Chapter XVIII

The Treasure

When Dantès returned next morning to the chamber of his companion in captivity, he found Faria seated and looking composed. In the ray of light which entered by the narrow window of his cell, he held open in his left hand, of which alone, it will be recollected, he retained the use, a sheet of paper, which, from being constantly rolled into a small compass, had the form of a cylinder, and was not easily kept open. He did not speak, but showed the paper to Dantès.

'What is that?' he inquired.

'Look at it,' said the abbé with a smile.

'I have looked at it with all possible attention,' said Dantès, 'and I only see a half-burnt paper, on which are traces of Gothic characters inscribed with a peculiar kind of ink.'

'This paper, my friend,' said Faria, 'I may now avow to you, since I have the proof of your fidelity—this paper is my treasure, of which, from this day forth, one-half belongs to you.'

The sweat started forth on Dantès' brow. Until this day and for how long a time!—he had refrained from talking of the treasure, which had brought upon the abbé the accusation of madness. With his instinctive delicacy Edmond had preferred avoiding any touch on this painful chord, and Faria had been equally silent. He had taken the silence of the old man for a return to reason; and now these few words uttered by Faria, after so painful a crisis, seemed to indicate a serious relapse into mental alienation.

'Your treasure?' stammered Dantès. Faria smiled.

'Yes,' said he. 'You have, indeed, a noble nature, Edmond, and I see by your paleness and agitation what is passing in your heart at this moment. No, be

assured, I am not mad. This treasure exists, Dantès, and if I have not been allowed to possess it, you will. Yes—you. No one would listen or believe me, because everyone thought me mad; but you, who must know that I am not, listen to me, and believe me so afterwards if you will.'

'Alas,' murmured Edmond to himself, 'this is a terrible relapse! There was only this blow wanting.' Then he said aloud, 'My dear friend, your attack has, perhaps, fatigued you; had you not better repose awhile? Tomorrow, if you will, I will hear your narrative; but today I wish to nurse you carefully. Besides,' he said, 'a treasure is not a thing we need hurry about.'

'On the contrary, it is a matter of the utmost importance, Edmond!' replied the old man. 'Who knows if tomorrow, or the next day after, the third attack may not come on? and then must not all be over? Yes, indeed, I have often thought with a bitter joy that these riches, which would make the wealth of a dozen families, will be forever lost to those men who persecute me. This idea was one of vengeance to me, and I tasted it slowly in the night of my dungeon and the despair of my captivity. But now I have forgiven the world for the love of you; now that I see you, young and with a promising future,—now that I think of all that may result to you in the good fortune of such a disclosure, I shudder at any delay, and tremble lest I should not assure to one as worthy as yourself the possession of so vast an amount of hidden wealth.'

Edmond turned away his head with a sigh.

'You persist in your incredulity, Edmond,' continued Faria. 'My words have not convinced you. I see you require proofs. Well, then, read this paper, which I have never shown to anyone.'

'Tomorrow, my dear friend,' said Edmond, desirous of not yielding to the old man's madness. 'I thought it was understood that we should not talk of that until tomorrow.'

'Then we will not talk of it until tomorrow; but read this paper today.'

'I will not irritate him,' thought Edmond, and taking the paper, of which half was wanting,—having been burnt, no doubt, by some accident,—he read:

''this treasure, which may amount to two…
of Roman crowns in the most distant a…
of the second opening wh…
declare to belong to him alo…

Faria gazed fondly on his noble-minded, single-hearted, high-principled young friend, and read in his countenance ample confirmation of the sincerity of his devotion and the loyalty of his purpose.

'Thanks,' murmured the invalid, extending one hand. 'I accept. You may one of these days reap the reward of your disinterested devotion. But as I cannot, and you will not, quit this place, it becomes necessary to fill up the excavation beneath the soldier's gallery; he might, by chance, hear the hollow sound of his footsteps, and call the attention of his officer to the circumstance. That would bring about a discovery which would inevitably lead to our being separated. Go, then, and set about this work, in which, unhappily, I can offer you no assistance; keep at it all night, if necessary, and do not return here tomorrow till after the jailer has visited me. I shall have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you.'

