

**BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE  
"LOST MILLION". A CHAPTER  
OF THE SECRET HISTORY OF  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649751389

Beaumarchais and the "lost million". A chapter of the secret history of the American revolution  
by Charles J. Stillé

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**CHARLES J. STILLÉ**

**BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE  
"LOST MILLION". A CHAPTER  
OF THE SECRET HISTORY OF  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**



*Geo. Russell Young*

*From the author,*

1594

*Phila., Jan'y 10, 1897.*

# BEAUMARCHAIS

AND

"THE LOST MILLION."

---

A CHAPTER OF THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

---

BY  
CHARLES J. STILLÉ.

SUSANNE.

Quant à la politique ?

BÉGRARRS.

Ah ! c'est l'art de créer des faits, les évènements et les hommes ; l'intérêt est son but ; l'intrigue son moyen ; toujours sobre de vérités, ses vastes et riches conceptions sont un prisme qui éblouit ; aussi profonde que l'Etna, elle brûle et gronde longtemps avant d'éclater au-dehors, mais alors rien ne lui résiste ; elle exige de hauts talens ; le scrupule seul lui peut nuire ; c'est le secret des négociateurs.—

*La Mère Coupable :*  
Drame par Beaumarchais,  
Acte IV., Scène IV.



*BEAUMARCHAIS*

AND

*"THE LOST MILLION."*

I.

**T**HERE are few persons in modern times whose career has given rise to criticism of such an opposite character as that of Beaumarchais. He was, as all agree, a very considerable personage in France in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but how far he was a charlatan, and how far in his various enterprises he was a true and honest man, it is not easy to decide. He was the greatest dramatic author of his day, in the sense that he wrote a comedy (*Le Mariage de Figaro*) which did more to

open men's eyes to the monstrous evils of the government under which they lived than any other literary work of the time; he was, besides, a secret diplomatic agent employed by two Kings of France in negotiations of the utmost delicacy, which, in order that they might reach a successful issue, required that absolute confidence and trust should be placed in his secrecy and honor (a trust which, we ought to say, seems never to have been misplaced). He was the hero of many lawsuits, which, owing to their connection with the general politics of the time, and to the brilliant way he managed them, gave him a European reputation; yet he had been condemned by the *Parlement de Paris* to an infamous punishment for having produced in one of these lawsuits a receipt or discharge of a debt which that Court had pronounced suppositious, while by his keen satire of existing abuses he was thought by not a few, including the King, to be really undermining the foundations of the throne which he was professing to serve. To many he seems only a vain, ever active, unscrupulous intriguer, employing without hesitation lying and mystification whenever necessary to accomplish his object, which is assumed to have always been his self-advancement, and the gratification of an inordinate vanity for making himself talked of. By others, he is thought chiefly responsible for the success of two revolutions,—that of France, by holding up in the full light of day before the average Frenchman monstrous evils which had never before been so vividly portrayed, and that of America, by the energy which he exhibited in supplying us with arms and



clothing for an army of twenty-five thousand men, supplies which, we must admit, were essential to our military success against Great Britain. In France, in the highly feverish condition of things which existed just before the outbreak of the Revolution, he was undoubtedly one of the foremost leaders of public opinion, his denunciation of practical abuses, which every one recognized, reaching classes of the people wholly unaffected by the humanitarian doctrines of Diderot and Rousseau; and for his aid to America in the hour of her sorest need, whatever may have been his motive, or however questionable may have been some of his proceedings, we should never cease to be profoundly grateful. To his special power as a literary man in France at this time no one is a more competent witness than M. Taine, and he says, "It was necessary for the promoters of the Revolution to enforce the doctrine of the philosophers with brilliancy, with wit, and with a certain gayety of style and manner which would create public scandal. This Beaumarchais did in *Le Mariage de Figaro*. He exhibited a faithful picture of the *ancien régime* before the chiefs of the *ancien régime*. He used the stage as the place where a political and social satire would be most effective. He fixed publicly on each abuse a placard which told of its peculiar infamy. In short, he portrayed by a few bold touches a living picture, reproducing in the most telling way the complaints of the philosophers against the state prisons, against the censorship of the press, against the scandalous sale of public offices, against the privileges of birth and rank, against the arbitrary power

of the ministers, and against the incapacity of the men who then held office." (*L'Ancien Régime*, 360.)

To this man our forefathers were told in the early days of the Revolution to look for succor and safety. The more they heard about him the more completely did his position seem a mystery and riddle to them. To their sober and practical minds it was hard to conceive of him as a beneficent fairy who, unsolicited, was willing to send us millions of dollars' worth of the supplies we most needed to carry on the war, and who, as they were told by Arthur Lee, the earliest American commissioner in Europe, never suggested that he was to be paid for them, but merely hinted that it would be well for Congress to make him certain shipments of tobacco to conceal his transactions from the English. The Americans had no experience of merchants who carried on business in this way. It was not their interest, however, to inquire too closely into the source from which these supplies came, and they were inclined to settle down into the belief that Beaumarchais was a convenient *prête-nom* for the French government, which had so many reasons for encouraging us in our resistance, and so many more to conceal the aid it was giving us in our struggle with Great Britain. Whatever the Secret Committee or the Committee on Commerce of the old Congress may have thought or suspected, they did not, so long as the military supplies were provided in reasonable abundance, inquire with too much curiosity into their source. They accepted them with thankfulness, not doubting that they would discover in due time to whom they were indebted

for them. In the mean time they chose to regard them as gifts from the King of France. For more than two years and a half they were under this pleasant delusion. They were confirmed in the opinion expressed by Arthur Lee, by letters written by the American Commissioners in Paris, who told the Secret Committee in October, 1777, that they had been assured that these supplies were intended as *don gratuit*, or a voluntary gift, on the part of the French government. Of course, under these circumstances, they made no effort to pay for them. Beaumarchais, under the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., tired of waiting for remittances from this country, sent an agent here in the beginning of the year 1778, who, in a tone very different from the high-flown rhetoric of his master's letters, demanded full payment for all the supplies which had been sent. This demand dispelled all the dreams about *don gratuit* on the part of France. After ascertaining from the French government that Beaumarchais, under the name of Hortalez & Co., was really the man they had been dealing with, Congress, in January, 1779, made a partial settlement with his agent, and directed their President to write a letter of thanks and of apology to Beaumarchais for their delay in paying him. He received a large sum on account at that time, but a final settlement was delayed until further information from France reached them. While the liquidation was slowly going on, the French government, in 1781, entered into a treaty with our Commissioners in Paris, by which it agreed to loan to the United States a certain sum of money. In the preamble to