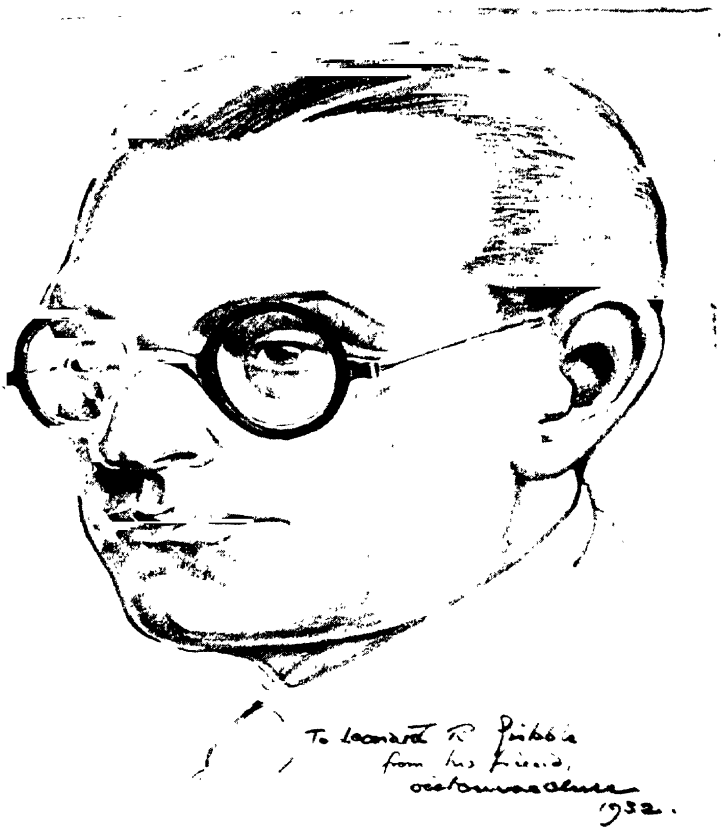
QUEENS OF CRIME

By the same Author:

The Gillespie Suicide Mystery
The Case of the Marsden Rubies
The Grand Modena Murder
Is This Revenge?
The Stolen Home Secretary
Etc., etc.



THE AUTHOR
A sketch by Victor MacClure

QUEENS OF CRIME

by

LEONARD R. GRIBBLE

Publishers since 1812

HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.
LONDON

MCMXXXII

Made and Printed in Great Britain
for Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., at
The Anchor Press, Tiptree, Essex.

For
NANCY

PREFACE

THE selecting of nine individuals whose crimes are sufficiently terrible in conception, horrible in execution, and awful as examples of what human beings are capable of to warrant their ranking as "queens" among their kind must necessarily result in an arbitrary choice. In favour of the present selection the author would say that certain principles governed his choice. While it was obviously impossible, under such a heading, to offer any new cases, only those were chosen which afforded the most interesting studies of individual types, of solutions to problems presented in terms of life and death, and of real criminal ingenuity. The range of selection varies from the sixteen-year-old Constance Kent, calm, implacable, imbued with a perverted sense of loyalty—surely a terrifying and lonely figure in her youthful guilt!—to the white-haired Euphrasie Mercier, bent under her sixty years of toil and futile striving; from the wanton, repulsive Anna Zwanziger, pursued by dread of a penniless old age, to that arch-fraud and plausible rogue Mary Bateman, whose antics horribly merged the farcical with the tragic.

It has not been the author's purpose to present a profound study of each subject; neither has his object been to indulge in pages of purely fictitious conversation of a highly melodramatic nature. He has contented himself with what he believes to be a straightforward account of the subject's life, interspersing the narrative

with certain theories and matters of general and literary interest calculated to extend the reader's understanding of that particular criminal, crime, and period.

It would be impossible for the author to make formal acknowledgment to every one of the many sources (some, alas, already forgotten!), authors, and translators to whom he is indebted for facts historical and biographical, but he readily admits his indebtedness to all of them.

L. R. G.

SANDERSTEAD
SURREY
June 1932

CONTENTS

I

MARY BATEMAN

The Yorkshire Witch

MARY BATEMAN

THE trial and execution of Mary Bateman towards the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century caused a great stir throughout the North of England. For years after her remains had been finally disposed of by the staff of the Leeds General Infirmary her name lived, surrounded by all the cold glamour of a dark legend. Trafalgar had been fought only four years when her name and crimes became notorious; Waterloo loomed in the distant future: throughout the land the effects of the Napoleonic wars were being felt more and more as each month passed, privation and hardship were rife among the poorer classes, and, probably more than anywhere else in England, times were hardest for the working classes of Lancashire and Yorkshire, who were feeling the fullest effects of the vast changes brought by the Industrial Revolution. Over the dark and gloomy world of 1809 Mary Bateman cast an even darker shadow, the shadow of medieval sorcery and "black magic," of those ancient days when the devil was not afraid to claim his own and demand his due. To the populace of her day she was a "witch." She was probably the last of her sisterhood to flourish in this country.

Studying the story of her life, with all its roguery, deceit, and sham, one can but marvel at the sheer audacity which enabled her successfully to hoodwink those she marked down as her dupes. Spiritual sufferers, the physically deficient, reasonably well-balanced people

of means, all succumbed to her wiles and glib tongue and were made the victims of her arrant trickery. As a confidence trickster, the annals of crime cannot present her equal. Her eventual downfall was her success. It hardened her to the possibility of defeat and closed her eyes to her own limitations. Within the space of a few years she assumed a legendary significance throughout the entire West Riding. Shrewd, a keen reader of character, of a dominant personality, there was a perverse streak in her nature that decided the course of her life even in her very early years. With the passing of time she gradually divested her warped nature of any semblance to sympathy with human suffering which it might have had. She became cold and callous. Avarice filled her heart; greed of money became an obsession that finally choked all other interests in life and blinded her to the folly of self-deceit.

In many respects the story of her early life resembles that of Catherine Hayes. In the young Mary Harker we find the same waywardness and irresponsibility that marked the early years of the Tyburn murderess. She was born in 1768 at Ainsenby, near Thirsk, in the North Riding. Her parents were a farmer and his wife, both respected people of their parish and well liked by their neighbours. But the influences of a good home and kind parents were early shown to be wasted upon the Harkers' young daughter. Even at the tender age of five the child revealed alarming capacities for dissembling; she became a fluent little liar even as she learned to talk; and her fingers grew swiftly adept at securing those things that attracted her fancy. Until she was twelve years old she was a constant source of anxiety to Harker and his wife. For seven years they

did their best to instil into her some sense of distinction between right and wrong, but for all the change they wrought the punishments, scoldings, and pleadings might never have been inflicted or uttered. In 1780 she was sent from home as a last resource, and placed as a servant in a household in Thirsk. The Harkers doubtless felt that a radical change was the only thing that could effect an improvement: away from the leniency of her home, and forced to adapt herself to a regular routine of life, she might be disciplined. It was a vain hope. The next seven years passed, and with them all thought of filial obedience. Finally, in 1787, she cut the thread of her life and severed herself from her past. She went to York, and there began the big experiment of life as she understood it. Within a year she was compelled to run away from her mistress, leaving behind her wages and clothes; the trouble in this case was her light fingers. She went to Leeds, and in the large town she nearly starved. Without friends or funds, her straits soon became desperate, and it was only by the greatest good fortune that she ran across an old acquaintance of her father's. On the recommendation of this person she secured a position with a mantua-maker, with whom, we are told, she remained for some three years.

Then came the meeting with John Bateman. Whether it was a case of love at first sight, or whether the scheming young woman was already laying plans for a home from which she could the more easily direct her frauds, we are left to imagine. However that may be, after a brief courtship of three weeks the couple were married, in 1792. The happy husband did not remain long with his illusions. Within two months of the marriage they

had to move hastily to another town to avoid prosecution for fraud. The same manœuvre was repeated, and again. Before long the Batemans were in virtual flight. From town to town they passed, only to move on when the wife had run the short length of her tether. Bateman became harassed and fretful: his admonitions merely produced abuse; and finally, when his wife commenced dabbling in freak fortune-telling, he decided that life would be more comfortable in the Militia. He joined up, leaving her to fend for herself.

She promptly took herself to Leeds once more, and in 1799 she is known to have settled down in Marsh Lane, near Timble Bridge, in that town, and to have gone into serious business as fortune-teller and seller of charms. The past years of petty cheating and peculation had given her confidence in herself. She knew by heart the kind of tale that rouses doubt and fear in the minds of the credulous; and, furthermore, she knew instinctively just how to play upon those fears and how to wring the shillings from those doubts.

She was no cheap-jack gipsy from the Midland lanes. Her methods were more subtle than those of Romany rogues. She gave herself and the charms she dispensed plenty of time, because she realized that time was her greatest ally. According to the changes time brought about she worded her interpretation of the mystic influences that govern human affairs. Should time prove her forecast to be correct that only served to strengthen her reputation; should time prove her forecast wrong, then clearly the charm was not sufficiently potent; a far stronger charm was needed—and, of course, the stronger the charm the more it cost.

The increasing success of these fraudulent practices, however, tempted her to tackle something far more remunerative; and, wise in her knowledge of the frailties of human nature, she looked about for a love tangle. A mere rumour was sufficient to provide her with all the facts she required. The intended dupe was a Mrs. Greenwood, who had doubtless applied to Mary Bateman previously. The swindler began by hinting that Mr. Greenwood was in danger of being accused by some secret enemies of a particularly heinous crime, and ended by vowing that unless a charm of four pieces of gold, four pieces of leather, four pieces of blotting-paper, and four screws, in order to "screw them down," were surrendered by the wife the husband would be victimized within twenty-four hours. Unfortunately for the scheme Mary Bateman's shrewdness had failed her in one all-important essential: Mrs. Greenwood did not possess one piece of gold, much less four; and when, chagrined at this discovery, she suggested that Mrs. Greenwood stole the money the latter recovered sufficient of her common sense to disentangle herself from the other's snare there and then.

The episode, profitless though it had proved, had none the less whetted Mary Bateman's ardour. Her next attempt was upon a subject of different calibre; and she changed her method of approach. A simple-minded woman named Stead was persuaded that only by surrendering most of her furniture and household effects could she secure a charm that would "screw down" a woman who was inveigling her husband from his rightful affection. The outcome was that Stead entered the Army, and Mary Bateman, following up her success with the wife, tried her powers of persuasion with the

husband. By means of a glib tongue and deft arguments she succeeded in obtaining his "bounty" from him, this time under the pretence of "screwing down" his officers in order to secure his rapid preferment and promotion. The medium through whom she was supposed to work, and through whom the efficacy of the charms was assured, was a certain "Mrs. Moore," a lady who can doubtless be identified with the "Miss Blythe" who figured in the later deceptions.

However, with Stead now off the scene, Mary Bateman returned to the real "screwing down." Mrs. Stead had a daughter about eight years old, and Mary Bateman solemnly warned the mother that she had received intimation from the spiritualistic "Mrs. Moore" that unless immediate steps were taken a dire fate was sealed for the child. When she became fourteen she would be pregnant with an illegitimate child, and either she would destroy herself or else she would be murdered by her seducer. The alternative to this fearful future was the placing in Mary Bateman's hands of seventeen shillings, which "Mrs. Moore" would "reduce" to a "silver charm" that was to be worn round the child's arm until the "danger period" was past.

Even as Mrs. Stead, torn between fear of poverty and despair of her child's happiness, debated whether to sell her few remaining things an event occurred which caused her to make up her mind immediately. A young girl, a relative of Mrs. Stead's, arrived in Leeds at this time with a sad tale. She was pregnant, and had been forsaken by her lover.

Mary Bateman at once singled the girl out for her attention. In return for a guinea, she informed the girl, "Mrs. Moore" would guarantee to make the lover

marry her. The guinea and the seventeen shillings were paid. Several weeks passed, but no penitent lover seeking forgiveness and renewed happiness appeared. Then the Steads were told that "Mrs. Moore" had communicated the fact that the lover had proved too strong for the charm. More money to buy more "screws" was required. The last of the poor girl's money was passed into Mary Bateman's fingers, and, while she awaited her lover's coming, she secured a situation in a bachelor's household. Mary Bateman, learning of this, at once began planning afresh. By subtle insinuation she contrived to get the girl to believe that by her aid she could win the affection of her master and lead him to the altar. But the girl's condition was daily becoming more precarious, threatening to ruin these new schemes. So Mary Bateman gave thought to this obstacle, and came to a drastic decision. Bending the girl's will to hers, she forced her to take certain medicines she prescribed, with the ultimate result that she brought about an abortion. However, what was probably a carefully thought-out plan for blackmail was brought to naught by the girl being discharged from service. And then, ironically, the laggard lover turned up of his own free will and married the sweetheart he had deserted.

But the effect of Mary Bateman's foul machinations were yet to be brought to fulfilment. The girl, at the time of her marriage, was little better than a physical wreck as the result of the other woman's treatment, and slowly what remained of her strength ebbed. Shortly before she died, heartbroken, and embittered by the horrid series of blunders that had made up her young life, she is known to have said, "Had I never known Mary

Bateman my child would now have been in my arms, and I should have been a healthy woman—but it is in eternity, and I am going after it as fast as time and a ruined constitution can carry me."

Meanwhile the ogress who had sacrificed this life for her own gain was casting her net abroad to enmesh fresh victims. And it speaks volumes for the credulousness of the people of the day that she rarely cast in vain.

She was fast becoming inured to crime and the condition of mental callousness that a life of crime demands. Her deceiving became more ingenious, the harm she wrought more permanent; and her reputation as a delver in the darkest mazes of ancient sorcery was slowly but persistently spreading. That as a "witch" she was merely a humbug there can be no doubt; but she was a clever humbug, who, having set herself to learn a certain *rôle*, came in time to live the part she played.

A crime more cold-blooded and cruel than any she had turned her hand to up to that time was the poisoning of three Quaker ladies, the Misses Kitchen and their mother. Although, in the circumstances, there can be no positive proof that Mary Bateman murdered them, there seems little doubt that such was the actual fact. And the belief was widely expressed at the time of her execution.

The two Misses Kitchen carried on the business of linen-drapers in a shop near St. Peter's Square, in the heart of Leeds, and Mary Bateman, exercising her usual talents and muttering her mystic prognostications, gradually wormed herself into their good graces. Regularly she gave them demonstrations of her skill in divination, read the stars for them, and generally came to play upon their susceptibilities in such a way that they

believed she regulated their lives, guarding them from strange ills and threatening misfortune. It was not long before she became as one of the family, entering into and discussing their most intimate concerns and advising upon domestic and business matters.

Then, in September 1803, the younger Miss Kitchen was suddenly and unaccountably attacked by a severe illness, which left her prostrated. Mary Bateman, naturally, was given leave by the elder sister to procure soothing medicines. Medicines were accordingly produced, but instead of allaying the patient's pain and suffering they appeared to aggravate her disorder. Her condition grew rapidly worse, and within a week she died in violent agony.

The dying woman's mother had arrived from Wakefield just in time to witness her daughter's end. But neither she nor her remaining daughter grieved long. Within two days they also were dead. No relations being at hand, Mary Bateman took upon herself the duties of arranging the triple funeral, and the three women were laid together in the same grave. She carefully and assiduously distributed the news that the three Quaker ladies had died of the plague, and the ruse worked well. The house and its neighbourhood were shunned for weeks, and, indeed, it was not until some months had passed that certain tradesmen creditors urged an inquiry into the cause of death and regarding the question of distribution of the goods left in the house and shop.

When, however, an entry was made into the house it was found that practically nothing remained save the fixtures and a few broken pieces of furniture. Immediate inquiries were directed to Mary Bateman, who, in

her usual cool and collected manner, answered them without any show of hesitancy. Owing to the fear entertained on account of the plague, she said, she had been told to get rid of most of the heavy furniture. But when it was pointed out to her that not a few of the more expensive articles of furniture that had belonged to the Misses Kitchen now graced her own home she merely smiled and explained that they were gifts from her poor dear friends.

Suspicion was aroused, but too long an interval had elapsed for there to be any chance of confirming it in the light of the limited knowledge at that time of poisons and their reactions.

So once more Mary Bateman was free to continue with her depredations upon the credulous and timid. For another three years her dark arts brought the anxious and worried to her door, and with all the punctiliousness of an ancient pagan priestess she administered to their ailments and fears according to the size of their purse. Gradually she was creating a regular system of ritual for her more affluent "patients," and in this she was aided by the "spiritualistic" co-operation of a certain "Miss Blythe," who lived in Scarborough, and who was in the habit of making the most amazing demands on behalf of her intermediary, Mary Bateman. "Miss Blythe" had definitely superseded the erstwhile "Mrs. Moore," probably because the spinsterial prefix suggested a greater measure of unalloyed innocence. However that may be, as a sleeping partner in a dangerous business "Miss Blythe," we may imagine, was all that could be desired—and in more senses than one.

Then, in 1806, Mary Bateman began her greatest round of trickery and fraud; a round which she almost

won, but which was lost to her through her overweening confidence in herself.

In the spring of that year a Mrs. Perigo, who lived in the village of Bramley, outside Leeds, complained to her husband of a "flacking," or peculiar fluttering sensation, in her breast whenever she lay down. Mr. Perigo, alarmed, applied to a quack doctor for relief for his wife, but the doctor immediately pronounced the disorder beyond his skill to remedy, as, in his opinion, an "evil wish" had been laid upon the suffering woman. At this time, when the couple were well-nigh despairing of finding a means of allaying the wife's pains, a niece of the latter, who was a domestic servant in Leeds, arrived to spend her Whitsun holidays with her aunt and uncle. Now, strangely enough, the girl's name was Stead, and, although there is little doubt that she was no relation of the previous family of that name who had been victimized by Mary Bateman, she knew of and had been impressed by the "cures" worked in the city by the "witch."

So it is not surprising to find that the girl eagerly advised her uncle to procure the services of Mary Bateman in allaying Mrs. Perigo's queer and alarming complaint. The subject of approaching the "diviner" was discussed, and it was finally agreed that when the girl returned to Leeds she should call upon Mary Bateman on her uncle's behalf.

The upshot was that the girl paid a visit to the "witch" at her home in Black Dog Yard. She carefully recounted the various symptoms of her aunt's strange malady, and explained how every remedy that had been tried had failed to give the suffering woman any relief. Mary Bateman pretended to meditate for some while

upon what she had been told. She admitted that the complaint intrigued her, and probably took occasion to pump the girl upon the subject of her uncle's financial position. Learning that Perigo was not short of funds, she evidently made up her mind to tap this new source of wealth presented to her. She told the girl that she knew of a medium living in Scarborough whose aid might be employed in dispersing this "evil wish," and advised the girl to tell her aunt to send her a flannel petticoat or some article of clothing that had been worn next to the skin, and she would then communicate with the lady, whose name was "Miss Blythe."

Thus the ice was broken; Perigo took the plunge.

He called in person upon Mary Bateman, and with him he brought the flannel petticoat, as requested. The "witch," whose comely and neat appearance invited confidence rather than otherwise, accepted the garment and made a pretence of studying it with intent to "divine" something of the truth underlying the mysterious complaint. But she professed herself baffled. It was patently a case for the distant "Miss Blythe"; and to allay the husband's anxiety she promised to write to her friend in Scarborough that very night. She thought she should receive an answer within a week, and advised Perigo to call again after that length of time.

Perigo was punctual. Seven days later he paid his second call upon the "witch," and was delighted to learn that "Miss Blythe" had returned an answer to Mary Bateman's inquiry containing precise and succinct instructions. Doubtless in order to play upon her visitor's fears, Mary Bateman hummed and hawed before opening the letter, declaring that in these matters one had to be very sure that the omens were favourable and that good

influences were working with one. However, at last the letter was produced and the contents read to the fidgeting husband. Among a great deal of vague allusions to dark and evil influences that were abroad the note contained an order:

> that Mary Bateman should go to Perigo's house, at Bramley, and should take with her four guinea notes, which were enclosed, and that she should sew them into the four corners of the bed in which the diseased woman slept, where they were to remain for eighteen months; that Perigo was to give her four other notes of like value, to be returned to Scarborough; and that unless all these directions were strictly attended to the charm would be useless and would not work.

Apparently Perigo was satisfied with the demand, for on August 4 Mary Bateman called at the house in Bramley and made a great show of sewing up these guinea notes in four silken bags, which she afterwards handed to the invalid to place in the corners of the bed, according to the instructions in the letter. Perigo, pleased that at last his wife was in a fair way to being rid of her troublesome chest, paid over his own guinea notes with a glad heart, and Mary Bateman took her leave, reminding him to send to her occasionally, as there might possibly be further communications from "Miss Blythe."

Sure enough, "Miss Blythe" did not disappoint. Plainly she was not one to shirk her obligations! A fortnight after Mary Bateman's return to Leeds the second letter arrived from Scarborough. It directed Mary Bateman personally to nail two pieces of iron in the form of a horseshoe over the door of the Perigos' house, and gave implicit instructions that the pieces of iron

were not to be nailed with a hammer, but with a pair of pincers, which were afterwards to be sent to Scarborough, to remain with "Miss Blythe" for the eighteen months prescribed with the charm. Mary Bateman accordingly presented herself at Bramley, fixed the pieces of iron as instructed in the letter, and marched home with the pair of pincers.

More than a month passed, and early in October Perigo received the following letter, signed by "Miss Blythe":

> My dear Friend,
>
> You must go down to Mary Bateman's, at Leeds, on Tuesday next, and carry two guinea notes with you and give her them, and she will give you the other two that I have sent from Scarborough; and you must buy me a small cheese about six or eight pounds weight, and it must be of your buying, for it is for a particular use, and it is to be carried down to Mary Bateman's, and she will send it to me by coach. This letter is to be burned when you have done reading it.

Mary Bateman's most ingenious trick was fully launched: she was sucking Perigo of both funds and food; and, knowing full well the type she was dealing with, she realized that, having committed himself once, Perigo would go on, acceding to the blatant demands of "Miss Blythe" as soon as he read them. For otherwise the "charm" would not only prove powerless, but his wife's condition, governed as it was by influences that were entirely evil, would rapidly become worse!

Perigo was in a cleft stick and there seemed no use in wriggling. Indeed, the marvel is that he became so utterly dominated by Mary Bateman's personality; not only did he believe that she held a strange, superhuman

power that, by placating the Scarborough medium, or not, as the case might be, could either cure or kill his wife, but he came in time to look upon her as a creature herself governed by so-called "influences" that were not earthly. Perhaps in this last he was not so far wrong as the judge who sentenced Mary Bateman supposed.

However, at odd intervals letters continued to arrive from Scarborough, each demanding more than its predecessor, and in every instance Mary Bateman was to be the recipient of the money and goods handed over to aid the working of the charm. In the six months from October 1806 to March 1807 Perigo handed Mary Bateman no less than seventy pounds in money, and probably goods to an equivalent value. The latter were supposed to be passed on to "Miss Blythe" by her intermediary; the money was substituted by further supplies of silken bags for stuffing into the ailing woman's mattress.

And all this while very little change for the better appeared in Mrs. Perigo's condition. Not that the husband and wife were disheartened. Was not the charm to take eighteen months to arrive at fulfilment?

Then in March 1807 the Perigos received this note from "Miss Blythe":

> My dear Friends,
>
> I will be obliged to you if you will let me have half a dozen of your china, three silver spoons, half a pound of tea, two pounds of loaf sugar, and a tea canister to put the tea in, or else it will not do—I durst not drink out of my own china. You must burn this with a candle.

But for once William Perigo showed himself tardy. True, he had disobeyed the medium's instructions in several cases by not burning the letters he had received

from her; but probably even he had come to acknowledge that there was a sameness about their demands. Also, tea and sugar were just about twelve times as dear in 1807 as they are to-day; money was probably running short; and who knows but what his silver spoons and china had some sentimental value?

"Miss Blythe" revealed quite plainly that neither she nor her "charms" were to be trifled with. The following, received in April, quickly brought the unmindful Perigo to heel:

> My dear Friends,
>
> *I will be obliged to you if you will buy me a camp bedstead, bed and bedding, a blanket, a pair of sheets, and a long bolster must come from your house.* You need not buy the best feathers; common ones will do. I have laid on the floor for three nights, and I cannot lay on my own bed *owing to the planets being so bad concerning your wife*, and I must have one of your buying or it will not do. You must bring down the china, the sugar, the caddy, the three silver spoons, and the tea at the same time when you buy the bed, and pack them up altogether. My brother's boat will be up in a day or two, and I will order my brother's boatman to call for them at Mary Bateman's, and you must give Mary Bateman one shilling for the boatman, and I will place it to your account. Your wife must burn this as soon as it is read or it will not do.

The truth was, although neither Perigo nor his wife realized it, that nothing would do. They had so fed the flame of Mary Bateman's avarice that no sacrifice they could make would satisfy it. As events proved, even the death of the wife did not stem the "witch's" desire to squeeze Perigo of his last available guinea.

Soon after the delivery of the above letter Mary Bateman opportunely arrived to see that its instructions

were carried out to the last dot. They were. She took the Perigos to Leeds and accompanied them to the emporiums of a Mr. Dobbin and a Mr. Musgrave, where the various articles stipulated were duly purchased under her guidance. Perigo had to foot bills to the tune of sixteen pounds that day; while Mary Bateman placidly and methodically arranged that the goods should be sent to a Mr. Sutton's, at the Lion and Lamb Inn, Kirkgate, where they were presumably to await the "boatman's" calling. Doubtless Mr. Sutton had previously suggested a satisfactory all-in price after being shown an inventory.

But we are to gather that the camp bedstead was not of the kind that induces pleasant dreams. And one wonders whether it was not a short-sighted policy on Perigo's part to buy those common feathers, instead of the best. For before the end of the month the restless medium sent him a further note, as follows:

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I am sorry to tell you you will take an illness in the month of May next, one or both of you, but I think both, but the works of God must have its course. You will escape the chambers of the grave; though you seem to be dead, yet you will live. Your wife must take half a pound of honey down from Bramley to Mary Bateman's at Leeds, and it must remain there till you go down yourself, and she will put in such like stuff as I have sent from Scarbro' to her, and she will put it in when you come down, and see her yourself, or it will not do. You must eat pudding for six days, and you must put in such like stuff as I have sent to Mary Bateman from Scarbro', and she will give your wife it, but you must not begin to eat of this pudding while I let you know. If ever you find yourself sickly at any time you must take each of you a teaspoonful of this honey; I will

remit twenty pounds to you on the 20th day of May, and it will pay a little of what you owe. You must bring this down to Mary Bateman's, and burn it at her house, when you come down next time.

By this time Perigo was past reasoning for himself. He obeyed the instructions, handed the twenty pounds to Mary Bateman, and his wife received in return the honey, in which the woman mixed a "white powder," and six other powders of a similar kind, wrapped up in separate packages with written directions for taking upon them. The "witch" laid emphasis upon following these directions precisely, hinting that were they neglected death might be the penalty.

The Perigos had not long to wait before instructions arrived. On May 5 they received a further letter, which ran:

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

You must begin to eat pudding on the 11th of May, and you must put one of the powders in every day as they are marked, for six days—and you must see it put in yourself every day or else it will not do. If you find yourself sickly at any time you must not have no doctor, for it will not do, and you must not let the boy that used to eat with you eat of that pudding for six days; and you must make only just as many as you can eat yourselves, for if there is any left it will not do. You must keep the door fast as much as possible or you will be overcome by some enemy. Now think on and take my directions or else it will kill us all. About the 25th of May I will come to Leeds and send for your wife to Mary Bateman's; your wife will take me by the hand and say, "God bless you that I ever found you out!" It has pleased God to send me into the world that I may destroy the works of darkness; I call them the works of darkness because they are dark to you—now mind what I say whatever you do. This letter must be burned in straw on the hearth by your wife.

This is probably the most amazing letter ever sent by a murderer or murderess to an intended victim. Putting aside grammatical errors, and reading it only as a key to the mind of the writer, one can almost sense the urge to evil that swayed the woman's thoughts. The Perigos were her dupes, entirely surrendered to her foul practices, and she is again about to experiment with murder. Yet throughout the letter one feels the counter-urge to safety that was troubling Mary Bateman. Only the Perigos must eat the pudding, and only enough must be made for eating at one meal: there must be none left, or the charm will not work (a safe way of assuring herself that no tell-tale evidence will be left); and, again, no one other than the Perigos themselves must know how the pudding is made: the door must be kept secured; finally, to ensure the burning of this highly incriminating letter, a specially elaborate method is instructed, a method which to the credulous Perigos might appear to have some effect upon the efficacy of the charm. In short, the tone of the letter betrays something of the suspense in the woman's mind at the time when she launched this diabolical scheme. Yet so deliberately cold-blooded is her enterprise that she can afford to caution her dupes against the very fate she has prescribed for them! And she can even pun upon their finding her out!

The letter further reveals a type of mind at once subtle, deep, penetrating, and remorseless: it is a veritable self-portrait in words. If Marie Lafarge was a poisoner, then compared with Mary Bateman she was a mere amateur in preparing her crime, although she far surpassed the Englishwoman as an actress once the crime had been committed; the difference is the difference in two temperaments: one looked to the ground

she was treading, the other to the boulder-strewn way ahead.

But to return to the Perigos. "The absurd credulity of Mr. and Mrs. Perigo," says one chronicler, "even yet favoured the horrid designs." For five days puddings in which were mixed one of the powders were eaten, and without any apparent result. But on the sixth day the pudding tasted so nauseous that the husband could eat only one or two mouthfuls, while the wife, with a greater gain to secure, could bring herself to swallow only three or four. Immediately after the meal both were violently sick, and we are told that Mrs. Perigo, "whose faith appears to have been greater than that of her husband, at once had recourse to the honey."

The sickness continued for a day or two, and then Perigo began to feel better. But not so his wife, who, seized with acute stomach pains, would not hear of a doctor being called, lest the charm be broken, but persisted in eating the honey.

This state of affairs lasted for nearly a fortnight; and then came the end. On May 24 Mrs. Perigo died, "her last words being a request to her husband not to be 'rash' with Mary Bateman, but to await the coming of the appointed time."

What the dying woman expected the close of the eighteen months to bring about one can only imagine. The possibility is that she had some vague notion of the fully matured charm bringing her back from the dead. It seems hard to believe, but it is certain that she died with her faith in the mysterious "Miss Blythe's" charm as strong as ever before; and most probably it was this strangely perverse faith of his dying wife's that kept the blinding scales over Perigo's own eyes.

For, unaccountable as it may appear, although a surgeon, a Mr. Chorley, who attended the body expressed his belief that Mrs. Perigo had died of poisoning, and although a cat that had eaten some of the remaining pudding died, Perigo himself did nothing, but was content to await the expiration of the charm's eighteen months. He even continued to visit the "witch," who, being told of his wife's death, promptly explained it away by saying it was due to her having eaten all the honey at once.

And then, early in June, shortly after the funeral, a fresh note arrived from "Miss Blythe":

> My dear Friend,
>
> I am sorry to tell you that your wife should touch of those things which I ordered her not, and for that reason it has caused her death; it had likened to have killed me at Scarborough, and Mary Bateman at Leeds, and you and all, and for this reason, she will rise from the grave, she will stroke your face with her right hand, and you will lose the use of one side, but I will pray for you. I would not have you to go to no doctor, for it will not do. I would have you to eat and drink what you like, and you will be better. Now, my dear friend, take my directions, do and it will be better for you. Pray God bless you. Amen. Amen. You must burn this letter immediately after it is read.

Plainly "Miss Blythe" was working up to something further; hence the admonishing strain regarding the danger incurred to herself. But perhaps in this letter one can gain a little more substance for the theory previously expressed that the dying woman believed the charm would bring her back to life again. If Mary Bateman could suggest a resurrection to the husband *after* his wife's death, it is quite likely that she had said some such thing to the wife *before*, but had made

her promise not to mention the matter—doubtless for fear "it would not do."

However, what "Miss Blythe" was working up to soon became apparent. New notes arrived from her with fresh requests for clothing, coals, furniture, and food; and Perigo, with a feeling that there was no sense in breaking the charm at this stage, after having paid so dearly, continued to accede to the demands, to all seeming as credulous as ever.

But the trap finally sprang itself. In October 1808, having given the charm a full two years in which to mature, he decided the time was ripe for collecting his money from the bed! But instead of guinea notes and coins he discovered the bags contained only rotten cabbage leaves and farthings.

The discovery brought disillusion, and disillusion brought its own fellow—an implacable desire for revenge. Communicating the truth to the authorities, Perigo, his wits now shaken awake, in his turn prepared a snare for the fowler. He arranged to meet Mary Bateman upon the pretence of receiving from her a bottle of "charm" medicine that was finally to cure him of all bad effects of the pudding. The "witch," ignorant that the worm had turned, kept the appointment, and was promptly arrested.

