

XVI: Remy d'Arx's Notebook

Lecoq took the notebook and read:

"Report to His Excellency Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux.

"Monsieur le Ministre,

"Your Excellency will hopefully excuse me if I take the liberty of submitting to him a work as yet incomplete; there is some urgency. The case pending before the Court of Assizes of the Seine, which the voice of the public is already designating by the title of the Habits Noirs, appears to me to be leading public opinion astray—and, which is much more serious, justice also.

"I have abandoned the investigation of the case entrusted to me, which is no more than a shadow, in order to attach myself to the reality.

"The facts that I shall have the honor of bringing to the acquaintance of the Minister, the Chief Magistrate of France, are important, and I venture to claim his whole attention. They concern the Habits Noirs—not those who are presently in the hands of the law, but the true Habits Noirs, which is to say, in my judgment, the most dangerous association of malefactors that has ever existed.

"Your Excellency does not move in the circles where this appellation is already popular, and the administration, which is in a position to lift the veil, seems to be carried away by the idea that it is an urban legend, a story to frighten people, like many fabricated in the lower depths of Parisian society. The Prefect of Police, to whom I addressed myself first of all, has certainly not transgressed the rules of courtesy with regard to me, but he has given me no help at all, and I believe that he takes me for a dreamer.

"The reason for this error is simple, and I shall establish it straight away, in order that Your Excellency will not fall into the same trap. So far as the Courts are concerned, the Habits Noirs do not exist; they have never been brought before them; the very basis of their organization shelters them from the blade of the law. This is precisely what seems improbable, and what I shall explain clearly in the course of the present work.

"Just once, to my knowledge, I have been able to obtain a little more information regarding the matter that has occupied me night and day since I came of age. On one occasion, the secret of the brotherhood was placed at serious risk because three of its members were brought before a tribunal; I am alluding to the case of Quattrocavalli and associates, which cost the life of my father.

"I place here a brief summary of its history.

"On August 30, 1816, Monsieur Mathieu d'Arx was appointed Chief Prosecutor to the Royal Court of Ajaccio, Corsica. In October of the same year, he was the spokesman in an important case in which certain persons highly placed in the administrative division of Sartène were implicated.

"The Mayor of a major town in the canton was accused of complicity in a murder committed by the brothers Quattrocavalli, who were notorious for being part of the brotherhood of the Veste Nere..."

At this point, Lecoq interrupted himself to ask: "What's the significance of these marks in red pencil?"

"That means *pass*, my son," the Colonel replied. "It's the scientific aspect of the work. We all know our ancient history, and I've marked the paragraphs that you can skip over—otherwise we'd remain in session until tomorrow."

Remy d'Arx's report did indeed give explicit details of the Camorras of Southern Italy and of the origins of the first *Habits Noirs*. These details have been consigned to the foreword of our present narrative.

Lecoq turned over two or three pages, and continued: *"They were acquitted before the first Judges. On the appeal of the Public Minister, the case came before the Court of Ajaccio, where the brothers Quattrocavalli were acquitted for the second time, despite an assemblage of evidence that Your Excellency will doubtless find overwhelming. I hold these pieces at your disposal.*

"Throughout this affair, Monsieur Mathieu d'Arx found himself beset by difficulties of an inexplicable sort. Two young people from the town of Sartène, plainly innocent in his view, were thrown into the case to confuse the investigation, and the evidence fabricated against them testified to prodigious skill. The jury went full tilt along this false path, and opinion in the town was heavily prejudiced in the same manner. The effort of a secret but powerful influence was certain, which could not help but make a strong and durable impression on Monsieur d'Arx's mind.

"It cannot be said that he saw the implications of these strange and improbable details immediately, but once he had sensed the effect, he searched for the cause. I found incomplete notes among his papers which seemed to be the elements of a report analogous to the one that I have the honor of presenting today.

"The notes of which I speak, and which I still possess, are few and fragmentary; I was unable to do any more, in effect, than glean the remnants of the harvested crop. In the course of the catastrophe that put an end to his life, my father's desk was plundered, and the greater part of his papers destroyed. As for the report itself, I doubt that it ever reached the Garde des Sceaux of that era; at least, no trace of it remains in the official archives.

