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ALEXANDRE DUMAS
THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS was born at Villers-Cotterêts in 1802, the son of an innkeeper's daughter and of one of Napoleon's most remarkable generals. He moved to Paris in 1823 to make his fortune in the theatre. By the time he was 28, he was one of the leading literary figures of his day, a star of the Romantic Revolution, and known for his many mistresses and taste for high living. He threw himself recklessly into the July Revolution of 1830 which he regarded as a great adventure. Quickly wearying of politics, he returned to the theatre and by the early 1840s was producing vast historical novels at a stupendous rate and in prodigious quantities for the cheap newspapers which paid enormous sums of money to authors who could please the public. His complete works were eventually to fill over 300 volumes and his yarns made him the best-known Frenchman of his age. He earned several fortunes which he gave away, or spent on women and travel, or wasted on grandiose follies like the 'Château de Monte Cristo' which he built to symbolize his success. In 1848 he stood unsuccessfully in the elections for the new Assembly. By 1850, his creditors began to catch up with him and, partly to escape them and partly to find new material for his novels, plays, and travel books, he lived abroad for long periods, travelling through Russia where his fame had preceded him, and Italy where he ran guns in support of Garibaldi's libertarian cause. Without guile and without enemies, he was a man of endless fascination who lived long enough to see his talent desert him. He died of a stroke at Puys, near Dieppe, in 1870.

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Man in the Iron Mask

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
DAVID COWARD

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INTRODUCTION

The Man in the Iron Mask is the final instalment of a saga of chivalry and valour which spans half a century of French history and runs to over a million and a quarter words. It began with *The Three Musketeers* (1844) in which d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis foil the wicked Milady and the steely Cardinal Richelieu; was continued in *Twenty Years After* (1845) where Dumas's legendary heroes fight for right during the civil wars of the Fronde in 1648 and fail gloriously in an attempt to rescue Charles I from the clutches of the evil Cromwell; and reaches its climax in *The Vicomte de Bragelonne, or Ten Years After* (1848–50), which embroils the famous four in their last tilt. Dumas promised further adventures which, however, were never written.

The Vicomte de Bragelonne has more often than not been issued in English as three separate novels. The first part, *Bragelonne, or the Son of Athos,* introduces the languid Raoul who, though 'the principal hero of this tale', is unmanned by his love for Louise de la Vallière and plays little part in the action which tells how d'Artagnan, Porthos, and Athos, with some subtle manœuvring from Aramis, restore Charles II to the English throne in the summer of 1660. The second section, *Louise de la Vallière,* follows Louis XIV's growing love for Louise and his deepening antagonism towards Fouquet in the early summer of 1661. The sleuthings of d'Artagnan, who detects a threat to the King whom he continues to serve faithfully, and the sinister intrigues of Aramis, now Vicar-General of the Jesuits, are carried on into *The Man in the Iron Mask.* Porthos, who has been subverted by Aramis, and the increasingly vulnerable Athos are reduced to supporting roles but die appropriately honourable deaths. In the last pages, Dumas hurries time (which has for long periods stood still) and finally allows d'Artagnan to fall at the battle of Maestricht in 1673.

Readers will not perhaps have heard much of the battle of Maestricht and may not wish to. But they have always known

d'Artagnan and what he stands for: the spirit of adventure. They may not have read any of the Musketeer novels, but they will nevertheless be familiar with Athos, Porthos, and Aramis and their cry 'All for one and one for all!'. It is quite likely too that their idea of France in the seventeenth century has been largely shaped by Dumas's habit of seeing history in terms of personalities and by his tendency to pour black-and-white judgements over people and events. Ruthless Richelieu, miserly Mazarin, and conniving Colbert were in reality rather Good Things for France, though Dumas has all three down as thoroughly Bad Hats. On the other hand, Fouquet, who amassed considerable ill-gotten gains, becomes a sorely tried innocent, and Charles II of England—as clear an example of a Catastrophic King as any one could wish—is a Merry Monarch. Even freer with English history than with French, Dumas arranges for Aramis to crouch beneath the scaffold on which Charles I is executed and sends d'Artagnan to Newcastle where he kidnaps General Monk and exports him to Holland in a wooden barrel.

For when history failed to live up to expectations or proved inconvenient or uncertain, Dumas simply improved it. Historians wince at the liberties he took and have some cause to believe that on occasions he got as close as any Frenchman has ever come to Sellar and Yeatman's *1066, And All That.* Yet Dumas went to considerable lengths to graft his tales of adventure on to history of which he had a remarkable grasp. He immersed himself in seventeenth-century memoirs which, in his history-conscious age, were being published in large numbers, some for the first time. From them, always with an eye to the juicier morsels which he instinctively knew would appeal to a sensation-hungry public, he formed a strong idea of events and the people who made them. He worked closely with Auguste Maquet, a failed novelist of scholarly disposition, who gave him leads to follow and suggested ways of inserting his fictitious yarnings into the weave of historical fact. Maquet's role as documentor and collaborator is a little clearer now than it was in 1845 when a journalist named Jacquot accused Dumas of running a 'fiction factory': how else to explain an output so

prodigious that surely no one man could ever dictate, let alone write, all the books that Dumas signed? Dumas promptly sued for libel and won his case. He cheerfully acknowledged his debts to others—it was at Maquet's suggestion that he recast *The Count of Monte Cristo*, for example—but claimed, rightly, that his own genius, drive, and unerring sense of drama gave everything he wrote (and he did write it all, or nearly all) the 'Dumas touch'. He discussed story-lines with others and employed secretaries (who added punctuation and corrected his spelling) to copy the pages he filled so rapidly at sittings which sometimes lasted fourteen hours. But only he had the imaginative involvement, the compulsion, and the intuition to create characters and situations which, even in our own cynical times, have yet to lose their appeal and which, in his own day, made him not only France's best-selling author but the most famous living Frenchman in the world.

Dumas's novels were written for serialization in the new cheap papers and magazines which brought large rewards to novelists who had the knack. Balzac, who took too long to warm up his stories, failed miserably to deliver what was needed—action, strong characters, and suspense. Dumas was one of a select band of highly paid authors who supplied all three in vast quantities and on time. The pressures of deadlines and the need to cater for popular taste go some way to explaining why Dumas wrote in three colours, black, white, and gaudy, and why he rarely delayed matters by pontificating on historical themes or adding documentary detail—descriptions of dress, buildings, or court ritual—which would simply have bored the reader. Nor did he ever show more than a fleeting interest in using the past as a stick to beat the present. The business of keeping the reader enthralled and impatient to buy the next issue was more important than psychological subtleties and overall structures, and Dumas aimed instead for pace and high impact. His reader, who finds something interesting on every page, always knows who to cheer and who to boo. Literary critics carp at Dumas's sprawling, unmade-beds of novels; historians complain of oversimplification and anachronisms (in *The Three Musketeers* Dumas cheerfully thinks

of transporting Milady to Botany Bay a century and a half before Captain Cook set foot there); and both may prefer historical novelists with a better grasp of fact and a stronger grip on form. But few story-tellers have spun better yarns and no one has ever made history as exciting.

If Walter Scott, much admired by Dumas as the creator of the historical novel, was wary of involving famous figures in episodes of his invention, Dumas fearlessly cast kings and queens in major roles. The ploy sometimes misfires, for Dumas tended to divide humanity into Cavaliers, who are dashing fellows of generous spirit (Fouquet, for instance), and Roundheads who, like Colbert, are miserly, base plotters, grim of purpose and bent on treasons, stratagems, and spoils. And when there are not sufficient infamous to balance the famous, Dumas simply invents villains like de Wardes. If a touch of humour is need, he does not hesitate to turn La Fontaine and Molière into ripe caricatures. Nor was he as true to the spirit of the age as he liked to believe. His Louise is a more melting creature than the Louise de la Vallière of reality and, like Raoul—and there was a Raoul de Bragelongne who was her childhood sweetheart—she reflects more of the sentimental values of Dumas's own Romantic age than those of the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, under Dumas's guidance, with embellishments sanctioned by imaginative licence, they scamper through the corridors of history, knocking on doors, upsetting applecarts, and rousing the neighbourhood.

When *The Man in the Iron Mask* begins, the King's scheme to unseat Fouquet is well under way, Aramis has succeeded in speaking to the masked prisoner and is committed to a mysterious course of action which his recent appointment as Vicar-General of the Jesuit Order gives him the means to implement, and d'Artagnan, now commander of the Musketeers, scents multiple plots but as yet is uncertain how to act . . .

But a summary of the plot so far is as necessary as a handle on a cabbage. Ever attentive to the needs of freshly recruited readers, Dumas regularly inserts brief reminders of who has been doing what (and to whom, and when and where). But such

matters are in any case made redundant by the incessant urgency of the narrative. The suspense starts on the first page with the secret meeting between Aramis and Mme de Chevreuse, and thereafter the pace never slackens. Although it takes the first thirty chapters to follow the huge cast of characters through a single day, Dumas's expanded time does not seem artificial. Events come thick and fast and interlinked situations develop on a number of fronts. At the simplest level, we are drawn into the most royal of soap operas. At the highest, we are offered an infinitely varied gallery of simple but forcefully drawn characters who are moved through time and space with such control that only finicky readers will notice minor inconsistencies. Dumas moves us along on a high tide of excitement, makes us party to devilish plotting and brilliant counter-attacks, and carries us through a variety of moods: humour with Porthos, sadness with Raoul, tenderness with Louise, and despair with Athos. Our emotions are fully engaged because we are never in doubt that Dumas himself participated vicariously in the story he tells; it comes as no surprise to learn that his son found him sobbing at his desk on the day he killed off Porthos. For above all, it is the Musketeer spirit, though wrinkled now by the passing years, which draws us on. As long as the four indomitables are around, anything is possible.

They drew their life from Dumas, a loud, unpredictable, larger-than-life and endlessly fascinating man who invested his heroes with aspects of his own personality and values. D'Artagnan's cheerful resourcefulness is an echo of Dumas's own boundless energy, optimism, and sense of adventure. Porthos is as good a trencherman as his gormandizing creator and displays the Herculean powers attributed to Dumas's own father who was known for his feats of strength. Aramis, the least likeable of the quartet, reflects his intellectual cynicism and Athos his Romantic sensibilities. They represent what is best in male friendship which, however, across the span of years, is gravely tested. They follow their destinies and they change, but they grow old in ways which are perfectly consistent with their characters. D'Artagnan matures with the responsibilities of leadership, but still retains his dash and flair. Aramis's secretiv

soul grows darker and his motives larger and more complex. Porthos never quite grows up, but he remains forever the good-hearted Titan. Athos, the noblest of them all, always vulnerable to his feelings, meets his match only in the spectacle of Raoul's unhappiness, a human problem which is beyond the reach of his flashing blade. Dumas both understood and loved them. As they near 60, they might buckle a more intermittent swash, but their spirit is untarnished.

D'Artagnan remains faithful to an ideal of honour which is stronger than his loyalty to kings and ministers who abuse their power—hence his opposition to Colbert and his stormy interviews with Louis XIV who may be a king but acts without nobility of heart. Athos also groans under the royal yoke and looks forward two centuries to a time when kings will be shorn of their absolutist privileges and will exude a spirit of democratic monarchy which coincides rather obviously with Dumas's own rather confused political allegiances. Aramis may appear to be bent only on personal ambition and , in embroiling the good-hearted Porthos in his schemes, to act as ruthlessly as the hated Richelieu once had done, but his motive is simple and honourable: he too is offended by injustice. The masked prisoner has been doomed to a ghastly fate by the political expediency of a regime which has lost its moral credibility. The Mask's claim to the throne is legitimized not by the law of primogeniture but by the cruelty with which he has been treated. The Mighty Porthos may express few opinions but by his actions he encapsulates the loyalty, honour, and courage on which the Musketeer code is built. The new generation of men (to which the oversensitive Raoul belongs) is weak and ineffectual by comparison.

Even so, *The Man in the Iron Mask* has a distinctly autumnal quality. Dumas's Invincibles suddenly become mortal: they outlive the day when companionship and courage were enough to solve simple problems. They have lost none of their capacity for action and now have the advantage of money and experience. But they have been undermined from within by age and regret and, from without, are assailed by irresistible forces. The political stakes are higher—to save Fouquet and give

France a worthy king—but the result has been decided in advance by events; we know that Fouquet cannot be saved and that Louis XIV will rule. Their enemy is not human; it is history itself. D'Artagnan never finally revolts against Louis XIV who, after the arrest of Fouquet, begins at last to behave like a true king. Aramis casts himself as the Agent of Providence and, like the Count of Monte Cristo, learns the taste of defeat. Athos is strong against everything except the death of those he loves, but he too must finally bow to God's will. Porthos's glorious end is prefigured by bouts of mortal weakness and he dies because his physical powers fail him. The Musketeers are defeated by no man, but by change and decay. Yet if they fade away, they leave behind them trails of glory.

