CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MONK.

Two men lay extended on the ground; one bled in his blood, and motionless, with his face toward the earth; he was dead. The other leaned against a tree, supported there by the two valets; and was praying fervently, with clasped hands, and eyes raised to heaven. He had received a ball in his thigh, which had broken the upper part of it. The young men first approached the dead man.

"He is a priest," said I regrettably, "he has worn the tonsure.

Oh, theouncing! to lift their hands against the minister of God!"

"Come here, sir," said Urban, an old soldier who had served under the cardinal-duke in all his campaigns. "Come here, there is nothing to be done with him; whilst we may perhaps be able to save this one."

The wounded man smiled sadly. "Save me! oh no," said he;

"but help me to die, you can."

"Are you a priest?" asked Raul.

"No, sir."

"I ask, as your unfortunate companion appeared to me to belong to the church."

"He is the curate of Bethune, sir, and was carrying the holy vessels belonging to his church, and the treasure of the chapter, to a safe place, the prince having abandoned our town yesterday; and as it was known that bands of the enemy were prowling about the country, no one dared to accompany the good man, so I offered to do so."

"And, sir," continued the wounded man, "I suffer much, and would like, if possible, to be carried to some house."

"Where you can be relieved?" asked De Guiche.

"No, where I can confess myself."

"But perhaps you are not so dangerously wounded as you think," said Raul.

"Sir," replied the wounded man, "believe me there is no time to lose; the ball has broken the thigh-bone, and entered the heart."

"Are you a surgeon?" asked De Guiche.

"No, but I know a little about wounds, and mine is mortal. Try, therefore, either to carry me to some place where I may see a priest, or take the trouble to send one to me here. It is my soul that must be saved; as for my body, that is lost."

"Good God! good God!" added the wounded man, in an accent of terror which made the young man shudder; "you will not allow me to die without receiving absolution? that would be too terrible!"

"Calm yourself, sir," replied De Guiche. "I swear to you that you shall receive the consolation that you ask. Only tell us where we shall find a house at which we can demand aid, and a village from which we can fetch a priest."

"Thank you, and God will reward you! About half a mile from this, on the same road, there is an inn; and about a mile further on,
after leaving the inn, you will reach the village of Greney. There
you must find the curate; or if he is not at home, go to the convent
of the Augustines, which is the last house on the right in the village,
and bring me one of the brothers. Monk or priest it matters not,
provided he have received from our holy church the power of ab-
solving 'in articulo mortis.'”

“Monsieur d’Arminges,” said De Guiche, “remain beside this
unfortunate man, and see that he is removed as gently as possible.
The vicomte and myself will go and find a priest.”

“Go, sir,” replied the labor; “but, in Heaven’s name do not ex-
pose yourself to danger!”

“Do not fear. Besides, we are safe to-day; you know the axiom
—Nou bis in idem.”

“Courage, sir,” said Raoul to the wounded man. “We are going
to execute your wishes.”

“May Heaven prosper you!” replied the dying man, with an ac-
cent of gratitude impossible to describe.
The two young men galloped off in the direction mentioned to
them, and ten minutes after reached the inn. Raoul, without dis-
mounting, called to the host and announced that a wounded man
was about to be brought to his house, and begged him, in the mean-
time, to prepare everything necessary for dressing his wounds. He
desired him also, should he know in the neighborhood any doctor,
surgeon, or apothecary, to fetch him, taking on himself the payment
of the messenger. Raoul had already proceeded for more than a
mile, and had begun to desolate the first houses of the village, the red
roofed roofs of which stood out strongly from the green trees which
surrounded them, when, coming toward them mounted on a mule,
they perceived a poor monk, whose large hat and gray worsted dress
made them mistake him for an Augustinian brother. Chance for once
had seemed to favor them in sending what they were seeking for.
He was a man about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, but
who appeared to be aged by his ascetic exercises. His complexion
was pallid, not of that deathly pallor which is a beauty, but of a
bilious, yellow hue; his light colorless hair was short, and scarcely
extended beyond the circle formed by the hat round his head, and
his light blue eyes seemed entirely disintegrated by any expression.

