

Chapter XXVI. Heart and Mind.

"My lord," said the Comte de la Fere, "you are an noble Englishman, you are a loyal man; you are speaking to a noble Frenchman, to a man of heart. The gold contained in these two casks before us, I have told you was mine. I was wrong--it is the first lie I have pronounced in my life, a temporary lie, it is true. This gold is the property of King Charles II., exiled from his country, driven from his palaces, the orphan at once of his father and his throne, and deprived of everything, even of the melancholy happiness of kissing on his knees the stone upon which the hands of his murderers have written that simple epitaph which will eternally cry out for vengeance upon them:--'HERE LIES CHARLES I.'"

Monk grew slightly pale, and an imperceptible shudder crept over his skin and raised his gray mustache.

"I," continued Athos, "I, Comte de la Fere, the last, only faithful friend the poor abandoned prince has left, I have offered him to come hither to find the man upon whom now depends the fate of royalty and of England; and I have come, and placed myself under the eye of this man, and have placed myself naked and unarmed in his hands, saying:--'My lord, here are the last resources of a prince whom God made your master, whom his birth made your king; upon you, and you alone, depend his life and future. Will you employ this money in consoling England for the evils it must have suffered from anarchy; that is to say, will you aid, and if not aid, will you allow King Charles II. to act? You are master, you are king, all-powerful master and king, for chance sometimes defeats the work of time and God. I am here alone with you, my lord: if divided success alarms you, if my complicity annoys you, you are armed, my lord, and here is a grave ready dug; if, on the contrary, the enthusiasm of your cause carries you away, if you are what you appear to be, if your hand in what it undertakes obeys your mind, and your mind your heart, here are the means of ruining forever the cause of your enemy, Charles Stuart. Kill, then, the man you have before you, for that man will never return to him who has sent him without bearing with him the deposit which Charles I., his father, confided to him, and keep the gold which may assist in carrying on the civil war. Alas! my lord, it is the fate of this unfortunate prince. He must either corrupt or kill, for everything resists him, everything repulses him, everything is hostile to him; and yet he is marked with divine seal, and he must, not to belie his blood, reascend the throne, or die upon the sacred soil of his country.'

"My lord, you have heard me. To any other but the illustrious man who listens to me, I would have said: 'My lord, you are poor; my lord, the king offers you this million as an earnest of an immense bargain; take it, and serve Charles II. as I served Charles I., and I feel assured

that God, who listens to us, who sees us, who alone reads in your heart, shut up from all human eyes,--I am assured God will give you a happy eternal life after death.' But to General Monk, to the illustrious man of whose standard I believe I have taken measure, I say: 'My lord, there is for you in the history of peoples and kings a brilliant place, an immortal, imperishable glory, if alone, without any other interest but the good of your country and the interests of justice, you become the supporter of your king. Many others have been conquerors and glorious usurpers; you, my lord, you will be content with being the most virtuous, the most honest, and the most incorruptible of men: you will have held a crown in your hand, and instead of placing it upon your own brow, you will have deposited it upon the head of him for whom it was made. Oh, my lord, act thus, and you will leave to posterity the most enviable of names, in which no human creature can rival you.'

Athos stopped. During the whole time that the noble gentleman was speaking, Monk had not given one sign of either approbation or disapprobation; scarcely even, during this vehement appeal, had his eyes been animated with that fire which bespeaks intelligence. The Comte de la Fere looked at him sorrowfully, and on seeing that melancholy countenance, felt discouragement penetrate to his very heart. At length Monk appeared to recover, and broke the silence.

"Monsieur," said he, in a mild, calm tone, "in reply to you, I will make use of your own words. To any other but yourself I would reply by expulsion, imprisonment, or still worse, for, in fact, you tempt me and you force me at the same time. But you are one of those men, monsieur, to whom it is impossible to refuse the attention and respect they merit; you are a brave gentleman, monsieur--I say so, and I am a judge. You just now spoke of a deposit which the late king transmitted through you to his son--are you, then, one of those Frenchmen who, as I have heard, endeavored to carry off Charles I. from Whitehall?"