And it was just as well she was, for when her pockets were searched two bottles were found containing a liquid in which two powders had been dissolved; one powder proved upon analysis to be oatmeal—the other arsenic. Evidently the medicines by which Perigo was to have been "cured."

The last thread of her clever murder design had snapped in her own fingers!

The usual investigation followed, during which it was found that most of the furniture and effects intended for "Miss Blythe" were stored in Mary Bateman's house. The inquiry established the fact that the letters from "Miss Blythe" retained by Perigo were all in Mary Bateman's handwriting, and that no such person as the spiritualistic "Miss Blythe" existed or ever had existed in the coastal town, but that all the letters received by the Perigos had been sent to Scarborough by Mary Bateman and redirected back to Bramley. It was also ascertained that in April 1807 she had tried to purchase a quantity of arsenic from a Mr. Clough of Kirkgate, but he had refused to supply her. Where she had eventually secured the arsenic found in her possession was not proved.

At the trial no defence was put forward other than a plain denial of the charge; but the evidence was conclusive, and none more so than that of Mr. Chorley, the surgeon. He stated that upon analysing some of the pudding which Mrs. Perigo had eaten he had found it to contain corrosive sublimate of mercury; and he had found the same deadly poison in samples of the honey he had tested. Further, the medical testimony stated that the symptoms exhibited by both Perigo and his wife after eating the pudding were those associated with that particular poison.

The judge, in summing up the case, laid particular stress upon Perigo's credulousness. "It is impossible not to be struck with wonder," he said, "at the extraordinary credulity of William Perigo, which neither the loss of his property, the death of his wife, and his own severe sufferings could dispel; and it was not until the month of October in the following year that he ventured

to open his hid treasure, and found there what everyone in court must have anticipated that he would find, not a single vestige of his property; and his evidence is laid before the jury with the observation which arises from this uncommon want of judgment."

The jury did not retire; their verdict of "Guilty" was given almost as soon as his Lordship finished speaking. The latter then addressed himself to the prisoner again, and, with the forensic floridness then popular in the courts, passed some shrewd observations upon the prisoner's intentions towards her dupes. Those observations are fittingly included here.

"Mary Bateman," he pronounced, "you have been convicted of wilful murder by a jury who, having examined your case with caution, have, constrained by the force of evidence, pronounced you guilty; and it only remains for me to fulfil my painful duty by passing upon you the awful sentence of the law. After you have been so long in the situation in which you now stand, and harassed as your mind must be by the long detail of your crimes, and by listening to the sufferings you have occasioned, I do not wish to add to your distress by saying more than my duty renders necessary. Of your guilt there cannot remain a particle of doubt in the breast of anyone who has heard your case. You entered into a long and premeditated system of fraud, which you carried on for a length of time which is most astonishing, and by means which one would have supposed could not, in this age and nation, have been practised with success. To prevent a discovery of your complicated fraud, and the punishment which must have resulted therefrom, you deliberately contrived the death of the persons you had so grossly injured, and that by

means of poison, a mode of destruction against which there is no sure protection; but your guilty design was not fully accomplished. And, after so extraordinary a lapse of time, you are reserved as a signal example of the justice of that mysterious Providence which sooner or later overtakes guilt like yours; and at the very time when you were apprehended, there is the greatest reason to suppose, that if your surviving victim had met you alone, as you wished him to do, you would have administered to him a more deadly dose, which would have completed the diabolical project you had long before formed, but which at that time only partially succeeded; for upon your person, at that moment, was found a phial containing a most deadly poison. For crimes like yours, in this world, the gates of mercy are closed. You afforded your victim no time for preparation; but the law, while it dooms you to death, has, in its mercy, afforded you time for repentance and the assistance of pious and devout men, whose admonitions and prayers and counsels may assist to prepare you for another world, where even your crimes, if sincerely repented of, may find mercy.

"The sentence of the law is," the judge continued, drawing to a conclusion, "and the court doth award it, that you be taken to the place from whence you came, and from thence, on Monday next, to the place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you are dead; and that your body be given to the surgeons to be dissected and anatomized; and may Almighty God have mercy upon your soul."

When the clerk asked the prisoner if she had any reason to offer why the sentence of the court should not be carried out immediately she made the time-old

plea that she was pregnant—"twenty-two weeks gone with child." Upon hearing this the ladies in the court made a wild scamper for the doors, but the judge was too quick for them; he ordered the doors to be closed. A jury of matrons was then empanelled, and half an hour after Mary Bateman's last bid for life was made it was brought to naught by the matrons' unanimous decision that she "is not with quick child."

The few hours now remaining to her the "witch" spent in her cell, tending her infant daughter, while the prison ordinary, the Rev. George Brown, endeavoured in vain to get her to confess her crimes. She neither whined about her approaching end nor professed repentance for a criminal past, and on the day before her execution she calmly penned a letter to her husband with the request that her wedding-ring, which she enclosed, might eventually be given to her daughter.

On the morning of her execution she rose, dressed herself neatly, and paid particular attention to her appearance; then, after taking an unemotional leave of her child, she walked sedately and firmly to the scaffold.

"Upon the appearance of the convict upon the platform," we are told, "the deepest silence prevailed amongst the immense assemblage of persons which had been collected to witness the execution. As a final duty the Rev. Mr. Brown, immediately before the drop fell, again exhorted the unhappy woman to confession, but her only reply was a repetition of the declaration of her innocence, and the next moment terminated her existence."

In accordance with the sentence passed upon her, after her corpse had remained hanging for the usual period, it was cut down and sent to the Leeds General

Infirmary for dissecting. The huge throng of people that had gathered to behold the execution waited until the corpse was removed in a hearse, when they morbidly followed it to the Infirmary. Popular feeling ran so high, however, and the crowd was so desirous of actually seeing for themselves the remains of the woman they had dubbed "the Yorkshire witch," that the body was made the subject of a special exhibition, the price of admission to which was threepence. This horribly grim and repulsive spectacle resulted in raising the Infirmary's funds by some £30.

II

THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS

The Courtesan Murderess

THE MARQUISE DE BRINVILLIERS

In the history of French crime the dark story of that infamous poisoner the Marquise de Brinvilliers is recounted in a specially gruesome yet fascinating chapter. It is a chapter in which are combined all the glamour of the pageantry of the period of Louis Quatorze, of that age of dirt and diamonds, sin and silk, and something of that misbegotten eroticism which was to breed a canker in the very heart of a great and puissant nation. The Marquise de Brinvilliers has been termed France's most notorious criminal: it is probably symptomatic of the restless insincerity of her age that this arch-murderess was looked upon at the time of her execution, by a certain section of Parisians, as approximating closely to a saint.

Marie Madeleine Marguerite d'Arbray was born some time about the year 1630. She was the daughter of the Civil Lieutenant (or magistrate) of the Châtelet de Paris, and, as far as one can ascertain, her early life was uneventful. It may safely be presumed that until the time of her marriage she lived the life customary to the daughter of one of the Grand Monarch's civil magistrates. What schooling she received was doubtless from the sisters of some Parisian convent. That she spent some years learning those graces and glances deemed necessary for social advancement may be presumed from the fact that her marriage, in some measure brought about by her father—a man, apparently,

with ambitions for his family—was looked upon as a rare success. Indeed, her father, Dreux d'Arbray, was probably more ambitious than is usually supposed, for there is ample evidence that he continued to keep a watchful eye upon his daughter for years after she had left his roof. It may even be that he knew from experience that such surveillance was necessary and found the knowledge perturbing, for those were days when disillusioned husbands found a speedier method than the Divorce Court for settling their family disturbances; and probably Dreux d'Arbray, a knowing man of the world, realized that as the father of a *marquise*, and the father-in-law of a favoured officer of Le Roi Soleil's Guards, he was eminently more important than a mere official who had to retain his position by crippling bribes.

However that may be, it is a fact that this daughter of his who did so well for herself in the marriage market grew into a beautiful woman, as it is also a fact that the first time the Marquis de Brinvilliers, young, handsome, and dashing in his silks and brocade and heavily powdered peruke, set eyes on her he fell violently in love with the vision.

The young couple were married on December 20, 1651. The bridegroom, fresh home from service with his regiment in the bleak fields of Normandy, made of the occasion one long to be remembered. He was fond of gaiety, pleasure-hunting was a hobby of his, and from all accounts he was a reckless spendthrift. Of the young couple's early married life record tells us little, but from the sorry sequence one can easily conjure up the type of life into which they drifted. Brinvilliers, soon satiated with married bliss, turned to the fleshpots,

and commenced a round of wine-drinking, gambling, and easy love-making. With his handsome presence he was ever a favourite with the ladies, and most likely it was the satisfaction he received from other quarters that made him soon neglectful of his wife. The Marquis and his bride had not been settled down long before the latter was left more or less to her own resources. The result, in a creature of Marie d'Arbray's temperament, was rebellion. Rebellion brought about violent altercations, and these scenes produced, in their natural sequence, just as violent reunions. But it was not the kind of life that makes for placidity and the deep affection of a Darby-and-Joan-like existence. The quarrels became more frequent, and the makings-up fewer.

The beautiful, now experienced, Marquise de Brinvilliers began to look elsewhere for those attentions which her nature, true product of its age, demanded. They had been married some eight years, and by that time probably all futile pretence had been cast aside, when the husband introduced his wife to an acquaintance, another handsome young officer, well placed at Court, and likely to become influential in time; this was Jean-Baptiste de Gaudin, Seigneur de Sainte-Croix. Sainte-Croix, like his friend eight years before, soon became enamoured of that friend's wife's bright glances and smiles of double-meaning. In the Marquise's quick wit and swift, changing moods he discovered an allure which soon directed his steps day after day to the side of the deserted wife, and within a short while of their first meeting the two had reached a reasonable understanding.

It has been claimed that Brinvilliers lacked the qualities of the ideal husband in that he was content to play

the *rôle* of *mari complaisant*. Such may be the case; but he was probably far more concerned with whether other husbands were content to play similar *rôles*. Again, adultery being almost a virtue in that age—certainly it was a mark of social standing!—he may well have thought first about making a fool of himself. With his own reputation what it was he could hardly afford to allow the laugh to go against himself: it might have prejudiced the success of further *amours*. So if the Marquis de Brinvilliers, busy with his other engagements, his mistresses, his gambling, and his carousings with the younger gallants of the Court, took no notice of the fact that the Seigneur de Sainte-Croix was dancing constant attendance upon his wife one might have considered it nobody else's business.

However, somebody else thought it was. The Civil Lieutenant of the Châtelet regarded the irregularities of his daughter with marked and growing disfavour. As for the daughter, she did not seem to care. Reputations were rare things in France in those days; indeed, they were more often than not found to be encumbrances. But, knowing her father, she was unwise not to take sufficient precaution against her *affaire* with Sainte-Croix reaching his ears. Or, perhaps, a married woman of nearly ten years, she thought she had long ago shaken the filial shackles from her dainty ankles, and might trip where she listed or to what measure she fancied without reproof from the Châtelet.

Perhaps her great discovery dulled her intuitive powers and warped her normal sense of precaution. The discovery was that she and Sainte-Croix were of like minds on matters pertaining to things of this world. They matched each other, as they speedily found, in

unscrupulousness of outlook, depth of desire, and passion for wringing from their lives all they could selfishly attain; and the shreds of their spiritual lives matched the tatters of their physical existences. It is to-day considered old-fashioned to speak of affinities; yet one must risk so much to say that Sainte-Croix was the Marquise's affinity: in hate as in evil, in greed as in lust.

The lives of these two whose names were destined to be close-bracketed together throughout the centuries became as one. They schemed the same schemes, dreamed the same dreams, and came in time to dip their hands in the same murders. Whether the Marquise influenced Sainte-Croix more than he her, or whether the reverse was the case, cannot be argued with any certainty. One can only judge from the results of their villainy, in which, from the accounts of both, they shared more or less impartially. But I find one indication that presupposes me to give more credence to the theory that it was the woman who influenced the man. This is the fact that Sainte-Croix, despite his having presented his friend with a fine pair of horns, undoubtedly saved Brinvilliers' life when the wife would have destroyed it; and that secretly, by administering antidotes to counteract the Marquise's poisoned draughts. But this really belongs to the following pages.

It is a matter for unsuccessful speculation to consider whether the hideous crimes of which these two were later guilty would have been committed had the righteous indignation of the Marquise's father not provided both with motive and means. Dreux d'Arbray was not only indignant; he saw no advantage in his daughter changing her affections from Brinvilliers to Sainte-Croix. His scruples were pricked, too, when he

discovered that Sainte-Croix was already married. He pondered the situation well—but, unfortunately for himself and his family, not well enough. He disliked the philanderer for himself; there was nothing in Sainte-Croix's title or station that especially appealed to him. The very attraction most people found in the young officer, his chance of rising through being somewhat of a favourite, the irate magistrate discounted. Slowly he was forced to the conclusion that Sainte-Croix must be brought to heel. Otherwise . . . He dreaded contemplating the alternative. A stop, he brusquely assured himself, must be put to his daughter's foolishness. A stop was put to it.

D'Arbray, through civil channels, obtained a *lettre de cachet* against his daughter's lover. By means of its authority he was enabled to arrest Sainte-Croix without giving any reason or without allowing him any chance of trial; and Sainte-Croix was sent to the Bastille and given plenty of time in which to ponder his rashness. D'Arbray did not intend to confine his prisoner indefinitely, as seemed the practice of those times; rather it was his intention to cool the headstrong young man's ardour. As the tragic sequel shows, his imprisonment produced an entirely different result.

Outside the Bastille, the Marquise languished for her lover, for whom she had conceived a kind of unholy passion; inside, Sainte-Croix's soul was filled with desire for revenge upon the man who had been responsible for so disgracing him. Fate now threw its usual spoke into the wheel of human destinies. In that part of the grim prison in which Sainte-Croix was confined was another prisoner, an Italian named Exili, who at one time had served in the household of the Medici family.

Exili was a noted toxicologist, and it has been claimed that he was one of the few "alchemists" who knew of the properties of arsenic. Oddly enough, these two ill-assorted prisoners, the Italian poisoner and the French Court gallant, struck up some sort of friendship. They whiled away the long hours in the darkness of the subterranean cells in exchanging confidences. In this way Exili taught the young Frenchman the secrets of a terrible and practically unknown poison, which was unfailing in its power to destroy, and equally unfailing, if used properly, in its power to impart agony to the victim. What this poison was will ever remain a mystery, but there is much to be said for the supposition that it was arsenic. On the other hand, it is not altogether improbable that the secret Exili passed to his young companion was that of the dread *aqua tofana*, or *acqua tofania*. One of the most notorious poisoners in Italy in the seventeenth century was a woman named Tofana. She sold her terrible concoction in liquid form to young wives who, apart from having enough money to purchase the poison, desired to be rid of their husbands. Tofana thrived, and the reputation of the fearful potency of her brew spread throughout Western Europe. After the celebrated Sicilian poisoner had been strangled it was rumoured that her secret was held by several professional poisoners to whom she had imparted it. It is not unlikely that Exili was one.

Sainte-Croix had been thrown into the Bastille in 1663. The date of his release is not known for certain; it is doubtful if it is recorded even—there were so few occasions of a similar kind to be recorded in the seventeenth century. But immediately after he had passed through the tall gates of iron, a free man again, he made

his way without delay to the Marquise. He imparted to her the grim secret Exili had told him, and together they discussed plans for the future. Perhaps the Marquise was a little startled at first to discover such a change in her lover. Perhaps the lover hated d'Arbray even more when he learned how the Marquise had been longing for his return to her arms. It soon became clear, however, that both had one thought in their minds: vengeance! And perhaps some other consideration prompted the Marquise in her readiness to plan a means of gaining revenge. Brinvilliers had been gambling and losing heavily. His fortune was ebbing at an alarming rate—but her father, as far as she knew, had full coffers. True, he also had two sons and another daughter; the Marquise hesitated, however, to consider them insurmountable obstacles.

They discussed Exili's secret thoroughly, and found that they were both of a mind to use it in gaining their revenge—and perhaps in gaining profit. But it was imperative that they should first strengthen their theoretical knowledge with some practice. This provided a problem. They would have to take great care to see that no suspicion attached to them; but how were they to do this unless they had tried out the poison and knew exactly what its effects were?

It was the Marquise who solved the problem. She was giving thought to their plot, and a way soon made itself clear to her. Accordingly she began undertaking charitable work at the *hôtel-dieu*, where the luckless, the outcasts, and the starving congregated. Moving among them, stifling her detestation of the work, and probably sustained by the knowledge that these were the very material she required for her "experiments," she spent

her first few visits in distributing medicines and dainties. Then she began her real work. One after another of the poor devils was taken ill, with horrible pains racking his body, and after hours of acute suffering died in agony. The deaths were mysterious, but, then, death was the common lot of such human refuse, who came to the hospitals wasted with disease and in most cases tottering on the threshold of another world. It was a pity, the attendants thought, that the good Marquise de Brinvilliers had to observe such terrible, nauseating things. Apparently the good Marquise came to think so herself after a while, for suddenly her charitable visits stopped. She had tried out her experiments, and she had learned what she had gone to learn.

During this time Sainte-Croix must have rigged himself out with some sort of laboratory, wherein he made up the poison. There seems some evidence that he was helped by a chemist known as Christopher Glaser, but the latter does not figure prominently in the story of the Marquise, and so can be omitted from consideration here. How the poisons were prepared is another interesting point, for from what will be seen later Sainte-Croix invariably wore a mask when at work in his laboratory, presumably to protect his face from fumes. This rather suggests that he had to work with a retort, and that he had to contrive a compound of several volatile substances. The latter might be accepted as another point in favour of the *aqua tofana* theory.

Some time had now elapsed since Sainte-Croix had been liberated from the Bastille, and it was considered by the two would-be murderers that everything was set for their obtaining the revenge due to them. It was

the summer of the year 1666. Brinvilliers was away from Paris on some pretext, and the Marquise took the opportunity of persuading her father to take her to his *château* at Offemont, near Compiègne. The hot days passed slowly, in rural peacefulness, and then most unaccountably d'Arbray developed a peculiar and troublesome complaint. He daily grew worse, and agonizing pains developed in his stomach and chest. His throat grew parched, and no amount of liquid seemed to alleviate the terrible thirst he experienced. There was little that medical aid could do for him. Probably the local blood-letter did his worst. On September 10 the Civil Lieutenant of the Châtelet de Paris was dead.

Shortly afterwards, when his will was read, there were no more disappointed people in Paris than the Marquise de Brinvilliers and her paramour, for the father, who had openly disapproved of his daughter's conduct, had left most of his wealth to his two sons, the remainder to the Marquise's other sister, Thérèse. Regarding the time taken by the Marquise de Brinvilliers to murder her father authorities differ. One says that her poisoning process took eight months, that she was "kissing him and poisoning" him by turn, "until her diabolical nature was exhausted, and she was at last induced to administer a very violent dose."

Eight months, though, seems a little excessive. Cruel as the Marquise was to those towards whom she directed her enmity, there is reasonable room to doubt that she began poisoning her father in Paris, several months before she journeyed with him to the country *château*. But, as in life, in death Dreux d'Arbray had managed to frustrate his headstrong daughter. With the passing of her father's wealth to her brothers she

and Sainte-Croix realized how little revenge had counted in their schemes to destroy d'Arbray. Their cupidity was aroused afresh, and plans were now prepared for the destruction of the elder brother, Antoine, who had been fortunate enough to succeed his father as Civil Lieutenant of the Châtelet.

The first step in their fiendish plot was to manœuvre to get an accomplice in Antoine d'Arbray's household. After several attempts it was arranged that the brother should engage a valet who was in their pay, if not entirely in their secret. Accordingly Jean Amelin, or La Chausée, as he is generally known, enters the case. An unsavoury-looking individual, with a too-knowing eye, and a perpetual leer about the corners of his flaccid mouth, he was just the type of tool the Marquise and Sainte-Croix had been searching for. Subservient in manner, yet withal a good valet, Antoine d'Arbray was induced to take the man into his employ.

La Chausée and his master and mistress worked quickly. Only by a great stroke of luck was d'Arbray saved from being poisoned within a few days of the new valet joining his domestic staff. At a dinner which he had been giving to some friends in his home in Paris he had taken up what he had supposed to be a glass of wine, only to find that upon touching the glass with his lips they were burned as though by vitriol. La Chausée, watchful, and realizing instantly that his first shot had miscarried, hastened the mysterious glass of "wine" from the table.

The failure of this first attempt upon Antoine d'Arbray's life made the conspirators even more careful than before. Waiting had decided them. Their ultimate object was to secure the fortune Dreux d'Arbray

had left to his two sons and daughter Thérèse. Antoine was the first obstacle that had to be removed.

Winter passed and spring came. Fashionable Paris had decided that the current vogue was to spend spring —or, at least, some weeks of it—in the country *châteaux* of the vine districts. Accordingly Antoine d'Arbray and his family repaired to his own country residence at Villequay, in Beauce. Here, after a meal served by La Chausée, every one who had partaken of it felt suddenly ill. It was thought that they had eaten something peculiarly disagreeable—probably some spring fruit or vegetable, for all recovered except d'Arbray himself, who, rather unexpectedly, seemed to become worse as the days passed. But either it was deemed too risky to finish off the doomed man, or else some other purpose better suited the conspirators' arrangements, for d'Arbray's strange malady lingered for some months, when he seemed suddenly to get a little stronger. The months dragged into a year, and his family came to despair of his becoming again the man he was before his illness. The year dragged into nearly three, and suddenly he became worse again. Doctors were summoned to attend the stricken man, but none of their prescriptions, fanciful as some of them were, afforded him any alleviation from the pain he suffered, which hourly seemed to become more acute and maddening. He expired on June 17, 1670. The doctors sententiously declared that they must hold an autopsy. They did so, but the result of it was never known—probably because it produced no satisfactory result; the reason quite possibly being that they knew nothing of the properties of arsenic or of the symptoms of arsenical poisoning.

With their next victim the plotters were more hasty. The success that had finally attended their efforts to destroy Antoine d'Arbray had lent them a measure of confidence which no new doubts could altogether disperse. The second brother died in the November of the same year, barely five months after Antoine, and in his case the symptoms were observed to be identical with those that had attended the last hours of the elder brother.

Of course, nothing could be proved against the Marquise and Sainte-Croix, who all this time kept well in the background of events; and La Chausée, so well was he schooled to his part of murderous tool, was the last person the bereaved families would have suspected, although the widow of the elder brother experienced some strange and unaccountable repugnance when this creature, in another guise, presented himself before her with an application for the post of gardener. In refusing to employ the man she probably saved her own life and the lives of her children. This incident rather goes to prove that the Marquise had become so vindictive against her family that she desired to exterminate anyone connected with them.

This third death, with its strange and perplexing similarity to the second, probably decided the Marquise and Sainte-Croix to wait a while before murdering Thérèse. It is highly probable that in the interim that expired between November 1670, when the second brother died, and July 1672, when Sainte-Croix met with a fatal accident, the murderers and murderess disposed of other and unknown victims. For killing had well-nigh become a passion with the Marquise and Sainte-Croix. Their illicit passion for each other had found its devilish

complement in their mutual desire to destroy their fellows for gain. That was an age when both men and women craved strange and bizarre excitements. Black magic was still whispered, and strange tales were still told to which the credulous gave wondering ear. Men were known to sell their souls in these days, and there were those living who could recount experiences of such dread bargainings. Was some such reason as this—the desire for unnatural emotional stimulus—partly the cause of the horrors enacted by the Marquise, her lover, and their tool?

Thérèse d'Arbray must have been born under some particularly lucky star. We do not know the reading of her horoscope, but, whatever it was, it must have revealed an intriguing jumble of the forces of tragedy, hate, and luck. The murders of her brothers had left her with well-nigh the entire d'Arbray fortune, no mean one if the Marquise's persistency in endeavouring to secure it can be rightly judged. She had no near relation, as far as we know, other than her nobly married sister. It is not even certain whether she was married. The probability is that she was not.

However, in the early summer of 1672 the Marquise and Sainte-Croix decided that Thérèse's time had come. Suspicions—that is, of course, any that might have been entertained, and it is doubtful if any were—had had plenty of time to be forgotten. If Thérèse suddenly died after a very short illness there seemed no reason why anyone should suspect foul play.

So towards the end of July in that year Sainte-Croix made his preparations, and on the 30th repaired to his laboratory to mix the poison that was to send Thérèse d'Arbray to join her brothers. This time the finger

Fate jabbed in the plotters' pie shook with malice: it pointed the way for Death.

Sainte-Croix, working over his retorts, keenly absorbed in his preparation, failed to feel that the strap of his glass mask was loose. He bent more closely over the fuming retorts, the strap suddenly gave, the mask slipped from his face, and he received the contents of the bubbling retort full in the face. He fell back choking, struggling against the potency of the scorching fumes. All at once his strength gave out, and he slid forward unconscious. When he was found he had been dead for some hours.

Thus in a way strangely suggestive of "poetic justice" Antoine d'Arbray and his brother were in part avenged. I have chosen to recount Sainte-Croix's death in this way because it is the more usually accepted story. The writer of the article on the Marquise de Brinvilliers in *La Nouveau Larousse Illustré*, however, does not accept the story, although he is not clear as to how Sainte-Croix did die. It certainly seems quite a likely thing to have happened for Sainte-Croix to have lost his life through some oversight while at work in his laboratory —an oversight due most likely in the first place to excitement. Or perhaps the oversight was due to anxiety.

For Sainte-Croix was a strange man, as was proved after his death. When the terrible crimes in which he and the Marquise had shared became generally known one particularly strange fact came to light. It was learned that for quite a long while the Marquise had been endeavouring to poison her husband. In all sorts of subtle ways she had introduced poison into his food and drink, but he had most vexingly, after a short bout of sickness, recovered in every case. It was as though some

magic charm preserved the gambling Marquis's life. As a matter of fact, it was something even more unaccountable than a magic charm that was the cause of Brinvilliers's continuing to mount up his debts. Sainte-Croix, villain at heart as he was, had at least one germ of compunction in his make-up. Brinvilliers had at one time been his friend, and, try as he might, listen to the subtle arguments put forth by the wife as he would, he could not bring himself to be a party to Brinvilliers's murder. So he prepared antidotes to counteract the poisons given Brinvilliers by his smiling wife. In this way Brinvilliers proved a battleground, where was fought out the struggle for supremacy between the Marquise and her fellow-murderer. That Brinvilliers should in this way stand for something honourable in Sainte-Croix's life is especially interesting for the sidelight it throws upon Sainte-Croiz's character as a whole. He could seduce his friend's wife, ruin his character by lies and deceit; yet at the time when perhaps he had the greatest cause to fear that friend, and to wish him out of his way for good, he, the man who had lent himself to murder as another lends himself to sport, found that he must preserve that friend's life at all costs. It is a queer, contradictory situation, and, as I have said, may have given Sainte-Croix quite a deal of anxiety. He may have been thinking of Brinvilliers and his safety at the time he met his own death. Of course there are the cynical: those who are of the opinion that Sainte-Croix kept Brinvilliers alive as a measure of protection for himself. He did not trust the Marquise, they say. Brinvilliers alive was always a focus for the Marquise's unnatural hate. She had tired of him because she was tied to him; by inference she might in the same way tire

of anyone else to whom she was tied. So he is supposed to have administered antidotes to Brinvilliers, "dreading that he should be compelled to marry the widow."

The strange manner of Sainte-Croix's death called for an investigation by the authorities, and on August 8, little more than a week after the fatal accident in the laboratory, the appointed inquirers paid a visit to Sainte-Croix's home and commenced a studious examination of all his papers. Among his effects was a small iron-bound box of the variety strongly suggestive of containing surprises and secrets. As was natural, the widow of the dead man claimed the box, together with the remainder of what he had left, but when his will was read it was found to contain an insistent clause to the effect that that particular box was to be given, unopened, to the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

Of course, most of those present, including the wife, knew what Sainte-Croix and the Marquise had been to each other, and equally of course they were curious to know what light was shed upon the irregular relationship by the contents of the box. Whatever it was, they were certain that it could be nothing deadly. Some foolish lovers' letters and tokens, doubtless—actually nothing to make a fuss about, but maybe something that would provide them with a laugh.

So the box was opened before being delivered to the Marquise, as the will instructed. It did not contain a great deal, just a few papers and one or two packets, tightly sealed. The first paper was a promissory note for some 10,000 livres made out to a M. Cusson on account of a M. Paul. It was signed by a well-known rich Parisian, one M. Pennautier, and a clause in the note read to the effect that M. Paul was really M. Pennautier.

At first glance this seemed an innocent enough paper, although it was strange finding it in Sainte-Croix's possession. The second paper was the equivalent of an IOU for 30,000 livres signed by Dreux d'Arbray. Why Sainte-Croix had kept this latter is uncertain. It might have been a forgery that he was still hoping to palm off somehow; or it may be that, the note being genuine, d'Arbray's sons had refused to acknowledge it. This would have added to Sainte-Croix's dislike of them. The third possibility is not so likely—namely, that d'Arbray at the time of his death had not the means of meeting his obligation. There is no evidence that he had. So the note remains a mystery.

The investigators, puzzled by the sealed packages, broke open one or two, and, on discovering them to contain various powders, were immediately desirous of knowing what they were. Some of each was given to several animals, and every one of them died. This startling result gave the investigators pause. Why had Sainte-Croix hidden those powders in his box? And why had he willed that box to the Marquise de Brinvilliers? They remembered acutely how Sainte-Croix had met his death, the mysterious circumstances, even then not understood and left uncleared. Delving further into the box, they had found a paper with sundry allusions to the deaths in the d'Arbray family, which, now that they pondered them, seemed to have a dreadful significance. But there was Pennautier's name, too, and there were likewise vague references to someone called La Chausée. Pennautier, however, was a rich man, and as such had to be treated with circumspection, if not with respect. His reputation was not of the most savoury. There had been several enemies of his that had

suddenly disappeared. He had been a close friend and confidant of Sainte-Croix's, for they had come from the same part of the country, and had had much in common.

The immediate result of the surreptitious opening of the strong-box was the seeking out of Pennautier, who was soon found; La Chausée, who was come upon tramping the streets of Paris, in his pocket a packet of powder similar to one of those discovered in Sainte-Croix's box; and the Marquise, who, hearing of what had transpired after the reading of her lover's will, made speed to decamp. The discovery created a *furore* at the time, and the case against Pennautier proved a special topic for debate, such well-known writers as de Grammont and Mme. de Sévigné pausing to discuss his prospects and to append the reflection that he could not be convicted of having taken any hand in crime. They were right. Pennautier had seen to that.

The Marquise was fortunate in eluding those who would have prevented her from leaving Paris. With little enough time to spare, she made the best of her way to the coast, and straightway crossed to England.

In the meantime things were going hard with her late henchman, La Chausée. In the hands of the authorities, whom he was not able to bribe, as he had no means, he had to submit to their methods of endeavouring to extract information: rather crude methods, similar to those employed to-day by the police of the United States. But La Chausée was apparently made of stern stuff. Like the conventional transatlantic gangster, he did not "rat." He chose to "come clean" only after the ordeal was over. What probably happened is that he had waited, hoping the Marquise would make some effort to extricate him from the particularly tight corner in

which he was wedged. But she gave no sign that she even knew of his plight, and he lost heart. Then his lips tumbled out the whole grim tale, and Paris, listening, shuddered. Summary sentence was passed on La Chausée himself and the missing Marquise. La Chausée was to be broken on the wheel; the Marquise de Brinvillers was to be decapitated.

La Chausée paid the awful price of his crimes some time in the following year, 1673. Thus far he was the only victim the authorities had secured, for Pennautier was once more moving within the charmed circle he cultivated. A long wait began, and an unceasing vigil was maintained against the Marquise de Brinvilliers's return.

In a foreign land, with few resources, a strange restlessness assailed her. Within a few months she was crossing to the Netherlands, and a short while afterwards saw her brought to another pause in her flight from justice, this time in a convent at Liége. There seems little point, remembering the woman's past life, in wondering whether she had gone to that particular refuge in order to meditate upon her past wickednesses. Fear possessed her, a fear that had been a nightmarish reality during the lonesome weeks of her wandering. She wanted to be back in Paris, where the streets and gardens were familiar to her; she wanted to watch the sun's warm light melting in the Seine. She was homesick; it was as though suddenly the sheer initiative to live had departed from her.