Dumas's heroes can be explained in many ways—as an extension of their creator's personality, as a reflection of his growing awareness that life gets the better of our dreams, or even as a lament for the vigour and values of the ageing generation of writers who had given France a new direction in the Revolution of 1830. What is certain, however, is that he did not entirely invent them. Charles de Batz-Castelmore d'Artagnan (?1615–73) was a Gascon who arrived in Paris in 1640, enlisted in the King's service, became a lieutenant of the Royal Guard in 1651, and six years later moved into the Musketeers which he was commanding in 1667. It was he who was given the delicate task of arresting Fouquet in 1661 and Lauzun in 1671. Appointed acting Governor of Lille in 1672, he was killed in action the following year, leaving two sons by a marriage which had ended by mutual consent in 1665. Much less is known about Armand de Sillègue d'Athos, a Béarnais, who was born near Sauveterre in the Oloron valley. A nephew of the Tréville who commanded the Musketeers briefly in the 1640s, he seems to have died in a duel in 1645. Henri d'Aramitz also hailed from the Oloron valley. He too was a nephew of Tréville and served in the Musketeers between 1640 and 1655. Isaac de Porteau was born at Pau in about 1617. After enlisting in the King's Guard in the early 1640s, he became a Musketeer in 1643. There is nothing to suggest that they were in any way remarkable or even that they knew each other. It is more than

likely that only d'Artagnan was alive in 1660 when Dumas recalled them for their final adventure.

Dumas found them not in the history books but in their already dashing adventures as written by Gatien Courtilz de Sandras (1644–1712). A soldier of fortune and author of libellous pamphlets which earned him several stays in the Bastille, Courtilz published a number of fabricated pseudo-memoirs, including the *Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* (1700) from which Dumas borrowed wholesale for *The Three Musketeers*. Having made Courtilz's heroes his own, Dumas proceeded to put them through their paces, slotting them into history and turning them into archetypes who, as Swinburne wrote, will never lose their appeal 'while the boy's heart beats in man'. Their adventures lit up the skies and occupied the printing presses of the world. The first translation of *The Man in the Iron Mask* was published in Philadelphia within a year of its serialization in *Le Siècle*, and Routledge of London issued the first complete English text of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, running to 700,000 words, in 1857. This anonymous version, subsequently lightly amended by the American Henry Llewellyn Williams (and frequently announced as 'a new translation'), was republished many times either in full or in three separate parts. At the height of the Dumasmania which afflicted the English-speaking world between 1890 and the First World War, *The Man in the Iron Mask* was reprinted some thirty times in England and about as frequently in the United States. The drama was transferred to the stage (Norman Forbes Robinson produced a spectacular *Prisoner of the Bastille* at the Adelphi in 1899) where it kept interest high. The vogue picked up again after the War on both sides of the Atlantic before being overtaken by the cinema which gave Dumas's story of the Masked Prisoner a new lease of life. Douglas Fairbanks played the ageing d'Artagnan with athletic gusto in the splendid 1929 silent film and among his more notable successors have been Warren Williams (1939), Louis Jourdan (in a version for television made in 1976), and, in *The Fifth Musketeer* (1977), Cornel Wilde. Cinema fashions may change, but d'Artagnan, played seriously or, more often, with tongue in cheek, still makes good box office.

But who is d'Artagnan? Surely not the obscure Musketeer of history nor the adventurer invented by Courtilz. Before Dumas, there was no d'Artagnan legend and after Dumas had done with him d'Artagnan passed into our cultural mythology. If Tarzan expresses the city-dweller's longing for natural freedom and Dracula is the shape of our fear of the dark, d'Artagnan symbolizes thrills, youth, and adventure. The cornerstone of a vast epic of honour and courage, he is a figure of high romance, a Hero, a myth.

He is not, however, the only mythical force at work in *The Man in the Iron Mask*. The gratifyingly elusive tale of the mysterious masked captive is not so much a product of history as of historians who have argued about his identity for nearly three hundred years. The brief entries in the unofficial register kept by the Deputy Governor of Bastille, Étienne du Junca, tell as much of the tale as is certain.

On 18 September 1698, M. de Saint-Mars, formerly Governor of the prisons of Pignerol in Piedmont, Exiles in the Alps, and the island of Sainte-Marguerite off the coast of Cannes, arrived in Paris to take command of the Bastille. He brought with him, 'in his litter', a long-term prisoner 'whom he kept masked at all times and whose name is not spoken'. On 19 November 1703, the unknown prisoner, after a short illnesss, 'still masked with a mask of black velvet ... died this day at half past ten of the evening ...; he that had been so long a captive, was buried on Tuesday, at four of the afternoon, 20th November, in the cemetery of Saint Paul in this parish. In the register of deaths was entered a name, also unknown.' A marginal note in du Junca's hand adds: 'I have since learnt that he was named in the Register as M. de Marchiel and that 40 livres were paid for his funeral.' The entry in the burial register for 19 November records the death of 'Marchioly, aged forty-five years, or thereabouts, [who] departed this life in the Bastille'.

These bald entries establish the secret existence of an unknown, masked prisoner. The correspondence between Saint-Mars and the King's ministers is so discreet that no positive identification is possible, though it reveals that the man

was guarded in conditions of exceptionally tight security. None of his gaolers or fellow prisoners (who for a time included Courtilz de Sandras) ever spoke of him—a sure proof, say the mystery-mongers, that there was something to hide. The secret was well guarded; nothing leaked out for over thirty years, by which time almost everyone who might have been able to throw light on the mystery was dead. By 1745, however, the hunt had begun. An anonymous author identified the Mask as the Duke de Vendômois, the illegitimate son of Louis XIV and Louise de la Vallière. Voltaire scented a scandal and, alluding knowingly to unimpeachable sources of information, claimed that the prisoner was no less than Louis XIV's older brother. This startling suggestion made by the most combative intellectual of the age, turned a minor historical oddity into a sensational quest. Others argued that the unknown prisoner was the Duke of Monmouth, son of Charles II by Lucy Walters, or an Italian named Ercolo Antonio Matthioli, secretary to the Duke of Mantua, who had once duped the King of France, unless, that is, he were Muhammad IV, or the Duke de Beaufort whose naval service was cunningly buried in the code-name 'Marchiali' which, deciphered, reads 'hic amiral' ('here lies the Admiral'). Gibbon doubted that any well-known public figure could have been removed from circulation without being missed, and inclined to believe that the mask hid the face of the son of Mazarin and Anne of Austria, while Benjamin Franklin thought the man was the bastard of Anne and the Duke of Buckingham.

Witnesses spoke, or rather whispered, not of what they had seen but of what they had heard, and what they had heard always came on the very best authority. The dramatist Crébillon told Casanova that Louis XIV had told him, personally, that the story of the masked prisoner was nothing but a tale. According to J. Anquetil (*Memoirs of the Court of France during the reign of Louis XIV*, Edinburgh, 1791, i. 163), Lenglet du Fresnoy, a cleric who had himself been several times sent to the Bastille for uttering subversive writings, 'had often seen this man. About the year 1754, he related to me nearly all that is commonly told of his moderate stature, the sprightliness and

elegance of his wit and the respect with which he was treated by the Governor. From this conversation, he inferred that he had travelled through almost all Europe. He talked very well of public affairs, politics, history and religion. When I pressed the Abbé to tell me whom he took him to be, he replied; "Would you have me sent a ninth time to the Bastille?"' A Mme Cassis of Cannes was said to have visited the Mask in his cell where she shook his hand: it was a woman's hand. There were reports that peasants had sighted the prisoner when Saint-Mars transferred him in 1687 from Exiles to Sainte-Marguerite and thence to the Bastille in 1698: he was tall and short, young and old, robust and frail, and had hair that was black or quite possibly white. Some swore that they had seen a silver plate bearing a message etched with a knife which had been thrown from the poor prisoner's window, or claimed to have examined the very tweezers which he used to pluck his beard beneath the mask which was fitted with a hinged chin-piece to allow the wearer to eat of the finest food, which he did off gold plates. The mask, made of cloth, seems to have turned into a mask of *vair*—the same fur of which Cinderella's slipper was made before it was turned into *verre* (glass) by printer's error—and thence became horrifying *fer* (iron). The mask itself was discovered as often as the grave was opened; inside the coffin, when there was a coffin, was found a decapitated body, or simply a stone. It was said that the tomb had been connected by a dark tunnel to the Bastille itself...

When the Bastille fell in 1789, a Dutch journal reported the discovery of a note bearing the number 64389000, the name 'Kersadion', and the words: 'Fouquet arriving from the Island of Sainte-Marguerite in an Iron Mask'. The suggestion that the Mask was Fouquet, who died in 1680, was startling enough, but there was far better to come. In 1790, Soulavie, in his apocryphal memoirs of the Duke de Richelieu, published the death-bed confession of an unnamed courtier who had, in a sequestered house in Burgundy, brought up a male child, born eight hours after Louis XIV, who was not merely his brother but his twin. Playwrights capitalized on this highly theatrical fancy as did, in a minor way, constitutional revolutionaries; the

inhumanity of Louis XIV towards his brother clearly made him and his Bourbon successors unfit to sit on the throne which must needs revert, legitimately, to Philippe Égalité, the Mask's true descendant. But the victim's lineage was to be hotly disputed. Staunch royalists in the Vendée warned the faithful against the idea, bruited by his emissaries, that Napoleon had usurped the throne with a view to returning it to the Bourbons; on the contrary, one pamphlet said in 1801, Bonaparte 'is simply waiting for peace to be restored, at which time he will show his hand and base his claim to the throne upon his descendance from the children of the Iron Mask'. Las Cases later recalled in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (at 12 July 1816) that Napoleon knew that he had been connected with the Mask, dismissed the story as fanciful but had never denied it, finding the idea politically useful. (The connection had been made through an absurd variant which seems to have been widely current. The governor of Sainte-Marguerite, a M. de Bonpart so the story went, had a daughter who fell in love with the Mask and eventually married him. Their children drifted and finally settled in Corsica where they Italianized their name to Buonaparte.) Having been appropriated by the Revolution and the Empire, the legend turned royalist after the restoration of the monarchy. In the 1830s Charles Naundorff, a clockmaker who claimed to be the lost prince, Louis XVII, and therefore true heir to the throne, offered to prove his title by revealing the identity of the Mask which he could only have known through his father Louis XVI, who told him the secret as he had been told by his father Louis XV. As late as 1911, a priest in the diocese of Marseilles, tracing his descent from yet another son of the Mask, went about calling himself Henri de Valois and, as such, laid claim to the French throne at a time when France had long since been a Republic.

Meanwhile, Literature refused to be denied its share of the spoils. By the 1820s the Romantic imagination, which had a particular weakness for prisons and prisoners, was warming to the subject. Vigny lamented his fate in one of his grim poems in 1821, and variants of the 'King's twin' theory were turned into melodramas in Paris and London in the 1830s. In 1847–8 Hugo

wrote two acts of *The Twins* but gave up when he heard that Dumas had beaten him to it.

But historians, some more serious than others, also began rummaging through dusty archives and came up with new solutions, some well documented, and others so peculiar as to make the protestations of the Sons of the Mask appear unremarkable. A retired soldier named Taulès found in 'Kersadion' a not altogether convincing anagram of Awedick, the name of an obscure Armenian patriarch who had incurred the wrath of the Jesuits. On surer ground, Delort (1825) plumped for Matthiolo, the double-dealing secretary of the Duke of Mantua, and Paul Lacroix (1836) for Fouquet. By the time Dumas wrote up the affair in volume viii of his *Crimes célèbres* (1840), he was able to list fourteen solutions of which he selected the 'twin' theory for its dramatic impact. His view did not convince the scholars who continued to trawl for facts. In 1869 Marius Topin rejected fifty-two names before championing Matthioli. Colonel Iung (1873) preferred an obscure soldier named Bulonde. Jules Lair (1890) made an impressive case for Eustache Dauger who, he speculated, was a minor courtier arrested in 1669 for his part in a conspiracy to overthrow Louis XIV, and who later served as Fouquet's valet at Pignerol. Oddest of all was the eccentric theory put forward by Auguste Loquin in 1890. The Mask was Molière who did not die on stage in 1673 as most people believe but was jailed at the behest of the Jesuits whom he had offended. He subsequently escaped—the body buried in 1703 was that of an unknown man—and made his way to Genoa as a variant of the M. de Bonpart whom we have already met. He settled at a later date in Corsica, gave his name an Italian ring, and, at the rather advanced age of 150 or so, became the father or perhaps the grandfather of Napoleon.

