Table of Contents

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT

Wilkie Collins

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.−−I. MEMOIRS OF AN ADOPTED SON.

I.−−CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH PRECEDED HIS BIRTH.

TOWARD the beginning of the eighteenth century there stood on a rock in the sea, near a fishing village on the coast of Brittany, a ruined tower with a very bad reputation. No mortal was known to have inhabited it within the memory of living man. The one tenant whom Tradition associated with the occupation of the place at a remote period had moved into it from the infernal regions nobody knew why−−had lived in it nobody knew how long−−and had quitted possession nobody knew when. Under such circumstances, nothing was more natural than that his unearthly Individual should give a name to this residence; for which reason, the building was thereafter known to all the neighborhood round as Satanstower.

Early in the year seventeen hundred, the inhabitants of the village were startled one night by seeing the red gleam of a fire in the tower, and by smelling, in the same direction, a preternaturally strong odor of fried fish. The next morning the fishermen who passed by the building in their boats were amazed to find that a stranger had taken up his abode in it. Judging of him at a distance, he seemed to be a fine tall, stout fellow; he was dressed in fisherman's costume, and he had a new boat of his own, moored comfortably in a cleft of the rock. If he had inhabited a place of decent reputation, his neighbors would have immediately made his acquaintance; but, as things were, all they could venture to do was to watch him in silence.

The first day passed, and, though it was fine weather, he made no use of his boat. The second day followed, with a continuance of the fine weather, and still he was as idle as before. On the third day, when a violent storm kept all the boats of the village on the beach−−on the third day, in the midst of the tempest, away went the man of the tower to make his first fishing experiment in strange waters! He and his boat came back safe and sound, in a lull of the storm; and the villagers watching on the

cliff above saw him carrying the fish up, by great basketfuls, to his tower. No such haul had ever fallen to the lot of any one of them, and the stranger had taken it in a whole gale of wind.

Upon this the inhabitants of the village called a council. The lead in the debate was assumed by a smart young fellow, a fisherman named Poulailler, who stoutly declared that the stranger at the tower was of infernal origin. "The rest of you may call him what you like," said Poulailler; "I call him The Fiend−Fisherman!"

The opinion thus expressed proved to be the opinion of the entire audience−−with the one exception of the village priest. The priest said, "Gently, my sons. Don't make sure about the man of the tower before Sunday. Wait and see if he comes to church."

"And if he doesn't come to church?" asked all the fishermen, in a breath.

"In that case," replied the priest, "I will excommunicate him; and then, my children, you may call him what you like."

Sunday came, and no sign of the stranger darkened the church doors. He was excommunicated accordingly. The whole village forthwith adopted Poulailler's idea, and called the man of the tower by the name which Poulailler had given him−−"The Fiend−Fisherman."

These strong proceedings produced not the slightest apparent effect on the diabolical personage who had occasioned them. He persisted in remaining idle when the weather was fine, in going out to fish when no other boat in the place dare put to sea, and in coming back again to his solitary dwelling−place with his nets full, his boat uninjured, and himself alive and hearty. He made no attempts to buy and sell with anybody, he kept steadily away from the village, he lived on fish of his own preternaturally strong frying, and he never spoke to a living soul−−with the solitary exception of Poulailler himself. One fine evening, when the young man was rowing home past the tower, the Fiend−Fisherman darted out on to the rock, said, "Thank you, Poulailler, for giving me a name," bowed politely, and darted in again. The young fisherman felt the words run cold down the marrow of his back; and whenever he was at sea again, he gave the tower a wide berth from that day forth.

Time went on, and an important event occurred in Poulailler's life. He was engaged to be married. On the day when his betrothal was publicly made known, his friends clustered noisily about him on the fishing−jetty of the village to offer their congratulations. While they were all in full cry, a strange voice suddenly made itself heard through the confusion, which silenced everybody in an instant. The crowd fell back, and disclosed the Fiend−Fisherman, sauntering up the jetty. It was the first time he had ever set foot−−cloven foot−−within the precincts of the village.

"Gentlemen," said the Fiend−Fisherman, "where is my friend Poulailler?" He put the question with perfect politeness; he looked remarkably well in his fisherman's costume; he exhaled a relishing odor of fried fish; he had a cordial nod for the men, and a sweet smile for the women; but, with all these personal advantages, everybody fell back from him, and nobody answered his question. The coldness of the popular reception, however, did not in any way abash him. He looked about for Poulailler with searching eyes, discovered the place in which he was standing, and addressed him in the friendliest manner.

"So you are going to be married?" remarked the Fiend−Fisherman.

"What's that to you?" said Poulailler. He was inwardly terrified, but outwardly gruff−−not an uncommon combination of circumstances with men of his class in his mental situation.

"My friend," pursued the Fiend−Fisherman, "I have not forgotten your polite attention in giving me a name, and I come here to requite it. You will have a family, Poulailler, and your first child will be a boy. I propose to make that boy my adopted son."

The marrow of Poulailler's back became awfully cold; but he grew gruffer than ever, in spite of his back.

"You won't do anything of the sort," he replied. "If I have the largest family in France, no child of mine shall ever go near you."

"I shall adopt your first−born for all that," persisted the Fiend−Fisherman. "Poulailler, I wish you good−morning. Ladies and gentlemen, the same to all of you."

With those words, he withdrew from the jetty, and the marrow of Poulailler's back recovered its temperature.

The next morning was stormy, and all the village expected to see the boat from the tower put out, as usual, to sea. Not a sign of it appeared. Later in the day the rock on which the building stood was examined from a distance. Neither boat nor nets were in their customary places. At night the red gleam of the fire was missed for the first time. The Fiend−Fisherman had gone! He had announced his intentions on the jetty, and had disappeared. What did this mean? Nobody knew.

On Poulailler's wedding−day, a portentous circumstance recalled the memory of the diabolical stranger, and, as a matter of course, seriously discomposed the bridegroom's back. At the moment when the marriage ceremony was complete, a relishing odor of fried fish stole into the nostrils of the company, and a voice from invisible lips said, "Keep up your spirits, Poulailler; I have not forgotten my promise!"

A year later, Madame Poulailler was in the hands of the midwife of the district, and a repetition of the portentous circumstance took place. Poulailler was waiting in the kitchen to hear how matters ended upstairs. The nurse came in with a baby. "Which is it?" asked the happy father; "girl or boy?" Before the nurse could answer, an odor of supernaturally fried fish filled the kitchen, and a voice from invisible lips replied, "A boy, Poulailler, and I've got him!"

Such were the circumstances under which the subject of this Memoir was introduced to the joys and sorrows of mortal existence.

II.−−HIS BOYHOOD AND EARLY LIFE.

When a boy is born under auspices which lead his parents to suppose that, while the bodily part of him is safe at home, the spiritual part is subjected to a course of infernal tuition elsewhere, what are his father and mother to do with him? They must do the best they can−−which was exactly what Poulailler and his wife did with the hero of these pages.

In the first place, they had him christened instantly. It was observed with horror that his infant face was distorted with grimaces, and that his infant voice roared with a preternatural lustiness of tone the moment the priest touched him. The first thing he asked for, when he learned to speak, was "fried fish"; and the first place he wanted to go to, when he learned to walk, was the diabolical tower on the rock. "He won't learn anything," said the master, when he was old enough to go to school.

"Thrash him," said Poulailler; and the master thrashed him. "He won't come to his first communion," said the priest. "Thrash him," said Poulailler; and the priest thrashed him. The farmers' orchards were robbed; the neighboring rabbit−warrens were depopulated; linen was stolen from the gardens, and nets were torn on the beach. "The deuce take Poulailler's boy," was the general cry. "The deuce has got him," was Poulailler's answer. "And yet he is a nice−looking boy," said Madame Poulailler. And he was−−as tall, as strong, as handsome a young fellow as could be seen in all France. "Let us pray for him," said Madame Poulailler. "Let us thrash him," said her husband. "Our son has been thrashed till all the sticks in the neighborhood are broken," pleaded his mother. "We will try him with the rope's−end next," retorted his father; "he shall go to sea, and live in an atmosphere of thrashing. Our son shall be a cabin−boy." It was all one to Poulailler Junior; he knew who had adopted him, as well as his father; he had been instinctively conscious from infancy of the Fiend−Fisherman's interest in his welfare; he cared for no earthly discipline; and a cabin−boy he became at ten years old.

After two years of the rope's−end (applied quite ineffectually), the subject of this Memoir robbed his captain, and ran away in an English port. London became the next scene of his adventures At twelve years old he persuaded society in the metropolis that he was the forsaken natural son of a French duke. British benevolence, after blindly providing for him for four years, opened its eyes and found him out at the age of sixteen; upon which he returned to France, and entered the army in the capacity of drummer. At eighteen he deserted, and had a turn with the gypsies. He told fortunes, he conjured, he danced on the tight−rope, he acted, he sold quack medicines, he altered his mind again, and returned to the army. Here he fell in love with the vivandiere of his new regiment. The sergeant−major of the company, touched by the same amiable weakness, naturally resented his attentions to the lady. Poulailler (perhaps unjustifiably) asserted himself by boxing his officer's ears. Out flashed the swords on both sides, and in went Poulailler's blade through and through the tender heart of the sergeant−major. The frontier was close at hand. Poulailler wiped his sword, and crossed it.

Sentence of death was recorded against him in his absence. When society has condemned us to die, if we are men of any spirit, how are we to return the compliment? By condemning society to keep us alive−−or, in other words, by robbing right and left for a living. Poulailler's destiny was now accomplished. He was picked out to be the greatest thief of his age; and when Fate summoned him to his place in the world; he stepped forward and took it. His life hitherto had been merely the life of a young scamp; he was now to do justice to the diabolical father who had adopted him, and to expand to the proportions of a full−grown robber.

His first exploits were performed in Germany. They showed such a novelty of combination, such daring, such dexterity, and, even in his most homicidal moments, such irresistible gayety and good humor, that a band of congenial spirits gathered about him in no time. As commander−in−chief of the thieves' army, his popularity never wavered. His weaknesses−−and what illustrious man is without them?−−were three in number. First weakness: he was extravagantly susceptible to the charms of the fair sex. Second weakness: he was perilously fond of practical jokes. Third weakness (inherited from his adopted parent): his appetite was insatiable in the matter of fried fish. As for the merits to set against these defects, some have been noticed already, and others will appear immediately. Let it merely be premised in this place that he was one of the handsomest men of his time, that he dressed superbly, and that he was capable of the most exalted acts of generosity wherever a handsome woman was concerned−−let this be understood, to begin with; and let us now enter on the narrative of his last exploit in Germany before he returned to France. This adventure is something more than a mere specimen of his method of workmanship; it proved, in the future, to be the fatal event of his life.

On a Monday in the week he had stopped on the highway, and robbed of all his valuables and all his papers an Italian nobleman−−the Marquis Petrucci, of Sienna. On Tuesday he was ready for another stroke of business. Posted on the top of a steep hill, he watched the road which wound up to the summit on one side, while his followers were ensconced on the road which led down from it on the other. The prize expected in this case was the traveling−carriage (with a large sum of money inside) of the Baron De Kirbergen.

Before long Poulailler discerned the carriage afar off at the bottom of the hill, and in advance of it, ascending the eminence, two ladies on foot. They were the Baron's daughters−−Wilhelmina, a fair beauty; Frederica, a brunette−−both lovely, both accomplished, both susceptible, both young. Poulailler sauntered down the hill to meet the fascinating travelers. He looked, bowed, introduced himself, and fell in love with Wilhelmina on the spot. Both the charming girls acknowledged in the most artless manner that confinement to the carriage had given them the fidgets, and that they were walking up the hill to try the remedy of gentle exercise. Poulailler's heart was touched, and Poulailler's generosity to the sex was roused in the nick of time. With a polite apology to the young ladies, he ran back, by a short cut, to the ambush on the other side of the hill in which his men were posted.

"Gentlemen!" cried the generous thief, "in the charming name of Wilhelmina de Kirbergen, I charge you all, let the Baron's carriage pass free." The band was not susceptible; the band demurred. Poulailler knew them. He had appealed to their hearts in vain; he now appealed to their pockets. "Gentlemen!" he resumed, "excuse my momentary misconception of your sentiments. Here is my one−half share of the Marquis Petrucci's property. If I divide it among you, will you let the carriage pass free?" The band knew the value of money, and accepted the terms. Poulailler rushed back up the hill, and arrived at the top just in time to hand the young ladies into the carriage. "Charming man!" said the white Wilhelmina to the brown Frederica, as they drove off. Innocent soul! what would she have said if she had known that her personal attractions had saved her father's property? Was she ever to see the charming man again? Yes; she was to see him the next day−−and, more than that, Fate was hereafter to link her fast to the robber's life and the robber's doom.

Confiding the direction of the band to h]s first lieutenant, Poulailler followed the carriage on horseback, and ascertained the place of the Baron's residence that night.

The next morning a superbly−dressed stranger knocked at the door. "What name, sir?" said the servant. "The Marquis Petrucci, of Sienna," replied Poulailler. "How are the young ladies after their journey?" The Marquis was shown in, and introduced to the Baron. The Baron was naturally delighted to receive a brother nobleman; Miss Wilhelmina was modestly happy to see the charming man again; Miss Frederica was affectionately pleased on her sister's account. Not being of a disposition to lose time where his affections were concerned, Poulailler expressed his sentiments to the beloved object that evening. The next morning he had an interview with the Baron, at which he produced the papers which proved him to be the Marquis. Nothing could be more satisfactory to the mind of the most anxious parent−−the two noblemen embraced. They were still in each other's arms, when a second stranger knocked at the door. "What name, sir?" said the servant. "The Marquis Petrucci, of Sienna," replied the stranger. "Impossible!" said the servant; "his lordship is now in the house." "Show me in, scoundrel," cried the visitor. The servant submitted, and the two Marquises stood face to face. Poulailler's composure was not shaken in the least; he had come first to the house, and he had got the papers. "You are the villain who robbed me!" cried the true Petrucci. "You are drunk, mad, or an impostor," retorted the false Petrucci. "Send to Florence, where I am known," exclaimed one of the Marquises, apostrophizing the Baron. "Send to Florence by all means," echoed the other, addressing himself to the Baron also. "Gentlemen," replied the

noble Kirbergen, "I will do myself the honor of taking your advice"−−and he sent to Florence accordingly.

Before the messenger had advanced ten miles on his journey, Poulailler had said two words in private to the susceptible Wilhelmina, and the pair eloped from the baronial residence that night. Once more the subject of this Memoir crossed the frontier, and re−entered France. Indifferent to the attractions of rural life, he forthwith established himself with the beloved object in Paris. In that superb city he met with his strangest adventures, performed his boldest achievements, committed his most prodigious robberies, and, in a word, did himself and his infernal patron the fullest justice in the character of the Fiend−Fisherman's adopted son.

III.−−HIS CAREER IN PARIS.