Enclosed behind the convent walls strange, moody thoughts perplexed her, yet thoughts that she knew instinctively she would have to reason out for herself. Her funds were almost depleted. True, she was still

receiving letters from her complacent husband. He promised her money and what help he could manage to raise; but his gambling debts had impoverished his estate and he was rapidly approaching the condition of a bankrupt. He had been shocked at the great scandal caused by La Chausée's confessions, but, the shock once over, he had readily revealed a peculiar sympathy for the wife whom evidence showed to be a human monster. His letters of condolence and brackish sentiment had followed her to England and then to the Low Countries. But as far as the Marquise was concerned Brinvilliers might have spared himself his trouble. His wife had forgotten him. If she recalled anything it was the horror of Sainte-Croix's accident and the terrible torture La Chausée had undergone. Of her sister, Thérèse, whom she had designed to be her latest victim, she heard no news; she doubted very much whether it had been guessed that Thérèse had been marked down as an intended victim.

The days that passed left her mind clouded with gathering doubts. The fear she had thought to kill with confident reassurance continued to grow and make miserable her life. Yet it was not a fear born of the pricks or stirrings of conscience. It was a genuine physical fear: amounting almost to a premonition.

The life in the convent was dreary. She was left pretty much to herself; no one concerned herself about her. She was not wanted; she was not unwanted. She was merely tolerated; and perhaps it was that feeling of being tolerated that came gradually to play havoc with her nerves. For she was by nature highly strung, temperamental, and gifted with a clear intelligence. Routine, in time, palled; the very sameness

of the life made it seem interminable. There was no one within the convent with whom she could converse as an equal, or even upon a topic that held a natural interest for her. Week succeeded week, and, though she knew that in the convent she was safe, again a strange restlessness urged her to continue her wandering, if not in search of peace, at least to find some suitable distraction to relieve the tautness of her nerves.

Although she did not know it, the police authorities of Paris had been to infinite pains to learn where she had taken herself, and, once having picked up her somewhat hidden trail, they took further care to see that she did not entirely disappear without their knowing where. Thus during her stay at the convent in Liége she had, as a matter of fact, been under police surveillance. Of course, the Parisian authorities were powerless to arrest her, and if they were to secure the opportunity it became daily more clear that by some means or other they would have to trick her into crossing into French territory.

Considerably more than a century was to elapse before Vidocq brought the Sûreté into being, yet even at this remote period Frenchmen were fond of playing rather desperate *rôles* in the business of tracking down criminals and persons wanted for capital offences. One of the star investigators of the Parisian police force of those days—nicknamed *les chevaliers de guet*—was one François Desgrez. He was a shrewd fellow, with a commanding presence when he wished, and capable of playing any part assigned to him. A fairly good actor, he had a way with the ladies that had proved invaluable on sundry occasions, and, what was more, he took his work very seriously.

To Desgrez was entrusted the task of getting the Marquise de Brinvilliers from her safe retreat and arresting her at a suitable moment and in an appropriate place. Desgrez accordingly began his task by sending some of his agents into Liége to learn something about the convent and the life of its inmates. Upon being informed that the order was not a particularly strict one, and that frequently the Mother Superior was visited by priests from neighbouring churches, Desgrez at once made up his mind how he was going to achieve what at first had seemed the impossible.

He laid his plans carefully, and took some pains to school himself in the *rôle* of priest. Then he arranged for his men to assemble in a village not far from Liége where a convenient inn offered stabling for horses and a coach. When all was in readiness and his men each knew what was expected of him Desgrez set out for Liége in his priest's robes. It was a daring and unscrupulous manœuvre, but Desgrez justified his behaviour on the grounds that he was pitting his wits against a daring and unscrupulous adversary, and one, furthermore, who had managed to secure a distinct advantage over him.

Arrived in Liége, he made his way to the convent, where he suitably impressed everyone, especially the Marquise, to whom he appeared most sympathetic. Listening to the little she allowed herself to tell—mainly about her dislike of the enforced confinement—he readily suggested that she would feel better if she took occasion now and again to stroll through the surrounding countryside, letting her mind relax from her worries. If only she could manage to cease fretting, he assured her, she would soon find that life held a great deal of brightness and happiness.

This sort of conversation, so different from what she had been used to during the past months, took her off her guard. This sympathetic and kindly disposed father, she felt, did her good, and perhaps he was right, after all. She ought to arrange to go out into the country more. The change would do her a great deal of good. As he had said, it would take her mind off things, and that, she realized quite well, was what she chiefly needed: a fresh orientation of ideas and thoughts, the chance to make a new conspectus of her life—of what was left of it.

She ventured to say as much to the smiling priest. At once he took her up. Yes, he was glad that she agreed. Indeed, they could make the most of that very afternoon. They could talk, and perhaps he would be able to help her when she told him more.

A frown probably swept her eyes at this. She did not intend to tell him—or anyone else—any more than she had already admitted, but the break from the usual routine appealed to her, and if she could wish for a companion more after her own heart, at least this priest wasn't as smug as most she had met. If she set herself to manage the conversation he might even become interesting.

So the bait proved sufficiently tempting, and the proud woodcock stepped into the spring.

Once away from the convent the "priest's" mouth set in a hard line. He thrust a masterful hand upon her arm and she realized that her worst fears had not been unfounded. However, Desgrez said nothing until he brought his captive to the village inn where his men were posted. Then, setting her into the waiting coach, all speed was made in their retreat to the French frontier.

It had been a daring enterprise, carried out with a lack of nerve that marked the true adventurer bred in those times, and with an ingenuity one can truly marvel at. The difficulties Desgrez had had to surmount must have been numerous, the risk quite considerable. Yet he had brought off his *coup*, and in a manner that was astoundingly efficient.

Back in Paris, he handed the Marquise over to the authorities that had sent him upon his quest, and then stepped out of the story as abruptly as he had entered it.

With the Marquise in their hands, the investigating authorities began a meticulous search of her effects, and among her papers they came upon an astounding piece of autobiography, in which she detailed the various crimes she had committed and her plans for others. In this glaring piece of evidence—all that the prosecuting authorities required—was the story of her career as murderess and adulteress. When the contents became known Paris seethed with excitement. Such a case could not be remembered before; and the prisoner's high rank only added to the uniqueness of the interest. What the husband, Brinvilliers, did at this time is not known. Probably he was unable to face the storm and took refuge in retreat. Flight could not have been anything but a relief to him, for his credit in the capital was by this time almost entirely lost. His method of life had drained his last resources.

As for the Marquise herself, now that the worst had overtaken her, she steeled herself to endure with fortitude the terrible penalty that she knew would be exacted from her. Terrible it certainly was—barbarous: the age's comment upon her crimes.

In the first place she was arraigned before the fearful

chambre ardente, and almost within the shadow of the grim Bastille, from which had emanated that fatal knowledge which had made of her what she had become, she suffered the fearful "ordeal by water." What actually transpired when the State torturer approached her and placed the dread funnel over her face is unknown; but it is generally believed—the grounds for the belief are uncertain—that she endured the torment with great fortitude. As bucket after bucket of water was poured down the funnel she bore the great strain in silence, and upon recovering her breath managed to mock her tormenter: "*Cher mâitre, vous me donnez une soif insatiable!*"

However, whether the Marquise confessed her crimes as a direct result of the inquisition held by the *chambre ardente* or not, she did confess, and in her confession admitted to murdering the alarming number of more than a score of people. Who most of them were was never learned. The trial over, Paris waited breathlessly for the execution. Her expiation was to be a spectacular affair. She was to be taken to the place of execution in a cart, dressed in a thin garment, barefooted, round her neck a length of rope, and in one hand a large lighted torch. Before the assembled populace, on bowed knees, she was fully to confess her heinous crimes, admitting that she murdered her father and her two brothers out of an evil desire for vengeance and out of covetousness.

In the Place de la Grève her proud, haughty head was struck from her beautiful shoulders, and after she had paid the penalty for her crimes she suffered the additional indignity of having her corpse exposed to the pressing throng at the scaffold's foot.

"Yet," says Mme. de Sévigné, "she died as she had

lived—resolutely, merely stipulating that as she walked to the scaffold the executioners should ward off the contaminating presence of Desgrez." This last-minute hatred of the police agent who had been instrumental in bringing her to justice is an interesting clue to the state of her mind immediately preceding her execution. Allowing the theory that she had endured her "questions extraordinary" with all fortitude, it is strange that, having more or less resigned herself to the plight in which she found herself, she still gave Desgrez sufficient thought to hate him for his duplicity. Everything else she accepted as merely part of the necessary proceedings; Desgrez alone remained the object of her intense resentment.

Her confessor immediately before her execution was the worthy Père Pirot, who, to his credit, endeavoured to make her last moments as peaceful and as full of hope as he could. His kindly words did not fall upon deaf ears, one is given to understand, for just before the end a change overspread the murderess's features. It was as though some great truth had dawned upon her. She did not die miserably bitter, complaining at the scurvy trick Fate had played her, and uttering imprecations at the executioner and his broad-shouldered crew of awestruck helpers. We have the priest's own word for it that just before her head fell from her shoulders he saw the lips curved in a beatific smile. Her pose at the last had been almost saintlike.

Indeed, after the terrible rite had been finished in the Place de la Grève, and her body consumed in the flames of a roaring fire, a crowd waited by patiently, determined at the last to collect some of her ashes, to treasure as relics.

One wonders whether she was not at the last posing for effect. If she was she certainly fooled the worthy man who was genuinely concerned about her soul's immortality. She died on July 16, 1676.

The story of the notorious Marquise de Brinvilliers has held a strange fascination for writers and reading public alike from her own day to this. In France she ranks as one of the greatest criminals in the nation's records of crime—probably because she is one of the few great French murderesses who was not involved primarily in a *crime passionnel*, although, as I have explained, the credit for that lies with Sainte-Croix.

In conclusion it is interesting to note that Albert Smith, the well-known Victorian writer and lecturer, took the Marquise de Brinvilliers as the subject of one of his successful novels: *The Marchioness of Brinvilliers*, first published in 1846. The story was roundly condemned by *Punch*, in terms that stirred the author to reply in a breezy satire upon that journal. The Marquise was also made the subject of a burlesque opera by Scribe, but the general performance was in such bad taste that failure was assured. Of late years, however, the Marquise has ceased to provide imaginative writers with inspiration: to-day she seems definitely relegated to the compilations of criminologists—which probably is just as well.

III

ELIZABETH BROWNRIGG

The Midwife Murderess

ELIZABETH BROWNRIGG

LIKE that of the infamous Catherine Hayes, the notoriety of Elizabeth Brownrigg has secured a lasting memorial to her crimes in a column of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. A bitter, hard-natured woman, with feelings and instincts resembling more closely those of an untamed jungle creature than of a human being, the story of her cruelties roused the fury of the London mob as little else had done for years. Her name was uttered with loathing and horror throughout the land, and more than thirty years after she had been hanged her crimes were made the subject of some stanzas of parody in the *Anti-Jacobin*.

Little is known of this callous woman's early life, except that she came of humble parents and that her savage, vengeful nature gained her few friends. Her outward demeanour was morose and taciturn. Of plain features, unattractive in herself, with practically no womanly charm, she resented beauty and grace in others; her tongue was quick to harm, her hands quicker to bruise. This strange creature of dark moods, of sudden, stormlike passions, whose temper brooked no check, and whose growing hatred of her sex was in time to become a fearful obsession, married one James Brownrigg, a young house-painter who had just finished his apprenticeship. For about seven years the Brownriggs resided in Greenwich, and then, probably with a view to Brownrigg's better advancement, they moved

to London, where they rented a house in Fleur-de-Luce Court, a little backwater street, mainly comprised of artisans' houses, which ran between Fetter Lane and Fleet Street. Here Brownrigg was fortunate enough to continue his trade (to which he had now added that of a plumber) with considerable success. According to one source, Brownrigg's means at this time might be gauged by the fact that he was able to rent, in addition to the home in Fleur-de-Luce Court, a small house in Islington, which his growing family used as a summer retreat. However, by the time the sixteenth child had arrived he discovered his fortunes had experienced a sad decline. The summer house in Islington was given up, and the question of how to increase the weekly income became more and more urgent.

Now it was during the years spent in London that Elizabeth Brownrigg had first turned her attentions to the profession of midwifery. What had first attracted her to it one cannot hazard with certainty. True, in the light of her later cruelties the fact seems strange enough—indeed, well-nigh incredible—but it must be remembered that Elizabeth Brownrigg was essentially a woman constitutionally imbued with rival passions which were continuously at war within her. It was most probably the result of this internal conflict, harrowing and devastating to her outlook on life and her feeling towards her fellows, that fashioned her into that hardened monster whose sadistic outbursts later assumed the complicated and distorted complexion of a lunatic's ravings. Thus the true reason for those inhumanities which allowed a writer to say nearly eighty years after she had been executed, "the case of this most notorious criminal is too well remembered to render

any introduction to it necessary," may possibly be found in some queer, perverted reaction to the gentleness and care demanded of the successful midwife.

For as a midwife Elizabeth Brownrigg was singularly successful. One must remember the age. Midwives with only a smattering of medical knowledge and slight understanding of the principles of hygiene were unknown in the middle of the eighteenth century. As often as not the child died or was maimed through ignorant handling, while the crudity of the attention and the complete lack of regard for the sanitary conditions as likely as not resulted in the mother contracting some horrible disease. Child-bearing in those days was a terrible travail, fraught with tears and despair and an agony of human suffering that to-day is almost unimaginable. In all conscience, a strange trade for a woman of Elizabeth Brownrigg's nature to choose, but, curiously enough, she soon earned (and presumably deserved) a name as a successful practitioner. Women summoned her who hoped to have their children live.

However, with the decline of the family's means, Elizabeth Brownrigg turned to her craft as a source of supplying a fair portion of the Brownriggs' income. In 1765 she applied to the overseers of the neighbouring parish of St. Dunstan's-in-the-West for the post of midwife to the poor women in the parish workhouse. She was appointed, and seems to have given the parish officers every satisfaction. Shortly after, in the same year, she was advertising that she was prepared to receive private patients. Her reputation stood her in good stead, and the number of applications she received necessitated her securing some help in her work. However, she was not prepared to pay the expense of keeping

servants, and eventually hit upon the idea of making an application to the officers of the Precinct of Whitefriars and of the Foundling Hospital for girls who should be sent to her as apprentices in the duty of managing a household. The proposal was welcomed by the officers of both institutions, and a girl named Mary Mitchell was sent to her from the Whitefriars precinct and bound as her apprentice, while Mary Jones, an inmate of the Foundling Hospital, was likewise placed with her as an apprentice.

Remembering the institutions from which the girls had come, and the period, one can hardly expect either girl to have been a model of feminine deportment and grace; but the probabilities are that the officers took good care to select the best of the material they had at their disposal. So we may safely assume, in the circumstances, that neither Mary Mitchell nor Mary Jones was worse or any more aggravating than the average girl of their class and upbringing. It appears that at first their mistress showed them quite a deal of consideration, and was perfectly willing to make their tasks as light and pleasant as she could. But this state of affairs did not last for long. The two unfortunates had barely grown to know their good luck before a swift and terrible change became noticeable in the woman they had to serve. They were now reprimanded for the most trivial offences, and anything likely to cause the serious displeasure of Elizabeth Brownrigg was rewarded with bodily chastisement. In a very little while the gratitude of the two apprentices at having been taken out of their humdrum lives was turned to a living dread of annoying their mistress.

The first girl to suffer from this new attitude on the

part of the mistress appears to have been Mary Jones, and for some reason this girl in particular was made a special recipient of the woman's wrath. A customary punishment this girl received at the hands of her mistress was to be tied down across two chairs in the dingy kitchen, and, with her back bared, whipped until her tormentor was forced to desist from sheer exhaustion. A bucket of cold water was then thrown over the body of the poor creature, or else her head was thrust into the bucket, as a summary means of reviving her, and she was sent back to her room with no further attention than a muttered imprecation and a threat of beatings to follow.

The two girls were helpless. Pleading with the implacable tyrant who ordered their lives brought forth only jeers and cuffs, and the remainder of the family seemed determined not to run in any way counter to the wishes of the mistress of the household. Indeed, it is rather a matter to remark upon that none of the Brownrigg family should have opposed the brutality exercised by the mother. One can only suppose that Elizabeth Brownrigg was the real wearer of the trousers; that it was she who ruled the roost and told the others what to do. Quite possibly her husband remonstrated with her at first, but, his interference merely serving to turn his wife's vicious attentions upon himself for a spell, he soon left her to indulge her newly found passion for cruelty as she willed. On the other hand, it is a matter for comment that the eldest son of the family showed definite signs of approving his mother's terrible treatment of her apprentices, and upon more than one occasion he is known to have aided her in some particularly gruesome and savage demonstration of brutality.

At this point I may be excused if I digress so far from

my subject as to explain why, in my category of "queens of crime," I have chosen Elizabeth Brownrigg in preference to Sarah Metyard. My reason, primarily, is that Mrs. Brownrigg undoubtedly provided the Metyards with a terrible example and an even more terrible inspiration. The Metyards lived in London, in Bruton Street, Hanover Square; the mother was the greater villainess of the two, without doubt; they maltreated and tortured their apprentices in a fiendish manner (according to individual opinion less harshly or more horribly than did Mrs. Brownrigg); and, further, they were executed within a year of Mrs. Brownrigg's hanging. The similarity between the two cases is at once apparent; but it must be conceded that Mrs. Brownrigg was the originator, Mrs. Metyard the imitator. To this extent *is Elizabeth* Brownrigg, in my opinion, the greater criminal of the two. Again, whereas in the case of Sarah Metyard one could argue—from accounts of people who knew her (for example, Mr. Rooker, the "perfumed old tea-dog")—*at least a measure of insanity*, in that of Mrs. Brownrigg no such doubt could be entertained. Whatever horror she devised, to whatever extent her passion for brutal expression swept her, she was at every moment completely aware of her purpose. She was a sadist; she revelled in the rites and ritual of her cult; but she was perfectly sane—a woman clever and intelligent enough to alleviate the suffering of one section of the community while, in some perverted sense of compensation, inflicting a barbarous and fanatical hurt upon two of her own sex who might reasonably expect from her some show of kindness and consideration. Mrs. Brownrigg was a criminal who found encouragement in her wrongdoings and inspiration

in the degree of her own excesses : only a forceful interference could have stayed her hand, as the sequel shows. Further, she was shrewd, had a plausible story ever ready to pour into the ears of the curious ; she dominated and controlled her family, even forced them to abet her ; and, lastly, when the eloquence of that celebrated Newgate missionary, Silas Told, strove with her obdurateness and succeeded in wringing a confession from her, and in securing an acknowledgment of the justice of the end to be meted out to her, even then she could supply no other motive for her crimes than an intense desire to harm the girls placed in her charge.

But to return to Mary Jones. With the increasing occurrence of the harsh treatment she received the girl decided to run away at the first opportunity. However, it was extremely unlikely that a chance would present itself during the daytime. The mistress invariably kept a close watch upon the girls ; either she or some other member of the family (generally, in these cases, the eldest son) would be with the girls, superintending their work, and their every minute from the time of their rising, soon after daylight, until they threw themselves, too weary and discouraged to sleep, upon their straw mattresses at night could be accounted for. However, it chanced that the door of the room in which Mary Jones slept opened off the main passage leading from the kitchen to the front door. Each night the girl kept jealous watch on the lock of the street door, but night after night she saw the door secured and the heavy key removed from the lock. Then came a night when the key was turned, but not removed from the lock. For hours that night the girl sat up in the darkness of her room, listening for sounds of any of the

family stirring. At last, when quietness had settled on the house, she crept from her room and stole to the front door. A few minutes later she was out in the street inquiring her way to the Foundling Hospital.

Her case came before the Governors, who instructed a surgeon to examine her. The latter found her wounds to be of a grievous character: festering sores, long untended and repeatedly broken, covered one part of her head, her shoulders, and disfigured several other parts of her body. Accordingly the Governors instructed their solicitor, a Mr. Plumtree, to send a note to James Brownrigg demanding a full explanation of the girl's condition, and threatening prosecution if he did not comply.

Presumably the arrival of this note caused no little fluttering in the Brownrigg cote, and doubtless it was Elizabeth Brownrigg herself who carefully gauged the probable issues of the case and advised her husband to hold his hand. However that may be, the Governors received no explanation from James Brownrigg, and, after considering the case at a later time, when their first indignations had burned out and they had had opportunity to ponder the consequences of a lawsuit, they decided to let the matter drop without any undue fuss or fuming. When the girl's wounds were healed a successful application was made to the Chamberlain of London, and she was discharged from the hospital. What became of her is not known. Her connexion with the Brownrigg case ends with her leaving the Foundling Hospital gates, most probably to enter the household of some merchant's wife, whom we trust was more kindly disposed towards the unfortunate girl than her previous mistress had been.

The startling exit of Mary Jones from the Brownrigg

ménage, however, had not solved the problem of the other girl apprentice, Mary Mitchell. This unfortunate wretch remained at the mercy of her infuriated mistress for above a year. Shortly after Mary Jones had gone the girl discovered that her mistress's temper was growing even shorter and quicker than it had been. The horrible and degrading punishments that had been the lot of the other girl were now reserved for her. Her life became one round of perpetual misery. Dressed in filthy rags, forced to spend long hours in manual toil, and given food that was little better than kitchen scourings, the while incessantly beaten and mocked and railed at by turn, the girl's health dwindled, and the more desperate grew her plight the more bruised became her spirit. Only once, driven to the point where despair supplies its own mad courage, did she attempt escape; but she had barely proceeded a few yards from the front door when she ran into one of the Brownriggs, who promptly arrested her flight. What price she paid for this venture of despair must be left to one's imagination.

However, shortly after this episode Mrs. Brownrigg again applied to the Precinct of Whitefriars for another girl apprentice, and the officers, having heard nothing of the case of the girl from the Foundling Hospital, obligingly sent the poor creature the story of whose miseries later caused the entire metropolis to shudder. This girl was Mary Clifford, who, for some reason entirely unexplained, at once aroused in her mistress a feeling of intense antagonism that blazed into a relentless hatred. All that was most bestial and cruellest in Elizabeth Brownrigg's warped nature rose to the surface when she turned her hand against this girl. As far as is known the girl was neither beautiful nor coquettish, and it is

very much to be doubted whether twenty years as the husband of Elizabeth Brownrigg had left anything of the cavalier in James Brownrigg, a man dependent upon the income provided by his wife. So jealousy cannot be entertained as a motive for the mistress's hatred. Sheer delight in hurting a person peculiarly sensitive to ill-treatment, in bludgeoning a spirit both frail and timid, alone can explain the terrible lust that came to possess Elizabeth Brownrigg during the time Mary Clifford was in her household.

It is on record that frequently Mary Clifford was tied by her wrists to a beam in the kitchen, and, stripped naked, beaten with a hearth-broom, a leather horsewhip, or a thin cane until she sagged senseless in her shackles. There is an old print in existence which vividly portrays some such scene as must have occurred several times in the course of a single week. On the bound girl's face is a look of stark terror; her legs are drawn under her in a vain effort to relieve the agony shooting through her arms. Behind her, a thorny broom raised to strike, stands Elizabeth Brownrigg, a-tiptoe in her eagerness to lend every ounce of strength to the intended blow; and imprinted on her face is a look of cunning cruelty mixed with a horrible leering expression of satisfaction at the results she is obtaining.

"And the poor girl," continues one chronicler, "having a natural infirmity, her mistress would not permit her to lie in a bed, but placed her on a mat in a coalhole that was remarkably cold. After some time, however, a sack and a quantity of straw formed her bed, instead of the mat; but during her confinement in this wretched situation she had nothing to subsist on but bread and water; and her covering, during the night,

consisted only of her own clothes, so that she sometimes lay perished with cold.

"On a particular occasion, when she was almost starving with hunger, she broke open a cupboard in search of food, but found it empty ; and on another day, being parched with thirst, she tore down some boards in order to procure a draught of water. These acts of what were deemed daring atrocity by her inhuman mistress immediately pointed her out as a proper mark for the most rigorous treatment; and, having been stripped to the skin, she was kept naked the whole day, and repeatedly beaten with the butt-end of a whip. In the course of this barbarous conduct Mrs. Brownrigg fastened a jack-chain round her neck so tight as almost to strangle her, and confined her by its means to the yard door, in order to prevent her escape, in case of her mistress' strength reviving, so as to enable her to renew the severities which she was inflicting on her ; and a day having passed in the exercise of these most atrocious cruelties, the miserable girl was remanded to her cell, her hands being tied behind her, and the chain being still round her neck, to be ready for a renewal of the cruelties on the following day. Determined then upon pursuing the wretched girl still further, Mrs. Brownrigg tied her hands together with a cord, and, fixing a rope to her wrists, she drew her up to a water-pipe, which ran across the kitchen ceiling, and commenced a most unmerciful castigation, but the pipe giving way in the midst of it she caused her husband to fix a hook in the beam, and then again hoisting up her miserable victim, she horsewhipped her until she was weary, the blood flowing at nearly every stroke. Nor was Mrs. Brownrigg the only tormentor of this wretched being, for her elder

son having one day ordered her to put up a half-tester bedstead, her strength was so far gone that she was unable to obey him, on which he whipped her until she sank insensible under the lash."

This terrible picture sufficiently indicates the three factors contributing most to the fearful conditions existing in the Brownrigg home: that Mrs. Brownrigg herself was obsessed with a brutish lust to inflict pain and a desire to see others suffering, that Brownrigg, however he may have squirmed inwardly, was too much the tool of his wife to take any steps to control her fiendish outbursts, and, lastly, that the mother's horrible example was stimulating all the degenerate qualities of the eldest son. And then one remembers that this same brutish woman, after wearying at her inhuman sport (for it was nothing else), would straightway turn her attention to some frightened, pale-faced young wife labouring with the pains of her first-born. The hand that had grasped the stock of a horsewhip, and the arm that still ached from the blows delivered upon the bleeding back of a fainting girl, sought to bring comfort and ease to another fragile body racked with pain. What irony! One can believe the woman enjoyed its contemplation. What secret satisfaction did she wring from the terrible contrast that was her life? The cries of newly born children must have echoed in her ears alternatively with the groans of her lacerated victim; her waking hours being filled with a threnody of anguish. Yet as the weeks passed there came no abatement of her horrid lust; almost it seemed as though she grew jealous lest her victim should become inured to pain. She contrived new and more fiendish means of breaking the girl's bruised spirit, and the hours of

suffering grew longer; the sorely battered body refused to heal.

"At length the unhappy girl," we are told, "being unable any longer to bear these unheard-of cruelties, complained to a French lady who lodged in the house, and entreated her interference to procure some remission of the frightful barbarities which had been practised upon her. The good-natured foreigner appealed to Mrs. Brownrigg, showing to her the inhumanity of her behaviour; but the only effect produced was a volley of abuse levelled at the person who interposed, and an attempt on the part of the monster to cut out the tongue of her apprentice with a pair of scissors, in the course of which she wounded her in two places."

Small wonder the wretched girl gave up all hope of release after this. Only one release was possible—the one she ultimately found in the quiet of a ward of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Yet—the irony continues! —without the death of this poor girl the law would have been powerless to inflict upon Elizabeth Brownrigg a punishment fitted to her crime.

In July of this same year, 1767, Mary Clifford's stepmother came to London. The occasion was probably her summer holiday, which she thought to enjoy partly in the young girl's company. Most likely, being a countrywoman, she wanted Mary to tell her what was best to see and how to go to see it; and of course there were all the little titbits of gossip that she had been saving up for weeks. Accordingly Mrs. Clifford inquired of the parish officers with whom the girl had been left where she was now placed, and was directed to Mrs. Brownrigg's house. The good woman may be excused any alarm at the thought of her stepdaughter in the

household of a professional midwife. Morality in those days was slack; and slackest of all in houses where girls from the parish workhouse were employed. But to be sent to the home of a midwife! As far as one can learn Mrs. Clifford was genuinely attached to her step-child. One can imagine her arriving at the Brownrigg house with an anxious face and rapping rather too loudly at the door—at any rate, loud enough to cause Mrs. Brownrigg to peep through the curtains at the visitor before hurrying to the door. And Elizabeth Brownrigg, being anything but a fool, and noting the country style of the caller's clothes and bonnet, must have guessed who she was at the first glance. Doubtless she received a mild shock, though, for a relative of Mary Clifford was the last person she wished to see. She sent her husband to the door, and his instructions were explicit. At no cost was the woman to be allowed in. Brownrigg, at the best of times a faintheart, must have offered a lame excuse when Mrs. Clifford asked to see her stepdaughter, and the good woman, surprised, her alarm growing at this stony reception, quite probably raised her voice louder than she was aware. She was prepared to argue; her holiday plans were not to be spoiled for the sake of a little effort, and, besides, she wanted reassuring. But she received no reassurances from the gruff-mannered plumber, who closed the interview by slamming the door in her face.

However, Mrs. Clifford's loud expostulations had brought someone else on the scene. Mrs. Deacon, the wife of a baker who lived next door to the Brownriggs, opened her front door and inquired if there was anything she could do to help. Mrs. Clifford explained who she was and why she had paid her call in

Fleur-de-Luce Court. At that Mrs. Deacon looked at the other woman in a mysterious manner and beckoned her to come closer. There was something, she said, that she thought she ought to tell her. Of course, it was none of her business, and the Brownriggs had never been very sociable or neighbourly, but it was certainly a strange thing that both she and her husband had repeatedly of late heard deep groaning on the other side of the wall that separated the two houses. Of course, she knew nothing for certain; the Brownriggs, as a family, were very close about their own concerns, and told nobody anything; but she strongly suspected that the two apprentices were treated very harshly. The girls were never seen about; they never sang at their work; and, of course, there was the affair that happened when Mary Mitchell ran away.

Mrs. Clifford was invited in, and the two women discussed at length the probable secret of the Brownrigg *ménage*. Deacon, on returning home, was told their fears, and he agreed that something ought to be done. The Brownriggs' behaviour, he considered, was something more than suspicious. But, naturally, one would have to go to work carefully to find out the truth, and one would have to be sure of one's facts. The law didn't trouble too much about poorhouse apprentices, but making false allegations against one's neighbour was another matter. He agreed to keep watch upon the Brownriggs' house, and if he saw anything that gave him grounds for alarm he would send for Mrs. Clifford, who gave him her address for the time she was staying in London. The poor woman left Fleur-de-Luce Court to spend the rest of her holiday in anxious waiting.

It is a curious fact that circumstances often combine

the chance to buy a pig cheaply. He brought the animal home, and, not having a sty, put it "into a covered yard, having a skylight." Probably he put it into some small outhouse or low-roofed scullery. However, the pig's habits soon necessitated the removing of a window in the shed. This proved the undoing of the Brownriggs. Deacon's maid-of-all-work, an inquisitive girl to whom the advent of the pig was something of a novelty, took to watching the creature wallowing in its bed of straw; and one day she was horrified to see there, lying full length in the pig's filthy bed, not the hog itself, but the naked body of a girl. She lay motionless, her torn back smeared with blood and pig mire. It was Mary Clifford.

The maid ran to the mistress with the news of what she had seen, and Mrs. Deacon immediately called in some neighbours and led them into her garden. Standing on the roof of the Deacons' scullery, one or two men tried to rouse the girl in the sty by dropping pieces of dirt on her. But she did not stir; she had been beaten to unconsciousness.

Mrs. Deacon then sent to Mrs. Clifford, and the step-mother hurried to the house of a Mr. Grundy, one of the overseers of St. Dunstan's, and into that gentleman's shocked ears poured out the whole ghastly tale. Mr. Grundy at once set out and called upon his fellow over-seers, and the party made their way to Fleur-de-Luce Court. Knocking at the door of the Brownriggs' house, they were met by Brownrigg himself, who, after a quick

glance at their faces, demanded their business. Mr. Grundy asked to see Mary Clifford, but Brownrigg swore that she was not in his house, but showed himself willing enough to produce the other apprentice, Mary Mitchell.

The overseers, however, were not deceived with such bluff. Mr. Grundy went in search of a constable, and then demanded that the house be examined. But Brownrigg had wasted no time. During Mr. Grundy's absence he had taken the unconscious girl out of the pigsty and hidden her in a part of the house where it was unlikely that she would be found. Now that the truth seemed about to come out he was mortally afraid. He had to let the constable and the overseers enter when they returned, and with ill-grace stood by while they searched his rooms. But for the moment he had fooled them. They could not find the girl. The overseers, their eyes opened by what they had just seen, were not taking any further chances. The case had suddenly assumed a startling importance. There would have to be a public inquiry, and it would not do for them to appear as laggards in the discharge of their duties. Ignoring Brownrigg's protest, they left, taking Mary Mitchell with them.

