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PRÉFECTURE DE POLICE

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

CABINET DU PREFET

Paris, le 3 Déc 192 7.

Cher Monsieur Martin

M. le Préfet serait heureux s'il vous était possible de donner le plus large facilité à M. Ashton Wolfe qui désire consulter les archives de la Préfecture de Police en vue de recueillir une documentation pour ses ouvrages sur la police.

Veuillez agréer, cher Monsieur Martin l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus cordialement dévoués

[signature]

TRANSLATION

Dear Mr. Martin.—The Prefect would be pleased if it were possible for you to give the utmost facilities to Mr. Ashton Wolfe, who desires to consult the Archives of the Prefecture of Police, with a view to obtaining data for his works on the Police. I am, dear Mr. Martin,

TRUE STORIES OF
IMMORTAL CRIMES

(TALES OF TERROR)

by

H. ASHTON-WOLFE



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TO

J. R. WADE,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK, IN SINCERE GRATITUDE
FOR HIS FRIENDLY HELP AND ADVICE.

—H. ASHTON-WOLFE.

FOREWORD

NOT for a moment would I attempt to vie with the legion of erudite historians who have so ably dealt with French history and analysed the many psychological factors " behind the scenes."

I have merely been favoured by being allowed a glimpse of the secret archives stored at the Prefecture of Police in Paris ; and thus haply I may have gleaned some facts that were overlooked, as trees may be overlooked in a forest.

In all probability, since I am not a historian, I have approached the various episodes from a new angle—let that be my justification for this book.

The documents and engravings illustrating the stories are to be found in the spacious galleries of the historical section of the archives, where the Prefect of Police, Monsieur Chiappe, and the present archivist, Monsieur Martin, with great kindness allowed me to photograph them.

I hereby take the opportunity of expressing my gratitude to both.

THE AUTHOR.

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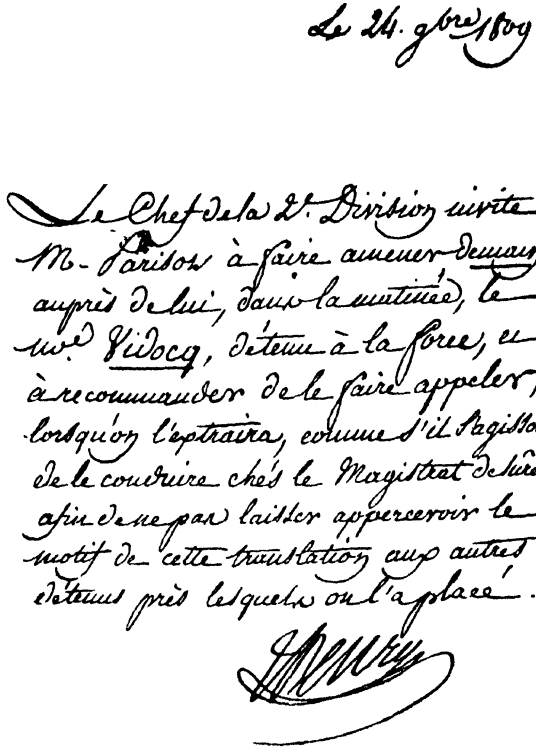
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True Stories of Immortal Crimes

THE DIAMOND OF VENGEANCE

BEING THE TRUE STORY OF THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

THE French have a proverb: "Happy the people which has no history."

If there be any truth in the saying, then the French are a very unhappy nation—for few countries on this little planet have such a turgid, frightful, glorious, bloodstained, glittering history as France.

Echoes of the wild deeds committed in days gone by have drifted down to us in many a romance and poem, for those deeds were such that they could not fail to fire the imagination of the world's troubadours. Dumas wrote of nothing else; and although his historical novels are fantastic and fancifully embroidered, they have their roots in French history.

Many a day have I wandered among the grim relics of the wanton kings and their galaxy of courtiers, listening to echoes from the dead past.

I have stood and gazed at the black mediæval towers of the Conciègerie, where countless prisoners dragged out a weary existence in foul dungeons, until the rack, the question, or the sword of some masked executioner ended their lives; and I have felt their agony vibrating around me. In the distance across the Seine is Nôtre Dame, a stone's throw from the Châtelet, where once towered the grim fortress prison, marking the extreme limit of the city.

I knew that vivid, picturesque records of those times existed, packed away on the dusty shelves of the Secret Police Archives. Only a few, a very fortunate few, have ever entered these Bluebeard's chambers and unwrapped the numbered parcels which

bear such unexpected inscriptions that they instantly call to life a host of leaping thoughts.

" Prisoners of the Bastille," " Reports on the trial of Marie Antoinette," " The attempted assassination of the Duke of Wellington " ; such are some of the striking words on the labels.

Orders for executions and letters of cachet signed Louis, King of France, are still to be found in their hundreds, although a very convenient fire, which destroyed the Ministry of Justice and the old Sûreté building, consumed many which could to-day endanger the reputation of famous families.

Great was my joy, therefore, when, having applied for permission to study these secret documents, I received the coveted permits, signed by the Prefect of Police and the Chief of the Archives, authorising me to delve among these records and to photograph, copy and publish what I thought might be of interest. That such permission should be granted to an Englishman was indeed a great kindness ; but then, Monsieur Chiappe, the energetic chief of police, who was formerly head of the Sûreté, is a Corsican. And Corsicans, whether fighting for law and order, or against it, do everything impulsively.

M. Martin, the Director of the Archives, whom I also wish to thank for his great courtesy, is a savant, a dreamer and poet, and he hailed with delight the proposed publication in England of some of his treasures. Thus the stories which follow are true.

Among the first discoveries I made were the original documents from which Alexandre Dumas evolved his wonderful book, *The Count of Monte Cristo.*

As I scanned the reports of the old, famous story, I felt as I imagine a man would feel who suddenly, unexpectedly, encounters a fabled monster—a mermaid, or a unicorn. I realised that I had never believed the tale. Yet here, on ancient, rough, linen paper, and written in the clear mincing hand of police officials who lived more than a century ago, were the dates, names and statements, with annotations in the margin in Dumas' own handwriting. So my first story will be the relation of that amazing series of episodes which Dumas used for his great romance *The Count of Monte Cristo.* I shall add nothing, invent nothing, and alter no fact ; it would be the act of a vandal.

The story is classified in the archives of the Paris Sûreté as " The Diamond of Vengeance." Originally, it was merely a jumble of tedious police reports, details of investigations, and interrogations by examining magistrates, of the various men and women who played their parts in this epic drama.

Then, in 1820, Monsieur Peuchet, the eminent archivist of the

French police, selected all those documents which were truly relevant and important, and welded them into one coherent narrative, eliminating the countless corroborations and repetitions so inevitable in a complex case. To this bald collection of facts he added the long confession of the dying Pierre Picaud, made in the presence of two police officers ; and the account of the death of Allut in England and his strange statement, which Father Duvernais of the French Catholic Church in London sent to the Prefect.

Those who have read *Monte Cristo* will at once recognise the fantastic theme from which the great romancer evolved his story.

NÎMES, that ancient fortified town which was once held by the legions of Rome as a barrier to invasions from Spain, lay basking in the torrid sunshine of Provence. The day was drawing to a close and the public fountains were surrounded by groups of handsome, laughing girls come to obtain a supply of cool, sparkling water for the evening meal. The air vibrated to the deep, melodious language of the South. Each girl, as the tall brown pitcher brimmed over with a pleasant gurgle, hoisted the heavy vessel to her head and strode away with that graceful swing of the hips which left the head and shoulders rigid, and balanced the burden so accurately that not a drop was spilt. Everywhere tousled children, brown as Arabs and almost nude, played in the dusty narrow streets, or slept in corners under the shady arches.

As usual Mathieu Loupian stood at the door of his modest inn, Place St. Opportune, awaiting the drove of customers who would soon return from their toil on the farms and among the olive groves and vineyards. Already several be-ribboned mules, atinkle with bells, were tethered to iron rings, while their owners sprawled on the stools and benches scattered about the front of the tavern, and waited for the flame-coloured earthenware jugs of wine, for which Nîmes was famous.

Soon a clamorous, turbulent company filled the street with yells and laughter, for the men of Provence love noise for its own sake, as an expression of their violent, primitive natures. Three young fellows who sat apart and were evidently bosom friends of the innkeeper, were especially noticeable by their easy familiarity with the smiling servants and their boisterous greetings to each new arrival. These were Gervais Chaubart, who owned the finest mules in the town ; Guilhem Solari, the peasant ; and Antoine Allut, a farmer. The last-named was a giant, and his fierce

temper and bulging muscles had more than once brought him in conflict with the rural police.

Mathieu Loupian had just settled down to drink with them, when a handsome, swarthy youngster halted before their table. *His long legs touched the ground at every movement of the sturdy* donkey which he straddled, and his appearance was greeted with shouts of ironical laughter.

"Hello, Pierre," the landlord called to him, "how smart you look! Why have you donned your Sunday clothes? Are you going to dance the Treilhas at the fête to-night?"

"Dance, no. I've something better than that in view," the newcomer, whose name was Pierre Picaud, replied gaily. "I'm going courting when the moon rises."

"Courting?" Loupian exclaimed in astonishment, for Picaud's poverty was proverbial. "Who is the girl who'll flirt with you, when you cannot even buy her a silken shawl?"

"That's my secret, and a secret it shall remain, until the wedding. Now give me a jug of wine, for there is a layer of dust on my throat."

The four cronies looked at each other meaningly. Here was a chance for fresh gossip. At all costs this wonderful secret must be dragged from handsome Pierre; and they set to work to ply him with wine and flattery, until at last the unsuspecting man, flushed and laughing with embarrassment, sprang to his feet and cried:

"Well then, if you must know, drink to the health of Marguerite de Vigoroux, my betrothed."

For an instant surprise held the listeners spellbound, then a babble of questions and exclamations broke from them:

"What, Marguerite the heiress? Marguerite, who possesses a hundred thousand *pistoles* in gold? Why, man, that's impossible. What have you to offer her?"

"Love," Picaud replied earnestly. "Such love as you cannot understand. I care nothing for her money. I worship her sweet face and could kiss the ground on which her dainty feet walk."

"Love!" and shouts of laughter greeted the passionate outburst. "Love is not enough, you simpleton. Women want more than that nowadays."

"No," Picaud replied, looking at the innkeeper with an angry glitter in his eyes. "She is content. I shall bring her my two strong arms and a faithful heart. You fellows think money is everything. If you like to come, I invite you all to the wedding feast next Tuesday, at Latignac's restaurant. There will be a

dance afterwards ; an open air ' *bal* ' and fireworks. Now good-bye and thank you for the wine," and Pierre swung a leg over his donkey and trotted away.

Loupian watched him disappear with a sneer on his thin lips. A silence had fallen on the four friends, and each was busy with his thoughts. The canker of envy was in their hearts, for Marguerite was not only the most beautiful girl in Nîmes, but one of the wealthiest and an orphan besides.

Loupian turned abruptly to the giant Allut.

" I'll bet you a hundred francs that Marguerite doesn't marry that poverty-stricken Adonis."

" What do you mean, Mathieu ? What evil thoughts are you harbouring ? Let the youngster be. Good luck to him ! He's a better man than any of us."

Loupian lifted his lip in a snarl.

" A better man, is he ? Well, he won't be that for long. Now, listen—just for a joke we'll send a letter to the *commissaire.* You know Picaud was the friend of that English painter, John Forrester, who had to flee for his life when the people rose against the aristocrats. The Englishman was known to have had friends at Court in Paris, and the revolutionary tribunal would have sent him to the guillotine had they caught him. We'll say that Picaud is a spy of the English and an agent of the Vendéens. The police will arrest him and that'll put off his wedding feast for some time."

Solari and Chaubart agreed eagerly to the proposal, but Allut thumped the table with his huge fist and shouted :

" Don't do it, Loupian. It's a foul scheme. No good will come of it, and I'll have nothing to do with such plotting."

" Rubbish ; it's only a joke, anyway. We'll see whether the rich Marguerite loves him enough to wait until he is released."

So the letter was sent to the *commissaire* of police, who forwarded it at once to his chief, the Duke of Rovigo.

Meanwhile, Pierre Picaud, happy and full of plans for the future, had gone to keep the tryst with his beloved, who awaited him, as she had done every evening, in the orange gardens surrounding her house. There in the scented paths, bathed in soft moonlight, they renewed their vows of eternal love and discussed the day, now so near, when they would be man and wife. Pierre was in an aggressive and vainglorious mood, a thing so strange and unusual that Marguerite was vaguely distressed.

" I have to-day had it thrown in my teeth that I am a poor peasant," he cried, when he was about to leave, " and that it is your wealth alone which attracts me. I invited those who said

that, to come to our wedding. I can see that there will be many who will hate me, sweet one, and who may, perhaps, try to poison your mind."

Marguerite felt an evil breath sweep about her at the words. Later, when the whole town was astounded at Picaud's mysterious disappearance, she remembered that moment and repeated the conversation which took place to the police.

"Why have you spoken of our betrothal?" she exclaimed with fear and reproach in her voice. "You little realise, Pierre, how soon now the news will spread."

"Well, and what of it, *ma mie*? We are doing no wrong. I would like to shout my happiness from the housetops. You have no parents to raise obstacles; neither have I, and we love each other. If spiteful rumours are spread about me you will not believe them, surely?"

Marguerite nestled closer to the stalwart form of her lover, and said nothing more. She felt that while he was in that mood argument was useless, and to tell the truth she was just a little proud of his defiant attitude. They parted after many kisses and soft speeches. No friendly spirit warned them that from that moment the dark curtain of destiny had swept down, and that they would never kiss again.

Like a poisoned arrow, the lying denunciation sped on its way to the Duke of Rovigo, and orders were immediately given to take Pierre Picaud secretly, at night, to the prison fortress of Fenestrelle. It was sufficient in those times that a man should be merely accused of conspiracy with the British, or the exiled nobles, to cause him to be imprisoned, and, unfortunately, Picaud's friendship with John Forrester, who had once painted a picture of the unhappy Marie Antoinette, was well known, and regarded with much disfavour.

Two days later, as Pierre was leaving his house to meet his betrothed, a cloak suddenly enveloped his head and shoulders; a rope was twisted around his arms and legs, and he was lifted and carried to a coach which at once drove away.

Marguerite waited for her lover until dawn, and then in her anxiety she hurried to his house, but no one had seen him; and as the days passed with no sign of Picaud, his mysterious disappearance was discussed in all the taverns and the wildest theories were evolved. But the three conspirators who guessed at the truth kept their own counsel and threatened Allut with instant death if he spoke.

One may imagine the utter despair and anguish of Pierre when, after a terrible and apparently endless dash through the

night, bound and unable to move or cry out, he was thrust into a tiny stone cell, and the heavy door clanged shut behind him.

It was all the more dreadful since he could not conceive why he was thus treated. In the long, monotonous days which followed, each day seeming like a long, weary year, he cudgelled his brain in vain for a reason for this unbelievable thing which had happened.

His gaolers would tell him nothing, and merely shrugged their shoulders when he demanded to see their superior. A whole year passed before he even discovered where he was imprisoned. Then for a time a frenzy seized him, he refused to eat, and one morning, when the turnkey entered his cell with the daily ration of water and bread, he sprang at the man and fought desperately to escape. But his iron muscles were already weakened from slow starvation and the absence of fresh air and exercise. The noise of the scuffle naturally brought help, and Pierre was beaten with sticks into unconsciousness and then chained to a ring in the wall. As a punishment for his assault on the gaoler he was later taken into an underground vault and received two hundred strokes with an iron rod, from which he never completely recovered.

Another year passed, leaden, bitter, dreadful, every day adding white threads to his once glossy black hair, and fresh furrows to his pale, grime-encrusted face. Only one thought bore him on and kept his mind from plunging over the brink into final madness: he clung tenaciously to the belief that Marguerite, his beloved, still waited somewhere in the world of free men, and that perhaps he would see her again. And with that hope came a desire for vengeance. Vengeance on those who were guilty of having sent him to that living death.

During those endless days he groped in vain for some clue to the mystery of his fate. No doubt it was the unsolved problem which preserved his sanity. He realised, too, that rebellious conduct would only harm his chances of freedom, and became docile and patient. At last, after three months, his daily plea that the chain should be removed was acceded to, and it was taken from his neck.

One gathers from his description that the constant, unbroken silence was almost unendurable, for he related that even the distant shrieks and groans of prisoners undergoing some nameless torture, dreadful though they were, came as a relief from that unending grey monotony.

It was during the third year in the gloomy fortress that he first heard faint tappings on the wall, to which he replied with frantic joy. Some unhappy wretch in a cell not far from his

own was trying to attract his attention. Then, one day, while chewing the scanty allowance of black bread, his teeth encountered a tightly rolled wad of paper. He unrolled this with the eagerness of a man starved for human intercourse and found that it bore a message of cheer and instructions for communicating by a series of raps on the wall.

Thereafter, when the guards were at meals, Picaud conversed with the unknown. He learnt thus that his neighbour was an Italian priest named Torri, who had already spent ten years in the same dungeon. Picaud in return related his own story. Patiently day after day he slowly spelt the words, by tapping on the wall with the chain which had formerly been fastened by a ring to his neck.

These two unhappy men thereupon decided to cut through the massive stone which separated them, in order to be able to communicate more freely. Picaud smashed the iron collar, and ground both halves to a sharp edge, and with these improvised chisels, he scraped and laboured day after day at a spot near the floor where the stones had been joined with cement, and where no ray of light ever penetrated. Picaud had no exact means of gauging the passing of time, for sometimes he was ill for weeks and lay shivering with fever on the heap of straw which was his bed. But he tried to allow for these periods when he added a scratch on the wall for each dragging month.

It was in April of the year 1807 when Picaud was arrested, and 1812 arrived before at last the remains of his chisels, now worr away to tiny fragments, broke through the last layer of stone and cement. The hole was just large enough for Picaud to reach with his emaciated arm into the next cell and grasp bony fingers in his own.

Each kissed the other's hand in an ecstasy of joy, and thereafter, when night came, Picaud, who had shifted his straw to that wall, as the other had done, lay and talked, or listened in his turn while the priest related his own Odyssey. He learnt thus that Giuseppe Torri had been thrown into that dungeon by the intrigues and influence of his brother, Prince Carlo Torri of Milan, in order to force him to divulge the hiding place of a vast treasure in diamonds, and the names of the banks where his money was deposited. Neither torture nor the dreadful years of silence had weakened his determination to prevent his arch enemy from learning the secret.

Picaud had abundant proof that Torri was truly rich and wielded some influence, even as a prisoner, for he received good and abundant food and his cell even contained some furniture.

Many comforts, besides a share of the food, were given to Picaud by his friend. Clean linen, wine and spirits—these latter, by means of a cloth steeped in the liquid, were also conveyed through the tiny aperture; and when the fever seized Pierre, as it did periodically, the priest gave him a healing powder.

Thus another year passed, somewhat less dreadful than the others, although hope, that last friend of the wretched, was slowly forsaking him. Then one night, instead of the gentle voice of the priest, Picaud, to his horror, heard only groans and mutterings. Torri was delirious and evidently dying. Yet before he died he pushed through the hole to Picaud a paper, on which he had written the names of the banks where his money was placed and the directions to the hiding place of the diamonds. This paper also made Picaud the sole heir to this wealth, valued at eight millions, should he ever regain his freedom.

A week later Picaud heard the guards enter the cell of his benefactor and carry away the body. Thereafter, he lapsed into sullen apathy, fully expecting to die in the same manner.

But destiny had willed it otherwise. In 1814 the Imperial Government was over-thrown, and with its fall came an order for the release of political prisoners from the Fenestrelle fortress. Thus on the fifteenth of April, seven years after that last unforgettable meeting with his beloved Marguerite, a creature, who was nothing but the broken husk of a man, hobbled along the country road leading to Avignon, a wisp of cloth tied over his eyes to protect them from the stabbing light of day. This creature was Pierre Picaud, free at last. But although his frame was weak and broken, his spirit burned with fierce passions. He was rich, immensely rich, or would be soon, and the rest of his life should be spent in hunting down those who had caused him to be consigned to that living death.

Only rarely did his thoughts stray to the winsome Marguerite. The flame of love had flickered and died in the grey twilight of the prison cell. His blood was stale and thin, and no desire for the joys of life remained. Nothing but a wild lust for the power to return evil for evil still animated his withered muscles. Although the owner of many millions and a vast store of cut and uncut jewels, he had as yet not a single penny to aid him in attaining this wealth. But if those long years of solitude had turned his heart to stone and his blood to ice—he had at least learnt patience. Some occult presentiment whispered that nothing could harm him until that dread vengeance of which he dreamt day and night was consummated.

Day after day he plodded on, and his appearance was such

that everywhere kindly peasants gave him food and shelter. Many weary miles he travelled stretched at ease in farmers' carts ; and when no farmer passed, he walked patiently, endlessly, oblivious to pain or fatigue.

So he finally reached Milan and found the hidden treasure. Diamonds of all sizes, emeralds, sun-kissed topazes and even wonderful cameos glittered and flashed in the dim light of the ancient crypt, where Torri had cunningly concealed his hoard.

From that moment his progress was swift. By degrees he acquired clothes, a servant and passports in the assumed name of Joseph Lucher. Fate, which had diverted itself with casting him into the deepest misery, now seemed to enjoy making his path smooth and care-free. In Paris, Hamburg, Amsterdam and at the Bank of England, the priest's will and the documents which had been hidden with the diamonds, made his claim unassailable. He bought a mansion in London and a country seat in Fontainebleau, and then prepared to seek Marguerite and those among his friends in Nîmes, who, he hoped, could give him the information which would lead him to his enemies. But again the unforeseen happened.

The nervous energy which had sustained Picaud until now, suddenly snapped under the inevitable reaction and he fell ill ; so seriously ill that he was forced to enter a nursing home, where he remained during the days of Napoleon's exile at Elba, and while the Emperor once again reigned in France ; nor did he regain his strength and health until the second accession of Louis XVIII to the throne.

During his prolonged convalescence Picaud employed several clever spies, who brought him startling information. The disappearance in 1807 of a young man named Pierre Picaud had caused a sensation in Nîmes, for his betrothed had spent large sums in attempting to trace him, without success. She had travelled from town to town, bribed officials right and left, and even sent a petition to the Emperor. But her search had been futile because the customary ruse in those days had been resorted to, in order to throw pursuers off the track, and Picaud had been entered in the prison register under a totally different name.

After two years of vain inquiries Marguerite found herself in danger of arrest for corrupting officials, and Mathieu Loupian, the innkeeper, had offered to protect her if she would become his wife. In despair Marguerite had listened to his pleadings and promises and the wedding had taken place.

Picaud's spies also reported that a farmer named Allut had hinted several times, when drunk, that he knew why Picaud had

disappeared. This news goaded Picaud to instant action. He dressed himself as a priest and drove as fast as relay upon relay of horses would take him from Paris to Lyons, and from Lyons to Avignon, granting himself only one night's rest on the long journey.

It was as the Italian Abbé Baldini that at last Picaud again entered his native city, rage and hatred seething in his heart. The name Allut was a common one in Nîmes, but Picaud guessed that the only man who could have any knowledge of the disappearance of the young peasant would be that Antoine Allut whom he had met once or twice just before his arrest. After a lengthy search he discovered him. To his joy Allut was in poor circumstances; he had married a lazy shrew, who thought of nothing but fine dresses and cared little for her husband's struggles on the unproductive land he had bought. This gave Picaud his chance.

As it happened, a cousin of Allut, with whom the shrew was not on good terms, had saved the Count of Rantzau, a Danish nobleman, from drowning in the Rhône some months previously. Picaud sent one of his agents to this cousin with twenty thousand francs, purporting to be from the nobleman as a reward for the service he had rendered him. The same day Picaud called on Allut, and after introducing himself as the Abbé Baldini, said:

"I was for many years a prisoner in the Château de l'Oeuf at Naples. One of my companions in misfortune was a young man from this town, named Pierre Picaud——"

At the mention of this name Allut was unable to repress a cry of horror.

"What, did you know the young man?" the priest queried. "That is fortunate, for I am charged with a mission. This poor young man and I became great friends. With us there was also an Englishman who, before he died, gave a beautiful diamond to my friend Pierre, so that if he ever regained his freedom he should not be poor. But the unfortunate young man became very ill soon after. When he felt that the end was near he implored me to travel to Nîmes, since he had heard that I was shortly to be released. He charged me to give the diamond, which is worth at least 50,000 francs, to the man who would reveal to me the names of those who caused him to be imprisoned, so that their names may be cut on a stone above his grave, together with the story of their treachery. Look, here is the jewel"—and the pseudo-priest held out a beautiful diamond which flashed and glittered like a living thing in the hollow of his hand. At the sight Allut was seized with a fit of trembling.

"Never!" he exclaimed. "Even if I knew the names I would not betray them."

"But poor Picaud is dead. You must think of him also. He and I were friends, and I know he was innocent of any crime. Surely you can grant his soul that last satisfaction, and you will be rich in return."

Allut sprang up, deadly pale, beads of perspiration on his brow, and was about to send the priest away, when his wife came running in, almost inarticulate with rage.

"Antoine, Antoine!" she shouted, heedless of the stranger. "That creature François has just received a fortune in golden louis from the Count Rantzau, whom he pulled out of the Rhône. Oh, how they will lord it over us now! Why cannot you get money as easily as that—— Oh, why did I marry a fool——" And the virago tore her hair with hysterical violence.

"True, madame," the cunning Picaud said quickly. "Your husband is a fool, for he has just refused a jewel worth fifty thousand francs, which I offered him in return for some harmless information."

At this the rage of the woman became terrible to see. Allut was unable to withstand her onslaught, and at last gave way, on condition that the priest should help him to sell the stone. A jeweller was sent for, who offered to buy it for sixty thousand francs if Allut would take a farm as part payment and the rest in gold. To this Allut agreed, nor did the priest interfere, although he knew that the stone was worth more than double that sum.

When the bargain had been made Allut related with trembling lips the story of the letter which had been sent to the *commissaire*, and gave the priest three names: Loupian, Solari and Chaubart; whereupon the priest withdrew.

A week later Allut learnt that the diamond had been sold by the jeweller for the huge sum of six thousand louis. A frenzy seized him at the news, which his wife spat at him in a torrent of fierce insults and reproaches. The same evening Allut waylaid the jeweller and killed him. When the police came to arrest him they found that he had already fled the country.

Meanwhile Picaud had traced Loupian and discovered that with Marguerite's money he had bought the largest café and restaurant in Paris and was now a wealthy man. He also learnt that the other conspirators, Solari and Chaubart, had followed him to that city and came regularly to the café. Thereupon, an old lady called on Loupian and related that she would like to obtain a post for a faithful servant, whom she could not keep any



De la Reynie, first Lieutenant of French Police.

(see p 153)



Pierre Picaud at the time when he was arrested.

longer because she intended to travel abroad. She was willing to pay Loupian three hundred francs a month, if he would employ this servant and give him some money and his food, allowing him to believe that he was being paid for his services as a waiter. He must never know that she was paying for him. To this Loupian, who with the years had become more avaricious than ever, eagerly agreed.

So it came about that an ugly old man, in whom no one recognised the once handsome Pierre Picaud, became a waiter at the restaurant. Not even the beautiful Marguerite, now Madame Loupian, had any suspicion that the broken, wretched creature whose eyes seemed to follow her wherever she went, was her erstwhile stalwart lover ; but she admitted later that his presence always caused a shiver of dread to invade her nerves. Yet with everyone else the old waiter, who gave his name as Joseph, soon became a great favourite.

Now events rushed rapidly to a fearsome climax.

A few days after the arrival of Joseph, Solari came stumbling in with the news that his friend Chaubart had been found on the Pont des Arts, dead, stabbed to the heart, and pinned to his breast was a piece of paper on which had been written : " Number One."

A long and patient investigation by the police remained fruitless. No clue to the mysterious assassin was found.

Now Loupian had by his first wife a daughter, who was eighteen years old and so beautiful that many customers came to his café merely to gaze at her as she sat at the till.

But, although beautiful, she had her father's base vanity and greed for money. When, therefore, a dashing young *merveilleux*, who cast his gold about in the most reckless fashion, and whom his companions called the Marquis d'Auvergne, began to pay his court to her, those failings stifled her facile virtue and she agreed to meet him in secret.

The unhappy Loupian truly loved his daughter, and when he discovered that she had given her favours to the Marquis d'Auvergne without troubling to become his wife, his grief was terrible.

A violent scene ensued between the two men, but at last, to the father's surprise, the nobleman declared that he was willing to marry his daughter. A date was set for the wedding, and to the great joy of the family the marquis even insisted on inviting all the friends and customers of his future father-in-law to the marriage feast. One hundred and fifty guests were chosen. What pleased the avaricious father most was that the banquet was to be entirely at the expense of the marquis, and the most

extravagant viands and costly wines were immediately ordered. Hardly had the ceremony taken place when the husband suddenly disappeared.

All the guests were assembled for the feast and a horrible scandal appeared inevitable, when a mounted messenger arrived with a note from the marquis. In it he begged them to excuse his absence, because family matters of vital importance had called him away. He promised, however, to return before the end of the dance, which was to last all night. A vague hint that he had been summoned unexpectedly by the King himself, satisfied and flattered Loupian and his friends. The dinner went off merrily enough, but when dessert was served, every guest found a piece of paper on his plate, on which was written :

" The son-in-law of M. Loupian is a common galley felon and murderer, who has had to flee for his life."

And as though to prove that it was no hoax, the police entered the banqueting hall to arrest him, while the startled company was still speechless with surprise. The disgrace and disappointment were so great that the young wife became violently ill and died a week later.

On the very night after the funeral of the unhappy girl, flames burst from all sides of the Loupian café and restaurant, and, notwithstanding the efforts of the hastily summoned fire brigade, the entire building was completely destroyed. Loupian, his wife, and their only son barely escaped with their lives. Loupian was completely ruined, but he succeeded in borrowing a small sum with which, as a last resort, he opened a tiny wineshop. To his astonishment, the old waiter Joseph, whose true identity no one suspected, requested to be allowed to remain in his service and declared himself willing to work without any wages.

With each new crime Picaud's desire for revenge only raged more fiercely, and shortly after they had settled down in their humble business in the Rue St. Antoine, Solari was taken violently ill after eating his evening meal there, and died the same night in great agony. The suspicious circumstances in which he died caused the police to investigate, and Loupian was arrested on suspicion of having poisoned his friend. He was released the next day, however, for when the officers were about to remove the body of Solari they found pinned to his breast a paper on which were the ominous words " Number Two."

Little by little this series of terrible disasters crushed Marguerite and her husband body and soul, until they went about their daily tasks in a state not far removed from madness. The rumour that Solari was poisoned by the food he ate in their inn

frightened away the few regular customers they had gathered, so that their only resources were the takings from chance clients.

Among these was a goldsmith and jeweller, who appeared to have taken a great liking to Loupian's only son. He suggested that instead of letting the boy help in the café, where he naturally met many doubtful men and women, he should allow him to become an apprentice and learn the goldsmith's trade. To this Loupian agreed eagerly.

One evening, when the family was at dinner, the police entered, followed by the jeweller, who accused the lad of having stolen several valuable trinkets. A search of the premises revealed these hidden in the son's bed, and he was led away to prison. A month later the courts sentenced him to the galleys for life. The dreadful tidings were brought by Joseph, who with an insolent swagger entered the room where Marguerite was sitting in dull apathy, awaiting the return of her husband, who had gone to the courts as witness.

"Your son will now taste the horrors of imprisonment, just as I did, Marguerite *la belle*," he croaked with unholy glee. At the sound the wretched woman started to her feet, an icy chill of terror causing her heart to contract painfully.

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "Why do you call me by that name?"

"Ha, ha! Look at me—look! Do you know me? I am all that your husband's vile plotting has left of Pierre Picaud, once young and handsome, and your lover."

"Merciful God!" Marguerite sighed, staggering forward with outstretched hands. "Pierre—you—you have brought all this about"—and with a moan she sank to the ground in a swoon. Picaud at once rushed off, for he knew which way Loupian would come home. He met him, staggering along, on a deserted path near the Seine, and stopped him with outstretched hand.

"So, Loupian, your money has gone, your daughter is dead, your son will spend the rest of his days in the galleys, and both Solari and Chaubart are burning in hell. Is my vengeance good, do you think?"

The frenzied tone and the terrible words pierced to the dulled brain of the stricken father.

"Who are you?" he asked, a dawning horror in his shaking voice.

"Who am I? Don't you know? I am that wretched Pierre Picaud whose life you ruined and of whom you made an old man before he was forty. Now go to rejoin your friends."

And with the words Picaud drove the blade of a dagger into his enemy's heart.

At that instant two sinewy arms closed around his body. He was thrown to the ground as once before, a cloak was twisted around his head and he felt himself lifted and borne away. For a moment Picaud imagined that the police had captured him, then he reasoned that they would not take such precautions ; but, on the other hand, a footpad would not think it worth while to waylay and rob a poorly-dressed man, nor would he trouble to carry him away: a knife in the ribs or a blow with a club was their method. Therefore it could only be an enemy, but who that enemy was he could not conjecture. His rage was indescribable, for here, at the moment when his vengeance was almost complete, fate had again stepped in and robbed him. He had intended to carry off Marguerite and with her to enjoy his vast wealth for the few remaining days of his embittered life. Now, it seemed, he, too, had to die.

He began to struggle fiercely, but a brutal pressure from the powerful arm which encircled his neck warned him that resistance was useless. Slinging him across broad shoulders as a hunter carries a mountain goat, his captor walked rapidly for more than an hour, as though unconscious of his burden.

At last the loud echoes of his footsteps and a change in the air, warned Picaud that they had entered some subterranean passage. He felt himself thrown on a bed and the cloak which enveloped his head was removed. He saw that he had been brought to a vaulted stone chamber, which was evidently a part of the ancient Christian catacombs. Near the bed on which he lay was a table and chair, and in a corner an iron stove and some cooking utensils. Before him, with folded arms, silent, gloomy, gigantic, stood the man who had abducted him, but in the dim light it was impossible to distinguish his features. For long minutes neither spoke ; then with a slow, heavy voice his captor said :

" So, you fiend, I have found you at last. By which name do you wish to be addressed now ? Is it as Pierre Picaud of Nîmes, or as Joseph Lucher, the name you used when you left the prison of Fenestrelle ? Perhaps you would prefer to be called l'Abbé Baldini, or, better still, Joseph the waiter. Cannot your diabolical ingenuity suggest some other title ? You dog ! Your desire for vengeance has robbed you of any remains of human feeling. To satisfy that desire you have sold your soul to Satan. You have spent the last ten years of your life in hounding to death and worse, three miserable wretches, whom Christian charity should have taught you to forgive the evil they once did. You

have committed crime after crime, damning your soul and mine also."

"Who are you?" Picaud asked in a hoarse whisper.

"I am your accomplice—as guilty as yourself—since, for the sake of gold, I betrayed my three friends and set you on their track. Your gold brought me nothing but misfortune and misery, for it awakened in me an insane lust for wealth. I murdered the man who cheated me. Because of that I was forced to flee with my wife to Greece. She died in exile, and I was arrested and sent to the galleys. When at last I escaped I determined to seek out and punish the Abbé Baldini, who had been the cause of my misfortunes. Yes, I resolved to kill that priest, who knew so well how to find and torture my former friends; but I arrived in Naples only to discover that no Baldini existed.

"I sought the grave of Picaud and learnt that he was alive. How did I discover all this? No one shall ever know. Since then I have hunted ceaselessly for Picaud, for whom I had always felt pity, but when at last I traced him, two murders, the death of Loupian's daughter and the imprisonment of his son, proved to me that the once good-natured lover of Marguerite had become a monster. Loupian himself was ruined, his house destroyed and his soul trembling on the brink of madness. To-night I intended to reveal the truth to the unhappy man, but again Satan helped you, and I arrived only to find Marguerite dying and Loupian dead. Yet God was with me, for I was in time to capture their murderer. I will show you that I too can punish. I am Antoine Allut."

For the first time since Picaud had started on his bloodstained career of vengeance, he regained for a moment a lucid frame of mind, and realised how others must regard his ruthless actions. But his soul was steeped in guilt beyond redemption, and the gold which had conferred upon him such awful power had also killed all human pity. Only avarice remained and destroyed his reason.

His work was done. Those who had ruined his life were dead, but his future still held a promise of pleasures. He was rich, and desired now to enjoy those riches and all the delights which they could buy him. No doubt it would be a simple matter, with gold, and promises of more, to obtain his release. Yet, so strange is the soul of man that the thought of losing any of his wealth, although he possessed many millions, filled him with anguish. He reflected that the money was well hidden. He had played the part of a poor waiter for years, and Allut probably believed him to be without means.

"Where am I?" he asked, when Allut had ceased.

"You are in a spot where no one will hear your cries and where

no one will ever seek you. You are entirely in my power," Allut replied fiercely, and then without further ado he sat down at the table and began to eat the food which he had brought.

"I am hungry," Picaud said petulantly. "Give me something to eat."

"How much will you pay me for a meal?" his captor asked.

"Pay! You know I have no money."

"No, you only possess the eight millions which Torri the priest left you, and which are stored in various banks." And Allut named them all and gave him such accurate details that Picaud was amazed.

"You are dreaming!" he stammered.

"Well, then, dream that you are eating." And with that Allut sprang at him and twisted a chain round his waist, which he locked to a ring in the wall. Thereupon he left the vault, nor did he return until the next day. Again he sat down and prepared a succulent repast. Picaud, who was now famished, begged and prayed for some food.

"I will give you all you want," Allut said quietly; "but you must pay me a thousand gold louis for each loaf of bread and each jug of water."

Picaud raved, screamed, and prayed, but his enemy merely shrugged his shoulders and left him once more alone. Twenty-four hours later he returned and the scene was repeated. Picaud, although starving and parched with thirst, refused to pay a penny, for he believed that Allut would weaken first. Seeing this, Allut suddenly sprang at him in blind rage and drove a knife into his body. Then, gathering his few belongings, he fled from Paris and succeeded in gaining a ship which brought him to England.

Meanwhile the police had been hunting for the murderer of Loupian, whose name the dying Marguerite had given them, and they discovered Picaud in time to take down his confession before he expired. Allut remained in London, but fell ill soon after his arrival and died in 1828. The Catholic priest who was with him at the last wrote out the long statement which he made and sent it to the Prefect of Police in Paris, together with the following letter:

Sir,

I am forwarding the confession of a great sinner, but one who, before he died, repented and received the absolution of the Church. I have no reason to believe that Allut was delirious when he related his terrible story, for he was quite calm and replied clearly to all my

questions. For a long time he refused to say how he had obtained the details of Pierre Picaud's crimes, nor how he had learned where all his money was hidden, but just before his death, he exclaimed: "Father, no man can be more certain of life after death than I am, for I have spoken with the spirit of the priest Torri, who guided me to Pierre Picaud and ordered me to obtain possession of the money, in order to give it to the poor. The same disembodied spirit also ordered me to kill Picaud, to prevent him from committing more crimes."

I remain, Excellency,
Your obedient servant,
Father Duvernais.

And that is the true story of Monte Cristo. As readers of the famous novel will remember, Dumas at first followed the original police dossier so closely that incident for incident they are alike. The only differences are that in Dumas' book Monte Cristo and the Abbé made so large a hole between the two cells that the two men were able to pass through and visit each other. Also, instead of Monte Cristo being liberated by legitimate means, Dumas created the sensational incident when Edmond Dantes places the body of the dead Abbé in his own bed while he himself enters the sack which was to be thrown by the gaolers into the sea—their method of disposing of the dead bodies of prisoners. By substituting his body for that of the dead man, Monte Cristo was hurled from the prison tower into the water, ripped open the sack with a knife and swam to freedom.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE LYONS MAIL

TRULY " blind " justice aptly fits this most terrible of tales as a symbol.

It is one of those sombre dramas of real life which paralyses the imagination with horror, and gives the cynic and the atheist an opportunity of exclaiming with a triumphant sneer that there is no such thing as an all-seeing Providence ruling the world and the affairs of man; and that our lives are but so much thistledown, blown to and fro at the will of a perverse imp, whom some name Chance and others Fate. Even the man of faith may justly wonder what dim and monstrous purpose can have been served, when happy righteous Joseph Lesurques was torn from the loving embrace of his wife and children, from the midst of the friends who esteemed him, and from his many duties as a good citizen faithfully observed, to die a murderer's shameful death for a crime he never committed, whilst the guilty Dubosq laughed and caroused, contemptuous of the law.

Upon what flimsy and purely circumstantial evidence a man may be convicted, this true narrative will show. Fortunately, similar cases are rare; indeed I can recall no parallel in history of such a fearful chain of coincidences as that which brought Lesurques to the guillotine. Although it happened long ago, yet the story of the Lyons Mail may serve even to-day as a warning to those who trust too easily to appearances, or to the evidence of honest but over dogmatic witnesses; above all when it is a question of identity. Many versions of the events have circulated in various forms, and shortly after the death of the Judge Daubanton, who through remorse at his hasty sentence became insane, a play based on the tragic tale was staged at the Théâtre de la Gaieté. More than all the reports, investigations, and pamphlets of the period, this play brought into vivid relief the fantastic, stupid, and trivial events which wove so close a web around an innocent man that he struggled in vain to escape. Because of this play, a great cry rang through the land that at

least the honour of the unhappy Lesurques should be vindicated. Then, unexpectedly, like the shifting scenes of a melodrama, the confessions of the guilty, which judges and jury had unanimously rejected, turned out to be true. The legendary bandit Dubosq was captured at last and paid the penalty of his crimes ; and thus, too late, the incredible miscarriage of justice stood forth in all its naked horror. I have spent many days perusing the numerous reports of the investigation, the details of the arrests, and the descriptions of the executions, which have lain so long in their dusty covers. Somehow, even now, a century and a half later, a vague atmosphere of utter despair and immeasurable pain still seems to cling to them. The story would fill a volume, and it has been a difficult task to choose and reject in order to condense the whole to the requisite length, without sacrificing any of the essential details of this grim tale. The dossiers from which I have culled the narrative are marked B.B. 30.960 to 965 and are in the National Archives.

On April 27th 1796, a squat travelling coach was being loaded with boxes of merchandise and stout canvas mail-bags in the paved forecourt of the inn Le Plat d'Etain, in readiness for its long jolting journey over the rough roads from Paris to Lyons. The postilion, Etienne Audibert, who was to guide the three lank but muscular horses on the first stage to Mélun, was examining the hoofs of his animals with minute care, for a breakdown on the highway in the year 1796 was a thing to be avoided. Since the terrible days of the revolution, with Napoleon absent and fully occupied with his conquest of Italy, highwaymen, cut-throats and marauding bands of reckless criminals infested the deserted roads and silent forests. The courier, Escoffon, watched his comrade test the traces and tighten the harness with a thoughtful frown.

"*Ma foi*, I wish they had given us an escort," he muttered, throwing a swift glance over his shoulder. "Even a few passengers would make me feel more comfortable."

"How much are we carrying to-night, *citoyen* ?" the postilion queried.

"Seven millions in assignats* for the army in Italy, and fifteen thousand francs in gold, besides bonds and jewellery."

The postilion dropped the tool he was using and straightened up in alarm.

*Bank-notes issued by the temporary Government.—In 1796, they were worth about the tenth of their face value.

"Then why in God's name have we not an armed escort? If any of the brigands such as the 'Chauffeurs' got wind of this, we should be waylaid and killed—just like that"—and he drew his finger across his throat with an expressive gesture.

The courier shrugged his shoulders.

"An escort would advertise the fact that we are carrying money; and the Government has no men to spare. I'll go and talk to the landlord."

A few moments later he returned just as Audibert was backing the horses towards the coach.

"I've spoken with the innkeeper. He says there is one passenger, a sturdy fellow named Laborde, who looks as though he could fight. He is a wine merchant from the Tour du Pin, and his passport takes him to Lyons."

Escoffon's sweetheart, Marguerite Dolgoff, who had approached unnoticed by either of the men, overheard the last words. She pulled her lover by the sleeve and pointed to a short, dark man, wearing top boots and a brown greatcoat. Under the folds of the garment, the outline of a cutlass was clearly visible.

"He is a jovial person," she exclaimed coquettishly, "and has invited us both to eat with him. Since you will get nothing more until morning, it will have to be dinner and supper in one, so you'd better come now. It is already three, and you are due to start at five. *Allons.*"

Laborde, the passenger, was indeed a lively and apparently good-natured man, and the three ate and drank heartily of the abundant cheer the inn provided. At five o'clock exactly, the postilion sprang to saddle, passenger and courier settled themselves in the spacious belly of the vehicle, the precious box of money under their feet, and amid shouts of *bon voyage*, and the furious barking of dogs, the ill-fated Lyons Mail rattled and bumped out of the cobbled yard and started on the first stage of its journey along the road to Mélun, which wound through Villeneuve-Saint-Georges and the sombre forest of Sénart.

That night at Lieusaint, where the next relay of horses was in readiness, the postilion Caron, whose duty it was to take the place of his comrade from Paris, waited in vain until the hour at which the coach should have arrived was long past. Muttering and cursing angrily, he was about to enter the stables when the clatter and rumble of a vehicle coming up the hillside caused him to seize his lantern and run into the road.

"Hola, Etienne," he called, "is that you? What makes you so late?"

"Late?" a strange voice replied. "I am not late, and my name is not Etienne."

Startled at this unexpected answer, Caron flashed the rays of his lantern into the face of the newcomer.

"Great heavens! I thought you were Etienne Audibert. He should have arrived with the coach from Paris two hours ago. Where have you come from?"

"It is three hours since I left Villeneuve."

"Then you must have passed them on the road. Did you not see the coach?"

"I saw no one; but stay here, I'll take a horse and go back along the road."

Seizing the saddle-horse, the stranger turned and galloped away. Two miles along the road, at a spot named Les Closeaux, he discovered the coach, which had been dragged under some trees and overturned. Tying his horse to a branch, the man approached slowly, first taking care to draw a pistol from its holster. On the ground, not far from the coach, lay the unfortunate Audibert. His body had been hacked and slashed in fearful fashion, apparently with a cutlass, and one of his hands, severed at the wrist, lay a yard away in a pool of blood. Behind a bush was the twisted corpse of the courier, his throat cut from ear to ear. Traces of a terrific struggle were all about the scene of the tragedy. In a circle of many yards, gouts of blood had spurted over the grass, and the soft ground was marked with deep ruts where heavy feet had stamped and torn the soil as they sought a hold during the fierce mêlée. Merchandise and mail-bags littered the spot, and a heap of tinboxes which had contained money were piled together with gaping lids.

Terrified at the horrible sight, the man ran to his horse, sprang into the saddle and galloped wildly to Mélun to inform the police.

Although it was long past midnight, a brigadier and several gendarmes at once set out to investigate. The bodies of the murdered men were taken to Lieusaint and placed in a room of the inn, whilst the officer sent his subordinates in haste to the various neighbouring villages to search for the assassins. Shortly after dawn, an investigating magistrate arrived and immediately organised an informal enquiry. The wild cries and the furious galloping of horses through the night had already alarmed the countryside, and many witnesses anxious to help the police arrived at Lieusaint. It transpired that the preceding day four men of doubtful appearance had come on horseback to Montgéron, and ordered a meal at the Auberge de la Chasse.

There they had remained drinking heavily and talking furtively in whispers until sunset. A farmer saw them mount and ride away towards the forest, two on each side of the highway, as though seeking someone. He had specially noticed that one of the men wore silver spurs. A peasant woman named Alfroy, of Lieusaint, saw the four horsemen pass several times near her farm. The first time at five o'clock, again at six, and the last time shortly after eight. A postilion named Jean Chartrain also averred that he met these men, and that later he saw them separate, two of them riding towards Mélun, the others towards Paris. An innkeeper related that he had served them with wine and that he had been requested to fetch a piece of twine with which to repair the broken chain of a spur. He had also remarked that the spurs were of silver. A workman came forward and stated that one of the horsemen had stopped him near Les Closeaux to enquire when the mail coach generally passed ; to which he had replied that it never arrived there before eight. These manœuvres had appeared so suspicious to the peasant folk that none were surprised when they learned of the attack and the murders of postilion and courier. A cutlass, probably that of the passenger Laborde, was found near the overturned coach. Two of the horses which had drawn the vehicle were discovered straying in the forest, but the third had disappeared. It was seen the next day wandering about with cut traces near the Church des Minimes, in Paris. Obviously this animal had been used by the passenger, who was undoubtedly an accomplice, in order to return with the other four to town.

A number of gendarmes and detectives were at once dispatched in various directions to track down the five men, but for several weeks they appeared to have vanished, leaving no trace, and it was thought that they had separated and perhaps even left the country. But chance came to aid the law. One evening the brigadier of gendarmes, Laurent Huguet, who was in love with a handsome girl known as Madeleine Brébant, invited her to a dinner at a small restaurant in the Palais Royale. Curiously enough, that same day the brigadier had received the visit of an informer who related that a fellow named Couriol had been seen on the morning following upon the crime at Lieusaint, leading four horses to a stable belonging to the citizen Morin, in the rue des Fossés St. Germain l'Auxerrois. This information was doubly welcome, because Couriol had long been the brigadier's rival for the favours of handsome Madeleine.

No doubt the dinner served a double purpose ; and the many flagons of Burgundy, followed by various brandies, unloosened

the girl's tongue. Skilfully questioned by the officer, she admitted that her friend Couriol had been unusually generous of late, and that as a matter of fact he was leaving the next morning for Calais, and had invited her to go with him. Couriol was arrested the following day, just as the travelling chaise was about to start. In the coach were one million and a half of State bank-notes, a brace of pistols, a powder flask and a cutlass. The bank-notes were identified immediately as some of those stolen from the Lyons Mail. Couriol was taken before M. Daubanton, magistrate at the Pont-Neuf section, and interrogated.

Since the crime at Lieusaint, Couriol had been lodging in the house of a man named Richard. The premises were searched, and among the documents confiscated by the police were papers belonging to another tenant named Guesnot.

It was from this moment that the fate of Joseph Lesurques became entangled by the most amazing and perverse circumstances with that of the assassins.

Lesurques was the son of a wealthy farmer of Douai in the north of France. Born in 1763, he had served his time as a soldier in a regiment of Auvergne, and at twenty-six, after a short but passionate courtship, had married the belle of the town. A true love-match, he and his charming wife had been exceptionally happy, and the three children who came to gladden their hearts had drawn husband and wife so closely together that they lived but for each other to the exclusion of all lesser interests. Furthermore, in 1796, at the time of the tragedy, Joseph Lesurques had already succeeded in investing his money so adroitly that he possessed an income of ten thousand francs, a sum which at that period was sufficient to place him among the wealthy.

Finding that in the little town of Douai he could not obtain the teachers he wished for his children, Lesurques finally decided to settle in Paris and to send them to school there. A comfortable apartment in the house of a notary in Montmartre pleased both husband and wife, and without further search this was taken on a long lease and various alterations in the rooms begun. It was on the very day that Lesurques had taken possession of his new home, whilst strolling aimlessly through the busy teeming streets of Paris, that he met Guesnot, his best friend, with whom he had been to school in Douai. Guesnot had also migrated to Paris and was rapidly making a fortune as purveyor to Napoleon's army. When Lesurques had first come to town in search of lodging for his family, some weeks previously, Guesnot had invited his friend to dinner at his own apartment. Since the landlord of the house, a man named Richard, was also a native of Douai,

the latter had joined them, and all three had sat chatting until late about old times. This Richard owned a number of saddle horses, and Couriol, who had hired four of the animals, came in during the evening and drank a glass of wine with them. Not to be outdone in hospitality, Lesurques invited his two townsmen some days later to a luncheon at a restaurant, since his family had not yet arrived in Paris. Although Couriol was a stranger to him, Lesurques had generously included him in his invitation. So it was that when Lesurques and Guesnot met on the Pont-Neuf several weeks after the luncheon, the latter at once related a most unpleasant adventure which had befallen him. The day previously the police had suddenly invaded Richard's house and arrested them all upon learning that Couriol, who had been caught just as he was about to journey to Calais, had been living there for some time. Guesnot was able to convince the police that he had been at Château-Thierry when the Lyons Mail was attacked, but unfortunately his papers had been taken away with the documents seized in the house. Guesnot was now on his way to the magistrate investigating the murders, in order to obtain the restitution of his property. Lesurques had naturally heard of the tragedy and offered to accompany his friend to the court-house, and suggested that afterwards they should lunch together at his apartment.

That morning, a number of witnesses had been called and were waiting to be interrogated by the magistrate Daubanton. Quite unconscious of the frightful trap into which he had walked, Lesurques sat down beside his friend Guesnot in the waiting-room, conversing light-heartedly on various topics. In a corner were the two servants from the inn at Montgéron, who had served the four mysterious horsemen with food and wine on the afternoon of the day the courier and postilion were murdered. Their eyes dilated with terror when they perceived Lesurques, and they began to whisper excitedly to the gendarme on duty.

"It is he; I am sure it is the chief of the bandits," the elder, a woman named Sauton, exclaimed excitedly. "Take me to the judge at once. Look, Marie—see those fair curls, and those blue eyes which look at you so innocently? I'd recognise them anywhere. Why, he is even wearing the same brown coat he had on the day he came to Montgéron."

Although it seemed incredible that the murderers whom the police were seeking all over France should walk of their own free will into the very court where the many witnesses who had seen them were assembled, the gendarme was so startled at the vehemence with which the two women declared they recognised

Lesurques and Guesnot, that he at once informed the judge, who decided to question the women and ordered the gendarme to conduct them to his office.

"What is this?" Daubanton barked with ill-humour. "You say that two of the four assassins are outside?"

"But yes, citizen judge," Elise Sauton shrilled excitedly. "I am certain of it. Those four men remained eating and drinking at the Tavern de la Chasse for nearly two hours on April 27th, the day the mail coach was attacked. I and Marie Grossetête here, served them with wine and spirits. I especially noticed the fair curly hair of the man who appeared to be the leader. He joked with me and pinched my arms. He was of medium build, dressed in a dark brown frock-coat. His blue eyes and white teeth, which he showed much when laughing, I can never forget. Oh, the monster! Why, he and the others even played at billiards before leaving to commit their horrible crime."

Shaken in his sceptical attitude by these details, Daubanton ordered the gendarme to summon two of his colleagues and to bring the men before him. Guesnot and Lesurques, tired of waiting, were just leaving—the gendarme afterwards said they were trying to flee—when the officers tapped them on the shoulders and ordered them to follow into the judge's office. Still quite unsuspicious and under the impression that the papers Guesnot had come to fetch were about to be returned, Lesurques and his friend made no demur and at once obeyed. At their entry, the two women backed away with a wail of terror. Pointing an accusing finger at Lesurques, Elise Sauton again declared emphatically that she recognised the man with the fair hair as the leader of the bandits. The judge thereupon questioned the men, but more in jest than in earnest, for the incident struck him as merely fantastic. When Guesnot admitted, however, that he lived in the house where Couriol had been staying, Daubanton stiffened to attention.

"Do you also know this Couriol, who is undoubtedly one of the bandits?" he asked sharply of Lesurques.

"I met him by chance whilst dining with my townsman Richard," the unfortunate man replied lamely. Instantly, from indifferent, the judge became hostile, and as one after another the most extraordinary coincidences came to light, they produced a natural reaction and became in his eyes incontrovertible and damning evidence against the astounded Lesurques.

Richard, then already in prison, had evidently supplied the horses on which the assassins had ridden to Lieusaint. In the judge's opinion, now, it was at the dinner and the subsequent

luncheon that the crime had been planned. Both men were immediately searched. Guesnot, purveyor to the army, had an order for several horses in his pocket, but no police card, a most necessary thing at the time. Lesurques had one, but whereas he had given his name as Joseph, the card was made out to Emile Lesurques. His explanation that this was due to a mistake when the card was filled in by the local police officer was not listened to. Guesnot and Lesurques were arrested and shut in a cell. Convinced that by good luck he had caught two of the criminals, the judge did not even trouble to inform the unfortunate wife, and it was only two days later that she at last heard with relief of her husband's arrest, for she had feared that he had been murdered.

A request to visit her husband was granted; but when about to leave, Daubanton ordered her to be searched, and a letter was found hidden in one of her shoes. The letter had been secretly written by Lesurques for one of his friends, who could prove an alibi, and given to his wife to take to him. Unfortunately this letter, although afterwards proven to have been written in good faith, appeared to the judge to be a clever trick for suggesting to the friend what he should say. An extract from it is as follows: *

Dear Friend,

My arrest leaves me quite helpless, but I have no fear, for you know well that I am innocent of any crime, although I am accused of an atrocious murder—that of the courier and postilion of the Lyons Mail, at which all France is horrified. Two women and several men, whose existence I never even heard of before to-day, have had the audacity to swear that they recognised me as one of the horsemen (you know that I cannot even ride). Please try to remember what I did and where I went on the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh of last month. Legrand will probably remember that I dined with him at Lebrun's house. Hilaire le Dru, with whom I drank some wine on that day, will, no doubt, recall the fact. It was in a café on the Boulevard des Italiens.

The citoyenne Eugenie can also state that I spent the evening of the twenty-seventh with her . . . and so on.

Only an innocent man would write such a foolish letter, but in the eyes of the police the suggested alibis and the fact that an attempt had been made to send this letter without the consent of the magistrate, appeared to be a further proof of guilt.

So at last, on August 2nd, came the fatal day of the trial. The

*Archives B.B. 30.962

record of all that happened has been faithfully preserved. The first witness was the ostler from the inn at Montgéron. Asked if he recognised the prisoners, he examined them one by one, and formally identified Couriol and Lesurques. The latter had arrived first, he stated, followed at intervals by the other three.

"He is mistaken," Lesurques cried, pale and shaken. "I swear, gentlemen of the jury, that I am the victim of a fatal resemblance."

A traveller named Perraud, who had been at the inn the same day, also recollected having seen the prisoners, and confirmed the statement of the woman Sauton, that Lesurques had played billiards. One after the other, farmers, peasants and travellers, unanimously identified Lesurques, until the unfortunate man could only wail:

"They are mistaken, they are mistaken! . . ."

Champault, the innkeeper at Lieusaint, related the incident of the piece of twine with which the leader of the bandits had mended his silver spur.

"Do you accuse the citizen Lesurques?" the judge thundered.

"Oh yes, he forgot his sword in the stable and came back for it, and it was to him my wife gave a piece of twine for his spur."

"*Very well. Point him out then.*"

Without hesitation, Champault pointed at the horrified Lesurques.

The last witness on the initial day of the trial recognised only one of the prisoners, but that one was again the unhappy wretch who now sat tearing at those conspicuous golden curls which seemed to him to have become red hot.

The following day went in favour of Joseph Lesurques. Two friends, one of whom was the famous painter Hilaire le Dru, whose picture of Lesurques taking leave of his fainting wife and three children, before going to the scaffold is now in the Louvre, came forward and declared emphatically that on the fatal day of the crime at Lieusaint his friend had spent the afternoon and evening with him in Paris. At this dramatic statement, Lesurques sprang triumphantly to his feet and with a voice of pathetic relief cried:

"And now to drive home my innocence! There is the jeweller Legrand, from whom I bought a silver spoon on the twenty-seventh. He has brought his book in which the sale is recorded."

The emotion at this unexpected denouement was so great that a muttering rumble of applause and many cries of "bravo" sounded from the public gallery. With characteristic fickleness the crowd, which had until then been violently hostile, now prepared to acclaim the victim of a terrible error. The judge held

out his hands, and with tears in his eyes the jeweller passed his salesbook to the usher.

For a moment there was dead silence, then in an angry voice the presiding magistrate cried:

"The entry is false. The date has been altered. Seize citizen Legrand and place him in the dock!"

In vain the jeweller protested that he had made a mistake in the date at the time the spoon was bought, and had at once rectified it. The fact that the nine had been changed to a seven convinced everyone that Legrand had borne false witness intentionally. He should, of course, have struck out the wrong date and made a fresh entry, leaving the other plainly visible in proof of his good faith. To disguise a figure is severely punished in France. A violent reaction rippled through the disappointed public, which a moment before had been eager to carry Lesurques in triumph from the court, and from that instant his cause was hopeless. So strange is the human mind, that now every witness favourable to Lesurques was greeted with groans and hisses. Indeed, so frightful was the impression which the horrified Legrand perceived he had caused that, knowing Lesurques to be innocent, he fell to the ground in a fit and became raving mad, and died a month later in the asylum at Charenton. The atmosphere of the court was now vibrant with hate and blood-lust. The two women who had caused Lesurques to be arrested were hailed with shouts of approbation when they re-appeared and again emphatically accused the trembling prisoner. It was the end, and the unhappy man covered his face and sobbed hysterically in utter hopeless abandon.

The verdict was a foregone conclusion.

Couriol, Guesnot and Lesurques were sentenced to death, Richard to twenty years as a galley-slave. At the sentence, Couriol, who had sat without saying a word throughout the trial, sprang to the front of the dock and cried in a loud voice:

"I am guilty, you dogs, and I admit it, but you have condemned a man who is entirely innocent. Joseph Lesurques knew nothing of the murders, I met him for the first time a week after the attack on the Lyons Mail."

Hardly had the judges withdrawn when Madeleine Brébant, whose indiscretion had brought about the arrest of her lover Couriol, demanded to speak to the magistrate Daubanton.

Trembling with excitement, she declared that a terrible mistake had been made. The five assassins were Couriol, Vidal, Durochat, who had been the passenger Laborde, Roussy and Dubosq. It was the latter who bore such an extraordinary

resemblance to Lesurques. By a strange coincidence, he had worn a flaxen wig, and this had made him the twin of the man sentenced to death. The magistrate was incredulous, but the following day the same statement was made by Couriol, who with a solemn oath revealed the names of his accomplices, and repeated that the wig Dubosq had worn to hide his black hair had caused Lesurques to be mistaken for him. His confession was believed to be the result of a bribe offered by the unhappy wife. The Government refused to stay the execution, and a week later the three men were driven in a tumbril to the Place de Grève. During their transport through the streets, Couriol continued to yell at the top of his voice : " Lesurques is innocent, Lesurques is innocent, Dubosq is your man."

At the foot of the guillotine, the unhappy Lesurques, whom fate had so cruelly stricken, asked for permission to cut off and send to his wife the golden hair which had brought him to the scaffold. He also wrote the following letter to Dubosq :

You for whom I am about to die, let the sacrifice of my life remain always present in your memory. If ever you are captured and sentenced, think of my three children, whose name is besmirched, and of my unhappy wife whose future is full of pain. For God's sake tell the truth !

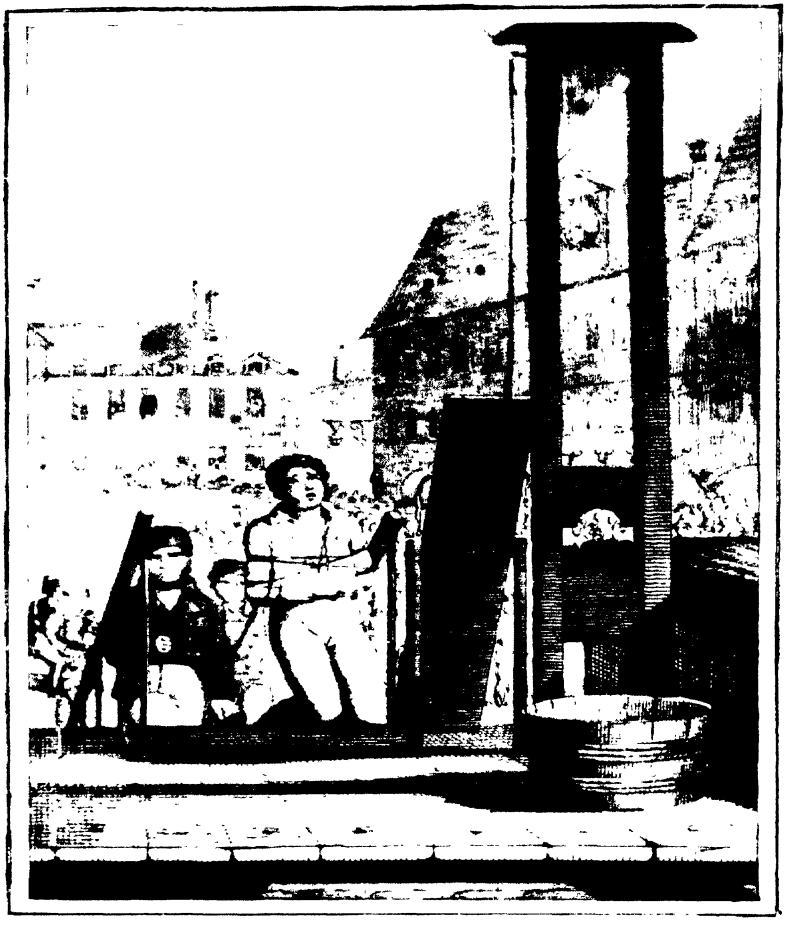
Then he stepped courageously up to the grisly machine and knelt down. As the executioner seized him, he cried wildly :

" Let the Lord forgive my cruel judges as I do."

Couriol died last, and as he was thrown under the knife, he again shouted : " It is just, I am guilty, but the law has murdered an innocent man."

This steadfast cry in the face of death finally shook the assurance of the magistrate Daubanton, and he began to be obsessed with the fear that perhaps he had been too stubborn. He resigned his post and set himself to hunt down the mysterious Dubosq ; and as though that perverse imp, who had surely laughed in glee at the vain struggles of Lesurques, now wished to jeer in turn at the law, he was entirely successful. Within the year Durochat, who had played the part of the passenger Laborde, was discovered in prison ; he had been sentenced to fourteen years hard labour under another name, and Daubanton obtained his transfer to Paris. Durochat freely confessed his own part in the murders of Escoffon and the postilion, and confirmed every detail of the statements the girl Brébant and Couriol had made.

Dubosq had been the real leader of the expedition and had



"Let the Lord forgive my cruel judges, as I do."
The last moments of Lesurque at the guillotine, reproduced from a picture painted by Hilair le Dru

conceived the robbery. He furthermore gave the magistrate a detailed description of the bandit, and related what had taken place. Durochat was executed in April 1797 at Versailles, and before he died he declared on oath that he had never met Lesurques. Vidal was also discovered in the prison of St. Pelagie, and executed. Thus if Dubosq existed, since only five men had shared in the crime and five had been already beheaded, then one of these had suffered the dread penalty unjustly; and at the thought Daubanton groaned in horror. And suddenly this Dubosq materialised. His description was recognised in a dozen prisons, from all of which he had escaped. He had been caught not long before the tragedy of the Lyons Mail under the name of Barrière and imprisoned together with his wife Claudine. Both had been sentenced to life-long detention, but escaped together a week after their arrival. Vidal, before he died, revealed to the police where Dubosq was hiding, and so at last the bandit was captured and brought to Paris.

Daubanton insisted on taking the place of the *juge d'instruction*, and harried him with questions, but Dubosq denied all knowledge of the murders and defied the law. Madeleine Brébant, who had married the very executioner who had beheaded her lover, was conducted to Paris, but on the very day she arrived, when the turnkey entered the cell of Dubosq, he found two of the window-bars wrenched away and the cubicle empty. As he was about to summon help, his ears caught the sound of loud groans and, looking from the opening, he espied Dubosq lying on the edge of the moat. He had broken a leg in jumping from the narrow ledge. A doctor was called and the prisoner taken to the infirmary. For a month he lay in agony, and the prison surgeon, Duclos, was of the opinion that he would not recover. Naturally enough the vigilance of the officials relaxed somewhat, and one fine morning Dubosq again escaped with the help of strips cut from his blankets. At the news Daubanton, who had been anxiously waiting to continue his investigation, was struck down by apoplexy and became mad.