Once established in the French metropolis, Poulailler planned and executed that vast system of perpetual robbery and occasional homicide which made him the terror and astonishment of all Paris. Indoors as well as out his good fortune befriended him. No domestic anxieties harassed his mind, and diverted him from the pursuit of his distinguished public career. The attachment of the charming creature with whom he had eloped from Germany survived the discovery that the Marquis Petrucci was Poulailler the robber. True to the man of her choice, the devoted Wilhelmina shared his fortunes, and kept his house. And why not, if she loved him−−in the all−conquering name of Cupid, why not?

Joined by picked men from his German followers, and by new recruits gathered together in Paris, Poulailler now set society and its safeguards at flat defiance. Cartouche himself was his inferior in audacity and cunning. In course of time, the whole city was panic−stricken by the new robber and his band−−the very Boulevards were deserted after nightfall. Monsieur Hérault, lieutenant of police of the period, in despair of laying hands on Poulailler by any other means, at last offered a reward of a hundred pistoles and a place in his office worth two thousand livres a year to any one who would apprehend the robber alive. The bills were posted all over Paris, and the next morning they produced the very last result in the world which the lieutenant of police could possibly have anticipated.

While Monsieur Hérault was at breakfast in his study the Count de Villeneuve was announced as wishing to speak to him. Knowing the Count by name only, as belonging to an ancient family in Provence or in Languedoc, Monsieur Hérault ordered him to be shown in. A perfect gentleman appeared, dressed with an admirable mixture of magnificence and good taste. "I have something for your private ear, sir," said the Count. "Will you give orders that no one must be allowed to disturb us?"

Monsieur Hérault gave the orders.

"May I inquire, Count, what your business is?" he asked when the door was closed.

"To earn the reward you offer for taking Poulailler," answered the Count. "I am Poulailler."

Before Monsieur Hérault could open his lips, the robber produced a pretty little dagger and some rose−colored silk cord. "The point of this dagger is poisoned," he observed; "and one scratch of it, my dear sir, would be the death of you." With these words Poulailler gagged the lieutenant of police, bound him to his chair with the rose−colored cord, and lightened his writing−desk of one

thousand pistoles. "I'll take money, instead of taking the place in the office which you kindly offer," said Poulailler. "Don't trouble yourself to see me to the door. Good−morning."

A few weeks later, while Monsieur Hérault was still the popular subject of ridicule throughout Paris, business took Poulailler on the road to Lille and Cambrai. The only inside passenger in the coach besides himself was the venerable Dean Potter, of Brussels. They fell into talk on the one interesting subject of the time−−not the weather, but Poulailler.

"It's a disgrace, sir, to the police," said the Dean, "that such a miscreant is still at large. I shall be returning to Paris by this road in ten days' time, and I shall call on Monsieur Hérault to suggest a plan of my own for catching the scoundrel.

"May I ask what it is?" said Poulailler.

"Excuse me," replied the Dean; "you are a stranger, sir, and moreover I wish to keep the merit of suggesting the plan to myself."

"Do you think the lieutenant of police will see you?" asked Poulailler; "he is not accessible to strangers, since the miscreant you speak of played him that trick at his own breakfast−table."

"He will see Dean Potter, of Brussels," was the reply, delivered with the slightest possible tinge of offended dignity.

"Oh, unquestionably!" said Poulailler; "pray pardon me."

"Willingly, sir," said the Dean; and the conversation flowed into other channels.

Nine days later the wounded pride of Monsieur Hérault was soothed by a very remarkable letter. It was signed by one of Poulailler's band, who offered himself as king's evidence, in the hope of obtaining a pardon. The letter stated that the venerable Dean Potter had been waylaid and murdered by Poulailler, and that the robber, with his customary audacity, was about to re−enter Paris by the Lisle coach the next day, disguised in the Dean's own clothes, and furnished with the Dean's own papers. Monsieur Hérault took his precautions without losing a moment. Picked men were stationed, with their orders, at the barrier through which the coach must pass to enter Paris, while the lieutenant of police waited at his office, in the company of two French gentlemen who could speak to the Dean's identity, in the event of Poulailler's impudently persisting in the assumption of his victim's name.

At the appointed hour the coach appeared, and out of it got a man in the Dean's costume. He was arrested in spite of his protestations; the papers of the murdered Potter were found on him, and he was dragged off to the police−office in triumph. The door opened and the posse comitatus entered with the prisoner. Instantly the two witnesses burst out with a cry of recognition, and turned indignantly on the lieutenant of police. "Gracious Heaven, sir, what have you done!" they exclaimed in horror; "this is not Poulailler−−here is our venerable friend; here is the Dean himself!" At the same moment a servant entered with a letter. "Dean Potter. To the care of Monsieur Hérault, Lieutenant of Police." The letter was expressed in these words: "Venerable Sir−−Profit by the lesson I have given you. Be a Christian for the future, and never again try to injure a man unless he tries to injure you. Entirely yours−−Poulailler."

These feats of cool audacity were matched by others, in which his generosity to the sex asserted itself as magnanimously as ever.

Hearing one day that large sums of money were kept in the house of a great lady, one Madame De Brienne, whose door was guarded, in anticipation of a visit from the famous thief, by a porter of approved trustworthiness and courage, Poulailler undertook to rob her in spite of her precautions, and succeeded. With a stout pair of leather straps and buckles in his pocket, and with two of his band disguised as a coachman and a footman, he followed Madame De Brienne one night to the theater. Just before the close of the performance, the lady's coachman and footman were tempted away for five minutes by Poulailler's disguised subordinates to have a glass of wine. No attempt was made to detain them, or to drug their liquor. But in their absence Poulailler had slipped under the carriage, had hung his leather straps round the pole−−one to hold by, and one to support his feet−−and, with these simple preparations, was now ready to wait for events. Madame De Brienne entered the carriage−−the footman got up behind−−Poulailler hung himself horizontally under the pole, and was driven home with them under those singular circumstances. He was strong enough to keep his position after the carriage had been taken into the coach−house, and he only left it when the doors were locked for the night. Provided with food beforehand, he waited patiently, hidden in the coach−house, for two days and nights, watching his opportunity of getting into Madame De Brienne's boudoir.

On the third night the lady went to a grand ball; the servants relaxed in their vigilance while her back was turned, and Poulailler slipped into the room. He found two thousand louis d'ors, which was nothing like the sum he expected, and a pocketbook, which he took away with him to open at home. It contained some stock warrants for a comparatively trifling amount. Poulailler was far too well off to care about taking them, and far too polite, where a lady was concerned, not to send them back again, under those circumstances. Accordingly, Madame De Brienne received her warrants, with a note of apology from the polite thief.

"Pray excuse my visit to your charming boudoir," wrote Poulailler, "in consideration of the false reports of your wealth, which alone induced me to enter it. If I had known what your pecuniary circumstances really were, on the honor of a gentleman, madame, I should have been incapable of robbing you. I cannot return your two thousand louis d'ors by post, as I return your warrants. But if you are at all pressed for money in future, I shall be proud to assist so distinguished a lady by lending her, from my own ample resources, double the sum of which I regret to have deprived her on the present occasion. "This letter was shown to royalty at Versailles. It excited the highest admiration of the Court−−especially of the ladies. Whenever the robber's name was mentioned, they indulgently referred to him as the Chevalier De Poulailler. Ah! that was the age of politeness, when good−breeding was recognized, even in the thief. Under similar circumstances, who would recognize it now? O tempora! O mores!

On another occasion Poulailler was out one night taking the air, and watching his opportunities on the roofs of the houses, a member of the band being posted in the street below to assist him in case of necessity. While in this position, sobs and groans proceeding from an open back−garret window caught his ear. A parapet rose before the window, which enabled him to climb down and look in. Starving children surrounding a helpless mother, and clamoring for food, was the picture that met his eye. The mother was young and beautiful, and Poulailler's hand impulsively clutched his purse, as a necessary consequence. Before the charitable thief could enter by the window, a man rushed in by the door with a face of horror, and cast a handful of gold into the lovely mother's lap. "My honor is gone," he cried, "but our children are saved! Listen to the circumstances. I met a man in the street below; he was tall and thin; he had a green patch over one eye; he was looking up suspiciously at this house, apparently waiting for somebody. I thought of you−−I thought of the children−−I seized the suspicious stranger by the collar. Terror overwhelmed him on the spot 'Take my watch, my money, and my two valuable gold snuff−boxes,' he said, 'but spare my life.' I took them." "Noble−hearted man!" cried Poulailler, appearing at the window. The husband started; the

wife screamed; the children hid themselves. "Let me entreat you to be composed," continued Poulailler. "Sir! I enter on the scene for the purpose of soothing your uneasy conscience. From your vivid description, I recognize the man whose property is now in your wife's lap. Resume your mental tranquillity. You have robbed a robber−−in other words, you have vindicated society. Accept my congratulations on your restored innocence. The miserable coward whose collar you seized is one of Poulailler's band. He has lost his stolen property as the fit punishment for his disgraceful want of spirit."

"Who are you?" exclaimed the husband.

"I am Poulailler," replied the illustrious man, with the simplicity of an ancient hero. "Take this purse, and set up in business with the contents. There is a prejudice, sir, in favor of honesty. Give that prejudice a chance. There was a time when I felt it myself; I regret to feel it no longer. Under all varieties of misfortune, an honest man has his consolation still left. Where is it left? Here!" He struck his heart, and the family fell on their knees before him.

"Benefactor of your species!" cried the husband; "how can I show my gratitude?"

"You can permit me to kiss the hand of madame," answered Poulailler.

Madame started to her feet and embraced the generous stranger. "What more can I do?" exclaimed this lovely woman, eagerly; "oh heavens! what more?"

"You can beg your husband to light me downstairs," replied Poulailler. He spoke, pressed their hands, dropped a generous tear, and departed. At that touching moment his own adopted father would not have known him.

This last anecdote closes the record of Poulailler's career in Paris. The lighter and more agreeable aspects of that career have hitherto been designedly presented, in discreet remembrance of the contrast which the tragic side of the picture must now present. Comedy and Sentiment, twin sisters of French extraction, farewell! Horror enters next on the stage, and enters welcome, in the name of the Fiend−Fisherman's adopted son.

IV.−−HIS EXIT FROM THE SCENE.

The nature of Poulailler's more serious achievements in the art of robbery may be realized by reference to one terrible fact. In the police records of the period, more than one hundred and fifty men and women are reckoned up as having met their deaths at the hands of Poulailler and his band. It was not the practice of this formidable robber to take life as well as property, unless life happened to stand directly in his way−−in which case he immediately swept off the obstacle without hesitation and without remorse. His deadly determination to rob, which was thus felt by the population in general, was matched by his deadly determination to be obeyed, which was felt by his followers in particular. One of their number, for example, having withdrawn from his allegiance, and having afterward attempted to betray his leader, was tracked to his hiding−place in a cellar, and was there walled up alive in Poulailler's presence, the robber composing the unfortunate wretch's epitaph, and scratching it on the wet plaster with his own hand. Years afterward the inscription was noticed when the house fell into the possession of a new tenant, and was supposed to be nothing more than one of the many jests which the famous robber had practiced in his time. When the plaster was removed, the skeleton, fell out, and testified that Poulailler was in earnest.

To attempt the arrest of such a man as this by tampering with his followers was practically impossible. No sum of money that could be offered would induce any one of the members of his band to risk the fatal chance of his vengeance. Other means of getting possession of him had been tried, and tried in vain. Five times over the police had succeeded in tracking him to different hiding places; and on all five occasions, the women−−who adored him for his gallantry, his generosity, and his good looks−−had helped him to escape. If he had not unconsciously paved the way to his own capture, first by eloping with Mademoiselle Wilhelmina de Kirbergen, and secondly by maltreating her, it is more than doubtful whether the long arm of the law would ever have reached far enough to fasten its grasp on him. As it was, the extremes of love and hatred met at last in the bosom of the devoted Wilhelmina, and the vengeance of a neglected woman accomplished what the whole police force of Paris had been powerless to achieve.

Poulailler, never famous for the constancy of his attachments, had wearied, at an early period, of the companion of his flight from Germany; but Wilhelmina was one of those women whose affections, once aroused, will not take No for an answer. She persisted in attaching herself to a man who had ceased to love her. Poulailler's patience became exhausted; he tried twice to rid himself of his unhappy mistress−−once by the knife, and once by poison−−and failed on both occasions. For the third and last time, by way of attempting an experiment of another kind, he established a rival, to drive the German woman out of the house. From that moment his fate was sealed. Maddened by jealous rage, Wilhelmina cast the last fragments of her fondness to the winds. She secretly communicated with the police, and Poulailler met his doom.

A night was appointed with the authorities, and the robber was invited by his discarded mistress to a farewell interview. His contemptuous confidence in her fidelity rendered him careless of his customary precautions. He accepted the appointment, and the two supped together, on the understanding that they were henceforth to be friends and nothing more. Toward the close of the meal Poulailler was startled by a ghastly change in the face of his companion.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked.

"A mere trifle," she answered, looking at her glass of wine. "I can't help loving you still, badly as you have treated me. You are a dead man, Poulailler, and I shall not survive you."

The robber started to his feet, and seized a knife on the table.

"You have poisoned me!" he exclaimed.

"No," she replied. "Poison is my vengeance on myself; not my vengeance on you. You will rise from this table as you sat down to it. But your evening will be finished in prison, and your life will be ended on the wheel."

As she spoke the words, the door was burst open by the police and Poulailler was secured. The same night the poison did its fatal work, and his mistress made atonement with her life for the first, last act of treachery which had revenged her on the man she loved.

Once safely lodged in the hands of justice, the robber tried to gain time to escape in, by promising to make important disclosures. The maneuver availed him nothing. In those days the Laws of the Land had not yet made acquaintance with the Laws of Humanity. Poulailler was put to the torture−−was suffered to recover−−was publicly broken on the wheel−−and was taken off it alive, to be cast into a blazing fire. By those murderous means Society rid itself of a murderous man, and the idlers on the Boulevards took their evening stroll again in recovered security.

. . . . .

Paris had seen the execution of Poulailler; but if legends are to be trusted, our old friends, the people of the fishing village in Brittany, saw the end of him afterward. On the day and hour when he perished, the heavens darkened, and a terrible storm arose. Once more, and for a moment only, the gleam of the unearthly fire reddened the windows of the old tower. Thunder pealed, and struck the building into fragments. Lightning flashed incessantly over the ruins; and, in the scorching glare of it, the boat which, in former years, had put off to sea whenever the storm rose highest, was seen to shoot out into the raging ocean from the cleft in the rock, and was discovered on this final occasion to be doubly manned. The Fiend−Fisherman sat at the helm; his adopted son tugged at the oars; and a clamor of diabolical voices, roaring awfully through the roaring storm, wished the pair of them a prosperous voyage.

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.−−II. THE POISONED MEAL.

[From the Records of the French Courts.]

CHAPTER I.−−THE POCKETS.

This case takes us across the Channel to Normandy; and introduces us to a young French girl, named Marie Françoise Victoire Salmon.