At the workhouse the girl was found to be in a bad state of health; her "body was covered with ulcerated sores; and on taking off her leathern bodice, it stuck so fast to her wounds that she shrieked with pain." She had a terrible tale to unfold. Her listeners heard her in silence. It was obvious now that there was no chance of avoiding a great scandal. The girl's story would fire the town. Nothing like it had been heard for years.

The girl gave one particularly memorable account

of what had happened to her fellow-apprentice a few days before, on the 13th. Their inhuman mistress had taken Mary Clifford into the kitchen, and, after stripping her naked and tying her hands above her head to a staple, had commenced beating her unmercifully, although at the time the girl's head and shoulders were covered with sores and her body, arms, and thighs with still-open wounds. After thrashing the girl until her back was raw from shoulders to buttocks Elizabeth Brownrigg untied her and ordered her to wash herself in a bucket of ice-cold water. Even then the woman's fury mastered her, and she struck the girl repeatedly while washing. She was immediately afterwards tied up again, and the whole horrid process repeated five times that day. Mary Mitchell constituted the terrified audience to this disgusting and nauseating outrage.

One by one the overseers plied the unfortunate girl with questions, and piece by piece the terrible history was unfolded. Some of the incidents the girl related are too gruesome and vile to print, almost beyond credence. Then Mr. Grundy returned to the happenings of that same day, and the girl admitted that shortly before the overseers had returned she had met her fellow-apprentice groping up the stairs in a half-fainting condition. She was sure that Mary Clifford was still in the house in Fleur-de-Luce Court, and that Brownrigg had hidden her.

Having learned this much the overseers delayed no longer, but returned once more to the Brownriggs' house, where they were met by a man desperately afraid and apprehensive. However, Brownrigg clung to his former statement, that the girl was no longer in his house, and denied any knowledge of her whereabouts. Mr.

Grundy was not to be put off; he insisted that Brownrigg produce the girl. Then Brownrigg, knowing full well that he was putting up a losing fight, sent for a solicitor and tried to brave the affair out with the best face he could. His solicitor tried hard to intimidate Mr. Grundy, but the overseer repeated that if the girl was not produced he would take the case to court. This firmness on the overseer's part decided the solicitor. He advised Brownrigg in his own interests to hold back no longer. If the case came up in court no bail would be allowed on such a grave charge. Brownrigg, now at his wits' ends and thoroughly cowed, promised to release the girl providing he was left his liberty. Anxious to save time, Mr. Grundy compromised. Brownrigg then led them into the dining-room, and pointed to a small cupboard almost hidden under a "beaufet." That was where he had imprisoned Mary Clifford.

"Words cannot adequately describe," we are told, "the condition of misery in which the unfortunate girl was found to be on her being examined. Medical assistance was immediately obtained, and she was pronounced to be in considerable danger." So dangerous was her condition, in fact, that Brownrigg was shortly after arrested and taken to the Wood Street Compter. His wife and eldest son, returning home after the constable and his charge had left, gathered together what articles of value they could lay their hands upon and abruptly left the neighbourhood. Upon this being learned by the authorities Brownrigg was taken before the sitting alderman, Mr. Alderman Crossby, and was committed for trial upon the charge of being guilty of violent assaults.

But Mary Clifford was dying. No human aid could

now assuage her suffering. Her body was "one continual ulcer, ready to mortify." The poor girl died in St. Bartholomew's Hospital a few days later, and at the coroner's inquest which was held shortly after a verdict of wilful murder was brought against the Brownriggs and their eldest son.

A hue and cry was now raised for the apprehension of the mother and son. Descriptions of them were issued by the authorities, and all London, aghast at the terrible tragedy that had been enacted, sought to discover the wanted persons. But Elizabeth Brownrigg and her son had crossed the river and taken lodgings in the suburb of Wandsworth, where they felt comparatively safe.[1] However, the man in whose house they had taken rooms, a chandler by the name of Dunbar, was a studious reader of the news-sheets, and, as it chanced, was by nature curious. He was not averse to listening at doors, or making inquiries about his tenants' movements when they left his house. It was not long before this Paul Pry became suspicious that the middle-aged woman and the young man were not all they purported to be; and when one day he came across one of the descriptions of the missing Brownriggs he felt his suspicions justified. Without

[1] It is believed that after leaving Fleur-de-Luce Court Mrs. Brownrigg and her son made their way eastward to Rosemary Lane, in Whitechapel, better known as the Rag Fair, where they obtained disguises. The place is referred to in a note to Pope's *Dunciad* as "a place near the Tower of London where old clothes and frippery are sold." Thomas Pennant (1726-98), the antiquary, and a contemporary of Mrs. Brownrigg's, has left the following satirical sketch of the old Rag Fair: "The articles of commerce by no means belie the name. There is no expressing the poverty of the goods, nor yet their cheapness. A distinguished merchant, engaged with a purchaser, observing me looking on him with great attention, called out to me as his customer was going off with his bargain to observe that man, 'for,' says he, 'I have actually clothed him for fourteenpence.'" One of the most popular features of the Rag Fair was the sack of old wigs, where purchasers were allowed to "dip" for a penny.

more ado he informed the authorities, and a few hours later Mrs. Brownrigg and her son were arrested. The three Brownriggs were indicted at the next Sessions.

The trial came on at the Old Bailey, and during the eleven hours of its duration such evidence was brought forward as made the entire city shudder. The case created a *furore*. Outside the court, in Newgate Street, the mob hooted and howled, and were barely restrained from forcing their way inside. When the jury returned Mrs. Brownrigg was the only one of the three convicted of murder; her husband and son were found guilty of grave misdemeanour and were detained for a later trial on that charge. They were subsequently sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Newgate.

The time remaining before her execution was spent by the doomed woman in quiet meditation in her cell; "and being attended by the ordinary of the jail," we are told, "she confessed to him the enormity of her guilt, and that the punishment which awaited her was a just one."

The change in her was sudden. From a virtual virago, obsessed with inhuman instincts and a savage hatred of her sex, she became a meek creature of few words, and those only pious prayers. When visited by her husband and son shortly before the journey to Tyburn she exhibited a genuine affection for both. The parting "appeared to call up all those better feelings of the heart in the breast of this wretched woman, which must have lain dormant during the whole course of the maltreatment to which she subjected her wretched apprentices."

Silas Told[1] visited her and offered her spiritual consolation. He tells us that on the day of her death she was in a heavenly state of mind. To Told we are indebted for a graphic account of Mrs. Brownrigg's reception at the hands of the mob as she was led forth to the Tyburn gallows. No stories or reports of the woman's later piousness could appease the smouldering rage of the London mob; and on the day of Mrs. Brownrigg's execution the mob took a holiday. For weeks rumours and strange fictions had been passed from mouth to mouth. Fearful stories of the doings of the midwife ogress were current, and the mob wanted the chance of seeing this jackal in human guise for themselves. They wanted to express their loathing, and, in their own inimitable way, damn her at the gallows' foot.

"The time came when Mrs. Brownrigg was ordered into the cart," says Told, "when the Reverend Mr. James and myself stationed ourselves on each side of her, Mr. James on the right hand, and myself on the left. When we had fixed ourselves I perceived that the whole powers of darkness were ready to give her a reception. Beckoning to the multitude, I desired them to pray for her, at which they were rather silent, until the cart began to move. Then they triumphed over her with three huzzas; this was followed by a combination of hellish curses. When we had passed through the gate carts

[1] Silas Told was a celebrated Wesleyan prison missionary. It is said that in 1744 he was deeply touched by Wesley's preaching on the text "I was sick and in prison and ye visited me not" (Matthew xxv, 43). As a direct result of Wesley's sermon Told began to exert himself among the prisoners at Newgate. He has left a graphic forthright account of his work for the prisoners' betterment and spiritual grace. It is noteworthy that Told was vigorously opposed at first by the ordinary of the prison, but his zeal persisted and gradually he overcame all the obstacles put in the way of his progress in the life he had chosen. Along the grim road to Tyburn his was a familiar figure. He accompanied many notorious highwaymen and thieves on their last journey in this world.

were placed on each side of the street, filled principally with women. Here I may say, with the greatest truth, nothing could have equalled them but the damned spirits let loose from the infernal pit, and, to be brief, this was the spirit of the wicked multitude entirely to the place of execution. . . . Then some of the common cries from the thoughtless concourse, accompanied with dreadful imprecations, were, 'Pull her hat off! Pull off her hat! That we may see the b——'s face!'"

One can gather from the foregoing how little Told liked the mob of the day; but, for all that, his description of the reception Mrs. Brownrigg received at their hands indicates sufficiently how her fearful crimes had roused the ordinary citizen's indignation. At the gallows she made a pitiful attempt to stem the crowd's raucous outcry. The doleful ringing of St. Sepulchre's bell as she passed along Holborn must have been sweet music in her ears compared with the shouts of hate which greeted her exit from life. "Before the termination of her existence she appeared to be fully sensible of the awful situation in which she stood, and prayed the ordinary to acquaint the people that she confessed her crime and acknowledged the justice of her sentence."

And so at Tyburn's grim field, on September 14, 1767, Elizabeth Brownrigg, whose name was to live in hated memory, expiated her fiendish and callous crime.

Shortly after the last breath had left her body the corpse was cut down and conveyed in a hackney-coach to Surgeons' Hall, where it was dissected and the skeleton hung up, "that the heinousness of her cruelty might make the more lasting impression on the minds of the spectators." A futile hope, as events proved (and as stated

earlier), for ten months later the Metyards, mother and daughter, were executed at Tyburn for a similar offence (July 19, 1768), and their skeletons, likewise, were exhibited at Surgeons' Hall, Old Bailey.

Perhaps one of the chief causes that have contributed towards the dark immortality with which Mrs. Brownrigg has been shrouded is the contribution to the *Anti-Jacobin* referred to on page 73, and which is generally attributed to Canning. Certainly Canning did not deny the authorship of the lines. They are a parody on the lines beginning:

> For thirty years secluded from mankind
> Here Marten lingered

written by the young Southey on the cell in Chepstow Castle where the regicide Henry Marten was confined. Canning's parody is as follows:

INSCRIPTION

FOR THE DOOR OF THE CELL IN NEWGATE WHERE MRS. BROWNRIGG THE PRENTICECIDE WAS CONFINED PREVIOUS TO HER EXECUTION

> For one long term, or e'er her trial came,
> Here Brownrigg lingered. Often have these cells
> Echoed her blasphemies, as with shrill voice
> She screamed for fresh Geneva. Not to her
> Did the blithe fields of Tothill, or thy street,
> St. Giles, its fair varieties expand;
> Till at the last, in slow-drawn cart, she went
> To execution. Dost thou ask her crime?
> She whipp'd two female prentices to death,
> And hid them in the coalhole. For her mind
> Shaped strictest plans of discipline. Sage schemes!
> Such as Lycurgus taught, when at the shrine
> Of the Orthyan Goddess[1] he bade flog

[1] Diana.

> The little Spartans : such as erst chastised
> Our Milton, when at college. For this act
> Did Brownrigg swing. Harsh laws ! But time shall come
> When France shall reign, and laws be all repeal'd ![1]

Canning, as can be seen, was not concerned greatly with detail. Mrs. Brownrigg, if we are to believe reliable contemporary authorities, did not blaspheme during the two days which elapsed between Mr. Justice Hewitt's passing sentence on her and the ride to Tyburn (she was tried and convicted on September 12); she did not whip two apprentices to death—what eventually became of Mary Mitchell is not known; and she did not hide the bodies in a coalhole—she did not hide any *body*: it was Brownrigg who hid Mary Clifford. However, the poem lost none of its devastating effect on account of these discrepancies.

[1] To appreciate the point of this last line it must be remembered that the object of the *Anti-Jacobin* (1797-98) was to ridicule the policy of the Whig party (Southey was an advanced Whig, a Radical), and so counteract the strong feeling of unrest prevalent in England at the time of the French Revolution.

IV

GESINA GOTTFRIED

The Female Bluebeard of Germany

GESINA GOTTFRIED

HAD Gesina Gottfried been born three hundred years sooner, and three hundred miles south of the place where she first saw the light of day, she would have been born in her right century and in her right city. Milan in the time of the Sforzas would have proved—if one can use the term—the true spiritual home of this young woman with the pretty face and flinty heart. Or perhaps, travelling yet another three hundred miles south—at the same period, however—Rome in the heyday of Cesare Borgia would have found Gesina Gottfried as fully happy as it was in her nature to be. Clandestine lovers, purses of gold, domino masks, quick wrists and quicker rapier thrusts, moonlight assignations by palace gates, large cumbersome goblets filled with acid-tasting wine, and strange white powders with the strangest power of stealing life : in such a setting Gesina Gottfried would have become world-famous for her crimes and passions. She and Lucrezia Borgia might have shared twin thrones—despite strong controversy among historians !—as the most regal murderesses in Renaissance Italy, that age of regal murder.

But she was not born towards the end of the fifteenth century. In fact, it is not definitely known when she was born, except that it was some time during the last years of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, she was a German by birth, not an Italian ; and she came of humble

parentage, not of some blood-sodden *condottiere* and his professional courtesan.

However, brought into a world of far chillier realities than that of the Sforza palace at Milan, a world devoid of all the glamour and hatred and passion and mystery and voluptuousness that made up a courtier's life in the time when Michelangelo was proving that he was the last, and possibly the greatest, of the Italian sculptors, Gesina, uneducated, hating her life for its very drabness, her mind preyed upon by strange thoughts of life and death, soon determined to give expression to that inmost nature of hers, which craved for the subtle excitement of dealing death secretly.

Her mind was essentially that of a criminal. The sufferings of others did not affect or distress her. She was greedy and avaricious. When she killed her victim died in agony. But she did not kill unless she stood to gain considerably by the death. She neither wasted her efforts, nor yet dallied when her mind was made up. Even on the day of her execution she remained impervious to the terrible significance of her fate; her only worry on that occasion was lest, after her death, the crowd assembled to witness it should learn that she had had false teeth!

She was blessed—or cursed—with good looks, or, rather, with what went for good looks in those days. Certainly she had an attractive figure, truly feminine in line, and the full battery of her blue eyes was counted to weaken the forces of any masculine fortress. Before she was fifteen she was a past-mistress in the art of turning young men's heads—and keeping them turned. But even in those early years her shrewd brain was scheming; although still a child she was bent upon finding a man

of means, who would support her in luxury and fill her life with colour and gaiety.

She thought she had found him when she was about seventeen. Among a host of admirers was a man named Mittenberg, who was reputed to be a smart business man and to have quite a fortune. Mittenberg made no secret of his admiration for the girl with the pretty dimples and smart figure. He openly boasted of how he would treat her were she his wife. The best in the land would not be too good for her. The prettiest frocks would be only her due. Gesina gave ear to Mittenberg's rhapsodies. The prospect seemed fair enough; and she made up her mind to become Frau Mittenberg and enjoy her husband's wealth.

Doubtless she dazzled her parents with the brilliance of the prospect, for when Mittenberg, as he thought, seized his opportunity they offered no objection to his marriage with their daughter.

In due course Gesina had her way, and became Frau Mittenberg. It was an empty victory she had achieved, however, for Mittenberg, as it soon was proved, far from being a man of means and able to provide his wife with a life of luxury and ease, was heavily in debt. What was more, his creditors were pressing him hard.

The discovery of the true state of her husband's finances was a bitter blow to Gesina's pride. All that was most vicious in her nature was stirred at thought of how she had been tricked by lies and soft words and promises. As day after day passed, and Mittenberg became moodier under the weight of his cares, she came to hate the very sight of him. Quarrels arose between them, and then, well-nigh in despair, Mittenberg took to drinking heavily.

For Gesina the darkest hour was when, in a drunken fury one day, he struck her to the floor senseless.

After that her every thought was turned against the man whom she now looked upon as having ruined her life. She was the mother of two children; but they were Mittenberg's children, and because of their father she hated them and treated them with inhuman harshness. She rarely fed them properly, and always when the mood possessed her—which was frequently—thrashed them unmercifully. Stripping them of every particle of clothing, she would beat the trembling and fearful little bodies with a stout stick, and then push the poor mites out into the backyard, where, untended and unclothed, they were left to spend the rest of the day as best they might, let the weather be what it would.

She was utterly devoid of maternal feeling. Disappointment in her marriage had dried up any slender stream of motherly instinct in her shallow nature. Her mind was now given solely to obtaining from others what she had failed to receive from her husband—the thrill of romance and passion.

During these years she had many secret lovers. Her charms were guarded jealously. No hard work must soil the white smoothness of her small, dainty-looking hands. The pretty nails tipping the ends of her slender fingers must not be scarred with menial labours. *Chic* and new clothes were essential for the appeasement of her vanity. She must have shapely turned and smart shoes to set off the smallness of her feet and the slimness of her ankles. Her hats must suit the oval pallidness of her face, and the deep violet blue of her eyes must be enhanced.

Small wonder men became enslaved to her charms,

which she took good care were neither too obvious nor too readily possessed. Her vanity was fed constantly, and her life gradually developed into one of farcical opposites: the drunken, callous-minded husband she hated and the two children she loathed; and the secret lovers, with their gifts and flattery and their ability to transport her into the world of which she had been cheated.

Then came her meeting with a young man named Gottfried. He, more than the others, was able to inflame her with a desire to live her life to its fullest. Gradually she found herself drifting violently in love with him. She was so far honest with herself—if not with others—as to accept this new situation and make the best of it. It was dangerous to meet Gottfried so often, but she quickly learned to enjoy the very danger she ran. More and more daring became her schemes for spending time with her lover. Longer and longer she wanted to be in his company. That he was the very antithesis of Mittenberg served to enhance his charm in her eyes. As time passed, and the love-spell lasted, she became enraged at the thought of her drunken husband's claim upon her. If only Mittenberg were dead things would be different—vastly different, she told herself.

She was toying with the greatest danger she had contemplated running. Could she rid herself of Mittenberg?

She spent days thinking over the problem, and the more she thought the more determined became her resolution to be free to live her life as she pleased with Gottfried. But try as she would she could think of no way that would at one and the same time satisfy her desire for revenge upon her husband and yet remove any suspicion from herself.

Chance provided her with the means she sought.

Visiting her mother one day, she saw her sprinkling a piece of cheese with a white powder. Later she observed the powdered cheese lying beside a small hole in the floor-boarding. Evidently the house was overrun with mice, and her mother intended poisoning the pest.

She questioned her mother regarding the poison. The latter laughed. She was going to pains, she explained, and expense too, to keep down the plague of mice. The poison was arsenic.

Gesina revealed a surprised interest. Was arsenic a deadly poison? Her mother treated the question as a joke, and, falling into what she thought was her daughter's humour, admitted that it would merely kill anything living within a very short while.

The young wife left her mother's house to brood over what she had been told. Poison! Yes, she had thought of poisons, but, due to her ignorance of them, had turned her mind to other and more ready means, but always without hitting upon the one she wanted, the one that would be safe, yet sure. Arsenic, her mother had said, worked quickly. Well, it could not work too quickly for her. Every day that passed left her hating Mittenberg with a greater intensity. Her life in his house was becoming more than a great physical trial; it was torturing her mentally. To be rid of him, to be clear of that dreary house whose atmosphere seemed to stifle her, not to be always running risks, scheming, snatching her few real pleasures in the hours when Mittenberg lay sprawled across the bed snoring in his drunken sleep! The very thoughts were torturing stabs at her pride.

Had she found the solution to her difficulty?

She sounded herself well, and was satisfied that she had the nerve to carry this thing through. There would be no remorse afterwards. Intuitively she realized that, and it gave her confidence. Rather did the thought of harming him afford her some secret satisfaction. She would be sacrificing him for her own gain; and she delighted in receiving sacrifices. They lulled that feeling of insufficiency that so often disturbed her; they made her feel she was not merely the chattel of a drunken sot who couldn't pay his way. All her lovers had made sacrifices for her. Sacrifice was the one thing she demanded of them all. They sacrificed their money, their happiness, even their self-respect to appease her innate greed for power and desire for the good things of life. She loved nothing better than to feel that some new lover had sacrificed his very self to her. The knowledge stimulated her craving for dominion over men.

She tried yet again to analyse her passionate longing for Gottfried. She wanted him. But did she really love him? *Could* she love him—or any man? She had no answer. Was it not sufficient that she desired to be Gottfried's wife? She wanted the man for himself; there was that in his eyes and in the power of his arms that for the time being sufficed her. But would she want him always? Would she tire of him? Would satiety leave her wishing to be rid of him?

The thought caused her to smile. At the moment it was Mittenberg she wished to be rid of. The smile passed; a frown took its place. Too much thought was not good; it warped her vivacity and destroyed the lure in her eyes. If she was to act at all she must act quickly.

She did. When next she visited her mother's home

she stole some of the white powder that was rapidly lessening the number of mice. On her return she mixed some of it in the beer she knew Mittenberg would drink with his evening meal.

That night when her husband munched his food she did not leave the room. As he quaffed thirstily at the tankard by his plate a genuine thrill ran through her shapely body. "Not many hours more! Not many hours more!" something seemed to sing inside her.

She bore his gruff unpleasantries meekly, and could even smile into his frowning, suspicious face. As he could force no rejoinder from her Mittenberg continued with his meal in heavy silence. He drank deep of the beer. It tasted bitter, but that would probably be due to thunder in the air. No sense in leaving good beer to spoil.

While Gesina busied herself with clearing the table Mittenberg was taken suddenly ill. Standing up, he clawed at his stomach, his heavy, boorish face twisted with pain. Soon he fell back into his chair, his face and neck damp with a cold, clammy sweat. He gasped for air, and then vomited, the effort seeming to tear at his very vitals. In the doorway of the room stood Gesina, a quiet smile curving the rich line of her lips.

No, there was no remorse! She had been right! He could not last much longer. Even as she watched, quietly triumphant, he shivered as with an ague. The chill of death was settling on him, robbing his limbs of their motion; his mutterings became less articulate. She glanced from the steaming vomit between Mittenberg's thick boots to the writhing lips, and the unfathomable Mona Lisa expression on her face changed to a sneer.

This was the fool who had tricked her with his lies

and deceit, who had tied her down to a life of drudgery in a mean home!

When she returned to the living-room after putting away the dishes and clearing the kitchen Mittenberg was dead.

No time was wasted over the burial. It was widely known that Mittenberg had been a debtor and a drunkard, and his demise was thought to be the result of his continued dissipation. Doubtless many a neighbouring husband whose delight in a foaming tankard was not sufficiently discreet was read a lesson over Mittenberg's death. Neighbouring wives were too jealous of the young widow's charm to miss pointing the moral.

Not that Gesina cared—until her parents revealed a strong dislike towards Gottfried. And Gottfried, strangely enough, informed her that he would not marry her without her parents' consent. When she pleaded with him he smiled, but remained resolute. It was for her, he said, to show her parents that he was not the worthless young hare-brain they thought him.

Gesina had doubts as to her powers of convincing her parents. Her father might prove more tractable than her mother, as far as her wishes were concerned, but he had never interfered with his wife's method of bringing up their child. Better if he had!

She approached them tearfully, but the artifice proved useless. Instead of being first denied, then consoled and petted, and finally given way to, she found that her mother had been brooding over her relations with Gottfried for some time, and was now glad to give vent to her spleen.

Every argument she put forward in the young man's favour was derided; but she did not give in readily.

Only when she saw that no matter what she said or did her mother would remain of the same determination—and likewise her father—did her annoyance change to anger. While still pleading in a sobbing voice dark thoughts of hate chased through her active mind. Had she risked so much—done so much—to be denied now? Never! Was she to be treated like a child, she who—bitter reflection!—had two children of her own? Was she to lose Gottfried and happiness because of an old couple's whim and selfish fancy?

She suddenly dried her tears and ceased her pleading. Something inside had hardened, steeling her. With a swift, sun-after-rain smile she acknowledged that they thought only of her welfare, and that perhaps, after all, Gottfried would not turn out to be the ideal husband she had thought he would. Yes, she saw that they were right—she ought to have known as much!—and would do her best to forget the young man. Certainly she would see him no more.

The result of this charming change of front was that the family, father, mother, and daughter, sat down to their next meal feeling that a weight had been lifted from their minds. However, the meal had been prepared by Gesina, who had shown herself anxious to save her mother needless running backwards and forwards.

It was a death-feast. Within a few hours of their sitting down to the meal cooked by their daughter both parents were dead.

And again Gesina felt no remorse. Living, she had looked upon her parents merely as a means towards an end; dead, she was certain of it. What, then, was there to be doleful about?

The deaths were officially reported to be the result

of natural causes, and the double burial proceeded without any hitch in Gesina's maturing plans. She did not wait long after the funeral before approaching Gottfried.

But again she met with disappointment. This time the objection came from Gottfried himself. Gesina was amazed when he told her that he felt he could not marry her while there were her two children by Mittenberg claiming her affections. She argued, pleaded, and cajoled; but in this matter Gottfried was firm. What he wished her to do with the children she did not know. She thought only of the fact that they were in her way, preventing her having Gottfried for herself. She always had hated them. Even now the cowed looks in their eyes brought back hateful memories of those days and nights in Mittenberg's house, of his drunken snatches of song and of the heavy sound of his lurching from one room to the next. And some tiny expression of fear on their young faces would, for some inexplicable reason, bring back vividly to her mind Mittenberg's horrible leers as he had watched her moving about the house.

But Mittenberg was gone; so too were her parents: all three sacrificed in her desire to become Gottfried's wife.

Small wonder that, filled with a new bitterness and a great feeling of disappointment, she made up her mind to rid herself of the children also. Then there would be no reason for Gottfried refusing to marry her!

She was blinding herself to the fact that Gottfried must already have become suspicious regarding the deaths of Mittenberg and her parents. What would be his reaction to her when he learned that her children also had died?

She did not think of that. One thought alone possessed her mind: Gottfried *should* be hers! Humanly it was possible—and she would make it so!

Within a few days of Gottfried's refusing to marry her on account of the children that one obstacle to what she fondly looked upon as true happiness was removed from her path for ever. The children, like their father and their grandparents, were poisoned with arsenic administered by their inhuman mother.

Gesina must have been born under a lucky star. Strange as it may seem, this rapid succession of deaths in her family, if it attracted comment—and it must have done—yet did not apparently arouse any suspicions of foul play. The children were thought to have died of some infectious disease, and a bitterly weeping mother followed the two tiny coffins to their last resting-place. Then, pitied by the entire neighbourhood, she returned home to be alone with her grief.

However, it was not long before she arranged to meet Gottfried again. When the two met she was not prepared for the change she found in him. There was a new nervousness in his manner towards her, and his eyes remained unsmiling. The pressure of his arm was more lax, and she noticed that frequently his attention would wander from what she was saying.

But she did not realize the truth. She was vaguely perturbed, yet would not challenge him outright. If it was some rival . . .

She must have smiled to herself at the thought. A strange sense of elation upheld her. She, Gesina Mittenberg, held in her hands the power of bestowing death upon those who were foolish enough to run counter to her wishes. There would be no rival who could

displace her in Gottfried's affections. She could not admit the possibility. Yet, could she be entirely sure of Gottfried?

It was the first doubt sown in her mind. But she was alarmed at how much it disturbed her. She glanced at him again. Still that fresh aloofness; still that annoying inattention to her bright chatter. She frowned. Point-blank she asked him when he would marry her; no longer were there the children. Some peculiar intuition had prompted her to put that question just when she did.

It took Gottfried unawares. For a moment he stammered about arrangement, finally ending up with a lame plea for time to think things over.

But the damage was done. Had he had the pluck to look in Gesina's usually violet eyes then he would have seen them black with rage. It was true! The exclamation rumbled through her mind like the approaching echo of yet distant thunder. It was true Gottfried no longer wanted her. Then the real truth flashed home.

He was afraid of her.

An unholy mirth possessed her all of a sudden. Gottfried watched her bobbing head and heard the wild laughter babbling from her lips with misgiving. She was strange; somehow her beauty had slipped from her, like some artificial covering. It was as though he saw her really for the first time, and what he saw appalled him: for he knew fear. This mistress he had taken to himself was no woman. She was some hideous being from an old folk-tale clothed in what men took to be an alluring tenderness. A veritable Lorelei siren, whose beckoning arms but waved one on to destruction.

From that night onward there was never a doubt in Gesina's mind as to what she intended to do. She had lost Gottfried in the very act of recovering him. Very well, so much the worse for Gottfried.

Systematically she began poisoning Gottfried. It was far from her intention to murder him in one fell swoop, as she had her children, parents, and husband. No, a special fate was reserved for Gottfried, the tardy lover: one of suffering, and one that should in the end prove lucrative to herself. She was wearied by the constant chaffing her long "engagement" to her lover evoked from her acquaintances. There was deadly method in the madness of this "woman scorned."

Gottfried became daily worse from agonizing pains in his stomach. Gesina had been careful. Very small had been the doses she had managed to sprinkle among his food, and, despite all he had suspected her of in the past, he could not bring himself to believe that he was suffering from anything Gesina had given him. Those others had each died suddenly. No, he must have contracted some disease.

But the pain did not ease. Gesina, her pretty face lit with a bright and cheery smile, leaned across his bed and smoothed his throbbing forehead with her cool smooth fingers. The ache above his eyes seemed to ebb under the magic of that caressing touch. He would smile up at her, and she would return his smile with a wealth of tenderness in her pitying gaze. Gottfried's former doubts receded. Gesina was loyal to him. She was nursing him, and he had no claim upon her. People would talk. Yes, it would get about, and there would be much head-wagging, and the gossips would start their tongues a-clacking to a great deal of idle purpose. He

must think of her a little. What was he was trying to think of? Something she had asked him to do . . .

Then the griping pain in his entrails would again seize him with ravaging force. All thought of Gesina and everything else would float from him.

It was not many days before Gottfried was too weak to argue with her. He was willing to agree to anything. She had told him of the people's murmuring about her being so often and so long in his room. If only she were his wife she could tend him as she really wanted to; he would soon become his old self again then.

Carefully, day after day, Gesina returned to her favourite theme, of what she could do for her patient were she his wife. At last, almost incapable of reasoning, and worn out with subtle arguments and striving to understand them, Gottfried agreed that they should be married.

Within twenty-four hours of his assenting to their marriage she was installed in his house as his wife—"until death doth them part." It had been an ironic bedside wedding, the groom hardly conscious of what was happening, so acute were his pains, and so scorching the fever that raged behind his eyes.

But now Gesina moved to bring to an end the play of which she was tiring. Every spark of her former affection for the man who was now her husband had been blown out in the cold breath of her disillusion—her second disillusion! Her husband must make his will, and then she would show him some mercy—enough to dispatch him within an hour or so!

The will was duly made—after all, it was not surprising that a husband in such a low state of health as Herr Gottfried should wish to make a will, incidentally leaving everything to the brave little wife who had

scarcely left his bedside during the entire period of his confinement. For several days the sufferer was allowed a respite. It would not have looked well for him to have died immediately after making the will. But a week had not passed after her husband's worldly wealth had in effect become hers before Gesina brought down a speedy curtain on a particularly agonized last act.

Miraculously, as it seems to us to-day, even this new death did not result in directing any suspicion towards her. Yet in a little over six months Gesina had poisoned six persons!

With the murder of Gottfried, however, Gesina had crossed her life's Rubicon. Whereas her other murders might be put down as the wanton expression of an unbalanced mind, this sixth murder left her changed, a woman from henceforth given to crime as the only life left open to her. All her sweets had turned to gall in her mouth. Disappointed, with no heart left to strive honestly, she was to seek what life would surrender to her cunning, hunt as the hunter hunts—prepared for a kill.

The five preceding murders had all been dictated by some grown desire. Morally deficient, a woman of strange mental and physical complexes, lacking a sense of proportion, and endowed with a nature essentially shallow and fickle, her deepest feelings were merely selfish cravings and sudden, sharp pangs of annoyance when some cherished object was denied her. She had killed her first husband in a mood half desiring revenge, half because his removal from her life left her free to order her life anew. Her murder of her second husband, however, was committed solely in a desire for revenge: he had failed her.

Henceforth she was to look upon life as an adventure, and a perilous one—for those who ventured with her!

A few weeks after Gottfried's burial saw her far afield in a large city searching for a "victim" of her newborn rapacity. She met him one night at some place of amusement. He is the "Herr X" in her life, for, apparently, his name is unknown. All that is known of him is that he was a prosperous merchant of some kind. But he was soon brought to heel by the scheming adventuress. With guile and all the feminine tricks of her adopted profession she enslaved him to her purpose. Money flowed from his pockets into her daintily cupped hands.

Receiving enough from this "lover" to maintain her in some sort of ease and luxury, she was content to let the experiment provide its own result. However, a hitch soon appeared. This was the appearance on the scene of a soldier brother, who arrived one day like a bolt from the blue.