Two years elapsed before Dubosq was again taken. This time he was loaded with chains and officers watched him day and night.

The trial was one of the most sensational of the time. None of the witnesses recognised Dubosq as the fourth horseman at Lieusaint, and the bandit jeered openly at the judges. But the man who had succeeded Daubanton had a surprise in store for the fellow. A wigmaker named Guilliard suddenly stepped up to the dock and pulled a fair curly wig over the head of Dubosq.

For a moment there was complete silence in court. The prisoner stood motionless, paralysed at the unexpected move, then a loud agonised wail broke from the woman Sauton, whose evidence had sent Lesurques to his death.

"God Almighty!" she shrieked, falling to her knees and raising her hands in horror—"there . . . there . . . stands the man who supped at the inn. I have murdered an innocent citizen."

So on February 24th, 1801, Dubosq, master bandit and murderer, was beheaded, but to the last he refused to make that confession which would have cleared Joseph Lesurques.

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

THE mystery of his birth and the implacable misfortune which attended the man in the iron mask through life, has stirred the imagination of succeeding generations, not only in France but all over the world. The very means taken by the royal hypocrites to ensure his utter annihilation as a man, without actually committing murder, instead of causing him to sink into obscurity and insignificance, fashioned of him a legend which will outlast the memory of his enemies.

Who has not heard of this unfortunate man, who for forty long, weary years dragged out a painful existence in the fortress prisons of mediæval France, to die at last without a murmur, without a harsh word for his inhuman tormentors, in the dreadful dungeons of the Bastille.

Perhaps the most wonderful part of this historical mystery is not so much the poor fellow's patient endurance, or the callous indifference of those who disposed of his destiny, as the incredible loyalty with which the secret was kept.

When one remembers that the secrets of kings were then at the mercy of clown and courtier, that a legion of spies was for ever prowling about the ancient French capital, some in the pay of the all-powerful Church, others in the service of police or nobles, and all ready at any moment to sell their knowledge to the highest bidder; when one remembers also that nameless tortures were applied by the contending factions, ruthlessly and remorselessly, without a moment's hesitation, in order to drag possible secrets from the panting wretches who were unfortunate enough to be suspected of possessing useful or harmful knowledge—tortures, the least of which was the driving of heavy wedges into iron boots that crushed the bones of the living feet thus encased in their fearful grip; the pouring of molten lead into those same boots until flesh and bone were dissolved in unutterable agony—then it is truly miraculous that a secret which might have swept away the throne of the Bourbons with a tempest of indignation, or driven Richelieu, the *Red Cardinal*, from Paris, should have

remained a secret right through seething centuries, until to-day only a faint echo of it lingers.

Who was the Man in the Iron Mask? Even now, although the secret archives, locked away in the grim towers of the *Conciergerie*, are at my disposal, I can only evolve a theory. But that theory is built up on such tangible evidence that it becomes a mathematical certainty.

Fortunately for me, no one in modern, enlightened, republican France holds a brief for her dead kings and their execrable memory. No longer do men desire to fight for their vile reputations, or I might find it difficult to glean and publish these facts. But France to-day, while justly proud of their art, repudiates all the crimes of those monarchs; crimes which at last culminated in the terrible but just revolution, when all the creeping, slinking horrors of the royal regime were laved in a bath of blood.

That this mysterious prisoner was of kingly blood is certain. The governor of Pignerolle, the Fenestrelle fortress in the Maritime Alps, who knew the man's true identity, always addressed him humbly as Monseigneur, which is the equivalent of Your Royal Highness, and spoke to him hat in hand, although the man was entered in the prison books as plain le sieur Montaigne. When later he was transferred to the Bastille his name again changed, but the deference with which he was treated remained the same. His identity is the more interesting to the British reader since he will gather from the story I am about to relate that the man in the iron mask was the son of George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, and Anne of Austria, wife of Louis XIII and Queen of France.

He was therefore the half-brother of Louis XIV, and his senior. Thus, although he could be kept a prisoner and rendered harmless, his royal blood was too sacred to be spilled. Again, as in the tale of Monte Cristo, Dumas had already divined the truth and vaguely indicated it in his *Three Musketeers* where the immortal d'Artagnan saves the Queen's honour by returning to her the diamond studs which she had given to Buckingham. But Dumas was at heart a royalist and further than this he would not go. Doubtless, also, the noble houses of France, Spain and Austria were still very powerful when he wrote his novel.

The tale as I have pieced it together is taken from the documents collected by M. Peuchet, Archivist of the Prefecture of Police in 1800, and some of the reports of the spies hired by Cardinal Richelieu to dog the footsteps of Buckingham, a few of which have escaped destruction. To these I have added in corroboration the gist of several letters written by the Queen's



Louis XIII, King of France



Anne of Austria, Queen of France, and mother of the Man in the Iron Mask.



(Centre) The first Duke of Buckingham, father of the tragic prisoner.



M. de St. Mars, for thirty years entrusted with the safe keeping of the Man in the Iron Mask.



Louis XIV, who was believed to closely resemble his half-brother of the Iron Mask.

confidante, Mmes de Chevreuse and de Luynes, who was known as *Mme la Connétable.*

George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, was hardly a model husband. Of the manner in which his marriage with Lady Katherine Manners, only daughter of Francis, sixth Earl of Rutland, was brought about, there are two versions in existence. There is no doubt that Lady Katherine, a notable heiress, was passionately in love with the Duke, but she had to reckon with the insurmountable obstacle of religion. Lady Katherine was a devout Roman Catholic, and, much as she loved George Villiers, she openly stated that she would not and could not change her faith.

The fates were not propitious to the union and a marriage would never have taken place with the consent of the Puritans, if Buckingham had not, with his usual disregard of the conventions, enticed the maiden to his house. There, according to several historians, "she remained for some time and was then returned to the indignant father." Since the Duke was at that time the greatest match in the kingdom, he smoothed matters over by suggesting that the wedding should be celebrated forthwith.

It is only fair to state that a totally different version was given by George Villiers' mother, the Countess of Buckingham. Whatever the true facts, the outcome of the scandal was to render the marriage imperative and Lady Katherine became a Protestant convert.

In 1627, the Duke—as he was styled—had gained the summit of his power ; so after a career of unfailing and continued success —due to his own beauty and charm as much as to the favour of King James I—he finally aspired to the love of Anne of Austria, wife of Louis XIII. Even the open hostility of great Cardinal Richelieu did not daunt him. His passion became a madness, an obsession, before which the dictates of reason—indeed of mere common sense—were powerless.

No actual proof of the Queen's faithlessness to her morose puritan husband exists to-day, but the reports of the Cardinal's spies are so clear that one cannot doubt that the impetuous and ruthless wooing of the handsome British Ambassador—whose duties brought him constantly into close touch with the royal household—vanquished her last scruples. The result was the birth of that hapless son whose bitter destiny it was to languish in empty solitude, his face hidden for ever from human eyes by a mask of iron.

The story of the Duke's courtship is best narrated by a translation of the letters and statements of Doctor Bois-Robert and the Marquis of Beautru, two active spies of the Cardinal, and signed by both, which are in the secret archives of the Parisian police.

The doctor's letter is as follows :

Your Eminence,

I have been so fortunate as to meet again by chance a young Irishman named Patrick O'Reilly. In former days when O'Reilly was studying in Paris I rendered him a service for which he was very grateful. When O'Reilly returned to England he became the body-servant of the Duke of Buckingham. The young Irishman is one of those who never has any money, although his post is very lucrative. Thus, in return for certain monies, I obtained from him a statement, which, together with the report of the Marquis, will give Your Eminence the desired details of the wanton life led by Britain's Ambassador. I am enclosing the Marquis' letter and the details he obtained, which complete mine.

(Signed)
Bois-Robert.

And the second letter :

Monseigneur,

The dream of my life is to serve Your Eminence faithfully. Therefore I have succeeded in winning the confidence of several members of the Ambassador's household, thanks to a duel which took place twenty years ago when I was fortunate enough to act as second for a Scottish nobleman, Sir Hamilton. That is a service no cavalier can refuse another. Sir Hamilton killed his adversary, a Spaniard named Medina-Sidonia. I was not so lucky, for my opponent, Count Variclery, of Italian origin, wounded me so grievously that I was forced to lie abed six months. My loyal friend Sir Hamilton remained with me until I was recovered from my hurt. Out of gratitude for my help he swore an oath that whatever I should demand of him he would faithfully carry out. When I learned that he was in the Duke's suite, I reminded him of this sacred promise. His grief at my request was great, but he could not break his oath, and it is his report, joined to that obtained by Bois-Robert, together with numerous statements of servants and courtiers of King Louis' household, which has enabled me to compile the following narrative. I vouch for its accuracy.

(Signed)
Marquis de Beautru.

The outstanding figure in this play of frivolous flirtations and sombre drama is the Duchess de Luynes, who was familiarly known as *Madame la Connétable*. She was a beautiful, clever and charming woman, with the temperament of the South—but a born intriguer, a schemer whose thirst for power and wealth was unquenchable. A great favourite at Court, thanks to the position of her husband, *Connétable* of France, she succeeded in gaining the confidence of the Queen and quickly became her intimate friend and constant companion, although Louis XIII and the great Cardinal Richelieu disliked her intensely.

When Buckingham, as Britain's Ambassador and bitter opponent of the Cardinal, allowed his amorous regard to rest on the Queen, he at once realised that Mme de Luynes would become his ally and set about winning her friendship and allegiance. Already his infatuation for Anne of Austria was the principal topic in his own circle. From there it quickly spread, as scandal does, first to the Court of the French King and then to the masses, who responded by cartoons and gallant sonnets. Buckingham apparently felt so assured of his unassailable power and position that he took no pains to hide his desire. A report of one of the Cardinal's spies states that :

" Everyone at the British Embassy is aware that the Duke loves our Queen. His audacity is outrageous. He has Her Majesty's portrait in his study, under a blue velvet canopy surmounted by white and red plumes. He also wears her miniature, surrounded by costly jewels, suspended from a chain around his neck, as though it were a present from the Queen. Marie de Rohan, who is now the Duchess of Luynes, since her marriage to Charles Albert Duke of Luynes in 1617, is the friend and ally of Buckingham. He feigns to love her, but in reality she helps him in his wooing of the Queen.

" Not long ago the Duke presented Mme de Luynes with a valuable diamond trinket and a large sum of money, because she had complained that she was in financial difficulties. It is common knowledge that both money and jewellery were accepted. Thereafter costly gifts of all kinds were showered upon Mme de Luynes by Buckingham in return for her help in furthering his intrigue. She misses no opportunities of vaunting the Duke's qualities to the Queen, and constantly insists on his great love for Her Majesty, notwithstanding his apparently insolent behaviour."

The same report goes on to describe a fête given by the Duchess de Luynes in honour of the King and Queen. This fête was suggested and paid for by Buckingham ; and during the afternoon and evening, although he was only secretly present, he succeeded in flattering and amusing the Queen by his audacity

and irresistible courtship, and evidently obtained the coveted promise of a private interview.

"In order to avoid rousing the King's jealousy, and also to be free to woo the Queen in his own manner, milord the Duke saw fit to disguise himself and play numerous parts hardly befitting so exalted a person. When Her Majesty arrived, and Buckingham had dressed in the elegant livery of the de Luynes, mingling with the lackeys, he pushed past the officers of the royal household and lowered the steps of the carriage. He was distinctly seen to press the Queen's foot most amorously in assisting her to alight.

"The head gardener had been ordered to present Her Majesty with baskets of choice fruits and flowers. No doubt by bribing him, and with the consent of the Duchess, milord usurped the servant's prerogative. He appeared again dressed in the clothes of the head gardener, and, while showing the Queen the contents of the baskets, he was enabled to converse with her for some time. What he said was not overheard, but apparently his compliments pleased the Queen, for she was seen to blush furiously.

"Doubtless with the same object in view, Mme de Luynes had organised various diversions. Some Bohemians and jugglers had erected their tents in the grounds. Once more milord Buckingham played a part unworthy of his high rank: that of a magician, and the white beard, flowing robes, and pointed cap disguised him well. It was noticed that the Duchess touched the Queen's arm, thus calling her attention to milord's presence and preventing her from showing surprise. As a magician he was able to converse for some time with Her Majesty while pretending to foretell the future. It was impossible to overhear what was said, for when one of our spies approached, Mme de Luynes warned the Duke.

"In order to give Buckingham a further opportunity of approaching 'his lady,' the hostess had organised a masked ball, which Your Eminence and the King applauded right heartily, without suspecting that it was merely an excuse to bring the Duke and the Queen together. Your Eminence will remember that among the fancy dresses were those which represented the Emperors of China, Japan, Abbyssinia, the Grand Mogul, the Sultan of Turkey and others. Each of these carnival kings was followed by his georgeously attired suite. His Majesty had been informed that these parts were played by the noblemen of the houses of Lorraine, de Rohan, de Bouillon, de Chabot and de la Tremouille.

"In order to prolong the festivities and apparently to please the Queen, these foreign potentates surrounded her and danced

with her in turn. Buckingham had secretly taken the place of the young Duc de Guise, thanks to the fantastic dress and mask of the Grand Mogul, which had been assigned to de Guise. When the time came for unmasking, Buckingham disappeared behind a curtain and returned his costume to the young Duke. Then when, after supper, masks were donned for the dances, Buckingham again borrowed the habiliments of the Grand Mogul and once more succeeded in dancing with the Queen. Since that fête, not a day has passed but what the Duke of Buckingham has met and spoken with the Queen in secret, thanks to the help of Mme de Luynes. Finally, two days ago, Your Eminence will remember it was rumoured that the terrible 'White Woman'—that apparition which always haunts the Louvre before a calamity to the Kings of France—was seen gliding through the corridors and rooms of the palace. Nothing was said to His Majesty about it, for he would have been terrified. The truth about this rumour is as follows:

"Milord the Duke was evidently not satisfied with the short meetings and hurried trysts with the Queen, which his faithful friend Mme de Luynes had contrived for him, and desired a more lengthy and intimate interview. Pretexting a letter from his sister-in-law which he was charged to hand to 'his lady,' Buckingham succeeded in persuading the Queen to receive him in her apartments. This letter was supposed to contain a secret by which Your Eminence the Cardinal could be ruined, and since Her Majesty hates Your Eminence, the interview was granted. Whether or no the Queen was aware of the true motive behind this imaginary letter we, the undersigned, cannot say, women are so complex. Perhaps she enjoyed playing with fire.

"The interview in her private apartments granted, it became necessary to discover a means whereby milord could enter and escape safely if he were surprised. Mme de Luynes, who is a clever schemer, suggested that Buckingham should dress as the phantom White Woman, since his appearance would so terrify all who saw him that they would not dare to oppose his flight if this became necessary.

"The Duke thereupon arrayed himself in a long white robe adorned with black triangles and having on the back and breast a painted skull. The face was covered with the famous elastic skin-mask invented by Noblin, which milord has already used on several occasions where an ordinary mask would not serve. An ample Spanish hat termed a sombrero covered his head, and a flowing cape completed this fantastic disguise. One of the servants of the Duchess de Luynes, who believed that he was

merely escorting an Italian astrologer, conducted the ambassador by devious passages to the apartments of the Queen. Mme de Flottes, the chief maid-in-waiting, had been sent on an errand, and as soon as the Duke was introduced, Mme de Luynes prepared to leave, but the Queen at first requested her to remain. Then, when the Duke mentioned the secret letter—the prearranged signal—his ally again wished to depart, the Queen saved her the trouble, however, by rising and entering her own boudoir followed by milord the Duke, whereupon Mme de Luynes closed the door.

"Some time later, the valet Bertin made a tremendous noise by overthrowing some chairs, for he believed that the King was coming to Her Majesty's apartments and this noise had been agreed upon as a signal. It was a false alarm, since the King, instead of entering, was preparing to leave, together with Baradas, for a promenade in the Tuileries gardens. No doubt the alarm disturbed the Duke's peace of mind, for he came quickly into the ante-chamber and donned his disguise, which in the Queen's presence he had removed. Thus attired he hurried along the corridors, to the terror of waiting servants. The report that the dreadful White Woman was in the palace sent lackeys and gentlemen of the King's household flying in dismay to their quarters.

"The Duke reached Bertin's rooms safely and there divested himself of the fearsome dress. Bertin then conducted him to the garden gates. It was at that moment that Your Eminence, coming unexpectedly to visit Her Majesty, was surprised at the tumult and disorder reigning in the palace, and heard that the White Woman had been seen.

"As Your Eminence knows, something of the truth leaked out and caused the King to request the Duke of Buckingham to leave France."

Such, then, was the state of affairs when George Villiers returned to England. That some part of the story did come to the ears of the King is proven by the fact that, shortly after, he refused to sanction Buckingham's return to Paris, and ceased even in public to show anything but indifference towards the Queen.

The coolness between Louis XIII and his frivolous consort rapidly increased. The King was in despair because no child had come to gladden his marriage to Anne of Austria, and he feared that the lack of an heir would bring great trouble to France at his death. Although it is certain that the true facts of Buckingham's escapade were kept from him, yet rumours circulated freely and the King became more morose than ever and rarely sought the Queen's company.

Within the year, while Buckingham was preparing to rush to the aid of La Rochelle, just prior to his assassination by Felton, the Queen journeyed to Mme de Luynes' country seat at Fontainebleau and spent several months with her. It was stated officially that she went there to restore her health. The secret of what transpired has been jealously guarded, but in the memoirs of Bertin the valet and Antoinette Gribouille the maid of the Duchess de Luynes, there occurs the mention of the birth of a boy during Her Majesty's stay at Fontainebleau.

There is still a ruined wall at Noisy-le-Sec, which marks the spot of a pleasant villa to which Antoinette Gribouille retired soon after the death of Buckingham. And there the child was tended by her and brought up in perfect seclusion. When he reached the age of ten a tutor came and resided with him and taught the lad all that a gentleman should learn.

There was one strange thing about this villa. Shortly after Antoinette Gribouille settled down, workmen were ordered to remove every mirror from the house—the fact is recorded in a police report. Furthermore, long iron spikes somewhat like *chevaux de frise* were set along the top of the high walls. No one ever saw the boy outside the grounds, but his voice was often heard, and a sombre, elegant carriage, that of Mme de Luynes, frequently drove through the hamlet to the villa.

Then came the birth of the future Louis XIV in 1638, just as the King had given up all hope. With the coming of an heir to the throne, the royal couple became more united. Strangely enough, too, the carriage of Mme de Luynes was seen no more at Noisy-le-Sec, but the servant and tutor still resided there and tended the mysterious recluse.

When the King died, a year after the great Cardinal, and Anne of Austria suddenly found herself virtually ruling France until the boy King should be old enough to sit on the throne, she banished Mme de Luynes, who had married the Duke de Chevreuse, but was again a widow. Some very pleasant gilding must have covered the pill, however, for the Duchess made no protest. Something happened during her absence which caused the Queen and her ministers to proclaim that the house in Noisy-le-Sec was a meeting place for conspirators. Both maid and tutor disappeared one night and were never heard of again. The popular version is that they were murdered. Soon, to their surprise, the villagers discovered the mysterious house to be deserted. The youth whose voice had so often been heard had also vanished.

It was precisely at that time that a coach escorted by a dozen mounted soldiers drew up before the gates of Pignerolle. It was

no ordinary captive who had arrived, for the trumpets blared and the drums of the fortress sounded the signal which warned inmates and guards that they must at once withdraw from the walls and corridors—the usual proceeding when a prisoner whose identity was to remain a secret was about to be admitted. Only a favoured few, chosen among the officers whose presence was indispensable, were allowed to stay.

The drawbridge was lowered and coach and soldiers entered the gloomy court. The governor himself assisted a slim figure in rich male attire to alight from the vehicle, but those who pressed forward to obtain a glimpse of this prisoner of distinction were astonished to see that his head and face were covered by a steel head-dress, much like a mediæval casque, complete with visor—only, this visor had tiny airholes instead of bars, and was padlocked, so that it was impossible to discern the features behind it.

All day workmen had been preparing two rooms in the east tower, so situated that neither the sentries nor the fortress guards could peep through the barred windows. Beneath was the wide moat, further away cultivated fields, and in the distance the jagged broken chain of the French Alps. Comfortable and even sumptuous furniture had been installed in these cells. A bed bearing the royal arms of the fortress, with fine linen and soft mattress, had been carried there ; rugs and carpets covered the stone floor, and silken curtains bedecked the grim walls.

There the ' Man in the Iron Mask,' as he was at once called, took up his abode. It was with trembling eagerness that the *greffier* awaited the entry in the prison register. What royal name would he be called upon to inscribe in the ancient tome ?

" You will enter the prisoner as Monsieur de Montaigne," the governor informed his clerk with a faint smile.

Eagerly, too, the turnkey carried a plentiful repast to the east tower, for, in order to eat, the prisoner must needs take off the steel " casque." To his chagrin the prisoner had already removed it, but a close-fitting velvet cap, with a mask which only left his mouth free, had replaced the visor.

Naturally enough, the very means which had been adopted to guard against prying eyes, caused everyone to discuss the probable identity of the new arrival. It was justly argued that features so carefully hidden were not only well known to all, but must be those of a great noble, and that their disclosure would endanger either the throne or the Church.

The story of the disappearance of the mysterious youth from Noisy-le-Sec, and the indiscretions of the Queen with Buckingham,

were related by some as proof that the " Man in the Iron Mask " was half-brother to the King. Others spread the whispered rumour that an hour after Louis XIV was born the Queen had given birth to a twin brother and that for reasons of state this twin had been at once confided to the care of a trusted nurse and brought up in ignorance of his true condition. But the second theory was disposed of by the obvious age of the prisoner, who was a young man, whereas a twin to the King would have been only a boy.

For a time the curiosity of the men-at-arms and the turnkeys was wildly aflame, and many attempts were made to surprise the undoubtedly illustrious captive without his mask. One man did succeed in entering the cell while the inmate was asleep. What he saw no one ever discovered ; he was found dead in the moat the same day. The lesson was a chastening one, and, outwardly at least, the interest died down.

Two entries in the governor's diary have been preserved. They tell of the poor masked captive's talent for music and his skill with a guitar, and describe the unutterable despair and longing embodied in the songs he composed and sang in a sweet tenor voice. So the leaden, monotonous years dragged by ; each one no doubt a century to the recluse. But that he was aware of his rank and had never entirely given up hope, is proven by the following incident.

One morning a peasant urgently demanded an audience with the governor. When he was admitted to the private apartments of that official, he pulled a linen shirt covered with fine rust-coloured writing from under his blouse.

" I found this floating on the waters of the moat, Excellency," he gasped excitedly. " As I fished it out, a voice high above me cried, ' Two thousand *pistoles, mon brave,* if you take that linen with all speed to Madame la Connétable in Paris.' I looked up at once, but saw no one, so I brought it to Your Excellency."

The governor seized the strange document and rapidly scanned the writing.

" You have read this ? " he demanded fiercely of the peasant.

" My lord, I cannot read," the man replied.

When he heard this the governor hurriedly folded the shirt and thrust it into a cupboard. Then he ordered the men-at-arms to leave him and sent for the priest who looked after the spiritual welfare of his captives.

An hour later a courier was dispatched in all haste to Paris, with a letter for the first minister of the realm, crafty Mazarin. The peasant remained in the governor's room until the evening.

No one saw him leave, but he was found the following morning lying in a field, a dagger in his heart.

The name of the courier who had been sent to Paris was Jacques Frelot, and by a strange freak of chance he was a relative of Antoinette Gribouille, the unhappy maid of the Duchess de Luynes, who, together with the tutor, vanished from Noisy-le-Sec and was never heard of again. Whether his cousin's fate still rankled or whether the man sought to enrich himself is not known, but that he did reveal the events just related to enemies of the King and the Catholics is certain, for barely a year later a daring attempt was made to liberate the illustrious victim.

Large sums were spent on bribes by the conspirators, in order to communicate with the masked prisoner. Notes were smuggled in with his food, informing him that on the tenth day after the last communication he was to feign illness and ask for a doctor to attend on him. It was probably feared that the doctor might become suspicious, so, in order to avoid the risk of the deception being discovered, a drug was mixed with his food. When the hastily summoned governor entered the cell he found his charge apparently delirious and burning with fever. The doctor who examined the patient pronounced him to be dying and suggested that a priest be sent for to administer the last sacrament.

Now, strange to relate, a priest had only recently arrived at the fortress to replace Father Duvillier, who, after twenty years' unselfish service, had been recalled to Paris. This successor was a young Jesuit named l'Abbé Ravigny. A report describes him as dark and slim, with a pale olive complexion and black eyes burning with fanatic fires.

He was immediately summoned, and after a hasty examination of the prisoner's condition ordered everyone from the cell, so that he could receive the man's dying confession in peace. By the rules of his order no other ears than his were allowed to hear a penitent's words. The turnkey who had first informed the governor of the prisoner's illness remained on guard outside the locked door.

An hour later a man wearing the dark dress and wide-brimmed

hat of the priest was seen to descend from the tower, leaning on the arm of the turnkey.

"All is over," the Jesuit said hollowly to the governor, who stopped him on the stairs to enquire after his captive. "His poor tortured soul has fled."

Something about the priest's voice evidently struck the governor as unusual, and he crept silently after him. To his horror, as the light from a torch fell across the man's face, he recognised the aristocratic features which had so long remained hidden from human eyes. With a loud cry of alarm, the governor sprang at the man as he was about to jump into the moat, and throwing a cloak about his head, pushed a pistol against his breast, threatening him with instant death if he did not follow immediately to the tower. Thus the unhappy wretch was captured just as freedom was in sight and led back to his gloomy dwelling, where he was stripped of the priest's clothes. The shouts of alarm had warned the Jesuit that the plot was discovered, and running to the roof of the tower he leapt to his death. Only the turnkey succeeded in getting clear away in the ensuing confusion. He crossed into Italy and disappeared.

That was the last attempt made to liberate the Man in the Iron Mask. Many of those involved in the plot were arrested and sent to the Bastille. The prisoner spent another dreadful ten years in the fortress. Upon giving his parole he was again treated with consideration, and permitted to take the air on the roof as before. The only document regarding this long period is the doctor's report, which states that though suffering from prolonged fits of melancholy the prisoner in the east tower remained in good health. Then an order came that he should be removed to the Bastille. When the governor entered the cell and courteously requested Monseigneur to don his "casque," the poor wretch exclaimed :

"Are you taking me to my butchers, then ? Am I to die after all without feeling the blessings of freedom ? I have faithfully kept my promise."

"My lord," the governor replied, shaken doubtless by the longing in the poor captive's voice, "I am merely transferring you to another fortress. There are rumours that this castle is threatened."

So once again, after an interval of twenty years, a coach drew up in the gloomy court and a well-dressed, middle-aged man, his face hidden by the dreadful steel visor, stepped quickly from the tower into the vehicle and was driven away. At the taverns where relays of horses were waiting, the unhappy wretch was always

hurried into a private room, surrounded by soldiery, and no one caught a glimpse of the face behind the visor. The man's likeness to the reigning king must have been remarkable for such extraordinary precautions to be taken, and somehow the legend of his passing has remained, undimmed by time. There is an ancient ruined inn, Les Galons d'Or, still in existence on the old Roman road near Avignon, where visitors are shown a room of huge stone blocks, all that remains of the original house. Over the lintel is the sign :

" Here the famous ' Iron Mask ' rested and refreshed himself on his journey to a living death in the Bastille. God rest his soul."

The governor of the Bastille entered his illustrious prisoner as *Monsieur Marchiali, or Mattioli, in the register of the prison. He was assigned a large room in one of the inner towers, and allowed to walk daily along the wall, but emissaries of King Louis XIV* first explored all the neighbouring buildings in order to make sure that he could not be seen by prying eyes. It is still related in stories of the period, that young men and women used to gather at sunset to listen to a sweet, full-throated tenor voice singing melancholy ballads, accompanied by a guitar, somewhere in the dread Bastille. They would shudder and make the sign of the Cross and whisper : " That is the unhappy man in the Iron Mask —he is of royal blood."

And there he died—when is not certain. There is a doctor's report that he was called to examine an old man who wore a velvet mask—but when he died and where he was buried have been purposely omitted from the prison books. Only in a letter of the Pompadour is he mentioned once. She had asked her royal protector to reveal the secret of the mysterious prisoner's identity.

The King replied : " It is not my secret, it concerns the welfare of my throne and my father's honour. I cannot tell you."

To me, however, delving in the bloodstained, musty past, conviction has come. The Man in the Iron Mask was half-brother to Louis XIV, and in his veins flowed British blood.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY THE MARTYR AND MARAT THE MONSTER

NEVER in the world's history have there been two opponents so widely apart nor so entirely different in type as the sanguinary madman Marat, and noble Charlotte Corday. The one was cruel and rapacious, repulsive in the flesh and the spirit, a human gorilla seething with hatred of all mankind; and the other a sweet gentle girl, beautiful of face and form, with the pure ideals and clear courageous soul of Joan of Arc. Yet with unflinching purpose she thrust a knife through the heart of the beast and gave her life for the future happiness of France, braving the frenzy of the ignorant mob without a murmur.

The French revolution has formed the theme of so many plays, books, novels, and historical essays, that I need but touch the fringe of the bloodstained events that led up to this epic drama, which only a Poe or Stevenson could portray fittingly. Yet the memory of man is fleeting and fickle, and a brief outline of that phase which culminated in the killing of the self-styled " friend of the people " may not be unwelcome.

During the days spent in examining the many documents so jealously guarded in the archives, a conviction was born in my mind, which grew and developed until I could no longer shut my eyes to the inevitable inference. The creature who sent thousands of men and women to the scaffold for no other crime than that they had dared to fight courageously and unselfishly for the ultimate peace and regeneration of their beloved country, combating his doctrine of death and carnage by a steadfast desire for justice and equity, was truly a madman. He was a leper and a megalomaniac, obsessed by the belief that ceaseless and secret persecutions dogged his footsteps. Nor was this the only conclusion, for whilst studying his history I seemed to be reading again the lives of others of his ilk. I remembered the tale of Nero, emperor and clown, who preferred to pose as a poet and songster rather than as a statesman, and who shed crocodile tears and

sang melancholy improvisations whilst watching Imperial Rome crumbling in the flames which at his secret command the incendiary Tigellinus had ignited.

Like Nero, Marat was the most dangerous of degenerates—the sentimental criminal. Versatile fanatic, diseased in mind and body, he was furthermore a coward. To-day an alienist would describe him as a lucid madman, and diagnose acute paranœa. I have only cited one other example of the species, but there have been many such, and in every case the poison in their blood produced a condition of hysteria which made them at times appear exceptionally gifted, but which also goaded them on to the most terrible excesses.

Jean Paul Marat, tribune and pamphleteer, was not even a Frenchman. His mother, Louise Cabrol, was Swiss, and his father, Jean Mara, a Sardinian Jew of Spanish origin, born in Cagliari. Marat—as he later wrote his name, in order to make it appear French—was one of four children and was born in Boudry in Switzerland.

From a child he was violent, stubborn and consumed by a colossal vanity, and this abnormal vanity became his dominant characteristic throughout life.

He studied diligently only in order to be able to refute or contradict the theories of others. His arguments were never subtle. Violence, insults and contemptuous epigrams were his favourite weapons. The peaceful atmosphere of his native Switzerland did not suit him, and when his father died, Jean Paul, then barely twenty, set out to travel. His exceptional versatility seems to have enabled him to gain a veneer of many accomplishments, but he was restless and discontented and unable to settle down. It is recorded that already as a youth he spoke French, German, Spanish and Italian. Probably his mixed ancestry and his birth in a country where three languages are constantly used, had much to do with this. After several years in Bordeaux he travelled through Holland, lived awhile in Paris, migrated to Dublin, and finally came to London, where he published his first book anonymously in English. The original title was *An Essay on the Human Soul.* A specimen, probably the only one in existence, is now in the British Museum. Later he obtained the publication of a second edition which had been changed to *A Philosophical Essay on Man.*

Then, in 1774, appeared his *Chains of Slavery,* which was frankly revolutionary. There is a note in the archives that Marat " spent three months reading English history. He worked twenty-one hours daily and slept only three. He banished sleep

and fatigue by drinking black coffee in great quantities, and when his book was completed, collapsed and remained two weeks in a species of stupor." This trait is typical of the man, who could do nothing reasonably. When he recovered, Marat began to study medicine, and in 1775 obtained the diploma of doctor of medicine delivered by St. Andrew's University of Scotland. It is probable that he also obtained diplomas from other universities, for he often mentioned them. Thereupon he put up his plate in Church Street, Soho, then a very fashionable neighbourhood, and soon acquired an excellent reputation as a general practitioner and occulist. He remained in London until 1777 and then crossed to Paris with the intention of remaining definitely in France. And there Marat, future killer of aristocrats and " friend of the people," became of all things the private doctor-in-chief of Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, brother of King Louis XVI. It seems incredibly fantastic that Marat, who later committed murder wholesale with frenzied hatred of all that was noble, and sent to the guillotine friend and foe alike because his crazed brain was haunted day and night by the phantom of constant persecution, should once have been the medical adviser of royalty. Yet by a special brevet of His Royal Highness, he was lifted to that exalted post soon after his arrival in Paris, and received an income of two thousand livres, with lodging, food and perquisites. His elegant apartment was in the royal household itself, rue de Bourgogne, in the aristocratic Faubourg St. Germain. Whilst there he actually attempted to crawl out of his plebian hide to become one of the execrated nobility. To this end he consulted several authorities on heraldry, but they could not contrive anything that would suit him. Ingeniously enough he thereupon designed an escutcheon which combined the arms of Geneva with a device entirely invented by himself. A seal was graven to his order in the form of a shield surmounted by the crown of a Count. Marat the executioner a Count ! The mere thought is grotesque, but in keeping with the mentality of this twin of Quasimodo. There are several letters still in existence written by him on the finest linen paper and sealed with this curious device. There was also a letter, or part of a letter, formerly in the possession of the Bonaparte family, which Marat wrote in 1783 and addressed to the Juge d'Armes, who at that time had the right to deliver certificates of nobility, in which he describes his origin and suggests that in view of his eminent position as doctor of the King's brother, he should be given the title of Count. The Marat of that period was not the dirty, ragged, ill-favoured creature he later became in order to pose as a humble citizen. He dressed well, and notwithstanding

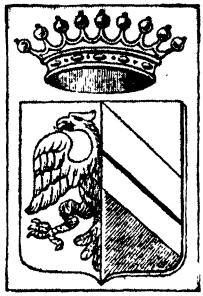
his hideous features succeeded in playing the ardent lover with some success. But his violent and irascible nature was soon to topple him from the temporary dignity to which he had climbed, heaven knows how. There is a police report in the National Archives which relates that Marat was called to attend a lady named Courtin in the Rue Roche. His treatment was not successful and a friend of the lady, Count Zabieloff, reproached him bitterly for having endangered her life. Marat flew into a frightful rage and at once assaulted the Count, who thereupon called two friends and a servant to his assistance. Marat drew his sword, but this was twisted from his hand and snapped in twain. He was then soundly thrashed and kicked downstairs. The matter would have ended there, had he not foolishly enough called upon the police for redress. The enquiry made a tremendous stir, and soon after Dr. Enguehard of Montpellier took Marat's place as doctor to Monseigneur d'Artois.

Convinced that the medical profession was in league against him, Marat at once gave up practising medicine, installed a laboratory and spent his time experimenting with light, heat and electricity.

Within a year he published a book entitled *The Discoveries of the Phyiscian Marat Regarding the Nature of Fire,* and some time later a dissertation in three volumes on *Man.*

The only notable feature about these books is that he refutes the theories of every famous scientist, including Newton. This naturally opened the sluices of hostile criticism, as already in 1777, when Voltaire himself had lashed Marat to blind ungovernable fury with his facile satire. From that moment the monster's mania of persecution swamped his reason completely, and he settled himself to fight law and order. He began to write, print and distribute his terrible paper *l'Ami du Peuple,* in which he preached sedition and anarchy. One of his phrases which sticks in the memory was "France must be purified by blood. But not by mere drops. Rivers of blood must sweep away the pollution of the royal wasters and the nobility!" His diatribe was so violent and yet so persuasive, for he wrote well, that the authorities began to hunt him. His life became that of a nocturnal beast—or rather that of a sewer rat, for he lived in cellars, in underground haunts and even in the old catacombs, fleeing from lair to lair and shunning the light of day. A board to write on and paper and pen, were all that he required. An old coat protected him from the damp and cold, and his scanty fare, collected at haphazard, was composed of crusts only fit for the rodents which kept him company.

Yet his frightful influence increased among the wretched and



At one time, Marat, the Revolutionary, greatly desired to become an aristocrat, and designed this coat-of-arms for himself, to be used when the title of Count should be conferred upon him.





(*Left*) Marat on the day of his murder. (*Right*) Adam Lux, who remarked : " She was greater than Brutus," as Charlotte Corday went to the scaffold. For these words he himself was guillotined.

The document from the French Police Archives, appointing Marat to be doctor-in-chief to the brother of King Louis XVI.

hungry by leaps and bounds. His paper circulated from hand to hand and was to be found in every home; and the life he led, which probably for that very reason was made as theatrical as possible, caused his every word to be eagerly accepted as truth. For now he was one of the poor he feigned to champion. No longer did he seek a crown and title; instead, he dreamt dreams of mad ambition. The King was tottering on his throne, and Marat the revolutionary aspired to rule France one day in his stead. Now also that terrible leprosy, which made him hideous to behold, caused a more active poison to burn in his blood and to irritate his already diseased nerves by the constant bite of the inflamed skin. Thus, when Louis XVI was dethroned in 1792, and the members of the Gironde climbed to power in the National Assembly, Marat, elected by the people, sprang into the open with one bound, took his stand at the tribune, and vomited his hate with such overwhelming eloquence that even Danton and Robespierre stood aghast.

"Blood!" was his cry—"blood and vengeance! To the guillotine with the enemies of France!" And this snarl of a madman came opportunely to the hungry and ignorant masses who saw in Marat their perfect leader. What did France and the republic matter? To burn, pillage, and kill was their only delight and ambition.

For a time the saner spirits, the real patriots, contented themselves with half-hearted opposition and treated Marat with contempt.

Yet, in January 1793, Marat and his clan succeeded in persuading the Assembly to vote the death of the King, which was followed soon after by the execution of unhappy Marie Antoinette. The Girondins, who had organised the revolution and formed the Convention, as the National Assembly was then designated, did not realise that they were losing their grip of the people, and that their power, based on right and justice, was slipping from their hands. But Marat and his supporters realised it and gathered in the slack.

At last the "friend of the people" had discovered his vocation. As the dread disease increased daily in virulence, so his violence and lust of killing gathered strength. Indeed, it may be said that his inflamed speeches corresponded to the burn and bite of his ulcers, and the only relief he found was to inflict pain in return for the pain he suffered.

His paper was now a constant menace to the peace of the land, it bristled with suggestion for further massacres, and daily named fresh victims for the guillotine.

Vergniaud, one of the most eloquent of the Girondins, at last attacked Marat openly, but his offensive was a mere effort of oratory. Whilst the monster was haranguing the Convention, he sprang up and cried :

" He is a cannibal, a cave-man. Bring him a bowl of blood, for he is thirsty."

The next day Vergniaud was beheaded. Too late the Girondins decided to overthrow their enemy. Marat was accused of sedition and treachery and arrested. But it was a forlorn hope, and his trial a farce. The revolutionary tribunal, corrupt and prejudiced to the core, acquitted him after a short debate and he was carried back in triumph to the Convention, where he inaugurated his dictatorship by ordering the arrest and execution of thirty-two of his former colleagues.

Then blood did indeed flow in streams, and the guillotine erected at the Place de la Revolution loomed dimly through a crimson mist, whilst the thud of the triangular blade never ceased from dawn till sunset.

But Nemesis, in the shape of a maid, was preparing to come to the aid of unhappy France from distant Normandy. Her name was Marie Anne Charlotte de Corday d'Armont, and she was the grand-daughter of the great Pierre Corneille.

Charlotte Corday was born in July 1768 near Caen, and was sent when twelve years old to the Convent of the Sainte Trinité. Thus her youth was spent in a calm and contemplative atmosphere. No shadow of the fearsome tragedy which was soon to send her innocent soul to join the ranks of those thousands who had mounted the scaffold before her, came to trouble Charlotte in her peaceful retreat. The grey convent walls shut out the turmoil of the seething cities, and only the scent of Normandy apple-blossoms mingled as fragrant incense with the songs and prayers to her God which the holy sisters had taught her. The heroic deeds and the philosophy of the great men in history had been her favourite study, and when, in 1790, all convents in France were closed, she naturally began to take an active interest in the political unrest of the time, which culminated in the fall of the royal house and the establishment of the republic. Charlotte, although an aristocrat, believed in this republic and read with enthusiasm the fiery and proud speeches of Brissot and Barbaroux, the most famous of the Girondin party.

Strangely enough she had no desire to marry. It is related of her that, although her beauty and grace attracted many wooers, she remained pure and heart-free, preferring, as she wrote in a letter to her father : " The love of humanity to the love of a husband."

In reply to his suggestion that she should meet the young man he had chosen for her, she wrote :

My love is dedicated to the future of my country.

It was natural, therefore, that these ideals should cause the girl to watch with ever-increasing horror as the monster Marat and his partisans committed murder after murder in the name of that republic which was to have regenerated the land. The execution of Louis XVI finally tore the shreds of illusion from the eyes of the pure-minded girl and caused her to write with disgust :

These men who were to bring us liberty have assassinated it. They are executioners, nothing else. I have only tears for the fate of my beloved France.

With this horror a hatred of the revolutionaries was born, and Marat became to her the symbol of all the hideous carnage which dishonoured the Convention.

Whilst she was at Rouen with an aunt and already preparing to flee to England, where the more fortunate nobles had found safety, she happened one day to be caught in a crowd which surged around the handsome and eloquent Barbaroux. A chance phrase caught her attention : " Unless another Joan of Arc, sent by heaven, can come in time to save us, our poor country is ruined." Another Joan of Arc ! The words thundered and vibrated in her ears through a long sleepless night, and from that moment her thoughts crystallised to a firm unshakable resolve. She would be that new redemptress. A vision came to her in which she saw the hideous blood-stained Marat lying dead, and it was her own tiny white hand which had ended his foul career.

On July 7th she was present when the youths of Rouen marched away to join the army of General Wimpffen, which was preparing to combat the revolutionaries. Since these young men were so ready to give their lives for the welfare of France, she would combat for them. Two days later Charlotte Corday wrote a short letter to her father, obtained a passport for Paris, and took her seat in the post chaise. She arrived in the capital on the 11th and engaged a room at the Hotel de la Providence, rue des Vieux Augustins, where she set about preparing herself for the supreme sacrifice of a life full of hope and promise, a life barely begun, for Charlotte Corday was then just twenty-five. As though that fate which had made her its emissary intended to sweep away any last scruples, she learned the morning after her arrival, whilst visiting

a member of the Convention named Lauze Déperret, to whom she had letters of introduction, that Marat had that very day proclaimed his intention to send a further *two hundred and sixty thousand victims* to the guillotine !

This fearful decision caused the heroic girl to hasten her final dispositions. She spent the day composing her justification, which was found pinned to her dress when she was searched. The following is a passage from this document now in the National Archives.

How long, unhappy people of France, will you remain divided by hatred and civil war ? Those who pretend to work in your interest are devoured by selfish ambition and care nothing for you. They excite you to violence and laugh when by killing your own friends you increase their power. Their tyranny is established on the ruins of our beautiful country. Peace and prosperity can only return if the laws of our fathers are respected. By killing the beast Marat, I am not breaking any law, for he is outlawed and condemned by the whole world. I have shown you, I, a weak girl, that monsters can be killed. Follow in my footsteps.

When she had written this she went to bed, and, as the proprietress of the hotel later testified, slept soundly until the morning cup of coffee was taken to her room.

Immediately after her frugal breakfast, Charlotte Corday went to a shop near the Palais Royal and bought a long slender knife, complete with leather sheath, for forty sous. Then, about ten o'clock, she drove to number 30, rue des Cordeliers, where Marat lived.

The concierge, Madame Marie Barbe-Pain, informed her that the apartment of the " Friend of the People " was on the first floor, but that citizen Marat was ill and could see no one. The girl at once withdrew, but an hour later she returned and, without stopping to speak to the concierge, swiftly mounted the stairs and rang the bell. Mlle Simonne Evrard, the friend and housekeeper of the tribune, opened the door but barred her way with the curt remark that her master could not be disturbed. This time Charlotte insisted on an interview, but in vain. She thereupon returned to her room and dispatched a letter to the rue des Cordeliers in which she related that she had come specially from Caen with important revelations regarding a counter revolutionary plot. Then at six o'clock she dressed herself carefully in a fashionable light dress, donned the silk hat of the period, and once more returned to Marat's apartment, the knife hidden under her

embroidered shawl. Mme Barbe-Pain opened at the summons, and recognising the visitor of the morning called Mlle Evrard. An angry discussion ensued, for Charlotte was determined to execute the tyrant without further delay. The noise of the quarrel penetrated to the dingy bathroom where Marat now spent most of his time immersed in tepid water to the armpits, for the inflamed condition of his skin was such that only in his bath could he find any relief. There he wrote his vile insulting articles, corrected the proof sheets of his paper *l'Ami du Peuple*, and drafted the list of the next day's victims for the guillotine. There also he received delegations or conferred with his host of spies. Irritated by the loud voices of the women, he called Mlle Simonne Evrard to know the reason for the disturbance. He had just read the note sent by Charlotte, so that when he learned who it was he ordered Simonne to conduct her to him. Thus for the first time, beautiful sweet Charlotte Corday came face to face with the beast whose life she had determined to take. Mlle Evrard stated in her evidence that as she entered she heard Charlotte murmur "*Et tu Brute*," but did not understand what this meant. Marat, who had two loaded pistols within easy reach, looked long and searchingly at the tall, handsome figure, but the pure innocent expression of the girl reassured him. Charlotte sat down and calmly examined the hideous leprous head of Marat.

His eyes, she wrote from her cell, *were red and cruel as though he dreamed only of the guillotine. His bulging upper lip was swollen with the poison he daily spat at the world, and his pen, clutched in crooked, quivering fingers, seemed to drip not ink but blood.*

Yet she hesitated, some proof she must have that he was irreclaimable. So for a while she related the details of an imaginary plot and gave him the name of eighteen Girondins who had found refuge in Caen. Marat listened to her story and made a note of everything. When she had finished he said with a leer:

"Excellent—they shall all be beheaded."

That was the signal for his own death! Charlotte rose quietly, as though about to leave, drew the knife from under her shawl and drove it with one fierce thrust straight to the black heart of the tyrant. Instantly the water was changed to deep crimson, and Marat fell back with a faint cry of "Help! help! friends!" whilst a continuous jet of blood spurted from the wound, for the aorta had been pierced. On the last word his soul was whirled into eternity, but the faint cry had been heard. Simonne

Evrard came running in, followed by the concierge and a porter named Laurent Bas, who with bestial rage seized a chair and felled Charlotte, who was standing, hands outstretched in horror, in a corner of the room. With incredible brutality he continued to strike her whilst she lay helpless on the ground. The shrieks of the women brought the neighbours rushing to the scene. A dentist who lived in the house lifted Marat, with the help of the concierge, and carried him to a bed where he applied a pad to the wound. A doctor was sent for in haste whilst a *commissaire* of police and several soldiers dragged Charlotte Corday into another room, where she was at once interrogated. From there she was taken to the prison of l'Abbaye, and after a ceaseless fire of questions which lasted until midnight she was once more conducted to the rue des Cordeliers surrounded by a detachment of National Guards, who literally fought all the way to keep the girl from being lynched by the frenzied mob. She was taken to the room where Marat was lying and confronted with the body. At sight of the loathsome thing Charlotte Corday could not repress a shudder, but drawing herself up proudly she exclaimed in a firm voice: "*Eh bien, oui*—I killed him!"

The next morning all Paris was in an uproar. Faction fought with faction, and the rumour spread like wildfire that the death of Marat was only the prelude to a general offensive by the counter-revolutionaries.

Charlotte Corday was believed by all to have been an emissary of the Girondin party. Déperret, whose address was found in Charlotte's room, was arrested as an accomplice, and with him many others. The National Assembly on July 14th and 15th resembled a meeting of lunatics, at which the various clans gave free reign to the most fantastic theories. The unhappy girl was ordered to be tried by a court solely formed of Marat's friends. It was decided that the body of their leader, for the nonce a martyr, was to be exposed at the Place du Théâtre Français with his wound uncovered, and a large sum was collected to buy an urn of agate, studded with precious stones, in which his embalmed heart was to be placed.

Fortunately the loathsome leprosy made the first part of the programme impossible, and he was buried at once in the garden of the Cordelier's club. His epitaph: "Here lies Marat—friend of the people—assassinated by the enemies of the people, July 13th, 1793," was typical of the moment, but it was soon cut from the gravestone.

Fouquier-Tinville, the terrible public prosecutor, hastened the day of Charlotte's trial with ferocious energy. Meanwhile the

poor girl was shut in a cell at the Abbaye prison, where two gendarmes watched her day and night. She tried in vain to obtain that women should replace these two men, but the fanatics who now disposed of her at will merely laughed when she spoke of her outraged womanhood. From her cell she wrote two last letters. One of them, to her father, ended with an epigram which has become a popular saying :

" It is the crime, not the scaffold, which matters, and I have committed no crime."

The other, sent to her judges, requested them to allow her portrait to be painted before she died, adding, with true insight into their mentality : " The people of France will wish to see what the creature looked like who deprived them of their gentle friend."

In reality she knew well that, more than any words, her beautiful features would convince future generations that she had acted from unselfish motives. Early in the morning on July 17th an immense and hostile crowd surged around the steps of the Palace of Justice, and the sound of their voices was like the roar of the sea in a vast cavern. Cries of " Death, death to the murderess ; death to the virago," burst from a thousand throats as the tumbril came to a halt. But instead of the hag, the fury with dishevelled hair and eyes aflame, whose image had obsessed their minds, there stepped from the vehicle a lovely girl, calm, pale and dignified, her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders in long, silky waves, her slender, perfect form moving with exquisite grace as she passed up the wide staircase, surrounded by gendarmes. A silence so intense that it came as a physical shock, suddenly swept over the massed ranks of men and women. Silently they stood aside to let her pass, and as silently, with wondering, dilated eyes, they followed into the vast courtroom, where the judges were already seated.

The president at once opened the proceedings with a stream of questions which were incredibly harsh and hostile. The replies of Charlotte, like so many aphorisms, caused the public to break again and again into loud cries of involuntary admiration.

" Who suggested that you should commit this murder ? " the presiding judge asked.

" The man himself and his atrocious crimes."

" Who inspired this hatred of Marat ? "

" I needed no man's inspiration—my own sufficed."

And so question and answer went on for several hours without

respite. At last the public prosecutor rose and demanded the death penalty. Chaveau-Legarde had accepted the difficult task of defending the brave girl, but he knew that a word too much might easily cause his own death, and only made a short speech. The jury then retired, but it was a mere farce, they returned at once and their verdict was guilty, whereupon the president pronounced the dread sentence of decapitation. Hardly had Charlotte made ready for her last few hours on earth, when the painter Hauer came and begged her to sit to him for that portrait which she had requested the tribunal to permit her to leave as a record of her passing. When he had finished his sketch and cut off a lock of hair for the colour, the executioner entered and pulled a scarlet blouse over the girl's dress and then tied her hands. Thus attired she walked proudly to the waiting tumbril, which at once rattled and bumped over the cobbles to the scaffold. A last ray of July sunshine broke through the clouds at that moment and struck full on the proud tragic figure, so calm and peaceful in the face of death. The vivid scarlet of her felon's dress enhanced the silken lustre of the hair which fell like a mantle to her waist, whilst her eyes stared straight into the sky, the mystic expression of a visionary in their depths. So beautiful was she that even the hideous hags who sat and knitted from morning till night at the foot of the grisly machine rose and crossed themselves; whilst many men knelt and prayed. Handsome Adam Lux, newly elected to the Convention, seeing Charlotte Corday thus, was invaded by a strange overwhelming passion for this fearless girl whose last minutes were flitting with the swiftness of the approaching night. Fascinated, as one walking in dreamland, he stumbled and pushed his way to the guillotine, and with the dropping of the knife he cried in a voice that pierced the brooding silence like a trumpet call:

"She was greater than Brutus."

Those words cost him his life. Two days later he was beheaded for having glorified a murderess.

As the red-handed executioner seized him he cried: "I die for Charlotte Corday, but I shall not be the last, and a day will come when her name will symbolise France!"

And so it was, for to-day the French Republic is represented by a woman wearing a Phrygian bonnet, whom the people call Marianne, in souvenir of Marie Anne Charlotte Corday.

THE NECKLACE AND THE CARDINAL

A PREFACE TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

MEEK and servile to the glittering haughty galaxy of kings and nobles, and patient in their rags through long, lean hungry centuries, were the people of France. From force of habit and hereditary training even the mud which bespattered them, as gaudy carriages of courtiers and courtesans thundered over the cobbled streets from Paris to Versailles, seemed to them almost a favour to be coveted. What mattered it if sometimes a child of the poor was ground under the wheels. It was the *King's* highway, and plebians had no right to be there. Such humility and submission can hardly be conceived to-day, and the perusal of the ancient documents and diaries is more terrible by far than the most brutal narrative of the fierce upheaval which followed, when at last the people rebelled and swept away the secular regime in a tidal wave of blood. Many are the causes assigned to this sudden revulsion of feeling which unleashed the red terror of the revolution. Hunger, misery, the teachings of Voltaire and Rousseau, and the slow but inevitable march of civilisation—all these were no doubt so many contributing factors, but alone they were insufficient and lacked cohesion. The mine was ready, had been ready indeed for years, but it needed the vital spark. And this spark, which at last ignited the fuse, was merely an incredibly audacious fraud to possess a diamond necklace; although conceived by an adventuress who merits to stand alone in history. It was the bitter contempt for the royal dupes this fraud of the necklace awakened in the minds of the people, that at last opened their eyes to the frailty of that shimmering edifice of pomp and ceremony which for centuries had protected their heartless and profligate masters and upheld them on a fragile pedestal.

It may appear absurd to affirm that the French revolution was caused by the theft of a mere bauble, a string of precious stones, yet psychologists will readily admit that such an absurdity is truly human. Until then the King and Queen had seemed akin

to demi-gods. Whenever they appeared in public a thousand soldiers of the King's guard, brave in their blue and silver uniforms, formed a double hedge outside the exquisite gates of the Versailles palace and prevented the people from approaching too closely. Five hundred Swiss stood to the salute, trumpets blared, and gaily caparisoned postilions mounted the superb horses which drew the gilded royal coach ; whilst nobles, whose resounding titles caused the populace to speak of them with awe, followed the reigning monarch in their own glittering carriages, obedient apparently to his slightest wish. All this created a feeling of reverence among the masses and was in truth a protective armour. Thus, when the scandal so thoughtlessly provoked by honest but impulsive Louis XVI suddenly rent this legend of superiority to shreds and showed both King and Queen to be as human and vulnerable as any plebian, those agitators who posed as dispensers of liberty, equality, and justice suddenly acquired a new power. Insulting pamphlets and ribald songs deriding Marie Antoinette, who in truth loved the people and wished them well, suddenly became popular. And thus at last, brutally and inevitably, the whole artificial edifice came toppling to the ground.

Yet it is difficult to understand how the plot conceived to steal the necklace could ever have duped a Prince of the Church, for it was incredibly crude. But then, never in the history of France was there a period when superstition, credulity, and, above all, a pose which demanded that nothing be taken seriously, so completely possessed all minds. Whilst in England the sombre Puritans, even when they jested, did so morosely ; in Paris, during the reign of beautiful Marie Antoinette, the people laughed and joked at death itself. All feeling and sentiment were considered unseemly, and nothing but absurdities taken seriously.

I envy the screen its facility for depicting the leading characters at the outset of a story, for those who played the principal parts in the tragedy of the necklace were truly unique.

First, then, Joseph Balsamo, an Italian by birth, who, after residing many years in the East, suddenly sprang into prominence as the Count de Cagliostro, Grand Master of the Rosy Cross, magician, hypnotist, alchemist and clairvoyant. L'Abbé Beugnot described him as a short, squat fellow, speaking a horrible jargon of Italian, French, Arabic, and unknown tongues—probably his own invention. He asserted that he had discovered the elixir of life ; possessed the formula of a glowing red liquid which rejuvenated ; could cause diamonds to increase in size ;



Countess de la Motte, who, by extraordinary cunning stole the famous necklace.



A bust of the magician Cagliostro.
(Reproduced by the courtesy of M. Franck Brentan





On the left Queen Marie Antoinette, and on the right the girl who impersonated her at the secret meeting with the infatuated Cardinal de Rohan.

transmuted mercury into gold ; foretold the future, and held converse with angels and demons. His wife—also an Italian—was, according to historians, of such extraordinary beauty that for the peace of all men she could only appear veiled. Legend has it also that, although a wife, she had remained a maiden, because her purity conferred upon Cagliostro the power to enter the spirit-world at will.

Then there was Jeanne de Valois. As a child she ran after the coaches on the Paris highway, repeating the sempiternal refrain : " Alms, I beseech you, alms, for in my veins flows the blood of the Valois, once Kings of France."

A patrician, the Comtess de Boulainvilliers, was so taken by the girl's beauty that she at once made enquiries, and upon learning that the pathetic appeal was no mere formula and that the child was actually a lineal descendant of the once puissant house of the Valois, she placed the beggar-maid in a convent, where she remained for many years. But her adventurous spirit yearned for freedom, she succeeded in escaping and not long after married a handsome young captain of gendarmes, named de la Motte, who, at the suggestion of his scheming wife, ennobled himself and became the Count de la Motte. The pseudo Countess was devoured by ambition. By hook or by crook she would enter the royal household. A heartless spendthrift and utterly devoid of moral principles, she decided that the illustrious Prince de Rohan, Cardinal and Grand Almoner of France, should be the lever wherewith to attain wealth and position, and, when the opportunity came, involved him ruthlessly in her schemes.

The Cardinal de Rohan was undoubtedly the most complex personality of the tale. His motto was :

> " King I cannot be,
> Prince care not to be
> Rohan I am."

Young, handsome, rich, and, although a Prince of the Church, thoroughly frivolous and a libertine, he incurred the hatred of the austere Empress of Austria, mother of Marie Antoinette, whilst he was Ambassador of France at Vienna. This hatred of a narrow-minded woman, the imp of the perverse made the pivot of the play.

When de Rohan was forced to abdicate his post as Ambassador at the Viennese Court in favour of his political rival Breteuil, family influence compelled the King to accept him as Grand Almoner of France ; but he soon discovered that Marie Antoinette

had received peremptory letters from her mother, and already shared her dislike for his charming and light-hearted manners.

Louis XVI, who adored the Queen and saw only with her eyes, received de Rohan very coldly upon his return to Paris, whilst she even refused to grant him an interview. Deeply chagrined, and more than half in love with his beautiful sovereign, the Cardinal became obsessed with the desire to regain her favour. It was at this juncture that the fame of the magician Cagliostro attracted de Rohan, who, although clever in the superficial dilettante manner of the period, was extremely credulous. With consummate skill Cagliostro avoided the Cardinal in order to enhance his renown. When de Rohan sent a servant to him with a request for an interview, Cagliostro curtly refused to receive the Prince. This produced the desired effect and de Rohan actually called in person.

There is a letter in the archives, written by de Rohan to the Baronne d'Oberkirch as follows :

You ask what I can see in that charlatan, my dear friend? He is no charlatan, but the greatest man who has ever appeared on this earth. I have on my little finger a ring valued at twenty thousand livres. The gold of which it is fashioned was obtained in my presence by transmuting an ounce of mercury; and the stone, a superb diamond, was crystallised from a drop of his precious elixir. That liquid alone would set him high above any mortal, for by its magical properties Cagliostro has conquered time. This strange being was the intimate companion of Christ seventeen hundred years ago, and his wisdom has accumulated through the centuries. Sophie, a servant of the Comtesse de Varennes, drank the contents of a phial which Cagliostro sent her and which was to change the Comtess from a woman of fifty to a girl of twenty-five. Although Sophie was thirty when she drank the fluid she instantly became a child of five. Madame de Varennes informed me that it was a most curious thing to see the metamorphosis.

From this it will be gathered that the credulity of the Prince de Rohan was fantastic and childish. He was a fitting victim for the unscrupulous de la Motte, and his mad desire to regain favour at Court caused him to meet her half-way. Jeanne de la Motte had tried vainly to attract the attention of the Queen. Twice she had fallen to the ground in simulated convulsions just as Marie Antoinette was leaving the palace, but each time an excited crowd had surged around her, desirous to succour the apparently fainting woman, and completely screened her from the royal gaze. But

the " Countess " was not easily discouraged. To all her friends she related that the Queen had been so touched by her pitiable condition that she had insisted on seeing her carried into the palace, where ladies-in-waiting tended and restored her. Before she left, Marie Antoinette had also visited and comforted her. In order to make this tale more plausible, Jeanne began to go daily to Versailles in a hired coach, for which of course she did not pay. There still exists the half of a police report stating that she lunched and dined regularly for eight sous in a tavern kept by Master Carnot, subsisting on watery soup and beans. On her return to Paris she would relate with extraordinary vivacity that she had spent the day as the Queen's guest, enumerating the wonderful dishes that had been specially prepared for her delectation. So extraordinary was her facile imagination that little by little it came to be firmly believed that Jeanne Comtesse de la Motte was become the intimate friend and adviser of the Dauphine. Meanwhile husband and wife were hard put to it to live at all. Their rent was only paid by countless tricks and expedients, some of which were so shady that the police began to keep the couple under observation. The husband's scanty pay barely sufficed for his frills and fancies, and food was only obtained by changing their butcher and baker as credit with each one in turn was exhausted. It became necessary at last for Madame de la Motte to seek that generous assistance which a beautiful woman could find easily enough among the glittering cavaliers of the period. The young Comte de Beugnot, advocate in Parliament, proved his admiration of the facile Countess by paying some of the more clamorous creditors, but among the many wooers he was perhaps the only one who did not become her dupe. In his memoirs, which fortunately still exist, he described Jeanne somewhat satirically :

" Madame de la Motte was small and slim, but possessed a figure free from blemish. Blue eyes, admirable eyebrows and a lovely complexion were her principal charms, and her mouth, albeit somewhat large, was a carmine setting for perfect teeth. Hélas ! that she should have been entirely wanting in that education so necessary to a lady. Fortunately, although she was deficient in learning, nature had amply endowed her with the most extraordinary cunning. A scheming female, devoid of principles, she possessed the dangerous gift of persuasion, and had certainly been a stranger to truth since birth."

This then was the woman who in 1784 succeeded in making the acquaintance of the Grand Almoner of France, who at that time was concerned with only one thing : how to combat the open hostility of the young Queen and gain her goodwill. Jeanne de la

Motte instantly realised that the broad path to wealth had opened before her. Much too clever to speak of her fictitious friendship with Marie Antoinette to the Cardinal, she prepared a subtle *mise-en-scène.* Thanks to various important sums of money obtained from the Grand Almoner, *for the poor,* Mme de la Motte had moved to a comfortable apartment in the rue St. Gilles and and appointed one of her husband's friends named Rétaud de Villette as her secretary. De Villette was an adroit penman and could counterfeit the dainty hand of a woman to perfection. One day, whilst Jeanne was visiting de Rohan, de Villette called, dressed in sombre silk, and handed her a letter written on fine linen paper, with the three lilies of France in one corner.

Breaking the royal seal, which had been stolen by Jeanne when alone for a moment in the study of M. de Nolhac, she let the letter slip from her fingers. The Cardinal retrieved it with a courtly bow, but a rapid glance had shown him that it was signed "Marie Antoinette de France." The Countess read the letter, and making a grimace she begged de Rohan to excuse her as the Queen wished to consult her immediately. This audacious comedy produced the desired effect. The Cardinal had never seen the Queen's handwriting, nor did he remember that she never signed "Marie Antoinette de France" but merely her name. Here apparently was an intimate friend of his sovereign and one who could plead for him.

Thereafter not a day passed without some further proof that Mme de la Motte was indeed the ardently-desired mediator. Cagliostro, whom he at once consulted, was at first inclined to resent the intrusion of a rival, but when he attempted to belittle Jeanne he realised that his hostility was a false move and would probably estrange the Cardinal. Astute and unwilling to lose so generous a dupe, he thereupon staged a mystical séance in a room illuminated by one hundred candles, where, after endless formulas, incantations, and magical passes with a sword, he ordered his wife to read the omens in a bowl of crystal fluid. She thereupon declared that she saw the Cardinal kneeling before the throne, and Mme de la Motte holding his hand. Rohan hesitated no longer, and the following day he begged the adventuress to intercede for him with the Queen. Now ensued a long and amazing correspondence between the Cardinal, and, as he imagined, Marie Antoinette. His letters, laboriously composed and full of respect and devotion, were read by Jeanne, her husband, and de Villette and then destroyed. Letter after letter was written in reply to his missives by the adroit secretary, and brought to the Cardinal by his sympathetic friend the Countess, who insisted upon burning

them immediately after their perusal. These bogus letters from his sovereign increased in warmth as time went on, but gave many reasons why, as yet, she could not receive the Cardinal openly. The King was still hostile—there were political enemies who would make trouble for her in Vienna—and so forth. Finally, the Cardinal became impatient. Since the Queen dared to write, surely she could receive him. Jeanne perceived that something must be done to weld the Cardinal to her and efface all doubt from his mind. An interview had to be staged. The daring woman resolved to find someone who could play the part of Marie Antoinette, and as usual luck was with her.

The husband, frivolous and libertine as most of the gallants of that time, had encountered a young seamstress in the gardens of the Palais Royal, whose resemblance to the Queen was extraordinary. Her name was Mlle Nicole le Guet. She had the same aureole of golden hair, the same figure, the broad brow, and the vivacious manner so characteristic of Marie Antoinette; furthermore, she was incredibly simple, not to say stupid. De la Motte introduced her to his wife, who at once set to work to flatter and cajole her. Le Guet was too plebian a name, so she endowed her with a title, and simple Nicole became the Baronne d'Oliva, the anagram of Valois. When the girl's head was thus completely turned, Jeanne abruptly proposed to give her fifteen thousand francs if she would go at night with de Villette to the palace gardens at Versailles and hand a rose to a cavalier with the words: "You realise what this means."

Then, as Nicole still hesitated, she added: "It is a great secret, but you will also oblige my friend the Queen." So it was arranged. Jeanne informed the delighted Cardinal that although, for the time being, she could not reinstate him publicly, Marie Antoinette would meet him two nights hence near the statue of Venus in the Versailles gardens. As proof of her friendship she would give him a rose.