Her father was a poor Norman laborer. Her mother died while she was a child. From an early age Marie had learned to get her own living by going out to service. Three different mistresses tried her while she was a very young girl, and found every reason to be satisfied with her conduct. She entered her fourth place, in the family of one Monsieur Dumesnil, when she was twenty years of age. This was the turning−point in her career; and here the strange story of her life properly begins.

Among the persons who often visited Monsieur Dumesnil and his wife was a certain Monsieur Revel, a relation of Madame Dumesnil's. He was a man of some note in his part of the country, holding a responsible legal appointment at the town of Caen, in Normandy; and he honored Marie, when he first saw her at her master's house, with his special attention and approval. She had an innocent face and a winning manner; and Monsieur Revel became almost oppressively anxious, in a strictly paternal way, that she should better her condition, by seeking service at Caen, where places were plentiful and wages higher than in the country, and where, it is also necessary to remember, Monsieur Revel himself happened to live.

Marie's own idea, however, of the best means of improving her condition was a little at variance with the idea of her disinterested adviser. Her ambition was to gain her living independently, if she could by being a seamstress. She left the service of Monsieur Dumesnil of her own accord, without so much as the shadow of a stain on her character, and went to the old town of Bayeux to try what she could do by taking in needlework. As a means of subsistence, needlework soon proved itself to be insufficient; and she found herself thrown back again on the old resource of going out to service. Most unfortunately, as events afterward turned out, she now called to mind Monsieur Revel's paternal advice, and resolved to seek employment as a maid of all work at Caen.

She left Bayeux with the little bundle of clothes which represented all the property she had in the world, on the first of August, seventeen hundred and eighty−one. It will be well to notice this date particularly, and to remember−−in case some of the events of Marie's story should seem almost incredible−−that it marks the period which immediately preceded the first outbreak of the French Revolution.

Among the few articles of the maid's apparel which the bundle contained, and to which it is necessary to direct attention at the outset, were two pairs of pockets, one of them being still in an unfinished condition. She had a third pair which she wore on her journey. In the last century, a country girl's pockets were an important and prominent part of her costume. They hung on each side of her, ready to her hand. They were sometimes very prettily embroidered, and they were almost always large and of a bright color.

On the first of August, seventeen hundred and eighty−one, Marie left Bayeux, and early on the same day she reached Caen. Her good manners, her excellent character, and the modesty of her demands in the matter of wages, rendered it easy for her to find a situation. On the very evening of her arrival she was suited with a place; and her first night at Caen was passed under the roof of her new employers.

The family consisted of Marie's master and mistress, Monsieur and Madame Huet Duparc (both highly respectable people); of two sons, aged respectively twenty−one and eleven years; of their sister, aged seventeen years; and of Monsieur and Madame De Beaulieu, the father and mother of Madame Duparc, one eighty−eight years old, the other eighty−six.

Madame Duparc explained to Marie the various duties which she was expected to perform, on the evening when she entered the house. She was to begin the day by fetching some milk−−that being one of the ingredients used in preparing the hasty−pudding which formed the favorite morning meal of the old gentleman, Monsieur De Beaulieu. The hasty−pudding was always to be got ready by seven o'clock exactly. When this had been done, Marie was next required to take the infirm old lady, Madame De Beaulieu, every morning to mass. She was then to go to market, and get all the provisions that were wanted for the daily use of the family; and she was, finally, to look to the cooking of the food, and to make herself additionally useful (with some occasional assistance from Madame Duparc and her daughter) in every remaining branch of household work. The yearly wages she was to receive for performing all these conflicting duties amounted to precisely two pounds sterling of English money.

She had entered her new place on a Wednesday. On Thursday she took her first lesson in preparing the old gentleman's morning meal. One point which her mistress then particularly impressed on her was, that she was not to put any salt in the hasty−pudding.

On the Saturday following, when she went out to buy milk, she made a little purchase on her own account. Of course the purchase was an article of dress−−a piece of fine bright orange−colored stuff, for which she paid nearly the whole price on the spot, out of her small savings. The sum of two sous six deniers (about a penny English) was all that Marie took credit for. On her return to the house she showed the piece of stuff to Madame Duparc, and asked to be advised whether she should make an apron or a jacket of it.

The next day being Sunday, Marie marked the occasion by putting on all the little finery she had. Her pair of festive pockets, striped with blue and white, came out of her bundle along with other things. When she had put them on, she hung the old workaday pockets which she had worn on leaving Bayeux to the back of a chair in her bed−chamber. This was a little room on the ground

floor, situated close to the dining−room, and perfectly easy of access to every one in the house. Long afterward, Marie remembered how pleasantly and quietly that Sunday passed. It was the last day of happiness the poor creature was to enjoy in the house of Madame Duparc.

On the Monday morning, she went to fetch the milk as usual. But the milk−woman was not in the shop to serve her. After returning to the house, she proposed making a second attempt; but her mistress stopped her, saying that the milk would doubtless be sent before long. This turned out to be the case, and Marie, having cleaned the saucepan for Monsieur De Beaulieu's hasty−pudding, received from the hands of Madame Duparc the earthen vessel containing the meal used in the house. She mixed this flour and put it into the saucepan in the presence of Madame Duparc and her daughter. She had just set the saucepan on the fire, when her mistress said, with a very remarkable abruptness:

"Have you put any salt in it?"

"Certainly not, ma'am," answered Marie, amazed by the question. "You told me yourself that I was never to put salt in it."

Upon this, Madame Duparc snatched up the saucepan without saying another word, turned to the dresser, stretched out her hand toward one of four salt−cellars which always stood there, and sprinkled salt into the saucepan−−or (to speak with extreme correctness, the matter being important), if not salt something which she took for salt.

The hasty−pudding made, Marie poured it from the saucepan into a soup−plate which her mistress held. Madame Duparc herself then took it to Monsieur De Beaulieu. She and her daughter, and one of her sons, remained with the old man while he was eating his breakfast. Marie, left in the kitchen, prepared to clean the saucepan; but, before she could do so, she was suddenly called in two different directions by Madame De Beaulieu and Madame Duparc. The old lady wished to be taken to mass, and her mistress wanted to send her on a number of errands Marie did not stop even to pour some clean water, as usual, into tho saucepan. She went at once to get her instructions from Madame Duparc, and to attend on Madame De Beaulieu. Taking the old lady to church, and then running her mistress's errands, kept her so long away from the house, that it was half−past eleven in the forenoon before she got back to the kitchen.

The first news that met her on her return was that Monsieur De Beaulieu had been suffering, ever since nine o'clock, from a violent attack of vomiting and colic. Madame Duparc ordered her to help the old man to bed immediately; and inquired, when these directions had been followed, whether Marie felt capable of looking after him herself, or whether she would prefer that a nurse should be sent for. Being a kind−hearted, willing girl, always anxious to make herself useful, Marie replied that she would gladly undertake the nursing of the old man; and thereupon her bed was moved at once into Monsieur De Beaulieu's room.

Meanwhile Madame Duparc fetched from a neighboring apothecary's one of the apprentices of the shop to see her father. The lad was quite unfit to meet the emergency of the case, which was certainly serious enough to require the attention of his master, if not of a regularly qualified physician. Instead of applying any internal remedies, the apprentice stupidly tried blistering. This course of treatment proved utterly useless; but no better advice was called in. After he had suffered for hours without relief, Monsieur De Beaulieu began to sink rapidly toward the afternoon. At half−past five o'clock he had ceased to exist.

This shocking catastrophe, startling and suspicious as it was, did not appear to discompose the

nerves of Madame Duparc. While her eldest son immediately left the house to inform his father (who had been absent in the country all day) of what had happened, she lost no time in sending for the nearest nurse to lay out the corpse of Monsieur De Beaulieu. On entering the chamber of death, the nurse found Marie there alone, praying by the old man's bedside.

"He died suddenly, did he not?" said the nurse.

"Very suddenly," answered Marie. "He was walking about only yesterday in perfect health."

Soon afterward the time came when it was customary to prepare supper. Marie went into the kitchen mechanically, to get the meal ready. Madame Duparc, her daughter, and her youngest son, sat down to it as usual. Madame De Beaulieu, overwhelmed by the dreadful death of her husband, was incapable of joining them.

When supper was over, Marie assisted the old lady to bed. Then, worn out though she was with fatigue, she went back to the nurse to keep her company in watching by the dead body. Monsieur De Beaulieu had been kind to Marie, and had spoken gratefully of the little attentions she had shown him. She remembered this tenderly now that he was no more; and she could not find it in her heart to leave a hired mourner to be the only watcher by his death−bed. All that night she remained in the room, entirely ignorant of what was passing the while in every other part of the house−−her own little bedroom included, as a matter of course.

About seven o'clock the next morning, after sitting up all night, she went back again wearily to the kitchen to begin her day's work. Her mistress joined her there, and saluted her instantly with a scolding.

"You are the most careless, slovenly girl I ever met with," said Madame Duparc. "Look at your dress; how can you expect to be decent on a Sunday, if you wear your best pair of pockets on week−days?"

Surely Madame Duparc's grief for the loss of her father must have been slight enough, if it did not prevent her from paying the strictest attention to her servant's pockets! Although Marie had only known the old man for a few days, she had been too deeply impressed by his illness and its fatal end to be able to think of such a trifle as the condition of her dress. And now, of all the people in the world, it was Monsieur De Beaulieu's daughter who reminded her that she had never thought of changing her pockets only the day after the old man's dreadful death.

"Put on your old pockets directly, you untidy girl!" said Madame Duparc.

The old pockets were of course hanging where Marie had left them, at the back of the chair in her own room−−the room which was open to any one who chose to go into it−−the room which she herself had not entered during the past night. She left the kitchen to obey her mistress; and taking the old pair of pockets off the chair, tied them on as quickly as possible. From that fatal moment the friendless maid of all work was a ruined girl.

CHAPTER II.−−THE ARSENIC.

On returning to the kitchen to go on with her work, the exhaustion against which Marie had hitherto

fought successfully, overpowered her that moment she sat down; her heavy head drooped, her eyes closed in spite of her, and she fell into a broken, uneasy slumber. Madame Duparc and her daughter, seeing the condition she was in, undertook the preparation of the day's dinner themselves. Among the dishes which they got ready, and which they salted from the cellars on the dresser, were two different kinds of soup−−one kind for themselves, made from fresh "stock"−−the other, for Marie and the nurse, made from old "stock." They were engaged over their cookery, when Monsieur Duparc arrived from the country; and Marie was awakened to take the horse he had ridden to the stables, to unsaddle the animal, and to give him his feed of corn.

While she was thus engaged, Madame Duparc and her daughter remained alone in the kitchen. When she left the stable, it was time for her to lay the cloth. She was told to put plates for seven persons. Only six, however, sat down to dinner. Those six were, Madame De Beaulieu, Monsieur and Madame Duparc, the youngest of their two sons, Madame Beauguillot (sister of Madame Duparc), and Monsieur Beauguillot (her son). Mademoiselle Duparc remained in the kitchen to help Marie in serving up the dinner, and only took her place at table after the soup had been put on. Her elder brother, after summoning his father home, had not returned to the house.

After the soup had been taken away, and while Marie was waiting at table during the eating of the second course, young Duparc complained that he felt something gritty between his teeth. His mother made precisely the same remark. Nobody else, however, agreed with them, and the subject was allowed to drop. When the second course was done with, the dessert followed, consisting of a plate of cherries. With the dessert there arrived a visitor, Monsieur Fergant, a relation of Madame Duparc's. This gentleman placed himself at table with the rest of the company.

Meanwhile, the nurse and Marie were making their dinner in the kitchen off the soup which had been specially provided for them−−Marie having previously placed the dirty plates and the empty soup−tureen from the dining−room, in the scullery, as usual, to be washed at the proper time. While she and her companion were still engaged over their soup, young Duparc and his mother suddenly burst into the kitchen, followed by the other persons who had partaken of dinner.

"We are all poisoned!" cried Madame Duparc, in the greatest terror. "Good heavens! I smell burned arsenic in the kitchen!"

Monsieur Fergant, the visitor, hearing these last words, politely stepped forward to echo them.

"Burned arsenic, beyond a doubt," said Monsieur Fergant. When this gentleman was subsequently questioned on the subject, it may not be amiss to mention that he was quite unable to say what burned arsenic smelled like. Neither is it altogether out of place to inquire how Madame Duparc happened to be so amazingly apt at discovering the smell of burned arsenic? The answer to the question does not seem easy to discover.

Having settled that they were all poisoned, and having even found out (thanks to those two intelligent amateur chemists, Madame Duparc and Monsieur Fergant) the very nature of the deadly drug that had been used to destroy them, the next thing the company naturally thought of was the necessity of summoning medical help. Young Monsieur Beauguillot obligingly ran off (it was apparently a very mild case of poisoning, so far as he was concerned) to the apothecary's shop, and fetched, not the apprentice this time, but the master. The master, Monsieur Thierry, arrived in great haste, and found the dinner−eaters all complaining of nausea and pains in the stomach. He naturally asked what they had eaten. The reply was, that they had eaten nothing but soup.

This was, to say the least of it, rather an unaccountable answer. The company had had for dinner,

besides soup, a second course of boiled meat, and ragout of beef, and a dessert of cherries. Why was this plain fact concealed? Why was the apothecary's attention to be fixed exclusively on the soup? Was it because the tureen was empty, and because the alleged smell of burned arsenic might be accounted for on the theory that the remains of the soup brought from the dining−room had been thrown on the kitchen fire? But no remains of soup came down−−it had been all consumed by the guests. And what is still more remarkable, the only person in the kitchen (excepting Marie and the nurse) who could not discover the smell of burned arsenic, was the person of all others who was professionally qualified to find it out first−−the apothecary himself.

After examining the tureen and the plates, and stirring up the wood−ashes on the fire, and making no sort of discovery, Monsieur Thierry turned to Marie, and asked if she could account for what had happened. She simply replied that she knew nothing at all about it; and thereupon her mistress and the rest of the persons present all overwhelmed her together with a perfect torrent of questions. The poor girl, terrified by the hubbub, worn out by a sleepless night and by the hard work and agitation of the day preceding it, burst into an hysterical fit of tears, and was ordered out of the kitchen to lie down and recover herself. The only person who showed her the least pity and offered her the slightest attention, was a servant−girl like herself, who lived next door, and who stole up to the room in which she was weeping alone, with a cup of warm milk−and−water to comfort her.

Meanwhile the report had spread in the town that the old man, Monsieur De Beaulieu, and the whole Duparc family had been poisoned by their servant. Madame Duparc did her best to give the rumor the widest possible circulation. Entirely forgetting, as it would seem, that she was on her own showing a poisoned woman, she roamed excitably all over the house with an audience of agitated female friends at her heels; telling the burned−arsenic story over and over again to every fresh detachment of visitors that arrived to hear it; and finally leading the whole troop of women into the room where Marie was trying to recover herself. The poor girl was surrounded in a moment; angry faces and shrill voices met her on every side; the most insolent questions, the most extravagant accusations, assailed her; and not one word that she could say in her own defense was listened to for an instant. She had sprung up in the bed, on her knees, and was frantically entreating for permission to speak in her own defense, when a new personage appeared on the scene, and stilled the clamor by his presence. This individual was a surgeon named Hébert, a friend of Madame Duparc's, who announced that he had arrived to give the family the benefit of his assistance, and who proposed to commence operations by searching the servant's pockets without further delay.