Dantès took the hand of the abbé in his, and affectionately pressed it. Faria smiled encouragingly on him, and the young man retired to his task, in the spirit of obedience and respect which he had sworn to show towards his aged friend.

'No, no,' cried Dantès; 'you are mistaken—you will not die! And your third attack (if, indeed, you should have another) will find you at liberty. We shall save you another time, as we have done this, only with a better chance of success, because we shall be able to command every requisite assistance.'

'My good Edmond,' answered the abbé, 'be not deceived. The attack which has just passed away, condemns me forever to the walls of a prison. None can fly from a dungeon who cannot walk.'

'Well, we will wait,—a week, a month, two months, if need be,—and meanwhile your strength will return. Everything is in readiness for our flight, and we can select any time we choose. As soon as you feel able to swim we will go.'

'I shall never swim again,' replied Faria. 'This arm is paralysed; not for a time, but forever. Lift it, and judge if I am mistaken.'

The young man raised the arm, which fell back by its own weight, perfectly inanimate and helpless. A sigh escaped him.

'You are convinced now, Edmond, are you not?' asked the abbé. 'Depend upon it, I know what I say. Since the first attack I experienced of this malady, I have continually reflected on it. Indeed, I expected it, for it is a family inheritance; both my father and grandfather died of it in a third attack. The physician who prepared for me the remedy I have twice successfully taken, was no other than the celebrated Cabanis, and he predicted a similar end for me.' 'The physician may be mistaken!' exclaimed Dantès. 'And as for your poor arm, what difference will that make? I can take you on my shoulders, and swim for both of us.'

'My son,' said the abbé, 'you, who are a sailor and a swimmer, must know as well as I do that a man so loaded would sink before he had done fifty strokes. Cease, then, to allow yourself to be duped by vain hopes, that even your own excellent heart refuses to believe in. Here I shall remain till the hour of my deliverance arrives, and that, in all human probability, will be the hour of my death. As for you, who are young and active, delay not on my account, but fly—go—I give you back your promise.'

'It is well,' said Dantès. 'Then I shall also remain.' Then, rising and extending his hand with an air of solemnity over the old man's head, he slowly added, 'By the blood of Christ I swear never to leave you while you live.'

heir.

'25th April, 149"

'Well!' said Faria, when the young man had finished reading it.

'Why,' replied Dantès, 'I see nothing but broken lines and unconnected words, which are rendered illegible by fire.'

'Yes, to you, my friend, who read them for the first time; but not for me, who have grown pale over them by many nights' study, and have reconstructed every phrase, completed every thought.'

'And do you believe you have discovered the hidden meaning?'

'I am sure I have, and you shall judge for yourself; but first listen to the history of this paper.'

'Silence!' exclaimed Dantès. 'Steps approach—I go—adieu!'

And Dantès, happy to escape the history and explanation which would be sure to confirm his belief in his friend's mental instability, glided like a snake along the narrow passage; while Faria, restored by his alarm to a certain amount of activity, pushed the stone into place with his foot, and covered it with a mat in order the more effectually to avoid discovery.

It was the governor, who, hearing of Faria's illness from the jailer, had come in person to see him.

Faria sat up to receive him, avoiding all gestures in order that he might conceal from the governor the paralysis that had already half stricken him with death. His fear was lest the governor, touched with pity, might order him to be removed to better quarters, and thus separate him from his young companion. But fortunately this was not the case, and the governor left him, convinced that the poor madman, for whom in his heart he felt a kind of affection, was only troubled with a slight indisposition.

During this time, Edmond, seated on his bed with his head in his hands, tried to collect his scattered thoughts. Faria, since their first acquaintance, had been on all points so rational and logical, so wonderfully sagacious, in fact, that he could not understand how so much wisdom on all points could be allied with madness. Was Faria deceived as to his treasure, or was all the world deceived as to Faria?

