

IV.

NOTICE OF AN IRON MASK. BY JAMES DRUMMOND, Esq., R.S.A.,
F.S.A., Scot. (PLATE XX.)

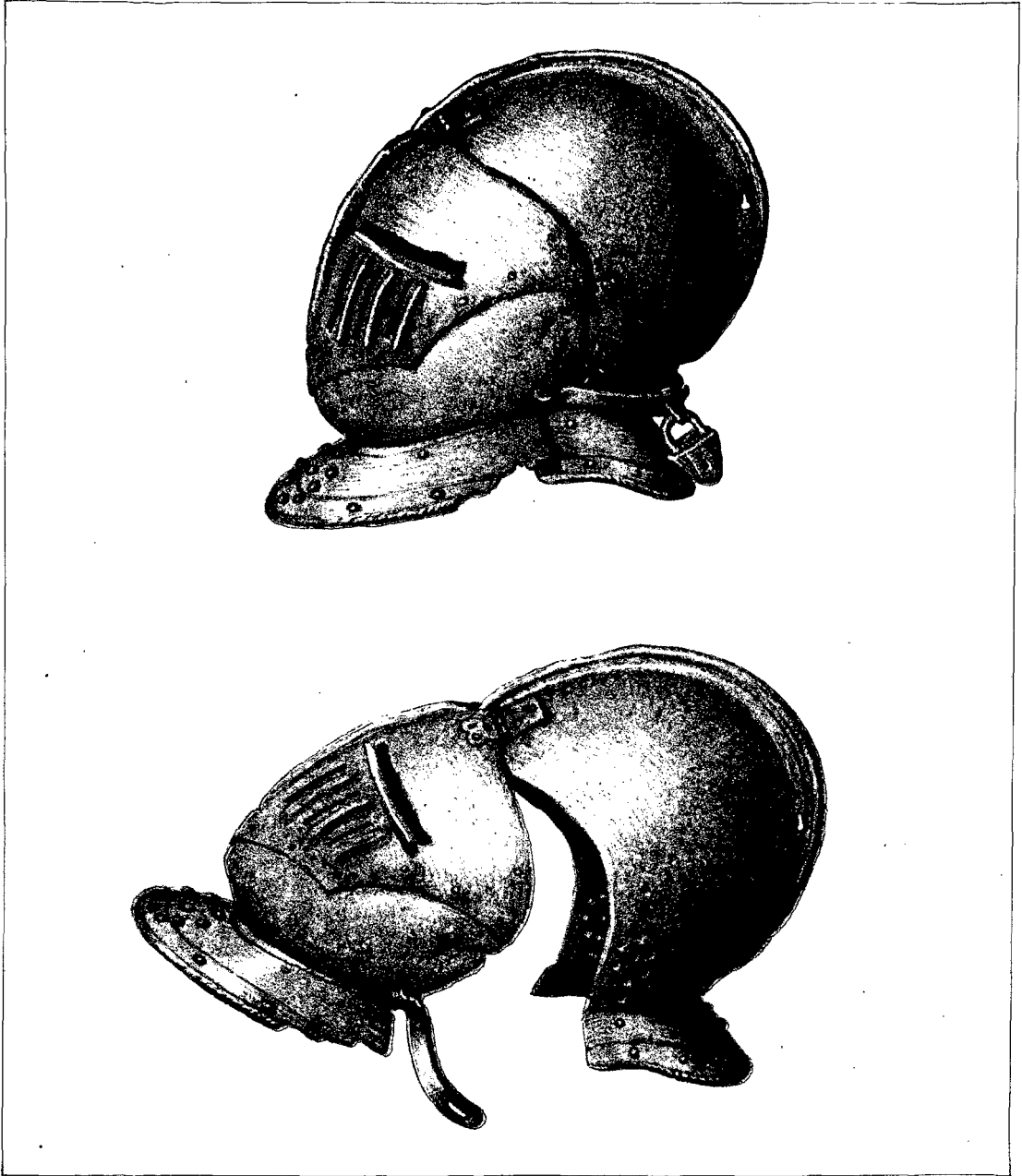
The mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask having lately been brought prominently before the public, it occurred to me that the exhibition at this meeting of an iron mask in my possession would interest the members of the Society. In doing so, however, it is not my intention to enter into any discussion as to who really was the victim known in history as the Man in the Iron Mask, further than to remark, that no better illustration could be given than this story of how far men will go in advocating a favourite idea, even in defiance of historical proof to the contrary.

Among the theories advanced, the most probable, at first sight, was that it was a twin-brother of Louis XIV., who was thus kept in life

duance, for state reasons ; unfortunately no reliable facts can be adduced that such a person ever existed. Then came the Count of Vermandois (a son of Louis XIV. and the Duchess de la Vallière), although it is well-authenticated that he died in the midst of a camp, after some days' illness, and was buried with great pomp in the cathedral church of Arras, in 1683. Even the beheading of the Duke of Monmouth on Tower Hill, in 1685, did not prevent his being brought forward. But there was one more extraordinary still, Henry Cromwell, the youngest son of the Lord Protector, who, after returning from the government of Ireland, settled quietly upon his estate at Spinney Abbey, where he died in 1674, being buried in Wicken Church, where a black marble tablet still marks his burial-place. Claims have even been set up for Mahommed IV., the Turkish Sultan who was deposed in 1687, as also for an Armenian patriarch. Fouquet, the finance minister of Louis XIV., having crossed his master in some of his projects, was, with that king's usual vindictiveness, accused of treason, sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, and thrown into the Bastille in 1661, from whence he was removed to the prison of Pignerol, where he died in 1680. So far this looks very like the real prisoner ; but the Man in the Iron Mask, whoever he was, lived till 1703, in which year he died in the Bastille. Present opinion is in favour of Count Matthioli, who had been secretary of state under Charles III., Duke of Mantua ; but who having entered into a secret treaty with Louis XIV., to deliver up Casale, and thus open the way for the admission of the French army into Italy, betrayed the secret to some of the Italian Courts. Louis finding himself deceived, had the Count secretly arrested in 1679. After this nothing is heard of Matthioli ; but evidence has been adduced, on apparently good authority, identifying him with the Man in the Iron Mask. To call what was used on the above occasion an "iron mask," is a misnomer, as it is well known to have been "of black velvet, stiffened with whalebone, and furnished about its lower part with steel springs, which permitted its wearer to breathe, eat, drink, and sleep without difficulty. It covered the whole of the face, and was fastened behind with a padlock"—in other words, it was simply used for concealment.

That which I now submit is, or rather has been a knight's helmet of the sixteenth century (see Plate XX.), the bevor and vizor of which (being in one piece) have been riveted to the under or chin part, the side

joints have also been unfastened, and the ends filed away, their place being supplied by two rude hinges at the brow, and thus forming a sort of rude box, which is held close by two strong hasps, which may be fixed by a padlock or chain; and if used, as I conjecture it must have been, would be an instrument of torture of the most barbarous nature, for the purpose of starving a man into confession or perhaps to death. A few small openings for breathing or seeing certainly; but for food, none. Once shut into it, farewell to the world; hope being shut out with the last click of the padlock, or the last rivet of the chain. A more horrible death could hardly be conceived. I acquired it at the dispersion of the collection of the late Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who very likely knew its history. It was put up as "a rusty old helmet." At first I thought it might have been part of a trophy hung over a knight's tomb in a church; but on examining it, saw that it had been converted by the means described into an iron mask.



LITH. W. & A. K. JOHNSTON.

IRON MASK, THE PROPERTY OF M^R DRUMMOND, R. S. A.