Doubtless he had returned from the army that had been dispersed after the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars and had set himself to find her. Having found her, however, he set himself down in her home and proceeded steadily to engage himself in his favourite occupation—drinking. Gesina had now to move with care. Her lucrative lover would be suspicious should he arrive one day to find the brother at home, and it did not suit her plans to lose the merchant at this stage.

For a while she was successful. The merchant's visits to her home were timed during the intervals when the brother was away at some tavern or other. But the inevitable happened at a time when she was unprepared.

The brother arrived at his sister's home one evening to find the merchant seated with Gesina in her own room. He had been imbibing heavily, and his befuddled brain was incapable of appreciating the obvious. In a moment he flew into a violent temper, ordered the merchant out of the house, and theatened him with dire consequences should he ever see him there again.

The merchant, a mere carpet knight at best, made haste to leave. Gesina, white-faced, trembling with indignation, wisely said nothing, bidding her time. Her brother, after the merchant's departure, flung himself down and told her to prepare him some supper. Still Gesina said nothing. Moving quickly from the living-room to the kitchen, she soon had a meal set before her brother, who fell to with ravenous appetite.

But next day, after a horrible bout of sickness, he died. Looking upon his still corpse, Gesina breathed a deep sigh of relief, and for the first time in hours permitted herself to smile. Another fool who had tried to turn her head with a taut rein! Animated by some fresh feeling of elation—for he would never return to pester her with his boorishness and drunken habits—she made arrangements for a speedy funeral, and when the dismal ceremony was over at once set out for the merchant's apartments.

There, with a tearful face, she told how her brother had brought retribution upon his own head. He had always treated her with brutish cruelty, and now his wild ways and drinking had finished him. Her sobs became almost hysterical-sounding, and the merchant, whose valour was stimulated by the sight of tears, endeavoured to soothe her. Doubtless his vanity was mollified at the rather unexpected results of his clumsy

efforts. Before Gesina left him they were once more the "lovers" they had been, and he had given his promise to call to see her whenever she wanted him. Gesina's ravishing smile as she stood up to put on her hat left no doubt as to how frequently that would be.

Now, however, Gesina thought of enacting a drama she had already brought off once with success. The merchant, rumour reported, was passing rich. Certainly, he had been more than just "generous" to her; but his fatuous personality was already palling. She had grown tired of playing with this fish who desired nothing better than to be caught. Well, then, she would haste along that experiment of hers.

Her brother had not been buried long when she modestly broached the topic of marriage. But she was careful not to startle the quarry. The subject was led up to by degrees, and the unwary merchant soon found himself thoroughly pleased with having offered himself and been accepted. Gesina then shrewdly showed herself the romantic affianced wife. The wedding could not be soon enough for her. With sparkling eyes and bright-flushed cheeks she chattered gaily about the life they would live when they were man and wife; of the things they would do, the sights they should go to see and enjoy in each other's company. Gradually, by a skilful manipulating of the conversation, she brought him to that half-comatose state in which he could deny her nothing she asked. She even began talking about how she could help in his business. Oh, she was to be the perfect wife: understanding, loving, kind, yet attentive to her husband's welfare and his progress! And she was willing to help him socially. Had she not *entrée* to those circles from which he was barred?

A fish floundering ecstatically in the rarefied waters of a seventh heaven is not a pretty sight. Gesina came to hate the idolizing gaze in the eyes of this one she had hooked so surely and was playing with so cleverly. But even on the day of their marriage she was sufficiently mistress of herself not to forget her *rôle*. Her smiles were never more heart-fluttering than on the day the merchant called her his wife; never had she looked so fair in his eyes. Or, if the truth were known, never had he looked so fishlike in hers, for on that same day, in order to satisfy what he looked upon as her girlish caprice, he made out a will leaving everything he possessed to her.

On the day after the wedding he was surprised at the change he found in her. Gone were her smiles and bright looks. A new, cold, almost menacing expression lit her eyes. For the first time he realized how very thin her lips were when she closed her mouth tightly.

By the end of that first week he knew something of the truth. He could do nothing right. Instead of entering upon a blissful existence, when the very passing of time was but a merry song, he had settled down to a cat-and-dog life with a shrew who cared not a brass pfennig about his comfort or his happiness. By the end of the second week he was glad to be away from home.

When his wife's manner changed from shrieking demonstration to frigid silence he began to tell himself that things might have been worse. If only he had had sufficient insight he would have realized that soon they were to be. Gesina's sudden silence portended something sinister. She was thinking things over and calmly reviewing her position, and wondering if the time was ripe.

It was not long before she decided that it was. The same week that she made up her mind on this matter her husband's funeral was being arranged and his lawyer interviewed upon the rather delicate subject of his effects.

With a well-lined pocket and a banking account the thought of which was a sheer comfort, Gesina continued her peregrinations in search of "adventure." She found it in many places and came upon it in many guises. Men loved her—offered the sacrifice she demanded of all alike—and she passed on. For a while she deemed it safer to live on her own. No more marrying so long as a little ingenuity on her part would save her the risk marriage necessarily entailed. But she grew rather tired of being left alone with her own thoughts—not that remorse worried her. It was just that she had come to need the company of another. Alone she could not compose her thoughts to her schemes. She needed the stimulant of constant practice in being on her guard. Finally she attempted to reach a solution to this difficulty by living with another woman. She already owed this woman—her name was Katrina—a sum of money, for one of Gesina's habits was borrowing where she could, and then forgetting—or refusing—to pay back. Katrina had been generous and had not pressed for the money, and, in fact, showed herself in several ways a very good friend to the rather flashy Gesina.

Katrina, however, palled after a while, and doubtless the question of the outstanding account came up at intervals. Anyway, Gesina finally decided that, after all, her temperament was one that tolerated loneliness in preference to another woman's fussiness. How much Katrina came to learn of her "friend's" past is not known,

but it is certain that she came to learn too much about her present for Gesina's peace of mind.

So Katrina fell another victim to the implacable murderess, and again Gesina, now inured to success, got away with her crime.

It is believed that from this time onward, though, she was more careful in her activities. The life she had led and was leading was beginning to produce its effect. A strained look was becoming more natural to her face, and more desperate became her efforts to retain her threatened good looks. She had grown parsimonious in her habits; yet despite a grudging thrift she managed to dwindle away her means, until the time came when she had to mortgage her house in the Petzerstrasse, in Bremen. This temporary respite did not suffice to save her, however; she was forced eventually to sell the house to the mortgagee, a man named Rumf.

But she did not relinquish her stronghold without a struggle, and was fortunate enough to come to terms with Rumf. While he moved into the house with his wife and family, Gesina was to remain as housekeeper. The arrangement suited the Rumfs, and it more than suited Gesina, for she was determined to resort to her old tactics. Rumf had money, and he was but a man. She had met his sort before. With his wife and children out of the way, and himself requiring sympathy from someone who knew his ways and the little comforts of his life, it ought to be easy to transfer his wealth to herself.

So the dark star that lit Gesina's firmament threw its murky reflection across the life of Herr Rumf and his happy family.

Frau Rumf was the first to succumb to Gesina's

murderous intention. She apparently died of heart trouble, and her despairing husband gratefully handed over his children to the care of the sympathetic housekeeper. The fact that his wife had died during confinement added to the husband's self-reproach. Gesina, who had been clever and devilish enough to take opportunity of the wife's condition, now revealed herself as a creature of wide human understanding. Unfortunately for the children, however, they were not squeamish at showing their dislike of the housekeeper. Gesina was not willing to allow them the chance of ruining her plans by their idle chatter to the distracted father, though, and consequently each in turn became, as it was thought, infected with some virulent and highly infectious childish disorder. The doctors summoned by the harassed father did their best, but were unable to make headway against the peculiar complaint from which the children suffered. As for Gesina, she nursed them with unstinting attention. No one but she gave them their medicine. She even kept the father from them so as not to excite them.

However, all these apparent efforts proved unavailing. The children died. The doctors regretted their inability to save them, but were quite ready to sign the death certificates.

So the children were buried with their mother, and Gesina, happy behind her show of tears, returned to the house in the Petzerstrasse to set about consummating her vile plot.

She was too clever an actress to make a false step by approaching Rumf before his grief had in some measure worn itself out. But little by little she crept into the inner recesses of his life. Minor intimacies sprang up

between them, and as the days passed Gesina saw to it that her duties in the house changed gradually from those of a housekeeper to the more subtle attentions of a wife. Weeks slipped by; she began wearing her jewellery of an evening and throughout the daytime paid more attention to her looks. Her hands, that had always been her pride, were now carefully manicured, the nails polished, and the long, slender fingers adorned with glittering rings. The more becoming of her dresses were paraded, and an approving comment won from Rumf was sufficient to warrant the wearing of an even more daring gown.

Finally, as a result of the subtle warfare waged against him, Rumf—who, let it be said in all fairness to him, was what is generally termed a "plain" man, and no match for the guile of such an accomplished adventuress as Gesina—found himself physically attracted to his housekeeper. Gesina was perfectly content to live with Rumf as his mistress—on one condition, though one not new to her scheming mind: namely, that he made his will in her favour. Doubtless she argued that as he had no wife or close relative to claim his possessions in the event of death overtaking him suddenly she was entitled to the right to live quietly by herself, without any further anxiety as to the future. And, just as doubtless, she made her plea at moments when Rumf was least likely to deny her. The upshot was that, as in the past, she had her way. Rumf sealed his own death-warrant by making a will in her favour.

However, he was reprieved by Gesina, for the first time in her life, observing considerable caution in the matter of how she administered the poison. Before her procedure had been to bring her crime to fulfilment as

soon as possible. Her victim had generally died within twenty-four hours of first feeling ill. But in the case of Rumf she decided to let her poison do its work slowly and by degrees. Probably she was allowing for the possibility of another sudden death arousing suspicion against her.

Now Rumf, like most German householders of the day, kept pigs and poultry in his garden. When a pig was killed there would be enough fresh pork to last for several weeks, and Rumf, who was fond of pork, took care that his pigs were well fed and properly tended. Thus one day when after a meal of his home-reared pork he felt sick he was perplexed to think of a cause. Gesina, as it happened, was out. Rumf thereupon went into the larder himself to examine the joint from which his meal had been carved. To his amazement he found that it was covered with a fine white powder.

He required no second glance to confirm a terrible suspicion that had leapt to his mind. Wrapping up some of the pork, he hurried with it to the police, and after he had made his statement a chemist was deputed to submit an analysis of the white powder. The latter did not require much time. He promptly pronounced the powder to be arsenic. An order was therewith made out for the arrest of the woman who styled herself Gesina Gottfried.

The arrest was made on March 5, 1828. She was charged with the attempted murder of Herr Rumf. Later the charge was altered to the murder of Frau Rumf and her children.

The arrest created a sensation throughout Germany, and when the trial of this notorious murderess opened interest in the proceedings extended to most European

cities enjoying the advantages of a daily newspaper. It is reported that at the time of her apprehension by the police authorities she made no attempt to deny the crimes with which she was charged. Instead, she openly boasted that she had in the course of her career poisoned no less than thirty people, of whom fifteen had died—murdered.

All sorts of conflicting tales about her prison life—and it was not very lengthy—were circulated once her notoriety was established. It was said that, in order to preserve her comeliness, which the rough prison fare did not maintain, she wore several dresses, one over the other! She is even reputed to have made advances to several of the gaolers, while her general conduct throughout this time is supposed to have been frivolous in the extreme. When she was sentenced to be executed, far from appearing downcast by thought of the grim fate to be meted out to her, she actually smiled derisively at the concourse thronging the confines of the court.

There is a different story told, however, about her in her cell. It is said that in the darkness she was aware of the accusing spirits of her many victims standing by her. She feared to be left alone after night had fallen, and until dawn would sit up in a listening attitude. But with the coming of daylight her old attitude of abandon and frivolous gaiety would return, and, despite the growing circles under her eyes, there would be a twinkle in their depths.

To the end her attitude was one of carelessness towards her fate and the consequences of her life. She died, as I have said, half joking, half complaining that after her death everyone would know she had had false teeth.

Yet even after her execution her evil reputation lived. Certain it is that there was little good interred with her bones! Throughout Germany the mention of her name was sufficient to make a nervous person shudder. However, thirteen years elapsed between the execution of Gesina Gottfried and the translating into German by Herr Fromm of James Marsh's *The Test for Arsenic*. But during those years Europe was to be thrilled by the case of Marie Lafarge, the first case in the history of crime in which the Marsh test for arsenic was employed as a means of directing evidence and proving a legal supposition. After the Lafarge case the Gesina Gottfrieds of Germany and every other nation of Europe were doomed. The fact is proved by the extraordinary number of women condemned to death during the latter half of the nineteenth century for committing murder by means of arsenical poisoning.

Yet although the Marsh test for arsenic remained a thing of the future, it seems little short of amazing that Gesina Gottfried should have been able to carry out her nefarious exploits with impunity solely because of the ignorance and lack of discernment on the part of the German doctors of the day. That little or no suspicion was aroused in the minds of her acquaintances and neighbours may be put down to the fact that she was a consummate actress. With all the cold-blooded deliberateness of purpose that characterized Catherine Hayes, she had the additional capability of acting a true-seeming grief in the eyes of the world.

But like most murderesses—and murderers too, for that matter—she was self-centred. Indeed, only an inordinately self-centred person could so expunge any twinge of conscience and obliterate all thought of fear

as Gesina Gottfried was able to do in the solitariness of her cell. One despairs of labelling her with any certain "complex," but it may be safely assumed that both physically and mentally she was more or less normal. Pride, jealousy, and greed prodded her to the brink of a personal abyss; after that she was lost to all sense of responsibility other than to herself. Even her jealousy she managed to discard in time. But her pride and greed remained with her to the end. These, when analysed, are seen to be but normal desires—or passions, if you will. Her pride was essentially feminine; a misfitting or soiled dress could make a living torture of it. And her greed likewise was a natural greed. She was lazy (a condition arising out of her pride in her appearance and dress), and she desired to be kept in luxury, to have time in which to devote herself to those things she considered made her life worth living. So she planned to secure riches and resources as a means only towards this end. She was neither a miser, nor a crank; but a woman whose very love of self crowded every healthy interest out of her life and made her a veritable ogress whose comeliness and charm were but the signet of an almost passionate indifference to human suffering.

V

CATHERINE HAYES

The Butcher Wife of Tyburn

CATHERINE HAYES

WRITING some hundred and fifty years after Catherine Hayes had been executed, Camden Pelham, editor of the *New Newgate Calendar*, referred to her case as one which found a parallel only "in that of the monster of modern crime—Greenacre."[1] Truly, few murders in the annals of crime can compare with that of John Hayes in sheer cold-blooded deliberateness of execution; and all the more horrible does the crime seem when one

[1] James Greenacre was publicly executed at Newgate on the 2nd of May, 1837, for the murder of Mrs. Hannah Brown. The crime attained a wide notoriety on account of the lengths to which the guilty man went to dispose of his victim's body. Members were discarded in various parts of London. Later in this study of Catherine Hayes a contemporary "ballad" of her crime is quoted. For contrast I quote here another product of Seven Dials, upon Greenacre. A hundred years had lapsed between the writing of the two; one can readily perceive how the tradition lived.

You recollect about Christmas-time,
Both in country and town,
That the body of a female
In Edgware Road was found.
Deprived of both her legs and head,
As plainly might be seen.
And ever since that time till now
A mystery has been.

The legs were found near Brixton,
How dreadful for to tell,
And the head was found at Stepney,
In the Regent's Canal.
But the murderer could not be traced,
In country or in town,
For the base, inhuman murder
Of Mrs. Hannah Brown.

Of such a dreadful deed as this
We seldom ever hear,
And may we never have again
To hear such a sad affair.

considers its author, a creature dominated by strong passions, determined to have her way let the cost be what it might, sensuous, given to lust and vice: Catherine Hayes was a woman devoid alike of pity and remorse; a mother of twelve children, yet a reckless harlot. Considerably more than a hundred years after her death the protesting Thackeray took her character as the basis for his satiric novel *Catherine*.

Her life of wanton viciousness began when she was quite a child; her parents, an artisan named Hall and his wife, found themselves unable to control her fierce outbursts and displays of passion. As much as they could

---

But Providence did so ordain
It should be brought to light,
And thus this awful tragedy
At length it was found out.

When in High Street Office he did go
With people it was filled;
And when he did confess the deed
Each breast with horror thrilled.
He says he threw her from the chair,
Which took away her life,
And the limbs cut from her body
With a sharp and deadly knife.

And when he had the body torn,
Oh, where could the villain look?
From place to place he went about,
And certain parts he took.
And when the whole he had disposed
(So Greenacre now does say),
Had he not so soon been taken
Abroad he meant to steer his way.

Even a hundred years, it seems, could make no difference to the products of "the Dials," could bring no improvement in quality.

In conclusion it might be pointed out that the crimes of Catherine Hayes, James Greenacre, and (in recent times) Patrick Mahon (committed at intervals of roughly a hundred years) all deeply stirred the English public of their day. In each of these three cases the body of the victim was dismembered and the parts dispersed. Mutilation crimes of this character are far more common on the Continent than in England. The history of English crime shows, however, that when one is brought to the notice of the general public feeling runs very much higher than abroad, and the event is not soon forgotten. Can it be that the Englishman has a particular dread (arising partly from his insular nature) of his corpse being dismembered, a dread not felt to the same degree by the peoples of other nations?

For a while she afforded them amusement. She was brimming with enthusiasm, her high spirits never flagged, and her morals were as lax as any rake could wish. But in a short time she palled; her vigorous personality too quickly satiated, and after a few weeks she found herself deserted. In a sad pass, she secured refuge with a family named Hayes, who took compassion on her youth. Doubtless she had a heartrending tale to tell, for her tongue was ever glib, and one imagines her at that age with a pretty, doll-like face, that would melt a stranger's coolness as the sun melts snow.

The inevitable happened: the eldest son of the family, a carpenter by trade, fell desperately in love with her. He offered to marry her, and was promptly accepted. But fear of the father caused the couple to keep their engagement a secret. Weeks passed, and at length a plot was hatched: they were to meet secretly one night and elope, make their way to Worcester, and become man and wife. At this time Catherine was just about sixteen, while Hayes was little more than twenty.

The adventure ended as might be expected. They arrived at Worcester with all the money they could readily come by, were married, and settled down to live a cat-and-dog life.

In due time, however, old Hayes came to learn the truth, and Catherine, fearing his wrath, manœuvred to

get her husband enlisted in the regiment of volunteers then quartered in the town. Then she took to a roving existence, following him from town to town and living the kind of life she pleased. Hayes soon sickened of soldiering, however, and wrote his father begging him to secure his discharge. The old man, realizing how things stood between his son and the latter's wife, made an effort; and before long Catherine was disappointed to find herself loaded with the cares of a husband again. An existence trammelled by regular hours and the necessary worries of managing a house and family roused a sullen anger in her. She grew unresponsive to her husband's kindnesses and less attentive to the affairs of her home; her sharp temper provoked quarrels with most of her neighbours, her extravagances ran the household into debt, and her conduct—or, rather, misconduct—received the disapproval of all of her acquaintance.

Hayes, nevertheless, continued indulgent with her. She was still pretty; a becoming flush often stole to her cheek and a bright sparkle kindled in her eye; and, after all, a simple-minded husband can forgive a pretty wife much. He gave way to her whims and fancies, excused her outbursts, and freely forgave her lapses. But even he came to realize that the time had arrived when they must move.

So the Hayes family moved to London, where they lodged for a couple of years in Tottenham Court Road, after which period they moved to a house in Tyburn Road (the present Oxford Street). Here for about a year Hayes worked steadily at his craft, and in between whiles ran a small money-lending business; he began to amass profits. At length, some ten months or so before the murder, the Hayes family moved again, this time

to a house near by, kept by a Mr. Whinyard. They installed themselves on the second floor.

To this house followed one of Catherine's clandestine lovers, a journeyman tailor named Thomas Billings. So far she had managed successfully to hoodwink her money-making husband as to her relations with several "friends" of the family, but gossip now began to circulate, and eventually ugly rumours reached the ears of Hayes himself. He at once went to his wife and accused her. This time her glibness of tongue did not save her. Hayes had already worked himself into a towering passion; he thrashed her soundly.

It is to be supposed that this sudden harsh treatment from the man who had always been so patient and gentle with her, and who had forgiven all her previous lapses, and whom in turn she had come to regard as a poor fool without the courage to chide her, content to play the *rôle* of *mari complaisant* as long as she cared to remain under his roof, kindled a spark of fierce resentment that was to smoulder until finally it broke into a consuming, devastating hate.

Shortly after this incident the Hayeses were visited by Thomas Wood, an acquaintance of the husband's youth. Wood soon became friendly with Billings, who was a regular caller at the house in Tyburn Road, and Catherine set herself to snare his affections. How successful she was we are left to imagine, but it was not long before she was able to bend him to her will as easily as Billings. Then she set herself to devise a plan whereby they could help her to rid herself of Hayes. Wood, however, upon sounding, proved that he was not altogether broken to her purpose. He shuddered at the thought of soiling his hands with blood, but the

wily arguments of the wife unseated his qualms. She held out tantalizing promises, hinted that in the event of Hayes' death she would be mistress of fifteen hundred pounds, and spoke of what could be done with such a fortune by a man and woman intent upon enjoying it together. At length, after being told that Billings had agreed to aid her in getting rid of Hayes, Wood also consented to join the conspiracy.

A few days after agreeing to the wife's infamous proposal Wood returned to London to find Hayes, Catherine, and Billings in the former's apartments making merry. Upon Wood's arrival Billings offered to lay a wager with Hayes, that if the latter could drink half a dozen bottles of "best mountain wine" he would pay the bill. Hayes, now in a jovial mood and of a mind to enjoy himself after a spell of hard work, readily consented, and while supper was being prepared Wood and Billings left the house to fetch the wine. Sitting there in the parlour with her husband, waiting for the others to return, a ghastly plan took shape in the wife's mind. Here was an opportunity, she told herself, the like of which might not occur for many a day. When the two men returned she seized a moment while Hayes was in the bedroom to tell them of her plan. Billings, who had already had too much to drink, received it with gusto; Wood, however, was still troubled by some symptoms of compunction.

The merry-making became more riotous; Hayes consumed bottle after bottle, until the six were dispatched and he was reduced to a maudlin state. The wife, biding her time, was planning her foul deed with a dispassionate calm that counted every risk of failure. Hayes, to her mind, was not sufficiently drunk, so she

procured another bottle of wine from a cupboard, and continued to replenish his glass as long as he had sense enough to empty it.

When able no longer to keep his eyes open Hayes staggered into the bedroom and flung himself across the bed. In a few seconds he was breathing heavily in a drunken sleep.

Catherine then produced beer, and systematically began to ply the two men in the parlour with full tankards and equally full suggestions. This cunning admixture of hops and hopes wrought havoc with Billings. Rising suddenly, he ran into the kitchen and caught up a coal-hammer, and, returning, crossed to the bedroom where Hayes was sleeping, entered, and, moving across to the bed, brought the hammer down with a sickening thud that fractured the victim's skull. The terrific force of the blow knocked the body to the floor, and the sound alarmed the Springate family, who lived on the small floor above. Mrs. Springate, hastily donning a dress, for the hour was drawing late, went downstairs to inquire what was the matter; but was met at the door by a sweetly smiling Mrs. Hayes, who demurely explained that her husband was enjoying a few games with some friends who had come to escort him on a journey into the country. In true wifely fashion she hoped the noise they made was not unduly disturbing, and promised to keep them as quiet as she could. With another charming smile she closed the door, and Mrs. Springate crept back to her garret.

This interruption from the floor above, however, had resulted in Wood's losing his nerve. His face tense in expression and pale as a sheet, his limbs twitching, he suddenly panicked. Fright whipped him into

action. Gripping the coal-hammer Billings had dropped, he ran wildly into the bedroom and battered the corpse in hideous fashion. All at once he collapsed, whimpering.

But the woman kept her head. Her main object was achieved: John Hayes was dead; nothing on earth could bring him back to life. A cold elation thrilled her, prompting her active mind to conceive fresh horrors. Taking Billings on one side, she discussed how best they could dispose of the body. Billings was rapidly growing fretful; the crime had been committed, and the enormity of it had cleared his brain and sobered him. But Catherine, watching his face closely, lulled a growing fear to sleep by smooth assurances. Disposal of the body would be easy, she argued, once they had rid themselves of the head. Without the head, she went on, the trunk would not be recognizable. They must cut off the head.

Wood was shaken awake and told of the plan; he could not but acquiesce. Catherine brought a pail and a candle from the kitchen, and the three went into the bedroom and closed the door.

Billings raised the body and flung it across the bed, so that the broken head hung over one side. Raising the head by the hair, he bared the throat, while the wife held up the candle and fixed the bucket under the face; then Wood slashed at the thick neck with his pocket-knife. The gruesome, horrible task must have taken many minutes before the head was severed and fell into the bucket, and ample testimony to the woman's steel-like nerves is shown by the fact that she did not faint, but stood there, holding the bucket and candle.

The conspirators had now to wait until the flow of blood had ceased, when the mutilated trunk was wrapped

up and an attempt made to clean the reeking shambles. The blood in the pail was emptied down a wooden sink attached to the window, and the sink was well rinsed with clear water. The three then took counsel as to the best method of disposing of the head.

Catherine, her mind keen to possibilities of detection, suggested boiling the fearful object of their vandalism until only the skull remained visible. Her main thought was to rid the head of any recognizable feature. Billings and Wood, however, were not in favour of such slow measures. They were anxious to dispose of the head at the earliest possible moment, and nothing would serve but that they did so that very night.

Slipping into their greatcoats, Billings took up the pail containing the head, and, covering it with the skirt of his coat, let himself out on to the landing. Wood followed at his heels. A few moments later they were in the deserted street, making for Whitehall Steps.

Mrs. Springate, hovering out of earshot on the landing above the Hayeses' apartments, saw them go, and ventured to inquire of the wife who they were. Catherine, alert and on her guard against the woman's prying, explained that it was her husband and his friend who was accompanying him into the country. How long he would be gone she said she could not say, as the matter which took him was one of urgent business. Wishing Mrs. Springate good night, she closed her door, and presumably retired for the night.

Billings and Wood arrived at Whitehall to find that the gates were shut; so, deciding to make for Macreth's Wharf, they set off in the direction of Millbank. Macreth's Wharf was situated near to the old horse-ferry (commemorated to-day by Horseferry Road) and was

fronted by a dock. Arriving at the wharf without having been observed, Billings tumbled the bucket and head over the side of the dock, and then the two made the best of their way back to Tyburn Road.

However, they had not reckoned upon two unforeseen chances. Firstly, that at the time when the head was pitched into the dock the tide was low, and so the gruesome object became lodged in the black slime; secondly, that some lightermen on a barge close to the ferry pier had seen them, but had not troubled to think twice about them.

These two facts were to bring about their undoing and to place in the records of crime one of the ghastliest and most wanton of murders that has ever been unravelled.

A watchman named Robinson, passing by the wharf in the morning, saw the head lying in the mud and a few yards from it the bloodstained bucket. As soon as his discovery had been reported a hue and cry was raised by the officers of the parish, and, the question of identification not having been answered at the close of the day, it was ordered that the head should be cleansed, the hair combed, and the fearful features composed and patched up, and the grim trophy was then erected on a pole in the churchyard of St. Margaret's, Westminster. Looking back over a period of more than two hundred years, it is ironic to think of such a grisly marital totem adorning the yard of a church now celebrated chiefly for its Society weddings!

The news soon spread throughout London,[1] and

[1] The following is from the *Daily Post* of March 3, 1726:

"Yesterday morning, early, a man's head, that by the freshness of it seemed to have been newly cut off from the body, having its own hair on, was found by

crowds flocked to Westminster to gaze at the dreadful spectacle, and in a very short time many wild and conflicting rumours were bruited abroad. Women whose husbands had been missing for some time came to the churchyard and wrangled as to whose spouse the head belonged to; and then finally excitement bubbled over when the lightermen came forward and produced their evidence.

In the meantime a strong guard had been posted at all gates leading down to the river, as the officers of the parish conceived it likely that the murderers would attempt to dispose of the trunk in the same manner as they had disposed of the head.

For a couple of days the town was thrilled with the prospect of the perpetrators of the crime being apprehended. But Catherine Hayes was not the kind of woman to lose her self-possession even when all London was seeking her. Billings and Wood had blundered badly; it was for her to repair the error and to cover all possible tracks as soon as possible. Calmly she debated with herself how best to act without leaving any loophole for suspicion. Her problem was tripartite: firstly, she had safely to remove or possibly to destroy the trunk and members of her husband's body; secondly, she had to invent a plausible and satisfactory story to account for John Hayes' continued absence should friends or relations inquire regarding his whereabouts; and, thirdly (and certainly not the least part of her problem),

the river's side, near Millbank, Westminster, and was afterwards exposed to public view in St. Margaret's churchyard, where thousands of people have seen it; but none could tell who the unhappy person was, much less who committed such a horrid and barbarous action. There are various conjectures relating to the deceased; but, there being nothing certain, we omit them. The head was much hacked and mangled in the cutting off."

she had to keep Billings and Wood under her control and ready to accede to her wishes without demurring.

With a definiteness characteristic of the woman, she first arranged for the disposal of what remained of Hayes' mutilated corpse. Upon Wood remarking that earlier in the day he had noticed a partially dried-up pond in Marylebone Fields, she decided that here was a suitable place for hiding the grisly remains. So on the night following the erection of Hayes' head in the churchyard of St. Margaret's two furtive journeys were made from the house in Tyburn Road to the marshes of Marylebone. The first journey was made somewhere about nine o'clock, some time after dark had fallen. The day was March 2, in the year 1726, and in all probability it was a blustering, rainy night fitted for the enterprise. Whether Catherine accompanied the two men on their journeys is not certain. One can imagine her going with them to bolster up their courage; on the other hand, knowing the prying nature of Mrs. Springate, she may have elected to stay at home. In which case her nerves must have been of steel, for Wood and Billings on their first journey carried, wrapped up in a blanket, the dismembered trunk of John Hayes, leaving the limbs for the second excursion.

The two men returned to the house in Tyburn Road about eleven o'clock, and a few minutes afterwards set out with the butchered man's limbs, wrapped in another blanket. Whether on this second journey fear hastened their steps, or whether the nature of their burden proved more accommodating than the heavy trunk had been, one is left to hazard, but they were back at the Hayes' lodgings soon after midnight

On the next day, Thursday, March 3, Wood

returned to his home in Greenford, taking with him some of Hayes' clothes, and during the next few days Catherine busied herself with disposing of the remainder of her husband's wardrobe. With Wood well out of the way, and while Billings was most probably endeavouring to dissolve his thoughts and tremors against a pewter tankard-bottom, Catherine found time in which to think and plan. Her husband's wealth was hers now. She was free to do as she chose, to live as her fancy hinted—providing she was careful. Not much more than a mile away her husband's head was attracting crowds to Westminster. Revellers passing under her window after the taverns had closed debated bibulously upon the identity of the murdered man. At street doors during the daytime women neighbours gossiped, and always there was Mrs. Springate, curious, prying, soft-footed, a source of danger. Dividing her attention for the most part between Mrs. Springate and Billings, Catherine found the next few days pass slowly.

On the following Sunday, March 6, the parish officers dismounted the head of John Hayes from its grim pole and placed it in the keeping of a surgeon named Westbrook for preserving. From then on the head could be seen for the asking in a large glass case of spirits. With the removal of the head from St. Margaret's yard public excitement abated somewhat, and the days began to slip past without any further development that threw light on the tragedy. Rumours still persisted, as they invariably do, and in a moment when conversation flagged the mystery still presented a topic for eager discussion.

Catherine, biding her time and watching her step, took such opportunities as offered themselves for

dropping mysterious hints regarding a serious quarrel in which her husband was concerned. Pressed for details by the gossips of the neighbourhood, she elaborated a convincing tale of how the hot-headed John had by accident killed someone with whom he had disagreed. More precise information she would not give, and she particularly avoided the perilous course of giving the supposed victim a name and home. Her husband, she concluded significantly, was away endeavouring to appease the distressed widow, who was proving herself to be a most unreasonable person. The gossips, fully aware of Mrs. Hayes' reputation, retired to their own kitchens to chatter over this not unsavoury tit-bit of scandal and to hazard shrewd opinions as to the nature of the quarrel.

