

MADAME DE  
BRINVILLIERS  
AND HER TIMES





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MADAME DE BRINVILLIERS







*A. Goussier del.*

*Madame de Brinvilliers on her way to execution, with  
her confessor, the Abbé Pison.  
after the drawing by Charles Lebrun in the Louvre*

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# MADAME DE BRINVILLIERS

AND HER TIMES 1630-1676

:: BY HUGH STOKES ::

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN PHOTOGRAVURE  
AND FIFTEEN OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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## PREFACE

**N**IETZSCHE tells us that "woman is unutterably more wicked than man." If Madame de Brinvilliers could be taken as a normal type of her sex one might be disposed to agree with the German philosopher. But Marie Marguerite d'Aubray was far from being an ordinary example of womanhood, and it is exactly that which makes her case so engrossing. Amongst the records of famous criminals the trial of this highly-born lady has always taken a prominent place. If criminology be at times a trifle morbid it is often valuable, and in this instance it enables us to follow rather closely a curiously complex society from which was evolved a mighty state. This volume is not intended to be so much a recital of the crimes of the Marquise as a picture of the lively circles in which she lived.

One idea will certainly arise before the last page is reached, and the reader must guard his mind against it. It is unfortunate that the wicked people are generally more interesting than the good. There was much vice in the reign of Louis XIV., much hypocrisy, much double-dealing. We, by the way, in the twentieth century are not so virtuous that we need cast stones at the seventeenth. But France, it must always be remembered, cannot be judged from Paris, and France was not wholly bad. Had it been so, Louis XIV. and his ministers with all their prescience could never have made it the first nation in Europe. At this period it boasted a roll of fame upon which were inscribed the names of Pascal,

Descartes, Molière, and Corneille, to mention haphazard but four out of a score of others almost equally as great. A city which could boast of a Saint Vincent de Paul was redeemed of many sins. A country which could raise such a family of saints as the Arnaulds of Port Royal had a moral strength capable of carrying it through many difficulties. These men and women, by their spiritual insight, their fine intelligence, and their wonderful energy, have made such a mark upon the history of the world that their names are as familiar to us as they were in the ears of their contemporaries. They did not stand alone, but were simply the more brilliant members of a large class which exercised considerable authority throughout the land.

France has always been the "gay sprightly land of mirth and social ease." It has also been the home of some of the noblest minds and deepest thinkers of which the world can boast. As a nation it has from the earliest ages cherished the purest ideals and aspirations. And its women have been of an essentially courageous type, of which Joan of Arc is a shining example. Madame de Brinvilliers lived in a particularly vicious circle, and, so far as she was led away from the paths of righteousness, she cannot be called representative either of her sex in France, or in any other country of the globe.

The first part of this volume concerns itself chiefly with the conditions under which the Marquise lived. An attempt is made to show the utter heartlessness and complete lack of moral fibre in the Court and the town, for which Louis XIV. and his ministers were largely personally responsible. The second part relates the three crimes which were definitely brought home to the Marquise and Sainte-Croix. It also introduces that strange character the ecclesiastical financier Pennautier and his dealings with Sainte-Croix. They were never probed to the bottom, and Pennautier escaped. Had he

been a poor man he would have undoubtedly suffered. The third part follows the evidence at the trial, unfortunately with many lacunæ, summarises the famous "factum" or defence of Maître Nivelles, and deals with the ministrations of the Abbé Pirot. The many documents still in existence and the voluminous memoir left by the priest allow the last days of Madame de Brinvilliers to be reconstructed with remarkable accuracy. The Bibliography shows what an extensive literature has grown up round the subject, whilst the contemporary memoirs and correspondence contain numerous references to the unhappy Marquise, her crimes, and her tribulations.

The author has attempted to give a consecutive history of this curious case. But he is conscious that owing to the loss of judicial archives some of the more obscure passages are difficult to unravel, and for this he must ask the indulgence of his readers.



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PART I  
THE CAUSE  
FRENCH SOCIETY 1661-1676

“The source of all these crimes was love,  
and then what we other Latins call: *Auri  
sacra fames*, the execrable hunger after gold.”

BUSSY-RABUTIN.

# MADAME DE BRINVILLIERS

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

**T**HE drama which surrounds the memory of the Marquise de Brinvilliers remains one of the most sinister mysteries in an age of intrigue and corruption. Her high position in the exalted circles which surrounded the Court of Louis XIV. gives added interest to the recital of her crimes. The extraordinary story helps us to recreate in a vivid fashion the doings and manners of the society in which she moved, and casts a brilliant light upon a very interesting period in modern history. For Louis XIV., and the statesmen who worked with him, were the founders of France as we know it to-day. Here we are able to study the rough material they succeeded in moulding into a great nation.

At the trial the whole of Paris passes in review. Each section of the community is drawn upon to give evidence. From beggar to king not a man but is personally concerned in the verdict, for the perpetual terror of poison makes the whole of France tremble. Maid-servants, lackeys, valets, apothecaries, surgeons, barristers, tutors, priests, men of business, professors of law, are cited before the court under circumstances which can well make them quake

with fear. The most dreadful secrets are dragged from them. A recalcitrant witness is quickly changed into a cowering prisoner. There is no mercy for the man or woman who dares to equivocate with the examining judges. All suspects are conveyed to the cells of the Bastille or the Châtelet. Rascals, who have no desire to publish all they know, make a rapid stampede across the frontier. But the agony of the "question," as applied in the torture chamber of the Conciergerie, often (though not always) reveals the hidden truth. And the executioner and his assistants, with the dreadful tools of their trade, are daily busy in front of the gaping crowds on the Place de Grève. Every man devoutly crosses himself and implores the intercession of the Saints to protect him from the dangers of poison and sorcery, whilst the tiny packets of arsenic and all the distilled abominations of the alchemists are clandestinely passed from hand to hand.

Voltaire said that an important trial was more interesting than one hundred thousand idle stories, or one hundred thousand lectures for the prizes of the Academy. Possibly he was thinking of the trials for poison at the end of the seventeenth century. The picture is gloomy but fascinating. In the Marquise de Brinvilliers justice held a prisoner of uncommon physical attractions added to the keenest intellectual acuteness. Her strength was more in her apparent weakness than in any display of will force or power. Her soft smile, her blue eyes, her graceful figure, concealed the unbridled passions of a tigress. First love and then ambition ruled her being. Relentlessly she swept aside every unfortunate person who blocked her progress. Heart she had none, not even for the men she loved. Like the basilisk her look was fatal to the lives of those she hated.

It has been said that had she concentrated her natural aptitude to better aims her name might have been as respected as it became execrated. But this remark,

applied to so many criminals, can hardly be justified. Criminals of talent, like poets, are born and not made. They are men and women of perverted genius. We must not admire them, but we must admit that they are not common clay. Environment may assist in extinguishing instincts which are dangerous to the social welfare. Education may teach how to subjugate and control hereditary predisposition.

How far is anyone personally accountable for his actions? "In short," wrote Lafcadio Hearn, "there is no possible room for argument as to whether each particular character—with all its possibilities, intellectual or emotional—is not predetermined by the character of nervous structure, slowly evolved by millions of billions of experiences in the past." The thought is an apology for all criminals. "It might at first sight shock a strong soul to perceive itself, not individual and original, but an infinite compound. . . . The thought that one's strength is the strength of one's ancestors—of a host innumerable and ancient as the race—has its larger consolations." These consolations were not for the seventeenth century, which believed in the articles of its faith very sincerely. How far Madame de Brinvilliers was influenced to the bad by her ancestors it is not possible to tell. But it was proved that her early education lacked religious training. Without preparation she was launched while yet a young girl into a foul crowd, which, veneered by the outward practice of religion, was unrestrained by the slightest affectation of morality. This fact remains her sole extenuation.

Turning aside from the personality of the prisoner, one of the chief factors in the trial shows how curiously civil and ecclesiastical laws were intermixed. Some of the judges were of ecclesiastical appointment. But the main defence of her advocate was based upon the rule of the Church which decrees the inviolability of the seal of con-



fession. The subject is engrossing. One may doubt how far the confessional was ever secret in an age which abounded in instances of broken oaths and casuistical reservations. During the unravelling of the poison mysteries the clergy at Notre Dame gave the police many broad hints of the misdeeds that were going on. It is easy to imagine that priests, eager to make progress in a world full of obstacles, would not be unready to earn official and Court gratitude by conveying valuable information to the heads of the State. Amidst the sordid desires and baseness of motive which enshroud the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers, it is refreshing to come across these references to the teaching of St Augustine and the Fathers of the Church.

Unfortunately the seal had been broken. The written confession—if it was a confession—had been read, and its contents were known. Madame de Sévigné sums up the public opinion when she says that “one does not have to write down the fact that one had poisoned one’s father, because one was afraid to forget it.” But, even if the Marquise, in a fit of madness, had not written the appalling document, the evidence of the tutor Briancourt was enough in itself to condemn her to the block. For this wretched creature we can have no sympathy. He was evidently quite truthful. He clearly wanted to do the right thing in a position of singular difficulty. Yet, if he had thrown himself into the Seine, or, better still, sought the friendly shelter of a neighbouring State, he would have gained our respect. He was weak, he was a coward. For the last crime there is little forgiveness.

In France criminal trials often develop into affairs which menace the safety of the Government. The Paris mob is ever ready to suggest that the judges wish to suppress evidence directed against men of high position. The prisoner sometimes bases his plea for leniency upon the fact that he has State secrets in his possession which



it would be dangerous to reveal. In the *Affaire Steinheil*, which monopolised the attention of France in 1909, it was said that the "black widow" held the key to several matters which it was inexpedient for the world to know. The same fear may possibly explain several odd passages in the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers. She was related by blood to many of the judges. She was intimately connected with the chief members of fashionable society. It was also clear that she had for years past a *liaison* with an admitted manufacturer of poisonous drugs. Poison was rife in the Court and the city, and here was a link in the chain of cause and effect. The guilt or the innocence of the rich man, Pennautier, was never sifted to the bottom. With the execution of the Marquise, the court appears to have been content. Justice had been done, and the judges were only too eager to consider the matter at an end. The trembling suspicions of Louis XIV. and his ministers that they were on the brink of a disaster which threatened the existence of the throne itself were fully justified by the events of the future. Many members of the Court were anxious as to the avowals—under torture—of the mistress of Sainte-Croix. Women who were undoubted poisoners, such as Olympe de Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons, had the effrontery to be present at the prison when the victim was led out to execution.

Had Madame de Brinvilliers shielded them? Was she offered up as a partial sacrifice to satisfy public calls for vengeance? It is impossible to tell. If she was fit for the torture and the block, hundreds should have joined her from Monsieur, the king's brother, to La Voisin on the Pont Marie. Her confessor, the priest Pirot, was convinced that she told the whole truth. "If I were only to speak, half the people in Paris would be lost," she is reported to have said on the scaffold, then adding, "I shall say nothing." The Abbé Pirot says that he never heard this, but admits that there was a great deal of noise

just before the execution. Twenty-three years later the plain-speaking Princess Palatine, duchesse d'Orléans, in a letter dated from Saint Cloud, made an identical observation. "If the king wished to punish all those who are guilty of the blackest crimes he would be no longer surrounded by aristocracy, by princes of the blood, or by servants. There would not be a family in France left without mourning."

Why then did she allow herself to be the sole victim? This is another question difficult to answer. The Abbé Pirot repeatedly impressed upon her the necessity of revealing the names of her accomplices. In some cases the confessors did not wish to hear all the communications of their penitents. When Henriette d'Angleterre, wife of the king's brother and sister to Charles II. of England, was dying, not without the strongest suspicion that she had been poisoned at the instigation of her husband, Bossuet and the Canon Feuillet did their utmost to suppress any accusation. Directly the word "poison" was mentioned the priest interrupted, "Madame, think only of your God!" And Bossuet counselled self-abnegation rather than recrimination.

The Parisians were famous for being able to put together all the flying rumours and fragments of gossip which percolated through the inner ring of the court and also through the grim doors of the torture chamber. If they did not get the facts quite correctly they managed to arrive at some semblance of the truth. For this reason Madame de Brinvilliers gained on the day of her torment a sympathy she did not deserve. Paris knew that criminals as guilty were free and at large within the same city. So the Marquise died in the odour of sanctity, with her white face lit up by the aureole of a martyr. It was a strange end to such an abominable career.

## CHAPTER II

THE KING AS HEAD OF THE STATE—GENERAL DECADENCE OF MORALS CHIEFLY OWING TO HIS BAD EXAMPLE—EARLY POISONING MYSTERIES

**T**HE France of the Marquise de Brinvilliers is notable for its general corruption and decadence of morals. Before the drama of the poisons is dealt with, a slight glance must be given at the society in which it took place. The head of that society was the King.

Voltaire praised the age of Louis XIV. in order to disparage that of Louis XV. The glorious legend of "le roi soleil" is hard to kill. Even his birth was a miracle. His subjects veritably believed him to be "God given." No man received such adulation. "Ye kings!" cried Bossuet in a fervour of eloquence, "ye are gods." Every courtier who listened to the burning oratory of the great preacher knew that the words had a direct application to the little prince who held the destinies of France in his hand. Louis, for one, had no misgivings upon the subject. He was not God himself, but he was very near to the throne of grace. His attitude towards the Almighty was that of one puissant monarch towards another. Religion, properly speaking, he did not possess. He had never been thoroughly instructed in the tenets of his faith, and, apart from a scrupulous adherence to outward forms, and a daily attendance at Mass, he was untroubled by the laws of the Church. In later life the Court became more devout and more hypocritical. But the King, always

a true Bourbon, never really changed in character or outlook.

“L'État, c'est moi,” may or may not have been his dramatic phrase before the assembled Parliament of Paris. The saying is one of the disputed points of history. If the words were never spoken, the thought is undoubtedly his. “The nation is not a body corporate in France,” he caused to be written for the guidance of his grandson. “It lives entirely in the person of the king.” As a child his writing-master had set him to copy the maxim, “Homage is due to kings. They do as they please.” In the imperial library at St Petersburg the sheet is still to be seen with the prince's repeated attempts beneath to form his handwriting. The idea was engrained in the race, not only during this reign, but also in that of his successor. When Louis XV. was proclaimed king at the Tuileries, his tutor showed him the crowds huzzaing in the gardens of the palace. “Behold all these people,” said the Marshal de Villeroy. “They belong to you. All the people you see yonder are yours.” This is the key to the characters of the last kings of France. “After the education we received,” remarked Charles X., “it is a wonder we did not become tigers.”

A man with a good opinion of his own merits and position is no rare spectacle. In kings it is a dangerous failing. “Self-aggrandisement is the noblest as well as the pleasantest occupation of kings,” wrote Louis XIV., amongst his earliest aphorisms. Had he been alone in imagining it the historian would merely have given him credit for more than ordinary frankness. “Pride, like an eagle, builds amidst the skies.” But the wonder remains that the King's self-conceit was acquiesced in by the whole of his subjects. “I had for the personality of the king a feeling difficult to define, a sentiment of dedication, of almost a religious character. The word of the king had a magic and a power which nothing altered. This love



became a kind of cult." Thus wrote the Marshal Marmont in his memoirs. The unfortunate soldier of fortune Du Cause de Nazelle (whose romantic history is set forth in the next chapter) said that "this prince is the love and the delight of the court and of his people." His King could commit no fault. All the mistakes, all the injustices, were made by the ministers. "My bad destiny deprived me of the rewards that I might reasonably have expected for such services to the king and to the state," he adds at the close of his dolorous tale. But he does not reproach in the slightest the monarch who had profited from and then overlooked his devotion.

The personality of Louis XIV. is a psychological study of the deepest interest for those who wish to comprehend the state of France during his reign. His character was never easy to read, and judgments have varied considerably, when they have not contradicted each other. "He pretends to be a man of ability," said his mother, Anne of Austria. A prophet seldom has honour in his own country, and the bitterest and most unjust criticisms of any man usually come from the bosom of his family. Cardinal Mazarin had a better opinion of his pupil. "He will be a great king," he announced, with the mocking addendum—"he never says a word of what he thinks." Truer still was his remark to the Marshal de Grammont, "Louis will mature late, but he will go further than the rest. He has the material for four kings and one honest man." Napoleon, whose judgments are based upon sound insight, said that "if Louis had not been a king he would have been a great man." But Napoleon's definition of the qualities of a great man must be agreed upon before this dictum can be altogether accepted.

The first quality a nation demands of its king is that he be kingly. A republic is never very enthusiastic over its head, for the simple reason that most presidents lack those graces of person which commend man to his fellow-

men and women. In the United States the presidents may look good and be honest, but the most patriotic inhabitant of "God's own country" can hardly admit that its rulers have been handsome. In France the condition of things has been far worse. From Thiers to Fallières, but one president, the unfortunate Carnot, has had any pretence to personal attraction. The loss has been much. A king may be admired for his good will and his force of purpose. He will only be loved for his "beaux yeux." Charles I. is an example of an indifferent monarch whose melancholy charm was his greatest asset. Louis XIV. might have been far worse as a man and a monarch. His gracious personality would always have saved him.

En quelque obscurité que le sort l'eût fait naître,  
Le monde, en le voyant, eût reconnu son maître.

"If fortune had not made him by birth a great king," said the Venetian ambassador, "it is very certain that nature had given him the appearance." He not only looked the part. After years of careful practice he was able to play it to perfection.

In the early days of his reign he showed himself to his subjects chiefly as a ballet dancer and posturer. When he was fifteen (in 1654) the Venetian ambassador, in one of his absorbing epistles to the Doge, reports that "the king gives up his whole day to learning the ballet." How far it was the policy of Mazarin to distract his young charge from affairs of State is a vexed question. It was not because of his tender years. We imagine that the present day is particularly the age of youth. An outcry is heard because a secretary of state is only thirty-one. In the seventeenth century men commenced life much earlier. The "surintendant" Fouquet became a practising barrister at seventeen. Colbert's star was rising about the same time. Louvois was ready to succeed his father as minister of war in his twenties. If Mazarin wished the boy to



A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE BEFORE THE FRENCH COURT  
*After the engraving by Jean Lepautre, dated 1678*





take up his duties Louis, as a youth, displayed every sign of desiring to shirk his responsibilities. When he sat at a council he became so bored that he abruptly left the chamber to play his guitar and discuss the next ballet. "A fine prince, strong and healthy," wrote Dr Gui Patin in 1658. "He is tall and graceful. It is a pity that he does not better understand his duties."

He certainly comprehended the nature and arrangements of ballets. These representations in the great hall of the Palace Petit Bourbon remain unique in the history of monarchy. The King danced before his subjects as David danced before his people. Reserved seats were at the disposal of the ambassadors and the Court. Otherwise the performances appear to have been almost free for all who cared to enter. To gain a good position the spectator had to wait at least three hours outside the hall, and then there followed a tedious interval of some eight hours to be spent in the hall itself before the ballet opened.

There are many contemporary descriptions of these brilliant displays. We will quote from the diary of two wealthy young Dutchmen belonging to the Hague, who spent a year and a half in Paris to acquire style and deportment. On the 4th February 1657, the two sieurs de Villiers, it being a Sunday, and they belonging to the reformed faith, went to the protestant place of worship at Charenton and heard their pastor preach a sermon "which ravished the souls of everybody as much by the beauty of the discourse as by the goodness and excellence of the holy matters of which he treated." After service they returned to Paris for dinner, and found that a friend had obtained an order of admittance to the King's ballet which was to be danced that evening. They entered the palace without trouble, and were placed in the charge of a very civil lieutenant of the guard, Carnavalet by name, "who took every care imaginable." He seated them amongst the ambassadors, and in order to pass the time

they were presented with a copy of the "book" of the ballet. Some employment was needed, for although they took their seats at three o'clock the King did not make his entry until the stroke of nine. In their brief notes the two young noblemen admit that the assembled Court made a scene of exceeding beauty. The great hall in which the ballet took place sparkled with so many crystal lustres that the light was as strong as full day. The ballet, entitled *L'Amour malade*, consisted of ten parts, a medley of dance, comedy, and farce. The intervals were filled up with music and singing explanatory of the action. This was repeated so often as to become tedious, and the two strangers agreed that, on the whole, the ballet was wearisome. They did not know that one of the actors in the *divertissement* was Molière.

A year later they receive a second invitation. A rendez-vous is given at the Petit Bourbon at four o'clock in the afternoon. In company with an enormous crowd they pass through the gates of the palace, all strictly guarded, into the hall. Then they have to wait for three hours to find at last that the performance is not up to their expectations. "It is a meagre feast for one who has seen the others. It is very surprising that the King should have such a great pleasure in dancing this ballet so often. It seems that he ought to get tired of it." Some of the scenes are beautiful enough, but others are exceedingly feeble. The giants and the dwarfs are ridiculous, but there is a procession of paladins who, by their grotesque postures, create much amusement. Then come the forty musketeers. At first twenty enter and go through military exercises, which end in the storming of a barricade defended by their twenty comrades to the ringing music of drums and fifes, the clic-clac of their arms, and the harmony of the violins. This is the best scene, hardly equalled by the exquisite dancing of Mademoiselle Verpré as the Princess of Mauretania in an African interlude. It

is the last act, and the ballet concludes with a grand concert of singing and instruments of every kind. The finest ensemble has been put at the end in order that the audience might forget the bad ones that have gone before.

Such were the chief preoccupations of the young King. These days were not to last forever. In March 1661 Mazarin dies. Louis shuts himself up alone for three hours and comes from his retreat a changed man. Like Henry V. of England,

Never was such a sudden scholar made ;  
 Never came reformation in a flood  
 With such a heady current.

Hitherto his hours had been "fill'd up with riots, banquets, sports." He walked out of his study a slave to duty. Years before, some letters from Catherine de' Medici to her son Henri II. had been placed in his hands. The Queen-mother had based her exhortations upon the theme "a king must reign." Now, as Louis pondered over the moral of the civil wars of the Fronde, the strength of his nobility, the despotic power that ministers such as Richelieu and Mazarin had successfully kept within their grasp, he made up his mind once and for all that he alone would be the ruler. "I resolved," he wrote afterwards in his memoirs, "not to have a first minister, and not to permit to be filled by another the functions belonging to the king, as long as I bear the title . . . I felt immediately my spirit and courage elevated. I found myself a different individual. I discovered in myself a mind which I did not know existed, and I reproached myself for having so long ignored this joy. The timidity which judgment at first gave caused me pain, above all when it was necessary to speak in public a little lengthily. This timidity, however, was dissipated little by little. At length it seemed to me I was really a king and born to rule. I experienced a sense

of well-being difficult to express." And in another place he writes, "the business of a king is great, noble, and delightful."

Changes were at once made. He gave orders to the secretaries of state that in future no documents were to be signed or sealed unless they had passed through his hands. The president of the assembly of clergy enquired to whom he should address his business now that the cardinal was dead. "To me, archbishop," was the royal reply. "Le roi soleil" was a man of many faults. But the manner in which he prepared himself for his duties displays much individuality. He returned to his school books. In the words of Shakespeare, his companions had "never noted in him any study, any retirement, any sequestration from open haunts and popularity." Now they re-echoed the complaints of the son of the "grand Condé." "The whole court is more wearisome than can be imagined," wrote he. "The king is shut up almost the whole afternoon."

A typical day is cited by a contemporary historian. From ten to half-past one the King attended a council of finance. He then dined, and presided over a second council. This was followed by two hours devoted to the re-acquisition of the Latin which he had entirely forgotten. He considered that a monarch was shamed who could not read his own despatches, so a learned priest was sent for, and he became a scholar again. The evening was occupied by a third council which did not rise until ten o'clock. Each hour had its appropriate work. As a rule he devoted from six to eight hours daily to the business of the State, and this regular arrangement lasted without a break until his death fifty-four years later. "With an almanac and a watch one was able to say at three hundred leagues distance what the king was doing at any one moment," wrote Saint-Simon. Louis XIV. believed in the virtues of hard work, and he surrounded





JEAN BAPTISTE COLBERT  
*After the engraving by R. Nanteuil*



himself with ministers—drawn chiefly from the professional classes—who shared the views of their monarch. Fouquet, Louvois, Colbert, Arnauld de Pomponne, worked as hard as any “pushful” business man of to-day.

Many merchant princes and lords of commerce of the twentieth century drive their energies at such high pressure that they have no strength or inclination for recreation. Louis and his ministers belonged to another age in more senses than one. They were not only governed by different laws, they themselves controlled more robust physical organisations. Their motto was summed up in the quaint lines of the old English versifier, Turberville,

Eschew the idle life,  
Flee, flee from doing naught :  
For never was there idle brain  
But bred an idle thought.

Colbert alone would commend himself to the modern moralist. A serious and stern man, he had been raised amidst the small bourgeoisie of Rheims. His father was a cloth merchant, and his early occupation had been that of a bank clerk. His life was cold and severe. Madame de Sévigné had nicknamed him “The North.” He had no inclination towards coarse pleasures. His code of morality was considerably higher than that of his friends. What shows how far apart he stood from the majority of his countrymen is that he did not love the vine or its products, although he was a native of the champagne country. Throughout his life he remained a water drinker, and, at his death, but a few bottles of wine were found in his cellars. Anticipating modern thought he was convinced that drunkenness was a vice antagonistic to the welfare of the State. “The business of a tavern-keeper is founded upon idleness and debauchery. Wine is a great hindrance to work.” Such sayings prove that

Colbert was in advance of his age. He continually invited the viticulturists of France to convert their vineyards into cornland.

He worked himself to death, a poor reward for such an exhibition of virtue. His maxims read like those of a copy book. "It is the will which gives the pleasure in all we do, and it is the pleasure which gives the power of application." "Difficulties augment the pleasure of overcoming them." He conducted his interminable work with all the methods of a modern American office. He debated as to which was the best time of the day to work, and decided that the only course to pursue was to begin early and finish late. Perhaps Charles Lamb had heard of this when he fell into trouble over his hours at East India House. "Well," he explained in apology, "if I begin late I leave off early."

Hugues de Lionne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was as notorious for his application to the affairs of the State as for his devotion to the ladies of the Court. When pressed, no one could surpass his powers of unremitting toil, but he sacrificed health and fortune to "play, good cheer, and other pleasures." His personal life was as scandalous as that of his wife. Le Tellier was not, in the French phrase, "un noceur," although his son, the brutal Louvois, who had been trained to succeed him as minister, had other failings besides his harsh and merciless temper. People said that his manners were those of a footman. When Madame de Courcelles disdained his advances he persecuted her to such an extent that he procured her arrest and imprisonment and ruined her life completely. No minister was more vindictive, no man was more feared.

When Hugues de Lionne suddenly died it was generally believed that he had been murdered by a dose of poison administered by his wife. With Louvois the cause of death was said to have been the same, although the poisoner was never discovered. One day, in 1691, after





Messr. Nicolas Fouquet  
de Vaux, Conseiller du  
Etat, surintendant des  
des ses Majestés

Chevalier, Vicomte de Melan,  
Roy en ses conseils, Ministre  
Finances et Procureur General

R. Nanteuil delinavit pingit et sculpsit 1661

NICOLAS FOUQUET  
After the engraving by R. Nanteuil



leaving the King's cabinet, he dropped down a corpse. "He is dead," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "that great minister, that important man, who held so grand a position, and whose *Moi* spread so far, who was the centre of so much." The surgeons said he died of apoplexy, a convenient diagnosis which covered many complaints.

But the most remarkable personality was that of the "surintendant" Fouquet. He was ruined by his own ambition. *Quo non ascendam?* To what height can I ascend? This was an audacious and bombastic motto. Yet of all the ministers in the earlier reign of Louis XIV., he receives our keenest sympathy. There is something superhumanly magnificent in his boldness. Whilst still young, he had attained high position in the official world, and when he was named superintendent and controller of the taxation of France he found a task which needed the hand of a master. His genius was one of financial organisation and control, and he did good work for the State. He undoubtedly peculated. So did his master, Mazarin, who amassed one of the largest fortunes of his century.<sup>1</sup> Even the moral Colbert grew rich in a suspiciously short space of time. There was Boisfranc, a poor Auvergnat, who arrived in Paris in wooden shoes, so great was his poverty, becoming superintendent of the exchequer to Monsieur, the King's brother, in 1673. Fourteen years later, he was disgraced, and sentenced to reimburse the treasury with a sum of 1,500,000 livres. Yet when he married his daughter to a marquis in 1690 he was able to give her a dot of 700,000 livres. The sin was venial, universal, and not to be judged by the lofty standards of the twentieth century.

Nicolas Fouquet was energetically brilliant in a brilliant and expensive age. He patronised art. He encouraged letters. He spent huge sums upon building and decoration.

<sup>1</sup> The enemies of Fouquet and Mazarin described their methods as "the exploitation of France by one rogue for another."

Actually this extraordinary man, in the midst of his multifarious and engrossing occupations, found time to make love upon a lordly scale. And that, as much as anything else, brought him sharply to the ground. For he looked too high, and his aspirations clashed with those of his master.

Fouquet's enemies were thick in the land, and at their head conspired Colbert and Le Tellier. Louis XIV. preferred that his ministers should be jealous of each other. "The jealousy of one is often a bridle upon the ambitions of another," he remarked with much wisdom. Colbert and Fouquet were almost at open enmity. On Fouquet's blazon was a squirrel, on Colbert's shield a snake. Court gossip said that the snake was after the squirrel, and the observation was true in substance. But had Fouquet not fallen in love with the blue eyes of the blonde Mademoiselle de La Vallière the squirrel might have remained free until the end.

The facts are not clear, but one thing remains plain. It was not politic for a subject in the seventeenth century (particularly a tax-gatherer) to become richer than his king. Versailles had not yet commenced to trouble the economical spirit of Colbert. Apart from the Louvre, Louis had but two palaces, St Germain and Fontainebleau. Then Fouquet, in the midst of his other expenses, built Vaux-le-Vicomte, near Melun, which far surpassed all three. It was a fairyland of splendour which cost over 18,000,000 francs, or, in the money of to-day, about £1,400,000. Leveau was the architect, Le Nôtre the garden planner, Lebrun the decorator. Fouquet showered gold upon them. Even the *grandes eaux* of Versailles were not so fine as the fountains of Vaux.

The "surintendant" was urged by his smiling enemies to entertain the King in his new *château*. It was the single weak spot in the armour of the *parvenu*. He could not resist the dangerous temptation, and it was impossible

for him to undertake so glorious a function in any spirit of meanness. The King's visit to Vaux-le-Vicomte in August 1661, the extraordinary welcome he received, the banquet off plates of gold, the gala decorations, the representation of a new play by Molière, these are historical. Louis, no doubt, wondered where all the money came from. But Mazarin had been only three months dead, and the young King had still much to learn. If Louis had not become jealous of Fouquet's attentions to Mademoiselle de La Vallière, the tragedy would not have hastened so rapidly to its close.<sup>1</sup> It is said that Fouquet made her an offer of 200,000 livres while the fête was in progress. She, from innate saintliness, or because the King had already revealed his inclinations, spurned the idea with indignation.

A king need have no rivals in love. Fouquet considered that he was securer than ever in the favour of his sovereign. *Quo non ascendam?* One day he worked with Louis the whole morning, who, with "a refinement of duplicity," did not allow him to suspect the coming disaster. From time to time the monarch went to the window which overlooked the courtyard. Those he was expecting had not arrived. Upon the plea of searching for a missing document he left the room to inquire as to the delay. At last a noise was heard on the stones. The hour had come for the betrayal. Louis smiled upon his minister, and ended the audience. When Fouquet stepped out of the palace he was arrested by Monsieur d'Artagnan, captain of the musketeers, and conveyed in one of the unwieldy coaches of the period to a State prison. This is not the place to relate the story of his imprisonment in the fortress of Pignerol, which endured without the slightest clemency

<sup>1</sup> One story relates that the King's suspicions were first aroused when he saw a nude painting of La Vallière in Fouquet's rooms. The same thing was done years later to annoy the prim Madame de Maintenon, which it did most effectually. It is not suggested in either of these cases that the artists worked other than from their imagination.



for nineteen years. The glories of Vaux-le-Vicomte melted away into a tiny cell. Fouquet devoted himself to religion, wrote little books of devotion, studied chemistry (even his enemy Louvois did not disdain an eye wash he compounded), and, evading his jailers, made the acquaintance of a fellow prisoner, the young de Lauzun. There was another unfortunate being imprisoned in the sombre castle, the mysterious "man in the iron mask." Perhaps Fouquet climbed through the chimney (as he did in the case of Lauzun) and made the acquaintance of this gentleman without a name. His knowledge was of no use to the world from which he had disappeared for ever.

The King never forgave those who interfered with his love affairs. As a youth, when his mother, Anne of Austria, somewhat puritanical and old-fashioned, reproved him for his chief vice, he frankly admitted that his passions were stronger than his will. He loved his wife, the meek little Marie Thérèse of Spain, who, with the rest of the nation, blindly adored him. But he was not faithful to her twelve months after marriage. In December 1664 the Marquis de Vardes was committed to the Bastille upon suspicion of having written to the Queen an anonymous letter, dealing with the King's intrigue with Mademoiselle de La Vallière. This nobleman was not liberated until 1666, and then only with the stipulation that he should exile himself from Paris. The Duchess de Navailles, mistress of the ladies of honour to the Queen, closed a door which Louis had constructed to reach their apartments. She was soon after disgraced, and never received back into the royal favour. Naturally he had more temptations than fell to the lot of the average man. There was not a woman of quality who had not the ambition to become his mistress. "Numbers of women, married and unmarried," wrote Primi Visconti, "have told me that there was nothing offensive to



LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE  
*After the engraving by N. de Larmessin*





husband, father, or to God, in arriving at the position of being loved by one's prince."

In this Court, where every man and woman fought for royal favour and notice, the art of the poisoner was soon evident. The death of Henriette d'Angleterre, sister to Charles II. of England, and wife to the King's brother, Monsieur, Philippe d'Orléans, was generally ascribed to this cause. Latterly Funck-Brentano has argued with a certain probability that her death was natural. His conclusions have not all been accepted, and the truth can never be known.

Monsieur was a man of despicable character. He was seldom on good terms with his brother the King. In April 1658, when Louis was twenty and Philippe eighteen years of age, the following curious story is recorded in the journal of the two young Dutch noblemen earlier mentioned. "There has been a great quarrel at the Louvre between Monsieur, who has meat on fast-days, and the king. Eating some boiled meat he presented some to the king on his spoon whilst His Majesty was upbraiding him for eating meat and fasting at the same time. The king, annoyed at the indiscretion of his brother, who was treating him like a child, pushed him back rudely. Upon which Monsieur angrily gave him a blow with the spoon on the end of his nose. The king, without anger, got up and said, 'Little boy, were it not for the respect I bear to the Queen, your Mother, I would teach you the respect you owe to me.' And at the same time he had him arrested and confined to a room. This incident embarrassed the Queen and his Eminence (Mazarin), but through their care and address peace was concluded next day at two o'clock after midnight when Monsieur asked the king's pardon." This gossip corroborates Primi Visconti's testimony that Louis XIV. was never seen in a passion, and never even swore.

Philippe d'Orléans was despised by all who knew

him. He was a little man, always dressed up like a woman with rings, bracelets, jewels, ribbons. He was perfumed and even rouged. That such a man could have any affection for his wife, or, according to Madame de Motteville, for any other woman in the world, was impossible. Monsieur inherited some of the tastes of his Italian ancestors, and surrounded himself with favourites. The first was the Comte de Guiche, the second the Chevalier de Lorraine. The scandal became so public that the King interfered. De Guiche had already been enticed away. The Chevalier was sent to the Château de Pierre-Encize at Lyons and afterwards shut up in the Château d'If.

Did the neglected wife console herself in other directions? The story of Henriette d'Angleterre, fifth child of Charles I. of England and grand-daughter of Henri IV. of France, is one of the tragedies of history. Born at Exeter in the midst of the Civil Wars, she was secretly carried to Paris where she and the Queen, her mother, lived at the Louvre in the completest destitution. At first it was arranged that she should marry the King, but Louis would not consent. Upon the restoration of her brother to the throne of England, she was married to Monsieur d'Orléans. Her wit and good nature made her the favourite of the Court. But the character of the man she had married barred all conjugal happiness. She became the centre of the brightest and most intellectual society of Paris, the friend of Racine and Corneille, and the godmother to the child of Molière. The King openly showed his devotion, it is said, as a blind to his passion for Louise de La Vallière. He was quite able, however, to pursue two conflicting amours. Henriette had a series of flirtations, and her husband grew daily more morose and surly. He believed that she had instigated the King to remove the Comte de Guiche and shut up the Chevalier de Lorraine.

More galling still was the knowledge that she was taking an important share in the negotiations for a treaty with England. Monsieur knew nothing of this, and everything was carefully concealed from him. He could not be trusted, and was allowed to take no part in the direction of affairs. But his suspicions were verified in an unedifying way, and one cannot do better than repeat the story exactly as Primi Visconti gives it. "The credit of Marshal Turenne was destroyed by the intrigues of Madame de Coëtquen. She was not beautiful, her face was marked with smallpox, but she had a dignified air and much wit. Turenne was very infatuated. The Chevalier de Lorraine was curious to know why Madame was going to England in 1670 to see her brother the king. He pretended to be in love with Madame de Coëtquen, hoping to discover the King's secret, for Turenne had the royal confidence. The Chevalier succeeded in his aims, for the lady, sacrificing age to youth, gave a *rendez-vous* to Turenne at Vincennes. There she soon extracted the secret and passed it on to the Chevalier." Lorraine had his own grudge against Madame and told her husband. The King discovered the treachery, but the evil had been done.

In revenge Monsieur shut up his wife in the country at Villers-Cotterets and vowed that she should not go to Paris until his favourites were free. The King pardoned him and them, for Madame was too valuable a political agent to be lost. She actively commenced her negotiations to forward the King's policy. In Flanders she surprised Arnauld de Pomponne, the King's envoy, with her business capacity. At Dover she flaunted the brazen charms of her lady of honour, Louise de Querouaille, better known as the Duchess of Portsmouth, under the eyes of her brother Charles, and was instrumental in obtaining his signature to a treaty which made England the vassal of France. Early in June she returned to Paris triumphant. Philippe d'Orléans was noticeably

gloomier. On the 26th June he surprised his wife and his brother in a confidential conversation which ended immediately he entered the room. He dragged her away to his palace at Saint Cloud. On the 29th June, after drinking a cup of chicory, she was seized with violent illness. In ten hours she was dead.

“O nuit désastreuse, o nuit effroyable où retentit tout à coup, comme un éclat de tonnerre, cette étonnante nouvelle : Madame se meurt, Madame est morte ! . . . Madame a passé du matin au soir ainsi que l’herbe de champs. Le matin elle fleurissait, avec quelle grâce, vous le savez : le soir nous la vimes séchée. . . . Quelle diligence ! en neuf heures, l’ouvrage est accompli.” Thus orated Bossuet in his famous funeral sermon at the Abbey of Saint Denis.

In her dying moments the unfortunate daughter of the martyr King believed that she had been poisoned, “but inadvertently.” In Paris it was universally believed that her husband had instigated the crime to avenge the exile of the Chevalier de Lorraine. In England feeling was so strong that Charles II. sent two London surgeons to attend the autopsy. No fewer than fifteen doctors witnessed the *post-mortem*. Their conclusions are somewhat negative. The princess was consumptive. She had been ill for months. She had imprudently bathed in the Seine. She had been attacked by a sudden perforation of the bowels which had proved fatal.

Officially the verdict of the *post-mortem* was accepted by the Kings of France and England. But Louis was troubled by doubts which he could not well express ; and Charles remarked to Sir Thomas Armstrong, “Orléans is a great rascal, but, on your life, don’t say a word to anyone.” The two nations scouted the doctor’s opinions, and remained convinced that Madame had been poisoned. In recent years the question has been thoroughly argued by medical historians, and still opinion is divided. In





*HENRIETTE D'ANGLE*  
*d'Orleans dernière fille de Charles*  
*Et de Henriette Marie de France Nas*  
*quinta la Reine sa Mere lors qu'elle*  
*le*  
*Philippe de France*



*TERRE. DUCHESSE*  
*1<sup>re</sup> du nom Roy de la grande Bretagne*  
*quit à Excester le 15 Juin 1634. accom*  
*pe sauna par mer en France Epousa*  
*Duc d'Orleans frere unique du Roy.*

HENRIETTE D'ANGLETERRE, DUCHESS OF ORLÉANS  
*After the engraving by Grignon*





Saint-Simon's memoirs there remains one brief sentence for posterity to dispute over. "Monsieur Joly de Fleury was told by Furnon, the *maître d'hôtel* to Madame, that the poison was sent from Italy by the Chevalier de Lorraine." If Saint-Simon has repeated gossip he gives very exact indications as to its source. Funck-Brentano's brilliant study arrives at the conclusion that, as Madame could not have been poisoned by a venom impregnated in the silver cup containing the chicory water, or by the water itself, she must have died of perforation of the bowels, to which all her symptoms point.

Whatever its cause, the public concern over the manner of her death shows the nervous apprehension of her contemporaries with regard to poison. Her daughter, Marie Louise, Queen of Spain, died in 1689, almost at the same age, with identical symptoms. Gossip declared that she had also been poisoned. Her grand-daughter, the Duchess of Burgundy, died in a like manner, and the common talk of the town repeated itself. Mazarin was said to have died of poison. Colbert had strange illnesses no physician could diagnose. Some historians brush aside all suspicions by insisting that the medical science of the seventeenth century had not advanced to a high level. There is, however, no smoke without flame, and the poisoning fraternity was extremely active in every class of society, as later chapters will prove. Louis XIV.'s Queen, Marie Thérèse, was an innocent woman without guile. But she was daughter, sister, niece, grand-daughter and cousin to avowed poisoners and assassins.

The mistresses of the kings ran a special risk. Gabrielle d'Estrées, the friend of Henri IV., was poisoned. Mademoiselle de Fontanges died so unexpectedly that Louis himself gave orders for an autopsy. The bitter Princess Palatine (second wife to Monsieur, Philippe d'Orléans) writes in her memoirs: "La Montespan was a devil incarnate, but La Fontanges was good and simple.

Both were very beautiful. The latter is dead they say because La Montespan poisoned her milk. I do not know if this is true, but I do know that two of her servants died, and that people said publicly that they had been poisoned."

Throughout the whole of the seventeenth century men and women of position lived in dread of the sudden death. Against poison they felt themselves almost helpless. Cardinal Richelieu kept a number of cats, not merely for the pleasure of their company, but because these domestic pets are the most suspicious of animals. They smell with distrust food offered by the most friendly hands, and they refuse anything of which they have the slightest suspicion. Stronger even than the evidence of the Cardinal's cats is the correspondence between the minister and his master. Repeatedly Louis XIII. warns Richelieu to take every precaution before touching food.

Poisoning became a national vice. It had been imported from Italy and gradually infected the whole of France. The King and his ministers recognised the importance of stamping it out. Madame de Brinvilliers was the first case they were able to probe thoroughly. They imagined that the disease had been killed. Then came the terrible scandals of La Voisin, which implicated the most prominent members of the Court. The evil growth was not eradicated until well into the eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER III

PARIS AND THE COURT CROWDED WITH ADVENTURERS—TWO TYPICAL  
EXAMPLES: THE STORIES OF DU CAUSE DE NAZELLE AND DE  
LAUZUN

**I**T has already been said that Louis XIV. was personally responsible to a large extent for the moral decadence which is so marked a feature of his reign. "The king who persecuted in the name of 'the true religion,'" writes Ferdinand Brunetière, "passed from La Vallière to Montespan, from Montespan to Fontanges, and loved them all three together." With such an unedifying example the code of morals of the society in which Madame de Brinvilliers moved could not possibly have been a high one. There was, however, another subtle movement at work which destroyed many of the older influences for good.

Although the rebellion of the Fronde has been called "the women's war," the men bore themselves in it with distinction. It had not, however, raised the tone of French society. During the long campaign the women had been allowed a liberty which they were ready to abuse. When peace was declared their husbands returned home brutalised and coarse, and, above all, impoverished. Directly the young King had got a firm hold upon the government of his country he was able to carry out his plan of reducing the power of his nobility. With a weaker aristocracy there was less fear of future rebellions.

The scheme was carried forward in an insidious but clever manner. By keeping his peers continually at Court he slowly broke their territorial influence. They

had formerly delighted in the chase and violent exercises. By making them subservient courtiers their strength was enervated. They were not allowed to take a prominent part in the affairs of State. Louis selected most of his ministers from the lesser nobility or from the trading middle classes. But the greater nobility became idlers. They never lost their physical courage, but they seem to have lost much of their physical endurance. The "Grande Mademoiselle" was seriously alarmed when her favourite, De Lauzun, had to stand uncovered before the King in the rain.

"He will catch cold!" she cried. The remark is typical of the high society in which De Lauzun had managed to worm his way.

While the steady decadence of the old nobility was beginning to bear fruit, the capital was flooded by men of lesser birth attracted by the knowledge that the highest positions at Court were open to intelligence and intrigue. The younger sons who swarmed to Paris from the provinces were in an extremely precarious state if they could not rely upon substantial remittances from home. Primi Visconti, himself a child of fortune, noticed this. "There are," he wrote, "in Paris more than twenty thousand gentlemen who have not a sou. They live by gambling or on the women. . . . One day they arrive on foot, and the next day they are in a carriage. For heedless young men this is the finest country in the world." Let us follow the careers of two of these penniless rascals who walked so boldly in the circle to which the Marquise de Brinvilliers belonged. The histories are entertaining and give a remarkable insight into the ideals and manners of the period.

The memoirs of the youthful Du Cause de Nazelle, whose name has lived in connection with the conspiracy of the Chevalier de Rohan, presents a picture of much truth and actuality. It also shows to what straits the



boys who aspired to glory were at times reduced. Du Cause de Nazelle was a Gascon of noble family. But, like another noble Gascon, D'Artagnan of the musketeers, his relations were miserably poor. He was the eldest son, and his father desired him to remain under the family roof. He longed, however, to serve his King, "this prince who was then in the flower of his youth." Throughout the provinces active levies were being made to reinforce the army. "All the youth of the kingdom," writes De Nazelle, "breathing but glory, pressed forward to enter the royal service."

The boy witnessed his neighbours dropping out one by one as they left to join the flag, and his ardour could stand no further restraint. It was impossible to obtain help from his father. Paternal authority was strong in the seventeenth century. Even to-day the laws of the Republic are more rigid in this respect than any other European code. The elder De Nazelle would have refused his consent and shut up his son until he capitulated. So the boy (he was about fifteen years of age) succeeded by an extraordinary stratagem.

His mother was the cause of endless family trouble. She carried on abominable intrigues with men of low condition. She quarrelled with her husband, and had so little natural affection for her children that she actually attempted at one period to have her eldest son assassinated. Yet, living in such a frail house of glass, she strongly objected to the throwing of stones. Some offensive, and possibly truthful, remarks made by a neighbour reached her ears. She determined to be revenged. Her husband either could not be told the cause or else would have refused to pick up the glove. She complained bitterly to the son she had not previously succeeded in murdering. He saw his opportunity.

"If I had a horse," he remarked quietly, "some arms,

and some money in order that I might take refuge after the deed, I would avenge you."

The mother eagerly supplied the steed, the sword, and the cash. With what joy she watched her knight ride forward to wash the stain off her honour. There are times when the student wonders if such a thing as honour existed in the France of the seventeenth century. This is a case in point. The Chevalier reveals his callousness and lack of moral feeling in sentences so neatly framed that they cannot be improved upon. "Without putting myself to the trouble of avenging an offence which was in itself chimerical and without foundation, I left during the night, and made for Paris, travelling day by day."

This truthful hero soon arrived in what was then the centre of Christendom. The sights of the city dazzled the eyes of the raw provincial. His first aim was to see the King and the brilliant Court of which he had heard so much. He decided to attach himself as a cadet to the regiment of French guards in which the young nobility were taught the military sciences. Unfortunately his money was running short. He had already sold his horse. There was not the faintest hope that his father would send him supplies. And it was a point of honour with the volunteers of this smart regiment not to draw their pay, or at least to distribute it amongst the inferior ranks.

De Nazelle concocted another ingenious little plot which succeeded to perfection. The standard of morals and honour was low at the time, but one must hope that this young sprig of Gascony was not a normal example of the provincial nobility. One of his father's neighbours had settled in Paris as a barrister and kept a house of comfort and size. De Nazelle forged a letter in his father's name, stating that his son, his unique consolation, had run away from home. Search had been made for the boy without success. He asked his com-

patriots whether the missing heir had turned up in Paris. If so inquiry was to be made. If he was still honest and living up to the family honour, as he undoubtedly lacked money, he was to be supplied with all that was necessary in order that he might qualify in military exercises. The father then gave his word of honour to repay faithfully any sum advanced to his son. It must be observed that family "honour," and the various interpretations of an extremely elastic word, occupy a considerable place in the different chapters of the Chevalier's memoirs.

This document was a skilfully conceived letter of credit. By some means De Nazelle caused it to fall under the notice of the barrister, who comes more creditably out of the transaction than the young Gascon. For directly he read it he searched the town, and found the boy, who was anxiously awaiting discovery. He talked to De Nazelle, saw that his views were not unreasonable, and then unreservedly placed his purse and his home at the youth's service. "I had the best of masters for my exercises, and I was equipped for the position of cadet in the regiment of French guards." His great joy was to mount guard in the presence of the King, and he was the eager spectator of everything which passed at Court. The sole annoyance which troubled him was a lack of pocket money. "Money is the chief corrupter of youth," said the good barrister sententiously, giving him exactly enough small cash to pay his daily expenses. When his companions arranged a party of pleasure De Nazelle had to make some excuse that would keep him away. Such a state of things was galling to a boy of blood and spirit. His Gascon inventiveness overcame all obstacles.

His host, the barrister, had a wife who grumbled at the expense the young "garde du roi" was causing the household. Probably her husband in bringing a fresh mouth to the table had neglected to increase the house-keeping money. They quarrelled over the matter, either



because she was avaricious, says De Nazelle, or because she feared the debt would never be paid. Women have a keen intuition in such things. They have also many weaknesses. She was only twenty-two and De Nazelle was barely seventeen. But he was very old in wisdom. He knew he was extremely handsome in his new uniform, and he invited his hostess and a friend to see his regiment reviewed in the great court of the Tuileries. The effect was as he had anticipated. This clever boy pulled off all his schemes. When she came home she was enthusiastic in her praise of the royal guard. "But to her taste I was the most skilful, and had the best appearance in the whole troop. Not a man carried his arms with better grace. But one thing detracted from my beautiful ensemble. I lacked a wig." She was so insistent that her husband had to advance the money to buy a wig the next morning. The battle had been won, and De Nazelle never again lacked pocket-money. In the significant phrase of all memoir writers, she was not "cruel." For a year their attachment continued with "reciprocal contentment." Then the thunderbolt fell.

From time to time the barrister wrote long letters to the elder De Nazelle, telling him how his son was progressing. He may also have asked for a little money on account. These letters he gave to the young guardsman to forward to Gascony. The boy opened them, and forged answers in the name of his father. "These replies gave my host great security for his payment," writes De Nazelle complacently in his memoirs.

But the parent in the depth of the provinces met a neighbour who had been spending a holiday in Paris, and from him he learned that the lost heir was cutting a dash in the capital. This gave him inquietude as well as surprise. His son must be engaged in some dishonourable business, otherwise he could not exist without supplies from home. The elder De Nazelle then remembered his

former friend the barrister. An old gentleman who was travelling to Paris on business, was instructed to interview the barrister, and to ask him if he knew by what miracle the boy was existing so comfortably.

Their conversation must have been truly comic. The miracle was explained, and the packet of correspondence from Gascony produced and read. Upon examination the ambassador pronounced them false. The barrister was struck with dismay at the idea that his money was lost. Immediately he was reassured. The elder De Nazelle was a gentleman of probity and honour, who would meet all the obligations of his son. The man of law, however, could not easily swallow his anger at having been so outrageously duped by a child. When the young guardsman returned from his duties, or pleasures (the entry in the memoir is ambiguous), his "dear hostess" was waiting for him on the doorstep. She told him the bad news.

"Why did you not confide in me?" she whispered in tears. "I could have arranged everything. My husband understands that he will lose nothing. And you can be well excused, for have you not been acting for your own advancement!"

De Nazelle was too much ashamed to meet the lawyer, whose resentment he feared. He bid good-bye to his mistress, and left the house for ever. It is satisfactory to know that the elder De Nazelle paid every penny that had been advanced to his son.

A young man in the position of De Nazelle, although attached to the regiment of the guards, was little better than an adventurer. His only means of lucrative employment was a war. When the army returned from Flanders, or when the Crete expedition had come back, he was forced to join the ranks of the penniless. These youths preyed upon the wives and daughters of the bourgeoisie. The adventures of the "Three Musketeers" are true in

every incident, and Porthos was not the only gentleman-at-arms who relied upon an affectionate mistress in "la cité" or "la ville" for his food and fine clothing.

The after-career of Du Cause de Nazelle belongs to another story. It was he who discovered and revealed to Louvois the conspiracy of the Chevalier de Rohan, which, had it succeeded, would have changed the future of France. It failed, and three scaffolds in front of the Bastille received the heads of de Rohan, Madame de Villars, and the Chevalier de Préau. The fourth conspirator, the white-headed Dutch schoolmaster Van den Enden, not being of gentle birth, was suspended from a gallows. The man who had saved the kingdom was ruined. Louvois, always mingling private animosities with the affairs of the State, wished to encompass the disgrace of the Marquis d'Ambre. It was suggested to De Nazelle that in giving evidence against the conspirators he might add very considerably to his good fortune by inculpating d'Ambre.

The treachery appeared to him so frightful that he was unable to reply immediately to his tempter. He pretended never to have seen the marquis. That matters little, replied the intermediary, a creature in the service of Louvois. And he drew a picture of the man his master wished to suppress. The Marquis was tall, with a brown skin, and much black hair. It would be easy, he added, to meet him at Court in order to get some idea of his appearance. "By following my advice," he continued, "I am instructed to tell you that you will be rendering a very great service and your future will be assured."

It was a glittering bribe to a man without position or influence. But De Nazelle was seized with an extreme horror at the thought of bearing false witness against a fellow Gascon, who had always been particularly friendly towards him. He refused the proposition, and moreover in vague terms warned the Marquis against the hidden

dangers which threatened him. In so doing he sealed his own fate. The brutal Louvois never pardoned those who did not fall in with his plans. After the execution of the Chevalier de Rohan, De Nazelle found that Louvois refused to give him protection or advancement. He was attacked twice in the streets of Paris by bravoos who did their best to assassinate him. When Pellisson, the friend of Fouquet and of that meek widow Scarron who afterwards became Madame de Maintenon, a man who was Historiographer to the King and member of the Académie Française, heard the story he told De Nazelle that he was fortunate to be yet alive.

“Go!” he advised earnestly. “Fly to the furthest extremity of your province. You will find no safety in Paris.”

The young officer fled, but his sufferings were only at their beginning. At Bordeaux he was thrown into the cells of the Château Trompette. After five cruel years of prison he was released. Ceaselessly during this while his wife had petitioned the King, and at last her petition was read with favour. Had he lacked so faithful and devoted an ally his fate would have been that of numberless other unfortunate prisoners. Forgotten alike by friends and enemies they languished for life in the bastilles of provincial France. De Nazelle left his cell a free man—with restrictions. He was never to set foot in Paris, a malignant precaution which effectually stopped him from representing to the King his innocence and his sufferings.

“I have never been able to discover what had rendered me culpable,” he writes in his memoirs. “I was warned never to attempt to discover it, which was indeed hard and difficult. In order to stop me, I was given to understand that this curiosity would lead to even greater evils for myself and my family than those I had endured.” His friends pathetically warned him that if he fought



against the power which oppressed him he was truly lost. He was wise in his generation and took their advice. "To God alone I have left the care of protecting my innocence and my family." At the age of thirty he drops out of sight a ruined and broken man.

In tracing at length the history of Du Cause de Nazelle we have revealed one side of the seamy life of the soldier adventurer. Another cavalier, who also arrived in Paris from Gascony, made a far greater name. Antonin Nompar de Caumont, Comte and later Duc de Lauzun, was born in Périgord in 1632 or 1633. He was the third of nine children, and could expect nothing from his parents. So at the age of fourteen he was packed off to Court, and, having considerably more acuteness than the unhappy De Nazelle, and an even less keen sense of personal honour, he soon made a commanding place for himself in the entourage of Louis XIV. Personally he was hardly prepossessing. Primi Visconti describes him (but this was at a later date) as being "very little, ugly, half bald, greasy, dirty, deformed, resembling more an Indian or a Tartar than a Frenchman." He was bold and insolent, and irrepressibly self-confident. Like his fellow nobles he was practically uneducated, and he was ready for every trick or devilry which could suggest itself to the mind of so typical a Gascon. This odd personality commended itself to the young monarch, who, when he took up the reins of government upon the death of Mazarin, commenced to load his favourite with honours. At the age of twenty-four he was in command of a regiment. He became colonel-lieutenant of the King's dragoons, and three years after was created captain of the "cent gentilshommes au bec-de-corbin." He was even able to check and insult his enemy Louvois.

Lauzun's first set-back was the result of an amazing piece of effrontery, which only he would have dared to put into execution. The Duc de Mazarin having resigned his

post as Grand Master of the Artillery, Lauzun, probably through his friendship with Madame de Montespan, was the first to learn the news before it became public. Over persuaded, Louis verbally promised his favourite the appointment. Before it was officially confirmed Lauzun was unable to resist the temptation of boasting of his new honour. Louvois, who had suffered repeatedly from the insolence of the dwarfish Gascon, at once appealed to the King, representing the lack of wisdom of such a selection. Lauzun found his chances quashed by the strong and hated minister of war. Louis diplomatically forgot his promise. Lauzun appealed to Madame de Montespan for assistance. She promised to plead his case.

Lauzun was jealous and mistrustful, as well as suspicious of the good faith of the King's mistress. Louis and de Montespan were in the habit of spending their afternoons together. Lauzun bribed one of the maids to give him access to the room, concealed himself under the bed, and over-heard the conversation. Madame de Montespan referred to his disappointment but not in the way she had promised. Her attitude was clear. She had not the simple nature of La Vallière or La Fontanges, and she recognised that in a Court where "everything was to be taken" might and power could not be secured by goodness alone. If Lauzun, the King's favourite, gained greater influence, she, the King's mistress, would have less. She was quite unwilling to be supplanted, and ready to forego any affection she had for Lauzun rather than run a risk of seeing him absolute master. In gossiping with the King she exercised all her wit in making fun of the Gascon. The King joined in her merriment. Lauzun trembled with perspiration and rage beneath the dusty bed. When the room was empty he crept out and waited upon Madame de Montespan. She had been dressing for a ballet. Lauzun offered his hand in escort, and casually trusted



that she had mentioned his name to the King. She replied that she had rendered him every service possible. Then, as they were walking slowly towards the scene of the ballet, Lauzun whispered in her ear the whole of her conversation with the King. Calling her softly the most infamous names, he led her to her seat at the performance and left her almost unconscious.

The King and de Montespan were in a "horrible rage." They could only explain the revelation by ascribing to Lauzun powers of sorcery. But the Gascon had not finished with the business. Three days later he confronted his sovereign, and in his presence, broke his sword in two, protesting that he would no longer serve a prince who forswore his word. Even worse, he cast some unpleasant aspersions on the fair name of Madame de Montespan. Already, at the age of thirty, Louis knew how to comport himself as a King. He opened the window and threw out his cane, saying that he should regret having struck a gentleman. The next day Lauzun was taken to the Bastille. In two months he was pardoned, and created captain of the royal body guard.

Lauzun was a courtier of genius. Jealous of everybody and contented with nothing, as Saint-Simon tells us, he aspired to the highest rank. Mademoiselle de Montpensier, cousin to the King, was one of the most energetic and masculine women of her age. Finding herself upon the verge of becoming an old maid, having successively refused—or been refused by—kings and princes of the blood, she fell in love with the ugly dwarf. "Mademoiselle ought to be ashamed to love so little a monster," wrote Bussy-Rabutin to Madame de Sévigné. But love him she did, and although he did no more than pretend to love her (for his conceited shrivelled-up heart could only find room for love of its owner) together they managed to gain the King's consent to their marriage. Again Louvois exerted all his strength to checkmate this

fresh move. Lauzun wished the marriage to take place with semi-royal magnificence, and precious time was being lost at the Luxembourg, the home of the princess, in arranging the ceremony.

“In the name of God, marry to-day rather than to-morrow!” cried one of Lauzun’s friends. “You are tempting God and the King,” said Madame de Sévigné to the bride-elect. The widow of the poet Scarron, she who was later known as Madame de Maintenon, was acting as governess to the royal children. Madame de Montespan had suggested to the King that he should give his consent. Madame de Maintenon “pointed out to Madame de Montespan what a tempest she would draw down on her head in supporting Lauzun in this affair; that the royal family and the King himself would reproach her for the steps she had urged. Madame Scarron succeeded so well that the one who had urged the marriage was responsible for preventing it.”

At the last moment the marriage was forbidden. Months later Lauzun discovered the treachery of Athénaïs de Montespan. A frightful scene ensued, which the Marquise endured meekly. It was said that she had once been Lauzun’s mistress, which explained the influence the “cadet de Gascogne” exercised over her. Madame intervened, and de Montespan told the King that “she did not think her life was safe as long as this man was free.”

During the night of 25th November 1671, Lauzun was arrested at Saint Germain, and immediately carried to the prison fortress of Pignerol. His captivity lasted for nine years, and this imprisonment shows the unstable character of the King. For a long period the young Count had been his chosen favourite. Now, at the instigation of his mistress, he shuts up his dearest friend in an apartment consisting of two low-pitched vaulted rooms facing a deserted courtyard. The windows are

darkened by iron bars over which is steel basket-work which prevents the prisoner from seeing or being seen. "I engage upon my honour," writes the governor Saint-Mars to the minister Louvois, "that as long as this gentleman is under my care you will hear no further word about him, it will be as if he already lay *in pace*."

At the end of the first month of the imprisonment, the governor reports that his prisoner "is in so profound a grief that I can hardly describe it. He said to me that I had made him a lodging *sæcula sæculorum*." In the middle of January "he is overwhelmed with so extraordinary a grief that I fear he may lose his reason. . . . He repeats that he has never been judged, and that his worst suffering is caused by the fact that he is ignorant of his crime." Every effort is made to prevent the "Grande Mademoiselle" (Mademoiselle de Montpensier) from communicating with him. He is as effectually cut off from the living world as if he had been nailed in his coffin. An abortive attempt is made to carry news to the prisoner. Some of the soldiers of the garrison have been bribed. "To tell the truth," writes the ferocious governor, "I have only to find the smallest charge against a soldier or domestic and I hang him at once."

At long intervals books were supplied to the wretched Lauzun. In 1676 he almost succeeded in escaping. His secret intercourse with another prisoner, Fouquet, the former intendant of taxes, is one of the most romantic passages in the story of prison life. In 1677, through the death of his brother, he became the head of his family. It was necessary to place the affairs of the succession in order, and Louis XIV. allowed the prisoner to be visited by a younger brother, a sister, and their lawyer. His condition was deplorable. "We were moved with pity," writes the lawyer. "We remarked his haggard face, and the extreme pallor of his countenance, at least as much as could be seen of it under his long beard and moustache.

. . . A chair near the fire, facing the window, was given him. He shrank back, coughing, saying in a whisper that a bright fire made his eyes and head burn." The business matters were introduced. Lauzun "said coldly that having been kept for six years, and a portion of a seventh, in a very restricted prison, and not having heard any business details for so long a time, and having seen nobody, his mind had become so sealed and his intelligence so clouded, that it was impossible for him to understand anything the lawyer was saying."

He then burst into tears, the sister fainted, the brother was ill with emotion, and even the lawyer was moved with pity. In 1681 he was set at liberty. The "Grande Mademoiselle," after ten years' waiting, had been allowed to buy his freedom. But at what a price. Retaining only a life interest, Mademoiselle de Montpensier was compelled to sign a deed of gift conveying the principality of Dombes and the earldom of Eu to the Duc de Maine, the natural son of Madame de Montespan by the King. One cannot relate here the whole story, telling how King and mistress attempted to dupe and spoliage the unhappy "Grande Mademoiselle" and her lover. In March 1682 Lauzun was received by Louis. Ten times he threw himself at the feet of the monarch, but he was not forgiven. Then he retired to the consolations of Mademoiselle, and it is probable that they were secretly married.

The result was not successful. For two years they did nothing but quarrel. She had waited for him, she had given up all her great possession as a princess closely allied to the throne. In April 1684, he told her, "I am going away, and I bid you farewell. I shall never see you again."

"It would have been better if we had never met," was her frigid reply. "But better late than never."



“You have ruined my career,” he retaliated. The remark was hardly just or grateful.

“Adieu then,” she said, going to her boudoir. A little while after she returned to the salon. Lauzun was still there playing cards with her maids of honour. Her ladies invited her to join the game.

“This is too much,” she cried to her husband. “Keep your promise. Go away.”

They do not appear to have met again, but the cavalier of fortune started life afresh. He was not received at Court, so he travelled to England a discredited and seemingly ruined man. He arrived in the autumn of 1688. “I admire the star of Monsieur de Lauzun,” wrote Madame de Sévigné in a letter dated Christmas Eve, 1688. “Again it sheds its light over the horizon when we supposed it to have been for ever extinguished.” The cadet of Gascony came to the Court of Saint James upon the outbreak of the revolution. He saved the English royal family from their threatening subjects, and at much risk brought them safely to France. King Louis wrote him an autograph letter of thanks, and he entered Versailles a hero. Bussy-Rabutin sums up the situation in a letter to his faithful correspondent, Madame de Sévigné. “We have seen him in favour, we have seen him submerged, and now behold he is again riding the waves. Do you remember a childish game in which one says, ‘I have seen him alive, I have seen him dead, I have seen him alive after his death.’ This is his history.” James II. made him a knight of the Order of the Garter. Louis XIV. rewarded him with the title of Duke. But the “Grande Mademoiselle” refused to be reconciled, and in 1693 she died at the age of sixty-six.