"From December 1816 to April 1820, three attempts were made to assassinate my father, and on June 22 of the same year, the ceiling of his office collapsed while he was seated at his desk. He asked for, and obtained, a transfer, not to flee from his destiny—for everyone in my family knew that my father was resigned to the violent death which would soon strike him down—but for the opposite reason: to pursue the war in which he was engaged more energetically and obstinately. He thought that, once he was away from Corsica, he would be able to move more freely and that he would not find the same obstacles raised between him and the central authority.

"While he was traveling from Marseilles to Toulouse, where he was to supervise the Court, a gunshot fired from behind a hedge in broad daylight smashed the door of his post-chaise. I was there, still very young, and so were my mother and my baby sister.

"I was sent to the Collège Royal de Toulouse. In the summer vacation of 1822, I found my father aged by 20 years. My mother, in tears, told me that following an official dinner at the Prefecture, my father had almost died, and that his health was ruined..."

The reading of the report was interrupted here by a little dry laugh, which emanated from the presidential armchair. The Colonel was twiddling his thumbs. He said, cheerfully: "I remember that dinner. I was there." Then he added: "Oh, that old Mathieu d'Arx had a very durable life!"¹

Lecoq continued: *"On July 14, 1823, at nine o'clock in the morning, someone came looking for me at the College. The servant that brought me home dared not tell me what frightful misfortune had overtaken the household. I found my mother sitting in the dining room; she looked at me but did not recognize me. She was mad. My father had been strangled in his bed while my little sister—who was then three and a half years old—was asleep beside it. The assassins had not seen the child at first. She had probably woken up during the perpetration of the crime and cried out. They had kidnapped her—or killed her.*

"I was the first person to go into my father's office. The bureau, the writing-desk and the pigeon-holes had all been ransacked; money had also been stolen, although the very modest savings of an austere Magistrate could not have been the objective of such a crime. My present fortune came to me a long time afterwards, from my mother's family.

"I have been very brief, Monsieur le Ministre, in relating the final episode of this sinister history, because the facts are known to you. It caused great consternation in the entire Magistrature, and many people claim that this great misfortune figured large in the benevolence that the administration has shown towards me.

"A poor man, a former family servant, was accused, convicted and condemned, and lost his head on the scaffold. I affirm on my honor that the poor man was innocent..."

"Come on!" Corona interrupted, rudely. "Were we really summoned here to hear this history, as old as the Deluge?"

"The fact is," the Comtesse de Clare added, "that it doesn't concern us at all."

The others seemed to share this opinion. The reading of the report, allegedly so terrible, left the audience indifferent to the point of somnolence.

The Colonel looked around, the glare of his feline eyes slightly caustic. "Have patience, my dears!" he said. "The adventure itself is unfamiliar to you, since no one now remains from those times, save for l'Amitié, who was my errand boy, and who has grown a great deal since. Everything passes, except me, and how I miss those good friends! Patience! The author of the present report has Corsican blood in his veins—from his mother, who was an Adriani. This is simply a *vendetta*. For myself, I don't find the report too badly-written—a little dry, perhaps—but it is necessary to provide a context for what will follow. I hope that will be able to please you better; we shall soon see. Go on, l'Amitié, you read like an angel!"

As Lecoq opened his mouth to obey, the Colonel stopped him. "One more word, my dears," he said, "to establish more clearly the relationship between ourselves and this fellow, Remy d'Arx—who is young and ardent, who takes the law into his hand like a soldier brandishing his sword, who has talent, is protected, and cannot be bought. We have killed his father and he knows it. His mother died insane. As for

his sister—that detail escapes me somewhat, but I suppose that she must be far away, if she has survived into the present day. He is, therefore, alone; we have taken everything he loved; don't be astonished if he is possessed by the Devil. I have spoken."

He made a sign to Lecoq, who immediately resumed reading.

"Monsieur le Ministre, I shall add nothing more to the story of that catastrophe. My adolescence was unhappy; I sought consolation in work. I completed my studies, did what was required of me and was admitted to the bar as an advocate in 1828.

"I spent my vacation that year on an estate that belonged to us, in the vicinity of Arcachon. It was there that I saw my mother for the last time. She had never recovered her reason, but in her madness, which was tranquil, she had occupied herself in gathering together all my father's remaining books and papers.

