

THE KING OF THE MOUNTAINS.

*(From the French of M. Edmond About.)**(Continued.)*

CHAPTER III.

HADGI-STAVROS.

DIMITRI set out on his return trip to Athens ; the monk went back to his bees ; and our new masters drove us into a path leading to the camp of their chief. Madame Simons at first obstinately refused to advance a step, but, on the brigands threatening to carry her, she was induced to proceed. Mary Anne was more astonished than alarmed. The brigands who had captured us had given proof of a certain amount of delicacy ; they had searched no one, and had kept their hands off their prisoners. Instead of despoiling us they had required us to despoil ourselves ; neither had they noticed that the ladies wore ear-rings, nor even requested them to take off their gloves. We were a great way off from those old stagers in Spain and Italy, who cut off a person's finger to obtain possession of a ring, or who pull off the lobe of the ear to secure a pearl or diamond. The whole misfortune to which we were reduced was the payment of ransom, and there was even a chance of our being released *gratis*. How was it to be supposed possible that Hadgi-Stavros would retain us with impunity at five miles distance from the capital, from the court, the Greek army, a battalion of his Britannic Majesty's, and an English guard-ship ? So reasoned Mary Anne. Involuntarily my thoughts wandered to the story of the little girls from Mistra, and a feeling of sadness came over me ; I feared, too, that Madame Simons, with her patriotic obstinacy, would expose her daughter to danger, and deter-

mined, therefore, to enlighten her as soon as possible on the dangers of our situation. We were walking in single file through a narrow path, and were separated from one another by our fierce travelling companions. The way seemed endless, and I inquired many times whether we would soon reach our journey's end.

Towards eleven o'clock a fierce barking apprised us of the vicinity of the camp. Ten or twelve enormous dogs, with hair like sheep's wool, flung themselves upon us, showing all their teeth. Our protectors received them with blows, and after hostilities had continued for about a quarter of an hour peace was made. These inhospitable monsters proved the advance guard of the King of the Mountains. They scent the gendarmerie as smugglers' dogs scent custom-house officials. But this is not all ; their zeal is so great that they occasionally devour an inoffensive shepherd, a traveller who has lost his way, or even one of Hadgi-Stavros' companions. The king maintains them as the old sultans kept up their janizaries, in perpetual fear of being devoured.

The king's camp was a table-land of an area of about seven or eight hundred metres. It was in vain I sought thereon the tents of our conquerors ; brigands are by no means Sybarites ; and on the thirtieth of April they sleep in the open air. I saw neither heaped spoils nor treasures set forth, nor, in fact, any of those things one would expect to see at the headquarters of a band of robbers. Hadgi-Stavros causes all booty to be sold ; every man receives his share in money, and can employ it according to his fancy.