Two years after, Lauzun married a child of fourteen, the daughter of the Marshal de Lorges. “You are bold to take Lauzun into your family. I trust you may not repent it,” said the King to the bride’s father. Repent

it the unfortunate child certainly did. They lived together in the house facing the river on the banks of the Ile de Saint Louis, now known as No. 17 Quai d'Anjou. The Hôtel de Lauzun (or Hôtel Pimodan) like the Hôtel d'Aubray has little altered during the past two centuries. It has gathered other memories. Here in 1849 lived Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire. "The first time I met Baudelaire," wrote Gautier, "was in the middle of 1849 at the Hôtel Pimodan, where my rooms communicated with his by a stair, concealed in the thickness of the wall, still haunted possibly by the ghosts of some of Lauzun's fair favourites." Scandal has kept alive the tricks Lauzun played upon the young Duchess. Nature herself (being a woman) smiled on him, and he never grew old. When he died in 1723, he was over ninety years of age, and left an immense fortune to a nephew.

The respective careers of Du Cause de Nazelle and the Duc de Lauzun offer many contrasts. Like Gaudin de Sainte-Croix they were both adventurers and both Gascons. One of the memoir writers of the period remarks that the first aim of these young men, when they arrived in Paris, was to attach themselves to women with money. This was exactly what Sainte-Croix did when he met Madame de Brinvilliers. All these Gascons were men with relatively no moral sense, morality being little more than an abstract virtue in those days. But if they lacked one good quality they needed another. Only a stout heart with abundant courage could dare to force the gates of fortune at the close of the seventeenth century.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE POVERTY OF THE PEOPLE AND THE PROSPERITY OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES

**T**HE cruel wars of the Fronde lowered the whole standard of humanity and morals. When at last France was again at peace the country was devastated, and the condition of the peasantry truly deplorable. To understand the atmosphere in which the young Marie Marguerite d'Aubray was reared one must examine, if only briefly, the conditions which influenced her early days.

It was one of the maxims of war in that pitiless time that a conquered country should be completely at the mercy of its victors. "In the eight or nine leagues where we have been staying during the past two months we have eaten everything," wrote Harcourt during a campaign to Mazarin. A friendly army passing through a countryside was a disaster. A hostile troop was worse than a thousand devils. In the first case the cost of feeding the men and their numerous followers meant ruin. Mazarin once allowed a foreign legion of lutheran mercenaries to winter in Picardy. It consisted of five regiments of infantry and cavalry, about 1500 women, and some 900 servants. The fields were bare, and little was to be found. The wild mob lived chiefly by robbery and violence. The same conditions existed in nearly every quarter of France. Discipline was at its lowest ebb, and the military commanders admitted their inability to hold the men in check.

Until the eighteenth century barracks did not exist,

and when they were built the unruly soldiers preferred the freedom of living at their ease upon the wretched civilians. No greater punishment could fall upon a town than to be used as a garrison. When Angers in 1647 refused to pay an impost of 100,000 livres, it was ordered to become a centre for cavalry. In addition to food and lodging each householder had to pay three or four livres per day to each man quartered upon him. The officers inhabited the most comfortable salons, the men rioted in the streets. "If an army of Turks had taken the town one could not have suffered so many disorders," writes an eyewitness.

In 1666 doctor Gui Patin wrote of Madame de Brinvilliers' native country: "all the towns of Picardy are crowded with soldiers. They eat up the people who have nothing left but skin and bone."

Only one city had enough courage to hold the troops in awe. The attitude of the inhabitants of Rheims was so martial that the soldiers dared not say "the least word." As soon as night fell chains were drawn across the streets. Townsmen from other parts of France were astonished. It was not ordinarily the citizens who kept the soldiers in subjection.

The rumour that troops were approaching immediately emptied the smaller towns. At Rambervilliers, in the Vosges, in 1675 and 1678, all fled with as many of their beasts as they could drive away. At Billom in Auvergne, a small hamlet, one hundred persons left within a month. When four squadrons of cavalry and three battalions of infantry were stationed at Gray, all the artisans and daily labourers moved to set up their homes elsewhere. Towns, like Bar-sur-Seine, always on the lines of communication were at last left deserted.

This happened with regard to the movements of the national armies. But fears of an invasion resulted in panic. The able-bodied men and women fled to the

woods, or took refuge in caves and quarries. Sometimes they concealed themselves in the vaults and crypts of their churches. When discovered they were smoked out. They were rarely successful in escaping the foreign furies. Their flocks were captured by the commissariat, their miserable houses pillaged and wantonly destroyed. Corn was trodden under foot, and vines cut down at the roots. Finally the village was fired. When the survivors considered it safe to return, a mass of smoking ruins represented their homes and property, and a heap of mutilated bodies the unfortunate beings who had fallen into the hands of the marauders.

The picture is not exaggerated. Indeed it is hardly possible at this date to give a faithful account of the ravages of war in the seventeenth century, so revolting are the details. Callot's realistic etchings represent a few of the atrocious sufferings of his countrymen. The soldiers tortured the peasants, not only to extort information revealing hidden treasure, but from a fiendish delight in giving pain. Children were killed and roasted, men and women thrashed with whips of thorns, whilst bets were made as to whether husband or wife would die first. The rich were tormented with even more refinement of cruelty than their servants. A certain Comte d'Arbois bargained with a band of marauding soldiery that his house should remain unpillaged upon payment of a large sum of money. At the last moment one of the brigands caught sight of a beautiful girl, and insisted that she should form part of the ransom. The girl was the Count's daughter. With terrible anger he refused. A quarrel ensued, he was slaughtered, the mansion pillaged and burnt, and the unhappy girl carried off. The generals in command of these hordes, if they did not actually encourage the men, as Condé did, in many cases shut their eyes to deeds they considered impolitic as well as impossible to prevent.

Eight years after the Fronde, during the period of Madame de Brinvilliers' early married life, not only in the frontier provinces, such as Burgundy, Picardy, Champagne, and Lorraine, but even in the far interior, the misery was as intense as that to be seen in the environs of Paris.

The letters of Turenne afford many indications of the abandoned tracks of land. He journeys through Alsace: "Not a peasant in the villages." Crossing the Palatinate he remarks that "one can pass through a hundred villages without meeting a man." In the smiling Moselle there is "not enough sustenance to nourish four men."

Within a day's travel of Paris the most terrible sights were common. Wolves prowled amidst the ruined villages. Impossible to bury the dead, plague added to the number of the victims. At Rouen 17,000 persons are said to have died in a year, at Dreux one in every eight. At Limours the deaths were 34 in 1649, 43 in 1650, and 101 in 1652, whilst the births fell from 33 in 1649 to 19 in 1652, and for three years there was not a single marriage. The population was probably about 1000 souls. Refugees flocked to the larger towns. At Saint Quentin there were nearly 10,000 necessitous poor.

Many of the towns which had passed through repeated fire, pestilence, and rapine, lost all powers of recuperation. Étampes was conquered by Turenne after a fierce attack in May 1652. La Fontaine passed through the little town in August 1663. He wrote to his wife that "nothing could be more desolate or hideous. Imagine rows of houses without roofs, without windows, pierced on all sides." This was eleven years after the assault. Lyons was twenty years recovering its past prosperity.

One result was the almost entire extinction of agriculture. In 1675 the peasants of Dauphiny had no other nourishment than the grass in the fields and the bark on the trees. The winter of 1663-1664 was a nightmare.



Famine swept through the land. In one village it was reported that out of two hundred inhabitants one hundred and eighty lacked bread. At Châteauroux there were nearly two hundred orphans. Dead children were found in the fields, their mouths stuffed with the grass with which they had been endeavouring to assuage their hunger. In Berry the women and children were naked, and the men skeletons.

Colbert attempted to regenerate France by the creation of fresh manufactures, and the foundation of colonies. As Lavisse points out in his engrossing history, this statesman was born in a shop and passed all his days in an office. He looked upon agriculture with the eye of a finance minister. It was to be encouraged in order to be taxed. Now Sully and Henri IV. loved the country because they themselves were countrymen, as indeed were most of the nobles of the age. "Labourage et pâturage sont les deux mamelles de la France" is a popular saying true of many other countries. In the twentieth century, English agriculture is falling under the control of a bureaucracy, whilst the great land owners, reared with an instinctive love of the soil, are being driven by excessive taxation from their estates. There is a present moral to be drawn from the events of two hundred and fifty years ago.

The unfortunate peasant had many crushing burdens to bear. His soul was the property of the Church, his body belonged to his lord. Many of the seigneurs were undoubtedly just to their vassals. But the general oppression had reached a fearful height when an important judicial investigation was opened in the Centre in 1665. The "grands jours d'Auvergne" were hailed by the peasantry as the dawn of a new freedom. Many of the nobility in their eyries had defied all law and justice. The temper of the labourers is well conveyed in the anecdote of a countryman who remained covered in the

presence of his seigneur. His cap was roughly knocked to the ground by the indignant noble.

"Pick it up! Pick it up!" cried the peasant. "If you don't the King will have your head cut off at the 'grands jours.'"

His seigneur picked it up.

The "grands jours" had little effect. One seigneur was executed, and many fled until the storm blew over. Then they returned and were so far forgiven that the King received them into his royal service. The oppression of the poor did not end until the great revolution.

The middle classes were better off, particularly in the cities. Colbert wished to make France a trading nation, and to some extent he succeeded. Companies were formed to exploit America and the East. The money drained from the provinces circulated in the towns. It was a golden age for the richer merchants, who turned over their wealth rapidly and to increasing purpose. For about ten years commerce was exceedingly prosperous. About 1667 the tide began to turn.

As a rule the tradespeople had more money to spend than the professional classes. "The wife of a cloth merchant, or of a retail grocer, or of a mercer, has more crowns for pocket money than the wife of a notary has sixpenny pieces," said an acute observer. In the smaller shops the whole family of the proprietor was actively engaged. At Orléans a traveller notes that one saw but women and girls in the shops and offices. At Rouen women, girls, and children were engaged in keeping the accounts and conducting the correspondence. The young women of some towns had a widespread reputation for the commercial instinct. The business men of Lyons selected their domestic partners from the girls of Le Puy, who, having been trained from their infancy in the lace negotiations of their mothers, were able when wives to graduate as the silk saleswomen of Lyons. To-day Le Puy, one of



the quaintest and most fantastic of French cities, hardly lives up to its old celebrity as a school of commerce, although the women can still drive a bargain.

At Montpellier, in Languedoc, the native country of the financier Pennautier, who will appear later in this story, the trading community was notorious for avarice and economy. Had it been possible, it would have sold to strangers the very air they breathed. At least so said contemporary gossip. But many of the bourgeoisie, particularly in Paris, drunken with success, set up large and extravagant households.

“The ambition of a bourgeois,” said Mercier in the next century, “is to own silver-plate upon which he can engrave his arms, and to rise out of the class to which he belongs.” With the increase of their wealth came the loss of their simplicity. From commerce, pure and honest, they entered into finance, with all its dubious and shady bypaths. Speculation was rife. “If business has its roses, it is not without its thorns.” Bankruptcy became common. Rich business people were as eccentric in their habits as the biggest wildcaps of the nobility. According to Chateaubriand, the merchants at Saint Malo were not above the tricks of schoolboys in their frolics. They would throw from their windows red-hot coins for the crowd in the street to scramble for. But, as A. Babeau reminds us, when the disasters of the wars with Spain reached their climax, these same merchants brought as an offering to the foot of the throne thirty-two million francs in gold with which to defend the honour of France.

From imitating the nobility, they began to set the pace for them. Gradually, by alliance and royal honour, they entered the ranks of the aristocracy, who were perfectly prepared to become merchants. At first the men of rank engaged in business with much hesitation. In Brittany they temporarily forfeited their position, and were com-

pelled to deposit their swords in the chamber of the nobility until they had renounced their plebeian engagements. Finally, in 1701, Louis XIV. declared that commerce in itself was no stain upon the scutcheon, and the French nobility rushed to the desk in much the same manner as the English aristocracy invaded the city of London a few years back. The mixture of classes was complete.

The family of Madame de Brinvilliers belonged essentially to the widespread legal clan, which has always remained a class apart. It was the dream of every bourgeois to see his son admitted a barrister, although notaries generally earned more money. The d'Aubrays belonged to the magistrature, which throughout the century retained much reputation for courage and probity. They belonged to the "noblesse de robe," in itself only inferior to the "noblesse d'épée," which affected to regard them as an intrusion.

"Remember that you are but a bourgeois," said the mother of the Abbé de Choisy to her son, who belonged to a family chiefly composed of councillors of state. "In France one recognises but one nobility, that of the sword."

Voiture, the poet, consorted with the highest personages of the land. He was welcomed by every salon. Yet he was never allowed to forget that he was the son of a wine merchant.

At the close of the seventeenth century these distinctions were beginning to melt away. But the nobility retained much power and great pride, and it is easy to comprehend the brilliant position in society of the Marquise de Brinvilliers. When the Marshal de Luxembourg was concerned in the poisoning scandal which ended in the "Chambre Ardente," Saint Simon reproached him, not for being mixed up in so unsavoury a case, but for refusing when a prisoner to demand the prerogatives due to his rank.

By allowing talented men of inferior birth to occupy the seats of the ministers, the King assisted the slow change. The women, however, fought over questions of precedence to the bitter end.

The coach of a rich tradesman's wife attempted to pass the carriage of a peeress. A war of words and recriminations ensued.

"Shut up, *bourgeoise!*" screamed the Marquise. The fatal word abruptly closed the argument. Like every sting, there was truth in the insult.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STREETS OF OLD PARIS—THE MARAIS AND THE CITÉ

“**A** HORRIBLE place. Stifling hot, and such a stench.” In these frank words the plain-spoken Princess Palatine summed up seventeenth-century Paris. The phrase conveys a very accurate impression of the city in which Madame de Brinvilliers lived.

The first characteristic noted by all travellers was the mud. Some historians have derived the name of Lutetia from “lutum.” In the Middle Ages the city was notorious for this repulsive mixture. Montaigne said it had a bitter odour. At a later date Boileau drew attention to its glue-like consistency. Even now the mud of Paris is not as other mud.

In many other respects the capital of France has changed but little. There remain scores of streets with which the ages have made no appreciable difference. Rising with the slow smoke of the city mingle the cries of the market and the moans of countless forgotten generations. Through these worn thoroughfares Paris has pirouetted its “danse macabre” of life and death for century after century. To-day the mixture of palpitating energy and picturesque idleness amidst the grey relics of the past is one of the supreme fascinations of the city on the Seine.

The quarter in which Madame de Brinvilliers lived during the greater part of her unhappy married life remains almost untouched, and the Hotel d'Aubray in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul presents the same appearance

as when Sainte-Croix and La Chaussée passed under the "porte cochère" to visit the fascinating Marquise.

If we walk along the broad Boulevard Henri IV., which runs from the Place de la Bastille across the Pont Sully, tipping the east point of the Isle Saint Louis, and joining the Boulevard Saint Germain at the Halle aux Vins, we are surrounded by the work of modern hands until we reach the Quai des Celestins. The boulevard is painfully new and uninteresting. But take any street on the west, the Rue de la Cerisaie or the Rue des Lions, and we are at once in the quaintest portion of the Marais. It is the quarter of the Arsenal and of Saint Paul, bounded on the north by the Rue Saint Antoine and on the south by the river. Visitors to Paris rarely penetrate its recesses, but to the inquirer who wanders in search of relics of the past it is crammed with attractions.

The neighbourhood was formerly the home of the earlier Valois kings. In the fourteenth century Charles V. bought nearly the whole of the open land and constructed the Hôtel de Saint Paul. Many of the streets recall the courts and pleasaunces of the palace. The Rue Beautreillis is the site of the vineyards, the Rue des Lions of the royal menagerie, the Rue de la Cerisaie of the orchards. Many fragments of the old buildings can be discovered in the new. But of the beautiful Gothic church of Saint Paul, which stood in the Rue Saint Paul, not a trace remains. Once the whole nobility and wealth of France flocked in these narrow streets. In the seventeenth century the quarter of the Marais was the centre of the fashionable world. The hotels of the nobility rivalled those of the financiers and tax-gatherers. The movement towards the faubourg Saint-Germain commenced about 1670, when Louis XIV. definitely installed his Court at Versailles. The aristocracy then built their residences on the road which runs through Vaugirard to Versailles. The wide thoroughfare was easier for the passage of their





ENTRANCE TO THE HOTEL D'AUBRAY, RUE NEUVE SAINT PAUL  
(NOW NO. 12 RUE CHARLES V) THE RESIDENCE OF THE  
MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS





heavy coaches, drawn by several horses, particularly at night. The streets leading from the Tuileries to the Marais were narrow.

Fashion has now quitted the Marais for ever. The quiet streets doubtless still house many good people, but some, especially those running at right angles to the Quai, certainly shelter a multitude of dirty ones. Visitors who have picked their way amidst the garbage of the Rue des Jardins, for instance, will agree to the assertion without question. "Un cloaque infect et malsain," said an old writer upon Paris, and the words apply to many of these streets with a long history.

The short thoroughfare, known to-day as the Rue Charles V., and formerly called the Rue Neuve Saint Paul, is an exception. More open to the sky than most of its neighbours, cleaner, and even more respectable and "solid," it remains exactly the same as when Madame de Brinvilliers' heavy coach rumbled over its roughly laid stones. It is one of those secluded, not to say desolate, streets which are to be found in so many parts of old Paris. They carry the semblance of by-streets in a country town. It is hard to guess that they are within a few steps of the busiest quarters of Paris. They dream in silence of their lost days of glory when they resounded with the ebb and flow of fashionable life.

On the north side of the Rue Charles V., an open gateway at No. 12 displays what may be truthfully called a home of ancient peace. Gazing through the archway, a glimpse is caught of a wide courtyard planted with the gayest flowers. The walls are covered with luxuriant creepers. The sun plays across the grey stones. There is nothing of a forbidding nature or sombre aspect. This was the home of the Marquise de Brinvilliers. It is hard to believe that the smiling mansion was the scene of the most dreadful domestic drama in the history of the modern world.

But in order to recreate the atmosphere of the neighbourhood in which the Marquise lived, it is not enough to say that in one house Gabrielle d'Estrées was poisoned (Hôtel de Lesdiguières, destroyed by the formation of the boulevard), or in that street (Rue des Jardins) Rabelais died. We must listen to the gossip on the pavements, sniff the odours so graphically described by the Princess Palatine, watch the crowds. Let us cross the Pont Marie, which must have been daily used by the Marquise (the poisoner La Voisin lived in one of the quaint houses overhanging the river), and reach the Ile de la Cité, the centre of Old Paris.

Here we are in a land of legend and history. Many of the tales have an element of the grimmest fantasy. Read a few and we forget the twentieth century, and are thrown back into the days of the Renaissance, when modern thought and doubt were beginning to fight the old superstitions.

Take one at random. Between the market on the Quai des Fleurs and the great church of Notre Dame used to stand the church of the Parisian butchers. This is the reason it received such patronage. One day in the early Renaissance a student, who had been driven mad by his classical studies, rushed up to the altar and proclaimed the worship of Jupiter. He was speedily tried and executed, after which a religious procession swept through the street leading to the church, praying that the blasphemy might be forgiven. The priests passed two cows driven to the slaughterhouse. As the Host was raised the animals knelt in adoration. The miracle gave the church its distinctive name, Saint Pierre aux Bœufs. As we stand amidst the Marché des Oiseaux, we can remember that the mediæval mind was possibly more sympathetic towards the animal world than the present materialistic age with all its humanitarianism. A thousand folk-tales tell us how the birds and beasts

talk one to another, and in many parts of France the belief still runs that at midnight on Christmas Eve the oxen kneel to usher in the Sacred Morn.

One story of the Ile de la Cité, though slightly horrible in its details, like every good fairy story, is far too thrilling to be forgotten, particularly in a volume dealing with the crimes of Paris. It is a Lutetian combination of Sweeney Todd, not unknown to fame as the demon barber of Fleet Street, and Sam Weller's respectable tradesman who disappeared so mysteriously. It occurred sometime in the fifteenth century, it might have been the thirteenth or the sixteenth, a few hundred years one way or another cannot affect the gist of such a matter. In a street leading to the cloisters of Notre Dame, a street with an evil-smelling gutter in the middle of its cobbled pathway, down which a black and slimy liquid lazily trickled towards the Seine, a street where the worn and dilapidated houses leant against each other for support, with overhanging eaves shutting out all but the strongest rays of sun, a street in which fat professors of theology quarrelled with thin students of divinity over intricate points of doctrine while the bells of Notre Dame punctuated the fleeting hours with Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Evensong, and Compline (Le Stryge, that ugly monster, and all his distorted fellows crocketed on the stone, grinning as they watched the doomed souls below passing to destruction), in such a street lived, door by door, a pastry-cook and a barber.

Now watch, as they say in the old plays. The pastry-cook's little pies enjoyed a celebrity not only in the Ile de la Cité, but in the new regions on the opposite banks of the river. The man was quickly gaining a monopoly for toothsome patties. His fame spread to far-away towns. But presently the dreadful origin of his wares was revealed. History tells us not how. Perchance a jealous and bankrupt rival unearthed the mystery.

The barber's shaving chair stood upon a sliding trapdoor, and his unfortunate customers were precipitated into the cellars of the adjoining house for the benefit of the wicked pastry-cook.

It must have been a poor business for the barber, unless he received a capitation grant or a commission upon the sale of pies. This did not influence the judges. The guilty tradesmen were suitably executed, and their houses razed to the ground. For ever was it forbidden to build upon the site. But eternity is a long while, and a new lease was granted in the reign of Francis I., which proves, of course, that the story must be true.<sup>1</sup>

The streets in the rear of Notre Dame looking towards the quarter of the Arsenal were a huddled mass of churches, taverns, and eating-houses. This, indeed, describes all the older quarters of Paris, particularly that part round the Place Maubert, in which Sainte-Croix lodged. The company, though interesting to those young men who were making the "grand tour," was not always edifying. Jester Chicot and Dom Goremflot had many a carouse together in these disreputable dens. The "clochetteur des trépassés"<sup>2</sup> stumbled along the black streets in the still night. He was clad in a white robe, upon which were embroidered skulls. In one hand he held a bell, in the other a lantern. At every corner he shook his bell and lugubriously chanted:—

" Réveillez-vous, gens qui dormez ;  
Priez Dieu pour les trépassés."

And sometimes he added, " Pray for the soul of so-and-so, who died at such an hour ! "

The desperadoes of Paris must have turned in their

<sup>1</sup> Another tale says that the actual house was only destroyed in the nineteenth century by the extension of the Hôtel Dieu, which entirely swept away the Rue des Marmousets, in which the murders occurred.

<sup>2</sup> This curious official did not disappear until the time of the Revolution. Probably he lingered later in provincial France.



beds as the doggerel lines reached their ears. When the cathedral bells rang the knell of another fleeting hour across the soft air, did these ruffians ever tremble in fear at the approaching vengeance of the Almighty? Did they ever imagine that dreadful day when the bodies in which their stilettoes had been sheathed would rise, and, displaying their wounds, cry aloud for judgment? Did these adventurers ever wander into the little churches which were scattered across Paris, and ask to be shriven?

And Madame de Brinvilliers herself! Did she ever toss restlessly throughout the night thinking of the crimes which had stained her soul? The Hotel d'Aubray almost adjoined the church of Saint Paul, and its bell must have re-echoed through every room of the house. Awakened by the tolling, which signified to the world that another human being had gone to his last account, in what manner did the Marquise contemplate her end?

She must often have listened to the cracked voice of the bellringer at the corner of the Rue Saint Paul and the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. How could she ask God to pardon such fearful crimes? How could she pray for the repose of the souls of her father and her brothers? As we learn her history, we shall see that remorse was the last thing to trouble her mind. She probably turned on her pillow and went to sleep again.

## CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE BRINVILLIERS—HOW MARRIAGES WERE ARRANGED—GAMBLING AND DISSIPATION—A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WOMAN OF QUALITY

**I**N 1651, at the age of seventeen, Marie Marguerite d'Aubray married Antoine Gobelin de Brinvilliers, Marquis de Brinvilliers and Baron de Nourar. Both parties had high connections in the ranks of wealth and fashion. If money and social advantage were able to ensure happiness, this marriage should have been without a cloud. And during the earlier years there is no reason to imagine that it was other than perfectly serene and peaceful.

Although the Marquis was an aristocrat, his family origin, if distinguished, was slightly that of the parvenu. It has been suggested that he was not strictly entitled to the rank he carried. This objection can be brushed aside. Rank was rigidly guarded in France, and it was more difficult to assume a bogus title in the seventeenth century than it is in the twentieth. The family of Gobelin came from Rheims, and originally from Flanders. They were famed throughout Europe for the dye-works they established on the banks of the dirty stream called La Bièvre, which flows through the south-eastern quarter of Paris. In the fifteenth century any skill out of the ordinary was credited to the help of Satan and all his imps, and it was generally believed that these dyers were assisted night after night by well-disposed goblins, who had cast a spell over the wonderful dye tubs. Hence the origin of the family name. So successful were they financially, that

each branch of the family rapidly enriched itself, bought lands, received honours, and naturally retired from participation in the business. In 1662 Colbert purchased the house in the Rue de Bièvre (now the Rue de Gobelins) for the tapestry factory, and before the end of that century the family as dyers had disappeared.

The Marquis was son of a former president of the "Chambre des Comptes" or audit office. At first he was destined for the robe rather than the sword. It was soon seen that he had no aptitude for study, and whilst quite young he entered the army. The *Gazette de France* officially notes on the 23rd July 1650 that the Chevalier de Brinvilliers joins as volunteer the expedition of the Comte de Grancey, from the household of the Marshal de Turenne. If this be the same person, and it is difficult to trace any other Brinvilliers at the time, we have here some evidence of his early work as a soldier.

The army was not a school of manners. Society was corrupt to a point difficult to imagine nowadays. Men were not only vicious, but gloried in their vice, and the successful man was generally the biggest rogue. "Without money honour is a disease," was a saying of the time. Crime was severely punished—in the lower orders. During the first part of the reign of Louis XIV. a man of rank could do almost anything with impunity provided he was not guilty of high treason or blasphemy.

The Marquis de Brinvilliers, so far as his individuality can be reconstituted, was a man without morals. Far worse, he was a man without strong personal character, weak as water and unstable as sand. His marriage was probably a "mariage de convenance," although Pierre Clément, without giving authority for the statement, says that it was a "mariage d'inclination," or love match. But these have never been encouraged in France. If love is to join husband and wife, let it come after marriage and not before. Such an idea is almost re-

pugnant to the English mind, but in practice it works out very successfully. The "Grande Mademoiselle" (cousin to Louis XIV.) expressed rather strongly the sentiments of her fellow-countrymen. "I have always had a strong aversion for even legitimate love. This passion appears to me to be unworthy of a noble soul; but I am now confirmed in this opinion, and I comprehend well that reason has but little to do with affairs of passion. Passion passes quickly, is never, in fact, of long duration. One may be unhappy for life in entering upon marriage for so transient a feeling, but, on the other hand, happy if one marries for reason and other imaginable considerations, even if physical aversion exists. For I believe that one loves more with this aversion conquered."

The sad commentary on this is that the "Grande Mademoiselle" married for love despite all her theories, only to discover that her suppositions were correct, for she found in De Lauzun a cold-blooded husband. If Madame de Brinvilliers married for love, she was deceived within a few years of her marriage. Her husband became simply indifferent, and quite content to allow his wife to do as she pleased so long as he was left in peace to follow his own degraded inclinations.

Marie Marguerite d'Aubray was worthy of a better fate. She came of an energetic stock, and herself possessed superabundant vitality. The d'Aubrays belonged to Lorraine, and, like the Gobelins, had several estates in Picardy. They settled in Paris, and soon rose to prominence in the bureaucratic world. Marie Marguerite was the eldest of five children of Antoine Dreux d'Aubray, who was himself the son of a treasurer of France at Soissons. Dreux d'Aubray was a rich man, holding an important position. He was Seigneur of Offémont and Villiers, Councillor of State, Master of Requests in 1638, Civil Lieutenant of the city of Paris in 1643, and Lieutenant-General of the Mines of France. As civil lieutenant to





ANTOINE DREUX D'AUBRAY  
*After the engraving by R. Nanteuil*





the provost of Paris he controlled the surveillance of the streets and the administration of the police. The actual pursuit of criminals fell to the criminal lieutenant. These onerous functions, practically analogous to the present-day prefecture of police, brought him into constant contact with the ministers, and he was much trusted by Colbert. By family ties he was closely related to the noblest families of the land.

Upon her marriage his daughter entered an extremely dangerous society at the early age of seventeen. She was a woman of much attraction. Her skin was extraordinarily white. Her hair was very thick, and of the deepest nut-brown hue. Her eyes were blue. She was not tall, but exceedingly well formed. Her intelligence was above the average. In one respect her education had been good. "The spelling of her letters," says Funck-Brentano, "is correct, a rare thing with the ladies of her time. Her handwriting is remarkable. Bold, firm, like a man's, and such as the observer would be disposed to ascribe to an earlier period." But the Abbé Pirot said that she was strangely ignorant of scriptural and religious knowledge, a thing he wondered at, for he had always understood that her mother was a good and high-minded woman who had fulfilled every maternal duty.

Her confessor gives many details which allow one to draw a vivid picture of an arresting personality. She was by nature a woman of great courage, born with many inclinations towards good rather than evil. With an outward air of complete indifference, she was in reality keenly observant. She could form a very clear view of things, and when she spoke she used few words ; but they were logical and to the point. She was very clever in finding a way out of a difficulty, and she made up her mind with rapidity. On the other hand, she was frivolous, and had no power of application. She did not like to

talk too much about the same subject. She refused to be bored. But she had a complete command over herself, and seldom lost her self-composure. She tempted Fate, and was willing to abide by the results.

Financially the household could not have started better. The Marquis de Brinvilliers had an income of 30,000 livres, about £5000 in present money. In 1646 his father allotted to him a capital sum of 600,000 livres. Madame de Brinvilliers was given upon her marriage 150,000 livres by her father, and she inherited another 50,000 livres about the same time. The combined fortune must have amounted to about £40,000, which produced a far greater income than it would to-day.

It was not enough for their needs. French society was suffering from the intrusion of the wealthy middle classes, and the expense of living in the "smart set" of the early reign of Louis XIV. was far more than it had ever been before. The parvenu, bursting with money, although despised, generally sets the pace. The Court was riotously extravagant, and the nobility endeavoured to follow their King's example. As they became more impoverished, their one hope was to marry heiresses. A marshal married the daughter of a moneylender. A duke married the daughter of a man who at one time drove a coach. The King did not disdain to dine with a millionaire who had started life as a footman. Fathers implored their sons to marry wealth, and searched the country for girls with large marriage portions. "I pray you, on my knees, not to choose the woman you wish to marry," wrote a father to his son in 1631. The principle, which applied equally to rich young men, had not changed thirty years later; for Molière satirised it in *Le Médecin malgré lui*, which was played for the first time in 1666. Géronte does not encourage the aspirations of Léandre to become his son-in-law. Suddenly he learns that the youth has inherited all the property of his uncle. "Monsieur,

I recognise your fine character," cries the happy father, rushing to embrace him. "I give you my daughter with the greatest joy in the world."

There was a recognised scale of marriage portions for the daughters of the rich middle class who desired to improve their social status. If the *dot* ranged from 2000 to 6000 livres, she could only expect a sergeant, a petty commissioned officer, or a merchant. If the father could produce any sum ranging from 12,000 to 20,000 livres, he could pick out a son-in-law from amongst the notaries or "greffiers." The "greffiers" were superior clerks to the courts of justice, who read the judgment decrees, and saw that they were properly executed. As the *dot* increased, so did the rank of the "future." A "treasurer of France" would cheerfully marry a wife who had a fortune of from 35,000 to 45,000 livres. A councillor required 45,000 to 75,000; a councillor to the parliament (or law courts) and a minor judge expected from 75,000 to 150,000. When 200,000 livres were in question, the young lady was not obliged to limit her ambitions. She could marry a "president" (or judge of the first rank), a marquis, or even a duke. A duke, however, generally required his wife to bring a marriage portion of 600,000. Reckoning a livre as being worth between four and five francs of present French money, one cannot say that the figures are exorbitant, for £100,000 is not a large sum to add to ducal coffers.

The worst feature of the invasion of wealth was the impetus given to dissipation, particularly gambling. This was the chief cause contributing to the ruin of the Marquis de Brinvilliers and his wife. After the devastating wars of the Fronde, the country, under the careful guidance of Colbert, was gradually recovering. Trade and commerce were encouraged with lavish bounties. The nobility did not disdain to compete with the bourgeoisie, and large profits were rapidly turned over. Ex-

cessive prosperity was not good for a Court which had passed through poverty. A fever of gambling infected the whole land. Colossal sums were gained and lost at hoca, lansquenet, portique, and other games of chance. Mazarin played every evening for 3000 or 4000 pistoles. His niece, the Comtesse de Soissons, gambled furiously. The Marquis de Beaumont lost 10,000 pistoles one evening, and fell into the most complete poverty without uttering a complaint. The minor Court clergy gambled, for at one sitting the Abbé de Choisy lost 100,000 écus to the Abbé de Lionne at "raquette." The King in his earlier days lost so much over one game that he was seriously frightened at his huge draft on the exchequer. The father of the "Grande Mademoiselle," Gaston d'Orléans, actually did ruin himself. He once lost half a million francs to the Chevalier de Gramont. Madame de Montespan lost 700,000 écus (about £110,000) one Christmas Day at Versailles. She played £40,000 upon three cards, and won. Losses of £20,000 were common. The gamblers played in their coaches as they passed from town to town. Cheating was common, and euphemistically called "correcting the cards." La Reynie, the chief of the police, bravely attempted to grapple with the evil which threatened to undermine the whole credit of France. But against the flood of adventurers and rogues who surged into the capital, particularly from Italy, he could make little headway. The vice was too actively encouraged at Court for him to extirpate it in the town.

One wickedness produced another, and the standard of morality was low all round. "In a great century everything was great," said Victor Cousin, referring to this period. In truth, very few things were great. Life for the wealthy classes was a round of pleasure and of fêtes. The majority of the ladies of quality led existences of complete idleness. "What worries me," wrote Madame de Sévigné to Bussy-Rabutin, "is that one does nothing.



The days pass. One grows old. One dies." Yet this idleness took up a good deal of time.

If we want to know the daily life of Madame de Brinvilliers, we have only to follow the round of hours of every woman of rank. The evening was spent in dancing. Bed was reached so late the following morning that the maid hardly dared to open the windows of her mistress' room until the sun was at midday. Whilst her hair was being arranged, Madame sat in bed and wrote her correspondence. The coiffure was one of the most important ceremonies of the early day, and not by any means to be hurried over. If Champagne, the famous hairdresser of the period, deigned to have a hand in the matter, Madame's joy was complete. He could command any fee, and one of his successes was the production of a "head like a cabbage." At least that is what Madame de Sévigné says it looked like. She even added that it was "the most ridiculous thing one is able to imagine." But no fashion, however eccentric, is ever ridiculous when a pretty woman wears it.

After the hairdressing came a slight wash, more as a basis for the manipulations of the toilet than for purposes of cleanliness. Madame de Brinvilliers had a notably white skin, and she was too much of a coquette to neglect it. She probably used the common toilet preparation, a kind of veal broth and the fat stewed from sheep's feet. One then arrived at the stage of paint. Rice powder did not come into general use until the early years of the eighteenth century, but every woman used rouge. "The women of this country," wrote La Bruyère, referring particularly to the members of the Court, "assist the decline of their beauty by artifices which they imagine help to make them beautiful. Their custom is to paint their lips, their cheeks, their eyebrows, and their shoulders." Tiny spots of black taffeta were gummed on to the face. They were called "mouches" or flies. Placed at the

corner of the eye the "mouche" was an "assassin," near the lips a "coquette" or "fripon," on the cheek a "galante." Every lady carried a little gold box full of prepared "mouches," and when she found herself in front of a mirror, gummed an assassin or a coquette on to her pretty face, and added a little more rouge. Hair was dyed, and the author of the "Roman Bourgeois" (1666) says, that having seen his mistress one evening with black hair, he did not recognise her the next morning for she was blonde. This is one of those prehistoric jokes which man cracks century after century.

Some customs were hardly pleasant. Most of the ladies snuffed, many took more wine than was good for them. We do not know whether the Marquise de Brinvilliers gave way to the first weakness. She did occasionally to the second as the trial revealed.

Dinner was now served, and after the labours of the day it was an extremely hearty meal. The royal family were gluttons, and etiquette as well as inclination prescribed the same manners for the whole of society. The King's performances at table were the admiration of his kingdom. One of his daughters-in-law writes, "I have seen him eat four full plates of different kinds of soup, a whole pheasant, a partridge, a big plate of salad, two large slices of ham, some mutton with gravy and garlic, a plate of pastry, and then fruit and hard boiled eggs." The royal doctor once asked the royal cook not to send so many inviting dishes to table. "Don't interfere in what does not concern you!" cried the proud servant. "Its my duty to feed his majesty. Your duty is to physic him." Only the last sentence was put more coarsely, and referred very directly to the usual cure for over-eating.

Madame de Brinvilliers had a cook in her large household, and did not disdain to visit the kitchen. A feature of this was made in the trial, it being suggested that she

was interested in the preparation of the food for sinister motives. During the earlier period of Louis XIV. the table was not appointed in the rich style which characterised his successors. The plates were changed but three times during the meal though the courses were numerous. Gentlemen and ladies freely used their fingers. The serviettes and cloths were covered with sauce and grease. Towards the end of the repast everybody became more or less happy and noisy.

A loyal society follows implicitly the actions of its sovereign. If we want to know what wine was placed upon the table in the Hôtel d'Aubray, we must look to the royal board. Louis XIV. liked iced champagne. French society copied his example until the royal physicians ordered the King to drink old burgundy, when champagne went out of fashion. Before dinner a glass of quinquina was taken as an appetiser, and another varied decoction was thought highly of as a digestive. Rossolis was akin to vermouth. It had as foundation a Spanish wine in which were infused aniseed, fennel, coriander, sugarcandy, carrot, skirret, and other old-world herbs whose names and use are almost forgotten. Rossolis was made in Turin, and an Italian doctor was the first to introduce it to the King. It was soon placed on the table at the end of every meal. Coffee was suspected at the moment, and rossolis was taken in its stead. "Nothing is worse than coffee," wrote one of the princesses a few years later than this period. "It causes no end of diseases." We have not that opinion to-day, but coffee does decidedly lower the general vitality, and in the late seventeenth century a courtier needed all the physical strength he could command.

"Teach me," says Monsieur Jourdain in the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," "how one must make a reverence in meeting a marquise."

"If you wish to salute her with great respect," replies

the dancing master, "you must make a bow directly you see her. Then you must walk towards her making three bows, and the last one must be almost to your knees."

Madame de Brinvilliers had fled from France when Monsieur Jourdain stepped upon the stage, but his politeness—if slightly exaggerated—was a sign of the age. In company, according to Madame de Motteville, a woman was to act as an ornament, and to receive the admiration of men.

The guests at the Hôtel d'Aubray<sup>1</sup> did not waste much time over the literary conversation which amused the Hôtel de Rambouillet. It was frankly a pagan gathering, wholly devoted to the coarser pleasures of life. The Marquise was no "précieuse." The talk was witty and scandalous, the humour broad, the latest gossip of the Court, of the law (for the hostess was related to most of the judges), of the ballets in which the King danced, and of the plays with which Molière was making Paris laugh. Then there were the races, outside the Porte de Saint Antoine, and adventures at the fair of Saint Germain where the Court and the mob mixed, dancing and masquerading, up to the eve of Palm Sunday. Louis did not disdain to elbow his people, and his brother went on foot disguised as a girl. During this period of the year every reception was open to whoever wished to enter, all being masked. Sometimes the masquerading gangs became so riotous that furniture was broken and the doors had to be shut. Life was gay and there was plenty of material for conversation.

Before the evening had grown old the card tables were out, and ombre, basset, hoca, and lansquenet, exercised

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Brinvilliers is also said to have lived at No. 28 Rue de Bièvre, leading from the Quai Montebello to the Boulevard Saint Germain, and also at the Hôtel de Reuilly, destroyed by the construction of the Boulevard Diderot. But all the incidents here related took place at the Hôtel d'Aubray, now No. 12 Rue Charles V.



their spell over the assembly. A cold collation was handed round by the servants, champagne, oranges, citrons, sweets,—no one to this day is ever allowed to live three hours in France without eating. It is, and has always been, the country of good cheer. There are no nut-enthusiasts in Paris, and, because the French cook thoroughly knows how to employ vegetables, there has never been a vegetarian restaurant.

Whilst the guests were engaged upon the sweets there would be some music, violins, basses, a clavecin, and perhaps dancing. But if play had commenced in earnest all else was neglected. The madness of the game ruled the salon. Some ladies of fashion became so infatuated that they did not go to bed for several nights in succession. The ruin of the Brinvilliers from this cause was only one case amongst hundreds. The cards scattered the fortunes of many noble houses, and directly prepared the way for the dominion in the following century of the financiers and tax-jobbers.

With the violet dawn rising across the Seine and breaking up the grey shadows of the Hôtel d'Aubray, the assembly comes to an end. There is a noise in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul as the guests of the Marquise de Brinvilliers roll home in their lumbering coaches, their footmen lighting the way with flaming torches. The Marquise slowly leaves the empty salon and steps to her bedroom. With haggard face and brilliant eyes she counts her losses, and wonders how she can meet the demands of her angry creditors.

The Marquis her husband has not been mentioned. He left his home hours before to visit his friend the enticing Mademoiselle Dufay.



## CHAPTER VII

AN ADVENTURER FROM GASCONY, GAUDIN DE SAINTE-CROIX—HIS INTRIGUES WITH THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS—HIS ARREST BY " LETTRE DE CACHET "—HE IS SENT TO THE BASTILLE

**B**USSY-RABUTIN said that the source of all the poisoning crimes which overshadowed the social life of his time was to be found " in love, and what we other Latins call ' *Auri sacra fames* ' " (" The execrable hunger for gold," a phrase borrowed from Virgil's " *Æneid* "). The affair of the Marquise de Brinvilliers, like so many others, was based upon a mixture of the two. It commenced in an ignoble intrigue which did no credit to the god with the arrows.

Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was a handsome young officer with a fascinating manner. Marie d'Aubray was a lady of about the same age as Sainte-Croix, who, if not classically beautiful, possessed a thousand attractions. The Marquis her husband was a dissolute gambler who spent most of his leisure away from home. Here are all the characters for a tawdry romance, which, at first played as a comedy, developed into a most frightful tragedy.

The Marquis met Sainte-Croix for the first time in 1659,<sup>1</sup> and the two men soon became bosom friends. The acquaintance which commenced when they were on military service continued in Paris. They drank together, they gambled together, they scoured the town

<sup>1</sup> Popular legend says that Sainte-Croix was living at this time in the exceedingly picturesque house with a finely proportioned octangular tourelle, No. 21 Rue Hautefeuille, in the centre of the Latin quarter.

together. In one respect Sainte-Croix was no fit companion for a peer of France.

His birth was obscure. Even his name was doubtful. "A person named Godin and called Sainte-Croix," says a hostile barrister in the great trial. The Marquise always accorded him the honourable prefix "de" in all her correspondence. This he was in no way entitled to use. When he met her husband he was a simple captain in the cavalry attached to the regiment of Tracy. He had been born at Montauban, and was by repute the illegitimate child of a noble parent whose name he did not dare assume. Bastards are often men of brilliant capacity, and Sainte-Croix was no exception to the general rule. Besides he was by birth a Gascon, a race celebrated throughout Europe for its calm self-assurance. D'Artagnan was a Gascon, and a fair example of a notorious provincial type which may have wanted manners and polish but never lacked conceit and devilry. Sainte-Croix was industrious, and could suit his manners to the society in which he mixed. In military circles he could ruffle with the bravest. In quieter conversation he would assume a more sanctimonious air. He studied theology as well as chemistry, and at times assumed the title and black habit of an abbé.

Maître Vautier, the barrister who conducted the case brought by the widow of the poisoned financier, Hanyvel, against her husband's rival Pennautier, thus sketched the portrait of this man. "Sainte-Croix," he said, addressing the court, "though in poverty and distress, had a rare and singular genius. His countenance was prepossessing, and displayed much intelligence. This he possessed to such a degree that he gave universal pleasure. His happiness was to be found in the happiness of others. He entered into a religious scheme with as much joy as he listened and agreed to a suggestion for a crime. Keenly alive to insults, susceptible of love, and in love jealous to fury even of those persons upon whom

public debauchery gave rights which were not unknown to him. His expenses were frightful, and they were supported by no regular employment. Indeed his soul prostituted itself to every kind of crime. He dabbled in outward forms of piety, and it has been said that he wrote books of religion. He spoke divinely of the God in whom he did not believe, and, assisted by this mask of piety which he never took off except with his friends, he seems to have participated in good deeds whilst in reality he was immersed in wickedness."

In the "factum" or defence prepared on behalf of the Marquise we are told that the friendship between her husband and Sainte-Croix had existed for some years before he was introduced into the household of the Hôtel d'Aubray. Naturally the advocate, in endeavouring to make out a good case for his client, was not slow in denouncing a man who was in the grave and unable to reply. Sainte-Croix was young, seducing, and very adaptable in hypocrisy. "This pernicious man," cried the barrister, "was the demon who brought about the storm and troubled the security of the family. Having caused the Sieur de Brinvilliers to incur excessive expenses this man was the only and single culprit who committed the crimes which are now being imputed to the Dame de Brinvilliers."

It was an effective line of defence quite unsupported by the evidence. The Sieur de Brinvilliers was a spendthrift long before Sainte-Croix crossed his path. Knowing the tempers of husband and wife it is difficult to believe that the family serenity had hitherto been undisturbed by a single cloud. Brinvilliers may have trusted Sainte-Croix sufficiently to give him the freedom of his house. Undoubtedly the poor creature evolved the shallow scheme of throwing his brilliant friend at his wife. "The chagrin with which Madame de Brinvilliers endured the infidelities of her husband, seconded by the attractive personality of

Sainte-Croix, gave her no time to breathe,” says one of the barristers. The Marquis was overjoyed at the success of his stratagem. Its result he pretended not to see. He had no objection to the new “cicisbeo,” who allowed him to give more time to the fascinating Mademoiselle Dufay. The Marquise, for her part, devoted herself entirely to the handsome Gascon who now dominated the household in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. Says Maître Vautier, “Madame de Brinvilliers made no mystery of her amour. In society she gloried in it, whence there resulted much noise.”

Whether this was the first fault, the first downward step, in the life of Madame de Brinvilliers it is difficult to tell. It is said that she solemnly warned her husband that, in admitting Sainte-Croix to such an intimacy, his honour was menaced by grave risks. But in thus warning the Marquis did she sincerely wish to end a passion which was going to play havoc with her existence? Was she oblivious of his ignoble arrangement? Or did she ingeniously try to dissemble her feelings, and hide her weakness under a cloak of virtue? According to the confession she wrote at Liège she had forfeited her right to the title of an honest woman long before she met Sainte-Croix. And without her written word it is hard to believe that a woman of such strong passions, living in the midst of a corrupt society of easy manners and no morals, was able to resist all temptations until her husband's friend was thrown across her path.

The “ménage à trois” continued for some time to the satisfaction of all parties. But her husband's prodigalities (to which must be added her own) were making rapid inroads upon their joint fortune. Money was becoming scarce. Sainte-Croix proposed a radical cure. He advised the Marquise to take legal process to separate her fortune from that of her husband. The advice was good in itself and was strongly to his own interest.



But it aroused the d'Aubray family to instant action, and brought the whole pack of cards to the ground.

The two brothers of the Marquise bitterly reproached her for the scandal she was causing. Brothers can seldom exercise any control over a sister, and their words were wasted. For her eldest brother she had always had much contempt. They then approached their father, Dreux d'Aubray, and acquainted him with the critical state of affairs in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. Apart from his feelings as head of a well-known family, his high position officially in the magistrature moved him to take an extremely serious view of the affair. Sainte-Croix was a man of low and unknown extraction, and there was reason to fear that his daughter and her young family might be thrown penniless upon his hands. He went to her and beseeched her to shut the door on Sainte-Croix. As father he implored her to respect the honour of her family; as magistrate he threatened her with every punishment at his command. She laughed in his face, his demands were unheeded, and her intimacy with Sainte-Croix was unbroken.

Stung to the quick and wild with anger, Dreux d'Aubray applied to the King for an order of arrest, or "lettre de cachet," against Sainte-Croix. Owing to his position, this he obtained without the slightest difficulty. Alexandre Dumas draws a thrilling picture of what happened. It is not exactly history, but it follows the essential facts so closely that it may well be summarized.

Early in March 1663 a large crowd was attracted to that part of the Pont Neuf which falls towards the Rue Dauphine. The object which had seized their attention was a heavy coach of which all the windows were closely shut. A police officer attempted to pull open the door, and as the travellers incited the coachman to gallop away two police sergeants seized the bridles of the horses and two others arrested the driver. The struggle



lasted some little while. Suddenly the door was flung open, and a young officer in the uniform of a cavalry regiment stepped on to the pavement. Quickly he shut the door behind him, but the crowd caught a glimpse of a woman sitting back in the coach, who, heavily cloaked and veiled, had evidently every wish to remain unrecognised.

“Monsieur,” said the officer to the “exempt” or police official in command of the attacking party. “Unless I am mistaken it is with me alone that you have business. Show me by what authority you stop the carriage in which I am travelling. And now that I have left it order your men to allow it to continue its journey.”

“First of all,” replied the police “exempt,” un-intimidated by the haughty manner of the cavalry captain, “have the goodness to answer my questions.” The police sergeants did not relax their hold of the horses and the driver.

“I am listening,” replied the young man, visibly endeavouring to preserve his self-control.

“Are you the chevalier Gaudin de Sainte-Croix?”

“I am.”

“Captain in the regiment of Tracy?”

“Yes.”

“Then I arrest you in the name of the King!”

“By whose order?”

“In virtue of this ‘lettre de cachet’!”

Sainte-Croix recognised the signature of the minister.

“Very well,” he replied. “But this ‘lettre de cachet’ carries my name only. You have not the right to exhibit to the public curiosity the person with whom I was riding when you arrested me. I ask you to order your sergeants to allow this carriage to continue its journey. Then take me where you wish. I am ready to follow.”

The “exempt” spoke to his men, who stood aside. The coachman whipped up his horses, and the coach

and its occupant were soon out of sight. At the corner of the Quai de l'Horloge a hackney coach was found, and Sainte-Croix and the "exempt" took their seats in it. Two of the sergeants mounted behind. A brief command was given to the driver.

"To the Bastille."

Torn from the side of the Marquise, Sainte-Croix was rapidly conveyed to the frowning prison which dominated the eastern quarters of Paris. He treated the matter philosophically. It was an unpleasant but not unexpected incident in the life of an adventurer.

The Marquise looked at it in a different way. It was a terrible and public insult which could never be forgiven. As she was being taken home in the coach to the house in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul she raged with the blind fury of a wild animal.

In asking for the arrest of Sainte-Croix the old Dreux d'Aubray had signed his own death warrant.

## CHAPTER VIII

“LETTERS DE CACHET”—WHAT THEY MEANT AND  
HOW THEY WERE USED

**S**AINTE-CROIX was shut up in the prison of the Bastille by the authority of a “lettre close,” more generally known as a “lettre de cachet,” or sealed letter, in contradistinction to “lettres patentes.” The first were originally addressed to individuals by name. The second were open communications commencing with the well-known phrase “know all men by these presents.” The “lettres de cachet” were amongst the most important and characteristic institutions of the old French régime. Take away the “lettres de cachet,” wrote Malesherbes, a century later, and you deprive the King of all his authority, for they are the sole means he possesses of compelling his will to be executed throughout his kingdom.

The term was first used about 1560. Richelieu and Mazarin, despite the continual protestations of the parliaments, found the “lettres de cachet” very valuable, and Louis XIV., essentially a personal ruler, “the last sovereign who had the sentiment of the traditional rôle of the King of France,” employed these arbitrary documents as a necessary part of the machinery of his system of government.

The fulminations of Mirabeau, Malesherbes, Turgot, and a score of other publicists during the last days of the monarchy, have left us with rather a mistaken idea of the functions of these curious orders. M. Funck-

Brentano, who has studied the subject more deeply than any of his contemporaries, disabuses us of many false impressions. It is a common error, he writes, to think that "lettres de cachet" were wholly confined to affairs of State. In fact they can rarely be placed in that category. Out of a thousand letters not more than two or three, four at the utmost, were concerned with the political world. The nine hundred and ninety-six dealt with the troubles of families, or the regulations of the police. In Paris the letters were generally used for police control. In the provinces they chiefly concerned family matters. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they were the only means that the police possessed for effecting prompt arrest. A judge, except in a case taken "en flagrant délit," was only able to arrest by a decree "de prise de corps." The decree could not be made until an "information" had been laid. This necessitated the examination of witnesses, and there followed the usual delay over depositions. Whilst this was in progress the criminal escaped. An order from the King obviated such a catastrophe.

The action of the "lettres de cachet de famille" (under which heading the case of Sainte-Croix comes) can best be shown from actual instances. M. Funck-Brentano draws many of his examples from the unpublished police reports which are still preserved in the libraries of Paris. They mostly deal with the reign of Louis XV., but they illustrate equally well the government of his predecessor. Louis XIV. interested himself deeply in the personal affairs of his subjects. He liked to hear all the gossip of the day. The study of a bundle of papers concerning a family squabble, or a scandal between husband and wife, was congenial work. The regent, Philippe d'Orléans, was of a different nature and paid lesser attention to this detail of government. Louis XV. allowed it to pass out of his hands entirely. If

we did not know the scrupulous care ministers gave to the consideration of these letters, it might be suggested that here we have one cause for their misuse and abuse.

The offences for which they were issued are interesting. Towards the end of the year 1750, Berryer, then lieutenant-general of the police, received a complaint from Marie Adrienne Petit, the wife of François Ollivier, a perfumer and glovemaker, living in the Rue de la Comtesse d'Artois. The fickle husband had recently made the acquaintance of Marie Bourgeois, a young dressmaker of the Rue Saint Denis aux Rats, an ancestor of those charming "midinettes" who to-day crowd the streets which radiate from the Opéra. Madame Ollivier was despised and neglected, the business was wasting away through inattention, and even the savings of the errant perfumer were squandered on presents for the attractive demoiselle to whom he could refuse nothing. The lieutenant lent ear to the complaint of the wife, and sent an official, named Grimperel, to the little dressmaker.

Marie Bourgeois was solemnly warned, "in the name of the magistrate who represented the royal authority," to cease distracting Monsieur Ollivier from his business and his home. The matter did not end so quickly however. Both the perfumer and the dressmaker were light-hearted as well as light-headed. The unhappy wife addressed a second complaint to the police. Her husband was still visiting the Rue Saint Denis aux Rats. "Our household and our business are in such disorder," she cries, "if it continues we shall soon go bankrupt. I beseech you, monseigneur, to shut up Marie Bourgeois." This complaint is not only signed by Madame Ollivier, but is also countersigned by the most important tenant in the house of Marie Bourgeois in the Rue Saint Denis aux Rats. The affair became serious. The lieutenant delegated it to his secretary, Chaban, who dealt particularly with "lettres de cachet."



An inspector called Dumont investigated the matter in company with the commissary, Grimperel, who had previously interviewed the dressmaker. Their report condemned her. "The aforesaid Bourgeois has not ceased to see the Sieur Ollivier, in spite of the fact that she has been forbidden to do so."

Berryer was a man of much intelligence and good will. Although the holder of despotic powers, which he was ever slow to use, he always gave the culprits every opportunity to amend the error of their ways. Before proceeding to the last extremity he approached Ollivier and Mademoiselle Bourgeois in a fresh direction. The priest of their parish was asked to speak to them, lecture them soundly, and possibly bring them back to more decent behaviour. In some way or another Marie Bourgeois was warned of the coming ecclesiastical discipline, so, being evidently a girl with strength of mind, she abruptly changed her lodgings into another parish, and thus upset the whole carefully arranged scheme. In May 1751 poor Madame Ollivier again complains that her husband is worse than ever. He has fallen into the most frightful excesses. She is certain that he is arranging to quit Paris in company with the dressmaker. "Have pity, monseigneur," she writes, "and shut up Marie Bourgeois." Berryer patiently opens another inquiry. Before it is finished a further letter comes from Madame Ollivier. "My husband is getting ready to leave Paris at any moment. Already his mistress has given notice to vacate her room."

On the fifteenth of July, Marie Bourgeois was arrested at nine o'clock in the evening. The "lettre de cachet" was countersigned by the Comte d'Argenson, then minister for war. She was at first taken to the prison Fors l'Éveque, and then transferred to the Hospital of the Salpêtrière. From two families the lieutenant of police received supplications. Her sister and her

aunt assured him that Marie was “a girl of honour,” and produced as witnesses to the fact the other lodgers in the house. Madame Ollivier implored the powers to keep the dressmaker under lock and key. In February 1752, after seven months’ incarceration, she was liberated. Her sister and her aunt signed a document promising to watch over her conduct. François Ollivier signed another binding himself to break off all relations with her. M. Funck-Brentano can find amongst the archives no further complaints from Madame Ollivier. With him one hopes that peace and prosperity returned to the perfumery in the Rue de la Comtesse d’Artois. But one somewhat doubts it. One would like to know how the gay perfumer settled down, and what became of the fascinating little dressmaker.

This affair took place eighty years after the arrest of Sainte-Croix, but the principle of “lettres de cachet de famille” altered but little from its foundation until its suppression in 1790. “The reason for the existence of ‘lettres de cachet’ is the preservation of the honour of families,” writes a contemporary jurist, and this is repeated again and again. It was not a proceeding in criminal law and no stigma was attached to the parties. A man arrested by “lettre de cachet” need feel no shame. It was not a condemnation after judgment, but a precaution, a personal act of the sovereign, a paternal correction.

A characteristic of “lettres de cachet” was the fact that the procedure was absolutely secret. In many cases as soon as the culprit was safe in prison the papers were burnt, in order that the details of the examination should not be read by curious and indiscreet persons. When the affair was less important the police did not trouble to destroy the papers, but they were stored in “one of the most secret places of the kingdom,” namely at the bottom of one of the towers of the Bastille.

From this place of safe deposit they were never removed. No matter upon what pretext they were called for, as evidence in family successions or in lawsuits, the lieutenant of police resolutely refused to produce them. "Lettres de cachet" have been condemned on account of their secrecy. This very secrecy was their excuse and reason of being in the eyes of contemporary society.

The Chevalier de Baillivy wrote in 1773 that "lettres de cachet," considered in principle, were graces accorded by the King to protect families from the dishonour they feared some member might bring them to. And later, in 1781, Vergennes said that there were a crowd of cases where the King, by the employment of his fatherly goodness, corrected in order to prevent justice from punishing. Lastly we have the emphatic statement of Saint-Florentin. "An order of the King is more a favour than a punishment."

"The family has an interest to prevent one of its members from an infamous condemnation," wrote Malesherbes in 1789. "When the King through goodwill wishes to save a culprit from the vigour of the law by shutting him up, he confers a favour." And in his report on the subject made to Louis XVI. he repeats an old law. "A father alone has the right to ask for a 'lettre de cachet.'"

This terrible power of a father over his son is one of the most remarkable features of old French jurisprudence. In the same manner that a king had an absolute right over his subjects—a doctrine which in its way led to the Revolution—so the father could rule the doings of his son. The idea was carried to such lengths that it became almost ridiculous.

A councillor in the parliament of Dijon had a son for whom he was arranging a marriage. The youth, hearing gossip in the town, went to his father. It was the first time he had ever entered his father's room without being

sent for. Tremblingly he said: “I have been told that you have resolved to marry me to Mademoiselle X——. Will you permit me to ask what truth there is in the report?” The councillor surprised at such a question, replied with severity, “My son, mind your own business!” A short while after the youth was married to the lady who had been selected by the paternal will.

This is reminiscent of the celebrated scene between Captain Absolute and his father in “The Rivals.”

“Pray, sir, who is the lady?” asks the captain.

“What’s that to you, sir?” replies Sir Anthony.

“Sure, sir, this is not very reasonable, to summon my affections for a lady I know nothing of!”

“I am sure, sir,” bellows the irate father, “’tis more unreasonable in you to object to a lady you know nothing of.”

But this right was taken by some unfortunate children in a terribly serious light. In the seventeenth century a boy in the provinces shot himself with a pistol as he could no longer stand the cruelties of his father. The laws gave no relief to such a martyr. In the eighteenth century men who struck their parents were not only condemned to death, but executed. On the eve of the Revolution, Malesherbes wrote that “in the interests of the ‘house’ a father preserves the right to deprive his son of liberty, no matter whether the son be of full age, married, or himself father of a family.”

The archives from which M. Funck-Brentano has extracted such valuable information contain numberless instances of parents who desired “for the honour of the family” to imprison their erring children. Every class of society sought for the “lettre de cachet.” A glazier who worked in the streets of Paris, repairing broken squares of glass, solicits a letter to shut up a son “who has a tendency towards rascality, and is likely to cast infamy upon his family.” This artizan is so poor that



he is unable to pay any sum towards the "keep" of the prisoner. An actor asks that his son be shut up in Bicêtre. He will cheerfully pay a pension of 150 livres rather than have the family dishonoured by the bad end his son will surely come to if he is allowed to follow his own devices. A merchant in fans desires that his daughter Euphrosine be sent to the Salpêtrière, because "he sees that he is on the eve of being dishonoured by the wicked conduct of this unhappy being." An inquiry was held by a police officer called Bazin. The girl was so terrified that the father asked that "the execution of the order of the King be at present suspended. I believe that the fright will make her re-enter better paths." A little while after the fanmaker wrote to the police asking them to execute the order. "She is worse than ever." Within a few hours Euphrosine was inside the forbidding Salpêtrière with plenty of leisure to repent of her wickedness and to consider the duty a daughter owed to her parents.

It was not necessary that the child should have actually committed a crime. The fear that he or she might possibly stain the family honour was enough. A thoughtless boy or girl, a nervous, irritable, and excited parent, a letter to the lieutenant-general of police, an inquiry carried out with careful deliberation, but with the culprit to some extent already prejudged—Bicêtre, Fors l'Évêque, or the Salpêtrière, became facts in a surprisingly short space of time. The demand of the parent was rarely refused. "The paternal authority ought to be enough in such circumstances, because one cannot presume that the piety or the friendship of a father could be exercised for any other purpose." When the friends of the child tried to say a few words in mitigation the inflexible minister replied, "It is the custom to arrest the children when the father complains of them."

If the father were dead the mother had as strong an



authority, which even devolved upon brothers, uncles, cousins. All could unite and even obtain the signatures of their friends to a petition asking that a "lettre de cachet" be granted to end the wild career of some young spark. The widow of a working plumber wants to shut up her daughter who is about to disobey her by marrying an unwelcome son-in-law. As the mother is seventy years old it might have been admitted that the daughter had reached an age of discretion. Thomas Bouillette, a carpenter, is sent to the Bicêtre by a "lettre de cachet" solicited by his widowed mother who exercised the trade of a tripeseller. In her petition she explains that "the family consists of honest people who fear that this libertine will come to a bad end." A widowed daughter is sent to the Salpêtrière, at the request of her mother, because she has consoled her loneliness by receiving the attentions of a soldier. The "archer" says that he is quite ready to marry his mistress, and the mother of the girl consents on condition that the marriage takes place before her daughter is released—a touching lack of maternal faith. Everything is arranged when the father of the "archer" appears on the scene. He will not allow the family honour to suffer such an affront as that of having his son married in the chapel of a prison. So the ministry of police (always ready to accommodate itself to the interests of its clients) decides that the marriage shall take place outside the prison in the neighbouring church of Saint Paul. It even furnishes the witnesses, two police officers, who remain in charge of the young widow until the rings have changed hands, and Mother Church has made her a respectable woman again.

The authority of the French State was essentially paternal and personal. Many other instances can be given to show how tender was its care of all the youthful culprits committed to its charge through family dissension. But the system had its abuses. Here is a flagrant case.

A certain Du Rosel de Glatigny, belonging to the royal bodyguard, "a gentleman of the Isle de France," asked the minister to issue an order to imprison his daughter, Marie du Rosel, aged nineteen years. The reason he offered was that she wanted to marry a "trompette," or bugler, rather than a guardsman of quality who had demanded her hand in marriage. Prudently he had already sent the girl to a convent at Meaux in order to get her away from the wiles of the too attractive bugler. But he had every reason to fear that the gallant intended to carry her off, for it had been discovered that the lovers had found a means of seeing and speaking to each other. "All this," he concludes with the usual grandiloquent flourish, "would dishonour a family which boasts of lieutenant-generals and chevaliers of Malta."

As the girl was in a convent the police communicated with the Archbishop of Paris. He advised that in his opinion religious communities were not fit places for young ladies of such light habits, who might well corrupt the morals of the nuns. He suggested that the institution known as Sainte Pélagie, or "The Refuge," was the proper situation for Marie du Rosel, and the unhappy girl was promptly removed to that prison in Paris. Shortly after the minister received a warm letter of protest from Madame de Richelieu, superior of the convent at Meaux. She declared that the girl, far from allowing herself to be courted by soldiers, was not only pious and modest but actually contemplating a religious vocation. Furthermore the mother-superior explained that Marie du Rosel had inherited money from her mother which her father desired to make use of. By imprisoning her in Sainte Pélagie, where he hoped she would remain for the rest of her life, the miserable father would be able to enjoy this wealth. D'Argenson verified the facts, and compelled the father to avow his infamy.

The affair caused a great sensation, but Du Rosel appears to have escaped punishment. His daughter retired to the convent at Meaux and took the veil. This happened in 1713, and was not the first case of its kind.

There was another variety of family argument which often required pacification. M. Funck-Brentano tells us that although the husbands who desired to shut up their wives were many, the wives who wished to place their husbands in safe keeping were more numerous still. A “lettre de cachet” was also more easily obtained by a husband for his wife than by a wife for her husband. Doubtless the ladies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries agreed—as many of them do to-day—that under a government of men, with laws made by men, and carried out by men, there was no justice for women. Then comes a very extraordinary fact. More letters were actually issued to the wives than to the husbands, because, says Malesherbes, the ladies pressed their complaints with extreme ardour. If the husbands were on one side very wicked, they were counterbalanced by a number who were evidently very forgiving.

The young Duc de Fronsac, who, upon the death of his father, became the Duc de Richelieu, was sent to the Bastille because he did not love his wife. After several weeks in “a gloomy solitude,” having for his sole companion a cross priest who incessantly lectured him upon his duty, his wife visited him.