In 1903 an English Catholic, Monsignor Barnes, brought forward further incontrovertible proof to support his candidate, the abbé Prignani. By the time Maurice Duvivier rehearsed all the arguments once more in 1932, he estimated that over one thousand identifications had been made, mostly by lunatics. Duvivier demolished the case for Matthioli and

positively identified Dauger as Eustache Dauger de Cavoye, gaoled for his part in the 'Affaire des Poisons', though it has subsequently emerged that Dauger de Cavoye died in Paris, in the prison of Saint-Lazare, in about 1683. Georges Mongrédien reviewed the evidence again in 1952 and judged both the Matthioli and the Dauger solutions to be historically viable, while Pierre-Jacques Arrèse renewed the case for Fouquet in 1970. Marcel Pagnol (1973) shrewdly remarked that seekers of the true Mask generally favour candidates who resemble themselves in some way; historians opt for obscure historical figures, politicians select politically convenient candidates, Monsignor Barnes chose a cleric and Colonel Iung a general. Pagnol, who was a maker of myths like Dumas, accordingly opted for the 'twin' theory, adding a complicated coda suggesting that Dauger's real name was James de la Cloche, and that James de la Cloche was Louis XIV's twin brother who was brought up secretly in Jersey. In 1987 a similar thesis was advanced by Harry Thompson who concluded that Dauger de Cavoye was Louis XIV's illegitimate half-brother. After 300 years of ingenuity and diligence, historians agree only that there was a Mask and that he was 'Eustache Dauger'—though who Dauger was, and whether Dauger was his real name, remain unanswered questions.

Any suggestion that there was no mystery to uncover has always been regarded at best as unsporting, and at worst as obtuse. It is, of course, quite possible that the man was simply one of many prisoners who mouldered forgotten in Louis XIV's jails. But whether or not there was an important masked prisoner, the persistence of the quest is to be explained as much by the trappings of the tale as by the search for Truth. The legend became a myth by association with the Bastille which, even in the eighteenth century, symbolized injustice and tyranny. Moreover, the sadistic idea of enclosing a prisoner within a claustrophobic iron mask starts a *frisson* of horror. It is probably this rather than the innumerable efforts to establish his true identity that explains the very memorable, grisly glamour which has made the Mask a star of stage and screen and the hero of many speculative novels, the most recent of

which is Peter Hoyle's *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1986) which deals with an old man's obsession with the mysterious prisoner.

The legend has held historians, enquirers both informed and uninformed, novelists, playwrights, and generations of open-mouthed readers in its thrall. Tom Sawyer, that connoisseur of stylish 'evasions', was of a mind to make Jim write a message 'on the bottom of a tin plate with a fork and throw it out of the window to let the world know where he was captivated', just as the Iron Mask had done in Dumas's romance (*Huckleberry Finn*, chap. 35). Mark Twain had visited the Château d'If and seen for himself not only the 'authentic' dungeon where Edmond Dantès languished in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, but also the cell where Dumas's Iron Mask had lain, though he was never there except in the imagination of the guide. Twain would not have given a fig to know beyond question who the man was and why he had been so cruelly punished. 'Mystery! That was the charm. That speechless tongue, those prisoned features, that heart so freighted with unspoken troubles, and that breast so oppressed with its piteous secret had been there. These dank walls had known the man whose dolorous story is a sealed book forever! There was fascination in the spot' (*Innocents Abroad*, 1869, chap. 11). If the imaginative involvement of Tom and his creator was complete, it was surely because no story-teller has ever exploited the tale with more panache than Dumas. But then, few have had the advantage of being able to graft a fourteen-carat legend on to a solid-gold myth. Why, to get the Musketeers *and* the Mask in one book is like having two puddings.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Enquiries into the identity of the Mask are numerous. The most reliable are those by Maurice Duvivier (*Le Masque de fer*, Paris, 1932) and Georges Mongrédien (*Le Masque de fer*, Paris, 1952), while Marcel Pagnol's *Le Secret du Masque de fer* (Éditions de Provence, 1973; first edn., 1965) is entertaining and often acute. The most recent study in English is Harry Thompson's *The Man in the Iron Mask: A Historical Detective Investigation* (London, 1987).

A CHRONOLOGY OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

1762 25 March: Birth at Saint-Domingo of Thomas-Alexandre, son of the French-born Marquis Davy de la Pailleterie and a mulatto, Marie-Cessette Dumas. He returns to France with his father in 1780 and, after enlisting in 1786, rises rapidly through the ranks.

1792 28 November: Marriage of Colonel Dumas and Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Labouret, daughter of an inn-keeper, at Villers-Cotterêts.

1801 1 May: General Dumas returns to France from prison in Italy.

1802 24 July: Birth at Villers-Cotterêts of Alexandre Dumas who, after his father's death in 1806, is brought up in straitened circumstances by his mother. He attends local schools and has a happy childhood.

1819 Dumas, now a lawyer's office-boy, falls in love with Adèle Dalvin who rejects him. Meets Adolphe de Leuven, with whom he collaborates in writing unsuccessful plays.

1822 Visits Leuven in Paris, meets Talma, the leading actor of the day, and resolves to become a playwright.

1823 Moves to Paris. Enters the service of the Duke d'Orléans. Falls in love with a seamstress, Catherine Labay.

1824 27 July: Birth of Alexandre Dumas *fils*.

1825 22 September: Dumas's first play, *La Chasse et l'amour* (*The Chase and Love*), written in collaboration with Leuven and Rousseau, makes no impact.

1826 Publication of a collection of short stories, Dumas's first solo composition, which sells four copies.

1827 A company of English actors, which includes Kean, Kemble, and Mrs Smithson, performs Shakespeare in English to enthusiastic Paris audiences: Dumas is deeply impressed. Liaison with Mélanie Waldor.

1828–9 Dumas enters Parisian literary circles through Charles Nodier.

1829 11 February: First of about fifty performances of *Henri III et sa cour* (*Henry III and His Court*) which makes Dumas famous and thrusts him into the front line of the Romantic revolution in literature. Dumas meets Victor Hugo.

1830 30 March: First performance of *Christine* (written in 1828). May: Start of an affair with the actress Belle Krelsamer. Active in the July Revolution: Dumas single-handedly captures a gunpowder magazine at Soissons and is sent by Lafayette to promote the National Guard in the Vendée (August).

1831 5 March: birth of Marie, his daughter by Belle Krelsamer. 17 March: Dumas acknowledges Alexandre, his son by Catherine Labay. First performances of *Napoléon Bonaparte* (10 January), *Antony* (3 May), *Charles VII et ses grands vassaux* (*Charles VII and the Barons*) (20 October), and *Richard Darlington* (10 December).

1832 6 February: Start of his affair with the actress Ida Ferrier. 15 April: Dumas succumbs to the cholera which kills 20,000 Parisians. 29 May: First performance of *La Tour de Nesle* (*The Tower of Nesle*): Gaillardet accuses Dumas of plagiarism. July: Suspected of republicanism, Dumas leaves Paris for Switzerland. After the spectacular failure of his next play, *Le Fils de l'émigré* (*The Son of the Emigré*) (28 August), he begins to take an interest in the literary possibilities of French history.

1833 Serialization of a book of impressions of Switzerland, the first of his travelogues.

1834–5 October: Dumas travels in the Midi. From the Riviera, he embarks on the first of many journeys to Italy.

1836 31 August: Dumas returns triumphantly to the theatre with *Kean*.

1837 Becomes a *chevalier* of the Legion of Honour.

1838 Death of Dumas's mother. Travels along the Rhine with Gérard de Nerval who introduces him to Auguste Maquet in December.

1840 1 February: Dumas marries Ida Ferrier, travels to Italy and publishes *Le Capitaine Pamphile*, the best of his children's books.

1840–2 Dividing his time between Paris and Italy, Dumas increasingly abandons the theatre for the novel.

1842 June: Publication of *The Chevalier d'Harmental*, the first of many romances written in association with Maquet.

1844 March–July: Serialization of *The Three Musketeers* in *Le Siècle*. August: First episode of *The Count of Monte Cristo* published in *Le Journal des Débats*. 15 October: Amicable separation from Ida Ferrier. Publication of *Louis XIV and his Century*.

1845 21 January: Start of serialization of the second D'Artagnan story, *Twenty Years After*, in *Le Siècle*. February: Wins his libel suit against the journalist Jacquot, author of *Fabrique de romans: Maison Alexandre Dumas et Cie* (*A Fiction Factory: The Firm of Alexandre Dumas and Company*), in which Jacquot accused Dumas of publishing other men's work under his own name.

1846 Separates from Ida Ferrier. Brief liaison with Lola Montès. November–January: Travels with his son to Spain and North Africa.

1847 30 January: Loses a lawsuit brought by newspaper proprietors for failure to deliver copy for which he had accepted large advances. 11 February: Questions are asked in the National Assembly about Dumas's appropriation of the Navy vessel, *Le Véloce*, during his visit to North Africa. 20 February: Opening of the 'Théâtre historique'. 7 March: Completion of the 'Château de Monte Cristo' at Marly-le-Roi. 20 October–12 January 1850: Serialization of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* in *Le Siècle*.

1843 Dumas puts up, unsuccessfully, as a parliamentary candidate and votes for Louis-Napoleon in the December elections.

1850 Beginning of a nine-year liaison with Isabella Constant. 20 March: The 'Théâtre historique' is declared bankrupt. The Château de Monte Cristo is sold off for 30,000 francs.

1851 Michel Lévy begins to bring out the first volumes of Dumas's complete works which will eventually be complete in 301 volumes. 7 December: Using Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* as an excuse, Dumas flees to Belgium to avoid his creditors.

1852 Publication of the first volumes of *Mes Mémoires*. Dumas declared bankrupt with debts of 100,000 francs.

1853 November: Dumas returns to Paris and founds a periodical, *Le Mousquetaire* (last issue 7 February 1857) for which he writes most of the copy himself.

1857 23 April: Founds a literary weekly, *Le Monte Cristo* which, with one break, survives until 1862.

1858 15 June: Dumas leaves for a tour of Russia and returns in March 1859.

1859 11 March: Death of Ida Ferrier. Beginning of a liaison with Emilie Cordier which lasts until 1864.

1860 Meets Garibaldi in Turin and just misses the taking of Sicily (June). He returns to Marseilles where he buys guns for the Italian cause and is in Naples just after the city falls in September. Garibaldi stands, by proxy, as godfather to Dumas's daughter by Emilie Cordier. 11 October: Founds *L'Indipendente*, a literary and political periodical published half in French and half in Italian.

1861 22 March: First performance of Dumas's five-act drama, based on *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *Le Prisonnier de la Bastille*, at the Théâtre du Cirque.

1863 The works of Dumas are placed on the Index by the Catholic Church.

1864 April: Dumas returns to Paris.

1865 Further travels through Italy, Germany, and Austria.

1867 Publishes *Le Terreur prussienne* (*The Prussian Terror*), a novel designed to warn France against the coming Prussian threat. Begins a last liaison, with Adah Menken, an American actress (d. 1868).

1869 10 March: Dumas's last play, *Les Blancs et les Bleus* (*The Whites and the Blues*).

1870 5 December: Dumas dies at Puys, near Dieppe, after a stroke in September.

1872 Dumas's remains transferred to Villers-Cotterêts.

1883 Unveiling of a statue to Dumas in Paris.

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

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I

TWO OLD FRIENDS

WHILST every one at court was busily engaged upon his own affairs, a man mysteriously entered a house situated behind the Place de Grève. The principal entrance of this house was in the Place Baudoyer; it was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, enclosed in the Rue Saint-Jean* by the shops of tool-makers, which protected it from prying looks, and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin. The man we have just alluded to walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword plainly revealed one who seemed in search of adventures; and, judging from his curling moustaches, his fine and smooth skin, which could be seen beneath his sombrero, it would not have been difficult to pronounce that the gallantry of his adventures was unquestionable. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by a servant armed to the teeth, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active and of an imposing carriage. She concealed beneath a rich toilette and the most exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de l'Enclos* alone could have smiled at with impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule, than the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand.

"Good-day, my dear Duchesse,"* he said.

"How do you do, my dear Aramis," replied the Duchesse.

He led her to a most elegantly furnished apartment, on whose high windows were reflected the expiring rays of the setting sun, which filtered through the dark crests of some adjoining firs. They sat down side by side. Neither of them thought of asking for additional light in the room, and they buried themselves as it were in the shadow, as if they wished to bury themselves in forgetfulness.

"Chevalier," said the Duchesse, "you have never given me a single sign of life since our interview at Fontainebleau, and I confess that your presence there on the day of the Franciscan's death,* and

your initiation in certain secrets, caused me the liveliest astonishment I ever experienced in my whole life."