“Sir,” began Raoul, with his usual politeness, “are you an eccle-
siastic?”

“Why do you ask me that?” replied the stranger, with a coolness
which was barely civil.

“Because we want to know,” said De Guiche, haughtily.
The stranger touched his mule with his heel, and continued his
way.
In a second De Guiche had sprung before him and barred his pas-
sage. “Answer, sir,” exclaimed he; “you have been asked politely,
and every question is worth an answer.”

“I suppose I am free to say who I am, or not, to any kind of
people who choose to take a fancy to ask me.”

It was with difficulty that De Guiche restrained the intense desire
he had of breaking the monk’s bones.

“In the first place,” he said, making an effort to control himself,
we are not people who may be treated any how; my friend there
is the Viscount of Bragelonne, and I am the Count de Guiche. Nor is it from a matter of caprice that we asked you the question; for there is a wounded and dying man who demands the succor of the Church. If you be a priest, I conjure you in the name of humanity to follow me to aid this man; if you be not, it is a different matter, and I warn you, in the name of courtesy, of which you appear so utterly ignorant, that I shall chastise you for your presumption.

The pale face of the monk became so vivid, and his smile was so strange, that Raoul, whose eyes were still fixed upon him, felt as if this smile had struck to his heart like some insult.

"He is some Spanish or Flemish spy," said he, putting his hand to his pistol. A glance, threatening and as transcendent as lightning, replied to Raoul.

"Well, sir," said De Guiche, "are you going to reply?"

"I am a priest," said the young man.

"Then, father," said Raoul, forcing himself to give a respect to his speech which did not come from his heart, "if you are a priest, then, you have an opportunity, as my friend has told you, of exercising your vocation. At the next inn you will find a wounded man, who has asked the assistance of a minister of God, attended on by our servants."

"I will go," said the monk.

And he touched his mule.

"If you do not go, sir," said De Guiche, "remember that we have two swords quite able to catch your mule, and the power of having you seized wherever you may be; and then I swear your trial will be short; one can always find a tree and a cord."

The monk's eye again flashed, but that was all; he merely repeated his phrase, "I will go"—and he went.

"Let us follow him," said De Guiche; "it will be the more sure plan."

"I was about to propose doing so," answered De Bragelonne.

In the space of five minutes, the monk turned round to ascertain whether he was followed or not.

"You see," said Raoul, "we have done wisely."

"What a horrible face that monk has," said De Guiche.

"Horrible!" replied Raoul, "especially in expression."

"Yes, yes," said De Guiche, "a strange face; but these monks are subject to such degrading practices; the fumes make them pale; the blows of the discipline make them hypochondriacs; and their eyes become inflamed in weeping for the good things of this life which we enjoy, and which they have lost."

"Well," said Raoul, "the poor man will get his priest; but by Heaven, the penitent appears to have a better conscience than the confessor. I confess I am accustomed to see priests of a very different appearance."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Guiche, "you must understand that this is one of those wandering brothers, who go begging on the high road, until some day a beneficent falls down from heaven for them; they are mostly foreigners—Scotch, Irish, or Danish."

"What a misfortune for that poor wounded fellow to be under the hands of such a friar!"

"Pahaw!" said De Guiche. "Absolution comes not from him..."
who administrates it, but from God. However, let me tell you that I would rather die unshriven than have anything to say to such a confessor. You are of my opinion, are you not, viscount? And I see you playing with the pommel of your sword, as if you had a great inclination to break his head.

"Yes, count, it is a strange thing, and one which might astonish you; but I feel an indescribable horror at the sight of that man. Have you ever seen a snake rise up on your path?"

"Never," answered De Guiche.

"Well, it has happened to me to do so in our British forests, and I remember that the first time I encountered one with its eyes fixed upon me, curled up, swinging its head, and saluting its tongue, that I remained fixed, pale, and as if fascinated, until the moment when the Comte de la Fere—"

"Your father?" asked De Guiche.

"No, my guardian," replied Raoul, blushing.

"Very well—"

"—'Until the moment when the Comte de la Fere,' resumed Raoul, 'said, 'Come, Bragelonne, draw your sword;' then only I rushed upon the reptile, and cut it in two; just at the moment when it was rising on its tail and hissing ere it sprung upon me. Well, I vow I felt exactly the same sensation at the sight of that man when he said, 'Why do you ask me that?' and looked at me."