“The beautiful angel who came down from heaven to earth to deliver Saint Peter could not have been so radiant,” cried the duke, who seems to have earned a speedy release. But husbands did not always change their minds. In September 1772 the lieutenant of police reports to the minister: “Michel Arny asks that he may be allowed to remain in Bicêtre for the rest of his life, assuring me that he will be far happier in the hospital than with his wife.” Arny was a cobbler, and the

administration of this semi-prison was able to find plenty of work for his willing hands. He therefore received official authorisation to continue to live in the building, and was classed amongst the "good poor." Thus, with duke as with cobbler, the chief aim of the bureaucracy of France was to promote the true happiness of the King's subjects. This is the ambition of every government, but how few are successful to such minute detail.

The recapitulation of these romances of the "lettre de cachet" makes many things clear in the affair of the Marquise de Brinvilliers. We can at once understand the enmity of the Marquise towards her father, an ill feeling it is otherwise difficult to explain. Against his action she was powerless. The arrest of Sainte-Croix, and his imprisonment in the Bastille, was a stern effort on the part of Dreux d'Aubray and his sons to save the honour of the family. True, his daughter was married, but the Marquis was a complaisant husband who was unwilling and unable to control the doings of his wife. The Marquise was heavily in debt, and longing to participate in the succession to her father's estate. But apart from this aspect, he, living, was a menace to her own freedom. Although not an angry man he seems to have had the quick temper which his daughter inherited. At any moment he might obtain a "lettre de cachet," not for his daughter's lover but for the daughter herself. This was an unendurable thought for the passionate woman. It is the keynote to the whole tragedy, and prompted the sentence of death which Sainte-Croix and the Marquise passed upon the unsuspecting old man.



## CHAPTER IX

### DAYS IN THE PRISON OF THE BASTILLE

**S**AINTE-CROIX, upon the authority of the "lettre de cachet," was immediately conveyed to the Bastille, which was almost within a stone's-throw of Madame de Brinvilliers' house in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. One of the most celebrated prisons in the whole of Europe, its name has become a synonym for tyranny and bad government. In the words of an English Restoration poet, the Bastille was

"A nauseous sepulchre, whose craving womb  
Hourly inters poor mortals in its tomb."

The gruesome picture is hardly justified by the facts. Errors in the administration of the Bastille were many. At the best of times a prison can never be a particularly gay place of residence. But the Bastille was not the living tomb most historians would have us believe. Indeed, M. Ravaisson, the best authority upon the subject, says that so well were many of the prisoners treated that they were more comfortable in the prison than when free and at large.

The story of the rehabilitation of the good name of the old fortress is in itself somewhat romantic. When the Bastille was invaded and captured by the mob on the 14th July 1789 the whole building was thrown open to all who wished to enter. In their fury the crowd scattered through the prison—so long an object of mystery and dread—and threw pell-mell into the open courts all the



furniture and papers they could lay their hands upon. These documents, an enormous mass which covered more than a century of administration, consisted not only of the ordinary accounts of management, but also all the secret archives (which previous governments had refused to produce) and even the personal correspondence which had been in many cases cruelly withheld from the prisoners. Before guards could be placed to protect the national property, and before the public were forbidden entrance, many of the documents were abstracted by speculators in autographs and curious Parisians who wished to preserve some souvenir of the popular victory. Large sections were sold to foreign libraries, notably to that at St Petersburg. The soldiers themselves were not over careful. M. Ravaisson states in the preface to his monumental work that many of the documents bear traces of the rough usage they went through.

At last M. Ameilhon, librarian to the city of Paris, realising their value, had them removed in bulk to the Hôtel de Ville. Those who had taken documents from the courts of the Bastille were requested to return them to the municipality. In some respects the men of the Revolution were honest. The most valuable archives, such as the registers of the prisoners and of the "lettres de cachet," were replaced. A commission was then formed to classify the papers for early publication. The age was not fortunate for such a work. Several of the commissioners fell under the axe of the guillotine, others left Paris. Monsieur Ameilhon found himself alone. An ardent revolutionist, he devoted himself to the preservation of the documents, manuscripts, and books which fell into the hands of the State through the destruction of religious houses and the emigration of the nobility. His good work was recognised by the various governments which so rapidly succeeded each other. As time passed

on, his earlier political views were forgiven and forgotten. He was created administrator of the library of the Arsenal, and the archives of the Bastille followed him to the same place. Those which had been classified were stored in boxes. But the greater number were temporarily lodged in an obscure apartment which became so full that it was almost impossible to enter. There they remained entirely forgotten for thirty years. In 1840 a young librarian with much leisure desired to examine the enormous collection. "Hazard placed his hand upon the 'lettres de cachet,' and at first sight he was convinced that he had discovered the treasure which had been searched for during so many years." This librarian was François Ravaisson, who in 1866, after twenty years of labour, published the first volume of the "Archives of the Bastille." The rest of his life was devoted to the task. He died in 1884, after the publication of the seventeenth volume of the archives, but before his labours were wholly completed. One who had studied the history of the prison with such assiduous care might surely be allowed to speak with the voice of authority. Many of his conclusions, however, have been challenged by writers whose knowledge could only have been founded upon the papers Ravaisson had himself prepared for use. It is upon the researches of this laborious archivist that the following description of the Bastille is mainly based.

The first stone of the State prison was laid on the 22nd April 1367 by Hugues Aubriot, a provost of Paris with a somewhat eventful history. At first the fortress consisted of two towers, about seventy-five feet high, joined by a wall in the midst of which opened a gate facing the country. The towers or bastions gave to the prison its name. Both *bastille* and *bastion* come from the old French, "*bastire*," to build. Formerly a fortified place was called a *bastillion*, but when the *bastillion* defended a gate the name became feminine and was changed into

bastille. To the original towers were added six others, all joined by walls of equal height, and the whole formed a quadrangle, the inner court of which was about 162 feet long by 72 feet wide. The moat, about 25 feet deep, only contained water when the Seine overflowed.

The fort was completed in 1380, after twelve years' building, and the Bastille remained almost unaltered until its destruction four centuries later.

In walking down the Rue Saint Antoine, with one's back to the west of Paris and the palace of the Louvre, at the junction of the main street with the still-existing Rue des Tournelles, the traveller would directly face the north-west corner tower of the Bastille, known as the "Tour du Puit." In order to continue the journey along the Rue Saint Antoine it would be necessary to turn sharply to the left, as the thoroughfare skirted the moat. On the right, separated from the prison by the moat, would be found a group of miscellaneous buildings which formed the entrance.

A sentinel stood at the gateway, and entrance was free to the visitor. Passing through the passage, on the left were six small houses with their back windows overlooking the moat. These shanties, they could hardly have been much better, were shops let by the governor at high rents to artizans who supplied the castle with various commodities. On the right, opposite, was a range of barracks with a "salle d'armes." The thoroughfare then took a sharp turn round the moat. On the left the shops gave way to an open view of the fortress across the moat. On the right was a range of stabling with coach-houses. The visitor then walked over a drawbridge which was only raised at nightfall. On the left of this bridge was a guardhouse. When a prisoner was conveyed to the Bastille the crowd of curious sight-seers which followed the coach apparently had a right of entry as far as the first drawbridge, known as the "pont

levis de l'avancée." But as the coach rumbled across the wooden bridge the prisoner must have felt himself in truth alone with law and justice. For the guards marched out, and, like the constables at the door of a London police station, the crowd was formally turned back.

The coach, with its escort of police officers now pulled up in the large Governor's Court which faced the Governor's House. Ravaisson says that this building was reconstructed more than once, and at the time of the Revolution was modern in style with an attractive façade. He also says that there was a ditch in front of the house, but this is not shown in a contemporary plan. On the east side of the governor's house was a small terrace (reached by a flight of six steps from the courtyard) with trees and a spacious belvedere, the whole communicating with the gardens of the Arsenal. At an inner corner of the terrace was a bathing-house for the use of the governor's household.

The road again took a sharp turn to the north, and passing the large buildings devoted to the kitchens, faced the prison itself and the drawbridge, flanked by two of the great towers, which gave actual entry. This drawbridge was protected by beams covered with iron forming a kind of cage. In this cage stood sentinels. Passing through this bridge into the Bastille, on the right was another guardhouse, and the visitor, or prisoner, had reached the great court of the prison. Six of the eight towers had entrances from this court. On the right between the "Tour de la Chapelle" and the "Tour du Trésor" were the remains of the ancient gate of Saint Antoine, which the bastion had been originally built to defend. Opposite, on the left, between the "Tour de la Liberté" (strange name for such a place) and the "Tour de la Bertaudière," was a tiny chapel. From the "Tour de la Chapelle" and the "Tour de la Liberté"



were buildings which contained a library and a council chamber. In this room the lieutenant-general of the police interrogated the prisoners. Kitchens and servants' rooms occupied the ground floor. On the first floor were prisoners not under close restraint. On the second floor lived the King's lieutenant, and, as his windows overlooked both the Great Court and the "Cour du Puit," he was able to exercise continuous surveillance. This "Cour du Puit" was a smaller court on the right of which was the "Tour du Coin" and on the left the "Tour du Puit." In the wall which connected these towers were lodgings for the cooks and scullions, for the valets who were permitted to attend the more important prisoners, and even some of the lower-class prisoners who were allowed to promenade in the "Tour du Puit."

The courts were used by those prisoners who were not closely detained in their cells. The Great Court, writes Ravaisson, resembled more the courtyard of a college or school than the yard of a prison. It was usually full of prisoners and their friends. Every kind of game was played. Only at night did the hubbub cease. Then there was no sound, except the footsteps of the warders and the whispered conversations of the prisoners in their rooms.

The arrest of Sainte-Croix was carried out in full daylight. There was no lack of detail in the execution of an order of arrest. In Paris it was generally in the hands of the "archers du guet," or constables of the watch, under the command of the "lieutenant civil" or city provost. The police agent arrested the prisoner in the name of the King, and touched him on the shoulder with his white wand of office. There was seldom any resistance. If so, some "hoquetons" or yeomen of the guard were able to deal effectively with it. The prisoner was never taken to prison on foot. If a coach was not waiting the first one that passed was stopped in the King's name, the



police agent and the prisoner entered, the blinds were lowered, and the horses put to a sharp trot. Every effort was made that the arrest should not unduly excite public attention, and in many cases the arrests were made in the twilight or during the night.

Leaving the Marquise de Brinvilliers, foaming with rage in her coach on the Pont Neuf, Sainte-Croix was at the principal gate of the Bastille within ten minutes. The formalities were the same in every case.

“ Qui vive ? ” cried the first sentinel outside the guard-house.

“ Order of the King,” replied the officer in charge of the escort.

A sub-officer of the guard turned out. At the sight of the “ lettre de cachet ” he allowed the coach and its escort to enter. Then he struck a bell which resounded throughout the prison. Another guest had arrived. In a few minutes the Lieutenant of the King and the captain of the gates appeared, the coach door was opened, and the prisoner descended. The guard stood under arms, but in order that the prisoner should not be recognised they had to hold their hats before their faces. If they were hatless they turned their faces to the wall, or made themselves scarce in the quickest possible manner.

The Governor then interrogated the prisoner briefly, and in his absence the Lieutenant to the King (who was practically never away from the prison) took his place. The police agent had his receipt signed, and, whilst a cell was being prepared, the prisoner was searched, and his arms, his money, and his papers taken from him. An inventory was made of these possessions and jointly signed by the Governor and the prisoner. If the prisoner happened to be bad-tempered and refused to be searched the operation was carried out by force. With regard to arms the rule was strict. Except the officers of the guard,

no one was allowed to carry arms, and even visitors had to deposit their swords upon entering the château.

The prisoner then went in company with the officers of the guard and the turnkeys to his room. "If," explains Monsieur Ravaisson, "he was a personage of distinction he was lodged in a good apartment. But he went to the towers if he chanced to be a poor devil." He now remained in solitude until the magistrates had further investigated the case. Then, unless the governor had orders to the contrary, he was allowed to mix with the other prisoners.

Sainte-Croix was not a prisoner of distinction. His affair was a matter of mere family discipline. He was not put under severe restraint, and the Marquise de Brinvilliers probably supplied him with money. Apart from the enforced confinement within the prison, which was not of long duration, his detention could not have been altogether unpleasant.

At the Bastille the kitchen was conducted upon a basis of the most extravagant hospitality. In the morning the prisoners had déjeuner. At mid-day or one o'clock they received dinner, and during the evening supper was served by the domestics. Ravaisson asserts that the quality of the food would have excited the envy of more than one easy-going bourgeois. There were always several dishes, soup, entrée, a second meat, and dessert: at each dinner two bottles of wine, burgundy or champagne, were supplied with a third bottle for the needs of the day. More was served than the prisoners could consume, and the turnkeys used to walk down the stairs very slowly in order to finish the plates. But the prisoners seldom allowed their guardians to drain the bottles. Some of them owned quite well-assorted little "cellars" in the corners of their cells. On holidays the governor would extend the wine-list. One prisoner mentions that on a fête-day he received six bottles of wine.

The governor was paid a substantial sum for the maintenance of each prisoner. It was to his financial interest to keep his flock in good health, for, from a certain point of view, the Bastille was a huge boarding-house. Indeed at one time the cuisine was so good that some of the prisoners suggested that the governor should give them plainer food and that the difference between the actual expense and the sum allocated per head by the King should be equally divided. "When the imprisonment lasted for a length of time this amounted to a considerable sum, and more than one prisoner who entered poor and miserable left the Bastille richer than he had ever been before." Surely paternal government as practised by the later Capets could hardly go further. Except during the black years 1709 and 1710, when the government was short of money, and the governor suspected of avarice, the reputation of the Bastille kitchens suffered no declension. Sixty years later the poet Marmontel thought the menus sufficiently noteworthy to be reproduced in his memoirs.

In only one event was any alteration made. Prisoners were punished by being deprived of their food. In this case they received in place of the full course a simple meal of soup, meat, bread, and half a bottle of wine. For extreme punishment they were given bread and water. This, however, happened very rarely, and never without the express order of the Court.

The prisoners were not entirely without expense. When Sainte-Croix was at the Bastille, and until 1709, each prisoner had to provide the furniture in his room. The King provided nourishment only. If the prisoner's relations and friends were not able to send furniture he had to apply to an upholsterer who owned the monopoly of supplying such goods. It was a very valuable privilege. In 1709 it was discovered that the prisoners were able to communicate with the outside world through the

interchange of their furniture, and the privilege was abolished.

In many respects the management of this curious prison was a mixture of severity and laxity. One great feature of criminal proceedings in the seventeenth century was secrecy. A man was arrested by "lettre de cachet." His friends wished to discover where he was imprisoned. Unless they had actual indications this was a matter of extreme difficulty, and it was only by chance that the prison could be located. The ministers either refused information, or gave false.

Methods of clandestine communication are always interesting. One favourite device with the prisoners of the Bastille was to wrap a message written on a piece of paper round a stone and then to endeavour to throw it over the moat on to the Rue Saint Antoine which passed along the north side of the prison. If the stone fell in the roadway some one in the street would pick it up, and, according to Monsieur Ravaisson, it was generally safely and quickly delivered at the address indicated. Frequently the stones fell into the moat, and so often was this means of correspondence adopted that the guard made a round twice a day to stop it. Many of the prisoners were allowed to keep pets, such as birds and particularly pigeons. Pigeon-post was attempted several times. Once the minister of the day ordered the destruction of all the pigeons, but the decree was never thoroughly executed.

The outside world also endeavoured to carry news to the prisoners. If the prisoner had the privilege to walk on the platforms of the towers he had a full view of the traffic in the Rue Saint Antoine, and friends in the street were able to signal messages with a handkerchief. When Laporte, the valet of Queen Anne of Austria, was sent to the Bastille the Queen herself appeared in the Rue Saint Antoine to intimate to her servant



that she had not forgotten him. Sometimes a room was hired in one of the houses facing the prison, and a friend wrote on a huge placard placed in the window letters large enough to be read at a considerable distance. Those on the platforms of the towers would then be able to spell out the message letter by letter. At night a daring man would step to the edge of the moat and shout a message through a speaking-trumpet. This required courage. The guard was always on the alert. Directly they heard the noise they would turn out and search the neighbourhood. But the speaker had vanished.

Prisoners such as Sainte-Croix had much liberty. They were allowed to read. If they brought books they were strictly examined before being passed into the prison, and when finished with they were added to the prison library. Chess and cards were permitted. If the minister of State gave permission, paper and ink were allowed. The sheets were carefully counted, and the warders insisted upon taking away from the prisoner the exact number of sheets they had issued, together with the pen. At least thirty prisoners always had liberty to walk in the courts. In the morning their rooms were unlocked and they had a modified freedom until the evening. In the courts they were able to play at skittles, a kind of "Aunt Sally," and something like billiards. Amongst such prisoners would be Sainte-Croix, for this mild treatment was meted out to those who came under the heading of family offences, military misdemeanours, and prisoners who, like Exili, were simply detained as a measure of public safety.

There were forty-two rooms in the fortress for the reception of prisoners, and of these thirty-seven were in the eight towers. One tower, that called by the name of liberty, had seven floors, others ranged from two to six. Exteriorly they were round, but the interiors were octagon. Each room was heated by a large chimney-



piece, or, in the case of some of the smaller rooms, a stove. Light came through windows which pierced the enormous stone walls. The rooms were generally about fifteen feet wide by fifteen feet high. Each room had a double door with enormous locks, and each tower had a separate warder in control of the keys.

In the basements of the towers were black dungeons which received a little light from the moat. When the Seine overflowed the water rushed through the narrow slits. These cells were used for purposes of punishment, or for the insane. Ravaisson asserts that prisoners were never kept in them very long, but on this point authorities differ. Under the roof of each tower was a room, hot in summer, freezing in winter, which was also used as a punishment cell for those who were not to be exposed to the vigour of the "cachot" in the basement.

When the prisoner had passed through the period of solitary confinement he was allowed to mix with companions. Men of equal social condition shared their rooms and meals in common. They were also sorted out with regard to their crimes. Prisoners who were suspected of being State spies (there were many such in the reign of Louis XIV. with its troubled diplomacy and intrigue) were shut up with fellow-suspects. Thieves were placed with thieves, poisoners shared their rooms with other poisoners. It was a rough-and-ready method of classification, with the disadvantage that the rascals were able to pass on much technical information of value in their respective professions. Now and again women were imprisoned in the Bastille, but it was seldom a woman's prison. They were not allowed to meet the men, and the scandals which occurred in other prisons were rare in the Bastille.

But although many of the prisoners never met, some remaining in solitary confinement, all were well acquainted with the news of the outside world. It was impossible

to prevent them from communicating with each other. The wide chimneys were often used. Heavy grilles prevented a person without keys from traversing the passages but they did not stop sound. It was possible to raise one's voice in such a manner as to talk to the prisoners on the upper or lower floors. The pewter plates were written upon in microscopic characters, and, as the service was the same for the whole prison, this clever idea was successfully used for a long period without being discovered. Then the governor insisted that each tower should have its separate service. Messages were written on pieces of cloth or on bits of plaster which had dropped from the ceiling. A chicken bone was used as a pen, and a little blood made a good ink. Messages were also written on broken pieces of wood in the cell, and the splinter then allowed to drop back in its place and cover the writing. When the cell changed occupants, and one prisoner was freed before another, there was a slight chance that the message might reach the outer world.

Amidst these surroundings Sainte-Croix passed three quiet months. He did not waste his time.

## CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERIOUS POISONER EXILI—HIS RAMIFICATIONS ACROSS EUROPE—HE IS ATTACHED TO THE COURT OF QUEEN CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN

**A**CCORDING to the register of prisoners, Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was in the Bastille from the 19th March until the 2nd May 1663. He there made the acquaintance of the Italian, Exili (or Eggidi), who moves so mysteriously across the history of this period, a man who was feared in every court of Europe, yet of whom to-day no exact details are known.

At the time of his arrest on the 2nd February 1663, Exili was ostensibly a gentleman in the service of the strong-minded and eccentric Queen of Sweden. Christina employed many strange individuals in many strange ways. One modern historian describes her as a woman who had almost genius, but was morally a monster; another one calls her simply an hysterical epileptic. Such a creature could do anything, and her actions were always carefully watched. It was known that Exili had joined the royal household, but what his duties were could only be guessed. His past record was not encouraging. Except that he was Italian by birth his origin was unknown. In a book published in Holland about 1680, and mainly directed against the Père la Chaise, the famous confessor of Louis XIV., it is incidentally stated that in 1650 Exili occupied the position of a public murderer at the disposal of any client who cared to hire him. The author also refers in uncompli-

mentary terms to his sister as a well-known lady of light morals who had an extensive following among the Roman prelates. The archivist, Ravaisson, who discovered this information, is careful to add : " what confidence can we place in an anonymous libel printed in Holland ? " These little books of seventeenth century Dutch gossip contained much truth and many lies, and only in the Low Countries were their authors reasonably safe from imprisonment or death.

Another rumour, which was possibly true, said that in Rome he had been engaged as a poisoner by that Madame Olympia who was practically queen of the papal city under Pope Innocent X., and that by the exercise of his peculiar talents he had been the cause of some one hundred and fifty deaths, through whose inheritances the lady had been greatly enriched. It was probably in this capacity that he first became known to the secret agents of the French government. Olympia Maldachini held in her gift the highest offices of the pontifical court. Her uncle was pope, and allowed his unscrupulous niece to do as she chose. When Mazarin desired his brother to become a cardinal, Olympia negotiated the matter successfully in spite of the strenuous opposition of Spain. The agreed fee was 40,000 écus, which Mazarin neglected to pay, and after the quarrel with his vindictive ally he never dared set foot in Rome. Exili's potions were of much service to Olympia Maldachini as they enabled her to make vacant by sudden death positions she could fill again to her financial advantage.

Exili is said to have quitted Italy after having been condemned to death on account of his many crimes, and he sought refuge in France. This seems hardly likely, for he returned freely to Italy in after years, and his talents were too valuable an aid to government in the numerous petty ducal courts of that country to



be lost in so easy a manner. Throughout his life Exili had powerful, yet unknown, protectors. When he turned up in France his life was under the guardianship of Sweden.

He was not a free man for long. Queen Christina was at loggerheads with the French ministry. The pope was quarrelling with the French ambassador in Rome over the vexed question of ambassadorial rights which the papal police had violated. Queen Christina actively supported the arguments of the Holy Father. Exili was a known poisoner, and every French minister was nervously afraid of death by poison. The Italian was placed under lock and key whilst the police agents endeavoured to ferret out the true reason for his visit to France. On the 10th April, two months after his arrest, Le Tellier wrote from Paris to Monsieur d'Oppède, first president, or judge, at Aix.

MONSIEUR :—Some time ago an Italian named Eggidi, who calls himself gentleman to the Queen of Sweden, was arrested in this city, and made a prisoner in the Bastille. As on him was found a letter which had been written to him by a Franciscan father of Saint Maximin, called Terras, who holds the rank of almoner to that princess, and as the king much desires to discover the real object of his journey in France, His Majesty commands me to tell you that he wishes you to cross-examine the father, Terras, in order that you may obtain some information of the business he has had with Eggidi, since when he has seen him, and if he knows for what business he has come here. And you are to ask any other questions you may judge proper to extract a clear statement which we desire to have from the priest.

Three days later a second letter is sent to the judge at Aix. "By my last despatch," writes Le Tellier, "you will have learnt the intentions of the King concerning the Franciscan father, P. Terras, who is at Saint Maximin. I now send you a copy of the interrogatory of the Sieur



Eggidi, and an extract from the letter written here by the Sieur du Mas, so that you will be more able to get easily from the Franciscan father all the necessary knowledge to discover the design the Sieur Eggidi had in coming to France."

Unfortunately the replies of the judge and the result of his examination of the priest have been lost. This is much to be regretted as the letters contained valuable news. On the 8th May the minister wrote again to Aix. "Monsieur, the letter which you did me the honour to write on the 28th of last month has been received together with the evidence of the father, Terras, which accompanied it. We will profit by what it contains to extract all the knowledge which will be of use to us in connection with this affair."

There the correspondence ends. All this while Exili and Gaudin de Sainte-Croix are pacing the great court of the Bastille or discussing the elaborate menus of the prison kitchen. The rogues were mutually attracted to each other. The Italian with his cosmopolitan information and his scientific learning opened up a new branch of enquiry to the dissolute young adventurer from Gascony. The popular tale tells us that Exili was the first to reveal to Sainte-Croix the possibilities of the drugs he could supply. Several writers doubt this. They point out that since 1660 Sainte-Croix had been in close friendship with another interesting personality, Christopher Glaser the Swiss apothecary. But no clear evidence of this friendship can be found prior to Sainte-Croix's imprisonment. Glaser had travelled to Italy upon mysterious errands and probably knew Exili. It may be suggested that Exili introduced Sainte-Croix to Glaser upon his release from the Bastille. One writer goes so far as to state that "long before he entered the Bastille Sainte-Croix had a knowledge of the art of poisons which far exceeded that of Exili." This is most unlikely for

Exili was at the head of his sinister profession. Sainte-Croix may have had some inclination towards the study of drugs, but Exili led him into new paths and taught him much he never knew before. In an examination during the trial, thirteen years later, Jean Briancourt, tutor to Madame de Brinvilliers, made a very clear statement.

The youth, in conversation with Madame de Brinvilliers, had asked how Sainte-Croix had picked up this "beautiful business of poisoning." His mistress replied that when Sainte-Croix had been sent to the Bastille at the instigation of her father he had met an Italian, the cleverest man in the world for poisons. The secrets of this Italian had cost much money, and she herself had supplied Sainte-Croix with the cash to purchase such valuable information. This effectually disposes of the idea, advanced only by a few writers, that Sainte-Croix knew more than his master.

On the 2nd May Sainte-Croix was released. Many arrangements had been entered into with Exili, who remained a prisoner until the end of June. Evidently no direct evidence of evil-doing could be proved against him. The protection of the Queen of Sweden was a potent factor in the situation. At the same time he was too dangerous a man to be allowed to settle in Paris. He was released upon condition that he left the country immediately. On the 27th June the following order of the King was addressed to Monsieur de Besmaus.

Having agreed to allow the person named Eggidi to leave my château of the Bastille to go to England according to his desire, and giving order now to the captain of the watch of my good city of Paris to have him accompanied to Calais, I have written this letter to let you know that as soon as you receive it you are to hand over to the captain of the watch, or who ever presents this letter to you, the aforesaid Eggidi, without difficulty or delay.

At the foot of this order (which is in the British Museum) is the following endorsement :—

The Sieur Eggidi, an Italian, has been placed in my charge to be conducted to Calais, in consequence of the order above written, *1st July 1663.*

(Signed) DESGREZ.

Upon these documents arise two questions which cannot be answered satisfactorily. The first is, why did Exili elect to go to England? He was not to remain in France, but why did he not return to Italy, to Sweden, or the Low Countries? It is said that in the seventeenth century London was a sanctuary for scientific criminals much as it is to-day a sanctuary for continental anarchists. Charles II. had a passion for medicine and alchemy. The merry founder of the Royal Society was an active investigator into the properties of poisons. Charles was also keenly alive to the fact that poisoning was a ready weapon in the intrigues of foreign Courts, although it had seldom tainted the palace of Whitehall. Exili was a man who would be unofficially welcomed in other respects, for he must have possessed a fund of information about the diplomatic and personal intrigues of the continent which even the English ambassadors would be unable to supply to their master.

The second question is, did Exili ever leave France? Madame d'Aubray, sister-in-law of Madame de Brinvilliers, in her "Factum" or complaint against the Marquise, states that the order was never properly executed, and that Exili lived for at least six months after his release in the house of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix. This is against all probability. One may reasonably remain assured that Exili reached Calais and was seen into the packet-boat for Dover. The signature, "Desgrez," to the endorsement is sufficient evidence. Desgrez, who again

appears in the Brinvilliers drama, was one of the smartest of the police agents in Paris. His history proves it. His duty was to deport the crafty and dangerous Italian, and we know enough of the character of the man to rest convinced that he carried it out to the last letter. If Exili lived with Sainte-Croix, which is not impossible, he must have clandestinely returned from England, and escaped detection. In any case, his name appears no more in the history of the Marquise and her lover. He had set the ball on the move, other hands were able to keep it rolling.

In 1672, Exili is referred to as a man who had disappeared from public sight for some time. Voltaire, who had fairly exact information from survivors of the period about which he writes (chiefly owing to his relations with the Hôtel de Vendôme), says that the Italian was with Sainte-Croix about 1670. He also adds, but the fact remains uncorroborated, that Exili had an assistant who was shut up with him and who died in the Bastille.

He seems to have remained a member of the household of the Queen of Sweden. A letter from the French ambassador at the Hague, dated 20th November 1668, hints that his fatal activity was not altogether suspended.

“The ‘maître d’hôtel’ of the Queen of Sweden is dead at Lunenbourg. But one does not know in what manner, whether he has been killed or poisoned.”

Queen Christina had no compunction in ridding herself of an obnoxious person. Monaldeschi was quickly disposed of at Fontainebleau. We do not know how the unfortunate “maître d’hôtel” had made himself unpleasant, but with Exili at hand, sudden death could not be altogether unexpected.

The last news history can give us of this extraordinary man is that he married. In 1681 he severed his connection with Queen Christina, and married the Countess Ludovica Fantaguzzi, who was cousin to the Duke

Francis of Modena. It was a brilliant and unlooked-for match. Exili remains a mystery to the end. It is hardly in so exalted a quarter that a man of this description finds a mate. The Countess Ludovica must have been either very brave or very simple. One is curious to learn how she fared as the wife of such a famous criminal.





PART II  
THE CRIME



## CHAPTER XI

HOW POISONS WERE MANUFACTURED IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY  
—THE EXTRAORDINARY INGREDIENTS—METHODS OF POISONING

**A**MBROISE PARÉ, the greatest surgeon of his age, not only in France but in the whole of Europe, doubted the expediency of devoting space in his medical text-books to a description of the preparation and effects of the various deadly poisons used during the sixteenth century. "I do not wish to put my hand to the pen to write about them in order to assist the malicious intent of traitors, of the wicked generally, of perfumers, executioners, and poisoners." As these lines are being blotted the old question is being raised afresh, and we are being asked if the lengthy newspaper reports of a criminal trial, in which a comparatively unknown poison has been used, make for the good of the community.

Thus practitioners of the twentieth century have the same thought as their brethren of the sixteenth. They protest against knowledge of a technical nature falling into the grasp of laymen. The danger is a very real one. From a pharmacopœia published during the reign of Louis XIII. a magistrate's wife extracted enough information to poison her husband, slowly and successfully, by soaking all his linen in a preparation compounded to one of its formulæ. This was no solitary example. The book, although issued under the King's privilege and passed by the censor, was a notorious production. It ranks with the anarchist productions of the present day wherein the agitator is scientifically instructed in the manufacture

of bombs. There are many departments of human intelligence which are best confined to the wise. In themselves they may be of the highest benefit and value to the race. But the key which unlocks the door should not be had for the asking. They are a class apart, like some masterpieces of literature whose only place is on the upper shelves and not upon the public bookstall.

However, this chapter can safely deal with the delicate subject without arousing suspicion that it will be used by some future criminal to remove his enemies.

During the Middle Ages poison was little known in France, and seldom used. But when at the epoch of the Renaissance the Italian influence permeated the land this happy ignorance was soon dissipated. Poison became a recognised tool in diplomacy and statecraft, an almost legitimate instrument with which to remove family inconveniences. Nobody was free from its insidious attacks. And as the people have always been inclined to imitate the doings of the Court the terrible contagion spread from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and from the middle classes even amongst the lower ranks of the artisans and labourers in the country. Ambroise Paré draws attention to a peculiar epidemic of poisoning amidst the mountains of far-away Auvergne. It attacked the poor equally with the rich. In two or three days the venom achieved its purpose, and the wretched victims died in delirious frenzy after a few hours of agony. More than a century later, when La Voisin was active in Paris, a peasant of Beauce had an immense and sinister reputation as a diviner, a sorcerer, a seller of love philtres, and a dispenser of poisons. But as a general rule the malady was at its worst amongst the people of quality.

When Catherine de' Medici arrived in France, as wife of Henri II., she brought in her train a crowd of followers who did not improve the moral tone of the Court. Some of them, half charlatans, half savants, have become



historical. René, the Florentine, was undoubtedly a poisoner. Cosmo Ruggieri cloaked his baser activities under the garb of an astrologer. They served their forbidding mistress only too well, and materially helped to change or modify the fluctuating course of French history.

Ruggieri was accused of having poisoned Charles IX. It is still stoutly asserted that the King's death was a natural one, and some modern medical writers define the disease as pulmonary phthisis or consumption. The fact remains that Ambroise Paré, who attended the deathbed, refused to give Brantôme any exact details of the monarch's fatal illness, evidently considering silence to be the safest course to adopt. Stranger still La Mole, Coconas, and Cosmo Ruggieri were decapitated for having "used diabolic arts to kill the King."

But whether the miserable Charles died by poison or not there is something pathetic in his fear of the peril to which he was daily exposed. For his safety he relied upon a single being, his Huguenot physician, Paré. To lose this honest man of genius meant death to him. So, according to Brantôme, when the massacre of Saint Bartholomew was at its height, and Charles stood crying, "Kill! kill," the protestant doctor was shut up by royal order in the inner rooms of the Louvre, with a solemn warning not to stir until the slaughter had finished.

The victims of Catherine de' Medici and her satellites were numerous, and the various methods employed to kill those who blocked their path are not uninteresting.

Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre, and mother to the prince who became Henri IV., was, according to most contemporary historians, one of the prey of Catherine de' Medici. She died suddenly, whilst staying at Paris, within the space of four days. Gossip says that her death was encompassed by poisoned gloves which had been prepared by René.

A few years later, in 1574, the Cardinal de Lorraine, was reported to have been murdered through the agency of a purse of tainted money. Immediately the cardinal fingered the pieces of gold he fell dead. The deed was ascribed to a rogue called Saint-Barthélemi. Doctors Cabanès and Nass are convinced that the cardinal in reality died through a pleurisy contracted by walking with bare feet in a religious procession at Avignon. This may have been, but Saint-Barthélemi was a skilful poisoner, famous at the time, who together with his master, the Prior of Cluny, is credited with having poisoned some eighty persons within a year. Although many of the sudden deaths of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be explained by natural causes, the universal dread of poison, coupled with the unceasing activity of the mephitic crowd of occultists and charlatans, give us many good reasons for believing popular legend to be founded upon the truth.

The Medici and the Borgia had an evil influence over France. The miasma of their neighbourhood travelled far. Cosmo de' Medici, first of the grand-dukes of Tuscany, like Charles II. of England a century later, was an ardent student of chemistry and allied subjects. His palace in Florence contained a laboratory which steadily manufactured poisons. Retribution fell upon his family. His son Francis, who succeeded, died within a week of his wife Biancha, the drug having been administered by another member of the race, the cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici.

The Borgia family carried poisoning to its utmost refinement. The doctors Cabanès and Nass describe their agents in an eloquent passage. "The Borgia have poisons which kill at their will, in a day or a year. Their infamous drugs even improve the wine, and compel one to empty the cup with increased pleasure. A person believes himself to be drunk. He is dead. Or, perhaps

a man falls all of a sudden into a decline, his skin shrivels up, his eyes become hollow, his hair whitens, his teeth break like glass upon the bread he eats. He is no longer able to walk; he can only crawl. Breathing is difficult, there is a rattle in his throat. He laughs no more. Sleep is denied to him. He shivers in the mid-day sun. A young man he has the face of extreme age. This agony continues for a while, then he dies. He dies, and somebody remembers that six months or a year before he drank a glass of Cyprus wine at the table of a Borgia."

The basis of most poison in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was arsenic. The mysterious poison of the Borgia, known as "cantarella," seems to have been a powder of the same nature. It is described as white, and resembling sugar. The other poison of the period, "acqua toffana," was a solution of arsenic in distilled "eau de cymbalaire," with the addition of an alcoholised preparation of cantharides, which, apart from its own peculiar properties, is a violent irritant poison.

In France arsenic was extremely easy to procure.<sup>1</sup> Almost every grocer sold it as "mort aux rats," or rat poison. Very little was required, the taste was easy to hide, and its traces were difficult to discover. To-day no poisoner who desires to escape condign punishment would dare to use the powder as Madame de Brinvilliers and Sainte-Croix employed it. Since Marsh's test was discovered about a hundred years ago, arsenic has been one of the simplest poisons for the analytical chemist to locate, and for the criminal its value has been well lost.

Arsenic was rarely employed in an absolutely pure state, but generally in the form of a sublimate. As a

<sup>1</sup> One result of the Brinvilliers case and the poisoning drama of La Voisin was that French apothecaries were compelled to keep a poison book in which they had to record all poisons sold and the names of the purchasers. Nearly 200 years elapsed before this wise regulation was adopted in England.

powder it was mixed with the food, as a liquid it was mingled with the wine. And it must be remembered that in the centuries under our study the men and women of every condition of society were gross eaters. The food was highly spiced, with every variety of condiment, and the wine was thick and sweet. The sauces were particularly dangerous to those who, by their position were exposed to the attack of the poisoner. Some men of rank took an antidote morning after morning as a regular incident in the day's routine.

Of the two forms of administering arsenic the liquid was far more toxic than the powder. In the exceedingly skilful method of its preparation we find a clue to the drug which Madame de Brinvilliers and Sainte-Croix used with such dreadful effect.

About the middle of the last century, it was proved that tissues in decomposition create in themselves an active poison. These animal alkaloids are commonly known to-day under the name of ptomaines, and they are frequently the cause of cases of poisoning through the medium of "high" game, of fish that is not fresh, and of tinned goods no longer fit for consumption. In 1872 Selmi, in his investigations, discovered that the combination of a mineral substance with this organic body produced what he called an amine, and such combinations possessed what might be termed a progressive virulence.

The fact was no addition to human knowledge. The chemists, who, forty years ago, were labouring in this field of science were following in old and forgotten tracks. The quacks and empirics of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had in some manner foreseen the properties of these hidden alkaloids which to the exacter learning of a later age remained unknown. The poisoners who occupied so strong a position in the earlier commonwealths made every use of the action of the ptomaines, and they probably in some instances engaged in bacterial



culture. In the seventeenth century toxicology reached heights it has never since attained. The laboratories of the poisoners in France and Italy contained secrets happily lost to-day.

The preparation of the potions used in France during the reigns of Louis XIII. and his successor, may be briefly described. An animal was doctored with a dose of arsenic. After death the liquids of the body were carefully distilled, and the resultant was of extreme virulence, being composed of the virus of arsenic and the alkaloids of decomposition. When the animal thus killed was credited with a bodily venom the distilled liquid was a concentration of three poisons instead of two. For this reason the toad was the favourite subject of the experiment, although how far the batrachian poison affected the drug is open to doubt. Of the deadly effect of the liquid there can be no question. The "venin de crapaud" was used by Madame de Brinvilliers, Sainte-Croix, La Voisin, and all their confederates. Under torture the Marquise admitted that her drugs were composed of sublimated arsenic, vitriol, and "venin de crapaud."

Against it medical skill was almost helpless. As late as 1693 the celebrated physician Devaux declared that it was very difficult to indicate exact symptoms of poisoning. His words are almost a repetition of those uttered by Ambroise Paré. "The method of guarding oneself from being poisoned is very difficult to state. The wicked poisoners and perfumers, who secretly manufacture the poisons, carry on their betrayals and crimes so subtly that they deceive the most expert men." During a century the increase of skill had been confined to the assassins, the healers remained almost powerless.

There were numerous fashionable antidotes, such as theriac, composed of fifty other drugs including opium, and orviétan, imported from Orvieto. It was sold in a shop at the corner of the Rue Dauphine and the Pont



Neuf, and contained about thirty ingredients. Theriac and orviétan remind us of the doctor who was his own dispenser. All the waste of his dispensing he poured into one receptacle, and from that bottle he dosed those of his patients whose diseases he failed adequately to diagnose. Upon such a principle, these antidotes were prepared. The most generally accepted antidote was milk, and probably it was the best of the many in use.

But another complication for the honest physician was the mixture of superstition in its lowest forms, and on the other hand, a debased practice of religion. The soothsayers and readers of the future were the centres of the infection. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, sorcerers were beginning to lose their terror in the eyes of the law. As sorcerers pure and simple, they were laughed at and despised. A new spirit was rising in the land. Certain tribunals, Rouen in particular, continued to imprison all these charlatans. In 1672, Louis XIV. ordered their release. His clemency was a mistake.

"Those whom you condemn as sorcerers, are simply poisoners," said Cyrano de Bergerac. The quotation is from his own writings and not from the mouth of Rostand's puppet. The release of the sorcerers coincided with the extremest activity of the poison gangs. Five years later (three years after the execution of Madame de Brinvilliers) the King was obliged to create the "Chambre Ardente," and immediately, nearly four hundred prisoners were on trial for poison, mostly soothsayers like la Voisin, la Filastre, la Bosse, la Lepère, and la Chéron.

They helped children to remove their parents, wives to become widows.

Avait-on un amant ?

Un mari vivant trop au gré de son épouse ?

Une mère fâcheuse, une femme jalouse ?

Chez la devineresse on courait . . .



*Madame de Montespan*

*After a contemporary engraving*



These amiable lines are written by the gentle La Fontaine, and without the slightest poetical exaggeration represent the truth. Acting in concert with these unholy women were the abandoned priests, and with them came all the abominations of the Black Mass and the profaned sacraments. The Abbé Guibourg, whom even Madame de Montespan did not save, is an interesting example.

Even the saints were pressed into the traffic. Unhappy wives looked to Saint Nicholas for help. A discontented wife made a "neuvaine" or nine day's prayer in her parish church to Saint Nicholas, asking euphemistically for the "conversion" of her husband. He, poor man, died at the end of the eighth day.

"There," cried the laughing widow, "is a saint who is very good. He gives more than one asks for."

Lastly, must be taken into consideration the dependence of the medical profession upon its wealthy patrons. Ambroise Paré, who has been quoted more than once in this chapter, was a man of the purest integrity and of the most elevated character. But even he had to pick his way with caution amidst the intrigues of the Court. And when a great man died suddenly, and an autopsy was ordered, the surgeons and physicians were often in a quandary. Poison might be actually as well as morally certain. The instincts of self-preservation forbade the analysts to declare the truth. Modern historians, such as Funck-Brentano and Cabanès, base their judgments upon the signed verdicts of the post-mortems. To what extent were these documents edited for state reasons before being submitted for the signatures of the jury of experts?

The long list of monarchs whose deaths were attributed, by popular gossip, to the effect of poison cannot be treated as unworthy of credence. Catherine de' Medici was a known poisoner, surrounded by poisoners, and her two sons, Francis II. and Charles IX., were probably hastened

to their end by the adroit administration of drugs, as well as by their low state of general health. There is a good case for the assertion that Louis XIII. died of poison. His mother, Marie de' Medici, was accused of being the greatest poisoner of her age. It was publicly commented upon in Paris that by malignity or instinctive clairvoyance the King was well or ill as he agreed or quarrelled with the Queen-mother. After her death he had other enemies to over-shadow his path.

The ministers of state ran palpable risks. Richelieu had curious illnesses which can easily be attributed to toxic causes. He knew his danger and took every precaution. Mazarin's death cannot wholly be explained by natural causes. Despite the clever pleading of Monsieur Funck-Brentano, the death of Madame, sister to Charles II. of England, must remain a subject for doctors and historians to argue over.

Suspicion lurked in every palace. Frightened by the abuse of royal authority, suborned by large sums of money, many of the physicians forgot their duty to humanity.

Gui Patin (who died in 1672), a man of reputation and honesty, casts an extraordinary sidelight upon the moral standards of his professional brethren in a letter written during the earlier reign of Louis XIV.

“ Consider the beautiful politics of our century ! ”

“ The doctor to the heir to the throne, the successor designate, is called in consultation upon the health of the King ! And he dares to prescribe a brew containing poison ! ”

“ If his advice had been followed and the King had died, his master would have been King, and he first doctor to the King ! It was not thus formerly.”

“ One never called to a sick King any of the doctors attached to the households of the princes of the blood. The political reasons against it were very strong.”



There could not be a more terrible indictment. The most distinguished ornaments of the allied professions are not free from the stain. A formula for poison, used by an associate of La Voisin, was given to her by Brioude, doctor to Mademoiselle. And the next chapter will show how Christopher Glaser, one of the most brilliant chemists of his age, and a true scientist, actively assisted Madame de Brinvilliers to poison her relations.

## CHAPTER XII

SAINTE-CROIX IS LIBERATED FROM THE BASTILLE—EXPERIMENTS  
IN ALCHEMY—THE ELIXIR OF LIFE—THE SWISS CHEMIST,  
CHRISTOPHER GLASER—THE HOTEL DIEU—DEATH OF DREUX  
D'AUBRAY

SAINTE-CROIX was liberated from the Bastille after six weeks' detention. It is difficult to say why his imprisonment should have been so short. For less reason, men were allowed to rot in the Bastille for years. Possibly Dreux d'Aubray intended the experience more as a warning than as a punishment. If so his leniency was a mistake. Upon his release Sainte-Croix returned immediately to the arms of the Marquise, although the continuance of the liaison was undoubtedly kept secret from the angry d'Aubrays.

Throughout the whole story of this extraordinary case in which fact and gossip, evidence taken on oath, and the wild rumour of an excited city, are inextricably mixed, one finds the most curious conflict of statement. It is said that Sainte-Croix entered the Bastille a beggar and left it a rich man. It is impossible to establish this fact or to deny it. We have seen how he made the acquaintance of the Italian poisoner Exili. Supposing that he already possessed a knowledge of pharmacy, Exili taught him—for a price—much that he did not know before. When he left the Bastille he took a house, had servants, footmen, a coach, even an "intendant" or steward. His old servants gathered round him, the villainous La Chaussée, who divided his allegiance between Sainte-Croix and Madame de Brinvilliers, and

George, who was to be clandestinely transferred to the household of the financier Hanyvel upon an unholy errand. Oddest fact of all, Sainte-Croix married. Perhaps the unfortunate woman was a small heiress who supplied the money for the household. Madame de Sainte-Croix remains in the background. All one can relate of her is that for a time she separated from her husband, mainly because of his connection with the Marquise de Brinvilliers. We picture her as a soft yielding girl, content to sink her own individuality in the overpowering wilfulness of her iron-willed and handsome master. Jealousy changed her into sterner clay, and upon the death of her husband she fought his paramour with strength and persistence.

Having taken a wife Sainte-Croix did not lose his mistress. "I accuse myself," said the Marquise at her trial, "of having given a great deal of my wealth to this man, and he ruined me." This was hardly the exact truth. The Marquise had been short of money for some long while. Her husband was pursued by his creditors. She herself spent lavishly. Together with Sainte-Croix she studied two perilous sciences. The first was that of alchemy, or the actual making of precious metal; the second, that of poison, or the "removing" of those who had it in their coffers. Of the two she soon saw that the second was likely to be more lucrative. But these studies were kept secret. If the d'Aubray family ever met Sainte-Croix—or, what is more likely, received police reports upon his behaviour as a free man—they learned nothing of his continued amity with the daughter of their house, nor did they discover the exceedingly suspicious business of his daily life.

Sainte-Croix had come out of the Bastille a changed man, at least outwardly. He gave up all loose living. He turned his back upon gambling and card-playing in company with such debauched and reckless men as

the Marquis de Brinvilliers. Not a breath of scandal attached itself to his name. He became pious. His confessor was a certain priest named Dulong, a canon of the cathedral of Notre Dame. The worthy Canon will be heard of again. The imprisonment had certainly done the young cavalry officer much good. He went regularly to church, and his conversation was devout. It was said (in the "Factum" for Madame de Saint Laurent, the widow of Hanyvel) that he had written several little books on theology. As no copies have come down to us in the Bibliothèque Nationale or the British Museum, it is clear that their value was small. For in those days the dry bones of theological argument attracted the reader as now a novel draws the crowd. It is evident that Sainte-Croix was not able to find a publisher. Still he gained all the credit due to such honourable intellectual diversions, and frequently the unpublished author receives more approbation from his admiring relations than the writer of many volumes. Giving the cold shoulder to all his former disreputable friends, Sainte-Croix frequented only the most select circles. He began to have business with men of high position. Most noteworthy, he turned his private room into a laboratory, and commenced to travel the thorny path which led to the investigation of the philosopher's stone.

At the close of the seventeenth century, the search for the stone which was to transmute commoner metals into gold or silver, was equally in the hands of the quack and the honest man of science. That it could, and would, be found, was universally agreed. If any zealous chemist boasted too loudly that he was on the verge of the precious secret, the paternal government was more than likely to clap him in the Bastille, give him all the materials for his work, and invite him to go ahead. The secret was far too valuable to remain in the hands of a private individual. If the man had really solved the problem

of veritably manufacturing gold the profits would be so great that the state must own the monopoly. Upon this reasoning many alchemists were imprisoned indefinitely. It is easy in the twentieth century to laugh at the folly and ignorance of the French statesmen of the seventeenth. One must remember that deep thinkers, such as Bacon, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, firmly believed in the philosopher's stone, and the transmutation of metals. Their chimerical dreams were not finally destroyed until Lavoisier exploded the idea for good a century later.

These men, with most wonderful patience, in pursuit of a fantasy, were at the same time the founders of modern chemistry, so that after all their labours were not wholly wasted. Most of them had two great aims in view, the discovery of the philosopher's stone, and the components of the elixir of life. The stone had been sought for from earliest history. Chinese, Arabs, Greeks, had spent ages in the fruitless search for the substance and the means by which all baser metals could be changed by chemical action, into gold and silver. Enormous sums of money were spent over an object which, if attained, would have given the inventor all the wealth of the world. Berthelot, the French chemist, acutely remarks that "the doctrines of alchemy concerning the transmutation of metals, did not originate in the philosophical views of the constitution of matter as generally supposed, but in the practical experiments of goldsmiths occupied in making fraudulent substitutes for the precious metals."

The second aim was the discovery of the elixir of life which would give immortality. This opened the way to an immense amount of charlatanism. Paracelsus believed that the human body could be rejuvenated if a fresh supply of vitality could be supplied. Where could the vital fluid be found? His arguments had a certain cool speciousness. "Metals may be preserved



from rust, and wood may be protected against rot. Blood may be preserved a long time if the air is excluded. Egyptian mummies have kept their form for centuries without undergoing putrefaction. Animals awoken from their winter sleep, and flies, having become torpid from cold become nimble again when they are warmed. Therefore, if inanimate objects can be kept from destruction, why should there be no possibility to preserve the life-essence of animate forms?" Upon these suppositions the wild goose chase started. Mr C. J. S. Thompson, in the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, gives some illustrations of the elixirs Paracelsus distilled. "He prepared a remedy which he called 'Primum Ens Melissæ,' which was made by dissolving pure carbonate of potass, and macerating in the liquid the fresh leaves of the melissa plant. On this absolute alcohol was poured several times in successive portions, to absorb the colouring matter, after which it was collected, distilled, and evaporated to the thickness of a syrup. The second great secret elixir of Paracelsus was his "Primum Ens Sanguinis.' This was prepared by mixing blood from the medium vein of a healthy young person, and digesting it in a warm place with twice its quantity of 'alcahest,' after which the red fluid was to be separated from the sediment, filtered, and preserved. The 'alcahest' was Paracelsus's celebrated universal medicine, and was considered the greatest mystery of all. It was made with freshly prepared caustic lime and absolute alcohol. These were distilled together ten times. This was again distilled with alcohol. It was then placed in a dish and set on fire, and the residue that remained was the 'alcahest.'"

The pity is that nobody seemed to live a day longer than Heaven prescribed, though it may be suspected that many came to an untimely end through taking the abominable drugs which constituted most of the so-called elixirs of life.

If Sainte-Croix had engaged in chemical experiments before his imprisonment in the Bastille, it may well have been in pursuit of the golden dreams of the alchemists. But his acquaintance with Exili turned his thoughts another way, and the mysterious Italian taught a new and unholy trade which promised considerably more wealth than the nebulous stone of the philosophers or the nasty elixir. It was a doubtful elixir of life, but a very certain elixir of death.

Sainte-Croix was exactly the man to manage a dépôt in Paris for the sale of what a modern manufacturing chemist would call "the Exili preparations." The government forbade chemists to have furnaces and stills without permission. This license was readily granted to alchemists. Thus poisoners were easily able to distil their venoms under pretence of searching for the philosopher's stone. Harmless plants were placed in the alembic to guard against any undue suspicion, and the still was working day and night in the production of arsenic. The false alchemists carried their effrontery to such a pitch that they continued their operations at the expense of the state. Colbert in his anxiety to create new French industries opened government glass-works and freely granted licences for furnaces to those who wished to experiment in the new manufacture. He went so far as to place the state furnaces at the disposal of those experimenters who had small means. Many of the poisoners carried their crucibles to the government furnaces. Maybe they considered that they had some right to avail themselves of this gratuitous aid, for to them was mainly owing the rise of the industry. Formerly all drinking vessels were made of metal, chiefly silver. But when it became widely believed that the poisoners were able to impregnate these cups with poison the world of rank and fashion called for glass which was proof against all machinations. The death of the princess Henriette

d'Angleterre was generally ascribed to the fact that she had sipped some water from a silver cup which was in itself poisoned.

The Marquise de Brinvilliers joined in the new occupations of Sainte-Croix with considerable zest. It was probably she alone who had raged with anger against the manner in which her family had put her to shame. Sainte-Croix, we imagine, had not troubled so deeply over his imprisonment which was not in itself so unpleasant. He was an adventurer, and if it was the first time he had ever been under lock and key (which may be doubted) it was hardly more than he could naturally expect. He was lucky to receive his liberty at the end of six weeks. Under Exili's guidance, a vast and profitable undertaking was embarked upon. These distillers of poison made large sums of money, and sent their fatal drugs to the furthest ends of Europe. If the business was important and the remuneration adequate, the distillers travelled personally with their goods and sold them without the aid of an intermediary. Sainte-Croix entered the business for gain. But his mistress saw in it all the possibilities of revenge, as well as the means for the aggrandisement of her own shattered fortunes.

There now enters on the scene another curious foreigner. Christopher Glaser's story shows how strangely mixed were the good and evil elements in the society of the "grand siècle." He came from Basle in Switzerland, and became a pupil of Vallot, doctor to the Queen-Mother Anne of Austria, and also to the King, who appointed him superintendent of the Jardin des Plantes. Vallot made Glaser demonstrator in chemistry to the garden, and he became pharmacist-in-ordinary to the King, and professor of chemistry to the King's brother. In the acceptance of the term as used to-day, he was the chief chemist of his time in Paris. He wrote a treatise on chemistry which became a standard authority, passed through numerous

editions, and was translated into several foreign languages. He discovered sulphate of potassium, which was known for a long while as "polychreste de Glaser." "He was," said Fontenelle, "a true chemist, full of obscure ideas, avaricious even of those ideas, and not at all sociable." Like many of his brethren of the period he also was seeking for the philosopher's stone. Occupying the most prominent position in his profession, holding an important office at Court, where panics about poison were of frequent occurrence, Glaser should have been above suspicion. He was not.

In his establishment in the Rue du Petit-Lion, Faubourg Sainte-Germain, he taught Sainte-Croix and the Marquise de Brinvilliers, the whole theory and practice of poisons. He supplied them with poisons from his drugs, particularly the preparation of arsenic known as "Glaser's receipt," or the "powder of succession"—because heirs who had waited too long found it singularly useful in bringing them to their own. Exactly all he taught the couple, and the names of all the people he sold poison to, are not known. When he found himself implicated in the affair at the time of the death of Sainte-Croix, he threw up his appointments and disappeared. It was not the action of an innocent man, and, although his guilt was never proved, there can be little doubt that he indirectly played a prominent part in the poisoning scandals of his age. At the date of the trial, it was said that he had died previously, but his death did not take place until later. It is odd, however, that a savant of European reputation should have been able to hide himself so effectually. He never left his concealment and his after history is quite unknown. The Marquise told Pirot, her confessor, that Glaser supplied both her and Sainte-Croix with the poisons they used, and, when under torture, related a conversation Sainte-Croix had once with her about Glaser.



The Swiss chemist, said Sainte-Croix, had studied in Florence the art of preparing the finest and most subtle poisons. Some of these poisons had been sold to a person of rank. Madame de Brinvilliers understood that Fouquet, the superintendent of finance, had sent Glaser to Florence in order to obtain this precious knowledge, and Glaser in gratitude had remained his faithful servant. Attention has never been drawn to the fact that Vallot, who invited Glaser to leave Switzerland and settle in France, was Fouquet's intimate and trusted friend. There is enough circumstantial evidence to prove Glaser's guilt. There were good reasons why he should leave France. He was the possessor of too many vital secrets drawn from every station of society. There must have been a general sigh of relief when he disappeared, and nobody seems to have inquired after him or endeavoured to induce him to return to Paris.

Madame de Brinvilliers in pursuit of her deeply laid plans, then commenced to experiment with the deadly phials and powders Glaser and Sainte-Croix had placed in her power. Her first essays were made in the Hôtel Dieu, that great public hospital, which stands to-day where it has stood since its foundation, between the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Palace of Justice.

It is difficult, in a few words, to give a just view of the operations of this hospital, which contained over three thousand patients. A considerable amount of confusion hampered the management, which was partly ecclesiastical, partly medical, and partly secular. The medical profession had always been held in control by the Church from the days when the doctors were chiefly priests. Even in the seventeenth century they were bound down by many purely ecclesiastical laws. Under a Bull of Pope Pius V. a doctor was not allowed to visit a patient more than three times, if the sick person could not produce on the third visit a letter showing that he had confessed



since the beginning of his illness. By a royal proclamation, issued in 1712, the number of visits was reduced to two, and if the doctor still visited a patient, who had not confessed to his parish priest, he ran the risk of being forbidden to practise.

At the Hôtel Dieu, the ecclesiastical bodies claimed full control. All the nursing sisters were under their charge and they were responsible for the domestic arrangements. The priests scrambled for the patients' souls, which from their point of view, were of far more importance than their bodies. The medical staff fought to save the bodies and cursed the incompetence of the sisters, who always looked to their spiritual heads for final orders. The hospital was overcrowded, and the surveillance badly organised. Rules and regulations were ignored by the sisters who left their patients whenever they wished to spend a quiet time in the chapel. Servants were taken haphazard, and often paid in kind and not in money. One complaint says that every day there was a crowd of men waiting outside the gates of the hospital for engagement. In lieu of payment they were allowed to help themselves to the wine and food set apart for the patients.<sup>1</sup>

Gloomy and fetid as the hospital must undoubtedly

<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to find a contemporary description of the Hôtel Dieu at the close of the seventeenth century, although no doubt several exist. But in 1788 the surgeon Tenon presented to Louis XVI. a report on the state of the hospital, from which it is easy to judge its condition a hundred years earlier. One of the buildings alone contained 2627 patients. There was no classification; fever cases, wounds, maternity cases, skin diseases, and contagious diseases, were mixed haphazard in close neighbourhood to the dead-house and the dissecting room. Beds built to contain two patients were crowded with six, three at the head and three at the foot, so that the feet of one were on the shoulders of the other. Sleep was impossible in these couches of bitterness and sorrow. Operations took place in the midst of the wards, and the whole range of buildings was a centre of infection. The wonder remains that any patient went out alive.

have been, there was some comfort. Many of the ladies of Paris faithfully visited the sick, and all the nurses were not idle. The Comtesse de Suze went to the hospital regularly for over twenty years, and, curious detail, invariably masked so that she should not be recognised. Amongst these good women the Marquise de Brinvilliers was allowed to wander at will. Upon the unfortunate patients, she experimented secretly but freely. She brought and administered sweets, wine, and biscuits, all carefully prepared with "Glaser's receipt." Patients who received gifts from her hands invariably died in the greatest agony. Nobody seems to have detected her. Medical science had not advanced to any state of exactitude. The hospital was understaffed. All hospitals are. In 1666, there were twelve house-surgeons, a visiting staff, and many pupils. But the mortality must have been extremely high, and Madame de Brinvilliers was not the only experimentalist, although the others were working for the good motive and not for the bad.

At the same time she was experimenting upon the bodies of her own servants. She gave one of her maids, Françoise Roussel, some preserved gooseberries on the point of a knife. Soon after the girl had a slight attack of illness. Then her mistress gave her a slice of ham, and the maid became rapidly worse. She felt "as though her heart was being stabbed," and she did not recover for three years. The result of all these trials was that the Marquise had been able to estimate and regulate the strength and action of "Glaser's receipt." And she completely demonstrated that medical science had not advanced far enough to detect its ravages or discover its causes.

Early in 1666, the first attempt was made to dispose of the head of the family. It was three years since Dreux d'Aubray had sent Sainte-Croix to the Bastille, and patiently the Marquise and her lover had been laying

their plans and perfecting their instruments. For some time the civil lieutenant and his daughter had been reconciled. During the earlier months of the year he had been ill in Paris. He decided to go to his country estate at Offémont in Picardy, a few leagues from Compiègne. He invited his daughter to join him. She arrived just before Whitsun, and he is said to have scolded her affectionately for not arriving earlier. The country air did not cure his malady. On the contrary, he became rapidly worse. Feeling death at hand he returned immediately to Paris, in order to be near the best medical advice. No amelioration took place, and his family were summoned. In September his eldest son, who was "intendant" at Orleans, asked leave of absence from the minister Colbert. The following letter is still preserved in the French archives.

PARIS, *this 10th September 1666*  
*at six o'clock in the morning.*

MONSIEUR—In coming to my father my first thought after having seen him for an instant is to render you my very humble thanks for the permission you have given me to fulfil my duty and render my assistance to him. I have found him in the condition that was told me, almost beyond any hope of recovering his health. You may judge, Monsieur, how overwhelming has been my grief to see a person so dear to me in such extreme peril. It is true, however, Monsieur, that amongst the different thoughts that have troubled me I have found consolation in your generosity and the goodness that you have shown towards me, and I dare to flatter myself by my infinite gratefulness and my profound respect to merit the honour of your good graces and that you will not abandon me on the occasion when I shall have to seek your protection, being engaged all my life to live and to die in your interests. I will say nothing of what worries me, Monsieur. I submit myself to what you will be pleased to let me know of the wishes of His Majesty and yourself, which I will execute punctually and with a pleasure without equal. My actions

shall justify the sincerity with which I write to you. As I have asked permission but to be near my father I dare not present myself before you without your consent, having certain matters to communicate to you which concern me but which I am not able to write. DAUBRAY D'OFFÉMONT.<sup>1</sup>

This letter conveys some idea of the deference with which ministers like Colbert were approached by men of wealth and position. The business which was troubling D'Aubray d'Offémont was the succession to his father's appointment as "lieutenant civil." The same day the letter was written, Dreux d'Aubray died. It was in the evening, and, according to doctor Gui Patin, he was surrounded by the whole of his family. His daughter soothed his last moments. Glaser's receipt had triumphed. She admitted that she administered it twenty-seven times.

The eldest son asked for an audience of the King and the minister Colbert. His father's "charge" was one of the most important family possessions.

PARIS, *Saturday at six o'clock.*

MONSIEUR—Though the grief of the death of Monsieur the "civil lieutenant" which came to us last evening has taken from me the liberty of thinking of any business it still reminds me that I have my duty. Monsieur, the two days' leave that I asked for to assist my father expires to-day. If the extreme disorder of my affairs permit I will leave to-

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<sup>1</sup> With good reason there was a general disinclination to mention private information or business in letters. When Madame de Sévigné wrote to her daughter Madame de Grignan about the inner history of the Brinvilliers case she abruptly finished with the remark that the gossip could not well be written and must form matter for conversation one evening when they meet. Not only were many of the servants spies, but letters were freely tampered with in the post. Fouquet was a master of the art of bribing minor officials. He had such an effectual call upon the services of the superintendent of the post, Monsieur de Nouveau, that when Colbert wrote to Mazarin his letters were opened in the post, copied, and the copies sent to Fouquet by the very post which delivered the originals to the cardinal.



morrow to take up my office. But I do not wish to go immediately if you will grant me the honour to render you my very humble respects, and to make a reverence to His Majesty if it be agreeable to you. This I ask for extremely, Monsieur. Let me know your will, and I will execute it always with the last attachment.

D'AUBRAY D'OFFÉMONT.

There was a slight suspicion that the death of Dreux d'Aubray was due to poison. The physicians made an autopsy and stated rather vaguely that it was owing to "natural causes." The eldest son succeeded to the vacant post, and the estate was parcelled out according to the will.

The death of her father severed the last restraint which held the Marquise back. Her conduct was unbridled. Her favours were not confined to Sainte-Croix, the father of two of her children as she later acknowledged. She became the mistress of a certain F. de Pouget, Marquis de Nadaillac, a captain of the light horse and cousin to her husband. There was also admitted to her friendship a cousin of her own. She encouraged Briancourt the tutor of her children. Her temper became feline in its uncertainty. She quarrelled with Sainte-Croix for his unfaithfulness, and savagely stabbed her husband's mistress, the woman called Dufay. Amidst wild dissipations and excesses the money bequeathed to her by her father melted away. Creditors dunned her on every side. In 1670, a property at Nourar, jointly belonging to her husband and herself, was sold by order of the Court. Rather than it should go towards the liquidation of her debts, she endeavoured to set the house on fire.

Again it became absolutely necessary for her to find money. She was next heir to her brothers. The elder was "civil lieutenant," the younger "counsellor" to the Parliament of Paris. It was decided to remove them both, and Glaser's receipt was for a second time called into operation.



## CHAPTER XIII

THE FIDELITY OF FRENCH SERVANTS—THE ROGUE LA CHAUSSÉE—  
THE MARQUISE AND HER BROTHERS—THEIR DEATHS—A STRANGE  
HOUSEHOLD

**I**N a little guide to Paris, which was written by a German tutor, for the benefit of foreign visitors in the early eighteenth century, there is a series of curious notes upon French servants. In general, observed the author, they are extremely faithful. They will pass through fire for the love of their master, will share all his hardships, and risk their lives in his quarrels. They are rarely thieves, and the worst that can be said of them is that they insist upon making small profits over their masters' purchases. For instance, explained the methodical German, if you send out your valet to buy a pound of powder, the price will be eight sols (or sous). But he will charge you nine or ten, and the same thing will happen for wood, candles, sugar, tea, and wine. He will even levy contributions from your tailor, boot-maker, wig-maker, and glover, upon the pretext that all orders come on his recommendation. When the current rate of wages is cited as being a trifle over a franc a day, it is easy to understand the valet's greediness after these little gains.