Dantès remained in his cell all day, not daring to return to his friend, thinking thus to defer the moment when he should be convinced, once for all, that the abbé was mad—such a conviction would be so terrible!

But, towards the evening after the hour for the customary visit had gone by, Faria, not seeing the young man appear, tried to move and get over the distance which separated them. Edmond shuddered when he heard the painful efforts which the old man made to drag himself along; his leg was inert, and he could no longer make use of one arm. Edmond was obliged to assist him, for otherwise he would not have been able to enter by the small aperture which led to Dantès' chamber.

'Here I am, pursuing you remorselessly,' he said with a benignant smile. 'You thought to escape my munificence, but it is in vain. Listen to me.'

Edmond saw there was no escape, and placing the old man on his bed, he seated himself on the stool beside him.

'You know,' said the abbé, 'that I was the secretary and intimate friend of Cardinal Spada, the last of the princes of that name. I owe to this worthy lord all the happiness I ever knew. He was not rich, although the wealth of his family had passed into a proverb, and I heard the phrase very often, "As rich as a Spada." But he, like public rumour, lived on this reputation for wealth; his palace was my paradise. I was tutor to his nephews, who are dead; and when he was alone in the world, I tried by absolute devotion to his will, to make up to him all he had done for me during ten years of unremitting kindness. The cardinal's house had no secrets for me. I had often seen my noble patron annotating ancient volumes, and eagerly searching amongst dusty family manuscripts. One day when I was reproaching him for his unavailing searches, and deploring the prostration of mind that followed them, he looked at me, and, smiling bitterly, opened a volume relating to the History of the City of Rome. There, in the twentieth chapter of the Life of Pope Alexander VI., were the following lines, which I can never forget:—

"The great wars of Romagna had ended; Cæsar Borgia, who had completed his conquest, had need of money to purchase all Italy. The pope had also need of money to bring matters to an end with Louis XII. King of France, who was formidable still in spite of his recent reverses; and it was necessary, therefore, to have recourse to some profitable scheme, which was a matter of great difficulty in the impoverished condition of exhausted Italy. His holiness had an idea. He determined to make two cardinals."

By choosing two of the greatest personages of Rome, especially rich men—*this* was the return the Holy Father looked for. In the first place, he could sell

of his friend. At length a slight colour tinged the livid cheeks, consciousness returned to the dull, open eyeballs, a faint sigh issued from the lips, and the sufferer made a feeble effort to move.

'He is saved! he is saved!' cried Dantès in a paroxysm of delight.

The sick man was not yet able to speak, but he pointed with evident anxiety towards the door. Dantès listened, and plainly distinguished the approaching steps of the jailer. It was therefore near seven o'clock; but Edmond's anxiety had put all thoughts of time out of his head.

The young man sprang to the entrance, darted through it, carefully drawing the stone over the opening, and hurried to his cell. He had scarcely done so before the door opened, and the jailer saw the prisoner seated as usual on the side of his bed. Almost before the key had turned in the lock, and before the departing steps of the jailer had died away in the long corridor he had to traverse, Dantès, whose restless anxiety concerning his friend left him no desire to touch the food brought him, hurried back to the abbé's chamber, and raising the stone by pressing his head against it, was soon beside the sick man's couch. Faria had now fully regained his consciousness, but he still lay helpless and exhausted on his miserable bed.

'I did not expect to see you again,' said he feebly, to Dantès.

'And why not?' asked the young man. 'Did you fancy yourself dying?'

'No, I had no such idea; but, knowing that all was ready for flight, I thought you might have made your escape.'

The deep glow of indignation suffused the cheeks of Dantès.

'Without you? Did you really think me capable of that?'

'At least,' said the abbé, 'I now see how wrong such an opinion would have been. Alas, alas! I am fearfully exhausted and debilitated by this attack.'

'Be of good cheer,' replied Dantès; 'your strength will return.' And as he spoke he seated himself near the bed beside Faria, and took his hands. The abbé shook his head.