A dress had already been made, which, although the unsuspicious girl did not know it, was a copy of the flowing white gown in which the famous artist, Mme Vigée Lebrun, had painted the Dauphine, and which had caused such a sensation at the Art Exhibition in 1783. After the plotters had enjoyed a succulent dinner, ordered in advance at a *traiteur* in Versailles, and drunk many bottles of Burgundy, Nicole was dressed, and her hair brushed and curled fashionably. Towards midnight Rétaud de Villette, Jeanne de la Motte, her husband, and Nicole enveloped in a long dark cloak and carrying a superb rose, set out for the Royal gardens, which, since the death of Louis XV, remained open all

night. There was only a crescent moon, and the paths under the trees were in shadow. When they arrived at the statue of the goddess Venus, Nicole, much to her astonishment, was left standing alone, dressed only in her white gown. She felt cold and extremely nervous, and was about to seek her companions when a heavy step crunched on the gravel—doubtless the nobleman to whom she was to hand the rose. In her agitation she let it fall. The Cardinal was quite as perturbed as the girl, for he was convinced, at sight of the characteristic dress and golden cloud of hair, that the Queen had actually kept her tryst. He instantly dropped to one knee, kissed the hem of Nicole's gown and, picking up the rose, began to pour out his respect and devotion in a passionate speech. The girl tried vainly to remember the line she had been taught to say, but could only murmur unintelligible words. At that instant, Rétaud de Villette, who was listening, appeared suddenly and cried in simulated alarm: "Your Majesty—quick—here comes Madame d'Artois!"

The Cardinal at once rushed off and Nicole was hurried away. But the scene had been more impressive than the conspirators thought. The gloom, the mystery, the sudden appearance of the same man who had once brought Jeanne a letter from the Queen, instead of awakening doubts in the mind of de Rohan convinced him that his dearest wish had been granted and that the Queen of France at last looked upon him with favour. No doubt the inconceivable audacity of the scheme and the man's vanity both made for success, nor did Jeanne commit the mistake of accepting any reward. De Rohan later admitted that he did not question the sincerity of the Countess, a descendant of the Valois, for it seemed that she had nothing to gain by any deception.

The time had come, thought Jeanne, to reap what she had sown. First she brought the Cardinal a letter in the now familiar writing. The Queen was in need of one hundred thousand *livres*, for which she did not wish to apply to the King. Without hesitation de Rohan handed over the money, flattered that he should be chosen for such a service. The ease with which this sum was obtained emboldened Mme de la Motte, and she would probably have repeated the operation, when the opportunity to obtain at one blow enough money to enable them all to seek safety abroad presented itself unexpectedly. Truth to tell the conspirators knew that any day some unforeseen mishap might bring ruin and punishment, and they were prepared to flee at a moment's notice. Boehmer and Bassange, a famous firm of jewellers, had fashioned a necklace of the finest diamonds, which they had intended to offer to Louis XV for his favourite, Mme du Barry. The death of the

wanton King had come too soon, and the necklace, valued at nearly two million francs, a huge sum at that time, was unsaleable. They had offered it in vain to the King of Spain, and later, when all France was mad with joy at the birth of the ill-fated Dauphin, they attempted to persuade Louis XVI to buy the trinket for Marie Antoinette. The King had appeared willing enough, but his wife refused it with the words :

" Two millions, that is the price of two battleships. We need them more than diamonds ! "

All this Mme de la Motte learned through a fellow named Laporte, who had vainly tried to earn the commission offered by Boehmer and Bassange to anyone able to sell the necklace for them. With no definite plan as yet, Jeanne visited the jewellers on December 29th, 1784, and requested them to show her the famous gems. One look was enough, those diamonds should belong to her by hook or by crook. The Cardinal had gone to Strasbourg, and this gave Jeanne time to mature her scheme. On January 21st, 1785 she again called on the partners and announced that she had probably discovered a buyer for the necklace.

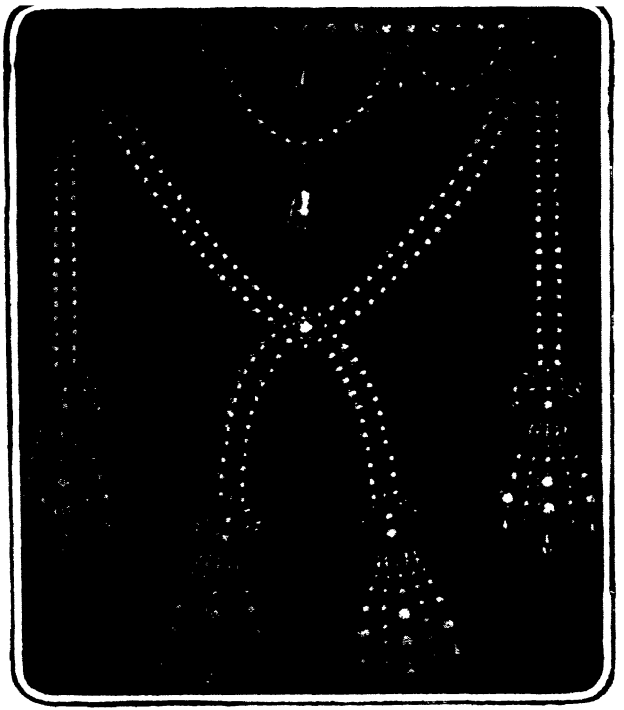
" He is a great nobleman, and desires to discuss the transaction with you in person. I do not wish to have anything to do with the matter. In fact, I prefer that my name should not even be mentioned." When, a few days later, the Cardinal returned to Paris, she informed him that Marie Antoinette ardently coveted the jewels, but that the King was unwilling to buy them. Not wishing to offend her husband, she had also feigned to refuse when the jewellers publicly offered her the necklace. Nevertheless, she had decided to acquire it and pay the price out of her private income. Since it was important that no one should guess at the truth, a trusted emissary was necessary, who would keep her secret and who was in a position to negotiate with the jewellers on her behalf. On the advice of her friend Jeanne de la Motte, the Queen had come to the conclusion that de Rohan was the ideal intermediary, and as proof Jeanne showed the Cardinal another of those pretty letters purporting to be from Marie Antoinette, which Rétaud de Villette now wrote with ease. This time de Rohan hesitated. Before deciding, he would interview his counsellor, the magician Cagliostro. Unfortunately there is no document nor any real proof in existence to show whether Cagliostro and Madame de la Motte now became accomplices. At the trial Jeanne accused the magician ; but then she also accused everyone else. It is more than probable that the wise Italian realised that in truth the Cardinal had already made up his mind and that to prophesy or counsel adversely would be tactless.

At any rate, another mystical performance was arranged. Incantations, incense and the perfumed vapours of two hundred wax tapers created an atmosphere at once propitious and intoxicating. The virgin wife appeared in a white dress fringed with silver, a huge golden sun embroidered on the front, and when she had succumbed to the hypnotic passes of the master mummer, the Cardinal—heedless of his vows to the Church—meanwhile kneeling at her feet, she proclaimed in a musical chant that she saw the throne once more and on the right of the King sat Marie Antoinette, a wonderful necklace glittering on her ceremonial robes.

This was sufficient. On January 24th de Rohan called on the jewellers and examined the gems, and on the 29th Boehmer and Bassange came to the Cardinal's palace and signed the agreement, according to which one million six hundred thousand francs were to be paid in four half-yearly instalments. The first became due in August, but the necklace was to be delivered on February 1st. It was the Cardinal himself who drafted the agreement and gave it to Mme de la Motte with the request that she should obtain the Queen's signature and approval. This time the daring adventuress hesitated. It was dangerous enough to forge letters which were immediately destroyed, but to imitate the royal signature on a document which could be produced at any moment, and which stipulated the payment of a sum equivalent to a million pounds sterling to-day, meant death at least if the perpetrators of the monstrous fraud were discovered. But now it was impossible to draw back. Once again Rétaud de Villette set to work. He wrote the word "approved" in his mincing hand beside every clause, and signed "Marie Antoinette de France." How it was that de Rohan did not know the Queen never added "de France," has never been explained, but neither he nor the jewellers raised any objection, and the necklace was given to the Cardinal. Mme de la Motte insisted that he should be present when it was delivered. She invited him to her apartment, in the rue St. Gilles, and when he was safely hidden behind a curtain the same young man who had already twice appeared as emissary of the Dauphine, entered and handed her a letter with the words—"From the Queen."

This letter she passed to the Cardinal ensconced behind the curtains. In it Marie Antoinette apparently requested that the necklace should be given to her servant. Thereupon the foolish Churchman parted with the jewels, convinced that they would be carried at once to his sovereign.

An hour later Jeanne, her husband, and Rétaud de Villette,



The famous necklace, from a drawing by the jewellers, Boehmer and Bassange, who made it for a king's favourite.



Prince de Rohan, Cardinal and Grand Almoner of France, who fell in love with Marie Antoinette and bought the necklace for her.

(Reproduced by the courtesy of M. Emile Bremond)

locked in a tiny room with closed shutters, were brutally prising diamond after diamond from their settings until a glittering heap of crystallised rainbows shimmered on the table in the candle-light. Stuffing a huge handful in his pocket, de Villette sallied forth to transform the pebbles into golden louis. At the outset he met with trouble. The dealers and Jews of the Paris Ghetto, to whom he offered them at absurd prices, took fright. No one would sell gems of the purest water, the least of which weighed eight carats, for only a fraction of their value, unless they were stolen.

On February 12th a merchant named Adan called at the police station of Montmartre and informed the inspector on duty that a certain de Villette had been going the rounds of all the dealers in precious stones, his pockets bulging with diamonds. Rétaud was arrested ; but since no theft had been reported, his tale that he was selling them for a great lady at Court was believed —for such things were not uncommon then—and he was released. He at once fled to Switzerland. The adventure frightened Jeanne. She sent her husband to England with most of the remaining stones. There he met John O'Neill, an Irishman, and was introduced to Father Bartholomew McDermott, who spoke French fluently. The confession of McDermott in the archives is a precious document. On the advice of the priest he visited Robert and William Gray, jewellers in New Bond Street, and Nathanial Jeffries of Piccadilly. Both were witnesses at the trial, and identified the diamonds by means of a drawing of the necklace sent to them later by Boehmer. The English dealers were even then suspicious, and communicated with the French Embassy, but since no news of a theft had come to their ears they also believed the story of a Court intrigue and bought stones to the value of £250,000. A number of gems was left with them by de la Motte to be set in rings and scarf-pins for his own use. Others were exchanged for the most absurd trifles such as snuff-boxes, pearl necklaces, a carving knife and fork, asparagus dishes and candlesticks.

In Paris Jeanne also sold many diamonds in separate lots and paid most of her debts with the smaller stones.

Then began an orgy of crazy buying. Riches easily acquired are easily spent. The Cardinal was sent on a mission by means of another "Royal Command" ; and when at the beginning of June de la Motte returned from England, horses, carriages, furniture, silks and satins, marble statues and priceless table-ware, began to transform the plotters' house in the rue St. Gilles and their newly acquired country seat at Bar-sur-Aube, into another Aladdin's

Palace. Tessier—the famous decorator of the rue St. Louis, was kept busy a month. Gervais, Fournier, and Hericourt, whose arts were then the fashion, furnished the rooms. Chevalier was chosen for the marble and alabaster, and Sikes for the crystals, mirrors, glasses and vases. The bed of Mme de la Motte alone cost one hundred thousand francs. Three months after the gigantic fraud, husband and wife arrived at Bar-sur-Aube in their pearl-grey chaise, drawn by eight horses. On the panels was a crest and the motto *Rege ab avo sanguinem, nomen et lilia.* (From the King I inherit my blood, my name and the lilies.) The amazing Jeanne seemed to think that a necklace worth a King's ransom would be found again as soon as the proceeds of the first were scattered, for in a short time only a small sum was left. Not once did she look back on the days when as a ragged beggar-maid she ran after the coaches crying: "Alms, I beseech you, for in my veins is the royal blood of the Valois."

Meanwhile the poor Cardinal waited in vain for a letter of thanks from the Queen. He had requested one of his friends to describe the manner in which the Queen wore the necklace, but no report came from the friend. The jewellers, too, called on de Rohan and expressed their astonishment that Marie Antoinette did not wear the jewels.

He suggested that they should write and thank her for her royal patronage. This they did, and a draft of the letter is as follows:

Madame,

We are happy to think that the arrangements we made at your request pleased you. We are and shall always be your devoted servants and are delighted that the most beautiful ornament of gems in the world belongs to the most beautiful of Queens.

This obscure letter was handed to Marie Antoinette just at the moment—such are the wiles of destiny—when the Grand Chancellor entered. The jewellers withdrew in haste and the Queen did not break the seal until the Chancellor had gone. Puzzled by the strange missive she gave it to Madame Campan, her reader, who made neither head nor tail of it. The Queen thereupon disdainfully tore it to shreds. This foolish act was afterwards cited against her by the people as proof that she knew of the shady transaction and was in fact a party to it. The date of the first payment was now not far away. Mme de la Motte had discovered that Saint James, Treasurer of the Navy, had advanced

nearly a million francs to Boehmer and Bassange to enable them to buy the stones for the necklace. Monsieur Saint James was a great admirer of Cagliostro and of Mesmer, the discoverer of mesmerism. Like all his kind he was ambitious and had hoped that the trinket intended for Mme du Barry would help him to greater favour with Louis XV. Jeanne at once visited Cagliostro and suggested that he should invite Saint James to a mystic séance and inform him that the Queen was short of money and that he must wait. But this time Cagliostro, who certainly had his suspicions, refused to co-operate. Mme de la Motte thereupon carried another bogus letter to the Cardinal, in which Marie Antoinette " de France " requested him to inform the jewellers that they must wait until October, when she would pay two instalments. At last the Cardinal began to feel vaguely uneasy. He asked Saint James, who was his friend, to lend him 400,000 *livres*. The latter refused with the words : " I have already advanced twice that amount to Boehmer and Bassange."

It speaks highly for the fearless spirit of Mme de la Motte that at this juncture she did not simply disappear. Instead, she sent the following message to the jewellers : " You have been swindled. The agreement is a forgery. See the Cardinal at once. He is rich enough to pay you."

It was a master stroke which miscarried only because Boehmer and Bassange feared to affront the Prince de Rohan. Brutally faced with the alternative of a great loss or a terrible scandal, the Cardinal would certainly have paid the jewellers, since his credulity in believing that the Queen of France had actually met him at midnight in the palace gardens would be considered as *lèse majesté*, an offence then punished with death. Jeanne could thus have remained in undisturbed possession of her wealth. Unfortunately, the timid Boehmer preferred to seek an interview with the Queen. His request was not granted, for Marie Antoinette imagined that he still desired to persuade her to buy the necklace. But Boehmer succeeded in speaking to Mme Campan, who at once exclaimed : " You have been the victim of an adventuress. The Queen never had the jewels." Mme de la Motte believed that now at last the jewellers would go to the Cardinal, but again their cowardice brought her schemes to nought.

Yet she played her cards like the genius she was. That same evening she and her husband actually arrived at de Rohan's palace in the rue Vieille du Temple, and demanded his hospitality for the night, which he dared not refuse. Every move of the woman was calculated to embroil the Prince, until, hopelessly

compromised, he would have to pay and remain silent. A letter still in the archives shows that de Rohan was by now in a dreadful state of fear and doubt. He realised at last that he had been victimised, and when the couple left the next morning for Bar-sur-Aube he sent for Cagliostro and related the whole story. The magician for once acted promptly. Disdaining all pretence he said :

" Go immediately to the King, tell him what you have told me. He is your cousin and a kind-hearted man. Together you can bind the jewellers to secrecy. You must at all cost avoid a scandal ! "

" But if I do that Mme de la Motte will be beheaded," the good natured Cardinal replied, trembling at the thought.

" Choose—if you do not follow my advice, *you* will probably go to the scaffold."

Even with this alternative in view the Cardinal hesitated, and when at last he decided to act, the matter had passed out of his hands. Jeanne de la Motte was more energetic ; Rétaud de Villette, who had returned to Paris, was at once sent abroad, and her husband fled to England. She with superb courage elected to remain, and spent a whole night burning documents and letters. Only the royal seal which she had stolen, was later discovered buried in the garden. Meanwhile the Queen had been informed of the interview with the jeweller by her confidante, Mme Campan. She at once sent a peremptory letter to Boehmer, which he received on August 8th. Questioned at length, he related how he had been tricked and wrote out a full account for the King. Unhappily, her dislike of the Cardinal blinded Marie Antoinette to the consequences of a scandal which would inevitably besmirch all concerned. She persuaded the King to act without consulting his ministers. August 15th, Festival of the Assumption, was also the fête of the Queen. The Court, the nobility and the half of Paris had gathered at Versailles at an early hour. The Cardinal de Rohan, as Grand Almoner of France, was already robed in purple and bedecked with his pontificial emblems, since he was to officiate at high mass. Suddenly a messenger appeared and summoned him to the King's presence. With Louis XVI were the Queen, his political enemy Breteuil, and his friend Miromesnil. Open on the table was the jeweller's report.

" My cousin," said the King, " what is this tale of a necklace bought in the name of the Queen ? "

De Rohan, pale as death, tried to reply but could not, so great was the shock. At last he stammered :

"Sire—I realise—I have been tricked—but I intended no evil."

"In that case explain. You need not fear."

Like a trapped animal de Rohan gazed wildly around. He saw the King, calm but determined. Miromesnil looked anywhere but at his friend, Breteuil's face exuded triumph and the Queen's regard blazed with hatred and outraged pride. His silence was so poignant with anguish that the King said gently:

"Very well, if you cannot speak, sit down and write out a full statement"—and he left the Churchman alone. When he returned de Rohan handed him a hastily written explanation of the manner in which Mme de la Motte had tricked him.

"Where is this woman?" the King demanded.

"Sire, I do not know."

"And the necklace, is it in your possession?"

"Sire, the woman has it, but I have the bills of exchange, signed by someone who imitated the Queen's hand."

For a moment the King hesitated and the future of France hung in the balance. It was still possible to arrange matters in secret, and perhaps had this been done the terrible revolution would never have swept the throne. At that predestined instant Marie Antoinette, who had remained in an adjoining room, burst into tears. She could not forgive the Prince for having actually dared to believe that she had met him clandestinely. Her sobs galvanised Louis XVI into natural but ill-advised action. With a loud voice he cried:

"Arrest the Cardinal!"

To the astonishment of the waiting people—the hour for grand mass was long past—the Grand Almoner of France suddenly appeared on the steps of the palace between two guards. At the moment of entering the coach which was to conduct him to the Bastille he was able to whisper to his secretary, l'Abbé Georgel: "Burn all my papers!"

With terrible brutality blow followed upon blow. Cagliostro and his wife were arrested and also taken to the Bastille. Mme de la Motte was captured at Bar-sur-Aube. The unfortunate Nicole le Guet, who had been sent to Belgium, was brought back, and Rétaud de Villette was arrested in Geneva. Only the husband succeeded in hiding in Ireland and was never caught. In his possession was all that was left of the famous necklace.

Now began a merciless triangular battle. On one side the King and the many enemies of the puissant de Rohan family; massed against them and blind with rage at the unpardonable insult offered to their name were the Soubise, de Rohan and

Lorraine and the powerful friends of the Cardinal; whilst the people surged from clan to clan, as the frenzied agitators swayed them. The populace had realised at last that their idols were frail, fickle, and vulnerable as themselves.

Too late Vergennes, the King's confidant, said:

"Sire, you cannot cast a stone into mud without bespattering yourself."

For days and nights excited crowds thronged the streets, just as ready to cheer as to howl, and already like a sombre shadow the dread guillotine towered above the gates of the future. The blood-soaked events of 1793, when King Louis XVI returned from his trial at the Temple as simple Louis Capet, and not long after mounted the steps of the scaffold, soon to be followed by beautiful Marie Antoinette, were slowly crystallising in the mould of fate.

As though the King were bewitched, instead of making use of his royal prerogative to judge the offenders himself, he allowed de Rohan to appear before judges nominated by Parliament, and thus gave the enemies of the royal house the opportunity they had long sought.

Saint Just, who later lost his own life at the hands of a rabble drunken with blood, cried to the crowds assembled in every street: "Good news, citizens. Liberty shall soon come for all. Down with the wasters. You see the worth of the throne and the cross. They are just common thieves."

The letter which the jewellers had sent and to which the Queen had not replied because she did not understand it, was regarded as a proof of her complicity. Thus with regrettable fracas came the day of a trial unique in history, when sixty-four judges were assembled to judge six people.

Mme de la Motte was led in first. She twisted and changed her methods according to the witnesses, but one and all were insulted and accused of complicity by this extraordinary woman, who, when nothing else would serve, simply fainted. It was only when naïve Nicole and snarling Villette related the parts they had played that she broke down. She was sentenced to be whipped, to be branded with the letter V (*voleuse*, thief) on one shoulder, and to life-long imprisonment. Mme Cagliostro was acquitted. The magician invoked his demons and angels and swept the judges from their seats in a torrent of French, Italian and Arabic which lasted six hours. Finally, he too was declared to have been merely an innocent if careless party to the fraud. Nicole le Guet softened all hearts by her pretty ways. Her advocate obtained her acquittal without difficulty. Rétaud de

Villette was merely banished. His confession and that of Nicole cleared the Cardinal of complicity in the theft of the necklace, but not of *lèse majesté*. Thus one by one the smaller fry were cleared from the stage and the real battle between the Queen and the Cardinal began.

When de Rohan entered, every judge rose and saluted him. In a clear sonorous voice and with simple frankness he recounted the whole fantastic story. Meanwhile outside the court the rabble sang ribald songs, and yelled insults, whilst pamphlets and obscene engravings provoked laughter or cries of indignation, for all Paris was divided into clans. On March 31st the verdict ran like wildfire from street to street: Prince de Rohan was acquitted and held free from blame. At this the Queen's fury knew no bounds, for this decision was an insult to herself and the King.

The last and most poignant scene was when Jeanne de la Motte was publicly whipped and branded. So terrible were her struggles that the white-hot iron slipped and marked her on the breast. Thus apparently ended the scandal of the necklace. But in reality, nobility, royalty and Church had lost all prestige, and the revolution which swept them away may truly be said to have had its beginning from that moment.

THE AMAZING CAREER OF PIERRE COIGNARD

Escaped Galley Slave and Sometime Count de Pontis de Sainte Helene

Once at least in the life of every man opportunity, that fickle goddess, knocks at the door. Pierre Coignard possessed keen ears ; at the first timid rap he flung wide the portals and hurled himself into the whirlpool of destiny's warring forces. Had it not been for the queer twist in his brain, which made everything but continuous excitement, unceasing parry and thrust, and constant danger seem unworthy of his astounding audacity, he might have risen to the " Maréchals baton." Instead, free for a time from the torture of the chain gang, he preferred to live a life of unparalleled adventure such as Napoleon himself could not equal. Then abruptly, in one hour, the whole unstable edifice he had builded collapsed, and the galleys claimed him again.

Vidocq, around whose name a fantastic legend has grown, mentions Pierre Coignard in his memoirs and describes the long battle of wits which culminated in the capture of the handsome and reckless adventurer, who succeeded in attaining the rank of a Lieutenant-Colonel and for thirty years successfully imposed upon all, usurping the title and honours of the defunct Count de Pontis de Sainte Helene. By a queer coincidence Vidocq had also begun life as a dangerous, reckless adventurer. He was sent innumerable times to prison, and even twice riveted to the dreadful *Chiourme,* the chain gang of French convicts, but succeeded in escaping in every instance. He too would doubtless have ended his days in one of the penal fortresses had he not adroitly taken advantage of the incapacity of the regular police to cope efficiently with the cunning criminals of their day. Tired of being hunted ceaselessly, this amazing man one day entered the office of M. Henry, chief of police, and with an impudent leer exclaimed : " Your agents are hopeless, monsieur ! See—they seek me everywhere, yet I am here—in your private

room. I am Vidocq!" Then, as the startled official rose in alarm, the outlaw added: "Have no fear, I am come to offer you my services in return for a pardon. I know all the wiles and tricks of thieves. Make me your auxiliary—chief of a brigade of detectives whom I will select—and I promise you that within a year law and order shall triumph."

M. Henry was speechless with astonishment, but the suggestion came opportunely and the incredible bargain was concluded on the spot. Vidocq was placed in command of a special "Brigade de Sûreté," and from that time dates the contemptuous saying: "Set a thief to catch a thief."

Naturally therefore Vidocq, when relating his encounter with that formidable adventurer Pierre Coignard, had all a former felon's disdain for such a trifle as truth. I have found it necessary to verify every one of his reports in the police archives, and to reject those which were not corroborated, although until now most of them have been generally accepted as true by the public.

Pierre Coignard, then, was born at Langeais in 1776. His father was a saddler and esteemed by all in the village. Pierre was the eldest of six boys. Three of these, since they remained honest and laborious, have nothing to do with this story, but Louis and Alexandre followed the leadership of Pierre and equalled him in criminal instincts, although they did not possess his superb audacity and unshakable optimism. The sedition and lawlessness which preceded the French revolution gave the three brothers many opportunities to satisfy their craving for wild deeds, and they were able at an early age to develop their talents for pillage and thefts of every description. Pierre, a tall curly-haired youngster with flashing black eyes, to whom fear was unknown, first served as a soldier in the royal armies of Louis XVI; but regular service was not to his taste. Soldier thieves were severely punished, and when later the Normandy and Brittany peasants revolted and began that terrible guerilla warfare named the war of the Chouans—he at once entered their ranks. Thus he gathered a considerable experience of hand to hand fighting and ambuscades, and by leading small independent skirmishes increased the natural aptitude for command which served him so well in later years. His polished manners, acquired heaven knows how, his handsome features and soldierly bearing, gained for him the protection and friendship of the Count and Countess Martausier. He became their permanent guest, and with his extraordinary powers of assimilation was soon able to ape the speech and ways of a true aristocrat. He did not rob these kindly people *himself*, but gave his brother Louis an impress of the various



A French convict, sentenced to hard labour in the chain gang, undergoing the ordeal of having the iron collar round his neck riveted to the chain which secures him to a fellow-convict. It was the custom to admit the public to the prison courtyard in order that they might "enjoy" the spectacle.

locks in the house. Unfortunately, Louis was seen when escaping with the jewels of the Countess and a large sum in gold, and Pierre was again compelled to take to the road. His career at that time was one long series of daring frauds and thefts. His brother Louis was captured during one of their expeditions and sent to the galleys at Brest, but escaped and fled to Spain. Not long after, Pierre was also arrested and sentenced to fourteen years hard labour in the chain gangs, a pretty debut!

During his imprisonment at Bicètre, whilst waiting to be transferred to Toulon, Pierre Coignard attempted to regain his freedom, together with nine other convicts. Every morning from ten to eleven the prisoners were allowed to exercise in the court surrounding the main building. His keen eyes at once espied a hollow in the high and apparently unscaleable wall, the only barrier between him and the outer world. A stone had crumbled and fallen, leaving just enough room for a foot. By a lucky coincidence, above it, some five feet away, was a projecting angle. Pierre approached as near as he dared, since the warders observed every move of the prisoners, and he perceived that several agile men could assist each other to reach the broad summit, along which numerous sentries patrolled at night, sounding their monotonous refrain "We are keeping watch!" every fifteen minutes, according to regulations. The attempt, therefore, would have to be made at dusk, before these sentries came on duty. Pierre was an adept at picking locks, and he already possessed a stout iron hook. A week before the date fixed for the departure of the chain gang, at the moment when most of the warders were at their evening meal, Pierre emerged noiselessly from his cell. Only a few minutes were required to liberate the men he had chosen as companions. Before the single guard had time to sound the alarm he was knocked senseless and shut in the cell Pierre had occupied. The convicts reached the wall without trouble. Pierre was the first to gain the summit, where, hanging from his knees, he assisted the others to clamber to the ledge beside him. Already freedom was in sight when soldiers rushed towards them from all sides with loaded guns. This exploit nearly cost the chief warder his position. He was a cruel and vindictive fellow, and when Pierre was securely chained to a wooden beam he revenged himself by so belabouring him with a heavy stick that soon the unfortunate prisoner was nothing but a quivering mass of wounds. Although deep scars remained to remind him of the escapade, Pierre recovered and was sent to Toulon in 1802. There, chained by the right leg to an iron ring in the wall of his cell, he began his preparations for flight. It appeared impossible

that men so fettered could escape, but nevertheless they did, almost regularly each month. Every convict in these terrible fortress prisons had only one thought, one hope—which gave him the strength to withstand the misery, the beatings, and the cruel labour demanded of him—the possibility of flight. One and all when they arrived vowed to help each other, and those who escaped were bound by their oath to assist the unfortunates left behind. A powerful clandestine organisation had thus come into being. Means were always found to smuggle files and money into the prison, and the lucky prisoner whose turn it was to risk all in a desperate bid for freedom knew where he would find shelter, clothes and food, whilst hiding until the first hue and cry was past. Three years elapsed before an opportunity at last came for Pierre to make his escape. When lights were extinguished his chain was cut and dozens of willing hands helped him over the wall. A feigned revolt, timed to begin simultaneously, kept the guards busy elsewhere. Although the police searched for days he was not recaptured, and a month later crossed into Spain, where his brother Louis was already established. Notwithstanding the hardships he had undergone, Pierre Coignard was still a handsome, tall, and muscular man, of that type which has always attracted women. His voice was full and sonorous—his large black eyes glittered with a bold, alert, masterful light, and his truculent bearing was well calculated to inspire fear and respect. When after many miles of weary plodding he at last stood on Spanish soil, his gaze flickered over the smiling countryside with the easy assurance and smiling contempt of a man come to conquer a strange land. France and the chain gang lay behind, a new life waited not far away. Swinging jauntily along through fields and woods he came upon a young woman sitting at the foot of a gnarled ak. She was sobbing bitterly, her face sunk in her hands, but the shapely figure and silky hair attracted his attention. Pierre approached and asked the reason for her grief, expressing his willingness to assist her. At the sound of his voice the girl looked up and Pierre was astounded at the extraordinary beauty of the tear-stained face he now beheld.

"Alas, señor foreigner, there is nothing you can do—but thank you nevertheless," she replied in sonorous Spanish, which fortunately he understood, for he had learned the language from a fellow prisoner. Pierre Coignard stood fascinated, never had he beheld such a woman nor heard such music in a human voice. Perhaps his soul dimly sensed that he had met his mate—the being who was to share his good and evil fortune for all his days,

and who would cling to him, braving all because of her great love, faithful to the last. He sat down and with unusual gentleness wiped away two large tears still clinging to her long beautiful lashes.

"It would be strange," he said with a bitter laugh, "if I, who have known what it means to be one of the damned in hell, should encounter someone even unhappier. No, that is not possible! Whatever the cause of your tears, *ma belle*, I'll wager that in an hour you'll be smiling. Tell me your troubles."

"What is the use, señor? Besides, it would take too long."

"Never mind. Time is of no account, tell me——"

"Time *is* of account to me: I must reach the coast before night, I am travelling to France."

"That is strange. I have just left France—for ever I hope. Once more, I am eager to hear your story. I have an idea that I may perhaps be able to help you."

"If you insist, señor—then listen. It is now many years since I became the servant and confidante of a great nobleman, the Count de Pontis de Sainte Helene, a fugitive from the French revolution. He was a famous and valiant soldier and commanded a regiment in America. But the climate ruined his health. Since all his family were dead he settled down in Spain—there in that town you see in the valley. Alas, his health did not improve. Instead he became daily weaker, although I nursed him tenderly. And at last my master died. He was poor and left me only a few gold pieces and this iron box which I am taking to an old lady at Soissons, the only person left alive who knew him, he said. It appears that in it are important family papers, which he guarded jealously. So now that I am alone again, perhaps in return for these papers the lady will help me to find work. I am easily satisfied, so long as I have food and shelter I shall not require more."

"You are a strange girl, señorita. What is your name?"

"Maria-Rosa Marcen."

"Rosa—a pretty name. Well, you see, I was right: you have someone to go to—I have no one. You have several gold pieces—I have only one. You have a casket full of precious papers—I have not even a passport. You are infinitely more fortunate than I."

"Poor fellow," the girl said with a queer smile.

"No, do not say that. I have been blessed to-day in that I have met you, and perhaps I can even render you a service. You say that in the box are merely family papers. Experience has taught me that apparently worthless documents are sometimes of great value to those who know how to use them. Come, let me

see what the box contains. I can tell you at least if your master told you the truth."

"Since the documents are probably in French, I agree—for my knowledge of that tongue is limited—but—to read them you must open the casket. It is of iron, and I have no key."

Without a word Pierre Coignard seized the heavy metal box—a blow with a stone, a twist with the blade of his knife and the lid flew back. With a quick movement that betrayed long habit Pierre extracted papers and crackling parchments and began to read.

"H—m, birth certificate, marriage lines—he was married then?"

"Oh yes, but his wife had been dead several years."

"Yes—ah, here is something even better! Titles of nobility and the official record of his military career. I perceive your Count de Sainte Helene was not only a great aristocrat but a man of orderly habits," and Pierre fell silent, his thoughts already leaping and dancing. Rosa watched him curiously.

"Well, what is your opinion now about these papers, señor?"

The man started and looked searchingly at the handsome girl.

"The Count had no family nor friends left, you say?"

"No one but this old lady—he often told me so."

"Splendid, splendid! Would you like to be rich, Maria-Rosa? Would you like to ride in your carriage, wear fine dresses, possess many jewels and rise in one hour from poverty to splendour?"

"I don't understand, señor."

"Would you not wish to be the Countess Pontis de Sainte Helene, and bury your charming but humble name for ever? Let me persuade you. Your eyes are full of fire and intelligence. Together we may climb to great heights."

"I see," the girl said thoughtfully, a flush of excitement tinging her cheeks. "You suggest that since no one can contradict us, we should take those papers and the position they confer. But suppose when you had attained your desire you were to leave me?"

"I do not think I shall ever do that, Maria-Rosa. Already my heart beats fiercely at the witchery of your glance. I feel that soon I shall love you madly. At this moment, had I to choose between the tempting position these parchments offer and your red lips—I should take the kiss. But I believe I can have both. I cannot guarantee that I am honest, but at least I am not treacherous—remember, I could have taken your box and money, and left you half-strangled to recover at your leisure."

Like the flicker of a viper's tongue, a long keen blade set its point at Pierre's throat, gently pressing on the great throbbing artery. For a moment neither moved. Pierre looked steadfastly at the girl, his lips smiling sardonically, while she crouched—rigid, breathing sibilantly. Then, as abruptly the knife slithered with a backward fling somewhere into her long hair, and with a gurgling laugh Maria-Rosa said :

" You see, my friend—to leave me as you suggest would not be so easy. Besides, once we are Count and Countess you will not dare—for I shall hold your secret."

Pierre sighed deeply, joyously, and exclaimed : " I am glad you did that. You will truly play your part well. Is it agreed ? "

In reply Rosa held out her hand. Pierre gripped it as he would a man's, instead of touching the fingers with his lips. Again the girl smiled her slow enigmatic smile, obviously pleased.

" How do they name you, señor partner ? " she enquired.

" Count André de Pontis de Sainte Helene, madame"—and in one breath he added the long list of titles and honours inscribed on the dead man's parchments, which his prodigious memory had already retained. Rosa Marcen rose to her feet with supple grace and curtsied.

" Then, Señor Count, let us go to seek an inn, for open fields do not suit people of our station."

So this astounding bargain was struck, and the pseudo Count and Countess arrived a few days later at the saddler's workshop established by the brother Louis in Barcelona. No doubt the haunting shadow of the chain-gang still obsessed Pierre. He dared not return to France at once, even protected by the newly-acquired papers. These he decided must be backed by an edifice of deeds and upheld by a carefully elaborated reputation, so Rosa Marcen was installed in a house taken and furnished by Pierre in the fashionable Avenida de la Rambla. There he also established a spacious shop for his brother under the name Charles Cardon & Cie. The capital for this enterprise was obtained by a series of audacious burglaries. Louis Coignard had already gathered about him a number of escaped French convicts, and Pierre at once became their secret leader. He was clever enough not to appear openly at the gang's headquarters. Instead, when in 1808 the Spaniards refused to accept Joseph Bonaparte as their King, Pierre seized the opportunity which the insurrection gave him and offered his services to General Duchesne, who was at that time in Catalonia with the French armies. His experience with the Chouans had made him an expert at guerilla warfare, and as the Count Pontis de Sainte Helene, he was soon placed in command of

a handful of men. Always a brave, although faithless, soldier, he changed sides constantly, deserting always to the victorious leaders and seeking only opportunities for pillage, which his gang of convicts exploited with great success. But he yearned to establish his rank firmly and officially. Thanks to his brother's army of spies he obtained the impress of the locks at the Spanish Ministry of War. Duplicate keys were quickly made, and one night Pierre entered the offices of the archives. He chose a register which corresponded to the date of the dead Count's sojourn in America, and carried it to the saddlery. There he effaced the name of an officer who had been killed, and entered instead that of André de Pontis, Comte de Sainte Helene, with the mention "retired temporarily." His rank he carried from Lieutenant to Captain, and then to Lieutenant-Colonel, adding a list of imaginary services and distinctions, among which the cross of a Cavalier of the Order of Alcantara.

He also compiled a minute description of his features, and enumerated the scars which various affrays and the beating at Bicètre had left, transforming these into so many honourable wounds received whilst with his regiment in South America. This regiment had not been selected at haphazard, for he had learned that it was still stationed in the New World. When his position was thus substantiated and as he believed unassailable—thanks to the turmoil and disorder reigning in every department at the time—he aged the ink by a process one of his men had discovered and replaced the register before its absence was noticed. A month later Pierre applied for a command on active service. The archives were searched—de Pontis was found to be indeed an officer of distinction, and since his obvious knowledge of the French made such a man a valuable acquisition, he was given a regiment. Now at last Pierre Coignard, thief, housebreaker, and convict, had attained official recognition. With one magnificent bound he had gained a dizzy height. As a nobleman and a Colonel of the Spanish King's armies, the shaping of his future was in his hands. A valiant soldier he certainly was, and an honest career would have brought him many honours. But there was a twist in the man's nature. Although he dreamed of great things, the craving to steal ruled him, as much for the excitement as for material gain. It was the flaw in his armour of audacity and cool indifference to danger. A profound contempt for man's ethics was his dominant characteristic. Such warfare as the Spaniards opposed to the French occupation, made of ambuscades, night attacks and forays, was to him a superb opportunity. Smuggler and robber from birth, he yet led his men well and gained the

confidence of his superiors. But if by day he was a keen, efficient officer, the instinct of the robber predominated at night. When others slept he gathered his convict friends around him and planned the pillage of villages and isolated houses, from which he drove Spaniards and French alike.

He was careful to pose as an intensely religious man and gave much of his ill-gained wealth to the priests, who in turn became his powerful friends. He even earned the esteem of the famous General O'Donnell, who was in command of the armies in Catalonia. Again Pierre saw a chance to buttress his assumed titles with further proof. He sent a number of documents manufactured by his expert forgers to the General, in which the entirely fictitious but glorious exploits of the Lieutenant-Colonel de Sainte Helene were set out, and according to custom received a detailed receipt for them. Then at the first opportunity he entered the General's quarters and destroyed the forged documents, so that no trace remained of his fraud. But one night the Count de Sainte Helene, Colonel and Cavalier of Alcantara, was caught red-handed with six of his convict allies whilst despoiling a church of its gold votive offerings. No defence was possible, and all were sentenced to be shot! Fortunately Rosa, who had come to the camp as a Vivandière, assisted at the shameful exposure. Booted, spurred and dressed in the uniform of a trooper she rode through the night and the next day to Barcelona, with grim humour commandeering fresh horses in the name of the Lieutenant-Colonel. Not even granting herself one hour's rest she at once started on the long ride back with Louis and two of their most reckless followers. One may imagine the horror, anxiety, and deadly sickness of the plucky girl after three days and nights in the saddle, when as she approached the General's camp at dawn, a volley of musketry abruptly reverberated from the hilltops. At the sound Rosa reeled dizzily. That she had returned too late was her last thought as Louis caught her in his arms. At once a spy wormed his way past the sentries. He returned quickly, panting with excitement, and reported that one of the band had been executed, but the others and their chief were still alive. They were to be shot the following morning.

All day the three men and Rosa Marcen lay hidden, then towards midnight, when the camp fell silent, they crawled like Indians from tent to tent until they reached the one which sheltered the prisoners. Their experience of such expeditions made the rest easy. The sentry was strangled before he could give the alarm, the captives freed from their fetters and an hour later Pierre and his followers were far away, riding their stolen

horses over the secret passes he knew so well, whilst Rosa lay fast asleep across the saddle in her lover's arms. By what incredible tissue of lies the ex-Lieutenant-Colonel gained the confidence of Marshal Soult, who commanded Bonaparte's troops, is not recorded, but gain it he did, and some months later Count Pontis de Sainte Helene sent Rosa to Paris in charge of his brother and received the command of a regiment of French mountaineers. Furthermore, it is related that he fought with singular courage when at last the French were compelled to retreat. Vidocq suggests in his memoirs that Pierre probably made his desertion from the Spaniards the greatest argument in his favour, averring that, although he had been willing to fight the British, he preferred to relinquish his high command when sent against his own people. It is certainly a plausible explanation, and I fancy Vidocq was right. It was just the kind of impudent story Pierre Coignard would concoct, well aware that no one could contradict it. Yet he was not lucky, two weeks after changing sides the Spaniards captured Pierre and sent him to Majorca. His position was critical indeed; recognition might follow at any moment. With characteristic audacity he shed his shackles, liberated several other prisoners, seized a small schooner and succeeded in reaching Algiers after five days crowded with hardship and suffering, for there had been no water on board. The French Consul hailed the handful of fugitives as heroes and sent them to Marseilles. He now followed the declining fortunes of the Emperor, and remained in command of his regiment when Napoleon abdicated at Fontainebleau. A son was born to Rosa at Colmar during the Corsican's short and desperate attempt to regain the throne.

It is certain Pierre fought at Waterloo, but the moment he perceived that the day was lost he fled to Gand, and posing as a faithful adherent of Louis XVIII again made his desertion appear an act of heroism. Nemesis, however, now decided that it was time to check the ever-increasing dare-devilry of this impertinent renegade. When at last he arrived in Paris, where Rosa waited, he learned that the precious box containing the parchments and documents of the dead nobleman had been stolen by one of his own men. For once Pierre lost his head. He attempted to overawe and to talk the mayor of a little town in the Vendée, St. Pierre de Blaize, into giving him a birth certificate. Why he chose this particular town is not clear, but it was a false move. His grandiloquent tone and swashbuckling manners merely aroused the shrewd peasant's suspicions. He refused to accede to Pierre's request, and communicated with the Paris Sûreté.

The enquiry into the antecedents of Count de Sainte Helene brought nothing deterimental to light, but Vidocq, with his extraordinary intuition, sensed a mystery and made a note of the name. Perhaps if Pierre had been content to remain discreetly inactive for a time the matter might have ended there, but long success made him over-confident. Furthermore, he knew nothing of the Vendéen peasant's report. Haunted by the spectre of the chain gang and obsessed with the desire to establish his assumed name on a firm basis, he discovered that the Archives at Soissons had been destroyed by a fire and again applied there for duplicate papers. A second report definitely aroused the suspicions of the authorities. He also called on influential people with the request to be given a command in the West Indies, and wrote many contradictory letters. Meanwhile Rosa Marcen, now the Countess de Sainte Helene, was installed in the rue des Moulins, and there Pierre again gathered a band about him and sallied forth at night to commit countless burglaries and even highway robberies. Then unexpectedly the long-deferred blow fell.

At an important military ceremony a recently-liberated convict named Dalcroix, who had been chained to the same bench for a year with Pierre at Toulon, recognised him, notwithstanding the lapse of time and the glittering uniform of the aristocratic Colonel. He followed him to his dwelling and demanded an interview, which was granted. Rosa, who had that moment returned from the Tuileries, crossed Dalcroix on the stairs. A premonition of coming disaster seized her and she questioned him, seeking to learn the reason for his visit. Dalcroix, coarsened by the years spent at Toulon, answered with a leer that he wanted money, unless perhaps she preferred to honour him with her friendship. Hardly had he spoken when rough hands seized him from behind and he was flung against the wall. Pierre had come out at that moment and overheard the fellow's jeering remarks. Pale with rage he thrashed Dalcroix soundly, and then called the servants to throw him into the street, regardless of Rosa's entreaties that the man should be well entertained and his silence bought. Enraged at the humiliation, Dalcroix hurried to Vidocq and related what he had discovered. Yet Pierre's rank made it imperative that the military authorities should first question him. General Despinois was ordered to investigate. The Count was summoned to his office, where after some polite phrases the General asked him point blank to justify the rank and title he bore. The blow struck home—Pierre became pale and tried to bluster, but in vain. At the close of the interrogation, which had lasted several hours, General Despinois ordered the pseudo Count to be

conducted to the rue des Moulins where his papers were to be examined in his presence.

Meanwhile, when she saw her lover did not return, Rosa had acted promptly. Everything of value had been rapidly packed and removed, and as Pierre stepped from the carriage, guarded by three soldiers and the officer who was to carry out the search, an imperceptible signal from his brother, lounging in the hall dressed as a servant, warned him that nothing was left but flight. Pierre at once conducted the soldiers to the study and handed the officer his keys. Then he asked for permission to wash his hands, pointing to the open door of an adjoining bedroom. The request was reasonable enough, but a soldier was nevertheless placed on guard outside. Several minutes passed, the splashing of water was heard, and the officer was about to begin his search when the violent slam of the house door alarmed him. He rushed to the window and was just in time to see his prisoner leap into a travelling chaise which at once disappeared into the night. Too late he perceived that there was a secret exit behind a wardrobe. Now the hunt was up. The description of the fugitive was sent to all the gendarme stations, and Vidocq ordered to capture this Colonel who was now definitely believed to be the former convict Coignard. But the famous detective soon found that he had met his match. Since all was lost, Pierre set to work to gather enough money to flee the country. Burglary after burglary was committed, and ever the reports proved that it was the phantom bandit and his organisation who were the perpetrators of these outrages. A year passed and Vidocq was at his wit's end. Then one day a spy related that he had followed two men who much resembled the brothers Coignard to a house in a distant suburb. He had watched them enter and greet a very beautiful woman who was standing at a window holding a dark, curly-haired boy in her arms. An hour later Vidocq and a dozen men dressed as loafers, were posted so that every possible issue from the building could be watched. Two days and two nights passed thus, but although their vigilance did not relax a moment they saw no one enter or leave. Finally, since the house appeared to be definitely deserted, the detectives decided to make a search. They discovered Rosa and her son hiding in an attic.

Now Vidocq had received no orders regarding them, but he realised that they were precious hostages and seized and locked them in a room. Vidocq then dressed one of his agents in some clothes belonging to Rosa and manufactured a bundle, which from a distance could be mistaken for the child. Then with much ostentation he withdrew all his men, but so soon as a

bend in the road hid the house from view, he doubled back and prepared an ambush. Meanwhile the decoy sat at the window nursing and apparently talking to a child, every now and then beckoning to unseen watchers. The ruse was successful. Pierre, who was devoured by anxiety for Rosa, hurried back, believing that all was well. In an instant, as he passed a narrow alley, a blanket fell over his head, his arms were bound, and thus at last he was captured.

Deprived of their leader, eight others of his gang were quickly found and joined him at the Conciergerie. Poor Rosa was taken to Saint Lazare, and her boy handed to the nuns. The first trial, which took place a year later, was merely a formality to establish Pierre's identity. Cold, reserved, and with all the seeming of a true aristocrat, Pierre battled and argued four long days to prove he was truly Count de Pontis de Sainte Helene. But he was beaten. The verdict declared him to be an impostor and an escaped convict. Then came his second trial, which ended with the pitiless sentence of life-long hard labour in the chain gang.

Furthermore, he was to stand twelve hours in the stocks and to be branded on the left shoulder with the letters T.F. (*Travaux Forcès*: Hard Labour). At the awful sentence Rosa, who had been acquitted, stretched out her arms to Pierre and cried despairingly:

"I shall follow you to the galleys, my love, and remain near you while I live."

Guarded day and night, Pierre realised that escape was impossible. Even his hardy courage gave way and he sank into a species of stupor. At last came the day for the departure of the chain gang to the prison fortress at Toulon, a dreadful ceremony.

At an early hour the prison gates were opened to the public who, instead of showing pity, made it an occasion for laughter, coarse jests, and morbid curiosity. In droves of twenty the convicts rushed, shouting and yelling fiercely, into the enclosure where the smith waited. Each one in turn was seized, the anvil pressed against his neck, and the rivets driven home through the iron collar with frightful blows of a huge hammer. It was an ordeal before which even the bravest trembled. The sudden jar caused the head to jerk forward at every blow, yet the slightest movement at the moment the hammer fell would have smashed the head into pulp. As Pierre's turn came, a fashionably-dressed woman, pale as death, with staring, red-rimmed eyes, sank to her knees in the mud and filth and prayed, although each word of her simple appeal was broken by sobs of utter anguish. It was Rosa! Near her lay a bundle of food and stout shoes. When at last the

convicts were herded, twenty to a chain, in the lumbering wagons which were to transport them to Toulon, she set out to walk the long dreary way behind the cart which contained her lover. Thirty weary days she walked, nor would she accept the many offers of farmers to make room for her in their vehicles.

" My Pierre must stand chained like a beast to other beasts. It is not just that I should ride at my ease," she said. " We may, perhaps, redeem our past by suffering."

Pierre Coignard, erstwhile grandee and Lieutenant-Colonel, convicted bandit and robber, did not succeed in escaping again, his spirit was broken. He died in Rosa's arms in 1835.

THE POISON FRENZY

THE priests of ancient Egypt and the alchemists of mediæval days firmly believed that all poisons were under the spell of a demon whose malevolent will they obeyed implicitly, and that, moreover, some occult bond united them with the planets and stars glittering nightly in the heavens. A fantastic theory truly, but the glimpse which has been granted me of the fearsome career of that terrific poison arsenic, makes the grotesque belief appear almost justified. Like an evil spirit long starved for victims, arsenic, which had lain dormant through the ages, when abruptly unleashed by the Italian poisoners who learned their art in the service of the Medici, swept with irresistible fury through the peninsula, sowing death wherever it tarried, and finally invaded France. Its appearance was hailed with glee by the corrupt and avaricious men and women, eager for vengeance and wealth, who thronged the steps of the throne, then filled by Louis XIV. Its discovery is generally attributed to the Swiss chemist, Christoph Glaser, but there is no doubt that the formula for its manufacture in various forms was brought to France by Exili the Florentine who, before he was incarcerated in the Bastille, communicated the secret to Glaser. Exili, though a prisoner in the impregnable fortress, made arsenic his messenger of vengeance and by its means amply satisfied his hatred of the nobility who had contemptuously thrown him into a dungeon. For a century, until scientists finally discovered a method whereby its presence could be infallibly traced, victims unnumbered succumbed to the fatal drug. Lovers swept rivals and obstacles from their path, wives regained their freedom, husbands killed their wives, until an epidemic, that had its source in a gloomy prison cell, swept the world. A veritable reign of terror, as ghastly, though less spectacular, as the terror that used a triangular blade a century later. And its coming was insidious, swift and remorseless.

The Marquise de Brinvilliers, a voluptuous fury, every nerve of her shapely form aquiver with unappeased desires, is a figure

notorious in history. Her innocent blue eyes and small symmetrical features were but a mask fittingly formed by Satan to hide her tempestuous soul. She was a faithful servant of the demon mineral, and the lingering deaths she scattered in her path gathered around the scaffold at the last, a grisly invisible army of ghosts. The woman and her frightful deeds have inspired many writers, but the tale of her evil life has only been told in fragments, or summarised by cold precise historians. I have assembled the complete story of her career, and that of the master criminal, her lover, from the reports in the archives of the Paris police, from the dossiers and memoirs of the archivist, M. Peuchet, from the investigations of chemists and doctors of the period, and the famous letters of her contemporary, the Marquise de Sevigné, now in the Carnavalet Museum. I am also indebted for much information to the erudite archivist of the Paris Arsenal, where the trial was held. But the principal document which made it possible to cast these wild, incredible deeds into narrative form, is the written confession of the woman herself.

Marie Madeleine Dreux d'Aubray, a daughter of the Chief Civil Magistrate of the Chatelet, was born in July 1630. Already as a child she rebelled against all moral restraint and gave free rein to those promptings which were later to horrify even the frivolous and tolerant society of her day. With cynical frankness she recounts her early depravity in her confession, and so brutal and licentious is this confession that the criminal Lieutenant la Reynie ordered the manuscript to be translated into Latin so that its publication should not defile the people. At the age of seven her amorous desires had cast their tentacles around her two brothers, those brothers whom later she was to murder. She was sent to a convent but remained there only a short time, and her departure was welcomed with relief by the holy sisters, who had vainly laboured to set her dainty feet in the path of religion. Yet this extraordinary girl was apparently modest and reserved, almost shy, slight in body, with a wealth of chestnut hair; her complexion was clear and exquisitely tinted, and her speech low and musical. It was this seemingly fragile beauty which charmed the young Marquis Antoine de Brinvilliers, Captain of a Normandy regiment, who in an evil moment chose her as wife.

" Mademoiselle Marie Madeleine d'Aubray, may I request you to sign here." And the black-garbed notary waved the white goose-quill with a quaint dramatic flourish and bowed low as a dainty figure, slim and graceful, rose with a swish of silken skirts

and advanced towards the small table in the centre of the room. The undercurrent of flippant frivolous chatter ceased for a second. It was a fateful ceremony for many in that room, had they but known it; the swoop of death's black wings was mingled with the musical rustle of the girl's dress, and his bones rattled in unison with the tapping of the fashionable heels on the polished floor. Mademoiselle d'Aubray had consented to wed a gallant young officer, the Marquis Antoine de Brinvilliers, and both were now about to sign the marriage contract. To the right of the notary stood the future husband, a dashing figure in his handsome uniform, and beside him, idly taking snuff, whilst his shrewd eyes roved from face to face, finally settling on the young bride elect, was his friend and comrade, Sainte Croix—also a captain of the King's armies.

As she seized the pen a grim smile flickered over his handsome features, and for an instant his gaze probed deeply into the girl's limpid blue eyes. No one but he saw the shiver that rippled over her skin at the impalpable contact and caused her to hesitate a second before signing. A burning spot glowed on each cheek when she stepped aside to make room for de Brinvilliers, and over his shoulder she looked again at his friend with wonder and a tinge of defiance in her regard. But now Sainte Croix turned away with seeming indifference, twirling his moustache to hide a grin of satisfaction.

A week later the wedding took place and Sainte Croix, at the husband's right once more, was the first to congratulate him and to press his lips to the bride's bejewelled fingers.

Although in outward seeming never was there a couple so well matched, in truth the Marquis de Brinvilliers and his wife were strangely ill-assorted.

Superficial and a libertine, as became an officer and nobleman of the seventeenth century, he never for a moment intended to allow this marriage to interfere with his numerous intrigues, and, the first flush of novelty past, began to spend his nights as before—drinking, gambling, and flitting from one to another of the facile ladies at court. The two hundred thousand *pistoles*—his wife's dowry—began to melt rapidly. The constant visits of Sainte Croix he hailed with welcome, for whilst his friend entertained the Marquise, who appeared to listen to his never-flagging fund of Court scandal with good-humoured indifference, he could slip away unhindered. Little did he dream that the soul of the apparently ingenuous girl of twenty-one was in reality a fierce, raging vortex of desire, passion, jealousy and unquenchable pride. But Sainte Croix, *spadassin*, adventurer and cruel egotist, had not gazed idly

into her expressive eyes. He at least had glimpsed what lay below the surface, and of a set purpose at once began to weave his web. Not that he cared for the woman—money was his god—and he had sensed at their first meeting that she would be as wax in his hands and aid him in his schemes. Therefore he came daily to the house in the rue Neuve St. Paul, and almost all his meals were eaten at his hospitable friend's table. Finally de Brinvilliers, who sincerely liked the man, invited him with foolish confidence to take up his residence with them for a time. This was the opportunity for which the adventurer had waited. And when one night the Marquis, was who frequently called to Versailles, where his regiment was stationed, returned unexpectedly, Sainte Croix met him at the door of his wife's room, rapier in hand.

"You fool!" he cried with a bitter sneer. "A husband who returns too soon has only one thing to expect. I am at your service; let it be now at once, you have your sword."

For a minute de Brinvilliers stood motionless, eyeing his treacherous friend's glittering blade. At heart he was a coward, and his opponent had the reputation of being the deadliest swordsman in France. Then he shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed: "Fool, perhaps, but not such a fool as to give you the joy of killing me. Stand back, I have my pistols!"—for Sainte Croix had lifted his weapon. "I prefer to enjoy my life. Keep my wife; I'll spend her money!"—and with this Parthian shot he turned and entered his own room. From that moment the audacity of the guilty lovers knew no restraint. The tale of the husband's cowardice flitted from lip to lip; and Sainte Croix cynically continued to live with the couple and accompanied the Marquise wherever she went. She, too, flaunted her shame openly, braving the censure of the graceless nobles and immodest courtesans, who at least made a pretence at concealing their debauchery from the people. But if the Marquis lacked the courage to interfere, the father, Antoine d'Aubray, was not so weak. He obtained a *lettre de cachet* from the King, and one day the lover was arrested whilst lolling in the carriage beside the Marquise. Rudely seized by archers, he was flung into a waiting vehicle and driven to the Bastille, there to be imprisoned.

As though fate had so willed it, he was consigned to an apartment already occupied by Exili, a Florentine and former hired assassin of the infamous Medici. What followed is taken from various letters written by Exili, Sainte Croix, and the confession of Madame de Brinvilliers.

The Florentine was quick to sense in the new arrival a kindred spirit, and his superstitious nature led him to believe that this was

the man through whom he would wreak a dire vengeance on the French. King, nobles, and people, he hated them all. Sainte Croix was bursting with fury at the indignity—for so he considered it—he had suffered through the interference of M. d'Aubray, and needed but little prompting to pour out the tale of his wrongs to his fellow-captive. The Italian listened with a sardonic smile until he had raved himself to a standstill but said little. He felt that all had not been told, and that silence would serve him best. Annoyed by the man's apparent indifference, Sainte Croix confessed a few days later that his arrest was not the only thing troubling him. He had wrung piecemeal from the Marquise all the money and jewels at her disposal, and just before he was arrested he had learned that the father had obtained an order empowering him to withdraw the dowry, or what remained of it, from the hands of de Brinvilliers. Moreover, he threatened to allow the faithless wife only a small income. At this news the beady eyes of the Florentine became mere slits.

"Well, *Caro*," he purred, "combine vengeance with utility: get rid of the father. His daughter will then be rich and free to love whom she pleases."

Sainte Croix abruptly ceased his restless pacing of the cell. "But how? If I kill him I shall be beheaded, and if she kills him she will suffer—either way neither will profit by the deed."

The Italian laughed. "You are very simple. There are ways of killing in such fashion that death appears to be due to natural causes. He is an old man too. Tell me—will the Marquise help?"

Sainte Croix nodded. "She will do anything I order. Besides, she is aflame with lust for wealth and revenge. She has long chafed at her father's constant watchfulness."

"Very well. I hold a secret, the formula for making a poison which leaves no trace. No; don't shake your head. I know—it has stood the test for years. I foresaw my arrest and confided in a friend, an apothecary named Christoph Glaser. He resides in the rue de Lion. Now there is a turnkey here who knows something of this matter, he will carry a letter to your lady. Order her to obtain the ingredients I shall write down, from Glaser, and to give them to this fellow. Then I shall instruct you in the use of the poison. In return you must promise to arrange for my escape when you are released, and remember *I shall need money*!"

Thus the silent terror was set free to begin its fearful career in France. François Vigoroux, the turnkey, whose destiny it was later to become hideously notorious, had indeed been strangely fascinated by the oily, insidious manners of the Italian, and the vague hints Exili had whispered at times of a golden key to wealth,

had awakened his cupidity. With his complicity Madame de Brinvilliers was informed of the plot which the two prisoners had conceived, and the words " a secret poison " had set her thoughts leaping and dancing. Her pent-up sensuality was aflame. To kill with impunity—what a weapon ! What exquisite pleasure she would derive from a power which made her akin to the demons. Soon the cell in the Bastille was littered with crucibles, retorts and formulæ. Magic triangles, pentacles and circles were drawn in chalk on the stone floor, the powers of darkness invoked, and amid such sacrilegious mummery as the Florentine thought necessary to impress the credulous turnkey, and the no less credulous Sainte Croix, white arsenic, truly an evil spirit if ever such a thing existed, came into being. The first test was made on a comrade of Vigoroux, a man whom he had long hated and whose shoes he wished to fill. Subtly instructed by Exili, the treacherous gaoler mixed several doses of the deadly powder with the man's food and drink. Three days later he was unable to leave his bed, but with feigned solicitude Vigoroux called daily and brought him toothsome trifles containing poison, feasting his eyes on the victim's agony. When within a week the man died, the doctor who attended him declared that he had succumbed to a wasting fever.

That night the three plotters toasted the new poison, and the anxiously waiting Marquise de Brinvilliers was immediately informed of the success of their *experiment.* It only remained now to obtain an order for the release of her lover. Since his incarceration, Madeleine de Brinvilliers had redoubled in tenderness and demonstrations of affection to her father, and feigned successfully to have forgotten Sainte Croix. Even the husband, although well aware now that the woman was an adept at deceit and guile, began to believe that the momentary folly had burned itself out. Dreux d'Aubray, who might have brought serious charges against Sainte Croix, for the fellow was known already to be a rogue and his debts were a scandal, contented himself with having, as he thought, driven him from their midst, and in June 1663 the adventurer was set free.

At once he and the Marquise began to visit in secret a little isolated house in the rue de Lion, the residence of the chemist Glaser. The death of the intolerant, virtuous father had been decided upon, and the daughter he loved was chosen to commit the fearful crime. But first she also wished to make sure that Exili's formula could be used safely, and resolved to experiment upon hospital patients with the poison which, in a moment of inspiration, she had aptly named " The Powder which Brings Inheritances."

It was the custom then for rich and charitable ladies to play at nursing, and the Marquise de Brinvilliers, fully instructed by her evil genius, began to visit the patients in the Hotel Dieu. She brought them cakes steeped in arsenic, fruit tainted with the poison, and soothing drinks. To her devilish joy, everyone of her victims died, slowly or quickly as she had willed it, and the doctors, although alarmed at this inexplicable holocaust, were unable to discover any traces of foul play. How many poor women she thus murdered even she could not remember.

In her confession she wrote that " twenty partook of Glaser's recipe and died, but there may have been more." Were the fact not history, such utter lack of pity in a woman would be incredible. Convinced at last that no doctor could trace the drug, she decided to give it to her father.

At the beginning of February, M. d'Aubray was persuaded by his beloved daughter to retire to his country seat at Offemont, near Compiègne, and to his delight she at once offered to accompany him. There she began her monstrous work, and, whilst pretending to minister tenderly to her father's needs, remorselessly poisoned him with small regular doses so that he lingered eight months, wasting away as the deadly drug slowly but surely ate into his vitals.

At last, certain that the duration of the mysterious malady from which her father was believed to suffer would allay any suspicion of foul play, she made an end, for Paris and its pleasures were waiting. Antoine Dreux d'Aubray died on September 10th, 1666. Bursting with triumph the loathsome parricide hurried at once to Sainte Croix with the news. " We are free now," she cried—" free to love and defy the world, and we have money enough for all our needs."

But the man received her coldly. He had already discovered that only a very small share of d'Aubray's fortune had been left to the daughter. A glimmering of the truth had perhaps at last penetrated to the dying man's intelligence.

" We are avenged for the insult I received," he answered. " But your two brothers have all the money, they must die also. Thus indeed we shall be rich."

For a moment the woman quailed, then with a laugh she exclaimed : " So be it, the *powder of inheritance* is still with us ; they shall die. But I cannot do it, they mistrust me."

This was true, Antoine Dreux d'Aubray, the elder, who succeeded his father as Chief Civil Magistrate of Paris, would not allow Marie Madeleine to enter his house, instead he had invited his only brother to reside with him. It was a servant, a scoundrel

named La Chaussée, who was persuaded by Sainte Croix to become their accomplice; but Sainte Croix compelled the Marquise to supply the valet with the poison. Already he realised that this hysterical, ferocious creature must be held with a tight rein or she would master him also. He therefore set to work to terrorise her. The letters she had written him were placed in a small iron box, together with several bottles of poison and two promissory notes for large sums of money which she had signed, in the belief that they had been given to Exili in return for the secret formula. The box was then hidden. At the least sign of revolt, Sainte Croix threatened to send it to the police. This always had the desired effect—but hatred, a fierce hatred and mutual distrust, sprang into life between the guilty couple. Sainte Croix had meanwhile kept faith with Exili and had connived at his escape with the assistance of Mme de Montespan, the King's friend, and several puissant nobles at Court, who had made good use of Glaser's recipe, the infamous powder that brought inheritances.

Unknown to the Marquise, the Italian was hidden in Glaser's house in the rue de Lion where he helped his friend with his occult experiments. Meanwhile, she, free from her father's supervision, threw herself bodily into the wildest debauches. Among her successful suitors was her husband's cousin, the Marquis de Nadaillac, and a young and honest but weak-minded scholar, whom she had chosen to be a tutor to her children—for this monster was actually the mother of several children, although it is probable that de Brinvilliers was not their father.

For a while La Chaussée found it wise to serve the two brothers honestly in order to gain their confidence. It was not until 1669 that at last the poison made its appearance. Both men became very ill, yet for a time their robust constitutions fought successfully against the repeated attacks of the arsenic. Finally, Madeleine de Brinvilliers became impatient, money was scarce, all that she had received at her father's death had been extorted from her by Sainte Croix, whose power over the woman remained undiminished. Curiously enough during this period M. de Brinvilliers, the unfortunate husband, appears to have accepted his humiliating position with resignation, indeed, many comments of the period have it that he was glad to be rid of the stifling presence of this reincarnated Messalina, and took no pains to conceal his own intrigues. The truth, however, is that the terrible epidemic of deaths which appeared to follow his wife wherever she went had aroused his suspicions. Twice he essayed to leave her definitely, fearing that some subtle danger menaced him too, but the very clear threat she uttered had caused him to remain.

" You shall not rob me of the fictitious mantle of your protection," she had said with a sneer. " When I am ready for you to go—you shall go—never fear "—and drunken with triumph she had pulled a phial from her bosom and tapped it significantly. On June 17th 1670, La Chaussée brought the news that the elder brother was dead—of a wasting fever, the doctors had said, like his father. Some time later the second and last obstacle between Marie Madeleine and the coveted wealth also died. And to fill the cup of irony, La Chaussée actually received a legacy from the men he had poisoned, " for his loyal care and faithful service." But now, although the doctors were at fault, the people began to find these opportune deaths suspicious. The word poison flew from mouth to mouth, the more terrible in its menace since medical skill failed to discover it. But if Mme de Brinvilliers had obtained her desire, and in appearance was able to satisfy every whim—her life was an inferno. The leering, cringing La Chaussée never ceased in his demands for money, and the greed of Sainte Croix could not be appeased. When she refused to give way, he threatened to send the fatal iron box to the police. This box became a nightmare, it haunted her night and day, and in her terror she resolved to beguile her accomplice into parting with it. Although black hate filled her soul, she clutched at the belief that the sneering adventurer still loved her. She could not conceive that the passion which had once enslaved him was dead.

She persuaded Sainte Croix to reside with her, thus hoping to rekindle the flame; and she wheedled, begged, and prayed that he should marry her, and to that end began to mix poison with her husband's food. But this was the last thing Sainte Croix desired, and in secret he gorged the unfortunate fool, once his friend, with powerful antidotes. Every time the bite of arsenic caused de Brinvilliers to rush to his room in horror, Sainte Croix was at hand to administer coffee, milk, and other remedies. Seeing this, the woman tried her hand on the man she hated, but he was not to be caught, instead it was the Marquise who swallowed the poison. She realised at once, by the burning agony which followed, that she had been outmatched, and fled to her country house at Offemont. But she was not beaten. Twice Sainte Croix was attacked by footpads when returning home late at night, and only his subtle skill with the rapier saved him, although on the second occasion he was slightly wounded. When she learned that her enemy still lived, the woman's rage knew no bounds. Monsieur de Briancourt, the tutor of her children, was at Offemont, and her fatal beauty had woven a spell around the young scholar. In him she hoped to find an ally, and in a moment of hysterical rage,

when the news came that her evil genius had again escaped her assassins, she confided in Briancourt, related the tale of her fearful crimes, and pressed him to help her in killing de Brinvilliers and Sainte Croix. Too late she realised her mistake. With hands outstretched in horror, trembling, livid, but firm in his resolve not to commit a crime, the young man fled to his room. All through the night she begged and prayed that he would at least keep her secret, and finally played her trump card and feigned to poison herself. This had the desired effect and de Briancourt gave way.