"Then you regret that you did not cut your serpent in two moments?"

"Faith, yes, almost," said Raoul.

They had now arrived in sight of the little inn, and could see on the opposite side the procession bearing the wounded man, and guided by Monsieur d'Armanges. The youths spurred on.

"There is the wounded man," said De Guiche, passing close to the Augustinian brother. "Be good enough to hurry yourself a little, sir monk."

As for Raoul he avoided the monk the whole width of the road, and passed him, turning his head away in disgust. The young men rode up to the wounded man to announce that the prince was followed by the priest. He raised himself to glance in the direction which they pointed out, saw the monk, and fell back upon the litter, his face being lightened up by joy.

"And now," said the youths, "we have done all we can for you; and as we are in haste to rejoin the prince's army we must continue our journey. You will excuse us, sir, but we are told that a battle is expected, and we do not wish to arrive the day after it."

"Go, my young sirs," said the sick man, "and may you both be blessèd for your piety. God protect you, and all dear to you!"

"Sir," said De Guiche to his tutor, "we will precede you, and you can rejoin us on the road to Cambrai."

The host was at his door, and everything was prepared—bed, bandages, and lint.

"Everything," said he to Raoul, "shall be done as you desire, but will you not stop to have your wound dressed?"

"Oh, my wound—mine—it is nothing," replied the viscount; "it will be time to think about it when we meet at dinner; only have the goodness, should you see a cavalier pass who should make inquiries
from you about a young man mounted on a chestnut horse, and fol-
lowed by a servant, to tell him, in fact, that you have seen me, but
that I have continued my journey, and intend to dine at Mazingarbe,
and to stop at Cambrai. This cavalier is my attenant."
"Would it not be safer and more sure that I should ask him his
name, and tell him yours?" demanded the host.
"There is no harm in over-caution. I am the Viscount de
Bragelonne, and he is called Grimaud."
At this moment the wounded man passed on one side, and the
monk on the other, the latter dismounting from his mule and desir-
ing that it should be taken to the stables without being unharn-
essed.
"Come, count," said Racoul, who seemed instinctively to dislike
the vicinity of the Augustinians; "come, I feel ill here," and the two
young men spurred on.
The litter, borne by the two sercents, now entered the house.
The host and his wife were standing on the steps of the staircase,
while the unhappy man seemed to suffer dreadful pain, and yet only
to be anxious to know if he was followed by the monk. At the
sight of this pale bleeding man the wife grasped her husband's
arm.
"Well, what's the matter?" asked the latter; "are you going to
be ill just now?"
"No, but look," replied the hostess, pointing to the wounded
man: "I ask you if you recognize him?"
"That man—wait a bit."
"Ah! I see that you know him," exclaimed the wife; "for you
have become pale in your turn."
"In truth," cried the host, "misfortune has come upon our house;
for the executioner of Bethune!"
"The former executioner of Bethune!" murmured the young
monk, shrinking back and showing on his countenance the feeling
of repugnance which his prudent inspired.
Monsieur d'Armandes, who was at the door, perceived his hesita-
tion.
"Sir Monk," said he, "whether he is now or has been an execu-
tioner, this unfortunate being is no less a man. Render to him,
then, the last service he will ask from you, and your work will be
all the more meritorious."
The monk made no reply, but silently wended his way to the room
where the two valets had deposited the dying man on a bed.
D'Armandes and Olivain, and the two prelates, then mounted their
horses, and all four started off at a quick trot to rejoin Racoul and
his companion. Just as the tutor and his escort disappeared in their
turn, a new traveler stopped on the threshold of the inn.
"What does your worship want?" demanded the host, pale and
trembling from the discovery he had just made.
The traveler made a sign as if he wished to drink, pointed to his
horse, and egestulated like a man who is rubbing something.
"Ah! stable," said the host to himself; "this man seems dumb. And
where will your worship drink?"
"There," answered the traveler, pointing to the table.
"I was mistaken," said the host; "he's not quite dumb. And what else does your worship wish for?"
"Do you know if you have seen a young man pass, fifteen years of age, mounted on a chestnut horse, and followed by a groom?"
"The Vicomte de Brusgolonne?"
"Just so."
"Then you are called Monsieur Grimaud?"
The traveler made a sign of assent.
"Well, then," said the host, "your young master has been here a quarter of an hour ago: he will dine at Mazagarbe, and sleep at Cambria."
"How far from Mazagarbe?"
"Two miles and a half."
"Thank you."