The fidelity of the French body-servant is, however, proverbial. In every romance dealing, with the adventures of the gallants of the seventeenth century, we have the hero supported by a servant ready to share all the ups and downs of fortune. Wages formed part of the contract, but in many cases wages were a most pre-

carious form of income. The lackeys who followed the three musketeers must often have gone as short as their masters. In several cases this faithfulness was pushed to such an extent that when the master was sent to prison, the servant voluntarily shut himself up in the same place. Fouquet's valet passed many years of close confinement with the erstwhile superintendent of taxes in the fortress of Pignerol. To this day there is a closer bond of sympathy between masters and servants in France than in many other parts of Europe.

It must not be thought that the valet in Paris was a creature of perfection. If he robbed, said the German author, complain to the police without delay. They will lose no time over ceremony. He who steals to-day will be hanged to-morrow. If he be an impudent varlet, dismiss him on the spot. This was the chief failing of the French servant as we can easily learn from Molière, and a score of old comedies. A proverb said that German valets are the comrades of their masters and English the slaves, that Italian servants were respectful, Spanish obedient, but the French alone were the servants who endeavoured to rule their masters. They did more than rule their masters, they tried to bully everyone else. La Reynie, the chief of the police, had always much difficulty in controlling the hordes of insolent manservants swarming in the streets of Paris. At first they were forbidden to carry swords. A few years later sticks were prohibited. Their behaviour was so rough that they were refused admittance into the royal gardens of the Tuileries and the Luxembourg. Their misdeeds were punished without mercy. A footman to the Duc de Roquelaure and a page to the Duchesse de Chevreuse fought and wounded a student on the Pont Neuf. They were caught and summarily hanged, in spite of the supplications of duke and duchess. In the late seventeenth century the London authorities had the same

trouble with English servants who were equally as turbulent.

Gaudin de Sainte-Croix had several personal servants. Like master, like man. They were all rogues. Of Bazile we know little, except that he appears to have known of his master's dealings in poison, and, like many of Sainte-Croix's laqueys, worked at various times in the Hotel d'Aubray. George was too eager to serve his master. He had enough wit to escape from France when trouble was in the wind. Jean Hamelin, commonly called La Chaussée, was the biggest rascal of the three, a bold, impudent wretch, who swaggered through the streets, fearing no man. He had an amount of clever cunning which did not preserve him from a bad end. But he fell a victim to his own audacity. The best that can be said of him is that Sainte-Croix and the Marquise de Brinvilliers could not possibly have found a more zealous and devoted assistant in their crimes.

Madame de Brinvilliers was never on really affectionate terms with her brother. The elder she particularly disliked, and referred to him pointedly as being "no good." He was, however, a man of intelligence and position, for at the death of his father he was "intendant" at Orléans. It was an important post, somewhat akin to the duties of a modern prefect,<sup>1</sup> but not so valuable to the holder as that of "civil lieutenant" to the city of Paris. Like his father, he enjoyed the confidence of Colbert. Why brother and sister should have disagreed so bitterly is not clear. But the quarrel went so far that Madame de Brinvilliers hired two desperadoes to murder the "intendant" as he travelled on the road to Orléans. The attempted assassination failed, probably because the "intendant" was travelling in company, and he evidently never discovered the plot. After the death

<sup>1</sup> The "intendants" were created by Richelieu, and gradually the whole of the administration passed into their hands.



ANTOINE D'AUBRAY, COMTE D'OFFÉMONT  
*After the engraving by Vallet*





of their father the family became reconciled, although, pressed by the unceasing need for money, the Marquise "resolved on fresh poisonings so as not to lose the fruits of the first."

Antoine d'Aubray d'Offémont (as the elder brother was usually known) in the meanwhile married a certain Mademoiselle Marie Thérèse Mangot de Villarceau, who never took kindly to her sister-in-law. The younger brother, a "conseiller au parlement," was unmarried and shared the same house. Of him we have the scantiest details, but in the family arguments he took the side of his brother against his sister. A younger sister had taken the veil, and entered a convent of Carmelites in Paris.

Sainte-Croix and the Marquise had carefully mapped out their scheme of operations. It embraced the "removal" of the whole d'Aubray family down to the Carmelite. The first step was easily arranged. The younger d'Aubray wanted a valet. His sister heard of it, and knew exactly the man to suit him, a most faithful and expert servant she could thoroughly recommend. It happened to be La Chaussée. Only one person recognised that the new valet had formerly been in the service of Sainte-Croix, a name of evil omen in the d'Aubray household. This was Cluet, a sergeant at the police dépôt of the Châtelet, an intelligent officer, who was courting Madame Villarceau d'Aubray's maid.

"If it is discovered that La Chaussée was formerly a servant to Monsieur de Sainte-Croix they will refuse to take him," said Cluet to the Marquise.

"It is much better that La Chaussée should earn some wages rather than someone else," she replied.

La Chaussée accordingly entered the service of the councillor and the "civil lieutenant." But before he took up his duties, the Marquise signed and gave to Sainte-Croix two promissory notes, one for 25,000, the other for 30,000 livres.

The valet was not slow in carrying out his instructions. At the beginning he doctored his master's wine too strongly.

"Wretch!" cried the lieutenant, springing up from his chair one morning. "What have you given me? I believe you wish to poison me!"

His secretary tasted some of the wine on the edge of a spoon. He said he thought it was vitriol. La Chaussée did not lose his calm self-possession.

"It is the fault of Lacroix," he explained. Lacroix was a fellow valet in the house. "He took some medicine this morning, and I suppose he left the dregs in the glass."

Without hesitation he picked up the glass and threw the contents on the fire. Monsieur d'Aubray's suspicions were not aroused, and the incident passed without further remark.

During the Easter of 1670 the two brothers went to their estate at Villequoy in Beauce, and La Chaussée, who had thoroughly gained their favour, went with them as their only personal servant. Alert and prompt he ingratiated himself with everyone. He assisted in the kitchen, which was clearly no part of his duty. The same day a giblet pie was sent up to the table. Those who ate were violently ill. Others who had not touched it remained in good health. On the 12th April, six days after Easter, as the lieutenant became rapidly worse he returned to Paris. He lost all desire for food and gradually wasted away. His most assiduous nurse was his valet, La Chaussée, who cared for him night and day. On the 17th June 1670, d'Aubray d'Offémont died of exhaustion, after much agony. His Carmelite sister was present at his death-bed, but the Marquise remained on her estate at Sains in Picardy.

After the death of the lieutenant an autopsy was held. His death was attributed to a "malignant humour." Thus the ignorance of the faculty was effectually cloaked,

and the second murder remained undiscovered. The success of this attempt urged Sainte-Croix, the Marquise, and La Chaussée to renewed exertions. Throwing all prudence to the winds, for they considered that they were absolutely secure from detection, they decided to make away with the younger brother without loss of time. The councillor d'Aubray was soon ill with identically the same symptoms as his father and brother. Again La Chaussée was an excellent nurse, seldom leaving the sick man. He was so good a servant that when the councillor *in extremis* made his will La Chaussée was given a legacy of one hundred écus for his attention, although he had been in his service but a short period. The unhappy patient daily grew worse and expired, three months after his brother, in September 1670. Madame de Brinvilliers, the widow of the late lieutenant, and the Carmelite nun, had now the entire d'Aubray estate between them.

This time the doctors in attendance seem to have been a trifle more searching in their enquiries. Dr Bachot, who had cared for both the brothers, conducted an autopsy in conjunction with two surgeons, Devaux and Dupré, and an apothecary called Gavart. They evidently believed that the case was one of poisoning, but they had not the courage or the complete conviction to state the fact. They drew up and signed a report upon the condition of the internal organs, which to-day would leave little doubt as to the cause of death. The illness had followed exactly the same course as that of the elder brother, and it is very strange that they did not push their investigations further. It was a negative decision which surely should have led to further examination. But it was nobody's business to intervene, and another secret crime went unpunished.

Madame de Brinvilliers now could foresee the time when she would be able to re-establish the former magni-

ficence of her house in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. In her own mind she had arranged that her eldest son should succeed to the family post of "civil lieutenant." In her home he was even playfully called "the lieutenant." Her other children she did not care for so deeply. Her daughter was not loved. She was ugly and evidently dull-witted. The poor child received several doses of "Glaser's receipt." Then her mother repented of her evil intentions, and gave her a quantity of milk as an antidote.

The position of the wretched Marquis was extraordinary. He was undoubtedly well aware of all the evil business in progress. Harassed by creditors, he sat down quietly in the Hôtel d'Aubray, prepared to avail himself of any sudden inheritance which might assist the family fortunes. He lived in fear of poison, and several attempts were made to remove him with the aid of "Glaser's receipt." "Madame de Brinvilliers wanted to marry Sainte-Croix," wrote Madame de Sévigné. "With that intention she often gave her husband poison. Sainte-Croix, not desiring so wicked a woman for his wife, gave antidotes to the poor husband, with the result that, shuttlecocked about in this manner five or six times, now poisoned, now unpoisoned, he still remained alive." At some moments his wife had compassion upon the weak and contemptible man, and ceased her treatment. She even called in a doctor to prescribe for him. He in the meanwhile exercised every care over his food, and swallowed huge quantities of milk, the only sure antidote to the poisons. He kept his own valet, who served him at table. "Don't change my glass," he repeatedly ordered. "But wash it out every time you give me anything to drink." His health was not unaffected. He had a weakness in the legs from which he did not recover. He also always carried theriac, the treacle compound of some sixty various drugs, reduced by means of honey



to an electuary, which was supposed to be very efficacious against poison. Of this he took many doses, and gave it freely to his servants. Probably for the same reasons the tutor, Briancourt, escaped with his life. The Marquise had every need to destroy him, for in moments of weakness he had been made the confident of all her crimes. As it was, he passed through some exceedingly perilous adventures in the Hôtel d'Aubray, as related at length in his evidence.

La Chaussée, the valet, went freely in and out of the house in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. The Marquise received him privately in her own room, and gave him money.

"He is a good fellow, and has done me great service," she used to remark. She was seen "in great familiarity" with him, and, on one occasion, when an unexpected visitor was announced she had to hide him behind her bed. It must be explained that in the seventeenth century all ladies received guests in their bedroom. In France to-day the bedroom is more used as a sitting-room than it is in England.

The rogue had Madame de Brinvilliers entirely at his mercy and within his power. It is a wonder that Sainte-Croix did not settle his account, but the valet was too clever to be caught napping.

Retribution, however, was at hand. A woman in grief and loneliness had retired to the country to mourn the sudden death of her husband. Marie Thérèse de Villarceau in her solitude carefully reconsidered all the circumstances surrounding the deaths of her husband, her father-in-law, and her brother-in-law. To her mind, they led to but one conclusion. Poison had ended their days prematurely.

She then wondered to whose benefit their deaths tended. Save herself and the Carmelite sister the successions could only enrich her sister-in-law, the



notorious Marquise de Brinvilliers. Of Sainte-Croix she knew nothing, and had probably never seen the dashing cavalry officer. But she was well versed in the history of the earlier scandals which surrounded the Marquise's name. She had never been on good terms with the mistress of the Hôtel d'Aubray. Now she was convinced that her sister-in-law was one of the many women who did not disdain the fatal "powder of succession." She could not prove the crimes, but recognising that she was next in the line of succession, she promptly left Paris for the comparative security and safety of the country. She took the most minute precautions against poison.

And she waited patiently.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE MILLIONAIRE PENNAUTIER—HIS RIVALS DIE OF "APOPLEXY"  
—UNEXPECTED DEATH OF SAINTE-CROIX

**A**MONGST the new friends of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was a man very well known in the professional and ecclesiastical circles of Paris. Pierre Louis de Reich de Pennautier lived in much state in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins, not far from the markets. His portrait has not been preserved to us, yet one may attempt to reconstruct his image from a few indications left by his contemporaries.

Reich de Pennautier was probably a native of Languedoc. It is noteworthy that the lively inhabitants of the Midi have always taken more than their fair share of public life in France. Reich at first was a clerk and cashier. His business abilities were marked, and it was easy to predict a highly successful career. He quickly made an excellent marriage, a Mademoiselle Lesecq, and his wife was able to give him a social position he had not before. He was an ambitious man, determined to make his way in the world, and he recognised that a carefully selected father-in-law would be of considerable help. Monsieur Lesecq was extremely rich, and, moreover, Treasurer to the States of Languedoc. Reich (or his wife) bought an estate near Carcassonne and added its name to his own. Henceforth he became known as Monsieur de Pennautier, and it was understood that he would succeed his father-in-law. Suddenly and unexpectedly Monsieur Lesecq died at a comparatively early age.

Nothing luckier could have happened for Pennautier. He became Treasurer. But the sad event broke up his household. Lesecq's death was unexplainable, although in those days apoplexy covered every disease the physicians could not otherwise account for. Madame Lesecq refused to accept it as an explanation of her husband's death, complained of the behaviour of her son-in-law, and refused to meet him. Even more decisive was the action of Madame de Pennautier. She separated from her husband for good. Evidently two extremely suspicious women.

These domestic troubles did not trouble the new holder of the purse of Languedoc. He had now got his feet well on the rungs of the ladder and intended to mount still higher. He became treasurer to the clergy of Languedoc, and, according to Saint-Simon, prodigiously rich. The ambitious man is always troubled by rivals, and Pennautier had a serious private annoyance.

The receivership-general of the clergy of France was a post worth some 60,000 livres per annum, or about £10,000 a year in present reckoning. For a long period it had been in the possession of a certain Monsieur de Mennevillette, who had for his chief assistant a man called Hanyvel. When Mennevillette resigned the clergy appointed Hanyvel in his stead, and he, like Pennautier, bought an estate, added its name to his own, and became Saint-Laurent. This was in 1662.

Pennautier, holding a similar appointment in Languedoc, suggested that Hanyvel de Saint-Laurent should share the income of his new office with him. As a reason he asserted that the burden was too much for one man. He explained in detail his scheme of partnership, but Saint-Laurent refused to consider it. Pennautier was not a man to be easily shaken off. He aroused all the bishops and clergy of Languedoc, and convinced them that Saint-Laurent had not the capacity to grapple

with such vast finances. Saint-Laurent, on his side, whipped up his friends the bishops of the north of France, where his strongest influence lay. The forces engaged in battle, and Pennautier so far triumphed that Saint-Laurent was forced to resign his post. Menneville came back from his retreat, and resumed his old functions for the space of three years.

On the 17th March 1667, Menneville resigned for the second time, and named Saint-Laurent definitely as his successor. In 1669 the new receiver-general was attacked with serious illness whilst he was on his estate at Pontchevron. He also fell off his horse, and received some severe bruises. In April he hurriedly returned to Paris, and on the 2nd May he died in horrible agony. So quickly came the fatal end that an old friend attached to the Court who came to sympathise with the patient arrived to find a corpse. Upon hearing all the details of the last days of Saint-Laurent he said openly before the servants that an examination must be made of the body.

One of the household was a valet called George, who had been recommended to Saint-Laurent by Gaudin de Sainte-Croix. This man had heard the conversation between the old friend and Saint-Laurent's notary Sainfray. Within an hour he had disappeared. He did not say a word to his fellow-servants. He did not even ask for his wages. It was a very suspicious proceeding, and the autopsy did not clear up the mystery. Except for some slight internal ulceration the body was healthy. The surgeons decided that the death of the financier was indirectly due to the fall from his horse.

Marie Vossier, Madame de Saint-Laurent, became extremely uneasy, and the flight of George suggested to her mind a dreadful explanation. Search was made for the valet but he could not be found. Then one day a priest, who was acquainted with all the secret details of the death of Saint-Laurent, whilst walking along the Rue

des Maçons, close to the Sorbonne, caught a sight of the missing servant. The two men met almost face to face, and a big cart of hay blocked up the whole of the street. George looked up and recognised the priest who pushed forward to speak to him. The valet instantly and at the risk of his life dived between the wheels of the cart, scrambled underneath, and vanished for good. When the horses were pulled to one side, and the priest had passed through, the street was empty. Madame de Saint-Laurent's suspicions were strengthened, but she could do little. She entered a police complaint against her former servant, but he was never seen again in Paris.

The extraordinary death of Saint-Laurent awakened many suspicions throughout the various circles which composed the polite society of Paris. But the connection between George and Sainte-Croix, and between Sainte-Croix and Pennautier, was never unravelled, does not even ever seem to have been suspected. Like Madame de Villarceau d'Aubray another woman sat alone and waited.

Pennautier was at Toulouse. Upon hearing of the death of his rival he returned in all haste to Paris. He immediately interviewed Madame de Saint-Laurent, who held the appointment *ad interim* subject to finding a suitable successor. She, poor woman, was in a cleft stick. She evidently disliked Pennautier, although she could not connect his machinations in any way with the death of her husband. But she guessed that the only man who could follow her husband without public attack was Pennautier himself. So she made the best of a bad business, and a contract was signed that Pennautier should become the new treasurer subject to the payment of half the emoluments to herself as owner of the charge. Menneville had also certain interests which Pennautier had to buy. By the 11th June he was firmly established. The contract with Madame de Saint-



Laurent did not expire until the end of 1675, and her personal right to the charge extended a further ten years.

Then Pennautier had another little trouble. Ostensibly because the work had become so heavy he took as a partner a certain Monsieur D'Alibert. Probably D'Alibert supplied Pennautier with part of the cash to pay out Madame de Saint-Laurent and Menneville. Partners should never conceal facts from each other, and D'Alibert forgot to tell Pennautier that he was secretly married. When D'Alibert suddenly died of apoplexy Pennautier was surprised to receive a visit from Madame D'Alibert, who wished to investigate the accounts as between her late husband and the receiver-general. Pennautier was angry at such an unexpected intrusion. He repudiated her interests and showed the widow to the door. Madame D'Alibert had a brother, Monsieur de la Magdelène, who was a man of business. She asked him to take the matter up and fight the question of Pennautier's liability to her in the law courts. Hardly had the notaries commenced their preliminaries when Monsieur de la Magdelène died without warning—of apoplexy. It was unfortunate for Madame D'Alibert. She had no money and no friends. She could not produce costs to finance the action, which dropped to the ground. Her lawsuit abandoned, she disappeared in a condition of the utmost poverty.

Pierre Louis de Reich de Pennautier had quickly climbed the ladder of success. Step by step Death's bony fingers had considerably helped him. He was now receiver-general of the clergy of France, treasurer of the purse of the State of Languedoc, councillor to the King, honoured by the Church, respected by the Law, welcomed by Society. A man controlling such large sums of money was also of interest to the ministry. Colbert recognised his financial ability and held him in esteem.<sup>1</sup> Although his domestic

<sup>1</sup> Funck-Brentano says that Pennautier "was one of the most active and intelligent of Colbert's lieutenants. On such questions as the

affairs had turned out unfortunately owing to the waywardness of Madame Pennautier, *née* Lesecq, the great man did not lose heart. He married his sister to Monsieur le Boultz. They may have loved each other, they may have been simply indifferent. But the alliance gave Pennautier the support and kinship of the most powerful legal family in the capital. The receiver-general was a consummate tactician.

He was a tall big man, but very soft speaking. When a big man has a soft voice beware of him. There is something unnatural in the combination. In addition Pennautier was most devout, as was seemly in an official who had so many dealings with the Church. Frequently he entertained the bishops and the minor clergy at his house in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins. Sometimes he had to suffer slight annoyances from envious people. There was once a rumour that he was a coiner of false money. Somebody had overlooked his offices and watched his clerks handling more gold than one could imagine a man to acquire legitimately. The police searched the house, a rather undignified affair for so great a celebrity. But all they found was a skull, which, in a contemporary report, "witnessed more to the devotion of this good person, and of the pious thoughts which in the middle of business he devoted to eternity."

Amongst the clerks who worked in Pennautier's office was an individual named Belleguise. He had formerly been in the employ of the unfortunate D'Alibert, and had remained in the service of the receiver-general.

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resuscitation of the French manufacture of fine cloth, the Languedoc Canal, the purchase of Greek MSS. in the Levant, the draining of the fens of Aigues-Mortes, the name of Pennautier is linked with that of Colbert in enterprises of the utmost utility." Saint-Simon, a bitter critic who spoke favourably of but few men, said that "he was a tall and well-made man, with a gallant and dignified air, courteous and eminently obliging. He had plenty of intelligence, and many connections in society."

He was a confidential and trusted clerk, and his most intimate friend was the highly respected Gaudin de Sainte-Croix. He spent many hours in the laboratory of the Place Maubert. Perhaps he too was seeking for the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life.

The gathering rumours, however, disquieted Sainte-Croix. An appointment became vacant in the royal household. Like every official appointment in the seventeenth century it was to be bought. In this case the sum of 100,000 écus was demanded for the charge. It was generally reported that Sainte-Croix had bought it. As a matter of fact he had opened up negotiations, but he could not complete the business as he had little money. He then, through Belleguise, addressed himself to Pennautier. And he wrote a very guarded and a very curious letter to the clerk.

“Is it possible,” he cries, “that he (Pennautier) refuses to help so good a business which will give us both rest for the remainder of our lives? I really think the devil has mixed himself up in the matter, or perhaps you are not putting the matter properly before him. Explain it again to him, and push it even if it be against the grain. Be unpleasant, and you will find that you will yet be able to satisfy me. I have done everything for your safety since our interests have come together in this affair. Help me, I pray you. Remain convinced that I shall recognise it, and that you will never have done anything so satisfactory in the world either for yourself or for me. You can understand this for I have opened my heart more to you than I have done to my own brother. If you wish to see me this afternoon I will remain in my lodgings or in the near neighbourhood, and I will wait for you until to-morrow morning, when I will come to you for your reply. I am with you with all my heart.”

Pennautier could not be moved from his decision. Sainte-Croix had some secret claim upon his goodwill and

Belleguise was prepared to share in the blackmail. But the receiver-general, secure in his strength, refused to part with a sou to help Sainte-Croix into a lucrative post at Court. It was a case of diamond against diamond, a comedy of rogues quarrelling over the booty.

Then Death, who had been so often invoked, came forward and played a rude trick. In the midst of the discussion Sainte-Croix died. And this time even Pennautier did not expect it.

## CHAPTER XV

### CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS OF SAINTE-CROIX'S END

**T**HE manner of Sainte-Croix's death remains a puzzle to the historian. The popular explanation is the more interesting, even if it be not true. As contemporary statements are sifted the mystery does not clear itself, and there are almost as many facts in support of one story as the other.

Sainte-Croix lived in the Rue des Bernardins. The street is still to be found between the Pantheon and the Seine. Its course can be followed to-day from the west side of the Ecole Polytechnic until it meets the Pont de l'Archevêché on the eastern point of the Ile de la Cité. In the seventeenth century this bridge did not exist and the Rue des Bernardins was a quiet thoroughfare leading to the river and chiefly noticeable for the magnificent monastery of the monks of Saint Bernard from which it took its name. Remains of these great buildings can still be seen between the Rue Monge and the Boulevard Saint Germain, and when Sainte-Croix was living in the street he was able to watch daily the rebuilding of Saint Nicholas-du-Chardonnet under the superintendence of his fellow-parishioner the painter Lebrun.

A few steps away the alchemist had his laboratory in the house of the widow Brunet on the Place Maubert. The neighbourhood was composed of tortuous rookeries which at no time bore the best of reputations. Of its picturesqueness there could be no doubt. Across the stream rose the twin towers of Notre Dame. Amidst



the undulating roofs were the delicate dreams in stone which Gothic masons had constructed for the shrines of the saints, the buttresses of the Church of Saint Séverin, the severe simplicity of Saint Julien-le-Pauvre, and on the hill of Sainte-Geneviève the almost feminine grace of Saint Etienne du Mont. No quarter in Paris was more crowded with religious houses, and colleges in connection with the university. And the river entrance under the houses on the Petit Pont was guarded by the immense walls of the donjon of the Petit Châtelet.

In the room in the Place Maubert the apothecary Glaser and Sainte-Croix are said to have experimented together. That Glaser the professional should have worked with Sainte-Croix, who might be called an amateur, is open to doubt. Glaser had his own laboratory not far away in the Rue de Petit Lion, and there seems little reason for him to have joined company with Sainte-Croix in the Place Maubert. According to Parisian legend the experiments were fatal to all who took part in them. Glaser fell ill and died, said the story. This statement must be queried. Madame de Brinvilliers certainly believed that he was dead at the time of her trial in 1676, but there is some reason for thinking that he lived for several years after his disappearance. Had he died in Paris the death would have been properly authenticated. Although French sources of information give ample details about his career they are strangely silent as to the place or date of his death.

A servant also became very ill through the experiments. He is a man who flits across the scene more than once. Sometimes he is called Martin, sometimes De Breuille, and he is said to have been employed by a brother of Sainte-Croix, the only reference we have to any other member of the Gascon's family.

Lastly, the investigations in the Place Maubert affected the health of Sainte-Croix, but although he sickened, he



PLACE MAUBERT LOOKING TOWARDS NOTRE DAME  
*After the etching by Lucien Gautier*



continued his researches without intermission towards the desired end.

The popular story is best told by the author of "Les Crimes célèbres." According to this account Sainte-Croix was endeavouring to discover a poison the emanations alone of which would be able to kill. He had heard of the poisoned napkin with which the young dauphin, elder brother of Charles VII., had wiped his face whilst playing at tennis, and the contact of which alone was sufficient to kill. Then there was the gossip about the gloves belonging to Jeanne d'Albret which had been prepared by one of the Italian poisoners in the train of Catherine de' Medeci, a crime which was never brought home to its instigator. The secrets of these poisons had been lost, and Sainte-Croix wished to find them.

"Then came to pass one of those strange events which seem rather to be a punishment from Heaven than an accident. At the moment when Sainte-Croix, leaning over his stove, watched his fatal mixture reach its highest state of intensity, the glass mask, which covered his face, and preserved him from the mortal exhalations which escaped from the liquor, became unfastened and dropped off. Sainte-Croix fell to the ground as if struck by a thunderbolt."

At the hour of supper his wife, not seeing him, knocked at the door of his laboratory. There was no answer. As she knew that her husband occupied himself with sombre and mysterious works she feared that some evil had happened. She called her servants, who forced the door, and they found Sainte-Croix on the floor by the side of the stove amidst the scattered fragments of the glass mask. He was dead.

It is a dramatic story, and was generally believed at the time. When the Abbé Pirot attended Madame de Brinwilliers before her execution he referred specifically to it.

“ Did he never confide his secrets to you ? ” asked the priest.

“ Only those I have told you,” replied the Marquise.

“ But, madame, if he worked at making these poisons, as it has been said, and if he poisoned himself inadvertently because the mask which preserved his face from the poisons suddenly broke, it is hardly possible that you knew nothing about it.”

“ Monsieur,” replied the Marquise. “ He did not die in that way. It is a fable.”

The other story has not such a popular attraction. It is more ordinary. It is given by Vautier and Garanger, the barrister and lawyer, who prepared the complaint against Pennautier. They affirm that Sainte-Croix died after an illness of five months. But when they add that this illness was occasioned by the vapour of the poisons they give the key to the origin of the popular legend. It has escaped the notice of all other commentators upon the affair that during the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers it was given in evidence that Sainte-Croix had visited Italy some months before his death. This leads one to suppose that his indisposition was not at first of great consequence.

On the other hand, he possessed certain papers which were vital to Madame de Brinvilliers and Pennautier. If his illness lasted so long as five months why did they make little or no attempt to remove or destroy these papers ? He was not during the last year on very good terms with the Marquise, and he even tried to get her out of the way. Once he gave her so strong a dose of arsenic that she knew from the pain she was suffering what she had taken. She drank warm milk and saved her life, but was ill for several months. Another time she threatened to commit suicide. There must have been perpetual quarrels.

Indirectly Pennautier seems to have kept in touch with



Sainte-Croix. During his last illness Belleguise came repeatedly to see him. Now Belleguise had been clerk to D'Alibert and upon the sudden death of his master had been taken into Pennautier's employ. When Belleguise came to the sick man, Madame Sainte-Croix was asked to leave the room so that she might not overhear the conversation. One day Belleguise came together with a little truck in the charge of two porters. From Sainte-Croix's room were taken two very heavy coffers. Madame Sainte-Croix did not know what they contained, but she not unnaturally imagined that they were taken to Pennautier's house. When she spoke to him after her husband's death he disclaimed all knowledge of the boxes.

That Sainte-Croix's death was to some extent generally unexpected seems evident from what occurred directly the news was carried abroad.

## CHAPTER XVI

EXAMINATION OF SAINTE-CROIX'S PROPERTY—DISCOVERY OF A CASKET OF POISONS AND LETTERS—ANXIETY OF PENNAUTIER AND THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS—THE CASKET IS OPENED—ITS CONTENTS—FLIGHT OF THE MARQUISE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF LA CHAUSSÉE

THE earliest person to hear of the death of Sainte-Croix was the financier Pennautier. Without losing a moment he wrote to Madame de Brinvilliers informing her of the unwelcome news. Her creditors had been so troublesome that she had temporarily left her town house in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul and was staying in the little village of Picpus outside the Porte Saint Antoine. It is said that she was in retreat with the nuns of Saint Augustine-de-Lepauté. But another authority asserts that she had a small country house at Picpus, and this seems more probable. By some mischance Pennautier's letter was delayed by one of the servants, and, when she at length received it, she flew into a terrible passion over the man's forgetfulness. She then returned at once to Paris.

It is said that she arrived at the Place Maubert on the same day that Sainte-Croix died. This could hardly be possible. Even had she done so, she would have been too late for her purpose. Sainte-Croix died heavily in debt, and hardly had the breath left his body than a commissary named Picard was summoned from the Châtelet. This functionary placed his official seal upon all the articles of furniture, and also across the little door which led to the private cabinet of the dead man. It

contained his books, papers, and personal effects. It was also used as his laboratory. Everything now was in the custody of the law.

A week later, on the 8th August, the seals were broken in the presence of the widow, the creditors, and their legal representatives. The gathering was crowded, and entrance seemed free to all who wished to interfere. One notary, named Baglan, made an inventory of the furniture. Another notary, Le Roi, helped him. Le Roi had come without invitation, and did not (or could not) show any credentials proving him to be a party interested in the succession. He was promptly told that he had no right to stop in the house, and requested to go. As he absolutely refused to leave, and as nobody was prepared to use force, he was allowed to remain. Perhaps he had a watching instruction on behalf of some client who did not want his name revealed.

A magistrate presided over the formalities, Monsieur de Riantz, a substitute from the office of the "procureur du roi." With him came the commissary Picard to remove the seals he had affixed. There were several notaries. Fernant represented the creditors, Pierre Guyeux the widow, and a "huissier" or sheriff's assistant named Cruellebois, was selected to take charge of the property. Then a Carmelite priest, who had attended Sainte-Croix in his illness arrived, although seemingly he had little to do with the investigation. Another uninvited looker-on was a sergeant of police called Cluet, who was attached to the criminal Court of the Châtelet. He had a remote interest, for his wife had been maid to Madame de Brinvilliers' sister-in-law, and he knew the personal history of Sainte-Croix. Whilst the lawyers were arguing, Dr Moreau, who had been physician in attendance on Sainte-Croix, walked in with some of the neighbours. The man, who went under two names, sometimes calling himself Martin, and sometimes

De Breuille, wandered about the house. On and off he had acted as a servant to Sainte-Croix. Now he paid little attention to the taking of the inventory, and appeared to be searching for something. In the cellar, where the servants were opening bottles of wine, Martin was seen to smash a number of small glass phials which he had found. In the light of after events, this action had a grave significance.

The inventory was not concluded on the 8th August, and the meeting was adjourned until the 15th, when the smaller room was opened. By some unexplained means the Carmelite priest had possession of the key which he handed to the commissary. This was an irregularity to which no one paid much attention. But the priest seems to have entered the room before the others, for he was the first to notice on the table a sheet of paper upon which was written in large characters "My Confession." Without allowing the numerous legal gentlemen time to open an argument, he propounded the ecclesiastical law that such a document was sacred and should neither be seen or read. The magistrate agreed with him. The commissary Picard picked up the confession and dropped it on the fire without further ado. All were satisfied, and the investigation proceeded.

Gazing round the room they then found on a shelf a casket covered in red skin, about eighteen inches long and twelve inches high. The key was in the lock. Picard opened it. On top of the contents was placed half-a-sheet of notepaper upon which was written the following request.

I very humbly beg those persons into whose hands this casket may fall to be good enough to return it to Madame the Marquise de Brinvilliers living in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul, as all that it contains concerns her alone, and apart from this there is nothing in it of utility to anyone in the world. And in case she should have pre-deceased me,

everything in it is to be burnt without examination, and if anyone pretends ignorance of this wish I swear by the God I worship and upon all that is most sacred that I say nothing but the truth. Written at Paris, on the afternoon of May 25 1670.

SAINTE-CROIX.

There is a single packet addressed to Monsieur Pennautier which must be given to him.

This solemn command from the tomb produced an immense sensation. The widow Sainte-Croix recognised the casket at once. Her husband had always been anxious about its safe custody. Whenever he left Paris he invariably made arrangements for its disposition. Often it was taken by a maidservant called Guesdon, who was sometimes in his employ, sometimes in the employ of Madame de Brinvilliers. The magistrate peeped into the box. It contained a number of paper packets and several little glass phials. Madame Sainte-Croix and her legal adviser asked that the casket should be specially sealed and given into the care of an officer of the Court. Monsieur de Riantz agreed with him, relocked the box, sealed it, and gave it to the "huissier" Cruellebois, whilst Picard held the key. That finished the business on the 15th August.

On the same day the former valet La Chaussée appeared. He went into the office of the Commissary Picard, and explained that he had deposited 1700 livres with his old master for safe custody. Would the commissary kindly give them to him! There were also papers in the house which belonged to him. Seventeen hundred livres (about £350) was a large sum for a valet to claim, but La Chaussée said he had been in Sainte-Croix's service for seven years. He described the papers he wanted and said that the money was in a bag behind the window of the little room, and in the bag would be found two hundred pistoles and one hundred white écus or crowns.



He added that the bag contained a paper stating that the contents belonged to him.

The Commissary Picard was somewhat suspicious of La Chaussée who displayed an intimate knowledge of Sainte-Croix's laboratory.

"If you have the money in the house of the deceased," said the police agent brusquely, "you must turn up at the next meeting and oppose the sealing of the goods."

This did not please La Chaussée, and he pressed his demand for the bag behind the window. Incidentally Picard mentioned that the casket covered in skin had that morning been opened. La Chaussée stared blankly across the room for a moment, then clapped on his hat and ran. The commissary was left aghast. He knew that La Chaussée lived in the Rue de Grenelle, and he sent to his lodgings for an explanation of such extraordinary behaviour. But La Chaussée had vanished for good, which made it so far more curious that a warrant was at once issued for his arrest.

In the meanwhile Madame de Brinvilliers had been exceedingly active. She had been warned by Pen-nautier of the death of her former lover, but Madame Sainte-Croix was the first to tell her that the casket covered in skin had been taken charge of by the police. The widow Sainte-Croix hated the Marquise who had exercised a predominant control over her household, and even taken away her husband. This feeling of detestation she adroitly veiled. When the casket was opened she sent a man to Picpus with the message that during the taking of the inventory things had been found which were likely to prejudice the Marquise. It was a vague message cleverly contrived to throw the rival into an agony of fear. This purpose was achieved. Madame de Brinvilliers was much troubled.

"This Sainte-Croix," she said to the messenger, "was

clever enough to have forged my handwriting. But I have good friends."

Then she asked who had sealed the casket.

"The Commissary Picard of the Châtelet," replied the messenger.

"Ah, then!" cried the Marquise, "for fifty pistoles one can get the seals broken and put something else in the place of the present contents."

The messenger returned to Madame Sainte-Croix and repeated the conversation. She immediately warned Cruellebois to take every precaution to guard against the box and its seals being tampered with. So the casket was placed in the joint care of Cruellebois and Sergeant Cluet. This was on the 17th August. Madame de Brinvilliers soon heard of the arrangement, which added to her anxieties, for she knew that Cluet and his wife's mistress, Madame Villarceau d'Aubray, wished her no good. Several fragments of her conversation have been preserved.

"Indeed! They have found a red casket! But six months ago Sainte-Croix assured me that he had placed it in the hands of his confessor or else with Monsieur Dulong, Canon of Notre Dame."

Then to a man called Philippe, she remarked, "Monsieur de Pennautier is worried about the contents of the casket. He would give fifty louis d'or to have what there is inside it. It is of great importance and concerns us both."

"There is a rich man who would give four or six thousand livres for the packets."

"If the rain comes down in drops on me, it will come down in buckets on Monsieur de Pennautier."

The creditors, as well as the widow Sainte-Croix, were now getting anxious. The commissary and the magistrate had not found any money or jewels of value. On the 18th August, Madame Sainte-Croix's lawyer made

formal application to have the seals broken, and the contents of the casket examined.

The same day Madame de Brinvilliers surpassed even her former energy. She sent a message to Madame Sainte-Croix announcing her intention to visit her in the Rue des Bernardins at nine o'clock that evening. It was a rash idea, for there was no love lost between the two. But the Marquise was a woman who made up her mind very rapidly, and acted with decision.

When she arrived her remarks were to the point.

"The papers in the casket are able to harm many people. The best thing to do is to get hold of its custodian, give him a bribe, break the seal, and replace the papers with others."

The widow Sainte-Croix protested that she could do nothing. She had not the casket and could not control those who had. The interview was most unsatisfactory, and Madame de Brinvilliers, without loss of time, went on to Sergeant Cluet. She told him that Pennautier would give any money for the little red box. Cluet refused to produce it, and referred her to his superior, the Commissary Picard. It was eleven o'clock at night when she interviewed him. She pretended not to know where the casket actually was, and repeated to the commissary the story that Sainte-Croix had assured her that it was in the hands of the Canon Dulong or else of the priest attached to St Nicholas. After some hesitation she admitted that she too was interested in its contents. She boldly claimed it as her property and insisted that it should be given to her without further examination. Another version says that she called upon Madame Reich de Pennautier (had the financier become reconciled to his spouse?) but that angry woman refused to see her.

The next morning Commissary Picard received from the lawyer La Marre, who was acting for the Marquise, the offer of a large sum for the casket. Briancourt,

the tutor to the Marquise's children, also called upon the commissary and told him that the box was worth any ransom. But Picard was not to be moved.

The following day, Madame Sainte-Croix went to see a councillor at the Châtelet, Monsieur de Laune, and they decided to interview Madame de Brinvilliers at Picpus. The object of their visit is not clear. They found the Marquise at home and in a conversational mood. She declared that she had no idea what was in the casket. She called one of her page boys, and told him to fetch a similar casket of her own from her room. This she opened and produced to her visitors two bills signed by Pennautier. Her chief aim was to convey the fact that Pennautier was more concerned in the contents of the red casket than she was. It is possible that Cluet formed one of the party, for it is he who reports her remark that "Monsieur de Pennautier is much troubled. He would give money for the casket." She had already told a Madame Fausset, wife of one of the Châtelet officials, that there was no truth in the rumours of poison which were so widespread. "There is no substance in it. It will soon be forgotten. There is a rich man I know who will pay to arrange the affair. He is not a man of rank, but he is very rich."

Pennautier was plainly hinted at as being "the very rich man." He did not desert the Marquise in her trouble, but went to visit her at Picpus. Monsieur Funck-Brentano says that this step did him much honour. At the same time it may have been actuated by less nobler promptings, for he was undoubtedly gravely concerned. He explained his visit by saying that as he did not believe her guilty of the serious accusations which were rumoured in Paris, he visited Picpus to present his respects and give outward sign of his belief in her innocence.

In the meanwhile the casket was opened. The magis-



trate de Riantz, the "civil lieutenant" who had succeeded the unfortunate Dreux d'Offémont, the Commissary Picard, and a few others, went to the house of the sheriff's officer Cruellebois. La Marre, who acted as solicitor to Madame de Brinvilliers, made a curious protest. "If," said he, "there is any bill found in the casket for thirty thousand livres purporting to bear the signature of my client I intend to prove that the document was obtained by fraud."

Picard then examined the seals and declared them to be intact. Before he broke them the man known as Martin and also as De Breuille, who had been seen smashing bottles in Sainte-Croix's lodgings, created a diversion. He strongly objected to the opening of the casket. At last he became so excited and uncontrolled in his anger that the "civil lieutenant" threatened to have him ejected if he did not keep peace. The seals were finally broken, and the casket unlocked. As each object was taken out Sergeant Cluet wrote its description on a schedule.

The first packet was sealed in four places. On it was written in Sainte-Croix's hand, the following request.

Papers to be returned to Monsieur de Pennautier, Receiver-general of the clergy, and I very humbly beg those persons into whose hands they may fall to be good enough to return them to him in the event of my death, as they are of no value to anyone but him.

The packet was opened, and the first document was a request signed by Reich de Pennautier to Sainte-Croix. It asked him to pay to Monsieur Cusson, a merchant of Carcassone, a sum of ten thousand livres due to Pennautier under the name of Monsieur Paul from the Marquis and the Marquise de Brinvilliers. Cusson was empowered to give proper receipts for the whole, or part



of the money, and the paper was dated at Paris on the 17th February 1669.

Cluet then picked out some smaller packets. One was broken and the contents, a white powder, scattered on the table. Doctor Moreau took a pinch and threw it on the fire. It burnt with a violet flame. Other similar packets were opened and the doctor thought he recognised antimony, corrosive sublimate, and vitriol. This shed a new light upon the general anxiety on the part of two or three persons that the box should go unexamined. The "civil lieutenant" ordered the sitting to be suspended, the casket was resealed, and he himself took charge of it.

Events now moved rapidly. On the 19th August, Madame Sainte-Croix's lawyer made formal application that Pennautier should acknowledge his debts to the estate of Sainte-Croix and make payment. The casket was again opened, and other papers found. A bill was discovered signed by Madame de Brinvilliers.

I will pay in the month of January next to Monsieur de Sainte-Croix the sum of thirty thousand livres, value received from the said gentleman.

Made at Paris, this twentieth April 1670.

D'AUBRAY.

Two packets of letters were opened written by Madame de Brinvilliers to Sainte-Croix. Why he should have preserved them so carefully is beyond all comprehension. The first packet contained thirty-four letters, the second seventy-five, and they were charged with sentences which, according to a contemporary report, "marked an extreme ardour." In one sense they were love letters, and proved the close intimacy between the Marquise and Sainte-Croix. At some moments she was extremely unhappy, and one letter spoke of suicide in no uncertain terms.

"I have taken Glaser's receipt. You will see that I am going to sacrifice my life."

But womanlike before quitting the world she wished to have another conversation, if only for a quarter of an hour, with Sainte-Croix in order to bid him an eternal adieu ere she died. Apart from this mass of correspondence there was an account of expenditure for repairs executed at the Hotel d'Aubray and various receipts for money from the Marquis and his wife.

Further packets of powders were opened. Two contained corrosive sublimate, another six ounces of vitriol, another half a pound of sublimate, one with half an ounce of sublimate, and one with calcined vitriol. A folded packet contained two drams of corrosive sublimate in powder, a second contained an ounce of opium, another three ounces of antimony, another fifteen portions of sublimate. A little china pot was full of prepared opium. A packet marked "several curious secrets" was opened and found to contain twenty-seven pieces of paper on each of which was written a receipt to cure deafness, to discover the philosopher's stone, to stop the flow of blood, and many like formulæ.

The small glass phials were sent to Guy Simon, the apothecary, for analysis. A large square bottle contained simply clear water, or at least that was all Simon could make of it. A second bottle contained clear water with a white sediment. The sediment troubled him as he could find no acid matter, no fixed salt, and it was not tart to the tongue. Then he administered some of the liquid to a pigeon, a dog, and a chicken. The animals died, and on examination it was found that blood had slightly coagulated in the ventricle of the heart. Simon then put some of the white sediment on a piece of meat and gave it to a cat. The animal was violently ill for half an hour and was dead the next morning. Upon examination not the slightest trace of the action of the poison could be found in any part of the body.

Here was a poison new to the toxicological knowledge

of the seventeenth century. Its action was certain, and it left no traces of its work. Chemists could not determine its exact nature, but generally believed it to be a preparation of arsenic.

Whilst these analyses were in progress Madame Sainte-Croix displayed much activity. She demanded the bills in order that she might sue for the recovery of the money which they seemed to show was owing to her husband's estate. The magistrate De Riantz decided that the casket with its contents should remain in the custody of the law. He then cited Madame de Brinvilliers and Pennautier to appear before him for cross-examination as there were many points he considered they could explain.

The two orders were made returnable on the 23rd August, but neither of the parties appeared before the lieutenant of the police. The date was then made four days later and the two parties cited to appear on the 27th. That morning Hubert Desvignes, who was legal adviser to Pennautier, presented himself and asked for a further postponement as his client was not in Paris. Soon after he had gone La Marre appeared and on behalf of Madame de Brinvilliers declared that the bill bearing her name was a forgery. Later in the day Pennautier himself appeared, and said he had just returned from a visit to the Duc de Verneuil. He recognised the request to Saint-Croix to pay Cusson as being in his handwriting, said that he had lent the Brinvilliers a considerable sum of money and asked for the return of the documents bearing his signature.

Inquiries were being made in another direction. The disappearance of La Chaussée had created such an impression upon the energetic sergeant of police, Cluet, that he made every effort to unravel his past history. He may have had some personal score to wipe off, for he knew the valet at the time when Madame de Brinvilliers

introduced him into the household of her brothers. Under the same roof lived Madame d'Aubray's maid whom Cluet was courting.

La Chaussée had been lodging with a barber and bath-keeper named Gaussin in the Rue de Grenelle. There is not a surname in this affair which is not spelt in several different ways, and the woman called Guesdon who took charge of the red casket for Sainte-Croix was probably Madame Gaussin, the wife of the barber. Gaussin was a fashionable tradesman, and had been appointed barber to the King. Outwardly La Chaussée acted the part of an assistant. Sometimes he even condescended to assist in the shop for he was a skilled perruquier. Cluet gossiped with Gaussin who soon let out all he knew. La Chaussée's employment was merely a blind. The valet had been placed in the barber's house by a rich and powerful protector who was paying four hundred livres a year for his board and lodging. This patron turned out to be Sainte-Croix, although the money was paid through La Serre, Sainte-Croix's tailor.

The barber was more than willing to relate all he knew about his peculiar assistant. La Chaussée, said he, was getting on in the world. Monsieur Sainte-Croix was trying to buy him an appointment in the royal household as "officer of the goblet" or cup-bearer. This entailed the care of the linen, bread, wine, and fruit, which was served to the King. That La Chaussée of all men in Paris should aspire to such a position of trust was a remarkable commentary upon the manner in which the royal household was managed. It must be remembered, however, that every official appointment under the crown changed hands to the highest bidder.

Cluet also discovered that Monsieur de Pennautier was going to act as guarantee to La Chaussée. The valet had chattered at random and unguardedly about his affairs. He told Gaussin that he had not in reality deposited a



farthing with Sainte-Croix, but that he had a right to a certain sum for the great services he had rendered to his master.

This information redoubled the efforts of Cluet and the police at the Châtelet. On the 4th September, at one o'clock in the morning, La Chaussée was recognised and stopped in the street. He endeavoured to hide his face in his cloak. Concealment was impossible and he was immediately arrested by a police agent, Thomas Regnier.

Upon being searched a piece of paper was found in one of his pockets containing some calcined vitriol similar to that taken from Sainte-Croix's casket.

"What is this for?" asked the police agent.

"That?" replied the clever rogue. "That's to stop the flow of blood when I am so unlucky to cut someone in the shop with the razor."

The police took their prisoner to Gaussin's house in the Rue de Grenelle and thoroughly searched his room. In a cupboard they came across some more packets of white powder.

"Those," explained La Chaussée, "are remedies for skin disease."

This did not satisfy Regnier, and La Chaussée in an unhappy condition was marched off in custody.

The arrest of La Chaussée altered the state of affairs, and Madame de Brinvilliers was pointed at as the next victim. But the police were slow to act, for her rank in society placed her almost above suspicion. Regnier went to Picpus and told her that he had arrested La Chaussée. He also said that he had had many conversations with the commissary Picard. The Marquise changed colour but did not reply. He then escorted her to mass. After the service she re-opened the conversation about the red casket.

"Madam!" cried Regnier, "you cannot be concerned in such a business?"



“ How can I be ? ” she queried.

Regnier suggested that La Chaussée had possibly been telling lies with the intention to incriminate her. She agreed, adding that Sainte-Croix should have returned the casket, and that Pennautier knew a lot about the matter. Regnier then said good-bye to the Marquise and called next on Briancourt her former tutor.

When that young man learnt that La Chaussée was arrested he became thoroughly frightened.

“ She is a lost woman ! ” he cried.

“ Who ? ” asked Regnier.

“ Why the Marquise.” And the youth revealed the fact that his old mistress often spoke about poison and kept it in her room.

Two widows now commenced to move the authorities of justice. Madame de Saint-Laurent suggested that Pennautier had poisoned her husband, and the widow, Villarceau d'Aubray, entered a formal accusation against the valet La Chaussée and his mistress Madame de Brinvilliers of having poisoned her late husband the “ civil lieutenant.” The grounds upon which she based the accusation were slender and mainly circumstantial, but they were strong enough for the issue of a decree of arrest against the Marquise.

When the police reached Picpus to execute the order they found the bird had flown. A few nights before, lawyer La Marre had arrived exceedingly late at the country house. His news was evidently grave and he counselled such speed that he assisted his client to remove many of her goods through the window. All the police could learn was that the Marquise and a single maid-servant had gone to London.

They might have expected such action. But perhaps, judging from the extreme slowness of their movements, they knew it before they entered Picpus.

PART III  
THE PUNISHMENT



## CHAPTER XVII

### ARREST OF LA CHAUSSÉE—HIS TRIAL AND TORTURE—CONFESSION AND DEATH

UPON the death of Dreux D'Aubray in 1667 only half his valuable appointment was given to his son. For a long while Colbert had been contemplating an alteration in the police system of Paris. The streets were abominably dirty, and so badly guarded as to be positively unsafe without an escort. So the civil functions were alone transferred to D'Aubray d'Offémont, and the purely criminal administration was placed in the custody of Nicholas de la Reynie, who was soon by the curious irony of events to enforce the law against the eldest daughter of his predecessor.

There is little difficulty in obtaining an exact idea of the features of the men who worked so well to build up the glory of "Le Roi Soleil," for towards the latter end of the seventeenth century French art was particularly rich in portrait painters. La Reynie was no exception to the general rule, and there is an admirable painting by Mignard, most exquisitely engraved by Van Schuppen. Here we can study the dreaded chief of the police in the very habit of life. Despite the sarcasm of the Duchesse de Bouillon he was not altogether ill-looking. Her witty remark was a Parisian joke for years. She was being examined by La Reynie during the investigation of the mysterious poison scandal which so quickly succeeded the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers. La Reynie's ques-

tions were somewhat uncomfortable for the fair Mancini, but in his dogged manner he was determined to probe the truth of the Duchess's dealings in the world of occultism.

"Have you ever seen the devil?" asked La Reynie. The Duchess was accused, amongst other misdeeds, of sorcery.

"I see him at this moment," replied the lady without hesitation. "And a very ugly man he is, too. He is disguised as a councillor of state."

La Reynie did not further pursue this line of his examination. Looking at Mignard's portrait the gibe is rather exaggerated. There is not much of the Mephistopheles about Nicholas de La Reynie. His face shows a man who is a keen judge of character. The eyes are open and penetrating, with the faintest trace of a twinkle. The chin is tight and firm. This magistrate has a pride in his functions, nothing can move him from his sense of duty, his temperament is well-balanced, a rogue will receive strict justice from his acute decision. Colbert again proved his genius in selecting the right man for the right task, although it is the fashion of some recent French historians to teach that La Reynie was a mediocre blunderer subject to panic.

This was not the opinion of his contemporaries, who were better able to appraise his qualities. Mazarin had watched his early official career with benevolent care. "He had much intelligence and diplomacy," wrote the Marquis de Sourches. "He spoke little, and had an air of deep gravity." From the day he became lieutenant of police, upon the death of the elder d'Aubray in 1667, until the moment when he tendered his resignation to his sovereign in 1697, he never for an instant lost the confidence of his master. Even the Parisians learned to admire him, and admitted that he had improved their city vastly for the better. His power was assumed at a



critical period in the history of Lutetia. Swarms of rogues and criminals had almost gained a mastery of the capital. La Reynie was not only able to deal with the adventurers who infested Paris; he was bold enough to punish vice which drew its support from the higher ranks of society. All his skill was required to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of Sainte-Croix.

Sergeant Cluet of the Châtelet had kept his patron, Madame Marie Thérèse Mangot de Villarceau d'Aubray (to give her full name), well informed of the proceedings about the red casket and its contents. That lady lost no time in returning to Paris to avenge the death of her husband. She directly accused La Chaussée, who was under lock and key, Madame de Brinvilliers, who was hiding in London, and Sainte-Croix, who was in his coffin, of having conspired together to effect the murder of her husband and her brother-in-law. Whilst Colbert, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, was endeavouring to arrange the extradition of the Marquise, La Reynie, and the Criminal Court of the Châtelet tried to arrive at the measure of guilt which covered the servant.

The unfortunate fact became clear that there were no direct proofs against La Chaussée. Madame d'Aubray produced all kinds of gossip. Louis Ridou gave evidence that when La Chaussée was asked how his master went on, the impudent lackey jestingly replied, "I don't know. The old devil languishes long enough. He gives us plenty of trouble. I can't say when his light will go out." Jean le Roux heard La Chaussée talk with the servants in the Hôtel d'Aubray. "The old devil is dead. I have put him in his shroud. If he were still living I would have done it all the same." His intimacy with Madame de Brinvilliers was proved, and also the hitherto unknown fact that she was responsible for his introduction into her brother's household. The elder of the two brothers had been ill from the time he shared the fatal

giblet pie, during the Easter of 1670. But no one could prove that La Chaussée had doctored the pie. He had helped the cook, and that was all that could be said.

The Court was at first inclined to clear up this lack of evidence in a peculiarly seventeenth-century manner. La Chaussée should be applied to the "question," or torture, "*manentibus indiciis*." This formula, says Maître Cornu, in his review of the legal aspects of the Brinvilliers case, in the old criminal procedure of France signifies that where the accused cannot be induced to confess his crime when under torture, the judges in default of sentencing him to death, could condemn him to pecuniary damages or lighter punishment.

Madame d'Aubray energetically protested against this step, for if La Chaussée could endure the torture and hold his tongue, there was some chance that he might go free. And if he escaped the Marquise would never be convicted. If we knew the inner history of the d'Aubray family we should probably find a long-standing enmity between Madame d'Aubray and her sister-in-law.

The arguments as to the advisability of torturing La Chaussée, in order to extract incriminating evidence, were so hotly pressed that the "Parlement" of Paris was invited to adjudicate. It is not clear whether La Chaussée suffered torture before he received sentence of death, but he certainly did immediately after. The most likely method was that of the "*brodequins*." He avowed nothing. He was then ordered to be broken on the wheel, a favourite punishment for such malefactors as horse thieves or highway robbers. Again he was tortured, and to quote Maître Cornu, "very happily for the conscience of his judges," the wretched footman, during his torment previous to execution, confessed enough to justify his fate. Some fragmentary remains still exist of his first examination, on the 24th March 1673, before he was put to the "question."

Jean Hamelin, called La Chaussée, twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age, native of N—— (name illegible).

Admitted that he had been arrested at eight o'clock in the morning. Said that he had slept in the house of a person named Beaulieu.

It was proved that he had not slept there.

Admitted that he had not. Said that he did not hide the name of his master when arrested. Had formerly been in the house of Gaussin, a bath-keeper, and had left him because he had no more money, and owed two hundred francs. Had since been staying at Saint-Germain.

Told that he must have known he was accused.

He denied all knowledge of his accusation, and said that he had not left Paris, and had not been to Rouen, or in Picardy. The vitriol which had been found on him had been given to him by a surgeon at the Hôtel Dieu. Its object was to staunch the flow of blood. He had two keys with him which opened some cupboards in which he kept two bottles containing spirits of wine. He was a servant to Monsieur de Plerat before he became servant to Monsieur de Sainte-Croix. When he left he had four hundred francs which he gave to Sainte-Croix to take care of. He had been in the army with Monsieur Herval, and had also lived with the brother of the civil lieutenant.

“ Who put you there ? ” asked a magistrate.

“ I applied for the position myself.”

“ When did you first conspire to poison the brothers d'Aubray ? ”

“ There was never any plot to poison them. I never had any poison. I earned six thousand francs in the army, and I have never spoken anything but the truth.”

“ Did you not know that Madame de Brinvilliers gave to Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, in April 1670, a promise to pay 30,000 francs ? ”

“ I know nothing about it. I never went to Madame de Brinvilliers’ house except by order of Monsieur d’Aubray. One day when I was with her a gentleman called, and as she did not wish him to see me she made me hide by the side of her bed. I never saw Monsieur d’Aubray the father. I did not poison Monsieur d’Aubray d’Offémont. I did not give him poison to drink, and I put no glass on his table. I have already said that the glass was too small to be able to place one’s finger at the bottom.”

La Chaussée denied everything. He even asserted that he did not know of the intimacy between Madame de Brinvilliers and Sainte-Croix. After this examination, with its negative result, he was condemned to death.

Under torture his attitude changed. A few brief notes have been preserved of the interrogatory.

“ I am guilty. Madame de Brinvilliers gave poison to Sainte-Croix. He told me about it.”

“ What did he tell you ? ”

“ Sainte-Croix told me that she gave it in order that her brothers might be poisoned.”

“ Was it a powder, or a liquid ? ”

“ A liquid. It was administered in wine and in soup.”

“ What did you put in the dish at Villequoy ? ”

“ A clear liquid, taken from Sainte-Croix’s casket. I gave poison to both the brothers. Sainte-Croix promised me one hundred pistoles.”

“ Did you report to Sainte-Croix the effect of the poison on Monsieur d’Aubray ? ”

“ Yes, and he gave me some more poison.”

“ You are exhorted to tell the truth. Who were your accomplices ? ”

“ Sainte-Croix always told me that Madame de Brinvilliers knew nothing about the matter. But I believe that she knew everything.”

“ What makes you think so ? ”



“ Because she often used to speak about poisons.”

“ Did you ever see her at Picpus ? ”

“ Yes. We talked about the casket, and I asked her if she knew where the casket was.”

“ Was it ever suggested that Madame d’Aubray should be poisoned ? ”

“ Sainte-Croix was not able to get me into her household. Some days before the death of Sainte-Croix, Belleguise took from his lodgings two boxes, but I do not know what was inside. I knew Belleguise ever since I was in the service of Sainte-Croix. Madame de Brinvilliers asked me to tell her where the casket had been placed, and if I knew what was inside. I did not think it was in Sainte-Croix’s rooms, because for a long while it had been placed in the care of a woman called Guédon, who had been working with me in the Rue de Grenelle. I do not know whether Guédon was acquainted with its contents.”

La Chaussée was again asked if Sainte-Croix had given poison to Madame Villarceau d’Aubray.

“ No,” he replied. “ But if he could have introduced anyone into her household he would have done so.”

The lackey was then taken to the prison chapel to rest for an hour before being carried to the place of execution. Upon being asked if he had anything further to add, he made some rambling observations about a certain Lapiere who had been living with Belleguise, and who was sent away. The sense is difficult to arrive at, and after his torture he may have been slightly delirious and light-headed.

He was then taken in a cart to the Place de Grève, and his limbs broken with an iron bar, a singularly atrocious punishment which was not abolished until the age of the great revolution. Like all cruelties of this nature, it never prevented a single crime. Indeed the brigands and thieves, for whom it was chiefly intended,



were in the habit of hardening their flesh against its agonies, and in their moments of recreation used to carry out mock but painful tortures of the wheel, which enabled them to suffer on the public scaffold with fortitude and resignation.

The death of La Chaussée did not close the criminal investigation. During and after his torture, he had mentioned several names. La Reynie and the magistrates followed up each clue. The first man to get hold of was Belleguise.

La Chaussée evidently knew this man extremely well. Sometimes he went under the name of Du Mesnil. He was clerk to Pennautier, and lived in the same house as his master in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins.

The lackey had said that search was being made where nothing could be found, but that if Belleguise were asked why he had helped a certain Lapiere to escape, much might be discovered. Belleguise had offered to assist La Chaussée if he wished to leave Paris. Inquiries proved that Lapiere was Sainte-Croix's servant, and had also been a servant in the employ of Pennautier.

Some accounts showed that sums of money had been paid without ostensible reason by Belleguise to Martin, alias De Breuille, the man who wandered about Sainte-Croix's house breaking bottles, and who so persistently opposed the opening of the casket. Martin had been in the service of Sainte-Croix's brother and had also lived with d'Alibert, the business associate of Pennautier.

Martin presented himself before the Court to give some personal explanations. He described himself as a gentleman in the King's service, and formerly a collector of taxes at Montauban, near Rennes. He had some business dealings with Sainte-Croix, had known that he was interested in alchemy, but had never heard him speak of poisons.

Every fresh investigation linked together the names

of Pennautier and Sainte-Croix, and the discovery of the casket and its contents inspired a crowd of men and women with strange terrors and significant precautions.

On the 27th March, three days after the execution of La Chaussée the following decree was made public.

The Court, having considered the report of the examination and the execution on the twenty-fourth of the present month of March 1673, containing the declaration and confession of Jean Amelin, called La Chaussée, orders that the following persons, namely Belleguise, Martin, Poitevin, Olivier, the father Verron, the wife of Guésdon the hairdresser, do appear before the Court to be interrogated concerning the matter. It also orders that the decree of arrest issued against Lapierre, and that the decree requiring Pennautier to appear, both issued by the lieutenant of criminal affairs, be forthwith executed.

Given in Parliament, the 27th March 1673.

Lapierre could not be found. Martin, otherwise De Breuille, was examined on the 22nd April. The minutes of his evidence have been lost. He probably denied all knowledge of Sainte-Croix. Madame Guésdon followed him, and told the Court that Martin had brought to her husband's house in the Rue de Grenelle a casket belonging to Sainte-Croix. Martin rose in the Court and accused her of lying. He definitely denied all knowledge of the casket. Evidence was given that La Chaussée often met Lapierre, Martin, Belleguise, and others, in the Place Maubert, at the house of the widow Brunet. These rooms were afterwards inhabited by Martin. The Court then broke up for a short interval. Martin spoke to Madame Guésdon, and he was overheard saying—

“ Above all, don't mention a word about the casket ! ”

Later in the day the Court resumed its sitting and examined Pennautier. He admitted an acquaintance with Sainte-Croix, having known him about ten or twelve years. Sainte-Croix sometimes visited him, and had

borrowed two hundred pistoles. He had seen him for the last time about three weeks before his death during his last illness. Pennautier said that he knew Madame de Brinvilliers, but not very intimately, simply as a person of rank who lived in the same neighbourhood.

In 1662 Madame de Brinvilliers lent him 30,000 livres, which had since been repaid. Later, in return for this service, Pennautier under the name of Paul had lent 10,000 livres to the Brinvilliers, husband and wife. Of this sum 2000 livres 12 sous had been repaid to his agent, Cusson.

"But?" asked a magistrate. "Why did you visit Madame de Brinvilliers immediately after the discovery of the casket? You had not visited her for some ten years!"

"I did not believe her culpable. In my eyes, she was a woman of rank whom I had known in better circumstances, and who was now struck by calumny. I considered it my duty to pay her my respects. It is my habit upon such occasions. I went to Picpus. I did not find her at home. Out of the simplest civility I wrote a card, and I did not go again."

"Did you know La Chaussée?"

"I have never heard his name mentioned before."

"Do you know Martin?"

"I remember having seen a man of that name in my offices, but I know very little about him. The papers found in the casket show clearly what my dealings were in reference to the "Paul loan." The receipt Cusson gave was as follows:—

"I, the undersigned, admit having received from Monsieur and Madame de Brinvilliers, by the hand of Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, the sum of two thousand livres twelve sous, in deduction, and being taken from the larger sum that the said Sieur and lady de Brinvilliers owe to Monsieur Paul, in principal and interest. At Paris, the 21st May 1667.

"CUSSON"

What could be clearer? At the request of Sainte-Croix I agreed to lend to the Brinvilliers ten thousand livres. I wished to do it in the name of a third party, Paul Sardan. The expiration of the term of the loan approached as I was going to Languedoc. I told a cloth merchant at Carcassone, Cusson by name, who was then in Paris, to collect this sum for me together with several others. He was paid through Sainte-Croix, but he received only two thousand livres. You ask me why I did not take action to recover the remainder? Well, it is because I am not the kind of man to push a debtor to the last extremity. From what I heard there was a strong hope that the Brinvilliers would repay me sooner or later."

On the 24th April, Alexander Belleguise was examined. He admitted that he knew Sainte-Croix closely. He had met him at Pennautier's house, and had visited him several times at the Rue des Bernardins, and also at his private, or secret, rooms in the Place Maubert, up a cul-de-sac sometimes called "de la Valette," where Sainte-Croix worked to discover the philosopher's stone.

On the 16th July, it was announced that Pennautier was discharged from the inquiry. On the same day an order of arrest was issued against Martin, but when the police went to execute it, they found that Martin had followed Lapierre's example and disappeared.

Belleguise was again summoned to appear. His conduct, viewed in the light of fresh evidence was most suspicious. Witnesses said that during the trial of La Chaussée he had been much upset. Upon the day when the unfortunate servant was broken on the wheel, in the Place de Grève, Belleguise went from person to person, agitatedly demanding—

"Has La Chaussée spoken? Has he said anything?"

On the 9th September the Court of the Châtelet ordered that Belleguise should produce the two boxes which he



had removed from Sainte-Croix's lodgings. The sagacity of La Reynie was here considerably at fault for these boxes should have been seized months earlier.

However, Belleguise produced them promptly. They contained thirty ells of tapestry and a piece of black cloth.

"Sainte-Croix owed me some money, and this was given me in discharge of the debt," explained Belleguise.

But papers were found which indicated that the boxes had contained many other things including alchemical notes. Belleguise's room in Pennautier's house was suddenly searched, and the correspondence discovered from Sainte-Croix which proved that he was endeavouring to make Belleguise move Pennautier for assistance.

Belleguise had a ready explanation. Sainte-Croix occupied himself solely with philosophy and chemistry. The proposition referred to in the letters concerned his quest for the philosopher's stone. But what about the repetition of the word "safety," and the necessity for a secret laboratory in the cul-de-sac of the Place Maubert? It was said that all the mysterious doings of Sainte-Croix arose from his desire to study deeply and in quietude. A Norman Comte de la Tour had dragged Sainte-Croix into the practice of alchemy, and when the Comte went away Sainte-Croix renounced philosophy.

