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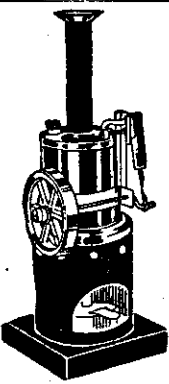
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Dumas With a Difference

AUTHORS, amateur historians, journalists and even radio script-writers have speculated many times about the identity of that mysterious historical figure *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Some say he was the son of Anne of Austria who (unknown to the world) had married Cardinal Mazarin. Others believe he was the son of the Duke of Buckingham. Alexandre Dumas came forward with the romantic notion that he was in reality the natural brother of Louis XIV of France (a theory originally advanced by Voltaire). Though the historical basis for this theory is rather shaky there is no denying its attractions as a source of romantic entertainment. It is the Dumas version of history which listeners encounter in a new serial being presented by the ZB stations.

The producer, George Edwards, decided that as radio entertainment *The Man in the Iron Mask* would be more effective if the mystery of the man were examined as a prelude to the story. The serial begins, therefore, in the 20th Century with a discussion of the theories which have been put forward through the centuries. The young couple who take part in this discussion make a pilgrimage to the island of Sainte-Marguerite, where the masked man was imprisoned for 20 years, and there they "find" records left by the Governor of the prison. It is from the reading of these records that the tale unfolds.

It opens in Gascogne where a prison governor is acting as guardian of one "Edmund Marchiali." There has been talk among the villagers of the comings and goings of many high personages in the guardian's estate, but the guardian himself, Georges Saint-Mars, has made it known that his ward is an orphan, and a relative.

When the young man turns 21 he falls in love with the daughter of a neighbouring farmer. Saint-Mars finds he



GEORGE EDWARDS
From Voltaire via Dumas

can no longer control the youth and so sends urgent messages to Cardinal Mazarin at the Court of Louis XIV. It is hinted at this stage that an injudicious marriage might split France in two, and the Cardinal commands Saint-Mars to use every resource to turn the boy from the peasant girl. All efforts fail and the Cardinal urges a drastic step. The girl must go to the Bastille secretly. Edmund is in despair.

The scene now shifts to Spain. The Cardinal is anxious to form an alliance and strives to bring about marriage between Louis XIV and Maria Theresa of Spain. A life-size painting, ostensibly of Louis, has been sent to the Infanta Maria Theresa, and she, examining it with her maid-in-waiting Franceta Carlos, decides that the king is young and handsome. Shortly afterwards, Franceta is caught in the act of trying to sell a Spanish political secret and flees the country, fearing life imprisonment.

Fate, of course, has stepped in. It so happens that Marchiali's guardian, Saint-Mars, is anxious to find a Spanish tutor for his ward. Franceta is interviewed and employed, but when she is introduced to Marchiali, she is amazed when he turns out to be the young man of the portrait which her mistress, Maria Theresa, had received. Surely, she feels, he must be Louis XIV of France. Discovering that the king is in Versailles, she concludes that Marchiali must be a close relation, and seeks to become his wife.

From then on the story runs through high intrigue, political upsets and dramatic events till it defeats history and ends happily.

The Man in the Iron Mask, extra-specially adapted by Eric Scott, is arranged in 52 episodes, each of approximately a quarter of an hour. It is running currently at 12B and 22B at 8.30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and will open at 32B on Tuesday, November 16, and at 42B on Tuesday, November 23.



ERIC SCOTT
Love laughs at history