'The last attack I had,' said he, 'lasted but half an hour, and after it I was hungry, and got up without help; now I can move neither my right arm nor leg, and my head seems uncomfortable, which shows that there has been a suffusion of blood on the brain. The third attack will either carry me off, or leave me paralysed for life.'

to drag myself along. Who knows what may happen, or how long the attack may last?'

In spite of the magnitude of the misfortune which thus suddenly frustrated his hopes, Dantès did not lose his presence of mind, but descended into the passage, dragging his unfortunate companion with him; then, half-carrying, half-supporting him, he managed to reach the abbé's chamber, when he immediately laid the sufferer on his bed.

'Thanks,' said the poor abbé, shivering as though his veins were filled with ice. 'I am about to be seized with a fit of catalepsy; when it comes to its height I shall probably lie still and motionless as though dead, uttering neither sigh nor groan. On the other hand, the symptoms may be much more violent, and cause me to fall into fearful convulsions, foam at the mouth, and cry out loudly. Take care my cries are not heard, for if they are it is more than probable I should be removed to another part of the prison, and we be separated forever. When I become quite motionless, cold, and rigid as a corpse, then, and not before,—be careful about this,—force open my teeth with the knife, pour from eight to ten drops of the liquor contained in the phial down my throat, and I may perhaps revive.'

'Perhaps!' exclaimed Dantès in grief-stricken tones.

'Help! help!' cried the abbé, 'I—I—die—I— ' So sudden and violent was the fit that the unfortunate prisoner was unable to complete the sentence; a violent convulsion shook his whole frame, his eyes started from their sockets, his mouth was drawn on one side, his cheeks became purple, he struggled, foamed, dashed himself about, and uttered the most dreadful cries, which, however, Dantès prevented from being heard by covering his head with the blanket. The fit lasted two hours; then, more helpless than an infant, and colder and paler than marble, more crushed and broken than a reed trampled under foot, he fell back, doubled up in one last convulsion, and became as rigid as a corpse.

Edmond waited till life seemed extinct in the body of his friend, then, taking up the knife, he with difficulty forced open the closely fixed jaws, carefully administered the appointed number of drops, and anxiously awaited the result. An hour passed away and the old man gave no sign of returning animation. Dantès began to fear he had delayed too long ere he administered the remedy, and, thrusting his hands into his hair, continued gazing on the lifeless features

the great appointments and splendid offices which the cardinals already held; and then he had the two hats to sell besides. There was a third point in view, which will appear hereafter.

The pope and Cæsar Borgia first found the two future cardinals; they were Giovanni Rospigliosi, who held four of the highest dignities of the Holy See, and Cæsar Spada, one of the noblest and richest of the Roman nobility; both felt the high honour of such a favour from the pope. They were ambitious, and Cæsar Borgia soon found purchasers for their appointments. The result was, that Rospigliosi and Spada paid for being cardinals, and eight other persons paid for the offices the cardinals held before their elevation, and thus eight hundred thousand crowns entered into the coffers of the speculators.

It is time now to proceed to the last part of the speculation. The pope heaped attentions upon Rospigliosi and Spada, conferred upon them the insignia of the cardinalate, and induced them to arrange their affairs and take up their residence at Rome. Then the pope and Cæsar Borgia invited the two cardinals to dinner. This was a matter of dispute between the Holy Father and his son. Cæsar thought they could make use of one of the means which he always had ready for his friends, that is to say, in the first place, the famous key which was given to certain persons with the request that they go and open a designated cupboard. This key was furnished with a small iron point,—a negligence on the part of the locksmith. When this was pressed to effect the opening of the cupboard, of which the lock was difficult, the person was pricked by this small point, and died next day. Then there was the ring with the lion's head, which Cæsar wore when he wanted to greet his friends with a clasp of the hand. The lion bit the hand thus favoured, and at the end of twenty-four hours, the bite was mortal.

Cæsar proposed to his father, that they should either ask the cardinals to open the cupboard, or shake hands with them; but Alexander VI. replied: "Now as to the worthy cardinals, Spada and Rospigliosi, let us ask both of them to dinner, something tells me that we shall get that money back. Besides, you forget, Cæsar, an indigestion declares itself immediately, while a prick or a bite occasions a delay of a day or two." Cæsar gave way before such cogent reasoning, and the cardinals were consequently invited to dinner.