The instant Marie heard him make this proposal she untied her pockets, and gave them to Surgeon Hébert with her own hands. He examined them on the spot. In one he found some copper money and a thimble. In the other (to use his own words, given in evidence) he discovered "various fragments of bread, sprinkled over with some minute substance which was white and shining. He kept the fragments of bread, and left the room immediately without saying a word." By this course of proceeding he gave Marie no chance of stating at the outset whether she knew of the fragments of bread being in her pocket, or whether she was totally ignorant how they came there. Setting aside, for the present, the question, whether there was really any arsenic on the crumbs at all, it would clearly have been showing the unfortunate maid of all work no more than common justice to have allowed her the opportunity of speaking before the bread was carried away.

It was now seven o'clock in the evening. The next event was the arrival of another officious visitor. The new friend in need belonged to the legal profession−−he was an advocate named Friley. Monsieur Friley's legal instincts led him straightway to a conclusion which seriously advanced the progress of events. Having heard the statement of Madame Duparc and her daughter, he decided that it was his duty to lodge an information against Marie before the Procurator of the king, at Caen.

The Procurator of the king is, by this time, no stranger to the reader. He was the same Monsieur Revel who had taken such an amazingly strong interest in Marie's fortunes, and who had strongly advised her to try her luck at Caen. Here then, surely, was a friend found at last for the forlorn maid of all work. We shall see how Monsieur Revel acted, after Friley's information had been duly lodged.

The French law of the period, and, it may be added, the commonest principles of justice also, required the Procurator to perform certain plain duties as soon as the accusation against Marie had reached his ears.

He was, in the first place, bound to proceed immediately, accompanied by his official colleague, to the spot where the alleged crime of poisoning was supposed to have taken place. Arrived there, it was his business to ascertain for himself the condition of the persons attacked with illness; to hear their statements; to examine the rooms, the kitchen utensils, and the family medicine−chest, if there happened to be one in the house; to receive any statement the accused person might wish to make; to take down her answers to his questions; and, lastly, to keep anything found on the servant (the bread−crumbs, for instance, of which Surgeon Hébert had coolly taken possession), or anything found about the house which it might be necessary to produce in evidence, in a position of absolute security, under the hand and seal of justice.

These were the plain duties which Monsieur Revel, the Procurator, was officially bound to fulfill. In the case of Marie, he not only neglected to perform any one of them, but actually sanctioned a scheme for entrapping her into prison, by sending a commissary of police to the house, in plain clothes, with an order to place her in solitary confinement. To what motive could this scandalous violation of his duties and of justice be attributed? The last we saw of Monsieur Revel, he was so benevolently disposed toward Marie that he condescended to advise her about her prospects in life, and even went the length of recommending her to seek for a situation in the very town in which he lived himself. And now we find him so suddenly and bitterly hostile toward the former object of his patronage, that he actually lends the assistance of his high official position to sanction an accusation against her, into the truth or falsehood of which he had not made a single inquiry! Can it be that Monsieur Revel's interest in Marie was, after all, not of the purest possible kind, and that the unfortunate girl proved too stubbornly virtuous to be taught what the real end was toward which the attentions of her over−benevolent adviser privately pointed? There is no evidence attaching to the case (as how should there be?) to prove this. But is there any other explanation of Monsieur Revel's conduct which at all tends to account for the extraordinary inconsistency of it?

Having received his secret instructions, the Commissary of Police−−a man named Bertot−−proceeded to the house of Monsieur and Madame Duparc, disguised in plain clothes. His first proceeding was to order Marie to produce the various plates, dishes, and kitchen utensils which had been used at the dinner of Tuesday, the seventh of August (that being the day on which the poisoning of the company was alleged to have taken place). Marie produced a saucepan, an earthen vessel, a stew−pan, and several plates, piled on each other, in one of which there were the remains of some soup. These articles Bertot locked up in the kitchen cupboard, and took away the key with him. He ought to have taken the additional precaution of placing a seal on the cup board, so as to prevent any tampering with the lock, or any treachery with a duplicate key. But this he neglected to do.

His next proceeding was to tell Marie that the Procurator Revel wished to speak to her, and to propose that she should accompany him to the presence of that gentleman forthwith. Not having the slightest suspicion of any treachery, she willingly consented, and left the house with the Commissary. A friend of the Duparcs, named Vassol, accompanied them.

Once out of the house, Bertot led his unsuspecting prisoner straight to the jail. As soon as she was inside the gates, he informed her that she was arrested, and proceeded to search her person in the presence of Vassol, of the jailer of the prison, and of a woman named Dujardin. The first thing found on her was a little linen bag, sewn to her petticoat, and containing a species of religious charm, in the shape of a morsel of the sacramental wafer. Her pockets came next under review (the pockets which Surgeon Hébert had previously searched). A little dust was discovered at the bottom of them, which was shaken out on paper, wrapped up along with the linen bag, sealed in one packet, and taken to the Procurator's office. Finally, the woman Dujardin found in Marie's bosom a little key, which she readily admitted to be the key of her own cupboard.

The search over, one last act of cruelty and injustice was all that remained to be committed for that day. The unfortunate girl was placed at once in solitary confinement.

CHAPTER III.−−THE EVIDENCE.

Thus far the case is one of suspicion only. Waiting until the end of the trial before we decide on whom that suspicion ought to rest, let us now hear the evidence by which the Duparcs and their adherents proceeded to justify their conspiracy against the liberty and the life of a friendless girl.

Having secured Marie in solitary confinement, and having thus left the house and all that it contained for a whole night at the free disposal of the Duparcs, the Procurator Revel bethought himself, the morning after the arrest of his prisoner, of the necessity of proceeding with something like official regularity. He accordingly issued his requisition to the Lieutenant−Criminel to accompany him to the house of Monsieur Duparc, attended by the medical officers and the clerk, to inquire into the circumstances under which the suspected death by poisoning of Monsieur De Beaulieu had taken place. Marie had been imprisoned on the evening of the seventh of August, and this requisition is dated on the morning of the eighth. The document betrays one remarkable informality. It mentions the death of Monsieur De Beaulieu; but is absolutely silent on the subject of the alleged poisoning of seven persons at dinner the next day. And yet it was this latter circumstance only which first directed suspicion against Marie, and which induced Friley to lodge the information against her on which the Procurator was now acting. Probably Monsieur Revel's legal acumen convinced him, at the outset, that the story of the poisoned dinner was too weak to be relied on.

The officers of the law, accompanied by the doctors, proceeded to the house of the Duparcs on the eighth of August. After viewing the body of Monsieur De Beaulieu, the medical men were directed to open and examine it. They reported the discovery in the stomach of a reddish, brick−colored liquid, somewhat resembling the lees of wine. The mucous membrane was detached in some places, and its internal surface was corroded. On examining the reddish liquid, they found it to contain a crystallized sediment, which, on analyzation, proved to be arsenic. Upon this, the doctors delivered it as their opinion that Monsieur De Beaulieu had been poisoned, and that poison had been the cause of his death.

The event having taken this serious turn, the first duty of the Lieutenant−Criminel (according to the French law) was to send for the servant on whom suspicion rested, to question her, and to confront her with the Duparcs. He did nothing of the kind; he made no inquiry after the servant (being probably unwilling to expose his colleague, the Procurator, who had illegally arrested and illegally imprisoned her); he never examined the kitchen utensils which the Commissary had locked up; he

never opened the servant's cupboard with the key that had been taken from her when she was searched in prison. All he did was to reduce the report of the doctors to writing, and to return to his office with his posse comitatus at his heels.

It was necessary to summon the witnesses and examine them. But the Procurator Revel now conveniently remembered the story of the poisoned dinner, and he sent the Lieutenant−Criminel to examine the Duparcs and their friends at the private residence of the family, in consideration of the sick condition of the eaters of the adulterated meal. It may be as well to observe, here as elsewhere, that these highly indulged personages had none of them been sufficiently inconvenienced even to go to bed, or in any way to alter their ordinary habits.

On the afternoon of the eighth, the Lieutenant−Criminel betook himself to the house of Monsieur Duparc, to collect evidence touching the death by poison of Monsieur De Beaulieu. The first witness called was Monsieur Duparc.

This gentleman, it will be remembered, was away from home on Monday, the sixth, when Monsieur De Beaulieu died, and only returned, at the summons of his eldest son, at half−past eleven on the forenoon of the seventh. He had nothing to depose connected with the death of his father−in−law, or with the events which might have taken place in the house on the night of the sixth and the morning of the seventh on the other hand, he had a great deal to say about the state of his own stomach after the dinner of the seventh−−a species of information not calculated to throw much light on the subject of inquiry, which was the poisoning of Monsieur De Beaulieu.

The old lady, Madame De Beaulieu, was next examined. She could give no evidence of the slightest importance touching the matter in hand; but, like Monsieur Duparc, she had something to say on the topic of the poisoned dinner.

Madame Duparc followed on the list of witnesses. The report of her examination−−so thoroughly had she recovered from the effects of the dinner of the seventh−−ran to a prodigious length. Five−sixths of it related entirely to her own sensations and suspicions, and the sensations and suspicions of her relatives and friends, after they had risen from the table. As to the point at issue, the point which affected the liberty, and perhaps the life, of her unfortunate servant, she had so little to say that her testimony may be repeated here in her own words:

"The witness (Madame Duparc) deposed, that after Marie had helped Monsieur De Beaulieu to get up, she (Marie) hastened out for the milk, and, on her return with it, prepared the hasty−pudding, took it herself off the fire, and herself poured it out into the plate−−then left the kitchen to accompany Madame De Beaulieu to mass. Four or five minutes after Monsieur De Beaulieu had eaten the hasty−pudding, he was seized with violent illness."

Short as it is, this statement contains several distinct suppressions of the truth.

First, Madame Duparc is wrong in stating that Marie fetched the milk, for it was the milk−woman who brought it to the house. Secondly, Madame Duparc conceals the fact that she handed the flour to the servant to make the hasty−pudding. Thirdly, Madame Duparc does not mention that she held the plate for the pudding to be poured into, and took it to her father. Fourthly, and most important of all, Madame Duparc altogether omits to state that she sprinkled salt, with her own hands, over the hasty−pudding−−although she had expressly informed her servant, a day or two before, that salt was never to be mixed with it. At a subsequent stage of the proceedings she was charged with having salted the hasty−pudding herself, and she could not, and did not, deny it.

The examination of Madame Duparc ended the business of the day of the eighth. The next morning the Lieutenant−Criminel, as politely attentive as before, returned to resume his inquiry at the private residence of Monsieur Duparc.

The first witness examined on the second day was Mademoiselle Duparc. She carefully followed her mother's lead−−saying as little as possible about the preparation of the hasty−pudding on the morning of Monday, and as much as possible about the pain suffered by everybody after the dinner of Tuesday. Madame Beauguillot, the next witness, added her testimony, as to the state of her own digestive organs, after partaking of the same meal−−speaking at such prodigious length that the poison would appear, in her case, to have produced its principal effect (and that of a stimulating kind) on her tongue. Her son, Monsieur De Beauguillot, was next examined, quite uselessly in relation to the death by poison, which was the object of inquiry. The last witness was Madame Duparc's younger son−−the same who had complained of feeling a gritty substance between his teeth at dinner. In one important respect, his evidence flatly contradicted his mother's. Madame Duparc had adroitly connected Monsieur De Beaulieu's illness with the hasty−pudding, by describing the old man as having been taken ill four or five minutes after eating it. Young Duparc, on the contrary, declared that his grandfather first felt ill at nine o'clock−−exactly two hours after he had partaken of his morning meal.

With the evidence of this last witness, the examinations at the private residence of Monsieur Duparc ended. Thus far, out of the seven persons, all related to each other, who had been called as witnesses, three (Monsieur Duparc himself, Madame Beauguillot, and her son) had not been in the house on the day when Monsieur De Beaulieu died. Of the other four, who had been present (Madame De Beaulieu, Madame Duparc, her son and her daughter), not one deposed to a single fact tending to fix on Marie any reasonable suspicion of having administered poison to Monsieur De Beaulieu.

The remaining witnesses, called before the Lieutenant−Criminel, were twenty−nine in number. Not one of them had been in the house on the Monday which was the day of the old man's death. Twenty−six of them had nothing to offer but hearsay evidence on the subject of the events which had taken place at, and after, the dinner of Tuesday. The testimony of the remaining three; namely, of Friley, who had lodged the information against Marie; of Surgeon Hébert, who had searched her pockets in the house; and of Commiesary Bertot, who had searched her for the second time, after taking her to prison−−was the testimony on which the girl's enemies mainly relied for substantiating their charges by positively associating her with the possession of arsenic.

Let us see what amount of credit can be attached to the evidence of these three witnesses. Friley was the first to be examined. After stating what share he had taken in bringing Marie to justice (it will be remembered that he lodged his information against her at the instance of Madame Duparc, without allowing her to say a word in her own defense), he proceeded to depose that he hunted about the bed on which the girl had lain down to recover herself, and that he discovered on the mattress seven or eight scattered grains of some substance which resembled the powder reported to have been found on the crumbs in her pockets. He added further, that on the next day, about two hours before the body of Monsieur De Beaulieu was examined, he returned to the house, searched under the bed, with Monsieur Duparc and a soldier named Cauvin, and found there four or five grains more of the same substance which he had discovered on the mattress.

Here were two separate portions of poison found, then. What did Friley do with them? Did he seal them up immediately in the presence of witnesses, and take them to the legal authorities? Nothing of the sort. On being asked what he did with the first portion, he replied that he gave it to young Monsieur Beauguillot. Beauguillot's evidence was thereupon referred to, and it was found that he

had never mentioned receiving the packet of powder from Friley. He had made himself extremely officious in examining the kitchen utensils; he had been as anxious as any one to promote the discovery of arsenic; and when he had the opportunity of producing it, if Friley were to be believed, he held it back, and said not one word about the matter. So much for the first portion of the mysterious powder, and for the credibility of Friley's evidence thus far!

On being questioned as to what he had done with the second portion, alleged to have been found under the bed, Friley replied that he had handed it to the doctors who opened the body, and that they had tried to discover what it was by burning it between two copper pieces. A witness who had been present at this proceeding declared, on being questioned, that the experiment had been made with some remains of hasty−pudding scraped out of the saucepan. Here again was a contradiction, and here, once more, Friley's evidence was, to say the least of it, not to be depended on.