"I was suffering from chronic listlessness; the physicians had given up on me, and I was secretly glad to see the end of my life approaching. The hours of my solitude were passed in the library, where my mother had amassed her pious treasure. I remember looking out through the windows at the distant ocean, over a forest of young fir-trees that had been planted to purify the lagoon.

"The choice of a career was a matter of indifference to me—in fact, I did not want a career. I read a few law-books now and again, especially those dealing with criminal matters, and above all—Your Excellency will understand this instinct—passages touching on judicial errors. The collection assembled by my mother was rich in that genre, because Mathieu d'Arx, for motives analogous to mine, had been subject to the same attraction.

"One evening, when I was perusing a set of memoirs relating to the revision of the Lesurques case,ⁱⁱ I came to a famous consultation signed by Berryer père, Professor Toullier, Pardessus and Dupin l'aîné.ⁱⁱⁱ On the page that contained the nomenclature and the strange heap of evidence accumulated by chance against the alleged assassin of the Lyon courier, I suddenly stopped following the text, because a few lines written in the margin in my father's hand attracted my attention violently.

"The note was conceived thus: 'Apart from the entirely fortuitous fact of the resemblance between the innocent man and the guilty one, there is a combination of circumstances that led the Judge astray. I see in this case the point of departure of the system invented by the Veste Nere. What is here the work of chance alone was reproduced strategically and cleverly in the Quattrocavalli case. The Habits Noirs have obviously found the means of creating judiciary error, but someone has now discovered their secret, and God is watching...'"

Lecoq's voice slowed as he read this passage.

"That's warmed you up," said the Colonel. "Our Marguerite has opened her lovely eyes."

"God wasn't watching very attentively," replied the Comtesse de Clare, "since the man is dead."

"He has an heir. Let's get on, Toulonnais—proceed, my son."

"The doctors," Remy d'Arx's memoir continued, "were doubtless right to give up on me, for they could not foresee the extraordinary reaction produced in me by reading these lines. It seemed to me that a blindfold fell from my eyes, and it is no exaggeration to say that new blood was transfused into my veins. I had a goal. I wanted to live. I lived!

"The Sun rose the following morning to find me leafing through my father's favorite books. His correspondence, his notes and his manuscripts had been completely destroyed, but the volumes in his library had been left untouched. I spent three days and three nights engaged in a task that was thankless, but feverish. I probably did not recover more than two pages worth, but that was enough. I had my father's heritage, and the idea that had brooded within me in a latent state was fully formulated. I wanted not only to avenge my father, but to pursue, track down and obliterate the monstrous brotherhood which, making crime into an exact science, and multiplying it thereby, systematically created judicial error and obtained impunity from the law by maintaining a storehouse of innocent blood, ever-ready to pay for the blood of its victims."

The Colonel shook his head, tickled the portrait of the Emperor of Russia on his gilded box, and murmured: "There's a masterly sentence! The fellow has the will and the capacity. I've collaborated slightly, without appearing to do so. Go on, l'Amitié."

"After ten years of uninterrupted work, I cannot yet tell Your Excellency that I have arrived at a definitive result as regards persons, but as regards things, I declare that I know the secret of the Habits Noirs as well as the Habits Noirs themselves.

"I have been to look for them at their point of departure, in Corsica; I have followed their trail in various European countries, and I have arrived at the certainty that their greatest safeguard is the very

improbability of their Machiavellian scheme. No one wants to believe in such an excess of perversity, and they are able to extend the circle of their hideous industry ceaselessly, sheltered as they are behind the very incredulity of intelligent and powerful men.

“For them, the conception of every crime is twofold: for every Lyon courier who is robbed and killed, there is a Lesurques to pay the debt to the scaffold. Just as Dubose is struck down, in perfect security—for the means of escape is prepared—Lesurques arrives on the crime scene, and is doomed. He has to go there; he cannot do otherwise. A mysterious thread leads him there, and ten witnesses—I mean honest witnesses—will come forward to affirm as required that he has left some business or pleasure in order to go to that accursed place. For the strength of the Habits Noirs is not only in themselves, and it is a veritably infernal genius that weaves the veil which covers them; their best accomplices are those who do not know them and who would be horrified by their sanguinary maneuvers.