"I can explain my presence there to you, as well as my initiation," said Aramis.

"But let us, first of all," said the Duchesse, "talk a little of ourselves, for our friendship is by no means of recent date."

"Yes, madame; and if Heaven wills it, we shall continue to be friends, I will not say for a long time, but for ever."

"That is quite certain, Chevalier, and my visit is a proof of it."

"Our interests, Duchesse, are no longer the same as they used to be," said Aramis smiling, without apprehension in the gloom in which the room was cast, for it could not reveal that his smile was less agreeable and less bright than formerly.

"No, Chevalier, at the present day we have other interests. Every period of life brings its own; and, as we now understand each other in conversing, as perfectly as we formerly did without saying a word, let us talk, if you like."

"I am at your orders, Duchesse. Ah! I beg your pardon, how did you obtain my address, and what was your object?"

"You ask me why? I have told you. Curiosity in the first place. I wished to know what you could have to do with the Franciscan, with whom I had certain business transactions, and who died so singularly. You know that on the occasion of our interview at Fontainebleau, in the cemetery, at the foot of the grave so recently closed, we were both so much overcome by our emotions that we omitted to confide to each other what we may have had to say."

"Yes, madame."

"Well then, I had no sooner left you than I repented, and have ever since been most anxious to ascertain the truth. You know that Madame de Longueville and myself are almost one, I suppose?"

"I am not aware," said Aramis discreetly.

"I remembered, therefore," continued the Duchesse, "that neither of us said anything to the other in the cemetery; that you did not speak of the relationship in which you stood to the Franciscan, whose burial you had superintended, and that I did not refer to the position in which I stood to him; all which seemed very unworthy of two such old friends as ourselves, and I have sought an opportunity of an interview with you in order to give you some information that I have recently acquired, and to assure you that Marie Michon, now no more, has left behind her one who has preserved her recollection of events."

Aramis bowed over the Duchesse's hand, and pressed his lips

upon it. "You must have had some trouble to find me again," he said.

"Yes," she answered, annoyed to find the subject taking a turn which Aramis wished to give it; "but I knew you were a friend of M. Fouquet's,* and so I inquired in that direction."

"A friend! oh!" exclaimed the Chevalier. "I can hardly pretend to be that. A poor priest who has been favoured by so generous a protector, and whose heart is full of gratitude and devotion to him, is all that I pretend to be to M. Fouquet."

"He made you a bishop?"

"Yes, Duchesse."

"A very good retiring pension for so handsome a musketeer."

"Yes; in the same way that political intrigue is for yourself," thought Aramis. "And so," he added, "you inquired after me at M. Fouquet's?"

"Easily enough. You had been to Fontainebleau with him, and had undertaken a voyage to your diocese, which is Belle-Île-en-Mer, I believe."

"No, madame," said Aramis. "My diocese is Vannes."

"I meant that. I only thought that Belle-Île-en-Mer——"

"Is a property belonging to M. Fouquet, nothing more."

"Ah! I had been told that Belle-Île was fortified; besides, I know how great the military knowledge is you possess."

"I have forgotten everything of the kind since I entered the Church," said Aramis, annoyed.

"Suffice it to know that I learnt you had returned from Vannes, and I sent to one of our friends, M. le Comte de la Fère,* who is discretion itself, in order to ascertain it, but he answered that he was not aware of your address."

"So like Athos," thought the bishop; "that which is actually good never alters."

"Well, then, you know that I cannot venture to show myself here, and that the Queen-Mother* has always some grievance or other against me."

"Yes, indeed, and I am surprised at it."

"Oh! there are various reasons for it. But, to continue, being obliged to conceal myself, I was fortunate enough to meet with M. d'Artagnan,* who was formerly one of your old friends, I believe?"

"A friend of mine still, Duchesse."

"He gave me some information, and sent me to M. Baisemeaux,* the governor of the Bastille."

Aramis was somewhat agitated at this remark, and a light flashed from his eyes in the darkness of the room, which he could

not conceal from his keen-sighted friend. "M. de Baisemeaux!" he said; "why did d'Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I cannot tell you."

"What can this possibly mean?" said the Bishop, summoning all the resources of his mind to his aid, in order to carry on the combat in a befitting manner.

"M. de Baisemeaux is greatly indebted to you, d'Artagnan told me."

"True, he is so."

"And the address of a creditor is as easily ascertained as that of a debtor."

"Very true; and so Baisemeaux indicated to you——"

"Saint-Mandé, where I forwarded a letter to you."

"Which I have in my hand, and which is most precious to me," said Aramis, "because I am indebted to it for the pleasure of seeing you here." The Duchesse, satisfied at having successfully alluded to the various difficulties of so delicate an explanation, began to breathe freely again, which Aramis, however, could not succeed in doing. "We had got as far as your visit to M. Baisemeaux, I believe?"

"Nay," she said, laughing, "further than that."

"In that case we must have been speaking about the grudge you have against the Queen-Mother."

"Further still," she returned,—"further still; we were talking of the connection——"

"Which existed between you and the Franciscan," said Aramis, interrupting her eagerly; "well, I am listening to you very attentively."

"It is easily explained," returned the Duchesse. "You know that I am living at Brussels with M. de Laicques?"*

"I have heard so."

"You know that my children have ruined and stripped me of everything."

"How terrible, dear Duchesse."

"Terrible indeed; this obliged me to resort to some means of obtaining a livelihood, and, particularly, to avoid vegetating the remainder of my existence away, I had old hatreds to turn to account, old friendships to serve; I no longer had either credit or protectors."

"You, too, who had extended protection towards so many persons," said Aramis softly.

"It is always the case, Chevalier. Well, at the present time I am in the habit of seeing the King of Spain* very frequently."

"Ah!"

"Who has just nominated a general of the Jesuits,* according to the usual custom."

"Is it usual, indeed?"

"Were you not aware of it?"

"I beg your pardon; I was inattentive."

"You must be aware of that—you who were on such good terms with the Franciscan."

"With the general of the Jesuits, you mean?"

"Exactly. Well, then, I have seen the King of Spain, who wished to do me a service, but was unable. He gave me recommendations, however, to Flanders, both for myself and for Laicques too; and conferred a pension on me out of the funds belonging to the order."

"Of Jesuits?"

"Yes. The general—I mean the Franciscan—was sent to me; and, for the purpose of conforming with the requisitions of the statutes of the order, and of entitling me to the pension, I was reputed to be in a position to render certain services. You are aware that that is the rule?"

"No, I did not know it," said Aramis.

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis, but it was perfectly dark. "Well, such is the rule, however," she resumed. "I ought, therefore, to seem to possess a power of usefulness of some kind or other. I proposed to travel for the order, and I was placed on the list of affiliated travellers. You understand it was a formality, by means of which I received my pension, which was very convenient for me."

"Good heavens! Duchesse, what you tell me is like a dagger thrust into me. *You* obliged to receive a pension from the Jesuits?"

"No, Chevalier; from Spain."

"Except as a conscientious scruple, Duchesse, you will admit that it is pretty nearly the same thing."

"No, not at all."

"But surely, of your magnificent fortune there must remain——"

"Dampierre* is all that remains."

"And that is handsome enough."

"Yes; but Dampierre is burdened, mortgaged, and almost fallen to ruin, like its owner."

"And can the Queen-Mother know and see all that, without shedding a tear?" said Aramis with a penetrating look, which encountered nothing but the darkness.

"Yes, she has forgotten everything."*

"You have, I believe, attempted to get restored to favour?"

"Yes; but, most singularly, the young King inherits the

antipathy that his dear father had for me. You will, too, tell me that I am indeed a woman to be hated, and that I am no longer one who can be loved."

"Dear Duchesse, pray arrive soon at the circumstance which brought you here; for I think we can be of service to each other."

"Such has been my own thought. I came to Fontainebleau with a double object in view. In the first place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the bye, how did you know him?—for I have told you my story, and have not yet heard yours."

"I knew him in a very natural way, Duchesse. I studied theology with him at Parma. We became fast friends; and it happened, from time to time, that business, or travels, or war, separated us from each other."

"You were, of course, aware that he was the general of the Jesuits?"

"I suspected it."

"But by what extraordinary chance did it happen that you were at the hotel where the affiliated travellers had met together?"

"Oh!" said Aramis in a calm voice, "it was the merest chance in the world. I was going to Fontainebleau to see M. Fouquet, for the purpose of obtaining an audience of the King. I was passing by unknown; I saw the poor dying monk in the road, and recognised him immediately. You know the rest—he died in my arms."

"Yes; but bequeathing to you so vast a power that you issue your sovereign orders and directions like a monarch."

"He certainly did leave me a few commissions to settle."

"And for me?"

"I have told you—a sum of twelve thousand livres was to be paid to you. I thought I had given you the necessary signature to enable you to receive it. Did you not get the money?"

"Oh! yes, yes. You give your orders, I am informed, with so much mystery, and such a majestic presence, that it is generally believed you are the successor of the defunct chief."

Aramis coloured impatiently, and the Duchesse continued, "I have obtained my information," she said, "from the King of Spain himself; and he cleared up some of my doubts on the point. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and must be a Spaniard, according to the statutes of the order. You are not a Spaniard, nor have you been nominated by the King of Spain."

Aramis did not reply to this remark, except to say, "You see, Duchesse, how greatly you were mistaken, since the King of Spain told you that."

"Yes, my dear Aramis; but there was something else which I have been thinking of."

"What is that?"

"You know, I believe, something about most things; and it occurred to me that you know the Spanish language."

"Every Frenchman who has been actively engaged in the Fronde knows Spanish."

"You have lived in Flanders?"

"Three years."

"And have stayed at Madrid?"

"Fifteen months."

"You are in a position, then, to become a naturalised Spaniard when you like."

"Really?" said Aramis, with a frankness which deceived the Duchesse.

"Undoubtedly. Two years' residence and an acquaintance with the language are indispensable. You have upwards of four years—more than double the time necessary."

"What are you driving at, Duchesse?"

"At this—I am on good terms with the King of Spain."

"And I am not on bad terms," thought Aramis to himself.

"Shall I ask the King," continued the Duchesse, "to confer the succession to the Franciscan's post upon you?"

"Oh, Duchesse!"

"You have it already, perhaps?" she said.

"No, upon my honour."

"Very well, then, I can render you that service."

"Why did you not render the same service to M. de Laicques, Duchesse? He is a very talented man, and one you love besides."

"Yes, no doubt; but, at all events, putting Laicques aside, will you have it?"

"No, I thank you, Duchesse."

She paused. "He is nominated," she thought; and then resumed aloud, "If you refuse me in this manner, it is not very encouraging for me, supposing I should have something to ask of you."

"Oh! ask, pray ask."

"Ask! I cannot do so, if you have not the power to grant what I want."

"However limited my power and ability, ask all the same."

"I need a sum of money to restore Dampierre."

"Ah!" replied Aramis coldly—"money? Well, Duchesse, how much would you require?"

"Oh! a tolerably round sum."

"So much the worse—you know I am not rich."

"No, no; but the order is—and if you had been the general——"

"You know I am not the general, I think."

"In that case you have a friend who must be very wealthy—M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet! He is more than half ruined, madame."

"So it is said, but I would not believe it."

"Why, Duchesse?"

"Because I have, or rather Laicques has, certain letters in his possession, from Cardinal Mazarin, which establish the existence of very strange accounts."

"What accounts?"

"Relative to various sums of money borrowed and disposed of. I cannot very distinctly remember what they are; but they establish the fact that the Surintendant, according to these letters, which are signed by Mazarin, had taken thirty millions of francs from the coffers of the State. The case is a very serious one."

Aramis clenched his hands in anxiety and apprehension. "Is it possible," he said, "that you have such letters as you speak of, and have not communicated them to M. Fouquet?"

"Ah!" replied the Duchesse, "I keep such little matters as these in reserve. The day may come when they may be of service; and they can then be withdrawn from the safe custody in which they now are."

"And that day has arrived?" said Aramis.

"Yes."

"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"

"I prefer to talk about them with you, instead."

"You must be in sad want of money, my poor friend, to think of such things as these—you, too, who held M. de Mazarin's prose effusions in such indifferent esteem."

"The fact is, I am in want of money."

"And then," continued Aramis in cold accents, "it must have been very distressing to you to be obliged to have recourse to such a means. It is cruel."

"Oh! if I had wished to do harm instead of good," said Madame de Chevreuse, "instead of asking the general of the order, or M. Fouquet, for the five hundred thousand francs I require——"

"Five hundred thousand francs!"

"Yes; no more. Do you think it much? I require at least as much as that to restore Dampierre."

"Yes, madame."

