dimmed his brilliant eyes. He bent respectfully, but the prince took him by the hand.

"See how unfortunate I am, my lord count; it is only due to chance that I have met with you. Alas! I ought to have people around me whom I love and honor, whereas I am reduced to preserve their services in my heart, and their names in my memory: so that if your servant had not recognized mine, I should have passed by your door as by that of a stranger."

"It is but too true," said Athos, replying with his voice to the first part of the king's speech, and with a bow to the second; "it is but too true, indeed, that your majesty has seen many evil days."

"And the worst, alas!" replied Charles, "are perhaps still to come."

"Sire, let us hope."

"Count, count," continued Charles, shaking his head, "I entertained hope till last night, and that of a good Christian, I swear."

Athos looked at the king as if to interrogate him.

"Oh, the history is soon related," said Charles. "Proscribed, despoiled, disdained, I resolved, in spite of all my repugnance, to tempt fortune one last time. Is it not written above, that, for our family, all good fortune and all bad fortune shall eternally come from France? You know something of that, monsieur,--you, who are one of the Frenchmen whom my unfortunate father found at the foot of his scaffold, on the day of his death, after having found them at his right hand on the day of battle."

"Sire," said Athos modestly, "I was not alone. My companions and I did, under the circumstances, our duty as gentlemen, and that was all. Your majesty was about to do me the honor to relate--"

"That is true, I had the protection,--pardon my hesitation, count, but, for a Stuart, you, who understand everything, you will comprehend that the word is hard to pronounce;--I had, I say, the protection of my cousin the stadtholder of Holland; but without the intervention, or at

least without the authorization of France, the stadtholder would not take the initiative. I came, then, to ask this authorization of the king of France, who has refused me."

"The king has refused you, sire!"

"Oh, not he; all justice must be rendered to my younger brother Louis; but Monsieur de Mazarin--"

Athos bit his lips.

"You perhaps think I should have expected this refusal?" said the king, who had noticed the movement.

"That was, in truth, my thought, sire," replied Athos, respectfully; "I know that Italian of old."

"Then I determined to come to the test, and know at once the last word of my destiny. I told my brother Louis, that, not to compromise either France or Holland, I would tempt fortune myself in person, as I had already done, with two hundred gentlemen, if he would give them to me; and a million, if he would lend it me."

"Well, sire?"

"Well, monsieur, I am suffering at this moment something strange, and that is, the satisfaction of despair. There is in certain souls,--and I have just discovered that mine is of the number,--a real satisfaction in the assurance that all is lost, and the time is come to yield."

"Oh, I hope," said Athos, "that your majesty is not come to that extremity."

"To say so, my lord count, to endeavor to revive hope in my heart, you must have ill understood what I have just told you. I came to Blois to ask of my brother Louis the alms of a million, with which I had the hopes of re-establishing my affairs; and my brother Louis has refused me. You see, then, plainly, that all is lost."

"Will your majesty permit me to express a contrary opinion?"

"How is that, count? Do you think my heart of so low an order that I do not know how to face my position?"

"Sire, I have always seen that it was in desperate positions that suddenly the great turns of fortune have taken place."

"Thank you, count: it is some comfort to meet with a heart like yours; that is to say, sufficiently trustful in God and in monarchy, never to

despair of a royal fortune, however low it may be fallen. Unfortunately, my dear count, your words are like those remedies they call 'sovereign,' and which, though able to cure curable wounds or diseases, fail against death. Thank you for your perseverance in consoling me, count, thanks for your devoted remembrance, but I know in what I must trust--nothing will save me now. And see, my friend, I was so convinced, that I was taking the route of exile, with my old Parry; I was returning to devour my poignant griefs in the little hermitage offered me by Holland. There, believe me, count, all will soon be over, and death will come quickly; it is called so often by this body, eaten up by its soul, and by this soul, which aspires to heaven."

"Your majesty has a mother, a sister, and brothers; your majesty is the head of the family, and ought, therefore, to ask a long life of God, instead of imploring Him for a prompt death. Your majesty is an exile, a fugitive, but you have right on your side; you ought to aspire to combats, dangers, business, and not to rest in heavens."

"Count," said Charles II., with a smile of indescribable sadness, "have you ever heard of a king who reconquered his kingdom with one servant the age of Parry, and with three hundred crowns which that servant carried in his purse?"