“These accomplices for a day, an hour or a minute are my neighbor, my friend, myself, and—you will pardon me, Monsieur le Ministre—perhaps you, for they infiltrate everywhere, high and low, and no one can say that he has never been touched by the hand of one or other of them...”

The Colonel experienced a small explosion of gaiety. “Excuse me, my loves,” he said. “That made me laugh, because I had just been dining at the Minister’s house when I first read that passage.”

“Lesurques is thus delivered to his post,” continued the report. “I say Lesurques in order to characterize the unfortunate who is thrown to the vindictive public as prey. Lesurques does not know what sort of ground he is walking on; he has no inkling of the trap laid out before him. He is in the place where he must be, and that is sufficient to condemn him.

“Others arrive, he is searched; unknown to himself, he has upon him a few compromising papers; the smoking gun or the bloody knife is still at his feet. The evening before, he has done something insignificant that suddenly turns to his disadvantage; he has complained about someone in a moment of bad temper, murmured a few threats, or—better still—has manifested a need for money, an anxiety regarding a bill.

“All this is accumulated and compounded; it surrounds him and presses upon him; likelihood emerges, grows, changes into certainty. He senses that he is lost; he is so completely disguised as the guilty party that he says to himself, in his terrified consciousness: ‘If I were the magistrate, if I had to pass judgment on a man in my situation, I would find him guilty!’

“This is what they call, in their own parlance, the invisible weapon. It strikes as many times as the assassin’s weapon, blow for blow; it wounds in a sure fashion. And, by means of a scheme that is the height of sacrilege, it is the law—always the law—that finishes off those who are wounded.

“But the invisible weapon can also kill on its own behalf, and replace other weapons that are blunted or insufficient. There are people who are well-armed: the invulnerable Achilles or Mithridates, immunized against poisons.^{iv} Against them, material means can do nothing; it is necessary to draw the invisible weapon, which can pass through mail of the hardest steel. The waters of the Styx themselves cannot deflect its blows, and Mithridates would search in vain for an antidote to the diabolical poison in which it has been dipped. That may be a word—or, more subtly still, a thought, a suspicion, a desire, a terror, perhaps even an affection. Those who deploy this terrible and inevitable weapon are numerous, they have gold, and the blind world becomes their accomplice...

“They are the ancient organizations of the Camorra, which renamed themselves vehmgerichte,^v and the secret societies of Lombardy. Their grand master, or Père-à-Tous, is surrounded by a High Council whose members are called Masters, or Frères de la Merci. Below that general staff, there is a body of officers admitted to a certain degree of initiation; they are active and intelligent thieves, who may be summoned before the Council when circumstances require it. The Masters wear black veils on such occasions; except for the Père and the other members of the Council, no one ever sees their faces. Lower still, there are the soldiers, or simpletons, who obey like machines, receiving the wages of their sinister work and knowing no secrets.

“The central Lodge is in Paris, but it can move elsewhere; it was in London during the bold attempt to destroy the Bank of England’s reserves.^{vi} When a sensational theft has been committed, which makes it necessary to give public emotion time to calm down, the central Lodge disappears and goes into its winter quarters in Corsica. Perhaps it is in Corsica that I shall obtain the ultimate proof that will finally place the Habits Noirs in the hands of the law.

“The central Lodge, for the present—or, at least, according to my most recent information—is composed of the Père and six Masters. I do not know their names; the affiliates whom I have bought, or from whom I have obtained revelations, are not Masters and have only seen the Masters veiled. On the

other hand, the senior employees of the Police, while never losing the respect due to my robe, are obstinate in their skepticism and only render me illusory aid.

“Even though I have been unable to obtain the names or descriptions of the principal Habits Noirs, however, information regarding their persons is not entirely lacking, and I know at least a little about them.

“The Père is a man of very advanced years, exceedingly rich, insinuated into the high society of the Court as well as the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The brotherhood surrounds him with a superstitious respect. His skill partakes of sorcery; one could fill a thick volume with the interminable series of crimes that he has ordered or committed, all the while maintaining outwardly a reputation of unimpeachable honesty, almost of sanctity...”