"I say, therefore, that, instead of asking for this amount, I

should have gone to see my old friend the Queen-Mother; the letters from her husband, the Signor Mazarini,* would have served me as an introduction, and I should have begged this mere trifle of her, saying to her, 'I wish, madame, to have the honour of receiving you at Dampierre. Permit me to put Dampierre in a fit state for that purpose.' "

Aramis did not reply a single word. "Well," she said, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am making certain additions," said Aramis.

"And M. Fouquet subtractions. I, on the other hand, am trying the art of multiplication. What excellent calculators we are! How well we could understand one another!"

"Will you allow me to reflect?" said Aramis.

"No, for with such an opening between people like ourselves, 'yes,' or 'no' is the only answer, and that an immediate one."

"It is a snare," thought the Bishop; "it is impossible that Anne of Austria could listen to such a woman as this."

"Well?" said the Duchesse.

"Well, madame, I should be very much astonished if M. Fouquet had five hundred thousand francs at his disposal at the present moment."

"It is no use speaking of it then," said the Duchesse, "and Dampierre must get restored how it can."

"Oh! you are not embarrassed to such an extent as that, I suppose."

"No; I am never embarrassed."

"And the Queen," continued the Bishop, "will certainly do for you, what the Surintendant is unable to do."

"Oh! certainly. But tell me, do you not think it would be better, that I should speak, myself, to M. Fouquet, about these letters?"

"Nay, Duchesse, you will do precisely whatever you please in that respect. M. Fouquet either feels, or does not feel himself to be guilty; if he really be so, I know he is proud enough not to confess it; if he be not so, he will be exceedingly offended at your menace."

"As usual, you reason like an angel," said the Duchesse as she rose from her seat.

"And so, you are now going to denounce M. Fouquet to the Queen," said Aramis.

" 'Denounce!' Oh! what a disagreeable word. I shall not 'denounce,' my dear friend; you now know matters of policy too well to be ignorant how easily these affairs are arranged. I shall

merely side against M. Fouquet, and nothing more; and, in a war of party against party, a weapon of attack is always a weapon."

"No doubt."

"And, once on friendly terms again with the Queen-Mother, I may be dangerous towards some persons."

"You are at perfect liberty to be so, Duchesse."

"A liberty of which I shall avail myself."

"You are not ignorant, I suppose, Duchesse, that M. Fouquet is on the best of terms with the King of Spain."

"I suppose so."

"If, therefore, you begin a party warfare against M. Fouquet, he will reply in the same way; for he, too, is at perfect liberty to do so, is he not?"

"Oh! certainly."

"And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will make use of that friendship as a weapon of attack."

"You mean that he will be on good terms with the general of the order of the Jesuits, my dear Aramis."

"That may be the case, Duchesse."

"And that, consequently, the pension I have been receiving from the order will be stopped."

"I am greatly afraid it might be."

"Well; I must contrive to console myself in the best way I can; for after Richelieu, after the Frondes, after exile, what is there left for Madame de Chevreuse to be afraid of?"

"The pension, you are aware, is forty-eight thousand francs."

"Alas! I am quite aware of it."

"Moreover, in party contests, you know, the friends of the enemy do not escape."

"Ah! you mean that poor Laicques will have to suffer."

"I am afraid it is almost inevitable, Duchesse."

"Oh! he only receives twelve thousand francs pension."

"Yes, but the King of Spain has some influence left; advised by M. Fouquet, he might get M. Laicques shut up in prison for a little while."

"I am not very nervous on that point, my dear friend; because, thanks to a reconciliation with Anne of Austria, I will undertake that France should insist upon M. Laicques's liberation."

"True. In that case you will have something else to apprehend?"

"What can that be?" said the Duchesse, pretending to be surprised and terrified.

"You will learn; indeed, you must know it already, that having once been an affiliated member of the order, it is not easy to leave it; for the secrets that any particular member may have

acquired are unwholesome, and carry with them the germs of misfortune for whoever may reveal them."

The Duchesse paused and reflected for a moment, and then said, "That is more serious, I will think over it."

And, notwithstanding the profound obscurity, Aramis seemed to feel a burning glance, like a hot iron, escape from his friend's eyes, and plunge into his heart.

"Let us recapitulate," said Aramis; determined to keep himself on his guard, and gliding his hand into his breast, where he had a dagger concealed.

"Exactly, let us recapitulate; good accounts make good friends."

"The suppression of your pension——"

"Forty-eight thousand francs, and that of Laicques twelve, make, together, sixty thousand francs; that is what you mean, I suppose?"

"Precisely; and I was trying to find out what would be your equivalent for that?"

"Five hundred thousand francs, which I shall get from the Queen."

"Or, which you will not get."

"I know a means of procuring them," said the Duchesse thoughtlessly.

This remark made the Chevalier prick up his ears; and from the moment his adversary had committed this error, his mind was so thoroughly on its guard, that he seemed every moment to gain the advantage more and more; and she, consequently, to lose it. "I will admit, for argument's sake, that you obtain the money," he resumed, "you will lose the double of it, having a hundred thousand francs' pension to receive instead of sixty thousand, and that for a period of ten years."

"Not so, for I shall only be subjected to this reduction of my income during the period of M. Fouquet's remaining in power, a period which I estimate at two months."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"I am frank, you see."

"I thank you for it, Duchesse; but you would be wrong to suppose, that after M. Fouquet's disgrace the order would resume the payment of your pension."

"I know a means of making the order pay, as I know a means of forcing the Queen-Mother to concede what I require."

"In that case, Duchesse, we are all obliged to strike our flags to you. The victory is yours, and the triumph also is yours. Be clement, I entreat you."

"But is it possible," resumed the Duchesse, without taking

notice of the irony, "that you really draw back from a miserable sum of five hundred thousand francs, when it is a question of sparing you—I mean your friend—I beg your pardon, I ought rather to say your protector—the disagreeable consequences which a party conquest produces."

"Duchesse, I will tell you why; supposing the five hundred thousand francs were to be given you, M. Laicques will require his share, which will be another five hundred thousand francs, I presume? and then, after M. de Laicques' and your own portions have been arranged, the portions which your children, your poor pensioners, and various other persons will require, will start up as fresh claims; and these letters, however compromising they may be in their nature, are not worth from three to four millions. Can you have forgotten the Queen of France's diamonds?—they were surely worth more than these bits of waste paper signed by Mazarin, and yet their recovery did not cost a fourth part of what you ask for yourself."

"Yes, that is true; but the merchant values his goods at his own price, and it is for the purchaser to buy or refuse."

"Stay a moment, Duchesse; would you like me to tell you why I will not buy your letters."

"Pray tell me?"

"Because the letters you say are Mazarin's are false."

"What an absurdity."

"I have no doubt of it, for it would, to say the least, be very singular, that after you had quarrelled with the Queen through M. Mazarin's means, you should have kept up any intimate acquaintance with the latter; it would look as if you had been acting as a spy; and upon my word, I do not like to make use of the word."

"Oh! pray say it."

"Your great complaisance would seem very suspicious, at all events."

"That is quite true; but what is not less so, is that which the letter contains."

"I pledge you my word, Duchesse, that you will not be able to make use of it with the Queen."

"Oh! yes, indeed; I can make use of everything with the Queen."

"Very good," thought Aramis. "Croak on, old owl—hiss, viper that you are!"

But the Duchesse had said enough, and advanced a few steps towards the door. Aramis, however, had reserved an exposure which she did not expect—the imprecation of the slave behind

the car of the conqueror. He rang the bell, candles immediately appeared in the adjoining room, and the Bishop found himself completely encircled by lights, which shone upon the worn, haggard face of the Duchesse, revealing every feature but too clearly. Aramis fixed a long and ironical look upon her pale, thin, withered cheeks—upon her dim, dull eyes—and upon her lips, which she kept carefully closed over her blackened and scanty teeth. He, however, had thrown himself into a graceful attitude, with his haughty and intelligent head thrown back; he smiled so as to reveal his teeth, which were still brilliant and dazzling. The old coquette understood the trick that had been played her. She was standing immediately before a large mirror, in which her decrepitude, so carefully concealed, was only made more manifest. And, thereupon, without even saluting Aramis, who bowed with the ease and grace of the musketeer of early days, she hurried away with trembling steps, which her very precipitation only the more impeded. Aramis sprang across the room, like a zephyr, to lead her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her servant, who resumed his musket; and she left the house where such tender friends had not been able to understand each other, only because they had understood each other too well.

2

WHEREIN MAY BE SEEN THAT A BARGAIN WHICH CANNOT BE MADE WITH ONE PERSON, CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH ANOTHER

ARAMIS had been perfectly correct in his supposition; for hardly had she left the house in the Place Baudoyer, than Madame de Chevreuse proceeded homeward. She was, doubtless, afraid of being followed, and by this means thought she might succeed in throwing those who might be following her off their guard; but scarcely had she arrived within the door of the hotel, and hardly had assured herself that no one who could cause her any uneasiness was on her track, when she opened the door of the garden, leading into another street, and hurried towards the Rue Croix des Petits Champs, where M. Colbert* resided.

We have already said that evening, or rather night, had closed in; it was a dark, thick night, besides; Paris had once more sunk into its calm, quiescent state, enshrouding alike within its indulgent mantle the high-born Duchesse carrying out her political intrigue,

and the simple citizen's wife, who, having been detained late by a supper in the city, was making her way slowly homewards, hanging on the arm of a lover, by the shortest possible route. Madame de Chevreuse had been too well accustomed to nocturnal political intrigues to be ignorant that a minister never denies himself, even at his own private residence, to any young and beautiful woman who may chance to object to the dust and confusion of a public office, or to old women, as full of experience as of years, who dislike the indiscreet echo of official residences. A valet received the Duchesse under the peristyle, and received her, it must be admitted, with some indifference of manner; he intimated, after having looked at her face, that it was hardly at such an hour that one so advanced in years as herself could be permitted to disturb Monsieur Colbert's important occupations. But Madame de Chevreuse, without feeling or appearing to be annoyed, wrote her name upon a leaf of her tablets,—a name which had but too frequently sounded so disagreeably in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great Cardinal.* She wrote her name in the large, ill-formed characters of the higher classes of that period, folded the paper in a manner peculiarly her own, handed it to the valet without uttering a word, but with so haughty and imperious a gesture that the fellow, well accustomed to judge of people from their manners and appearance, perceived at once the quality of the person before him, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert's room. The minister could not control a sudden exclamation as he opened the paper; and the valet gathering from it the interest with which his master regarded the mysterious visitor returned as fast as he could to beg the Duchesse to follow him. She ascended to the first floor of the beautiful new house very slowly, rested herself on the landing-place, in order not to enter the apartment out of breath, and appeared before M. Colbert, who, with his own hands, held both the folding-doors open. The Duchesse paused at the threshold, for the purpose of well studying the character of the man with whom she was about to converse. At the first glance, the round, large, heavy head, thick brows, and ill-favoured features of Colbert, who wore, thrust low down on his head, a cap like a priest's, seemed to indicate that but little difficulty was likely to be met with in her negotiations with him, but also that she was to expect as little interest in the discussion of particulars; for there was scarcely any indication that the rough and uncouth nature of the man was susceptible to the impulses of a refined revenge, or of an exalted ambition. But when, on closer inspection, the Duchesse perceived the small piercingly black eyes, the longitudinal wrinkles of his high and massive forehead, the

imperceptible twitching of the lips, on which were apparent traces of rough good humour, Madame de Chevreuse altered her opinion of him, and felt she could say to herself: "I have found the man I want."

"What is the subject, madame, which procures me the honour of a visit from you?" he inquired.

"The need I have of you, monsieur," returned the Duchesse, "as well as that which you have of me."

"I am delighted, madame, with the first portion of your sentence; but, as far as the second portion is concerned——"

Madame de Chevreuse sat down in the arm-chair which M. Colbert advanced towards her. "Monsieur Colbert, you are the Intendant of Finances, and are ambitious of becoming the Surintendant?"*

"Madame!"

"Nay, do not deny it; that would only unnecessarily prolong our conversation, and that is useless."

"And yet, madame, however well disposed and inclined to show politeness I may be towards a lady of your position and merit, nothing will make me confess that I have ever entertained the idea of supplanting my superior."

"I said nothing about supplanting, Monsieur Colbert. Could I accidentally have made use of that word? I hardly think that likely. The word 'replace' is less aggressive in its signification, and more grammatically suitable, as M. de Voiture* would say. I presume, therefore, that you are ambitious of replacing M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet's fortune, madame, enables him to withstand all attempts. The Surintendant in this age plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; the vessels pass beneath him and do not overthrow him."

"I ought to have availed myself precisely of that very comparison. It is true, M. Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember to have heard it said by M. Conrart,* a member of the academy, I believe, that when the Colossus of Rhodes fell from its lofty position, the merchant who had cast it down—a merchant, nothing more, M. Colbert—loaded four hundred camels with the ruins. A merchant! and that is considerably less than an Intendant of Finances."