"I shall not betray you," he said, "but you must promise me that your evil deeds shall cease from this moment."

Terrified at what she had done, the Marquise feigned sincere repentance and there and then threw away the contents of several phials, which she afterwards avowed contained only water. In return for this concession she persuaded Briancourt to accompany her to Paris so that he might sustain her in the hour of temptation, and strengthen her newly-found honesty. In reality she had determined that Briancourt should die.

To her accomplice and enemy she related that Briancourt had surprised their guilty secret, and Sainte Croix at once agreed that it was necessary to remove a dangerous witness. Since the tutor knew of the poison, another method would have to be used. Two days after her return the Marquise sent a message to Briancourt requesting him to come to her at midnight, for she wished to show him the new decorations and tapestries of her room. And so the last act of this fearsome tragedy was played. Briancourt, through some freak of chance, entered the long passage which led to the woman's apartment shortly after ten. This saved his life. The curtains were not drawn before the glass doors and he saw that Mme de Brinvilliers was giving instructions to her servants. So he waited impatiently until these had gone, for he was still infatuated with the treacherous creature. Hardly had the door shut behind them, when the Marquise walked swiftly to the hearth and pressed what was evidently a hidden spring. A panel in the wall swung aside and a figure dressed in coarse ragged clothes emerged from the recess. Although the face was smeared with grime he recognised the intruder—it was Sainte Croix! The conspirators conversed a moment in whispers, and he caught the gleam of a weapon. Then abruptly the panel closed again and the Marquise came and flung back the door behind which Briancourt stood aghast and trembling. At sight of him she started back with a cry of anger. "I requested you to come at midnight!" she exclaimed harshly. "How long have you been there?"

" Madame," he lied, " I have but this moment arrived."

He was loth to enter, yet curious to discover the depths to which this infamous woman had sunk. With well simulated indifference she pointed out the various tapestries which had been sent to decorate her room. Then she flung herself on the bed and said : " Extinguish the candles, the light hurts my eyes, and sit beside me."

Since this would have placed him with his back towards the hearth, he realised that it was indeed his death which had been discussed. Instead of obeying he strode towards the bed and cried :

" Alas, madame, that so fair a face should hide so black a soul. I saw your evil genius, whom not so long ago you wished me to murder. He is there behind that panel, but I am armed ! "

On the last words he pressed the spring and Sainte Croix stumbled into the room. The adventurer realised that the plot had failed, and fled without attempting to use his knife. Again the woman played on the foolish love of the young tutor. She cried, implored, and at last made oath that she would die that very night rather than suffer the shame of exposure. Thus she obtained a renewed promise of silence from Briancourt, but, terrified and disillusioned at last, he packed his few belongings and fled the crime-haunted dwelling. Sainte Croix meanwhile had rushed to his own house and at once busied himself with the preparation of so subtle a form of poison that he believed at one blow to be able with it to remove the woman, the husband, and the tutor. And in this work he met his end. The mask he wore to protect him from the deadly gases must have slipped or been broken some time during the night, for when day came a servant found the poisoner lying dead and contorted amongst a litter of smashed crucibles and empty phials. When the news was carried to Mme de Brinvilliers she sprang to her feet and cried wildly :

" The box, the box ! I am lost unless I have it ! "

But it was too late. Sainte Croix had been in debt to hundreds of people, and the authorities at once took possession of his dwelling and stationed police at the doors. The Commissaire Picard proceeded to examine the dead man's rooms on August 9th, 1672. With him was a police officer, two notaries and a representative of the dead man's creditors. Nothing suspicious was found in the house, nor were they expecting to find anything, for until then no charge of a criminal nature had been preferred. For two days they contented themselves with making an inventory of his possessions. Then on the third day they entered the laboratory where Sainte Croix had died. In full view on the table lay a roll

of paper tied with tape, and across it sprawled the words " My confession."

The commissaire, a devout Catholic, looked at his companions. " The man died suddenly before he could summon a priest," he said slowly, " but he intended to confess his mistakes, as this paper proves. It is not for us to pry into matters which concern only his soul. We are here to take stock of his furniture and goods, and nothing else. Are you agreed ? "

None of the men present desired to appear unduly curious before his fellows, and the document was solemnly burnt unread. The commissaire lived to rue his haste. Beside the confession stood an iron box, painted red, from which dangled a key. In it were a number of phials full of coloured liquids, some papers containing powders, a bundle of letters from the Marquise de Brinvilliers, two promissory notes for 30,000 *livres* signed by her —they were the price stipulated by Sainte Croix for his assistance in poisoning her father and two brothers. An open letter lying on top was as follows :

I beg and beseech most humbly those who find this box, that it be given at once, intact, with all its contents, to the Marquise de Brinvilliers whom it concerns. I swear by all I hold sacred that there is nothing in this box of any value except to the Marquise, to whom I should have returned it long ago. As God is my witness this is the truth.

Sainte Croix.

The extraordinary emphasis of the words, and the solemn and unnecessary oath, aroused the magistrate's suspicions. He recalled the rumours of poison which had reached even him—and here were phials and powders. Monsieur Picard closed the box, sealed it with his private seal, and instructed the police sergeant to carry it to the Chief Civil Magistrate. Mme de Brinvilliers was quickly informed of the unforeseen calamity and immediately dispatched a servant to demand the restitution of the fatal box. When she learned that it had been sealed and taken away, she hastily ordered her carriage, drove to the commissaire's house and haughtily ordered the servants to conduct her to their master. It was then late at night and the magistrate refused to admit the Marquise. The next morning M. Delamere, a lawyer who represented Mme de Brinvilliers, called on the commissaire and attempted, first by threats and then by bribes, to obtain the fatal casket. Later in the day a young man—it was ascertained at the trial that this was the unfortunate tutor Briancourt—also offered

the commissaire a large sum of money in return for the same box, but in vain. Thereupon the woman, who had so long depended on Sainte Croix for help, completely lost her head. She made statement upon statement, spoke at random of the various people she would drag down with her, and accused all who had approached her of complicity. Then abruptly the same night she ordered her furniture to be removed and sold, for she was in urgent need of money, but so great was her desire to be gone that much of it was broken by being carelessly lowered from the windows. Leaving the sale to be supervised by Briancourt, she fled to her country house. On August 11th experts proceeded to examine the contents of the red box. The liquids and powders were given to various animals and all died in a short time. But when the bodies were examined by surgeons no method then known revealed the presence of the deadly agent.

"Poison, a mysterious, unknown poison"—the words ran like wildfire through Paris, and with the exaggeration natural in such cases every recent death was attributed to this secret drug. La Chaussée, whom the death of Sainte Croix deprived of an income on which he had learned to depend, hastened to the Civil Magistrate and with incredible audacity related that a sack containing a large sum of gold and silver which belonged to him was hidden in the sinister laboratory.

"You will find it," he said, "behind the furnace near the large window. I hid it there with the consent of my master——"

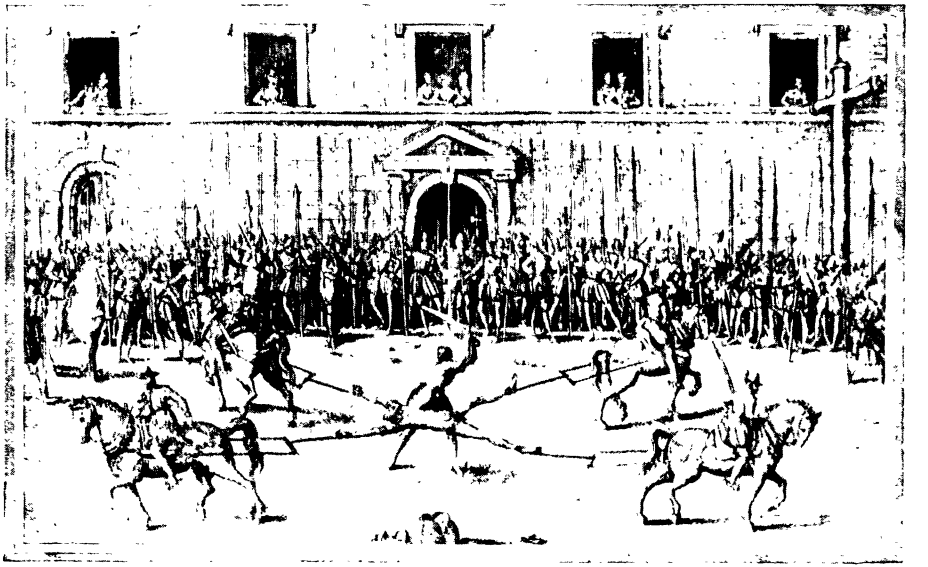
"Master?" the judge interrupted—"so Sainte Croix was your master? Well, we have tested the liquids and powders we found in that laboratory—they are all deadly poisons. What do you know about them?"

At the question La Chaussée lost his assurance, his face became livid, his shifty eyes flickered from the official to the door, and with an inarticulate cry he rushed out before the astounded man could move. Several days passed with no news of the fugitive, and then early one morning a police officer named François Regnier, one of Lecoq's best men, caught sight of a muffled figure emerging from a house in the rue de Lion, which seemed strangely familiar. With a bound Regnier caught the fellow and tore the cloak from his face. It was La Chaussée. Grave suspicion already rested on the Marquise de Brinvilliers also, but her rank caused the officers of the law to hesitate. Definite proof was needed before they dared arrest her. Lecoq and Regnier went to Offemont, where the woman had taken refuge, and with characteristic brutality Locoq said to her: "Madame, we have caught La Chaussée and the lieutenant of police has

that he shall undergo the torture of '*the question.*' No doubt that will make him confess."

The officer had hoped to frighten the woman into an admission, but to his surprise she simply shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and without replying called a servant to show them the door. Crestfallen at the failure of their ruse the police were about to return to Paris when they happened on Briancourt in the garden. To him they at once repeated the same formula, this time with success. At the ominous words the young tutor fell to his knees in an attitude of prayer and cried: "God have mercy on her. She is lost now, utterly lost."

Thereupon the detectives seized him roughly and by dint of threats and promises dragged an avowal of the woman's guilt from his trembling lips. Still La Reynie hesitated. But Mme Antoine d'Aubray, widow of the elder of the two murdered brothers, came to Paris and publicly accused La Chaussée and her sister-in-law of murder. This opportune intervention shifted the responsibilities, and La Chaussée was tried and sentenced to the terrible torture by water—the question. Against this decision the widow d'Aubray battled energetically, for she realised that if the fellow but possessed the courage to suffer in silence he and his accomplices would be held guiltless. Her influence prevailed, and a second trial took place. Although the Marquise had fled to England both were sentenced to death. La Chaussée was to suffer the agonies of the Brodequins and afterwards to be drawn and quartered, Mme de Brinvilliers was to be decapitated. To everyone's surprise the cringing valet showed unexpected courage. Wedge after wedge was driven into the Brodequins—which consist of two planks tightly laced around the foot and leg—until his bones were crushed and his flesh mangled. Yet he uttered no word of complaint. And then when he had been released from the stool and carried to a bed, he abruptly burst into a torrent of speech and related without prompting the whole series of ghastly crimes. La Chaussée was executed the same day. All Paris shuddered when the true nature of the graceful and seemingly charming Marquise became known. At once a request for extradition was sent to the French Ambassador in London, and Louis XIV wrote in person to King Charles II, but before the police could receive their instructions the woman fled to Belgium. Curiously enough it was the husband whom she had treated so scurvily who now sent her money for subsistence. At Liège, the Marquise entered a convent and fondly believed herself to be safe. But one of Lecoq's men, noted for his beauty, succeeded in entering the convent disguised as a woman. To the



An engraving preserved in the Police archives, believed to represent the execution of La Chaussée, one of Madam de Brinvilliers' accomplices.

[N.B.—The artist has not depicted the right costumes however, but chosen those of a much earlier period.]

Marquise he revealed his true sex, and wooed her with such ardour that he obtained a tryst in the convent garden where his spies were in ambush. Snared once more by her insatiable nature, this woman was thus at last captured and taken to Paris. In her dress was found the confession in which her odious life of treachery and murder was faithfully related, from her earliest days. Strange that this creature, who strenuously denied her crimes at the trial, should have carried such a document on her person when she knew that her capture was imminent. The only explanation of the astounding fact that she had spent many hours setting out in detail her countless orgies, is that she derived a sadistic, occult pleasure from their perusal. A legal battle was fought over it, the defence contending that it could not be used against her, but common sense and justice won the day. She was again definitely condemned to demand pardon of the Church on her knees, before the portals of Nôtre Dame, and afterwards to be beheaded, her body burned, and her ashes to be strewn to the four winds.

A tragic moment occurred when the young tutor, Briancourt, related the story of his life with the Marquise. At the conclusion he fell back, sobbing bitterly, thereupon the Marquise pointed contemptuously to him and remarked : " He is no man, to shed tears in public."

To the great satisfaction of the Church and the Abbé Picot, she consented to express regret at her misdeeds, but it was her only moment of weakness. She was forced to her knees before Nôtre Dame, but utterly refused to pronounce the formula of grace. She died as she lived, an untamed beast, in July 1676. But although *she* died, the poison she had unleashed was still rampant, and its victims were to equal the population of a city before at last science deprived it of its dripping fangs.

THE LOVE STORY OF DOMINIQUE CARTOUCHE

MANY have been the theories evolved by historians regarding the true origin of this wild, ruthless and exceptionally gifted bandit, who became when yet a boy the plaything of a love as great as any of those flaming passions immortalised by poets. He might, like Romeo or Paul, have sought relief from the unappeased yearning of his heart in death, and thus taken his place among the tragic lovers of history, but Cartouche, lion-hearted and untamable, rebelled against fate. Like Hercules, every fall caused him to rise, girt anew for battle, and vibrating with undiminished vigour, and thus his violent unquenchable love drove him to commit the wildest excesses, until, leader of two thousand reckless bandits, he towered for a while as the real master of Paris and snapped his fingers at the vain efforts of the police. Yet, somehow, that fierce love which seemed not only predestined but as though continued from a former life, blinded Cartouche to the power he wielded and robbed him of ambition. There was a time—a fleeting hour—when he might have established a dictatorship and ruled France, but the opportunity passed—and left him merely a bandit, the most reckless and puissant outlaw the world has ever seen.

Fortunately, although the complete story of his life has never been told, it was not an impossible task to reconstruct events from the beginning. Nearly four hundred voluminous dossiers and reports were prepared for the trial of Cartouche, and when already bound to the wheel which was to tear him limb from limb, this man, whom none of the ghastly tortures inflicted had caused to weaken, gave a last circular glance, searching the serried ranks of the silent crowds in the hope that his formidable army of cut-throats would make an attempt at rescue and then, convinced that in truth they had abandoned him to his fate, he cried in that full sonorous voice which was his greatest charm :

" So be it, they have broken their vows ; now every one shall

pay for that cowardice with his life. Cut my bonds, I will relate the tale of my life. Let scribes sit by me to record it, and to record the names of my men."

And for eighteen consecutive hours, sitting on the edge of the rack, naked but for a cloak, sustained now and then by wine and bread, Cartouche made confession. It is from that confession, written by monks in old-fashioned French, that I have gleaned the tale of his fantastic career. When I found them, the yellow dusty pages were still bound with one of the slender chains which once encircled his ankles. Fortunately historians, among which the learned Peuchet, had added notes and translations of many parts, so that, but for a phrase here and there, the story stood out in bold relief.

In October 1693, a saddler named François Louis Cartouche, who lived in the rue Pont aux Choux in Paris, registered the birth of a son, Louis Dominique, but after the execution of this son he confessed that the notorious outlaw had been brought to him clandestinely when only a babe by a nobleman and famous dignitary of the Church, who had paid him a large sum to bring him up and keep him in ignorance of his true origin. Who the mother was he never discovered. Since Dominique was totally unlike his brothers and sisters and displayed the superb courage which at that period was the birthright only of aristocrats, it is probable that he was indeed of noble birth. At any rate he was given a good education, and sent when fourteen years old to a famous Jesuit school, where it appears Voltaire was also a pupil. There the first seeds of his future misfortunes were sown. As a saddler's son, set among the scions of courtiers and nobles, he became the butt of their disdain and their cruel pranks. One boy, named Hector d'Ormessan, lost no opportunity of persecuting Dominique, and at last caused him to be suspected of having committed a theft. The head of the school had received several jars of honey from Narbonne, which he locked in a cupboard in his room. D'Ormessan somehow succeeded in stealing the key of this cupboard and carried the honey to the dormitory. In order to make Dominique's guilt appear quite certain he smashed one of the jars on his bed. To his surprise he found a heap of golden ducats hidden in the honey. Thereupon he placed some of the coins in his victim's mattress and pocketed the rest himself. But he had been seen by another pupil, Ernest de Lusbert, who was the only friend Dominique Cartouche had in the school. Informed of what had happened, instead of going to the principal

Cartouche caught d'Ormessan in the grounds and at once attacked him. The boy was then nearly seventeen, and although not tall he was very strong and agile. In a few minutes a fierce battle was raging, and d'Ormessan, finding that he was no match for Cartouche, called loudly for help. Only de Lusbert sided with Dominique; sticks and belts made their appearance and the priests arrived only just in time to prevent Cartouche and de Lusbert from being killed.

The principal was so enraged at the loss of his secret hoard that he ordered Cartouche to be locked in a species of dungeon. But the boy succeeded in wrenching the rusty bars of the tiny window from their crumbling base and escaped, fully determined neither to return to the school nor to go home. He walked several days and nights at random through the woods which extended towards the coast, and at last, hungry, tired, and with his clothes in rags, he fell in with a roving band of acrobats. The leader, a gigantic swarthy Romany known as Jacques the Wrestler, listened to the boy's story, made him strip and examined his squat muscular body, and finally agreed to enrol him as a member of his troupe.

With characteristic indifference to the future, Cartouche abandoned all hope of becoming a lawyer, as he had intended, and threw himself heart and soul into the study of tricks of sleight of hand and feats of agility and strength. Soon he became the cleverest of the nomad athletes and a great favourite with the gipsies, who pitched their tents and gave performances in every hamlet to which their wanderings led them. A year passed thus and Cartouche was already resigned to his fate when one day, whilst waiting for his turn to appear on the green of a Brittany village near Quimper, he noticed two girls dressed as servants standing not far away, watching the antics of a bear that had been trained as a juggler. One of the girls was superb—tall, slender, with a mass of red-gold hair and large brilliant blue eyes; her complexion had the creamy tint of perfumed apple blossoms, and at each merry laugh her teeth sparkled between the carmine lips. Cartouche gazed and gazed, his soul in his eyes. Never had he seen such perfection. Here was the girl of his dreams, the mate of his choice. As he strode hastily forward and bowed, an embarrassed blush suffused the girl's cheeks. He stood a moment hat in hand, murmuring vague compliments, but what his tongue refused to utter his shaking voice and deadly pallor revealed clearly. A handsome couple they made standing thus in the sunlight. Cartouche lithe, muscular, dressed in sombre clothes that gave him the air of a grandee of Spain, a brilliant plume in

his hat the only splash of colour, was extraordinarily attractive. His sunburnt skin, flashing black eyes and curly hair were in profound contrast to the girl's vivid dazzling charms. Neither seemed aware of the surging crowd. As though obeying an irresistible impulse the girl held out her hand and Cartouche pressed his lips to the shapely fingers.

"My name is Ivonne," the girl whispered. "I have come to watch you perform—I saw you this morning on horseback, when you passed the gate of the castle there"—and she pointed suddenly to a belt of trees, "You are not a gipsy, are you?"

"No, mademoiselle," Cartouche answered. "I am of noble blood. I joined these Bohemians because of an enemy. Who lives in that castle?"

"The Duke Abelard de Kergolese. He is in Paris just now."

"And you, whom do you serve?"

An instant the girl's eyes glittered angrily, and she threw back her head with a movement of disdain; then, at a warning touch from her companion, she became confused, laughed a little and replied:

"I am maid-in-waiting to the Duchess."

At that moment the harsh note of a bugle sounded from the group of gipsies, and with a hurried "Wait for me, mademoiselle, I must join my companions," Cartouche hurried away.

That day he surpassed himself in reckless daring, and when at the conclusion of the performance he supported a pyramid of eight men and swung two heavy weights from his extended arms, the populace burst into frenzied applause. But Cartouche had eyes only for Ivonne standing as though fascinated under a spreading oak. The leader of the nomads was so pleased with the sum he collected that he decided to stay another day, much to the delight of Cartouche, who had already obtained the promise of a tryst from Ivonne. His hurried wooing was fierce and passionate, and when the next day the gipsies struck their tents and proceeded on their way, Ivonne sat behind him on his horse, wrapped in a long black cloak, her face almost hidden by a cowl.

At first the leader was inclined to be angry.

"We want no trouble with the police," he growled. "There will be an outcry when this wench doesn't turn up in the morning, and the Duke is a dangerous man. She must go back."

"Very well," Cartouche replied. "But you are a fool. She will learn to perform with me—see how beautiful she is! Dress her as one of ourselves, and with a little touch of paint no one will know her, and a handsome girl always pleases the public.

However, if you will not let her stay I'll leave also and apply for a post in the Duke's stables."

On the words he threw back the cowl and exposed the girl's exquisite face. The gipsy stared spellbound, and an expression of bestial desire slowly transformed his swarthy features; it was not lost on Cartouche, who half drew a dagger from his belt and tapped it significantly. "And she is mine, *don't forget*, Jacques. Mine—and the man who comes near her *will* taste cold steel."

With a muttered curse the fellow stumbled off, but Cartouche realised that Ivonne's beauty would surely cause trouble, and determined to leave the gipsies at the first opportunity. Yet for a time these two were happy. At the next halt the picturesque Romany marriage rites made them man and wife, and they received a tent to themselves. But although in outward seeming the gipsies were still his friends, Cartouche sensed a change. Vague and intangible at first, he could hardly say whence it came. Yet twice a dim shapeless presentiment caused him to leave his food untouched, and it was well he did so, for when he gave a portion to one of the dogs the animal died within an hour. After that he prepared his own meals. The women too drew away and left Ivonne to herself, and the looks of the men when they believed themselves unobserved were pregnant with sensuous desire.

Then one day, whilst performing in a village, at the moment Cartouche made the flying leap which should have ended on the shoulders of his partner, the fellow moved swiftly sideways, and Cartouche struck the ground with a crash and lay senseless and bleeding.

He was carried with feigned concern to a cottage and left in the care of the good-natured peasant. For three days he was delirious and unable to move. But at last his robust health overcame the shock of his fall, the wound on his head began to heal and the fever died down. When the peasant came as usual to bathe his head with water, and to renew the herbs he had bound to the cut, he found his patient sitting on the bed, struggling with his clothes.

"Why am I here? Where are my friends and where is my wife?" he cried hoarsely when he perceived the farmer. "Why am I in bed and undressed, and why does my head ache so infernally?"

"Softly, softly, my fine fellow," the kindly peasant replied. "There is some broth on the fire. Eat that first and then we will talk."

Cartouche seized the bowl the man held out and eagerly gulped the contents.

"Now, that is better, my lad. You have had a bad spill. I saw it happen, and I'd swear it was done with intention. We all thought so; and your friends, as you call them, had to leave in a hurry or they would have felt the weight of our sticks. I'm thinking your wife would have stayed to nurse you, had she cared, but perhaps they kept her hidden, for I saw none but old women. Anyhow, you may thank your stars I was there to look after you."

"God in heaven, how long have I lain here?" Cartouche cried, starting up and staggering dizzily to a chair.

"Four days—I do not——"

"Four days!" Cartouche interrupted. "Oh, my sweet Ivonne—I see it all now. For the love of Christ lend me a horse—which way did they go!"

His anguish was so poignant that the farmer calmed him with the promise of a vehicle. "You are not fit to ride," he said gently. "But there was some gold in your pocket which fortunately I removed—for your swarthy chief searched your clothes. I will drive you to Vallabrais and from there you can get a post chaise. They cannot travel fast. Here is your money," and he held out a handful of coins. Cartouche thanked the honest fellow and dressed in haste, and an hour later he was whirling along the road in a clumsy but serviceable cart. It was late at night when he arrived at Vallabrais, and learned that the troup had indeed passed that way. Bidding the kindly farmer good-bye, with renewed thanks for his assistance and the promise to repay him in full if ever the opportunity came, he ran to the nearest inn and without losing a moment hired a horse and rode frantically through the night, although his strength was almost spent and he was compelled to tie himself in the saddle with his scarf.

No doubt such fierce energy was unexpected, for three days later he discovered the freshly made tracks of waggons and horses, which he recognised at once, and not far away he heard the barking of dogs and cracking of whips. Tying his horse to a tree he sat down to wait for the dark; then, sword in hand, he crawled towards the camp, guided by the sheen of the gipsies' fires. His was the patience of the savage, alone against twenty he knew that only cunning would serve. First he must discover where Ivonne was hidden; for that she was a prisoner he felt sure. From his hiding-place he watched the evening meal prepared, and when all were seated around the central fire he saw a woman fill a platter with food and carry it to one of the covered waggons. Slowly

the hours dragged by and it seemed to Cartouche that the gipsies would never cease chattering. But at last the chief rose with a yawn and stumbled to his tent. His example was soon followed by the others and little by little the camp fell silent. Only one sentry and the dogs remained on watch. To his joy Cartouche saw that the waggon in which his wife was a prisoner stood some distance from the firelight. With infinite caution, inch by inch, he wormed his way towards it. Once one of the dogs raised his head and inhaled the air, but the night breeze was blowing towards Cartouche. He believed, moreover, that should they sense him they would not give the alarm, for they knew him well. Circling noiselessly round the clearing, he reached the waggon to which he had seen the woman carry food. It was only covered by a large sailcloth stretched over wooden hoops. Drawing his knife he ripped through the canvas, instantly whispering :

" Don't move, Ivonne—it is I, Dominique."

At once a faint cry answered his words :

" Oh, my love—my love, they said you were dead. I am tied hand and foot and stiff with bruises. That beast Jacques beats me every day. He is determined to make me marry him."

Two shaking hands were thrust through the opening and with a quick slash he freed them from the ropes. Thereupon the girl pulled herself forward until he could do as much for the coils on her feet and around her waist. Then, placing his muscular arm beneath her back, he lifted her to the ground, and an instant later she was in his arms. At that supreme moment his nerves contracted with icy terror, a rough hand gripped his shoulder and flung him aside, and a coarse voice growled :

" Aha, the lovers ! So you thought to get away. This time I'll slit your throats."

It was Jacques the Wrestler, who had approached unseen. But Cartouche was desperate. He still held his heavy knife, and before the fellow could voice the shout bubbling in his throat the heavy blade drove fiercely through flesh and bone and pinned him by the neck to the cart. But the noise of his fall against the wood had alarmed the sentry, and at his call several men came running. Cartouche thrust Ivonne behind him and drew his sword. Beset from all sides he was unable to ward off the smashing blows from heavy staves, his knees sagged, and a fierce pain shot through his head, but as the black veil of unconsciousness shut out the fight, he thought he heard wild yells of terror and the crashing of horses through the shrubs. Once again, when feeling and sight returned, he found himself lying on a bed, whilst a woman who wore the white bonnet of Brittany was bathing his

head with cold water. From her he learned that her brother had found him in the forest, bleeding from several wounds, and had carried him to their house.

"And the gipsies?" Cartouche asked, pressing his hands to his throbbing temples.

"Oh, they are all under lock and key. The soldiers caught them as they were fleeing; they've been after them for some time. All those Bohemians are cut-throats and robbers, and they steal children as well. I hear that they had abducted a girl. So it was the gipsies attacked you. How did you come to be near their camp at night?"

Cartouche muttered something about seeking his horse and feigned to fall back in a swoon. He well knew that more than once the gipsies had robbed lonely houses, and that when opportunity offered they had not been averse to despoiling travellers. He realised that he must not let it be thought he had been a member of the band. So soon as he was able to walk, he interviewed the warders at the prison, where his former companions were now detained, and enquired if a girl with red-gold hair was with them. From their replies he gathered that somehow Ivonne had escaped when the soldiers arrived, for no one had seen her. So once more Cartouche began his weary search. He dared not ask too many questions, but he learned that it was by the King's order the soldiers had set out to hunt the gipsies, soon after they had passed through the village where he met Ivonne, and this order had come because the daughter of a noble family was believed to have been abducted. Day after day he trudged along the road which led to the castle where he had met his beloved wife, in the hope that there he would find her. Food and shelter he earned by displaying his skill with cards and performing various tricks of sleight of hand, whenever he came to a town or village. As an acrobat he could do little alone, and he dared not recall his connection with the Bohemians for fear that he might also be charged with the crimes they had committed. So by slow and weary stages he revisited the scenes where only a short time since he had been so happy. At last, with fast-beating heart, he saw the turrets of the grim old castle looming through the trees. Yet now that the desired moment had come, he felt afraid. After a scanty meal at an inn, he crept to the massive gates of the park and knocked. The lodgekeeper gave him a queer look when he enquired if a girl who had disappeared some time before had returned, but vouchsafed no direct reply; instead, he opened the gates and requested Cartouche to enter and wait in his lodge, while he informed mademoiselle of his arrival. Cartouche

complied and eagerly watched the man hobble towards the house. An hour passed before he returned and beckoned him to follow. The vast hall they entered was empty, but his guide ushered Cartouche into a square, dimly-lit room, evidently a library, and curtly bade him wait. Seized with sudden suspicion Cartouche sprang to the door as it closed and tried to turn the handle—but it was too late, the man had locked it. The window too was high and heavily barred, and there was nothing in the room with which he could effect an escape. Like a fool he had walked into a trap and was now a prisoner.

He drew his sword, and with his back against the wall prepared to fight for his freedom. Almost immediately a key grated in the lock, a kick flung the door wide, and a tall figure stood framed in the opening, pistol in hand. Surprise held Cartouche spellbound. Despite the pointed beard and moustache he recognised the man who had appeared so abruptly.

"D'Ormessan!" he cried shrilly, and sprang forward with uplifted blade. "You—my enemy—here. Where is my wife?"

D'Ormessan gazed at Cartouche with an evil smile.

"I knew we should meet again, *mon chér*, and you are now entirely at my mercy. Your wife indeed! You are mad! You and your Bohemian friends actually dared to abduct the Marquise Ivonne de Kergolese, daughter of my uncle the Duke, and niece of His Excellency Don Alvarez de Leon, and for that they shall be hanged. As for you—a slow painful death shall square our accounts, but you shall live long enough to see me marry the Marquise. She has told me that you held her a prisoner and that she feigned to allow you to woo her in order to escape. Fortunately, the Duke's men arrived in time."

"You lie, you foul beast—the girl who married me of her own free will was only a servant of the Duchess."

"Golden-haired, was she not? Yes, I thought so. The Marquise loved to masquerade as a commoner; but as for marrying you —pah," and d'Ormessan spat at Cartouche.

Like a raging tiger, the youth leapt with vibrating blade straight at his sneering enemy, but d'Ormessan had foreseen the onslaught and dropped to one knee, causing Cartouche to stumble and fall. Before he could regain his feet a dozen men had thrown themselves on him—he was bound hand and foot and carried to a chamber hewn from the living rock below the castle. A chain was fastened round his neck and locked to a ring in the wall in such fashion that he would strangle at the least struggle. There he lay for days, despairing, hopeless, convinced that he would die. The air in the vault was so foul that soon his brain

became numb. Only a tiny ray of light came through a loophole high up in the outer wall, which served but to reveal the horrors of his prison. Rats scampered over his body and gnawed the scanty food a man threw at his feet once a day, and all the crawling horrors such a place begets tortured him without respite. With diabolical cruelty, salt was added to his tiny ration of water, causing his throat to burn with a thirst that nothing could assuage, and at night the bitter cold twisted his limbs in agony. How long he remained there praying for death to end the torture he never knew, for his wandering senses could take no count of time. It seemed to him that ages had passed, when one day a voice hailed him from the slit in the wall and something bright came tumbling at his feet. It was a long keen knife, and tied to the hilt was a file. As he twisted forward, risking the tightening chain, and grasped this unexpected gift, the voice came again in a sibilant whisper :

" When you are free from your bonds, wait until your food is brought—then act ! Do not fail or you are lost ! My mistress is closely guarded at a relative's house in Paris, but I do not know where. She sent me a message to say she prays night and day you will come so soon as you are free. D'Ormessan boasted you were his prisoner here."

More than the hope of freedom, these words caused his stagnant blood to leap and drum in his veins, and his heart began to pound wildly. Holding the knife between his knees he was soon free of the ropes on his wrists and legs, and at once set to work with the file to cut the chain from his neck. Night had almost come before this was accomplished, but at last he stood upright, rid of all his bonds. It was evident that his movements had been observed by the unknown friend, for again the welcome voice called softly, and a rope to which a bundle was fastened was slowly lowered until he could grasp it. He found that it contained meat, water and wine, and a bag filled with money. He ate and drank sparingly, walking to and fro for hours to give his cramped limbs time to regain some measure of strength. At last when the grey dawn crept along the wall he prepared for his desperate venture. The straw on which he had lain he tumbled over his cloak and boots, to make it seem as though he were lying beneath ; the chain he fastened to his jerkin and the severed ropes he threw into a corner. Then he took up his post beside the door, knife in hand. And now the creeping hours were truly torture, but at last he caught the jingle of keys and knew that the moment for action had come. With resounding clang the bolts were drawn and the door flung wide. The breath

whistled through his teeth as the turnkey stooped to pour water into his overturned jug. With a horrible thud the knife sank to the hilt between the man's shoulders, and as he dropped Cartouche pressed his face violently into the mound of straw. Only a muffled groan followed ; the body quivered in one long agonised contortion and he felt that life had fled. He crouched beside the door and listened anxiously but not a sound came from the passage, and without further delay he dressed, wrapped his cloak around him, locked the door, and crept cautiously up the stairs, carrying a sheaf of the straw on which he had lain so many weary days. To his relief no one appeared to be about, and when he reached the stairs which led to the house he dropped the straw, and with the flint and tinder taken from the turnkey he quickly fanned it into flame. So soon as it was well alight he crept to the hall and pulled tapestries and curtains from the walls to increase the blazing pile, and finally added chairs and benches. Then he ran to the door and keeping well in the shadows reached the gates, where he waited until he saw dense clouds of smoke and darting flames issue from the windows of the castle and heard the yells of terror of frightened servants. Well satisfied that for a time no one would trouble about him, he scaled the wall at a spot where the stones had crumbled, and ran without a backward glance until he gained the wood where once the gipsies had camped. His one thought now was to reach Paris. Thanks to the money he had received, he was able to hire horses, and a week later he entered the town by the St. Denis gate.

Thus, after such extremes of joy and torture that in a few months his soul had leapt from youth to old age and his heart was filled with cold and bitter hatred, whilst visions of vengeance distorted his every thought, he stood once more in the city of wealth and pleasure. But now he was no longer a passionate reckless youth. Every man was to him a potential foe, a barrier to his one desire—Ivonne. But to find her he needed both wealth and allies, and in this extremity he bethought himself of his talent at sleight of hand, and without further ado thrust himself into the crowds thronging the Pont au Change, bent on robbery and violence. Watches, purses and trinkets he deftly extracted from their owner's clothes until his pockets bulged. He remembered a tavern Jacques the Wrestler had mentioned, where thieves were wont to sell their goods. It was an evil den near the rue aux Loups, in a narrow alley known as La Grande Pinte. Already, although it was only noon, several oily Jews were haggling in a corner with their ruffianly clients.

Cartouche approached and threw his loot on the table.

"How much? Hurry now," he growled, his throat thick with disgust. The men looked up without replying, and at the same instant a heavy hand spun him round. He saw a powerful red-faced man, armed with a pistol, who grinned at him like a snarling dog.

"Get out," this fellow cried. "No strangers here. And leave that gold." Cartouche drew his knife and with a clever feint set its point at the fellow's throat, disdainful of the pistol. At that the man laughed hoarsely.

"Well done, coxcomb—you'll suit my band. You're a fool to work alone, for if caught you are helpless. I'm Red Michelet. Ah, you've heard of me, eh?"—as Cartouche started back at the notorious name. "Well—what say you, will you join?"

Cartouche closed his eyes and thought a moment. Alone he could never reach Ivonne, and that was all he lived for, whereas with the help of this bandit and his cronies he could at least defy the police.

"Yes, I'll join. But if I'm worth my salt you must help me in a private matter."

So it was settled, and for a time Cartouche curbed his impatience and obeyed orders. The band Michelet commanded was composed of roughly two hundred men. All had their work assigned to them by the leader. Cartouche, because of his well-bred manners, was given fine clothes and money, and sent to gamble in the countless clubs and "tripots"—his skill at cheating brought him much money, but in time a current of suspicion inevitably closed all doors and he was branded a "*grec*." Thereafter it was he who planned the thefts to be carried out, and left the work to others, whilst he searched Paris from end to end for his wife. One day, when preparing to attack a country house, he and Michelet had remained behind. As they climbed into the boat which was to take them across the Seine, Michelet, who was far from sober, pointed to the water and said to Cartouche: "See, we are alone—if I were to drown, you would be chief."

Cartouche looked in amazement at the drunken ruffian. Then with blazing eyes he cried:

"What an idea you've given me, you fool," and on the words his sword flashed, Michelet sank like a stone and only a crimson foam marked the spot where he had vanished. Wiping his blade on some leaves, Cartouche calmly rejoined his companions, and remarked in icy tones:

"Michelet is dead, he fell in the river. Henceforth I'm your leader."

At once he began to organise the band which was soon to

terrorise France. His undoubted genius for leadership might in other circumstances have won him the foremost rank as a soldier. It served him well as an outlaw. In a few months over two thousand men, sworn by the most fearful oaths to obey him, and holding positions in every walk of life, were at his beck and call. Even famous surgeons, who by day received the élite of Paris as patients, accompanied him on his nocturnal raids and succoured the wounded. Half the archers of the watch were in his pay; postilions, warders, and high court officials and even the governor of the Chatelet prison accepted Cartouche as their chief. The police were powerless against this army of robbers. Every window in Paris was at once protected by spikes and iron bars, and a regiment of the royal guard was constantly under arms in the city—but all these precautions were vain. By day his men worked in bands of fifty, taking all that came their way. The jewelled sword hilts of the time especially attracted Cartouche, and time and again the Regent himself found his scabbard empty. It was then that for the first time wrought-steel hilts were ordered from England in order to give the courtiers a chance to retain their swords. Soon popular legend endowed Cartouche with magical powers. The Regent gave the military authorities unlimited powers to break up this gang and a huge reward for the leader's capture was offered. But every day twenty of his men, dressed and made up to resemble him, were seen in twenty different parts of the town, until it became a hopeless task to search for the real Cartouche. And then at last his spies brought him word that the girl he sought was truly the Marquise de Kergolese, and that she was held captive in the palace of the Spanish Ambassador. At once Cartouche laid his plans. Whilst five hundred of his men made a feigned attack on the buildings of the royal mint, he led the assault on the palace, which stood quite alone in spacious grounds near the Versailles gate. The servants and the handful of soldiers were helpless to stem the swirling tide of ruthless bandits. Soon the doors were battered down and the windows smashed, and at the head of a chosen twenty Cartouche rushed from room to room, searching for the girl he loved and putting all he met to the sword. But he failed to discover her. At last, when about to set fire to the place and the order to withdraw had already been given, a secret panel suddenly opened and Ivonne, her beautiful hair draping her like a fiery mantle, rushed forward with outstretched arms.

"My love, my love—I did not know until I heard your voice that it was you!"

Sweeping her into his arms he fled, leaving his men to loot and

burn the building. But this outrage was his undoing. Every available regiment was ordered to besiege the bandit's lair. For many days a desperate battle was waged, his men fighting with courage, but his presence was needed to hearten them against such odds, and Cartouche lay in the arms of his love, indifferent to the future. At last his chief lieutenant, Poil de Feu, came bursting into his room.

"Dominique, the troops are rushing our last defences; come if you do not wish to be taken."

But already it was too late, they were surrounded. Just before dusk the watching sentries saw to their amazement the well-known figure of the bandit chief climb over a wall and run swiftly towards the river. So audacious was this move that, had it not been for hidden musketeers, he would have escaped. But when already almost out of range, there came a rattle of musketry and he fell. At once a second figure, the exact counterpart of the first, followed regardless of flying bullets and flung itself on the body, and when the wondering soldiers approached they found Cartouche, wild-eyed, haggard and speechless, kneeling on the ground and holding the mangled form of a beautiful girl in his arms. She was dressed in clothes that were like his own, and had hoped by this ruse to give her lover a chance to escape. Cartouche allowed himself to be bound and led away without a struggle, begging only the right to cut a lock of hair from the beautiful head of his Ivonne, the girl he had loved more than life.

His trial lasted a month, but through it all he refused to utter a word. He was sentenced to die on the wheel after undergoing fearful torture, in the hope that he would reveal the names of all his men. Although the executioner tried every one of his ghastly arts—crushing and maiming the living flesh—it was in vain, and at last the bandit was taken and tied to the wheel which was to tear him limb from limb. Pale as death, with clenched teeth, he gazed at the silent crowds, seeking a sign of that rescue on which he had counted. When at last he realised that his men had abandoned him to his fate, he cried in a ringing voice:

"Untie me—I will reveal the names of every one of the craven dogs."

Scribes sat by him, a day and a night, and as name after name was uttered archers ran to arrest these men and brought them to stand beside their chief. Five hundred of his followers were thus captured. When no more could be found Cartouche turned to those who stood beside him with downcast eyes, and cried:

"You dogs—you could have saved me and yourselves. A



One of the former haunts of Cartouche, still standing to-day, although three centuries old, in the Passage de la Grande Pinte.



Cartouche just before his death. From an ancient wood carving.

desperate rush and these 'canaille' would have scattered like chaff. Now we will die together."

They were his last words; the executioner whipped his horses, the dreadful wheel turned, and Cartouche, ardent lover and master outlaw, was nothing but mangled flesh. Yet some of his men must have loved his memory, for a week later d'Ormessan was found dead on the steps of Nôtre Dame, and on the dagger which had pierced his heart was tied a scrap of paper with the words "Cartouche pays his debt."

PHANTOM GOLD

A TALE OF MEDIÆVAL ALCHEMY

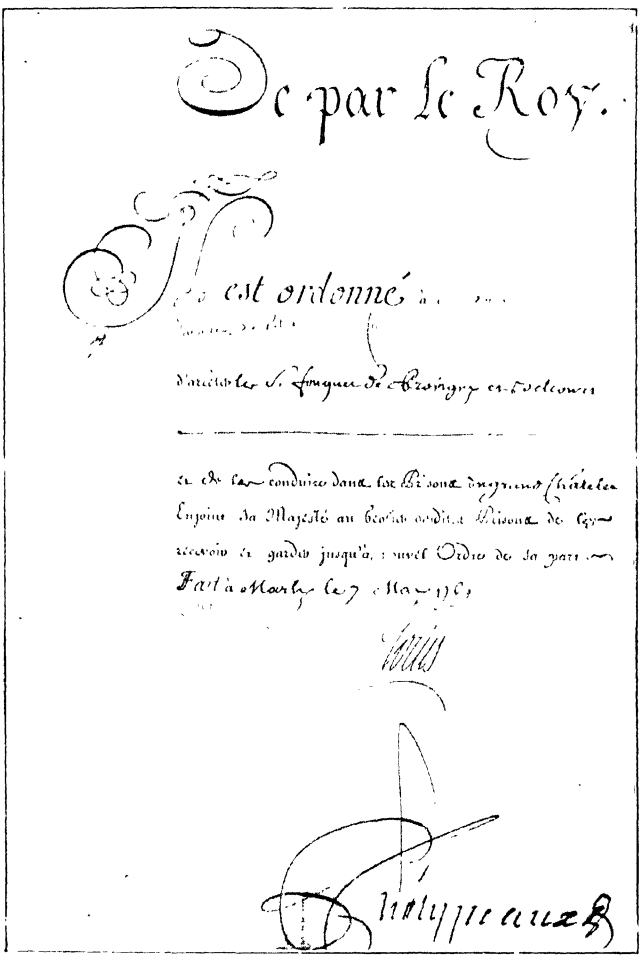
AT no time in the history of France was the general belief in the legendary philosopher's stone—that powerful agent whose mission it was to solidify mercury and transmute base metals into virgin gold—so firmly accepted as just before the tidal wave of hate and lust which swept away the glittering Court of the Tuileries and Versailles, and left in its place only a starving populace that believed in nothing.

Cagliostro—necromancer, alchemist and visionary—whose origin has ever remained veiled in mystery, was the greatest of the self-styled magicians who spent their lives poring over ancient parchments. He had many followers, but none became so famous as his favourite pupil, Count Charles Fouquer de Crovigny. Although quite young, he stands out in bold relief for his daring frauds and cynical use of magic formulæ. He at least was not the dupe of his own fancy, and the superstitions so prevalent at that time did not swamp his reason. His beautiful wife, Florianne, long remained a byword for heartless treachery; and his twin brother, who founded the notorious tavern " le Cabaret à la Mode " under the plebeian name of Jean Ramponeau, and secretly seconded the schemes of Charles, has passed into history as a typical example of the power a dual existence may confer on a clever actor. Fortunately several authentic engravings of the period have escaped destruction, also the famous *lettre de cachet*, signed by Louis XVI and sealed with the royal arms, which caused de Crovigny and his servant Delcourt to be imprisoned in the Chatelet; and even the second order, commanding the governor of the infamous prison to release the alchemist under the name of le frère Alexis Ruppere, are still in the archives.

Much of the tale I have gathered from fragments of folk lore, and popular satirical songs, which curiously enough vary little in the main outline from the memoirs of de Crovigny's

servant, Peter Delcourt—for his name is everywhere given as Peter, instead of the French equivalent Pierre. Indeed, many of the phrases Delcourt used have not only a flavour of the sea but are strangely English in construction. Moreover, in the introduction to these memoirs, which were written in prison, he states briefly that, " tired of robbing Spanish ships, I had settled down to what I fondly hoped would be a peaceful life, little dreaming that it would lead me to end my days in a dungeon." It had been noticed also that instead of a rapier the man always carried a sailor's cutlass when accompanying his master, and this cutlass had a massive brass hilt of English make. It is obvious from this that at some time in his career Peter had served on a British pirate vessel. Peuchet relates that when the Chatelet prison was demolished, in 1802, his manuscript was found under a stone and that it was given to a learned Jesuit—Father Lapostelle. This priest found the tale so absorbing that, like the Abbé Prevost who immortalised the career of Manon Lescaut, he edited and printed fifty copies for his friends. Only one now remains in the library of the police archives, where it was my good fortune to discover it.

A large furnace of glazed bricks threw a ruddy sheen of dancing flames across the floor of a gloomy vaulted chamber that obviously served the owner as a laboratory. Mummified cats crouched in countless niches along the walls; uncouth stuffed bats, hanging by invisible threads, vibrated in the draught, and appeared to skim back and forth under the curved rafters, whilst in a corner stood the complete skeleton of a woman. A broad rough table in the centre of the room was littered with crucibles, retorts, and mediæval appliances, and stooping over a parchment covered with magic symbols was a young man of pleasing aspect. This was Count Charles Fouquer de Crovigny, alchemist and dreamer, a pupil of the notorious Cagliostro. He had renounced the frivolous pleasures of his age in order to seek for that loadstone of the philosophers—the secret formula which would transmute lead and mercury into gold. His features were partially hidden by a cunningly fashioned mask of wood, leather and glass, for noisome vapours rose from the bowl into which his supple hands, mottled and scarred by countless stains of acids, were busy casting powders and crystals. By his side, her beautiful face quivering with excitement, stood his wife. That the languorous East had bred the woman was apparent at once from her eyes. Unnaturally long and narrow, the fire and passion which



The warrant, known as a 'lettre de cachet', signed by Louis XV for the arrest of the alchemist and his sailor servant.

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slumbered in their depths held a promise of violent and sensuous passion which attracted all men who encountered their gaze. Although the heavy lids and curling lashes were in exquisite harmony with the deep black of the glittering pupils, there was something reptilian in their expression that conveyed a subtle warning, whilst appealing to the primitive evil dormant in mankind. She was a Circe who changed men into beasts. Her skin was a deep, creamy satin, that enhanced the vivid scarlet of the humid lips. But her greatest charm was the cloud of glossy hair which was gathered at the neck in a circlet of gold and rippled and shimmered in the candlelight like a phosphorescent sea at night. An exotic, intoxicating perfume emanated from her shapely form, yet—why or how it was hard to say—she recalled the snake that indeed drowsed in her sombre depths. There was nothing but adoration in her husband's eyes, however, as he turned at last and exclaimed in despair :

" It's no use, Florianne, either Cagliostro has tricked me, or I have failed to pierce the veil. A yellow powder does indeed gather on the surface of the liquid, but it is not gold."

" So, despite the countless days and nights you have spent in this pestilent hole, poring over pots and pans, and despite the money—all we possessed—which has been wasted, you are no further advanced on the road to riches. Advanced "— and the woman laughed bitterly—" far from it. We are beggars, and my dream of a life of pleasure at Court must remain—a dream."

Suddenly she stooped and clutched her husband by the shoulders in a brutal grip, but the biting fumes from the bubbling liquid at which he laboured caused her to stagger, stifled and coughing, to the wall. De Crovigny sprang up in alarm and seized a glass of spirit—" Merciful God, Florianne, you must never approach the table—it is death without a mask. Drink this quickly ! "

For a minute the woman remained with closed eyes and head thrown back, breathing in gasps, then she gazed long and searchingly at her husband, and slowly the hard, angry light faded, until her witches' eyes were smiling.

" Charles, you love me, or so at least I think," she purred. " Well, listen then. Cagliostro has cheated you. But you have the reputation of a great magician, as great almost as that Italian merchant of empty words. It is your turn to swindle others now, for money we *must* have."

De Crovigny shook his head with energy :

" I do not eat of that bread, madame. I seek for Nature's truths, and truth does not mix with lies."

"Very well—then I shall leave you. Continue to seek—at the bottom of the well of poverty. I shall easily find a rich lover."

"Ha—ha—ha, the lady is right, my master," a rude voice barked from the door. "Truth can only be bought with gold; and if the bailiffs come, you'll be helpless. I've slit many a throat and sent many a fine ship to the fishes for that same gold. It is the only thing that matters. I have heard that the Duke of Entremont offered Cagliostro ten thousand *pistoles* for a parchment which that old fraud could not sell because he was afraid; but you are no coward. If I may make a suggestion, why not see the Duke?"

It was a queer figure that came lurching into the room with a true seaman's roll. The squat powerful body was clad in blue broadcloth, bedecked with metal buttons; a heavy cutlass, that had obviously been fashioned in Britain, swung from a bandolier, whilst the sunburnt face, broad and good-humoured, looked out from the pleated folds of a gaudy neckcloth. De Crovigny removed his mask and glared angrily for a moment at the swaggering apparition, then, as though against his will, he burst into a boyish laugh.

"Peter, Peter, when you saved me from the press-gang at Brest and I engaged you as my servant, I did a foolish thing, for you have the manners of a pirate and not those of a valet."

"Well, I *am* a pirate—leastways I was; but if I am rough I am loyal, Monsieur le Comte. My old hanger will have to split in twain, and my heart too, before harm can befall you. But about the Duke now. You are my master, of course, yet——"

Florianne glided stealthily forward and threw a white arm about her husband's neck, rubbing her cheek against him with cat-like grace. At the sight Peter Delcourt turned away with a grin.

For a minute there was silence, then de Crovigny cast his mask on the table with a clatter.

"So be it, my family and the d'Entremonts have always been enemies. Go to him, Peter—you're a damned rogue, but you look honest. I'll write you a letter, but first listen to my instructions. If we are to cheat it would be well to make sure of success——" De Crovigny stopped and looked at his wife as though seeking an inspiration. "I have it!" he exclaimed abruptly. "This secret the Duke wished to buy from Cagliostro is the art of causing jewels to swell. I have just thought of those two boxes I have. They come from the Indies and are exactly alike. I'll suggest that d'Entremont shall bring a small diamond which I shall place in one of them. Then, when the room is full of magical smoke,

which will make him cough, you, Peter, will exchange that box for the other, into which I shall slip the big stone my father brought from the East. It is all that remains of my family jewels. D'Entremont has never seen it although it once adorned my father's sword. When the Duke has been convinced that his diamond has increased in size, the box must be closed and again exchanged for the other."

"And the gold?" the woman asked.

"Leave that to me," de Crovigny whispered. "The Duke will pay more attention to your beautiful eyes than to what I do."

Hastily scribbling a note, de Crovigny sealed it and handed it to his servant.

"Hasten back, friend Peter. We have much to do. I have requested d'Entremont to come to-morrow just before midnight."

André, Duke d'Entremont, was as credulous as his friend the Cardinal de Rohan. He had also become an ardent admirer of Cagliostro, and the cunning Italian's mystical jargon had convinced him that Nature had at last given up her secrets. He was eager to regild his coat of arms by acquiring the alchemist's formula, for cards, women, and money-lenders had sadly depleted his purse, but the Italian trickster was prudent. To extract money from his dupes by selling them philtres and incantations was simple, whereas to swindle a powerful courtier by selling a secret he did not possess, even though d'Entremont offered a tempting price, was fraught with danger, and Cagliostro had no wish to rot in a dungeon of the Bastille. Therefore he had refused, thus enhancing his reputation without endangering his liberty. As may be imagined, the Duke was delighted when Peter brought him de Crovigny's letter. It was common knowledge that the young man had been Cagliostro's pupil, his reputation for occult wisdom was great, and d'Entremont, to whom such treachery seemed natural, believed that the pupil had stolen the secrets his master guarded so jealously.

An hour before midnight, muffled in a long cloak and accompanied only by one servant, d'Entremont arrived at the alchemist's house. It was Peter who received him. He was garbed for the occasion in long flowing robes, richly studded with silver stars. A pointed, flame-coloured cap sat oddly on his bullet head, and his chin was hidden by a flowing beard cunningly fashioned of human hair. To de Crovigny's surprise he had fished this from an old Spanish chest, his only possession, which no one had ever seen open. More than once the erstwhile pirate had hinted that it contained secrets as dark as his master's pots. With a sweeping bow he ushered the Duke into the gloomy chamber, where the

furnace still burned redly. De Crovigny had not troubled to alter his appearance—and in truth his sombre dress and uncouth mask of glass and leather were impressive enough. But the moment the Duke entered, he forgot all else for the entrancing vision of Florianne, in gauzy veils that only partly concealed her sinuous form. Her glossy hair floated in perfumed waves over shoulders and arms, and on her brow was a jewelled crown. De Crovigny presented the woman with a sweep of his hand.

"This is my wife and assistant. Her spirit can command the powers whose help we need. Here is a rope—you must bind her to that chair while I prepare the crucible in which this molten lead shall be changed to gold. Be careful not to step over the occult signs I have traced on the floor."

With shaking hands d'Entremont obeyed. Powerless to resist the exquisite appeal of her sex, he slipped the cord over her unresisting form, his nerves quivering with delight. He lingered long with bowed head against the silky hair, then, obedient to the curt voice of the alchemist, he seated himself beside her. Pungent incandescent vapours now rose from the cauldron on the fire, which Peter maintained at white-heat with the blast from enormous bellows. Murmuring harsh-sounding words of apparently occult import, de Crovigny poured a silvery liquid into a bowl and added it to the bubbling pot. Denser and more stifling grew the air of the room, volumes of black smoke poured from six braziers placed in a circle, and although he fought against the incubus the Duke felt helpless and faint, whilst his lungs battled for life. Ten minutes dragged by, then abruptly a vivid crimson glare rent the mysterious gloom and struck full on de Crovigny, standing with outstretched arms beside the furnace. A hoarse yell burst from d'Entremont, and it was echoed by a shrill scream from the woman beside him; for a moment the alchemist seemed to waver, melt and become indistinct, and then, as though rent in twain, a second figure, his exact counterpart, appeared to issue from him, to stand in the same posture. And the phantom's lips also moved to the rhythm of resonant incantations. Form, dress, mask, and hands, all were alike, and the two echoing voices blended as one. Then the light flickered, failed altogether, the blaze from the coals died down, and when the terrified Duke recovered some measure of self-possession, Peter had lit numerous tapers and de Crovigny was pouring a golden liquid that hissed and hardened as it spread, into a metal form.

"Gold!" d'Entremont gasped, staggering to the table. "I know how it looks when molten. Marvel of marvels, you have found the philosopher's stone!"

De Crovigny removed his mask. His face was livid, great beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks, and at the sight d'Entremont's eyes dilated and he crossed himself furtively.

"You look as though you had come from Satan's realms," he said, wonder and awe in his voice. For answer the alchemist pointed to his wife:

"Remove the rope—my hands must not touch her to-night."

Whilst stooping over Florianne the Duke did not see the quick exchange of containers, and when he turned again to the table de Crovigny held a hemisphere of yellow metal.

"Test it," he said, "lest later you are doubtful how it was made. It is still hot, but it will not burn your fingers."

"I am satisfied. That lump of metal frightens me. Moreover, it is not the gold itself but the formula I seek. What price do you ask?"

"One hundred thousand *livres* for this and the method by which jewels will increase in size. But do not think you can succeed alone. A messenger to the powers of the air, such as my wife has become, must help you. When you desire to use the knowledge for which kings would sell their crowns, you shall come to me, and we will share equally. I need your money for the moment only, because my supply of rare ingredients is low. My experiments have ruined me. Moreover, I crave the King's favour for other matters, otherwise I should not dream of selling what has taken me years to discover. Before you leave this house you must swear never to divulge what you have seen nor what I shall tell you. Now give me the diamond you wish me to enlarge."

D'Entremont dropped a small jewel into the quaintly-carven box the alchemist held out. It was then closed and given to Peter, who carried it to Florianne, still sitting motionless in the magic circle. For a moment she recoiled, then she placed her hands on it, and when the lid flew back, to the Duke's delight, a great scintillating jewel, twenty times larger, had replaced the original stone.

With much ceremony, de Crovigny thereupon affixed a seal to each corner of the box and offered it to his guest.

"Box and diamond are yours, take them," he said. "But do not break those seals before midnight to-morrow. Here, too, is the parchment on which the ingredients and incantations are inscribed. Now pay me and swear the oath."

"But—I have not brought so large a sum with me. I can only give you ten thousand *pistoles*. I will send the rest to-morrow."

De Crovigny shook his head.

"Dawn is not far away. Let me offer you meat, wine, and a

couch. My servant shall accompany you at daybreak, and will hand you this sealed box, the gold and the parchment, in return for the sum agreed upon."

For a second the Duke hesitated, but now Florianne rose and came towards him with outstretched hands.

"Your Grace will accept our hospitality, I feel sure. I, too, am faint and will sup with you."

D'Entremont flushed with pleasure and bowed. A meal had been prepared in a pleasant, gaily-coloured room which came as a grateful change after the gloomy laboratory. With the food and wine d'Entremont regained his normal poise. A favourite at Court for his beauty and wit, he quickly forgot whatha d happened in his eagerness to woo this beautiful woman, and more than once de Crovigny saw meaning glances pass between the two. What few scruples still oppressed him at the fraud he had perpetrated vanished in the flame of his jealousy. Yet it was he who had plotted to use Florianne as a decoy, and he strove to believe she but played a part. He decided, however, to go in person with the Duke in order to make sure of the money. Unfortunately, whilst dressing for the journey to Versailles, he gave the treacherous nobleman the opportunity for which he had waited, and d'Entremont made good use of the few minutes he was alone with Florianne. He little guessed that this woman, whose fatal beauty had set his blood on fire, thought only of the life of ease and pleasure awaiting her at Versailles. Whilst he murmured burning words of love, her subtle brain sensed the innate cruelty of the man, and she decided to leave her husband before the fraud they had practised could be discovered. That he had willingly risked imprisonment for her sake mattered little, for she was utterly heartless. When de Crovigny had met her drifting from town to town with a drunken, improvident father who lived only by his wits, she had believed in the alchemist's dreams of gold and fame. Now that poverty had again crept near, she listened with joy to the Duke's empty promises, and at once accepted a tryst at his palace. Yet, cunning as she was, she did not suspect that in seeking to win her, d'Entremont was chiefly influenced by the belief that her presence would permit him to transmute lead into gold without the husband's assistance. To him women were as leaves in the forest, and the desire to hold Florianne in his arms was but a shallow passion. True to her creed, when the following night she entered the travelling chaise in which the Duke was waiting—for they had decided to hide for a time in Normandy—she carried, rolled in her cloak, the half of the money de Crovigny had obtained, and which, drunken with triumph, he had divided. Soon after they reached

their destination, d'Entremont stumbled into her room livid with rage, and scattered a handful of worthless crystals over the carpet.

"The box!" he snarled—"it was empty but for that rubbish. Where is the diamond it contained?"

It was only then that she remembered that the Duke had been entirely deceived by the scene at the laboratory. Obsessed by the desire to throw all the blame on her husband, she failed to realise at once that her own prestige was intimately linked with the Duke's belief in her powers, that he needed her to assist him in the incantations which de Crovigny had made so impressive. The shock was so unexpected that for a moment her native cunning deserted her, and she began to relate how he had been swindled. Just in time his furious face conveyed a warning to her brain, and she twisted the tale adroitly to her own favour.

"I *have* magical powers," she concluded with a rapt mystical air, "and the spirits obey me, but they can only be invoked by the man I love—and I have ceased to love my husband."

"Then all that scene, when your husband's phantom stood beside him, was a trick?" d'Entremont shouted.

At the question the woman flinched and grew pale. The strange apparition was something even she had not expected nor understood, and de Crovigny had refused to explain. Slowly she shook her head. "I do not know, I was almost swooning. I cannot account for it myself. But I know the diamond was stolen by means of duplicate boxes."

D'Entremont looked long and searchingly at her, and as he gazed his resentment cooled. She was a beautiful woman and worth the price he had paid, even though he had been tricked. And perhaps after all de Crovigny held secrets worth stealing. "The transmutation of lead into gold was no fraud," he muttered at last. "I fancy the fellow was clever enough to hide the truth even from you. Of course the parchment he gave me is worthless; I think, however, he can be made to reveal what he knows. He is now in my hands."

So it came about that a week later an officer and a guard of soldiers came with a royal *lettre de cachet* to arrest de Crovigny and Peter Delcourt. De Crovigny was abed and in high fever—the loss of his wife had utterly crushed him—and faithful Peter was by his side preparing a cooling drink. Thus both were taken without a struggle, although the servants opposed a frenzied resistance, hoping to give their master time to escape. In view of the alchemist's condition, the officer drove him to the Bastille instead of the Chatelet, since there he could have medical attendance. He

was at once bled copiously, and this and the shock of finding himself a prisoner brought him to his senses.

"This is d'Entremont's doing," he whispered to Peter, whose face was drawn with anxiety. "And that means my wife is with him. Oh, the dog! I shall live if only for revenge. I have a friend——"

"You have me above all," the loyal fellow replied in a low voice. "So get well quickly. I brought a rope under my clothes of which I can make a ladder. Damnation—do you think I roved the seas without learning something? And there is a fellow here in the north tower who—well, he and I were once shipmates. He'll help."

Thus encouraged, de Crovigny sent every day for food and wine, and, spurred by the desire for vengeance, rapidly gathered strength. It was a month, however, before Delcourt decided they could make the attempt to escape. That he had friends in the fortress was evident, for when more ropes were needed to finish the ladder he returned from their daily walk on the wall with a long coil under his cloak. Somehow a keen dagger and sundry twisted bits of iron also found their way to the cell. At last their preparations were complete, and Peter set out his scheme in detail.

"To-morrow night there is no moon, and at eleven the guard on the bastions is changed. We can fasten the ladder on one of the cannon, and I have prepared a hook to throw over the outer wall; the moat is not very wide."

"But if we are seen, dressed as we are and wet through?"

"We shall have uniforms to-night; my friend has obtained two, epaulettes and all. People will think we are just soldiers who have been carousing in the taverns, and that we fell into a ditch. Heaven send a dirty night."

"And how do we open the door of our cell?" de Crovigny asked, startled at the unexpected foresight of his servant.

For answer Peter pointed to a twisted piece of iron.

"The locks are quite simple. I'll undertake to pick them in an hour."

As though in answer to the prisoners' prayer, the next day came with streaming rain and intermittent thunder, and at ten, when de Crovigny and Peter crept from their cell, dressed as soldiers of the guard, the din of the warring elements was terrific. But the very storm which seemed to them so auspicious almost led to their undoing. One of the soldiers had stayed behind to bind a kerchief over his hat, and as he passed the corner where the fugitives crouched, a vivid flash of lightning revealed their presence. Then it was Peter gave his companion an insight into his past activities.

Like a snake he reared and struck. The long blade of his knife sank to the hilt in the unlucky soldier's throat, and he fell to the ground without a moan. What followed was to de Crovigny like a horrid dream. The frail ladder swung and slatted against the tower, buffeted by the storm; the ground seemed dreadfully remote and he sought the rungs with nerveless limbs, expecting every instant to feel himself hurtling through the air. But at last he gained the court, followed by Delcourt. At once the ladder began to ascend, and he caught a glimpse of a white face far above them.

"That's my friend," Peter remarked with a chuckle. "He'll burn it to leave no trace. Come along, only the wall and the moat now."

Fortunately the storm had driven all pedestrians from the streets and they gained the open fields unseen. Here Peter took his master's hand and led him to a lonely farmhouse, where to his astonishment a meal, dry clothes, weapons, and horses awaited them. Peter laughed as de Crovigny stared at these unexpected preparations.

"A wicked past is sometimes useful. Your Duke is at Versailles, so we have not far to ride"—and he made his cutlass sing through the air.

"We must hurry, though," he added briskly. "Our escape will be noticed by morning. So soon as we've settled accounts with madame and His Grace, we'll away to Dieppe, where I know of a captain who'll take us to England."

De Crovigny shook his head sadly. "I cannot leave my wife without proof that she betrayed us."

"That proof you'll have in plenty at d'Entremont's palace, I fear. To horse now, though I wish I had a sloop under me instead."

The two horsemen reached Versailles safely, and Peter, who had now completely taken charge of the expedition, made short work of climbing the wall surrounding the nobleman's grounds by means of the rope he had brought. With infinite caution they crept through the dripping shrubs to the house, of which only two windows were illuminated. Aided by his energetic companion, de Crovigny succeeded in reaching a balcony; the curtains had not been drawn, and with fluttering heart he gazed through the glass. Instantly a cry of rage burst from him: his wife was standing before a crackling fire, and beside her, one arm about her waist, was his enemy. Before Delcourt could intervene he had shattered the panes with frenzied blows from his pistol, and leapt into the room. At the unexpected irruption the woman screamed and sank to the floor, but d'Entremont had himself well in hand.