“My description is rather flattering, as you see, my children,” the Colonel said, sanctimoniously. “Don’t be too surprised; I’ve retouched it slightly, and I hope that yours will be equally satisfactory to you. I’ve no further need to implore you to listen now, thank God—you’re all ears!”

“A man whose twilight years are crowned with public veneration,” the report went on, “an old friend of my father’s, who owns immense properties in Corsica, in a region where the Habits Noirs have certainly been, and where their refuge is probably located, Colonel Bozzo-Corona, has been kind enough to consult his memory and communicate a certain number of legends to me. The leader of the Habits Noirs is none other than the most celebrated of Italian bandits, grown old. Far from becoming a hermit, the Calabrian Devil has, to the contrary, increased the scope of his misdeeds and abandoned the musket he now finds too heavy in order to take up the infernal weapon of which I spoke just now.

“Next to him is a rogue of a secondary species, but especially dangerous, a escaped convict, former domestic servant and former commercial traveler, presently a Parisian businessman...”

Lecoq interrupted himself and asked, brusquely: “Have you also collaborated in my advertisement, Papa?”

“No,” the Colonel replied. “I left your description, and those of our dear friends, as they were. In the game of hide-and-seek that he is playing against us, Remy d’Arx is very close to victory: he’s on fire, and I wanted you to see that for yourselves.”

Lecoq continued reading. He was pale and his brow was furrowed.

“I am almost inclined to believe that this wretch is connected with the Police in some capacity; I have not offered my opinion on certain adulterous alliances, but the administration’s refusal to co-operate must have a cause, and I have sometimes had occasion to search for it. I fear that I have found it. I am hopeful too, for if I have guessed correctly, I shall have unmasked that man within a week...”

After having read this last line, Lecoq put the manuscript down on the table and looked the Colonel in the face. “Papa,” he murmured, “for myself, I don’t need to see any more. The others may read, if they wish, that which concerns them, but I’m satisfied and I await your explanation.”

The Colonel gave him a slight nod of the head, smiling the while, and picked up the manuscript in his turn.

“Once,” he said, “I could have read you a drama in five acts without drawing breath—for I’ve played comedy in my time, and even sung tenor—but nowadays, I get tired so quickly! One cannot be and have been. Does l’Amitié’s description seem accurate to you, my treasures?”

The members of the High Council had changed their attitudes and their expressions; they were all attentive, and even Corona was listening with visible anxiety.

“This Remy d’Arx has seen through Lecoq,” the Comtesse said. “Evidently, he only has to put out his hand to seize him.”

“Well, dear,” replied the old man, “your description is even more complete than that of the worthy l’Amitié; it’s a veritable photograph. The Abbé is painted full-length; a gendarme would recognize him. The portrait of Corona speaks volumes, and as for the excellent Doctor Samuel, I’d advise him to send a colleague if Remy d’Arx asks for him, for his resemblance has been captured as accurately as faces on walls with Louis-Philippe’s whiskers and toupées. But the masterpiece is our eminent Professor of Law, who plies his tools for us in the five Codes and who first told us: ‘*One must know how to play the law as Paganini plays the violin; when one understands the technique, the law is an instrument that steals and assassinates.*’ ”

“And me?” said the Prince, whose voice was tremulous. “My damnable role is like a placard on my back; I’m the easiest of all to recognize.”

“And when Remy d’Arx took it into his head to entrust his manuscript to me,” the Colonel replied, “it was to your description that I turned first. You are fortunate, my son, as we both are; every evening for the

last two months, our handsome Examining Magistrate has seen us together at the Hôtel d'Ornans. The least suspicion falling on you would supply the key to all the rest, but the man who furnished him with this information is a little behind the times. In the description of our Louis XVII, there is but one word: 'Dead.' ”^{vii} He paused before continuing, in a cheerful humor that contrasted with the general mood: “Perhaps our good friends will be content to see for themselves. Pass the manuscript along, l'Amitié, so that everyone can read his own eulogy.”

The memoir went from hand to hand. An ominous silence reigned around the green baize.