"Madame, I can assure you that I shall never overthrow Monsieur Fouquet."

"Very good, Monsieur Colbert, since you persist in showing so much sensitiveness with me, as if you were ignorant that I am Madame de Chevreuse, and also that I am somewhat advanced

in years; in other words, that you have to do with a woman who has had political dealings with the Cardinal de Richelieu, and who has no time to lose; as, I repeat, you do not hesitate to commit such an imprudence, I shall go and find others who are more intelligent and more desirous of making their fortunes."

"How, madame, how?"

"You give me a very poor idea of negotiators of the present day. I assure you that if, in my earlier days, a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars,* who was not, moreover, a man of very high order of intellect, and had said to him about the Cardinal what I have just now said to you of M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have already set actively to work."

"Nay, madame, show a little indulgence, I entreat you."

"Well, then, you do really consent to replace M. Fouquet."

"Certainly I do, if the King dismisses M. Fouquet."

"Again, a word too much; it is quite evident that if you have not yet succeeded in driving M. Fouquet from his post, it is because you have not been able to do so. Therefore, I should be the greatest simpleton possible if, in coming to you, I did not bring you the very thing you require."

"I am distressed to be obliged to persist, madame," said Colbert, after a silence which enabled the Duchesse to sound the depth of his dissimulation, "but I must warn you that, for the last six years, denunciation after denunciation has been made against M. Fouquet, and he has remained unshaken and unaffected by them."

"There is a time for everything, Monsieur Colbert; those who were the authors of those denunciations were not called Madame de Chevreuse, and they had no proofs equal to the six letters from M. de Mazarin, which establish the offence in question."

"The offence!"

"The crime, if you like it better."

"The crime! committed by M. Fouquet!"

"Nothing less. It is rather strange, M. Colbert, but your face, which just now was cold and indifferent, is now positively the very reverse."

"A crime!"

"I am delighted to see it makes an impression upon you."

"It is because that word, madame, embraces so many things."

"It embraces the post of Surintendant of Finance for yourself, and a letter of exile, or the Bastille, for M. Fouquet."

"Forgive me, Madame la Duchesse, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet can be exiled; to be imprisoned or disgraced, that is already a great deal."

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of what I am saying," returned Madame de Chevreuse coldly. "I do not live at such a distance from Paris as not to know what takes place there. The King does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly sacrifice M. Fouquet if an opportunity were only given him."

"It must be a good one, though."

"Good enough, and one I estimate to be worth five hundred thousand francs."

"In what way?" said Colbert.

"I mean, monsieur, that holding this opportunity in my own hands, I will not allow it to be transferred to yours except for a sum of five hundred thousand francs."

"I understand you perfectly, madame. But since you have fixed a price for the sale, let me now see the value of the articles to be sold."

"Oh, a mere trifle; six letters, as I have already told you, from M. de Mazarin; and the autographs will most assuredly not be regarded as too highly priced, if they establish, in an irrefutable manner, that M. Fouquet has embezzled large sums of money from the treasury, and appropriated them to his own purposes."

"In an irrefutable manner, do you say?" observed Colbert, whose eyes sparkled with delight.

"Perfectly so; would you like to read the letters?"

"With all my heart. Copies, of course?"

"Of course, the copies," said the Duchesse, as she drew from her bosom a small packet of papers flattened by her velvet bodice. "Read," she said.

Colbert eagerly snatched the papers and devoured them.

"Excellent!" he said.

"It is clear enough, is it not?"

"Yes, madame, yes; M. Mazarin must have handed the money to M. Fouquet, who must have kept it for his own purposes; but the question is, what money?"

"Exactly,—what money? if we come to terms I will join to these six letters a seventh, which will supply you with the fullest particulars."

Colbert reflected. "And the originals of those letters?"

"A useless question to ask; exactly as if I were to ask you, Monsieur Colbert, whether the money-bags you will give me will be full or empty."

"Very good, madame."

"Is it concluded?"

"No; for there is one circumstance to which neither of us has given any attention."

"Name it!"

"M. Fouquet can be utterly ruined, under the circumstances you have detailed, only by means of legal proceedings."

"Well?"

"A public scandal, for instance; and yet, neither the legal proceedings nor the scandal can be commenced against him."

"Why not?"

"Because he is Procureur-Général of the Parliament;*because, too, in France, all public administrations, the army, justice itself, and commerce, are intimately connected by ties of good fellowship, which people call *esprit de corps*. In such a case, madame, the Parliament will never permit its chief to be dragged before a public tribunal; and never, even if he be dragged there by royal authority, never, I say, will he be condemned."

"Well, Monsieur Colbert, I do not see what I have to do with that."

"I am aware of that, madame; but I have to do with it, and it consequently diminishes the value of what you have brought to show me. What good can a proof of crime be to me without the possibility of obtaining a condemnation?"

"Even if he be only suspected, M. Fouquet will lose his post of Surintendant."

"Is that all!" exclaimed Colbert, whose dark, gloomy features were momentarily lighted up by an expression of hate and vengeance.

"Ah, ah! Monsieur Colbert," said the Duchesse, "forgive me, but I did not think you were so impressionable. Very good; in that case, since you need more than I have to give you, there is no occasion to speak of the matter at all."

"Yes, madame, we will go on talking of it; only, as the value of your commodities has decreased, you must lower your pretensions."

"You are bargaining, then?"

"Every man who wishes to deal loyally is obliged to do so."

"How much will you offer me?"

"Two hundred thousand francs," said Colbert.

The Duchesse laughed in his face, and then said suddenly, "Wait a moment, I have another arrangement to propose; will you give me three hundred thousand francs?"

"No, no."

"Oh, you can either accept or refuse my terms; besides, that is not all."

"More still! you are becoming too impracticable to deal with, madame."

"Less so than you think, perhaps, for it is not money I am going to ask you for."

"What is it, then?"

"A service. You know that I have always been most affectionately attached to the Queen, and I am desirous of having an interview with Her Majesty."

"With the Queen?"

"Yes, Monsieur Colbert, with the Queen, who is, I admit, no longer my friend, and who has ceased to be so for a long time past, but who may again become so if the opportunity be only given her."

"Her Majesty has ceased to receive any one, madame. She is a great sufferer, and you may be aware that the paroxysms of her disease occur with greater frequency than ever."

"That is the very reason why I wish to have an interview with Her Majesty; for in Flanders there is a great variety of these kinds of complaints."

"What, cancers—a fearful, incurable disorder?"

"Do not believe that, Monsieur Colbert. The Flemish peasant is somewhat a man of nature, and his companion for life is not alone a wife, but a female labourer also; for while he is smoking his pipe, the woman works: it is she who draws the water from the well; she who loads the mule or the ass, and even bears herself a portion of the burden. Taking but little care of herself, she gets knocked about, first in one direction, and then in another, and very often is beaten by her husband, and cancers frequently arise from contusions."

"True, true," said Colbert.

"The Flemish women do not die the sooner on that account. When they are great sufferers from this disease they go in search of remedies, and the Béguines of Bruges are excellent doctors for every kind of disease. They have precious waters of one sort or another; specifics of various kinds; and they give a bottle of it and a wax candle to the sufferer, whereby the priests are gainers, and Heaven is served by the disposal of both their wares. I will take the Queen some of this holy water, which I will procure from the Béguines of Bruges; Her Majesty will recover, and will burn as many wax candles as she may think fit. You see, Monsieur Colbert, to prevent my seeing the Queen is almost as bad as committing the crime of regicide."

"You are, undoubtedly, Madame la Duchesse, a woman of exceedingly great abilities, and I am more than astounded at their display; still I cannot but suppose that this charitable consideration towards the Queen in some measure covers a slight personal interest for yourself."

"I have not given myself the trouble to conceal it, that I am aware of, Monsieur Colbert. You said, I believe, that I had a slight personal interest? On the contrary, it is a very great interest, and I will prove it to you, by resuming what I was saying. If you procure me a personal interview with Her Majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand francs I have claimed; if not, I shall keep my letters, unless, indeed, you give me, on the spot, five hundred thousand francs for them."

And rising from her seat with this decisive remark, the old Duchesse plunged M. Colbert into a disagreeable perplexity. To bargain any further was out of the question; and not to bargain was to pay a great deal too dearly for them. "Madame," he said, "I shall have the pleasure of handing you over a hundred thousand crowns; but how shall I get the actual letters themselves?"

"In the simplest manner in the world, my dear Monsieur Colbert—whom will you trust?"

The financier began to laugh silently, so that his large eyebrows went up and down like the wings of a bat, upon the deep lines of his yellow forehead. "No one," he said.

"You surely will make an exception in your own favour, Monsieur Colbert?"

"In what way, madame?"

"I mean that if you would take the trouble to accompany me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered into your own hands, and you would be able to verify and check them."

"Quite true."

"You would bring the hundred thousand crowns with you at the same time, for, I, too, do not trust any one?"

Colbert coloured to the tips of his ears. Like all eminent men in the art of figures, he was of an insolent and mathematical probity. "I will take with me, madame," he said, "two orders for the amount agreed upon, payable at my treasury. Will that satisfy you?"

"Would that the orders on your treasury were for two millions, monsieur. I shall have the pleasure of showing you the way, then?"

"Allow me to order my carriage."

"I have a carriage below, monsieur."

Colbert coughed like an irresolute man. He imagined, for a moment, that the proposition of the Duchesse was a snare; that perhaps some one was waiting at the door; and that she whose secret had just been sold to Colbert for a hundred thousand crowns, had already offered it to Fouquet for the same sum. As

he still hesitated a good deal, the Duchesse looked at him full in the face.

"You prefer your own carriage?" she said.

"I admit that I do."

"You suppose that I am going to lead you into a snare or trap of some sort or other?"

"Madame la Duchesse, you have the character of being somewhat inconsiderate at times, and, as I am clothed in a sober, solemn character, a jest or a practical joke might compromise me."

"Yes; the fact is, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many servants as you like, only think well of what I am going to say. What we two may arrange between us, we are the only persons who know it; if a third had witnessed, we might as well have told the whole world of it. After all, I do not make a point of it; my carriage shall follow yours, and I shall be satisfied to accompany you in your own carriage to the Queen."

"To the Queen!"

"Have you forgotten that already? Is it possible that one of the clauses of the agreement, of so much importance to me, can have escaped you already? How trifling it seems to you, indeed; if I had known it I should have asked double what I have done."

"I have reflected, madame, and I shall not accompany you."

"Really—and why not?"

"Because I have the most perfect confidence in you."

"You overpower me. But provided I receive the hundred thousand crowns?"

"Here they are, madame," said Colbert, scribbling a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed to the Duchesse, adding, "You are paid."

"The trait is a fine one, Monsieur Colbert, and I will reward you for it," she said, beginning to laugh.

Madame de Chevreuse's laugh was a very sinister sound; every man who feels youth, faith, love, life itself throbbing in his heart, would prefer tears to such a lamentable laugh. The Duchesse opened the front of her dress and drew forth from her bosom, somewhat less white than it once had been, a small packet of papers, tied with a flame-coloured ribbon, and, still laughing, she said, "There, Monsieur Colbert, are the originals of Cardinal Mazarin's letters; they are now your own property," she added, refastening the body of her dress; "your fortune is secured, and now accompany me to the Queen."

"No, madame; if you are again about to run the chance of Her Majesty's displeasure, and it were known at the Palais Royal that I had been the means of introducing you there, the Queen

would never forgive me while she lived. No; there are certain persons at the palace who are devoted to me, who will procure you an admission without my being compromised."

"Just as you please, provided I enter."

"What do you term those religious women at Bruges who cure disorders."

"Béguines."

"Good; you are one."

"As you please, but I must soon cease to be one."

"That is your affair."

"Excuse me, but I do not wish to be exposed to a refusal."

"That is again your own affair, madame. I am going to give directions to the head valet of the gentleman in waiting on Her Majesty to allow admission to a Béguine, who brings an effectual remedy for Her Majesty's sufferings. You are the bearer of my letter, you will undertake to be provided with the remedy, and will give every explanation on the subject. I admit a knowledge of a Béguine, but I deny all knowledge of Madame de Chevreuse. Here, madame, then, is your letter of introduction."