Sergeant Hébert followed. What had he done with the crumbs of bread scattered over with white powder which he had found in Marie's pocket? He had, after showing them to the company in the drawing−room, exhibited them next to the apothecary, and handed them afterward to another medical man. Being finally assured that there was arsenic on the bread, he had sealed up the crumbs, and given the packet to the legal authorities. When had he done that? On the day of his examination as a witness−−the fourteenth of August. When did he find the crumbs? On the seventh. Here was the arsenic in this case, then, passing about from hand to hand, and not sealed up, for seven days. Had Surgeon Hébert anything more to say? Yes, he had another little lot of arsenic to hand in, which a lady−friend of his had told him she had found on Marie's bed, and which, like the first lot, had been passed about privately for seven days, from hand to hand, before it was sealed up. To us, in these later and better days, it seems hardly credible that the judge should have admitted these two packets in evidence. It is, nevertheless, the disgraceful fact that he did so receive them.

Commissary Bertot came next. He and the man named Vassol, who had helped him to entrap Marie into prison, and to search her before she was placed in solitary confinement, were examined in succession, and contradicted each other on oath in the flattest manner.

Bertot stated that he had discovered the dust at the bottom of her pockets; had shaken it out on paper; had placed with it the little linen bag, containing a morsel of the sacramental wafer, which had been sewn to her petticoat; had sealed the two up in one packet; and had taken the packet to the proper office. Vassol, on the other hand, swore that he had shaken out the pockets, and had made up the packet; and that Bertot had done nothing in the matter but lend his seal. Contradicting each other in these details, both agreed that what they had found on the girl was inclosed and sealed up in one packet, which they had left at the office, neglecting to take such a receipt for it as might have established its identity in writing. At this stage of the proceedings the packet was sent for. Three packets appeared instead of one! Two were composed of paper, and contained dust and a little white powder. The third was the linen bag, presented without any covering at all. Vassol, bewildered by the change, declared that of these three separate objects he could only identify one−−the linen bag. In this case, it was as clear as daylight that somebody must have tampered with the single sealed packet which Bertot and Vassol swore to having left at the office. No attempt, however, was made to investigate this circumstance; and the case for the prosecution−−so far as the accusation of poisoning was concerned−−closed with the examination of Bertot and Vassol.

Such was the evidence produced in support of a charge which involved nothing less than the life or death of a human being.

CHAPTER IV.−−THE SENTENCE.

While the inquiry was in course of progress, various details connected with it found their way out−of−doors. The natural sense of justice among the people which had survived the corruptions of the time was aroused to assert itself on behalf of the maid of all work. The public voice spoke as loudly as it dared, in those days, in Marie's favor, and in condemnation of the conspiracy against her.

People persisted, from the first, in inquiring how it was that arsenic had got into the house of Monsieur Duparc; and rumor answered, in more than one direction, that a member of the family had purchased the poison a short time since, and that there were persons in the town who could prove it. To the astonishment of every one, no steps were taken by the legal authorities to clear up this report, and to establish the truth or the falsehood of it, before the trial. Another circumstance, of which also no explanation was attempted, filled the public mind with natural suspicion. This was the disappearance of the eldest son of Monsieur and Madame Duparc. On the day of his grandfather's sudden death, he had been sent, as may be remembered, to bring his father back from the country; and, from that time forth, he had never reappeared at the house, and nobody could say what had become of him. Was it not natural to connect together the rumors of purchased poison and the mysterious disappearance of this young man? Was it not utterly inconsistent with any proceedings conducted in the name of justice to let these suspicious circumstances exist, without making the slightest attempt to investigate and to explain them?

But, apart from all other considerations, the charge against Marie was, on the face of it, preposterously incredible. A friendless young girl arrives at a strange town, possessing excellent testimonials to her character, and gets a situation in a family every member of which is utterly unknown to her until she enters the house. Established in her new place, she instantly conceives the project of poisoning the whole family, and carries it out in five days from the time when she first took her situation, by killing one member of the household, and producing suspicious symptoms of illness in the cases of all the rest. She commits this crime having nothing to gain by it; and she is so inconceivably reckless of detection that she scatters poison about the bed on which she lies down, leaves poison sticking to the crumbs in her pockets, puts those pockets on when her mistress tells her to do so, and hands them over without a moment's hesitation to the first person who asks permission to search them. What mortal evidence could substantiate such a wild charge as this? How does the evidence actually presented substantiate it? No shadow of proof that she had purchased arsenic is offered, to begin with. The evidence against her is evidence which attempts to associate her with the actual possession of poison. What is it worth? In the first place, the witnesses contradict each other. In the second place, in no one case in which powdered substances were produced in evidence against her had those powdered substances been so preserved as to prevent their being tampered with. Two packets of the powder pass about from hand to hand for seven days; two have been given to witnesses who can't produce them, or account for what has become of them; and one, which the witnesses who made it up swear to as a single packet, suddenly expands into three when it is called for in evidence!

Careless as they were of assuming even the external decencies of justice, the legal authorities, and their friends the Duparcs, felt that there would be some risk in trying their victim for her life on such evidence as this, in a large town like Caen. It was impossible to shift their ground and charge her with poisoning accidentally; for they either could not, or would not, account on ordinary grounds for the presence of arsenic in the house. And, even if this difficulty were overcome, and if it were alleged that arsenic purchased for killing vermin had been carelessly placed in one of the salt−cellars on the dresser, Madame Duparc could not deny that her own hands had salted the

hasty−pudding on the Monday, and that her servant had been too ill through exhaustion to cook the dinner on the Tuesday. Even supposing there were no serious interests of the vilest kind at stake which made the girl's destruction a matter of necessity, it was clearly impossible to modify the charge against her. One other alternative remained−−the alternative of adding a second accusation which might help to strengthen the first, and to degrade Marie in the estimation of those inhabitants of the town who were now disposed to sympathize with her.

The poor girl's character was so good, her previous country life had been so harmless, that no hint or suggestion for a second charge against her could be found in her past history. If her enemies were to succeed, it was necessary to rely on pure invention. Having hesitated before no extremes of baseness and falsehood, thus far, they were true to themselves in regard to any vile venture which remained to be tried.

A day or two after the examination of the witnesses called to prove the poisoning had been considered complete, the public of Caen were amazed to hear that certain disclosures had taken place which would render it necessary to try Marie on a charge of theft as well as of poisoning. She was now not only accused of the murder of Monsieur De Beaulieu, but of robbing her former mistress Madame Dumesnil (a relation, be it remembered, of Monsieur Revel's), in the situation she occupied before she came to Caen; of robbing Madame Duparc; and of robbing the shop−woman from whom she had bought the piece of orange−colored stuff, the purchase of which is mentioned in an early part of this narrative.

There is no need to hinder the progress of this story by entering into details in relation to this second atrocious charge. When the reader is informed that the so−called evidence in support of the accusation of theft was got up by Procurator Revel, by Commissary Bertot, and by Madame Duparc, he will know beforehand what importance to attach to it, and what opinion to entertain on the question of the prisoner's innocence or guilt.

The preliminary proceedings were now considered to be complete. During their progress Marie had been formally interrogated, in her prison, by the legal authorities. Fearful as her situation was, the poor girl seems to have maintained self−possession enough to declare her innocence of poisoning, and her innocence of theft, firmly. Her answers, it is needless to say, availed her nothing. No legal help was assigned to her; no such institution as a jury was in existence in France. Procurator Revel collected the evidence, Procurator Revel tried the case, Procurator Revel delivered the sentence. Need the reader be told that Marie's irresponsible judge and unscrupulous enemy had no difficulty whatever in finding her guilty? She had been arrested on the seventh of August, seventeen hundred and eighty−one. Her doom was pronounced on the seventeenth of April, seventeen hundred and eighty−two. Throughout the whole of that interval she remained in prison.

The sentence was delivered in the following terms. It was written, printed, and placarded in Caen; and it is here translated from the original French:

"The Procurator Royal of the Bailiwick and civil and criminal Bench and Presidency of Caen, having taken cognizance of the documents concerning the trial specially instituted against Marie Françoise Victoire Salmon accused of poisoning; the said documents consisting of an official report of the capture of the said Marie Françoise Victoire Salmon on the seventh of August last, together with other official reports, etc.

"Requires that the prisoner shall be declared duly convicted:

"I. Of having, on the Monday morning of the sixth of August last, cooked some hasty−pudding for

Monsieur Paisant De Beaulieu, father−in−law of Monsieur Huet Duparc, in whose house the prisoner had lived in the capacity of servant from the first day of the said month of August; and of having put arsenic in the said hasty−pudding while cooking it, by which arsenic the said Monsieur De Beaulieu died poisoned, about six o'clock on the same evening.

"II. Of having on the next day, Tuesday, the seventh of August last, put arsenic into the soup which was served, at noon, at the table of Monsieur and Madame Duparc, her employers, in consequence of which all those persons who sat at table and ate of the said soup were poisoned and made dangerously ill, to the number of seven.

"III. Of having been discovered with arsenic in her possession, which arsenic was found on the said Tuesday, in the afternoon, not only in the pockets of the prisoner, but upon the mattress of the bed on which she was resting; the said arsenic having been recognized as being of the same nature and precisely similar to that which the guests discovered to have been put into their soup, as also to that which was found the next day, in the body of the aforesaid Monsieur De Beaulieu, and in the saucepan in which the hasty−pudding had been cooked, of which the aforesaid Monsieur De Beaulieu had eaten.

"IV. Of being strongly suspected of having put some of the same arsenic into a plate of cherries which she served to Madame De Beaulieu, on the same Tuesday morning, and again on the afternoon of the same day at the table of Monsieur and Madame Duparc.

"V. Of having, at the period of Michaelmas, seventeen hundred and eighty, committed different robberies at the house of Monsieur Dumesnil, where she lived in the capacity of servant, and notably of stealing a sheet, of which she made herself a petticoat and an apron.

"VI. Of having, at the beginning of the month of August last, stolen, in the house of Monsieur Huet Duparc, the different articles enumerated at the trial, and which were found locked up in her cupboard.

"VII. Of being strongly suspected of stealing, at the beginning of the said month of August, from the woman Lefevre, a piece of orange−colored stuff.

"For punishment and reparation of which offenses she, the said Marie Françoise Victoire Salmon, shall be condemned to make atonement, in her shift, with a halter round her neck, holding in her hands a burning wax−candle of the weight of two pounds, before the principal gate and entrance of the church of St. Peter, to which she shall be taken and led by the executioner of criminal sentences, who will tie in front of her and behind her back a placard, on which shall be written in large characters these words: Poisoner and Domestic Thief. And there, being on her knees, she shall declare that she has wickedly committed the said robberies and poisonings, for which she repents and asks pardon of God and justice. This done, she shall be led by the said executioner to the square of the market of Saint Saviour's, to be there fastened to a stake with a chain of iron, and to be burned alive; her body to be reduced to ashes, and the ashes to be cast to the winds; her goods to be acquired and confiscated to the King, or to whomsoever else the may belong. Said goods to be charged with fine of ten livres to the King, in the event of the confiscation not turning to the profit of his Majesty.

"Required, additionally, that the said prisoner shall be previously submitted to the Ordinary and Extraordinary torture, to obtain information of her accomplices, and notably of those who either sold to her or gave to her the arsenic found in her possession. Order hereby given for the printing and placarding of this sentence in such places as shall be judged fit. Deliberated at the bar, this

seventeenth April, seventeen hundred and eighty−two. (Signed) REVEL."

On the next day, the eighteenth, this frightful sentence was formally confirmed.

The matter had now become public, and no one could prevent the unfortunate prisoner from claiming whatever rights the law still allowed her. She had the privilege of appealing against her sentence before the Parliament of Rouen. And she appealed accordingly; being transferred, as directed by the law in such cases, from the prison at Caen to the prison at Rouen, to await the decision of the higher tribunal.

On the seventeenth of day the Rouen Parliament delivered its judgment, and confirmed the original sentence.

There was some difficulty, at first, in making the unhappy girl understand that her last chance for life had failed her. When the fact that her sentence was ordered to be carried out was at length impressed on her mind, she sank down with her face on the prison floor−−−then started up on her knees, passionately shrieking to Heaven to have pity on her, and to grant her the justice and the protection which men denied. Her agitation at the frightful prospect before her was so violent, her screams of terror were so shrill and piercing, that all the persons connected with the management of the prison hurried together to her cell. Among the number were three priests, who were accustomed to visit the prisoners and to administer spiritual consolation to them. These three men mercifully set themselves to soothe the mental agony from which the poor creature was suffering. When they had partially quieted her, they soon found her willing and anxious to answer their questions. They inquired carefully into the main particulars of her sad story; and all three came to the same conclusion, that she was innocent. Seeing the impression she had produced on them, she caught, in her despair, at the idea that they might be able to preserve her life; and the dreadful duty devolved on them of depriving her of this last hope. After the confirmation of the sentence, all that they could do was to prove their compassion by preparing her for eternity.

On the 26th of day, the priests spoke their last words of comfort to her soul. She was taken back again, to await the execution of her sentence in the prison of Caen. The day was at last fixed for her death by burning, and the morning came when the torture−chamber was opened to receive her.

CHAPTER V.−−HUSHED UP.

The saddest part of Marie's sad story now remains to be told.

One resource was left her, by employing which it was possible, at the last moment, to avert for a few months the frightful prospect of the torture and the stake. The unfortunate girl might stoop, on her side, to use the weapons of deception against her enemies, and might defame her own character by pleading pregnancy. That one miserable alternative was alt that now remained; and, in the extremity of mortal terror, with the shadow of the executioner on her prison, and with the agony of approaching torment and death at her heart, the forlorn creature accepted it. If the law of strict morality must judge her in this matter without consideration, and condemn her without appeal, the spirit of Christian mercy−−remembering how sorely she was tried, remembering the frailty of our common humanity, remembering the warning word which forbade us to judge one another−−may open its sanctuary of tenderness to a sister in affliction, and may offer her the tribute of its pity, without limit and without blame.

The plea of pregnancy was admitted, and, at the eleventh hour, the period of the execution was deferred. On the day when her ashes were to have been cast to the winds, she was still in her prison, a living, breathing woman. Her limbs were spared from the torture, her body was released from the stake, until the twenty−ninth of July, seventeen hundred and eighty−two. On that day her reprieve was to end, and the execution of her sentence was absolutely to take place.

During the short period of grace which was now to elapse, the situation of the friendless girl, accused of such incredible crimes and condemned to so awful a doom, was discussed far and wide in French society. The case became notorious beyond the limits of Caen. The report of it spread by way of Rouen, from mouth to mouth, till it reached Paris; and from Paris it penetrated into the palace of the King at Versailles. That unhappy man, whose dreadful destiny it was to pay the penalty which the long and noble endurance of the French people had too mercifully abstained from inflicting on his guilty predecessors, had then lately mounted the fatal steps of the throne. Louis the Sixteenth was sovereign of France when the story of the poor servant−girl obtained its first court circulation at Versailles.

The conduct of the King, when the main facts of Marie's case came to his ears, did all honor to his sense of duty and his sense of justice. He instantly dispatched his royal order to suspend the execution of the sentence. The report of Marie's fearful situation had reached him so short a time before the period appointed for her death, that the royal mandate was only delivered to the Parliament of Rouen on the twenty−sixth of July.