The upshot of this was that a very subdued and ostensibly tearful Mrs. Hayes moved her lodgings from Tyburn Road to Chelsea, and, once safely established in her new home, Catherine relaxed her wakeful vigil. No mention of a husband was made to her fresh neighbours, and if to some she seemed a woman given to proving a trifle elusive when questioned, she did not offend by revealing any curiosity on her own part. In fact, with the passing of another fortnight it seemed that the success of Catherine's murderous and heinous plot was definitely assured. Living an entirely new life, it was as though the past were shrouded in an impenetrable mantle of secrecy. True, Wood and Billings still dogged her footsteps, not unaccompanied by some symptoms of compunction, but the minor twinges of their barometric consciences were no match for the ruthless personality of the dominant Catherine. She had money now, her freedom none could gainsay, and the sharp edge of her contempt was

something to be avoided. When it came to reasoning upon their several positions respecting the crime it was she who held the whip hand. The others were but her minions, sunk in their guilt beyond all hope of redemption. Doubtless she made so much plain ; probably there were threats on both sides. However that may be, Catherine clung to her money and the two men heeded what she told them.

How long this state of affairs would have continued before the rogues fell out one cannot say. Billings, more violent in his demonstrations than Wood, was, nevertheless, more easily controlled by the woman's display of passionate affection. It is probable that had things gone differently Catherine and Billings would have conspired to rid themselves of the elder man, and then, with only one person in the world sharing her foul secret, it may have been in Catherine's mind to make her security doubly secure.

However that may be, on March 21, exactly a fortnight from the day on which the parish officers had delivered the head to Westbrook, Fate, in the person of a certain Joseph Ashby, visited Catherine Hayes in Chelsea. Ashby was an old friend of Hayes', and, being in the metropolis upon some business, had gone to no little trouble to discover the new lodging of his friend. A lucky chance had directed his steps. Upon his presenting himself at Catherine's door he was vouchsafed a timid welcome by an obviously distressed wife. It was apparent that something was wrong, and he was not left in doubt for long. Between sobs that to the unsuspicious Ashby were genuine enough the old story of the misadventure and the killing was told. Ashby was appalled, and for the moment nonplussed. His

offer of help was gently but firmly declined; and on his asking further questions the nimble-witted Catherine hesitatingly "confessed" that, fearing the consequences of his rash act, her husband had gone to Portugal.

Ashby's concern for his friend, however, was far more genuine than Catherine had bargained for. Pondering on how he could best help the missing John, he visited Henry Longmore, a cousin of Hayes'. To Longmore the story was news, and rather disturbing news. If John had indeed killed a man the reputation of the family was jeopardized. Any day the victim's widow might take her complaint to the magistrates. And what then?

In no easy frame of mind, and doubtless irked by some suspicion that Catherine herself was the real cause of the quarrel, Longmore went to Chelsea to learn the facts at first hand. His arrival must have proved a tremendous shock for the woman, for upon being questioned closely she failed not only to keep her story coherent, but contradicted several things she had told Ashby. Longmore, who had never liked his cousin's wife, and who was probably only too ready to believe the worst of her, at once became suspicious of foul play. Here was Hayes' wife living in a new lodging, at no loss for funds seemingly, and, as far as he could discern, she had resigned herself to not seeing her husband any more. If Hayes was in Portugal, why had she not gone with him? Her reply was that her husband had found it expedient to leave England at short notice, without first seeing her. Then how came she to have so much money? Hayes, surely, being a thrifty man and far-sighted, would not have left the country penniless. In the circumstances that would have been disastrous.

At this point Catherine began to search her normally ready wits in vain. Longmore was pressing her too closely. From his tone and by the expression on his face she could tell that his suspicions were aroused. He had taken her unawares, and she had no time to formulate a plausible sequel to her old story of the quarrel. At a loss, with her husband's cousin watching her closely, waiting to entrap her, she took the only course open to her. She feigned too great a distraction to continue the interview, and reluctantly Longmore had to leave her.

That night Longmore sat up late puzzling over this strange story and the even stranger behaviour of his cousin's wife. What lay behind it all? Why had she changed her lodgings so suddenly and without sending word to the other members of the family? And the money, what about that? Recalling past stories of Catherine's displays of viciousness, perhaps, even, remembering old threats she had made when her temper had risen several degrees above her natural caution, he became more firmly convinced that the story of his cousin's guilt and his flight to Portugal was nothing but a glib fiction. But if this was the case, then what was the truth of the mystery? Where was Hayes? Why this silence on his part?

Asking himself questions he could not hope to answer, and sounding possibilities pregnant with dark meaning, his thoughts turned to murder. What if Hayes were the victim of jealousy and covetousness, and not the murderer his wife had confessed? In other words, what if Catherine had boldly and ingeniously turned the truth inside out and fastened upon Hayes a crime for which, in actual fact, she was guilty?

Some time during that night Longmore's thoughts, whirling in turmoil, returned to that unknown head that had been erected in St. Margaret's, Westminster. Did the truth lie that way? The suggestion was hideous; but the question was only the logical outcome of a sequence of other searching queries. He went over all the rumours and stories he had heard regarding the unknown head, trying to fix the time of the crime, and came to the conclusion that his fearful hypothesis fitted the facts as far as he personally was able to verify them. He recalled one very important and intriguing fact that suddenly filled him with impatience; he himself had not seen the head.

The next morning he called upon Ashby, and within a short time had succeeded in bringing him to acknowledge that his fears were well founded. They agreed to go to Westbrook immediately and to see the head for themselves. They went, saw the head, and both were convinced that, despite several changes due to the treatment to which it had been subjected, it was the head of John Hayes.

Their worst fears confirmed, the two returned to Longmore's home, where they met Longmore's brother. The latter, upon being told the story and its gruesome culmination, at once urged them to go to a Justice of the Peace. On the next day, March 23, Henry Longmore and Joseph Ashby presented themselves before Mr. Justice Lambert and on oath recounted what they had discovered. Mr. Lambert was at once aroused, and, doubtless to some degree prompted by the thought of helping personally to solve the riddle of the mysterious head, agreed not only to make out the warrant immediately, but to accompany the constable himself. Upon

further discussion the warrant was made out against Catherine Hayes, Thomas Wood, Thomas Billings, and Mary Springate, as it was decided that all four might be to a more or less extent implicated, whether as accessories or actual perpetrators.

At nine o'clock that night the party arrived at the house where Catherine lodged; they were admitted by the landlord, and upon learning that Mrs. Hayes was in proceeded to her apartments. Mr. Lambert, stepping forward, rapped upon the door with the head of his cane. From inside came Catherine's voice inquiring, "Who is there?" Mr. Lambert then called upon her to open the door in the name of the law. Whereupon she replied that she would do so as soon as she had put on some clothes, for she was in bed. An interval of some minutes elapsed, and then the bolts were withdrawn and the door opened a few inches. Before she had decided who her visitors were the door had been pushed wide open and she found herself seized. Sitting on the bed dangling his bare legs was Billings. He too was apprehended, and Mr. Lambert proceeded to question them. But, as though acting upon some previously determined arrangement, neither would confess or admit to anything. Even when Catherine was questioned upon the obvious she was at least found to be consistent in her attitude. Mr. Lambert asked her whether she and Billings had been in bed together. She replied no. Billings had been mending his stockings. "Why, then," replied Mr. Lambert dryly, looking round at the tumbled bedclothes and the darkened apartment, "he has very good eyes to see to do it without fire or candle!"

A constable was sent to arrest Mrs. Springate, who

was lodged in the Gate-house for the night, while Catherine herself was taken to the closer confines of Tothill Fields, Bridewell, and Billings was sent to the New Prison. Wood, not being in London at the time, remained for the time being a gentleman desired by the authorities. During that night as she lay in prison Catherine studied her new position very carefully. It was decidedly anything but healthy, but she was far from giving up hope. Fate had played her a scurvy trick in sending Ashby to her door, but she was not a woman without resources. She had still wifely tears which she could summon to her aid. True, the finding of Billings in her apartments would not help matters, but she had kept her head when Lambert had tried to frighten her into committing herself as an adulteress.

The next day when she was being conveyed by coach to Mr. Lambert's for another examination she earnestly demanded to be allowed to see the head of which the Justice had spoken to her. She was accordingly taken to Westbrook's and shown the glass case. As soon as her eyes fell upon the terrible reminder of her guilt she professed to recognize it. Rushing to the glass case, she spread her arms over it in an endeavour to clasp it to her.

"It is my dear husband's head!" she moaned piteously. "It is my dear husband's head!"

Westbrook, a grim smile on his face, took the head from the case, carefully wiped the spirit from it, straightened the hair, and offered it to the woman. Nothing loth, urged to the consummation of her *rôle* by an impelling dread, Catherine startled her onlookers with a show of deep affection. Pressing the unsightly head to her lips, she kissed it fervently and long, weeping

copiously the while, and muttering broken and impassioned words of endearment. Then, turning tear-blurred eyes to Westbrook, who seemed not in the least convinced by the scene, she tremulously asked for a lock of the hair. The surgeon callously replied that in his opinion she had had too much of his *blood* already. At that her marvellous self-control broke down. She fainted.

Thus ended a scene in the drama of Catherine Hayes as gruesomely mordant, as grimly tragic, and as sombre and chilling as any in the works of Ford or Webster; a scene which, in my opinion, is without parallel in the history of English crime.

When Catherine recovered she was hurried to Mr. Lambert's, a woman now cognizant that over her hung the shadow of a doom she had been unable to avert. As frequently happens in such cases, events suddenly proceeded with an almost startling rapidity. While being examined by the Justice, and still protesting her innocence and lack of knowledge regarding her husband's true fate, a constable arrived with information to the effect that a Mr. Hardy and his servant had that very morning, while crossing Marylebone Fields, discovered the limbs and trunk of a man's body wrapped in two blankets lying in a ditch near the Farthing Pie House. The constable, a man named Crosby, had himself been to Marylebone, and had returned at once to report. Mr. Lambert thereupon charged Catherine with complicity, but she adhered firmly to her former protestations and denied knowing anything about the crime. The Justice, losing patience with her, committed her to Newgate, to await further developments.

Developments were not long in forthcoming. A

day or two later Wood, returning to London after an absence of some little while, and ignorant of the march of events during the past few days, called at Catherine's lodging, where the landlord, with deep cunning, directed him to Henry Longmore's. Wood, entirely unsuspicious of any deceit, at once repaired to the address with which he had been supplied. As it chanced, Longmore himself was out when Wood arrived, but his brother, who answered Wood's rap at the door, at once recognized him from the tales he had heard. Without hesitating, he jumped at Wood and dragged him from his saddle, shouting at the same time for a constable.

The outcome was that a few hours later Mr. Lambert was pitting his forensic guile against Wood's sullen obdurateness, with results that were singularly ungratifying to the harassed Justice. Wood confessed to nothing, and, at Mr. Lambert's instance, was taken to Tothill Fields. While in the prison he learned for the first time what had taken place during the past week. He was amazed. Without counsel, and not knowing how much Catherine and Billings had admitted, he became panicky. Suppose, in an endeavour to save themselves, they fastened the crime upon him. It was the word of two against one. He could prove nothing, and if the others turned against him he was helpless. His very absence from London would tell against him. Besides, he was the one who had disposed of Hayes' clothes. If that was known and the clothes traced he would not have a chance. Probably it was this last that decided him upon which was the best course to pursue. The crime had been discovered, and he himself was held in custody against the finding of fresh evidence.

There was nothing left but to confess and plead for leniency.

When the time came for his re-examination he expressed his desire to make a statement, and the following confession was prepared, which he signed:

The examination and confession of Thomas Wood, taken before John Mohun, Oliver Lambert, and Thomas Salt, Esqrs., three of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, this 27th day of March, 1726.

Who confesseth and saith, That on Tuesday, being the first day of March instant, he had been drinking in several places, and that the last place was in the Hog in the Pound, and came about twelve of the clock at noon to Mr. Hayes' lodgings; and, when he came home, was merry, as Mr. Hayes told him: and Mr. Hayes told him he could drink a great deal of liquor, and not be fuddled; and said, "I and another drank half a guinea apiece in wine, without being fuddled." That Thomas Billings, then in company, said that if Mr. Hayes would then drink half a guinea's worth of wine, and not be fuddled, he would pay for it; that Hayes agreed, and they each put down half a guinea; and that Catherine Hayes, Thomas Billings, and this examinant went out about four o'clock in the afternoon, on the day aforesaid, to Bond Street, and brought in with them, to Mr. Hayes' lodgings, about six or seven bottles of mountain wine; and, upon their return, found Mr. Hayes sitting by the fireside, in the fore-room, eating bread and cheese; That, then, this examinant went to the Angel and Crown to fetch a pot of Twopenny, to drink while Mr. Hayes drank the wine; that he stayed about half an hour, and when he returned about half the wine was drank, and Mr. Hayes began to be very merry, and danced about the room, and said he thought he should not have wine enough to make him fuddled; on which, Thomas Billings went out by himself and fetched another bottle of wine; and, when Hayes had drank that, he began to reel about the room, and went

and laid down on the bed in the back room; That Thomas Billings followed him into the said room, and there, with a hatchet, struck him on the back part of the head, which blow, this examinant heard given, and went into the room, and found Mr. Hayes dead; and that Mrs. Hayes followed this examinant and said, "We must take off his head, and make away with it, or it will betray us." And that, then, Catherine Hayes, Thomas Billings, and this examinant, with this examinant's pocket-knife, cut off Mr. Hayes' head, about eight of the clock at night, on the day aforesaid, and then put it into a pail, without a bale [handle]; and Thomas Billings and this examinant carried the pail, with the head in it, to the Water Side; and when they came there, Thomas Billings set down the pail, and this examinant took it up, and threw it into the Thames, and so both returned to Mrs. Hayes' lodgings, and went to bed in the fore-room, in which room Mrs. Hayes sat up all night.

And this examinant further confesseth and saith, That the next morning, as soon as it was light, Catherine Hayes, Thomas Billings, and this examinant began to consult what they must do with the body. That Catherine Hayes proposed to put it in a box which she had by her, and put it in a coach, and carry it away, and throw it into the Thames: that they all endeavoured, but the box was not large enough to hold it; upon which, Catherine Hayes proposed to cut it in pieces, which she, Thomas Billings, and this examinant did, and put it into the box, where it remained till night, and then all agreed to carry it out by parcels; and that, first, about nine of the clock at night, Thomas Billings and this examinant took the carcase in a blanket, and carried it, by turns, to a sort of pond, or ditch, in Marylebone fields, and threw it in, with the blanket; and then returned to Mrs. Hayes' lodgings, being eleven o'clock at night, and then took the limbs in a piece of blanket; and, by turns, carried them to the same place, and threw them into the same pond, and returned again about twelve or one of the clock the same night, and knocked at the door, and were

let in. That they went to bed in the forenoon, and that Catherine Hayes was in the same room, and sometimes went and lay down upon their bed.

And this examinant further confesseth and saith, That on Thursday, being the third of March instant, he went to Greenford, near Harrow, in Middlesex, and carried with him a white coat, and a pair of leathern breeches, which were Mr. John Hayes', and are now in Greenford aforesaid.

And this examinant further confesseth and saith, That on Saturday, being the fifth day of March instant, this examinant returned to Mr. Hayes' lodgings, for some linen of his own; that, then, Mrs. Hayes gave him a pair of shoes, a waistcoat, a hat, and a pair of stockings, which this examinant knew to be her late husband's; and, likewise, gave him two shillings in money; that she told him the head was found at Westminster, but was not known; he then returned to Greenford.

And this examinant further saith, That Catherine Hayes gave him three shillings and sixpence, and promised to supply him with money whenever he wanted: And further saith, That the said Catherine Hayes had many times before, and often on the first day of March instant, proposed to Thomas Billings and this examinant, the murder of her husband; that Thomas Billings had agreed to murder him, and offered to give this examinant money to buy wine to make Mr. Hayes drunk, that they might accomplish the murder.

THOMAS WOOD

The news that Wood had confessed soon spread beyond the walls of the prison, and the mob which thronged the gates was incensed. Feeling in London ran high against the culprits, and already open demonstrations were being made by the more unruly elements. When Wood was finally conveyed to Newgate it was found necesary to send with him an escort of a sergeant and eight soldiers with fixed bayonets. The mob

hooted him the entire way from Bridewell to Newgate.

It was not long before Billings was apprised of this new turn events had taken, and, following close upon this, came word from Catherine that it was useless to deny the murder any longer. For they were all guilty, she concluded, on a peculiarly fatalistic note, and must die for what they had done. As far as Billings could see, there was no further object in holding out. With evil grace he relinquished his pose of injured and slighted innocence and made a confession similar to that of Wood's. The two confessions, however, left several minor details in dispute. Thus small differences will be found between the present account and Wood's confession. For instance Wood said a hatchet was used, whereas another source says the weapon was a coal-hammer. Indeed, there is an old illustration extant showing the crime being committed with a heavy weapon resembling a hammer more than a hatchet. Again, it is still a question whether Catherine supplied the final bottle of wine or not. But such points are essentially for a more detailed consideration than the present. For my own part, the acceptance of the coal-hammer theory seems reasonable enough. For if a hatchet were used to kill Hayes, why perform the decapitation by the slow and particularly unpleasant method Wood describes? Several blows from the hatchet would have sufficed.[1] Again, it is rather in keeping with Catherine's character that she had an extra bottle of wine stored away against some such emergency.

[1] A point not raised by any writer upon this crime of whom I know is: Why was not a suitable implement for the decapitation chosen from among Hayes' tools? The victim was a carpenter by trade, as has been mentioned, and presumably various of his tools were in the lodgings. This rather indicates an oversight on the part of the criminals.

However, the two confessions sufficed to exonerate from any complicity that little busybody Mrs. Springate. She was released, and doubtless she made good the shining hour by adding her own version, complete with surmises and suspicions.

The next stage in this ghastly case is the trial. Catherine was found guilty of the crime of petit treason, or conspiring to murder one's husband, a crime which remained on the Statute books until much later in the century, and the punishment for which was burning at the stake. She showed little concern, however, for herself, accepting the dread sentence passed upon her with apparent resignation, but she seemed greatly distressed for Billings and Wood. Both these gentlemen had pleaded guilty at the trial, and had been sentenced to be hanged, their bodies afterwards to be hung in gibbet chains. However, even at the last Wood cheated the gallows, for he died in prison shortly after the trial. Of what he died is not certain, but the probability is gaol fever.

Whether Catherine was really as concerned for Wood and Billings as she appeared to be at the trial, I for one very much doubt. The chances are that she adopted that conciliatory manner purely in order to pacify the mob somewhat. Already ballad-mongers and pamphleteers in Seven Dials were penning her history in halting metres. During the last days of her life London buzzed with nothing else but the forthcoming execution.

On the Friday before her execution she made her last personal gesture. By some means or other she had had some poison smuggled in to her, and was prevented from robbing the mob of a rare pleasure only by the astuteness of a wardress, who tasted the prisoner's food before she

commenced her meal. There was nothing now but to accept the inevitable.

At twelve o'clock noon on May 9, 1726, Catherine Hayes was drawn on a sledge from Newgate to Tyburn. Billings, with eight other malefactors, followed in three carts. First the hangings were disposed of, and then, amid the wild catcalls and shrill hissings of the crowd surging about the ranks of soldiers, Catherine Hayes was secured to the stake erected for her by iron chains passed round her waist and under her arms. Round her neck, in accord with the scant mercy of those times, the executioner placed a rope, which was passed through a hole in the stake. The intention was to strangle her when the faggots heaped about her legs were ignited. But Fate, which for a time had smiled upon Catherine Hayes' foulness, was still frowning. The poison had been snatched from her lips, and now the strands of rope which were to save her from untold agonies were by a trick of the wind burned through before the faggots were well alight, with the result that the woman died a death a hundred times more fearful than that she had meted out to John Hayes.

Here is the description of her end which appears in the *Newgate Calendar*:

"Mrs. Hayes having spent some time in devotion, was taken to a stake near the gallows; and, an iron chain being fastened round her body, she was there burned alive. It is necessary to observe that every woman convicted either of high or petit treason receives sentence to be burned alive; but the common practice, consistent with the dictates of humanity, is first to strangle them, so that they are dead before the fire can touch the body.

Various have been the conjectures why the letter of the law was executed upon Mrs. Hayes: and, some years ago, a series of letters were written in the newspapers upon that subject. Some said that the court, in consequence of the aggravating circumstances, had given private orders for a literal execution, while others imputed it to the Sheriff. But the most rational account that we could procure is that she was fastened to the stake, and a rope drawn round her neck by the executioner, to strangle her, which he pulled as tight as he could; but, the flames beginning to reach his hands, he was obliged to let it go, and she was seen, in the middle of the fire, pushing the faggots from her, and crying in such a terrible manner that those who were present remembered the expressions made use of by her many years after. Undoubtedly it was a most dismal spectacle, and must have made a deep impression on all those who had the least spark of humanity, to see a fellow-creature burning alive in the flames; for, although they continued to heap faggots upon her, yet it was a considerable time before she was dead, and three hours before she was reduced to ashes."

A hundred yards away, swinging on the gibbet chains in which it was secured, swayed the body of Thomas Billings, insensate to the terrible moans of his fellow in murder and adultery.[1]

[1] It has been my purpose in this brief study to tell the story of Catherine Hayes' nefarious plot to destroy her husband, and of that plot's brutal execution. For this reason I have particularly avoided discussion of the very debatable topic (eagerly discussed by the unhappy woman's contemporaries) of whether Billings was a son of Catherine Hayes by some unknown lover. It is certainly true that Billings was many years younger than the woman who so darkly shadowed his destiny, and it is also true that he was known to refer to himself as a close kinsman of hers. But, for my part, lacking certain knowledge on the point, I am content to let the word "adultery" stand, in preference to the more insidious and repugnant "incest."

Popular as were tirades and pamphlets upon the *causes célèbres* of the period, it is probable that no murder trial in the first half of the eighteenth century evoked a more voluminous or steady flow of ballads than did the trial of Catherine Hayes and her two accomplices. As late as 1730, four years after her execution, the following ponderous attempt at drollery was on sale in the streets of London:

A SONG ON THE MURDER OF MR. HAYES BY HIS WIFE

To the tune of "Chevy-Chace"

In Tyburn road a man there liv'd
A just and honest life,
And there he might have lived still,
If so had pleased his wife.

Full twice a day to church he went,
And so devout would be,
Sure never was a saint on earth,
If that no saint was he!

This vext his wife unto the heart,
She was of wrath so full,
That finding no hole in his coat,
She picked one in his skull.

But then heart began to relent,
And griev'd she was so sore,
That quarter to him for to give
She cut him into four.

All in the dark and dead of night,
These quarters she conveyed.
And in a ditch in Marybone,
His marrow-bones she laid.

His head at Westminster she threw
All in the Thames so wide;
Says she, "My dear, the wind sets fair,
And you may have the tide."

But Heav'n, whose power no limit knows,
On earth, or on the main,
Soon caus'd this head for to be thrown
Upon the land again.

This head being found, the Justices
Their heads together laid;
And all agreed there must have been
Some body to this head.

But, since no body could be found,
High mounted on a shelf,
They e'en set up the head to be,
A witness for itself.

Next, that it no self murder was,
The case itself explains,
For no man could cut off his head,
And throw it in the Thames.

Ere many days had gone and past,
The deed at length was known,
And Cath'rine, she confessed, at last,
The fact to be her own.

God prosper long our noble King
Our lives and safeties all,
And grant that we may warning take
By Cath'rine Hayes's fall.

The quotation of this "ballad" serves one other purpose than to give a fair idea of the type of doggerel hawked in the streets at the time (and presumably bought); it shows how many versions of a case came to be established in the minds of the public. For the rest, I am sorry to say that the author whose facile genius conceived the pun "Marybone" and "marrow-bones" preferred a safe anonymity to a doubtful immortality.

Allusion has already been made to Thackeray's *Catherine*, which was first issued in *Fraser's Magazine* under his *nom de plume* of Ikey Solomons. The story

was based upon the life and character of Catherine Hayes the murderess, and was written as a gibe at the early nineteenth-century practice of making harlots and scoundrels heroines and heroes of fiction. Unfortunately for the novelist confusion arose when the admirers of Catherine Hayes, the popular Irish singer, mistook the subject of the story for the *prima donna*. A reference to the murderess in the second volume of *Pendennis* likewise was misunderstood, and evoked a series of strong disclaimers in the Irish newspapers of the time. Later Thackeray had the passage deleted, and in his defence published a letter in the *Morning Chronicle* of April 12, 1850, on "Capers and Anchovies," wherein he explained the facts. The story is told of an Irish admirer of the celebrated singer, determined to bring Thackeray to task for his insulting references, renting a room opposite the novelist's house in Young Street. But Thackeray, being apprised of what awaited him, summoned a policeman and boldly made his way across the street. After a deal of explaining he succeeded in pacifying the indignant Irishman, and the affair ended amicably. But Thackeray wrote no more about Catherine Hayes!

Incidentally, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the reference to Catherine Hayes in the serial issue of *Pendennis* (vol. ii, Chapter 7) has a particular interest in that it explains the original initial letter, of humorous design, drawn by Thackeray for that chapter. With the later omission of the reference the initial lost its point.

VI

CONSTANCE KENT

The Acquitted Fratricide

CONSTANCE KENT

CONSIDERING the circumstances, the age of the murderess at the time of her crime, and the terrible strength of purpose that must have imbued her young mind, there is probably no more appalling or singular confession of guilt in the literature of British criminal records than that of Constance Kent, conveyed in a letter to *The Times* by Dr. John Charles Bucknill, the physician appointed by the Home Office to examine the girl's mental condition shortly before her trial. Yet Bucknill found that she suffered no derangement, and was, in all respects, a perfectly sane and responsible person.

At the time of her crime Constance Kent was sixteen —"an ill-balanced girl of sixteen," as Miss Tennyson Jesse describes her; at the time of her trial she was twenty-one. It would not be unreasonable to say "an ill-balanced girl of twenty-one," for the intervening five years had not aged her greatly, and the urge to confess her crime had come to her suddenly, while engaged in preparing herself for confirmation in a religious retreat in Brighton. When she came to London with her spiritual mentor, the Rev. Arthur Wagner, and confessed her guilt to Sir Thomas Henry at Bow Street, the solution was afforded to one of the most puzzling and comment-provoking murders that ever stirred the tongues and imaginations of the Press and the public.

The crime, as I have said, was committed five years before the murderess confessed her guilt. In the early

summer of 1860 the Kent family were to all intents and purposes happily settled in the large Road Hill House, which stood above the village of the same name in Somerset. True, Mr. Samuel Saville Kent was not a man extremely liked by the people of the countryside. Rather dictatorial in manner (he had at one time been a Government sub-inspector of factories!), inclined to regard the encroachment of others upon what was his with distinct disfavour, a man, one might suppose, lacking tact and discretion, given to asserting himself upon the least provocation, and probably not without a keen sense of his own importance in the scheme of things, he had on more than one occasion had trouble with his neighbours over such trifles as the trout in the stream which ran by his grounds and the fences which bordered his property. His family, as one American commentator on his daughter's crime avers, might have stepped out of the pages of a novel by Trollope or Wilkie Collins.

Indeed, the same writer—Mr. Edmund Pearson[1]—is of the opinion that the history of the Kents undoubtedly interested both those novelists; certainly, there is a similarity between the case and certain parts of *The Moonstone*, while Mr. William Roughead has already pointed to the fact that Dickens himself, in describing the running away of Helena Landless in *Edwin Drood*, probably had in mind a similar escapade of Constance Kent's more youthful years. However, up to the year 1860 Mr. Kent's life had been fairly representative of that of most Victorian gentlemen in the middle stratum of society. Two wives, if not altogether brightening

[1] Edmund Pearson, *Murder at Smutty Nose and Other Murders*, p. 252 (Heinemann, 1927).

his life, had certainly filled his home. In June 1860, with eight of his offspring alive, Mr. Kent was wondering whether his second wife's next child—his fifteenth—would add to the number of his sons or of his daughters. Eight years before, in 1852, the first Mrs. Kent had died, "a victim of madness and maternity." Her demise had been followed in the succeeding year by the promotion of her maid, a Miss Mary Pratt, to Mrs. Kent the Second. The even tenor of the Kent household had proceeded without interruption, for the original mistress had been suffering from a severe mental malady for some twenty years before her death, and during that time had been incapable of managing her family's domestic businesses.

However, the interesting fact remains that the mother of Constance Kent, at the time of the latter's birth, in 1844, was virtually a mad-woman, although her derangement up to that period had not taken any particularly violent form. It is on account of her mother's condition at the time of her birth that Dr. Bucknill's decision upon the mental state of Constance Kent before her trial is interesting. It seems almost grotesque that the child of such a mother, while born with an instinct for the callous and the brutal, should be left with unwarped mental calibre. Like the carelessly drawn character of an inept novelist, inconsistently portrayed, Constance Kent moves across the narrow stage of her life a tragic figure burdened with her own solitariness, in her heart the raging turmoil of small hopes opposed to bitter, instinctive jealousies. Yet in her very inhumanness is she human. Life at Road Hill House must have been a depressing experience for any girl of high spirits, endowed, ironically enough, with the courage of her

own convictions, never mind how wrong or how perverse those convictions were. And probably the most deep-rooted of her convictions in her adolescent years was that which caused her to look upon her stepmother as an interloper. No child with any deep feelings of filial affection, however lacking in the customary maternal capacities her mother may be, can readily allow her nurse to usurp that mother's place in her heart and love; and that Constance Kent was blessed with a more than usual share of filial affection is proved by the contention of those students of her "case" who avow that her "confession," so suddenly made, was but a means she employed of diverting suspicion from her father, the real criminal. In this connection, before turning to the story of the crime itself, it is interesting to note the words of Dr. Bucknill himself, uttered thirteen years after Constance Kent had been sentenced. The extract is from a lecture he delivered at the Royal College of Physicians upon the subject of insanity.

"The most remarkable case in which I have been concerned," he said, "was the case of Constance Kent, who murdered her young brother and escaped detection. After an interval of several years a truly conscientious motive led her to confess, and the most painful and interesting duty fell to my lot of examining her for the purpose of ascertaining whether it would be right to enter the plea of 'Not guilty on the ground of insanity.' . . . By her own wish, and that of her relatives, I published a letter in *The Times* describing the material facts of the crime; but, to save the feelings of those who were alive at the time, I did not make known the motive, and on this account it has been that the strange portent has remained in the history of our social life that a young

girl, not insane, should have been capable of murdering her beautiful boy brother in cold blood and without motive. I think the right time and opportunity has come for me to explain away this apparent monstrosity of conduct. A real and dreadful motive did exist. The girl's own mother having become partially demented, was left by her husband to live in the seclusion of her own room, while the management of the household was taken over the heads of the grown-up daughters by a high-spirited governess, who, after the decease of the first Mrs. Kent, and a decent interval, became Constance Kent's step-mother. In this position she was unwise enough to make disparaging remarks about her predecessor, little dreaming, poor lady, of the fund of rage and revengeful feeling she was stirring up in the heart of her young stepdaughter. To escape from her hated presence Constance once ran away from home, but was brought back; and after this she only thought of the most efficient manner of wreaking her vengeance. She thought of poisoning her stepmother, but that, on reflection, she felt would be no real punishment, and then it was that she determined to murder the poor lady's boy. A dreadful story this; but who can fail to pity the depths of household misery which it denotes? At her arraignment Constance Kent persisted in pleading 'Guilty.' Had the plea been 'Not Guilty' it would, I suppose, have been my most painful duty to have told the court the tragic history which I now tell to you in the belief that it can give no pain to those concerned in it, and that it is mischievous that so great and notorious a crime should remain unexplained."

In the above extract lies the real answer to those who persist in the belief that Constance Kent's self-confessed

motive for her crime—namely, revenge—is an utter illogicality. There seems to me little need to lay further emphasis upon this point. I purposely refrain from discussing the contention of a few: that Constance Kent was brought to "confess" her crime only after the application of that very vague and indeterminate system of persuasion "religious persecution."

At five o'clock on the morning of Saturday, June 30, 1860, the Kents' nurse, a certain Elizabeth Gough, awoke to find the sun streaming into the room. After rubbing her eyes she glanced across to the cot by the farther wall, and was surprised to see that it was empty. Then she recalled that little Francis had been unwell on the previous day, and presumed that his mother had taken him into her own room. With that she settled down and went to sleep again. When next she woke it was about half past six. Getting out of bed and going over to the cot, she was struck by the fact that the clothes were not rumpled. Without knowing why, she suddenly felt rather anxious, and went across to her mistress's room, on the other side of the landing. However, knocking twice and receiving no answer, she returned to her own room and dressed. Then she returned to the other room and again knocked on the door. This time Mrs. Kent was awake and called out to her to enter.