"Yes, my lord; it was I who was beneath the scaffold during the execution; I, who had not been able to redeem it, received upon my brow the blood of the martyred king. I received, at the same time, the last word of Charles I.; it was to me he said, 'REMEMBER!' and in saying, 'Remember!' he alluded to the money at your feet, my lord."

"I have heard much of you, monsieur," said Monk, "but I am happy to have, in the first place, appreciated you by my own observations, and not by my remembrances. I will give you, then, explanations that I have given to no other, and you will appreciate what a distinction I make between you and the persons who have hitherto been sent to me."

Athos bowed and prepared to absorb greedily the words which fell, one by one, from the mouth of Monk,--those words rare and precious as the dew in the desert.

"You spoke to me," said Monk, "of Charles II.; but pray, monsieur, of what consequence to me is that phantom of a king? I have grown old in a war and in a policy which are nowadays so closely linked together, that every man of the sword must fight in virtue of his rights or his ambition with a personal interest, and not blindly behind an officer, as in ordinary wars. For myself, I perhaps desire nothing, but I fear much. In the war of to-day rests the liberty of England, and, perhaps, that of every Englishman. How can you expect that I, free in the position I have made for myself, should go willingly and hold out my hands to the shackles of a stranger? That is all Charles is to me. He has fought battles here which he has lost, he is therefore a bad captain; he has succeeded in no negotiation, he is therefore a bad diplomatist; he has paraded his wants and his miseries in all the courts of Europe, he has therefore a weak and pusillanimous heart. Nothing noble, nothing great, nothing strong has hitherto emanated from that genius which aspires to govern one of the greatest kingdoms of the earth. I know this Charles, then, under none but bad aspects, and you would wish me, a man of good sense, to go and make myself gratuitously the slave of a creature who is inferior to me in military capacity, in politics, and in dignity! No, monsieur. When some great and noble action shall have taught me to value Charles, I shall perhaps recognize his rights to a throne from which we cast the father because he wanted the virtues which his son has hitherto lacked, but, in fact of rights, I only recognize my own; the revolution made me a general, my sword will make me protector, if I wish it. Let Charles show himself, let him present himself, let him enter the competition open to genius, and, above all, let him remember that he is of a race from whom more will be expected than from any other. Therefore, monsieur, say no more about him. I neither refuse nor accept: I reserve myself--I wait."

Athos knew Monk to be too well informed of all concerning Charles to venture to urge the discussion further; it was neither the time nor the place. "My lord," then said he, "I have nothing to do but thank you."

"And why, monsieur? Because you have formed a correct opinion of me, or because I have acted according to your judgment? Is that, in truth, worthy of thanks? This gold which you are about to carry to Charles will serve me as a test for him, by seeing the use he will make of it. I shall have an opinion which now I have not."

"And yet does not your honor fear to compromise yourself by allowing such a sum to be carried away for the service of your enemy?"

"My enemy, say you? Eh, monsieur, I have no enemies. I am in the service of the parliament, which orders me to fight General Lambert and Charles Stuart--its enemies, and not mine. I fight them. If the parliament, on the contrary, ordered me to unfurl my standards on the port of London, and to assemble my soldiers on the banks to receive Charles II.--"

"You would obey?" cried Athos, joyfully.

"Pardon me," said Monk, smiling, "I was going on--I, a gray-headed man--in truth, how could I forget myself? was going to speak like a foolish young man."

"Then you would not obey?" said Athos.

"I do not say that either, monsieur. The welfare of my country before everything. God, who has given me the power, has, no doubt, willed that I should have that power for the good of all, and He has given me, at the same time, discernment. If the parliament were to order such a thing, I should reflect."

The brow of Athos became clouded. "Then I may positively say that your honor is not inclined to favor King Charles II.?"

"You continue to question me, monsieur le comte; allow me to do so in turn, if you please."