The girl's life now hung literally on a thread. An accident happening to the courier, any delay in fulfilling the wearisome official formalities proper to the occasion−−and the execution might have taken its course. The authorities at Rouen, feeling that the King's interference implied a rebuke of their inconsiderate confirmation of the Caen sentence, did their best to set themselvee right for the future by registering the royal order on the day when they received it. The next morning, the twenty−seventh, it was sent to Caen; and it reached the authorities there on the twenty−eighth.

That twenty−eighth of July, seventeen hundred and eighty−two, fell on a Sunday. Throughout the day and night the order lay in the office unopened. Sunday was a holiday, and Procurator Revel was not disposed to occupy it by so much as five minutes' performance of week−day work. On Monday, the twenty−ninth, the crowd assembled to see the execution. The stake was set up, the soldiers were called out, the executioner was ready. All the preliminary horror of the torturing and burning was suffered to darken round the miserable prisoner, before the wretches in authority saw fit to open the message of mercy and to deliver it at the prison−gate.

She was now saved, as if by a miracle, for the second time! But the cell door was still closed on her. The only chance of ever opening it−−the only hope of publicly asserting her innocence, lay in appealing to the King's justice by means of a written statement of her case, presenting it exactly as it stood in all its details, from the beginning at Madame Duparc's to the end in the prison of Caen. The production of such a document as this was beset with obstacles; the chief of them being the difficulty of gaining access to the voluminous reports of the evidence given at the trial, which were only accessible in those days to persons professionally connected with the courts of law. If Marie's case was to be placed before the King, no man in France but a lawyer could undertake the duty with the slightest chance of serving the interests of the prisoner and the interests of truth.

In this disgraceful emergency a man was found to plead the girl's cause, whose profession secured to him the privilege of examining the evidence against her. This man−−a barrister, named Lecauchois−−not only undertook to prepare a statement of the case from the records of the court−−but further devoted himself to collecting money for Marie, from all the charitably disposed

inhabitants of the town. It is to be said to his credit that he honestly faced the difficulties of his task, and industriously completed the document which he had engaged to furnish. On the other hand it must be recorded to his shame, that his motives were interested throughout, and that with almost incredible meanness he paid himself for the employment of his time by putting the greater part of the sum which he had collected for his client in his own pocket. With her one friend, no less than with all her enemies, it seems to have been Marie's hard fate to see the worst side of human nature, on every occasion when she was brought into contact with her fellow−creatures.

The statement pleading for the revision of Marie's trial was sent to Paris. An eminent barrister at the Court of Requests framed a petition from it, the prayer of which was granted by the King. Acting under the royal order, the judges of the Court of Requests furnished themselves with the reports of the evidence as drawn up at Caen; and after examining the whole case, unanimously decided that there was good and sufficient reason for the revision of the trial. The order to that effect was not issued to the Parliament of Rouen before the twenty−fourth of May, seventeen hundred and eighty−four−−nearly two years after the King's mercy had saved Marie from the executioner. Who can say how slowly that long, long time must have passed to the poor girl who was still languishing in her prison?

The Rouen Parliament, feeling that it was held accountable for its proceedings to a high court of judicature, acting under the direct authority of the King himself, recognized at last, readily enough, that the interests of its own reputation and the interests of rigid justice were now intimately bound up together; and applied itself impartially, on this occasion at least, to the consideration of Marie's case.

As a necessary consequence of this change of course, the authorities of Caen began, for the first time, to feel seriously alarmed for themselves. If the Parliament of Rouen dealt fairly by the prisoner, a fatal exposure of the whole party would be the certain result. Under these circumstances, Procurator Revel and his friends sent a private requisition to the authorities at Rouen, conjuring them to remember that the respectability of their professional brethren was at stake, and suggesting that the legal establishment of Marie's innocence was the error of all others which it was now most urgently necessary to avoid. The Parliament of Rouen was, however, far too cautious, if not too honest, to commit itself to such an atrocious proceeding as was here plainly indicated. After gaining as much time as possible by prolonging their deliberations to the utmost, the authorities resolved on adopting a middle course, which, on the one hand, should ,lot actually establish the prisoner's innocence, and, on the other, should not publicly expose the disgraceful conduct of the prosecution at Caen. Their decree, not issued until the twelfth of March, seventeen hundred and eighty−five, annulled the sentence of Procurator Revel on technical grounds; suppressed the further publication of the statement of Marie's case, which had been drawn out by the advocate Lecauchois, as libelous, toward Monsieur Revel and Madame Duparc; and announced that the prisoner was ordered to remain in confinement until more ample information could be collected relating to the doubtful question of her innocence or her guilt. No such information was at all likely to present itself (more especially after the only existing narrative of the case had been suppressed); and the practical effect of the decree, therefore, was to keep Marie in prison for an indefinite period, after she had been illegally deprived of her liberty already from August, seventeen hundred and eighty−one, to March, seventeen hundred and eighty−five. Who shall say that the respectable classes did not take good care of their respectability on the eve of the French Revolution!

Marie's only hope of recovering her freedom, and exposing her unscrupulous enemies to the obliquy and the punishment which they richly deserved, lay in calling the attention of the higher tribunals of the capital to the cruelly cunning decree of the Parliament of Rouen. Accordingly, she

once more petitioned the throne. The King referred the document to his council; and the council issued an order submitting the Rouen decree to the final investigation of the Parliament of Paris.

At last, then, after more than three miserable years of imprisonment, the victim of Madame Duparc and Procurator Revel had burst her way through all intervening obstacles of law and intricacies of office, to the judgment−seat of that highest law court in the country, which had the final power of ending her long sufferings and of doing her signal justice on her adversaries of all degrees. The Parliament of Paris was now to estimate the unutterable wrong that had been inflicted on her; and the eloquent tongue of one of the first advocates of that famous bar was to plead her cause openly before God, the King, and the country.

The pleading of Monsieur Fournel (Marie's counsel) before the Parliament of Paris, remains on record. At the outset, he assumes the highest ground for the prisoner. He disclaims all intention of gaining her liberty by taking the obvious technical objections to the illegal and irregular sentences of Caen and Rouen. He insists on the necessity of vindicating her innocence legally and morally before the world, and of obtaining the fullest compensation that the law allows for the merciless injuries which the original prosecution had inflicted on his client. In pursuance of this design, he then proceeds to examine the evidence of the alleged poisoning and the alleged robbery, step by step, pointing out in the fullest detail the monstrous contradictions and improbabilities which have been already briefly indicated in this narrative. The course thus pursued, with signal clearness and ability, leads, as every one who has followed the particulars of the case from the beginning will readily understand, to a very serious result. The arguments for the defense cannot assert Marie s innocence without shifting the whole weight of suspicion, in the matter of Monsieur De Beaulieu's death by poisoning, on to the shoulders of her mistress, Madame Duparc.

It is necessary, in order to prepare the reader for the extraordinary termination of the proceedings, to examine this question of suspicion in some of its most striking details.

The poisoning of Monsieur De Beaulieu may be accepted, in consideration of the medical evidence, as a proved fact, to begin with. The question that remains is, whether that poisoning was accidental or premeditated. In either case, the evidence points directly at Madame Duparc, and leads to the conclusion that she tried to shift the blame of the poisoning (if accidental), and the guilt of it (if premeditated), from herself to her servant.

Suppose the poisoning to have been accidental. Suppose arsenic to have been purchased for some legitimate domestic purpose, and to have been carelessly left, in one of the salt−cellars, on the dresser−−who salts the hasty−pudding? Madame Duparc. Who−−assuming that the dinner next day really contained some small portion of poison, just enough to swear by−−prepared that dinner? Madame Duparc and her daughter, while the servant was asleep. Having caused the death of her father, and having produced symptoms of illness in herself and her guests, by a dreadful accident, how does the circumstantial evidence further show that Madame Duparc tried to fix the responsibility of that accident on her servant before she openly charged the girl with poisoning.

In the first place, Madame Duparc is the only one of the dinner−party who attributes the general uneasiness to poison. She not only does this, but she indicates the kind of poison used, and declares in the kitchen that it is burned−−so as to lead to the inference that the servant, who has removed the dishes, has thrown some of the poisoned food on the fire. Here is a foregone conclusion on the subject of arsenic in Madame Duparc's mind, and an inference in connection with it, directed at the servant by Madame Duparc's lips. In the second place, if any trust at all is to be put in the evidence touching the finding of arsenic on or about Marie's person, that trust must be reposed in the testimony of Surgeon Hébert, who first searched the girl. Where does he find the

arsenic and the bread−crumbs? In Marie's pockets. Who takes the most inexplicably officious notice of such a trifle as Marie's dress, at the most shockingly inappropriate time, when the father of Madame Duparc lies dead in the house? Madame Duparc herself. Who tells Marie to take off her Sunday pockets, and sends her into her own room (which she herself has not entered during the night, and which has been open to the intrusion of any one else in the house) to tie on the very pockets in which the arsenic is found? Madame Duparc. Who put the arsenic into the pockets? Is it jumping to a conclusion to answer once more−−Madame Duparc?

Thus far we have assumed that the mistress attempted to shift the blame of a fatal accident on to the shoulders of the servant. Do the facts bear out that theory, or do they lead to the suspicion that the woman was a parricide, and that she tried to fix on the friendless country girl the guilt of her dreadful crime?

If the poisoning of the hasty−pudding (to begin with) was accidental, the salting of it, through which the poisoning was, to all appearance, effected, must have been a part of the habitual cookery of the dish. So far, however, from this being the case, Madame Duparc had expressly warned her servant not to use salt; and only used the salt (or the arsenic) herself, after asking a question which implied a direct contradiction of her own directions, and the inconsistency of which she made no attempt whatever to explain. Again, when her father was taken ill, if Madame Duparc had been only the victim of an accident, would she have remained content with no better help than that of an apothecary's boy? would she not have sent, as her father grew worse, for the best medical assistance which the town afforded? The facts show that she summoned just help enough barely to save appearances, and no more. The facts show that she betrayed a singular anxiety to have the body laid out as soon as possible after life was extinct. The facts show that she maintained an unnatural composure on the day of the death. These are significant circumstances. They speak for themselves independently of the evidence given afterward, in which she and her child contradicted each other as to the time that elapsed when the old man had eaten his fatal meal before he was taken ill. Add to these serious facts the mysterious disappearance from the house of the eldest son, which was never accounted for; and the rumor of purchased poison, which was never investigated. Consider, besides, whether the attempt to sacrifice the servant's life be not more consistent with the ruthless determination of a criminal, than with the terror of an innocent woman who shrinks from accepting the responsibility of a frightful accident−−and determine, at the same time, whether the infinitesimal amount of injury done by the poisoned dinner can be most probably attributed to lucky accident, or to premeditated doctoring of the dishes with just arsenic enough to preserve appearances, and to implicate the servant without too seriously injuring the company on whom she waited. Give all these serious considerations their due weight; then look back to the day of Monsieur De Beaulieu's death, and say if Madame Duparc was the victim of a dreadful accident, or the perpetrator of an atrocious crime! That she was one or the other, and that, in either case, she was the originator of the vile conspiracy against her servant which these pages disclose, was the conclusion to which Monsieur Fournel's pleading on his client's behalf inevitably led. That pleading satisfactorily demonstrated Marie's innocence of poisoning and theft, and her fair claim to the fullest legal compensation for the wrong inflicted on her. On the twenty−third of May, seventeen hundred and eighty−six, the Parliament of Paris issued its decree, discharging her from the remotest suspicion of guilt, releasing her from her long imprisonment, and authorizing her to bring an action for damages against the person or persons who had falsely accused her of murder and theft. The truth had triumphed, and the poor servant−girl had found laws to protect her at last.

Under these altered circumstances, what happened to Madame Duparc? What happened to Procurator Revel and his fellow−conspirators? What happened to the authorities of the Parliament of Rouen?

Nothing.

The premonitory rumblings of that great earthquake of nations which history calls the French Revolution were, at this time, already beginning to make themselves heard; and any public scandal which affected the wealthier and higher classes involved a serious social risk, the importance of which no man in France could then venture to estimate. If Marie claimed the privilege which a sense of justice, or rather a sense of decency, had forced the Parliament of Paris to concede to her−−and, through her counsel, she did claim it−−the consequences of the legal inquiry into her case which her demand for damages necessarily involved would probably be the trying of Madame Duparc, either for parricide or for homicide by misadventure; the dismissal of Procurator Revel from the functions which he had disgracefully abused; and the suspension from office of the authorities at Caen and Rouen, who had in various ways forfeited public confidence by aiding and abetting him.

Here, then, was no less a prospect in view than the disgrace of a respectable family, and the dishonoring of the highest legal functionaries of two important provincial towns! And for what end was the dangerous exposure to be made? Merely to do justice to the daughter of a common day−laborer, who had been illegally sentenced to torture and burning, and illegally confined in prison for nearly five years. To make a wholesale sacrifice of her superiors, no matter how wicked they might be, for the sake of giving a mere servant−girl compensation for the undeserved obloquy and misery of many years, was too preposterous and too suicidal an act of justice to be thought of for a moment. Accordingly, when Marie was prepared to bring her action for damages, the lawyers laid their heads together in the interests of society. It was found possible to put her out of court at once and forever, by taking a technical objection to the proceedings in which she was plaintiff at the very outset. This disgraceful means of escape once discovered, the girl's guilty persecutors instantly took advantage of it. She was formally put out of court, without the possibility of any further appeal. Procurator Revel and the other authorities retained their distinguished legal positions; and the question of the guilt or innocence of Madame Duparc, in the matter of her father's death, remains a mystery which no man can solve to this day.

After recording this scandalous termination of the legal proceedings, it is gratifying to be able to conclude the story of Marie's unmerited sufferings with a picture of her after−life which leaves an agreeable impression on the mind.

If popular sympathy, after the servant−girl's release from prison, could console her for the hard measure of injustice under which she had suffered so long and so unavailingly, that sympathy was now offered to her heartily and without limit. She became quite a public character in Paris. The people followed her in crowds wherever she went. A subscription was set on foot, which, for the time at least, secured her a comfortable independence. Friends rose up in all directions to show her such attention as might be in their power; and the simple country girl, when she was taken to see the sights of Paris, actually beheld her own name placarded in the showmen's bills, and her presence advertised as the greatest attraction that could be offered to the public. When, in due course of time, all this excitement had evaporated, Marie married prosperously, and the Government granted her its license to open a shop for the sale of stamped papers. The last we hear of her is, that she was a happy wife and mother, and that she performed every duty of life in such a manner as to justify the deep interest which had been universally felt for her by the people of France.

Her story is related here, not only because it seemed to contain some elements of interest in itself, but also because the facts of which it is composed may claim to be of some little historical

importance, as helping to expose the unendurable corruptions of society in France before the Revolution. It may not be amiss for those persons whose historical point of view obstinately contracts its range to the Reign of Terror, to look a little further back−−to remember that the hard case of oppression here related had been, for something like one hundred years, the case (with minor changes of circumstance) of the forlorn many against the powerful few all over France−−and then to consider whether there was not a reason and a necessity, a dreadful last necessity, for the French Revolution. That Revolution has expiated, and is still expiating, its excesses, by political failures, which all the world can see. But the social good which it indisputably effected remains to this day. Take, as an example, the administration of justice in France at the present time. Whatever its shortcomings may still be, no innocent Frenchwoman could be treated now as an innocent Frenchwoman was once treated at a period so little remote from our own time as the end of the last century.