The Colonel alone retained his air of contentment; he had dipped his pen into the ink and was drawing comic figures with little bodies and huge heads on the blank paper in front of him. When the memoir had made the tour of the circle, he put his pen down. “Well, my lovelies,” he said, with a tranquility so provocative that sparks of irritation lit up in several eyes, “I promised you an interesting session, and you can't accuse me of disappointing you. What do you think of all that?”

“We've been betrayed,” replied the Doctor of Law. “That's obvious.”

“This man,” added the Comtesse de Clare, “is now so close to us that he could reach us merely by putting out his hand.”

“So much the better, dear,” the Colonel said, in support, “that he has a long arm. The Prefecture of Police inconveniences him more than a little because it does not like people trespassing on its ground; it's like an Academy that refuses to admit anything that it has not invented—but the present memoir is precisely designed to make the Prefecture fall into step.” He took the manuscript and turned it over so as to reach the last page at a single step. “And here are the conclusions,” he went on. “They are logical, precise, and appear to me to be very difficult for the Minister to refute. Listen to this:

“...I therefore demand from Your Excellency the direct aid of the government. I need agents of the administration, but I also need, at the same time, complete liberty of action and absolute independence, above all in that which concerns the Prefecture of Police.

“I willingly put my entire professional future in the balance. If I have taken a false path, I am a fool and a madman, and I shall condemn myself to retreat. If, on the other hand, I have seen clearly, I ask for nothing, because I shall not have to do anything that is not the duty of a Magistrate.

“If Your Excellency will give me three things—a warrant to act, my choice of agents, and carte blanche with respect to the Prefecture—I will undertake to place the keys to the Habits Noirs in the hands of justice within a fortnight from today...”

“It's a matter for the chef!” cried Corona. “We're under threat of being drowned in a glass of water. Strike first, and everything will be settled.”

The Colonel riffled swiftly through the notebook. “Of course, of course,” he said. “That's the first thought that occurred to me. Our Examining Magistrate is neither Achilles nor Mithridates; but there is a little passage that answers that point... With your permission? I'm genuinely afraid of abusing your kindness—this will be my last citation.”

He read: *“The Habits Noirs know me; they surround me; I know that, and above all, I feel it. It is of my own free will that I play with fire in this manner. The man who has given me the most reliable information is a murderer, the executor of important tasks, the sworn assassin of the High Council of the Habits Noirs...”*

There was a murmur of stunned surprise, and the name of Coyatier came to the tip of every tongue.

The Colonel winked maliciously. “Someone so trusted!” he murmured. “My God, yes, the dullest brute that I every encountered in my life, the chef, has had an idea—perhaps two: the idea of reforming and that of making his fortune; for this diabolical Remy d'Arx strews silver around as if he had the mines of Peru in his pocket. But let me finish.

“...From one day to the next I might be subject to my father's fate—but in my case, they will not have everything. I have taken my precautions; my work will survive me. The present memoir is, in fact, one of three copies, which are deposited in three different and equally safe hands. In the event of my suffering any misfortune, my three trustees have promised not to allow my enterprise to die, and their first act will be to take this text—to which my death will have given a solemn gravity—first to you, Monsieur le Ministre, secondly to the Duc d'Orléans, the heir to the Crown, and thirdly to the King himself...”

The Colonel closed the notebook, put it back on the table and said, as he drew the lapels of his quilted dressing-gown over his chilly breast: “You see, my darlings, that it's as simple as a hello. A little child could understand it. Killing the dear boy in the present circumstances would be lighting the fuse of a barrel of gunpowder.”

He fell silent.

All the members of the Council had lowered their heads. Lecoq, who seemed the least anxious, said: "Come on, Papa, one is never lost when one has a master like you. We shall not despair; be our Providence, as usual. You must be keeping something good in your bag of tricks."

"A poor bag, and poor tricks!" replied the old man, with exaggerated modesty. "I'm rather counting on you, my children. You're in the prime of life, you have the talent, the boldness, all that is need for battle, while I'm in decline... You have certainly made me aware of it, sometimes... And I have no need of your warnings to see that my role in this world is played out."

"Everyone stand to attention!" Lecoq ordered, in the tone of a drill sergeant. "On guard! Two steps forward! Knees on the ground! We are in the presence of our God, and we must worship him!"