3

THE SKIN OF THE BEAR

COLBERT handed the Duchesse the letter, and gently drew aside the chair behind which she was standing. Madame de Chevreuse, with a very slight bow, immediately left the room. Colbert, who had recognised Mazarin's handwriting, and had counted the letters, rang to summon his secretary, whom he enjoined to go in immediate search of M. Vanel,* a counsellor of the Parliament. The secretary replied that, according to his usual practice, M. Vanel had just that moment entered the house, in order to render to the Intendant an account of the principal details of the business which had been transacted during the day in the sitting of the Parliament. Colbert approached one of the lamps, read the letters of the deceased Cardinal over again, smiled repeatedly as he recognised the great value of the papers Madame de Chevreuse had just delivered to him and, burying his head in his hands for a few minutes, reflected profoundly. In the meantime, a tall, large-made man entered the room; his spare thin face, steady look, and hooked nose, as he entered Colbert's cabinet, with a modest

assurance of manner, revealed a character at once supple and decided,—supple towards the master who could throw him the prey, firm towards the dogs who might possibly be disposed to dispute it with him. M. Vanel carried a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm, and placed it on the desk on which Colbert was leaning both his elbows, as he supported his head.

"Good-day, M. Vanel," said the latter, rousing himself from his meditation.

"Good-day, monseigneur," said Vanel naturally.

"You should say monsieur, and not monseigneur," replied Colbert gently.

"We give the title of monseigneur to ministers," returned Vanel, with extreme self-possession, "and you are a minister."

"Not yet."

"You are so in point of fact, and I call you monseigneur accordingly; besides, you are my seigneur for me, and that is sufficient; if you dislike my calling you monseigneur before others, allow me, at least, to call you so in private."

Colbert raised his head as if to read, or to try to read, upon Vanel's face how much actual sincerity entered into this protestation of devotion. But the counsellor knew perfectly well how to sustain the weight of his look, even were it armed with the full authority of the title he had conferred. Colbert sighed; he could not read anything in Vanel's face, and Vanel might possibly be honest in his professions, but Colbert recollected that this man, inferior to himself in every other respect, was actually his superior through the fact of his having a wife unfaithful to him. At the moment he was pitying this man's lot, Vanel coldly drew from his pocket a perfumed letter, sealed with Spanish wax, and held it towards Colbert, saying, "A letter from my wife, monseigneur."

Colbert coughed, took, opened, and read the letter, and then put it carefully away in his pocket, while Vanel turned over the leaves of the papers he had brought with him with an unmoved and unconcerned air. "Vanel," he said suddenly to his protégé, "you are a hard-working man, I know; would twelve hours' daily labour frighten you?"

"I work fifteen hours every day."

"Impossible. A counsellor need not work more than three hours a day in Parliament."

"Oh! I am working up some returns for a friend of mine in the department of accounts, and, as I still have time left on my hands, I am studying Hebrew."

"Your reputation stands high in the Parliament, Vanel."

"I believe so, monseigneur."

"You must not grow rusty in your post of counsellor."

"What must I do to avoid it?"

"Purchase a high place. Mean and low ambitions are very difficult to satisfy."

"Small purses are the most difficult to fill, monseigneur."

"What post have you in view?" said Colbert.

"I see none—not one."

"There is one, certainly, but one need be almost the King himself to be able to buy it without inconvenience; and the King will not be inclined, I suppose, to purchase the post of Procureur-Général."

At these words, Vanel fixed his at once humble and dull look upon Colbert, who could hardly tell whether Vanel had comprehended him or not. "Why do you speak to me, monseigneur," said Vanel, "of the post of Procureur-Général to the Parliament; I know no other post then the one M. Fouquet fills."

"Exactly so, my dear counsellor."

"You are not over fastidious, monseigneur; but before the post can be bought, it must be offered for sale."

"I believe, Monsieur Vanel, that it will be for sale before long."

"For sale! What, M. Fouquet's post of Procureur-Général?"

"So it is said."

"The post which renders him so perfectly inviolable, for sale! Oh! oh!" said Vanel, beginning to laugh.

"Would you be afraid, then, of the post?" said Colbert gravely.

"Afraid! no, but——"

"Nor desirous of obtaining it?"

"You are laughing at me, monseigneur," replied Vanel; "is it likely that a counsellor of the Parliament would not be desirous of becoming Procureur-Général?"

"Well, Monsieur Vanel, since I tell you that the post, as report goes, will be shortly for sale——"

"I cannot help repeating, monseigneur, that it is impossible; a man never throws away the buckler, behind which he maintains his honour, his fortune, his very life."

"There are certain men mad enough, Vanel, to fancy themselves out of the reach of all mischances."

"Yes, monseigneur; but such men never commit their mad acts for the advantage of the poor Vanels of the world."

"Why not?"

"For the very reason that those Vanels are poor."

"It is true that M. Fouquet's post might cost a good round sum. What would you bid for it, Monsieur Vanel?"

"Everything I am worth."

"Which means?"

"Three or four hundred thousand francs."

"And the post is worth——"

"A million and a half at the very lowest. I know persons who have offered one million seven hundred thousand francs, without being able to persuade M. Fouquet to sell. Besides, supposing it were to happen that M. Fouquet wished to sell, which I do not believe, in spite of what I have been told——"

"Ah! you have heard something about it, then; who told you?"

"M. de Gourville, M. Pélisson, and others."*

"Very good; if, therefore, M. Fouquet did wish to sell——"

"I could not buy it just yet, since the Surintendant will only sell for ready money, and no one has a million and a half to throw down at once."

Colbert suddenly interrupted the counsellor by an imperious gesture; he had begun to meditate. Observing his superior's serious attitude, and his perseverance in continuing the conversation on this subject, Vanel awaited the solution without venturing to precipitate it. "Explain fully to me the privileges which this post confers."

"The right of impeaching every French subject who is not a prince of the blood; the right of quashing all proceedings taken against any Frenchman, who is neither king nor prince. The Procureur-Général is the King's right hand to punish the guilty; he is the means whereby also he can evade the administration of justice. M. Fouquet, therefore, will be able, by stirring up the Parliaments, to maintain himself even against the King; and the King could as easily, by humouring M. Fouquet, get his edicts registered in spite of every opposition and objection. The Procureur-Généralship can be made a very useful or very dangerous instrument."

"Vanel, would you like to be Procureur-Général?" said Colbert suddenly, softening both his look and his voice.

"I!" exclaimed the latter; "I have already had the honour to represent to you that I want about eleven hundred thousand francs to make up the amount."

"Borrow that sum from your friends."

"I have no friends richer than myself."

"You are an honest and honourable man, Vanel."

"Ah! monseigneur, if the world were to think as you do!"

"I think so, and that is quite enough; and if it should be needed, I will be your security."

"Do not forget the proverb, monseigneur."

"What is that?"

"That he who becomes responsible for another, has to pay for his responsibility."

"Let that make no difference."

Vanel rose, quite bewildered by this offer which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made to him. "You are not trifling with me, monseigneur?" he said.

"Stay; you say that M. Gourville has spoken to you about M. Fouquet's post."

"Yes; and M. Pélisson also."

"Officially so, or only by their own suggestion?"

"These were their very words: 'These Parliamentary people are as proud as they are wealthy; they ought to club together two or three millions among themselves, to present to their protector and great luminary, M. Fouquet.' "

"And what did you reply?"

"I said that, for my own part, I would give ten thousand francs if necessary."

"Ah! you like M. Fouquet, then?" exclaimed Colbert, with a look full of hatred.

"No; but M. Fouquet is our chief. He is in debt—is on the high road to ruin; and we ought to save the honour of the body of which we are members."

"Exactly; and that explains why M. Fouquet will be always safe and sound so long as he occupies his present post," replied Colbert.

"Thereupon," said Vanel, "M. Gourville added, 'If we were to do anything out of charity to M. Fouquet, it could not be otherwise than most humiliating to him; and he would be sure to refuse it. Let the Parliament subscribe among themselves to purchase, in a proper manner, the post of Procureur-Général; in that case, all would go on well, the honour of our body would be saved, and M. Fouquet's pride spared.' "

"That is an opening."

"I considered it so, monseigneur."

"Well, Monsieur Vanel, you will go at once, and find out either M. Gourville or M. Pélisson. Do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?"

"I know M. de la Fontaine very well."

"La Fontaine, the rhymester?"

"Yes; he used to write verses to my wife, when M. Fouquet was one of our friends."

"Go to him, then, and try to procure an interview with the Surintendant."

"Willingly—but the sum itself?"

"On the day and the hour you arrange to settle the matter, Monsieur Vanel, you shall be supplied with the money; so, do not make yourself uneasy on that account."

"Monseigneur, such munificence! You eclipse kings even—you surpass M. Fouquet himself."

"Stay a moment—do not let us mistake each other. I do not make you a present of fourteen hundred thousand francs, Monsieur Vanel; for I have children to provide for—but I will lend you that sum."

"Ask whatever interest, whatever security you please, monseigneur; I am quite ready. And when all your requisitions are satisfied, I will still repeat, that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. What conditions do you impose?"

"The repayment in eight years, and a mortgage upon the appointment itself."

"Certainly. Is that all?"

"Wait a moment. I reserve to myself the right of repurchasing the post from you at one hundred and fifty thousand francs profit for yourself, if, in your mode of filling the office, you do not follow out a line of conduct in conformity with the interests of the King and with my projects."

"Ah! ah!" said Vanel, in a slightly altered tone.

"Is there anything in that which can possibly be objectionable to you, Monsieur Vanel?" said Colbert coldly.

"Oh! no, no," replied Vanel quickly.

"Very good. We will sign an agreement to that effect, whenever you like. And now, go as quickly as you can to M. Fouquet's friends, obtain an interview with the Surintendant; do not be too difficult in making whatever concessions may be required of you; and when once the arrangements are all made——"

"I will press him to sign."

"Be most careful to do nothing of the kind; do not speak of signatures with M. Fouquet, nor of deeds, nor even ask him to pass his word. Understand this, otherwise you will lose everything. All you have to do is to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand on the matter. Go, go."

4

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE QUEEN-MOTHER

THE Queen-Mother was in her bedroom at the Palais-Royal, with Madame de Motteville and the Senora Molena.* The King, who had been impatiently expected the whole day, had not made his appearance; and the Queen,* who had grown quite impatient, had often sent to inquire about him. The whole atmosphere of the court seemed to indicate an approaching storm; the courtiers and the ladies of the court avoided meeting in the antechambers and the corridors, in order not to converse on compromising subjects. Monsieur had joined the King early in the morning for a hunting party; Madame remained in her own apartments, cool and distant to every one; and the Queen-Mother, after she had said her prayers in Latin. talked of domestic matters with her two friends in pure Castilian. Madame de Motteville, who understood the language perfectly, answered her in French. When the three ladies had exhausted every form of dissimulation and of politeness, as a circuitous mode of expressing that the King's conduct was making the Queen and the Queen-Mother pine away from sheer grief and vexation, and when, in the most guarded and polished phrases, they had fulminated every variety of imprecation against Mademoiselle de la Vallière,* the Queen-Mother terminated her attack by an exclamation indicative of her own reflections and character. "*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molena—which means, "These children!" words full of meaning in a mother's lips—words full of terrible significance in the mouth of a queen who, like Anne of Austria hid many curious and dark secrets in her soul.

"Yes," said Molena, "these children! for whom every mother becomes a sacrifice."

"Yes," replied the Queen; "a mother has sacrificed everything, certainly." She did not finish her phrase; for she fancied, when she raised her eyes towards the full-length portrait of the pale Louis XIII., that light had once more flashed from her husband's dull eyes, and that his nostrils were inflated by wrath. The portrait seemed animated by a living expression—speak it did not, but it seemed to menace. A profound silence succeeded the Queen's last remark. La Molena began to turn over the ribbons and lace of a large work-table. Madame de Motteville, surprised at the look of mutual intelligence which had been exchanged between the confidante and her mistress, cast down her eyes like a discreet

woman, and, pretending to be observant of nothing that was passing, listened with the utmost attention instead. She heard nothing, however, but a very significant "hum" on the part of the Spanish duenna, who was the perfect representation of extreme caution—and a profound sigh on that of the Queen. She looked up immediately.

"You are suffering?" she said.

"No, Motteville, no; why do you say that?"

"Your Majesty almost groaned just now."

"You are right; I did sigh, in truth."

"Monsieur Vallot is not far off, I believe he is in Madame's apartment."

"Why is he with Madame?"

"Madame is troubled with nervous attacks."

"A very fine disorder, indeed! There is little good in M. Vallot being there, when another physician instead would cure Madame."

Madame de Motteville looked up with an air of great surprise, as she replied, "Another doctor instead of M. Vallot?—whom do you mean?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation. If any one is really ill, it is my poor daughter."

"And your Majesty, too."

"Less so this evening, though."

"Do not believe that too confidently, madame," said de Motteville. And, as if to justify her caution, a sharp acute pain seized the Queen, who turned deadly pale, and threw herself back in the chair, with every symptom of a sudden fainting fit. Molena ran to a richly-gilded tortoiseshell cabinet, from which she took a large rock-crystal smelling-bottle, and immediately held it to the Queen's nostrils, who inhaled it wildly for a few minutes, and murmured:—

"It will hasten my death—but Heaven's will be done!"