These were not ghosts, as he saw by the trickle of blood on de Crovigny's face where a splinter had cut him. Instantly he seized a pistol and fired, then, sweeping the candles from the mantel, he sprang to the door shouting for help. As Delcourt dashed after him with raised cutlass, men came running up the stairs. Realising that they would be overpowered, he attempted to drag his master to the window, but before they could find the rope in the dark blows rained on them from all sides, pistols flashed, a slug tore the sword from Peter's hand, and in a trice they were bound and helpless. This time they were taken to the Chatelet prison at the Duke's orders, and thrown each into a noisome dungeon, into which the light of day never came.

But although defeat had overwhelmed him so quickly, de Crovigny had still a card to play. No one had ever suspected the existence of his twin brother Jean, who had secretly helped him for years at his experiments. He it was who had stood beside him on the night they had staged their fraud. As Jean Ramponeau, this brother had become notorious in his "Cabaret à la Mode," a tavern where all the élite of art and letters forgathered. Jean was the double of Charles in every detail, even their voices were alike, and because of his pride in the ancient name, Jean had never appeared in public without a cunning disguise. As a tavern keeper he was prosperous, and much of his money had maintained his brother in the state his rank demanded. When Jean learned of the misfortune which had befallen his twin, he obtained a permit to visit him. He went as an old woman, and although a turnkey watched from a distance to see that no weapon or instrument should reach the prisoner, they were able to talk and concoct a fantastic scheme. In the days that followed d'Entremont and Florianne were haunted. If they approached a window at night, the face of de Crovigny, pale, beaded with perspiration, and expressing unspeakable hatred and pain, seemed to float in space before their eyes. On several occasions d'Entremont was roused from sleep to see a vague form by his bedside which vanished when he called for help; and one night a bony hand clutched his throat. Frantic with fear—for by his orders de Crovigny had been tortured that very day, in the hope that he would reveal his secret for making gold—he called wildly for help, and when his servants brought candles he saw that the bed and the carpet were wet with blood. Without waiting for daylight, d'Entremont ordered a horse to be saddled and galloped furiously to the Chatelet. Colonel Hay, the governor, was aroused in haste and conducted his haggard visitor to the cell to which the unfortunate de Crovigny had been taken after two hours on the rack. They found him sprawling on

the floor in a swoon, and around his body was a circle of cabalistic signs which had been traced with his own blood. D'Entremont gazed in horror at the uncanny sight. Then he turned to the governor and cried fiercely:

"The man must die. I shall have no peace until he has been buried with a stake through his heart. Only that will keep his spirit from appearing to me every night."

"And his secret?" the governor asked, his eyes alight with greed.

"Let him keep it. I shall go mad if this continues. To-morrow, mind—not later. I will protect you from harm. As for the other, his servant, he will be executed soon for murdering the soldier at the Bastille."

But the governor was not minded to destroy for ever the chance of discovering the key to fabulous wealth. That day a priest, Brother Alexis Ruppere, had died in his cell. It was an easy matter for the governor to register instead the death of de Crovigny and to transfer the unconscious man to the chamber in which the priest had been confined. When d'Entremont came the following day he was shown the false entry in the prison books, and a rude bier ready for the graveyard. But Jean had been informed of the trick by his spies. He knew that Frère Alexis Ruppere had committed a crime of no importance, and at once appealed to Cagliostro, who, through the Prince de Rohan, obtained an order for the release of the supposed priest, which the governor, caught in a trap of his own making, dared not disobey. Thus once more, on July 31st, 1769, Charles de Crovigny passed into the world of free men, and drove away with Jean. A week later the tavern was sold, and they settled in a flat over a potter's premises, from which they could watch the grounds of the Duke's palace. Until his wounds were healed Charles did not stir out, and Jean, still dressed as a woman, ministered to his needs. During this enforced inaction they conferred often with Cagliostro, in the hope of obtaining the release of Peter Delcourt, but in vain. Finally they conceived a cunning plan. One night as the Duke and the faithless Florianne were returning from Paris, their carriage suddenly turned into the woods near Versailles and stopped in a clearing known as the King's Fountain. D'Entremont, who thought the postilion intended to rob him, sprang out with a furious oath, rapier in hand—but at the fearful sight which met his gaze the blade fell to the ground unheeded, and a scream of terror that echoed among the trees like the cry of a lost soul burst from his quivering lips. Beside the coach, motionless, pallid, but with gleaming malevolent eyes, stood the man he believed to be dead

and buried. A rough stake, mottled with crimson stains, appeared to traverse the breast and protruded a foot from the back. And now as he stared, powerless to move, a second ghostly figure, as though it were a reflection seen in a mirror, detached itself like a shadow from the first. At this the Duke sank to the ground moaning and gibbering with terror. A blood-flecked foam gathered on his lips, twice he essayed to speak, then abruptly with a pitiful gesture he fell on his face—dead, blasted by his superstitious fears. With a quick gesture Jean de Crovigny plucked the piece of wood from a socket in his doublet and stepped to the coach. Florianne had fainted in sheer horror and lay huddled on the seat. Pulling a scarf from his pocket de Crovigny bound it over her mouth, then with deft fingers he twisted a rope around wrists and ankles and shutting the door motioned his brother to the horses. An hour later they drew up before the entrance to an abandoned house in the Meudon Woods. The woman was carried, still unconscious, to a small room on the top floor and thrown on a bed. The door, a stout barrier of oak, was locked and bolted, then, their bloodstained clothes hidden by long cloaks, the brothers drove to the main road, and with a last flick of the whip left the horses to drag the coach where they willed. The body of the Duke was found the next day by a forester, and since he bore no wounds his mysterious death was ascribed to the supernatural. Only one man guessed at the truth, the governor of the Chatelet, who knew that de Crovigny was not dead. Trembling for his post he secretly hired spies to search for him. These found the house in the woods, and sent news of their discovery to the prison. Soldiers surrounded it unexpectedly and battered down the doors. The fight that followed was fierce but quickly over. Jean escaped from a window and was never seen again, but Charles was taken back to the dungeon where Peter still lay awaiting execution. No doubt it was thus he also learned of d'Entremont's death. Florianne never recovered from the horror of her husband's sudden appearance and died insane. A year later de Crovigny and Peter made a last desperate bid for freedom. They had already gained the outer walls when a volley of musketry burst from the loopholes and they fell side by side.

THE VENGEANCE OF LADY GUILFORT

THE FEMALE BLUEBEARD OF PARIS

MANY of the reports in the police archives, collected by officers during the reign of Louis XIV and XV, bear unmistakable signs that these men were not only uneducated and very credulous but often extremely superstitious. They compiled their dossiers according to their stations in life, and the queer accounts give one a vivid insight into the mentality of those days. The following story is so strange that were it not corroborated by Peuchet, Archivist of the Prefecture of Police from 1780 to 1810, I should hesitate to accept it as true. But Peuchet was noted for his absolute integrity and complete lack of imagination. He was a machine with no other ambition than to collect, classify and co-ordinate the countless cases the police were called upon to deal with under the royal régime. He states in a short comment on this astounding adventure : " The police archives are like a deep, dark well into which, year in year out, blind Themis pours a never-ending stream of confessions of human vice and frailty. And there they lie to await judgment on the last day of all."

Therefore I shall merely relate the story as I found it, omitting only needless repetitions. The people involved are famous in history. Lecoq was certainly the principal agent, or "*mouchard*," as the detective of those days was contemptuously termed, of Monseigneur la Reynie, first lieutenant of Paris police. The King's brother, who wielded almost as much power as the reigning monarch, was known as Monsieur, a title conferred upon him by the people; and his two friends, whose intervention ended in such tragic fashion, were noblemen notorious for their many intrigues and adventures. Who this Princess Jabirouska, later known as Lady Guilfort, really was, no one apparently ever discovered, but she undoubtedly was an Englishwoman, although she had lived in France many years and was thus enabled to play the parts she did. Nor is there, unfortunately, an authentic engraving of her to be found, but the description given by l'Eveillé, son of Lecoq the

detective, and the principal actor in this drama, is sufficiently vivid. One must remember that in the seventeenth century law and order had only just begun to emerge from chaos. Justice could be bought at all times, and the police, such as they were, closed their eyes or looked elsewhere if an act of lawlessness was committed by a nobleman, although their methods of repression were cruel and pitiless indeed if the offender were merely a humble citizen. The only protection which the King had granted the people of Paris against the hordes of robbers, bandits and assassins, was *le Guet*, an equivalent to " the watch " in England. Dresssd in leather jerkin and breastplate and armed with pikes and halberds, the men who formed *le Guet* never sallied forth after dark unless accompanied by archers, so great were the dangers of the rat-infested, unpaved, dirty streets. Illumination there was none, and each man carried his own lanthorn. The amorous intrigues of the corrupt, polluted Court made the task of " the watch " an ungrateful one, for woe betide them if by chance they arrested an aristocrat, even though his disguise of rough clothes, mask and cloak led them to mistake him for a simple *bourgeois*. Monseigneur la Reynie, a favourite at the Court, did almost as he pleased, and used his men on most occasions to further his own schemes. The position of chief of police was lucrative, and although he ostentatiously feigned to carry sharp warfare among the bandits, those who could pay for leniency, or bribe the watch, continued their nefarious life unhindered. Now and then, in order to pacify the indignant citizens, a brutal example was made—the rack and the executioner publicly displayed their horrors—and some hapless wretch was sent shuddering to his Maker. Trial virtually there was none. Although in theory no one, unless taken red-handed, could be executed if he did not confess, a confession was always obtained. Death was preferable to the lingering agony of the *question*—a formula involving the use of a hard leather funnel forced down the victim's throat by a callous assistant, into which bucket after bucket of water was poured.

Such then was Paris in the glorious reigns of the Louis of France; but although the people were schooled to suffer without protest, there came a time when the angry roar from the city penetrated even to the gilded palace of Versailles. The sons of more than twenty wealthy merchants had disappeared one after another, without leaving the slightest trace. The tale was ever the same: they had wandered out, bent on frivolous adventure and bedecked as was the fashion with gold and jewels, never to return.

At last so many families mourned the loss of their sons that

the dreadful mystery had become the sole topic of conversation. It was discussed in every café and wineshop, parents refused to allow their young men to risk themselves in the streets unless accompanied by well-armed servants, and an urgent petition was sent to the King. La Reynie was finally summoned to the royal presence and roundly upbraided for his inability to bring the malefactors responsible for these outrages to book. He returned to Paris greatly perturbed, and at once conferred with his chief agent Lecoq, an adroit spy, who had but lately taken charge of the newly-created secret police. A long and heated argument ensued. Lecoq declared that his men constantly patrolled every street, that no murder had been committed of which he had not learned, and that the missing youths had probably fallen victims to some amorous adventure. Finally Lecoq, who was extremely avaricious, gave way before the accumulated promises of la Reynie, who offered him great riches and countless favours if he discovered what had become of the young men, and exclaimed:

"I see only one way to find out what has happened to them. I have a son, he is eighteen and noted for his intelligence and his extraordinary personal charm. He is a handsome, clever lad, and all that is left to me since my wife died, but I can trust no one else. He shall become the decoy, for I am convinced that a woman is at the bottom of this mystery."

"Go, then," said la Reynie, making the secret sign which conferred unlimited powers upon his agent. "Go and instruct your son. If he succeeds in trapping the woman and her accomplices, he shall have a lucrative position and his future will be assured."

With a sigh Lecoq withdrew. Riches and position were desirable things, but he loved his son Exupére, whom the neighbours had nicknamed l'Eveillé, the wide awake. Until then the young fellow had never been allowed to wander about Paris unless one or two of his father's many police spies accompanied him at a distance, but it was evident that this female assassin, in whose existence Lecoq firmly believed, was very cunning. No one had ever seen her, nor had the missing men been perceived speaking to any woman. Therefore, if his son was truly to play his part as decoy, he would have to take certain risks. Alone with l'Éveillé, who became greatly excited when he learned of the part he was to play—for he shared his father's love for the detective's profession —Lecoq gave him minute instructions. He caused him to pocket a pair of excellent pistols and gird a rapier under his coat, an appendage which was then the prerogative of noblemen only. Thus armed and richly attired, as befitted his assumed wealthy rank,

with jewels and gold chains enhancing his natural beauty, l'Eveillé sallied forth.

For several days he strutted about the Palais Royal, the Luxembourg gardens and other fashionable districts, but without success. Although many languishing regards from handsome courtesans followed his gallant figure, none appeared to his observant eyes to belong to the type of woman who could have murdered the vanished youths. At last one afternoon, when he had already begun to believe that his father had sent him on a fool's errand, his attention was abruptly attracted by the vision of an exquisitely beautiful girl who suddenly brushed past him. She was followed by an elderly woman, obviously a servant or governess. The glimpse he had caught of two brilliant black eyes, and the graceful carriage of the girl, caused him to turn sharply in order to keep these two in sight. Twice he sauntered nonchalantly past the couple, examining them from under the brim of his hat, whilst feigning to flip some dust from his dainty cuffs. He had not been mistaken—the girl appeared to be not more than twenty-five and she was indeed charming. Apparently his antics had awakened her interest, for she at once halted and spoke to her companion and then walked slowly on while the servant dropped behind. L'Eveillé was not lacking in audacity, but his father had specially cautioned him not to speak to anyone, convinced that if he encountered the woman whom they sought she would make unmistakable advances. L'Eveillé therefore sat down on one of the numerous benches—they were now at the Seine embankment—and waited, his eyes fixed on the elegant figure not far distant. To his chagrin she abruptly began to walk away, and he was about to follow once more when he perceived the servant approaching. With apparent indifference to his presence she also seated herself on the bench. L'Eveillé raised his hat with courtly bow and murmured a polite phrase, to which the woman replied, meanwhile covertly examining him from head to toe, as though gauging his social standing. L'Eveillé, who certainly deserved his flattering nickname, sighed deeply and settling himself more comfortably said with woeful air :

" Alas, madam, how sad it is to be alone and a stranger in this great town. No doubt had I friends I should find someone to present me to that lovely girl who appears to be your mistress—but I know no one." At this the woman turned eagerly : " So you are not a Parisian, young man ? How long have you been here ? "

" Only a few days," l'Eveillé lied glibly. " My father is a rich farmer at Le Mans. He has sent me to Paris to study law.

But although he has given me a pocket full of golden Louis"—and he rattled some coins—" and these fine watches, chains, and rings, they do not make up for my loneliness. I would give much to make the acquaintance of your mistress. Who is she ? "

" If you desire to meet her that can be arranged. She is the daughter of a Polish Prince, her name is the Princess Jabirouska—although truly the Prince, who had returned to his country in order to obtain his King's consent to the marriage—died before he could wed her mother, who was only a commoner. A sad story " —and the woman feigned to wipe away a tear. " Fortunately," she continued, " all the enormous wealth of the father was faithfully brought to her by the Prince's servants. Happy the man who gains her affection, for as you say she is beautiful, and she is also very rich."

" You make me more eager than ever to meet her. What must I do ? " L'Eveillé, who had not been deceived by the romantic lie, asked quickly. The woman looked about her suspiciously, then she leant towards the young man and whispered : " Meet me to-night at ten at the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois. My mistress was much impressed by your noble appearance. She, too, is lonely, and sent me to discover who you were. But you must not carry a rapier. Her father died by the sword of an enemy and the sight of a weapon is hateful to the Princess. Adieu until to-night. Be sure to adorn yourself with all you possess, for, as you may guess, many are the noblemen who have tried to woo her, and you must continue to make a good impression."

With this the woman rose, and before l'Eveillé had decided what to do she disappeared behind the many stalls of street vendors. The mysterious manner of the servant and the obvious satisfaction she had evinced at the ostentatious enumeration of his wealth and loneliness, convinced the young man that by a fortunate chance he had indeed encountered the ferocious vampire who was responsible for the death of so many youths. Bursting with triumph and vanity he hurried at once to his father, and related in detail what had passed. Lecoq shared his son's opinion, and after some demur agreed to let him keep the appointment. He immediately summoned a dozen of his most trusted agents and made the necessary arrangements to trap the unknown. L'Eveillé was instructed, notwithstanding the woman's objection to his weapon, to wear the rapier and to hide a pistol in each pocket of his long coat. He was also given a silver whistle to hang around his neck. Lecoq and his men were adepts at disguise, and accustomed to watch and follow unseen. They were ordered to post themselves in the many dark alleys and tumbledown buildings

near the church, prepared to rush to the young man's assistance at the first blast from his whistle. Long before the appointed hour, as became an impatient suitor, l'Eveillé was strutting up and down before the gloomy portals of the church. The night was darker than usual. Scurrying clouds blotted out moon and stars, and sharp gusts of wind caused the lanterns of hurrying pedestrians to flicker and vacillate eerily. Lecoq and his spies were not to be seen, which was just as well, for l'Eveillé sensed that he was watched by hidden conspirators. Already he had begun to fear that the woman had taken fright, when abruptly a figure, muffled in a cloak and hood, brushed past him and plucked him by the sleeve with a muttered "Follow quickly." It was the servant! L'Eveillé attempted to detain her but she twisted herself from his grasp and, looking fearfully around, hissed:

"This place is too dangerous—remember the honour of the Princess must not suffer. Either come, if you wish to meet her, or stay behind, I cannot tarry."

Feigning to grumble at what he considered to be unnecessary secrecy, the young man fell into step beside the hurrying woman. At the corner of the rue de l'Arbre Sec she halted and said sharply:

"You realise, I suppose, that my mistress cannot receive you in her own palace. It is too public, and a host of admirers and courtiers are always on watch. Nevertheless, she bade me bind this scarf over your eyes"—and she drew a piece of silk from under her cloak. This time l'Eveillé thought it well to show some decision.

"My father warned me against such tricks before I came to Paris," he said. "I would do much to meet the Princess, but you must trust to my honour. Besides, I am a stranger in this vast town and could never find my way again to the house to which you are taking me in this gloom. Already I have not the least idea where we are."

With a muttered curse the old woman turned and shuffled away, one hand gripped on the youth's sleeve. Street after street was traversed in haste. They passed through the rue des Deux Boules, crossed the rue Jean Lambert and the rue des Orfevres, and threaded their way through so many nameless, filthy alleys that in truth l'Eveillé was hard put to it to recognise the infamous quarter they at last entered. Finally they halted before a leprous dismal building in a narrow passage. The dame drew a huge key from her sleeve, unlocked the door and pushed her companion inside. At once the portal clanged shut again and in the pitch darkness l'Eveillé began to repent his rashness. This was without doubt how the many young men had perished. Every

instant, as he stumbled up creaking stairs guided by a whispered word from the servant, he expected to feel the blow of a cudgel on his head or the scarf of the strangler around his neck. He gripped his sword convulsively and prepared to fight for his life. But to his relief nothing happened, and a moment later a light gleamed at his feet and he was thrust by a vigorous push from a singularly muscular hand into a large sumptuously-furnished room. Although l'Eveillé was dazzled by the abrupt transition from the black stairs into the soft illumination of a many-branched candelabrum, which stood before a mirror at the far end, he perceived at once that the Oriental carpets and tapestries, which adorned floor and windows, were of costly material. The table and chairs were inlaid ebony, and the large spacious divan against the wall was covered with lustrous embroidered Chinese silk. An unfamiliar somnolent fragrance filled the air with sensuous vapours. For a moment he fancied that he was alone, but as he turned to discover what had become of his guide a rustle came from the divan, the silken cover was thrown aside and the exquisite shape of the girl he had met in the morning suddenly appeared, rising slowly with a sinuous feline motion. He saw that she was clothed only in shimmering gauzy Eastern draperies through which her skin shone like some lustrous pearl. Never had he dreamt of such perfection. The eyes, black as the night, held a slumbering mystic fire in their depths, the features were small and daintily-coloured, and the lips, full and sensuous, drew him as a loadstone draws iron. For a moment he stood entranced, his mission forgotten—helpless, fascinated by this vision of beauty, unconsciously playing to perfection the part of a clumsy provincial. A silvery laugh recalled his wandering thoughts. Yet as the girl rose and glided noiselessly towards him he could hardly believe that she could be indeed a callous assassin.

An intoxicating perfume which emanated from the girl's silky hair completed his defeat, and when two white arms encircled his neck he gave himself up entirely to the languorous delight of her presence. Bewitched and no longer master of his actions, he rained passionate kisses on the white shoulders so temptingly near. But the dream was brutally shattered. Her supple fingers, he realised suddenly, were not concerned with caresses. Whilst he stood spellbound like a foolish schoolboy, they had in an instant robbed him of purse, watches, and, what was worse, of his whistle. Too late he tried to grasp the treacherous creature, but with another laugh, which now held a sinister note, she slipped from his arms, and before he could follow disappeared through a masked door in the wall. Slowly his reeling brain steadied—he

divined that any moment she would return, accompanied by her assassins who were probably waiting not far away. At all costs he must signal to his father. An icy chill of terror numbed him when he found that the sheath by his side no longer contained a blade, and that his pistols had vanished also. That had been the work of the servant. Fortunately at that instant a low whistle from the street, where Locoq and his men anxiously waited, somewhat steadied his nerves. Hastily he searched for the door by which he had entered, but no trace of it could he find. With shaking hands he felt along the walls. The blue vapour clogged his brain and the nausea of fear robbed him of strength. At last his hand encountered a massive glass handle. Fiercely he tugged at it, exerting his muscles to their utmost. With creak and sudden snap the lock gave. But it was only a recess into which he stared with dilated, unbelieving eyes. His tongue was lead, his teeth chattered, and with a hoarse inhuman yell of utter despair he staggered back against the table and sank slowly to the floor, unable to remove his shrinking gaze from the cupboard. There before him were twenty-six pallid lifeless faces. Twenty-six heads embalmed by some subtle Eastern method, each on a silver dish. They were all that remained of the hapless youths who had so mysteriously disappeared. L'Eveillé wished to shriek, but could not. All his life was in his eyes.

At last he tore them away from the fearsome sight. Aimlessly, stupidly, he looked around at the smoking tapers, the draperies, the window. And to his horror the heavy curtain appeared to move—was abruptly torn aside—and at that instant a gust of air extinguished the candles. But now strange flickering lights danced on the walls, and in their fitful uncertain sheen he saw the secret panel slide aside and the girl appear once more, followed by three ruffians carrying swords. With the sluggish thought that soon his own head would lie in that dread recess, came a crashing and smashing of glass. Wild yells, shouts of anger and triumph, the stamping of heavy feet and the red glow of torches transformed the nightmare into chaos, and with a groan l'Eveillé rolled over in a swoon. When he opened his eyes his father was kneeling beside him anxiously chafing his hands, and his men held the woman and her assassins in a brutal grip. It was their timely arrival through the windows which had caused him to faint. The house was immediately searched, and cowering behind the secret door they found the old servant, who turned out to be a noted cutpurse for whom the police had long searched, but who until then had evaded them, cleverly disguised by a grey wig and female clothes. The five assassins were taken to the Grand Chatelet

prison, and a week later all Paris thronged the square before the grim castle to see the men beheaded. The Princess Jabirouska, when questioned by the judges, declared that her true name was Lady Guilfort, and that she was an Englishwoman. She denied all knowledge of the murders, and since it was believed that she could be compelled to disclose the name of the ringleader and of those members of the band who were still in hiding, she was transferred to the Bastille. Twice she was led to the torture chamber, where she underwent the "simple question," which is limited to six quarts of water. At the second ordeal the woman confessed that she had been the true leader of the assassins, who had merely obeyed her orders. She it was who had, in each instance, snared the young men with her extraordinary beauty, and decoyed them to the sinister house where, after robbing them of all they possessed, her men had killed them. It had been her depraved whim to retain their heads, which a negro had embalmed. Upon this confession she was also sentenced to death. The Parisians shivered with horror when these things became known, and honours and wealth were showered upon Lecoq and his courageous son.

Yet fate had decided that Lady Guilfort was not to die under the executioner's axe. The infamous story was discussed one evening in all its loathsome details in the presence of the King and his suite. Mme de Montespan loudly expressed her aversion for such a creature, but Monsieur, the King's brother, seemed to find la Reynie's vivid description of the woman incredibly fascinating. When the King retired, Monsieur drew two of his courtiers into a corner and suggested that they should obtain the release of Lady Guilfort and take her to the house of one of his toadies at Versailles, where they would sup in her company and prevail upon her to relate once more all her exploits. The proposal was hailed with delight by his two friends. Monsieur possessed several blank *lettres de cachet* signed by the King, and one of these was transformed into an order for the governor of the Bastille, commanding him to entrust the notorious prisoner to the bearers of the order, for transfer to the terrible Pignerolle fortress. The governor of the Bastille, deceived by this ruse, delivered Lady Guilfort, bound and gagged, into the hands of the conspirators, who at once drove away.

During the long ride to Versailles the courtiers greedily feasted their eyes on the voluptuous beauty of their captive, and with characteristic cruelty of the period enjoyed to the full her obvious terror and anguish. Naturally enough the woman imagined she was being taken to some fresh torture as a

preliminary to execution. The scarf bound over her mouth prevented her from uttering a word, but her agonised moans and the tears which poured down her cheeks were proof of this. At last the selfish fear that terror would cause their captive to swoon, compelled Monsieur to remove the gag. He also wiped away her tears and whispered words of encouragement. In the gloom of the carriage Lady Guilfort could not clearly distinguish the features of her companions, but the silken rustle of their clothes, their cultured speech and the delicate perfume emanating from their hair, conveyed a message to her acute senses. She divined that these were no officers of the law. That they had obtained her release proved them to be powerful and rich, and in a flash of intuition she must have realised that she was to serve as a perverse diversion to some of the blasé nobles of the King's Court. Her sharp wits immediately began to seek feverishly how this unexpected good fortune could enable her to escape. When the carriage halted before a large building standing in spacious gardens, her demeanour had become at once demure and provoking, and, as later events proved, a plan had already formed in her cunning brain. The three conspirators conducted her in silence through several dark passages and at last ushered her into a handsome chamber illuminated by perfumed tapers, where a dainty repast was already set out on a table. Now she was able to take stock of her captors. It must have been a startling revelation to the creature when she recognised Monsieur, the King's brother, and his two companions, the Chevalier de Lorraine and the Marquis d'Effiat. The tragic dénouement of the adventure compelled la Reynie to investigate in person, and, although several pages of his report are missing, it was added to the archives by M. Peuchet, who with the help of various statements cleverly reconstructed the scene which ensued. That it was this escapade which brought about the disgrace and temporary exile of Monsieur, brother of Louis XIV, there is no doubt. Unfortunately many details, described by la Reynie without reserve, are so characteristic of the depraved, licentious manners of that time that they cannot be reproduced.

For a while, then, these three plied the woman with wine and vied with each other to woo her without restraint, seeking to extract from the voluptuous glances and furtive advances of a hardened murderess, a thrill to which their jaded nerves had long been strangers. But Monsieur—libertine though he was—later confessed that he could not overcome his loathing at the thought of the woman's crimes, and he withdrew after obtaining from his friends the promise that they would kill this monster, whom Satan

had endowed with such fatal beauty. Some warning of her fate must have reached her straining ears, for so soon as the royal profligate had gone she abandoned all hesitation and prepared to play a part which would bring matters rapidly to a crisis. The night was already half gone, and by morning she had to be far from Paris if she would save her life. To each of the two fatuous noblemen this treacherous creature succeeded in conveying the conviction that but for his companion she would abandon herself in his arms. With diabolical cunning she fanned the leaping flame of hatred and passion, until the Chevalier de Lorraine, drunken and no longer master of his desires, seized Lady Guilfort and attempted to drag her from the room. Instantly his friend barred his way with glittering blade.

"Kill him," she hissed into the Chevalier's ear, "then you will have me to yourself"—and slipping behind his snarling opponent, she repeated the same words.

The blades crossed, held, slipped, and a moment later—the woman forgotten and the beast uppermost—these erstwhile friends engaged in fierce combat. It was the opportunity she had played for. Supple as a snake she slipped behind a curtain and, as one of the men backed towards her, thrust with all her strength. A hoarse cry of mortal agony followed, and de Lorraine's blade pierced with irresistible force through his friend's heart. At the sight of the lifeless body sanity returned and he dropped to his knees with a sob. At that instant the door slammed, a key grated, and the Chevalier was imprisoned with a corpse. The stout oaken portal defied his frenzied onslaught, the windows were heavily barred, and he dared not call for assistance.

His own statement ends here, but he was probably released by the man whose house they had used. The death of the Marquis d'Effiat could not be kept a secret, and his slayer fled to Brussels. Although the police searched diligently, the woman had escaped, and a fictitious entry was made in the books of the Bastille, relating the sudden death of Lady Guilfort in her cell. Yet she had not left France, for within a few weeks first Lecoq, and then his son, l'Eveillé, found a letter under their door. Peuchet gives the text of the note sent to the son :

Spy and treacherous decoy. You trapped me once with your stupid face, now it shall be my turn. Day and night remember that a blade will find your heart.

Jabirouska.

At first l'Eveillé was terrified, the vision of the severed heads

on their platters still haunted him, and a bodyguard of archers accompanied him whenever he stirred out. But as the months passed with no sign of his enemy, he began to hope that the unceasing vigilance of his father's men had caused the vindictive woman to abandon her project of vengeance. But in this he was mistaken. For some time now l'Eveillé, whose vanity had been considerably stimulated by his first resounding success as a detective, and in whom the hereditary instinct for police work appeared to be singluarly strong, had sought for an opportunity further to enhance his reputation for astuteness. The activities of a daring band of smugglers, whose audacity was causing la Reynie much annoyance, and who appeared to be gifted with the uncanny power of vanishing at will, attracted his attention. He decided to show the King that where others had failed he would succeed. No doubt he boasted openly of his intention, for hardly had he settled on a plan of campaign when one evening a mysterious visitor called at the young man's dwelling and offered in return for a large sum, to lead him to one of the many houses where the smugglers stored their contraband wares. L'Eveillé was overjoyed at the unexpected fortune, and at once paid the man the stipulated sum. Pressed to reveal the name of the ringleader, the unknown declared that this he dared not do for twice the amount. As it was, his betrayal would probably cost him his life, but he had sworn to avenge a comrade killed by one of the band. It would be an easy matter, he added, for the police to set a trap, but he advised l'Eveillé first to come alone, or accompanied only by a friend, to visit the storehouse and remove the cases crammed with priceless silks and Mechlin lace. No one would know, and he would thus become a rich man for all his days. Then, since the smugglers never came to the house before dawn, he would have time to post his men in the best hiding-places. L'Eveillé, who like his father was greedy for wealth, decided to follow this advice, but his natural caution caused him first to confer with Lecoq. The latter said nothing of his fears, but when his son left, accompanied by a trusted friend, a detachment of police spies followed unseen. The storehouse was in a distant quarter near the river. Their guide quickly opened the door with a key, pointed to a row of wooden cases standing along the wall of a long unfurnished room, and without a word slipped away, leaving the two young men alone. For a minute neither spoke, then they crept silently across the floor and examined the cases one by one. Abruptly l'Eveillé gripped his friend's arm and drew him towards the door.

"Did you notice?" he whispered—"the three largest boxes

are pierced with numerous small holes. There are men inside. I will now say loudly that we go, to return later with a vehicle. Thereupon blow out the light and slam the door, then we shall wait and watch."

This was done and the two friends settled down in the dark with drawn pistols. Ten minutes passed in complete silence, then a muffled voice suddenly came from one of the mysterious cases.

"Something has frightened them away, Pierre. I hope they will return to carry us to the house of young Lecoq's son or the chief's plan will miscarry."

"Never fear," a second voice replied. "The upstart spy is avaricious. Besides, the rest of our men will be in the yard at midnight. Even if they come back with archers we shall take them by surprise. The door is open."

L'Eveillé nudged his friend and whispered into his ear:

"Creep across to that back door and drop the bar, then when I light the lantern fire into the boxes."

A minute later a rasping sound came to the straining ears of the young detective. He at once struck a spark from his flint, and, blowing on the tinder, lit the taper. Then with a shout both youths emptied their pistols into the three suspected boxes. Groans and yells of pain replied, the lid of one was flung back and a fierce-looking ruffian staggered out to fall in a heap. When they opened the other two they found that the men hidden inside were dead. At that instant a thunder of blows shook the outer door. It gave way under the pressure of many shoulders, and Lecoq burst into the room frantic with fear, followed by his men. At sight of the dead and dying bandits they crowded forward to see who these were, leaving l'Eveillé standing alone by the yawning entrance. That moment was his last, a blade flashed from out the gloom, thrown with deadly skill, and as it sank to the hilt in his breast a paper fluttered to the floor.

Dazed with grief, hardly knowing what he did, Lecoq picked it up and read in shaking voice:

So, after all, I have paid you in full, treacherous, greedy spy. I had more than one plan prepared. Try to find me now if you can.

Jabirouska.

A bare statement that the fiendish woman was never caught ends this curious record. It is more convincing in its brevity that the entire story is true, than if some just but probably

fictitious retribution had overtaken Lady Guilfort. Peuchet merely adds :

" Who this female bluebeard was, and where she went, was never discovered. Nor were the Parisians ever informed of the true facts. Only the King and la Reynie knew that she had not died in a dungeon of the Bastille."

THE MARVELLOUS HISTORY OF FRANÇOIS VIDOCQ

LOVER, CONVICT AND CHIEF OF POLICE.

THE French have a pretty saying—"*Qui vient de loin a beau parler*": he who hails from distant lands can lie with impunity. This is not perhaps a literal translation, but it aptly expresses the satirical meaning. Well, Vidocq did not hail from distant lands, and every incident in his truly fantastic career has been investigated, sifted, and proven by questing historians. That a man should have succeeded in crowding twice the activities of the legendary Odysseus into one span of life, is almost incredible. Adventures attracted him as he attracted adventures. Never before nor since did a prisoner continually escape from the iron fetters of the galley felons, finally to become chief of the Paris detective force. Such a feat alone is unique and stamps Vidocq as a man apart! Only a second Homer could sing the tale of his daring, his fearlessness, his versatility, and his tender passion for faithful Francine. I will merely add that François Eugene Vidocq was born in Arras in July 1775; and so to his story.

"Devil take that son of ours!" Maître Vidocq, baker and pastry-cook, renowned in Arras, exclaimed angrily to his wife He is too handsome and altogether too clever for a commoner. François should have been born a courtier. Theft, lies, and love-making seem to be his daily diversions."

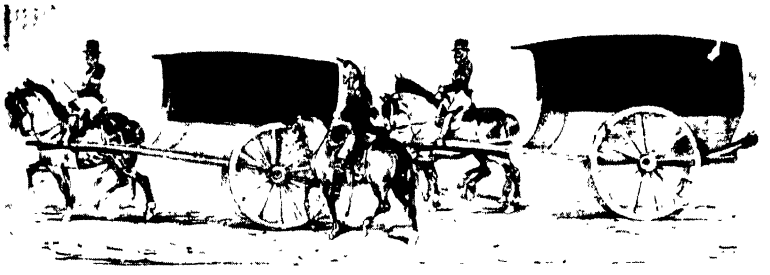
Madame Vidocq sighed. "You are angry, *mon ami*. What has he done now?"

"What has he done?—what hasn't he done? Five gold louis are missing from the till, and I found some bird lime on the edge of several coins—a real thieves' trick. A goose quill steeped in glue is what he uses to rob us. And now to crown it all—here is a summons a gendarme has just brought. We must go to the

court house in the hall of the cloth-makers at once. François has been arrested! Yes, arrested! *Dieu de Dieu!* and to think he is only seventeen. He spent last night courting Madame Guillemin, the notary's wife. It appears he stood under the balcony and serenaded her for an hour. Then, not content with that, he climbed up the wall and entered her bedroom. When the enraged husband—awakened by the noise—came in and caught them, our charming François thrashed him, threw his wig out of the window, and finally drove him into the garden in his night-gown. Fortunately a posse of gendarmes heard the poor man's cries for help and caught the outrageous imp. Now he will go to prison, and serve him right."

Madame Vidocq threw a shawl over her head, and called one of the assistants to take care of the shop. "Come, my man," she cried to the indignant father. "Our son is just full of fun —nothing else; he mustn't suffer the shame of prison. I shall plead with the magistrate."

Madame Vidocq was right! François, strong, tall, clever and so handsome that every wench in Arras was in love with him, was just a victim of the restless vitality with which Nature had endowed him. He should indeed have been born to silk and satin, or else in the cabin of a sea-rover. His humble position as a baker's son caused him constantly to fall foul of the narrow conventions of a provincial bourgoisie. His latest exploit was typical. The notary's wife, who was only eighteen herself, had cajoled the lad into playing the ardent lover, and when the elderly husband, seeing, as he thought, a stripling whom a stout stick would put to flight, had attempted to strike him, François had wrenched the cane from his grip, laid it lustily across his own shoulders, and had finally driven him, bruised and terrified, to seek refuge in flight, leaving the reckless lover to pursue his wooing unhindered. Nor did the boy's attitude serve him before the judges. In 1792 boys usually cringed before their elders, and this bold black-haired lad with the flashing eyes and disdainful smile was a new type to Monsieur Carlin, the criminal advocate. His cool explanation that he had beaten Maître Guillemin because he had interrupted him just when he was reciting a poem specially composed to the blue eyes of his lady, although it caused a roar of laughter to shake the court, only angered the judge the more, and it would have gone hard with François had not the mother pleaded eloquently for her son. At last, upon receiving the father's promise that he would administer a well-merited thrashing, François was set free. But he was not minded to take the paternal correction. Instead of returning



The first police vans (termed Salad Baskets) in such a vehicle Vidocq was constantly taken back to jail.



Vidocq as he appeared when he finally retired from the Súreté.



Vidocq, the famous bandit, who became a detective, as he appeared at the time he arrested Pierre Coignard.

home, he persuaded the postilion of the Lille post-chaise to give him a seat in the saddle in return for his help with the horses, and whilst his mother waited anxiously for the boy's return he was away on the road to new adventures. At the first halt he invited the postilion to a glass of brandy in the courier's room, and while the unfortunate man was gulping his drink François passed behind the chair, gagged and bound him with a scarf, dragged off his gold and blue uniform and calmly took his place as postilion, leaving his victim, clothed only in shirt and socks, to escape as best as he might from the cupboard into which he had been thrust. But François thought it best to decamp when the coach reached the next relay. His gaudy clothes he exchanged for those of an ostler, and thus, less conspicuously attired, he started to tramp across country at haphazard. It was summer time fortunately, and a bed in some farmer's hay loft or barn was always to be obtained. His handsome face and roguish smile won their way with ease to the susceptible hearts of the country lasses, and food, too, was not lacking. So by easy stages he reached Ostend, where he intended to try for a ship to the new world. But he had no papers, dared not reveal his true name, and without the one or the other no captain would take him.

Money he had none, the ostler's clothes had not worn well, the Flemish peasants were not so hospitable as his own country people, and poor François thought hungrily of the sweet-smelling bread in his father's shop. Slouching in aimless fashion through the dirty streets, hung with festoons of malodorous fishes, he was already considering how best to return home when his attention was attracted by a discordant blare of trumpets. The daily parade of the famous circus of le sieur Cotte-Camus was about to begin. At the sight François took heart. A circus was a golden opportunity. Without further ado he accosted the man with the tin funnel, who with leathery lungs was shouting to gather an audience. It was Cotte-Camus himself. So Vidocq, unconscious of the lasting fame his exploits would one day achieve, became general assistant to the all-nation troupe of Bohemians. But this did not suit him for long. He prevailed upon the acrobats to let him practise with them, and quickly mastered their tricks. All would have been well had not the women with one accord fallen to quarrelling over his charms. Caught one day with the belle of the circus in his arms, he was attacked by the whole company and barely escaped with his life. From Ostend, Vidocq wandered to Bruges, and there fell in with the owner of a puppet show. He had not eaten for two days, and offered to act as assistant. His part consisted in learning by heart various dramatic dialogues

and repeating these in feigned voices, whilst the professor, as he insisted in styling himself, pulled the strings and made his puppets perform their antics. And of course Vidocq fell in love with the professor's wife, a pretty girl of sixteen named Elise. Only one result was to be expected where handsome François was concerned. Elise promptly forgot her vows of fidelity, and one day, when a huge crowd was enjoying the usual miniature drama, the tiny actors suddenly fell silent and instead of their mimic voices a sound of kisses floated up from the wings. A moment later three furiously struggling forms burst through the canvas front and the whole tent collapsed. Bruised, breathless, his clothes in tatters, Vidocq resolved to return to Arras.

He was welcomed with open arms by his mother, and the paternal reception, though less enthusiastic, was at least not hostile. For a time Vidocq basked in the peaceful atmosphere of home, but the storm-god who had presided at his birth was merely gathering strength. The Red Terror of the revolution had begun to shake France, and the guillotine was busy. As in every provincial town, the new régime had become an excuse for bestial excesses and private revenge, and in Arras, Antoine Chevallier, a former blacksmith, held the power of life and death in his grimy paws. Chevallier had a sister named Annette, who, like so many others, had long admired the reckless dashing Vidocq. Her feminine subtlety now conceived a scheme to make him her own. She well knew that the notary had not forgotten the episode which had caused Vidocq to flee from his father's wrath, and at her suggestion, although François was but a lad, Guillemin accused him of hostility to the *Jacobins* and caused him to be seized and thrown into prison. With the aid of Chevallier, false witnesses were brought, and thus the blood-stained guillotine began to menace even poor François. It was Annette's opportunity. She visited him in the foul dungeon where he was herded with fifty others, and promised to obtain his pardon if he would marry her. Life was sweet, and Annette was a handsome girl, so François promised. He was at once released and the wedding celebrated shortly after, to the relief of his father and mother, who believed that at last their son would settle down. But Vidocq could not remain inactive for long. In order to gain some measure of freedom he joined the eleventh regiment of Chasseurs then stationed at Arras. Unfortunately, when his honeymoon was but three months old, the regiment was ordered to Lille. Vidocq had always loved the sword, and now as a soldier he became noted for his uncanny skill with a rapier, which several successful duels enhanced still more. He was chosen constantly

to fight men from other units, but finally a wound in the thigh procured for him a month's leave, and he hurried to Arras eager to embrace his wife. As he crept up the stairs, intending a surprise, he was startled to hear a muffled sound of kisses followed by the jingle of spurs and the clank of a sabre. With a furious kick he burst open the door of the room whence these sounds proceeded. Sitting at a table littered with viands and empty flagons, his faithless spouse was making merry with an officer of a local regiment. At sight of Vidocq, livid with rage, the couple escaped through an open window into a passage which led to the street. For once astonishment robbed Vidocq of his wits and he stood helpless, staring after the couple, then with a shrug of his shoulders he sank into a chair and dropped his face on his arms in order to hide the tears in his eyes. Then, as he reviewed his own reckless wooing in the past, a gust of hysterical laughter shook him and he was about to leave when a hand was timidly laid on his curly hair. Believing his wife had dared to return, he sprang up with an oath and half drew his sword, but instead of brazen Annette he saw a stranger standing beside him, and encountered the gaze of two soft brown eyes of marvellous beauty which rested on him with an expression of sweet compassion. For a moment he saw nothing but those eyes, then his glance flickered from the silken curls that framed an exquisite oval face to the full pouting lips, the supple elegant figure and tiny feet. The girl's beauty was so perfect that in an instant he forgot the pain at his heart and the sting of his outraged vanity.

"Mademoiselle—I—I—am Vidocq, François Vidocq," he stammered, tongue-tied for a moment. "You have surprised me in a most unsoldierly predicament. My wife——"

"I know," the girl replied gently. "All Arras knows——"

"Do they indeed—then a divorce should be simple——"

"No; on the contrary, you must fly at once. Do you forget that Chevallier is Annette's brother, and purveyor in chief to the guillotine? I came because I feared you would do something rash. I live in those rooms across the passage. My name is Francine—and I have seen you often."

"Then, Mademoiselle Francine, since you know so much—who was the officer? I caught but a glimpse of him and his face was in shadow."

The girl sprang forward in quick alarm and seized Vidocq by the arm. "No, no, you must not fight—listen——"

The tramp of many feet sounded in the street and furious blows shook the door. "There—you hear? Already they come for you. But I can hide you—follow me," and the girl

dragged Vidocq from the room and pushed him into a cupboard before he realised what was happening. From his hiding-place he heard the bolts of the door drawn. Then came a storm of angry voices, the pounding of boots on the stairs, followed by a scuffle and a shrill cry. Instantly he leaped out, to find Francine in the grip of two ruffians, whilst the very officer who had fled with his wife was threatening her with a whip. Like a flash of light, Vidocq's sword leapt from the scabbard and set its point at the fellow's throat.

"Well met," he yelled. "Will you have it now or will you fight?"

"I'll fight," the officer snarled—"come into the street. You there"—addressing the two men—"stand at each end so that we are not interrupted."

A minute later the enemies faced each other, but the combat was over before Francine, who had followed terror stricken, realised what was passing. With incredible swiftness Vidocq's blade had slipped under his opponent's guard, and only the fellow's sudden twist caused it to pierce the shoulder instead of his heart. As though this had been a signal, gendarmes immediately rushed down the narrow street. Vidocq was seized by his legs and arms and carried struggling and cursing to headquarters. The permanent council sentenced him to two months' detention in the "Pointed Tower" for wounding an officer. It was a lenient sentence, but the conduct of his wife was well known, and the court sympathised with Vidocq. Nevertheless, although he did not know it, that encounter was to be the beginning of a life which made him akin to a hunted beast for many years.

In that unsettled time the prison-fortress contained all manner of men. Military offenders, cheating civilians, and professional cut-throats. Vidocq was given a small room known as the "Oeil de Bœuf," and Francine's beauty so fascinated the governor that he permitted her to visit Vidocq almost daily. Thus their friendship, so strangely begun, became love—nay, more—it became a consuming flame that was to withstand every onslaught of the fiend who appeared to have seized the threads of their twin destinies in his remorseless grip. At every opportunity Francine brought her lover food and wine, to which his parents added their share, and thus the first month passed quickly, the monotony broken now and then by feasts, to which he invited his fellow captives. Amongst these were two reckless criminals, Grouart and Hervaux. Tempted by a farmer named Boitel, who promised them a large sum if they would aid him to recover his freedom, they determined to forge an order of release. Boitel had been

sentenced to six years' detention for selling inferior produce to the Army; but he had other misdeeds on his conscience and was anxious to be gone. So these three persuaded Vidocq to allow them to use his room, in order, as he believed, to draft a petition. He saw no reason to object, and whilst he conversed with Francine they sat and worked at his table. A week passed and Boitel ceased to come. He had been released, his two friends informed him. Then one morning warders entered, dragged Vidocq from his bed, bound his hands and conducted him before the governor of the prison. He was accused of having helped the two convicts to forge an order of release for Boitel. The fraud had been discovered and the farmer recaptured almost at once; and now, in order to mitigate his own guilt, he accused Vidocq of having been the instigator of the plot. Since it was in Vidocq's room that the forged order had been executed, his denials merely enraged the governor, who ordered him to be shut in a punishment cell. Instead of only one more month, many years in the chain gang now awaited the unfortunate young man, who knew what to expect with Chevallier the terrorist presiding at the courts! Without more ado he decided to escape. Once a week the military prisoners received the visit of an officer, and Vidocq, who had seen him often, gave Francine precise details of his uniform and appearance. Fortunately for the success of his scheme, Francine was still permitted to come to him with food. Piece by piece, hidden under her clothes, she brought a uniform, a wig, and even a pair of top boots. These things Vidocq secreted in his mattress. Then when the day for the officer's visit again arrived, he donned his disguise, and when all was ready hammered furiously on the door of his cell. At once a turnkey came rushing in, but a blow from Vidocq's iron fist stretched the fellow out. Vidocq coolly dressed him in his own clothes, slammed the door of the cell and walked unhindered past the saluting sentries. But it was not enough to escape from the prison: he and Francine must be far from Arras before the alarm was given, or the gates of the town would be closed. His plucky sweetheart was waiting at a preconcerted spot, with a powerful horse and light waggon filled with market produce, and Vidocq was safely smuggled past the sentry hidden beneath a mound of cabbages and onions. Not five minutes after they had left the gate and ramparts behind, the boom of a cannon warned the countryside that a convict had escaped. A violent storm, which had been threatening all day, burst simultaneously with the ominous sound, and their wild headlong drive through thorny shrubs and over sodden paths became a dreadful undertaking. But neither storm nor the

fear of a spill daunted Vidocq. Reckless as ever he wielded the whip without respite and kept the horse at a gallop. But at last the increasing gloom made all further advance impossible. He halted the panting horse and scrambled down, intending, to lead it. As he did so a gust of wind brought the menacing sound of baying hounds towards them.

"Convict hunters," Francine gasped—"oh, François, what shall we do? They will recognise you in that uniform."

"Undress quickly," Vidocq replied, shaking the rain from his cape. "I'll become a woman. This wig has lost its curl and will serve admirably. You must wrap yourself in the cloak and drive on. We'll meet at St. Omer. Hurry now!"

Sheltered by a tree, Francine unfastened her skirt and hooded cape, which Vidocq slipped over his military dress. Then he smeared his cheeks with mud and pulled the wig half over his face. The crashing of heavy bodies through the shrubs already sounded dangerously near, and the barking of the dogs had become continuous. The moment Francine had disappeared, driving through the pelting rain, Vidocq broke a bough from a tree and hobbled along the road in the opposite direction. At a turn in the road, two men of the brutish type the State paid to hunt escaped convicts, broke from the wood and came running towards him. Vidocq gave a shrill cry at sight of their dogs and raised his stick.

"Softly, softly, mother," the elder of the two called warningly. "Our pets will not harm you. We are after a man dressed as an officer. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, devil take him," Vidocq whined, "he robbed me of my loaf of bread. My children will go to bed without supper now."

"Never mind that. Which way did he go?"

"I'll sell my information," Vidocq replied with a leer—"give me the price of my bread and I'll tell you."

The man contemptuously tossed a coin at his feet. "There you are—now—let that loosen your tongue."

Vidocq picked up the piece of silver and pointed to the forest. "Through the trees. But take care, he is armed with a sword."

Without a word the convict hunters turned, and slashing at the puzzled, unwilling dogs, forced their way through the undergrowth. Vidocq listened to their retreating footsteps with a grin, then when the sounds grew faint he pulled his skirt above his knees and set off at a rapid pace after his sweetheart.

Francine meanwhile had not been fortunate. A flash of lightning had so startled the horse that it had bolted at breakneck pace through the forest paths. In vain the terrified girl had tried

to check the animal's career; a broken branch had caught her arm and swept her from the swaying cart. The fall was severe and she lay senseless until daybreak in a tangle of bushes, where some compassionate peasant women found her and carried her to a nearby farm. Convinced that he would find Francine waiting at their tryst, Vidocq walked briskly onward until dawn, but he realised that female garments would not serve him by day and succeeded in stealing a shepherd's smock and breeches from a barn. He stifled his conscience with the thought that the cloak he left in their place was a fair exchange. Thus attired he reached St. Omer after five days of weary plodding and constant alarms, for to his excited fancy gendarmes appeared to be patrolling every road. His dismay may be imagined when he learned that Francine was not at the inn they had chosen as a meeting-place. Hunted and penniless, for a time he came near to despair. In this extremity, by a freak of chance, a circus newly arrived in the town was again his salvation. One of the clowns had broken his arm and for two evenings Vidocq stood on the boards outside the tent and made merry jests, although his eyes roved ceaselessly from face to face—seeking his beloved Francine. This circus boasted four superb lions, whose trainer was a gipsy girl. Vidocq had been ordered to hand the girl paper hoops and various accessories during her performance and to stand ready, armed with an iron bar, to protect her in case of an attack by the felines. Soon he perceived that he had found favour in her eyes. It was not in his nature to reject any girl's advances; and so it came about that poor Francine, still weak and ill from her fall, opened the door of the caravan, where several of the circus people had informed her she would find her lover, at the very moment that he was in the gipsy's arms. Too late Vidocq tried to tear himself away; his sweetheart had fled, frantic with rage, and although he searched high and low he could not find her. Francine had been wounded to the quick, and jealousy is an evil counsellor. Stifling her love she went to the local police. An hour later, just as Vidocq returned to the circus, crazy with grief and furiously angry with himself, four gendarmes suddenly appeared with drawn sabres. But their quarry was not to be so easily taken. A sudden blow from his iron stave sent the first man flying, and with a quick wrench Vidocq opened the door of the lion's cage and slipped inside. Undaunted by the chorus of snarls and roars that met his appearance, he whirled his weapon round his head and held the beasts at bay.

"Now take me if you dare," he taunted the surprised police. For a minute Vidocq's daring held them spellbound, then with a

cry of rage one of the gendarmes, slashing right and left with his sabre, sprang after him into the cage. This second irruption maddened the lions. A glancing blow from a huge paw sent the plucky gendarme reeling weaponless against the bars, and already the beast crouched for a leap, with bared fangs, when Vidocq, seeing the man's deadly peril, struck the lion across the eyes with his rod and, seizing the man by his tunic, dragged him from the cage and instantly slammed the door.

"I'm sorry, my boy," the brigadier of police said in a shaking voice to François, who with cool indifference to his own plight was binding up a ragged scratch in the gendarme's shoulder. "I must obey orders and take you to Arras; but never was there a job I hated more. You are a brave fellow." Vidocq shrugged his shoulders; for the moment he was beaten, and without a struggle he allowed himself to be bound. As they passed the entrance to the main tent, Francine, who had followed the police, sank to her knees and sobbed bitterly. She was roused from her despair by a rude shake. It was the gipsy girl, whose infatuation for Vidocq had caused Francine to betray him.

"No use crying now, *la petite*," she cried harshly. "I cannot leave my work, but since you seem to love him too, I'll help you. Take these fire pots, they contain powder. You can ride, *hein*? Good, then I'll give you that horse—it's mine. Ride along the path by the windmill and you'll reach the wood before the police. When they appear, light these things and throw them among their horses. I use them every night to terrify my beasts, and they'll surely do as much for horses. Get your lover into the saddle and you need not fear capture. Alas, you'll not come back here, but good luck just the same."

Speechless with relief, Francine seized the boxes of powder, swung herself on the horse and galloped away. She had not been many minutes in hiding at the edge of the forest which surrounded St. Omer, when a jingle of military accoutrements warned her to prepare. Soon the gendarmes appeared, walking their horses and leading Vidocq by a rope tied under his armpits. Her flint and tinder were ready and she quickly lit the fuses and with a sweep of her arm flung the fire boxes through the air. The effect was terrific. The unexpected explosions caused the horses to rear and bolt in all directions. Poor Vidocq was jerked to the ground and dragged over stones and bushes, a complication Francine had not foreseen, and she fully expected her lover to be killed. Fortunately he had been tied to the saddle of the gendarme whose life he had saved. Seeing the boy's peril the man slashed at the rope with his sabre and released him. Although he

was bruised and bleeding, Vidocq's quick wits had already guessed at the reason for the explosions, and as Francine ran forward leading her horse he staggered to his feet and, seizing her hand, climbed into the saddle.

Two days later they returned to Arras and Vidocq was smuggled into a house belonging to one of Francine's friends. For several weeks he remained a voluntary prisoner, tended by his sweetheart. But inaction to him was torture, and one evening, whilst the girl was away, he climbed to the roof and gained the street through a neighbour's house. He had taken care to disguise himself with a heavy cloak and wide-brimmed hat, which partially hid his features. Unfortunately his exploits had already made him famous, and when he entered a tavern for a sup of wine he was hailed with delight by a crowd of roysterers, eager to drink his health. He escaped from their ill-timed advances through a cellar door, but found that already the police were watching the street. Agile as a cat he swung himself to a window, but he had been seen and with a shout two men started in pursuit. Others joined in the chase, which continued through the night, and at last he was compelled to slide down a chimney and to seek refuge with a girl he had known formerly. He remained hidden in her rooms five days; but, notwithstanding the danger, his anxiety for Francine drove him out once more. He reached the house where they had lived without trouble, but to his dismay Francine and her friend had gone, and, what was worse, they had removed all their belongings. Perplexed at this unexpected event, he descended the stairs intending to make enquiries in the neighbourhood, when, as he stepped out, a cloak was twisted round his head, his hands were bound and an hour later he was thrust back into the very cell from which he had so ingeniously escaped. All night he paced the stone flags in despair, the thought that Francine had deserted him hammering ceaselessly at his brain, and the following morning he was taken before the *juge d'instruction.*

"Where did you spend the last five days?" was the magistrate's unexpected question. Loyalty to the girl who had sheltered him caused him to remain silent. For a week the same question was asked again and again. Finally, since he would not reply, he was brought before the court and charged *with the murder of Francine.* Then and then only did he learn that blood-stained clothes, a knife and other damning evidence had been found in Francine's rooms when the gendarmes had invaded the place just before his return. His own disappearance had led the police to believe he had murdered the girl and hidden her body. Already the public prosecutor had demanded the death penalty, when Francine

staggered in, supported by two soldiers. She related that when she found her lover gone, she had tried to stab herself. The sisters at the hospital to which she had crept, bleeding from a deep gash, confirmed her story, and Vidocq thus escaped the guillotine. But there still remained the accusation of forging an order of release, with which he had originally been charged. The two scoundrels and the farmer who had used his room in the Pointed Tower, swore formally to his guilt, and on this evidence François Vidocq was sentenced to eight years in the chain gangs at Brest.

When, a month later, the iron collar riveted around his neck, Vidocq trudged with five hundred others along the roads to the convict station, Francine followed, determined to help him to escape. His first two attempts failed utterly ; and he was beaten so savagely by the angry warders that the doctor sent him to the infirmary. From there he succeeded in gaining the outer gates but was caught at the last moment. Yet ever did this audacious youth turn defeat into victory. He was at once taken to the governor's quarters by one of the sentries. At the door of the governor's office the man laid aside his cape and cap and entered to report. Instantly Vidocq seized the cap, pulled it low over his face, slung the long cape around him, and grasping one of the waiting prisoners by the arm he swiftly walked out of the gates, as though conducting the man to another prison. Ten minutes later he was in Francine's room. She had already purchased some sailor's clothing, a wig and beard, as being a disguise least likely to cause remark in a seaport. But they had still to escape from the town, and at the gate through which they must pass sat Lachique, a former convict, who boasted that no prisoner could deceive him. That unconscious habit of dragging the right foot, caused by the weight of the chain and iron ball which were riveted to every felon's leg, was a sign which his eagle eye never failed to note. Vidocq knew this and, instead of trying to pass in silence, stepped up to Lachique and asked him for a pipelight. As his tobacco began to glow, a dull, reverberating boom sounded from the prison.

" Fichtre," Vidocq exclaimed in a hoarse voice, " I'm just in time. One of your sweet gaolbirds has escaped. Another minute and the gate would have been shut and good-bye to my dream of spending a week's shore leave with my sweetheart."

Lachique laughed wickedly and pushed him through the door —" Get out of sight quickly, then, or I'll be punished."

Vidocq needed no urging, At a bend in the road faithful Francine was waiting, and once more these two fled—hiding by day, travelling by night, until they reached Ostend. There for a time

they lived in peace, but the little money they had soon melted. Vidocq knew that without papers honest work was impossible. He fell in with a gang of sharpers, and using Francine as decoy he despoiled drunken farmers and roystering sailors of their golden louis. But one of these, the captain of a Dutch brig, had noted Vidocq's supple hands and bulging muscles, and resolved upon a profitable revenge.

One night whilst Vidocq was carousing in the inn, a dozen powerful seamen seized him and carried him to their ship. It was the usual method of the press gangs. But this time they had caught a Tartar. On board were a hundred others caught in like manner, and with their help Vidocq seized the brig, set captain and officers adrift and decided to turn pirate. Unfortunately, the only navigator among them proved a traitor, and steered the ship under the guns of a Dutch fort. Several officers at once rowed out to them, but Vidocq had meanwhile seized the treacherous steersman and bound him on a powder keg, and when the officers climbed over the side they were seized and held as hostages, while a man stood ready by a powder train with flaring match and threatened to fire the magazine. This had the desired effect, and an emissary sent to shore procured them immunity from the guns of the fort. They gained the open sea, where their hostages were allowed to leave. Two days later Vidocq fell in with a French privateersman and joined forces with him. His desire to find Francine caused him to desert at Dunkirk. He had barely stepped ashore when he was stopped and questioned by patrolling gendarmes, and because he could give no satisfactory account of himself he was taken before the prefect. The convict's brand on his chest proved him to be an escaped prisoner, and a week later he found himself once more in the dreary fortress at Brest. But no prison was built that could hold him long. Francine, who had traced her lover, succeeded in hiding files and clothing under a loose stone on the wharf where the chain gangs laboured. Advised of this by a message secreted in a loaf of bread, Vidocq and a fellow prisoner named Coco-Lacour, again freed themselves of their fetters and after countless adventures reached Paris. For a time Vidocq lived among the dregs of the underworld, but the life of a hunted beast had become a nightmare to him. Poor Francine had been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for her share in Vidocq's escape, and he resolved to gain both his and her pardon by an incredibly audacious move.

One morning a tall handsome man, with bushy side whiskers, walked into the office of Monsieur Henry, the chief of Paris police.

"Your detectives are fools," the mysterious visitor exclaimed

when the door was shut. "Paris is infested by robbers and murderers, who commit their crimes unhindered night after night. Make me the chief of a special *brigade de Sûreté* and I will undertake to cleanse the town in a year."

M. Henry frowned. "I need no man's help. Besides, you promise what is impossible. Who are you?"

The visitor laughed and pulled off the wig and whiskers.

"See—your men have searched for me in vain all over France, and here I am in your office. I am Vidocq!"

For a moment the official was speechless, then his eyes narrowed and his wits began to leap and dance. Vidocq! Such a man would indeed be a reckless, clever auxiliary.

And so with the consent of M. Pasquier, the prefect, the bargain was struck—Francine was released, Vidocq nominated chief agent of the Sûreté, and Coco-Lacour his lieutenant. No longer hunted—Vidocq had become the hunter.

VIDOCQ, CHIEF OF DETECTIVES, AND THE BAT

IT is always a bleak and thankless task to follow the path which the great have taken. Victor Hugo was inspired by the incredible adventures of Vidocq, as recorded in the National Archives, to write his *Misérables* ; and he frankly admitted that Jean Val Jean and Tantine, persecuted by Javert, symbolised Vidocq and Francine, remorselessly hunted by the police. The disguise is transparent enough ; and more obvious still is Balzac's wonderful Vautrin. Both writers merely changed the names, and with the poet's intuition and fancy filled inevitable gaps in the record. Therefore the only excuse for relating these fragments of Vidocq's history, is that the documents from which they are taken were not accessible in Victor Hugo's day. Even now, a century later, the authorities are reluctant to admit that Vidocq was indeed the first and greatest of their detectives.

The sombre leprous approaches to the grim La Force prison resounded with the rattle and clank of iron chains. Heavy shuffling footsteps squelched and thudded through the mire, whilst coarse voices, incapable of ought but foul curses and snarling jests, flung back biting retorts at the pitiless men and women perched safely out of reach at upper windows, who made the arrival of yet another file of galley-felons an occasion for mirth. Once perhaps their hearts had contracted with horror at the sight of these weary, dirt-encrusted, haggard wretches who, whatever their crimes, were yet treated more cruelly than the necessity for repression demanded ; but with the years they had become hardened to the passing of the chain gang. Dusk was approaching, and as the long file of outcasts emerged from a winding alley and halted, obedient to the sharp commands of the guard, the last blood-red shafts of the sinking sun struck fully on the iron doors of the prison, illuminating them fittingly, as in ironic

welcome. As though the slanting rays had struck a tangible blow announcing the coming of the *Chiourme*, a bugle sounded, and with much creaking and clanging of bolts the gates swung wide and disgorged a dozen warders, who fell upon the helpless convicts with kicks and blows, driving them like so many beasts into the forecourt. Each man dragged himself forward in turn and knelt before a huge anvil, where a waiting smith cut through the rivets connecting him to the common chain and locked an iron ball to the gyves on his legs. When this revolting ceremony had been completed the felons were herded, menaced by whips and staves, into a hall of massive stone where turnkeys searched them brutally for hidden tools or weapons. In the dim light of smoking oil lamps, it seemed as though the rakings of some obscene hell were gathered in this chamber. Already endless marches, bitterly cold nights in tumbledown shelters, and scanty food, had set such a mask of misery and sullen indifference on every man that they looked like the creatures of one brood. Yet all pugnacity and spirit had not been entirely destroyed, even in these dregs of humanity, for as the chief warder dragged a tall muscular fellow into the sheen cast by the rushlight on the desk of the *greffier*, whose duty it was to enter their names and number in the prison register, a hoarse murmur of approval burst from each man's lips, akin to the involuntary applause a successful play wrings from an audience.

"Vidocq, Eugene François," the gaoler announced with a leer; and at the name soldiers and warders stiffened to attention, and even the impassible clerk lifted his goose-quill from the page and stared at the bronzed features, the gleaming eyes, and the knotted limbs which moved restlessly under the tattered clothes.

"Aha—my fine fellow, so you have come back at last! We are honoured indeed," he sneered. "Hola, smith!—look at his fetters again. I should not be surprised if they were already filed in half. This is Vidocq, the master escaper."

The squat shape of the blacksmith pushed itself forward at the call. With slow scrutiny he passed each link of the chain through his hands, and tapped the arm and ankle rings with a hammer.

"No, no, citizen," he growled, "they sound true. No file has touched them as yet; but we've never kept him long, and I'll wager he'll fool you all again, though God knows how he does it."

There was a note of grudging admiration in his voice, and he stepped back a pace to gaze at this hairy giant, with the set, resolute face. Again a hoarse mutter rose from the convicts, and

several laughed and spat jests at the warders, who for once did not reply with blows. The masterful air of the reckless adventurer carried a warning even to their bestial minds. When the last name had been inscribed in the book of the damned, two warders seized Vidocq's chain and dragged him to the sleeping quarters, where a narrow bench, clamped to the floor, was given each man as a bed. Vidocq's restless eyes flickered from bench to bench, noting those who first lifted their heavy ball securely to a corner before they stretched their limbs to rest. These were home-comers—*les chevaux de retour*—men who had learned the tricks of the chain gang during many spells in prison. Once all were shut in this den together, discipline relaxed. Each man was free to talk or sleep, for the armed sentries pacing outside were deemed sufficient to suppress a riot. Here and there a novice, utterly crushed by the horror of his fate, sat with bowed head, forcing back the tears that came unbidden, or gazed in hopeless despair at the dreadful surroundings. When the warders had gone Vidocq became the centre of attraction, for to these outcasts he was a hero. Twenty-seven escapes stood to his credit, and legend had endowed him with powers more than human. But that night he was tired and even discouraged, although to him captivity had now lost much of its horror. The chief of police had accepted his offer to cleanse France of evil-doers, and so long as he succeeded in this task he was free to use what methods he chose. For the time no longer a convict, but head of the Sûreté, he had been sent to La Force at his own request in order to discover who led the bands infesting Paris, and to learn the plans of those scheming to escape. He was a spy, but he owed no allegiance to these outlaws, who were a constant menace to the community. Vidocq had been sentenced to eight years in the galleys as the result of a cruel plot. Desperate and rebellious, he had escaped time after time, until ceaseless persecution made him akin to a hunted beast, but through it all he had preferred honesty to crime. At last he turned the tables on the police. No longer hunted—he was become the hunter, and their master, although in the prison this was known to none but the governor. Francine, his faithful mate and ally, the girl who had clung to him through thick and thin, was his sole link with the outside world. As the heavy days dragged by, many hardened felons sought his advice, came to him with secrets, and gave him details of their plans for flight. Vidocq felt like a traitor, but the thought that he had not been pardoned, and that the prefect could send him back to the chain gang if he failed, kept his resolution firm. It was a hunchback named Cervalet, who first spoke to him of an organisation for

wholesale murder which the police had long sought in vain to trace.