"Are you mocking me, Lecoq?" asked the old man, looking at him so sharply and severely that Lecoq's eyes lowered.

"No, I swear!" he stammered. "Look—you're surrounded by joined hands."

"You're right, Père," the Comtesse de Clare added, humbly. "Our heads are here, tottering on the brink of an abyss; you alone are capable of saving us. Please, save us!"

Colonel Bozzo stood up straight. His skull, polished like an ivory figurine, immediately loomed over all their bowed heads.

"Ah!" he said, his voice recovering its sonorous vibrations. "You still have need of me, and of the noose that I have in my pocket? It seems that there's still life in the little gentleman. The moment fire threatens the house, you return to me—always to me, because I will always be the strongest, until the very hour when I breathe my last. You do well; you will do better never forget who I am, and who you are. I no longer remember the names of those who were sitting in your places ten years ago; the Council has renewed itself around me 20 times over. The others die, *but I live!* I am the soul and you are the body. You know nothing, and I know everything. You had the smile of incredulous ignorance on your lips while you listened to the page that spoke of the *invisible weapon* and of invulnerable men—but we are in the presence of a man whom neither steel nor poison can attack. Against him, we must use the *invisible weapon*. Where is it? Which of you knows? Who among you knows how to sharpen and wield it?"

"There is no one but you, Père," replied the Comtesse, with conviction.

The others added: "Master, there is no one but you."

The old man seemed to savor his triumph momentarily; then the fire in his eyes was extinguished and his heavy eyelids fell like a veil. "My friends," he went on, resuming his benign tone, "you shall soon know as much as I do. So few days remain to me! This is my final affair. There is no family as closely united as ours; you are my children, my beloved heirs—do you think that I have waited for your prayer before defending you? No, I have watched over you and your fortune. Your enemy's aegis is formed by the three copies of his denunciation. I have one of them, and I shall have the others; until then, have no fear. The *invisible weapon* has been drawn from its scabbard; it has already touched Remy d'Arx's breast. He shall live, since his premature death would kill you, but he shall live in chains. I have garroted his heart!"

ⁱ I have translated Féval's *vie bien dure* in a calculatedly clumsy fashion as "a very durable life," attempting to preserve something of the double meaning by which the French *dure* means both "hard" and "long-lasting."

ⁱⁱ See Note 12, referring to Féval's foreword.

ⁱⁱⁱ Berryer père was Nicolas Berryer (1757-1841); his more famous son, Antoine, would have been at the height of his fame—as a Legitimist adversary of the Second Empire—when *The Invisible Weapon* was serialized, so the surname would have been familiar to Féval's readers. Charles-Bonaventure Toullier (1752-1835) and Jean-Marie Pardessus (1772-1853) would have been less well-known outside legal circles, but André Dupin (1783-1865)—who was usually known as *l'aîné* (the elder) to distinguish him from his brother Charles—was a famous Magistrate and political activist until Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* put an end to his career.

^{iv} Mithridates the Great (120-163) was the sixth of a long series of Kings of Pontus bearing that name. Legend alleges that he ascended the throne at an early age, and found himself constantly under threat from his various "protectors." In order to protect himself from insidious attacks, he acquired an encyclopedic knowledge of poisons and their antidotes; in more exaggerated versions of the story, he immunized himself against many toxins by taking small doses to build up his body's tolerance.

^v Féval has *Sainte Vehme* (Holy Vehm), but I have substituted the more familiar term for the German secret tribunals that were supposedly suppressed in the Napoleonic era.

^{vi} This refers to the events of *Les mystères de Londres*.

^{vii} There is an apparent continuity error here. Although the main events of the second part of *The Black Coats: 'Salem Street* precede those of *The Invisible Weapon*, the final occurrences of the earlier novel take place at a slightly later date—especially the sequence in which the earlier novel's Pretender is summarily dispatched by the marchef. It is conceivable that Remy d'Arx is referring to another impostor—Féval has mentioned that the *Habits Noirs* have several fake Louis XVIIIs at their disposal, but it is unclear how his most significant informant would be able to give such confident information regarding the demise of any of the others. Obviously, Féval was referring here to the ending of *'Salem Street*, and simply got his chronology mixed up by a few months.