

"I knew it!" exclaimed Duguesclin enthusiastically.

Bevan began to dislike this conversation exceedingly. Did this man—this criminal—know who he was? He knew he was a J. P., that his mother was alive, and now his Masonic dignities. He distrusted this Frenchman more and more. Was the story but a pretext for the demand of a loan? The stranger looked prosperous, and had a first-class ticket. More likely a black-mailer: perhaps he knew of other things—say that affair at Oxford—or the incident of the Edgware Road—or the matter of Esmé Holland. He determined to be more than ever on his guard.

"You will understand with what joy," continued Duguesclin, innocent or careless of the sinister thoughts which occupied his companion, "I received and answered this unmistakable token of friendship. That day no further opportunity of intercourse occurred, but I narrowly watched him on the morrow, and saw that he was dragging his feet in an irregular way. Ha! thought I, a drag for long, an ordinary pace for short. I imitated him eagerly, giving the Morse letter A. His alert mind grasped instantly my meaning; he altered his code (which had been of a different order), and replied with a Morse B on my own system. I answered C; he replied D. From that moment we could talk fluently and freely as if we were on the terrace of the Café de la Paix in our beloved Paris. However, conversation in such circumstances is a lengthy affair. During the whole march to our work he only managed to say, 'Escape soon—please God.' Before his crime he had been an atheist. I was indeed glad to find that punishment had brought repentance."

Bevan himself was relieved. He had carefully refrained from admitting the existence of a French Freemason; that one should have repented filled him with a sense of almost personal triumph. He began to like Duguesclin and to believe in him. His wrong

had been hideous; if his vengeance seemed excessive and even indiscriminate, was not he a Frenchman? Frenchmen do these things! And after all Frenchmen were men. Bevan felt a great glow of benevolence; he remembered not only that he was a man, but a Christian. He determined to set the stranger at his ease.

"Your story interests me intensely," said he. "I sympathise deeply with you in your wrongs and in your sufferings. I am heartily thankful that you have escaped, and I beg you to proceed with the narration of your adventures."

Duguesclin needed no such encouragement. His attitude, from that of the listless weariness with which he had descended from the train, had become animated, sparkling, fiery; he was carried away by the excitement of his passionate memories.

"On the second day Dodu was able to explain his mind. 'If we escape, it must be by stratagem,' he signalled. It was an obvious remark; but Dodu had no reason to think highly of my intelligence. 'By stratagem,' he repeated with emphasis.

"'I have a plan,' he continued. 'It will take twenty-three days to communicate, if we are not interrupted; between three and four months to prepare; two hours and eight minutes to execute. It is theoretically possible to escape by air, water, or by earth. But as we are watched day and night, it would be useless to try and drive a tunnel to the mainland; we have no aeroplanes or balloons, or means of making them. But if we could once reach the water's edge, which we must do in whatever direction we set out if we only keep in a straight line, and if we can find a boat unguarded, and if we can avoid arousing the alarm, then we have merely to cross the sea, and either find a land where we are unknown, or disguise ourselves and our boat and return to Devil's Island as shipwrecked mariners. The latter idea would be foolish. You will say that the Governor would know that Dodu would not be such a fool; but more, he would know