The nurse opened the door and then stood stock-still. There was no sign of Francis in his mother's room. Falteringly she put her question. In an instant Mrs. Kent was sitting up in bed, wide awake. No, she had not brought the child into her room. What was the matter?

It was very soon apparent that the boy was nowhere in the house. Then the housemaid, a girl named Sarah

Cox, came out with the story that early that morning she had found the door of the drawing-room ajar, and the shutters of the window open, and the window itself slightly raised. At this piece of information an idea of what must have happened occurred to the father. Someone had kidnapped the child, intending to hold him for ransom. Without any delay he ordered the carriage to be brought to the front door, and then set out for Trowbridge, to inform the police of what had happened.

However, during his absence the news spread to the village, and several of the villagers arrived at the Kent home and offered to make a search of the grounds. Mrs. Kent gladly accepted the offer, and the men set out to hunt among the bushes and shrubs, on the chance that the child had been left there.

Now it happened that hidden in a remote part of the grounds was an old water-closet that for a long time past had not been used. The section of the grounds where the old closet was situated was searched by a couple of men named Benger and Nutt. While his companion continued his search among the bushes Benger opened the door of the closet and glanced inside. He was startled to see, lying upon the floor, a pool of wet blood. He called to Nutt, and together the two men moved inside. Lifting the lid of the receptacle, Benger was horrified to behold the body of the missing child, which had been hastily wrapped in a blanket. The head had been almost severed from the little trunk. Gently the two men wrapped the mutilated remains in the blanket, and then carried the body back to the house, where quite a number of people had assembled to console the anxious mother, among whom was the rector of the parish, a Mr. Peacock. However, when the terrible

to go at once to Trowbridge, to acquaint the father and the police of the latest horrible development. The rector, however, met Mr. Kent on his way back, accompanied by Superintendent Foley of the Trowbridge Police, and within a few hours of Benger making his dreadful discovery the Road Hill House was taken over by the police and the superintendent was vigorously directing his inquiry.

Doubtless Superintendent Foley did all that lay within his powers, but by the time of the inquest, which was held on the following Monday, July 2, he had learned very little that appeared to cast any light on the mystery. The inquest was held at the Red Lion Inn, in the village, and was conducted by a Mr. Sylvester. Mr. Kent's solicitor, Mr. Rodway, of a Trowbridge firm of solicitors, attended the hearing as the legal representative of the Kent family. One by one the Kent household gave their evidence, but it surrendered little that was illuminating. It was proved that Mr. Kent himself had been the last member of the household to retire on the ill-fated night, but as he was usually a very heavy sleeper, and as on that night he was very tired, having had a long day, he had not been attentive to any noises he might have heard. Thus the police's most promising witness, the bereaved father, failed to afford them any real help. When Thomas Benger was called he explained how he and Nutt had made their discovery. "The child was lying on the splashboard," runs the report. "It had only its little nightdress on and a flannel waistcoat. Its throat was cut, but it looked

pleasant and its eyes were shut. He carried it into the kitchen, and then the family came to look at it. If it had not been for the splashboard the body would have fallen down into the vault."

And if the body had fallen down into the vault the crime might never have been discovered. For although Benger had seen the blood on the floor of the closet, if he had not also seen the body on lifting up the lid he might have conjured up some other explanation to account for it. In that case the most likely "solution" to the mystery of the child's disappearance would have been the obvious one of "gipsies." One wonders in that case, too, what would have happened to Constance Kent's conscience. However . . .

Various other people who had been present in the grounds at the time of the finding of the body, or at some time shortly afterwards, next gave their evidence, and then Dr. Joshua Parsons, of Beckington, took the stand. Among a great many details he explained that "the deceased" had been cut twice on the left hand, although, in his opinion, no blood had flowed from these wounds. The throat, he said, "was cut to the bone by some sharp instrument—a single clean cut, without being jagged; it severed the skin, all the blood-vessels, and the nerves." At a later stage of his examination he had determined the nature of a dreadful wound in the child's chest. This wound, he added, had evidently been "made with a sharp, long, strong instrument, which cut through the flannel shirt, entered the body below the pericardium [the membranous cavity enclosing the heart], and extended three-quarters of the width of the chest." In conclusion he stated that this wound could not have been made with a razor-like instrument,

that the child had not been drugged prior to the murder, and that, lastly, considering the nature of the wounds, he did not think all the child's blood had been discovered.

This last statement by Dr. Parsons, if only the police had realized it at the time, offered the clearest clue they were to receive at that stage of the inquiry. For it meant that somewhere, either in the house or in the grounds (unless it had since been removed), was a very much bloodstained garment or blanket.

One other important item the medical evidence had offered the police: the child had been dead about five hours before the body had been discovered. The crime was thus fixed in time at what must have been a short while after dawn.

After Dr. Parsons's evidence had been submitted Mr. Sylvester allowed the jury to go to the Kent home to interview the two younger children of the first marriage. Constance, after giving her age as sixteen and admitting that she was a sister of the dead child, said that she knew nothing of the crime. She gave her account of the night of the murder as follows:

"I retired to bed about half past ten o'clock on Friday night last. I did not hear anything during the night. I slept soundly. It was between eight and nine o'clock on Saturday morning when I first heard anything about the occurrence. I arose about half past six in the morning. I did not leave my bed or hear any noise or anything unusual till then."

After repeating that she knew nothing about the crime she remarked that she knew of no disagreement among the various members of the family, and regarding Elizabeth Gough she offered the following comment, which, in light of the suspicion that soon came to rest

upon the woman, is particularly interesting: "I found the nursemaid generally quiet and attentive, and perform her duties in every respect as could be wished." So, whatever the conflicting nature of her thoughts at the time of her interrogation, and it cannot but be imagined that she was afraid lest some untoward question or discovery should pronounce her dread secret, there was no intention in her mind of deliberately foisting the crime upon another, and so doubly securing her own safety.

Young William, the other child questioned by the members of the jury, was a trifle more impetuous in his reply.

"I slept all night soundly," he said, "and got up at seven o'clock the following morning. I did not hear of this circumstance until I was coming out of my room. I did not get out of my bed at all during the night of Friday. I did not sleep on the same floor as the deceased, but on the floor above. I knew nothing nor heard anything of this circumstance till the morning—I wish I had!"

He also testified to the general liking the family entertained for Elizabeth Gough: "I have always found the nursemaid very kind and attentive"; and finally admitted a rather strange thing: "I do not sleep with my bedroom door locked, but I did lock it last night *from fear.*"

When the jury returned to their discussion of the crime one of them voiced an opinion that must have been shared by several. He said to the coroner after the latter had summed up the evidence: "There is a strong suspicion in my mind, for it is clear no one could have got into the house from the outside." After returning

the customary verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown the jury were discharged, and the case was thereupon thrown open to investigation on the part of the police and speculation on the part of the general public, whose interest in the case soon raised it to the doubtful elevation of a *cause célèbre*. The Press took up the case with fervour, and column after column was published offering the lives of each inmate of the ill-fated house. In a short while writers were expounding all sorts of theories, some ranging wildly beyond the bounds of probability, and one after another each member of the Road Hill House *ménage* came under a dark cloud of suspicion.

It was perhaps only natural, from the facts of the case, that the first person on whom suspicion should rest was the murdered child's nurse, Elizabeth Gough. There were several items in her evidence delivered at the inquest that the inquiring and scandalous-minded were quick to seize upon. We are told that she was a good-looking young woman, twenty-three years of age at the time of the murder, and that she had been in the Kent household for some ten months. She came of a respectable family, and there was nothing in her past that could justify the placing of an ominous query after her name. However, according to the sceptical, when one is twenty-three and good-looking it is not one's past that matters so much as one's present. Had Elizabeth Gough a lover? The question was bound to rise sooner or later: in this case it came sooner. Why had the nursemaid not heard the murderer moving across the room to the child's cot? That was the question which led to the other. She had said she awoke at five o'clock. Then why had she calmly gone off to sleep again? And

an hour and a half later why had she knocked timidly at the door of her mistress's bedroom instead of awaking the household, remaining, apparently, content to waste nearly another hour upon her toilet? Damaging questions, in all conscience; questions that, unanswered, seemed to creep mighty near to the truth. Imagination began to supply the missing answers, raising still more odious questions in the process. Some lover had paid a visit to Elizabeth Gough on the night of the crime, and the clandestine and illicit meeting had been witnessed by the child, who had been old enough to prattle dangerously. The crime had been committed, so these imaginative ones rounded off their argument, in order that the nursemaid's secret should not be divulged and she should not lose both her position and reputation.

The tale was circulated to an alarming extent, and speculation turned afresh upon the identity of this nocturnal lover. Many eyes focused upon the child's own father. Was Mr. Kent himself the unknown lover? A large section of the public was soon of the firm opinion that he was—emphatically so; another portion, even more given to scandal, decided that Mr. Kent had committed the crime for an entirely different reason—namely, because he had recently discovered that he was not the child's father. Either theory brought Elizabeth Gough into the forefront of the picture.

She was either an accomplice or the actual perpetrator of the foul crime, or else she was something almost as bad, an accessory both before and after the fact. The local authorities, in view of the strong tone public opinion was adopting regarding the case, had the nursemaid up for a close investigation; but all the pressure they could bring to bear on her neither elucidated the

fact that there was a lover nor changed in the slightest degree the evidence she had submitted at the inquest. So Miss Gough was (somewhat reluctantly) released amidst the noisy growls of the Press.

The local police remained very active, prosecuting their inquiry with a great deal of display, but it quickly became apparent that they were not going to produce any satisfactory result.

So Scotland Yard entered the case, and Sir Richard Mayne, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Force, sent down to Somerset one of his most capable officers, Inspector Whicher. With Whicher, as the latter's assistant, went Sergeant Williamson, who later rose to the rank of Chief Constable. So it can safely be asserted that two of the finest detectives England possessed took up the case. For Williamson the case turned out to be a bogey; for Whicher it assumed the size and complexion of something paler and larger than a white elephant—it smashed his career, and, ironically, solely because he arrived at the correct solution, which proved unacceptable to the public! Five years were to pass before his theory and belief were vindicated; but long before that time Whicher had retired from the police, a man out of favour and disgraced because he had had the courage of his own convictions and the intelligence to see farther than other men.

However, to return to the case. Whicher and Williamson journeyed down to Road some fortnight after the discovery of the body in the old water-closet. They arrived to find their way paved with obstacles. In the first place, any clue that might have remained at the time of the inquest had been hopelessly lost through the activities of the local police; in the second, the local

superintendent, Foley, of the Trowbridge division, regarded the intrusion of the Yard men with a distinctly disapproving eye, and soon made it clear that they need expect little help from him. Indeed, it has been asserted, and probably justly so, that Foley held back much that would have aided Whicher considerably. However, it is a fact that the superintendent was jealous of his colleagues from Scotland Yard, and, having failed to produce any abiding result himself, did not relish the two Yard men succeeding where he had drawn a blank.

Whicher and Williamson found themselves driven upon their own resources entirely. They began their investigation in the approved manner of the as yet young Criminal Investigation Department, by ferreting out all they could about the inmates of the Road Hill House, for, like the juryman at the inquest, they were soon of the opinion that the crime had been committed by someone inside the house. As a matter of fact, their inquiries did not bring to the surface any startling or bizarre facts regarding the pasts of any of the Kent household, and Whicher had soon made up his mind that the nurse-maid had told the truth. On the other hand, he found himself unusually interested in the personality of the young girl Constance. For a young girl, she offered a close-knit problem; she was moody and reticent and gay and brimming over with spirits by turn. Further, she had a glib tongue, and it did not take him long to discover that, for her age, she was an amazingly clever actress. She could control her true feelings with an ease that was astonishing in one apparently so unsophisticated. A country girl brought up in rural surroundings, who had had no chance to observe the manners of a wider world, she had poise and was quick-witted, and, what was more

intriguing, she was self-assured and surprisingly confident in herself.

Whicher, by dint of close questioning and following what few leads remained open to him, learned the story of Constance's escapade of some three years before, to which reference has already been made. The story at once assumed a startling significance to Whicher's mind, for it provided the only reference to the disused water-closet in the shrubbery that he had come upon other than in the story of the finding of the corpse. It appeared that during the summer holidays, when Constance was thirteen years old, she had planned to run away from home with her brother William, then eleven; and she had formed her plan with remarkable ingenuity. First she had secreted some cast-off clothes of her brother's in the old water-closet, where, as she knew, no one would be likely to go, and then, after the midday meal on the day she had arranged for the escape, she went there, changed into them, cut off her hair (which, with her own clothes, she threw into the vault—where afterwards they were found), and set off with her brother to walk to Bath, some ten miles away. Sturdily the pair had trudged their way along the dusty highroad, reaching the city at nightfall. Not a bit dismayed, and not at all daunted by the tiring effects of the journey, Constance had made her way to the Greyhound Hotel and asked for beds for the night. But the landlady had been suspicious, and had questioned the girl closely as to where she had come from, where she was going to, and where were her parents. But Constance had proved obdurate, refusing to answer the stream of questions levelled at her. Even a threatening tone the woman had adopted failed to disturb her calm; in fact, she is supposed to

have proved very insolent upon this occasion. However, little William was very tired, and, now that the novelty had worn off, not unnaturally frightened, so far away from home. It did not take the landlady long to get the truth out of him, and he was promptly put to bed, while Constance, much to her chagrin, was bundled off to the police-station. Even there she refused to divulge who she was or why she was alone in the city with her little brother. Later, after she had been taken home, she merely said that she had "wished to be independent," and had intended making her way to Bristol, where, as she had thought, she would be able to find a means of getting out of the country!

Whicher, mulling over this tale, wondered how far the recent crime had been a sequel to it. The girl had proved herself resourceful and possessed of a strong will-power; and when once she got an idea into her head it seemed that it was fixed beyond anyone's shifting. Had Constance received some terrible idea on that fateful Friday? And, if she had, what had given rise to it?

The painstaking Yard man now set to work delving into Constance's relations with the rest of her family, and when he learned that she was jealous of her mother's name, and was inclined to be openly resentful of her stepmother's attitude towards her predecessor and the children of the first marriage, he knew very well that he had the foundation of a "case." But before he could hope to take his theory to the proper authorities he knew that he must find something more concrete than personal surmise. He began to rack his brains for some piece of evidence which would definitely knit the loose threads he held into a clear pattern. Then he had a brainwave. What had become of the garment the perpetrator of the

crime had worn? It must have been bloodstained. Perhaps it had even been used to mop up some of the blood. The more he thought about the matter the more convinced he became that here was the clue he required to confirm his theory; and in support of it he had the opinion of the surgeon Parsons, who had examined the body and submitted his evidence at the inquest. Parsons had said, as has been pointed out before (page 174), "that so large a quantity of blood was not accounted for as was likely to be produced by cutting the throat of a child so large and well developed as the deceased."

Whicher immediately set to work on another line of inquiry, and it was not long before he had good reason to congratulate himself. Esther Holly, the woman who had hitherto done the laundry work of the Kent household, had been dismissed shortly after the crime on account of Mr. Kent entertaining suspicions that she had stolen a nightdress—one of Constance's. It appeared that the dirty linen of the household was sent to the laundry woman every Monday morning, and Sarah Cox, the housemaid, had kept a laundry book, containing a detailed list of all the articles sent, which was checked off on their return. She told Whicher that she distinctly remembered putting Constance's nightdress into the laundry basket on the morning of Monday, July 2—that is, the Monday after the crime. She had packed the basket in the lumber-room, and, while engaged in the task, she had been interrupted by "Miss Constance," who had asked her to look in the pocket of her slip to see if she had left her purse there. She had accordingly looked, and it had not been there. Then the girl had asked her to fetch her a glass of water. "I found her there when I returned with the water,"

she said later, "and I think I was not gone a minute." However, Constance had drunk the water and then left the lumber-room. The next thing she remembered was the laundress sending on the Tuesday morning to say that the basket was a nightdress short, according to the list in the book. Mr. Kent had been rather abusive.

However, Whicher was not greatly interested in Mr. Kent's views upon the matter. He went to Constance's bedroom and then summoned her to attend him. When she arrived he made her turn out the chest of drawers containing her linen wear. Then he scrutinized a list of her linen which she kept. The following is Whicher's own account of the episode:

"I said, 'Is this a list of your linen?' She replied, 'Yes.' I said, 'In whose writing is it?' She said, 'It is my own writing.' I said, 'Here are three nightdresses. Where are they?' She said, 'I have two; the other was lost in the wash the week after the murder.' She then brought me the two which I produce. I also saw a nightdress and a nightcap on her bed. I said, 'Whose is this?' She said, 'That is my sister's.' The two she had before brought me were soiled. I mean they had been worn."

Whicher's theory regarding the nightdresses was that the one worn by Constance on the night of the crime had become so bloodstained that she had had to destroy it, probably by burning it. Then, in order to cover up her deficiency, she had on the Saturday and Sunday nights used one of her clean nightdresses, which on the Monday morning she had purloined from the basket of dirty linen while Sarah Cox had gone to fetch the glass of water.

Whicher, armed with this additional piece of evidence,

presented his case before the local authorities, and, after expounding his theories for some time, was successful in getting them to acquiesce in the arrest of Constance Kent for the murder of her half-brother. He applied for a warrant on July 20—that is, within five days of arriving in Road—secured it, and the girl was accordingly arrested and lodged in the gaol at Devizes. A week later she was brought before the Road magistrates and formally charged. Throughout the hearing she kept her face closely veiled.

The court was packed, and as the various witnesses rose to give their evidence a hush of expectancy fell upon the gathering. Whicher played his cards as best he knew how, but it did not take long to show that popular opinion did not support him. The defence was ably conducted by a clever forensic duellist, Mr. (afterwards Sir) Peter Edlin, who opened his address by demanding the instant freeing of his client, whom he pictured as a young girl arrested solely to gratify the reward-seeking purposes of a policeman. It has been recorded that after a lofty and somewhat bitter peroration, in which contempt blended freely with contumely, "the learned gentleman resumed his seat amidst the loud applause of the audience." The magistrates then put their heads together for a short while, and finally came to the decision that they could not persist in holding the prisoner in custody. The "case," they mutually agreed—and probably with relief, if the truth were known——had exploded. And with it had exploded a reputation Whicher had spent years in carefully building up. He returned to London, his opinion the same, but a man defeated by popular prejudice. Every newspaper in the land was clamorous in its denunciation of the way

he had conducted himself and his inquiry. As a sample of what his cleverness had earned for him we quote the following:

"The grounds on which this accusation was made were so frivolous and the evidence by which it was attempted to be supported so childish, that the proceeding can only be described as absurd and cruel. . . . The other evidence to support the charge was singularly empty and vexatious. . . . By this indiscretion the exertions of the detectives, so far from having tended to the discovery of the criminals, had rather diminished the chance of success."

So Constance Kent had been arrested, charged with the crime, and then liberated. As one chronicler of the crime has remarked, "*The Times* shed tears of printer's ink over the touching scene of her reunion with her parents." But public interest in the case had no whit abated. After a violent outburst, vilifying the police and their methods, and censuring especially Whicher's action in having turned for information to some of Constance's school-friends, the Press again clamoured for the discovery of the murderer. The Kent case became the topic for debate throughout the entire length and breadth of the land. Indeed, the question of arriving at a solution became so imperative that Parliament roused itself to do something in the matter—very little, it is true, but that little was indicative of the heat to which public indignation had blazed. The immediate result was that Mr. Slack, a solicitor of Bath, was commissioned to undertake a special and private inquiry. Very little is known of Mr. Slack's actual investigation, but the upshot was that he accumulated enough so-called evidence

to persuade the Attorney-General, Sir Richard Bethell, to agree to the arrest of Elizabeth Gough. Less than a week after the nursemaid's arrest, on October 1, she was brought before the magistrates at Trowbridge.

Mr. Peter Edlin, who had defended Constance, again attended the court, this time to look after Mr. Kent's interests. For scandalous talk was again being uttered freely, and those who had previously held the opinion that the father and the nursemaid were jointly responsible for the crime reiterated their belief with added gusto. The hearing was believed to hold great possibilities in the way of surprises. Considering the ponderous nature of the evidence, and the fact that every piece of it had been well sifted before, perhaps the greatest surprise of the hearing was the nursemaid's ultimate liberation. The prosecution had twisted the known facts into some very ugly shapes. For instance, it was submitted that the wounds had been inflicted solely to misguide the authorities. The medical evidence was found to support a theory of suffocation as the means of death; and Mr. T. W. Saunders, of the Western Circuit, who was prosecuting, levelled this weighty observation to all and sundry: "The probabilities were that whoever committed the murder, and took the child out and deposited it where it was found, got out through the back door, was let out by a person in the house, and afterwards returned." Upon what he based his theory that the person who carried the body to the disused water-closet returned to the house is not clear. He added: "It may be suggested that it [the crime] was done by one person only. Whether it was done by one or more, it was clear almost to demonstration that the prisoner

must have been concerned." However clear the case was in Mr. Saunders' mind, the actual demonstration was lacking, and the result was that on the fourth and final day of the hearing the counsel defending the prisoner was able to knock most of the prosecution's contentions to atoms, and, after an impassioned appeal to the magistrates, and the lapse of another hour, during which those august persons deliberated over what they had heard, it was announced that the prisoner was free. Mr. Ribton, who had represented the prisoner, had scored a marked success, and had doubtless taken a load off Samuel Saville Kent's mind, for at one stage the case had assumed an ugly aspect.

Interest in the case, however, still did not wilt. The Press continued to debate the issues of the two hearings and the possibilities still open to the authorities with just as much *verve* as hitherto. Two more months slipped by, and then the last official investigation was inaugurated, this time by no less a person than the Attorney-General himself, in the Court of Queen's Bench, at Westminster. An attempt was made to overrule the verdict brought in at the coroner's inquest, some five months before, on the grounds that the jury had been misdirected and evidence had been withheld. A couple of months later, on January 30, 1860, after the court had found that the coroner's inquest had in no way been misdirected, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn discharged the rule. As far as the authorities were concerned the Road Hill House murder had closed.

It remained closed for nearly five years.

Three of those years the culprit, who had managed so successfully to evade the searching talons of the law,

spent in retreat in a convent in France. It has been put forward that the real reason for Constance's taking herself to France and retirement was that Whicher, still of the opinion that his theory was right, and anxious to vindicate himself to a chief who had lost faith in him, had returned to the scene of the crime and commenced making fresh inquiries on his own. However, with the murderess off the scene, and himself looked upon as a mere crank, poor Whicher's efforts were doomed to prove unavailing. In time he came to relinquish his quest for the truth, and the ex-member of the Criminal Investigation Department retired into obscurity.

In 1863 Constance Kent returned to England, and in the late summer of that year was admitted into St. Mary's Home at Brighton, an Anglo-Catholic establishment for devout women which was superintended by the Rev. Arthur Wagner, who was curate of St. Paul's, Brighton.

For two years Constance remained in the home, a seemingly devout young Christian woman, her mind given to pious considerations and matters spiritual. Whether the more rigorous routine of the English home was responsible for the change that eventually took place in her after two years had passed it is not possible to say with any certainty. Possibly the desire that came to her to divulge the truth she had hidden for five years was the outcome of the habit of confession. Possibly, too, there was a chance of her becoming really devout. However that may be, time and conscience worked their way with her. During those two years at St. Mary's Home one can imagine her battling fiercely and more fiercely with the urge to strip her life of its great mockery, to cleanse herself spiritually, and endeavour earnestly

to save the soul she must by this time have believed thoroughly damned.

It was while she was preparing herself for confirmation, in April 1865, that she confessed to Mr. Wagner that she was, as Inspector Whicher had five years before believed, the murderess of her half-brother. The scene that followed this avowal must have been the strangest in Mr. Wagner's life of listening to other people's guilty secrets. Whether he himself was instrumental in getting her to agree to make a public confession, or whether she had already decided to take that course, again is not known. But on the 25th of the same month she journeyed to London in the company of Mr. Wagner and the Mother Superior of the Home and made a full confession to Sir Thomas Henry, at Bow Street.

The news of the confession swept the country like a cold breeze. The general interest in the Road Hill House murder, that had lain dormant for the best part of five years, sprang up afresh overnight. When the trial opened, at Salisbury, on July 20, 1865, the court was thronged as it had never been thronged before. While the course of the trial, in view of the accused's spontaneous confession, was a foregone conclusion, great interest in the prisoner's story was revealed, for now that the truth was about to be made public people's minds reviewed the nature of the crime with fresh horror. A young, innocent-seeming girl of sixteen to murder her baby brother in cold blood, to stand up to a whittling examination by one of the Yard's most distinguished officers, and to win public sympathy as a result of her ordeal—here was tragedy and drama in real life the like of which the stage had never known.

On behalf of the Kent family it must be admitted that they commissioned their solicitor, Mr. Rodway, to retain the best counsel for the defence procurable, and accordingly Mr. John Duke Coleridge, afterwards Lord Chief Justice, made his way down to Wiltshire to plead for leniency for a young woman, barely twenty-one years old, frail-looking, with a face pallid and stamped with a look of half-timid wonder, who was bracing herself to do what she now considered her duty. The days before the trial were trying ones for the accused and her counsels. Mr. Rodway, whose heart was not in so thankless a task, in order to obviate possible criticism of his methods, procured a note from the accused herself authorizing him to adopt the only "defence" he could arrange for in the circumstances.

Accordingly Constance Kent addressed the following brief missive to Mr. Coleridge:

> SIR,
>
> I announced my determination yesterday to Mr. Rodway to plead guilty, and then if the judge should consider that a trial would conduce to clear those who are unjustly suspected, I would consent and leave the case in the hands of my counsel for that purpose. If the case is not gone into it will not be believed that my confession is a true one, and I am persuaded that nothing will tend to clear the innocent so completely as my conviction.
>
> Yours truly,
>
> CONSTANCE KENT

Doubtless those sceptical ones who later averred (as has already been mentioned, see page 168) that Constance Kent immolated herself upon the altar of sacrifice for a guilty father found substance for their belief in this very note. Rather is it an indication of the

great mental change solitude and reflection had brought about in the one-time wayward and strong-willed girl, who until she had retired to the life of a convent had been prone to indulge those urges of her nature from which her maturity shrank in horror. Her counsel, Mr. Coleridge, interviewing her shortly before the trial opened, strongly advised her to plead either guilty or not guilty. "I advise you against any intermediate course," he said. The prisoner accordingly pleaded guilty, and Mr. Coleridge prepared his defence as best he could in the circumstances.

A brief commentary on the case is provided by two entries from his diary, for the two days the trial lasted. They are:

> *July* 20: Saw Miss Kent, the sister, and William Kent, and then sat up till near three getting up my speech, which, after all, I shall not deliver.
>
> *July* 21: Poor Constance Kent pleaded guilty. I said a few words and there an end. It was very solemn.

No further commentary upon the trial is necessary. But before the trial opened the Home Office instructed Dr. Bucknill of Rugby to examine the prisoner to ascertain the truth concerning her mental condition, and it is to Dr. Bucknill that we are indebted for that document which has become known as Constance Kent's "confession." It was after the murderess had been sent to prison that the learned physician addressed to *The Times*—at her own request and at the request of her family—the following explanatory letter:

> SIR,
>
> I am requested by Miss Constance Kent to communicate to you the following details of her crime, which

she has confessed to Mr. Rodway, her solicitor, and to myself, and which she now desires to be made public.

Constance Kent first gave an account of the circumstances of her crime to Mr. Rodway, and she afterwards acknowledged to me the correctness of that account when I recapitulated it to her. The explanation of her motive she gave to me when, with the permission of the Lord Chancellor, I examined her for the purpose of ascertaining whether there were any grounds for supposing that she was labouring under mental disease. Both Mr. Rodway and I are convinced of the truthfulness and good faith of what she said to us.

Constance Kent says that the manner in which she committed her crime was as follows: A few days before the murder she obtained possession of a razor from a green case in her father's wardrobe and secreted it. This was the sole instrument which she used. She also secreted a candle with matches, by placing them in the corner of the closet in the garden, where the murder was committed. On the night of the murder she undressed herself and went to bed, because she expected that her sisters would visit her room. She lay awake watching until she thought that the household were all asleep, and soon after midnight she left her bedroom and went downstairs and opened the drawing-room door and window shutters. She then went up into the nursery, withdrew the blanket from between the sheet and the counterpane, and placed it on the side of the cot. She then took the child from his bed and carried him downstairs through the drawing-room. She had on her nightdress, and in the drawing-room she put on her goloshes. Having the child in one arm, she raised the drawing-room window with the other hand, went round the house and into the closet, lighted the candle and placed it on the seat of the closet, the child being wrapped in the blanket and still sleeping, and while the child was in this position she inflicted the wound in the throat. She says that she thought the blood would never come, and that the child was not

killed, so she thrust the razor into its left side, and put the body with the blanket round it into the vault. The light burned out. The piece of flannel which she had with her was torn from an old flannel garment placed in the waste-bag, and which she had taken some time before and sewn it to use in washing herself. She went back into her bedroom, examined her dress, and found only two spots of blood on it. These she washed out in the basin, and threw the water, which was but little discoloured, into the footpan in which she had washed her feet overnight. She took another of her nightdresses and got into bed. In the morning her nightdress had become dry where it had been washed. She folded it up and put it into the drawer. Her three nightdresses were examined by Mr. Foley, and she believes also by Mr. Parsons, the medical attendant of the family. She thought the bloodstains had been effectually washed out, but on holding the dress up to the light a day or two afterwards she found the stains were still visible. She secreted the dress, moving it from place to place, and she eventually burned it in her own bedroom, and put the ashes or tinder into the kitchen grate. It was about five or six days after the child's death that she burned the nightdress. On the Saturday morning, having cleaned the razor, she took an opportunity of replacing it unobserved in the case in the wardrobe. She abstracted her nightdress from the clothes-basket when the housemaid went to fetch a glass of water. The stained garment found in the boiler-hole had no connection whatever with the deed. As regards the motive of her crime, it seems that, although she entertained at one time a great regard for the present Mrs. Kent, yet if any remark was at any time made which in her opinion was disparaging to any member of the first family she treasured it up, and determined to revenge it. She had no ill-will against the little boy, except as one of the children of her stepmother. She declared that both her father and her stepmother had always been kind to her personally, and the following is the copy of a letter which she addressed

to Mr. Rodway on this point while in prison before her trial:

May 15

SIR,

It has been stated that my feelings of revenge were excited in consequence of cruel treatment. This is entirely false. I have received the greatest kindness from both the persons accused of subjecting me to it. I have never had any ill-will towards either of them on account of their behaviour to me, which has been very kind.

I shall feel obliged if you will make use of this statement in order that the public may be undeceived on this point.

I remain, sir,

Yours truly,

CONSTANCE E. KENT

To Mr. R. Rodway

She told me that when the nursemaid was accused she had fully made up her mind to confess if the nurse had been convicted; and that she had also made up her mind to commit suicide if she herself was convicted. She said that she felt herself under the influence of the devil before she committed the murder, but that she did not believe and had not believed, that the devil had more to do with her crime than he had with any other wicked action. She had not said her prayers for a year before the murder, and not afterwards, until she came to reside at Brighton. She said that the circumstances which revived religious feelings in her mind was thinking about receiving the Sacrament when confirmed.

An opinion has been expressed that the peculiarities evinced by Constance Kent between the ages of twelve and seventeen may be attributed to the then transition period of her life. Moreover, the fact of her cutting off her hair, dressing herself in her brother's clothes, and leaving her

home with the intention of going abroad, which occurred when she was only thirteen years of age, indicated a peculiarity of disposition and great determination of character, which foreboded that, for good or evil, her future life would be remarkable.

This peculiar disposition which led to such singular and violent resolves of action seemed also to colour and intensify her thoughts and feelings, and magnify into wrongs that were to be revenged any little family incidents or occurrences which provoked her displeasure.

Although it became my duty to advise her counsel that she evinced no symptoms of insanity at the time of my examination, and that, so far as it was possible to ascertain the state of her mind at so remote a period, there was no evidence of it at the time of the murder, I am yet of opinion that, owing to the peculiarities of her constitution, it is probable that under prolonged solitary confinement she would become insane.

The validity of this opinion is of importance now that the sentence of death has been commuted to penal servitude for life, for no one could desire that the punishment of the criminal should be so carried out as to cause danger of a further and greater punishment, not contemplated by the law.

I have the honour to remain your very obedient servant,

JOHN CHARLES BUCKNILL, M.D.

Hillmorton Hall,
Near Rugby,
August 24

Constance Kent was released from prison in 1885, a woman of forty-one, and from that time nothing has been heard of her. Various rumours have been spread about her entering another religious retreat, of her going abroad, of her changing her name; but the fact remains that no one knows what became of her after her release.