"Your Majesty's death is not so near at hand," added Molena, replacing the smelling-bottle in the cabinet.

"Does your Majesty feel better now?" inquired Madame de Motteville.

"Much better," returned the Queen, placing her finger on her lips, to impose silence on her favourite.

"It is very strange," remarked Madame de Motteville, after a pause.

"What is strange?" said the Queen.

"Does your Majesty remember the day when this pain attacked you for the first time?"

"I remember only that it was a grievously sad day for me, Motteville."

"But your Majesty had not always regarded that day a sad one."

"Why?"

"Because three and twenty years before, on that very day, his present Majesty, your own glorious son, was born at the very same hour."

The Queen uttered a loud cry, buried her face in her hands, and seemed utterly lost for some minutes; but whether from recollections which arose in her mind, or from reflection, or even from sheer pain, it was of course uncertain. La Molena darted almost a furious look at Madame de Motteville, which was so full of bitter reproach that the poor woman, perfectly ignorant of its meaning, was, in her own exculpation, on the point of asking an explanation of its meaning; when, suddenly Anne of Austria arose and said, "Yes, the 5th of September; my sorrow began on the 5th of September. The greatest joy, one day; the deepest sorrow the next;—the sorrow," she added, "the bitter expiation of a too excessive joy."

And, from that moment, Anne of Austria, whose memory and reason seemed to have become entirely suspended for a time, remained impenetrable, with vacant look, mind almost wandering, and hands hanging heavily down, as if life had almost departed.

"We must put her to bed," said La Molena.

"Presently, Molena."

"Let us leave the Queen alone," added the Spanish attendant.

Madame de Motteville rose; large and glistening tears were fast rolling down the Queen's pallid face; and Molena, having observed this sign of weakness, fixed her black vigilant eyes upon her.

"Yes, yes," replied the Queen. "Leave us, Motteville; go."

The word "us" produced a disagreeable effect upon the ears of the French favourite; for it signified that an interchange of secrets, or of revelations of the past, was about to be made, and that one person was *de trop* in the conversation which seemed likely to take place.

"Will Molena, alone, be sufficient for your Majesty to-night?" inquired the Frenchwoman.

"Yes," replied the Queen. Madame de Motteville bowed in submission, and was about to withdraw, when, suddenly, an old female attendant, dressed as if she had belonged to the Spanish court of the year 1620, opened the doors, and surprised the Queen

in her tears. "The remedy!" she cried, delightedly, to the Queen, as she unceremoniously approached the group.

"What remedy?" said Anne of Austria.

"For your Majesty's sufferings," the former replied.

"Who brings it?" asked Madame de Motteville eagerly; "Monsieur Vallot?"

"No; a lady from Flanders."

"From Flanders? Is she Spanish?" inquired the Queen.

"I don't know."

"Who sent her?"

"M. Colbert."

"Her name?"

"She did not mention it."

"Her position in life?"

"She will answer that herself."

"Her face?"

"She is masked."

"Go, Molena; go and see!" cried the Queen.

"It is needless," suddenly replied a voice, at once firm and gentle in its tone, which proceeded from the other side of the tapestry hangings; a voice which made the attendants start, and the Queen tremble excessively. At the same moment, a masked female appeared through the hangings, and, before the Queen could speak a syllable, she added, "I am connected with the order of the Béguines of Bruges, and do, indeed, bring with me the remedy which is certain to effect a cure of your Majesty's complaint." No one uttered a sound, and the Béguine did not move a step.

"Speak," said the Queen.

"I will, when we are alone," was the answer.

Anne of Austria looked at her attendants, who immediately withdrew.

The Béguine, thereupon, advanced a few steps towards the Queen, and bowed reverently before her. The Queen gazed with increasing mistrust at this woman, who, in her turn, fixed a pair of brilliant eyes upon her, through her mask.

"The Queen of France must, indeed, be very ill," said Anne of Austria, "if it is known at the Béguinage of Bruges that she stands in need of being cured."

"Your Majesty is not irremediably ill."

"But, tell me, how do you happen to know I am suffering?"

"Your Majesty has friends in Flanders."

"Since these friends, then, have sent you, mention their names."

"Impossible, madame, since your Majesty's memory has not been awakened by your heart."

Anne of Austria looked up, endeavouring to discover through the concealment of the mask, and through her mysterious language, the name of her companion, who expressed herself with such familiarity and freedom; then, suddenly, wearied by a curiosity which wounded every feeling of pride in her nature, she said, "You are ignorant, perhaps, that royal personages are never spoken to with the face masked."

"Deign to excuse me, madame," replied the Béguine humbly.

"I cannot excuse you. I may, possibly, forgive you, if you throw your mask aside."

"I have made a vow, madame, to attend and aid all afflicted or suffering persons without ever permitting them to behold my face. I might have been able to administer some relief to your body and to your mind, too; but, since your Majesty forbids me, I will take my leave. Adieu, madame, adieu."

These words were uttered with a harmony of tone and respect of manner that deprived the Queen of all her anger and suspicion, but did not remove her feeling of curiosity. "You are right," she said, "it ill becomes those who are suffering to reject the means of relief which Heaven sends them. Speak, then; and may you, indeed, be able, as you assert you can, to administer relief to my body——"

"Let us first speak a little of the mind, if you please," said the Béguine; "of the mind, which, I am sure, must also suffer."

"My mind?"

"There are cancers so insidious in their nature that their very pulsation is invisible. Such cancers, madame, leave the ivory whiteness of the skin untouched, and marble not the firm, fair flesh, with their blue tints; the physician who bends over the patient's chest hears not, though he listens, the insatiable teeth of the disease grinding its onward progress through the muscles, as the blood flows freely on; the knife has never been able to destroy, and rarely even, temporarily, to disarm the rage of these mortal scourges; their home is in the mind, which they corrupt; they fill the whole heart until it breaks. Such, madame, are the cancers, fatal to queens; are you, too, free from their scourge?"

Anne slowly raised her arm, dazzling in its perfect whiteness, and pure in its rounded outlines, as it was in the time of her earlier days.

"The evils to which you allude," she said, "are the condition of the lives of the high in rank upon earth, to whom Heaven has imparted mind. When those evils become too heavy to be borne,

Heaven lightens their burden by penitence and confession. There we lay down our burden, and the secrets which oppress us. But, forget not, that the same gracious Heaven, in its mercy, apportions to their trials the strength of the feeble creatures of its hand; and my strength has enabled me to bear my burden. For the secrets of others, the silence of Heaven is more than sufficient; for my own secrets, that of my confessor is just enough."

"You are as courageous, madame, I see, as ever, against your enemies. You do not acknowledge your confidence in your friends."

"Queens have no friends; if you have nothing further to say to me,—if you feel yourself inspired by Heaven as a prophetess—leave me, I pray you, for I dread the future."

"I should have supposed," said the Béguine resolutely, "that you would rather have dreaded the past."

Hardly had these words escaped her lips, than the Queen rose up proudly. "Speak," she cried, in a short, imperious tone of voice; "explain yourself briefly, quickly, entirely; or, if not——"

"Nay, do not threaten me, your Majesty," said the Béguine gently; "I came to you full of compassion and respect. I came here on the part of a friend."

"Prove that to me! Comfort, instead of irritating me."

"Easily enough; and your Majesty will see who is friendly to you. What misfortune has happened to your Majesty during these three and twenty years past——"

"Serious misfortunes, indeed; have I not lost the King?"

"I speak not of misfortunes of that kind. I wish to ask you if, since the birth of the King, any indiscretion on a friend's part has caused your Majesty the slightest serious anxiety or distress?"

"I do not understand you," replied the Queen; setting her teeth hard together in order to conceal her emotion.

"I will make myself understood, then. Your Majesty remembers that the King was born on the 5th of September, 1638, at a quarter past eleven o'clock."

"Yes," stammered out the Queen.

"At half-past twelve," continued the Béguine, "the Dauphin, who had been baptised by Monseigneur de Meaux in the King's and in your own presence, was acknowledged as the heir of the crown of France. The King then went to the chapel of the old Château de Saint-Germain, to hear the *Te Deum* chanted."

"Quite true, quite true," murmured the Queen.

"Your Majesty's confinement took place in the presence of Monsieur, His Majesty's late uncle, of the princes, and of the ladies attached to the court. The King's physician, Bouvard, and

Honoré,* the surgeon, were stationed in the antechamber; your Majesty slept from three o'clock until seven, I believe!"

"Yes, yes; but you tell me no more than every one else knows as well as you and myself."

"I am now, madame, approaching that which very few persons are acquainted with. Very few persons, did I say, alas! I might almost say two only, for formerly there were but five in all, and, for many years past, the secret has been well preserved by the deaths of the principal participators in it. The late King sleeps now with his ancestors. Péronne, the midwife, soon followed him, Laporte* is already forgotten."

The Queen opened her lips as though about to reply; she felt beneath her icy hand, with which she kept her face half concealed, the beads of perspiration upon her brow.

"It was eight o'clock," pursued the Béguine; "the King was seated at supper, full of joy and happiness; around him on all sides arose wild cries of delight and drinking of healths; the people cheered beneath the balconies; the Swiss guards, the musketeers, and the royal guards wandered through the city, borne about in triumph by the drunken students. Those boisterous sounds of the general joy disturbed the Dauphin, the future King of France, who was quietly lying in the arms of Madame de Hausac,* his nurse, and whose eyes, as he opened them, and stared about, might have observed two crowns at the foot of his cradle. Suddenly, your Majesty uttered a piercing cry, and Dame Péronne immediately flew to your bedside. The doctors were dining in a room at some distance from your chamber; the palace, deserted from the frequency of the irruptions made into it, was without either sentinels or guards, The midwife, having questioned and examined your Majesty, gave a sudden exclamation as if in wild astonishment, and taking you in her arms, bewildered almost out of her senses from sheer distress of mind, despatched Laporte to inform the King that Her Majesty the Queen wished to see him in her room. Laporte, you are aware, madame, was a man of the most admirable calmness and presence of mind. He did not approach the King as if he were the bearer of alarming intelligence and wished to inspire the terror which he himself experienced; besides, it was not a very terrifying intelligence which awaited the King. Therefore, Laporte appeared with a smile upon his lips, and approached the King's chair, saying to him, —'Sire, the Queen is very happy, and would be still more so to see your Majesty.' On that day Louis XIII. would have given his crown away to the veriest beggar for a 'God bless you.' Animated, light-hearted, and full of gaiety, the King rose from the table, and said to those

around him, in a tone that Henry IV. might have adopted,—'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.' He came to your bedside, madame, at the very moment Dame Péronne presented to him a second prince, as beautiful and healthy as the former, and said,—'Sire, Heaven will not allow the kingdom of France to fall into the female line.' The King, yielding to a first impulse, clasped the child in his arms, and cried, 'Oh! Heaven, I thank thee!'"

At this part of her recital the Béguine paused, observing how intensely the Queen was suffering; she had thrown herself back in her chair, and with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed, listened without seeming to hear, and her lips moving convulsively, either breathing a prayer to Heaven or in imprecations against the woman standing before her.

"Ah! do not believe that, because there could be but one Dauphin in France," exclaimed the Béguine, "or that if the Queen allowed that child to vegetate, banished from his royal parents' presence, she was on that account an unfeeling mother. Oh! no, no; there are those alive who know the floods of bitter tears she shed; there are those who have known and witnessed the passionate kisses she imprinted on that innocent creature in exchange for a life of misery and gloom to which State policy condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."

"Oh! Heaven!" murmured the Queen feebly.

"It is admitted," continued the Béguine, quickly, "that when the King perceived the effect which would result from the existence of two sons, both equal in age and pretensions, he trembled for the welfare of France, for the tranquillity of the State; and it is equally well known that the Cardinal de Richelieu, by the direction of Louis XIII., thought over the subject with deep attention and, after an hour's meditation in His Majesty's cabinet, he pronounced the following sentence:—'One prince is peace and safety for the state; two competitors are civil war and anarchy.'"

The Queen rose suddenly from her seat, pale as death, and her hands clenched together:—"You know too much," she said, in a hoarse, thick voice, "since you refer to secrets of State. As for the friends from whom you have acquired this secret, they are false and treacherous. You are their accomplice in the crime which is being now committed. Now, throw aside your mask, or I will have you arrested by my captain of the guards. Do not think that this secret terrifies me! You have obtained it, you shall restore it to me. Never shall it leave your bosom, for neither your secret nor your own life belong to you from this moment."

Anne of Austria, joining gesture to the threat, advanced a couple of steps towards the Béguine. "Learn," said the latter,