Belleguise involved himself in a tangle of explanations. Other witnesses gossiped about his past history. In his house in the Rue des Vieux-Augustins, Pennautier's house, he had been seen to open a door leading to the attics. The room contained furnaces, mortars, crucibles, earthenware and brass bottles, all the equipment of a laboratory. Was Pennautier an alchemist? In the time of d'Alibert it was reported that Belleguise had been a moneylender. From that it was an easy transition to assert that he was a Jew. He was possibly a coiner! He had bought a service of silver plate and paid for it



with bad money. Belleguise under severe examination admitted that he had opened the two boxes and burnt "some wicked letters." There was also in the box some "essence of silver for the philosopher's stone."

Wearied with all this farrago of fact and nonsense, of simple truth and self-evident falsehood, of gossip and hearsay, the Criminal Court of the Châtelet relegated the affair to the shelf. From the autumn of 1673, to the spring of 1676, justice appeared to be asleep. But Nicholas de La Reynie and his active agent Desgrez were wide awake. They forgot nothing, and were determined to bring one of the criminals to punishment.

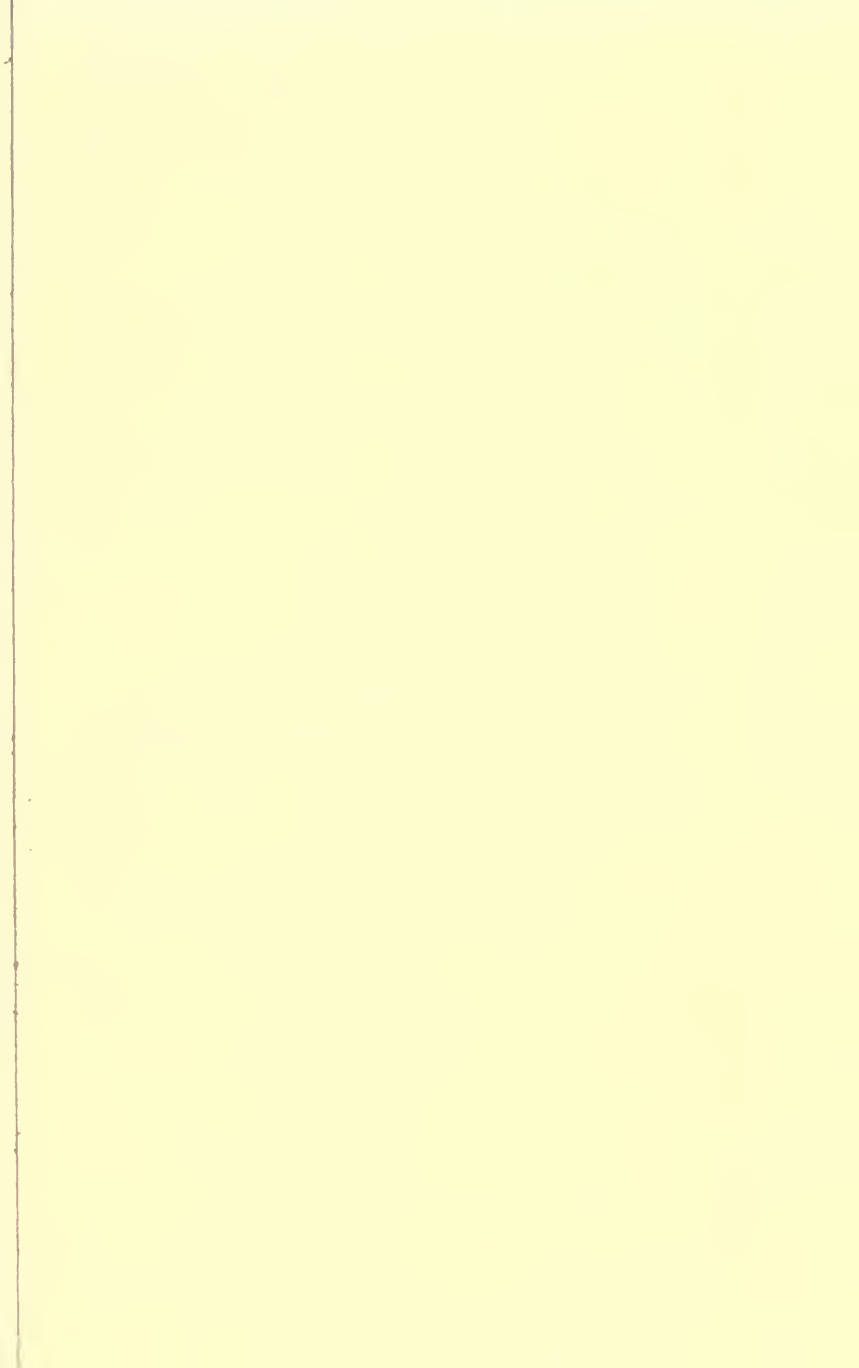
## CHAPTER XVIII

THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS' TRAVELS IN ENGLAND AND HOLLAND  
—THE KING IS ANXIOUS FOR HER ARREST, WHICH IS ULTIMATELY  
EFFECTED AT LIÈGE—HER CONFESSION AND EFFORTS TO COM-  
MIT SUICIDE

THE story of Madame de Brinvilliers' adventures as a fugitive can never be told, for no record exists. With her maid, and as much money as she could gather together in the short time at her disposal, she fled to London. La Reynie and his agents traced her movements until she was swallowed up in the huge city. They then lost her, and she became the subject of animated diplomatic representations between the statesmen of the two countries.

On the 19th November 1672, two months and a half after the arrest of La Chaussée, Colbert wrote from Versailles to his brother De Croissy, the French ambassador in England. De Croissy had already sent some information about the Marquise to the authorities at Paris. Colbert replied that it would lead to too great a scandal if a crime of this nature went unpunished, and the ambassador was to use every persuasion that he might think of, to induce the King of England to hand over the fugitive to his brother of France.

Five days later came the response. King Charles consented upon condition that his officers were put to no expense in the matter. They were not to have the trouble of conducting the prisoner to France. Madame de Brinvilliers was to be forcibly abducted by the ambassador's servants and hurried across to Calais, an





VERSAILL.  
*After the engraving.*



IN 1674  
by Israel Silvestre





extraordinary method of extradition to which the English judges would probably have strongly objected. "I shall have much trouble to succeed in this business," adds De Croissy, but he promises to do his best and to assist with all his powers the officers who are coming from France.<sup>1</sup>

On the 27th November, Colbert writes again. King Louis is very pleased to know that King Charles is willing to help him, in allowing the lady to be arrested. "The horror of her crime has inclined him to aid justice. His Majesty wishes you to thank him on his part. As soon as she is arrested do not fail to send us an advice by express courier. Have her taken in all safety to Calais." Orders have been given to the Duke de Charost and the King's Lieutenant at that port to shut her up in the citadel.

The next letter in this correspondence is from London. De Croissy writes on the 5th December. It is rather pessimistic. "I will do everything possible to execute the orders you have given me about Madame de Brinwilliers. But, whatever be the freedom to act permitted to me by the King of England, it will not be so easy for me to succeed in this matter as you think."

On the 8th December, another dispatch from London arrives in Paris. De Croissy has been ill, and whilst staying at the Portuguese ambassador's house for a change of air, meets Lord Arlington. The Brinwilliers matter was discussed at length particularly in relation to a letter, now lost, from Colbert, dated 3rd December. Some unknown reasons render the permission given by King Charles quite useless to the ambassador. Lord Arlington gives some hope that His Majesty of Great

<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV. and his ministers "had long arms" which reached all parts of Europe, and the laws of extradition were frequently broken. Marilly's arrest by French officers in Switzerland "frightened the world. That of the Armenian patriarch Avedyck had not a less effect."

Britain would approve of a fresh suggestion. "He will soon let me know his feelings on the matter. I will urge the affair as much as possible, and will not fail to inform you of the result."

That is the end, for Madame de Brinvilliers, finding her residence in London likely to come to a sudden termination, left the English city for more complete safety in Holland. The French ambassador failed to discover her exact location, but she was evidently fully informed of the secret negotiations between Paris and London. Probably she had friends in both places. There were many French families closely allied to her, who had no wish to see their high position sullied by the scandal which would arise out of her public trial. It is more than possible that they sent a warning across the Channel. On the other hand, the English Court was infested by charlatans and alchemists drawn together by King Charles's interest in chemistry and its allied sciences. Exili had visited London—might have been in London at that moment. The English King or his statesmen may have indirectly hinted that it would be advisable for the Marquise to move. For although permission was at first given for her arrest, De Croissy undoubtedly found himself obstructed when endeavouring to execute it. During the age of the Restoration, the Crown more than once defied the Law. But Charles, with all his easy-going qualities and lack of respect for the constituted authorities of his kingdom, possibly dreaded the storm which would have surely broken out, when it became understood that foreign police were given free powers to act without control on British soil.

For over three years Madame de Brinvilliers remained in hiding, her only companion being Geneviève Bourgeois, widow of an old family servant called Damoiseau. According to her own evidence she rested at various times in Cambrai, Valenciennes, and Antwerp, finally settling

as a boarder in a convent at Liège, then a neutral territory under the dominion of a prince-bishop, although the French army had surprised the citadel and remained in occupation since 1675. She was extremely poor, and would have been utterly penniless, if her sister had not made her an annual allowance of 400 livres, a sum which was greatly reduced by the exorbitant rates of exchange.

Here she might have remained in devout but irksome solitude until the scandal of her misdeeds had been quite forgotten. But her implacable enemy in Paris, the widow of her dead brother, never lost sight of her vengeance. Upon the actual day arranged for the evacuation of the French troops from Liège, Madame de Brinvilliers was arrested. Had she retained her freedom, for a few more hours she would probably have lived in security for the remainder of her life. According to the popular story the fatal result was chiefly owing to her own recklessness and folly.

On the 16th March 1676, Louvois wrote from the palace of Saint-Germain to a certain Monsieur Descarrières. Louvois was the all-powerful minister of war, then at the summit of his glory. Descarrières was a secret agent of slightly chequered career. He had started life as a clerk to Fouquet, but when that statesman was consigned to the fortress-prison of Pignerol, Descarrières or Bruant (for he went under both names) fled to Belgium to escape a similar fate. He obtained renewed favour with the French by acting as a spy in the conspiracy of the Chevalier de Rohan, and he had done useful work in unearthing valuable information during the wars with Holland.

“The King,” wrote Louvois, “wishes to arrest a person who is now in Liège. This person will be indicated to you by a man who will present a letter from me dated this same day. You will have her placed in the citadel of Liège, until she can be conducted with safety to Maestricht, and guarded until a new order is issued by

His Majesty. Confer with the mayor, Goffin, as to the means to be used to arrest her after she has been pointed out to you. If you cannot, the King wishes the officer in charge of the citadel to seize her by force. . . . When you have carried out this order, write to the Marshal d'Estrades for a good escort to take her in safety to the prison at Maestricht."

On the 22nd March Descarrières acknowledges the letter from Liége. "If the state of affairs at Liége permits me to be present, I will do as you order, if the thing is possible." Then he adds, "the man who brings the letter from you arrived this morning, and I only wait his indication to satisfy the King's order."

This man was the celebrated police officer, Desgrez, who had already been connected with the scandals created by the Marquise. In 1663, he had been given the duty of conveying the poisoner, Exili, to Calais for déportation. He was now about thirty-six to thirty-eight years of age, very good looking, elegant in all his ways, and extremely well-spoken. Desgrez was one of the first of the cosmopolitan detectives who to-day occupy so important a rôle in fact as well as in fiction.

The story of the arrest of Madame de Brinvilliers belongs to romance. Many historians deny its details, but there is no inherent impossibility in the tale. Desgrez arrived at Liége in the habit of a French abbé, "young, amiable and gallant," ostensibly a wanderer curious to see everything that crossed his path. Interested in the history of Madame de Brinvilliers, he obtained an introduction to her in the convent, and rapidly paid his court. She was wearied by her peaceful existence, and smiled upon the handsome abbé. He exercised his blandishments so effectually that she consented to accompany him for a promenade along the banks of the river Ourthe. When they were at



sufficient distance from the town, they met a coach. At a sign from Desgrez, some hidden police officers sprang out and seized the Marquise. Shutting her up in the coach, they were quickly able to convey her to the prison at Liége. The affair was thus carried through promptly and without excitement.

Monsieur Ravaisson says that there is no document giving any idea that the arrest was made other than by the ordinary forms of justice. But only after Madame de Brinvilliers had been seized, was the usual procedure followed. The embroideries of Alexandre Dumas may safely be disregarded. Desgrez arrived in Liége on the 22nd, and the criminal was secured on the 25th, which did not leave much time for lengthy love scenes. Desgrez probably was in disguise, for when the Marquise was in London, she received early notice of the steps to be taken, and so successfully eluded the police. And again Desgrez found it much easier to carry out the actual arrest in the open country than in the crowded and disturbed streets of Liége.

Descarrières reported the arrest to Louvois, without loss of time. "I gave you notice yesterday, Monseigneur, by the ordinary post, that the man with your authority had arrived here. To-day I have the honour to inform you that the lady in question is actually arrested and in the citadel, under the guard of the police officers, and that I have sent an express to the Marshal d'Estrades asking him to send a good escort to take her away. It was fortunate that I was here, and that the troops had not evacuated the citadel, for otherwise it would have been impossible. I had no need to employ force, which would not have been convenient under the present circumstances of our leaving. . . . I thought that the King would like this news at the earliest, and so I make use of this courier. The burgomasters have behaved so well that they have placed in my hands their magisterial

key in order to take this lady, and they have not asked me the reason."

In the meanwhile Desgrez went to the convent and searched the room belonging to the Marquise. He made some important discoveries, which Descarrières announced to Louvois the next day.

"I send you, Monseigneur, a duplicate of the letter which I gave myself the honour of writing to you yesterday, and sending by the courier the burgomasters of Liége have dispatched to the Court. To that letter I must add that I have taken with the lady a little casket of papers and letters of which she has the key, and which has not yet been examined. She told the mayor, Goffin, that it contained her confession, and she begged him to return it to her. The police officer was present as a private person at the arrest,<sup>1</sup> and I have sealed this casket with my seal, and he has also placed his seal upon it. We will take it to Maestricht to return to her, or to do as the King directs. We are waiting for the escort from the Marshal d'Estrades to convey her to Maestricht. However, I am able to assure you that she is well guarded by Monsieur Dreux, who is in command, Monsieur de Montfranc being absent. Although Monsieur Dreux<sup>2</sup> is related to her he is exercising particular care with regard to his prisoner, and for a last precaution we are making her change all her linen and clothes."

On the 29th March the first stage of the journey to Paris was commenced. The Marshal d'Estrades writes to the Abbé d'Estrades: "Madame de Brinvilliers, that wicked woman who has poisoned so many men, has been arrested in Liége and taken to the citadel. I sent my

<sup>1</sup> This bears out the popular story that Desgrez was in disguise. It must be noticed that Descarrières does not say that he personally effected the arrest.

<sup>2</sup> He must have been closely related to the Dreux d'Aubray family, probably a first cousin.

coach for her, and have locked her up in the prison (of Maestricht) whilst waiting the King's orders. He has already sent an officer of the constabulary to arrest her." On the same day Descarrières writes to Louvois: "The lady Brinvilliers is here, in the town house, where she is never out of sight, a very necessary precaution, for she has attempted during the past days to swallow some broken glass."

This was true. The unhappy woman had been seized with such a violent passion after her unexpected arrest that she gave herself up for lost. When she saw the casket containing her confession in the hands of the hated Desgrez, for a moment she relinquished all hope. Deprived of a knife, at one of her meals she had seized an opportunity to break her glass and swallow the fragments. Such an attempt gives some clue to her wild temper. Her guard quickly seized her by the throat and prevented her self-destruction. But three times during the journey she endeavoured to commit suicide.

Her activity was unceasing. She tried to swallow a pin, but one of the police officers, Claude Rolla, who was watching her closely, forced her to disgorge it. Then she attempted to suborn her guards. Another police officer from Paris, Antoine Barbier, watched her as she sat at table.

"If you will help me to escape I will make your fortune," she said under her breath.

"How will you do that?"

She calmly proposed that he should cut the throat of Desgrez. He refused, adding, however, that for anything else he would be at her service.

Taking pen and paper she wrote a short letter which she asked him to deliver.

"My dear Thiéria, I am in the hands of Desgrez who is taking me from Liége to Paris. Come quickly to save me.'

The personality of Thiéria remains a mystery. Monsieur Funck-Brentano thinks he was a former servant, another suggestion is that he was an old lover. He did not receive the missive, which Barbier gave to Desgrez. Clearly he must have been in the close vicinity of the cortège, for the following day the Marquise wrote a second letter to him saying that her escort consisted of eight persons only, and that it could be easily broken up by four or five determined men, and that she relied upon him for the attack to be made. Receiving no answer she wrote a third letter. If he was not strong enough to attack the escort he was at least to kill two of the four horses attached to the coach. In the confusion he was to steal the casket and throw it on the fire. Otherwise she was surely lost.

These letters were given to Desgrez who redoubled his care. One can picture the heavy coach with its four horses slowly lumbering and groaning along the bad roads of a country laid waste by war; the little guard of eight cavaliers with loaded musketoons anxiously searching the fields for an attack which might come from any corner; and the leather curtains of the coach drawn back from time to time, whilst a white-faced captive prays and yearns for the appearance of the "four or five determined men" who were to deliver her.

Thiéria did not receive any of these letters. But independently he worked on behalf of the captive. At Maestricht a man offered the minor police officers ten thousand livres if they would give the prisoner an opportunity to escape. They were not so easily corrupted. "Since my last letter," writes d'Estrades to Louvois, "a Frenchman of the middle class, married, of Liége, has come to Maestricht with the design to seek some means to save Madame de Brinvilliers. I have arrested him, and thrown him into prison." Monsieur Ravaisson



suggests that this person was the unknown Thiéria, otherwise Thierat, a former footman to Monsieur de Brinvilliers. But who supplied him with the large sum of money he offered to the guard? The mystery of Thiéria is one of the many inexplicable secrets which surround the story of the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

The authorities in Paris were fully alive to the possibilities of her escape. Correspondence was almost daily interchanged, and the King displayed the keenest interest. He approved of the sealing of the casket, and laid stress upon the orders to the Marshal d'Estrades with regard to a sufficient escort. Louvois was clearly aware that an effort might be made to rescue her by force. When the news of her attempted suicide arrived in Paris, Le Tellier wrote to the Marshal that all further attempts of this nature must be stopped, and that she must never be allowed out of sight.

On the 3rd April a letter addressed from Lille by Louvois to a Spanish "intendant," explains the prisoner's crimes and asks for a safe-conduct through the Spanish territory in Flanders. The escort was no longer confined to eight persons. Indeed its size was enormous. One hundred cavalry from the garrison at Huy were to conduct the Marquise from Maestricht to Dinan, and fifty horse were to accompany the coach from Dinan to within a few leagues of Rocroy. The Marshal d'Estrades himself took command of the convoy, and sends full information as to his movements to the ministers in Paris, whilst Descarières writes for orders concerning the casket, and Colbert puts in train the appointment of a magistrate to open the preliminary examination.

In the meanwhile the Marquise was far from being passive. She talks with her guards and even Desgrez. They are much troubled at her repeated attempts at suicide.

"You wicked woman," cries one indignant soldier.



"Having shed the blood of your own relations you now want to kill yourself."

"If I did so it was under bad advice," she answers without committing herself.

"You wretch!" says Desgrez. "You want to kill yourself. I can see that you poisoned your brothers."

"I lacked good advice," is the reply. "We all have our bad moments."

Ceaselessly she endeavoured to gain the interest of her guard. Monsieur Funck-Brentano tells us that she wrote to Pennautier. "He is as much interested in my safety as I am," she is reported to have said. She declared that Pennautier had great cause to be frightened, and that half the nobility of France were involved. "But I will say nothing." Adding with emphasis again, "I will say nothing!" She made a third attempt at suicide which is graphically described by Emmanuel de Coulanges in a letter sent by Madame de Sévigné to her daughter. And in its original French the realistic and witty sentences must be left.

In a letter dated the 15th April 1676, a friend of Madame de Sévigné writes under her mother's cover to Madame de Grignan that "the King has wished the Parliament to send Palluau, one of the councillors, to go to Rocroy to examine the Brinvilliers, because it is not desirable that this should be deferred until her arrival in Paris, where the whole magistrature is related to this poor wretch."

Denis Palluau was a wise and polished gentleman with a soft manner towards those with whom he had to deal. He arrived on the scene of action about the middle of April, and his first duty was to break the seals which closed the casket and to read the confession.

This document cannot be given in its entirety. It was written with much frankness in a country where a spade is always a spade. Madame de Brinvilliers may not have committed all the sins she noted in the confessions.

Michelet brushes some aside with the remark that they were the semi-innocent peccadilloes of a girl. Let it rest at that. She left no doubt regarding the crimes of which she was now accused.

“ I envied my brother.”

“ I accuse myself of giving poison.”

“ I accuse myself of having given poison to a woman who wished to poison her husband.”

“ I accuse myself that I did not honour my father, and that I did not render to him the respect I owed him.”

“ I accuse myself of having created general scandal.”

“ I accuse myself of having ruined myself with a man already married, and of having given him much money.”

“ I accuse myself that this man, whom my father imprisoned, was the father of two of my children.”

“ I accuse myself that a cousin of mine is the father of one of my children.”

“ I accuse myself of having poisoned my father. A servant gave him the poison. I was annoyed at the imprisonment of this man. I had my two brothers poisoned, and the servant was broken on the wheel for it.”

“ I have many times denied being the cause of the deaths of my father and my brothers.”

“ I wanted to poison my sister who was angry with me for the horrible manner of my life.”

“ I accuse myself of having given drugs five or six times to my husband. Then I regretted it and treated him until he was cured.”

“ I accuse myself of having taken poison, and also of giving some to one of my children.”

“ I accuse myself of having set fire to a house.”

It was an extraordinary document which included references to “bizarre and monstrous crimes.” No wonder the Marquise lost spirit when she saw it in the grasp of the Law. But why did she ever write it? Her conduct is inexplicable.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION—ARREST OF PENNAUTIER

**T**HE first examination of Madame de Brinvilliers took place on the 17th April 1676, at Mézières near Charleville. It was determined to commence the investigation before she had any opportunity to open up correspondence with her friends in the metropolis. She had so many powerful connections that it was generally considered that through secret influence she would be enabled to escape all punishment.

At Mézières she told the examining magistrate that after leaving Paris she went to London, and from London journeyed to the Netherlands. She then came home to Picardy, and the provinces newly conquered and added to France. She lived for some time in Cambrai and Valenciennes, remained in a convent for a year, and, when obliged to leave on account of the war, went to Antwerp and afterwards to Liège.

The casket seized by Desgrez, and sealed by Bruant Descarrières, was shown to her, and she recognised it. She said it contained some family papers of no importance and also another document. This was the general confession which she had written. When interrogated about this confession she declared that she had no memory of any kind with regard to it. When asked if La Chaussée had been broken upon the wheel she replied that she had forgotten, and the same extraordinary answer was given to the question, "Did you know Sainte-Croix?"

In fact she knew nothing.

“ I did not know the priest to whom I wished to confess. It was never my intention to make a confession such as you have read to me.”

“ I do not know why Monsieur Macé of Saint Sulpice hindered the post-mortem examination of my sister's body.” It was generally believed that the dead woman had ordered it so, as she wished her family to be spared a further proof of the Marquise's crimes.

“ I do not remember any intrigues of Sainte-Croix. Neither do I remember whether my father had him arrested for this reason.”

At last she admitted that Sainte-Croix was arrested in her own coach. But other denials followed.

“ I do not remember if Sainte-Croix ever gave me poisons.”

“ The thirty-four letters found in the casket belonging to Sainte-Croix were written by me.”

“ Why did you give the promissory note to Sainte-Croix ? ” asked the magistrate.

“ I put it into the hands of Sainte-Croix to serve me when I had need of it. I believed him to be enough of a friend to me to return it. The arrangement was made because of my creditors.”

“ This hardly explains why you drew a promissory note for thirty thousand livres in favour of Sainte-Croix ? ” replied the magistrate. “ It is dated April 1670, and made payable in January 1671.”

“ I did it under an indemnity that Sainte-Croix gave me.”

“ Where is this indemnity ? ”

“ I have lost it.”

“ Did your husband know about it ? ”

“ No.”

“ Was this note made before or after the death of your brother ? ” Possibly the magistrate referred to the indemnity, for in the previous questions he had given the



dates of the bill. The elder brother died in June 1670, the younger in the following September.

Madame de Brinvilliers would not enter into an argument over dates. "What does it matter?" she replied disdainfully. The magistrate refused to be put off.

"You must tell me. How did you come to make this note? What was the cause for it?"

"Sainte-Croix had lent me this money through one of his friends."

A fresh personality was imported into the discussion. The name was mentioned of Paul Foncenade, known as the Comte de Sardan, who had already fled from Paris to Holland where extradition was impossible.

"Did you owe two thousand livres to Paul or to Pennautier?" asked the magistrate.

"On the contrary, Pennautier owed me five thousand livres upon a note that I had given to my sister, Mademoiselle D'Aubray."

"Had you given a power of attorney to Chastel?"

"No."

In continuation of these involved financial matters Madame de Brinvilliers said: "I never gave Sainte-Croix authority on my account to pay to the said Paul, on his discharge, two thousand livres, being part of the ten thousand livres. Pennautier owed me five thousand livres on the bill I had sent to my sister, and that bill ought now to be in the possession of Cousté, who is the man of business to the Brinvilliers family."

"Were Sainte-Croix and Pennautier acquainted?" demanded the magistrate.

"They were very good friends, and had many secrets in common. But Sainte-Croix never told me what he knew."

"Was Saint-Laurent poisoned by Pennautier?" was the next startling question.

"I heard that Saint-Laurent was poisoned, but I never heard by whom. The report was spread by Saint-



Laurent's family. Sainte-Croix never spoke about it. Perhaps Sainte-Croix gave the poisons to Pennautier who passed them on to a servant."

"Who is the man who promised five or six thousand livres?"

"I do not know. Gossip said that there was a very rich person who had a packet which had been left in the casket, and who would give four or five thousand livres to get the packet. Somebody said it was Pennautier."

"Why did Sainte-Croix write a memorandum that the contents of the casket belonged to him?"

"He did it to displease me. He was a man without faith or religion."

"You are reported to have said that someone poisoned your brothers for two thousand pistoles."

"I do not remember to have said it. I did not see La Chaussée. He came but twice a year to my house. I gave him two écus at Picpus. I have never seen the casket or its contents. It does not belong to me. The memorandum was written by Sainte-Croix to make me angry."

"How did you come to know Pennautier?"

"Being rich, my husband and I lent him ten thousand livres on the security of his brother who was councillor at Toulouse. He gave us interest, and then repaid the capital. Since then we have had no dealings with him. I do not know whether Pennautier and Sainte-Croix saw each other often. Pennautier frequently went to Languedoc, and that reason alone would prevent them from meeting."

"Did you tell Cluet that Pennautier would give fifty pistoles to have the papers which concerned him taken out of the casket?"

"I deny it."

In answer to another question: "I know Martin and Belleguise, who were often with Sainte-Croix. Martin

was a fellow-countryman to Sainte-Croix. I do not know whether Martin took the casket to Guesdon's lodgings."

"Did you not try in company with Pennautier to get back the casket?"

"My family advised me to send for it."

"Do you know Cusson?"

"No."

"Did you give Chastel authority to borrow ten thousand livres from Paul, and did not Paul lend his name to Pennautier?"

"I do not know. And I do not know whether Sainte-Croix had Pennautier's order to pay ten thousand livres to Cusson. It is possibly true that Sainte-Croix paid Cusson two thousand livres on behalf of me and my husband. But I do not remember. I never owed ten thousand livres to Pennautier."

This completed the first examination, and it cannot be said that the magistrate extracted any important facts. Madame de Brinvilliers was then brought under escort to Paris, and Desgrez saw his prisoner safely locked up in the grim prison of the Conciergerie. She was placed in the cell in the Montgomery Tower which had been formerly occupied by Ravailiac, the murderer of Henri IV.<sup>1</sup> As she had attempted suicide more than once two women were left to guard her, and they never quitted her presence until she was carried out to execution.

On the 29th April she was re-examined.

"Did you not go to Offémont in 1666 with your father, and during the journey was he not exceedingly ill?"

"It seems to me that he was in as good health at Offémont as he was in Paris upon his return."

<sup>1</sup> This tower was inside the Palace close to the Sainte-Chapelle, and in appearance similar to the twin towers which face the Quai de l'Horloge. Its last prisoner was Damiens the regicide, and it was demolished in 1778.

“ Did he not have to wait a long while at the Récollets, and was he not angry at having to wait ? ”

“ I did not make him wait.”

“ Did Lapierre go on this journey ? ”

“ No.”

“ Did not your father take some soup at Offémont, and then was continually ill until his death ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ Did you know Egidio Exili ? ”

“ Yes. He was a prisoner in the Bastille with Sainte-Croix, and afterwards he remained some four to six months in Sainte-Croix’s house.”

“ Did you not tell Monsieur de Laune after Pennautier’s refusal to lend you money that if Pennautier did harm to you he would weep for himself ? ”

“ I do not remember to have spoken.”

“ Did you know Bressière at the ‘ Moor’s Head ’ in the Rue des Vieux Augustins ? ”

“ No.”

“ Pennautier, being one of your friends, and participating in your crimes, it is evident he is guilty.”

“ I did not know what I was doing when I wrote the letters to Pennautier. I have never had any business with him.”

Madame de Brinvilliers was then questioned about her knowledge of the poisoning of one of Monsieur de Rouley’s clerks.

“ I know nothing about it.”

The Court asked another question about the note for three thousand livres which elicited no clear reply. On the 9th May the interrogatory was continued, but in the meanwhile Madame de Brinvilliers had made a most unfortunate mistake.

She never lost faith in her powers of fascination. Believing that she had gained to her interest the sergeant of the archers who was in charge of her, she wrote and

gave him a letter to carry to Pennautier. The first letter is dated the 29th April, which was the day of her examination as given in the above lines. It is difficult to say definitely whether it was written before or after her appearance in the Court. But the fact that the examining magistrate throughout his interrogatory displayed keen interest in the prisoner's knowledge of Pennautier seems to show that he had the letter under his hand. For the sergeant of the archers deceived his prisoner, and, instead of taking the letter to Pennautier, had immediately given it to the "procureur general." Madame de Brinvilliers did not know this, and whilst she was fondly imagining that her powerful friend would soon come to her rescue, the following letter was amongst the papers on the judge's desk.

29 *April*. In the Conciergerie.

I learn from my friend that you have some design to help me in this business. You can believe that such an action would add one more obligation to all your civilities towards me. But, Monsieur, if you have such an intention, there is no time to lose, if you please. You must confer at once with those persons who will approach you as to the manner you wish to do things. I do not think you had better show yourself too much. The judge at Mézières questioned me about you a good deal. You can understand that I said nothing to prejudice you. And I will always do what you think fit. Having said nothing on my own account it is necessary that Martin who goes about in your neighbourhood should keep himself concealed. Do this without delay. The housekeeper here has told me privately that the widow Saint-Laurent has recommenced legal proceedings, that the widow des Bernardins<sup>1</sup> keeps her mouth shut. She has told some men that she has been given sixteen pistoles to hold her tongue. It is for you to take steps to deal with this miserable woman. She is a demon. I have discovered

<sup>1</sup> Probably the widow of Sainte-Croix who lived in the Rue des Bernardins.



this from a person who is a relation and friend of your wife. Let me have an answer, if you please, and believe me, if you render me a service I am able to do the same for you—although very unhappy.

Rely upon what your friend tells you. I am doing everything for the best and diligently. You will have news every other day.

Madame de Brinvilliers could not have written a more incriminating letter. So unsuspecting was she of the fate of her first missive that on the 3rd May she wrote a second.

It is absolutely necessary that you should reply to what has already been given you on my behalf, and that you let me know what you wish to do. The examination shows that things are as important for you as they are for me. I have answered nothing, and you must make up your mind with my friend Monsieur Cousté. See the man who will bring you these words with regard to the way you will act, and I will let you know my ideas. You must lose no time.

A reference was then made to the "monitoires" or documents issued by the ecclesiastical judges, which were read in every church on Sunday before the sermon. They exhorted the faithful, under penalty of excommunication, to reveal the circumstances of any crime which had by chance come to their notice. And they were also to give the names of the criminals if they knew them. Thus, by playing on the religious fears of the community and acting in co-operation with the Church the police sometimes obtained important information.

The result of these letters was unfortunate for Pennautier. He was immediately arrested and carried to the Bastille. The news of his imprisonment circulated quickly throughout Paris, and caused the wildest excitement.

On the 9th May Madame de Brinvilliers was shortly examined. She soon discovered what had happened



to her letters. But she continued to fence with the questions of the magistrates, and her bold spirit was witnessed with astonishment.

“ I do not know whether Martin was valet to Sainte-Croix. I know nothing about the two letters to Pennautier. If I wrote them I knew quite well that the sergeant to whom I gave them was a scoundrel. The sergeant asked me if I wished to write to my husband. No, no, master rascal, I replied. I want to write to unimportant men. What I wrote to Pennautier was simply to prove the fidelity of the sergeant.”

“ What interest had Pennautier to serve in advising you ? ” asked the Court.

“ I did not ask him for advice. I proposed that if he had any friends he would interest them on my behalf. I don't know why I should have written saying that I would follow his advice. But when a person is as unhappy as I am, she seeks advice from everybody. I would ask advice from a beggar.”

“ Why did you tell Pennautier that these matters were as important for him as for you ? ”

After some argument she admitted having used the phrase. She then replied that if she had written them she must have been out of her mind.

On the 12th May the examination was continued, and the magistrate was remorseless in probing into the facts of her relationship with Pennautier.

“ Why did you ask him to aid you in your defence ? What friendship had you with him ? ”

“ I had no more friendship with him than that I have previously spoken of.”

“ Why had you so much confidence in him as to ask him to arrange matters which you considered vital for your defence ? ”

“ I had no particular friendship with him for that purpose.”

“ Did you not know Martin, called Breuille, and was he not valet to Sainte-Croix ? ”

“ I have never seen him.”

“ Then why did you write to Pennautier saying that it was absolutely necessary to hide Martin ? ”

“ I had no real interest in getting Martin concealed. I put it in the letter because I knew that the sergeant who promised to give the letter to Pennautier was a rascal, and I wanted to see of what he was capable. So I tested his fidelity.”

The letter was shown to her.

“ I knew quite well that Barbier, the sergeant, would give it to my judges, and I wrote it to prove that Barbier was not faithful.”

“ What business dealings have you had with Pennautier ? ” asked the Court, still harping on the same string.

“ I have had no business with him for eight or nine years, and during that period I have not seen him, or met him, or spoken to him. I even went to see Madame Lesecq, his sister, to ask why my name should be mixed up with his in this matter. I wrote to him about it. Madame Lesecq said that she would send to Verneuil, where he was, and ask him. She could not explain why he was spoken of. Monsieur de Laune, the councillor at the Châtelet, can prove this, for he went with me to Madame Lesecq.”

“ But why did you tell Pennautier that you would do what he advised ? ”

“ I did not ask his advice, but only suggested that if he had friends he might interest them in this affair of mine.”

“ But you assured him that you would do what he thought fit.”

“ I cannot give any reason why I said that. When one is unhappy one seeks advice from the whole world, rich and poor.”

“ Why did you tell him that things were as important to him as to you ? ”

“ I was distracted when I wrote it. I have confessed nothing. I do not know that Pennautier has committed any crime. The letter was written simply to test Barbier. The second letter was also to test the sergeant. I know nothing about Monsieur de Pennautier.”

The two letters were read, and admitted as evidence, and were attached to the minutes of the examination. The prisoner was then removed to her cell.

On the 12th, 15th, 18th, 19th, and 20th June, the Court sat in deliberation, but beyond the bare fact no details are given, and witnesses do not appear to have been heard. A request was made to the judges by “ the Sieur Conte, tutor to the children of the Sieur and Dame de Brinvilliers,” but what the request actually was, and how it was disposed of, is not stated. It probably concerned the legal custody of the unfortunate children.

The story is now carried on by an extremely interesting letter written by Sarsfield, one of the British agents in Paris, to Sir John Williamson, an under-secretary of state at Whitehall. It is dated Saturday, 20th June, 1676, and the original is in the State Paper Office.

They every day discover more and more complices (as they are apt to believe) in Madame de Brinvilliers' business. Some say that the Bishop of Mans, a man very little beloved, but of an *esprit joli*, as they call it here, is also suspected (though not apprehended, as some would have it yesterday), for keeping formerly correspondence with her. It seems the judges or Parliament here have very strict orders to mind nothing else till this business be perfected. Monsieur Pennautier, of whom I spoke in my last,<sup>1</sup> a man worth 50,000 crowns a year in estate and employment as being Receiver General of the Clergy and of the Province of Languedoc,

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<sup>1</sup> This letter seems to have disappeared. I cannot find it at the Record Office with the other correspondence.

is closely kept in prison with two men to guard him. The judges caused, as I writ you, the gaoler to seem to have great pity of the Lady. So she gave him her note to Sieur Pennautier, to pay him 1000 pistoles, upon the gaoler's promise to help her to her escape. The gaoler carried the note to the judge, who ordered him to go back to the Lady, and tell her that Monsieur Pennautier refused to pay the note, which he did, I mean the Keeper, to whom the Lady delivered another letter to Pennautier mentioning her great services formerly to him, and writ positively to pay the note, and at the end *n'y marques pas*, further telling him that it was fit to stop such a woman's mouth about the 1500 livres. On the sight of this second note the Judges ordered Pennautier to be seized upon. The Archers, or Sergeants, being very numerous, went to the street near his house *au Marais*, and, to secure Sieur Pennautier the better from making his escape, by some back stairs and doors, which these great men's houses are full of. They got one of their men to run in the street as if he were a thief, and they to follow him to Pennautier's house, which was accordingly done, and Pennautier, there playing at cards with three or four bishops, hearing the noise, and finding that it was a thief, he came down to the sergeants, who seized upon and gave him time to set his horses to his coach, and so carried him to the prison at the Palace. His cash, being 1,700,000 livres, was sealed by the Judges, and now seized upon by Monsieur Colbert."

This letter does not agree in every detail with what we have already discovered, but it reproduces the contemporary gossip surrounding a trial which was arousing interest in every capital of Europe.

The industrious Ravaisson explains the reference to the Bishop of Mans in a footnote which throws a fresh light upon the ramifications of Madame de Brinvilliers. Louis de la Vergne-Tressan, born in 1628, was the first almoner to Monsieur, the King's brother. He was created Bishop of Mans in 1672, his predecessor, Monsieur de Lavardin, having died in Paris in July 1671. It was generally believed that Monsieur de Lavardin had been



poisoned by Madame de Brinvilliers. The household of Monsieur, husband of Henriette d'Angleterre, was always suspect and in bad repute, and Monsieur de Tressan, who succeeded to the vacant episcopal throne, was strongly accused of instigating the crime which had made it vacant. Glaser, the chemist, who gave lessons to Sainte-Croix and Madame de Brinvilliers, was professor of chemistry to Monsieur, and supplies one link connecting the royal household with the Hôtel d'Aubray.

On the 22nd June, Madame de Brinvilliers was further examined.

“ Did you not ask Monsieur de Pennautier to lend you some money, on the security of certain tapestry, in order that you might retire from France ? ”

“ I took care not to ask him to lend me money on the tapestry because it was already pawned for 2000 écus. This is easy to prove.”

“ When Monsieur de Laune said that Pennautier did not wish to lend the money, you replied that if he allowed drops to fall upon you, torrents would fall upon him.”

“ I do not remember having said this. I have no accomplices. As for the letters to Pennautier they were to prove the fidelity of the sergeant. Even if the man had delivered them, they had no other intention than asking him to help me.”

“ At Mézières you referred to a note for 5000.”

“ This was a note for 5000 livres, the balance remaining due to me of 30,000 livres. Bourges, who managed the business of the province of Languedoc, paid me a sum of ten thousand, being part of the thirty thousand. I wrote to Pennautier to draw out the 5000 livres. At the time he made no reply. I have read a letter which Pennautier wrote to Sainte-Croix. In it he said that he was much astonished that I pretended that 5000 livres was still owing to me out of the 30,000. I expect that Pennautier had accounted with Sainte-Croix who had



received some of it in cash and relied upon the rest for his own business. When I wrote to Pennautier my intention was to get some of my own money to pay for my defence, for I have no knowledge of the business between Pennautier and Sainte-Croix. But I was so worried in mind that I did not know what I was doing."

"When you said that torrents would fall upon the head of Pennautier, and that he ought to have fear, did you refer to the death of Saint-Laurent?"

"I do not remember making the remark. Bourges gave me a promissory note for 5000 livres. The note was a forgery, for Sainte-Croix had obtained the original bearing Pennautier's signature. I was in friendly relationship with Sainte-Croix, and had no reason to believe that the note was false. I had it from Sainte-Croix as the veritable document. It was one of Sainte-Croix's tricks, and it explains why I wrote to Pennautier."

The Court sat on the 26th, 27th and 30th June, and from the 1st to the 11th July. The minutes of the evidence have been lost. But Sarsfield sends two items of gossip to Mr Secretary Williamson at Whitehall.

PARIS, 27 June 1676, Saturday.

Madame de Brinvilliers and Monsieur Pennautier were yesterday brought together, and examined in (the) presence of the Judges. They say she brought great accusations against the latter (Pennautier), but for the Bishop of Mans, he is clear, and goes much up and down the streets to show himself.

Two weeks later, Sarsfield again writes to Williamson.

Madame de Brinvilliers justifies herself, but yet is like to suffer, and some say Monsieur Pennautier with her. There is a "factum" of all that matter, but I fear its (a) little too big to be sent by the post.

The evidence, so unfortunately lost, was clearly black against the Marquise. On Monday, 13th July, the "procureur general" produced one of the most important witnesses against the prisoner. Her fate was settled when Briancourt, ex-tutor and discarded lover, made his appearance in the Court.

## CHAPTER XX

### EVIDENCE OF THE TUTOR BRIANCOURT

**O**N Monday, 13th July 1676, the Court having assembled, the "procureur general," who occupied a position somewhat similar to that of an English public prosecutor, rose to make an important announcement. The tutor, Briancourt, who was being detained a prisoner in the Conciergerie, had sent for him. Earlier that morning he had visited Briancourt's cell, and had heard so much that he wished the Court to receive the evidence tendered by the ex-tutor.

So Maître Jean Briancourt, aged about thirty-two years, a barrister, and a bachelor in theology of the University of Paris, having been duly sworn, related the private history of Madame de Brinvilliers as it was unrolled before him in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul, and at Sains in Picardy. It was an extraordinary tale, and it sealed the fate of the prisoner.

"There are three reasons which should prevent me from saying all I know," commenced the witness. "I have been a servant in the household of the Brinvilliers, I have had a guilty intrigue with my mistress, and I have also been placed in charge of her two children. With regard to the first reason I believe that a servant ought not to reveal the secrets of the house in which he has lived, particularly when those secrets concern the lives of other persons and the honour of such great families as those of the D'Aubray and the Gobelin. As to the

second reason, I am strongly persuaded that a man should have enough decency not to reveal to the public what should be known to God alone. Thirdly, I have much friendship and good feeling towards the children, particularly the younger."

Having prefaced his evidence with three strong reasons for saying nothing, Briancourt added,

"I believe, however, that I am obliged to tell the truth principally because I have the honour to be a barrister."

Briancourt took up his appointment at Sains late in October or early in November 1670. Sains is a village in Picardy of from 700 to 800 inhabitants. He went by coach from Paris to Mondidier, where he remained two days. Here the Marquis de Brinvilliers, of whom he spoke in terms of warm commendation, sent him a horse. Arriving at the château of Sains he was received by the Marquise in her drawing-room, where she was with her daughter. The tutor offered her his services for the holidays only, as he wished to return after the vacation to Paris in order to study at the Sorbonne. During the next week he made the acquaintance of the family and the servants. Amongst them was a man called Grangemont who had been a page to the Marquis, and appeared to be a very honest fellow. He was a gossip, however, and freely discussed the character of his mistress.

"She is an extremely false and wicked woman, who has behaved scandalously with Sainte-Croix," said the former page amidst many other surprising tales. "From her face and from the way she is behaving, I can see that she is endeavouring to entangle you, Monsieur Briancourt, in her toils. I warn you not to give way to her caresses. They are full of danger."

Every evening the Marquise and her new tutor had long conversations together after supper. On the eighth day after his arrival these suddenly ended. A letter came from Paris telling the Marquise that her brother was on

his deathbed. Briancourt thought the letter came from Sainte-Croix, but the Marquise said it was written by Cousté. It was delivered late in the day, and Madame de Brinvilliers left for Paris two or three hours after midnight. Before she left she told Briancourt that she had much to say to him touching the management of her domestic affairs and also her estate at Sains.

"I can see that you are a thoroughly honest man," said she with adroit flattery. "You would always look after my interests. There are many things one cannot mention to Monsieur de Brinvilliers, for he is quite incapable. I will write and tell you all that happens in Paris, and in reply you are to send me the news from Sains."

Then leaving her husband, the children, and the tutor, she stepped into her coach on her journey through the night to Paris.

Madame de Brinvilliers wrote several letters to her tutor as she had promised. They breathed confidence and even affection. "You must share in whatever I have, even to a piece of bread. I hope soon to have some wealth which will put my family in a position of affluence. You must trust my word." And again she assured him of her deep esteem."

At the end of one letter she remarked that she had been the whole day with her brother, and was thoroughly tired of the religious devotees who surrounded his bed. She needed rest and had returned to the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. She said that she was sorry she had not brought her eldest son with her, for her brother liked the boy and had bequeathed a legacy to him. There was no need that her husband should hear of this. Briancourt wrote asking that she would write to her daughter on account of the girl's bad conduct. The Marquise replied that she hardly knew how to manage it. Would he give her his ideas on such a subject!



Monsieur d'Aubray died,<sup>1</sup> and Madame de Brinvilliers returned to Sains and the companionship of her family circle. She gave the tutor all the details of her brother's illness. The death had frightened her. During the last days she had been much fatigued in her brother's house on account of the number of visitors who called upon him. Her sister-in-law had inquired after the health of her nephews towards whom she showed considerable affection, even going so far as to suggest that the elder should take the name of d'Aubray. To this suggestion she replied that the boy was heir to the family De Gobelin, and that name must be preserved.

During these talks Madame de Brinvilliers continually and unnecessarily brought the conversation round to the subject of poisoning. Briancourt declared that he knew little or nothing about poisons. In France such subjects were never spoken of. But in Italy it was said that there were many kinds of very subtle poisons, and that the poisoners used prepared gloves and even poisoned bouquets of flowers. Madame de Brinvilliers replied that she knew a woman of rank who had made use of poison successfully, and when her object had been attained she devoted herself to religion. But she did not mention this lady's name. The tutor could not remember whether the Marquise had told him in what manner the poison had been used, but it was against the parents of the lady of quality. Shortly after the conversation the family returned to Paris.

Briancourt did not know whether the Marquise had any strong aversion against her daughter. Very often she threatened the child, and some of her menaces indicated a probable attempt at poisoning. The actual day they arrived in Paris the daughter was despatched to

<sup>1</sup> Briancourt was slightly wrong in his dates. He must have gone to Sains in September, the month in which the younger brother died, and not late in October as he stated.

a convent. The next day Sainte-Croix called, and after dinner Briancourt retired and left them together. Later in the week Sainte-Croix returned to the Hôtel d'Aubray in order to discuss business matters with the Marquise. He brought with him a man named Colbeau, who was devoted to the interests of Sainte-Croix and ordinarily dined with him. Sainte-Croix and Colbeau visited the Hôtel d'Aubray more than once.

The daughter was afterwards taken away from the convent and remained for some while at home. Her mother showed little love for her and threatened her, in words which barely concealed her meaning, that if the girl did not behave herself she would be abandoned to Sainte-Croix.

On the whole, affairs were not improving in the Hôtel d'Aubray. The coach was seized for debt, and Sainte-Croix came with Colbeau to advise her as to the means she should take to pay the money owing. Things were generally in such a tangle that the Marquise invited Briancourt to join the council. He did not agree with the advice of Sainte-Croix and Colbeau, who, in his opinion, were rascals. They suggested bribes in order to defeat the creditors. As for the coach, Sainte-Croix undertook to see Monsieur De Laune, a barrister attached to the Châtelet. De Laune was his intimate friend and could soon be won over. De Laune lived in the Temple, and Sainte-Croix promised to call on him in the course of the afternoon.

When Sainte-Croix and Colbeau had gone, Briancourt told the Marquise that such men were wicked advisers and their methods dishonest.

"But when one has need of such men one must make use of them," replied the Marquise. "It is easy to dismiss them afterwards."

Briancourt and the Marquise then returned to Sains. The first halt on the road to Senlis was a village called

Louvres-en-Parisis, about five leagues from the capital. There the travellers put up at the inn of the "Grand Cerf." The Marquise went to bed completely tired.

"My domestic affairs are not going as they should," she complained to the tutor. She seemed much worried.

"They are in the hands of men who will never allow them to go any better," replied Briancourt. "I have learnt that Sainte-Croix is the greatest rascal in the world. It is shameful that you should mix yourself up with a man of this character."

Possibly more than half this denunciation of Sainte-Croix was based upon jealousy. Briancourt had forgotten the warning of Grangemont and had become wholly infatuated with his mistress. The Marquise herself was torn by the conflicting pangs of love and jealousy. Not love for Briancourt, whom she intended to use as her tool, but love for Sainte-Croix and jealousy of his continued unfaithfulness to her. Throughout this history it can be seen that she did not always keep good counsel. In that dark little bedroom of the tiny inn at Louvres she avowed her guilt to the trembling youth, and placed her life in his keeping. It seemed the surest way of holding him in thralldom.

"I make use of Sainte-Croix precisely because he is a rogue," said the Marquise. "I had a purpose in making use of such a man. Together we poisoned my brother, the councillor d'Aubray."

Briancourt told the Court that he was stunned to hear these cruel words. For a quarter of an hour he did not dare to speak. Madame de Brinvilliers watched him silently.

"My brother was a perfidious wretch. He never had any friendship for me," she cried at last. Then she seized the unhappy youth in her arms, and smothered him in caresses. When they left the "Grand Cerf"

next morning to continue their journey, he was wholly at her disposal.

They travelled all day in the coach. After much reflection Briancourt came to the conclusion that he was with a strange woman, and it was necessary to exercise every precaution. Night drew in, and they stopped at another inn. Briancourt summed up enough courage to ask the Marquise how she had managed the poisoning. He probably thought that this knowledge would be the first step towards his own protection.

"I made use of a very clever scoundrel named La Chaussée," replied the Marquise, without the slightest concealment.

"What is La Chaussée?"

"He is hairdresser and barber to the household in the Hôtel d'Aubray." Then she explained that the poison was in two forms, liquid and powder.

"But Monsieur," she added, as if in after-thought. "I am confiding much in you. I believe you are discreet and wise. I trust you will guard to yourself this secret, such a precious secret?"

Without pledging his word, Briancourt asked who compounded the poisons, and how were they administered? She told him that Sainte-Croix made the drugs, which were given to the victim either in a drink or in a broth. The powder was simply sprinkled on bread and meat. Briancourt then wanted to know what formed the chief ingredient of the poison. The Marquise said that the liquid was a quintessence of toad's venom distilled in an alembic. The powder was ground in a mortar, and was so subtle that when making it the dispenser had to wear a mask of glass. There were two kinds of powder, one being not quite so strong as the other.

This evidence produced an immense impression in the Court. The wretched Briancourt felt his position acutely. He trembled as he told the story of these terrible



avowals. And his conscience smote him so keenly for betraying the dreadful secrets of his mistress that he lost all strength, and was unable to continue his deposition. Only after a meal of bread and wine was he sufficiently fortified to go on with his evidence.

He repeated further conversations with the Marquise in this roadside inn. He asked her how long Monsieur d'Aubray had been given poison, and how many weeks it took to poison a man.

"La Chaussée gave my brother poison for a long while," she replied. "But as he took great care of his health the poison did not affect him very rapidly. He was hard to kill. La Chaussée was assiduous in his attendance upon him as a valet. He devoted every spare moment to his master. But my brother did not die easily, and for many reasons it was difficult to look after him. His temper was more than most people could endure. For that reason I did not go near him often, but sent my sister, the nun. La Chaussée made an extremely good nurse."

The next day they arrived at the château of Sains. Madame de Brinvilliers explained to the tutor how much she had the welfare of her family at heart. Her eldest boy she referred to as "the President," because she intended that he should succeed to the family charge as "civil lieutenant." But there remained much to do.

In Paris Briancourt had already been told that all the men in the D'Aubray family had died in the same extraordinary manner.

"Madame," said he once. "It is rumoured by the gossips that Sainte-Croix poisoned your father and also your elder brother!"

"Well?" she answered, in the coolest fashion. "What if he did? Why did they behave to him in such a disgraceful manner?"

Then she confessed that her father and elder brother



had, in fact, been murdered in exactly the same way as the younger brother.

"My brothers were no good," she exclaimed. "I love my children, for they are my own flesh and blood. But how could I love my brothers? They despised me."

When she spoke of her father she wept bitterly. She told Briancourt that Sainte-Croix had learnt the art of poisoning from the Italian Exili in the Bastille. Briancourt admitted to the Court that as he listened to these confidences scorn and horror swept across him. Then as he remembered the Marquise's energetic character he feared that he too perchance might fall a victim to her poisons. After all, his position was precarious.

Madame de Brinvilliers quickly perceived his coldness toward her. She wrote to Paris, and, eight days after, Sainte-Croix rode up to the château attended by his lackey, La Pierre. Briancourt was surprised, and escorted Sainte-Croix into the reception room, where the Marquise was seated. She played her part admirably. Briancourt told the judges that she even blushed.

"Monsieur!" she cried, with affected surprise. "What brings you here?"

"To see you, Madame, and also the Marquis," replied Sainte-Croix, gallantly. "We have not met for a long while. It will almost be necessary to renew our acquaintance."

In a quarter of an hour the whole family, including the Marquis, was walking with Sainte-Croix in the park surrounding the château. "The impudence of Sainte-Croix in presenting himself in the home of Monsieur de Brinvilliers after the scandal of his liaison with the Marquise, would be incomprehensible," writes Ravaisson, "if we did not know that he had been shut up in the Bastille under an imaginary pretext, and thus the husband was able, like so many other husbands, to pretend to ignore what had passed."

The gathering was gay. Sainte-Croix and the Marquis gossiped about all their friends in Paris. They went so far as to joke about the fascinating Mademoiselle Dufay, that old flame of the Marquis, who had with reason aroused the jealousy of his wife. They returned from their stroll in the best of good humours. At table the Marquise sat by the side of Sainte-Croix, but her husband took a chair by the buffet. He was delighted to have Sainte-Croix for a companion, but he was fully aware of his friend's peculiar talents, and he did not intend to run any risks. By sitting against the buffet he could watch the glasses and the food. Every drink he took was served by his personal valet.

"Don't change my glass, and wash it out every time you give me something to drink," he kept on repeating to the servant.

Briancourt sat at this extraordinary supper table and silently wondered. But a little while before, the Marquis had told him that he had no greater enemy in the world than Sainte-Croix, who had robbed the family of its honour as well as of its wealth.

After the meal the Marquis retired to his room. Sainte-Croix and the Marquise went to her chamber, and Briancourt endeavoured to find rest on his own bed. It is doubtful whether he awoke much refreshed. Soon after he had dressed, Madame de Brinvilliers rushed into his room like a fury.

"I defy you!" she cried with anger. "You have wormed secrets of the greatest consequence out of me. Take care!"

"Madame," replied the astonished tutor. "The secrets you have told me I will never repeat." Then with tears in her eyes he implored her, if she was not satisfied with his conduct, to allow him to return to Paris.

Upon her part the comedy had been pre-arranged at the instigation of Sainte-Croix. Now she smiled on him.

“No, no,” she said, softly. “I do not want that. Remain discreet and I will make your fortune. It is easy to see that you will keep safe counsel.”

She left the room for an instant. Sainte-Croix was waiting on the staircase to learn the result of the farce. Before Briancourt could protest, he was swept into the conspiracy. He found himself chatting with his mistress and Sainte-Croix, who displayed the sincerest friendship, and assured him that he could always count upon his services and particularly besought him to exercise the greatest care with the little son of the Marquise. The next day Sainte-Croix left the château, and, under the pretext that he did not know the road, asked Briancourt to ride with him as far as Clermont. On the way he told the tutor many things, mostly stories of debauchery and gambling. His intention was to deaden and finally to destroy the moral conscience of the youth.

Briancourt returned to Sains. In a few days his part in the new scheme was revealed. Madame de Brinvilliers was afraid that her sister-in-law, the devout Mademoiselle d'Aubray, would bequeath some property to another equally devout lady, Mademoiselle de Saujon, who, before she had sought the solace of religion, had herself offered more worldly consolation to Gaston, brother of Louis XIII., and father of the “Grande Mademoiselle.” The Marquise feared that her children might lose what by right should descend to them. She expounded a deeply laid plot in which Briancourt was to exert himself to obtain the good graces of Mademoiselle d'Aubray, and the redoubtable La Chaussée was to be introduced into her household as gardener. He would then be able to take steps to achieve that event which had already thrice occurred in the d'Aubray family.

Briancourt was now entrapped. Too fascinated by the Marquise to seek safety in flight, he dared not

definitely refuse the project. Although he does not refer to the matter in his evidence, he probably exercised as much care over his food and drink as the Marquis. In company with Madame de Brinvilliers and the eldest boy, the tutor returned to Paris. Before the plot for the murder of Mademoiselle d'Aubray was fully elaborated, the fertile Sainte-Croix had conceived a better plan. His friend, Colbeau, had a daughter who had already entered the household of the unsuspecting Mademoiselle d'Aubray, in the disguise of a girl of the most religious temperament. This pious child was quite ready and willing to undertake the drastic business, but haggled over the price. She considered that the services she would render were worth one thousand pistoles. The sum is exceedingly high, and it is evident that the conspirators only agreed to it because they were not sure that Briancourt would remain loyal to them. In the meanwhile Sainte-Croix dined every day with Colbeau; and the valet La Chaussée, freed for the moment from the business connected with Mademoiselle d'Aubray, paid his court to Madame d'Aubray, widow of the elder brother of Madame de Brinvilliers, and endeavoured to persuade her to employ him in her household.

"She has a dowry of eight thousand livres a year," said the Marquis to Briancourt. "Such a sum is worth trying for."

Briancourt, more interested in his own health than in that of Madame d'Aubray, asked his mistress pointedly to explain why La Chaussée spent so much time in the kitchen.

"You are safe enough," was the short reply. Beyond that he could learn nothing.

Another time Madame de Brinvilliers told Briancourt that Sainte-Croix had offered to poison Madame de Gobelin, her mother-in-law, but she did not think it necessary to undertake so many enterprises together.



Struggling in the toils which were slowly enveloping him, and possibly afraid that if he sought safety in flight Sainte-Croix and the Marquise would be only too pleased to inculcate him if their schemes failed, Briancourt made a final effort to save the two doomed members of the d'Aubray family. La Chaussée was unable to obtain employment with Madame d'Aubray. But Madame de Brinvilliers had decided that the business was to be done in two months or not at all. The fate of Mademoiselle d'Aubray depended upon the payment of one thousand pistoles to the girl Colbeau.

Briancourt, holding his life in his hands, boldly remonstrated with the Marquise.

"Madame," he cried in protest, "let me implore you to take care of what you are doing. You have cruelly killed your father and your brothers. Now you wish to kill your sister. In the whole of history there is not a like example of such cruelty. You are, in fact, the most cruel and most wicked woman that has ever existed. Reflect upon your terrible deeds. This abominable man Sainte-Croix has destroyed not only you, but also your family. There can be no eternal salvation for you. Sooner or later you will come to a bad end. I insist that the attempts to murder Mademoiselle d'Aubray must cease, although she has done me harm in writing to the Marquis that I am a worthless fellow."

At this stage in his evidence Briancourt had to explain a matter which had not previously been referred to. By some indirect means (possibly through the girl Colbeau) Sainte-Croix had induced Mademoiselle d'Aubray to write to her brother-in-law, the Marquis de Brinvilliers, to complain that the tutor in his house was a young man of dissolute life and not fitted to undertake the education of her nephews. Sainte-Croix was jealous of Briancourt and wanted to get him out of the way.

Madame de Brinvilliers learnt that the letter had been



written and posted and on its way to her husband. She feared that it might reveal her intimacy with the tutor, and, curiously, she had no desire that the suspicions of her husband should be aroused. The letter had to be intercepted. The higglers of the neighbourhood were in the habit of bringing the letters from Clermont to the château at Sains. They were expected on the day the discovery was made. Briancourt went out under the pretence of hunting, waited for the dealers, and took charge of the letters for the house. He returned to the Marquise, and in the bundle was the letter they expected. They opened it, and found it to be in the handwriting of Mademoiselle d'Aubray, containing exactly the complaint they feared.

"The creature must be destroyed!" cried the Marquise. She intended to return to Paris to press forward the private execution of her sister-in-law.

"Before you kill Madame and Mademoiselle d'Aubray," exclaimed Briancourt, "I will kill you first."

"What good will that do?" asked his mistress. "Do you wish to prevent the advancement of my family? My sister-in-law is a liar who will ruin you as well as me. She is entirely under the thumb of her confessor. They say that she has already been to the priest at St Paul's Church and has entered a complaint against your conduct."

As Briancourt was living at the Hôtel d'Aubray, in the Rue Neuve Saint Paul, this was his parish priest, who exercised considerable authority.

"Well, there may be some substance for her complaints," replied Briancourt. "But when it comes to a question of killing women of such rank and position, I will never consent."

This conversation was reported to Sainte-Croix, who took an ominous step. The family returned to the Hôtel d'Aubray. Two new servants appeared. One was related to La Chaussée, the other was named Bazile. The

tutor found that Bazile was paying much attention to the preparation of his food and drink. Detecting the valet in some rascalities, Briancourt thrashed him so soundly that Madame de Brinvilliers was compelled to dismiss the new man.

This youth with a conscience stood in the way. Briancourt related to the astonished Court a determined attempt to remove him. Two or three days after Bazile had left the house Madame de Brinvilliers told Briancourt that she had bought a beautiful bed with tapestry to match. It had been pawned by Sainte-Croix and she had redeemed it. The bed had been placed in her own room and she made an assignation with the youth. He was too infatuated by her charms to refuse.

"I will expect you at midnight," said the Marquise. "It cannot be earlier as I have so many household matters to arrange with the cook."

A gallery overlooks the windows of the great bedroom which still exists in the old house of the Rue Neuve Saint Paul. Briancourt, instead of going to his mistress at midnight, took up his position in the gallery at ten o'clock. The curtains had not been drawn across the windows of Madame de Brinvilliers' room, and he was able to watch all her actions. She at first transacted all the petty business of her household. Then she undressed and put on a dressing-gown. This done she walked round her room with a light in her hand, until she came to the chimney-piece. In the seventeenth century these chimney pieces were very large and served as convenient hiding places. When fires were not on the hearth they sometimes chilled the room and were often enclosed with a couple of shutters fixed with a bolt. This had been done in the bedroom. Madame de Brinvilliers pulled back the bolt and opened the shutters. To Briancourt's intense surprise Sainte-Croix stepped out disguised in an old coat and a shabby hat. He kissed

the Marquise and for a quarter of an hour they talked closely together. Then Sainte-Croix returned to his hiding place, the Marquise closed the shutters but did not bolt them.

Briancourt met her at the door. She was slightly confused. He was not less troubled when their glances met. Ought he to enter the fatal room? There was time to retreat.

“What is the matter with you?” asked the Marquise still more confused. “Don’t you want to come?”

Briancourt noticed that her face burned with a fury she could scarcely conceal. Even her features had changed. He entered, and sat with her on the bed.

“Is it not a beautiful bed?” she said insinuatingly.

“It is very beautiful,” he repeated absent-mindedly for he was thinking of Sainte-Croix in the chimney.

Then she exercised over him all the blandishments which she so well knew the power of. But Briancourt did not surrender to her caresses for his blood was running cold.

“Extinguish the light,” she murmured.

He wished to test how far her cruelty would carry her. He did not move from his seat by the side of the bed.

“What are you doing?” she whispered from the pillows. “You seem to be so sad!”

“Ah!” he screamed, jumping up from his chair and facing her. “You are indeed cruel! What have I done to you that you should wish to have me assassinated?”

Madame de Brinvilliers sprang from her bed and caught him by the throat. He tried to release himself and reach the door. As they were struggling the shutters of the chimney piece opened and Sainte-Croix rushed to them.

“Scoundrel!” cried the tutor. “You have come to murder me.”

The torch was still burning and Sainte-Croix saw that he was recognised. With more discretion than courage

he opened the door of the bedroom and fled downstairs. He was able to murder slowly with secret poisons, but his nerve forsook him at the prospect of a rough and tumble fight.

Madame de Brinvilliers threw herself on the floor in a paroxysm of hysterical weeping.

"I do not wish to live. I want to die," she moaned.

Suddenly she got up, went to a cupboard, and brought out her casket of poisons. She opened it, and was about to swallow one of her drugs when Briancourt dashed it from her lips.

"You asked Bazile to poison me," he said sternly. "Then you wished Sainte-Croix to murder me."

She threw herself at his feet and denied it in a torrent of broken words.

"I pardon you," replied Briancourt, somewhat grandiloquently. "I will never think of what you have endeavoured to do. But you must promise not to kill yourself, and you must allow me to leave the house without delay."

She promised not to poison herself, provided he sincerely forgot what had passed. He obliged her to go back to bed, whilst he sat in an armchair. There they remained until six in the morning or even a trifle later. Then he returned to his own room.

He did not leave the Hôtel d'Aubray as he had said. In the afternoon he called on one of his friends, the Abbé Morel, and told him that somebody had tried to assassinate him. He asked Morel to lend him a pair of pistols. Morel did not own any, but said that the Comte de Rochebrune had a pair he could borrow. Much troubled in his mind Briancourt left his friend's lodgings and attended mass in the church of St Nicholas-du-Chardonnet. Why he went to this church it is impossible to tell. It happened to be in the street where Sainte-Croix



had his residence. During the service Briancourt's thoughts wandered, and he tried to think of the means by which he could get away from the dreadful Hôtel d'Aubray. He also determined that it was his duty to warn the victims of his ferocious and insatiable mistress. He had been originally introduced to Madame de Brinvilliers by a certain Monsieur Bocager, who not only had the reputation of being a clever lawyer, but who also knew intimately the first President of the Courts. Briancourt in his simplicity thought that this man would best exercise what pressure was needed to put an end to the schemes of Sainte-Croix and the Marquise. Directly the mass ended at Saint Nicholas-du-Chardonnet Briancourt went to the house of Bocager who was a professor in the law schools.