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.−−III. THE CALDRON OF OIL.

ABOUT one French league distant from the city of Toulouse there is a village called Croix−Daurade. In the military history of England, this place is associated with a famous charge of the Eighteenth Hussars, which united two separated columns of the British army on the day before the Duke of Wellington fought the battle of Toulouse. In the criminal history of France, the village is memorable as the scene of a daring crime, which was discovered and punished under circumstances sufficiently remarkable to merit preservation in the form of a plain narrative.

I. THE PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

In the year seventeen hundred, the resident priest of the village of Croix−Daurade was Monsieur Pierre−Celestin Chaubard. He was a man of no extraordinary energy or capacity, simple in his habits, and sociable in his disposition. His character was irreproachable; he was strictly conscientious in the performance of his duties; and he was universally respected and beloved by all his parishioners.

Among the members of his flock there was a family named Siadoux. The head of the household, Saturnin Siadoux, had been long established in business at Croix−Daurade as an oil manufacturer. At the period of the events now to be narrated, he had attained the age of sixty, and was a widower. His family consisted of five children−−three young men, who helped him in the business, and two daughters. His nearest living relative was his sister, the widow Mirailhe.

The widow resided principally at Toulouse. Her time in that city was mainly occupied in winding up the business affairs of her deceased husband, which had remained unsettled for a considerable period after his death, through delays in realizing certain sums of money owing to his representative. The widow had been left very well provided for−−she was still a comely, attractive woman−−and more than one substantial citizen of Toulouse had shown himself anxious to persuade her into marrying for the second time. But the widow Mirailhe lived on terms of great intimacy and affection with her brother Siadoux and his family; she was sincerely attached to them, and sincerely unwilling, at her age, to deprive her nephews and nieces, by a second marriage, of the inheritance, or even of a portion of the inheritance, which would otherwise fall to them on her death. Animated by these motives, she closed her doors resolutely on all suitors who attempted to pay their court to her, with the one exception of a master−butcher of Toulouse, whose name was Cantegrel.

This man was a neighbor of the widow's, and had made himself useful by assisting her in the business complications which still hung about the realization of her late husband's estate. The preference which she showed for the master−butcher was thus far of the purely negative kind. She gave him no absolute encouragement; she would not for a moment admit that there was the slightest prospect of her ever marrying him; but, at the same lime, she continued to receive his visits, and she showed no disposition to restrict the neighborly intercourse between them, for the future, within purely formal bounds. Under these circumstances, Saturnin Siadoux began to be alarmed, and to think it time to bestir himself. He had no personal acquaintance with Cantegrel, who never visited the village; and Monsieur Chaubard (to whom he might otherwise have applied for advice) was not in a position to give an opinion; the priest and the master−butcher did not even know each other by sight. In this difficulty, Siadoux bethought himself of inquiring privately at Toulouse, in the hope of discovering some scandalous passages in Cantegrel's early life which might fatally degrade him in the estimation of the widow Mirailhe. The investigation, as usual in such cases, produced rumors and reports in plenty, the greater part of which dated back to a period of the butcher's life when he had resided in the ancient town or Narbonne. One of these rumors, especially, was of so serious a nature that Siadoux determined to test the truth or falsehood of it personally by traveling to Narbonne. He kept his intention a secret not only from his sister and his daughters, but also from his sons; they were young men, not overpatient in their tempers, and he doubted their discretion. Thus, nobody knew his real purpose but himself when he left home.

His safe arrival at Narbonne was notified in a letter to his family. The letter entered into no particulars relating to his secret errand: it merely informed his children of the day when they might expect him back, and of certain social arrangements which he wished to be made to welcome him on his return. He proposed, on his way home, to stay two days at Castelnaudry, for the purpose of paying a visit to an old friend who was settled there. According to this plan, his return to Croix−Daurade would be deferred until Tuesday, the twenty−sixth of April, when his family might expect to see him about sunset, in good time for supper. He further desired that a little party of friends might be invited to the meal, to celebrate the twenty−sixth of April (which was a feast−day in the village), as well as to celebrate his return. The guests whom he wished to be invited were, first, his sister; secondly, Monsieur Chaubard, whose pleasant disposition made him a welcome guest at all the village festivals; thirdly and fourthly, two neighbors, business men like himself, with whom he lived on terms of the friendliest intimacy. That was the party; and the family of Siadoux took especial pains, as the time approached, to provide a supper worthy of the guests, who had all shown the heartiest readiness in accepting their invitations.

This was the domestic position, these were the family prospects, on the morning of the twenty−sixth of April−−a memorable day, for years afterward, in the village of Croix−Daurade.

II. THE EVENTS OF THE DAY.

Besides the curacy of the village church, good Monsieur Chaubard held some ecclesiastical preferment in the cathedral church of St. Stephen at Toulouse. Early in the forenoon of the twenty−sixth, certain matters connected with this preferment took him from his village curacy to the city−−a distance which has been already described as not greater than one French league, or between two and three English miles.

After transacting his business, Monsieur Chaubard parted with his clerical brethren, who left him by himself in the sacristy (or vestry) of the church. Before he had quitted the room, in his turn, the beadle entered it, and inquired for the Abbe de Mariotte, one of the officiating priests attached to

the cathedral.

"The Abbe has just gone out," replied Monsieur Chaubard. "Who wants him?"

"A respectable−looking man," said the beadle. "I thought he seemed to be in some distress of mind when he spoke to me."

"Did he mention his business with the Abbe?"

"Yes, sir; he expressed himself as anxious to make his confession immediately."

"In that case," said Monsieur Chaubard, "I may be of use to him in the Abbe's absence, for I have authority to act here as confessor. Let us go into the church and see if this person feels disposed to accept my services."

When they went into the church, they found the man walking backward and forward in a restless, disordered manner. His looks were so strikingly suggestive of some serious mental perturbation, that Monsieur Chaubard found it no easy matter to preserve his composure when he first addressed himself to the stranger.

"I am sorry," he began, "that the Abbe de Mariotte is not here to offer you his services−−"

"I want to make my confession," said the man, looking about him vacantly, as if the priest's words had not attracted his attention.

"You can do so at once, if you please," said Monsieur Chaubard. "I am attached to this church, and I possess the necessary authority to receive confessions in it. Perhaps, however, you are personally acquainted with the Abbe de Mariotte? Perhaps you would prefer waiting−−"

"No!" said the man, roughly. "I would as soon, or sooner, confess to a stranger."

"In that case," replied Monsieur Chaubard, "be so good as to follow me."

He led the way to the confessional. The beadle, whose curiosity was excited, waited a little, and looked after them. In a few minutes he saw the curtains, which were sometimes used to conceal the face of the officiating priest, suddenly drawn. The penitent knelt with his back turned to the church. There was literally nothing to see; but the beadle waited, nevertheless, in expectation of the end.

After a long lapse of time the curtain was withdrawn, and priest and penitent left the confessional.

The change which the interval had worked in Monsieur Chaubard was so extraordinary that the beadle's attention was altogether withdrawn, in the interest of observing it, from the man who had made the confession. He did not remark by which door the stranger left the church−−his eyes were fixed on Monsieur Chaubard. The priest's naturally ruddy face was as white as if he had just risen from a long sickness; he looked straight before him, with a stare of terror, and he left the church as hurriedly as if he had been a man escaping from prison; left it without a parting word, or a farewell look, although he was noted for his courtesy to his inferiors on all ordinary occasions.

"Good Monsieur Chaubard has heard more than he bargained for," said the beadle, wandering back to the empty confessional with an interest which he had never felt in it till that moment.

The day wore on as quietly as usual in the village of Croix−Daurade. At the appointed time the supper−table was laid for the guests in the house of Saturnin Siadoux. The widow Mirailhe and the two neighbors arrived a little before sunset. Monsieur Chaubard, who was usually punctual, did not make his appearance with them; and when the daughters of Saturnin Siadoux looked out from the upper windows, they saw no signs on the highroad of their father's return.

Sunset came, and still neither Siadoux nor the priest appeared. The little party sat waiting round the table, and waited in vain. Before long a message was sent up from the kitchen, representing that the supper must be eaten forthwith, or be spoiled; and the company began to debate the two alternatives−−of waiting, or not waiting, any longer.

"It is my belief," said the widow Mirailhe, "that my brother is not coming home to−night. When Monsieur Chaubard joins us, we had better sit down to supper."

"Can any accident have happened to my father?" asked one of the two daughters, anxiously.

"God forbid!" said the widow.

"God forbid!" repeated the two neighbors, looking expectantly at the empty supper−table.

"It has been a wretched day for traveling," said Louis, the eldest son.

"It rained in torrents all yesterday," added Thomas, the second son.

"And your father's rheumatism makes him averse to traveling in wet weather," suggested the widow, thoughtfully.

"Very true!" said the first of the two neighbors, shaking his head piteously at his passive knife and fork.

Another message came up from the kitchen, and peremptorily forbade the company to wait any longer.

"But where is Monsieur Chaubard?" said the widow. "Has he been taking a journey too? Why is he absent? Has anybody seen him to−day?"

"I have seen him to−day," said the youngest son, who had not spoken yet. This young man's name was Jean; he was little given to talking, but he had proved himself, on various domestic occasions, to be the quickest and most observant member of the family.

"Where did you see him?" asked the widow.

"I met him this morning, on his way in to Toulouse."

"He has not fallen ill, I hope? Did he look out of sorts when you met him?"

"He was in excellent health and spirits," said Jean. "I never saw him look better−−"

"And I never saw him look worse," said the second of the neighbors, striking into the conversation with the aggressive fretfulness of a hungry man.

"What! this morning?" cried Jean, in astonishment.

"No; this afternoon," said the neighbor. "I saw him going into our church here. He was as white as our plates will be−−when they come up. And what is almost as extraordinary, he passed without taking the slightest notice of me."

Jean relapsed into his customary silence. It was getting dark; the clouds had gathered while the company had been talking; and, at the first pause in the conversation, the rain, falling again in torrents, made itself drearily audible.

"Dear, dear me!" said the widow. "If it was not raining so hard, we might send somebody to inquire after good Monsieur Chaubard."

"I'll go and inquire," said Thomas Siadoux. "It's not five minutes' walk. Have up the supper; I'll take a cloak with me; and if our excellent Monsieur Chaubard is out of his bed, I'll bring him back, to answer for himself."

With those words he left the room. The supper was put on the table forthwith. The hungry neighbor disputed with nobody from that moment, and the melancholy neighbor recovered his spirits.

On reaching the priest's house, Thomas Siadoux found him sitting alone in his study. He started to his feet, with every appearance of the most violent alarm, when the young man entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thomas; "I am afraid I have startled you."

"What do you want?" asked Monsieur Chaubard, in a singularly abrupt, bewildered manner.

"Have you forgotten, sir, that this is the night of our supper?" remonstrated Thomas. "My father has not come back, and we can only suppose−−"

At those words the priest dropped into his chair again, and trembled from head to foot. Amazed to the last degree by this extraordinary reception of his remonstrance, Thomas Siadoux remembered, at the same time, that he had engaged to bring Monsieur Chaubard back with him; and he determined to finish his civil speech as if nothing had happened.

"We are all of opinion," he resumed, "that the weather has kept my father on the road. But that is no reason, sir, why the supper should be wasted, or why you should not make one of us, as you promised. Here is a good warm cloak−−"

"I can't come," said the priest. "I'm ill; I'm in bad spirits; I'm not fit to go out." He sighed bitterly, and hid his face in his hands.

"Don't say that, sir," persisted Thomas. "If you are out of spirits, let us try to cheer you. And you, in your turn, will enliven us. They are all waiting for you at home. Don't refuse, sir," pleaded the young man, "or we shall think we have offended you in some way. You have always been a good friend to our family−−"

Monsieur Chaubard again rose from his chair, with a second change of manner, as extraordinary and as perplexing as the first. His eyes moistened as if the tears were rising in them; he took the hand of Thomas Siadoux, and pressed it long and warmly in his own. There was a curious mixed expression of pity and fear in the look which he now fixed on the young man.

"Of all the days in the year," he said, very earnestly, "don't doubt my friendship to−day. Ill as I am, I will make one of the supper party, for your sake−−"

"And for my father's sake?" added Thomas, persuasively.

"Let us go to the supper," said the priest.

Thomas Siadoux wrapped the cloak round him, and they left the house.

Every one at the table noticed the change in Monsieur Chaubard. He accounted for it by declaring, confusedly, that he was suffering from nervous illness; and then added that he would do his best, notwithstanding, to promote the social enjoyment of the evening. His talk was fragmentary, and his cheerfulness was sadly forced; but he contrived, with these drawbacks, to take his part in the conversation−−except in the case when it happened to turn on the absent master of the house. Whenever the name of Saturnin Siadoux was mentioned−−either by the neighbors, who politely regretted that he was not present, or by the family, who naturally talked about the resting−place which he might have chosen for the night−−Monsieur Chaubard either relapsed into blank silence, or abruptly changed the topic. Under these circumstances, the company, by whom he was respected and beloved, made the necessary allowances for his state of health; the only person among them who showed no desire to cheer the priest's spirits, and to humor him in his temporary fretfulness, being the silent younger son of Saturnin Siadoux.

Both Louis and Thomas noticed that, from the moment when Monsieur Chaubard's manner first betrayed his singular unwillingness to touch on the subject of their father's absence, Jean fixed his eyes on the priest with an expression of suspicious attention, and never looked away from him for the rest of the evening. The young man's absolute silence at table did not surprise his brothers, for they were accustomed to his taciturn habits. But the sullen distrust betrayed in his close observation of the honored guest and friend of the family surprised and angered them. The priest himself seemed once or twice to be aware of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, and to feel uneasy and offended, as he naturally might. He abstained, however, from openly noticing Jean's strange behavior; and Louis and Thomas were bound, therefore, in common politeness, to abstain from noticing it also.

The inhabitants of Croix−Daurade kept early hours. Toward eleven o'clock, the company rose and separated for the night. Except the two neighbors, nobody had enjoyed the supper, and even the two neighbors, having eaten their fill, were as glad to get home as the rest. In the little confusion of parting, Monsieur Chaubard completed the astonishment of the guests at the extraordinary change in him, by slipping away alone, without waiting to bid anybody good−night.

The widow Mirailhe and her nieces withdrew to their bedrooms, and left the three brothers by themselves in the parlor.

"Jean," said Thomas Siadoux, "I have a word to say to you. You stared at our good Monsieur Chaubard in a very offensive manner all through the evening. What did you mean by it?"

"Wait till to−morrow," said Jean, "and perhaps I may tell you."

He lit his candle, and left them. Both the brothers observed that his hand trembled, and that his manner−−never very winning−−was on that night more serious and more unsociable than usual.