"No, sire; but I have heard--and that more than once--that a dethroned king has recovered his kingdom with a firm will, perseverance, some friends, and a million skillfully employed."

"But you cannot have understood me. The million I asked of my brother Louis was refused me."

"Sire," said Athos, "will your majesty grant me a few minutes, and listen attentively to what remains for me to say to you?"

Charles II. looked earnestly at Athos. "Willingly, monsieur," said he.

"Then I will show your majesty the way," resumed the count, directing his steps towards the house. He then conducted the king to his study, and begged him to be seated. "Sire," said he, "your majesty just now told me that, in the present state of England, a million would suffice for the recovery of your kingdom."

"To attempt it at least, monsieur; and to die as a king if I should not succeed."

"Well, then, sire, let your majesty, according to the promise you have made me, have the goodness to listen to what I have to say." Charles made an affirmative sign with his head. Athos walked straight up to the door, the bolts of which he drew, after looking to see if anybody was near, and then returned. "Sire," said he, "your majesty has kindly

remembered that I lent assistance to the very noble and very unfortunate Charles I., when his executioners conducted him from St. James's to Whitehall."

"Yes, certainly I do remember it, and always shall remember it."

"Sire, it is a dismal history to be heard by a son who no doubt has had it related to him many times; and yet I ought to repeat it to your majesty without omitting one detail."

"Speak on, monsieur."

"When the king your father ascended the scaffold, or rather when he passed from his chamber to the scaffold, on a level with his window, everything was prepared for his escape. The executioner was got out of the way; a hole contrived under the floor of his apartment; I myself was beneath the funeral vault, which I heard all at once creak beneath his feet."

"Parry has related to me all these terrible details, monsieur."

Athos bowed and resumed. "But here is something he had not related to you, sire, for what follows passed between God, your father, and myself; and never has the revelation of it been made even to my dearest friends. 'Go a little further off,' said the august prisoner to the executioner; 'it is but for an instant, and I know that I belong to you; but remember not to strike till I give the signal. I wish to offer up my prayers in freedom.'"

"Pardon me," said Charles II., turning very pale, "but you, count, who know so many details of this melancholy event,--details which, as you said just now, have never been revealed to any one,--do you know the name of that infernal executioner, of that base wretch who concealed his face that he might assassinate a king with impunity?"

Athos became slightly pale. "His name?" said he, "yes, I know it, but cannot tell it."

"And what is become of him, for nobody in England knows his destiny?"

"He is dead."

"But he did not die in his bed; he did not die a calm and peaceful death; he did not die the death of the good?"

"He died a violent death, in a terrible night, rendered so by the passions of man and a tempest from God. His body, pierced by a dagger, sank to the depths of the ocean. God pardon his murderer!"

"Proceed, then," said Charles II., seeing that the count was unwilling to say more.

"The king of England, after having, as I have said, spoken thus to the masked executioner, added,--'Observe, you will not strike till I shall stretch out my arms, saying--REMEMBER!'"

"I was aware," said Charles, in an agitated voice, "that that was the last word pronounced by my unfortunate father. But why and for whom?"

"For the French gentleman placed beneath his scaffold."

"For you, then, monsieur?"

"Yes, sire; and every one of the words which he spoke to me, through the planks of the scaffold covered with a black cloth, still sounds in my ears. The king knelt down on one knee: 'Comte de la Fere,' said he, 'are you there?' 'Yes, sire,' replied I. Then the king stooped towards the boards."

Charles II., also palpitating with interest, burning with grief, stooped towards Athos, to catch, one by one, every word that escaped from him. His head touched that of the comte.

"Then," continued Athos, "the king stooped. 'Comte de la Fere,' said he, 'I could not be saved by you: it was not to be. Now, even though I commit a sacrilege, I must speak to you. Yes, I have spoken to men--yes, I have spoken to God, and I speak to you the last. To sustain a cause which I thought sacred, I have lost the throne of my fathers and the heritage of my children.'"

Charles II. concealed his face in his hands, and a bitter tear glided between his white and slender fingers.

"'I have still a million in gold,' continued the king. 'I buried it in the vaults of the castle of Newcastle, a moment before I left that city.'" Charles raised his head with an expression of such painful joy that it would have drawn tears from any one acquainted with his misfortunes.