The table was laid in a vineyard belonging to the pope, near San Pierdarena, a charming retreat which the cardinals knew very well by report. Rospigliosi,

quite set up with his new dignities, went with a good appetite and his most ingratiating manner. Spada, a prudent man, and greatly attached to his only nephew, a young captain of the highest promise, took paper and pen, and made his will. He then sent word to his nephew to wait for him near the vineyard; but it appeared the servant did not find him.

Spada knew what these invitations meant; since Christianity, so eminently civilizing, had made progress in Rome, it was no longer a centurion who came from the tyrant with a message, "Cæsar wills that you die." but it was a legate *à latere*, who came with a smile on his lips to say from the pope, "His holiness requests you to dine with him."

Spada set out about two o'clock to San Pierdarena. The pope awaited him. The first sight that attracted the eyes of Spada was that of his nephew, in full costume, and Cæsar Borgia paying him most marked attentions. Spada turned pale, as Cæsar looked at him with an ironical air, which proved that he had anticipated all, and that the snare was well spread.

They began dinner and Spada was only able to inquire of his nephew if he had received his message. The nephew replied no; perfectly comprehending the meaning of the question. It was too late, for he had already drunk a glass of excellent wine, placed for him expressly by the pope's butler. Spada at the same moment saw another bottle approach him, which he was pressed to taste. An hour afterwards a physician declared they were both poisoned through eating mushrooms. Spada died on the threshold of the vineyard; the nephew expired at his own door, making signs which his wife could not comprehend.

Then Cæsar and the pope hastened to lay hands on the heritage, under pretense of seeking for the papers of the dead man. But the inheritance consisted in this only, a scrap of paper on which Spada had written:—"I bequeath to my beloved nephew my coffers, my books, and, amongst others, my breviary with the gold corners, which I beg he will preserve in remembrance of his affectionate uncle."

The heirs sought everywhere, admired the breviary, laid hands on the furniture, and were greatly astonished that Spada, the rich man, was really the most miserable of uncles—no treasures—unless they were those of science, contained in the library and laboratories. That was all. Cæsar and his father searched, examined, scrutinized, but found nothing, or at least very little; not exceeding a few thousand crowns in plate, and about the same in ready money;

well as that outward polish and politeness he had before been wanting in, and which is seldom possessed except by those who have been placed in constant intercourse with persons of high birth and breeding.

At the end of fifteen months the level was finished, and the excavation completed beneath the gallery, and the two workmen could distinctly hear the measured tread of the sentinel as he paced to and fro over their heads. Compelled, as they were, to await a night sufficiently dark to favour their flight, they were obliged to defer their final attempt till that auspicious moment should arrive; their greatest dread now was lest the stone through which the sentry was doomed to fall should give way before its right time, and this they had in some measure provided against by propping it up with a small beam which they had discovered in the walls through which they had worked their way. Dantès was occupied in arranging this piece of wood when he heard Faria, who had remained in Edmond's cell for the purpose of cutting a peg to secure their rope-ladder, call to him in a tone indicative of great suffering. Dantès hastened to his dungeon, where he found him standing in the middle of the room, pale as death, his forehead streaming with perspiration, and his hands clenched tightly together.

'Gracious heavens!' exclaimed Dantès, 'what is the matter? what has happened?'

'Quick! quick!' returned the abbé, 'listen to what I have to say.'

Dantès looked in fear and wonder at the livid countenance of Faria, whose eyes, already dull and sunken, were surrounded by purple circles, while his lips were white as those of a corpse, and his very hair seemed to stand on end.

'Tell me, I beseech you, what ails you?' cried Dantès, letting his chisel fall to the floor.