"Monsieur," said the young man. "I have a great secret to tell you. I believe that you will give me good advice, and as you often visit the President of the Courts you will be able to tell him what is going on, and he will give the necessary orders."

Bocager became very uneasy and confused. His face turned white, and he said nothing.

"You must keep your secret," he replied at last rather abruptly. "I do not want to hear it. And do not say anything to the priest at the church of Saint Paul, or indeed to anyone else. I will see to the affair. You say you want to leave the household of Madame de Brinvilliers. You ought not to leave the Hôtel d'Aubray so quickly. Wait a little longer, and I will look out for another situation for you."

This interview was altogether unsatisfactory, and Briancourt returned to the Rue Neuve Saint-Paul much perplexed. During the evening he did not see a soul. The gloomy house was quiet. Then a servant told him that a woman had been to the house with a message that Sainte-Croix wished to see Madame de Brinvilliers, and



was waiting for her in the Rue Saint-Antoine. She at once left the house to keep the appointment.

Two days later the Marquise suddenly said to the tutor, "Monsieur Bocager is not such an honest man as you imagine. You will find it out for yourself one of these days."

This chance remark was well calculated to make the wretched tutor tremble. His trials were not at an end. The same night as he was passing along the Rue Saint-Paul in front of the church of Saint Paul (but a few steps from the Hôtel d'Aubray) a hidden assassin shot at him twice with a pistol, and the balls pierced his coat.

Next morning, armed with the two pistols borrowed from the Comte de Rochebrune, Briancourt went boldly to Sainte-Croix's house. He refused to go to the rooms upstairs, and, like a prudent general, he left a friend in the passage to keep the door open.

The interview was curious.

"You are a scoundrel and a rogue," cried the brave tutor with his hands on his pistols. "You will end by being broken on the wheel. You have murdered many people of rank."

"I have never killed a single person," replied Sainte-Croix. "But let me add that if you will meet me behind the hospital with pistols I will give you all the satisfaction you require."

"I am not a fighting man," retorted Briancourt, the mild student of law and theology. "But," with a sudden access of pride, "when I am attacked I defend myself."

Leaving Sainte-Croix he went to Bocager.

"I wish to know what steps the first president is going to take respecting the matter I spoke to you of a few days ago?"

"I have not said anything about it to the president," replied Bocager coolly. "You must have a little patience. Do you know who is mixed up in this affair?"

"Yes," said Briancourt. "There is the Abbé Dulong, Canon of Notre Dame, and one of your own friends. He possesses a casket full of all the poisons used by Sainte-Croix who visits him frequently."

"The Abbé Dulong used to be one of my friends," corrected the professor of law cautiously. "He is no longer one. I know that he is very intimate with Sainte-Croix and also with Madame de Brinvilliers. The Marquise told me so herself. Indeed she said that she was so absolutely mistress of Sainte-Croix that he could refuse her nothing. He would even clean her shoes."

Again Briancourt was disappointed. He continued, however, to stir up the cesspool. He now interrogated the Marquise's servant, Mademoiselle Grangemont.

"Can it be true, Mademoiselle, that you, who have had so much to do with this scoundrel Sainte-Croix, did not know that he intended to stab me when I was in Madame's room? He passed by your room. He wanted to murder me because I oppose the poisoning of Madame and Mademoiselle d'Aubray."

"I know nothing at all about it," answered the maid stubbornly.

"You do not know that the two brothers d'Aubray were poisoned?"

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," was the amazing reply.

"Then miserable woman that you are, why did you not warn them?"

"They were rude. It was hardly possible to speak to them."

Briancourt explained to the Court, to which he was relating his story, that Mademoiselle Grangemont was in the hands of Sainte-Croix who gave her money whenever she asked for it. "Grangemont," said Sainte-Croix to the Marquise one day, "is a clever woman and a good manager. We must give her one of the estates to look

after." Grangemont had been heard to remark that the Marquise and Sainte-Croix had poisoned Madame de la Mailleraye, sister to the Marquis de Brinwilliers. She was a woman who had much love for her brother, and was therefore likely to interfere with her sister-in-law's schemes. How many attempts at poisoning had been made the tutor was unable to tell. The Marquise had once told him that Sainte-Croix wished to poison a certain Monsieur d'Hervart and his son. Whether the attempt was made he did not know.

Briancourt was weak-minded. His efforts to reform the Marquise were unsuccessful. She resumed all her powers of fascination, and to a certain extent reassured him. The liaison was not broken, and one day Mademoiselle de Villeray, who seems to have occupied a position of some dependency in the household, found him under circumstances which left no doubt as to his relations with his mistress. Briancourt had the grace to be ashamed. He attempted an apology.

"I am in despair!" he cried. "You have found me with the most wicked woman in the world. I ask your pardon. I want to leave the house, but I am in an enchantment and cannot free myself. I can't understand why an honest girl, such as you are, is able to remain for so long in this dreadful household?"

He told the Marquise that go he must. Alternately he loved and reviled her. She played with him as if he were a mouse on the end of a string. She was willing to release him but he must perform a final service. He must take the children back to their father at the château of Sains. Evidently the Marquis was happier away from Paris.

This further delayed the separation. Briancourt travelled with the children to Picardy, and remained at Sains for some while. Madame de Brinwilliers wrote him a letter which he read with mingled emotions.

“The time has come to quit this world. You must always remember me in your thoughts. I will leave you something in my will.”

Instead of committing suicide the Marquise went to Sains, arriving shortly after her letter. Another scheme was in germination, and Briancourt was requested to assist.

“You will render me a very great service, which will help to re-arrange my affairs,” she explained.

One of her husband's relations, a certain Marquis de Nadaillac, captain in the light horse, had been amongst her earlier lovers. He had promised to give some of his property to her children, and it was necessary that a trustworthy person should go to his estates and obtain his signature to the legal documents of conveyance. De Nadaillac hated Sainte-Croix, whom he did not scruple to call a rogue. He had promised Madame de Brinvilliers that whenever she got tired of Sainte-Croix he would quickly rid her of the monster.

Here was Briancourt's opportunity to break his connection with the Brinvilliers. He undertook the business with De Nadaillac, and, in the month of February, went to La Marche and lodged with Captain d'Arfeuille, a cavalry officer and brother-in-law to De Nadaillac. Then Madame d'Arfeuille spoke to him seriously.

“Why do you stop with Madame de Brinvilliers? Here you are with people of honour. Leave that woman. She means to destroy you!”

Briancourt returned to Paris without having brought his negotiations to a finish. De Nadaillac had changed his mind, if he had ever decided to do anything for the young Brinvilliers. And Briancourt had a suspicion that the sole reason for giving him the long journey was that he might be caught upon a lonely road and murdered. At the last moment, before starting, he had changed his plans and travelled in company. This probably saved his life.



In Paris the tutor resolutely put temptation behind him, and went into retreat at Notre Dame des Vertus, a religious house kept by the Oratorian Fathers in the village of Aubervilliers. But Madame de Brinvilliers did not allow him to remain in peace. From time to time she wrote asking him for news, and seven or eight months after his retirement she even called upon him.

In July 1672, Sainte-Croix died in the Place Maubert and the casket of letters and poisons was found. The Marquise at once wrote to Notre Dame des Vertus saying that she wished to see Briancourt immediately about her affairs. She was then living at Picpus, which is not far from Aubervilliers. Briancourt went.

He found her in a state of anger and excitement. Pennautier had written an important letter which had been delayed in delivery. The financier informed his ally (according to Briancourt) that there were rumours that they were both to be arrested on account of the casket which had been found in Sainte-Croix's room. He had therefore gone away for a few days to the country. Madame de Brinvilliers told her former tutor that Sainte-Croix had died so suddenly that she had not been in time to see him alive. A casket had been found of which she had tried to obtain possession. She had been to the Place Maubert, but was refused admission to Sainte-Croix's room.

Briancourt returned to Aubervilliers. Some days later Monsieur de Laune, the councillor at the Châtelet, who had been a close friend of Sainte-Croix, arrived at Notre Dame des Vertus with Monsieur La Marre the lawyer to Madame de Brinvilliers. Monsieur de Laune's object was to discover exactly what Briancourt knew about the poisons. The ex-tutor on being asked declared that he knew nothing. De Laune then said that he had done his best to get hold of the casket, but that the widow of Sainte-Croix had refused to give it



up to Madame de Brinvilliers. He had offered her money, but she demanded an extravagant sum. De Laune also talked much about Pennautier, who was a relation.

“ You know all the secrets of Madame de Brinvilliers,” he remarked to the young man, “ yet you know nothing about Monsieur de Pennautier.”

“ I know nothing about Pennautier,” repeated Briancourt.

De Laune had a priestly relation in the Oratory who acted as steward. The lawyer thought he would easily discover to what extent Briancourt was implicated in the crimes attributed to his client the Marquise. A cunning plot was laid to snare the youth.

Although Briancourt was studying at the Oratory, he was actually living in an adjacent inn. Suddenly before him appeared the steward, and the inn-keeper.

“ Monsieur Briancourt ! ” they cried in a single breath, “ the police have come to arrest you. This is a great scandal for Notre Dame des Vertus. There is a place where we can so well hide you that they will never be able to discover it.”

“ Bring me the police ! ” exclaimed the sorely tried Briancourt. “ I am ready for them. They are just the men I wish to see.”

Then the innkeeper was compelled to explain that the story was a lie. There were no police. The ruse had been invented by the priest to discover Briancourt's measure of guilt.

In despair the young man quitted the Oratory and returned again to Paris. He called upon Bocager who besought him not to drag his honourable name as professor of law into the wretched business. He then went to Michael de Marillac and his wife. Marillac was a man of position, and related to the d'Aubrays. Briancourt confessed to him that he knew from her

own lips that Madame de Brinvilliers had poisoned her brothers.

Perhaps he was received no more kindly by Marillac than by Bocager. He could find no resting-place in Paris, and went back to the solitude of Notre Dame des Vertus and the uninterrupted study of theology.

There he remained until he was arrested as being concerned in the poisoning of the two brothers d'Aubray.

This finished the long recital of his dealings with Madame de Brinvilliers. His story had made a terrible impression upon the judges. He had still to go through a severe examination.

## CHAPTER XXI

### EXAMINATION OF BRIANCOURT AND OTHER WITNESSES

“**I**N the whole of your story you omit all dates,” remarked the examining judge.

“I am not able to remember any,” replied Briancourt.

“Yet you seem able to remember some days, whilst others you quite forget,” observed the judge. “You made a reference to Monsieur d’Hervart ?”

“Madame de Brinvilliers told me that Sainte-Croix had agreed with Monsieur d’Hervart the younger, to poison his father for a sum of money. They had even got so far as to introduce La Chaussée into the house of the elder d’Hervart, but as the son was not able to produce the money, the business was postponed. I once asked Madame de Brinvilliers who supplied Sainte-Croix with cash as he had so many expenses to meet. She told me that he had business with Monsieur de Pennautier, who paid him a salary. She said that Sainte-Croix visited a certain Monsieur d’Alibert, and also a Monsieur Menneville. I also remember that when the casket was found in Sainte-Croix’s room La Chaussée went to Picpus to see Madame de Brinvilliers. He demanded money, but I do not know whether she gave him any.”

“Did you actually see the letter which you say Pennautier sent to the Marquise at Picpus ?”

“Madame de Brinvilliers did not show it to me. I only know what she told me about it.”

“ Did this letter give her the earliest news about the casket ? ”

“ I do not know. She was very angry with her servant for not having brought the letter more promptly.”

“ When did your guilty intrigue with the Marquise begin ? ”

“ At Paris, and before the journey to Sains, when she told me at Louvres that she had poisoned her brothers.”

“ What do you think Sainte-Croix died of ? Do you believe that he poisoned himself accidentally whilst compounding the drugs ? ”

“ I do not think Sainte-Croix poisoned himself. A man who has distilled poisons for a long while is not so careless as to poison himself. But I do believe that Sainte-Croix being a well-known poisoner, having business dealings with many persons of rank in connection with poisons, some people of rank and position might well have been able to compel him to poison himself. For there was every probability that the Brinvilliers affair would come to light one day.”

“ With what people of rank did Sainte-Croix have business, in connection with poisons, or otherwise ? ”

“ I do not know if he sold them poisons, but he visited the Abbé Dulong, Canon of Notre Dame, also Monsieur de Caumont, and the Bishop of Mans. Sainte-Croix also received an offer to go as Captain of Monsieur de Mecklemburg's guards at Mecklemburg.”

“ You have spoken of a certain Colbeau, whose daughter entered, or was about to enter, the household of Mademoiselle d'Aubray. What was he ? ”

“ He was a ‘ solliciteur de procès.’ I have seen him at the Courts since the time when the casket was opened. Madame de Brinvilliers always carried poison with her when she went to the country. When she asked me to visit her at Picpus I went to her room where she was with her maid. Opening a small cupboard at the head of her

bed, she showed me a square piece of paper in which I think there was some poison. I do not know the name of the servant, but she accompanied her mistress when she fled from France."

"Was this the same servant who brought the letter from Pennautier, and with whom she was so angry because it had not been given to her sooner?"

"I believe it was the same servant."

"Did Madame de Brinvilliers ever speak to you about Glaser the apothecary?"

"I do not remember that she ever mentioned his name."

"Did you ever see Martin, otherwise known as de Breuille, at Madame de Brinvilliers' house? Do you know him?"

"I don't know him."

This man Martin remained a mystery. It was suggested that he was probably the father of Madeleine Bertrand du Breuil, wife to Sainte-Croix. He is also referred to in some of the contemporary evidence as a notary, and as a servant.

"Did you know Monsieur Génébat?"

"No," replied Briancourt. "I never heard him spoken of as Sainte-Croix's friend."

"Did you know that Sainte-Croix, and many of the people who had dealings with him, were coiners of bad money?"

"I heard it rumoured that Sainte-Croix was a coiner. But I never heard any exact details."

"Was the salary which Pennautier paid to Sainte-Croix a large one?"

"I do not know."

Briancourt was then shown the two caskets, and asked to identify them. The smaller one in red which had been seized at Mézières, he recognised as the case in which Madame de Brinvilliers kept her poisons. The casket found in Sainte-Croix's rooms he had never seen before.



This done, Briancourt was handed over to the record officer. For some reason which does not appear clear Briancourt refused to sign his evidence. At a quarter to four, without leaving the Court of the Tournelle, the depositions were read over to him and he added some new and important facts.

Whenever he visited Bocager, the professor of law had always displayed the keenest curiosity with regard to Pennautier. He had continually endeavoured to "pump" Briancourt in order to discover if the tutor knew of the business dealings Pennautier had with Sainte-Croix. After the discovery of the casket, Bocager told Briancourt that Madame de Brinvilliers had been to see Pennautier but the great receiver-general was not at home. However, the Marquise found Pennautier's wife and her mother. These two ladies did not share Pennautier's interest in Madame de Brinvilliers. They loudly abused her, and "pushed her out of the house by the shoulders."

Briancourt also remembered some dealings with Michel Larcher, President of the Court of Accounts, and brother-in-law to Monsieur d'Aubray the younger, the civil lieutenant. President Larcher had sent twice to Notre Dame des Vertus to ask the tutor what he knew of the poisoning of the two brothers d'Aubray. He also asked if the lackey, La Chaussée, was guilty, and if Madame de Brinvilliers had been an accomplice. Briancourt made evasive answers, but upon his return to Paris the President pressed for a definite reply, and the tutor admitted that La Chaussée was indeed guilty. Larcher then observed that he wished no evil to Madame de Brinvilliers, but was she or was she not mixed up in the crime? Briancourt said that apparently she was an accomplice. Larcher then became inquisitive about Pennautier. Briancourt replied that he knew that Pennautier was a friend of Sainte-Croix, but he could say no more. Larcher was not to be put off so easily. "If I pay you a considerable

sum," he told the badgered tutor, "would that make it easier for you to say whether Pennautier is culpable or not?" Briancourt, who was always haunted by his conscience, resolutely put temptation behind him. "I am not a man to be bought by money. And it is not my habit to accuse people, or not to accuse them, whilst demanding payment." Larcher then represented that Pennautier was extremely wealthy, and there seemed to be every opportunity of making a good haul. In other words the President of the Court of Accounts was quite willing to enter into a blackmailing partnership with Briancourt and take financial advantage of the murder of his own brother-in-law! Larcher knew the Abbé de Grammont (probably the priest who died in 1717 as archbishop of Besançon) who was friendly with Pennautier and had done much business with the financier. The Abbé had spoken often of Briancourt.

Another time the President Larcher and Briancourt met accidentally, and the former tried to arrange a meeting at his house between Pennautier and the tutor, who, however, refused to be a party to such a meeting. Then followed an odd intrigue with Pennautier. After continued pressure Briancourt consented to interview the great man. He called at his house.

"I have come on the part of the President Larcher who says that you wish to speak to me."

"Ah, monsieur," replied Pennautier very civilly. "I know what you want. At the moment I am too busy to talk with you. Will you return to-morrow at the same time."

The next day Briancourt called again, and Pennautier seemed extremely surprised to see him. His manner was brusque.

"There is a rumour about that Sainte-Croix was my friend," he said hurriedly. "I don't pay any attention to it. Such gossip is worthless."



MICHEL LARCHER, PRESIDENT OF THE COURT OF ACCOUNTS  
*After the engraving by R. Nanteuil*



The interview was abruptly ended. When Briancourt reported the conversation to Larcher, the President was astonished. He proposed that Briancourt should obtain seven or eight thousand livres sterling. At this point the minutes of the evidence are vague and unsatisfactory. Larcher evidently wanted Briancourt to worry Pennautier and force him to disgorge a large sum in order to obtain silence.

Bocager also was continually asking Briancourt whether it was true that Pennautier and Sainte-Croix were friends. Briancourt replied that if Saint Laurent had been poisoned, as people said, then there must be much suspicion attached to Pennautier. Every visit he paid to Bocager was signalised by conversation about the financier.

"He's a very rich man," said Bocager. "Any one who can prove his guilt in this business can make some money." Bocager himself was not free from suspicion. Rumour said that having quarrelled with his wife he had procured some poison from the Abbé Dulong and made away with her.

Briancourt then added that Mademoiselle de Grangemont had told him that the day after the death of the Councillor d'Aubray several bags of money were brought into Madame de Brinvilliers' room, and that these bags were afterwards taken away by Sainte-Croix. Mademoiselle de Grangemont also said that amongst the other victims of Sainte-Croix's poison was Mademoiselle de la Mailleraye.

This closed the evidence of Briancourt. Then this strange but weak youth, with his conscience and his constant desire to lead a life of rectitude, who had been drawn into the vicious circle against his inclination, was confronted with his terrible mistress.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MARQUISE FACES HER JUDGES

**M**ADAME DE BRINVILLIERS and Briancourt, having respectively taken an oath to speak the truth, faced each other. The Marquise gave her age as forty-three.

She was then asked what she had to say about Briancourt.

"I have already told you the kind of man he is," she cried indignantly. "He was turned out of my house because he was a drunkard. He took little care of my children. He is not a man of good life. He does not fear God. One can place no reliance upon what he says."

Briancourt denied these accusations against his character. The clerk of the Court then read the evidence the tutor had given concerning his journey to Sains with the Marquise.

Madame de Brinvilliers remarked that the conversation alleged to have taken place between Grangemont<sup>1</sup> and Briancourt at Sains was impossible, for Grangemont was not at Sains at that time. As for the letter of November 1670, announcing that her brother was on his death-bed, which Briancourt said was written by Sainte-Croix, the Marquise again repeated that it was actually written by Monsieur Cousté, and that Louis, a bootmaker, an old servant for twenty years, had brought it.

<sup>1</sup> There were two servants of this name, evidently of the same family, one a footman, the other a maid, who, although married, was often addressed as "Mademoiselle."

“It was either from Sainte-Croix or Cousté,” interjected Briancourt.

“The letter arrived at mid-day,” continued the prisoner. “What reason had I to confide in Briancourt? He had only been in my service seven or eight days!”

“I have spoken the truth,” asserted the tutor.

“As for my daughter,” went on the prisoner, “she slept in Paris a single night, and then Madame Gobelin took her to the convent of Saint Louis.”

The text of the record is here broken, as if the writer found it difficult to keep pace with the prisoner’s vehemence. But the Marquise seems to have entered a general denial of Briancourt’s evidence, and particularly objected to the statement that she had ever spoken to him of the poisoning of her brother, the councillor d’Aubray.

“Do you deny that you told me that you and Sainte-Croix had poisoned your brother?” asked Briancourt.

“I do deny it,” replied the Marquise, and persisted in the denial.

Briancourt swore that she was lying, and that she had admitted the crime to him.

With regard to the devoutly-inclined Mademoiselle d’Aubray, Madame de Brinvilliers explained that her sister had given her goods to religion more than ten years ago.

It being seven o’clock the Court then rose.

On Tuesday, the 14th July, at seven o’clock in the morning, the Court re-assembled. Briancourt announced that he had remembered some further important details which he desired to add to the evidence he had already given.

“Madame de Brinvilliers told me that there was a valet-de-chambre in her brother’s household who was attached to her interests, and through him she was able to learn all that took place. She also said that Sainte-Croix wished to poison La Chaussée, and had indeed

plotted to get the lackey away in the country and poison him there. Sainte-Croix also wished to poison his wife, and if Madame de Brinvilliers had consented, Madame de Sainte-Croix would soon have been out of the world."

"The President, Larcher, had at first been much excited about the affair with Pennautier. Cluet, who was with Larcher nearly every day, told me that Larcher went constantly to see the Abbé de Grammont, and that Cluet himself had also been to see the abbé, by order of Larcher, on this same business. Cluet then told me that he believed Larcher had received a sum of money from Pennautier to stop his mouth. Cluet suggested that I should worry Pennautier in order to extract some more money from the financier, which might be divided between us. In this way we could continue to blackmail Pennautier, giving him to understand that Madame de Brinvilliers had told me many important secrets connected with his intercourse with Sainte-Croix."

"Did Larcher and Cluet speak to you about Pennautier before the condemnation of the valet La Chaussée, or after?" asked the President of the Court.

"Both before and after," replied Briancourt. "But the suggestion about money was only made after the execution of La Chaussée."

"How much did Cluet get?"

"I don't know."

It was mentioned that Mademoiselle Grangemont had been arrested and would be brought before the Court. Madame de Brinvilliers was then brought into the chamber, and the reading of Briancourt's evidence continued.

Briancourt suddenly remembered that Bocager, the law professor, had sent for him four times, and had at last written a letter insisting upon an interview. Bocager had told him that he believed the Marquise was responsible for the deaths of her brothers.

The prisoner entered into some family history. Her

sister, Mademoiselle d'Aubray, had given some 12,000 écus to the religious community with which she lived, a sum more than she could legitimately afford. She asserted that she had never seen Colbeau's daughter.

"I never said that you had seen Colbeau's daughter, or that you had proposed giving a thousand pistoles to Colbeau," replied Briancourt.

"The Court ought to make him say where it was that I told him of the necessity of killing my sister within a month," demanded the prisoner.

"You told me at Sains, on the road from Sains to Paris, and also in Paris itself," retorted Briancourt, without hesitation.

"I could not tell you such a thing on the road, for I have never travelled with you," insisted the prisoner. "And further, all you relate about the letter from Mademoiselle d'Aubray is quite untrue, and what proves it is that my sister suffered from gout ten years before her death and was unable to hold a pen."

"But I saw the letter," cried Briancourt. "I took possession of it and had it up to the date of my arrest, and I will produce it. And now I remember something which may be important, and which I ought to tell the Court. I believe that Madame de Brinvilliers once said that Sainte-Croix had helped to make the fortune of Monsieur de Pennautier, or else Monsieur de Menneville. It was one or the other."

"What you are saying is absolutely false," replied the prisoner. "Sainte-Croix was a beggar, and in no position to make the fortune either of Monsieur de Pennautier or of Monsieur de Menneville. I told this man that Pennautier was wealthy. As for the incident in my bedroom at the Hôtel d'Aubray, it is impossible to see the interior of the room from the gallery, because the windows do not correspond. Besides the curtains had been drawn."



"I have spoken the truth," affirmed Briancourt.

The two poison caskets were then brought into court.

"The little red box which is now being produced is the one I have seen in Madame de Brinvilliers' possession," said Briancourt.

As far as can be gathered from the disconnected records, Madame de Brinvilliers then appears to have addressed the Court at some length. Her rambling statements are briefly summarised in the documents that remain.

"Let it be recorded," she exclaimed, "that Briancourt admits he has never seen the larger casket. Call the Abbé Dulong and ask him if Sainte-Croix preserved his poisons in this casket. As for the Abbé Dulong I have seen him but once. Call Madame Grangemont. I deny that I have written to Briancourt. What he has said about my will is absurd. I was never rich enough to promise him a legacy. I do not remember that Pennautier ever wrote to me, but if he did do so, what harm is there in that? Briancourt never travelled with me to the country. He is being paid to tell these lies by Cluet, who is my enemy. Why, they used to get drunk together every day!"

Briancourt interrupted with a solemn declaration that he had told nothing but the truth.

"It is all false," cried the Marquise, in anger. "No faith can be attached to your words."

Briancourt burst into tears.

"I warned you many times that the disorder of your life could only end in disaster," replied the young man. "And I protested against your cruelty towards your relations."

"You have a faint heart," said the Marquise, with the utmost contempt. "Fancy crying before all these gentlemen!"

After this passionate scene Madame de Brinvilliers



and Briancourt were removed, and La Grangemont was called.

“My name is Marguerite Bernard. I am the wife of Grangemont, captain in the regiment of infantry of Bourlemont. My age is forty-five or six. I swear to speak the truth.”

“Why did you not reveal everything when you gave evidence the first time?” asked the President of the Court sternly.

“In my earlier evidence the criminal lieutenant at the Châtelet asked me if I had anything further to depose. To which I answered that I did not know if I was obliged to speak of what had only come to my ears by hearsay. The criminal lieutenant said that I was not obliged to repeat it.”

“Do you remember what you said to Briancourt?”

“I never said anything to him. But if I said anything I do not remember what I said.”

The President, repeating that he could not understand why she did not reveal everything the first time she was examined, pressed her to explain more fully certain matters.

“When Briancourt was in the household of the Brinvilliers as tutor to the children, he told me that he could not understand why a woman like me remained in a house of that description. I replied that I was quite ready to leave if only I could get my wages. Briancourt was perpetually with Madame de Brinvilliers, and I remonstrated with him several times, telling him that he should apply himself more to the education of the children. One day he said, ‘If you only knew the sort of house you are in you would leave.’ I answered, ‘Have the goodness to pay me my wages and I will go at once.’ Briancourt replied: ‘Money ought not to stop you from going. Madame and Sainte-Croix have no good intentions, and if the life of someone is attempted there will be no safety for you.’”

“ Did you see much money about after the death of the Councillor d’Aubray ? ” asked the Court.

“ I remember that much money was brought into the house. I did not actually see it. They hid it from me because they owed me so much for wages. But I caught sight of five or six bags of money on Madame’s little bed. I am not sure who brought the money, but I think it was a person called Chastelet.”

Briancourt was then confronted with Madame Grangemont.

“ I have nothing to say against him,” said Grangemont.

“ I have no objections to raise,” repeated Briancourt.

His evidence given on the previous day was read. In front of Grangemont, Briancourt adhered to all he had said. But Grangemont contradicted him in more points than one.

“ I never told him that Madame had poisoned her father and mother. It was he who told me. I certainly never heard it from anyone else. It is true that Briguet told me that one day Madame sent her to her room to find some earrings, and that in searching for the earrings she came across a box in which was some sublimate. I asked Briguet how she knew it was sublimate. Briguet said she was the daughter of an apothecary. I also know that Sainte-Croix and Briancourt were very jealous of each other.”

Again Briancourt persisted that he had told the truth.

“ I remember that when Briancourt spoke to me of the deaths of the two Messieurs d’Aubray I replied that it was possible that Madame de la Mailleraye was also poisoned. When Madame de la Mailleraye saw her brother ill she said ‘ If he dies I know to whom to look.’ ”

“ When Sainte-Croix brought the money after the death of Monsieur d’Aubray, the councillor, did I not say to you that it was the price of his blood ? ” asked Briancourt.

"I remember very well that you said that," replied Grangemont. "I think that the money came from Monsieur d'Aubray's house."

"Did you know Martin?" asked the Court.

"I saw him several times at Madame's house. He copied some letters from Madame Dufay for a lawsuit. He was introduced by Sainte-Croix."

"Did you know Belleguise, otherwise called Alexandre?"

"I believe I have heard his name mentioned, but I do not remember with certainty," replied Grangemont.

"Did you know Colbeau?"

"Yes. He was a 'solliciteur de procès' for Madame's business. He had been introduced by Sainte-Croix."

"Had he a daughter?"

"I don't know. If he had I did not see her."

An extraordinary feature of the trial was that Briancourt continually remembered fresh facts which necessitated the re-opening of his evidence. At this point he volunteered new information which the Court accepted.

"A man has been mentioned, by name Chastelet," said Briancourt. "It was thought that he was related to Sainte-Croix. Anyway, both of them were Gascons. Madame Grangemont told me that he was devoted to Sainte-Croix and also to Madame de Brinvilliers. He had served the Brinvilliers in the capacity of 'valet de chambre' and also as 'maître d'hôtel.' He had assisted Madame in pawning many of her pieces of furniture when she was short of money. Madame Grangemont said that Chastelet knew a good deal because he had such a close friendship with Sainte-Croix. I asked Cluet why he did not get Chastelet to give evidence in the trial of the lackey La Chaussée, because he would undoubtedly be able to throw much light upon the poisonings. Cluet said he could not ask Chastelet to be a witness as they had given each other presents. In the meantime, Chastelet

disappeared, and took refuge on the confines of Lorraine, of which country his wife was a native."

"I cannot say whether Chastelet was guilty," remarked Grangemont upon being interrogated.

The Court then rose for the day. Both Briancourt and Grangemont were taken to the prisons of the Conciergerie: And orders were given for the arrest of Colbeau, his daughter, and Chastelet.

The next morning at half-past seven "Marie Marguerite d'Aubray, wife of the Sieur de Brinvilliers, aged forty-three years," was brought into the court.

After having been sworn to speak the truth, and the truth only, she was told that the time had arrived for her to disclose everything.

"You are now before your judges. You are not likely to see them again. You must say truthfully whatever you know. You must not deny everything as you have done up to the present. You are accused of having poisoned your father and your two brothers."

"I have not poisoned them."

"But you have heard all the proofs which have been given in evidence!"

"I repeat that I have not poisoned them. I do not know how my father died."

"But how do you explain your written confession?"

"I wrote it in a foreign country when I was mad."

"That may be. But you must admit that it has every sign of good sense, and of having been written by a person in sound mind. You took particular care of it for a long while."

"I was at a great distance from home. Sometimes I had not a sou in my pocket, and I was forced to borrow even an écu. I never admitted anything to the witnesses. As for that man (Briancourt) he has been two months in the cells."



Her inference was that Briancourt would say anything to save his own skin and gain his liberty.

“Do you remember the Whitsun fêtes in 1666, when your father made an appointment with you, and you kept him waiting a long while?”

“I remember it. I went to my father. He was angry because I had not sent his horses. I did not keep him waiting. I saw nothing of Sainte-Croix that day.”

“What happened at Senlis?”

“We had supper with a canon of the cathedral, Cruvillier by name. I do not think that my father was ill at Senlis. He was not worse than usual at Offémont. He took some medicine. I don't know whether anyone else gave him poison, but I did not. I never knew what disease my brothers died of. La Chaussée never told me that he had given them poison.”

Then was read to her the procès-verbal of the execution of La Chaussée, and she was solemnly asked to speak the truth.

“I have done nothing!” she replied.

“Did not Sainte-Croix say to you, ‘Madame, what do you think of me now? Are you contented this time?’”

“I do not remember it. La Damoiseau was a creature of bad life. I never procured La Chaussée a place in my brother's household, and I do not know who put him there. I have never spoken to Cluet about La Chaussée. The casket never belonged to me. Sainte-Croix was in Savoy a month before his death, and did not take it with him.”

“Is it not true that directly the casket was found Pennautier wrote you a letter that he was going away to the country for four days?”

“I do not remember whether Pennautier wrote to me. But I had some monetary dealings with him, and there was correspondence about a promissory note for 30,000



livres. I never spoke of this note to the Councillor De Laune or to Lamarre."

"Was not this note for 30,000 livres the price of the blood of your brothers?"

"How could it be? We wished to hide the fact from my creditors."

"But Sainte-Croix had put this note for 30,000 livres in the casket, not wishing to make use of it."

"We wished to hide it from the creditors."

"You drew up a note to the profit of Paul, under the name of Chastel, by power of attorney."

"Paul is one of my creditors. I had no knowledge of Pennautier's order about the payment. It was necessary for someone to give a receipt. I never understood that I owed anything to Pennautier. I did not know Cusson."

"Why, out of the 10,000 livres that you owed to Pennautier, did you pay 2000 livres to Cusson, a man you did not know?"

"Cusson came to me on behalf of Paul, and thought that I had drawn the note."

The financial dealings between Pennautier, the Brinvilliers, and their intermediaries, were left in a state of foggy confusion, which was exactly what the prisoner desired. It cannot be said that these matters were clear to the judges. They are certainly not clear to the historian who attempts to unravel them. Pennautier and the Brinvilliers had an intricate money relationship stretching over a series of years. At one moment the Brinvilliers advanced cash to the financier, later the position was reversed. But to prepare a ledger account of debtor and creditor from the fragmentary documents which have come down to us is impossible. The Court abruptly passed to another aspect of the case.

"Your flight shows your guilt."

"When I went away there was no decree of arrest

against me. My relations advised me to go. I knew nothing about Monsieur de Pennautier's affairs."

"Why did you have such business with Pennautier?"

"I had no knowledge that he wrote to me. He might have written. He visited Picpus, but he did not see me."

"You told Cluet that you knew a man who would give four or six thousand livres to adjust the matter."

"I don't deny having said it. Many other people have said it as well, and I learnt it through common gossip."

"But if you had no business with him, why did you write two letters to him and say that things were as important for him as for you?"

"He owed me five thousand livres and I wanted the money."

"But then why did you tell him that it was necessary to conceal Martin, and that—unhappy as you were—you wished to be of service to him for the truth must be admitted?"

"I feigned haste as I wished to have my money."

"But why did you write: 'it is necessary that Martin goes to your neighbourhood and holds himself in hiding. Arrange this at once'?"

"There was no real reason to write that. My object was to get a reply from him."

"But this is no answer to the question. You wished strongly to have Martin concealed."

"It was nothing to do with me."

"You did not know Martin then?"

"I have seen him but two or three times in my life."

"You are not speaking the truth, Madame. You have seen him many times as a man who was with Sainte-Croix and employed by him."

"I never knew it."

"But Martin himself copied letters for you in a lawsuit you had with Dufay."

"He was employed to copy some land surveys."

“ Then why did you ask Pennautier to conceal Martin more than anyone else ? ”

“ I did not know what I was doing when I wrote that. I was guarded so strictly at the time.”

“ What business dealings had Pennautier with Martin ? ”

“ Pennautier might have seen him at the lodgings of Sainte-Croix, or at Monsieur de Caumont’s.”

“ But if, as you say, Martin had no secret intelligence on the subject of your business with Pennautier, what idea moved you to write to Pennautier suggesting that Martin should hide himself ? ”

“ Martin had no knowledge of my accusation.”

“ What knowledge had you of Pennautier’s affairs ? ”

“ None whatever.”

“ But why, Madame, did you desire that Martin should conceal himself if he knew nothing about Pennautier’s affairs and nothing about yours ? ”

“ I did not know what I was writing.”

Madame de Brinvilliers was questioned over and over again by the President of the Court with regard to her dealings with Pennautier and Martin. No satisfactory answer could be obtained.

“ In the second letter you wrote to Pennautier you said : ‘ things are as important for you as for me.’ Now, will you explain what you meant by those words ? ”

“ I was so upset that I did not know what I wrote. Why don’t you examine Monsieur de Pennautier himself on the subject ? I had no dealings with him except with regard to the note for the five thousand livres which he owed me.”

“ You have not always spoken like that. When you talked to Barbier you said that Pennautier was as much interested in the matter as you were, and in addition he had more to fear.”

“ I never said it. Barbier is a drunkard, and one can place no trust in him.”

“ If you do not wish us to trust Barbier you ought to allow us to believe Cluet, who has been connected with your family for so long. You told Cluet that Pennautier had been to Picpus and had remarked to you that he was troubled about the casket, and that he would give fifty pistoles to get from it what concerned him. Then you added that the contents were of consequence both to you and to Pennautier, and you repeated to Cluet that Pennautier was equally mixed up in the matter with you.”

“ When I said that Pennautier was mixed up in it with me I meant nothing. He had been formally summoned to recognise the promissory note. Furthermore, I related nothing to Cluet for the reasons I have already given.”

“ Explain your meaning when you told Cluet that Pennautier would give fifty pistoles ? ”

“ Cluet is a rogue. Again I say that I told him nothing.”

“ What did you mean when you said to Mademoiselle Desqueux that you had something in your cabinet which would pull you out of Pennautier’s affairs ? ”

“ I referred to the five thousand livres.”

“ Have you anything to say about Pennautier ? ”

“ I have had no dealings with him since I lent him money and he returned it to me.”

“ Is it not true that Pennautier made an allowance to Sainte-Croix ? ”

“ I know nothing about it.”

“ But you told Briancourt so.”

“ I never spoke of it to him.”

“ What did you mean when you said to Briancourt that Sainte-Croix had made the fortune of Pennautier and of the Sieur de Menneville, one or the other ? ”

“ I never mentioned the subject to him.”

“ Do you know whether Sainte-Croix was a coiner ? ”

“ People said he was. I do not know whether he was or not.”

The cross-examination dragged wearily along.

“ The casket never belonged to me,” cried the Marquise.

“ One ought not to believe such a man as Sainte-Croix.”

“ Did you poison Mademoiselle Villiers ? ”

“ No.”

“ Did you try to poison yourself ? ”

“ No.”

“ But you wrote in your confession that you did.”

“ I do not know what I wrote. I was so harassed that I did not know what I was doing.”

“ Why did you write to Sainte-Croix that you had nothing left of the drug that he had given you ? ”

“ I do not know what I did. Anyway, it was a bagatelle.”

“ Why did you tell Briancourt that you had tried to poison your sister ? When was it Sainte-Croix wished Colbeau’s daughter to enter your sister’s household ? Was not the explanation of your sister’s deathbed wish that her body should not be examined the fact that she did not want the traces of poison to be revealed ? ”

“ I did nothing. I never knew Colbeau’s daughter.”

“ Is it not true that you tried to burn the house at Nourar because the Courts wished to obtain possession of it ? ”

“ I did nothing.”

“ Have you anything to say ? ”

“ The casket did not belong to me.”

“ Did you not poison Roussel your servant ? ”

“ No.”

“ Did not Sainte-Croix tell you that he wished to poison your servant ? ”

“ No.”

“ But you had so much to do with Sainte-Croix that it is impossible he did not mention some of these



matters to you. Did he not tell you of his plans to become a secretary in the King's cabinet ? ”

“ He said nothing to me.”

“ Did you not go secretly to Glaser with Sainte-Croix ? ”

“ I have been there two or three times, but never secretly.”

“ Had you not better recognise your position ? You will not see your judges again.”

“ I have considered everything during the past four months.”

“ In which month did you twice administer poison to your sister, as you have written in your confession ? ”

“ I have no remembrance of what I wrote.”

The President of the Court told her that the greatest of her crimes was not that of having poisoned her father and her two brothers, although these indeed were very horrible, but that she herself had taken Glaser's prescription and attempted to poison herself. Suicide was the blackest crime against the laws of God.

Madame de Brinvilliers explained that she had written to Sainte-Croix saying that she had taken poison because she was sure that that would oblige him to come. She knew nothing about antidotes, having never made use of poison, and she had never even administered poison to anybody.

The President then asked for details about the last illness of her father. He implored her to throw off her indifference.

“ You are now perhaps at the end of your life. I beg of you to reflect seriously over your wicked conduct, which has brought upon you not only the reproaches of your family, but even of those who participated in your evil life.”

For half an hour the judges asked her to consider her position. She refused to say anything further. It is said that the judges wept over her obstinacy.

“ I have pains at my heart ! ” she cried, at last.

They would not let her go. They spoke of her husband.

“ You endeavoured to poison him.”

“ No,” she replied. “ Monsieur Brayer (the physician) treated him, and I nursed him with every possible care.”

It was announced that judgment would be read the next morning at seven o'clock.

The President said that by an unusual grace, which had been granted at the prayer of her sister, the carmelite nun, and her family, a person of much merit and virtue would be sent to her prison, to console her and to exhort her to consider her soul's salvation.

As she was conveyed from the growing gloom of the court (it was now evening) the Marquise could have had little doubt as to her fate.

Meanwhile, Sarsfield writes post-haste to Whitehall, gathering together the gossip of Paris. His letter is dated on Wednesday, the 15th July.

Madame de Brinvilliers was examined from seven o'clock yesterday morning till one, privately by the Judges. They say Monsieur Pennautier will come off well, his receiver of Languedoc is given to Monsieur Picon, one of Monsieur Colbert's *commis*. Madame de Brinvilliers (being a criminal's accusation) will not be heard against him without some other proof.

At the end of the letter Sarsfield adds the latest news.

I hear now that Madame de Brinvilliers declares nothing against Pennautier, but hath against President de l'Archer, a president in the chamber of accounts ; Madame de Lionne, the widow of the late secretary ; Monsieur Bocager, who teaches the civil law to most persons of quality in this Parliament of Paris ; and a Canon of Notre Dame, who, for fear, they say, is run away ; this accused of poisoning the late Archbishop, Bocager of his wife, who died in nine hours' time, she of her late husband ; some talks there are in town of Chevalier de Lorraine, but it's only a counterfeit story amongst the populace.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DEFENCE, FIRST PORTION

**I**N an English criminal trial the next step would be the speech for the defence. In the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers there was no actual speech for the defence, and indeed the wretched prisoner was denied the aid of counsel. During the examination and confrontation of witnesses she was compelled to fight her battles single-handed. But outside the court she was able to seek legal help. Her adviser, Maître Nivelles, wrote a "factum," or defence presented to the judges, which has remained celebrated in the annals of French jurisprudence for over two centuries, receiving the unstinted praise of so great an advocate as Berryer. It is singular that Maître Nivelles, clearly a man of the finest intellectual powers, should not have become more distinguished in his profession. Practically, our knowledge of his career is confined to the one fact that he wrote the defence of Madame de Brinvilliers. The "factum" is exceedingly long, and the following pages cannot do more than summarise a few of the points with which he endeavoured to convince the judges that his client was an innocent woman.

"Although the enemies of Madame the Marquise de Brinvilliers have distracted and prejudiced the public by the number and the atrocity of their accusations, and although the mind of the people has been blindly carried away by the passion of the accusers, and by that natural corruption which tends to calumny and the

cruelty of executions, nevertheless the prisoner hopes that her judges, who are ruled only by sentiments of truth and justice, and who are above the violent heat of popular movements, will decide nothing on suspicions and imperfect proofs. They know that in the case of an accusation for those crimes which are subject to the most rigorous punishment, the proofs must be undeniable, especially when the accusation is formulated against a person of birth and condition, whose education and rank in life are powerful presumptions towards the justification of her innocence."

"With regard to the public, Madame de Brinvilliers hopes yet that all reasonable persons—as well as her judges—will be disabused of the false preoccupations which render her unjustly odious, and that it will be recognised that her single crime has been her misfortune. This will be seen when the true history of her conduct is told, and of the persecution which she has suffered."

Maitre Nivelles then entered into details of the fortune and rank of both families, the Brinvilliers and the d'Aubray. "These advantages of rank, of birth, and of fortune, are enough in themselves to presume that she is incapable of the horrible and villainous crimes of which she is accused. But I will tell you the unhappy origin of the accusation."

The barrister then recounted the story of Sainte-Croix's acquaintance with the Marquis de Brinvilliers. "This pernicious man has been the demon who has excited the storm and troubled the peacefulness of these families. Having led the Marquis de Brinvilliers into vast expenses, which were impoverishing his fortune, Sainte-Croix became the only author of the crimes which have been imputed to Madame de Brinvilliers."

Sainte-Croix, argued Maitre Nivelles, led the Marquise astray. She was an innocent and simple-minded woman, not acquainted with the wiles and deceptions of the



world. Her husband's friend had been introduced to her as an honest man. He gained her confidence, and, when he advised her to separate legally her property from that of her husband, she thought his advice good. "It is necessary to admit," wrote the advocate, "that the Marquise was not prudent. But there are these excuses to be urged for her. She was ignorant, and without experience. Sainte-Croix deceived everybody who knew him, because, under a wise and good outward appearance, there was hidden one of the blackest and most detestable souls in the whole world."

The confidence which Madame placed in Sainte-Croix for the direction of her business affairs was unhappily misunderstood by her family. They believed false reports, and Monsieur d'Aubray, on the strength of his own suspicion and the complaints of his sons, had Sainte-Croix arrested upon some other pretext and shut up in the Bastille. Sainte-Croix considered every available means of revenge against the d'Aubray family, and particularly against the two brothers who were the persons who had mainly excited their father to imprison him. In the Bastille he met the poisoner Exili, and from this Italian he learnt the secrets of the most subtle and infallible poisons.

Now, continued Maître Nivelles, Sainte-Croix knew that Madame de Brinvilliers would oppose so detestable a scheme. And, as I will justify by indubitable proofs, he hid from her the whole design. He made use of a valet called La Chaussée who had been in his service for some time. La Chaussée was introduced in 1669 into the household of Monsieur D'Aubray, the councillor who lived with his brother the civil lieutenant.

This access gave him the means to poison the two brothers. La Chaussée admitted it before his death. And it is of the greatest importance to observe that in this same confession La Chaussée declared that Sainte-



Croix, who had made him the confident of all his secrets, and of his execrable poisonings, had always told him that he had hidden the matter from Madame de Brinvilliers. She knew nothing about it. She would never have consented to such abominable crimes, against which her whole nature would have revolted. The final confession of this servant has an insurmountable value, because the torments of the "question ordinaire et extraordinaire" did not extract from him any kind of avowal. But when he was condemned and in front of death, the exhortations of his confessor, the prickings of his conscience, and the fear of eternal damnation obliged him to speak the truth.

The barrister then argued that Sainte-Croix had every reason not to acquaint the Marquise with his schemes. He and La Chaussée were quite able to carry out their plans. In such a matter the fewer people engaged the better. Madame de Brinvilliers was not only absolutely useless to them, but she would have resisted the idea by reason of her natural feelings, her remorse, and the fear which is common to her sex. Sainte-Croix controlled her business affairs. She trusted him implicitly. He imagined that if she succeeded to the D'Aubray wealth it would also come into his hands. Madame de Brinvilliers had no advantage in the destruction of her family. It was the only resource she had in the miserable state of her affairs. Besides she would not inherit. That could be proved beyond dispute. The property of her father and her brothers was subject to the dowry of Madame d'Aubray, the accuser. This dowry covered it almost completely, for Madame de Brinvilliers had received at her marriage more than she was entitled to.

It was a specious argument, which the barrister then adroitly quitted to deal with Sainte-Croix. Divine vengeance had suddenly overtaken him. One day, whilst he was working over the abominable compounds intended to poison others, he was himself poisoned by the

vapour of his own preparations. Before his death he took a precaution to ensure his safety. He considered himself only, and did not trouble what pain might ensue for Madame de Brinvilliers, or anybody else. He had a casket in which he placed all the papers which concerned the business matters of the Marquise. And as there were only these papers he laid at the top of the casket half a sheet of paper, on which he wrote that the casket and its contents concerned Madame de Brinvilliers alone and must be returned to her. He wrote this inscription, and put it in the casket in May 1670, at which time there were only the notes and letters which concerned Madame de Brinvilliers. But after that date he became afraid that poisons would be discovered in his rooms. So he put the poisons in the casket, and gave the casket for safe custody to a person named Guesdon, a hairdresser, who had been his valet. And there is a proof that the packets of poison were placed in the casket long after the inscription had been written on the sheet of paper. One could see from a date written upon one of the poison packets that it had been placed in the casket two years after the earlier inscription. And there were other writings on each packet, in which he desired that all the packets should be burnt after his death. This proved not only that the poisons did not belong to Madame de Brinvilliers, but that Sainte-Croix never suggested that they did belong to her. And this can be further explained.

A little while before his death, wishing to make use of these poisons, Sainte-Croix had the casket brought back to his house. Thus it was found after his death and sealed. Madame de Brinvilliers knew that Sainte-Croix had some papers in the casket which belonged to her. She wished to reclaim it, thinking to find her papers. She was surprised when she was told that Sainte-Croix had put some decoctions in the casket. Not knowing what they were, it led to her remark that it was some folly of Sainte-

Croix. When the casket was officially opened, and found to be full of poisons, there was a reason for the proceedings. But the inquiry brought to light the fact that La Chaussée, under the direction of Sainte-Croix, had committed the actual poisoning.

La Chaussée was condemned on the 24th March 1673. He admitted having poisoned the brothers d'Aubray; he charged Sainte-Croix as an accessory; and he repeated that Madame de Brinvilliers had never been told by Sainte-Croix.

Unfortunately the accusations made with such heat against the Marquise aroused her creditors who obtained judgments against her. She considered that the best thing to do was to retreat into a place of safety where she could escape their demands. She was frightened at the dreadful accusations, and, moreover, she was a woman without experience. This retreat having been considered a flight, it was easy to include her in the decree on the cause of contumacy, and to condemn her as if she deserved the severest punishment.

But it was not difficult to find her. She had retired only to Liége, in a country allied to France. Mlle. d'Aubray, her sister, who died last August, and who knew well that she was not guilty, sent her everything necessary for her sustenance. If this sister were still living she would have given evidence towards the justification of Madame de Brinvilliers, whom she loved deeply.

Maitre Nivelles then energetically denounced the police officer Desgrez. He surprised and arrested her in the town of Liége, and exercised against her violences, menaces, and extraordinary artifices. Not content with having seized her person, her papers, her goods, even to the most necessary articles, he treated her on the journey with unheard-of severity and indignity for a lady of such rank. He had done everything to intimidate her, and to make her write letters and notes from which he could

extract certain deductions. In her prison these indignities were redoubled. She had even been deprived of the consolations of religion, for her goalers refused to allow her to attend divine service. For more than two months, since she has been in the Conciergerie, she has not heard mass, not even on Whitsun Day. She has only been allowed to leave her cell to be tormented by an infinite number of accusations and questions incessantly repeated.

But the most astonishing fact is that at the same time, while accusations are invented with every skill and ingenuity, she has not been allowed the slightest help, the most natural and the most legitimate aid for her defence. She has not been allowed—an ignorant woman unversed in the subtleties of the law—the assistance of counsel. By an unheard-of proceeding witnesses have been imprisoned after examination, without the slightest conceivable reason. One can only presume that it has been done to intimidate them and make them give evidence against her.

In so strange a persecution does it not seem that there is a wish to punish this lady before she has been judged, for one could never hope for a condemnation from judges so clear-sighted and equitable? To establish the justification of this lady it is necessary to examine the accusation and the proofs upon which one pretends to base a conviction.

Madame de Brinvilliers is accused of having poisoned her two brothers, and upon this accusation condemnation by contumacy has been given.

For such an accusation one makes use of two kinds of pretended proofs, by testimony and by writing.

But, before examining them, we must presuppose as an unalterable foundation this maxim, the most important and the most inviolable in criminal matters, that when one proceeds in relation to a capital crime the law requires



that the proofs shall be of the most striking force and as clear as the day. An accusation such as this, the most unheard of and most astonishing that has ever been made, an accusation that the prisoner has poisoned all the persons the most nearly connected to her by the laws of kindred and of nature, a crime horrible and unnatural, almost unbelievable by reason of its very atrocity, such accusation consequently demands proofs most powerful and incontestable. These proofs ought to be infinitely stronger when so strange an accusation is levelled against a person of high birth and illustrious condition. Can one believe that a woman of so advantageous birth, who has had a wise and honest education, with examples in her own family of perfect virtue, would abandon herself to commit such shocking deeds? A person does not pass from innocence to such great crimes in one stride. It can only be done by degrees. One does not commence by parricide. Saint Ambrose said that no one engages in crime easily. One does not lose all sense of shame in a moment.

Maître Nivelles quoted the Holy Scriptures to the same end, and insisted again that the proofs should be as clear as noon.

“Let us look at the proofs offered against this lady, and see if they are of this quality. The verbal evidence is ordinarily the most important in a case of this kind. The witnesses have been examined during a period of five or six months.” Maître Nivelles then proceeded to probe into the evidence of three of the most noteworthy, Cluet, Edmée Huet, and Briancourt.

Against the evidence of Cluet, the sergeant at the Châtelet, there are three several strong objections to be raised, and more than sufficient for the purpose.

The first objection to his evidence is his attachment to Madame d’Aubray, who has made the accusation. For many years he has been entirely devoted to her, and



she arranged his marriage with her servant Jeanne Sursin. He has not given his evidence as a simple witness, but rather as one of the accusing parties. His deposition is charged with a multitude of facts, detailed with so many singular and extraordinary circumstances, that one can only believe that his evidence is the result of passion. His deposition has been carefully rehearsed. It is impossible to believe that it is the effort of memory.

The second objection, justified by his own evidence, is that he has declared himself the enemy of Madame de Brinvilliers. He complains that she wished to kill him also, that he learnt it from Briancourt. His evidence is not disinterested. There is the motive of vengeance running through it.

The third objection is that he is "soliciteur" of Madame d'Aubray. He eats and drinks at her house every day. It is a fact of public notoriety that he is the principal mover of this accusation. He has pursued Madame de Brinvilliers with such a passion that he endeavoured to suborn the witnesses, as appears from the verification of Briancourt. He obliged Briancourt to give evidence by the most extraordinary menaces. Briancourt has not denied that it is true "that Cluet had been to find him at Notre Dame des Vertus, where he had retired, and that Cluet threatened to set fire to the lodgings of the Oratorian Fathers, where he was, if he did not give evidence against Madame de Brinvilliers." It is Cluet who arrested La Chaussée, the valet to Sainte-Croix. These are not vague and generalised objections.

Maître Nivelles again repeated that Cluet and Jeanne Sursin were entirely devoted to the interests of Madame d'Aubray, that Cluet was attached to the late Monsieur d'Aubray, her husband, and that Jeanne Sursin had been with her when she married Monsieur d'Aubray. When Cluet married Jeanne in February 1674, the marriage was solemnized from the house of Madame d'Aubray, who paid

all the expenses of the nuptials. Maître Nivelles also said that Monsieur d'Aubray had left 2000 livres in his will to Madame Cluet, and that Madame d'Aubray had made up part of her dot.

"Cluet has acted throughout on behalf of Madame d'Aubray. He has bought up the witnesses. Since his marriage he has particularly lived in Madame d'Aubray's household, even after the arrest of Madame de Brinvilliers. He is there every day. Madame d'Aubray has too much sincerity and conscience to deny this. The evidence of Cluet should not be considered. The law demands that there should be a certain amount of sincerity and reasonable indifference in a witness, who should be free from all passion. He should not be the friend of the prosecutor any more than the enemy of the accused. He should take no part in the accusation, for fear that his prejudices should lead him to tell lies. A single objection of this kind destroys the whole of a witness's evidence, and in the person of Cluet we have all these facts gathered together. He is in the familiarity, in the service, and one is able to say in the domesticity of Madame d'Aubray. He is the declared enemy of Madame de Brinvilliers and believes that she wished to kill him. He has arranged the case for Madame d'Aubray, he is a suspicious person, and his evidence is full of affectations."

These objections are so legitimate that it is hardly necessary to examine the evidence of Cluet, which is remarkable for its contradictions. He pretends that Briancourt told him that "Madame and Mademoiselle d'Aubray were wrong to complain of him (Briancourt), being under more obligations to him than they thought, as he had prevented them being poisoned." But Briancourt said nothing of this in his evidence. He denied it. It shows the falseness of the evidence which is no more than hearsay, unworthy of consideration.

He pretends also that he heard Madame de Brinvilliers

say that "her brother was no good, and that, if she wished, she would get two gentlemen to assassinate him on the road to Orléans, where he was *intendant*." This is past all belief. Madame de Brinvilliers would never speak in this manner against her brother to a man of low standing, particularly as she well knew that Cluet, being a sergeant in the Châtelet, was connected with her brother, and was continually in his house. The contradictions and absurdities are so numerous that one could not attach any value to the evidence.

The second witness is Edmée Huet, widow of Brigeon, a fruiterer. It is useless to examine her evidence given in the earlier trial. It ought to be entirely rejected. She has never been confronted with Madame de Brinvilliers. The rules of evidence (*Des Recollemens et Confrontations*, Article 8) formally and definitely state that the evidence of witnesses who have not been confronted with the prisoner cannot stand as proof. There is one single exception, "If they die during contumacy." There is no report that Edmée Huet is dead. Absence is not sufficient, death alone will admit her evidence. The confrontation of the prisoner and the witnesses is most important in a criminal trial, because the accused person has no other means of defending himself and of objecting to the witnesses.

It is for the prosecution to bring forward the witnesses. Otherwise their absence can only be considered a trick to present false evidence being destroyed by pertinent examination. This can be justly alleged in the case of Huet. She was solicited by Cluet to give evidence. She has received money to give evidence, and if she were here I would compel her to admit the fact. The prosecution know and fear these facts, and this is the true cause why she does not appear.

I am not then obliged to stop and examine in any detail the false assertions and suppositions which make

up her evidence. It is very easy to note the absurdities it contains. For example, she says that Madame de Brinvilliers sent her to find some earrings, and to do this gave her the keys of a casket. In the casket she found arsenic in the forms of powder and of paste, and she threw them in the fire without saying a word to Madame de Brinvilliers.

This is ridiculous. We are asked to believe that Madame de Brinvilliers gave her the keys of a casket in which poisons were kept. Huet admits that Madame had not given her any confidence. She says she was so surprised that she threw the poisons on the fire. Arsenic is used for more purposes than one in a household. It is not an extraordinary thing to keep. It is used as a remedy. Could not Huet have assumed that it was for these things? It is unfortunate that a person should be considered a poisoner simply because arsenic is in the house.

Huet adds something still more absurd. "One day at dinner," says she, "having drunk to excess, my mistress comes into my room with a box, in which she tells me there is something to avenge herself on her enemies. In the box were some 'successions,' without explaining another word." Then says Huet, "seven or eight hours after, Madame de Brinvilliers, having come more to her senses, told me that she did not know what she was saying when she spoke of 'successions.'" Afterwards, when going to her property at Nourar, she said to Huet that she did not wish to leave her casket in her room, as it was of importance, and that if she died Huet was to throw it in the fire. When she returned from her journey Madame asked earnestly for the casket, which was returned to her."

This evidence is a chain of absurdities which defeats its own end. Huet accuses her mistress of drunkenness, and that she was in such a state of stupidity that she did



not know what she was saying, a condition when one is capable of saying all manner of lies. Huet admits that Madame de Brinvilliers explained herself very imperfectly. She admitted afterwards to her servant that she did not know what she said. To show the falseness of this evidence, Huet, by an ordinary defect in lying and calumny, did not remember what she had come to say. It was that she had the boldness to take some arsenic which was in her mistress's casket and to throw it in the fire. Then she tells us that a long while after her mistress gives her the casket and tells her that in a certain event it is necessary to throw it in the fire; whereas there was no poison in it, for she herself has told us that she had taken it out and thrown it in the fire.

It would be still more absurd to say that her mistress had put fresh poisons in the casket. If she had done so she would never have given the casket to a person who had already thrown the other poisons in the fire.

As to what Mademoiselle Grangemont told her "that she (Grangemont) had heard Briancourt say that Sainte-Croix and Madame de Brinvilliers had a scheme to assassinate Briancourt or to poison themselves, because she had discovered that the Marquise's father and brothers had been poisoned." This proposition is ridiculous in itself. It is sufficient to remark that it is but hearsay, and even hearsay of another hearsay, coming from Briancourt, who denies having said it. Thus this evidence of a witness, who is not produced, is destroyed as much by objections as by contradictions. It hardly deserves the time that one has spent to fight it.

There now remains the third witness, Briancourt. The objections here are so evident that he himself has been obliged to recognise them. He has admitted being urged with extraordinary threats by Cluet to give evidence. He has been accused of complicity by the singular pro-



cedure against him. He is not to be received as a witness capable of giving evidence in this trial.

His evidence does not contain the slightest proof against Madame de Brinvilliers, inculpating her in the crime for which Sainte-Croix and La Chaussée are alone guilty. He says "Madame de Brinvilliers often spoke about poison, and in the house also it was often mentioned." There is nothing in that. The most innocent people, when these things arise, are accustomed to recount all they know. On the contrary, from it we are able to draw an inference of Madame de Brinvilliers' innocence, for it is quite certain that people who commit these dreadful crimes are those who will speak less of them before the world, from their fear that the secret may escape their lips.

Then he tells us that "Madame de Brinvilliers, being angry about something which had not succeeded, said that she would poison herself, and that there was a means of ridding oneself of the people who were displeasing." This evidence simply shows that angry persons are able to say many things without carrying them into execution. Usually people who in the quickness of temper cry out that they will kill themselves, or somebody else, are the most innocent, as those who threaten nobody are the most dangerous. But there is one infinitely important fact which can be noticed in the evidence of these three witnesses. Take the facts contained in them in detail, and there is not a single one which deals directly with the principal question in the accusation—did Madame de Brinvilliers poison or instigate the poisoning of her brothers? Not one witness declares that he had any knowledge that she poisoned her brothers, or that she obliged La Chaussée to do it, or that she had known when it was done, or that she had entered into any conspiracy either with La Chaussée or with Sainte-Croix, directly or indirectly, for this purpose. It is necessary

to prove this in order to make her an accomplice. Instead of these definite facts the witnesses recite vague and indefinite gossip about conversations and rumours of poisoning in general terms, without referring to the case in question. They speak of Madame de Brinvilliers' past life as if they wished to defame publicly her conduct rather than convict her of a particular crime.

These three witnesses are talked of as if they had given the proofs of perfect evidence and conviction. On the contrary it is easy to observe to what wicked lengths the persecution has gone against Madame de Brinvilliers in trying to bribe the witnesses. We have a serjeant, such as Cluet, and a simple fruiterer like Edmée Huet, as the principal witnesses of the persecution. And they are made to recite lies and contradictions which sufficiently refute themselves.

It is not necessary to speak of the other witnesses who have been heard in great number. Their evidence proves two facts which cannot be denied.

The first is that Sainte-Croix and La Chaussée are the true culprits who poisoned the two brothers d'Aubray.

The second is that Madame de Brinvilliers placed great confidence in Sainte-Croix, and that La Chaussée sometimes went to her house.

But, as to the first, do you not know that a crime is personal to the man who commits it? With regard to the second, the Marquis de Brinvilliers was the one who introduced Sainte-Croix into his household, and Sainte-Croix by this means managed to control Madame, and to persuade her to separate from her husband. Necessarily she had confidence in him, and she wrote to him because he was conducting this business on her behalf. But you cannot condemn a person as guilty of a crime simply because of the company he or she frequents. Every day there are many examples of men and women who deceive us by their appearance, and who surprise the

most capable and most innocent minds, to whom they have taken care not to communicate their bad ideas. In the case of Sainte-Croix, he had views and motives quite opposed to those of Madame de Brinvilliers. It was the furor of his vengeance which animated him to poison the d'Aubrays, the hatred of the insult which he considered he had received through his imprisonment. Madame de Brinvilliers lived in perfect friendship with her brothers. Another motive inspired Sainte-Croix in this abominable business. It was the desire for money. He had the criminal hope that he would become master of the property of this family when it fell into the hands of Madame de Brinvilliers. He controlled her absolutely. Madame de Brinvilliers has good right to complain. A woman of family, she falls a victim to the schemes and artifices of this abominable scoundrel, who ruins her in every possible way, and who punishes her most in destroying her family. Then she is reproached as being guilty of all the crimes Sainte-Croix has committed. It is the same with regard to the valet La Chaussée, who said that Madame de Brinvilliers knew nothing. He had been forbidden by his master to speak to her about it. Because he went sometimes to her house it does not follow that she participated in his crimes. It is quite possible to have servants who commit great crimes, but it is always the masters who are the last to hear of it. La Chaussée had good reasons to visit Madame de Brinvilliers' house, because he had two relations there, one the porter, the other a lackey. These facts, that she was very friendly with Sainte-Croix, and also knew his servant, prove nothing. They resulted simply by reason that Sainte-Croix was managing her business.

There is another witness to be considered whose evidence is more powerful than all the others together. His evidence must be considered as being more truthful, because it is the declaration of a dying man. This

evidence is the last statement of La Chaussée, the most authentic proof that one is able to have in a criminal matter.

I contend that this miserable man, who carried out the vengeance of Sainte-Croix, was in a state of repentance as he went to render an account of his actions before a tribunal infinitely more formidable than any of this world. He was obliged by his conscience and his oath to bear witness of the truth as to the asserted complicity of Madame de Brinvilliers. He said he never spoke to her about these matters. When he was exhorted to declare his accomplices he replied that Sainte-Croix, who had obliged him to carry out the poisoning, and who had confided to him all his secrets, had always said that Madame de Brinvilliers knew nothing. He was then asked what recompense Sainte-Croix had promised him, and he replied that it was one hundred pistoles. Sainte-Croix was his single accomplice, the sole author of the crimes, the compounder of the poisons, the instigator of the abominations, and the man who paid for these deeds. Can one doubt the truth of evidence given by a man who knew he was dying. Every law presumes that he told the truth. In his death confession, stretched on the wheel itself, the moment before he gasped his last breath, being again interrogated, he persisted in what he had already said. He had nothing to add, and declared that he spoke the truth and the whole truth. One is unable to imagine that a man wishes to lose his eternal salvation, and that, at the very moment when he is suffering from the blows of the steel, amidst the thunders of justice, divine and human, he is still ready to lie before God and man.

