

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK.

IN the year 1698, at three o'clock in the afternoon of September the eighteenth, St. Mars the newly appointed governor of the Bastille, the greatest state-prison of France, was seen coming from the Isle of St. Marguerite, accompanied by a prisoner richly dressed and strongly guarded, upon whose face was tightly fitted a mask of iron, or as others assert, of black velvet strengthened by bands of whalebone. The two silently entered the grim-looking fortress, and the large iron gates closed and forever deprived this prisoner of God's priceless gift of liberty, whether for the sake of justice or against its holy cause, posterity has been unable to ascertain with certainty. During the journey hither St. Mars has constantly and cautiously guarded his charge. His movements were ordered with as much precaution, and his commands given with such an air of mystery, that they vividly excited the imagination and the curiosity of the inhabitants around, and served as food for future gossip. The remembrance of this strange occurrence, together with the recollection of a similar proceeding upon the promotion of St. Mars from the governorship of the Pignerol, to a like position at the Isle of St. Marguerite, was perpetuated in the country, and the singular incidents which marked the removals were repeated by the older inhabitants to the newer generation, until, aided by the fanciful imaginations of many writers, this tradition has reached us in its most embellished form.

Five years later, on the twentieth of November, at a quarter past four in the evening, the draw-bridge of the redoubtable fortress was lowered, and a funeral procession came forth and quietly wended its way, accompanied by two subalterns of the prison,

towards the cemetery of the church of St. Paul. Upon the register of this church the dead man's name was inscribed as Marchiali. At the Bastille he was always known as "the prisoner from Provence." During his long confinement, this unfortunate man was frequently seen at the window of his cell, but always masked, and at twilight his mellow voice was often heard in sweet song floating out upon the evening's stillness, over the waters of the beautiful bay of Cannes.

Such is the mysterious personage, who, forsaken and languishing in the obscurity of a prison during the latter part of his existence, became a few years after his death, so famous throughout the entire world, and whose romantic history has for more than a century awakened the general imagination, attracted universal attention, and exercised, though to no purpose, the patience and the speculations of many of our best writers and historians. He has been made the hero of one of the most noted legends, and has had the rare privilege of inflaming public curiosity, without satisfying or even mitigating it, and that, too, among all classes, not alone in France, but in Italy, Germany and England.

Numerous are the theories brought forward for the identification of this celebrated prisoner with some important personage of the courts of Europe, all of them supported by vague and feeble argument. But as often as they have been proposed, they have been destroyed by strong and solid objections, and consequently rejected. A century of controversy has not yet dissipated the mysterious cloud in which the prisoner of Saint Mars is enveloped, and we have good reasons for agreeing with M. Michelet, the author of "*Histoire de France*" that the "History of the Iron Mask