

THE KING OF THE MOUNTAINS.

(From the French of M. Edmond About.)

(Concluded.)

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT.

IN the midst of our farewell speeches the ladies' maid came to pray them not to forget her, and although she had proved far from useful, Madame Simons cordially regretted her utter inability to remunerate the girl for her services. She begged me to relate to the king how she had been robbed of her money. Hadgi-Stavros merely shrugged his shoulders and muttered between his teeth: "This Périclès! . . . bad education . . . the city . . . court life. . . I should have been prepared for this." He added aloud: "Request these ladies not to trouble themselves; it was I who furnished them with a maid, and it is my duty to pay her. Tell them that should they require funds to return to town my purse is at their disposal. I will have them escorted to the foot of the mountain, although they are in no danger whatever. They will find breakfast, horses, and a guide at the village of Castia; everything is provided and paid for. Do you think they would honour me by shaking hands in token of reconciliation?"

Both ladies shook hands, first with the king and then with me. Madame Simons said to me at parting: "Be of good cheer, my dear sir." Mary Anne did not utter a word.

When the last man of the escort had disappeared, Hadgi-Stavros took me aside and said: "You must have been guilty of some awkwardness?"

"Alas! I answered, I have not been very skilful."

"The ransom has not been paid, but it

will be doubtless, for the ladies seem on the best of terms with you."

"Be easy, at the expiration of three days I will be far from the *Parnès*."

"So much the better, for I am in great need of money as you well know."

"Surely you need not complain after having just collected a hundred thousand francs."

"No, only ninety thousand, the priest has already deducted his tithe; and of the balance there will not be twenty thousand francs fall to my share. Our expenses are considerable I assure you."

"Did you ever happen to lose money in any of your transactions?"

"Once! I had just got possession of fifty thousand francs for the society, and one of my secretaries, whom I have hanged since, fled to Thessaly with the cash-box. I had to cover the deficit, for I am responsible. My share amounted to seven thousand francs, consequently my loss was forty-three thousand. But the scoundrel who robbed me paid dearly for it. I punished him according to the Persian mode. Before hanging him, his every tooth was extracted in succession and driven into his skull with a hammer. I am by no means ill-natured, but I never permit myself to be wronged."

I rejoiced that this man, who was by no means ill-natured, should lose eighty thousand francs in Madame Simons' ransom. and that the news of the loss would reach him when my teeth and skull were no longer within his reach. He caught my arm in a friendly way, saying:

"How will you manage to kill time until you take leave of us? You will doubtless miss the ladies, and the house will seem too large.