"Do, monsieur; and may God inspire you with the idea of replying to me as frankly as I shall reply to you."

"When you shall have taken this money back to your prince, what advice will you give him?"

Athos fixed upon Monk a proud and resolute look.

"My lord," said he, "with this million, which others would perhaps employ in negotiating, I would advise the king to rise two regiments, to enter Scotland, which you have just pacified: to give to the people the franchises which the revolution promised them, and in which it has not, in all cases, kept its word. I should advise him to command in person this little army, which would, believe me, increase, and to die, standard in hand, and sword in sheath, saying, 'Englishmen! I am the third king of my race you have killed; beware of the justice of God!'"

Monk hung down his head, and mused for an instant. "If he succeeded," said he, "which is very improbable, but not impossible--for everything is possible in this world--what would you advise him to do?"

"To think that by the will of God he lost his crown, by the good will of men he recovered it."

An ironical smile passed over the lips of Monk.

"Unfortunately, monsieur," said he, "kings do not know how to follow good advice."

"Ah, my lord, Charles II. is not a king," replied Athos, smiling in his turn, but with a very different expression from Monk.

"Let us terminate this, monsieur le comte,--that is your desire, is it not?"

Athos bowed.

"I shall give orders to have these two casks transported whither you please. Where are you lodging, monsieur?"

"In a little hamlet at the mouth of the river, your honor."

"Oh, I know the hamlet; it consists of five or six houses, does it not?"

"Exactly. Well, I inhabit the first,--two net-makers occupy it with me; it is their bark which brought me ashore."

"But your own vessel, monsieur?"

"My vessel is at anchor, a quarter of a mile at sea, and waits for me."

"You do not think, however, of setting out immediately?"

"My lord, I shall try once more to convince your honor."

"You will not succeed," replied Monk; "but it is of consequence that you should depart from Newcastle without leaving of your passage the least suspicion that might prove injurious to me or you. To-morrow my officers think Lambert will attack me. I, on the contrary, am convinced he will not stir; it is in my opinion impossible. Lambert leads an army devoid of homogeneous principles, and there is no possible army with such elements. I have taught my soldiers to consider my authority subordinate to another, therefore, after me, round me, and beneath me, they still look for something. It would result that if I were dead, whatever might happen, my army would not be demoralized all at once; it results, that if I choose to absent myself, for instance, as it does please me to do sometimes, there would not be in the camp the shadow of uneasiness or disorder. I am the magnet--the sympathetic and natural strength of the English. All those scattered irons that will be sent against me I shall attract to myself. Lambert, at this moment, commands eighteen thousand deserters; but I have never mentioned that to my officers, you may easily suppose. Nothing is more useful to an army than the expectation of a coming battle; everybody is awake--everybody is on guard. I tell you this that you may live in perfect security. Do not be in a hurry, then, to cross the seas; within a week there will be something fresh, either a battle or an accommodation. Then, as you have judged me to be an honorable man, and confided your secret to me, I have to thank you for this confidence, and I shall come and pay you a visit or send for

you. Do not go before I send word. I repeat the request."

"I promise you, general," cried Athos, with a joy so great, that in spite of all his circumspection, he could not prevent its sparkling in his eyes.

Monk surprised this flash, and immediately extinguished it by one of those silent smiles which always caused his interlocutors to know they had made no inroad on his mind.

"Then, my lord, it is a week that you desire me to wait?"

"A week? yes, monsieur."

"And during those days what shall I do?"

"If there should be a battle, keep at a distance from it, I beseech you. I know the French delight in such amusements;--you might take a fancy to see how we fight, and you might receive some chance shot. Our Scotsmen are very bad marksmen, and I do not wish that a worthy gentleman like you should return to France wounded. Nor should I like to be obliged, myself, to send to your prince his million left here by you; for then it would be said, and with some reason, that I paid the Pretender to enable him to make war against the parliament. Go, then, monsieur, and let it be done as has been agreed upon."

"Ah, my lord," said Athos, "what joy it would give me to be the first that penetrated to the noble heart which beats beneath that cloak!"