'Alas,' faltered out the abbé, 'all is over with me. I am seized with a terrible, perhaps mortal illness; I can feel that the paroxysm is fast approaching. I had a similar attack the year previous to my imprisonment. This malady admits but of one remedy; I will tell you what that is. Go into my cell as quickly as you can; draw out one of the feet that support the bed; you will find it has been hollowed out for the purpose of containing a small phial you will see there half-filled with a red-looking fluid. Bring it to me—or rather—no, no!—I may be found here, therefore help me back to my room while I have the strength

'Tut, tut!' answered the abbé, 'man is but man after all, and you are about the best specimen of the genus I have ever known. Come, let me show you my plan.'

The abbé then showed Dantès the sketch he had made for their escape. It consisted of a plan of his own cell and that of Dantès, with the passage which united them. In this passage he proposed to drive a level as they do in mines; this level would bring the two prisoners immediately beneath the gallery where the sentry kept watch; once there, a large excavation would be made, and one of the flag-stones with which the gallery was paved be so completely loosened that at the desired moment it would give way beneath the feet of the soldier, who, stunned by his fall, would be immediately bound and gagged by Dantès before he had power to offer any resistance. The prisoners were then to make their way through one of the gallery windows, and to let themselves down from the outer walls by means of the abbé's ladder of cords.

Dantès' eyes sparkled with joy, and he rubbed his hands with delight at the idea of a plan so simple, yet apparently so certain to succeed. That very day the miners began their labors, with a vigour and alacrity proportionate to their long rest from fatigue and their hopes of ultimate success. Nothing interrupted the progress of the work except the necessity that each was under of returning to his cell in anticipation of the turnkey's visits. They had learned to distinguish the almost imperceptible sound of his footsteps as he descended towards their dungeons, and happily, never failed of being prepared for his coming. The fresh earth excavated during their present work, and which would have entirely blocked up the old passage, was thrown, by degrees and with the utmost precaution, out of the window in either Faria's or Dantès' cell, the rubbish being first pulverized so finely that the night wind carried it far away without permitting the smallest trace to remain.

More than a year had been consumed in this undertaking, the only tools for which had been a chisel, a knife, and a wooden lever; Faria still continuing to instruct Dantès by conversing with him, sometimes in one language, sometimes in another; at others, relating to him the history of nations and great men who from time to time have risen to fame and trodden the path of glory. The abbé was a man of the world, and had, moreover, mixed in the first society of the day; he wore an air of melancholy dignity which Dantès, thanks to the imitative powers bestowed on him by nature, easily acquired, as

but the nephew had time to say to his wife before he expired: "Look well among my uncle's papers; there is a will."

They sought even more thoroughly than the august heirs had done, but it was fruitless. There were two palaces and a vineyard behind the Palatine Hill; but in these days landed property had not much value, and the two palaces and the vineyard remained to the family since they were beneath the rapacity of the pope and his son. Months and years rolled on. Alexander VI. died, poisoned,—you know by what mistake. Cæsar, poisoned at the same time, escaped by shedding his skin like a snake; but the new skin was spotted by the poison till it looked like a tiger's. Then, compelled to quit Rome, he went and got himself obscurely killed in a night skirmish, scarcely noticed in history.

After the pope's death and his son's exile, it was supposed that the Spada family would resume the splendid position they had held before the cardinal's time; but this was not the case. The Spadas remained in doubtful ease, a mystery hung over this dark affair, and the public rumour was, that Cæsar, a better politician than his father, had carried off from the pope the fortune of the two cardinals. I say the two, because Cardinal Rospigliosi, who had not taken any precaution, was completely despoiled.'

'Up to this point,' said Faria, interrupting the thread of his narrative, 'this seems to you very meaningless, no doubt, eh?'

'Oh, my friend,' cried Dantès, 'on the contrary, it seems as if I were reading a most interesting narrative; go on, I beg of you.'