"Have you heard of Pierre Lamort?" Cervalet queried one night, creeping to the trestle on which Vidocq lay. "I belong to his band! Lamort is known to us as the 'Bat'! He—he! It's no name given in jest. He can fly through the air and kill from afar. There are ten of his men here, and soon the Bat will haul us out of this hell. I was caught when we robbed Duschène's farm and killed all the inmates: man, woman and child. I fell from the roof and broke my leg—the soldiers were after us and Lamort had to look out for himself. But I'm not forgotten, as you will see."

That it was no idle tale, Vidocq soon learned, for the following day Francine, who visited him in the governor's office, where Vidocq was taken as though for some infringement of the regulations, informed him that M. Henry, the chief of police, had urgent need of his help. This band of the Bat was terrorising France, and no clue had been found of their identity nor could spies discover where they met.

Vidocq assured his sweetheart that already by a queer coincidence he had made progress in that very direction, and ordered her to inform M. Henry of this. When she returned, disguised as an old woman, to the rue de Jerusalem, she found the chief of police in excited conclave with M. Pasquier, the prefect. A gruesome and uncanny occurrence had just been reported.

The Duchess de la Corcière, widow of a wealthy and famous soldier and a noted beauty, had been found lying in her garden that very morning by terrified servants. She bore no wound nor mark to show how she died, and was attired only in a flimsy night-gown, although it was winter and very cold. Her maid, more observant than the others, had pointed out, moreover, that her bare feet were unstained by the soft clay of the paths. The body lay in a queer ring of ashes and what appeared to be charred herbs, several inches wide, which formed a complete circle around the unfortunate woman. Crowning horror of all, outside this mysterious sorcerer's ring ran a double line of footsteps: a human foot and a cloven hoof side by side. Not one of the servants had dared to cross these obvious signs of black magic, and so they had waited, terror-stricken, until the police, with many muttered prayers, had carried the Duchess into the house, where doctors had examined her.

M. Pasquier, who was a very superstitious man, was inclined to believe that in truth the devil, or one of his demons, had carried

the woman from her bed and dropped her, dead with fright, in the garden. But the chief of police was sceptical.

"Devil or man," he said with decision, "put Vidocq on the trail! He'll get him. Here is his chance to earn a permanent pardon. That fellow is afraid of nothing."

"Peuh—a galley-felon—a thief, a robber, and a notorious bandit," M. Pasquier retorted; "I am surprised you should esteem him so highly. As yet he has done nothing to justify the post he holds."

"No—that is true—but then it is not three months since he was made chief of the Sûreté. This, I repeat, is his chance! You, mademoiselle," M. Henry added, turning to Francine, who had stood unmoved, listening to this dialogue—"go to La Force again and tell Vidocq what has happened. He had better escape—it shall be arranged—unless he believes that some clue to this mystery is to be found in the prison. You may go."

The next day, to his surprise, Vidocq found a note in his daily portion of black bread, warning him that Francine would come immediately after the midday rest. When the chief warder went his rounds, Vidocq refused to salute and struck at the guard who attempted to haul him to his feet. For this insolence he was at once conducted before the governor, in whose office Francine already waited. She rapidly apprised her lover of the strange crime which was puzzling the police. At Vidocq's request Francine was given a bundle of civilian clothes and a key to his fetters, and an hour later they succeeded in leaving the prison together, hidden in the cart of one of the merchants who brought food to the prisoners awaiting trial. For a week Vidocq haunted the taverns of the underworld, cunningly disguised, accompanied by his lieutenant Coco-Lacour, a rat-faced little Parisian and former felon, whose liberation Vidocq had obtained when he organised his brigade of detectives. But the scent was stale, clues there was none, and finally Vidocq decided to return to La Force, for with his peculiar intuition he sensed that the tangle could best be unravelled from there.

The chief warder had meanwhile been informed of Vidocq's true position, and a garbled account of his daring escape from the governor's room was spread among the convicts. Vidocq was then led back to La Force by two of his own men dressed as gendarmes, who reported his capture with many jests. To complete the illusion Vidocq was chained to his bench, and special sentries ordered to watch him. He was of course hailed with cries of commiseration by his companions, and when lights were extinguished Cervalet crept to him, eager to learn what had happened,

Vidocq satisfied his curiosity with a series of imaginary mishaps, and at once related the story of the strange death of the Duchess de la Corcière, omitting no detail. He could not see Cervalet's face in the dark, but he laid his hand on the fellow's wrist, and to his joy he felt him quiver, and noted the quickening of his pulse.

"You know who did this, *hein*?" he queried in a whisper. At once the man became rigid.

"I—nonsense," he growled, "what should I know of it? From your account the devil came for her."

"*Bien*—you do well to mistrust everyone," Vidocq retorted with feigned indifference, although his brain was afire. The very denegation proved that Cervalet knew something of the matter or he would have discussed it freely.

"Though why you should fear me of all men," he added as an afterthought, "I don't understand."

But something had frightened Cervalet, perhaps Vidocq's hand on his wrist had carried a message to his brain also, for he made no reply. The next day, while the convicts were at work, Cervalet found an opportunity to say, "I do not distrust you, François. But I believe that my chief, Pierre Lamort, had something to do with the woman's death. He has supernatural powers. I dare not say more because his spirit can leave the body at will and come to spy on us. Who knows how often the cursed wraith has listened to me. Those who talked too much about the Bat have always died—horribly"—and the fellow shivered.

"I'd like to serve such a man," Vidocq said quickly. "Listen—soon my sweetheart will send me the tools for cutting these gyves. A warder has already been bribed. Two can go as easily as one. If I take you, will you lead me to the Bat? I'm tired of being always captured. Perhaps he will hide me safely since he is so cunning."

Cervalet's eyes flashed. "Already—you are preparing for flight? That is clever—but can you trust the turnkey?"

Vidocq laughed. "Francine is handsome, she can twist him round her finger. But no one else must know." His face suddenly became fierce. "I've trusted you. If the plan fails I'll smash your skull with my fetters."

Cervalet backed away in fear. "*Bien—bien*—you need not threaten. Do you think I want to stay in this hell?"

Vidocq said nothing more, but began to make leisurely arrangements for their escape. His was the patience of the savage, and he felt that this Bat was a dangerous creature, not easily fooled. But an urgent message from M. Henry compelled him to change his plans.

"You must leave La Force at once and handle this case," the message ran. "Count Mancini has been murdered by the creature with the cloven hoof. Paris is terror-stricken——"

Vidocq laughed grimly as he read the note. Once the police had hunted him day and night in order to thrust him into prison, now they frantically clamoured that he should come out! But his heart beat quickly at the definite promise of a pardon if he succeeded in clearing up the mystery of these uncanny crimes. He immediately gave his instructions for the distribution of the sentries and sent a message to Francine. He had not escaped so often when all the forces of the law were against him, without becoming an expert at the game, and the tiny saw, made from a watch-spring, with which he had learned to cut through chains and gyves was already in his possession. At dead of night he snapped his fetters, did as much for Cervalet, and crept silently down the aisles, for once apparently unguarded, until he and the convict reached the outer wall. A cautious whistle brought the end of a knotted rope tumbling at his feet, and a minute later both men crouched on the frozen surface of the moat and hurriedly donned the clothes Francine had brought. She had learnt her lesson well, and related in rapid whispers that men from the Sûreté were constantly watching her house. They must not go with her, or capture was certain. For a moment Cervalet hesitated, then he growled:

"Come then, François. I'll take you to the Père Ticquetonne. He keeps a cellar tavern and will hide us. I cannot do more until I have spoken with Pierre Lamort."

Under pretence of kissing Francine, Vidocq gave her concise instructions, then he followed Cervalet, who was impatient to be gone. Le Père Ticquetonne's place was one of the many underground haunts known only to the initiated, a vile, evil-smelling hole at the bottom of rotting stairs, encumbered with vats of wine which served alike as chairs and tables to the furtive men and women drinking there. At a whispered word from Cervalet the landlord, a hideous dwarf, opened a cunningly-hidden door in the wall which closed again the moment Vidocq and the convict had entered.

"Here we are safe," Cervalet exclaimed with a chuckle. "We will eat first and wash the taste of that prison fare from our mouths, then I'll go and talk to the Bat."

"He is here, then?" Vidocq asked, looking curiously around the room they had entered; but his companion shook his head and laid a finger on his lips.

"No, no, but I know where to find him. You must wait until I return."

This did not suit Vidocq, and whilst they ate the meal Ticquetonne brought them, he concocted a plausible tale about a hidden hoard of silver buried in a wood outside the town, which he wished to fetch. Part of this sum, he added, would be Cervalet's reward for presenting him to the Bat.

"*Bien*," Cervalet grumbled, tempted by the promise. "Money is always useful; I am not over-confident Lamort will let you join his band, however. Go carefully and don't get caught, and if you do, don't talk."

Vidocq rose with a laugh. "I never talk. What is the password?"

For a moment the convict hesitated, then looking fearfully around he whispered: "Mention bats in a casual way. That's enough for the old fool outside. I dare not say more now."

As Vidocq emerged cautiously from the filthy cellar, his features muffled in the generous folds of a neckcloth, an old woman wrapped in a ragged cape, who sat huddled in a doorway, raised her head for an instant and lifted the matted grey hair from her face. It was Francine, faithful and tireless. Vidocq made a warning gesture, then without a word disappeared into the mist of approaching dawn. By devious ways he gained the Sûreté headquarters in the rue de Jerusalem. It was a principle with Vidocq that no man should know his true appearance. When, an hour later, he entered his office to receive the reports of his spies, bushy whiskers and grey-flecked hair had transformed him into a typical police officer. None of the erstwhile felons of his secret brigade had gathered definite information, and he finally summoned his lieutenant, Coco-Lacour.

"What have you discovered?" he asked briefly. The little ferret-faced Parisian wagged his head despondently.

"There was no wound on Count Mancini—not a bruise even. He was found flat on his face in just such a devil's circle as the Duchess. We are fighting ghosts, François. I've questioned the servants. They swear a huge bat——"

At the word Vidocq started up, but the Parisian waved him back. "Sit down—yes, a bat, as big as a man, was seen perched in a tree. It had glowing eyes, and——"

Vidocq thumped the table angrily. "Have done, *mon vieux*. Did you break stones and carry a chain and ball for ten years at Brest without learning some of the tricks of our pretty criminals? The Bat is a man. I'll wager we'll have him in the cells soon. Did you look for footsteps; was the house robbed?"

"There were some footprints like those of an animal, but none

made by a man," Lacour replied with a shiver. " As for robbery —I waited until you came before searching the house."

Vidocq nodded and rose. " Send two men to Francine in case she needs help. She watches Ticquetonne's cellar in the rue aux Loups. Then come with me. I'll look at these foot prints myself."

The morning was bleak and cold and the trees in Coun Mancini's park loomed dimly through swirling streamers of mist like menacing evil sentries. Half-way along a broad path leading to the house, Lacour halted and pointed to a circle of blackened ashes soaked with dew, around which a double line of footprints made a complete circle. Vidocq advanced and knelt by these, scrutinising every detail and making notes of their depth and size. At last his companion became impatient.

" No need for such precision, François. You see what they are—devil's footprints ! Something with a naked foot and a hoof like a goat, danced about the Count's body."

" Why do you say danced ? " Vidocq queried. " If the thing, whatever it was, had danced, it would have blurred its own trail. But not a single mark is smudged. No, these traces were made slowly and purposely."

" And that ? " Lacour asked, pointing to the circle of ashes. " What do you think of it ? "

For answer Vidocq bent over the charred ring and sniffed at it repeatedly. Aromatic herbs have been burnt here. Probably just to make a mystery. Where was this fantastic bat seen ? "

Lacour indicated a beech beside the path. Vidocq examined the tree and the ground beneath it, then with a leap he seized a branch and drew himself up. When five minutes later he dropped to the ground beside his friend his eyes gleamed with triumph.

" This bat wore clothes," he said, holding out his hand. In the palm lay a shred of lustrous silk. " I found it hanging from a twig. Doubtless the fellow wears some queer disguise to frighten ignorant servants. We'll search the house now and examine the Count's papers. If nothing was stolen, then there must be a connection between the death of the Duchess and this Italian."

Vidocq showed his badge to the major domo, and in his presence opened cupboards and desks, but neither money nor jewels were missing, nor did the Count's papers give them any result. Coco-Lacour shook his head sadly when Vidocq withdrew, apparently baffled, and accompanied him in silence to his office. Great was his surprise, therefore, when Vidocq threw a scrap of paper on the table with dramatic gesture. A red circle occupied the centre, and around it ran the familiar foot- and hoof-prints crudely painted

in black, whilst in a corner were the ominous words: *You have only two days left! Proclaim the truth or you die!*"

"Since when does the devil write threatening notes, *hein*?—tell me that, *mon vieux*." Vidocq said with a chuckle. "I found this in the bedroom. Away with you to the rue aux Loups. I must know if Cervalet has left Ticquetonne's cellar, and, if so, where he went. You'll find me in one of the taverns near the Count's house, or in the servants' hall of the Duchess de la Corcière's mansion. I shall go as a gipsy fortune-teller. It's a trade which I learnt well in my youth."

Tireless, furtive, cunning, and quick to seize on the slightest clue, Vidocq slipped in and out among the credulous servants and gossiping neighbours. It was an ideal disguise for such work, and whilst foretelling their future he could put all the questions he wished without arousing suspicion. Late that night, after a hurried interview with M. Henry and a search in the secret police archives, he transformed himself into a Normandy peasant and returned to the cellar tavern of the Père Ticquetonne. He had found the connecting link. The Duchess de la Corcière and Count Mancini had been lovers, but they had also shared some other guilty secret, which from the many rumours he had sifted, had been more than just the fear of a scandal. The Duke had died suddenly and mysteriously some fifteen years previously, and soon after his death servants and neighbours had been struck by a curious change in his son, then a child of five. It was as though another had taken his place. Vidocq did not doubt that this had indeed happened, and that the real heir had been killed or abducted. It now remained to discover why the Count and the Duchess had been murdered by the Bat, and to capture the creature and his band. When Vidocq returned to the rue aux Loups, Francine, hideous in her rags, sidled up with a dismal whine and begged for alms. Vidocq dropped his knotted stick and as he stooped to recover it she whispered in his ear:

"Be careful, my love, Cervalet has not moved from the cellar, and unless there is a secret issue the Bat and his men are there also."

"Go now, little one, and snatch some sleep," her lover murmured tenderly. "My men shall guard every approach. If I give you no sign by to-morrow afternoon search for me, but take care not to arouse suspicion, for I may be a prisoner."

It was fortunate Cervalet had given him the password, for at sight of this stranger in the peasant's dress the innkeeper snatched a pistol from the shelf. Ignoring the weapon Vidocq called hoarsely for wine.

"There are bats flying about your door," he added, "they frighten me." At the words Ticquetonne slipped the pistol into his smock and shuffling forward peered into his visitor's face.

"Bats?" he croaked. "What do you know about them?"

Vidocq nodded towards the secret door. "Is Cervalet there?"

Ticquetonne glanced at the men and women sprawling on the barrels to see if they had heard, then he pressed a secret spring, and, hardly waiting for the panel to slide aside, pushed him through the opening. Cervalet lay on a mattress, apparently asleep, but at Vidocq's entry he started up. His keen eyes instantly pierced the disguise and he grinned ferociously.

"Made good use of your time, I see. Did you get the money?"

Vidocq held out a handful of silver. "Yes, here's your share. What news?"

"I have been out all day. I found Lamort and he will see you, but we go by secret ways so, although his lair is far away, I must blindfold you."

Vidocq grunted, the convict's eyes were shifty, and he sensed a lie, nevertheless he suffered a scarf to be bound over his face. When this was done Cervalet seized Vidocq by the hand and guided him through an opening so narrow that his shoulders brushed the sides, and down some steps. Thereafter they marched for an hour along echoing passages redolent of stale wine, Cervalet issuing whispered instructions as they turned, twisted, and stumbled up and down crumbling stairs. The elaborate ruse did not deceive Vidocq, he felt for and found the same projections and worn hollows again and again, and his uncanny senses told him that the room they at last entered was close by Ticquetonne's cellar. Abruptly the scarf was torn away and he stood staring with incredulous eyes at a scene worthy of a madman's dream. On two sides of a triangular table sat a score of black-robed men, their features hidden by masks that aped the most loathsome diseases. Blotched, speckled, and scarred with scarlet, these hideous faces made even Vidocq's hardened nerves tense with disgust. He shivered and tried not to look at their leader, enthroned at the point of this fearsome triangle, but the steady unblinking stare of two glowing eyes caught and held his unwilling gaze. The sheen of many shaded candles spared him no detail of the horror he faced. It was the image of Death, rigid, motionless, frozen, and had it not been for the eyes, alive with cruelty and lust, he would have believed that the thing was fashioned of wax. He was powerless to move, his senses swam, he felt as though he were falling—falling through a thousand years into a bottomless pit, whilst those inhuman eyes burned redly. Frantically he

began to count the stones in the walls, the stains on the table, praying for a sound to break the spell. But the lifeless face of the Bat blurred his thoughts. It was no mask he saw full well. The skin, yellow as ancient parchment, stretched tightly over fleshless cheeks and bulging jaw. Pointed teeth gleamed unnaturally in a lipless mouth, and in place of the nose were two hollows. Hair there was none, but a silken cap covered the skull, whilst the body, fleshless as the face, was clad from top to toe in black. As though divining his struggle for sanity this creature suddenly lifted its hands and exposed two shining wings attached to the arms which fell in loose folds to the knees. It was this movement which gave him respite. The strain relaxed and slowly his reeling senses steadied. Monstrous though the creature was, his reason told him it was mortal, and therefore it could be killed. He shook himself like a dog and shifted his eyes to the men with their grotesque masks, and suddenly rage throbbed through his veins and gave him courage.

"Have done with your acting," he cried. "I'm too hardened to be caught by such tricks. Men or devils, I'm not afraid"—and the sound of his voice restored his balance. It also appeared to irritate the evil Lamort, who realised that for once he had methis match. The pallid face began to twitch and a whistling voice issued from the lipless mouth. "Bind him and put him in the cell. I read treachery in his thoughts. Let him taste the dark. Later perhaps I will put him to the test. Just now I have much to do."

Before Vidocq could move, someone seized his ankles and jerked him to the floor, a rope was twisted about his wrists and legs, he was lifted by sinewy arms and thrown into a recess in the wall and the door slammed shut. Almost he could have laughed aloud. Violence at least he understood, and his muscles had tensed unconsciously to the pull of the knots. It needed but a twist and his hands were free of their bonds, yet ready to slip back in a second should his captors come. Bitterly now he repented his rashness in venturing into this den alone, for he sensed that the Bat had divined his mission or even knew that he belonged to the police. Yet how else could he have discovered this lair? Whilst Lamort and his men were in the room he was helpless, but he determined at least to learn their secrets and to fight for his life when the time came. A tiny shaft of light filtered through a crack near the hinges, and by kneeling, he was able to see into the room. The conclave around the table was breaking up. He watched the horrible Bat rise and limp with a queer, stiff-jointed gait towards a couch. Again Vidocq shivered, for he perceived

that one of the creature's legs was shaped like a goat's and ended in a hoof. This then was the explanation of the footprints around the witch's circle, and Pierre Lamort was truly the murderer of the Duchess and her lover. As the Bat flung himself down, a sliding door opened and Ticquetonne entered with wine and food. Vidocq clenched his fists in despair. He had been right, this room was near the cellar, but of what use the knowledge unless he found the means to escape. Hours passed, men came and spoke to the Bat and went again obedient to orders he could not hear. Finally, weariness and the foul air of his prison caused Vidocq to fall into a state bordering on stupor, and he sank to the floor. Fortunately he remembered to slip the ropes on his wrists again, for at some time during the night a man wearing a leper's mask came to him and held a jug of wine to his lips. The drink and probably a renewal of the air brought him partly to his senses. He remembered with relief that Francine and his men knew where he was. They would search for him soon and somehow he felt sure they would find this hidden retreat. He tried to keep his mind alert, but as time dragged endlessly on, the pain in his limbs became torture and his lungs battled to extract life from the tainted air. Again his mind began to wander, he realised dimly that unless the door were opened soon he would die, and during a lucid interval a frenzy seized him and he thumped on the wood and shouted wildly. At once a light shone in his eyes, and someone seized him under the arms and dragged him into the room. It was the man who had brought him wine, and with his help he tottered to a chair, where he collapsed limply. His legs were numbed and useless and he was faint from the long fast. How many hours or days he had lain at the mercy of his captors he could not tell, but that it was more than a night and a day he gathered from the food which an old crone was serving, and from the heap of dirty platters in a corner. To his surprise she placed a steaming dish and a jug before him. A grateful thrill contracted his nerves, as for an instant she lifted her tousled hair and he recognised Francine. Feigning to give him some bread she whispered: "Eat, beloved, soon you will be free, but for God's sake do not touch the wine!"

A moment her eyes gazed into his, and the love-light in their depths caused his blood to pulse quickly. The yearning tenderness of her look gave him renewed strength, for thus had she helped him through the darkest days in the past, and once again her unswerving devotion had saved him. As, bent and shaking, she hobbled away, playing her part to perfection, a wave of passion and love for this fearless mate brought a sob to his throat. Then

he remembered her words, and whilst swallowing the welcome food he furtively watched his enemies. Only a few of the band were there, drinking and throwing dice, the Bat had gone and with him most of the men. Soon he saw that those who remained were acting queerly. The wine they had drunk was drugged, and the drug was strong, for one after another they rose, staggered blindly a moment and fell to the floor, twisting in pain. Francine was already at the secret door, waiting for her lover, but, realising that he was still helpless, she ran back and poured water over his face and down his spine, whilst he rubbed and slapped his legs until the sting of renewed circulation caused him to groan in pain.

"Oh, hurry, my love!" Francine gasped. "It is nearly midnight, and that creature Lamort may return. I am horribly afraid. Ticquetonne and his wife are locked in a room behind the cellar. We caught Cervalet and learned where you were. These beasts here will not move again. I could not risk a slow narcotic, the wine is poisoned. Their lives for yours! The Bat and the others were followed by Coco-Lacour. They have gone to Versailles to the house of the murdered Duchess. It is your chance to trap them. Coco believes they intend to kill her son, and he is waiting there with all your men until you come."

The hurried words and the shock of the icy water brought Vidocq to his feet. Leaning on Francine he stumbled to the door.

"I have sworn to earn our pardon," he cried fiercely—"my body shall not fail me now. That monster killed Mancini and the Duchess, and I can prove it." He halted a moment in the cellar and gulped a flagon of untainted wine, then, hand in hand, he and Francine ran through the deserted byways to the Sûreté. But now that the crisis was past and her lover free, Francine became weak and fearful. A storm of weeping shook her, the while she clung desperately to him and prayed that he should not leave her alone. The salt tang of her tears on his lips caused Vidocq to waver, but he steeled himself with the thought that the arrest of the Bat would free them for ever from the menace of the galleys.

"Come, Francine," he murmured. "You are overwrought. I'll take you home first, but then I must go. Remember what this capture will mean to us."

When he had seen his sweetheart shut safely in her room, he chose a fast horse and galloped to Versailles. To his relief the mansion of the murdered Duchess was silent and dark, and the garden appeared to be deserted, but in the shadow of the lodge he came upon a group of his men, huddled together with chattering teeth, in mortal fear of the Bat. Coco-Lacour, he learned, had gone forward alone to reconnoitre. Some time before several furtive

shapes had been seen near the gates but they had since disappeared. Vidocq at once ordered the men, who were well armed, to creep through the shrubbery and to signal when the house was surrounded, then he advanced noiselessly, keeping well within the shadows. The silence was complete and already he believed the Bat had been warned of their presence, when an unearthly whistling scream made his flesh creep with dread. Wild yells of terror echoed this dreadful sound, followed by the thud of running footsteps and a bent figure dashed into his outflung arms.

It was Coco-Lacour, crazed with terror. Vidocq seized his shoulder and shook him roughly.

"There—my God!—over there!" the Parisian chattered hysterically, pointing to the house. "Run, François, the devil has the Duke."

Again the fierce inhuman cry sobbed through the night, and abruptly dancing flames shot up not fifty yards away. Against their glare he saw huge fluttering wings and a distorted shape that seemed to leap in long, flying strides around a figure prone on the path. Vidocq at once drew a pistol and fired, then his whistle shrilled and he rushed forward sword in hand. At the shot the leaping form had halted and turned, snarling like a beast. Even Vidocq's iron nerve failed him for an instant at sight of the fiendish face and glowing eyes of the Bat. Then he remembered his mission, and springing towards him he thrust with all his might. To his relief the blade sank into living flesh and he felt the hilt thud against the ribs. So great had been his momentum that he stumbled and fell to his knees as Pierre Lamort collapsed across the ring of flames, sprawling in a contorted heap beside the body of the young Duke de la Corcière. Instantly the park became a battlefield, men came running from every side, pistols spat redly, yells and curses rent the air, and hurtling bodies crashed through the bushes. But Vidocq had regained his feet and his booming voice issued terse commands which rallied his men. Coco-Lacour had seen the Bat collapse and realised that they were dealing with mortals. Thereupon he had fetched the gendarmes waiting outside the grounds, and ten minutes later the Bat's accomplices were securely bound and the fight was over. The ring of fire was still smouldering, and spirals of pungent smoke enveloped the Bat and his victim. A spasm of frightful nausea seized Vidocq when he tried to cross the glowing circle, his brain reeled and he would have fallen had not Lacour caught him and dragged him to safety.

"Poison," Vidocq gasped. "They may not be dead—help me to get them out, but cover your face and don't breathe."

At terrible risk, for the fumes from the burning herbs were indeed a deadly poison, the two bodies were pulled away, but too late. The Bat had died by the sword which had pierced his heart, and the Duke was already dead when Vidocq had attacked his murderer. What the poison was, no one discovered, but one of the prisoners admitted that it came from the East, where the Bat had lived many years. When the doctors examined this strange being, they found that his body was horribly scarred and disfigured as though at some time he had suffered unspeakable torture. His right foot had been cut and shaped to resemble an animal's hoof, probably by a savage people who had of set purpose manufactured a monster. Yet once he had been comely, for Pierre Lamort, the infamous Bat, was the true son of the Duchess de la Corcière. He had been taken from his mother and given to wandering gipsies by the Count Mancini, who had compelled the Duchess to rear their illegitimate boy in his place. This was proven by the documents the police discovered. No doubt his misshapen form had suggested the bat's wings to his distorted mind, as a method of terrifying his many victims. That he, too, had recently discovered his true name was proven by the murders of his unnatural parents and half-brother. Vidocq's first care, when the men who had been with the Bat were safely under lock and key, was to send police and soldiers to remove the bodies of those whom Francine had poisoned in the cellar tavern. He and Coco-Lacour had barely returned to the Sûreté when one of his servants stumbled into his office with livid face and palsied limbs. Gibbering and moaning the fellow sank at his master's feet incapable of speech. Vidocq wasted no time in vain questions. A cold presentiment gripping his heart, he rushed downstairs and flung himself on a horse. Followed by Coco-Lacour he galloped madly to his home. On the floor of her bedroom lay faithful Francine, a dagger in her heart. Held by the blade was a sheet of paper, wet with blood, on which had been traced the fiendish red circle and footprints. Lacour pointed with shaking finger at a scrawl beneath this emblem.

The Bat is dead, Vidocq read, his eyes dim with tears, *but his friends live to avenge him. Your turn shall come, traitor and spy.*

From that moment Vidocq's hatred of all criminals became a wild passion. Francine's face floated before his eyes in all his raids on the underworld. He received a pardon as reward for his bravery and skill, but elected to remain chief of the Sûreté,

and soon he became a terror to evil-doers. Many were the attempts made on his life, but all failed. He lived to be eighty, and his fantastic adventures have inspired a legion of poets and playwrights. This strange man disdained to profit by his position. There is a letter in the archives, written by Vidocq a year before he died, to the prefect of police, in which he reminds him that he captured more than fifteen thousand murderers, bandits, and robbers, during his career. The letter concludes with a request for a grant of money in return for these valiant deeds, since in his old age he found himself penniless and alone.

The Ministry of Justice acceded to this request, but because he had once been a galley-felon, though, as the records show, wrongly convicted, his unique services to the police have not yet received official recognition.

THE VANISHING TRAVELLERS

A VIDOCQ ADVENTURE

NOT far from the road that runs from Mimizan to the old-fashioned town of Biscarosse in the wild, primitive Landes country, a wall and some crumbling towers still stand to-day to arouse the curiosity of the traveller. It is all that remains of a gloomy mediæval castle, once a fortress of the puissant Dukes of Gascony. It was pillaged and partly burned by fanatic revolutionaries in 1789, but somewhere about 1800 the domain and forests surrounding it were acquired by the Abbé Fargeol, who, although formerly popular at Court and a favourite of the Cardinal de Rohan, had feigned to espouse with enthusiasm the doctrine of the republicans. With the advent of Bonaparte, l'Abbé Fargeol twisted his political views once more to suit the need of the moment, and by subtle intrigue, and also because for a time he had ministered to the spiritual needs of Napoleon's veterans, he retained his independence. He was known to be rich moreover, although the source of his wealth was long a secret. When he bought the castle, the Abbé sent to Dax for masons, who laboured to make part of one wing habitable. There he resided many years as a recluse, devoting his time ostensibly to erudite research into the history of mediæval France. His hobby was collecting ancient parchments and folk-lore, and he wrote many books dealing with the origin of the numerous legends of apparitions and supernatural manifestations with which the land was saturated from the Pyrénées to Brest. Tales of werwolves and witches especially interested this strange priest, whose gaunt form and burning fanatic gaze inspired superstitious terror in all the neighbouring villages, although his sporadic charity was readily accepted. One of his curious books, an analysis of the mentality of the infamous poisoners la Voisin and the Brinvilliers, is still in the police library. A fragmentary history of the man and a brief description of his death occurs in the memoirs of Canler, chief of the Sûreté after Vidocq retired,

A long report of the crimes the Abbé committed was sent by Vidocq to M. Henry, who transmitted it to Savary, Duke of Rovigo, Napoleon's trusted general and Minister of Police during the Corsican's reign. Savary thereupon gave orders for the castle to be razed to the ground, and instructed the local prefect to warn the country-folk against the treacherous quagmires which surrounded the spot. He even devoted a small sum to the work of filling some of these with stones and trees. Yet Nature still holds sway in the region, and woe betide the man or beast who ventures on this apparently firm expanse of spacious meadows, deceived by the swaying rushes and green willows which hide the quaking soil; once caught in the deadly sucking grip of the sands, their struggles are vain and they disappear for ever.

The story of Vidocq's successful investigation of the fiendish trap conceived by the mysterious Abbé for robbing and murdering unsuspicious travellers without staining his hands with their blood, is mentioned in Vidocq's and Peuchet's memoirs, and gave me the key to an incomplete dossier which, but for this clue, had been meaningless.

M. Henry, prefect of Paris police, sat in earnest conclave with his trusted agent Vidocq.

A report had arrived from Mimizan, a little flourishing town in the Landes district, which had been the scene of numerous mysterious crimes. This report was in cypher and the prefect held a translation which he was reading aloud:

"On the ninth of March," he began, "Pierre Leplot, a wealthy farmer, left Mimizan on horseback, and was seen by the postilion of the Dax post-chaise not far from Tolaize. Leplot owns extensive lands at Biscarosse. His horse was found dead in a ditch two days later. No trace of the farmer has come to light from that day to this. A similar fate overtook Maître Maizan, a notary. Then for two months nothing further occurred. But in June, Baron Verlaplan came to the monthly fair at Mimizan in order to arrange for the sale of cattle and produce for the army. When he left to return home, he carried forty thousand *pistoles*, and remembering the disappearance of Leplot and his money, hired two men to accompany him as a bodyguard. The Baron had intended to break his journey at Parentis, but did not arrive there. Both he and the two men have vanished. One of their horses was discovered several weeks later, much decayed, in a forest clearing. The two men hired by the Baron are believed to have been the notorious robbers, Jacomé Bourges and Combon le Boiteux, who

escaped a year ago from Brest prison. The peasants aver that the Abbé Fargeol, who lives at the ruined Château de Biscarosse, not far from Mimizan, had been sheltering them. The prefect requests that agents of the Sûreté be sent at once to investigate the matter.

"So much for the report," M. Henry concluded. "You had better take charge of the case, my friend. It may be that these missing men merely absconded with the money, but I do not think so. It is true the notary carried client's funds, but the others had no reason to disappear so mysteriously. Take all the men you need and spare no pains."

Vidocq rose briskly and flung his ample cape over his shoulders.

"Very well, monsieur, I will leave for Mimizan to-morrow. Should you need to communicate with me, I shall be at the principal inn as the farmer Jean Petit. Coco-Lacour shall accompany me, the fellow will make an ideal postilion, it is a part he has played more than once. Sergeant Dubois must take my place here meanwhile. I have taught him to dress and make up to represent me. It would be as well for people to think that the Sûreté chief is still in Paris."

Vidocq at once ordered Coco-Lacour, his little rat-faced lieutenant, a former convict, who followed him everywhere like a shadow, to summon the men they would need. Although the three days' journey to the Landes in lumbering rattling government coaches caused them to ache in every bone, Vidocq wasted no time when at last they arrived. After a hurried meal he sent his men to numerous taverns to collect scraps of gossip, whilst he set out with Coco-Lacour for the priest's castle. Two hours hard riding brought them to the edge of the forest through which the road had wound. Beyond was the sea, and on the shore, squatting like some uncouth mediæval beast on a rocky base, was the place they sought. Vidocq surveyed the desolate landscape with distaste, the tide was out, and the vast expanse of wet sand, glistening redly in the last rays of the sinking sun, resembled a hideous wound. In the dim light it appeared to rise and fall as though alive and breathing. Nearer to them were stretches of marshy land traversed by inky streams of slime and stagnant water, and covered with slender rushes that shivered and stirred in the fitful breeze. A tang of death and decay was in the air, and the shrill cry of gulls, skimming the surface in search of food, gave a dreary voice to the scene that aptly fitted its aspect. The huge arched gate and drawbridge of the castle, which faced towards them, were intact, but the towers and part of the roof had crumbled, and many massive blocks of stone obstructed the narrow path. Had it not been for a column of smoke which issued from a chimney,

and the lights shining from narrow windows, he would have believed the place to be utterly deserted.

"That is the ancient domain of the Dukes de Saintonge," Vidocq said turning to his friend, "I wonder why the Abbé Fargeol bought and restored it. What a dwelling for a priest."

"He must be mad to live there," Coco-Lacour muttered. "A week in such a house, alone with the gulls and the goblins which surely haunt these marshes, would make a raving lunatic of me. Fancy preferring that to Paris."

"Mad or bad, we must visit the fellow. Somewhere on this road foul crimes have been committed. It may be just coincidence that he chose to live in this fortress, but we must take nothing for granted. Come, we'll explore the wood before it is too dark. A storm is coming up, too, so let us hurry."

Abruptly, as they entered the first belt of trees, Vidocq's horse snorted and reared in fright and he perceived the vague outline of a man, dressed entirely in black, standing motionless in a clearing and examining them with steady piercing eyes. Vidocq pulled sharply on the reins and springing to the ground stepped quickly up to the startling apparition. He saw a gaunt yellow face in which the eyes glowed like sombre jewels. That this man was the priest Fargeol he divined at once.

"We are riding to Biscarosse," Vidocq said, doffing his hat, "and I fear we have missed the road, can you put us right?"

"Indeed no," a harsh voice answered, "you have made no mistake. The road is quite near to the right, but as you value your lives do not ride under the trees. It is dangerous!"

Before Vidocq could reply the ghoulish shape vanished, and although they hunted far and near no sign of the priest did they see again. Finally they tethered the horses to a tree, and lighting their lanterns pushed resolutely through the undergrowth, guided by a half-formed belief that somewhere in the forest they would find traces of the missing men. A moaning wind now swept in gusts above their heads, and a pelting rain, which fortunately only reached them in the rare clearings where fallen trees had crushed the tangle of bushes, made their grim quest increasingly irksome. For several hours they struggled on in silence, slipping on slimy jagged stumps, tearing their clothes on the thorns, and sinking every little while to their knees in some hidden morass. Abruptly Coco-Lacour seized Vidocq by the arm and lifting his lamp pointed with eloquent gesture at a large wooden building which loomed dimly through the gloom. As though this had been a signal, a blinding violet flash of lightning caused the house to stand out clearly a second, then a crackling and rending of wood

and a deafening thunderous boom compelled them to dash hurriedly to the shelter of a gaping doorway. Vidocq peered cautiously into the single room, it was dry and warm, and in a corner some saddles and a heap of blankets attested the fact that the house had been occupied recently. The storm had now burst in earnest, and despite the risk he decided to spend the night there. The door was stout, and a heavy bar had been fashioned to hold it shut. Vidocq was too excited to rest, but Lacour, whose slight frame was unused to continued exertion, pulled a saddle and blankets against a wall and was soon asleep. He awoke as an animal does, his senses alert and muscles taut, at the touch of a hand, and was startled to see his chief beside him, a finger on his lips.

"Ssh—don't move. There are men outside. I heard their voices, and someone tried the door. I cannot see from the window. It's still almost dark. We must wait to see what will happen. Look to your priming, it may be wet."

As they sat with straining ears, pistol in hand, a soft whistle broke the silence. It was answered faintly from far away. Then for a minute twigs snapped and leaves rustled. Softly Vidocq stole to the door and lifted the bar. The storm had ceased, only the dripping trees remained as evidence of its violence, and as they slipped like shadows over the threshold a refreshing, pine-laden breeze filled their lungs. The light was growing stronger every moment, and they were speedily able to follow the footprints of several men, which led them towards the sea. Soon the forest thinned out, and through a rift of broken branches Vidocq caught the gleam of water and perceived that before them lay the flat expanse of desolate sands, with the Abbé's castle looming huge and dim in the light and shadow of daybreak. A murmur of voices caused him to drop to the ground and wriggle forward like a snake. Ten paces away, but screened by a clump of willows, stood three men. He recognised the priest, who appeared to be issuing peremptory orders to his companions—burly ruffians, wrapped to their eyes in heavy cloaks. As he gazed, the group broke up, the Abbé Fargeol strode away towards the shore, whilst the men turned down a narrow path which evidently led to the main road.

Vidocq at once sprang to his feet.

"Come, *mon ami*," he cried, "our night has not been wasted, but we must get our horses and return to town before we are seen. We know at least that the key to the puzzle is here."

"I recognised those two men," Coco-Lacour gasped, running to keep up with his chief—"I saw them often at Brest."

"Jacomé and le Boiteux, who escaped from prison, you mean?"

"Yes; and they probably live in that log house in the wood; they are in league with the priest. The bodies of those poor travellers were either thrown in the sea or buried in the forest."

A messenger with a letter from M. Henry was waiting at the inn when they arrived.

"Our prefect believes in heredity," Vidocq remarked drily, handing the missive to Lacour. "He has searched the records and discovered that the Abbé Fargeol is a lineal descendant of a Duc de Saintonge, who lived in that castle in 1600, and also robbed and murdered travellers. Legend has it that the bodies of his victims were never found. Well, with the sea at his door that is not strange, and this priest had probably copied the methods of his ancestor. Have our men anything to report?"

"Yes, Sergeant Labrousse got hold of a talkative serving-wench. One of the men hired by the missing farmer as bodyguard had a scar between the eyes. She noticed it when he removed his hat. Le Boiteux had such a scar when I met him at Brest prison. Moreover, la Bru, a wealthy cattle breeder from Pontex, is expected to come to the fair to-morrow. He has sent four of his men in advance with a herd of beasts, and they have spread the tale that he intends to ride home at night, in the hope of drawing the bandits from their lair. It appears that Leplot, the farmer who vanished, was his friend."

Vidocq nodded. "Good—we must follow close behind; it may be our opportunity. Anything else?"

Coco-Lacour looked at his friend with a queer smile. "H-m-m—yes, I don't know that it has anything to do with us, though. A love affair. L'Abbé removed his niece, Juliette de Saintonge, from the St. Francis school at Dax. She is now shut in the castle under the guard of an old hag he pompously calls *la gouvernante*. It appears that Juliette, who is eighteen and very pretty, fell desperately in love with a sort of gentleman farmer at Biscarosse, the Count d'André. They met when the Count visited his sister, who was also at the convent. He tried to abduct Mademoiselle Juliette, but his scheme miscarried because one of the nuns found the note he had written. D'André comes often to Mimizan and is expected soon. He swears he'll storm the castle and get the girl."

"I don't see what all this——"

Coco-Lacour's cunning little eyes blinked rapidly. "Petticoats are our greatest allies, *mon vieux*. If all else fails we may use the Count as bait for our trap."

Vidocq laughed boisterously. "You are resourceful, my friend. No wonder they put chain and ball on your ankles at Brest. But

you are right. Send Sergeant Labrousse to me now, I'll give him my orders, then we'll to bed. To-morrow we become agriculturists. See that five of our fellows are stationed bright and early at the spot where we came on those three men, and they must be well armed."

All night the streets resounded to the tramp of beasts, the barking of dogs, and the raucous cries of drovers, and when Vidocq and his friend descended for coffee, dressed in the picturesque garb of the Landes farmers, they found the town tricked out in its brightest colours. Taverns and streets were thronged with boisterous peasants, and wine and brandy flowed freely. They quickly singled out the man whom they were to watch—a burly giant, with red face and tiny twinkling eyes that gleamed brightly from under heavy brows. Until late in the afternoon the fellow was concerned only with his business, but since each sale demanded much haggling, and brandy sealed each bargain, his piercing glance soon lost its power, his speech thickened, and his attitude became offensive. But if the farmer was not easily approached, the men he had chosen as bodyguard were more careless, and Vidocq saw them drinking with a crowd of ruffians, among whom he recognised Jacomé and le Boiteux. When finally la Bru sank down at a table, his last animal sold, and began to count his money, indifferent to the greedy eyes that devoured his gold and silver, Lacour sidled up to his chief and whispered: "Our friends the convicts are there, watch them."

But la Bru, although half drunken, was on his guard. When his men attempted to bring their friends to his table he warned them off with growl and oath, and pulled a pistol from his smock.

"Keep away there, the strangers, my ducats are not for your pockets, and you, Paul and Martin, to your post beside me and stop that drinking. To-night I hope to meet the devils who killed my friend"—and his eyes roved from face to face with a wicked gleam. At this Vidocq rose and slipped to the door, just as his agent Labrousse appeared from the stables.

"A gipsy has been fondling the farmer's horses," the man whispered; "some trick, I think—they'll either go lame or sick."

"Keep la Bru in view, we'll start now and hide on the road. Follow and signal if he does not leave to-night."

But the peasant was a man of mettle, and towards dusk Vidocq caught the stamp of horses and jingle of stirrups, and peeping out from his hiding-place saw him trot round a bend closely followed by his two servants, who carried swords and pistols. At once he stepped into the road and held up his hand.

"*Au large* there!" la Bru cried sharply, reining in his horse. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"A word in your ear, my friend," Vidocq replied, holding out both hands to show he was not armed. Then as la Bru cantered up he displayed his badge of office.

"I am engaged on the same task as yourself. I, too, hunt the men who killed your friend. Be warned, somewhere on the road there is great danger. Take this whistle, and if you need help sound it."

The farmer struck at the proffered whistle with his whip, knocking it out of Vidocq's hand.

"To the devil with you and your warnings, I can look after myself. Others of your ilk have already approached me and they also had a tricolour badge. You are probably in league with them. If I see you again I'll shoot"—and without further ado la Bru spurred his horse and trotted past with contemptuous sneer. The unexpected rebuff startled Vidocq. He stooped to pick up the whistle and joined his friend. "A dangerous man," he remarked—"and I can't say I blame him. So our friends from Brest posed as police officers. I wonder if we were recognised. Come, we must keep the fool in sight."

For an hour Vidocq and Lacour swung easily along under the trees. Night was coming on and they feared to lose sight of the farmer, but at a turn in the road they came on a curious scene. The horse la Bru was riding had abruptly become unmanageable and his men were striving to seize it by the bridle. But before they could do so, it reared furiously, pawing the air, and with sudden plunge unseated its rider, throwing him into some bushes. Relieved of its burden it galloped away, but hardly had it gone a hundred yards when it reared again and with a horrible scream rolled over and writhed in convulsions. The farmer had meanwhile picked himself up, but was knocked over again by one of his men, who was also in difficulties. In an instant both servants were struggling vainly to hold their mounts—it was as though a frenzy had seized the beasts—and before the startled farmer could come to his senses the horses thundered away in a wild gallop. Vidocq and Lacour at once tied their own animals to a tree and concealed themselves behind some bushes. They saw the farmer walk to the fallen horse and lift its head. Then, since it was obviously beyond help, he drew his pistols from their holsters and resolutely started to walk.

"The game has begun," Vidocq muttered. "I wonder what the next move will be?" His question was answered quickly. The servants were hurrying back on foot and with them was the

Abbé Fargeol. Vidocq saw the farmer halt and confer with them, then with a shrug of his broad shoulders he turned to follow the priest. Evidently the servants' horses had shared the fate of his own. Like shadows the two detectives slipped along close behind, but at the edge of the wood Vidocq paused and gripped his friend's arm.

"We must wait for night. We should be seen if we ventured on that stretch of sand whilst there's light. Look, they have crossed the drawbridge and it's rising. God help the poor fools! At all costs we must get across the moat."

Again his nerves tensed as he surveyed the desolate scene, heavy black clouds hung menacingly over the castle, the sands as usual seemed flecked with blood, and in the distance a last crimson beam shot through a rift in the clouds, lighting a single spot on the sea with unearthly brilliance. But the day was swiftly fading, the red glow changed to black as he gazed, and the night swept like a tangible thing across the leaden sky, blotting out every detail with inky fingers. At once lights began to twinkle from the windows and, guided by these, Vidocq and Lacour crept cautiously to the moat.

"The sea fills this," Vidocq whispered. "Look, the tide is running out. We may get across in an hour with dry feet. Meanwhile to the wood, *mon vieux*, and make sure that our men are about. I'll stay here."

As soon as his friend had gone, Vidocq crept along the edge of the moat, which was twenty feet wide, seeking a spot where he might climb the walls of the castle. But the men who built it had done their work well. Nowhere could he discover the slightest foothold, and on the seaward side the rocks were split into chasms that only ropes and planks could span. It was a fitting spot for the crimes Vidocq felt sure it had sheltered. He turned away with a shiver as his friend returned.

"All's well," Lacour said. "The men are ready to come at the first call from our whistles."

"*Bien*—but, you know, I thought the bodies were probably cast into the sea. That is impossible. If the priest had dropped them from his towers they would have fallen on these rocks, and they are above the highest tide. Well, we shall solve the mystery soon."

An hour passed in silence while they watched the water slowly recede, but just as Vidocq thought to lower himself and make an attempt to cross, a prolonged clanking and rumbling warned them that the bridge was being lowered. A moment later they heard the thunder of horses over the massive beams and saw two dim figures, carrying lanterns, gallop away.

"The cunning devil," he said, watching the twinkling lights recede. "Those were the servants, he sent them away on some pretext. If they do not return before midnight we must force our way in."

"If we do, we risk failure," Lacour replied with a curse. "For if no harm has come to the farmer we shall seek in vain for proof that the Abbé murdered the others."

Vidocq groaned in perplexity.

"I can't let that honest fellow be killed—if there is no other way we must swim across and batter down the gate."

The moat was almost empty now, and Vidocq immediately lowered himself to the glistening sand, but hardly had his feet touched the surface when it seemed as though a giant's hand had seized them. At his hoarse yell of terror Coco-Lacour threw himself to the ground and peered over the edge.

"What is it, François?" he cried in alarm. Vidocq gripped his outstretched hands fiercely. "Pull, Coco, for heaven's sake pull, I'm sinking."

Struggling desperately, Vidocq dragged himself to safety, but he lay for many minutes shaking and panting, his face wet with the dew of fear.

"What a devil's trap," he gasped at last. "No wonder the castle is safe even at low tide. Quicksands, *mon vieux!* The suction was frightful. That is the way the bodies went. We must wait for day, we are helpless now."

As they gazed with dread at the treacherous, quivering surface, a horrible raucous cry, vibrant with the fear of death, rose abruptly almost beneath their feet. Twice again it pealed out, the despairing wail of a soul in torment, then, as they raced towards the spot whence it seemed to come, a last inhuman gurgle, impossible to locate, reached their ears, and when with palsied hands Vidocq succeeded in lighting his lantern and flashed its yellow rays over the glistening sand, no trace of the tortured creature it had engulfed remained.

"We are beaten, François," Coco-Lacour said with shaking voice—"whatever it was made that fearsome sound has gone."

Vidocq assented wearily and sank down on a heap of stones, his head bowed in his hands. A deep silence now brooded over the haunted spot, and they crouched, shivering with cold, and waited for the night to pass. At last the sombre mass of the castle changed gradually to a livid grey, the sky no longer lay like a pall above their heads, and very slowly a frigid desolate dawn crept over the sea. Vidocq sprang to his feet and looked around with swift decision.

"Run to the wood and call our men. They were ordered to bring ropes and torches. Let them search for a fallen tree. The longest they can carry. We'll fasten the ropes to the bridge pillars and sling it across the gap. It will serve to reach the gate, and by heaven I'll force them to open.

This plan proved successful, and Vidocq rained thunderous blows with a cudgel on the massive gate. For a time there was no reply, then a wicket opened and the evil face of the Abbé Fargeol peered out.

"Lower the bridge," Vidocq cried fiercely. "At once, without argument, or *tonnèrre*, I'll fetch soldiers and powder and break my way in."

The burning eyes of the priest flickered over the group of men.

"Your authority?" he sneered.

"You shall see it when you open. I am the Emperor's agent."

"Stand back, then, and pull away that log"—and with rattle and clang the ponderous bridge descended.

The priest met them on the threshold, a pistol in each hand; but at sight of Vidocq's tricolour badge his manner changed.

"I am curious to know why you rouse me in this fashion, but since you are officers of the law, come in."

"The farmer la Bru, where is he?"

"La Bru," the priest exclaimed in feigned surprise. "He was my guest at supper and left with his servants after the meal; I lent them horses."

"We heard a cry, a horrible cry——"

"A bird of prey or a wolf no doubt, I often hear them; and the sea makes strange noises."

"This was no animal. It was the death cry of a man—and we saw only two horses."

"True—I had but two. The farmer was anxious to be gone and his servant sat behind him."

"I must search your manor at once."

"I will fetch torches."

"No, you stay with us, my men have torches."

But although they searched every nook and cranny they saw no sign of the farmer. One room indeed was locked, but the priest explained that it was the bedroom of his niece, which was always closed at night for he feared she might escape to join the Count d'André, who had threatened to abduct her. When Vidocq fiercely demanded to enter, the priest drew a key from his girdle and, placing a finger on his lips, softly opened the door. Vidocq saw the man had not lied—lying peacefully asleep, a rosy flush on her cheeks, was a winsome dark-haired girl.

"I apologise, monsieur," he was forced to say. "That cry we heard as we passed your manor caused us to fear that someone had been killed."

An evil smile flickered over the priest's lips.

"But why the farmer?" he murmured gently.

"Because we found his horse on the road—dead."

"Ah yes—I fancy it ate some poisonous plant. That has happened before"—and with an exaggerated bow the abbé conducted them to the gate. The sneer was not lost on Vidocq. He realised the priest was laughing at him, and felt angry and humiliated.

"Find hiding-places, you others," he ordered curtly, "and watch this place until I return. Note all that passes. We ride at once to la Bru's farm," he added, turning to Lacour. "Though I'll wager the priest lied, and the farmer did not leave with his men."

Despite their fatigue they rode in haste to the Mas de Pontex, and arrived just as the two servants were preparing to return to the castle with fresh mounts. From them he learned that their master had been persuaded after supper to send them for horses. Thereafter Vidocq's agents constantly formed an invisible guard around the sinister castle whilst he and Lacour probed and quested in all surrounding towns and villages. Soon he had proof that his every move was being watched. Vidocq had called upon Count d'André in the vain hope of persuading him to co-operate and to act as decoy, since he guessed that the young nobleman hated the priest for checkmating his plans to run off with Juliette de Saintonge by imprisoning her in the castle, but d'André had insolently declined to become their ally. Vidocq was driving the clumsy vehicle Lacour had hired, and they had just entered the outskirts of Mimizan, when two burly fellows sprang from a doorway with drawn pistols and seized the reins. A shot whistled past Vidocq's head, and without an instant's hesitation he fired at the nearest of the two aggressors and killed him. At the detonations several of his men came dashing up and overpowered the other. Although it turned out that they were merely footpads, Vidocq was convinced that the attempt on his life had been directed by the priest. All that night he paced his room seeking a plan that would give him proof of the Abbé's guilt, and at last, when day was already breaking, the welcome inspiration came, as it often does, through a chance word. Lacour had thrown himself on a couch, but Vidocq's agitation made sleep impossible. Suddenly he sat up and remarked: "Count d'André comes to the fair to-day to sell a herd of cattle. Labrousse told me of it. If only you could take his place."



Vidocq and his Lieutenant attacked by the priest's agents in Mimizan.

Vidocq stood transfixed and gazed at his friend with burning eyes, then he gave a triumphant cry.

"Tonnèrre de Brest, what an idea. Up, my friend, summon our men—we must catch him on the road. That ruined house we found will serve as a prison, whilst I become the Count. By heaven, I'll play the part with ardour, even if it should be my last masquerade. I'll teach that priest to laugh at me."

Instantly all was bustle—horses were quickly saddled, and before his startled agents were well awake they were galloping furiously out of the town. They chose their ambush with care, and when the nobleman appeared, followed by his servants, they were hauled from their horses, bound, gagged, and dragged to the house in the forest.

Count d'André was convulsed with rage, but Vidocq gave no heed to his ravings. Instead he calmly stood and watched his every gesture, until at last, impressed by his captor's unwavering stare, he fell silent.

"Thank you, monsieur," Vidocq said with a laugh. "That was what I wanted. Now off with his clothes, Coco—and undress his men also. You shall come with me and be my accountant. Have no fear, Monsieur d'André, my despised agents will see that you are not harmed whilst I am gone, but a prisoner you must remain until I have penetrated the secret of the castle. Tell me the price you want for your cattle; I shall bargain for you and bring you the money."

The Count's eyes glittered dangerously a moment and the blood surged to his face, then the utter audacity of the plan tickled his fancy and he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Monsieur the policeman, you are a man after my own heart. Listen then with care, but I charge you, if you succeed, to bring my sweet Juliette to me. She is a prisoner in that place."

With deft touches, sitting astride a chair, before a case filled with grease paint, wigs and a glass, Vidocq transformed his face until it was hard to tell which was the Count and which the actor. His power of mimicry was uncanny and no detail was overlooked.

"Your parole, monsieur," he cried when all was ready, "and you need not be bound."

"My parole, I freely give," the Count replied, and when his bonds had been removed he gripped the detective's outstretched hand and slapped his shoulder.

"Good luck attend you!"

That day the commissionaires at the fair found the roistering swaggering Count a hard bargainer; but he drank with all, was jovial with farmers and hucksters, and stuffed the coins and

bills-of-exchange carelessly into a leather pouch. A storm that had threatened all day gave him an excuse to leave early, and just as the sun was sinking behind a bank of clouds he called for his horses. But the priest's agents had meanwhile been busy, and his men were fast asleep on a bench in a tavern.

"Drugged," Lacour whispered; "and the horses will not get far. I saw the gipsy ostler in the stable."

"The last act is about to be played," his chief replied grimly, but he feigned to be furious that only his accountant remained as guard. Sympathetic peasants crowded round and advised him to stay in the town for the night. Whilst he appeared to hesitate, two men in riding cloaks and wide-brimmed hats, whom he knew, despite their disguise, to be the escaped convicts Jacomé and le Boiteux, offered to ride with him.

"We four shall be a match for any footpad," Jacomé cried gruffly, displaying a cutlass; and as though reassured by this, Vidocq at once mounted and trotted away followed by Lacour and his sinister companions. The wind and distant thunder made conversation irksome, and they rode in silence for an hour. Vidocq, alert for the slightest symptom of trouble, had a hand pressed on his horse's neck, and when the animal suddenly reared and pawed the air convulsively, his fall was well acted. As he scrambled to his feet he saw the poor beast galloping frantically into the night.

"My pistols!" he cried, making sure that his cloak covered them—"they are in the saddle! What shall I do!"

"We will ride after your horse," the man they knew to be le Boiteux shouted, and spurring his mount, dashed away, followed by his confederate. Coco-Lacour had dismounted, and by the light of his lantern examined his own beast. It was trembling and shivering, and a red-flecked foam had gathered on the muzzle.

"Strong stuff, whatever it is, François," he remarked grimly, "and dosed so that it does not act until far from town."

Vidocq gripped his arm to enjoin silence. The convicts were returning and with them was the Abbé Fargeol.

"I am told your horse threw you, monsieur," he cried, drawing rein. "It fell dead some distance away——"

Then, as though only just aware of the traveller's assumed identity: "Ah, it is you, Count d'André. I am sorry. I was about to offer you what poor fare my house contains—but——"

"Thank you, I do not wish to come," Vidocq replied coldly—then at a vivid lightning flash he looked anxiously at the sky, and turning away added: "My accountant's horse will carry us both."

But as he stepped towards it the animal sank to its knees and rolled over.

"Some poisonous plant must have got into the manger; the stable boys are very careless," the priest said smoothly. "I am afraid that rain and wind will make further progress impossible. These gentlemen will pass your house in the morning and can order servants to come for you. Meanwhile let us sink our quarrel. Mademoiselle Juliette shall sup with us to-night."

The last was intended as a bait, and Vidocq allowed a natural eagerness to replace his hostile manner.

"Thank you, Monsieur l'Abbé, then I'll accept your hospitality with pleasure."

So once again they crossed the grey desolate plain before the castle. Coco-Lacour loitered behind and flashed a signal from his lantern. The scream of a gull answered it and thereat he smiled. Help at least was within call. As the heavy drawbridge clanged into place behind them, the priest turned swiftly. "Here you and your money are safe for the night"—and there was an evil meaning behind the words. With a start Vidocq perceived that the girl who had been asleep in her bed when he searched the castle was standing on the threshold of a spacious hall. She had heard their voices and realised strangers were coming, but at sight of the man she believed to be her lover, she started back with a strangled cry that held more of horror than surprise. The Abbé was quick to interpose with oily words: "She did not expect you to be my guest, Count. After your threats and my indignation, she is naturally astonished."

Vidocq, who was afraid that the girl's terror might cause trouble, stepped swiftly forward and kissed her fingers.

"I am happy that Monsieur l'Abbé has brought me here," he murmured, and quickly related the manner of their meeting.

Juliette was trembling violently, and for a moment quite incapable of speech. Her beautiful eyes gazed wildly from one to the other as she vainly fought for composure. The priest filled the awkward silence by calling a servant to conduct his guests to their chambers. As Vidocq passed the girl she made a rapid gesture that he should refuse. Quick to seize his cue, he handed cloak and hat to Lacour, thrust his pistols out of sight and turning to the priest begged that he might be allowed to stay and converse with Mlle Juliette. The cunning Abbé readily consented, but summoned a hideous old hag to remain with them. Then he disappeared with the convicts and Lacour. Vidocq realised that Juliette was seeking vainly how to impart some urgent message, and manœuvred so that whilst he appeared

to be discussing idle commonplaces their backs should be turned to the spy. To his joy he saw that the creature was nodding in her chair, and continued his monotonous murmur; then, to test if she were really asleep, he suddenly bent forward until the girl could speak close to his ear.

"Your life is in danger, beloved," came a low hurried whisper. "I have learned that dreadful things happen here, although until now, when strangers came, I was given something that made me sleepy and locked in my room. But to-night the old woman told me the truth about my uncle—she evidently knew you were expected"—she paused as Vidocq looked cautiously round—the creature had not stirred. "After supper go to your room, and don't leave it whatever you see. There will be a drug in your wine; eat the apple I shall give you at table—take no notice of the bitter flavour—it will contain the antidote to their poison. Don't venture out of your room—the woman is aware I love you and has promised to help me. Look under your pillow for my letter——"

At that instant steps sounded outside and Vidocq sank back in his chair just as the priest entered. He gazed suspiciously at the old hag, but she had started up and appeared alert and watchful. The meal that followed was pleasant enough, and the priest did his utmost to be entertaining. Although he plied him with wine, Vidocq drank but little, emptying his glass beneath the table whenever opportunity offered. His keen eyes detected the priest's swift movement which indicated the glass intended for him when a servant brought brandy, and at once ate the apple Juliette had placed on his plate. It was bitter as gall, and the drug it contained caused his heart to pound unpleasantly. Watching the girl intently, he saw that now he should feign to become sleepy. Thereupon he caused his speech to sound thick and heavy, yawning repeatedly, and at last with an apology asked for permission to seek his room. The priest rose with evident satisfaction, and taking a heavy three-branched candlestick at once preceded him. Coco-Lacour had observed his chief's clever acting with a faint grin, and, although he had not touched the brandy, also declared himself desperately tired and stumbled to his quarters, which Vidocq perceived were on the floor below his own. He gazed curiously around the chamber to which the priest had led him. The oaken bed was common enough, but the walls were covered with life-size portraits of monks and cavaliers, heavily framed in gold. The painted faces glowed with a ghastly hue in the candlelight, and all appeared to be staring at the bed.

This silent lifeless host from a bygone age gave Vidocq a

queer tingling sensation that made his flesh creep. To his excited fancy it seemed that they waited tensely for the curtain to rise on some drama of death and horror.

The priest saw his glance and a twisted smile crept to his flexible lips.

"You will not feel lonely, monsieur—these are my ancestors. There are bolts on your door, by the way—and now—good night."

There were indeed stout bolts on the door, and Vidocq flung these into their sockets without delay. Then he turned to examine the bed, the walls and the floor. Reassured at last and believing that there was no secret entry he lay down to watch and wait. The house had become strangely silent; outside the lightning still flickered weirdly, and gusts of rain drove against the ancient lead-clamped panes. His brain seemed numbed, the blood sang loudly in his ears and a vague horrible feeling of fear, a fear of the unknown, swept in tingling waves to his nerves. He felt his courage oozing and was about to leap to his feet when he thought of the note Juliette had mentioned. His hand encountered a twisted paper under the pillow, which he eagerly unfolded. There were only two lines, but they came just in time:

"*The poison produces terror, but do not go through the secret door—the portraits——*"

He got no further, for at that instant first one then another of the candles guttered, flared, and went out. But instead of the dark he expected, glowing points of light filled the room with a faint crimson glow. His hair rose in sheer horror, for a second his heart ceased to beat, and a strangled cry he could not repress burst from his lips.

The pictures were alive—the pallid faces now shone with an inward flame, and the eyes gleamed like those of a feline in its lair, and they moved, they followed his every gesture with devilish intentness. Even Vidocq, hardened as he was, felt his senses swim—the breath whistled between his clenched teeth—for a moment he was powerless to move. Then, just as blind unreasoning panic threatened to swamp his reason: he recalled the girl's warning. *The poison induces fear—the portraits——*"

He sprang to the door, and the horrible eyes turned in their sockets as he did so; the bolts slipped back in their grooves at a touch, but the door was locked from outside. Turning frantically, he saw a panel in the wall swing back invitingly and he had already made a step towards it when, as in a dream, he recalled the last words of Juliette's warning: "Do not stir from your room." At

that his brain steadied. This then was the method : terror drove the victims to their own doom, and the demon priest had no need to stain his hands with their blood.

As always anger gave him strength. Pulling his pistols from his vest he fired—straight at the eyes of a cowled monk. The report was echoed by a yell of pain. Again he fired at a cavalier, and the groan that followed came from behind the secret door. Smashing a window, he sent blast after blast from his whistle whirring through the night. Hoarse exultant cries answered ; a key grated in the lock and Lacour appeared, rapier in hand.

" Quick, François, le Boiteux is on the stairs, shot through the head; Jacomé is wounded; the bridge is down; our men are searching the castle, and we have four of his creatures safely bound, but the priest and the girl have vanished."

As though in answer, wild shrieks echoed from the open panel, and seizing the lantern Lacour carried, Vidocq darted down a steep incline that lay beyond. A moment later he stood on the inner edge of the moat and gazed with dilated eyes at two figures that struggled in vain in the grip of the sand. One was the priest, and he carried Juliette. But the girl's frenzied shrieks had already brought several of Vidocq's men ; clinging to ropes and upheld by the logs they threw before them, they reached and dragged the girl away. For the Abbé Fargeol there was no hope, for even as Juliette reached the bank he disappeared in the slime with the same gurgling cry la Bru had uttered.

So at last the castle's secret was laid bare. Driven by fear, the victims of the haunted room fled down the passage and vanished in the moat. The terrific effect of the pictures was produced by ancient mirrors, which threw their light on the men standing behind each canvas, their own eyes in the empty sockets which by day were covered with painted eyes.

The joy of Count d'André was great when Juliette was brought to him, and he lavished rewards on Vidocq and his men. The Duke of Rovigo visited the castle in person, and when the hoard of money accumulated by the infamous priest had been removed, he watched whilst powder and flames razed the evil pile to the ground.

VIDOCQ AND LOUIS XVII

THE EPISODE OF THE ROYAL HEARTS

VISITORS to the Louvre may see, in Room XVI, a homely kitchen scene, painted by M. Drolling. An elderly woman is in the foreground busy on some housewifely task, whilst a young girl sits by the window sewing. In appearance the picture is quite *banal.* Much brown, burnt sienna, and umber have been used to create an atmosphere of sunset tranquillity, otherwise it has no distinctive trait. But my patient burrowing among the dusty police archives had brought to light a horrible, incredible fact, so horrible indeed that it caused me to rush at once to the famous art gallery to stare with unbelieving eyes at the insignificant square of canvas. And as I gazed, the apparent simplicity of the painting became a mockery, pregnant with brutal irony, for Drolling, who had believed that the spirit of a dead king guided his brush, had dissolved the embalmed heart of Princess Henriette-Anne d'Angleterre, daughter of Charles I and wife of Philippe d'Orleans, and mixed the bitumen thus obtained with the colours he used for this picture. The astounding discovery led me to search for definite corroboration in the National Archives, where I came upon the following report, classified under dossier 03623.

Louis François, Petit Radel, King's expert before the revolution, was ordered in 1793 *to destroy the secular tombs of the Kings of France at the St. Denis Abbey. From Charlemagne to Louis XV, Kings, Queens and heroes of the past were thereupon rudely torn from their coffins. Petit Radel had invited two friends, both painters, M. Drolling and Saint-Martin, to accompany him, promising them the embalmed hearts of the royal dead,"* from which they would be able to manufacture colours." *To this end Petit Radel also callously opened thirty of the beautiful funeral urns in the abbey and gave their contents to his friends, but many of the*

plates on which names and dates famous in history had been engraved he kept for himself. These plates were sold by auction after his death in the rue Castex.

Among the hearts Drolling carried away were those of Louis XI, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, the Regent, Marie Thérèse, the Duchess of Burgundy and Henriette d'Angleterre."

Signed Schunck—Philippe Henri,
Paris, 15th June, 1822.