Fear to offend increases as life diminishes. The soul loses its passions and falsehoods as it frees itself from the body, and as it approaches the tribunal of truth and justice. And after evidence of this nature



one can only be invincibly persuaded that Madame de Brinvilliers had no complicity in the crime.

Maitre Nivelles then argued the matter afresh upon the basis of the dying declaration of La Chaussée, "Sainte-Croix had always told me that Madame de Brinvilliers knew nothing."

There remains now the examination of the written proofs, which reduce themselves to three principal heads.

The first concerns the casket belonging to Sainte-Croix.

The second deals with the letters that Madame de Brinvilliers had written to Sainte-Croix.

The third and last is the document found amongst Madame de Brinvilliers' papers in which she has written a religious confession. It is astonishing that the prosecution wish the judges to read it. This document is of such a nature that all laws, divine and human, render it sacred and inviolable. It is sealed in the secrecy and silence exacted by the most august mystery of religion, as one will see later by reasons which do not admit of argument.

Now about the casket. It is the principal, it is almost the only proof, upon which the prosecution base their whole case. In other words, in this casket was found a sheet of paper on which Sainte-Croix had written that what was in it concerned Madame de Brinvilliers and belonged to her alone. Consequently, as the casket contained poisons, it is necessary to consider her as the accomplice of Sainte-Croix.

It is easy to destroy this argument by explaining that there is a difference of time between the writing of this sheet of paper and the date when Sainte-Croix placed the poisons in the casket.

The sheet of paper is dated 25th May 1670. The dates on the packets of poisons are some years later. In 1670 Sainte-Croix had in the casket only the letters from Madame de Brinvilliers. He preserved them



preciously, because he did not want them to be published. Possibly there were several other innocent marks of the confidence and friendship between them. At the same time he placed in the care of his "procureur du Châtelet" the papers relating to the lawsuit of Madame de Brinvilliers. Those papers are with the procureur at this moment. But it is not astonishing that Sainte-Croix wished the casket and the letters inside to be returned to Madame de Brinvilliers or burnt. These letters were couched in terms of friendship and confidence, which might be badly interpreted by slanderous tongues against the honour of Madame. It is customary when one has letters belonging to ladies, either to burn them or to return them. But as this casket was in his study he put in it from time to time all his poisons, because he had the fixed plan never to leave the casket and the poisons in his own house. So he placed the casket in the custody of Guesdon the hairdresser, who had been his valet. It seems that the poisons were put there in this manner about the year 1672. This is proved by the inscription on one of the packets of poisons which has been found in the casket. "Papers last placed here, as with the others, 1672."

It is clear that at the time Sainte-Croix put the sheet of paper in the casket he had not put the poisons in, but only the letters and some other papers from Madame de Brinvilliers. And if he left there in 1672 this sheet of paper, which he thought necessary to prevent the letters becoming public, he committed only the fault, perhaps, by forgetfulness or negligence, or imprudence, or malice, of not altering the terms of the inscription and distinguishing between the letters (which he wished to be returned) from the poisons, which he wished to be burned. He did not want the poisons to be given to Madame de Brinvilliers. One can prove this. He had written on each packet in the casket, and far from writing

on them that they belonged to or should be returned to Madame de Brinvilliers, on the contrary, he wrote that he charged the person who found them to burn them, with the exception of the packet of papers which was for Monsieur Pennautier, upon the envelope of which he had written that it was to be given to him. There was thus a manifest contradiction between the writing on the sheet of paper and the inscriptions on the packets. It is evident that one must choose between two things. We must either pay no attention to any of these inscriptions, or we must consider the particular inscriptions on the packets rather than the general inscription on the sheet of paper. The rule in criminal affairs is to make use of that which tends to the discharge of the prisoner rather than that which leads to his condemnation. Consequently, in examining all these facts, it is impossible to extract any evidence in this casket against Madame de Brinvilliers. Sainte-Croix wanted her to have back her letters solely. We have yet another proof in the dying words of La Chaussée, which have already been drawn attention to. "Sainte-Croix always told me that Madame de Brinvilliers had no knowledge of these poisons."

But supposing that it was true—as one has proved it to be false—that Sainte-Croix had attributed these poisons to Madame de Brinvilliers, it would be still false to conclude that these poisons really belonged to her. One cannot listen to the calumny of a man such as Sainte-Croix, a man notorious for the abominations of which he was guilty. Perhaps he had some idea of enveloping other people in his crimes for some new motive of hatred, of jealousy, of blind passion. But if, in dying, he declared that all the poisonings were due to Madame de Brinvilliers? A declaration made at a time when far from being in a state of repentance, he meditated the wickedest crimes. He wrote this

half sheet of paper in May 1670. He poisoned the two brothers d'Aubray in the June and November following. There is the greatest difference between the declaration of so black a scoundrel, made when he was meditating fresh crimes, and the evidence of a servant corrupted by his promises and money, who, being on the point of expiating his crimes, and in repentance publicly confessing before his death, repeats that Sainte-Croix has told him, "I have never said anything to Madame de Brinvilliers."

Is it not clear that in such a case Sainte-Croix would have contradicted himself? One is not able to allow the slightest suspicion against Madame de Brinvilliers. However, it is over this casket that the greatest noise has been made. It is about this casket and these poisons that slander itself has also poisoned every mind, believing that Sainte-Croix had ascribed them in dying to Madame de Brinvilliers.

Public sentiment is generally corrupted. There is an example in ancient history of a casket which had been deposited in the Temple of Apollo at Babylon. When it was opened there escaped from it poisons which infected not only the neighbourhood of the temple, but even the surrounding countries. Thus from Sainte-Croix's casket, which was placed in the hands of justice after his death, have escaped poisons which have infected and corrupted every mind against Madame de Brinvilliers, not only in this kingdom but even in foreign lands, although she is entirely innocent in the matter. And there is this difference between the casket placed in the Temple of Apollo and that belonging to Sainte-Croix. They did not know who made the first, and they were not able to punish him. But there is no doubt that Sainte-Croix was the author of the poisons in his casket. His servant, his single accomplice, has already been punished. Madame de Brinvilliers has never participated in the matter.

The second piece of written evidence concerns the letters found in the casket. Far from proving her complicity, they are a powerful plea for her innocence. But first, there is a general consideration which prevents them from being any precise proof against the writer. Not one is dated. It is impossible to fix the time when they were written. There is nothing in these letters to show the date. One cannot tell if they were written before or after the death of the two d'Aubrays.

The letters show extreme confidence and affection for Sainte-Croix, but there is nothing in them which proves complicity. There is not a single word which indicates that she has poisoned her brothers. On the contrary what agrees with La Chaussée's declaration that she knew nothing is this fact. Sainte-Croix so carefully preserved the letters he had from her, even going so far as to write on them that they were to be burnt or returned, that he would have also preserved those which mentioned this pretended complicity, for she spoke with confidence and secretly of many other affairs. In some of these letters it is said that she complains bitterly that she never sees Sainte-Croix, that this lack of attention drives her to such despair and such fury that she says in ambiguous terms that she will destroy herself to be delivered from the cruelties of Sainte-Croix. These are the exaggerations of a woman distracted because Sainte-Croix did not respond to her affection. But even if these portions of the letters proved (and they do not prove it) that Sainte-Croix had given her some knowledge of the poisons, they fail to prove that she was an accomplice in his poisoning schemes. What shows that he never confided in her the secret of his crimes is that, in one of her letters, she complains that Sainte-Croix is so reserved. And she reproaches him for all his precautions with respect to her. This proves that he took care not to tell her about business so criminal



and of such consequence as the poisoning of the two d'Aubrays, and it bears out the dying declaration of La Chaussée. Thus these letters, instead of proving anything against her, contain on the contrary many details which justify her statements.

It is hardly necessary to deal with the statement that her flight and contumacy are presumptive evidence of her guilt. She had other reasons for her retreat to Liége, The persecutions of her creditors were notorious. They had seized all her goods, and obtained judgments against her. This obliged her to borrow the name of Sainte-Croix, and to give him a note for 30,000 livres, so that she might conceal them against the creditors who were pursuing her so unjustly. She had trouble enough in defending herself, having nothing to live upon, owing to the unhappy state of her fortune.

It is easy to understand that a woman, intimidated on every side by so frightful an accusation, and the violent pursuit after her, would seek the means of putting herself in safety. Even the most holy people, even the Fathers of the Church (for instance, Saint Athanasius and Saint John Chrysostom) being falsely accused, have allowed themselves to be condemned in contumacy.

They feared the power and the calumnies of their enemies more than they relied upon the proof of their innocence.



## CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEFENCE, SECOND PORTION—ECCLESIASTICAL CONSIDERATIONS  
REGARDING HER WRITTEN CONFESSION AND THE SECRECY OF  
THE CONFSSIONAL

**M**AÎTRE NIVELLE then turned his attention to the unfortunate confession which Madame de Brinvilliers had written in a moment of weakness at Liége. It needed all his ingenuity to find a way through the most damning piece of evidence in the whole case. He boldly entered the arena of theological and ecclesiastical law. It must not be forgotten that the Marquise was being tried before a Court partly civil and partly ecclesiastical.

“Having destroyed every proof which might have served in the criminal investigation, it now remains for me to reply to that evidence which has been extracted, against all law, human or divine, from the religious confession of Madame de Brinvilliers.

“It is said that this confession, not verbal but in writing, was found amongst her papers when they were searched in the town of Liége. It is asserted that in it she accuses herself of all manner of crimes, even of crimes which have not been brought up against her in this Court. But it is very easy to understand that this confession, of which so much has been made, is very different from a confession which can be legitimately used for the examination and conviction of an accused prisoner. It is true that a confession, taken from the mouth of a prisoner examined according to the ordinary forms of justice, can be used to secure his conviction.

But it is a proposition unheard of, and contrary to all the rules of justice, that a confession extra-judicial, made voluntarily, can be used against a prisoner as a legitimate proof to secure his condemnation. A person is not allowed to accuse himself. This unalterable law is conformed to by all tribunals. One never receives the evidence of a man who denounces himself in order to be condemned. 'Non auditur perire volens.'"

Beyond this incontestable maxim, according to human law, there is one more sacred and consequently more inviolable. The authority of divine law. Confessors are obliged to shroud the confessions they receive in secrecy and silence, under a penalty of the severest punishment. Any person who finds a written confession, be it by design or hazard, must return it to the one who has written it, without reading it, under pain of mortal sin and of sacrilege.

It is useless to recall the infinite number of authorities and reasons for this decision. The maxim is indisputable. The principles of religion and of justice forbid the revelation of confessions, publicly or privately. The law is universally approved of by doctors, sacred and profane, who consider this act of religion as a mystery and sacrament most necessary for our salvation. Confession cannot be violated without outrage to the sanctity of religion. The sacrilege is so horrible, that those priests who profane confessions by revelation are punished by burning.

It would be equally useless to speak of the famous Councils of Mayence and of the Lateran, and many others, which have directed their heaviest thunders against those who are guilty of this sacrilege. One could cite the holiest saints and the most excellent Fathers of the Church. In gathering together such a number of weighty reasons they remark, with as much wisdom as piety, that if one gave the slightest approbation to the revelation of these religious mysteries the weaker con-

sciences would be frightened. It would chase them from the ports and harbours, the refuges of salvation. And above all it would banish the greatest sinners, those who have the most need of so salutary a remedy. Again, it would forbid an innocent and legitimate help to those who, by reason of their bad memory, are obliged to make a memorandum in writing. This help, their zeal, their piety, and often their director, prescribe. But destroy the secrecy of the confessional, and they could never make a complete confession of their sins. The deaf and dumb would be forbidden to confess at all. And thus one and another would be deprived of the assurance of a perfect absolution.

The very nature of religious confession would be corrupted and perverted. It would become confused with secular confession—a wholly different thing.

Religious confession is instituted by divine grace to absolve sin. Secular confession is established by justice to punish sin. The first is the sweet refuge of sinners, the second the bitter lash of criminals. If the first is the means of their salvation, the second is the instrument of their ruin.

The prosecution wishes us to believe that this document is not a confession, but merely a rough scheme for a confession. To this it is easy to reply that one can show it to be an actual confession. It commences "I confess to God, and to you, my father." In this paper Madame de Brinvilliers speaks to God, and to her confessor who represents Him. Since her confession is addressed to God alone no man has a right to examine it. To God alone is the knowledge. Aulugelle has well said that the senate can make no laws when heaven thunders; teaching us that when men have the right to divine justice, human justice must abstain. Written confessions must receive the same consideration as verbal ones. Both, in the sight of God, are indeed veritable confessions.

Theologians and doctors of the Church who have debated the question have decided briefly that there is no difference between the two. To reveal a written confession is as much a sacrilege as to reveal a verbal one. There are three principal reasons.

The first is that every means necessary for a full and perfect confession must be covered by the seal of secrecy. A confession can only be communicated legitimately to a minister consecrated to receive confessions. Any other person who hears a confession commits a mortal sin.

The second brings us again to the same inconvenience, for which the secrecy and seal of confession have been introduced. If persons who have heard a confession are forbidden to give evidence, written confessions ought not to be received as evidence in a trial where they may be used for the conviction of those who have made the confession. The danger involved in permitting the revelation of verbal confessions would be even greater in the case of written confessions. Written statements are always more powerful than the spoken word.

The third reason is that it is not only the confessor who is bound down under the seal of the confessional, but this inviolable obligation includes anyone else who has heard the confession by chance. This is the teaching of Saint Thomas, who says that if a confession is heard through an interpreter, he is bound to secrecy in the same way as the priest. A confession in writing is in effect an interpretation. So agree all the theologians. When a confession was made by letter to an absent confessor (and the usage has been changed only at the beginning of the present century by Clement VIII.), if the letter sent by the penitent was intercepted, or fell by hazard into strange hands, the seal of secrecy was still to be respected.

Maître Nivelles then quoted the Psalms and Saint Augustine, and continued his arguments as to the deaf



and dumb, and that if written confessions were not equally as secret as spoken ones there would be much danger and injustice. And he insisted that Madame de Brinvilliers' confession was an actual confession, as it commenced with the sentence "I confess to God, and to you my father."

The advocate then took some specific cases.

"Dominicus Scoto, a very famous canonical jurist, and a great theologian, who was confessor to Charles V. and who assisted at the first assembly of the Council of Trent under Paul III., propounded the problem of the man who had lost the paper upon which he had written his sins. An ecclesiastical judge found the paper and wished to make use of the information it gave. The judge was justly punished by his superior for the reason that confession is so sacred that even the notes written to form part of it are shrouded in perpetual silence. And Scoto says that the same law applies to secular judges as well as to ecclesiastical. The doctors draw no distinction between written and verbal confessions. Madame de Brinvilliers' confession was not even a simple aid to memory, but a true confession, written under the assurance that its contents would be known to God alone and His minister destined to receive it. She is able to rely that the Church guarantees the secrecy of the confessional."

In reply to a question of the King of England, Cardinal du Perron said, "the Church has given to those children who confess to her, in order to protect their honour and their life, the safe conduct of silence as to their sins, and one cannot violate it without at the same time violating all rights divine and human."

It is not necessary to imagine that the sacred attributes of the minister who receives the confession, or the divine function that he exercises in giving absolution, are the binding forces of secrecy. It is certain that if the minister, after having heard the confession, judges fit to refuse the



absolution, he is none the less obliged to respect the secrecy of the confession. In some cases a confession can be made to a layman. There is a memorable instance in the life of Saint Louis. His ship was tossed by a tempest, and those on board confessed to Jean, Sire de Joinville. One is not able to doubt that the good faith of the penitent, and the design that he has to confess to God, create the obligation of secrecy. It is not the person of the minister, it is not the absolution. It is the nature of the confession, which produces this indispensable obligation of secrecy, never to be violated.

The question as to whether it is necessary to examine this confession need not be entered into. Every one knows what the confession contains. But the doctors of the Church are quite clear upon the point involved. No criminal process can be based upon such a document, and even when this has been done, it is necessary to consider the matter as if it had never been.

There is a memorable example reported in the "Treatise for Confessors," written by Rodericus Acugna, Archbishop of Portugal. He gives all the circumstances in detail. A man in Barcelona, having been condemned to death for murder, refused to confess. He would give no reason for his refusal. It was thought that this obstinacy came from madness caused by the terror of death. Saint Thomas of Villeneuve, Archbishop of Valence, was told of the case, and out of his charity, wished to compel this criminal to confess rather than lose his soul and his body together. But the holy prelate was very astonished when the criminal gave his reason for his action.

" 'I have a horror of confessors,' said the man. 'I have been condemned to death because my confessor revealed a murder which I had confessed to him.' "

It seemed that the confessor was brother to the man who had been murdered, and that the desire of vengeance compelled the priest to reveal the crime and

secure the condemnation of the murderer. Saint Thomas of Villeneuve deemed the incident to be far more important than the trial and punishment of one man. The interests of religion were of infinitely greater consequence. He inquired into the truth of the man's story. He called the confessor, and made him admit his crime of revealing a confession. He then obliged the judges who had condemned the criminal to revise their sentence. This was done, to the admiration and applause of the public, as an example of the respect with which must be preserved the secrecy of religious confessions.

In the usage of the primitive church, where the purity of doctrines and of manners was in the sternest perfection, confessions were made publicly in the face of the whole congregation. The judges, who, as Christians, heard these confessions every day, would have been obliged to punish incessantly all those who confessed. But this would have caused a strange disorder almost impossible to imagine.

Maître Nivelles dealt with the whole question of public confessions and their relation to criminal law. He then shifted his ground and investigated the actual state of mind of the Marquise at the time when this unfortunate document was written. He attempted to prove that she was in a state of hysteria. She accused herself of crimes which she could never have committed. Her sins commenced before she had left the cradle. If her statements could be believed she became a criminal at the mature age of seven. Indeed there was every evidence in these extraordinary self-accusations of an hysterical madness. She accuses herself of having killed her father. But Monsieur d'Aubray died in 1666. Sainte-Croix, the single guilty person, was not exercising his abominable trade until 1670. La Chaussée, his assistant, did not enter the household of the younger d'Aubray until 1669.

It might be argued that Madame de Brinvilliers, being

in a condition of semi-madness, could not make a confession of a religious nature. Then confession must be forbidden to all persons ill with violent fever.

Upon this confession, new accusations have been formulated against Madame de Brinwilliers, notably that in 1670 she endeavoured to burn down the house at Nourar which had been taken from her by legal decree.

It is notorious that Monsieur d'Aubray, her father, died ten years ago, of an attack of gout, an illness he had had several years before. The illness was easily recognised, and there was no suspicion of poisoning, for La Chaussée and Sainte-Croix had not entered into partnership. She is accused of having administered poison to her husband. He never complained of it. She is accused of having tried to poison herself. She has never been ill. She says in the confession that she tried to destroy the house at Nourar. The new owners have entered no complaints against her. The last new accusation is that she poisoned the Demoiselle de Villerit, in 1673. That lady died without any mark or appearance of poison. During her illness she did not complain of poison.

Thus all these accusations formulated during the last two months are without proof. Their number and atrocity render them inconceivable. They have only been formulated against the accused because the prosecution saw that the proofs of the first accusation, the poisoning of her brothers, were insufficient. Throughout the trial no witness has been able to depose that she actually gave poison, or had it given, to her brothers, or that she formed any plot with Sainte-Croix and La Chaussée. It is necessary to prove these facts positively if she is to be accounted guilty. The witnesses are by no means above suspicion.

Now let us take the documentary proofs. The casket belonging to Sainte-Croix, about which there has been so much noise, does not convict her of anything, if we

take into account the discrepancy between the dates on the packets of poison and the date on the letter. The letters she wrote to Sainte-Croix contain no secrets and mention no poisoning. On the contrary, they complain that Sainte-Croix is hiding things from her. The dying words of La Chaussée positively declare that Sainte-Croix said that she knew nothing. La Chaussée himself swore that he had never spoken to her about the poisoning.

The earlier accusation lacking proof, a number of subsidiary accusations have been piled up. The public mind has been poisoned, and her name rendered unjustly odious.

But Madame de Brinvilliers is convinced that the prejudices of the public will not influence the intelligence of her judges, or affect the carefulness of their deliberations. One does not condemn on appearances, or on common gossip. The more atrocious the crime imputed, the more severely is all the evidence sifted, and only that is admitted which is allowable by the forms of justice.

Madame de Brinvilliers hopes that the divine laws of religion are too firmly established in the minds and hearts of her judges to allow them to violate the secret of religious confession, the most important mystery in religion.

This accusation of such enormous crimes, entailing capital punishment, against a woman of rank and birth, cannot be based upon imperfect proofs, which must be clearer than the day to secure condemnation.

Her judges must remember that whatever imprudences and faults she may have committed through being deceived by Sainte-Croix, the single author of these crimes, she has already been too much punished during years of exile, of illness, of prison, of intimidation, of terror, and of other like afflictions. They have reduced her to such a state that her present condition should excite the compassion of the whole world.



Madame d'Aubray has no right to accuse her. She has received satisfaction for the death of her husband by the exemplary chastisement of the miserable wretch who has already been executed. Surely she does not desire to see the family to which she is so closely allied sullied by an eternal shame! She ought not to place herself in such a position that she may be reproached that she is lacking in natural sympathy towards her nephews. She should consider them as her own children.

The deaths of the brothers d'Aubray have been amply atoned for by the public vengeance. If they were able at this moment to convey to us their sentiments, they would without a doubt tell us that the affection which they always displayed towards their sister was a sign that they recognised her incapable of such unnatural actions. They would plead for their own blood. They would not wish to sacrifice it, or expose it to the shame of execution. They would find their supreme satisfaction in preserving the honour of their family, in conserving the life of their family tree, and they would rather receive injury than revenge. For their consolation would be found in the justification of Madame de Brinvilliers and her children. Remember that these children will be punished if you find their mother guilty. Life will be a torture to them, death a consolation.

The wise magistrates who are now about to consider their verdict will give to the entire world a glorious example of justice, of piety, and of sovereign equity in granting their prisoner a full absolution.



## CHAPTER XXV

THE ABBÉ EDMÉ PIROT OF THE SORBONNE

**T**HE records of the trial are not complete. The examination of Madame de Brinvilliers had been concluded during the evening of Wednesday, 15th July. The report of the proceedings as reprinted by Ravaisson, ends with the statement that judgment would follow on the next day. It is not easy to say when the eloquent defence of Maître Nivelles was given. In this volume it has been summarised from the printed copy which had so large a circulation in 1676, for it was translated into English as a chap-book, and like all popular literature, pirated in Amsterdam. Here it has been inserted after the examination of the witnesses. It may have been delivered earlier in the trial, or there was time for its presentation on the morning of the 16th July. For, during the whole of Thursday the wretched prisoner was engaged upon other matters.

It is characteristic of the seventeenth century in France, that however harshly the pains of justice fell upon the prisoner, and however atrociously he was tortured mentally and physically, a particular care was taken of his soul. And, except in a very few instances, the criminal appreciated the trouble that was expended in preparing him for the hereafter.

The author of crimes so frightful as those which had engaged the Court for over four months, and which had also been in the "dossiers" of the police for nearly six years, needed special preparation for her approaching

end. The age of Louis XIV. was not on the whole an age of religious doubt or indifference. That stage was to come. On the contrary the atmosphere was permeated with religion. Never were the outward forms of worship more scrupulously followed by the mass of the people. At no time had the Church a more vigorous hold upon the community. Instances have already been given which prove how closely Church and State worked hand in hand.

Before Madame de Brinvilliers left the Court on Wednesday, the president told her that through the mediation and prayers of her family, particularly of her sister, the carmelite nun, a man of much virtue and merit would shortly attend her. He would console her, and exhort her to turn her mind towards the salvation of her soul.

It was probably the first religious ministrations Madame de Brinvilliers had received since her imprisonment. One of her complaints had been that she could not attend mass in the prison. The priest who was selected for the mournful task was a person of strong individuality and evident talent. Edme Pirot was born at Auxerre in 1631, and was comparatively young. He was professor of theology at the Sorbonne. Never before had he ministered to a condemned criminal, and it is hard to say why he was specially selected for this affair, unless he was a personal friend of the Carmelite and other members of the Brinvilliers family.

He remained with Madame de Brinvilliers for two days, Thursday and Friday. Strong in mind, but weak in body, he was so deeply impressed by the strange woman with whom he had to deal that more than once he was upon the brink of collapse. Her fascinating personality had a peculiar effect upon him which he has passed, without the factitious aid of literary art, to the readers of his own curious "memoir."

We now arrive at a remarkable change in our point of view. Up to the present we have treated Madame de Brinvilliers as a singularly revolting criminal, with hardly a redeeming note in her character. To sympathise with her has been impossible. We have gazed at her with the same mixed feelings of interest and disgust with which we study the movements of a beautiful snake in a zoological collection.

Naturally the abbé Pirot had no sympathy with the past life of the Marquise. He abhorred her crimes. But he undoubtedly, before many hours of his first interview had elapsed, sympathised very deeply with his penitent. He saw immediately that under his care had been placed no common criminal. He too was no ordinary priest. A living soul had been committed to his charge. He was resolutely determined to save it for immortality. Gradually in the course of his spiritual discourses and exhortations he completely broke down the fierce spirit of the woman. Before he had finished his task we find ourselves feeling sorry for a miserable being who in all equity cannot claim our favourable consideration for a moment.

Had the abbé Pirot been a commonplace priest the story of the conversion of Madame de Brinvilliers would have been lost to the world. His colleague Fromageau, who went every week of his life (one could almost write every day) to the scaffold in charge of the condemned, must have had some strange stories to tell. Unluckily, Fromageau left no records, not at any rate dealing with seventeenth-century criminology.

But Pirot was so touched by the death of the Marquise that he composed a full narrative of his ministration. He was with her some fifteen hours, and his manuscript, when set in small type, covers over four hundred closely printed pages. Several manuscript copies were made, and one was deposited in the library of the Jesuits.

From this was printed the rare volume published in 1883. It is a monument of patience and piety.

It possesses no striking literary grace, although it is clearly written by a man accustomed to the use of the pen. Its merit is to be found in the minute exactitude with which every minute of those trying days is chronicled. Pirot describes the feelings of the penitent. He reveals the tribulations and sufferings of his own soul. He repeats all the theological points which troubled the mind of his prisoner, chiefly in relation to the eternity of hell fire and the hope of ultimate salvation. It was an age of theology, and he attacked the questions with a professional zest. He often sets down his replies in the shape of sermons which occupy a score of pages.

This required considerable patience from its author. It asks for still more from its readers. There are many "longueurs" in the four hundred pages. But as a picture of the last hours of a repentant criminal it has never been surpassed.

In his opening pages the abbé tells us how he was approached in the matter. On Tuesday, 14th July, the first President of the Court, sent Father de Chevigny, an Oratorian, to invite him to his bureau.

"We ask you," said the judge, "of your charity, to assist at the death of Madame de Brinvilliers, who, we warn you, will be condemned. We say this without prejudice, as we have not yet examined her under torture. But it seems clear that our judgment will find her guilty. We send for you now because after sentence has been pronounced there will be little time to lose. She must be prepared to meet a Christian death. Her stubborn spirit frightens us."

That remained the keynote of his instructions. He indirectly suggested to the priest that every effort must be made to compel her to reveal the names of her accomplices.

When Pirot left the judge he visited the Carmelite nun. She gave him a letter asking her sister to receive his services. The next day, Thursday, under the guidance of Father de Chevigny, Pirot set out on his mission.



## CHAPTER XXVI

THURSDAY, 16TH JULY 1676

**T**HE two priests walked in company to the prison of the Conciergerie, and were taken to the Montgomery Tower in which Madame de Brinvilliers had been confined since her arrival in Paris. She understood at once the meaning of their visit.

“ This gentleman has come for—— ? ” she commenced to ask.

The priest replied, “ Let us pray.” All went on their knees whilst Father de Chevigny prayed for the intercession of the Holy Ghost. Then Madame de Brinvilliers asked that a prayer might be offered to the Virgin, and this was done.

“ Assuredly,” she remarked to the Abbé Pirot, “ you have been sent to console me, and it is with you that I must spend the little of my life that remains. For a long while I have been impatient to see you.”

“ I have come, Madame,” replied Pirot, “ to render you all the spiritual services in my power. But I wish it were under different circumstances.”

“ One must submit to everything,” was her answer. She turned to the other priest and thanked him for his visits. “ I implore you to pray to God for me. Adieu ! ”

Father de Chevigny then left, and the Marquise was with the Abbé to prepare for her approaching end. But not alone. There were in the room the two men and a woman who had guarded her from the first day she had

been a prisoner. It was a sombre chamber. The stone walls of the tower were so thick that in the most sultry weather the rooms were icily cold. In the winter it was impossible to warm them adequately, as they lacked fire-places. Two beds occupied much space, one with grey curtains for the prisoner, and the other for the wardress. A previous prisoner, a mad poet, had scribbled verses on the stone walls, and these had never been cleaned away. Haunted by gloomy memories, for from it Ravailac had been carried to his atrocious punishment, the dying light of the summer evening barely penetrated the heavily barred windows. Madame de Brinvilliers and the Abbé Pirot sat by a little table, and the jailers withdrew to the other end of the room.

The conversation between the priest and his penitent has been reported at considerable length by the Abbé Pirot in the manuscript volume which he devoted to his share in the great scandal. His eloquence flows at times like a mighty river. He replies to a simple question with an exhortation which extends to a dozen pages. One cannot help believing that the Marquise must sometimes have lost the thread of the good priest's learned discourse. Whilst he was citing the Fathers and appealing to the Saints she must have been dreaming of the green fields of Picardy, and the wild days in the Rue Neuve Saint-Paul, when she flung discretion to the winds and loved the young and handsome Sainte-Croix.

Although sentence had not been formally pronounced she did not hide from the priest that she knew her fate. Her dread was that she might go forth to execution that same night, within a few hours.

"It would give me so little time to prepare myself for death, and I have such a need."

This was a change of attitude. On the previous Sunday, when told by Father de Chevigny that from



THE "PALAIS DE JUSTICE" AND TOWERS OF THE PRISON OF THE  
CONCIERGERIE

*After Charles Méryon's etching, "La Tour de l'Horloge"*



what he could learn she could hardly escape capital punishment, she screamed with fright.

“What? Is this business going to kill me?”

He tried to calm her.

“No, no, my father. There is no need to reassure me. I will play my part when the time comes, and die like a brave woman.”

“Madame,” said the Abbé Pirot in answer to her question about the time of execution. “I do not know what the sentence will be. Nor do I know when it will be given. But if you are condemned to death to-day without doubt you will be executed to-morrow.”

This was not strictly true. The Abbé had already been told that a day would elapse between sentence and execution in order to allow time for the “question” or torture to be applied. The judges were determined to have the names of her accomplices. The priest was a soft-hearted man, and delicately he did not care to tell her of this ominous arrangement.

“My death is certain,” said the Marquise. “I need not delude myself with false hopes. I have to tell you the story of my life. But before opening my heart so freely you must give me some idea of what you are going to do with me, and what you think I should do in the state in which I am.”

“Madame,” replied Pirot. “You ask what I seek from you before you tell me the secrets of your conscience. I do not know whether you are guilty. I suspend my judgment. I shall only know by your conviction, or by the confession that you are about to make to me. You have not yet been sentenced, and you have confessed nothing. Thus I am able to doubt your guilt, although I am not able to ignore your accusation, which is so public that it has come even to my ears. This trial has made much noise in the world, and there are few persons who do not know something about it.”



“ I am aware that much is said about me, and for some time I have been the scandal and gossip of the people.”

“ It is so,” continued Pirot. “ And I know the crime of which you have been accused. It is poison. And I say to you that if you are guilty you are not to expect any pardon before God if you do not declare to your judges what is your poison, how it is made, what is its antidote, and who are your accomplices. So far as remains in your power every reparation must be made, and the crime must be prevented for the future. If you do not declare your accomplices you will be guilty of all the crimes they may commit after your death. To obtain pardon your sin must die before you. If your reserve and silence allow your accomplices to continue to poison, your sin will live.” The Abbé Pirot then cited the story of Jehu, Joram, and Jezebel, and the cry of Jehu, “ How can one hope for peace whilst the abominations of Jezebel continue ! ”

“ And that Madame will be the answer if you pretend to reconcile yourself with God without assuring that your own abominations and poisonings die with you, always supposing that you are guilty.”

“ Monsieur,” asked the Marquise, innocently, “ Was this Jezebel you mention a Christian ? ”

“ Madame,” replied the priest. “ She lived before the coming of Our Lord. I can quite see that you have never heard of the Scriptures, certainly not of the Old Testament. It is very astonishing that a person of such rank, who appears to have so much intelligence, and who has by repute such a good memory, who has moreover received a Christian education from a virtuous mother, has yet never heard of Jezebel.”

The Marquise interrupted his reflections. “ I have never read the Bible. I have never seen the Old Testament and never read the New Testament until when I was

out of France. I read to break the monotony of my days. But I don't think Jezebel was a Christian !”

The Abbé Pirot described the character of Jezebel. “ It is rather a strong example,” he added apologetically. “ But I put it before you supposing that you are guilty of what one accuses you, and of that I wish to doubt.”

“ There is nothing too strong for me,” said the Marquise. “ Instead of giving me an aversion to you by citing it you only enable me to master myself. You will soon see that I am unable to dissimulate anything from you.”

The Abbé informed her at some length that if she dissimulated she would not be in a fit state to receive absolution. Then he insisted that in the event of her guilt she must give every information about her crimes, particularly concerning her accomplices. And he added that a person condemned to death had nothing to lose by open confession to the authorities.

“ I thoroughly understand what you say, and without yet avowing that I am guilty I will—if I am guilty—bear your instructions in mind. But I must ask you a question, very necessary to me at this moment. Is there any sin which by its enormity is irremissible in this life ? Are there any sins so great that the Church is unable to remit them ? It is only right that I should commence by this question, for it will be useless for me to confess if I cannot hope to have all my sins remitted.”

The whole conversation is like a report of a market haggle. Madame de Brinvilliers in no way lost her presence of mind. The Abbé Pirot then launched into a homily upon sin which embraced references to David, Manassah, the Magdalen, Cain, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, with quotations from Saint Augustine, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Monsieur Arnauld of Port Royal.

Madame de Brinvilliers seemed contented with his sermon and his ruling that there was no sin in the world which was not able to be remitted. She had been troubled

by the saying that the sin against the Holy Ghost could not be pardoned in this century or any other, and this led to a further dissertation of extreme length.

"I am convinced of all you say," she replied. "I believe that God can pardon all sins. I hope He will pardon as miserable a being as I am, a creature unworthy of all His graces, and one who has so deeply abused all His goodness."

And then her heart was touched. At the thought of all her misery she burst into tears.

That, says the Abbé in his book, was the first sign of contrition. Nothing, he writes, could have made her shed tears but the horror of her sins and a fear of the judgment of God. She had spoken of her children in touching terms, she had referred with tenderness to her husband. But she had not wept. She was naturally intrepid and of great courage. She was born with a soft and very honest disposition. Her intelligence was lively and penetrating. She understood things quickly, and expressed herself in just terms, with few words, but very precisely. She would make up her mind rapidly, even about the most troublesome affairs. She was not strongly attached to anything, being discouraged when one spoke to her often about the same matter. She spoke without study and without affectation, and what she wanted to say she said well. Nobody from her face or conversation could have ever imagined her guilty of such crimes. There was something great in her soul, her coolness at the most unforeseen accidents, a firmness never disturbed, a resolution to await Death, and even to suffer it, if necessary. There was nothing in her face which warned the beholder of her strange malice:

Her hair was chestnut coloured, and extremely thick. The shape of her face round and well formed. Her eyes were blue, and particularly beautiful. Her skin was extraordinarily white. Her nose was finely modelled.

There was nothing disagreeable in her features, although it would not be true to say that she was a great beauty. A few wrinkles had already appeared, and she commenced to look old.

But, if her features were naturally sweet, when sudden anger seized her, a frightful grimace masked her face. From time to time convulsions of this character revealed passing storms of disdain, indignation, and scorn.

The Abbé Pirot also notes that she had a tiny waist, and was small in stature.

At half-past six he left her to say Mass in the chapel of the Conciergerie. After the office, as he took a little wine in the hall of the prison, one of the officials told him that judgment had been given. The priest then returned to the cell and found the prisoner in a state of "great serenity."

In the meanwhile she had been considering another aspect of theological discipline.

"Monsieur," she addressed the priest. "Shall I have the consolation of receiving the viaticum before I die?"

According to old French law condemned prisoners were forbidden to receive the communion. It was a refinement of cruelty.

"Madame," replied the Abbé Pirot. "If you are condemned to death you will most certainly die without it."

She pressed the point strongly. She said that Cinq-Mars and De Thou had communicated before their execution. The Abbé Pirot thought that she was wrong, as the fact was not mentioned in the Memoirs of Montrésor. Madame de Brinvilliers then quoted the case of Montmorency. Without commenting upon this, for he could not easily answer it, the Abbé Pirot opposed the instance of Monsieur de Marillac, to whom the family of the d'Aubray were related. He also remembered that Bourdaloue had allowed a special grace to the Chevalier



de Rohan. But as the Marquise had forgotten the circumstances, or had never heard of them, he was discreet and did not remind her of what supported very clearly her own contention.

At last she accepted the mortification.

“I can only be saved by the scaffold. I will declare my crime to my judges. I thought that in my confession I was not obliged to charge myself. However in my final examination to-morrow I will repair the evil I have done to others. The president said to me very touching things when I was before him. I felt them, although I was determined not to show any signs of my feelings. I do not doubt that I scandalised my judges by my behaviour and my hardness. But I recognise my fault now.”

“Madame, it is wrong to lie before the judges. It is your duty to say the whole truth.”

“Make my apologies, please, to the president. You will see him after my death. Tell him I ask his pardon, and also that of all the judges, for my effrontery. I believed it would help my defence. I never thought there was evidence enough to condemn me without my own avowals. But I see it now, and the words he said to me have touched me. It was difficult to prevent him from seeing it in my face. My condemnation was predestinated. But let us return to our business.”

For one hour and a half they talked, and then the servants brought some dinner. She took two fresh eggs and a little soup, and, whilst the priest was eating, she talked of many things with an intelligence and tranquillity which surprised him. It was, he wrote, as if she were giving a dinner in a country house. She insisted that her jailers, the two men and the woman, should feed at the same time.

“It is our custom,” she said to the priest. “They give me their company. It is the last time we shall



dine together. Ah, my poor Madame du Rus, you will soon have done with me. I have given you enough trouble for a long while. It will soon be finished. In seven or eight hours you will have no more of me. I shall be in the hands of the Abbé, and you will not be able to come near me. You must go then, for I don't think you have the heart to see me executed. Perhaps it will take place very soon."

She said this so coldly that the words marked a well-balanced mind rather than an affected pride. The two men endeavoured unsuccessfully to hide their tears. She pitied their sadness, much as would a mother on her death-bed. She spoke of the great heat of the last few days.

"There is no air," replied the priest. "Although we are so high up. But of course the window is very small."

"I know that it is very hot, but I have hardly felt the heat." And she pressed the Abbé to eat and drink, and apologised for not serving him as she was not allowed a knife.

"Monsieur," said she at the end of the dinner, "to-morrow is a fast day, and although it will be a day of great fatigue for me I do not wish to eat meat."

"Madame," replied the Abbé Pirot, "if you have need of a meat soup to sustain you do not scruple to take it. It is pure necessity, and not daintiness, and the law of the Church does not oblige fasting in such a case."

"Monsieur," answered Madame de Brinvilliers, "I would not take it unless I had a need for it, and you gave me permission. I will have a 'bouillon' at supper-time, and another at eleven o'clock. They must make it a little stronger than ordinary, and it will be enough to sustain me through to-morrow with two fresh eggs, which I will take after the 'question.'"

The coolness with which she made these preparations not only astonished the priest. They frightened him.

He admits it in his minute account of her last hours. I shivered, he writes, at seeing her order so calmly that the soup be stronger than ordinary, and that she would take two portions of it before midnight.

The dinner finished, she asked for paper and ink, in order that she might write a letter. "I have a letter to write at once which troubles me. After that I shall feel more at ease. I want to write to my husband, and you must read it, because I wish to say nothing that you do not find good. You must be the master of all my feelings and all my actions until my death."

She displayed great affection for the Marquis. Where was he? Probably out of the country to escape his creditors, for he did not appear at the trial and his wife never saw him after her flight from France in 1672.

The Abbé Pirot improved the occasion by some well-chosen words with regard to the love of a wife towards her husband. But he could not resist remarking the little interest the Marquis had shown over his wife's troubles.

"I do not know if you have always enjoyed a common sympathy. But I have heard it said that he has been rather indifferent towards your disgraces. He was not very troubled when you fled from France. He has never interested himself in the trial. He has not been here to see you."

"One cannot always judge things so quickly when knowing little about them. My husband has not neglected my interests. Whilst I was away from France we corresponded constantly. He would have come to Paris to see me in prison at once if he could only have ensured his safety. You do not know, Monsieur, that he is drowned in debts, and that if he came his creditors would arrest him immediately. He is not insensible towards me."

"I believe everything you say, Madame. But you must

not occupy yourself so strongly at this moment with thoughts of your husband. Your heart and mind must be given wholly to God. Saint Paul said that marriage divided a man so that he gave half to his family and half to religion. In the state in which you are you must render yourself entirely to the Lord, and you must regard the world as no longer existing. I do not forbid you to write to your husband. But you must give little time to it, and you must write in a Christian spirit. You must ask pardon of him, exhort him to conduct his life well, and to educate your children. Write your letter."

Madame de Brinvilliers then wrote very rapidly the following letter :—

At the moment of rendering my soul to God I wish to assure you of my affection, which will continue until the last moment of my life. I ask you to pardon all the things I have done against you. I die an honest death into which my enemies have drawn me. I pardon them with all my heart, and I ask you to pardon them. I also hope that you will forgive me for the ignominy which will rebound upon you. But remember that we are here but for a time, and that perhaps in a little while you will be obliged to render to God an exact account of all your actions, even to idle words—as I am shortly to do. Take care of our temporal affairs and of our children. Bring them up in the fear of God, and give them yourself the same example. Take the advice on that account of M. Marillac and Maître Cousté. Offer up for me all the prayers that you can, and remain assured that in dying I am wholly yours.

DAUBRAY.

At the foot of the letter she told him that she had left some money at Liège which he was to draw. She also made an observation in the letter which the Abbé Pirot would not reprint in his memoir, and which he made her strike out.

She read the letter to him.

"This letter does not please me," said the priest sternly. "What you say about your enemies is not

right. The only enemies you have are your sins and yourself. Those you call your enemies are those who love the memories of your father and your brothers. And ought you not to do the same?"

"But are not those people who have pursued me to death my enemies? Is it not a Christian sentiment to pardon them?"

"No, Madame, they are not your enemies. You yourself are the enemy of the whole human race, and nobody is your enemy. If you are execrated by every man it is your abominable conduct which has attracted this aversion. One cannot think of your crimes without horror. How could one not hate you!"

The Marquise replied that she hoped all those who had contributed to her death would go to Paradise.

The Abbé Pirot naturally took exception to the remark. "Explain yourself," he expostulated. "One often speaks in this manner when one wishes to get rid of people."

"I do not mean it in that way. I pray to God that He will give them many years of great prosperity in this world, and that when they are gathered to eternity they will receive the highest degree of glory of which they are capable."

"Madame, this is a useless digression. What have you to do with the pardon of enemies? Who are you to place yourself on a pedestal of generosity and endeavour to extract some glory from this pardon? You are not in a state to pardon anybody. You should rather ask pardon of the world which you have scandalised by an unheard of parricide." And the priest continued at length in the same severe strain.

They prayed together for nearly an hour, saying a "Veni creator" and a "Salve Regina." The Abbé Pirot translated the prayers into French, and she repeated them word by word. Then he made another prayer.



“If you would only give me a book in which it is written.”

“Madame, what I am telling you now is in no book. It is what God inspires me with at this moment.” She then said her “confiteor,” but as she was too weak to remain kneeling, she had to rise and sit. As she recited her sins the tears coursed down her face.

During the day she was left but thrice without her confessor. The “procureur-général” came at four o’clock to learn in what state of mind she was, and if she had anything to say. He did not enter the room, but remained on the staircase, and the Abbé went out to speak to him. The priest returned to his penitent.

“Will you not make open confession before your judges that you are guilty?”

“I will say everything to-morrow. Leave me in peace until to-morrow. Then I will admit my crime to Monsieur Palluau. I will admit that I poisoned my father, that I had my brothers poisoned, and that I intended to poison my sister. I wanted to know what was the composition of the poisons which I used, and which were given at my order. But all I ever discovered was that the quintessence of toads formed part of it, and that one was simply rarified arsenic.”

“Madame,” said the priest, determined to extract all she knew, “you had a thousand friendly conversations with the man who gave you the poisons. Had you never the curiosity to know truly what the ingredients were composed of? It is said that he had a laboratory and an alembic. Did he never confide in you the secret?”

“I know only what I have told you.”

“But he worked himself at these poisons, and if he used a mask—and actually died from the fumes when it suddenly broke—how could he have hidden the secret from you?”

“Monsieur, all that is a fable. He did not die in that



way. He knew his poisons, and sometimes he compounded them. But Glaser, the apothecary in the Fauburg of Saint Germain, usually made them, and he died a long while ago. I know that there were different poisons. In the casket were a red water and a white water, but I do not know how they were made. The only antidote I knew of was milk. That man often told me that it was a preservative against poison, and that if one took a little every morning his poison could do no harm. As for the accomplices, I know of none to accuse, except a man to whom I gave poison ten years ago. He had asked me for some to poison his wife."

"But, Madame, how do you explain the letter you wrote during your detention to Monsieur Pennautier, where you press him to do all he can for you, and in which you remind him that your interests in this business are his?"

"I do not know at all that he had any dealings with Sainte-Croix as to the poisons, and I could not accuse him without wronging my conscience. But as they found in the casket a letter which concerned him, and which I had seen a thousand times with Sainte-Croix, I thought that the friendship went as far as poison, and with these doubts, at random I wrote to him as if I knew he had those dealings; and I reasoned, if they had business together over the poisons, Pennautier will believe that I know his secret, and that will move him to help me from the fear that I will denounce him, but if he is innocent my letter is lost. I risked nothing but the indignation of a person who would have done nothing for me if I had not written."

"Madame," replied the priest severely, after this ingenious explanation, "take care what you are saying. If you are lying one must say to you what Saint Peter said to Ananias and Sapphira, You are not lying to men but to God." The Abbé Pirot solemnly warned her to

she speak the whole truth according to her knowledge, and to suppress nothing. He drew a vivid picture of everlasting fire. "Madame," said he, "this is the moment which will decide your eternity."

She broke into tears. "Alas, I know it and I fear it. Pray to God that he will pardon me. But I am telling you the truth, and I will say it to the judges. In conscience, how am I to accuse a man of whom I know nothing. If he is guilty I do not know it."

"But the letter?" interrupted the priest without pity. "The point is about the letter?"

"I do not lie. Not a syllable. I know very well that a lie now is a lie against God."

"You must say it to the judges. You owe it to them, and to Monsieur Pennautier to clear up this matter of the letter. You must not leave the slightest suspicion against a man whom you know is not a criminal. But do you not wish to be examined on the subject to-day?"

"The judges are not in the palace."

"They are, and they can be here in a moment."

"It would be useless. I pray you not to interrupt my confession. I will say everything to-morrow."

The priest wanted her to undergo an examination immediately. She stood firm. He insisted. She refused. When the "procureur-général" again called, two hours after his first visit, the Abbé Pirot could only say that she had promised to avow everything the next day. The judge told the Abbé Pirot not to exhaust himself, as he had the whole of to-morrow to go through.

"You must be properly fed, and do not sleep here."

The Abbé Pirot promised to go to the Sorbonne for a few hours' sleep. Then he returned to the Marquise. She spoke of her children. She said she loved them tenderly. In the midst of a long conversation upon religion she suddenly admitted that there were still moments when she did not regret having known Sainte-

Croix. The priest prayed her to chase away such thoughts, and to resist such temptations.

“However, if temptation comes to you—particularly on the scaffold—tell me, Madame, and I will do what I am able to help you to overcome it.”

The Abbé Pirot then prepared to leave her for the night.

“You must allow me to rest now for some hours,” he told the Marquise. “But Father de Chevigny will remain with you.”

“Ah!” she cried, “what do you say? I will not consent. You have promised not to quit me until death, and now you are going!”

“Madame,” answered the priest. “I will do nothing but what you find good. If I ask you to allow me to take a little rest it is only because I wish to come back with more vigour, and to render you better service than before. I will not go unless you allow me. You are counting upon the execution taking place to-morrow. I do not know if you are right, but if so, to-morrow ought to be your great day, your decisive day when you and I will need all our strength. We have been together now thirteen or fourteen hours, I am not very strong, and if you do not give me permission to rest a little you may expect that I shall not be able to help you to-morrow with much force.”

“Monsieur,” replied Madame de Brinvilliers, “I can say no more. To-morrow is a more important day for me than to-day. It is necessary that you rest to-night.”

The servants brought in supper. The priest wished to go without eating. She would not allow it. Whilst he was taking a morsel of food she sent to the keeper of the prison and desired him to have a coach ready for the Abbé Pirot. The cost was to be put to her account, which would be paid by Monsieur Cousté. The priest protested, but the Marquise insisted that the streets were not safe at that hour of the night, and that the priest was

too fatigued to walk. She would not be able to rest until she knew that he had arrived safely at the Sorbonne.

“ But remember well that you have promised to be with me to-morrow morning before six o'clock, so that I can have an hour with you before I leave to hear my sentence and to undergo the examination.”

She took two eggs and had a meat soup. Whilst the priest was eating she chatted about other matters.

“ I think, Monsieur, that I have seen you before.”

“ I have only seen you, Madame, once. It was at Senlis in 1666 in the month of June. You were going to Offémont with your father. But assuredly you did not see me. I was at a window at the ‘ Trois Pots d'Étain ’ with the late Monsieur Amelot. You returned from the cathedral with your father to this same inn, and you left a little while after. You did not look our way and you were not able to see us.”

The servant came to say that the coach was waiting.

“ Pray for me,” cried the Marquise. “ And do not forget to return before six o'clock ! ”

The Abbé Pirot arrived at the Sorbonne at a quarter to ten. He had left it shortly after eight in the morning.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### DURING THE NIGHT

**T**HE Abbé Pirot had never before attended the last moments of a criminal. Immediately he arrived at the Sorbonne he deemed it necessary to report himself to his superior, who had not yet given him permission to leave the house. Monsieur Germain Fromageau was a brilliantly gifted doctor of theology of the Sorbonne who occupied himself more particularly with cases of conscience. Born of rich parents he belonged by birth to the magistrature of France, and was not improbably connected by kinship with the Brinvilliers. His studies in canonical law and the discipline of the Church were celebrated, and consultations were addressed to him from all parts of the country upon cases of conscience and their treatment.

Pirot wished to see him, as he did not wish to trespass in Fromageau's peculiar functions. It was the duty of the House and Society of the Sorbonne to furnish from its members confessors to those prisoners condemned to death. Fromageau desired the post and received it. "This holy ambition," writes his biographer, "is the only one he ever had." He wished for no benefice, for no high ecclesiastical dignity, which might possibly have honoured his sterling talents. To the day of his death, in 1705, he consoled the miserable beings who were about to expiate their crimes. He was universally recognised as a humble, pious, and wise priest.

That day he had been engaged with a gentleman who



had been decapitated at the "Croix du Tiroir" for uttering false money.<sup>1</sup> He was very tired and had gone to bed. His servant did not want to admit the Abbé Pirot. But the door of his room was opened, and for a short while the two priests chatted together in the dark.

"I ask your pardon for having disturbed you," said Pirot. "It is a business, however, I cannot postpone. I was sent for this morning to go to the Conciergerie to prepare Madame de Brinvilliers who is to be executed to-morrow. I did not get an opportunity to speak to you before. I have been with her all day, and I think she is now in a good way. But I want your permission to attend her to the scaffold to-morrow."

Pirot seems to have imagined that with so interesting a criminal the Abbé Fromageau would have insisted upon exercising his full rights. Possibly, saintly man as he was, Fromageau had become a trifle fatigued with the gloomy pleasure of administering spiritual relief to the riff-raff of Paris. He gave Pirot leave to continue his services to the Marquise. He even complimented him on his skill, and said that he knew of nobody who would better fill his place.

The Abbé Pirot then returned to his room, and said his breviary. Whilst he was praying his thoughts wandered, and the face of the woman he had been with for fourteen hours distracted his attention. With the greatest difficulty he was able to say his breviary, and he was three hours reciting his office. It was then nearly two o'clock on Friday morning. He threw himself on his bed, and tossed restlessly until half-past four. He could not sleep. He tells us in his Memoir that, being naturally soft-hearted at the sight of misery and unhappiness, his soul was touched with a deep sorrow for Madame de

<sup>1</sup> Sarsfield refers to it also in his weekly letters to Williamson. "Thursday last there was a gentleman beheaded for coining false money, and three or four tradesmen hanged for putting it off."

Brinvilliers. He was uncertain in what state of grace she would go to the scaffold. He doubted his own powers of endurance during the terrible ordeal. He minutely traces his thoughts during these hours of agony, and in his Memoir he analyses his mental troubles during this "nuit blanche" to the extent of twenty pages of small type.

At four o'clock his servant came to the door, and he rose from the bed on which he had not slept. After some prayers he received absolution from the chaplain. Then, with a small crucifix, and followed by his servant, who carried his hat and cloak, he set out for the Conciergerie. At the gate of the prison he met Monsieur Rinssant, the doctor to the court, who had come to be present when the torture was applied. The President, Le Bailleul, had also arrived in his coach, and called to the priest to know in what state the prisoner was, stating that the ladies of his family were at that moment praying for her conversion.

"Tell me what she has told you."

"I cannot," replied Pirot. "As confessor I cannot divulge the conversation. But after her execution I will wait upon you and speak about it."

The priest and the doctor then mounted the staircase of the Montgomery Tower and met the Oratorian father Chevigny. He had been praying with Madame de Brinvilliers, and was so upset that tears ran down his cheeks.

"You are punctual," said the Marquise in greeting Pirot. "I have awaited you with impatience. Six o'clock has taken a long while to strike to-day. I am pleased you have not broken your word."

She wished the Oratorian adieu. The Abbé Pirot asked him to return, but he would make no promise.

"If you want me I shall be at Saint Honoré. I shall be saying prayers there for you with the other members of the community."

Pirot then recited a "Veni sancte spiritus."

"I slept very tranquilly for two hours during the night," said the Marquise. "I was somewhat tired after yesterday. After you had gone I wrote three letters to my sister, Madame de Marillac and Monsieur Cousté. Although they were short they took some time."

Father de Chevigny had promised to deliver the letters. Then the prisoner and the priest returned to theology. Madame de Brinvilliers had been tormented with a fresh doubt, which Father de Chevigny had not been able to answer satisfactorily. When her soul left her body how would she know whether she was in purgatory or in hell? Would she be able to tell if the flames which devoured her would end one day, or whether they would continue for eternity? The Abbé gave an explanation which occupies nearly ten pages in his Memoir. Then she went through her confession, and this occupied an hour and a half. Before it was finished she was warned to prepare to descend to hear the reading of the sentence.

"In a moment," she cried without fright. "But we have yet something to say."

"You must go at once," said the priest. "A superior authority calls you. You must attend without delay, and with prompt obedience."

In a moment they had finished, and she was ready.

"I promise to tell everything at the interrogatory," she said to her confessor. "But are you not going to accompany me?"

"Not to the interrogatory," replied the Abbé. "But I will be near you in case of need."

"Pray for me!" she implored.

Then with her jailers she descended the stairs to the torture-chamber of the Conciergerie.

The Abbé Pirot went to the little chapel of the prison to say his Mass.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SEVEN HOURS IN THE TORTURE CHAMBER OF THE CONCIERGERIE

**T**HE infliction of torture, said La Bruyère, is a marvellous invention for enabling an innocent person who is of feeble temperament to condemn himself, whilst allowing a guilty but robust criminal to escape. The great author stood almost alone in his protest against the use of pain to extort confession. Even his friend Bossuet believed in its efficacy. French jurists could not conceive a system of government unsupported by the "King's tormentor." When Colbert remodelled the jurisprudence of his country many reforms were introduced into criminal law. The celebrated "Ordonnance" of 1670 was drawn up by the cleverest men in the legal world, amongst whom were Denis Talon and Lamoignon, the President of the Court which tried Madame de Brinvilliers. The idea that a prisoner should have every opportunity to prove his innocence hardly seems to have occurred to them.

"The cruel mockery of the 'question préalable' was retained, and in the principal proceedings all the chances were thrown against the prisoner. All preliminary testimony was still 'exparte.' The accused was heard, but he was still examined in secret." Lamoignon, more enlightened than his brethren, wished to obtain for the prisoner the right of being represented by counsel. To-day the most elementary sense of justice would admit this privilege, but in 1670 Colbert absolutely refused to entertain it. He carried his point, and, as we have seen,





GUILLAUME DE LAMOIGNON, PRESIDENT OF THE "PARLEMENT"  
OF PARIS  
*After the engraving by R. Nanteuil*





Madame de Brinvilliers had to fight for her life single-handed. Had Maître Nivelles sat beside her, she might have escaped. By the "Ordonnance" of 1670 the judge was allowed the discretion of confronting the accused with all hostile witnesses. The President Lamoignon was a just-minded man (which cannot be said of all his brothers on the bench), and, knowing his character and reputation, it must be allowed that Madame de Brinvilliers received a fair trial, despite the absence of her advocate.

When the Marquise arrived in the torture-chamber she was met by Monsieur Palluau who had opened the investigation at Mézières, another magistrate, Monsieur Mandat, and the "greffier" or clerk, whilst in the rear stood the executioner and his assistant. Here, for the first time, the sentence of the court was communicated to her. Its harsh terms, and the gloomy surroundings under which it was read, were calculated to make the boldest prisoner tremble. It was dated 16th July 1676.

Marie Marguerite d'Aubray, wife of the Marquis de Brinvilliers, is declared duly accused and convicted of having poisoned Maître Dreux d'Aubray, her father, Antoine d'Aubray, master of requests and civil lieutenant of the county of Paris, and Monsieur d'Aubray, councillor of the court, her two brothers, and also attempted the life of the late Thérèse d'Aubray, her sister. In reparation she is condemned to make the "amende honorable" (or public penance) before the principal door of the cathedral church of Paris, where she will be taken in a tumbrel, with naked feet, a rope round her neck, and holding in her hands a lighted torch weighing two pounds. There, being on her knees, she will declare that wickedly, and from motives of vengeance, and in order to possess their property, she has poisoned her father and her two brothers, and attempted the life of her sister. From thence she will be conducted to the Place de Greve, to have her head cut off upon the scaffold. Her body will then be burnt, and the ashes thrown to the wind. Before execution she will be applied to the "question," ordinary and extra-

ordinary, in order to compel her to reveal the names of her accomplices.

Any goods she may have inherited through the deaths of her father, her brothers, and her sister, will be taken from her, and all her property confiscated. From this estate the sum of 4000 livres will be paid by way of penalty to the King, 5000 livres will be paid for prayers to God for the repose of the souls of the aforesaid brothers, father, and sister, to be offered in the chapel of the 'Conciergerie, 10,000 livres will be paid as a reparation to Madame Mangot de Villarceau, widow of Monsieur d'Aubray, and in addition all the costs of the trial must be paid, including the expenses incurred against La Chaussée.

Madame de Brinvilliers was much disturbed during the reading of the judgment, particularly at the gross indignity of being carried to execution in a cart. She also resented the large sum of money to be paid to her hated sister-in-law. She retained all her firmness, however, for she asked that the sentence should be read to her a second time that she might more fully understand its decrees. This done she was examined at some length by Palluau and Mandat.

The minutes of the proceedings have been lost, and it is somewhat difficult to reconstruct the exact sequence of her interrogation. It is evident that owing to the ministrations of the Abbé Pirot she was in a serene state of mind, and ready to reveal all she knew with the frankest sincerity. Perhaps this attitude slightly changed when she was tortured.

“ I am ready to be tortured, and I suppose I cannot escape it. But I will declare all my crimes beforehand. Up to the present I have denied all, because I was not obliged to confess anything. Now the Abbé Pirot has shown me my faults, and I will act differently. If I had met him three weeks ago, instead of a few hours, I would have told the truth at the beginning of my trial.”

Unfortunately her avowals included nothing fresh, and gave no clue to the names of her accomplices. She denied consistently that any existed.

They then delivered her into the care of the executioner. For an instant she looked at him without uttering a word. Noticing that he had a rope in his hand she clasped her own together and offered them to him to bind.

A sixteenth-century Flemish author, who wrote an exhaustive treatise upon criminal law and the proper manner to carry out its sentences, recommended judges, when choosing an executioner, to pick out "a good man, a master of his art, reliable, soft, hardy, courteous, full of pity, and affable." Such paragons were not easy to discover in an age when the executioner's office was regarded with universal loathing. At Paris, until late in the eighteenth century, he was not even allowed to live within the precincts of the city, and when, upon his selection, his patent was sealed in the chancellory the document was thrown under the table to signify the infamy of his employment.

Naturally his emoluments were considerable, although gathered together in many curious ways. He had in many cities some practice as a herbalist, and also in surgery. The light women of the town were taxed to pay his wages, and his scale of fees was graduated to suit every occasion. For administering the torture he received six livres, and for flagellation the same amount. For carrying out the details of a public confession and penance, five livres was allotted. Hangings and burnings were relatively simple calls upon his experience. Ten livres repaid him amply. A decapitation was requited by the same sum, although it necessitated considerable skill. For breaking a criminal on the wheel thirty livres was paid, and certainly well earned. Forty livres was given for the erection of the scaffold, and often large

sums were extorted from the culprits.<sup>1</sup> In many severe sentences the judges added a private order. For instance, when a prisoner was ordered to be burnt alive the judges sometimes made a secret recommendation that the accused was to be mercifully strangled before his body was consigned to the flames. But, so that he should suffer the torments of anticipation to the last possible moment, the prisoner was never informed of this act of grace. Then, if he possessed money, he paid his executioner to strangle him, unaware that his sentence officially ordered it.

André Guillaume, the executioner for Paris in 1676, was an interesting personality who had many of the

<sup>1</sup> "Vanoc" in the *Referee* quotes a German tariff, I have not been able to trace the original, which forms an interesting comparison. "In the Middle Ages under the Holy Roman Empire the charge for tearing asunder with four horses was five thalers and a fraction of a thaler. Imagine the depth of sincerity, vitality of purpose, and endurance suggested by the following tariff in thalers:

For quartering . . . . .	4
For beheading and burning . . . . .	5
For strangling and burning . . . . .	4
For cord and for laying the fire and kindling it . . . . .	2
For burning alive . . . . .	4
For breaking a man alive on a wheel . . . . .	4
For setting up the wheel with the body twisted in it . . . . .	2
For cutting off a hand or sundry fingers, and for beheading—altogether . . . . .	3
For burning with a hot iron . . . . .	1
For beheading and placing the head upon the stake . . . . .	3
For beheading, twisting the body in the wheel, and placing the head upon a stake—altogether . . . . .	5
For tearing a criminal before his execution with red-hot pincers—each tearing of the flesh . . . . .	3
For nailing a tongue or hand to the gallows . . . . .	1
For the first grade of torture . . . . .	1
For the second grade of torture, including setting the limbs afterwards, with salve for same . . . . .	2

The German fees seem to have been slightly higher than those of France. Shortly before the revolution the executioner's post in Paris was said to be worth some £700 per annum.



attributes of the ideal headsman. He had a ready sympathy with his victims, and was generally polite to them. His aim was to be unobtrusive, and as pleasant as his duties allowed him. Besides being profoundly attracted by the engrossing technique of his profession, he was a connoisseur, well known amongst dealers in bric-a-brac and curiosities. He owned a gallery of paintings, gruesome perhaps in subject, but very appropriate to his calling. He collected pictures representing the martyrdom of the saints. He entertained his friends by explaining to them the errors made by the artists in the details of the torments they attempted to portray. Guillaume had an essentially happy nature. His work was also his recreation. He delighted in carrying out his jobs with neatness and despatch. He had not only a duty to perform towards his God, his King, and the state which employed him, he was at the same time the humble servant of the citizens of Paris, who eagerly attended and criticised his not infrequent public appearances.

It is necessary to add, writes the archivist Ravaisson, that in spite of these innocent fantasies, he was suspected of having poisoned his wife, and that amongst his many gallant adventures was one with La Voisin, the sorceress and mistress of poisons, who herself came ultimately to the scaffold. Madame de Brinvilliers possibly had dealings with this monstrous fiend, although the truth was never elucidated. If his mistress told him all the secrets she held concerning the daily life of Paris, André Guillaume must often have sat in the torture chamber of the Conciergerie and chuckled, whilst the magistrates vainly endeavoured to extort confessions.

The courts and prisons of old France varied in their methods of torture. In some towns the judges applied themselves to this branch of their labours with more than professional ardour. The chief problem of torture was to inflict the greatest possible amount of suffering without

actually endangering the life of the subject. A maxim, often repeated in the manuals which were studied by the jurists of the time, suggested that the skin should never be broken. But this was a counsel of perfection. A prisoner who had passed through torture and proved his innocence was allowed by law to sue his judges in damages. As a rule judges and their assistant torturers were safe from reprisals of this kind. The few prisoners who possessed sufficient strength of body and courage of mind to emerge from torture without agreeing to anything or everything their interrogators desired, generally considered that they had had more than their measure of justice. One king punished a judge for over-torturing an accused person, but the monarch within a few months, under a sudden stress of irritation, surpassed his own servant in order to extract a much-required confession.

Human ingenuity exercised itself in the tasks of the torture chamber with a fearful zest. Authors of the fifteenth century enumerate over five hundred different methods. The Teutonic races applied themselves to the matter with a characteristic thoroughness. The Latin races were lighter and more artistic. In Italy a prisoner was often tortured by simply being forbidden to sleep, a most effective method which (if report be true) has been made use of quite recently by the New York police. In Italy this infliction was comparatively mild. When it was transplanted to Scotland, to extract incriminating confessions from the miserable old hags who played at witchcraft, the torment was continued for days, in one case the limit being reached by relays of watchers on the ninth day.

Torture by preventing sleep is unimaginative. This cannot be said of another method invented and carried out by a German expert. The bare feet of the prisoner were soaked in brine, and a goat was then encouraged to lick the soles. This was particularly recommended in

the text-books. It gave the most intense discomfort, without physically hurting the body of the patient in the slightest degree.