III. THE YOUNGER BROTHER.

When post−time came on the morning of the twenty−seventh, no letter arrived from Saturnin Siadoux. On consideration, the family interpreted this circumstance in a favorable light. If the master of the house had not written to them, it followed, surely, that he meant to make writing unnecessary by returning on that day.

As the hours passed, the widow and her nieces looked out, from time to time, for the absent man. Toward noon they observed a little assembly of people approaching the village. Ere long, on a nearer view, they recognized at the head of the assembly the chief magistrate of Toulouse, in his official dress. He was accompanied by his assessor (also in official dress), by an escort of archers, and by certain subordinates attached to the townhall. These last appeared to be carrying some burden, which was hidden from view by the escort of archers. The procession stopped at the house of Saturnin Siadoux; and the two daughters, hastening to the door to discover what had happened, met the burden which the men were carrying, and saw, stretched on a litter, the dead body of their father.

The corpse had been found that morning on the banks of the river Lers. It was stabbed in eleven places with knife or dagger wounds. None of the valuables about the dead man's person had been touched; his watch and his money were still in his pockets. Whoever had murdered him, had murdered him for vengeance, not for gain.

Some time elapsed before even the male members of the family were sufficiently composed to hear what the officers of justice had to say to them. When this result had been at length achieved, and when the necessary inquiries had been made, no information of any kind was obtained which pointed to the murderer, in the eye of the law. After expressing his sympathy, and promising that every available means should be tried to effect the discovery of the criminal, the chief magistrate gave his orders to his escort, and withdrew.

When night came, the sister and the daughters of the murdered man retired to the upper part of the house, exhausted by the violence of their grief. The three brothers were left once more alone in the parlor, to speak together of the awful calamity which had befallen them. They were of hot Southern blood, and they looked on one another with a Southern thirst for vengeance in their tearless eyes.

The silent younger son was now the first to open his lips.

"You charged me yesterday," he said to his brother Thomas, "with looking strangely at Monsieur Chaubard all the evening; and I answered, that I might tell you why I looked at him when to−morrow came. To−morrow has come, and I am ready to tell you."

He waited a little, and lowered his voice to a whisper when he spoke again.

"When Monsieur Chaubard was at our supper−table last night," he said, "I had it in my mind that something had happened to our father, and that the priest knew it."

The two elder brothers looked at him in speechless astonishment.

"Our father has been brought back to us a murdered man!" Jean went on, still in a whisper. "I tell you, Louis−−and you, Thomas−−that the priest knows who murdered him."

Louis and Thomas shrank from their younger brother as if he had spoken blasphemy.

"Listen," said Jean. "No clew has been found to the secret of the murder. The magistrate has promised us to do his best, but I saw in his face that he had little hope. We must make the discovery ourselves, or our father's blood will have cried to us for vengeance, and cried in vain. Remember that, and mark my next words. You heard me say yesterday evening that I had met Monsieur Chaubard on his way to Toulouse, in excellent health and spirits. You heard our old friend and neighbor contradict me at the supper−table, and declare that he had seen the priest, some hours later, go into our church here with the face of a panic−stricken man. You saw, Thomas, how he behaved when you went to fetch him to our house. You saw, Louis, what his looks were like when he came in. The change was noticed by everybody−−what was the cause of it? I saw the cause in the priest's own face when our father's name turned up in the talk round the supper−table. Did Monsieur Chaubard join in that talk? He was the only person present who never joined in it once. Did he change it on a sudden whenever it came his way? It came his way four times; and four times he changed it−−trembling, stammering, turning whiter and whiter, but still, as true as the heaven above us, shifting the talk off himself every time! Are you men? Have you brains in your heads? Don't you see, as I see, what this leads to? On my salvation I swear it−−the priest knows the hand that killed our father!"

The faces of the two elder brothers darkened vindictively, as the conviction of the truth fastened itself on their minds.

"How could he know it?" they inquired, eagerly.

"He must tell us himself," said Jean.

"And if he hesitates−−if he refuses to open his lips?"

"We must open them by main force."

They drew their chairs together after that last answer, and consulted for some time in whispers.

When the consultation was over, the brothers rose and went into the room where the dead body of their father was laid out. The three kissed him, in turn, on the forehead−−then took hands together, and looked meaningly in each other's faces−−then separated. Louis and Thomas put on their hats, and went at once to the priest's residence; while Jean withdrew by himself to the great room at the back of the house, which was used for the purposes of the oil factory.

Only one of the workmen was left in the place. He was watching an immense caldron of boiling linseed−oil.

"You can go home," said Jean, patting the man kindly on the shoulder. "There is no hope of a night's rest for me, after the affliction that has befallen us; I will take your place at the caldron. Go home, my good fellow−−go home."

The man thanked him, and withdrew. Jean followed, and satisfied himself that the workman had really left the house. He then returned, and sat down by the boiling caldron.

Meanwhile, Louis and Thomas presented themselves at the priest's house. He had not yet retired to bed, and he received them kindly, but with the same extraordinary agitation in his face and manner which had surprised all who saw him on the previous day. The brothers were prepared

beforehand with an answer when he inquired what they wanted of him. They replied immediately that the shock of their father's horrible death had so seriously affected their aunt and their elder sister, that it was feared the minds of both might give way, unless spiritual consolation and assistance were afforded to them that night. The unhappy priest−−always faithful and self−sacrificing where the duties of his ministry were in question−−at once rose to accompany the young men back to the house. He even put on his surplice, and took the crucifix with him, to impress his words of comfort all the more solemnly on the afflicted women whom he was called on to succor.

Thus innocent of all suspicion of the conspiracy to which he had fallen a victim, he was taken into the room where Jean sat waiting by the caldron of oil, and the door was locked behind him.

Before he could speak, Thomas Siadoux openly avowed the truth.

"It is we three who want you," he said; "not our aunt, and not our sister. If you answer our questions truly, you have nothing to fear. If you refuse−−" He stopped, and looked toward Jean and the boiling caldron.

Never, at the best of times, a resolute man; deprived, since the day before, of such resources of energy as he possessed, by the mental suffering which he had undergone in secret, the unfortunate priest trembled from head to foot as the three brothers closed round him. Louis took the crucifix from him, and held it; Thomas forced him to place his right hand on it; Jean stood in front of him and put the questions.

"Our father has been brought home a murdered man," he said. "Do you know who killed him?"

The priest hesitated, and the two elder brothers moved him nearer to the caldron.

"Answer us, on peril of your life," said Jean. "Say, with your hand on the blessed crucifix, do you know the man who killed our father?"

"I do know him."

"When did you make the discovery?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"At Toulouse."

"Name the murderer."

At those words the priest closed his hand fast on the crucifix, and rallied his sinking courage.

"Never!" he said, firmly. "The knowledge I possess was obtained in the confessional. The secrets of the confessional are sacred. If I betray them, I commit sacrilege. I will die first!"

"Think!" said Jean. "If you keep silence, you screen the murderer. If you keep silence, you are the murderer's accomplice. We have sworn over our father's dead body to avenge him; if you refuse to speak, we will avenge him on you. I charge you again, name the man who killed him."

"I will die first," the priest reiterated, as firmly as before.

"Die, then!" said Jean. "Die in that caldron of boiling oil."

"Give him time," cried Louis and Thomas, earnestly pleading together.

"We will give him time," said the younger brother. "There is the clock yonder, against the wall. We will count five minutes by it. In those five minutes, let him make his peace with God, or make up his mind to speak."

They waited, watching the clock. In that dreadful interval, the priest dropped on his knees and hid his face. The time passed in dead silence.

"Speak! for your own sake, for our sakes, speak!" said Thomas Siadoux, as the minute−hand reached the point at which the five minutes expired.

The priest looked up; his voice died away on his lips; the mortal agony broke out on his face in great drops of sweat; his head sank forward on his breast.

"Lift him!" cried Jean, seizing the priest on one side. "Lift him, and throw him in!"

The two elder brothers advanced a step, and hesitated.

"Lift him, on your oath over our father's body!"

The two brothers seized him on the other side. As they lifted him to a level with the caldron, the horror of the death that threatened him burst from the lips of the miserable man in a scream of terror. The brothers held him firm at the caldron's edge. "Name the man!" they said for the last time.

The priest's teeth chattered−−he was speechless. But he made a sign with his head−−a sign in the affirmative. They placed him in a chair, and waited patiently until he was able to speak.

His first words were words of entreaty. He begged Thomas Siadoux to give him back the crucifix. When it was placed in his possession, he kissed it, and said, faintly: "I ask pardon of God for the sin that I am about to commit." He paused, and then looked up at the younger brother, who still stood in front of him. "I am ready," he said. "Question me, and I will answer."

Jean repeated the questions which he had put when the priest was first brought into the room.

"You know the murderer of our father?"

"I know him."

"Since when?"

"Since he made his confession to me yesterday in the Cathedral of Toulouse."

"Name him."

"His name is Cantegrel."

"The man who wanted to marry our aunt?"

"The same."

"What brought him to the confessional?"

"His own remorse."

"What were the motives for his crime?"

"There were reports against his character, and he discovered that your father had gone privately to Narbonne to make sure that they were true."

"Did our father make sure of their truth?"

"He did."

"Would those discoveries have separated our aunt from Cantegrel if our father had lived to tell her of them?"

"They would. If your father had lived, he would have told your aunt that Cantegrel was married already; that he had deserted his wife at Narbonne; that she was living there with another man, under another name; and that she had herself confessed it in your father's presence."

"Where was the murder committed?"

"Between Villefranche and this village. Cantegrel had followed your father to Narbonne, and had followed him back again to Villefranche. As far as that place, he traveled in company with others, both going and returning. Beyond Villefranche, he was left alone at the ford over the river. There Cantegrel drew the knife to kill him before he reached home and told his news to your aunt."

"How was the murder committed?"

"It was committed while your father was watering his pony by the bank of the stream. Cantegrel stole on him from behind, and struck him as he was stooping over the saddle−bow."

"This is the truth, on your oath?"

"On my oath, it is the truth."

"You may leave us."

The priest rose from his chair without assistance. From the time when the terror of death had forced him to reveal the murderer's name a great change had passed over him. He had given his answers with the immovable calmness of a man on whose mind all human interests had lost their hold. He now left the room, strangely absorbed in himself; moving with the mechanical regularity of a sleep−walker; lost to all perception of things and persons about him. At the door he stopped−−woke, as it seemed, from the trance that possessed him−−and looked at the three brothers with a steady, changeless sorrow, which they had never seen in him before, which they never afterward forgot.

"I forgive you," he said, quietly and solemnly. "Pray for me when my time comes."

With those last words, he left them.

IV. THE END.

The night was far advanced; but the three brothers determined to set forth instantly for Toulouse, and to place their information in the magistrate's hands before the morning dawned.

Thus far no suspicion had occurred to them of the terrible consequences which were to follow their night−interview with the priest. They were absolutely ignorant of the punishment to which a man in holy orders exposed himself, if he revealed the secrets of the confessional. No infliction of that punishment had been known in their neighborhood; for at that time, as at this, the rarest of all priestly offenses was a violation of the sacred trust confided to the confessor by the Roman Church. Conscious that they had forced the priest into the commission of a clerical offense, the brothers sincerely believed that the loss of his curacy would be the heaviest penalty which the law could exact from him. They entered Toulouse that night, discussing the atonement which they might offer to Monsieur Chaubard, and the means which they might best employ to make his future easy to him.

The first disclosure of the consequences which would certainly follow the outrage they had committed, was revealed to them when they made their deposition before the officer of justice. The magistrate listened to their narrative with horror vividly expressed in his face and manner.

"Better you had never been born," he said, "than have avenged your father's death as you three have avenged it. Your own act has doomed the guilty and the innocent to suffer alike."

Those words proved prophetic of the truth. The end came quickly, as the priest had foreseen it, when he spoke his parting words.

The arrest of Cantegrel was accomplished without difficulty the next morning. In the absence of any other evidence on which to justify this proceeding, the private disclosure to the authorities of the secret which the priest had violated became inevitable. The Parliament of Languedoc was, under these circumstances, the tribunal appealed to; and the decision of that assembly immediately ordered the priest and the three brothers to be placed in confinement, as well as the murderer Cantegrel. Evidence was then immediately sought for, which might convict this last criminal without any reference to the revelation that had been forced from the priest−−and evidence enough was found to satisfy judges whose minds already possessed the foregone certainty of the prisoner's guilt. He was put on his trial, was convicted of the murder, and was condemned to be broken on the wheel. The sentence was rigidly executed, with as little delay as the law would permit.

The cases of Monsieur Chaubard, and of the three sons of Siadoux, nest occupied the judges. The three brothers were found guilty of having forced the secret of a confession from a man in holy orders, and were sentenced to death by hanging. A far more terrible expiation of his offense awaited the unfortunate priest. He was condemned to have his limbs broken on the wheel, and to be afterward, while still living, bound to the stake and destroyed by fire.

Barbarous as the punishments of that period were, accustomed as the population was to hear of

their infliction, and even to witness it, the sentences pronounced in these two cases dismayed the public mind; and the authorities were surprised by receiving petitions for mercy from Toulouse, and from all the surrounding neighborhood. But the priest's doom had been sealed. All that could be obtained, by the intercession of persons of the highest distinction, was, that the executioner should grant him the mercy of death before his body was committed to the flames. With this one modification, the sentence was executed, as the sentence had been pronounced, on the curate of Croix−Daurade.

The punishment of the three sons of Siadoux remained to be inflicted. But the people, roused by the death of the ill−fated priest, rose against this third execution with a resolution before which the local government gave way. The cause of the young men was taken up by the hot−blooded populace, as the cause of all fathers and all sons; their filial piety was exalted to the skies; their youth was pleaded in their behalf; their ignorance of the terrible responsibility which they had confronted in forcing the secret from the priest was loudly alleged in their favor. More than this, the authorities were actually warned that the appearance of the prisoners on the scaffold would be the signal for an organized revolt and rescue. Under this serious pressure, the execution was deferred, and the prisoners were kept in confinement until the popular ferment had subsided.

The delay not only saved their lives, it gave them back their liberty as well. The infection of the popular sympathy had penetrated through the prison doors. All three brothers were handsome, well−grown young men. The gentlest of the three in disposition−−Thomas Siadoux−−aroused the interest and won the affection of the head−jailer's daughter. Her father was prevailed on at her intercession to relax a little in his customary vigilance; and the rest was accomplished by the girl herself. One morning the population of Toulouse heard, with every testimony of the most extravagant rejoicing, that the three brothers had escaped, accompanied by the jailer's daughter. As a necessary legal formality, they were pursued, but no extraordinary efforts were used to overtake them; and they succeeded, accordingly, in crossing the nearest frontier.

Twenty days later, orders were received from the capital to execute their sentence in effigy. They were then permitted to return to France, on condition that they never again appeared in their native place, or in any other part of the province of Languedoc. With this reservation they were left free to live where they pleased, and to repent the fatal act which had avenged them on the murderer of their father at the cost of the priest's life.

Beyond this point the official documents do not enable us to follow their career. All that is now known has been now told of the village tragedy at Croix−Daurade.