"A million!" murmured he, "Oh, count!"

"'You alone know that this money exists: employ it when you think it can be of the greatest service to my eldest son. And now, Comte de la Fere, bid me adieu!'"

"'Adieu, adieu, sire!' cried I."

Charles arose, and went and leant his burning brow against the window.

"It was then," continued Athos, "that the king pronounced the word 'REMEMBER!' addressed to me. You see, sire, that I have remembered."

The king could not resist or conceal his emotion. Athos beheld the movement of his shoulders, which undulated convulsively; he heard the sobs which burst from his over-charged breast. He was silent himself, suffocated by the flood of bitter remembrances he had just poured upon that royal head. Charles II., with a violent effort, left the window, devoured his tears, and came and sat by Athos. "Sire," said the latter, "I thought till to-day that the time had not yet arrived for the employment of that last resource; but, with my eyes fixed upon England, I felt it was approaching. To-morrow I meant to go and inquire in what part of the world your majesty was, and then I purposed going to you. You come to me, sire; that is an indication that God is with us."

"My lord," said Charles, in a voice choked by emotion, "you are, for me, what an angel sent from heaven would be,--you are a preserver sent to me from the tomb of my father himself; but, believe me, for ten years' civil war has passed over my country, striking down men, tearing up soil, it is no more probable that gold should remain in the entrails of the earth, than love in the hearts of my subjects."

"Sire, the spot in which his majesty buried the million is well known to me, and no one, I am sure, has been able to discover it. Besides, is the castle of Newcastle quite destroyed? Have they demolished it stone by stone, and uprooted the soil to the last tree?"

"No, it is still standing: but at this moment General Monk occupies it and is encamped there. The only spot from which I could look for succor, where I possess a single resource, you see, is invaded by my enemies."

"General Monk, sire, cannot have discovered the treasure which I speak of."

"Yes, but can I go and deliver myself up to Monk, in order to recover this treasure? Ah! count, you see plainly I must yield to destiny, since it strikes me to the earth every time I rise. What can I do with Parry as my only servant, with Parry, whom Monk has already driven from his presence? No, no, no, count, we must yield to this last blow."

"But what your majesty cannot do, and what Parry can no more attempt, do you not believe that I could succeed in accomplishing?"

"You--you, count--you would go?"

"If it please your majesty," said Athos, bowing to the king, "yes, I will go, sire."

"What! you so happy here, count?"

"I am never happy when I have a duty left to accomplish, and it is an imperative duty which the king your father left me to watch over your fortunes, and make a royal use of his money. So, if your majesty honors me with a sign, I will go with you."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the king, forgetting all royal etiquette and throwing his arms around the neck of Athos, "you prove to me that there is a God in heaven, and that this God sometimes sends messengers to the unfortunate who groan on the earth."

Athos, exceedingly moved by this burst of feeling of the young man, thanked him with profound respect, and approached the window.

"Grimaud!"
cried he, "bring out my horses."

"What, now--immediately!" said the king. "Ah, monsieur, you are indeed a wonderful man!"

"Sire," said Athos, "I know nothing more pressing than your majesty's service. Besides," added he, smiling, "it is a habit contracted long since, in the service of the queen your aunt, and of the king your father. How is it possible for me to lose it at the moment your majesty's service calls for it?"

"What a man!" murmured the king.

Then, after a moment's reflection,--"But no, count, I cannot expose you to such privations. I have no means of rewarding such services."

"Bah!" said Athos, laughing. "Your majesty is joking; have you not a million? Ah! why am I not possessed of half such a sum! I would already have raised a regiment. But, thank God! I have still a few rolls of gold and some family diamonds left. Your majesty will, I hope, deign to share with a devoted servant."

"With a friend--yes, count, but on condition that, in his turn, that friend will share with me hereafter!"

"Sire!" said Athos, opening a casket, from which he drew both gold and jewels, "you see, sire, we are too rich. Fortunately, there are four of us, in the event of our meeting with thieves."

Joy made the blood rush to the pale cheeks of Charles II., as he saw Athos's two horses, led by Grimaud, already booted for the journey, advance towards the porch.

"Blaisois, this letter for the Vicomte de Bragelonne. For everybody

else I am gone to Paris. I confide the house to you, Blaisois." Blaisois bowed, shook hands with Grimaud, and shut the gate.