At Paris such novelties were not encouraged. Only two forms of torture were used at the Conciergerie, the Châtelet, and the Bastille. One, the "brodequins," was applied to La Chaussée, the other, the "water," was undergone by Madame de Brinvilliers.

Torture by water is fully described by the erudite Jousse in his treatise on criminal law. After the accused has been extended upon a trestle, and the arms and the legs fastened by means of cords passed through iron rings, the cords are tightened with such force that the body is suspended in the air without support, and if necessary a trestle is placed beneath the body to increase the distension. Then the accused is made to swallow water through a funnel placed in his mouth. For the ordinary torture he is made to drink four jars, each containing two pints, and for the extraordinary torture another and more elevated trestle is placed under his body and he is given an additional four jars.

Before she underwent these pains Madame de Brinvilliers made a full confession to the examining magistrates. Having been sworn upon the Evangelists she said that she desired to admit everything. She said that she had poisoned her father with her own hands some twenty-eight to thirty times, in addition to the assistance received from a lackey named Gascon, who had been sent to her by Sainte-Croix. This had gone on for seven or eight months. Poisons had been used in powder and in liquid. She had poisoned her brothers with the help of La Chaussée. The powder was put on their bread or meat. The liquid was mixed in their drinks.

She denied that her sister Thérèse or her sister-in-law had been poisoned with her knowledge or consent. She had given poison four or five times to her husband, but

not to any serious extent. He called in a physician, and was cured. She explained the action of arsenic, and said that Sainte-Croix had attempted to poison her during a period of seven or eight months. By constantly drinking milk she effectually saved her life.

"Did you know Glaser?" asked one of the magistrates.

"Only as a clever and intelligent man," she replied. "I heard Sainte-Croix say that Glaser had been to Florence to learn the method of distilling the finest and most subtle poison. Sainte-Croix said that Glaser supplied a woman of high rank with this poison."

"Do you remember the name of this woman?"

"I never knew it. I believe that Fouquet, the surintendant of finances, sent Glaser to Florence, and wished to make use of his skill.

Pressed by the magistrates she repeated a long conversation she remembered to have had with Sainte-Croix, in which her former lover had told her of the intimate acquaintance between Glaser and Fouquet. The financier had a great scheme on hand, and Glaser's assistance as a chemical expert was relied upon.

This was not what the magistrates sought to discover. Their anxiety was to learn the names of Madame de Brinvilliers' accomplices. They withdrew from the room and left her with the "greffier," or clerk, and the executioner.

When she saw the jars of water she smiled.

"Do you wish to drown me?" she asked. "I am so small a person that you can hardly intend to make me swallow all that."

The executioner did not reply. But the clerk demanded that she should give the names of her accomplices, the composition of the poisons, and the nature of the antidotes. Her explanation was not sufficient.

"If you do not believe what I have already said my



body is in your hands, and you must torture me as you will."

In a few minutes she was stripped, extended from ring to ring, and a trestle placed beneath her body, so that it rested as if bound upon a wheel.

"You are killing me, although I have spoken the truth," she exclaimed several times.

The first jar of water was administered.

"You are killing me!"

"Name your accomplices?"

"I had none. Ten years ago a man asked me for some poison to kill his wife. That man is dead."

The second jar was given to her to drink. She would not speak. The third was poured down her throat.

"Reveal your accomplices? Did you not write from the Conciergerie to Pennautier urging him to do all he could for you, and telling him that your interests and his were identical?"

"I never knew that Pennautier had any dealings with Sainte-Croix with regard to poisons," she gasped. "To say anything else would be a lie. But I once saw a note in the hands of Sainte-Croix which concerned Pennautier, and I thought that the friendship which existed between them might extend to the poisons. I took the hazard of writing to him, on the supposition that if he was mixed up with Sainte-Croix he would help me, and that if he was not the letter would receive no attention."

For the fourth time water was given.

"I can say nothing more. If I said anything it would rest on my conscience."

This ended the "question ordinaire." Four of the eight jars of water were empty. With regard to her accomplices, if they existed, she had admitted nothing. The executioner then proceeded to the "question extraordinaire." The trestle beneath her body was two feet and a half high. It was replaced by a trestle a foot



higher, which distended her body so tightly that the cords cut into the flesh of her arms and legs.

"You are dismembering me," she cried. "Good Lord, pardon me! Lord have mercy upon me!"

"Have you anything else to declare with reference to your accomplices?"

"You may kill me, but I shall not tell a lie which will make me lose my soul."

The fifth jar was emptied.

"Reveal the composition of the poisons, and their antidote."

"I do not know how the poisons were made. I remember that toads formed part of the composition. Sainte-Croix never revealed the secret. I believe that he did not make it himself, but that Glaser prepared it. One of the poisons was simply arsenic. The only antidote was milk."

"Have you nothing to add?"

"I have said all I know. Kill me now if you wish. You will extract no more from me."

The sixth jar was brought out.

"I am dead!" she murmured.

The seventh jar was used.

She refused to speak.

The eighth jar was administered.

With a deep sigh she gasped, "My God! My God! I am dead!" Then she said no more.

She was untied and laid on a mattress in front of a large fire, whilst a messenger was sent for the Abbé Pirot.

In this fashion was the Marquise de Brinvilliers tortured. The Roman law forbade the torture of men and women of rank, but in France the rule was in this case broken, although in no other country was there more clearly one code for the rich and another for the poor.

Nothing was gained by the torture. She admitted her guilt before she was put to the test, the actual applica-

tion of which added little to the evidence justice already possessed. The "question préalable" inflicted upon criminals condemned to death in order to obtain the names of their accomplices always failed in its object. Strong rogues were able to suffer and conceal their secrets; weak men endeavoured to escape the agony by denouncing innocent acquaintances.

From the brief minutes of the proceedings which have been preserved no definite conclusions can be drawn as to the guilt of Pennautier. But it is doubtful whether the document contains an exact record of her revelations. Madame de Sévigné sums up Parisian gossip in a letter written to her daughter after the execution. "She said nothing against Pennautier . . . She asked to see the 'procureur général' (Achille de Harlay). She was an hour with him. We do not yet know what the conversation was about." The valiant old cavalier, Lord Berkeley, who was then ambassador in Paris, tells practically the same story. "Maddam Brinvillier is sayd to have confest more than those that heard it will confess," he writes to Secretary Williamson.

Yet we know enough to be convinced of the unreliability of evidence procured under torture. "To extract the truth," wrote Montaigne, "torture is a means full of uncertainty and danger. What would we not say, what would we not do, to escape suffering so poignant?" It is a remarkable commentary upon human enlightenment that most of the philosophers of the seventeenth century acquiesced in the continuation of these revolting torments.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### PIROT'S LAST CONSOLATIONS IN THE CHAPEL

**T**HE Abbé Pirot did not see his penitent from half-past seven until two. All this while the tender-hearted man was suffering agonies. Every moment he was murmuring under his breath, "She is on the rack." His head ached. He hardly knew where to rest. Some time was spent in the sitting-room belonging to the warder of the prison, and there he partook of a couple of eggs. Several of the prisoners entered and asked him about the Marquise. His brief reply was that he trusted that she would die contrite, and he requested them to pray for her. At which they spoke of other matters and left him. Finally he became so unnerved and worried by the importunity of these people, that the warder placed him in a little room by himself, and would allow none to enter and disturb him.

He was not, however, left alone. A court lady, Madame de Refuge, came with the Comtesse de Soissons, that daughter of the House of Mancini already tainted with intrigue and double-dealing. Then the almoner of the prison remained with him for half an hour, and Madame Lamoignon sent a servant with a medal of Saint Anthony of Padua which had been blessed by the Pope. It carried an indulgence to the dying, and the lender suggested that Madame de Brinvilliers would find it of value.

Eleven o'clock struck. Exhausted and mentally dis-

tressed, the priest left his room, and walked through the corridors of the prison, several times remaining for a few minutes outside the door which opened into the chamber of torture. Whilst he was waiting in the hall one of the prison warders came up to him, and said :

“ There is a gentleman who desires to speak to you.”

The priest was annoyed that any one should speak to him at that moment. Not wishing to be rude he bowed to the stranger.

“ You do not know me ! ”

“ Monsieur,” replied the Abbé Pirot. “ I do not think I have ever had the honour of seeing you before. I ask your pardon for it, but I go very little into the world.”

“ My name is Le Boust. I am son to the judge, and I am also brother-in-law to Monsieur de Pennautier. Without a doubt you have heard the gossip which seeks to implicate him in this business of Madame de Brinvilliers, as if he were her accomplice. I know that he is innocent, and I am pleading for his liberty and his release from prison. We have nothing to fear from the truth, but we have everything to fear from the agony of torture, when a prisoner will say anything. We must admit the feebleness of the woman. I am convinced of the innocence of my brother-in-law, but I am afraid that Madame de Brinvilliers will falsely accuse him. In this case, monsieur, we hope that you will have enough integrity to oblige her to retract, and to make her understand that she will not be able to die in peace unless she frees an innocent person whom she may have accused without truth.”

The Abbé Pirot did not take the remarks kindly.

“ I know nothing about the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers, nor do I know her accomplices,” he replied. “ Thus I am able to say little about the matters you speak of. But I can assure you, from what I have seen of Madame de Brinvilliers, that I believe her to



be incapable of accusing anybody other than the guilty, however painful be the torture. As for me, I will do all I can during my ministry to her. But I can tell you at once that she has enough firmness and resolution to suffer without incriminating the innocent."

With that he refused to add another word, bowed ceremoniously, and passed on.

He returned to the company of Madame de Refuge, and it being noon, a servant set a dish of fish before them. One of the priests from the Church of Saint Bartholomew persuaded the Abbé against his will to take a morsel of bread and some wine. The governor of the prison looked in with the news that Madame de Brinvilliers had signed her declaration, and would shortly arrive. He also said that she had not been tortured, which greatly relieved the poor priest.

"Rest yourself for a while," said the governor. And the Abbé Pirot tried to sleep on a bed. He could not. Then at half-past one he was told to go to Madame de Brinvilliers, and the jailor who brought the message said that she had undergone torture.

"But in what a state she must be," cried the horrified priest. "Six hours of examination, and then torture!"

"She's not so very bad. You will find her on a mattress near the fire."

The Abbé Pirot hurried through the corridors. He met the governor, and reproached him for saying that she was not to undergo the "question." He snatched his hat and gown from his servant, and entered the dreadful room. Two of the examining judges were there.

"How long will it take you to prepare her?" they asked.

"I cannot precisely say. It depends upon the state in which I find her. After so long an examination, and with torture in addition, the situation may have



changed. She was in a good disposition this morning. But I shall want at least four or five hours."

The magistrates said that she had revealed little, but they believed that she had told all she knew. And, on the demand of the priest, they gave him a copy of the confession found at Liège.

The unhappy woman was in front of the fire. She swallowed two eggs, and was clearly in a condition of extreme exhaustion. The Abbé left the room to read the confession. Several judges and councillors stopped him on the way.

"Evidently this is your first attempt!" cried one, noticing his distress.

"Pardon me, monsieur," replied the priest, coldly. "I have confessed many persons. I have been at many death-beds. But I have never yet been on the scaffold."

"It's never too late to begin," was the mocking response.

He returned to his penitent. Her face was so drawn with pain that he was struck with pity.

"I have been waiting a long while for you to come and console me," she murmured with difficulty. "It has been a dreadful business. However it is the last time that I shall deal with men. I have nothing now to do but to think of God."

A mournful procession made its way down the staircase, and across the corridors to the chapel. The executioner supported her stumbling steps on one side, the priest held her arm on the other. He whispered into her ears a few words of consolation. In the chapel were some spectators who had come to gloat over her wretchedness. But the executioner led his prisoner behind the altar into the sacristy, and closed the gate of the choir, so that none could enter to disturb them. Terribly fatigued by the journey, she dropped into a chair by the side of the altar.

She was in a state of extreme agitation. Her skin, always white, had become unusually blanched. Yet in the swollen veins streams of blood could be noticed. Her eyes sparkled with an unnatural brilliancy. Her mouth was hideously distorted. Her hands trembled. It was evident that her heart was beating very feebly.

She demanded some wine. When it was brought she sipped it slowly, painfully swallowing drop by drop.

She asked a warder for a pin to fasten her collar.

"You need fear nothing," said she, referring to her previous attempt at suicide. "I will do no harm with it."

The warder gave it to her, and, begging her pardon for all the trouble he had given, dropped on his knees and kissed her hand.

"Pray to God for me," was her simple reply.

"Madame," replied the man, unable to restrain his sobs, "I will pray for you to-morrow with all my heart."

Alone in the quietness of the tiny sacristy she commenced to regain her composure. She was not so penitent as in the morning. After hours of mental and physical torment she was allowed a short respite from continual agony.

"Monsieur!" she cried to her priest. "Have you heard my sentence?"

"Madame," he answered. "I know that it is a sentence of death."

She complained with bitterness.

"Yes, there are many different kinds of death. But they have condemned me to one of ignominy. It is an infamy that my body should be burnt after my death. I am spared being burnt alive, but yet I am to suffer all the shame of it."

The priest tried to console her, but she protested that the public confession and the fire were terrible.

"It is nothing for me," she gasped. "I know I

deserve to be burnt alive rather than burnt when dead. But I have children, and both the 'amende' and the fire are very shameful for them."

The words of the Abbé produced little effect. He told her that there remained plenty of time to become calm.

"Ah, monsieur! It does not depend upon you. When everything is ready we shall be told that we have got to move on."

"I promise you, madame, that you will be granted all the leisure you need."

"I do not wish anybody to wait for me. When the cart is at the door I shall be ready to go."

The priest found it almost impossible to get her to concentrate her mind upon thoughts of religion. Her courage did not diminish, however, and they talked about her children. Her elder daughter was a Carmelite at Gisors, and she spoke of the girl with much affection. The younger child, who was staying with the Carmelites at Pontoise, she did not seem so interested in. This child was to receive sixty thousand livres from Madame d'Aubray upon her entry into a convent.

Madame de Brin villiers spoke little of her three sons, and she referred with disdain rather than indifference to that part of her sentence which decreed that ten thousand livres should be paid from her estate as an indemnity to Madame d'Aubray.

"My sister-in-law is to take ten thousand livres from me. That will be a bad thing for my children."

The Abbé Pirot spoke of her father and brothers. These remembrances did not touch her. She was uninterested in the conversation, and wanted to talk about the torture.

"I suffered more from the rack than from the water I swallowed." She showed the livid marks on her arms. She was able to walk easily, but she could not kneel without great pain.

She then talked about her interrogation, and said that she had added nothing fresh to what she had already declared.

“ However, it is necessary to tell you that this business has not passed entirely as I wished, and as you have ordered. I lied in one fact, in which the truth matters little to me. I did it because I felt a certain resentment against somebody. Briancourt said that I admitted my crimes to him, and this I have continued to deny, thus accusing him of lying and false witness. I have also said that the police officer who arrested me at Liége, in seizing my casket, mixed up other papers with those he pretended to find in the box. I said these things to uphold what I had already declared, and I accused this officer because I wished to revenge myself. What must I do ? ”

The priest replied that she must make a fresh confession of the calumnies she had uttered against Briancourt and Desgrez. Then he added severely :

“ There is little appearance that you have been touched by the grace of God, and that you are in a state of sincere repentance for your faults. After quitting me with a positive and absolute promise to say nothing in your examination against truth and justice you have uttered these false things. This is not a sign of penitence, and if you do not change how can I give you absolution ? Madame, I do not understand you. How can I believe in your contrition ? Even in the midst of your confession you fall back into the same sins ! ”

He reproached her at length.

“ I fear the state into which you have fallen. You make me tremble. I told you yesterday that there is not a sin which the Church is not able to remit. There is not one that she has not the power to undo. But I must add that in order to perform this she must find a broken heart ready to return to God. Without this disposition nothing can be done.”



Madame de Brinvilliers was deeply touched. Already Pirot had been exhorting her for nearly an hour. But since the torture she had changed. She cared less about God. Her soul was too full of resentment against men. The Abbé could not reduce her to a condition of humble contrition. It was not until he menaced her with the threat that he would refuse absolution that she altered.

“Monsieur!” she demanded in the deepest sorrow, “what do you wish of me? Have I not been enough humiliated? Could you desire me to be more broken?”

Tears gushed down her cheeks. The Abbé did not waste his time. He, too, was weeping. For an hour and a half they talked and prayed in the quietude of the tiny sacristy.

“My misery must be great to oblige you to weep so much,” she remarked. “Or else you take much interest in me!”

Gradually her feelings became more under control. She made her confession, and, with difficulty, dropped on her knees to receive absolution. The Abbé promised to give her a second absolution on the scaffold, and he also spoke of the medal which had been sent for her use.

In his pocket he had the notes of her confession, which he had written upon the previous day. The Marquise told him to take care that it did not fall from his pocket, and also to see that his servant did not read it. It was practically indecipherable for a stranger, as he had written it in a scribbling shorthand.

After the absolution she suggested that these notes should be burnt over a candle. In the original confession found at Liége she displayed little interest. She seemed to admit the justice of her sentence, and became detached from all thoughts of the world.

“Yet,” writes the priest in his remarkable history of her last hours, “with all these good moments she



had still from time to time some return of her difficult humour."

Prayers and religious instruction continued without cessation. Suddenly the executioner opened the door and looked in.

"Do you want anything?" he asked. His question was clearly a pretext. He was the bearer of a message. Some years previously a saddler had sold to the Marquise a coach for 1500 livres. She had paid him 300, and given a bill for the balance. He, poor man, was anxious for his money.

"Tell him," said she, in a voice without a tremor, "that I will give orders that he is to be paid. But is it necessary to start already? It will give us pleasure if you can allow more time."

The executioner was extremely polite.

"Nothing presses," he said with a bow. "We need not commence our journey for another two or three hours."

It was exactly half-past five. The Marquise was overjoyed at the delay. She chatted to the priest about many matters. She referred to her creditors, and deeply regretted that she had dissipated so much money. For a moment she gazed at a chaplet of beads in her hands.

"Monsieur, I should not like this chaplet to fall into the hands of the executioner. It is not because I think he would make a bad use of it. These men are Christians like ourselves. But I would prefer to leave it to someone."

"Madame, tell me to whom you would wish to give it, and I will take it as you desire?"

"I have nobody but my sister, and I fear that she would have a horror of anything which I have used. If it would not give her pain I should have much pleasure if she would take it. It would remind her to pray to God for me."

The Abbé Pirot replied that her sister had displayed great tenderness towards her, and would certainly accept the chaplet. It was arranged that the Marquise should hold it until her death.

“But?” said the Abbé with sudden remembrance. “All that you have belongs to the headsman, and you must ask his permission to allow me to take it to your sister.”

This seemed a keen humiliation.

“I will do it,” she consented in a low tone.

The “procureur-general” sent for the priest, who left his penitent in the care of the chaplain of the prison. The Abbé found the judge at the door of the chapel.

“Monsieur,” said the “procureur-general” abruptly, “this woman is trying us very much.”

“But how?” inquired Pirot. “I must confess that I have a great consolation at the state in which she is, and I hope God will admit her to His mercy.”

“Yes, but she admits her crime, but will not reveal the names of her accomplices. Would you not like me to tell you what is being said in the world? You are not able to hear it otherwise. You have been two days here, and you cannot learn the rumours in the palace and the city. I know both and I will tell you frankly.”

“Monsieur, you do me much honour, and I shall be very glad if you can tell me anything which concerns me.”

“What I have to say concerns but you. Gossip runs that you are the intimate friend of Monsieur Le Boust, and the friendship between him and you, between his family and yours, has made you persuade Madame de Brinwilliers not to incriminate Monsieur Pennautier and her other accomplices.”

“Monsieur,” replied the priest curtly, “what do you think yourself?”

“I will render you every justice. I admit your in-

tegrity, and I am persuaded that no amount of friendship would prevent you from doing your duty."

"I am much obliged for your goodness," said the priest. "I can assure you that the gossip is wholly false. Monsieur Le Boust is a great judge, known by everybody. If I saw him it would only be with a thousand others. But I have never seen him. I do not know his face. His son is a priest, a doctor, an almoner to the King, known to all the clergy. It would not be strange if I had the honour of his acquaintance. But I have never seen him. He has a brother, the only one of the family I know, and I saw him for the first time this morning, and the concierge of the prison will tell you of our interview."

The Abbé then related his conversation with young Le Boust.

"I believe your word," said the judge. "And I will see that this interview becomes public." They talked together about the declarations the prisoner had made respecting Briancourt and Desgrez, and also about the arrangements for the exposition of the Holy Sacrament, which was usual before a criminal went to death.

When the Abbé returned to the sacristy he found the Marquise gossiping very calmly with the chaplain and a certain Monsieur Aubert. The subject of their conversation was Mary, Queen of Scots.

"This queen," said Madame de Brinvilliers, "was as innocent as I am guilty. Calumnies have sullied her reputation. The truth of history justifies her as much as falsehood wishes to blacken her."

One of the men remarked that everybody was praying for the Marquise. She asked for their prayers, and when the Abbé entered they withdrew.

"I am a very miserable person to interest so many people that they must pray for me," she said.

"Thank God that so many are imploring grace for you," was Pirot's reply. "The angels are making ready

to rejoice over your conversion. But all the efforts of heaven and of earth are absolutely useless if you do not humiliate yourself, not only under the hand of man, but under the all-powerful hand of God. I can give you news of a happiness which I dared not hope for. I have already told you that a spiritual communion must take the place of a sacramental one, and that you could receive nothing further. It is now proposed to expose the Holy Sacrament upon the altar before we go to the scaffold, in order that you may have the consolation of seeing and adoring it. It will cost you little to receive this grace. You will be in the sight of a few people in the chapel, and in the galleries of the prison. When the Sacrament is exposed the prisoners are usually allowed to enter the chapel. You will be seen, but they will add their prayers to yours. I do not think it should give you much pain to be seen by these prisoners, as you are on the point of going to die in public, and to be a spectacle before God, before the angels, and in front of men."

"Alas!" cried the Marquise. "I shall soon see plenty of people in the streets, and in the place where they are going to cut off my head. Let those come to the chapel who wish."

After another long discourse the Abbé was again interrupted. Three of the examining judges entered the sacristy. In the corridor Achille de Harlay spoke to Pirot.

"These gentlemen have gone for a last time to interrogate Madame de Brinvilliers. They will not be a minute for they have but one word to say to her. We have such a lot to answer for in this business, and she is so extraordinary a person, that we must do all in our power to compel her to confess everything she knows."

"Monsieur," replied Pirot, "I am ready to repeat solemnly all that I have said to her."

He re-entered the sacristy. The two judges and



their clerk sat with the prisoner in the cold gloom behind the altar. One of them addressed the priest.

"Madame has told us that you have convinced her that she is obliged to declare everything she knows about the crimes."

The Abbé solemnly warned her that she could expect no safety if she was keeping any information back from justice, either concerning the poisons, the antidotes, or the accomplices.

"If you hide anything there will be no pardon for you."

One of the judges interrupted him. "There will be no absolution before God."

"I understand but that. I do not speak of absolution before men, for I am not the dispenser of it. I repeat again, madame, that you will find no justification before the judgment seat of Heaven if you do not accuse plainly all those who you know make use of poison."

"You have already said all this before, and at greater length," replied the Marquise coolly. "I have followed your advice, and revealed all I know. I have said everything. There is nothing more for me to add."

"That is enough," said a judge, and they withdrew.

The long day drew to its close. It was now a quarter to seven. The Marquise vainly endeavoured to hide her fatigue, and became indifferent to what went on around her. She sat tranquilly in her chair, whilst the priest talked incessantly of a spiritual world. It was past seven when they were warned that it was time to start. The executioner loosened her cords, and they advanced to the steps of the altar, before which the prison chaplain intoned the *Veni creator*, the *salve regina*, and the *tantum ergo*. A few prayers were said, and the chaplain pronounced the benediction of the Holy Sacrament. Then they left the chapel, the executioner's assistant holding her right hand, and the Abbé Pirot taking her left.



As they walked through the corridors she became much confused. A crowd of about a dozen persons had congregated to see her pass. Although her arms were tied she endeavoured to cover her face with her bonnet. Pirot murmured sentences of religious consolation. They had to pass a wicket gate, and as the crowd hurried to follow her the gate was hastily shut to bar the passage. Suddenly the string of her chaplet broke, and the beads scattered across the stones.

"Stop, madame, for an instant," cried the Abbé. He and the executioner's assistant went on their knees, picked up the beads and placed them in her hand.

"Monsieur," she said to the assistant, "I am well aware that everything I have belongs to you. Please allow me to give this chaplet to the Abbé. You will not lose much. It has no value. My sister is a Carmelite, and I wish her to have it."

"Madame," replied the youth, "you are mistress of all you have."

At this instant they arrived at the entrance hall of the Conciergerie. The executioner was waiting to dress her for the "amende honorable."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### PUBLIC CONFESSION IN FRONT OF THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME

**W**HEN Madame de Brinvilliers was told that the "amende honorable," or public confession, could only be made in a white chemise, she was troubled. The law decreed, in fact, that the culprit should wear a shift and nothing else. But in this case the headsman had already a long white gown, and he and his assistant simply threw it over the woman as she stood. It enveloped her from head to foot, completely covering all her clothes. A white bonnet was given to her, and tied under her chin. Her hands were shackled, and a cord was hung round her neck. She had also to appear bare-footed, and her shoes and stockings were left in the prison. She felt the shame of these preparations, and looked to her confessor continually for sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

This preliminary ordeal was more public than private. Over fifty persons had collected together to watch her undergo the toilet of the condemned. There was Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons, the most beautiful of Mazarin's nieces, then in the height of her glory. She was deeply interested in the trial and condemnation of the Marquise, and knew far more of the secret history of the case than most people were aware. She herself

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Sévigné says that the Marquise left the prison at six o'clock "nue en chemise," and that the sight made her tremble. The *Gazette d'Amsterdam*, on the 28th July, reports that she went from the Conciergerie at seven o'clock in the evening "sans habits et avec une chemisette seulement sur la chemise."

was suspected of having poisoned her husband. This was possibly untrue ; it has never been proved, or disproved. Whether she was an actual poisoner or not she was certainly incriminated, together with her sister, the Duchesse de Bouillon, by La Voisin, in the scandal which was to break during the next few years. With her in the hall of the Conciergerie were Madame de Refuge, one of her closest friends ; Mademoiselle de Scudéry ; the Rabelaisian Monsieur de Roquelaure, whose broad humour made him the most popular man at Court ; and also the Abbé de Chaluset, who, although he became a bishop, was also suspected of trafficking in poison. Madame de Brinvilliers knew all the people, some of them intimately. Under their cold, relentless gaze she trembled.

“ Monsieur,” she cried to her confessor, “ this is a strange curiosity.”

The priest was full of compassion. “ Take no heed of them, madame. Believe that so great a crowd gathers together only at the order of God to make you feel the confusion due to your great crimes.”

He delivered an address of considerable length in front of the courtiers and prison officials. Then with bare feet she left the Conciergerie.

“ Adieu, madame,” she cried to the woman who had remained in her cell. Then to her warder, “ Adieu, monsieur ! ”

They were both weeping.

The executioner whispered to the priest that it would be necessary to carry a bottle of wine, as the prisoner would probably need stimulant. She was indeed in an extremely weak condition.

But when she stood before the vehicle which was to convey her to her doom, her surprise was dreadful to witness. And her horror was shared by the priest. It was a rough, two-wheeled cart, used for the meanest

needs of the stable, and was so small that there was barely space for two persons. Yet four had to travel in it. The executioner's assistant sat on the footboard, his feet dangling over the shaft. Some straw had been thrown in the bottom of the cart, and Madame de Brinvilliers and the Abbé Pirot seated themselves with much difficulty. She crouched uneasily in one corner, the priest against her in the other. The executioner balanced himself on the tailboard, and his legs stuck into the priest's back. The sight was grotesque. In casting shame upon the criminal, Justice had forgotten the dignity due to herself.

When Pirot had settled into his cramped position he took from his pocket a crucifix which he held in front of the eyes of the Marquise.

"Madame, look only at this representation of Christ crucified. In a short while you will be elevated upon the scaffold as He was raised upon the Cross. Draw yourself to Him, and cry 'My God, let me approach you. Let me come like the spouse of the Canticles in the odour of your perfumes.'"

At this instant the executioner thrust into her hand a flaming torch, which she had to carry at Notre Dame when making her public confession. She was too agitated to hold it securely, so the priest took it from her, and held it himself during the first half of the journey.

An enormous crowd surged round the gates of the prison. So loud were its cries that hardly a word of conversation could be heard. The Seine was gay with boats, and the bridges black with spectators.

The sun was rapidly sinking, but the procession did not start. The decree of judgment had to be read afresh in the ear of the shrinking prisoner. Shame surrounded her like a mist. The wind from the river caught the streaming flame of the torch and drove the acrid smoke into her face. Agony piled itself upon agony.

"Ah!" she cried to the priest, as drops of sweat rolled across her cheeks, "after this how will my husband have heart enough to live in the world."

"I pray you, madame, do not think of worldly matters. Occupy yourself solely with the salvation of your soul. It is now your chief and only business. I do not condemn you for thinking for a moment of your family. The Son of God Himself had such a thought before His death. But you have so little time left that it must now be devoted to yourself alone."

"It cannot be wrong to think a little of one who is so dear to me!"

"Place yourself in the care of God."

Her agitation increased, her eyebrows contracted, her mouth twisted with pain. Never before had she been seen in such a condition. It was at this instant that the young painter, Le Brun, made his terrible drawing, for the cart remained stationary before the Conciergerie for ten minutes after she had taken her seat. Le Brun said that she looked like a tigress.

The priest talked to her about her husband. He was not able to say much, for he had lost most of his self-possession, and was on the point of breaking down. With astonishing firmness she suggested that Monsieur de Brinvilliers should enter some semi-religious community.

"There are several free communities in Paris where one could live a secular life—the Oratorian Fathers, for instance. What could stop him from entering such a house 'en pension'?"

The Abbé Pirot whispered prayers and exhortations whilst holding the crucifix aloft. The crowds screamed and shouted. Obscene expressions were shouted at her. She heard them and winced. Then she tried to hide her confusion from her confessor, and tears ran from her eyes. The guard had to fight the angry mob in order to make way for the cart to leave the court-



yard of the prison. But so dense was the throng that it could only advance at a walking pace. Madame de Brinvilliers fervently kissed the crucifix.

"If God gave me the option of life or of death I would ask for death, not because I am tired of life, but because I wish to expiate my crimes and satisfy justice. . . . I have suffered much since I fled from France, and since I have been in prison. . . . I go to my death with joy, because it will put an end to my sins."

She was again troubled at being compelled to wear the white sheet for the "amende honorable." The Abbé Pirot endeavoured to console her. Then she turned to another topic.

"Monsieur, to-day is the feast of Saint Alexis. Tell me something about him."

And the priest, who was fluent enough, discoursed at length upon the history of the Roman martyr.

During this long conversation the cart was painfully dragged by its single horse through the rookery of streets which led to Notre Dame. The citizens of Paris were divided in their manifestations. Some were full of pity, and prayed aloud, but many of the cries were curses.

"You must recognise that you deserve to be cursed by the whole world. Guilty as you are, you must regard these imprecations more as a punishment due to your crime than as an insult to your unhappiness."

"I take them in that spirit. I wish to suffer even more than I do," she replied with serenity.

Then suddenly the priest noticed that her face changed entirely in expression. She fixed her eyes with determination upon his crucifix. Something had distracted her attention, and shattered her peace of mind.

"Madame, you have seen something to upset you?"

She tried to hide a bitter emotion.

"It is nothing."

"You cannot contradict your eyes. There was a

fire in them a moment ago which could only have arisen at an annoying sight. What was it? You have promised to warn me of everything which might place temptation in your way."

"I will tell you. But it is nothing."

She turned to the executioner, who sat on the back of the cart.

"Monsieur," she said to him politely. "Would you move a little to one side so that I may not see the man who is riding behind you?"

The executioner looked over his shoulder, then moved as she had requested.

"What is it?" asked the priest.

"I understand very well," replied the headsman briefly. He did not wish to explain more fully.

The Abbé Pirot insisted.

"Madame," he continued with surprise. "What displeases you? Who is that man you do not wish to see?"

"It is nothing. Only a feebleness of mine. I could not bear to have under my eyes the sight of the man who has maltreated me so basely. It is Desgrez, who arrested me at Liége, and brought me to Paris. He is riding behind the cart. He was hard upon me, and it gives me pain to see him."

Pirot replied that Desgrez was only carrying out his duty.

"The more it makes you suffer to see him, the more necessary it is to do violence to yourself in looking at him. This is not the time to give way to false delicacy. Conquer yourself."

She made a slight grimace, then asked the executioner to take his former position in order that she might again see Desgrez. He did not move, however, until Pirot asked him. Then Madame de Brinvilliers contemplated the police officer afresh without trembling. This curious

incident took place as they passed under the walls of the Hôtel Dieu, the hospital in which she had conducted her first experiments in the art of poisoning. Desgrez rode at the head of a large force of "archers" or armed police.

The conversation between the penitent and the confessor continued during the whole of the journey. Madame de Brinvilliers still feared that she was to be burnt alive. Pirot told her that he had not read the judgment, but that if it ordered that her body should be burnt after death and not before, she might rest assured that its terms would be strictly adhered to. Then he added that her crimes were so great that she could not complain of any punishment, however painful. He drew her attention to the sufferings of the martyrs. Saint Peter was crucified, Saint Lawrence grilled upon a slow fire, Saint John thrown into a boiling cauldron, Saint Stephen stoned, St Ignatius thrown to wild beasts. As he was repeating these examples the cart with its escort entered the wide square in front of the metropolitan cathedral of Notre Dame.

The "parvis" was packed with sightseers from corner to corner, and after much trouble a small space was cleared before the great doors of the church. These were open, and through the gloom of the nave one could see the flickering candles like stars above the altar. The church was crowded. Madame de Brinvilliers slowly descended from the cart. Then the priest got down, but, so cramped had been his position, that for a minute he could hardly stand upon his legs.

The Marquise was made to kneel upon the first step leading under the porch. The lighted torch was placed in her hand. The clerk of the Court stood on her right, the executioner on her left, and the Abbé Pirot was behind. The clerk then read the terms of the "Amende honorable," and made her repeat it word by word.

Her voice was so feeble, that amidst the hubbub of the crowd it could not be heard.

“Say it louder!” cried the executioner. She raised her voice, and stumbled through the sentences. Luckily they were not long.

“I admit that wickedly and for vengeance I poisoned my father and my brothers, and attempted to poison my sister-in-law, in order to possess myself of their property. For which I ask pardon of God, of the King, and of Justice.”

Some of the spectators said afterwards that she displayed a slight hesitation in repeating the name of her father. The ceremony was soon over. The torch was taken from her grasp, and again she mounted the ignoble cart. The Abbé Pirot and the executioner followed.

The horse was turned towards the Place de Grève, and the guards struggled and fought with the excited crowd until a passage was forced for the procession to proceed to its destination on the other side of the river.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE EXECUTION ON THE PLACE DE GREVE—THE MARQUISE BECOMES A SAINT

**F**ROM the "parvis" of Notre Dame to the Place de Grève in front of the Hôtel de Ville is but a short distance. But the cart, surrounded by its bodyguard, made very slow progress.

The Abbé Pirot and Madame de Brinvilliers prayed earnestly together as they were jolted forward over the uneven roadway. Never was priest more active to save an erring soul. She endeavoured to repeat his prayers, and implored God to grant her mercy. In front of the church of St Denis de la Chatre the crowd redoubled its hostility, and shouted the most abominable expressions. It had smelt blood, and was not to be denied vengeance. Although there were numerous sympathisers, had the cart not been so strongly guarded by Desgrez and his police, there is little doubt that it would have been quickly overturned, and its occupants trampled upon and massacred.

As they crossed the Pont Notre Dame, Madame de Brinvilliers wept bitterly, and admitted the justice of her punishment. The Abbé Pirot concentrated his efforts and prayed with an incredible ardour.

The cart now stopped on the place de Grève some four steps from the scaffold. To-day we know the open space as the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, the centre of the corporate life of Paris. Two centuries ago, it was the scene of most public executions as well as all popular festivities.



The clerk to the Court came forward and again read the judgment, which was repeated word by word by the executioner. The Abbé Pirot raised his voice so that Madame de Brinvilliers' attention might be distracted. All this took much time.

"Madame," said the executioner to her. "It is necessary to persevere. It is not enough to come here and simply listen to Monsieur the Abbé. You must go to the end and finish as you have commenced."

Pirot admits that this was said in a truly Christian spirit with much real humanity. Indeed it edified him. Madame de Brinvilliers did not answer, but she bowed to the sympathetic headsman, who admitted afterwards that he had been exceedingly surprised at her firmness.

The clerk of the Court, who was on horseback, then rode up to the cart, and asked her if she had anything more to say. Two of the examining judges were in the adjoining Hôtel de Ville prepared to receive any further declaration she might be disposed to make. The noise of the crowd was so great that she could not hear what the clerk said. So the Abbé Pirot had to repeat it.

"You are now being asked for the last time," he said solemnly, "if you know anything more. If you are concealing any evidence, unless you reveal it now, you can hope for no salvation. Take thought, Madame. In a short while you will be standing before the judgment seat of God. And you will be unable to justify your actions before the divine tribunal if you do not at this moment make reparation for all the crimes you have committed against men. Does not your conscience still reproach you?"

"I have nothing more to say. I have said all I know."

"Madame, is this all in good faith? You are but a few steps from death. Do not lie before God!"

"Monsieur, it is all."

"Then say it aloud to the clerk of the Courts."

“Monsieur,” repeated the Marquise to the “greffier.”  
“I have nothing more to say.”

Some little while passed before she was able to step from the cart to the scaffold. During these moments she suffered much. The crowd pressed round her screaming for vengeance. In order to bring the cart up to the foot of the scaffold the driver had to strike the mob with his whip to force them back. In lifting the whip over his shoulder to bring the lash down with more force upon the nearest heads the Abbé Pirot received a blow across the face. Still the crowd moved to and fro, fighting and crying to get into position for the coming sight.

The executioner jumped off the cart, and raised a ladder against the scaffold.

“We must not part here,” said the Marquise to the priest. He says that her face was serenely peaceful, her voice clear and without a tremor. “You have promised not to leave me until my head is off. I hope you will keep your word.”

“Do not be troubled. I will not abandon you.”

Then she repeated her dying wishes, and thanked him for all his goodness.

“I want you to say a “*De profundis*” on the scaffold at the moment of my death, and to-morrow a mass. Remember me, monsieur, and pray to God for me.”

The Abbé Pirot writes in his Memoir that at this moment he was more deeply touched than in the whole previous course of his life. He wept, and found it impossible to utter more than a few broken words.

“Yes, madame, I will do all that you wish,” he replied. Whilst she was being assisted from the cart he wiped away his tears, and became a trifle calmer and more self-controlled. The assistant to the executioner, who had been driving, then helped him to the ground, and apologised for the blow he had unintentionally given.

The executioner took Madame de Brinvilliers by the

hand, and led her to the scaffold. But he stopped for a second to speak to a man on horseback. It was the police officer, Desgrez. The Abbé Pirot rushed forward to hear if the Marquise said anything to him. He was angry that the officer should continually cross the sight of Madame de Brinvilliers, for he must have been aware that his presence was extremely distasteful to her. The Abbé could not catch what his penitent was saying, but it was later reported that she told Desgrez that she asked his pardon for all the trouble she had given him, and she also asked him to have some masses said for the repose of her soul and to pray personally to God for her.

“I am your servant,” she concluded. “Adieu, monsieur !”

Another contemporary report states that at this moment she cried—

“Why is it that with so many others guilty I am the only one to die ?”

The Abbé Pirot denies that she said this, as she had admitted her crimes and confessed without naming any accomplices. But the noise of the crowd was so persistent that he may easily have missed hearing the words. That she uttered them was generally understood in Paris at the time of her death.

The executioner handed her up the ladder, on to the scaffold, and she knelt upon a block of wood placed in the centre of the platform. The Abbé Pirot knelt by her side, in such a manner that he could easily speak into her ear. She appeared to see nothing of the angry faces which filled the square. She gazed only at her confessor. The crowd hissed and whistled. Every window and every roof were black with spectators. Her eyes and ears were shut to all her surroundings. She did not appear to notice the pile of faggots, sprinkled with pitch and tar, upon which her body was to be consumed.

Nor did she see the executioner's sword resting on one corner of the scaffold, its gleaming edge half-hidden by the coat he had thrown carelessly over it.

The toilet of the condemned was leisurely proceeded with. The executioner cut her hair at the back and the sides. He was rather rough, but she did not complain. This took half an hour, for although her hair was not long it was exceedingly thick, and the man was slow over his task.<sup>1</sup> After this he rather cleverly, but still slowly, cut her chemise, so as to leave her neck and shoulders bare. She faced the Seine, and, across the housetops, the towers of Notre Dame.

As the headsman folded the handkerchief to place across her eyes, the Abbé Pirot noticed that she was gazing intently at the twin towers of the great church.

The Abbé prayed again, and she with him. And now she exhibited one of the first signs of weariness which she had outwardly shown during the trying day. As the Abbé was praying the executioner made a sign to him to withdraw slightly to one side. When she heard the priest moving she cried—

“You are going? But you promised not to leave me until I had received the stroke.” She said this in a loud tone, full of apprehension.

“I am not leaving you, Madame,” answered Pirot, in the midst of his prayers.

“Lord Jesus receive my soul!” she murmured. Again she repeated the sentence, “Lord Jesus, receive my soul!” Then a third time, “Lord Jesus, receive my soul!” The executioner picked up his heavy sword, and tried its edge.

The Abbé Pirot continued to pray at considerable length, the Marquise admitted her sins, and asked for divine mercy. Then she kissed the cross. At last,

<sup>1</sup> “A great cruelty,” writes Madame de Sévigné, feelingly.



after she had been on the scaffold almost an hour, the executioner completed his various preparations.

“ Say the ‘ Salve,’ monsieur,” he said to the priest.

The Abbé Pirot intoned the “ Salve ” in a loud voice, and one by one the people in the crowd took up the words until the entire throng was repeating the prayer.

Salve, regina, mater misericordiæ: vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus, exules filii Evæ, ad te suspiramus, gementes et fientes in hac lacrymarum valle. Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende! o clemens! o pia! o dulcis virgo Maria!

It was the old custom at French executions for the onlookers to repeat this prayer in the ears of the criminal. When the “ Salve ” had been said Madame de Brinvilliers asked for the second absolution which had been promised her, and she demanded a second “ penitence.”

“ The only ‘ penitence ’ that I give you is to accept death, and to suffer it in expiation of your crimes,” said the Abbé.

She repeated an “ Ave,” a “ Santa est Maria mater gratiæ,” and received absolution.

The crowd ended the repetition of the “ Salve ” and there was a sudden silence. Whilst the absolution was said all heads were bare.

“ Monsieur,” said the headsman, who acted as master of the ceremonies. “ The ‘ Salve ’ is finished. Now say the ‘ Oraison.’ ”

The Abbé recited the second prayer, and again the crowd joined with him. Then the priest held to the lips of Madame de Brinvilliers the medal which Clement X. had blessed. Three times she repeated the sacred name of “ Jesus,” and three times that of “ Mary ” in order to gain the plenary indulgence which Paul IV. had granted through the Sorbonne to all criminals con-



demned to death, who received their last ministrations from the priests attached to the house.

“ Ah well ! Are you contented with me, monsieur ? Am I able to look forward to the mercy of God ? Will He grant me grace ? ” she demanded serenely.

“ I am not the person to be contented with you. It is God alone.” Pirot delivered another lengthy address, and then moved to a corner of the platform. The executioner stood behind Madame de Brinvilliers, sword in hand. He was ready, but he was compelled to wipe the sweat from his face. Then his assistant produced a bandage.

“ Monsieur ! ” cried the prisoner. “ They are going to bandage my eyes ! ”

“ It is always done. It does not matter, for you will soon lose your other senses. Remember how much you have abused them.”

She repeated a prayer to the Virgin.

“ Recollect the cry of Christ when dying,” said the priest, and again he commenced to pray aloud. In the midst of a sentence he heard a dull thud, and he ceased. It was the headsman’s blow. For an instant the head remained on the shoulders. Pirot feared that the executioner had missed his stroke. Suddenly the head fell slowly back, and the body dropped to the red boards with a crash.

Pirot remembered his promise and repeated the “ De profundis.” It was exactly eight o’clock, and the bells of the city struck the hour.

The Abbé Pirot rose from his knees in great tranquillity of spirit.

“ Monsieur,” remarked the executioner, wiping his face with a cloth, “ was not that a fine stroke ! I always recommend myself to God and ask His assistance upon such occasions. Up to the present He has never deserted me. But I must say that this business has worried me.

For the past five or six hours, thoughts of this lady have been running through my head. Now it is all over I will have six masses said for her soul."

The priest nodded his head. The executioner picked up a bottle, and, free from all anxiety, took a long drink.

"I must say," he repeated, "the thing has been troubling me all day."

After an execution it was the usual custom to strip the clothes from the body, as they formed a valuable perquisite of the executioner's office. In this case it was not done. Probably some relations had made a money payment to prevent it. The executioner took hold of the corpse, together with the bandaged head, carried them down the ladder, and placed them on the pile of wood.

The Abbé also wanted to descend from the scaffold. He had no wish to be present at the burning.

"No, no," cried the good-tempered headsman. "You must wait awhile. You will find it impossible to fight your way through the crowd. You must wait. When the crowd is a little thinner I will myself conduct you to a place of safety."

The priest remained upon the elevated platform in a state of embarrassment, and turned his back to the flaming pyre which lit up the loftiest crockets and pinnacles of the stone-work of the Hôtel de Ville. At last he could remain no longer, and descended the ladder. But when he found himself surrounded by the crowd, absorbedly watching the fire, he lacked courage to push his way through. Again he returned to his solitary position on the scaffold.

In half an hour the executioner told him that there was more room, as the mob was gradually dispersing. Then he joined the headsman, whose duties were over, and with several of his friends, was escorted to the limits of the square.

"I thanked the executioner," writes the priest simply, in his "Memoir," "not wishing him to go further with me."

On the edge of the Place de Grève, Pirot found Santeuil the Latin poet, who had been present. The poet took the arm of the confessor and they walked from the dreadful scene in silent company.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following unpublished letter, from the records of the State Paper Office, written by Sarsfield to Secretary Williamson, adds some additional information with regard to the execution.

"PARIS, 18th July 1676, Saturday.

"Last night Madame de Brinvilliers about 8 o'clock was beheaded at the Grève, and her body was afterwards burnt. She made an amende honorable at Notre Dame Church, and told many things which are still kept secret. She was attended to the place of execution by 400 or 500 sergeants and archers, carried in a little cart, or tombereau as they call it. All Paris was to see her pass by, not forgetting our English ladies of the best quality here; and her death was declared up and down, printed, here, as she passed by though not yet dead. In short, they say she confessed all without any torture applied to her, as was intended, being too weak for it, and being besides related to the best here, her father being formerly lieutenant-civil, an employment worth 50,000 *l.* sterling."

Sarsfield was incorrect with reference to the torture, which was most undoubtedly applied. His description of the printed catch-penny sheets for sale in the streets is curious, and has quite escaped notice. The "English ladies of the best quality" probably included Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland and mistress to Charles II., who was most possibly in Paris at this time. Her three young children (sons of the monarch) were at Versailles the week before Madame de Brinvilliers' execution, together with many English people of high degree.

## CHAPTER XXXII

THE EXAMINATION OF PENNAUTIER—HIS RELEASE—THE MARQUIS  
AND HIS FAMILY—A CURIOUS DISCOVERY AT OFFÉMONT

“**A**T last it is finished. Brinvilliers is in the air. Her poor little body was thrown after the execution into a very large fire, and her cinders scattered to the wind. So that now we breathe her, and by the communication of intelligence we will catch the poisoning contagion, which will astonish all of us.”

So wrote Madame de Sévigné within a few hours of the execution of the Marquise. In her letters we find several references to the trial, which show under what excitement Paris was labouring during the fateful period. “Never have I seen so many people,” she wrote to her daughter, Madame de Grignan, “or Paris so agitated and concerned.” The witty and charming epistolist does not seem to have seen the actual execution. She and a friend took up their position on the Pont Notre Dame, without doubt at one of the windows of the sixty-one houses which stood on the bridge. She frankly admits that all she saw when the lugubrious procession passed was the white cap of Madame de Brinvilliers. And she closes her letter with the remark that the whole day was devoted to the tragedy.

Very accurately had Madame de Sévigné caught the public feeling. The execution of the Marquise was the culmination of a startling tragedy. Up to the day of her death she was considered the blackest of murderers. But during the last moments an extraordinary change had

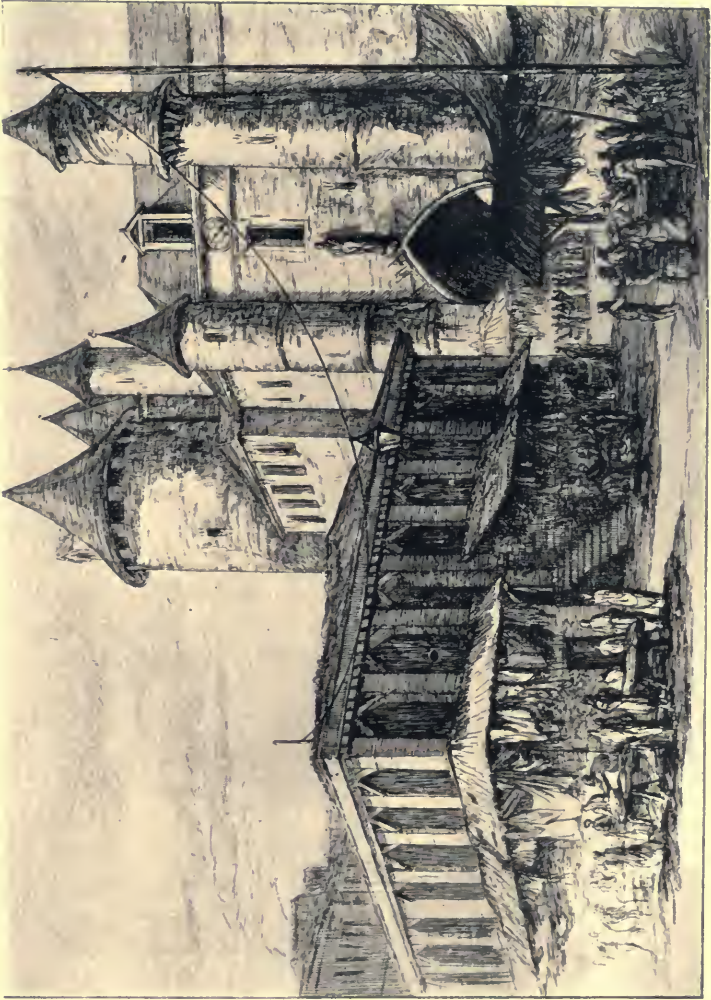


come over the mob. "Those who have seen the execution say that she mounted the scaffold with much courage," wrote Madame de Sévigné. Those nearest the scaffold swore that her face had been illuminated by a halo. Madame de Brinvilliers was a saint! The Abbé Pirot was convinced of the fact, and the populace agreed with him.

The crowd remained the whole night round the blazing faggots, upon which the body was being consumed. The police, under the command of Desgrez, had cleared a space for the pile of wood and straw saturated with oil and resin. No one was allowed to approach. The assistants to the executioner carried out the incineration. It requires little imagination to recreate a picture of the grim scene in the Place de Grève, red with the immense flames of the funeral pyre, their flickering lights picking out the flamboyant tracery of the Hôtel de Ville. Throughout the short midsummer darkness the mob watched and waited, laughing, talking, and singing, whilst the grotesque shadows of the executioners were silhouetted against the fire. Just before the break of day there remained a mere smouldering heap. The assistants collected the ashes in some baskets, ran down to the quayside, and threw them into the Seine. The tired police marched away to the Châtelet. The spectators wildly rushed to the hot black stones and groped for relics. There is an occult value in the blood or the bones of a malefactor, and to-day after a public execution handkerchiefs are dipped in the blood scattered by the knife of the guillotine.

The death of Madame de Brinvilliers did not end the public excitement, although evidence shows that the Court and the ministers of justice desired to close the unsavoury inquiry as quickly as possible. The Abbé Pirot's enthusiasm was not shared by all his fellow citizens, and thorny theological questions were propounded in the salons of Paris. "It is not possible that she has





THE PRISON-FORTRESS OF THE "GRAND CHÂTELET"  
*From the etching by Charles Méryon after a drawing attributed to Nicolle*



gone to Paradise," said Madame de Sévigné. "Her wicked soul must be separated from the others." Madame de Grignan did not agree with so drastic a solution. On the last day of the month her mother wrote again to her. "You are satisfied as to the salvation of the Brinvilliers. Nobody doubts the justice of God, and I return with much regret to the opinion of the eternity of punishment."

There remained Monsieur de Pennautier and a handful of other prisoners to deal with. With regard to the ultimate freedom of the Treasurer of Languedoc the society of Paris never had the slightest doubt. It was only surprised that he was kept a prisoner so long. On the 22nd July Sarsfield wrote to Williamson: "Pennautier was questioned yesterday. It is thought he will come off well." On the 3rd September he was given a modified freedom.

"Pennautier," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "will go out whiter than the snow. The public is discontented." On the 24th July she tells Madame de Grignan: "Pennautier is happy. Never has there been a man with so many protectors. You will see him released, but he will not be justified in the eyes of the world. There are many extraordinary things in this case, but one must not say them. . . . Everyone agrees with you that there will not be a crowd at Pennautier's table." In this respect gossip was mistaken. When Pennautier, upon his release, went to Languedoc all the men of quality of the country rushed to honour him at dinner.

It was freely prophesied that Pennautier was a ruined man, no matter what was the final result of the investigation concerning his affairs. He appears to have remained calm. "Have I told you that Pennautier takes the air in his prison," writes the mistress of the house of the Carnavelet. "He sees all his friends and relations, and passes the days admiring the injustices of the world. We like him, admire them also." And Madame de Sévigné

in another letter, dated 5th August, explains why the proceedings drag along in so painfully slow a manner.

“ There remains Pennautier. His clerk, Belleguise, has been caught. One does not know if it is so much the worse, or so much the better. As for him, we are disposed to believe that all is for his advantage. . . . It is said that the King himself insisted that this clerk should be arrested in the suburbs. The negligence of the ‘parlement’ is blamed, and when one considers everything one finds that it is due to the diligence and the liberality of the procureur général (Achille de Harlay) to whom the investigation has cost more than two thousand crowns.”

Sarsfield’s observations, though they do not agree entirely with those of Madame de Sévigné, show that the King was still resolutely anxious to punish all criminals. On the 5th August the English agent writes to Williamson : “ Monsieur Pennautier’s commis (clerk), who absconded himself when his master was taken, was lately discovered by the woman who served him, to whom the King gave 200 pistoles, and so is apprehended. His master and he are like to suffer.”

His continued imprisonment began to involve his business matters in relation to the clergy, and on the 24th November Cardinal de Bonzi wrote from Montpellier to Colbert drawing attention to the inconvenience. He asked that Pennautier’s trial should be hastened, and his innocence vindicated. This Cardinal, writes Ravaisson, had doubtless good reasons to defend the “surintendant.” He often remarked that people who had pensions charged upon his revenues did not live. His star killed them. One day a sarcastic abbé met the Cardinal in company with Pennautier.

“ I met the Cardinal with his star ! ” he observed in a loud tone. Everyone drew the inference.

On the 8th December Cardinal de Bonzi again wrote to Colbert. On the 9th the Duc de Verneuil also wrote



from Montpellier to the minister. In the meanwhile, the enemies of Pennautier were exerting all the power at their command to procure fresh evidence against him, and De Harlay, amidst a cloud of false witness, informs Colbert from time to time of the negative results.

Despite all the efforts made by his influential friends Pennautier was not liberated. At last, on the 19th July 1677, a year after the execution of Madame de Brinvilliers, Alexandre Belleguise was brought forward for examination. He, like his old master, had also been in prison for a year.

The witness gave his name as Alexandre Belleguise, forty-one years old, cashier to the late Monsieur d'Alibert. He was born at Doullens in Picardy, where his father was a hatter. Left an orphan, he came to Paris at the age of fourteen, and lived with an uncle. Then he entered the employment of d'Alibert, who was a banker. He denied that he had ever been d'Alibert's servant, and said that he remained with the banker for about twenty-two years, until his death in July 1671. D'Alibert died of apoplexy after two days' illness.

"You have not spoken the truth," said the examining magistrate. "You were not in charge of the cashbox, you were simply a lackey."

"I was never a lackey," replied Belleguise. He then gave many details of the work he had done for d'Alibert and also for Pennautier. He was asked for the names of his friends and acquaintances.

"I had no better friend than Monsieur d'Alibert. I never poisoned him, never had the thought. The witnesses are enemies."

"You went to see La Chaussée executed."

"I had nothing to do with La Chaussée."

"You went to see Martin in the cul-de-sac of the Place Maubert."



“ I saw nothing of La Chaussée, and I never saw Sainte-Croix at work. I admit having seen Lapiere, Sainte-Croix, Martin, Paul, Lafontaine, and ‘ father ’ Véron.”

He then told the Court that he had been in Sainte-Croix’s laboratory, but had never shared any of Sainte-Croix’s secrets.

“ The secret of the philosopher’s stone was simply the manufacture of poison,” remarked the magistrate. “ La Chaussée said that you offered to help him to escape as you helped Lapiere.”

“ I never had such a thought.” Belleguise denied everything. “ I did not offer him employment at Bordeaux or anywhere else. I have no acquaintances at Bordeaux or at Grenoble. I cannot understand why La Chaussée should have said such things. During the time La Chaussée was in Sainte-Croix’s employment I did not see him until the day of his master’s funeral. I do not know how long Sainte-Croix was ill. I visited him but once.”

“ You are not speaking the truth. You know everything about Sainte-Croix’s illness.”

“ I do not know how long he was ill. Perhaps I saw him four times.”

Belleguise, who was accused of passing false money, then denied this charge. He remembered the incident of the finding of a skull in a house belonging to Madame de Lionne, and also the dead body of a cat. It is not at all clear what this had to do with the investigation, although Madame de Lionne, if she really poisoned her husband, may have possibly got her drugs from Sainte-Croix.

“ You were much upset when La Chaussée was executed, and you went to the Place de Grève,” said the magistrate.

“ I was there, but it was only by accident.”

He then admitted having lent some money to Sainte-Croix before his illness.

“ Whilst Sainte-Croix was ill you took two coffers from his house.”

“ No.”

“ But both La Chaussée and the widow Sainte-Croix said so.”

“ I have never seen the coffers.”

“ The widow was present when you removed them.”

“ I remember nothing about it.” Then he remembered something about the two boxes, but it was an indefinite recollection.

“ Did you know Martin ? ”

“ I have seen him at Monsieur d’Alibert’s and Monsieur de Caumont’s. I don’t know what has become of him.”

“ You must have seen a good deal of Martin, for he demanded some money from you ? ”

“ Monsieur de Caumont told me to give him some money, but not Monsieur Pennautier. I don’t know why Monsieur de Caumont gave Martin money. I sometimes saw Martin at Monsieur Pennautier’s.”

“ Why did you try to run away ? ”

“ Because I was afraid of being kept in prison for a long while.”

This closed the extremely unsatisfactory evidence of Belleguise.

On the 20th July, Pierre Louis Reich de Pennautier, treasurer of the states of Languedoc, aged forty, was examined.

“ What were you doing when you were arrested ? ”

“ I was dressing.”

“ You were writing ? ”

“ I don’t remember.”

“ To whom were you writing ? ”

“ To Monsieur de Lavigère, my cousin, about a family quarrel.” Pennautier gave the details of the quarrel which had nothing to do with the case.

“Why did you want to hide the letters? You tore them up.”

“I don't remember how that happened for I was so surprised at the moment. I had no reason to tear them up, and no interest to serve by concealing them.”

When Pennautier was arrested he endeavoured to make away with this letter by swallowing it, but the officer who arrested him forced it out of his mouth.

Over the letters ensued a long argument between magistrate and prisoner. The family quarrel concerned a certain Louvigny who was to be sent away. The magistrate contended that this Louvigny was in reality Martin de Breuille. Pennautier stoutly denied that Louvigny and Martin were the same personality.

“Did you not employ Belleguise to give money to Martin?”

“I had no relations with Martin. He asked me for employment, and I knew that he was with Sainte-Croix. I do not know if Belleguise visited them. I never gave money to Sainte-Croix.”

“Why did Belleguise so much want Lapierre and La Chaussée to escape?”

“I have no knowledge of it.”

“Remembering that Belleguise was strongly suspected of having poisoned D'Alibert why did you take him into your service?”

“I never knew that Belleguise was suspected.”

“You are accused of having poisoned Saint-Laurent.”

“I was away from Paris at the time. I did not know any of Saint-Laurent's servants. It is an invention of Madame Saint-Laurent.”

“You were mixed up with Sainte-Croix's casket?”

“I know little about it. I never saw Madame de Brinvilliers at that time. I went once to Picpus. She asked me for money, and I refused it. Monsieur de Laune spoke to me on behalf of the Marquise saying

that she would leave some tapestry in pawn. I did not wish to accept it."

"Why did you visit Madame de Brinvilliers? You have said that your acquaintance with her had dropped."

"Hearing such gossip I went there because I did not believe her capable of such a crime."

"Madame de Brinvilliers said that she did nothing save in concert with you."

"She did not say it when we were confronted."

"She asked you to assist Martin to escape at the very time that Lavigère was helping the pretended Louvigny."

"I know nothing of it."

"You must have had a great friendship with Madame de Brinvilliers since she wrote to you so strongly?"

"She said everything at the confrontation."

"Briancourt was sent to you by the President Larcher, instigated by the Abbé de Grandmont, bishop of Saint Papoul, his intimate friend."

"It is true that the bishop told me that a person called Cluet had been to see him, and had said that one of his friends had much to say against me. I replied I had nothing to do with such things. I regarded Briancourt as a man who wished to blackmail me."

"Madame de Brinvilliers said that you were one of Sainte-Croix's closest friends."

"She said what she pleased."

"You must have had to do with the casket full of poison, and it is incredible that there should not be papers addressed to you."

"There were some papers Sainte-Croix ought to have returned to me."

"There is an appearance that you gave a note for a thousand pistoles to Sainte-Croix, and this was the price paid for the death of Saint-Laurent."

Pennautier did not accept the explanation, and this closed his examination, which elicited no fresh facts.



On the 21st July, Sébastien Camuset Picard, commissary at the Châtelet, was brought before the magistrate. He had been arrested because he burnt the confession of Sainte-Croix, which was found when Sainte-Croix's goods were sealed. He was closely interrogated to no purpose. He seems to have been an honest but rather thick functionary, quite unable to cope with the sharp-witted rascals who surrounded him.

He was followed by Jean Baptiste Briancourt, thirty-two to thirty-three years of age, a barrister, formerly a student at the Sorbonne. His evidence was very short, and simply a recapitulation of some of that already given at the trial of Madame de Brinvilliers. The last witness was Romain Bassetard, a solicitor's clerk, who had been a prisoner for several months in the Bastille. He had known Belleguise for nearly twenty years, and repeated some conversations which proved that Belleguise and Sainte-Croix were on the best of terms, and that the latter was busy with schemes of alchemy.

Picard, Briancourt, and Bassetard were possibly set free. No trace can be found of any judgment against them. Belleguise was banished for three years, three months, and three days. Pennautier was liberated on the 23rd July 1677, without a stain on his character, having been in prison over a year.

The verdict was fiercely debated in Paris, where public opinion had already tried and condemned the financier. The judges were adversely criticised, and satirical verse ascribed Pennautier's happy delivery to the power of his purse and the influence of his friends, two reasons which contained much truth.

A man of strong character, he paid no heed to the storm, went back to his office and busied himself with the affairs of the clergy and the states of Languedoc. Within a short while he recovered his position. "Although his reputation suffered much from this case he lived in



the world as if it had never been," wrote Saint-Simon. Exactly twenty years later, De Coulanges writes to Madame de Sévigné that he is going to have supper with Pennautier. Amongst the company he has been invited to meet are Monsieur and Madame de Marsan, the Duchesse de Lude, and all the Lamoignons: Of the social rehabilitation of Pennautier there could be no better proof. No fresh scandal attached itself to his name, he managed to keep out of the "Chambre ardente," and, as befitted the friend of the clergy, closed his eyes in the odour of sanctity. After founding some almshouses in his native province, he died peaceably in 1711.

It is impossible to trace the history of the other characters in this tragedy. The Marquis de Brinvilliers was compelled to give up the château d'Offémont to Madame d'Aubray. Ravaisson says that he held a military post in 1688. The date of his death seems to have been lost. The five children dropped the name of Brinvilliers, taking that of Offémont. The eldest son Antoine Gobelin, born in 1661, died in 1739, leaving two children. One, the Comte d'Offémont, became a magistrate, the other entered the army, and was created a chevalier of Saint Louis. Madame de Brinvilliers' second son became a priest, and the third took the second title of his father, calling himself the Baron de Nourar. The two daughters entered the cloister.

The last evidence of the tragedy was destroyed almost a century ago. The story is given by the author of "Crimes Célèbres," published in 1842. The father of the then owner of the château d'Offémont was living in the mansion, when France was invaded by the allied troops in the year before Waterloo. Frightened by the approach of the armies, Monsieur d'Offémont built up in one of the towers of his house all his plate and objects of value. The country is a lonely one, and the château stands in the midst of the forest of Laigue.

When the troops, after three months of occupation, retired to the frontier, the hiding places were opened. But a new cavity was discovered. Stones were removed, and a large cabinet was found, fitted as a laboratory, with a furnace, chemical instruments, several phials hermetically sealed and still containing liquid, and four packets of powder. Instead of submitting these materials to investigation, the owner of the château—afraid of their fatal powers—placed them all on the fire. “Thus,” writes Dumas, “was lost this strange and probably last occasion to recognise and analyse the substances which composed the poisons of Sainte-Croix and the Marquise de Brinvilliers.”

They killed, says Dr Legué, for the pleasure of listening to the death agony, and watching the human flesh change colour. They killed because they were governed by a suggestive will force which implacably asserted its supernatural power, its crushing and terrifying domination.

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