'I will. The family began to get accustomed to their obscurity. Years rolled on, and amongst the descendants some were soldiers, others diplomatists; some churchmen, some bankers; some grew rich, and some were ruined. I come now to the last of the family, whose secretary I was—the Count of Spada. I had often heard him complain of the disproportion of his rank with his fortune; and I advised him to invest all he had in an annuity. He did so, and thus doubled his income. The celebrated breviary remained in the family, and was in the count's possession. It had been handed down from father to son; for the singular clause of the only will that had been found, had caused it to be regarded as a genuine relic, preserved in the family with superstitious veneration. It was an illuminated book, with beautiful Gothic characters, and so weighty with gold, that a servant always carried it before the cardinal on days of great solemnity.

At the sight of papers of all sorts,—titles, contracts, parchments, which were kept in the archives of the family, all descending from the poisoned cardinal, I in my turn examined the immense bundles of documents, like twenty servitors, stewards, secretaries before me; but in spite of the most exhaustive researches, I found—nothing. Yet I had read, I had even written a precise history of the Borgia family, for the sole purpose of assuring myself whether any increase of fortune had occurred to them on the death of the Cardinal Cæsar Spada; but could only trace the acquisition of the property of the Cardinal Rospigliosi, his companion in misfortune.

I was then almost assured that the inheritance had neither profited the Borgias nor the family, but had remained unpossessed like the treasures of the Arabian Nights, which slept in the bosom of the earth under the eyes of the genie. I searched, ransacked, counted, calculated a thousand and a thousand times the income and expenditure of the family for three hundred years. It was useless. I remained in my ignorance, and the Count of Spada in his poverty.

My patron died. He had reserved from his annuity his family papers, his library, composed of five thousand volumes, and his famous breviary. All these he bequeathed to me, with a thousand Roman crowns, which he had in ready money, on condition that I would have anniversary masses said for the repose of his soul, and that I would draw up a genealogical tree and history of his house. All this I did scrupulously. Be easy, my dear Edmond, we are near the conclusion.

In 1807, a month before I was arrested, and a fortnight after the death of the Count of Spada, on the 25th of December (you will see presently how the date became fixed in my memory), I was reading, for the thousandth time, the papers I was arranging, for the palace was sold to a stranger, and I was going to leave Rome and settle at Florence, intending to take with me twelve thousand francs I possessed, my library, and the famous breviary, when, tired with my constant labour at the same thing, and overcome by a heavy dinner I had eaten, my head dropped on my hands, and I fell asleep about three o'clock in the afternoon.

I awoke as the clock was striking six. I raised my head; I was in utter darkness. I rang for a light, but, as no one came, I determined to find one for myself. It was indeed but anticipating the simple manners which I should soon be under the necessity of adopting. I took a wax-candle in one hand, and with

'There shall not be one a minute longer than you please,' said Dantès, who had followed the working of his thoughts as accurately as though his brain were enclosed in crystal so clear as to display its minutest operations.

'I have already told you,' answered the abbé, 'that I loathe the idea of shedding blood.'

'And yet the murder, if you choose to call it so, would be simply a measure of self-preservation.'

'No matter! I could never agree to it.'

'Still, you have thought of it?'

'Incessantly, alas!' cried the abbé.

'And you have discovered a means of regaining our freedom, have you not?' asked Dantès eagerly.

'I have; if it were only possible to place a deaf and blind sentinel in the gallery beyond us.'

'He shall be both blind and deaf,' replied the young man, with an air of determination that made his companion shudder.

'No, no,' cried the abbé; 'impossible!'

Dantès endeavoured to renew the subject; the abbé shook his head in token of disapproval, and refused to make any further response. Three months passed away.

'Are you strong?' the abbé asked one day of Dantès. The young man, in reply, took up the chisel, bent it into the form of a horseshoe, and then as readily straightened it.

'And will you engage not to do any harm to the sentry, except as a last resort?'

'I promise on my honour.'

'Then,' said the abbé, 'we may hope to put our design into execution.'

'And how long shall we be in accomplishing the necessary work?'

'At least a year.'

'And shall we begin at once?'

'At once.'

'We have lost a year to no purpose!' cried Dantès.

'Do you consider the last twelve months to have been wasted?' asked the abbé.

'Forgive me!' cried Edmond, blushing deeply.