"You think, then, that I have secrets," said Monk, without changing the half cheerful expression of his countenance. "Why, monsieur, what secret can you expect to find in the hollow head of a soldier? But it is getting late, and our torch is almost out; let us call our man."

"Hola!" cried Monk in French, approaching the stairs; "hola! fisherman!"

The fisherman, benumbed by the cold night air, replied in a hoarse voice, asking what they wanted of him.

"Go to the post," said Monk, "and order a sergeant, in the name of General Monk, to come here immediately."

This was a commission easily performed; for the sergeant, uneasy at the general's being in that desolate abbey, had drawn nearer by degrees, and was not much further off than the fisherman. The general's order was therefore heard by him, and he hastened to obey it.

"Get a horse and two men," said Monk.

"A horse and two men?" repeated the sergeant.

"Yes," replied Monk. "Have you got any means of getting a horse with a pack-saddle or two panniers?"

"No doubt, at a hundred paces off, in the Scottish camp."

"Very well."

"What shall I do with the horse, general."

"Look here."

The sergeant descended the three steps which separated him from Monk, and came into the vault.

"You see," said Monk, "that gentleman yonder?"

"Yes, general."

"And you see these two casks?"

"Perfectly."

"They are two casks, one containing powder, and the other balls; I wish these casks to be transported to the little hamlet at the mouth of the river, and which I intend to occupy to-morrow with two hundred muskets. You understand that the commission is a secret one, for it is a movement that may decide the fate of the battle."

"Oh, general!" murmured the sergeant.

"Mind, then! Let these casks be fastened on to the horse, and let them be escorted by two men and you to the residence of this gentleman, who is my friend. But take care that nobody knows it."

"I would go by the marsh if I knew the road," said the sergeant.

"I know one myself," said Athos; "it is not wide, but it is solid, having been made upon piles; and with care we shall get over safely enough."

"Do everything this gentleman shall order you to do."

"Oh! oh! the casks are heavy," said the sergeant, trying to lift one.

"They weigh four hundred pounds each, if they contain what they ought to

contain, do they not, monsieur."

"Thereabouts," said Athos.

The sergeant went in search of the two men and the horse. Monk, left alone with Athos, affected to speak to him on nothing but indifferent subjects while examining the vault in a cursory manner. Then, hearing the horse's steps,--

"I leave you with your men, monsieur," said he, "and return to the camp. You are perfectly safe."

"I shall see you again, then, my lord?" asked Athos.

"That is agreed upon, monsieur, and with much pleasure."

Monk held out his hand to Athos.

"Ah! my lord, if you would!" murmured Athos.

"Hush! monsieur, it is agreed that we shall speak no more of that." And bowing to Athos, he went up the stairs, meeting about half-way his men, who were coming down. He had not gone twenty paces, when a faint but prolonged whistle was heard at a distance. Monk listened, but seeing nothing and hearing nothing, he continued his route. Then he remembered the fisherman, and looked about for him; but the fisherman had disappeared. If he had, however, looked with more attention, he might have seen that man, bent double, gliding like a serpent along the stones and losing himself in the mist that floated over the surface of the marsh. He might equally have seen, had he attempted to pierce that mist, a spectacle that might have attracted his attention; and that was the rigging of the vessel, which had changed place, and was now nearer the shore. But Monk saw nothing; and thinking he had nothing to fear, he entered the deserted causeway which led to his camp. It was then that the disappearance of the fisherman appeared strange, and that a real suspicion began to take possession of his mind. He had just placed at the orders of Athos the only post that could protect him. He had a mile of causeway to traverse before he could regain his camp. The fog increased with such intensity that he could scarcely distinguish objects at ten paces' distance. Monk then thought he heard the sound of an oar over the marsh on the right. "Who goes there?" said he.

But nobody answered; then he cocked his pistol, took his sword in his hand, and quickened his pace, without, however, being willing to call anybody. Such a summons, for which there was no absolute necessity, appeared unworthy of him.