

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT

Wilkie Collins

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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."

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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 Poulailier 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, Poulailier, 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier?" 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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier. 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, Poulailier, and your first child will be a boy. I propose to make that boy my adopted son."

The marrow of Poulailier'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. "Poulailier, 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier'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

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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, Poulailier; I have not forgotten my promise!"

A year later, Madame Poulailier was in the hands of the midwife of the district, and a repetition of the portentous circumstance took place. Poulailier 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, Poulailier, 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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier; and the master thrashed him. "He won't come to his first communion," said the priest. "Thrash him," said Poulailier; 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 Poulailier's boy," was the general cry. "The deuce has got him," was Poulailier's answer. "And yet he is a nice-looking boy," said Madame Poulailier. 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 Poulailier. "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 Poulailier 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. Poulailier (perhaps unjustifiably) asserted himself by boxing his officer's ears. Out flashed the swords on both sides, and in went Poulailier's blade through and through the tender heart of the sergeant-major. The frontier was close at hand. Poulailier 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. Poulailier's destiny was now accomplished. He was picked out to be the

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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 his 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

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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. Poulailleur'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, Poulailleur 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, Poulailleur 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 Poulailleur 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, Poulailleur 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 Poulailleur 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 Poulailleur," answered the Count. "I am Poulailleur."

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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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier. "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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier.

"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 Poulailier.

"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 Poulailier; "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 Poulailier; "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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier, 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier—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—Poulailier."

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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, Poulailier 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier 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—Poulailier 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 Poulailier 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. Poulailier 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 Poulailier, "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 Poulailier. 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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier, appearing at the window. The husband started; the wife screamed; the children hid themselves. "Let me entreat you to be composed," continued Poulailier. "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

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on your restored innocence. The miserable coward whose collar you seized is one of Poulailier'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 Poulailier," 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 Poulailier.

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 Poulailier. 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier 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 Poulailier'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 Poulailier 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.

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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.

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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.

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT

[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.

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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 the saucepan. She went at once to get her

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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.

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"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

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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

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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 cupboard, 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

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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

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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 m