I had previously rejected as too fantastic to be true a narrative I found among Vidocq's dossiers describing the fate of the painter Drolling; but upon investigation I discovered, besides the authentic relation in the National Archives of France, ample confirmation of the event in Peuchet's memoirs, in the history of revolutionary Paris by Georges Caïn, and in various documents dispersed in the dossiers of those who played a leading part in the story. Whether the unhappy lad Vidocq rescued was truly the Dauphin, son of Marie-Antoinette, whose fate has remained shrouded in mystery, I cannot say. The official order for the burial of Louis Capet, signed by many of the revolutionary leaders, who refused the royal family any other name, would seem to prove that the boy died in captivity at the Temple; but then the fanatics of the Terror, although they recoiled from murdering a child, had every reason to spread the false report of his death, since the Royalist party was still to be feared. An incident which certainly confirms the widespread belief that the heir apparent did *not* die in the cobbler's dwelling, is the unexpected invasion of Vidocq's quarters by soldiers and political police, with orders to confiscate his private report of the case. Fortunately, Vidocq, cunning as ever, had foreseen this eventuality, and the dossier Henry's men carried away was involved and misleading. Had it been otherwise there is no doubt Vidocq would have spent his remaining days in prison. Some lingering suspicion of the truth must have persisted, however, in the prefect's mind, for later, when the famous Sûreté chief retired, he was refused the pension to which he was entitled. But the Royalists did not forget their courageous ally and sent him regular subsidies.

"There's a queer customer waiting to see you," Coco-Lacour remarked, à propos of nothing, as the chief of the Sûreté adjusted his wig and prepared for the day's work. It was a habit with him to change his appearance constantly, so that only his intimates should be able to recognise the real Vidocq.

"What do you mean?" he queried.

"Well, he snorts, sniffs, takes snuff incessantly, and struts up and down, glaring ferociously at our men every time they pass. A wizened little creature more like a monkey than a man. About eighty, I should say. One of the old régime of aristocrats."

"*Bien*, send him to me. Perhaps he has something interesting to relate." Then, turning to his sweetheart, Isabella da Silva—* "Sit beside me and take notes, make a quick sketch of the fellow if you can—your drawings are always useful."

The handsome girl, whose Spanish ancestry was very apparent, smiled and pinched her lover's cheek, and pulled a chair to the window so that her face should be in shadow. With an amused grin Coco-Lacour, Vidocq's rat-faced little lieutenant, a former convict and a true child of the great city's underworld, threw open the door and announced, "Monsieur Dubois, who desires a secret interview."

On the words a fussy little man—his wrinkled face ludicrously dwarfed under an old-fashioned powdered wig—shuffled into the room, peering right and left with suspicious glances. When he perceived the burly form of Vidocq, he planted himself squarely before him and shrilled excitedly: "Send your hirelings away, please, I loathe spies!"

"Then you have come to the wrong place, monsieur," Vidocq replied smoothly. "We are all spies here, it is our *métier*. Moreover, I dislike dealing with a man who masquerades under an alias. To begin with, suppose you tell me your real name."

Before the startled man could reply, Isabella placed a piece of paper before her lover. Vidocq glanced quickly at it, then rising and pulling a chair forward he bowed and said, "I am honoured to receive the Duc de Clairmont!"

A tense pause ensued; to cover his confusion the aristocratic visitor dragged a huge gilt snuff-box from his pocket and, helping himself to a generous pinch, offered it gracefully to the detective.

"Your secretary has sharp eyes—I have changed somewhat since this damnable revolution. However, I imagine your time is valuable, so I will state the reason for my call. I have come to enlist your sympathy, if I can, in the fate of a poor unfortunate lad who has been abducted by infamous ruffians and robbed of his patrimony. Moreover, these *canaille* have not hesitated to spread the report that the boy is dead. They are torturing their prisoner and slowly killing him. The reward, if you can rescue the unhappy youth, shall be whatever you care to stipulate. I make only one condition: you must swear to keep the matter a

* *See* Episode "The Clue of the Changing Eyes," p. 253.

secret from your chiefs and promise to keep faith with us—with me, I mean."

Vidocq's eyes narrowed, he gazed keenly at the strange old man and noted the flushed face and swollen veins which betrayed the strong, repressed excitement under which he laboured.

"The same old story," he remarked quietly. "Why do you come to me, a servant of the Emperor Napoleon?"

"What do you mean?"

"Cease to fence, monsieur. I know you were forced to flee because of your fanatic royalism. I know also that you believe the son of Louis Capet—well"—as the Duke started angrily—"the son of Louis XVI, King of France, if you like—to be alive. We are alone, and no one here, neither I nor my lieutenant, have any love for the butchers who sent Marie-Antoinette to the guillotine. Only, I cannot listen to you. I have no wish to lose my head also. Besides, the Dauphin is dead—he died in that dirty cobbler's house at the Temple."

"He did not," de Clairmont shouted furiously. "Louis XVII lives. Tortured, starved, and most unhappy of men, he lives, a prisoner in some thieves' haunt in Paris."

"Then why have not you or your powerful group of Royalists found him? Why have you let all these years pass without combing the city from end to end?"

"Because we were banished, driven to hide in foreign lands, forced to work in the dark. Emigrés we are called—alas! exiles would be a better word. Again and again we have tried to find the boy. We have searched and offered enormous rewards, but always some mighty secret power has paralysed our efforts."

"Napoleon has hampered you?"

"No, the upstart Corsican is much too busy drenching the world in blood. Even before his advent, this power—I can describe it in no other way—like some unseen evil genius, watched, plotted, and, when we became too bold, hired assassins to kill us."

"You are frank, monsieur—yet you would have *me* risk my life and liberty for the sake of a chimera."

The Duke shuffled uneasily a moment—then he said slowly: "Since when is François Vidocq afraid of man or devil? Oh yes, I know who you are—and I am familiar with your past. I came to you because you alone have the skill we lack. If he is to be found, you will find him."

"But in heaven's name, why now, suddenly, after all these years——?"

"Because, lately, unexpected information has come our way.

It is our last chance. The boy is alive, in desperate straits, a prisoner as he has always been, and ill indeed, but undoubtedly alive; yet if we do not find him quickly his end is not far away. All this has been revealed in a vision. I beseech you, monsieur; you are human—you have suffered—you can feel for others, I know. Think of the unfortunate King only as a human being; a poor sensitive delicate child, orphaned by loathsome Marat and Robespierre, suffering hideous wrongs somewhere in a foul den of criminals. Would you not rescue him were he merely a *bourgeois*? What crime has the wretched lad committed? Believe me, we shall not attempt to set him on the throne. We would take him to England, a land where justice and freedom reign, so that he may at least be happy once more.

During this impassioned speech Isabella had risen, tears in her eyes, and now she laid a trembling hand on Vidocq's shoulder, whispering: "The Duke is right, François. If the boy lives you must find him. Why make yourself an accomplice of the very men who sent you to slave in the chain gang for a crime you did not commit?"

A heavy ominous silence followed. Coco-Lacour, who had stood unmoved listening to all that passed, sidled up to the table and looked meaningly at his friend.

"You too, *mon vieux*?" Vidocq said listlessly. "Yet you know the risk we shall run if we thrust our heads into that wasp's nest."

Lacour nodded and smiled sadly. "Risks are our daily portion, François. The mystery of the vanished Dauphin has always fascinated me. No doubt the Duke will help us if we come to any harm. I am willing to do all I can; but as he says we must work alone, no one else must know. There is danger in numbers."

"Very well, I consent, monsieur; tell us what you think happened after the child—he was eight years old, was he not?—was placed in charge of the shoemaker."

The Duc de Clairmont gripped Vidocq's outstretched hand.

"I thank you with all my heart, my friend, but alas I can tell you very little. Our spies were set to watch the cobbler's place day and night. I do not think the Dauphin was actively ill-treated whilst there. In fact the cobbler was a good soul, and would have allowed us to bring the child food and other comforts; but that devil Robespierre was well served. One night a group of masked and armed ruffians appeared abruptly and barred the streets. One of our spies managed to climb to a roof, however, and he swears that a boy, bound and gagged and wrapped in a cloak, was carried away when they left. The next day the report

was spread that the Dauphin was dead, and in fact a coffin, supposed to contain the body, was buried shortly after at St. Denis Abbey. Here is a miniature of the boy which the Queen gave me, it was painted in 1792."

"That is many years ago. He was only seven then. To-day if alive he would be nearly twenty-four. How am I to be sure it *is* the Dauphin if I see him. There is that watchmaker Nauendorff, who declares that he is the son of Marie-Antoinette. And there is also Mathurin Bruneau. Have you questioned them?"

The Duke made a fierce gesture. "Impostors both—vile impostors!"

"Well—and the Italian poet Silvio Pellico relates that, whilst a prisoner at the castle Spielberg, he met a youth who averred he was the unhappy heir apparent. Where am I to begin?"

"I suppose you do not believe in seers—I mean men who are gifted with the strange power of perceiving things that are far away, as though their soul journeyed unhampered by the body?"

Vidocq shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "I have no faith in such nonsense."

"I felt as you do at first. But I think differently since I met the painter Drolling. He has strange powers. He is at times seized by violent convulsions, and during these fits his eyes become sightless, foam gathers on his lips, he hears nothing that passes around him, speaks in a high-pitched voice that differs from his own, as though another possessed his body, and at such moments he paints pictures in the dark—pictures of people and events that are not of our time. He it was saw the Dauphin in a vision, and he has promised to show me how the lad appears to-day."

"And you believe in this charlatan?"

"I have learned to scoff at nothing that is strange, monsieur. At least let us go to Drolling. I shall know immediately if the portrait he will paint can guide us. It has been arranged that the man shall receive us to-night. His house is in the rue Frévol, Number 34, near the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"You were very sure of me, monsieur?"

"No—had you refused to help, I should have gone alone."

"*Bien.* I will meet you at this madman's house at ten. You understand we must not be recognised. I shall be dressed as a soldier. Lead the way when you see me, but do not speak until we have entered. If what you have said of the *unseen power* is true, you may have been perceived coming here. I do not believe in Drolling's visions, but I know at least that—the might of Rome—is very real."

"Ah—so you have guessed who——"

"It is more than a guess," Vidocq said drily. "That part of your tale convinced me that it is not all moonshine—to-night, then, at ten!"

The rue Frévol was a narrow old-fashioned street, a stone's throw from the spot where once the Bastille had frowned on the city.

When Vidocq arrived, dressed in a shabby uniform and walking unsteadily as though he had drunk too much wine, he espied at once his quaint visitor of the morning crouching in the shadow of a tumbledown building. At the detective's approach he turned and vanished in a yawning archway, where Vidocq quickly rejoined him. Together they mounted endless rotting stairs until they reached a massive oaken door just under the roof. The key was in the lock, and the Duke, who had evidently expected this, seized his companion by the arm and led the way into a brightly lit and spacious room, furnished as an artist's studio, and littered with paintings, easels, and faded apparel of every description. Before a blank canvas, drooping forward and apparently asleep, sat a gaunt elderly man, garbed in a stained and dirty gown trimmed with bedraggled lace. His scraggy and unnaturally long neck, which emerged from an open collar lined with swansdown, resembled that of a vulture, and the sharp cruel face and curved nose, which at first Vidocq only saw in profile, were utterly bestial. At their entry the thing turned and peered at them with glassy eyes set far apart, and at sight of his bald dome-shaped head, and yellow, lifeless face, devoid of lashes or eyebrows, Vidocq shivered involuntarily. The semblance to an evil squatting bird of prey was so complete that it was only with an effort he forced himself to look on the creature as human.

"This is Monsieur Drolling," de Clairmont said loudly. "He is deaf," he added, "so you must raise your voice."

"Ha ha," came a hoarse croak from the almost lipless mouth. "Deaf am I, not always. Nor am I Monsieur Drolling. You see in me"—and he rose from the stool and stood swaying unsteadily on crooked spindle legs—"you see in me the living casket that holds the souls of our former kings. They inhabit my body when they wish. All, all—Bourbons, Capets and Valois. He! he! he!" his raucous voice rose to a shriek. "But it is the great one, Louis XI, who is ever present. I drank his heart in brandy and now for revenge he comes to torture me. So you want to see the Dauphin? Sit there on that couch, and when I extinguish the candles be silent." The creature seized the easel before which he had sat and turned it away from them. Then

he tottered to a cupboard, and groping with shaking talons in the interior withdrew a phial half-filled with a viscous fluid.

"This is the secret of my power—a priceless secret—it opens the doors of the soul"—with a swift gesture he gulped the contents, the bottle clattered to the floor, and he leaned a moment gasping and shuddering against the wall. Then unexpectedly upright and steady, he walked slowly to where the candles flickered on the table and stretched out his hand to extinguish them.

At this Vidocq started up in alarm. "Why in the dark? Have a care, I——"

The Duke pressed his arm and drew him down. "I told you he paints in the dark. Let him be," he whispered.

Yet the words, low as they had been, had evidently reached the painter, for the horrible face turned towards them again, and with a spasm of disgust Vidocq saw that the eyes had rolled up in their sockets until only the whites were visible. And now, instead of the former croaking utterance, a clear but high-pitched voice issued from his lips, although these appeared not to move. The words were strange, too, and meaningless, until abruptly Vidocq realised that the creature was speaking in obsolete old-fashioned French. "I know your desires," the voice cried shrilly. "The boy you seek is still alive, but death stands by his side, and already he is maimed in mind and body. Remain where you are and you shall see." With swift, sweeping gestures, he pressed his hands on the tapers, indifferent to pain, and in an instant the room was shrouded in gloom. Keenly on the alert for possible treachery, Vidocq heard the shuffling footsteps cross the floor, then the easel rattled, a scraping of charcoal on canvas followed, and he gathered that this nightmare being was at work, sketching and painting blindly; and whilst he worked he chattered and argued as though conversing with unseen ghostly attendants. It was an uncanny experience, and despite his scepticism Vidocq felt his flesh creep. A seemingly endless hour passed thus, then there came a sudden clatter as palette and brushes were cast on the floor; the dragging footsteps approached the table once more, sparks spurted from flint and steel, the tinder glowed, and one by one the candles flickered, died down, and again burned brightly. Then Vidocq perceived that on the square of canvas a half-length figure glistened wetly. It was a ghastly, hideous, but marvellously clear portrait the artist had created in such abnormal fashion. From a sombre background of leprous houses and leering monstrous shapes, emerged the gaunt emaciated body of a youth, clad only in squalid rags, which in some indefinable manner conveyed a hopeless appeal for succour.

The pallid twisted features expressed unending torment; the skin was red with loathsome sores; one eye had gone, leaving only an inflamed hollow, whilst above it, clinging to the brow, Drolling had depicted a large hairy spider. So life-like was the foul thing that Vidocq was tempted to brush it away. The painting was a horror, a nightmare, yet withal the features and expression recalled in some uncanny fashion the unmistakable traits of the murdered King and Queen.

De Clairmont seized the painter by the arm. "God in heaven, what is this you have done, what is the meaning of that distorted face and the spider?"

"He, he—as you see him, so he appears to-day—thanks to the fiends who torture him without respite. That is Louis Capet—once the Dauphin and rightful King of France."

For a minute it seemed to Vidocq that the room whirled about him in sweeping fantastic gyrations, and he saw that the Duke was clutching at the table with shaking hands.

"I cannot stand the strain!" de Clairmont gasped. "I shall swoon if I remain. I am stifling! Stay if you will and examine this monstrosity. I prefer to come again to-morrow. Perhaps by day the picture will not impress me so"—and as though he feared to linger a moment longer he dashed from the room.

The painter had meanwhile collapsed on a stool, but the slam of the door roused him, and turning his sightless eyes on Vidocq he screamed:

"Dead, dead—all dead! Kings, Queens, and Princes, but in me they live again. Shall I tell you why I bought their hearts, their mummified hearts, that once beat to the rhythm of their loves and hates? Because they made excellent paint, you think? Ho, ho, excellent paint, indeed! But that was not the only reason. Wait and I will show you why"—and running in jerky steps to a huge oaken cupboard he drew forth a handful of copper plates engraved with the lilies and crowns of France. These he threw on a bench with gleeful cackling laughter, and pushing one towards Vidocq he cried: "Look—this hung on the urn of Louis XIII. His heart was big. I painted a wonderful picture with it, as you shall see."

From a stack of frames, Drolling selected a large canvas and placed it on an empty easel, well in the light. Vidocq shivered involuntarily as his eyes rested on the vision the madman had conceived. Under a lurid smoky sky, that glowed fitfully as with hidden fires, an endless vista of piled faggots dwindled and vanished at last in utter gloom. From every heap of twisted

sticks, writhing spirals of flame were coiling and licking at hideous blackened beams, to which the naked, contorted forms of men and women were bound with silver chains. Beside each blazing pyre stood a figure in scarlet robes, watching with fiendish delight the agony of these victims, whilst all around cowled monks performed some ghastly blasphemous rite.

" Ha ha—he was a good Catholic—Louis the Just ; he and Richelieu loved the simple Protestants, did they not ? Here is another—a scene from the life of Madame de Maintenon's husband. His heart was only a shrunken morsel, but my master, Louis XI, taught me how to portray its passions and evil ambitions in all their glory." Before Vidocq could prevent it, the painter had dragged another dusty frame from the pile by the wall and thrown it on the easel. It was impossible to mistake the two striking figures in the foreground. One was the great Cardinal Mazarin and the other Louis XIV, the haughty despot who had once exclaimed, " I alone am the State ! "

They stood beside a carved chair in which a youth sat cowering, his features hidden by a steel helmet and visor from which a padlock dangled, and the face of the Cardinal exuded a sly triumph, whilst the King's mouth was twisted into a mocking evil smile. About these central figures, courtiers and wantons in silks and satins were grouped in wooden unnatural attitudes like a host of marionettes ; their eyes mere empty hollows, whilst under their wigs gleamed ghastly grinning skulls.

" Stop, man, stop ! " Vidocq cried hoarsely, as the gibbering creature fumbled once more amongst his pictures. " Enough of horrors—what is this talk of hearts ? "

" I bought them, I tell you, and used them to paint my pictures. When my friend, Petit Radel, was ordered to destroy the Royal graves at St. Denis, he gave me the urns containing the hearts of our erstwhile powerful Kings and Queens, embalmed in aromatic spices. From these I manufactured marvellous browns and reds. But that is nothing unusual, ask any artist. Only I was ambitious ; I determined that my work should be worthy of the material. The idea came to me in a vision. I also dissolved a fragment of each heart in brandy and drank it, and thus compelled the spirit of the dead to guide my brush. If my art reeks of the charnel house, blame our former Kings, they were monsters, every one."

Staggering to his feet, Vidocq struck the foul creature a violent blow in the face, which sent him reeling against the table, whence he fell with a crash, dragging cloth and candles to the ground. Without a backward glance, Vidocq thereupon rushed from the room in a frenzy of loathing, not stopping until he

reached the street. For many minutes he rested against a wall, breathing deeply of the cool refreshing breeze. Then, somewhat recovered from the ghastly ordeal, he set off in rapid strides towards his home. But he had not gone far before he halted, seized with a sudden misgiving—he had forgotten the picture of the Dauphin. It was true the painter was mad, but he had nevertheless in some mysterious fashion achieved a likeness that might indeed assist him in his search, and in haste Vidocq retraced his steps. But when he arrived once more at the Faubourg St. Antoine, he was startled to see that leaping crimson flames were spouting from Drolling's house and already an excited yelling crowd filled the street and barred all further progress. Whilst he stood irresolute, a hand grasped his arm, and turning he recognised the wrinkled face of the Duc de Clairmont.

"I came back to the studio, and I heard and saw all that happened. That monster has met with his just deserts. The candles in falling probably set the house ablaze. No one will ever see Drolling nor his abominations again."

Vidocq glance keenly at his companion.

"The candles?" he queried sharply. "You are sure? I thought the fall extinguished them. I rather suspect that you had a hand in this."

"No—no, you are mistaken—it was just an accident. Nor does it matter—the twisted scarred features of the poor Dauphin must be burned on your memory as they are on mine. Lose no time, Vidocq, I entreat you Find him and you may ask what you will of us."

Vidocq waved his hands angrily.

"Money does not tempt me. I am as eager as you are. That scene in the studio has swept away my last scruples. Whatever the crimes our Kings committed in the past, the nation should have respected— Faugh!—the thought sickens me. Where can I find you if necessary?"

"At the sign of the 'Full Moon,' rue Croix des Champs. Ask for Pierre Dubois."

Vidocq nodded and swung off through a short cut back to headquarters, determined to begin his search at once. Unhappily he lacked a starting point. In the circumstances he did the only thing possible and set his men to prowl about the Paris slums, each with a sketch of that pitiful face—which, as the Duke had truly said, he would never forget—and an outline of the dim background Drolling had depicted, and which even in his perturbed state of mind had somehow struck Vidocq as familiar, although he could not recall where he had seen it before. Coco-Lacour was

sent to ferret among the papers of the revolutionary tribunals that had ravaged the land in 1793. A few days later he entered his chief's office and laid a dirty yellow document on the table. "Here is the order for the burial of Louis Capet, son of Marie-Antoinette," he remarked, and the rogues who signed it were just the type who would stick at nothing. Perhaps, François, we should do well to ascertain if the child really died as this paper would have us believe. The coffin is at the abbey."

Vidocq stared at his friend in surprise. "You mean——"

"Well, why not—the place is isolated, no one ever goes there. At least we should know if we are not chasing ghosts."

"Yes—perhaps you are right. Have a lantern and tools ready at midnight, and pistols too—one never knows. Is there nothing yet from our men?"

"Vague rumours mostly. Sergeant Labrousse is combing the gipsy quarters, where the fortune-tellers, sorcerers, and philtre merchants congregate."

"What does he expect to discover in those foul slums?"

"It appears that le Père Couperet and his wife Caprera have a half-witted boy locked in an attic, and Couperet, when drunk—as he usually is—has several times pulled out a handful of golden coins, with the remark that a living Louis often brought other louis. Labrousse thought it might be worth investigating."

"Has anybody seen this lad?"

"Probably—but those cut-purses and vagabonds are tight-lipped."

Vidocq nodded and signed to his friend to leave him. He spent the rest of the day consulting the letters and reports of the year 1793 in the archives, in the hope that a chance phrase would give him something to go upon, but beyond the bald statement of the man who had beheaded the King that the Dauphin had been placed in the care of a shoemaker, he found nothing.

Shortly after midnight, Vidocq and Lacour, muffled to their eyes in heavy cloaks, threaded their way through deserted byways to the St. Denis Abbey. The heavy gate was locked, but they had come prepared, and this obstacle was quickly overcome. Inside the gloomy building the air was dank and foul, and their tiny lantern barely disclosed the massive blocks that paved the tunnel leading to the vaults. Bats scuttled to their holes before their advance, and the many mysterious sounds, begot by the night and silence, caused Lacour to halt more than once in alarm. Although Vidocq had ascertained where the coffin was originally placed, an hour passed in vain gropings before they actually found it. The rending sound their tools made in prising open

the lid echoed in rumbling thunderclaps from the curved arches and low roof, but at last the lead casket was laid bare, and despite the abhorrence he felt Vidocq inserted a heavy blade and ripped away one side, exposing a tiny shrouded form. At the very moment that his hand gripped the linen, ready to tear it away, a red flame stabbed the darkness, a thunderous report followed, and he sank to his knees, clutching desperately at his friend. At once several men, their faces concealed by scarves, appeared from behind a column, and for a second Lacour was paralysed by the unforeseen attack; but years of desperate fighting had taught him to act instinctively. His pistols boomed in unison with those of his chief, who had staggered to his feet again, although badly wounded and half blinded by the blood which ran down his face. Two of the men fell, and this unexpected check caused the assailants to halt a second. Giving them no time to recover, Vidocq and Lacour at once rushed at them, using their knives and pistol-butts with deadly effect, and so irresistible was this counter-attack that they gained the gate, which fortunately had remained wide open. Vidocq was in a bad way, the heavy bullet had cut a deep furrow in his scalp, and it was only by a superhuman effort of will that, with his friend's assistance, he was able to reach the safety of his office.

"We know at least that the Duke was right—Louis XVII is not dead," he gasped, when Coco-Lacour had bathed and bandaged his head. "And all our movements are closely watched. Dubois must take my place for a time, he can play the part well. No one must know I am wounded. Let him sit with his back to the window to-morrow. He must see to it that all callers keep their distance. I pray that Monsieur Henry does not come, for he would at once take steps to frustrate our investigation. You, *mon vieux*, must disguise yourself with care, and call on this gipsy Couperet. Report to Isabella if you think he is the man we want. She will be at the usual rendezvous, dressed as a beggar woman. Now that we are at grips with these unknown enemies, be as cautious as though we were still convicts hiding from the police. Help me to my room—no—on second thoughts—put a bed in one of the cells—I shall be in safety there until this cut has healed."

That this precaution was not needless became apparent the following night, for whilst Vidocq lay delirious, attended by a doctor whom he could trust implicitly, his rooms were entered from the roof and ransacked, although nothing was taken. Fortunately, his powerful frame soon threw off the effects of the jarring shock it had received, and when Coco-Lagour called some days later with the news that Couperet undoubtedly had someone captive

in a tumbledown building near the Porte St. Martin, Vidocq was able to accompany his faithful friend. Since he was still white and shaken, he stained his face a dark brown and donned the picturesque rags of a wandering fortune teller, a disguise he had often used in the days when he lived as an outlaw. Thus arrayed he believed he could safely penetrate into the maze of tortuous alleys of a district which sheltered the worst ruffians of the city. Lacour had been lucky enough to stumble across a former sweetheart, a girl named Jeanne la Porteuse, who was friendly with the infamous gipsy and his wife. Thanks to this girl, Couperet received Vidocq with open arms, the more so since Jeanne had informed him that Lacour and Vidocq were hiding from the police. It was an evil and fastastically jumbled mass of ruined tumbledown buildings, among which Couperet had his lair. A squat, bulldog type of man, with long knotted arms that dangled to his knees when he walked, the creature was known to have committed countless crimes of violence, but no direct proof of his nocturnal activities had ever been obtained. Vidocq's men had arrested him several times on suspicion, only to be faced with unexpected witnesses who testified to his innocence. Now the Sûreté chief began to have an inkling of the reason behind this occult protection, and it strengthened his belief that the creature was in league with those who had staged the mock burial of the unfortunate heir to the throne. Vidocq knew how to play the part of a fugitive from justice with consummate skill; lurking in a dirty garret all day and only venturing to carouse with the gipsy and his cronies when night had come. Soon he discovered that a door on the same side as his attic was heavily barred and locked, and peering through a crack in the lintel he had espied Couperet silently mounting the stairs twice a day with some scraps of food on a platter; but he was careful not to ask any questions. On the third night of his voluntary captivity, when as usual he joined Couperet in the underground kitchen that served as a meeting-place for all the riff-raff of the city, he found a crooked leering creature in ragged monk's robe with him.

"Hola, let me introduce l'Evéque," the gipsy cried, so soon as Vidocq appeared. "He has come to persuade me to help him rob a house at Villiers-Cotteret, where there is money and silver in plenty. Caprera has already gone to look at the place with your little friend. This is Pierre Petit," he added, waving his hand towards Vidocq, who had assumed that name. "He is a comrade afraid of nothing. What say you, will you join, Petit? With your share of the loot, you can leave the country. They say we gipsies are well received in England."

Vidocq agreed with well-feigned eagerness, and the rest of the night passed in discussing the best way to ensure success. Just before dawn Lacour and the woman Caprera returned and reported that the wall surrounding the grounds of the house, which belonged to a wealthy merchant, had crumbled on one side, thus making access a simple matter. It was decided that the expedition should take place the following night. When all had been settled, Couperet rose abruptly and, bolting the door, drew a pistol from his belt.

"No one shall leave until we are ready," he cried with a leer. "I am not taking any risks. We are all good friends, but by keeping together there'll be no wagging of tongues at the wrong time. La Caprera will prepare our food, and there are cards and dice. The time will pass quickly enough."

This unexpected move disconcerted Vidocq, who had hoped to slip away and post his men near the wall, in order to take the gipsy and his accomplices red-handed. He saw clearly that the fellow would have become alarmed if he made a false move, but late in the afternoon the empty wine bottles gave him an idea.

"This is no way to treat your friends," he exclaimed, pointing to the dregs in his glass. "If you have no wine left, I know where we can get more—but you are right, all must go. I, too, prefer that we remain together. The cellar I have in mind is in a quiet street and easily entered, we can be back before dark."

To this the gipsy agreed with alacrity, and Vidocq succeeded in scribbling a note unnoticed by anyone. He knew that his sweetheart Isabella was watching the house, dressed as a ragged beggar. When they sallied forth Vidocq dropped behind the others and flipped the paper into her lap. He was relieved to see her seize the message with a nod of understanding, and hobble away at once to give the needful orders to his men.

The well-stocked cellar to which he led them was his own, and when they returned laden with dusty bottles, Isabella was already crouching again in a doorway. Soon after dark they started on their journey to Villiers-Cotteret in a crazy vehicle which the gipsy had obtained from a friend. When they finally arrived at the ruined wall, Vidocq manœuvred so that he and Lacour should be the last to climb to the top, and as the gipsy and l'Evéque dropped to the ground, armed detectives appeared from all sides. At the first shots which were fired, Vidocq fell backwards as though wounded, and dragged Lacour with him. They lay motionless whilst the two robbers were bound, and dragged struggling and yelling, to the coach in which his men had come, and as

soon as it had started on its journey to headquarters he returned in all haste to Paris, eager to solve the mystery of the locked room. The woman Caprera was on guard at the house, and attempted to bar their way, but she was quickly overpowered and unceremoniously gagged and strapped to a chair.

For a time the heavy bars before the attic door resisted their onslaughts, but at last the staples were wrenched from the lintel and under the thrust of Vidocq's broad shoulders the wood gave way. The place was so dark, that although day had already come, they saw nothing for a moment but a ragged creature crouching on some straw in a corner, who at their abrupt appearance whimpered fearfully. The stench in the tiny room was overpowering, only a faint ray of light filtered through a barred window thick with grime and cobwebs, and the air was clogged with the dust they had raised in breaking in. Vidocq smashed the filthy panes with his pistol, letting in air and light. Then he stooped over the cowering creature with gentle reassuring words. The unfortunate prisoner was so shrunken and thin that it was hard to tell whether it was a boy or an old man. The face and head were swathed in rags that completely concealed the features, and the hands and feet were closely chained to the wall. When at last the links were snapped and the cruel fetters removed, Vidocq lifted the trembling captive and, carrying him to his own garret, laid him on the bed. Quickly he unwrapped the rags that covered the face, but as the last strip fell to the ground he started back with a hoarse cry of disgust. A metal cup had been strapped over one eye and part of the cheek, and beneath, alive, and hideously active, was a great hairy spider. Sick with horror he flicked the creature to the floor and crushed it before it could scuttle to safety.

"The spider," he gasped, seizing Lacour by the arm. "Just as that madman Drolling painted it. The face too is inflamed and blotched with sores—and the eye has been destroyed. What a horrible thing to do. The vile beasts—they shall pay me for this! By heaven—although suffering and privations have made the boy hideous to behold, yet—I'd swear—— Come, we must get him away."

They were about to lift the wretched youth when angry shouts resounded on the stairs and to their amazement Couperet appeared in the doorway. Before he could use the pistol he carried, Vidocq coolly shot him through the head.

"I'll hold the place till you return, Lacour," he ordered curtly. "Get all our men—arm them and shoot all who stand in your way. I'll teach these cowardly assassins to torture a

helpless boy. Couperet must have been rescued. Send Isabella to the Duke, you know where. He must get the Dauphin—for I believe it is indeed he—out of the country at once."

Although scowling faces peered at them from every door and window, the sight of the burly and resolute army of police officers kept the snarling horde of cut-throats at a respectful distance. The wretched lad, who appeared but vaguely conscious of all that passed, was at once driven in a closed carriage to the rue Croix des Champs where the Duke was waiting, overjoyed at the news of Vidocq's success; and from there he was conducted without delay to Le Havre, and hidden on an English ship which had been lying in readiness. Although Vidocq was exhausted by the strenuous exertions of the night, he lost no time in returning to headquarters and questioning the men sent to take Couperet and the renegade monk to the cells. Thus he learned that their coach had been attacked unexpectedly by masked horsemen who, without uttering a word, had levelled pistols at their heads and compelled them to liberate the robbers. They had then ridden away in haste, with Couperet and l'Evéque running at their stirrups. Vidocq was convinced that the unseen power which had directed the rescue would vent its baffled rage on him, and if possible bring about his disgrace, and he was not mistaken, for the same day he received a peremptory summons from the prefect.

When Vidocq entered his superior's office he was met with a storm of abuse for interfering in matters that did not concern him. But he was in no mood for a quarrel and withdrew at once on the pretext that he was ill, despite M. Henry's evident desire to detain him. He found Coco-Lacour waiting in the street, and with a queer look his friend suggested they should immediately ride to Vidocq's residence. A cold presentiment of evil caused him to comply without stopping to ask for an explanation. When he arrived at his private apartment he found soldiers and officers of the political police in possession. His papers were strewn in wild disorder over the floor, workmen were tearing laths and paper from the walls, and a *commissaire* sat at the table examining each dossier as it was handed to him. At Vidocq's indignant protest the man exhibited a search warrant signed by the Emperor, ordering the confiscation of all documents relating to the case upon which he had been engaged. Thereupon Vidocq coolly walked to a cupboard, pressed a hidden spring, and withdrew a bulky report, which he had prepared in view of a possible investigation of his activities. It had been cleverly faked and presented the matter in such fashion that he could not be suspected of plotting against Napoleon. The officer appeared satisfied with

this and withdrew his men. Bursting with rage, Vidocq hastily summoned his special brigade and relieved them of their duties. Then he prepared his own resignation, and returning to the prefect's office threw it on the table. The same night he took ship for England with Isabella and Coco-Lacour. His prompt action was justified, for spies sent him the news that within twenty-four hours his house had been surrounded and his arrest decided upon. M. Henry was furious when he realised that the Sûreté chief had outwitted him, but Vidocq had gained London safely and he could do nothing. A week later Vidocq sent his chief a letter in which he explained that he had arrested Couperet and l'Evéque merely because they were dangerous criminals, and that the rescue of the half-witted lad had been part of his duty. He averred, moreover, that he had acted only at the request of the father, Monsieur Dubois, to whom he had at once conducted the boy. This letter apparently satisfied M. Henry, although the fact that Vidocq's departure had been hailed with delight by the legion of criminals who infested Paris, probably forced his hand. So audacious did the numerous bands of cut-purses at once become, that the chief of police sent a special messenger to London, imploring his former ally to return without delay, and offering to reinstall him with a greatly increased salary. Thereupon Vidocq and his friends drove to Dover, where a French vessel had been placed at their disposal. At the last moment, when the moorings were already being cast off, a tall soldierly man stepped up to Vidocq and slipping a package into his hand murmured : " The lad is safe and recovering rapidly. But he will never be King, for his reason has gone. Yet whilst one of us remains alive, we shall ever be your devoted friends. In need—ask for Lord Avondale—at the Star and Garter Inn at Dover. Good luck ! You are truly a brave man."

Before Vidocq could reply the unknown had sprung ashore. The package contained money for his men and for himself a handsome circlet of gold set with a superb diamond. Inside the ring were the words : *Semper fidelis, Louis Rex.*



Political police searching Vidocq's quarters for the dossier of the Kings' Hearts.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE RIDING WOLVES

(THE WERWOLVES)

ALTHOUGH the vast atrium and spacious gardens where the last act of this fantastic adventure was staged still exist, and can be visited by the curious, the incredibly audacious robberies and fierce unexpected attacks, carried out with reckless daring by that strange creature, Spartaco, the Greek, and the wild orgies and nameless tortures conceived by his monstrous ally, the Tartar Tchinghizhan, are almost forgotten. Yet at the time all Paris trembled at the mere mention of the bandit's name. Even children ran crying to their mothers at the sight of a big dog if their playmates but shouted " Croquemitaine." The word is ancient and means anything unearthly—a ghoul, a ghost, or a bogle—but for many years it was used exclusively to designate Spartaco the robber. Nevertheless, he left no lasting impression, perhaps because his success was ephemeral and his apparition so abrupt. Moreover, his end was lamentable, and that I imagine is the reason why the people, who dearly loved a spectacular execution, did not grant him the notoriety such men as Cartouche and Robert Macaire attained. Furthermore, the argus-eyed political police were greatly feared, and the authorities had banned all pamphlets and popular ditties dealing with his exploits, and imposed severe penalties on the authors. Savary, Duke of Rovigo, then Minister of Police, was morbidly sensitive to ridicule, and his methods for preventing the true story from leaking out were brutal and efficient. Even Vidocq, who captured Spartaco, although he compiled his dossiers as usual, and reconstructed the case in detail, was careful to keep his dangerous knowledge to himself until, with the permanent exile of Napoleon, he might safely add the narrative to his memoirs. But by that time other events of more immediate interest engrossed him. Thus the tale of the meteoric career of these strange beings, the strangest perhaps the world has ever seen, has remained entombed in that section of the secret archives which Peuchet once ironically named " The Oubliette."

Who and what Spartaco the Greek really was I have been unable to discover. The record has been destroyed. There is some mention in Peuchet's memoirs that he served as a soldier with Napoleon, was caught red-handed stealing army funds, sentenced to be shot, and escaped; but, as the reader will see, this cannot be true.

The monstrous Tchinghizhan was indeed a Tartar Prince. He had hoped, with the Emperor's assistance, to overthrow the Romanoffs and usurp the throne of All Russia, and when, after obtaining much useful information from him, the wily Corsican merely laughed and called him a fool, Tchinghizhan came to Paris seething with hatred of France and the French. Vidocq in his memoirs suggests that the revengeful Tartar was instrumental in bringing about the terrible catastrophe which culminated in the sacrifice of Moscow and broke Napoleon's power. Whether this statement was based upon secret information which he had obtained, I cannot say.

Vidocq, chief of the Paris secret police, was for once a prey to ill-humour, a thing rare with him; his eventful life, seething with tragic adventures, bristling with dangers and beset with pitfalls evolved by his numerous enemies, had hardened his nerves and taught him long since how to maintain an iron grip on his moods. He was one of the few men who possessed that rare thing—a complete mastery of his mind. The broad table at which he sat was covered as usual with bulky reports, each one a tentacle writhing unseen from the Sûreté headquarters to some criminal cowering in an obscure haunt of the underworld. But as yet Vidocq had scarcely glanced at them. Instead, he fidgeted with his pen, drummed his fingers on the polished oak and looked incessantly at his watch. He had risen for the twentieth time and wandered aimlessly to the window, when the door was flung wide with resounding slam and clatter and Coco-Lacour, his able, cunning little lieutenant, whose prolonged absence has caused him such anxiety, came staggering in followed by several tall, burly members of the famous brigade of detectives. Vidocq had prepared a biting speech to express his annoyance at being kept waiting, but at sight of Lacour, pale, shaken, his face streaked with great gouts of blood, his clothes in tatters and his outstretched hands still shaking from some terrible emotion, his anger fled and he sprang forward with genuine concern in his eyes:

"In heaven's name, Coco, what has happened? You are hurt, old friend?"

Lacour smiled weakly and wiped the blood from his eyes, then suddenly turning with a fierce gesture to the men behind him he cried :

" Show the chief what we've been fighting ! "

At the words two of the men who had remained half-hidden in the background staggered past the little Parisian and flung the heavy body of an animal on the floor. Vidocq stared with amazement at the massive head and the formidable gleaming fangs that armed the wide-open jaws.

" A wolf—a mountain wolf ! What does this mean ? "

Lacour, who was rapidly regaining his usual flippant manner, hoisted himself to the edge of the table. " I'll tell you," he cried shrilly. " Last night, six of us armed with swords and pistols went as you ordered to Fontainebleau, where rumour had it that the bandit Spartaco and some of his ruffians were prepared to make one of their usual aggressions. When we arrived at the inn of the 'Green Hunter' we found the place crowded with terrified peasants and foresters. An hour before, the Greek had passed through Barbizon village on horseback, riding like the wind, and with him had been at least twenty of his band. At the fringe of the forest road a squad of hunters who had lain in wait for the robbers every night had erected a barrier of logs across the path, which forced the horsemen to halt, and since it was bright moonlight and the hunters outnumbered Spartaco's men, they dashed forward with yells of rage to give them battle. But to their horror the figures astride the horses were not men, they were wolves, great hairy wolves, riding like human beings. The peasants swear that several of these creatures leapt at them with snapping teeth, and that they mangled and killed two of the woodsmen who had attempted to use their guns. The sight of these werwolves so frightened the rest that they fled in all directions."

" You are mad, Coco. What is this tale of mounted wolves ? "

" Wait, let me finish. I, too, laughed and scoffed at the fantastic story, but when I was led to the room where the two dead men were lying, the appearance of their torn and bleeding bodies gave me a shock. Our arrival had put new heart into the peasants, but they refused point blank to do more than guide us to the spot where the encounter had taken place. There we found the tracks of many horses, and I saw the guns the foresters had dropped in their flight. The paths were sodden with the rain that fell yesterday, and, thanks to this and the full moon just overhead, we were easily able to follow the trail left by the bandits. It led us to the park surrounding the Château Malmousse, and whilst we were

still seeking how to gain admission a chorus of agonised screams, the howling of beasts and a volley of pistol-shots burst from the house. You recall that the Count de Favrol, whose residence it is, had several times been warned that Spartaco intended to murder him? Well, he kept his word. We at once scrambled over the wall and ran towards the château, where a fight was evidently in progress. A bonfire had been lit on the lawn, and around this a number of horrible misshapen creatures were leaping and dancing. I immediately gave the order to fire. At the detonations the blazing wood was instantly scattered in all directions, and the things, whatever they were, vanished among the trees. Reassured by this we dashed after them, to our cost. Hardly had we entered the shadows when a dozen huge wolves sprang at us. But they did not run on four legs, François, they ran upright like men, and were armed with knives and pistols. Toinon and Favart were killed right at the outset. I shot and wounded one of the brutes, but was hurled to the ground and crushed and nearly suffocated by another that dropped biting and clawing across me. You can see the marks of its teeth where it ripped my scalp open. I thought my last minute had come, but fortunately our men rallied and charged just in time, firing as they dashed forward. I heard a whistle blow somewhere, and struggling to my feet found that our opponents had fled. Only this creature which had knocked me down was sprawling across the glowing embers of the scattered fire. I brought it to show you my story is true. Well, we thereupon searched the house and found the Count on a bed, a dagger in his heart. The Countess had become insane with terror. We had to lock her in a room, and I posted two servants outside the door to guard her. All the jewels and money the Count possessed have been stolen. What do you make of it, François? Who would have thought it possible for men to change themselves into animals at will. I give you my word, old friend, that this dead wolf ran erect. Favart, poor fellow—his body is downstairs—was stabbed. And our men here saw them all ride away on horseback, just as the peasants at the inn had said."

For a long time Vidocq paced the room in silence, it had fallen to his lot to capture many ruthless criminals, but this Spartaco, it seemed to him, was the most fearsome of them all.

"If anyone but you, *mon vieux*, had come to me with such a tale," he exclaimed at last, "I should have ordered him to be shut in a cell as a madman. Come, let us forget what others told you. We will discuss only what you actually saw. Was Spartaco the Greek there?"

"Yes, I recognised his squat shape and bristling moustache,

although I only caught a glimpse of him in the flickering firelight. When I looked again he had changed into a wolf."

Vidocq shrugged his shoulders impatiently: "Nonsense—sheer nonsense, you are overwrought, you were deceived by the uncertain light. Such things do not exist. Werwolves, indeed! A childish belief!"

"I swear, François, I was not deceived—the bandit changed into a wolf. Besides, there is proof on the floor before you—you cannot explain that dead body away."

"You'll find I shall, before many days are past. Go now and see to your wounds. We'll talk again later. Have this carrion removed and send me all the reports we have received about the bandit. Let no one disturb me. I wish to think."

But Vidocq was not left long to his meditations. A mounted messenger arrived soon after with a peremptory summons from his chief, M. Henry, which could not be ignored. Making a bundle of the numerous reports, Vidocq immediately entered a carriage and drove in all haste to his superior's office.

"What is this terrible story I have just heard?" M. Henry demanded at once, hardly giving his energetic auxiliary time to divest himself of great-coat and hat. "For months now, Spartaco and his Russian lieutenant, Vassilieff, have robbed and murdered with impunity. You succeeded in arresting some of his men, and I had begun to hope the fellow's power was broken—and now suddenly—this! Wolves that shoot and stab, rend and tear, and steal jewels. Werwolves, the officer of foresters who has just left, called them. Warlocks and werwolves! God in heaven, had ever man such a task as I? Napoleon away, Savary irascible and contemptuous, and the people clamouring for protection. They hold public meetings every day at the Palais Royal, and plaster the walls with placards deriding the police. Don't sit there and grin, man, what have you done?"

"I have brought all the dossiers, monsieur," Vidocq replied, resuming his wonted gravity. "With your permission we will go over them. I confess this thing has startled me also. Two of my men were killed last night at Fontainebleau; Coco-Lacour was wounded. He brought back the carcase of a huge wolf."

At the words so quietly spoken, M. Henry leapt to his feet, his face livid. True to his superstitious nature he at once considered this incident a proof that the bandit was in league with the powers of darkness.

"A wolf? Then it is true? What a terrible thing!"

Vidocq smiled again and shook his head. "I do not believe in

goblins and sorcery. The animal is material enough, but it never walked on two legs."

M. Henry sat down and wiped his hands which had grown moist.

"Go on, I rely on you entirely. What plans have you made?"

"Those men we arrested are at La Force. I'll see if anything can be learned from them. My spies shall redouble in vigilance. Had I foreseen the denouement at Fontainebleau I should have gone in person, but until now Spartaco was a very ordinary, although a daring, bandit. This addition of wolves to his band is a new idea, and a good one, for I quite realise that no ignorant peasant will ever dare oppose them. The fact that it is a recent development gives me a starting point. He has enrolled a new recruit, who is probably the owner of the beasts."

Pulling his chair to the table Vidocq opened the dossiers and studied them.

"You see, monsieur, this Spartaco appeared suddenly about a year ago. It seems he had been a guide attached to one of the Emperor's Voltigeur regiments. He was caught red-handed robbing his comrades, and only escaped death by a miracle. Since then he has risen from petty theft to the leadership of all the riff-raff kicked out of the army. His appearance is well-known—short, thick-set, with regular handsome features and a heavy black moustache. Yet, although his personality is so striking, time and again he has escaped arrest in the most mysterious manner. Some one, I feel sure, who has great influence, is his ally and warns him in time. When I have discovered his lair I shall need soldiers."

M. Henry threw out his hands. "You shall have all the assistance you need, only for heaven's sake clear up this fantastic mystery; the people are frantic."

Vidocq nodded, and gathering his papers withdrew. Several days passed uneventfully. Every criminal haunt known to his clever brigade of detectives—themselves former convicts whose pardon Vidocq had obtained—was watched night and day, whilst their chief, cunningly disguised, allowed himself to be arrested and taken to La Force prison. This time, however, the method he had so often adopted with success appeared doomed to failure. The convicts whose confidence he tried to gain refused stubbornly to talk, and he had already decided to try what a spectacular escape would do when the governor sent for him in haste. With incredible audacity the Greek and his band had actually attacked the palace of the Minister of Police during his absence. Two servants had been killed and much gold and jewellery taken. Moreover, Spartaco had left a note pinned to a portrait of Napoleon

in which he informed the Duke that he had abstracted his sword of ceremony, because he hoped soon to drive it to the heart of many of the Emperor's toadies. As a consequence Vidocq had a stormy interview with his supreme chief, who as usual treated his subordinate with the utmost hauteur and contempt. Hardly had the detective returned to his office, livid with anger at the Duke's unjust reproaches, when Lacour brought him a letter from Savary's intimate friend and admirer, the Countess Morel de Castellane. It was she who had presented him with the jewelled sword the bandit had stolen, and she now implored the Sûreté chief to regain possession of it, offering him a large sum as reward.

"What do you know about the Countess?" Vidocq asked of Lacour when he had scanned the letter. "She is not French, is she?"

The little Parisian pulled a dossier from a pigeon hole and settled himself in a chair.

"Here we are, François. Catherine, Countess Morel de Castellane, wife of the late Count de Castellane. Came to Paris with her elderly husband a year since when he relinquished his post as diplomatic adviser to our ambassador at the Hague. So far as we know he married her abroad. The woman's extraordinary intelligence soon caused her to become a welcome and constant visitor at the Duc de Rovigo's palace. She is now in disgrace with Napoleon because, since the Count died some months ago, she has shown that crazy dwarf, Prince Tchinghizhan, many favours.

Tchinghizhan is the son of a great Tartar chieftain who was murdered by emissaries of the Czar. He vainly tried to persuade the Emperor to invade Russia, offering him the co-operation of a vast Tartar army. Napoleon listened to his plans, laughed at him and kicked him out. Tchinghizhan has, since then, become a fanatic enemy of Bonaparte, but is tolerated because everyone believes him to be mad. Queer, *hein*, François?"

"What do you mean?" Vidocq broke in.

"Well, the Countess is the friend of Napoleon's favourite, the Duke of Rovigo, yet she allows this savage dwarf, who hates France, to pay his court to her. Will you not investigate? One never knows."

In answer Vidocq rose and stuffed his badge into a pocket.

"Yes, I'll go and visit the woman now, although I can see no connecting link as yet with the case upon which we are busy."

His first impression, when an obsequious lackey had conducted him to a spacious salon where the Countess sat listlessly fanning herself, was that she was indeed handsome, albeit somewhat stout.

The features were regular and pleasing, the jet-black eyes full of intelligence, and the powdered wig, although no longer the fashion, enhanced the vivid, healthy complexion. She spoke French with a soft foreign accent difficult to define, that yet added to the charm of her personality. Squatting on a couch near the window was Prince Tchinghizhan. Vidocq could not repress a shiver of disgust as he gazed at the puny, twisted body, surmounted by a huge disproportionate head. The creature was a monstrosity, and an evil, sombre atmosphere that was almost tangible emanated from him. The tiny oblique eyes, deeply set under bushy overhanging brows, and the wrinkled scalp, high cheekbones, and thin flexible lips, combined to give the fellow an expression of repressed ferocity that not even his gorgeous silken clothes could mitigate.

"I have come, madame," Vidocq began, "in answer to your letter. I forgot to ask His Excellency about the sword to which you attach such value. Will you be so good as to describe it in detail. Perhaps you can suggest also why it should have especially attracted the thieves."

At the question a cackle of laughter burst from the dwarf.

"Ho, ho!—from what I have heard the bandit leader hates the upstart Corsican and his fawning tribe of courtiers as much as I do! The Countess and I do not agree on that point. My sincere wish is that you may not recover the sword nor capture the thieves."

"Be quiet, Ivan"—came from the woman in such imperious tones that Tchinghizhan shrank into a corner, where he continued to mutter to himself in his own tongue.

"Here, monsieur, is a drawing of the weapon, from which you will easily recognise it," the Countess added suavely. "Those large stones in the hilt are rubies. Have you any idea where these audacious robbers have their headquarters?"

"None whatever, madame. I very much fear they are not normal men of flesh and blood. They command the powers of darkness. I cannot hope to fight the supernatural."

Again a cackle of laughter came from the dwarf, and for a moment Vidocq could have sworn that a fleeting derisive smile had also hovered on the lips of the Countess, but her words of sympathy and encouragement, as he rose to go, banished the thought as soon as it was born. Wishing him success, she clapped her hands sharply and ordered the servant who instantly appeared at the summons to conduct the detective to the gates. That night Vidocq paced his room deep in thought. He was exasperated by the persistence of a vague shapeless idea hovering constantly in the dim recesses of his mind, elusive as a phantom, for he sensed

that it was the solution to the puzzle, could he but grasp it. Days passed during which he was irritable as never before; in vain did he seek traces of the bandit—the fellow had vanished. And then abruptly a monstrous crime brought Spartaco's name into prominence once more.

A farmer who was in the habit of bringing his produce to the markets of Paris regularly every morning, came rushing to the Sûreté in great agitation and demanded to see the chief. He related that at daybreak, when passing an isolated mansion on the outskirts of Argenteuil, he had been startled to hear shrieks of terror and the fearsome howling of wild beasts coming from the place, and in the dim light he had glimpsed what appeared to be great hairy animals dancing under the trees. Greatly frightened, for the story of the werwolves had spread even to his village, he whipped up his horses, not pulling rein until he reached the town gates. Leaving his produce in charge of an excise officer, he had immediately come to the rue de Jerusalem to inform the police. The house, he said, had for years excited the curiosity of the Argenteuil peasants because, although it appeared to be deserted, rumour had it that an immensely rich old miser, who never stirred out for fear his gold would be stolen, resided there all alone. Vidocq was resting after a search for Spartaco in the numerous riverside haunts, but when he heard of the farmer's adventure he at once gathered all the men still on duty, and leaving orders for Lacour to follow, galloped to the mysterious house, taking the farmer along as guide. The morning was well advanced when they drew rein at the ivy-covered gate, and in the bright sunshine all seemed quiet and normal. There was no bell, and since no one replied to his shouts and knocking Vidocq sprang from his horse to the wall and fastened a knotted rope to the coping to enable his men to follow. The garden was a tangle of weeds and creeper and the broad path almost hidden by thick growths that had not been disturbed for years, but when they reached the unkempt lawn before the house it became apparent at once that a wild orgy had indeed taken place there. Empty barrels and smashed flagons of wine littered the grass all about the remains of a huge fire of pine logs, and the soft ground was deeply scored by hoof-marks and footprints. A platform of rough boards had been erected under a spreading oak and before this, hanging in grotesque, unnatural attitudes from heavy leathern thongs, were the nude bodies of an old, white-haired man and a young girl. Vidocq approached cautiously, avoiding the many tracks, and gazed long at these unfortunates. With a grimace of repulsion he lifted and scrutinised each ghastly lifeless head in turn, then, suddenly struck

by the queer flaccid appearance of the limbs, he turned sharply to one of his men and cried:

"Come here, Vallais, you were once a surgeon on a pirate ship, what should you say caused the death of these two, *hein*?"

The man thus singled out, a wizened creature, disfigured by innumerable scars, shuffled forward and peered into the pallid faces, then, his interest suddenly aroused, he ran his gnarled hands questioningly over the arms and legs, and finally even examined the fingers and toes. His face had assumed a sickly hue when at last he turned to his chief and said hoarsely:

"I've seen the like only once in my life. Every single bone in these bodies has been broken—broken intentionally, I mean, and in turn. The yellow pirates of the East call it 'the torture of the thousand deaths.' It takes hours, I have heard. They begin by breaking the first bone of the little finger with a stick and a mallet. A minute later they break the second, and so it goes on until at last they come to the neck, and death."

Vidocq shuddered at the gruesome image the man's quiet words evoked. "Who can be the fiend brought such a thing to Paris?" he muttered. "Wait, let me have a look at the ground."

For a while he scrutinised the various tracks on hands and knees, then rising, he said sharply:

"Hoofprints, and marks made by dogs, or wolves, and by men. Spartaco the Greek again, and his new recruit is either a madman or a savage. I think that the very ferocity of the creature will prove his undoing. Let us see now why they did this."

Every room in the house was in wild disorder. Smashed furniture strewed the carpets, floor-boards had been ripped away, and every bed torn to pieces. Vidocq was still contemplating this senseless destruction when Coco-Lacour arrived. Evidently the pirate surgeon had related how the hapless victims had died, for the moment he entered he gave a quick glance at his friend's thoughtful face and cried:

"The old man was a notorious miser and had probably hidden his hoard in the house. That is what these monsters were after. When they failed to find it they applied torture to make the poor wretch reveal where it was."

"Yes, of course. But such torture—where did Spartaco get the idea?"

"It is more important to discover where they went, François. They entered from the forest behind the house, there is a small gate at the back and it is open. Fortunately not many people use that path. Horses and wolves should leave a strong scent. It is a case for dogs, *mon ami*!"

"By heaven, you are right. Ride to La Force prison and borrow the bloodhounds they use for hunting escaped convicts."

Coco-Lacour ran to the door but halted on the threshold, a queer smile twisting his lips, and said with feigned nonchalance:

"By the way, François—Spartaco has twice been followed to the *house of the Countess Morel de Castellane.* He was seen to enter, yet although our men waited all day he did not come out again. They thereupon succeeded in gaining admission and searched every room on various pretexts, but without result—the bandit had vanished. The servants stated emphatically that no stranger could hide in the house without their knowledge."

Vidocq stared incredulously at his friend. "What?" he cried. "You believe the Countess is sheltering Spartaco. Absurd, she is the intimate friend of our chief, the Duke of Rovigo."

"And also of a Tartar Prince who hates him. Didn't you say this fiendish torture of the broken bones is Mongolian?"

At the words so pregnant with subtle meaning, Vidocq started forward, opened his lips to speak and as abruptly sat down:

"Go on, get the dogs. I must think this out."

He was still sitting motionless, lost in thought, when several hours later Coco-Lacour appeared with three fierce animals, a mixture of mastiff and bloodhound. The scent held well through shrubbery and tangled undergrowth, although the dogs showed a singular reluctance to follow, compelling Lacour to use his whip several times. The bandits had crossed numerous small streams in their flight and waded against the current for some distance, as though they had foreseen the possibility of dogs being put on their trail, but at last, towards dusk, Lacour, who was in the lead, caught sight of a ruined house surrounded by huge loose blocks of stone, dimly looming among the trees, and divined that at last they had reached the bandit's lair. As though to dispel any lingering doubts they might have, a long savage ululation, pregnant with fierce menace, throbbed suddenly through the quiet evening. It was the howl of a wolf! And the wild primitive cry awoke ancient dormant memories that caused the detectives instinctively to draw together. Again it rose and fell like the wail of a lost soul, and whilst they stood debating what to do, a burst of loud raucous laughter came from the forest, startling them anew by the eerie contrast, and a moment later a band of horsemen swung round a bend in the path and clattered up to the huge gateway. Only just in time did Vidocq and his men find shelter behind some bushes, whilst Lacour twisted his cloak around the dogs' heads to prevent them from giving tongue.

"I will stay here and watch," Vidocq said, turning to his

lieutenant. "Ride to Paris and bring at least a hundred armed police and soldiers. You should be back before dawn, then we will attack and capture them all. Should I be compelled to leave before, use the dogs to track me, I'll tie them to a tree."

Without a word the little Parisian sprang into the saddle and with a reassuring wave of his hand turned his horse into a narrow side path under the shrubbery and was quickly lost to sight. With the coming of the night lights began to twinkle in the crumbling doors and windows of the robbers' stronghold, and the ruddy sheen of torches illumined the spacious forecourt, casting monstrous moving shadows on the curtain of trees that grew close to the entrance. Vidocq and his followers crept as close as they dared and tried vainly to obtain a clear view of the place, but the sight of armed guards striding back and forth warned them not to approach too near. Evidently a carouse was in progress, for they caught the clatter of dishes and bottles, and a confused clamour of hoarse voices and drunken laughter was carried to them in gusts on the fitful breeze, whilst ever and again, cutting sharply through the medley of discordant sounds, came the mournful howling of wolves.

The vigil was long and weary, and Vidocq, who had not rested for many nights, had begun to drowse, when abruptly a whistle shrilled. At once chairs and bottles crashed to the floor, a strident voice bellowed orders, and five minutes later a cavalcade swept through the gaping doorway and entered the path where the police lay in ambush. Vidocq's blood ran cold with sheer horror, as, silent now but for an occasional muttered word, the mysterious riders entered a patch of moonlight. Crouching low in the saddle, with cruel shining eyes darting swift glances from side to side, and hanging brutish jaws agape and dripping saliva, these hunched, hairy monsters the horses carried were utterly inhuman; flanking them like so many phantom guards, and running with supple noiseless strides, came a dozen fierce brutes that resembled the riders in every detail. The nightmare group passed in a flash, and so startling had been their advent that Vidocq stood spellbound, incapable of action until it was too late. It was the former pirate Vallais who first broke the creepy silence.

"The powers of darkness are loosened, chief. Those are true werwolves. I never believed the legends I heard when a boy, but the old wives were right. Such creatures do exist."

The words produced a welcome reaction; with a resounding curse, Vidocq sprang to his horse and cried:

"After them—whoever heard of wolves on horseback? A trick to frighten children. Those are some of Spartaco's ruffians

wrapped in skins, and they have real wolves with them. That they are again bent on some devil's work is certain. We'll see what pistol balls will do."

Unwillingly enough but shamed into obedience, the little band of detectives followed their leader, keeping well in the shadow of the trees. When their quarry was in sight once more, Vidocq ordered scarves and cloaks to be cut into strips and tied to their horses feet to muffle their gallop, and thus, noiseless as ghosts, they rode hour after hour until at last the outskirts of Versailles were reached. Apparently the men they followed had come to reinforce another detachment, for as they drew rein at the wall surrounding the grounds of a princely mansion, the residence of the famous painter Diaz de la Peña, the gates swung wide to give them passage.

" We are outnumbered," Vidocq said turning to his men, " but our arrival will be unexpected. Have your pistols and swords ready and shoot to kill without mercy."

Quickly they scaled the wall and ran through the shrubbery. Yet, hardened as was every one of the little band, the sight that met their gaze as they emerged from a belt of trees surrounding the house caused them to halt, shivering with that unconquerable fear of the supernatural which turns every man's blood to water. A dozen of the now familiar animal-men were leaping and whirling in a wild rhythmic dance around two wooden stakes in the ground, and as they danced the horrible melancholy howl of the wolf bubbled again and again from their throats. Bound to the stakes were two men, encased in raw and still bleeding bullock skins, the heads and horns dangling over their faces. The sheen of a huge fire illumined the fantastic scene with a flickering yellow glare, and as the flames rose and fell on the wind, monstrous misshapen shadows followed the leaping creatures. Creeping cautiously nearer, Vidocq espied the squat shape of Spartaco, draped like his followers in the skin of a wolf. With diabolical skill he had so arranged the brute's head that his bestial face was framed in the huge open jaws. He stood in an attitude of gloating triumph before his victims, and watched his creatures pile faggots at their feet. The sight of the ruffian he had sought so long in vain galvanised Vidocq to action, and with a fierce yell he raised his pistols and fired. Instantly a volley from his men echoed his shots, the wolf dance ceased abruptly, slugs whistled through the air, shining blades flashed in the firelight, and for a moment a fierce hand to hand battle seemed imminent; fortunately the bandits had been utterly surprised by the sudden attack, and, unaware that they greatly outnumbered their opponents, instead

of making a stand adopted their usual tactics, merely holding the police in check while the fire was scattered, so that in the ensuing darkness they could escape. Again the animals they had brought covered their retreat, leaping at Vidocq and his men with horrible snarls and fiercely snapping jaws. When at last they succeeded in driving these back with flaming brands from the fire, they found that Spartaco and his men had vanished. Even the two who had fallen at the first volley had been dragged to safety by their companions. The helpless captives they had come so opportunely to save were at once freed from their bonds, and Vidocq saw that one was the aged painter, de la Peña, and the other his son, a lad of twenty. The bullock-hides around their bodies had been strongly sewn together with leather thongs, and he was about to cut them away with his knife, for he saw that the pressure they exerted had caused the men inside to swoon, when Vallais touched his arm.

"Do you understand, chief? That also is an Eastern trick, in fact it is especially favoured by Chinese pirates. As these fresh hides dry they contract, until they crush the living flesh with the irresistible power of a python's coils."

Under their kindly ministrations the two unfortunates recovered rapidly, and Vidocq was able to question the father.

"They wanted my money," he whispered feebly, "but I refused to say where it was hidden, nor would my son tell them, so they strapped us in those skins. They were going to build a fire round us—I don't quite understand."

"No, it is better you should not," Vidocq interrupted. "Be thankful we came in time. Where are all your servants?"

"They fled in terror of the wolf-men."

"Well, several of my agents shall stay with you until morning. I have work to do yet."

Although he was almost fainting with fatigue, Vidocq at once rode to headquarters intending to obtain fresh horses, but there he found Coco-Lacour just returned from the house in the forest.

"The place was empty when I arrived, François," he explained. "I have posted soldiers and police in ambush in case the bandits come back, but in my opinion it is a mistake—they have dogs to warn them and will not return until our men are withdrawn. The man I left at the Countess de Castellane's place has just reported that Spartaco was seen there again. Can you not obtain a search warrant from Monsieur Henry?"

"No, he would laugh at the mere idea that the Countess could be the Greek's accomplice, and if we failed to find proof of that we

should be disgraced. You know the Minister of Police has always been hostile to our organisation."

"Very well, then let me try something new. I have a plan, if it fails no one will know. Give me *carte blanche*. I shall withdraw all the men from the ruined house in the wood, and if Monsieur Henry sends for you tell him you have not the slightest clue to the bandit's retreat as yet. No, ask no more for the moment, old friend, let me try my plan first. We must remain apparently inactive for at least a week if it is to succeed."

Vidocq sank wearily into a chair. "Very well, do as you will. If only I had disposed of more men I should have got them all last night."

Lacour smiled and shook his head. "You would not have captured the leader nor his crony, Vassilieff, and they would soon have gathered another band."

So for a week Vidocq was content to let his lieutenant follow his own devices, notwithstanding the bitter sarcasms of the prefect. Fortunately during that time nothing further occurred, it was as though robbers and police were resting from their last exploits. Then one evening Lacour came to Vidocq's office carrying a bundle of clothing.

"Come, François," he said, "put on these garments, the rats are in the trap! We go to the carnival ball the rich Latour-Maubourg gives to-night, the Countess and the Tartar are already there. I have two hundred men surrounding the place and they are well hidden. But I think there will be a fight, nevertheless, so take your pistols."

Vidocq watched his friend untie the bundle and array himself nimbly in the petticoats and frills of a Grisette. For once he was unable to guess at Lacour's plan, but he donned his own feminine garments without remark, finally adjusting the curly wig and silken mask. At the Maubourg mansion the festival was already in full swing. Despite the black *loup* covering her face the Countess was easily recognisable by her portly form. Her suitor, Tchinghizhan, had with grim humour chosen a huge fantastic cardboard head surmounted by a jewelled turban, and his puny body was arrayed with barbaric splendour. The frolic waxed fast and furious until midnight, the hour at which all were expected to unmask. The last stroke of twelve had hardly ceased to vibrate when a girlish figure sprang at the Countess and tearing off her fashionable wig shouted:

"Look, François, look—do you know who it is? They are all here, they intended to rob and murder the guests."

Vidocq stared at the handsome face of the angry woman.

Her own close-curling black hair looked curiously artificial after the snowy-white head-dress she always wore, but that he knew was the effect of contrast. For a moment he fancied that Coco-Lacour had lost his reason, but again his lieutenant's arm swept up, the fingers clasping a wisp of black lace which he clapped over the mouth of the astonished Countess. The effect was magical, and a wild cry burst from Vidocq.

"By all the saints—Spartaco! It is Spartaco, the bandit."

Instantly a frightful clamour arose from the glittering, grotesque medley of cavaliers, columbines, pierrots, and all the colourful riot of carnival, and death with sombre wings swooped down to take his toll. A commissaire of police on duty at the ball sprang forward to grasp the bandit, a shot cracked and he fell mortally wounded. At this sudden brutal tragedy, the real guests fled in terror, whilst Spartaco's cut-throats, variously and cunningly disguised, fought their way towards their leader casting aside capes, cloaks, and dominoes in order to reach their hidden weapons.

Vassilieff, disguised as a police officer, was just behind the bandit when Lacour unmasked him, and believing himself unobserved pulled a pistol from his sash and pointed it at Vidocq, but Lacour had seen the movement and, using the fearful *fourchette* of the footpads, thrust his outstretched fingers into the ruffian's eyes. Meanwhile Tchinghizhan was making desperate efforts to rid himself of his cardboard head, uttering shrill cries of rage as he was flung back and forth by the double current of fleeing guests and rallying bandits. Until the officer fell, Vidocq had been too startled to act, but simultaneously with the first shots his whistle screamed, and at the call the waiting army of detectives and soldiers abruptly appeared on all sides making further resistance futile.