Grimaud was drinking his wine silently, and had just placed his glass on the table to be filled a second time, when a fearful scream resounded from the room occupied by the monk and the dying man.

Grimaud sprang up:
"What is that?" said he; "whence that cry?"
"From the wounded man's room," replied the host.
"What wounded man?"
"The former executioner of Bethune, who has just been brought in here assassinated by the Spaniards, and who is now being confessed by an Augustinian friar."
"The old executioner of Bethune," muttered Grimaud; "a man between fifty-five and sixty, tall, strong, swarthy, black hair and beard!"
"That is he—do you know him?" asked the host.
"I have seen him once," replied Grimaud, a cloud darkening his countenance at the picture called up by his recollections.
"At this instant a second cry, less piercing than the first, but followed by prolonged groaning, was heard.
"We must see what it is," said Grimaud.

If Grimaud was slow in speaking, we know that he was quick in action; he sprang to the door and shook it violently, but it was bolted on the other side.
"Open the door," cried the host, "open it instantly, Sir Monk!"
No reply.
"Unfasten it, or I will break in the panel," said Grimaud.
The same silence, and then, as the host could oppose his design, Grimaud seized on some phœnix which he perceived lying in a corner, and forced the bolt. The room was inundated with blood, streaming through the mattresses upon which lay the wounded man speechless—the monk had disappeared.

"The monk?" cried the host; "where is the monk?"
Grimaud sprang toward an open window which looked into the court-yard.
"He has escaped by this means," exclaimed he.
"Do you think so?" said the host, bewildered; "boy, see if the mule belonging to the monk is still in the stable."
"There's no mule," replied the person to whom this question was addressed.
The host held up his hand, and looked around him suspiciously.
TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

whist Grimaud knelt his brows, and approached the wounded man, whose worn, hard features awoke in his mind such awful recollections of the past.

"There can be no longer any doubt but that it is himself," said he.

"Does he still live?" inquired the innkeeper.

Making no reply, Grimaud opened the poor man's jacket to feel if the heart beat, whilst the host approached in his turn; but in a moment they both fell back, the host uttering a cry of horror, and Grimaud becoming pale. The blade of a dagger was buried up to the hilt in the left side of the executioner.

"Run—run for help!" cried Grimaud, "and I will remain beside him here."

The host quitted the room in agitation; and as for his wife, she had fled at the sound of her husband's cries.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

Grimaud Speaks.

Grimaud was left alone with the executioner, who in a few moments opened his eyes.

"Help, help," he murmured; "oh, God! have I not a single friend in the world who will aid me either to live or to die?"

"Take courage," said Grimaud; "they are gone to find help."

"Who are you?" asked the wounded man, fixing his half-opened eyes on Grimaud.


"You?" and the wounded man sought to recall the features of the person who was before him to his mind.

"Under what circumstances did we meet?" he asked again.

"One night, twenty years ago, my master fetched you from Bethune, and conducted you to Armentieres."

"I know you well now," said the executioner; "you are one of the four grooms."

"Just so."

"Where do you come from now?"

"I was passing by on the road, and drew up at this inn to rest my horse. They were relating to me how the executioner of Bethune was here, and wounded, when you uttered two piercing cries. At the first we ran to the door, and at the second forced it open."

"And the monk?" exclaimed the executioner; "did you see the monk?"

"What monk?"

"The monk that was shut in with me."

"No, he was no longer here; he appears to have fled by the window. Was it he who struck you?"

"Yes," said the executioner.

Grimaud moved as if to leave the room.

"What are you going to do?" asked the wounded man.

"He must be apprehended."

"Do not attempt it; he has revenged himself, and has done well.