Still arrayed in their feminine garments Vidocq and Coco-Lacour directed operations, nor did they think of their appearance until the last of the struggling ruffians had been bound and dragged to the waiting coaches.

When this had been done, Lacour turned to his chief with a happy laugh and said:

"A clever scoundrel, eh? Who would have thought that Spartaco and the Countess were one and the same? That explains why he was able to plan all his forays with certainty. He knew who was worth robbing, and, what was more important—thanks to his friendship with the Minister of Police as the Countess de Castellane—he was aware of all our movements. Of course the moustache which he wore when playing the part of Spartaco was false, but it was so striking that the tell-tale features dwindled into



The unmasking of Spartaco the Greek From a drawing made by Isabella
The dwarf is in the right corner.

insignificance. Thus when hard pressed he could enter the woman's house and disappear. Small wonder we found no trace of the fellow when we searched secretly, although, naturally, the Countess was there. That and the woman's friendship with Tchinghizhan, which is recent and corresponds to the first appearance of the wolves and the horrible Eastern tortures, made me think there was a connecting link somewhere. So I used a pungent mixture, treacle and aromatic spices, which I spread generously at the ruined house in the forest, and at the little gate of the Countess's mansion, through which only the servants were supposed to pass, but through which Spartaco had been seen to enter twice.

"When with the connivance of a chambermaid I found traces of my mixture on her mistress's shoes; and when to-night my dogs followed the trail to this fancy-dress ball, I knew I was right."

" What is Spartaco, a man or a woman ? "

" Oh, he is really the Countess Morel de Castellane—a woman —and the very good friend of Savary, Duke of Rovigo, our supreme chief. We shall not be rewarded for our exploit by His Excellency unless we keep that part of the tale to ourselves."

" And the wolves ? "

" I fancy the mad Tartar Prince conceived that uncanny idea. I shall never believe in the supernatural again."

As Lacour had foreseen, the Duke was furious at having been duped, and the bandit never came up for trial. Peuchet says ironically: " He died opportunely in prison and was buried as Spartaco the Greek."

The Tartar denied that he had known anything of the true character of the woman he had wooed, and in deference to his exalted rank he was merely conducted to the frontier and forbidden to return to France. Most of the men were executed; those whose participation in the many murders committed could not be proven were sent to the chain gang.

THE CLUE OF THE CHANGING EYES

A TALE OF VIDOCQ THE DETECTIVE

M. PEUCHET, the eminent keeper of the secret police archives at the Paris prefecture, was a man who rarely indulged in flights of fancy. He spent his life searching for rare documents and hidden reports, concerned only with an exact relation of facts. He found this work so absorbing, and the uncanny knowledge of human frailties he thus gained so enthralling, that at last what had been merely his duty became an obsession. Many are the queer stories he briefly outlines in his memoirs, referring his colleagues to the bulky dossiers for details—but none so strange as the tale of Vidocq's career. Yet reading between the lines one gathers the impression that he disliked the Sûreté chief intensely, indeed he remarks at the outset that he must refrain from criticism since the man is still his superior in office. Most of the dossiers classified at headquarters, he adds, were mere fragments, but fortunately the complete reports were discovered at Vidocq's house, when the prefect sent soldiers there with a search warrant. I have compared the dates and find that this search occurred when Vidocq resigned from the Sûreté. It is from one of these dossiers, which also contains some engravings, that I have reconstructed the following story. The date on the letter signed by the chief of police proves that the fantastic adventure happened soon after the death of Vidocq's sweetheart Francine, in February 1809.

Vidocq in his own memoirs, which were banned by the perfect's orders, described the occurrence as "the clue of the changing eyes," and this title I have retained.

Although he realised the futility of the action, M. Henry, prefect of Paris police, again examined the bulky reports on his table, in the vain hope that he had overlooked something. He had done little else since sending for Vidocq, the chief of the Sûreté, who was at the moment ostensibly a convict at the Force prison. A

mysterious criminal organisation of incredible audacity had abruptly sprung into being and was terrorising France. Masked bandits had attacked a post chaise loaded with money for the army, killed postilion and guards, and escaped scot free with their rich booty. A week later a second coach on its way to the coast had met with a similar fate, although twenty soldiers accompanied it. Moreover, churches had been despoiled and lonely farms unexpectedly invaded and the inmates tortured in order to compel them to reveal where their money was hidden. Two staring eyes drawn in charcoal always marked the passing of these outlaws, as a gibe, it was thought, at the badge of the police.

Soldiers and national guards had at once been sent to patrol the roads, and a hastily-formed but well-armed band of peasants camped nightly near country houses, and prowled, alert and ready, in fields and woods, eager to encounter these ruthless robbers. Warned of this by their spies, they thereupon changed their tactics, and despite the vigilance of the police abducted the daughter of a wealthy nobleman, the Marquis de Combalat, as she was about to enter her father's carriage.

When the frightened servants burst into the house with the news, they found the Marquis staring in horror at a letter bearing the symbolical eyes, which had at that moment arrived. It was a demand for a huge ransom to be left immediately at a ruined house near the river. Threats of some nameless torture which awaited the girl if he failed to comply with the order or informed the police caused the father to abandon all thought of reprisals, and the following night he carried the money to the house the outlaws had indicated. There masked ruffians had taken the box of gold from him, and when he reached home he found his daughter lying in the garden. She was unhurt, but appeared dazed as from a poisonous drug and quite unable to describe her captors or to give any clue to the place where she had been imprisoned. Vidocq had immediately searched the deserted house by the Seine, but discovered nothing that could assist him. Hardly had the excitement caused by this daring outrage died down, when the son of Baron Dominique de Castell, a young man popular for his wit and beauty, disappeared mysteriously. Another letter with the same queer signature was found by a footman lying on a table. The Baron, a valiant soldier, gathered a number of friends and laid a trap for the bandits, but the attempt failed, and some days later the body of the unfortunate son was discovered on the Seine embankment. He bore no wound, and the doctors were unable to state how he had died. A queer uncanny detail, which caused all Paris to shiver with superstitious dread, was that when

the body was brought home, the mother had screamed: "His eyes, look at his eyes!"

The youth had been noted for his large grey eyes, and these, in some unaccountable fashion, had changed to a deep expressionless black. As usual, Vidocq had elected to work from within the prisons, believing that thus he could discover who was the leader of the men responsible for these crimes, but so far without success. Alarmed at the growing hostility of the people, who clamoured for protection, M. Henry had shut himself in his room with strict orders that no one should pass. He did not hear the door open, and started nervously as a man muffled to the eyes in a long dark cloak glided to the table. It was Vidocq, and as he threw the cape on a chair M. Henry saw that beneath it was the hideous dress of the galley felon.

"What news, man?" he cried eagerly. "I have sat and brooded over this terrible list of crimes since dawn. My head is spinning. For heaven's sake don't stare at me like that. And why have you retained those clothes?"

"Because, monsieur, I realised that you would be anxious. I have come straight from La Force prison. Monsieur Parisot, the governor, gave me his cape. My news is neither good nor bad. Time and patience are my best friends. The leader of this band is a ferocious and cunning creature known as Nathan the Jew. No one can describe him with any certainty. Some say he is a twisted hunchback, others declare he is tall. I fancy the fellow has taken a leaf from my book, and constantly alters his appearance. A tavern near the river, 'l'Auberge de Rouen,' is I feel sure one of their haunts. But they must also have a safe retreat outside the city where they store their loot and keep their prisoners. All my efforts are directed towards the discovery of this secret lair. I suspect several men of being members of Nathan's band, yet it would avail us little if I arrested them. I must strike only when certain of trapping them all. If the leader escaped he would probably organise another gang."

M. Henry nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I understand; but this queer tale about Baron de Castell's son. You saw the body—did you examine the eyes?"

"I did, there is no doubt that from grey they have changed to black. At first I was inclined to think the outlaws had substituted someone else, but the mother recognised a scar on his breast and a birthmark. It is her son without a doubt."

"But surely such a thing smacks of the diabolical. How can eyes change colour?"

"I do not believe in demons, monsieur. No, the beasts who

abducted the girl and murdered this poor lad are tangible enough. I think their leader possesses some terrible poison unknown to doctors. Their symbol of the staring eyes has assumed a new significance. Nathan knows the effect his poison produces."

"Surely a knife thrust would have been simpler and quite as deadly?"

"But not so terrifying. They rightly count on the awe their methods will awaken. The next time Nathan demands a ransom it will be paid at once."

"And you still hope to find the key to this puzzle at the prison?"

"More than ever. There is a fellow at La Force who was arrested some time ago for stabbing a man. His name is Labrousse, and he is either one of the gang or their sworn enemy, because the man he killed had a tiny slip of silver engraved with two eyes in his pocket. And lately a very handsome girl, a foreigner, and a lady it seems, although she wears cheap clothes, has been coming almost daily to the soldiers' quarters at the prison. She pretends to flirt with the guards, and brings them brandy; but twice she attempted to bribe them to let her visit Labrousse. If you will give me a letter for the governor, I will dress as a soldier and try to gain her confidence. It may be that this girl has been sent to help Labrousse to escape. If so, she shall have every opportunity. I shall watch him day and night, and if he does get free he may lead us to Nathan the Jew."

"Why not offer to escape with him, since he takes you to be a convict?"

"Because he distrusts me and would refuse my help."

M. Henry scribbled a line and handed it to Vidocq. "Do what you like, only for heaven's sake—succeed!"

Vidocq at once hurried to his office in the rue de Jerusalem, where Coco-Lacour, the cleverest of his agents, was pacing restlessly to and fro. Lacour was a sly, furtive, rat-faced little Parisian whose pardon Vidocq had obtained because the fellow knew every criminal den in Paris. Coco-Lacour loved his chief, and in return Vidocq trusted him implicitly. Ordering him to follow, Vidocq entered his private room and quickly transformed himself into a typical water carrier, whilst his friend dressed as a nondescript beggar, giving his appearance just that touch of the cut-purse which such nocturnal activities would produce.

Thus arrayed they hastened to the foul den by the river which they believed to be one of the haunts of Nathan's men. As

Vidocq stacked his wooden pails beside the entrance, Coco-Lacour feigned to stumble against him and whispered quickly:

"Look—the girl! I'll wager she has been watching this place, and our arrival frightened her."

A muffled shape had flitted from a doorway and was now hurrying up the steps of a bridge which led to the city.

"You are sure it's the girl?" Vidocq queried in surprise.

"Yes, *mon vieux*. That's the wench who tried to visit Labrousse, I had a glimpse of her face under the cowl. The moment she saw us she shrank back into the shadow and now she is off to warn the Jew."

"It's much more likely she recognised us and thinks the coast is clear at La Force. I'll risk it, anyway. Stay here till I return," and taking a short cut Vidocq ran swiftly to the gloomy prison He had guessed her intentions aright, for when he entered the rest-house by the massive gates, dressed as a soldier-guard, the girl was already there, chatting gaily with the men off duty and serving them with brandy. Standing unnoticed in the doorway a moment, he perceived that Coco-Lacour had not exaggerated when he described her as exceptionally beautiful. The cheap cotton frock, bedecked with tawdry frills, obviously assumed as a disguise, but emphasised the harmonious lines of her supple shape. Her eyes were large and magnetic, and the lustrous hair made an exquisite frame for the delicate features. Yet behind the seductive smile of carmine lips and dazzling teeth, Vidocq sensed a lurking sadness. But he too had a part to play, and twirling his gummed moustache he cried boisterously: "Well met, *ma petite*! I was just wishing for a glass of spirit. Since when are you our *vivandière*? Ye Gods! if you were with Bonaparte's army I'd return to the war at once, although only just well from a wound. What eyes, what cheeks, and *sacré tonnèrre*, what a mouth to kiss," and with sudden twist he seized her shoulders and was about to suit the action to the words when the fear and entreaty in her eyes gave him a queer shock and caused him to desist. He laughed uproariously to cover his confusion, but from that moment a passionate longing for those pouting lips gripped Vidocq, and he slipped easily from a feigned flirtation into earnest wooing. When at last the girl withdrew, they were apparently on the best of terms, and he followed her into the forecourt. After a swift glance to see that no one was near, Vidocq passed his arm about her waist and whispered:

"You have come here with a purpose, *ma belle*. Tell me about it. My name is Pierre Petit. Perhaps I can help you."

At the unexpected offer, the girl turned and gazed into his eyes, probing his soul.

"You?" she cried. "Why should you——" Then as though she had said too much, "Well, after all, why not? I have a friend in this dreadful prison, Jean Labrousse. He is the victim of a plot, and I would like to talk with the poor fellow. But there are reasons why I cannot apply for permission to the governor."

"Oh, that's easily arranged—trust Pierre Petit. Come to-morrow at one, when most of the guards are eating or sleeping. I'll wait for you here. But first—a kiss."

This time the girl did not resist, and at the sweet contact of her lips Vidocq for a moment forgot his mission and Francine.

"Nathan the Jew knows how to choose his confederates," he muttered angrily, watching her disappear. He had learned from experience that it was useless to follow. It had been tried, but the girl had merely led his men to a maze of foul alleys where she had abruptly vanished.

Instead of returning to the "Auberge de Rouen," he sent one of his men to summon Coco-Lacour and to bring his abandoned pails to the Sûreté. To his surprise the little Parisian burst into his office with an exultant shout:

"She peeped in at the tavern, François. I was sitting in a corner and caught a glimpse of her face. I was out like a flash and saw her enter a carriage which had waited by the bridge. Fine big springs it had, that just gave me a grip. It stopped outside the gates of a large house behind the old St. Pierre Church. The girl alighted and slipped into the grounds. She had a key. It didn't take me long to find out who lives there. It was bought three years ago by a foreign nobleman, Don Fernando da Silva. His daughter Isabella is the mysterious *vivandière*."

"Excellent, *mon vieux*—you have done well. Still, I wonder why she was so careless this time. We are not dealing with fools. They know all about us. Even this girl—Isabella you say? a pretty name—has her wits about her. I believe she knows who I am, and recognised me just now."

"What, in those clothes?" Lacour exclaimed incredulously. Not many have seen you as you really are. What makes you think so?"

"When I offered to help her, she said, 'Why should you? Well, after all, why not,' yet we know she tried to bribe the soldiers. As for my appearance, Vidocq the convict is known in the underworld. Only how did these people discover that Vidocq is——"

The Parisian finished the sentence with a queer whistle used by criminals as a signal that police are near. Vidocq smiled grimly

" Yes—that's it, she saw through me. If she accepts my help it's because she hopes to fool me. What is the matter ? " For Coco-Lacour had suddenly grasped his arm.

" François—have you asked yourself what that may mean ? How could these bandits know that you are not really a convict —unless—unless—remember, some of the Bat's men got away, among them Cervalet. They knew."

At the words Vidocq became deadly pale. " Heaven grant you are right, and that I shall yet find the man who killed Francine. We must move warily. Surround the house which the girl entered. Whoever leaves must be shadowed. Post men around the river tavern also. That you were able to follow this girl so easily, frightens me. It looks like a trick. When she meets Labrousse to-morrow, I shall watch them. Go now, I must think." His friend's suggestion that Francine's murderer was perhaps among the men he sought, had awakened slumbering devils in Vidocq's brain, and he paced his room far into the night, forming sterile plans of vengeance. When after the midday meal the girl came to the tryst with a friendly smile, his lips smiled a welcome too but his eyes were hard and his heart like ice. He had arranged for Labrousse to take his midday rest in one of the sheds, where she could speak to him alone, and from his hidden spyhole he watched her greet the convict, and noted the swift motion by which she transferred the means for escape to his hands. But to his annoyance their short conversation was meaningless to him, for they spoke in a foreign tongue. Although he tried hard to play the joyous, carefree soldier when she joined him again, he could not shake off the loathing her mission inspired, and allowed her to go without the kiss she obviously expected, although he wondered at the look of pain and longing in her eyes. He felt sure that Labrousse would make his bid for freedom the same night, and before donning convict garb he gave concise instructions to Coco-Lacour in case he should be unable to follow at once ; and it was well he did so. Although Vidocq would have laughed at the mere suggestion that any one could drug his bowl of nauseous soup, this unbelievable thing happened, and while he fondly thought he was watching Labrousse, his numbed senses failed to note the stealthy rustle and furtive movement as the fellow slipped from his gyves and crept to the door, which at Vidocq's request the governor had ordered to be left unlocked and unguarded. He came to himself with a start at the sound of a faint whistle from outside, and realised instantly how he had been outwitted. A draught of water from his jug partly dispelled the effects of the poison he had swallowed, and without wasting a

moment he crept between the rows of sleeping prisoners to the door. Again a whistle sounded from the wall, and at his cautious answer a rope fell in snaky coils at his feet. Although he still felt weak and dizzy, Vidocq quickly gained the overhanging ledge and lowered himself to the ground. Coco-Lacour, wet and forlorn, was crouching in the shadows, and a group of his men stood not far away.

"We lost him, François," the Parisian wailed. "Why in heaven's name didn't you follow?"

Vidocq groaned in despair. "I don't blame you, *mon vieux*—he fooled us all. I was drugged. Tell me, what happened?"

"That rope I threw you was lying here, so we knew where Labrousse would climb down. It has hooks to grip the stones and a thin cord, which no one would notice, was tied to the end and dangled inside. When we saw it go up, we lay flat behind some bushes and waited. Labrousse stopped to pull the rope from the wall and then started off at a run. He must have suspected he was watched, for he never once looked round, although we were close behind. When he reached the Seine, he followed the path towards the town until he came to the bridge near the 'Auberge de Rouen,' and there, before we could stop him, he sprang into the water. I jumped after him—but, François, I swear—he never came up again. The moment he leapt I shouted to the men to spread out, two even swam across and ran in opposite directions along the bank. He's drowned—I'm sure."

"Nonsense," Vidocq growled. "There is probably a hole in the bank, of which he knew, and he held on keeping only his face out of the water until you had gone. I understand now why my help was accepted, although they knew all about me. What bothers me is how he mixed a narcotic with my food."

"Easily enough—the convict who served out the rations is also of the band. What now?"

"Back to headquarters to snatch some sleep. To-morrow we will examine da Silva's house. I fancy that is where Labrousse went. I begin to believe the Portuguese nobleman is the mysterious leader of these bandits. But my head throbs like a drum and I want to think."

The next morning Vidocq laid his plans for a simultaneous raid on the tavern and da Silva's house, should Labrousse indeed have gone there. Coco-Lacour had been sent to gather what information he could meanwhile, and Vidocq was swallowing a hasty meal when his lieutenant stumbled into the room with twitching face and staring eyes. His breath came in gasps for he had been running—but at last he managed to cry hoarsely:

" We're all in a tangle, François. Da Silva cannot be Nathan the Jew, for he is dead."

" Who is dead, you fool? " Vidocq shouted, shaking his friend fiercely.

" Fernando da Silva—he was found dead yesterday morning and—his eyes have changed colour ! The doctor is downstairs."

" Take him to my office. The eyes, you say—and yesterday morning Labrousse was still in prison. I'll come at once."

Quickly slipping into the clothes he wore as chief of the Sûreté, his face transformed by wig and beard, Vidocq entered his office. An elderly man in sombre dress rose at his appearance and bowed.

" I am Doctor Ferrè-Boitiér, monsieur," he said, taking a pinch of snuff. " I thought that you would like to hear of the strange death of a foreign nobleman, Don Fernando da Silva."

" Naturally, *maître*—strange deaths always interest me. What is the name of your patient ? "

" Da Silva—but he was not my patient. I was summoned yesterday morning to a house near the old church of St. Pierre by a servant who said his master was dying. As a matter of fact the man was dead, had been dead many hours.

" How did he die—this foreigner ? "

" I cannot say. I found him lying peacefully in bed—but his face was that of a man who has died of sheer terror. The expression was horrible. I thought at first that he had been suffocated—the blue lips and purple skin were very suggestive—but the eyes were not bloodshot. Whilst I was examining them, the servant cried suddenly, ' God in heaven, master's eyes were light brown and now they are black—black ! ' I suspect that the man was poisoned. But I preferred to see you before reporting officially."

" And the poison, have you any idea what it is ? "

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

" Something quite unknown to science. Only—I remembered that when the son of Monsieur de Castell was found near the Seine—his eyes had changed from grey to black."

" But how can such a thing be ? "

" The eyes do not really change, monsieur, but this poison causes the pupils to dilate to such an extent that the iris becomes invisible—hence they are always black."

Vidocq nodded thoughtfully. " I understand. Did you see anyone besides the servant whilst at this house ? "

" Yes, a very beautiful girl, she was kneeling by the bed and sobbing as if her heart would break. I understand the dead man is her father. I wish you good day, monsieur."

The instant the doctor had gone Vidocq jumped to his feet.

"*Hurry now, a carriage! I must examine the room where* da Silva died. No one must know we suspect a murder has been committed."

When the carriage drew up near da Silva's house, Vidocq saw to his dismay that the wall surrounding the spacious grounds was smooth and unbroken and without the slightest foothold. There was nothing for it but to summon the lodge-keeper. Placing his men within call, he was about to do so when a servant in livery came out. Despite his altered appearance he recognised him instantly. It was Labrousse, and with a flash of inspiration Vidocq saw his chance. Throwing a heavy cloak over the fellow's head he pinioned his arms, and with the assistance of Lacour and his men, who came running at his whistle, Labrousse was bound, gagged, and thrust into the carriage which had brought them, and driven to headquarters.

"Now, my fine fellow," Vidocq cried, when ropes and scarf had been removed. "You will do exactly as I say or back you go to La Force, whereas if you help me I'll give you a chance to leave the country."

"Send me to prison if you like," Labrousse replied sullenly —"I never betray those who trust me."

"Put him in a cell," Vidocq ordered curtly. "I shall arrest everyone in that house whilst you, Coco, will raid the 'Auberge de Rouen.' Place men on both sides of the river and search all boats. I'll get Nathan and his gang before nightfall."

"What?" Labrousse yelled. "Oh, you blind fool! Why didn't you say you were after that fiend. It was Nathan I tried to kill when the police caught me. I stabbed one of the band by mistake. My master has sought him for years. But he was too clever, and now he has murdered Don Fernando."

"So you also believe da Silva was murdered?"

"Of course. Nathan the Jew has stealthily followed us without respite. It was he betrayed my master in Portugal, and we had to flee to France. He is after—something—Don Fernando had hidden. Several letters with his diabolical signature found their way into the house, threatening assassination if—what he sought, was not given willingly. We know at last what those symbolical eyes signify."

"By *we*, you mean Mademoiselle Isabella da Silva, the lady who helped you to escape?"

"Yes; she had begun to suspect—we both had—who Nathan really is, although we have no proof yet. She needed my help, but I arrived too late. Our every move is watched."

"What does this bandit leader look like?"

"I don't know," Labrousse answered evasively. "Some say he is tall and handsome, others swear he is a crooked hunchback——"

"Why not tell me what you suspect? Who is Nathan——"

"No, no—I dare not. But for God's sake let me return to the house. My mistress is now alone. I will assist you in every way."

"You have not mentioned her uncle, Leon da Silva, who also lives there," Vidocq said quietly, his eyes riveted on the man's face.

"He is useless, a dreamer and visionary, and no protection for a young and beautiful girl."

"Well, I cannot release you until I have examined the body and the room where it lies. You need not fear that I shall alarm the bandit's spies. I am going to take your place. You will instruct me so that I can play the part successfully. Wait—first I'll show you something. Take off your clothes." Labrousse obeyed wonderingly, and Vidocq disappeared into his room. Ten minutes later, whilst the servant still sat gazing with curious eyes at the door, a gasp of surprise caused him to turn quickly. Standing full in the light from a window he saw his exact counterpart. So perfect was the disguise that even Lacour emitted an admiring whistle.

"Well done, François, what an actor the stage lost in you."

Labrousse no longer hesitated, but explained in detail what Vidocq would have to do. When he had finished, the detective repeated his instructions word for word, and then, accompanied by Coco-Lacour, drove once more to the house where da Silva lay dead. The key Labrousse had given him made everything simple, and none of the servants noticed the substitution, for Vidocq possessed the perfect gift of mimicry; yet he shrank from the first meeting with Isabella and prayed that she would not examine him too closely. It was his duty to wait at table, and he placed the tapers so that his face would be in shadow. Although he had expected a change in the girl he was not prepared for the entrancing vision that entered the room, and he realised how outrageous his coarse pretence at love-making must have seemed to her. Fortunately, his burning cheeks passed unseen, for she was led to the table by a tall clean-shaven man of middle age, whose swarthy features and swift animal motions at once impressed Vidocq unfavourably. This he felt sure was the uncle Don Leon. They spoke little during the meal, which was soon over, and when coffee had been served Vidocq was free to do as he pleased.

His first care was to examine the murdered man. He had learned that the body would be placed in the family vault the next morning, and was not surprised to find it lying in an open coffin. By the light of the tapers placed at each end of the bier, he scrutinised the discoloured face, half hidden by a pointed beard, and lifted the eyelids. At once the horror of the incredibly dilated pupils caused him to start back with a shiver of dread.

"Devil's work," he muttered, and taking one of the candles he swiftly examined the panels of carved oak, and finally the bed and the windows. These were heavily barred, and a ponderous bolt on the door, which had been torn away by an onslaught from the passage, made it clear the man was alone when he met his end. He saw that a heavy curtain which hung before the entrance would serve to conceal him should anyone come, and lighting a tiny lamp of his own devising he settled down to watch and wait. Soon he heard the servants shuffle up the stairs, and a few minutes later Isabella and her uncle entered the room and knelt by the body in prayer. Then they too sought their beds and the house fell silent. Like a ghost Vidocq glided along the dark corridors and up and down the stairs, until a concise picture of the premises was impressed on his memory. Whence had the murderer come was the problem which engrossed him. Abruptly as he again passed the room where lay da Silva, his nerves thrilled to the shock of a faint metallic click, followed by a prolonged scraping and rustling; someone had entered through a secret door. Inch by inch he lifted the curtain; but the unknown intruder had extinguished the tapers and the room was now pitch dark; nevertheless, he sensed a lurking inimical presence, and a faint smell, as from an animal, made his gorge rise with disgust. Whilst he stood motionless, striving to master an unreasoning horror, there came again the snap of a spring, followed by a shrill neighing laugh that turned his blood to ice; then wood scraped against wood and all was still once more.

"A sliding panel, of course," Vidocq murmured, shining his lamp into the chamber. The body lay as before in its oaken shell, the silken coverlet fell in shapely folds to the floor, and the crucifix clasped in the waxen hands glittered eerily as he swept the dancing rays along the walls. Seized with a nameless fear, Vidocq hastened to a door that led to the garden and whistled softly. A vague shadow among the shrubs moved at the sound, and Coco-Lacour slipped to his side.

"What is it?" he whispered cautiously.

"I cannot tell yet," Vidocq replied. "But I feel uneasy; come, we'll keep watch together."



Vidocq as a soldier of the guard and Isabella da Silva. It is believed this engraving was copied from a drawing by Isabella, who was a talented artist.

Back in the room of death, his first care was to light the candles again. As he did so something peculiar about their appearance startled him.

"I'll swear they are longer and thicker than before," he whispered. "What the devil does it mean? Don't make a sound, *mon ami*, we must watch and be prepared," and pulling his friend behind the curtain he settled himself in such fashion that he could see into the chamber. Hardly had the heavy velvet fallen into place, when soft hurrying footsteps came down the passage, and to his surprise Isabella appeared, staggering under the weight of a narrow box. As she passed the curtain, a corner slipped from her hands and struck the carpet with dull metallic shock. Glancing about with frightened eyes, she swiftly withdrew a number of tiny leather bags, and pushed them under the rigid body wherever there was space. Then she knelt and kissed the lifeless face and the watchers heard sobs and tearful words of love. But she did not remain thus for long. Lifting the massive coffin lid, she adjusted it firmly, then, drawing a chair to a corner, placed a cushion behind her head and lay wearily back, with the obvious intention of waiting for dawn. Almost at once Vidocq became aware of a subtle resinous odour, which reached his senses in intermittent waves. It seemed to him, too, that the tapers burnt queerly, and their golden light was tinged with green. Whilst he stared wondering what this portended, there came a choking cry from the girl; she had staggered to her feet and now stood swaying dizzily, one hand clutching her throat. And as she slowly sank to her knees, Vidocq heard her call him by name.

"François, François—beloved—help!" it was only a whisper, yet it sufficed to rouse him to instant action. He dashed into the room, only to reel against the bed as a foul poisonous breath entered his lungs.

"The candles!" he gasped. "Quick, help me to drag her out" —and twisting a scarf about his face, he grasped the unconscious girl by the shoulders and with the assistance of Lacour they gained the passage, staggering like drunken men. It was long before Isabella revived under their ministrations, but at last she opened her eyes.

"The Medici candles," she muttered. "Take care, Vidocq, their fumes are death. Help me to my room—I feel faint—then open the windows and extinguish those devilish things. I trust you to watch my father's gold."

"How did you know I was in the house?" Vidocq cried in amazement.

"I knew—never mind how—perhaps I recognised you at

dinner. I felt safe because you were watching and tried to hide the treasure. We are both fighting the same evil man."

"But the candles—you called them——"

"Yes—I will explain later. Hurry, please."

Thrusting a pistol into the girl's hand, Vidocq and his friend ran frantically down the stairs, but they arrived too late. The poisoned tapers were gone, the windows wide open and the coffin despoiled of its bags of treasure. Vidocq cursed furiously, but as he ran to examine the walls he uttered a triumphant shout. A crack still showed where a framed portrait had been slightly displaced. Inserting the blade of a knife he succeeded in reaching the hidden spring and, a moment later, a gaping aperture disclosed narrow winding stairs. Vidocq did not pause to ask himself why the cunning murderer had neglected to close the secret door. Instead he seized his lanthorn and slipped through the opening, followed by Coco-Lacour. The steps were massive blocks of stone, and of these they counted a hundred before they reached a level circular space and saw that a narrow tunnel opened before them. The roof hung low and compelled them to stoop, but they were determined to see where it led, and crept cautiously forward. Water glistened on the sides, rats scampered squeaking to their holes, and a queer smell as of a perspiring animal filled their nostrils. It was the same odour Vidocq had noticed when the panel opened, and it caused him to halt, a kerchief to his face. Suddenly Coco-Lacour, who was close behind, whimpered like a hurt child.

"I'm afraid, François—afraid! What kind of a creature is it that haunts this place and kills from afar?"

Vidocq shivered, and the movement caused the lamp he held to fling it's yellow beams from floor to ceiling.

"We must go on—*tonnèrre*; two hardened galley-felons, well armed into the bargain. What have we to fear? Ah, look——"

The dancing rays had flickered over the ground as he spoke, and his hand pointed to huge stone flags at the foot of a blank wall, for on this lay a little heap of leather pouches.

"The treasure—he dropped it here."

Vidocq stooped and lifted one of the bags, and on the instant the stones slid from beneath his feet and he dropped into a black void. He did not fall far, but as his friend came tumbling to the ground beside him a shrill neighing laugh, vibrant with ghoulish glee, sounded from over their heads. Looking up, they saw, framed by the crimson glare of a torch, a bestial malignant face that gibbered and mocked, while again that inhuman laugh

pealed out. Then, with a resounding slam, the treacherous stone swung into place and a night as of the grave closed down.

"A nice fix——" Vidocq was beginning, when abruptly he yelled with terror. Invisible hands gripped him, a rope was twisted about his arms and legs, and he was lifted and carried some distance and finally flung to the ground. Before he could struggle to his feet, a chain snapped around his waist, and as though this had been a signal countless torches burst into smoky flame, illuminating a gruesome scene. He was lying in a circular pit of stone; from the roof of massive but rotting beams, curved rafters spread like the ribs of some monstrous beast, and under them the air vibrated to the sough and sweep of huge bats. He looked for his friend and found him trussed like himself and upheld by the chain that bound them to a wall. Escape seemed hopeless, for the vault was filled with masked men who gazed at them with smouldering hatred, yet their presence dispelled the fear which was sapping his strength. Despite the animal stench that now floated like a mist in the air, these creatures of the night were human—and of such he was not afraid.

"So you are the thieves and murderers I have hunted," he cried with contempt. At his words a crooked loathsome shape shuffled forward—and Vidocq looked into cruel eyes that mocked his plight. It hardly needed the curved nose, the fleshy lips and yellow skin, to convince him that at last he was face to face with Nathan the Jew. For a minute neither spoke, then a hoarse croaking voice issued from this monster.

"Leave me now," it said. "In an hour we meet at the river. I will deal with these two."

At once the men filed through a door whilst their leader busied himself with mysterious preparations. Vidocq shuddered as he saw him place two heavy candles on the ground just out of their reach, then grinning ferociously the creature tightened the chain round their bodies and locked it to a ring in the wall.

"So, my friends, your end at least shall be painless. Already a while ago you tasted the fumes of my tapers. When I go I set fire to the church above and a beautiful funeral pyre shall wipe out all traces of your end. You thought to trap me—look—do you know who I am?"

On the words a swift and amazing change swept over the hunchback. The curved nose, fleshy lips, and parchment skin came away together; the lump behind the shoulders straightened out; the body stretched, lengthened, and with a spasm of horror Vidocq saw that the creature was Don Leon da Silva, Isabella's uncle. He enjoyed Vidocq's astonishment a moment, then with a

swift motion lit the candles, and seizing a torch ran across the vault. At the door through which his men had passed he turned and cried triumphantly :

" François Vidocq, spy and traitor, I saw you kill my friend the Bat and vowed revenge. My hand drove the dagger to Francine's heart, and now my work is done," and with another hideous laugh he vanished.

A frenzy seized Vidocq and he struggled madly to free his hands, but without avail.

" We're done, François," Coco-Lacour muttered hoarsely. " Look, flames are already beating down the passage. We'd better sit near the candles and inhale the fumes. Fire frightens me."

A roaring and crackling from above confirmed his words. Every instant the air became denser and more deadly. As a last resource, feeling his senses leaving him, Coco-Lacour rolled over and tried to hold his bound hands above the flickering flame of the taper by his side, but the fumes had numbed his will. Vidocq, too, felt a deadly sickness, and had already resigned himself to his fate, when a wild cry reached his ears. He fought to reply, but only a croak passed his lips.

" Your whistle," Lacour gasped, and choking and coughing he seized this in his teeth and sent out a shrill blast. It was answered at once, lights flashed in the distance and men came running. A shower of heavy blows snapped the chains and muscular arms gripped and dragged them to safety.

When some measure of sanity returned to Vidocq, he discovered that Isabella was bathing his face, whilst Labrousse performed a similar service for Coco-Lacour.

" I took charge," Labrousse said, grinning cheerfully. " Mademoiselle followed you into the tunnel and saw you captured. She came riding like a fury to headquarters. I at once sent your men to surround the church and they caught the bandits as they were leaving. The rest were at the tavern by the river."

" And da Silva, did you get him ? " Vidocq cried eagerly.

" So you know. Yes—he is Nathan the Jew and our enemy. We suspected him long ago, but could never obtain any proof. It was he persuaded his brother to take this house, probably because he had learned of the crypt. Alas—he is still free. Mademoiselle thinks there is another passage known only to him. The vault in which we found you is beneath the church to which he set fire before leaving. That way is closed for ever. We must hope for the best—sooner or later Don Leon will be caught."

The next day, when the outlaws had been safely fettered and

shut in Bicetre prison, Isabella came to Vidocq's office to ask for news of the treasure.

" You may be sure my uncle carried away the gold and jewels," she said. " They were not left in the tunnel. I pray you will help me to regain them."

" I shall leave no stone unturned," Vidocq cried fiercely. " I have sworn to find da Silva and your money."

" You shall have your share," the girl replied, walking towards the door, then, as an afterthought, a roguish smile transforming her face, " Perhaps there is a way by which the treasure can become all yours—ours."

Vidocq drew her gently back to the table and laying his hands on her shoulders remarked sadly :

" I make no pretence of misunderstanding you, mademoiselle. But I was once a galley-felon."

" I love a fearless man, and I know your story, Vidocq," was her unexpected answer. " Francine was my friend. Moreover, my father was a thief, although he only robbed the State. It was faithful Labrousse helped him to escape when his brother betrayed him and we came to France. How say you, François ? " and Isabella looked at Vidocq with burning eyes.

" *A la vie, a la mort*—Isabella," he said softly. " In life and death we'll be one."

With a passionate cry, in which laughter and tears were mingled, she flung both arms about his neck and kissed his lips.

THE HUNTING OF DA SILVA

I FANCY the end of that ignoble creature da Silva, whose career of crime and treachery has few parallels in history, has been purposely rendered mysterious and vague. I can only guess at the reason, but after a careful study of the documents at my disposal I have come to the conclusion that at some period in his life he had become a member of a sect allied to the Rosicrucians, and that when he was driven into a corner by his remorseless and formidable enemy Vidocq, he called upon the brotherhood for help. But the tale of his misdeeds had, it seems, reached their ears and this help was refused. The burnt documents found beside da Silva's body would tend to prove that the creature had in some manner obtained possession of important secrets, probably dealing with the rituals and mysteries of this occult society, which in France was akin to freemasonry, and had threatened to make use of them. Thereupon the brotherhood meted out swift justice and saved the state executioner a task.

Peuchet, the police archivist, ends his account of da Silva's death with the words: "To understand fully how Leon da Silva died, one would have to be initiated into the mysteries of the Rosy Cross."

Vidocq must have guessed at the truth also, and moreover, found it expedient not to offend this powerful esoteric society, for his narrative ends so abruptly that I feel sure the last page has been destroyed. But later, in a letter to M. Henry the prefect, he writes: "The man who visited da Silva in the mediæval tower was of such abnormal stature and his mule so gigantic that at first I believed both were supernatural. It may interest you however to know that the glowing, fiery wound on the giant's forehead was in the shape of a cross. Perhaps da Silva belonged to the secret society which uses this symbol."

Thus it is almost certain da Silva did not at the last take his own life as French historians have stated.

In 1820, when Vidocq first wrote his memoirs, the experiments of Frederick Mesmer were still looked upon merely as amusing

tricks, and mechanical hypnotism, although probably practised in the East, was undreamt of in France. I am inclined to think, therefore, that Vidocq's tale of the rotating mirrors is true. He could not have invented the details he gives. Whether the device was used by the occultists he encountered in the catacombs, or whether it was conceived by da Silva, I cannot say. I have explored most of the ancient galleries and crypts that yet exist deep down below the streets of modern Paris, and a hall I discovered there certainly resembles the place he described so vividly. Much of the tale is fantastic in the extreme when judged by modern standards. I have thought it best, nevertheless, not to clip nor alter this curious narrative, since it gives one an unexpected insight into the mentality of the Parisians in the days that followed the Terror.

The snap of the secret lock, craftily designed to protect the Sûreté chief from dangerous visitors, caused Vidocq to halt abruptly in his ceaseless pacing of his spacious office. It was his sweetheart Isabella da Silva who had entered, and he divined what the question trembling on her lips would be.

"Still no news, Isabella," he said wearily. "I begin to believe that the quest is hopeless. All my men are out. Every haunt in the city has been ransacked in vain. Either the creature—I hate to speak of him as your uncle—has fled the country, or he is dead. We shall never find the gold now, and, what is worse, Francine must remain unavenged."

Averting her gaze, Vidocq sighed and sank into a chair. Had he not been so completely absorbed in his thoughts he would have seen at once by the girl's flushed cheeks and the gleam of excitement in her eyes that something unusual had occurred.

"I am not so sure, François," she replied, and the queer catch in her voice caused her lover to become suddenly alert.

"What do you mean, Isabella?"

"You have been so moody and preoccupied that I did not tell you before of the queer things which have happened in the last few weeks, but the time has come when I need your advice. I am glad I did not follow your suggestion and sell my father's house. It may yet prove Don Leon's undoing. You remember the repulsive animal smell that appeared to emanate from him in moments of excitement? Well, on several occasions, when I have gone to the room in which my poor father was murdered, it has seemed to me that faint traces of this foul odour still hung in the air——"

"Mere fancy, sweetheart. You know the secret passage has been filled with stones and the sliding panel destroyed——"

"I do not think it was just imagination, François. Moreover, although I did not mention it sooner because I knew it would disturb you, I feel sure there is some evil presence lurking in the house—watching—always watching for an opportunity to take me unawares. I have changed my room night after night, at the last minute, without telling the servants, in vain—this thing always knows where I sleep——"

"Good heavens, Isabella, why did you not tell me of this at once?"

"Because you would have said, as you did just now, that it was mere fancy. I thought so too at first. Moreover, what I have to relate is so vague: just a feeling of overwhelming terror—a fleeting wave of horror that sweeps over me, leaving me weak and trembling—nothing tangible—yet I cannot shake off the conviction that some malevolent invisible creature is constantly spying on me. Regularly towards dawn I have suddenly started up wide awake, oppressed by a nightmare I could never remember, and in the darkness and silence the sound of something that breathed with a strange whistling note, almost like a dog that sniffs at the edge of a closed door, has reached me, to be followed by a creaking of loose boards and the soft sickening thump and swish of a heavy inert body being dragged slowly over the floor. Sometimes I also heard a faint tapping that seemed to come from above. Of course I at once leapt from my bed and lit the lamp you gave me—but the room was always empty. Finally, two days ago, I strewed flour all round the walls of my bedroom in the hope of finding footprints, and prepared to spend the night watching with a loaded pistol ready to hand. Yet, against my will, sleep overpowered me and I awoke at the usual hour to see two dreadful shining eyes glaring at me over the edge of my bed. Although nearly helpless with terror, I nevertheless succeeded in lifting the weapon and fired at those malevolent eyes. For an instant the flash of the shot gave me a glimpse of something hairy and bestial, almost like a small bear, crouching by the wall. When my frightened servants rushed in with lights, there was no sign of the mysterious intruder, but I saw a tiny smear of blood by the fireplace, and there was a broad shapeless furrow in the film of flour. It was not my uncle, I am sure—but—I believe it is he sent this creature to attack me. The chimney is wide and leads straight to the roof. Although I have locked and bolted the door of the room where this happened, I dare not sleep in the house again unless I know you are

near me. My father had secreted a quantity of jewels, besides the gold which I tried to conceal in his coffin, but he died without disclosing the hiding-place. I had hoped to find them and to surprise you. Now I feel sure Don Leon also knows of these jewels and is trying to terrify me into leaving the house so that he may hunt for them without fear of capture."

Vidocq had been watching his sweetheart's face with intent eyes during this revelation ; now he leant forward and taking her hand said gently :

" That is not all—you are keeping something back."

" Well—yes, I had hoped to show you that I am worthy to be your partner. Yesterday, just as I was about to come here and tell you of my creepy experiences, a stranger called on me and after some vague commonplaces offered to buy the house, offering a large sum for it. He described himself as a foreign nobleman just arrived in Paris. The place had taken his fancy, he said, when he passed in his carriage——"

" You followed him when he left, of course?" Vidocq cried sharply.

" I did, François," the girl replied, " but he was too clever for me, and that is why I am convinced Don Leon is after those jewels. My instant action had been foreseen; I stayed but to wrap a dark cloak around me, but when I reached the gates the man was already far away—he had come mounted on a swift horse."

" You refused to sell your house——"

" No—on the contrary—I feigned to be exceedingly pleased with his offer and requested him to make the necessary arrangements for the transfer."

" Splendid—he will come back, and this time we shall be prepared."

" That is why I have told you all this. But do not be too hopeful. Remember, my uncle is a fiend, and cunning as an ape. He will not walk into such a simple and obvious trap."

Vidocq assented gloomily, but the prospect of at last discovering the retreat of the man he had hunted ceaselessly for many months awakened all his dormant energy.

" One thing is evident," he exclaimed excitedly: " Da Silva is still in Paris, and he spends his time skulking in some underground haunt from which he can reach your house by another secret passage, although we failed to find any sign of such a thing when we sounded the walls. From now on Labrousse or Coco-Lacour must always stay with you."

" I had hoped that you——"

"Never fear, beloved, I shall be within call, but ostensibly I must be busy elsewhere. Thank heaven for the jewels. They, and his desire to hurt me through you, will finally bring this creeping assassin into my net. Hola, Dubois!" Vidocq cried loudly, striding to a door cunningly concealed by a tapestry. A burly figure, resembling him in amazing fashion, instantly appeared in the opening.

"You will dress and make up to represent me," Vidocq ordered sharply. "We have shamefully neglected Courteaud and his gang of footpads of late. Go after them with all the *éclat* possible. Our friends of the underworld must spread the report that I have given up the search for da Silva; show yourself as much as you can—safely. I intend to disappear for a time. Now send Lacour to me."

The man saluted and withdrew and a few minutes later Vidocq's clever little lieutenant, Coco-Lacour, slipped noiselessly into the room.

In a few brief sentences his chief apprised him of the news Isabella had brought, and outlined his plan. But for once Lacour was not enthusiastic. He frowned thoughtfully a moment, then perching himself on the edge of the table at which Vidocq and his sweetheart were seated he said:

"I don't like it, François. Why should da Silva, who is supernaturally clever, do these things? If there is a passage from which he can enter the rooms, and if, as mademoiselle believes, he is able to watch her unseen, why should he take such pains to make her aware of his presence? Why the nocturnal visitor? It looks to me as if he wished to get us into the house. In other words, he is baiting a trap. Remember how we were caught the last time. As for the bogus nobleman who offered to buy the place, probably he will allow himself to be followed the next time—in order to split us up."

At the ominous words, Isabella rose, a hand pressed to her heart, and cried:

"He is right, François. Don't you see? Here he cannot reach you, but once you are in that lonely house God knows what form his attack will take—and he would have only one or two opponents to deal with."

"All the more reason why Dubois should lead him to believe I have given up the search in favour of more immediate investigations. It is my death he desires more than anything."

Again Lacour shook his head. "Too transparent, *mon vieux*. I'll wager that devil knows Isabella has come here this morning, and he knows also that she will relate all that occurred. Is it

likely you would choose this moment for abandoning the chase? Da Silva counts on your coming to the house secretly."

"What do you suggest, then?" Vidocq asked, startled by his friend's earnest manner.

"Act as you intended to do—allow the creature to think he has fooled us, but be on your guard and hide in the grounds. He will strike unexpectedly. Let Labrousse remain in the house. I will stay with you, and picked men must be always within call." Despite his eagerness to come to grips with his formidable enemy, Vidocq was forced to admit the wisdom of his friend's advice, and at once summoned those men of his brigade whom he considered most fitted for the coming ordeal. To each of these Isabella gave a rough sketch of her gardens with a minute description of the best hiding-places. It was arranged that soon after dusk, which came early owing to unexpected frost and mist, the men should enter singly through a small gate which was invisible from the windows and seldom used, and take up their stations, resting and watching in turns, and ready for instant action.

Isabella then returned to her dwelling and, an hour later, Coco-Lacour and Labrousse arrived with well simulated caution, but in such fashion that they could not fail to be seen by a lurking spy.

A peculiar bark, as of a hurt dog, which had long been their private signal, was to apprise Lacour of his chief's presence in the grounds. Firm in his belief that da Silva counted upon their advent, Vidocq's two allies sat listlessly chatting and playing cards until nearly midnight. Coco-Lacour was rarely troubled with nerves, but for once he seemed a prey to gloomy forebodings, and little by little his tense manner reacted upon his companions, until the unbroken silence became pregnant with some nameless horror. At last a faint staccato yelp cause them to start to their feet.

"Thank God," Isabella whispered with a sigh of relief. François has come."

Lacour at once crept down the passage and peered into the garden. A muffled shape was standing by the open door, and at his whispered challenge, the swift complex motion of a hand, holding something white, assured him that it was indeed Vidocq. That queer sign was known to them alone. Again the hand moved, ordering him in dumb show to extinguish the candles and await events.

Coco-Lacour at once returned to his companions and informed them by a nod and a warning glance that all was well. Obeying his silent instructions Isabella walked to the door as though retiring

for the night, and the moment the room was in darkness slipped back and sank into a chair. Instantly, as though their unseen foes had only waited for this, countless tiny sounds, impossible to locate, set their hearts pounding. Boards creaked, rappings came from the walls, and ever and again a meaningless sibilant whisper issued from inaccessible corners; the very air they breathed seemed to have changed, it was suddenly heavy and stagnant, as though some occult influence had charged it with terror. For a time they sat motionless, awaiting they knew not what, but at last Lacour could bear it no longer, and, rising, was about to ignite the candles when abruptly a sobbing wail came from the garden.

"Help, help, François, beloved"—a woman's voice, exactly like Isabella's, cried despairingly. At the sound Labrousse threw out an arm and clutched at his mistress, but he was too late—with a jerk she wrenched herself free and darting from the room screamed wildly:

"Don't go, François! I am here! It is a trap!" Before her companions had recovered from the paralysing shock of this sudden alarm, a long-drawn yell of agony vibrated on the night; two pistol shots boomed in quick succession, lights flashed under the trees, and hoarse voices and running feet sounded from all sides as the hidden detectives rushed to succour their chief. When Lacour and his companion stumbled blindly down the stairs they saw Isabella kneeling beside a huddled shape on the path, whilst their men stood in a silent mournful group a few feet away. While they paused, irresolute, overwhelmed by the abrupt tragedy, a neighing inhuman peal of laughter burst from a window above their heads. The horrible sound transformed the weeping girl into a fury; snatching a pistol from Labrousse, she disappeared into the house, and Lacour at once dashed after her. Again that gloating laugh pealed out, but this time it was answered by several vicious shots—the laugh became a gurgle, changed into a scream of horror, and when Lacour reached the room whence it had come he found Isabella crouching by the wall and staring affrightedly at a motionless furry shape on the floor.

"It is the Thing with the glowing eyes," she muttered.

"You killed it?" Lacour asked foolishly.

Isabella shook her head. "No—I did not fire—it was someone else."

Dazed and shaken, Lacour was about to step forward to examine the body when a hand gripped his arm and dragged him behind a curtain whilst a rough cloth stifled the yell of fear that rose to his lips.

"Quick, *mon vieux*," a well-remembered voice whispered

fiercely. " Don't let anyone approach the dead man in the garden. It's poor Dubois—he took my place, and that devil killed him instead of me. Let all except Isabella and Labrousse think me dead. Hurry now."

Joy at discovering that Vidocq still lived brought Lacour to his senses. Rushing into the garden, he despatched Labrousse to the weeping girl with the welcome news. Then, wrapping his cloak about the head and body of the unfortunate Dubois, he directed the men to carry it to headquarters and to place it in a cell, which he ordered to be immediately locked and guarded.

When he returned Isabella was waiting for him on the stairs. She handed him a piece of paper on which Vidocq had scribbled several lines :

" I think my first shot wounded da Silva. But he got away because I emptied my pistols into that creature on the floor, mistaking it for him. It is a monstrosity, a mixture of man and beast from some savage country, and it could see in the dark. I have found the opening to da Silva's retreat. Now that he believes me dead, he will be off his guard. Stay here—be watchful. Isabella and her maids are leaving the house. I shall be back before dawn dressed in her clothes. The men will return later—secretly—the old password."

When she saw he had read the message, the girl tore the paper to shreds and ran down the stairs, and for a brief second he caught the outline of a dim figure that slipped past her the instant she opened the door.

Lacour grinned delightedly at the thought that after all Vidocq's cunning would be a match for da Silva, but he sighed when he thought of Dubois, who had been such a staunch comrade.

The reaction after the fearful tumult and excitement of the night made him feel tired and listless and he would have given much for an hour's sleep, but he knew from experience that their formidable quarry was as dangerous as a poisonous reptile, so, signing to Labrousse to watch the passage, he squatted down near the sprawling shape of the beast-man and examined it curiously. Long, matted fur covered the body and even grew profusely on the swarthy face, and Lacour perceived with a spasm of horror that fangs as long and sharp as those of a wolf protruded from the distorted mouth. The thing was quite dead. Vidocq's bullet had entered between the eyes. Time dragged heavily—but at last a rustle of skirts caused him to turn swiftly and he saw that a tall feminine figure, the face half concealed by a cowl, was

standing in the doorway regarding him. It was his chief, cleverly disguised. Behind him, holding a lantern, hovered Labrousse. It was not often that even his best friends had seen Vidocq's finely chiselled features unadorned by beard or moustache, and for a moment Lacour gazed at him in sincere admiration. The wig of black hair completed the illusion, and transformed the redoubtable detective into a handsome girl. At a sign, the body of the dead savage was dragged away from the wall and Vidocq ran his sensitive fingers lightly over the oaken panels, in search of the spring which operated the opening to da Silva's retreat. Five minutes passed, then there came a metallic clang, and a portion of the wall, ornamented with elaborate carving, swung inwards. Holding his lantern above his head so that his face remained in shadow, Vidocq began to descend the ancient winding stairs which led steeply downward. Mindful of the trap into which they had walked when they had first hunted da Silva, who as Nathan the Jew had terrorised Paris, Vidocq tested every stone before resting his weight upon it. The steps twisted and turned bewilderingly, leading them ever farther away from the house; the air smelt dank and earthy, and some pungent indefinable odour caused them to pause more than once in fear of poison. At last Vidocq halted and pointed silently at many niches stretching away on both sides, and they saw that the walls were now formed of grinning skulls that shone with the eerie lambent flame of decaying wood.

"Surely we have entered the ancient catacombs under the city?" Coco-Lacour muttered. "I thought they could only be reached from the Faubourg du Temple?"

"They have never been completely explored," Vidocq replied in a whisper. "I must enquire into the history of Isabella's house. The passage we caused to be closed led to the Church of St. Pierre. From there it would be simple to break into the catacombs. We may be nearing our enemy's lair—this queer smell is growing stronger. Fortunately, I have brought scarves steeped in vinegar—bind them over nose and mouth."

Thus protected, Vidocq and his two companions again crept forward. Suddenly, as they turned a corner, Labrousse held up his hand; a gentle purring sound as of machinery in motion had become audible, and dancing flickering beams of brilliant light irradiated the gallery. Not ten feet distant the walls fell away, the roof sloped abruptly upwards, and they found themselves in a vast chamber hewn from the living rock and spanned by graceful Gothic arches. Opposite them, on a broad level stone that had obviously once served as an altar, burned a number of

lamps, and their flames were reflected in countless circular mirrors. The larger of these rotated slowly, while others, no bigger than saucers, spun with such speed that the play of the sweeping lights caused the astonished men to reel dizzily.

"What new trick is this?" Lacour queried, turning unsteadily to his chief. "What moves those mirrors?"

"Hidden springs, I suppose," Vidocq answered slowly. "Phew, I can hardly breathe. I feel tired, too"—and tearing the cloth from his face he collapsed on a block of granite.

"But, François," Coco-Lacour cried, also removing his scarf and seating himself beside his friend, "do you realise how strange it is to find such a mechanism in this place? Did da Silva light those lamps?"

Vidocq passed a shaking hand over his brow, which was clammy with perspiration. His eyes had assumed a glassy lifeless expression and they stared fixedly at a huge central mirror in which the swirling beams of all the others came to a focus. He felt his senses were playing him queer tricks. He was no longer master of his movements. A last glimmer of reason warned him that if he remained thus he was lost. Coco-Lacour had sunk to the ground and Labrousse stood beside him, gazing with empty eyes at nothing, motionless as a statue. Controlling his drifting thoughts by a superhuman effort of will, he hurled the lamp he carried straight at that numbing central ray. A splintering of glass and metal followed, the bewildering swing of the mirrors ceased, and a grateful shadow gave his tortured nerves respite. Only the lamps still burned on the altar. For a time he sat in a stupor. It seemed to him that centuries passed while he battled for the power to move his lifeless muscles, but at last, very slowly, the crushing weight lifted and he breathed more easily. Staggering to his feet he seized Lacour by the collar and dragged him, dazed and helpless, into a passage that opened from the hall. Then he returned to assist Labrousse, who was leaning limply against a column. But the effort left him without strength. Abruptly he was seized with spasms of violent nausea, and when at last he regained some measure of his normal poise, the last flicker of light had vanished and a rayless night enveloped him.

"Coco, old friend, are you there?" he called sharply. At the words trembling fingers tugged at his sleeve and a shaking voice replied: "I thought we were dead, François. What has happened, in God's name?"

I do not understand it myself, but be sure da Silva placed devil's contrivance there for us. I, too, felt as though I were dying. We must rouse Labrousse. Is he near you?"

"I am awake, Vidocq. But why can't we have a light?"

"You have your lamps still? I threw mine at those mirrors. That is what saved us."

Only a helpless groan answered his query. Both men had dropped their lanterns, and after a futile search they resolved to creep on hands and knees, one behind the other, until they reached the steps. That crawl in the dark was a nightmare, and when at last they halted from sheer weariness they were forced to face the terrible truth that they had lost all sense of direction.

"What fools we were not to bring food and water," Vidocq said despairingly—"I am famished and parched. It must be already day in the world above our heads, or perhaps even night has come again. Heaven knows how long we lay there after the lamps burned out. I noticed they were full of oil when we came into that damnable place. They would last twelve hours or more. We must go on or I shall become insane. Listen—am I mad already?"

In the ensuing silence a slow and stately chant of many voices throbbed and echoed from roof to wall.

"A church somewhere overhead," Labrousse cried joyously. "Let us hurry—the sound will guide us." Casting all caution aside they rose to their feet and ran blindly towards the welcome music. Soon a dim twilight showed them that the passage was widening, the solemn chant swelled and boomed like an organ, and with a shout of relief they stumbled into a spacious hall thronged with masked men in flowing white robes. The singers, whose voices had guided them, were grouped about a crimson cross before which stood a tall bearded figure. At their unexpected irruption this man threw out his arms and pointed. Vidocq caught the words: "A woman," then unconsciousness blotted out all feeling.

When he recovered gentle hands were chafing his limbs and the pleasant taste of cool water still lingered on his swollen tongue.

The bearded man knelt beside him, searching his face with stern gaze.

"Who and what are you who come dressed as a girl, whilst your companions carry the badge of the hated police?"

The words caused Vidocq to hesitate a moment, then he decided that frankness would serve them best, and at once related the details of their terrible experience. His description of the mirrors and their power caused his interlocutor to start violently. Grasping Vidocq by the hand he urged him to repeat this part of his story once more. Food and water were then given him, and he saw that his two companions were already greedily eating.

When he was somewhat restored the man who had questioned

him and who was obviously the leader of this esoteric assembly, drew Vidocq apart.

"This Leon da Silva once held high rank among us," he began. "The mirrors of which you spoke are part of our mysteries. I cannot tell you more. But their use against you proves that he has betrayed his trust. You shall know who we are before you return to your gross world so that you will not seek to harm us. When you are convinced that our only desire is to regenerate humanity, if you will promise never to reveal what you have learned, I will undertake to conduct you to Don Leon da Silva. Although we are kindly and harmless, we have power, terrible power, to punish, and that traitor cannot escape from us."

With much ceremony and many symbolical gestures the Grand Master extracted an ancient leather-bound tome containing many parchments from a golden casket. Removing a jewelled padlock he opened the volume and signing to Vidocq to approach, pointed to the seals and signatures on the first page.

"You are satisfied?" he asked gravely when Vidocq had examined them.

Vidocq bowed and smiled. "I give you immunity from the police whom I command, and I faithfully promise for myself and those two, who are my friends, that the secrets I have learned will not be divulged, and if you truly lead me to my enemy I shall ever be your debtor. *A propos*—do you know anything of the treasure da Silva stole?"

"The first rule of our order is to despise wealth, monsieur. That is why this man you seek was no longer admitted among us—his greed made him insufferable. Yet, although banished, he is still fettered by his oath"—and the old man clenched his fist menacingly. During this colloquy Vidocq's companions had approached stealthily. Now Lacour nudged his chief and whispered: "What is all this?"

"We are truly in the ancient catacombs," Vidocq replied evasively. "It seems they can be reached from Isabella's house. We have already wandered a day and a night, and but for this religious body—Zoroastrians I believe they style themselves—we should have died. They will send a guide back with us. I have promised for all three to keep this discovery secret."

"And da Silva?"

"Believing me dead, he was so contemptuous of pursuit that he merely placed those lamps and mirrors to guard his retreat for a few hours. By now he is in safety, or so he believes. We must return to headquarters at once. Isabella, poor girl, will have given us up for dead."

"But, François," Lacour urged, "what was it happened in that room of mirrors?"

Vidocq fidgeted, hesitated, and finally, with an uneasy glance at the white-robed men who watched them steadily from a distance, replied:

"Some natural phenomenon, like the swaying of a ship, which made us dizzy. These people say it is a mysterious new force—necromancy in fact, but I don't believe it." As though he had heard Vidocq's words the leader of the assembly approached hastily, followed by one of his adepts.

"Remember your promise," he murmured—"do not seek to probe into our secrets. Here is the brother who will guide you, and now farewell."

It was only when they had threaded the bewildering maze of galleries for several hours, led by the guide who carried a bundle of torches, that Vidocq realised how utterly lost they had been. At last they arrived at the foot of the massive stairs which they had never thought to find again. Pointing upwards in silence their guide bowed, and handing Lacour one of the torches at once shuffled away. They found Isabella, haggard with grief, crouching in utter despair on the floor of her room. At their abrupt entry she started up terror-stricken, believing them risen from the dead, and indeed their appearance warranted the thought. For a moment she stood swaying blindly, then Vidocq's arms were about her and his crushing embrace was proof that he was no ghost.

"My love, my love!" she sobbed. "I had given up hope. We searched for hours, and when we found your lamps I knew Don Leon had trapped you."

"We lost our way in that underground maze. How long have we been gone?"

"Two nights and a day. Even now your men are scouring Paris. Monsieur Henry has posted soldiers on all the roads leading from the city. Police guard every gate. A net through which even that beast cannot break has been spread."

"Excellent. Get me a carriage. I must not be seen like this. I shall not rest until my enemy is caught."

The prefect was overjoyed to see his auxiliary again and placed the entire organisation of which he disposed at Vidocq's service. Every haunt known to spies and informers was raided, detectives lurked in all the wayside taverns, vehicles entering and leaving the city were stopped and searched minutely, but again it seemed as though the man they sought had escaped. Then one morning Coco-Lacour came to his chief's office with an air of mystery.

"François, you said every unusual occurrence was to be reported to you whether it had anything to do with our quest or not. Well, I have heard a queer story. There is an ancient tower in the rue des Moines, which was built, I believe, by a Duke of Burgundy. I have long had an eye on it. An old white-haired man lives there. He is reputed as a philosopher and a searcher after hidden wisdom. He sells potions to heal the sick, but rumour has it that he also, for a price, sells potions that kill without leaving traces. Two weeks ago one of my spies reported that a man of gigantic stature, who rides a mule of such enormous size that no one has ever seen the like, comes regularly at sunset every Friday to this tower. He remains only a few minutes and disappears so swiftly and silently that the gossips aver he and his mount are demons. My man, who has seen this uncanny visitor, said that the mule is blind and has a dreadful open wound running the length of one side, and that the man also has a glowing wound or scar on his brow. Moreover, his eyes are so fierce that no one encountering their gaze can approach him. Of course that is all superstitious nonsense; but to-day is Friday, let us go to this tower at sunset."

Vidocq shrugged his shoulders impatiently, but before he could reply Labrousse came in with a folded paper.

"This dropped at my feet," he said with a puzzled frown, "just as I passed under the old Arch of Nazareth. It is addressed to you."

Vidocq hastily broke the seal; there was only one line of writing, but its effect upon him was extraordinary.

"You are right, by Heaven! This note says: 'Come to the tower in the rue des Moines to-night after dark.' The signature —no I cannot tell you what it is, but I know it is genuine and relates to da Silva." And holding the scrap of paper in the flame of a taper he at once destroyed it.

Long before nightfall Vidocq and his lieutenant were safely hidden near the tower. As the last rays of the sinking sun illumined the crumbling stones, changing swiftly from red to grey, a clatter of hoofs sounded on the cobbles and a huge black mule, bestraddled by a man of fearsome aspect, came to a halt before the massive portal. Before dismounting the rider peered warily about him, and Vidocq saw that his face bore the hue of death. This unearthly pallor was the more startling by contrast to his black hair and shining silky beard, the ends of which were stuffed into a metal-studded belt. So tall was the fellow that despite the size of the mule his feet scraped the ground. He was clothed from head to foot in soft leather, and by his side dangled a sword of

Spanish design. Apparently satisfied by his scrutiny, this strange being dismounted and, tying the bridle to an iron ring in the wall, rapped in curious fashion on the door. It opened at once, and for a fleeting second the watchers caught a glimpse of the bowed figure of an old man, who at sight of his visitor attempted to bar the way. But the giant thrust him aside. It was then Vidocq perceived the strange, glowing scar on his brow, of which Lacour had spoken. It did not bleed, indeed, but was crimson as though but newly healed. Mindful of the message he had received, Vidocq started forward, fully expecting some sign from the giant. But the door had shut again, and although he was aflame with excitement he thought it best to wait. Night had come, the tower was silent and dark, and already the watching detectives began to fear that they were the victims of a ruse, when a wild raucous cry of mortal terror burst from the gloomy pile. It swelled, died down, and broke out again, to end in a piteous whine, vibrant with the last despairing appeal of a coward who faces an inevitable doom. With one accord Vidocq and his friends threw themselves at the door. Somewhere in the tower murder was being done, and they hammered frenziedly at the stout barrier. Suddenly, without warning, it swung wide, causing them to sprawl on their faces. A heavy form passed in a flash above them, a clatter of hoofs followed, and when they raced to the end of the street they caught a last glimpse of the mule and its inhuman rider as they vanished into the gloom. Frenziedly the two men ran to the tower and searched every room—there was no sign of the old man, but when they had already given up hope Vidocq espied a crack near the floor through which a glimmer of light filtered. An iron door had been cunningly fashioned to resemble the blocks of stone which formed the base of the ancient building. Behind it was a square windowless cell, and the many chains and gyves that dangled from a massive pillar showed clearly that once it had served as a torture chamber. In a corner flared a single taper, by its light they saw that a red cross had been painted on the stone flags and beneath it were the words: "You who seek the traitor, da Silva, lift this stone."

"At last!" Vidocq cried, tugging at a massive ring in the centre of the cross; it required the united efforts of both men to move the heavy trap door, but finally it gave and they dragged it to one side.

"Underground again," Lacour muttered. "Wait, François, I will fetch some of our men. I have no desire to crawl like a rat in the dark once more, as we did in those catacombs."

Mastering his impatience, Vidocq assented and settled down to

wait. Soon Lacour returned leading one of the fierce dogs used for tracking, and accompanied by armed police. This time the search was not long. A single broad passage ended in a vault that once had been used as a dungeon. The iron-clamped door hung open, and at a stone table sat da Silva! His head was pillowed on his arms as though he had fallen asleep, but he was dead, and on the wall a silver sconce containing several of the poisoned Medici candles attested to the manner of his end. One socket, empty but for some molten wax, showed that the deadly taper it had contained had but recently burned itself out. It was still warm, and a faint resinous vapour yet hung in the air.

Vidocq raised the lifeless head and pointed to the disarranged wig and beard.

"So he was the wise philosopher. He would naturally be skilled in brewing deadly potions. Look—see his eyes—black as night! That's the effect of the poison fumes. How many murders this monster committed we shall never know, but at east his terrible knowledge has recoiled on his own head. I wonder if the giant with the crimson scar gave him a choice of deaths. The cry we heard inclines me to that belief. But we shall never know. I fancy it was not altogether for the sake of a promise the Master of the Order caused da Silva to be killed. The floor is strewn with charred papers. Secrets, no doubt, which this beast had stolen."

For many weeks Vidocq hunted diligently for the treasure, but nothing was ever found, or so at least he declares in his memoirs. And since no one ever accused the famous detective of being a miser, and since he never became rich, no doubt the statement is true.

THE END