It is quite possible that she is still alive, an old woman of eighty-eight, her terrible crime some seventy-two years back in the past. If so, what must be her thoughts to-day? How clear remains her recollection of that warm summer night when she stood in the old water-closet in the shrubbery, below her a vault filled with dark shadows concealing some terrible thing she had cast from her, in her hand a guttering length of candle, the wind murmuring weirdly through the leaves without?

Such a picture, ever present in one's mind, must make of life a living nightmare.

Perhaps it is better to think of Constance Kent as one dead, and that only the memory of her crime lives—and her expiation.

VII

MARIE LAFARGE

The Passionate Poisoner

MARIE LAFARGE

PROBABLY no single murder trial has ever aroused the same widespread interest as did that of the young Frenchwoman Marie Lafarge, accused of murdering her husband, Charles Pouch Lafarge, Maire of the Commune of Beyssac, and prosperous ironmaster. During the progress of the trial the evidence and the issue were hotly debated in every corner of Europe. As Mr. Harold Dearden has said: "To say that it was a *cause célèbre* at the time is to put it mildly. It was the subject of frenzied debate in every drawing-room in Europe. Families were divided by it. Immense tomes were written by more or less learned individuals to prove the particular view which they themselves espoused; and even to-day the most remarkable divergence of opinion exists among amateurs of crime as to the guilt or innocence of the accused."[1] Another modern writer has remarked: "For eighty years this question has been debated by the cleverest lawyers and detectives of Europe. It has proved to be the most impenetrable problem in the annals of crime." He goes on to say: "And to this day none can say that M. Lafarge's wife . . . was not a deeply wronged woman." Unfortunately there happen to be quite a few students of the Lafarge case who fail to subscribe to this writer's dogmatic assertion, and the present writer is one.

[1] Harold Dearden, *The Mind of the Murderer*, Chapter V.

Marie Lafarge was one of those romantically minded young women who, when an odious publicity descends upon them, usually contrive to rouse the general public's sentimental feelings; and such feelings, once in full flood, are almost impossible to stem. Marie Lafarge's most ardent defendants seem to base their plea upon the assertion that the very act of murder was foreign to her nature; but a close and thorough examination of the more pertinent factors which controlled her life scarcely bears out this contention. She was a highly strung person, emotional to a degree, quite capable of lying ingeniously, a clever actress when impelled by self-interest, and, furthermore, she posed as a successful medium. Here, then, we have a type of person quite capable of dissembling to her own advantage; at least, her mental make-up allowed as much. We have also the very tangible evidence of her *Mémoires*, written during her years in prison; these reveal a woman given to vain and sentimental dreaming, to long indulgences in self-pity, to highly coloured melodramatic imaginings, with herself posed as the noble-minded heroine. There can be little doubt in the mind of the discerning student of human nature that Marie Lafarge considered herself but very little short of the perfection of womankind. And the history of the human race, whatever else it proves, certainly provides ample examples of the fact that people so minded are liable to isolate themselves in a separate world from the rest of human-kind, a dream-world of strange and fantastic unrealities, where impulse supplants reason and where the right to kill very closely approximates to the right to live.

It was so with Marie Lafarge, a confirmed romantic who met the man who became her husband through

the most unromantic of channels—a matrimonial agency.

The uncle of Marie-Fortunée Capelle was a comfortably placed official of the Banque de France who, in 1839, was rather concerned with obtaining a suitable husband for his twenty-three-year-old niece. However, truth to tell, Marie was rather plain. Her spirits were high enough, but her nose hung too low: the result was that her uncle's endeavours were in vain. The girl whose middle name was Fortunée seemed singularly unfortunate in the matter of securing for herself that most desirable of Fortune's favours—a suitable husband. So Marie's aunt came to the rescue by applying to a matrimonial agency.

The joint efforts of the Capelles and the agency netted a not altogether savoury-looking fish. Charles Pouch Lafarge was already a widower when he left Glandier to seek his advertised Parisian wife, and at the time of his marriage was old enough to have been his bride's father. "He was big and burly," we are told, "coarse-featured and rough-tongued; and the only activities in which he excelled seem to have been with the instincts of eating and sex." A not altogether wise choice to bestow upon the more or less gently nurtured Marie; but Lafarge's wide talk of his wider lands carried the day with the uncle and aunt, who were the girl's guardians, and the wedding was arranged to take place in August 1839.

Immediately after the ceremony Lafarge placed his bride in a coach and set out with her for his home in Glandier, in the Limousin. The passage of a single day was sufficient completely to disillusion the bride. By the time the coach had rolled its dusty way to Orlêans

the bridegroom's primitive table manners and the particularly unpleasant note upon which he snored had aroused in her a keen sense of distaste. Glandier itself changed that distaste to loathing. The bridal pair arrived in a soaking downpour of rain, to find the much-talked-of Château a pile of mouldering stones, in a sad state of decay, gloomy in appearance, and broodingly forbidding in design.

The bridal chamber was a dreary, draughty apartment, depressing in the extreme. Alone in it, pondering bitterly the life she had exchanged for the monotonous daily round that lay before her, stretching to infinity, Marie's highly strung temperamental nature found an outlet in composing a letter calculated to shake to his depths the most phlegmatic of husbands.

She began it:

> Charles, on my knees I ask your forgiveness. I have deceived you terribly. I do not love you. I love another. God knows how I have suffered! Let me die! For pity's sake listen to me. Listen! His name is Charles; he is handsome; he is noble. We were brought up together; we have loved each other since we were able to love anything. Twelve years ago another woman took his love from me, and I thought it would have killed me. Then from spite I wished to marry. Alas, I knew nothing of the mysteries of marriage! I trembled with happiness from just holding your hand. Poor me! I thought that a kiss on the forehead would be all you would expect—that you would be kind to me, like a father.

Small wonder that Lafarge flew into a violent rage and upon receiving the letter rushed to the bedroom to demand an explanation. The rest of the letter contained little to pacify him:

Can you understand what I have suffered these last few days? Can you understand that unless you save me I must die? I must tell you everything. I respect you with all my heart; I admire you. But habit and training have put an immense barrier between us. In place of gentle words of love and sweet nothings there are these feelings which take voice in you, and which revolt me. And then "he" is sorry for what he has done. I saw him at Orléans. You were at dinner, and he was on the balcony opposite mine. Even here he is hidden at Uzerche. I shall be an adulteress in spite of myself, and in spite of you, unless you save me. Tell me this evening that you will let me go to him. Let me have two horses. I will take the Bordeaux coach and embark for Smyrna.

Of course, this Charles of the balcony who left her for another woman when she was eleven years old is merely a creature of her imagination. But for Marie he has more than served his turn. His very proximity, in a village close to Glandier, enables her to wax eloquently distracted:

I will leave you my fortune. God grant that you will prosper, for you deserve to! As for me, I shall earn my living by work, or by giving lessons. I swear that you shall never know that I exist. If you wish it, I will fling myself over one of your precipices, and all will be finished. Or if you wish it I will take arsenic—I have some—and the last word will have been said. You have been so good that in refusing you my affections I can give you my life. But I can never receive your caresses.

That paragraph alone is as admirable a piece of hypocrisy as was ever set down on paper. But, most significant touch of all, the reference to arsenic. The casual way in which she says "I have some," as though it were no matter for wonder!

But she has yet to reach her climax:

> Alas, if I did not love him more than life itself I could love you because of my respect for you! But as it is your caresses disgust me. Kill me—I deserve it! But meanwhile my one hope is in you. Slip a letter under my door to-night. Otherwise to-morrow I shall be dead. In whom can I confide, if not in you? Shall I go to him? Never! I shall not be yours, and I shall not be his. I am dead as far as love is concerned. Horses would draw attention to us—let me have two old suits of peasant's clothes.
>
> Do not accuse me of deception. Since Monday, since the first hour when I knew that I was to be something more than a sister to you, when my aunt told me what it was to give oneself to a man, I swore to die. I took too small a dose of poison. I took more at Orléans, and I vomited it up.
>
> Yesterday I held a loaded pistol to my head, and I was afraid. Write to me. For without your word of honour—and I believe in you—without that letter I shall not open my door.

Lafarge's wild and vociferous demonstration in the bedroom brought his mother and sister, who lived in the Château, hurrying on the scene, to demand an explanation. The ironmaster was by this time in a gibbering state; his wrath, volcanic in its eruption, had just as suddenly given place to cajoling entreaties. But Marie remained firm. She wanted the bedroom to herself, and no other arrangement would suit her. The upshot was that after reproving the wife for her behaviour and admonishing her for what they considered her silly chatter about poison, his mother and sister led Lafarge into another room, leaving Marie to herself.

However, this early quarrel was patched up after both parties had received some worldly-wise advice

from an old legal friend of the family. The wife made a show of sweetening her disposition towards her husband, while, for Lafarge's part, it must be confessed that he honestly put himself out to entertain this difficult wife whose dowry—all other considerations apart—was proving a most useful addition to his immediate resources.

This state of armistice lasted for about a fortnight. It ended as it had begun—at night, in a bedroom. The Lafarges had been invited to a ball which was held in a near-by town, and, according to arrangements, were to stay the preceding night at the home of some relation of Lafarge's. Marie, however, was still persisting in her foible regarding sleeping alone. No sooner had she arrived at her new relative's house than she made arrangements for her husband to sleep in the room prepared for her maid, a girl named Clementine, while she instructed the maid to sleep in her room, in which two beds had been put up. If the arrangement seemed rather queer she passed it off lightly enough, explaining that her husband was given to talking in his sleep, and, as she was a light sleeper, he naturally disturbed her rest.

All went well until some time about the middle of the night when the household was roused by the piercing screams of Clementine. The host and his wife, alarmed, hurriedly repaired to Marie's bedroom. There a strange sight met their bewildered and scandalized gaze. Seated in a chair, wrapped in her dressing-gown, was the wife, reading a book, while sprawled across the maid's bed was the husband, sobbing brokenly. Lafarge had taken advantage of the fact that he was away from home to attempt a kind of cave-man reconciliation, only to find his wife still unappreciative.

This fresh rupture was patched up in time for the

ball, however, at which Lafarge and his wife managed to convey the impression that they were the most devoted couple, and even after the return to Glandier Marie brought herself to appear to take an interest in her husband's doings, his work and his hobbies. If the truth were known, she had good reason to, for about this time it was discovered, much to Lafarge's alarm, that his ironworks were not paying. Business had grown slack, and it was becoming daily more apparent that new processes of production would in time make the older methods obsolete. Times were changing, and Lafarge was old enough to realize that he would have to change with them if he was to retain the prosperity he had hitherto enjoyed. To this end he interested himself in a secret process which, if patented, he believed would enable him to reap a rich harvest.

He began dreaming day-dreams, and Marie was clever enough to dream them with him. He outlined his schemes for their future, when they were to enter a little Paradise of their own, built by the wealth his patent would surely bring. And Marie played up to him. Yes, they would travel abroad. Indeed, so often did they discuss the prospect that the dream became transformed into some shadowy semblance of reality in the minds of both.

Then Marie fell ill. It was not a severe illness, yet was sufficient to torment Lafarge's peace of mind. His dreams of avarice were still too fresh to allow of his leaving out of them the trusting and loyal partner with whom he was to share them. And his pity for his wife welled over when she told him, in a plaintive little voice, that she intended making a will, leaving everything she possessed to him.

Was she going to die? His little Marie?

No. His dreams did not allow of it. But he would match her confidence with a like confidence of his own. She should perceive the real depth of his trust and true love. He agreed to her drawing up her will providing he also drew one up, in which he would leave everything to her.

A truly happy state of affairs, in which husband and wife trusted each other implicitly. Strangely, too, after Marie had sent Lafarge's will to a lawyer in Soissons she mended rapidly, and her high spirits returned.

The year dragged on, and Lafarge became more and more pressed for money. At last business and money matters became so pressingly urgent that early in November he went to Paris, where he set about exchanging some forged bills, in order to tide him over the period of trade depression, and endeavouring to interest some wealthy firm or financier in his secret process. With the passing of the bills he was more successful than he had dared hope. It was a risky thing to try, but the increasing sum of his debts acted like a spur. In the matter of the patent, however, he could have wished for more encouragement. Try as he might he could not seem to interest anyone in it. One thing alone saved him from despairing: his wife's letters.

Daily the two corresponded, lavishing on each other the most affectionate terms of endearment, and vowing the most constant love and esteem. Away in Paris, Lafarge's heart glowed at thought of the little wife awaiting his triumphant return. She was trusting in him, backing him up. How could he let her down? He couldn't. Back in Glandier, Marie was thinking

things over, wondering how she could change the life into which she had drifted.

Her letters to Lafarge became more girlish in tone. She wanted him to think of her constantly, as she thought of him. They were even to think of each other at certain stated times, so that they might both know that they were in a way spending the hour with one another. It was all very romantic, all deliciously lover-like. She even arranged to send him a batch of cakes, which, she said, had been made by his mother, and desired that he ate them at a time she named in her letter. For, she added, at that hour she too would eat of some made in the same baking. This little act, she opined, would help to bring them closer to each other in spite of the fact that they remained so many leagues apart.

Mme. Lafarge, told of the little scheme, willingly fell in with her daughter-in-law's plan. She was only too glad to lend her efforts to anything that would bring her son and his gentle-natured wife into a closer union. So the cakes were baked on December 14, and when they were ready taken to Marie's own room in the Château.

It was nearing Christmas-time, so Marie determined that her gift-box should seem really seasonable. Besides the cakes she packed into it some sheets of music, a pair of slippers (a truly wifely thought!), and some new socks, and, lastly, a picture of herself.

Now we come to the hub of the whole mystery.

A servant at the Château who helped Marie pack the "Christmas box" later swore that she saw put into it no less than half a dozen small cakes, cakes identical with those expressly baked by Mme. Lafarge. Yet the hotel servant who took the box up to Lafarge's room in Paris,

and who was present when the ironmaster unpacked it, was equally ready to take an oath that only one cake arrived in the box: a flat cake, entirely dissimilar in shape to those baked by Lafarge's mother. So that the vital and most searching question bruited and debated at the time of the trial was: Who changed the cakes?

But of that later. Sufficient now that Lafarge, with his customary gastronomic gusto, nearly finished the cake at his next meal, after which he sat himself down to pen a most sweet letter of thanks. When next he got to his feet he was in agony, suffering terrible stomach pains and experiencing a sudden desire to be sick.

However, the horrible experience passed after a few days of quiet resting, and he remained in Paris over Christmas. But by the New Year it was fairly obvious to him that his patent as a business proposition was a failure. So on January 3 he prepared to return to Glandier.

His family expressed considerable concern when he related his unaccountable illness, and none was more assiduous in her attentions than his wife, who now seemed gentleness itself. Yet, peculiarly enough, within a short while of his return to the shelter of his own roof the strange sickness and pain in his abdomen returned. A doctor was summoned, and the patient's case was given every attention. Despite the loving attentions of his wife, mother, and sister, however, and despite the fact that the doctor prescribed every antidote and palliative known to him, Lafarge's condition became hourly more critical. Marie, away from the stricken man's bedroom, gave in to the grief she was able successfully to conceal when efficiently ministering to his wants. All the cold

comfort both mother and daughter offered her seemed of little use. Her place was by her husband's side, feeding him with delicacies, tempting his jaded appetite, satisfying his unquenchable thirst.

In fact, after a time she would let no one but herself feed him. She explained that she feared he would not be fed right unless she saw to the matter herself. Yet still Lafarge vomited after almost every meal. Still the terrible thirst parched his throat, until his very speech became inarticulate; still the burning pains in his inside grew even more excruciating.

Mme. Lafarge began to voice her fears, and Marie was quick to blame the doctor for inexpert advice. She showed herself prepared to concoct some soothing beverage of her own. The mother, fearful for her son, not knowing what to do for the best, watched her daughter-in-law in silence, saw her enter the patients' bedroom with a cool-looking liquid on which floated some grains of white powder.

She asked submissively what it was, and was told gum arabic.

"But doesn't that dissolve in water?" she asked.

Marie, however, was apparently too engrossed in her mission of mercy to heed the remark.

The days passed slowly, with the patient sinking lower and lower, in spite of all the affection and assistance at his bedside. And now into the drama was suddenly infused that indeterminate and electric element a mother's love for her son. Watching her Charles growing daily more feeble, unaccountably weaker, Mme. Lafarge suddenly became desirous of knowing the composition of everything that passed his lips. She realized now, too late, but only too well, that he was struggling

for his life. Jealous of his wife's attentions, that jealousy begot a suspicion that grew hourly into a deep distrust. She remembered those terrible scenes in the early days of the marriage, and found herself wondering why, when, and how her son's wife had come to change towards her husband. Watchfully she superintended Marie's culinary efforts, and once, after observing her mixing a white powder in a bowl of broth, cried to her son not to drink it. But he did, and immediately afterwards complained that the burning sensation had returned. On another occasion she ventured to snatch a spoon from his lips as he was in the act of sipping a drink his wife had brewed. To her horror and dismay she saw, coating the bottom of it, a thickish grey sediment.

That night she confided her worst fears to her daughter, and the latter promptly added to them by remembering that Marie had some weeks before procured a packet of arsenic. True, she had done so quite openly. It had been while Lafarge was in Paris. She had bought the poison, so she had explained at the time, in order to exterminate the rats which infested the Château. But neither the mother nor the daughter remembered her having alluded to the time when she used it for that purpose; while Mme. Lafarge *did* now suddenly remember having seen a flat, unsavoury-looking cake lying on the kitchen table about that time.

The next morning the mother approached her son and requested that he take no food from any hands except her own. Puzzled at this strange request, he asked why, and was promptly told that his mother feared he was being poisoned by arsenic administered in his food and drink. At this terrible insinuation against the wife who had been by his bedside night and day he flew into

a trembling rage. His mother was desperate, though, and not prepared to beat about the bush. She showed him a cup in the bottom of which lay a whitish sediment. Lafarge sank back on his pillow, a man half convinced against his inclination.

Then the doctor arrived, and, on being shown the powder, prepared a quick test for arsenic. The results of this test confirmed the mother's worst fears. The powder was arsenic, and it was plain that Lafarge was being slowly but systematically poisoned.

Fear for himself now quickened the patient's drugged senses; but he began the battle for his life too late. He had consumed enough of the poison to destroy him. For a whole day Mme. Lafarge sat by her dying son's bedside, praying and hoping against hope that he would rally. The door was kept locked, and Marie was not allowed inside the room.

Towards evening of the day after the doctor had pronounced the powder in the cup to be arsenic Lafarge breathed his last. Mme. Lafarge lost no time in communicating with the police, and in due course the wife was arrested on the charge of murdering her husband.

The next stage in this drama is the trial, which lasted for no less than sixteen days, and which was attended by people from almost every country in Europe. The opposing counsels trimmed their arguments and pleas with every care, and during the course of the hearing the evidence was many times sifted. The medical witnesses astonished themselves and everyone else by disagreeing on almost every point that called for their opinion, and the judge was compelled to call in an expert on poisons. He chose to call upon the man who was probably the most celebrated toxicologist of his day.

This was Mathieu-Joseph-Bonaventure Orfila (1787-1853), the Spanish-born chemist whose *Traité des poisons* was to become a standard work. In 1823 Orfila had succeeded his old master, Monsieur L. N. Vauquelin, as Professor of Chemistry in the Faculty of Medicine, Paris.

By the time Orfila entered the case it had already been proved that Marie had purchased considerable quantities of arsenic, that she had never mentioned having used any in order to rid the Château of its rats, and, further, that she had purchased her last quantity of arsenic on December 12, while the cakes had been baked on the fourteenth and dispatched to Paris on the fifteenth. Piece by piece the evidence against her became more and more damning.

Then Orfila burst a bombshell when he subjected the remains of Lafarge to yet another test. This test was the now famous Marsh test, and at the trial of Marie Lafarge its results were for the first time accepted in a court of law as legal evidence. The test for arsenic employed by Orfila was invented by James Marsh (1794-1846), Faraday's thirty-shillings-a-week assistant at the Royal Academy. The first account of this successful test was published under the title of "The Test for Arsenic" in the *Edinburgh Philosophical Journal* of October 1836—that is, some four years before the Lafarge case came into prominence; and, strangely enough, although the treatise was well known on the Continent at the time of the trial, it was not translated into French until 1843, by which time the woman it had helped to convict was languishing in prison. One of the most interesting developments at the trial was that concerning a diamond and pearl necklace of a one-time friend of the accused woman, the

Vicomtesse de Leauteau. Some time before the Vicomtesse had lost a necklace which Marie Lafarge had been known to admire, and when the Vicomte brought his charge of theft against her it was learned that shortly after the disappearance of the necklace Marie had held a *séance*, at which, posing as a medium, she had surrendered the "information" that the necklace had been disposed of in such a way that its recovery by the Vicomtesse was an impossibility. However, upon the house at Glandier being searched, the jewels were discovered in one of Marie's boxes.

Confronted with this further piece of harmful evidence, she brazenly invented a story of blackmail and illicit love, involving the Vicomtesse, a tale which plausibly accounted for the presence of the pearls and diamonds at Glandier. Then she got one of her counsel, a Mâitre Bac, to deliver what was intended to be a heart-rending appeal to the consciously false Vicomtesse. This missive shows that she had not lost her former cleverness as a temperamental actress. It ran:

MARIE DE LEAUTEAU,

May God never visit upon you the evil you have done me! Alas, I know you to be really good, but weak! You have told yourself that as I am likely to be convicted of an atrocious crime I may as well take the blame of one only infamous. I kept your secret. I left my honour in your hands, and you have not chosen to absolve me. The time has arrived for doing me justice. Marie, for your conscience' sake, for the sake of your past, save me! Remember the facts—you cannot deny them. From the moment I knew you I was deep in your confidence, and I heard the story of that intrigue begun at school and continued at Busaguy by letters that passed through my hands. You soon discovered that this handsome Spaniard had neither

fortune nor family. You forbade him to love you, although you had first sought his love, and then you entered into another love affair with the Vicomte de Leauteau. The man you flouted cried for vengeance . . . the situation became intolerable, but money alone could end it. I came to Busaguy, and it was arranged between us that you should entrust your diamonds to me, so that I might raise money on them with which you could pay the price he demanded. Acknowledge in writing that you consigned the diamonds to my care, with authority to sell them if I thought it advisable. This will end the affair. . . .

A likely story, in the circumstances! The court took it with more than a pinch of salt. But it shows the fertility of her mind and reveals something of her power of pleading. Previously, from her cell in the prison at Saint-Brives, she had addressed a touching little note to the man who was now her chief advocate and defender, Mâitre Lachaud. She had begun the note:

The Prison,
Brives

MONSIEUR,

When I was happy, careless, gay, I heard you defend a poor woman accused of theft, and your words brought tears to my eyes. Now that I am wretched, careworn, and sad, I call on you to help me. I am suffering from the burden of an awful and a false accusation. Make me smile again, and fill with light the eyes that have wept so many bitter tears during the last few days. . . .

However, although the evidence weighed the balance of judgment heavily against the prisoner, it must be confessed that certain items were admitted as evidence which strictly speaking could not properly be classed as such. For instance, the evidence of a certain bailiff from the Glandier district was admitted, and the man

had nothing more to tell than gossip he had heard regarding the fact that Lafarge and his wife were not happy together. The bailiff went to the length of explaining that the person who had communicated this fact to him had prophesied that "Lafarge will not benefit by having a rich wife, for he will be poisoned by her. If I were in his place," the unknown had added significantly, "I should let her go, for fear she would do me some ill-turn." The prophecy, the bailiff claimed, had been uttered some ten days before Lafarge's death.

However, Mâitre Lachaud certainly made the best of the scope left to him. Without involving himself and the jury in too many impassioned appeals to their chivalry he sought to reveal the weakest points in the Prosecution's contention. Straightway he tackled the question of the amount of arsenic found in the dead man's body. He pointed out that the first autopsy had merely resulted in the two doctors assigned to the case failing to discover any trace of arsenic at all. He then cunningly reminded the jury that for the second examination it had been necessary to remove the entrails, place them in a cloth, and convey them in a jar to Brives. Further, he pointed out that the vessels containing the various parts of the dead man's viscera had remained unsealed for three days following the first examination, and that for those same three days the body of Lafarge had remained more or less exposed, certainly beyond the control of the prisoner—but not beyond the possibility of interference from her enemies, who might conceivably have placed arsenic within the corpse. It was, all things considered, a clever line to take, but Lachaud was a man destined to blaze a brilliant trail to fame in the career he had chosen. After this bold attempt

to raise doubts in the minds of the jury he went on to point out that while the illustrious Professor Orfila had assuredly found traces of arsenic in the victim's stomach, yet none was discernible in the flesh of the thighs. This, he contended, rather went to suggest that had the poison been administered during the victim's lifetime it would have been carried by means of the bloodstream and its absorbents into the flesh; but as no such traces had been found in the flesh, then surely one could with every safety make the assumption that the poison had been placed in the entrails after death—in short, after the first autopsy.

Lachaud even attempted to provide a villain for the piece. This was no other than Denis Barbier, the carrier who had taken the ill-fated box of cakes to Paris. The defending counsel even submitted that Barbier had actually substituted the flat poisoned cake for the half-dozen or so smaller ones packed by Lafarge's wife. Motive in Barbier's case was theft, but in endeavouring to enlarge upon this theme Lachaud found that he was not altogether on safe ground. The probability is that he was treading on nothing but air.

Barbier had been Lafarge's foreman at the ironworks, but it was generally known at the time of the trial that Barbier had shared in his master's little irregularities, such as in the matter of the forged notes. Again, as has been pointed out elsewhere, Barbier was a man without access to the Château; and Lafarge had been murdered in his own home, while lying on his own bed, murdered by someone who came to him at all hours of the day and night with food and drink steeped in poison. Barbier was a shifty rogue, and doubtless in the neighbourhood of Glandier was known at the time as a thoroughly bad

lot. He might even have stooped to murder had opportunity and advantage presented themselves to him at the same time. But what advantage would he have gained from killing Lafarge, who, it seems, was a source of regular income to him! And, again, what opportunity had he after the trip to Paris?

Mâitre Lachaud's bold bid for his client—whom doubtless he wished to "make smile again"—lacked real conviction. It was a spoke in the wheel of the jury, but it failed to impede their arriving at a unanimous decision.

At this stage, while the trial is fast approaching its conclusion, it might be as well to introduce the episode of M. Raspail, another well-known chemist, who followed the course of the trial with great interest. Raspail was especially interested in the medical evidence, and Professor Orfila's evidence left him bubbling over with enthusiasm. So agitated did he become, so anxious that the results of the tests taken at Saint-Brives should be as accurate as possible, that he began to check the Professor's experiments himself.

He knew very well that the Marsh test for arsenic was absolutely reliable—provided the reagents used were themselves free from arsenic. Raspail, so we are told, followed Orfila's results with the combined interest of a detective and a scientist. He even went to the extreme length of tracing the shop where Orfila had purchased the zinc wire he had employed in his analysis. He purchased a similar wire, and, returning home, set himself to follow the examination in detail. While engaged in this he made a startling and terrifying discovery—namely, that there was more arsenic in the zinc wire than Orfila had discovered in Lafarge's body!

Immediately he found a means of reporting his discovery to Marie Lafarge's counsel, and as soon as he was able set out to attend the court. Unfortunately, however, he met with an accident on the way, and was delayed for some considerable time. The result was that by the time he reached the court the case was finished and sentence had been passed.

It is rather difficult to assess this discovery of Raspail's at its true evidential value. It is possible that the fact that there was arsenic in the wire might not materially have effected Orfila's experiment, which was purely of a quantitative character; again, on the other hand, it might have. It is certainly true that Raspail, learning that he was too late to submit his evidence in court, metaphorically speaking moved earth and high heaven in his endeavours to get the French judicial authorities to reconsider the case and order a retrial. In these efforts he was warmly seconded by Marie Lafarge's chief counsel, Mâitre Lachaud; but their united attempts to obtain a retrial failed. Even then Raspail did not cease to interest himself in the case. He at once got into communication with Orfila himself, and, after a deal of correspondence had flowed between the two, succeeded in bringing him to acknowledge (if not actually convincing him) that the composition of the wire he had used in his analysis left ample room for honest doubt regarding the integrity of the result obtained.

The upshot was that Orfila joined Raspail in drawing up and ultimately submitting to the French Government of the time a report containing details of their fresh discoveries. However, nothing came of the report, although quite possibly its very existence helped to fix

the decision of those gentlemen who, some twelve years after Marie Lafarge had begun her sentence, decided to issue a free pardon.

But to return to the closing scene in the courtroom. Packed to the doors with a breathless crowd of spectators, the atmosphere was heavy and close as the chief juryman rose to give the verdict of them all. Guilty!

Then the stern-voiced judge addressing the prisoner, finally passing upon her the dread sentence of imprisonment for the remainder of her life. The Lafarge case had passed into history and was ready to be written down in the records of *causes célèbres*.

However, after the passing of sentence the public interest in the case did not by any means subside. From all parts of Europe letters of condolence reached the woman in her cell. Indeed, it is said that she received more than five thousand such. In some were conveyed practical hints regarding means of escape, others proffered considerable sums of money to help her in securing another trial, while yet others, more romantic in tone (and therefore possibly those which she cherished most) offered proposals of marriage, together with eloquently worded promises of a great happiness to be found in distant lands, where one could find new interests and new friends and speedily come to forget the nightmare of the past.

It is even said that her gaolers schemed to arrange a means of escape for her. But she was the type of person who could wring a personal romance from the grey stone of prison walls. "To remain or to fly, that is my problem!" she wrote. "If I remain I lose youth, but if I fly I lose honour! Honour! My father did not

hesitate when on the field of Waterloo he was prepared to fall, dying, in the midst of his dying companions! A father's example should be a daughter's duty! I shall remain."

There is at once an imperious and a farcical note in that "I shall remain." One might even be inclined to accept this strange attitude as genuine were it not for the character of the woman herself. She had proved herself a clever liar and a *poseuse* with considerable poise; and at one time shortly after the close of the trial she went to the length of declaring herself to be *enceinte*. In her writings of the time there is evidence that her mind was occupied with thoughts and matters maternal. But as there were no true grounds for the claim this mood, like every other in which she indulged, passed, to give place to another.

Part of her sentence was to be spent "on exhibition," after which she was to be removed to the prison at Montpellier, where she was daily to undergo the rigours of a sentence of "hard labour." For six years she remained at Montpellier, and then her health suddenly broke up. So ill did she become that it was considered advisable to release her. A full pardon reached the broken-hearted and broken-bodied woman in 1852, whereupon she was taken by friends to a seaside resort to recuperate. It was useless, however; the hard life at Montpellier, whatever it had done to her physical well-being, had most certainly crushed her spirit. Her fire had suddenly died out; interest in life had vanished. A few months after her release she died, and it is one of the most remarkable tributes ever paid to her that Mâitre Lachaud, from the day of her death until shortly before his own regularly made a special journey to lay

flowers on her grave. His belief in her innocence never wavered. Truly Marie Lafarge had chosen wisely when she selected the man to defend her! In fact, it remains largely due to Lachaud's consistent acknowledgment of her innocence that so many people who have studied her case have, with him, believed her a victim of a gross miscarriage of justice.

But Lachaud undoubtedly came under the spell of the woman's personality. His entry into her case was unusual; he came to take up her defence not so much as a fee'd lawyer as a chivalrous Frenchman who would not stand by and see her placed at a disadvantage. And undoubtedly during the trial she revealed qualities which called forth his admiration: her calm, collected presence; her fortitude as the inference to be drawn from the presentation of the evidence became more apparent; the very consistency of her denials—these were the things about her that won Lachaud's regard and fixed his faith in her.

Then, again, one must not omit the romantic element of her life. A young girl married to a man twenty years older than herself, a man by birth and breeding on a social plane far below that to which she had been born, a man given to enjoyment of the grosser pleasures of life, lacking those intellectual accomplishments which are considered the natural possessions of a fit mate for a young girl in whose veins flowed noble blood. The picture called forth one's sympathy, and brought home very forcibly the dangers of *mésalliance*.

The match could hardly be called one between December and May, but there is no exaggerating in likening it to one between a gusty, vigorous March and a temperamental, electric-skied June. The ultimate

result, in either case, is likely to be disastrous, and probably more completely so in the latter.

Regarding Lachaud's contention that "enemies" had placed arsenic in the body between the time of the first autopsy and the second one can only wonder: Who were these enemies? The facts of the case would indicate Lafarge's mother and sister. But if this were so, how reconcile the fact with Mme. Lafarge's ready compliance in making the ill-fated cakes, an act performed solely in order to bring her son and his wife closer together. Again, the evidence submitted during the trial rather pointed the other way—namely, that both mother and daughter had been patient with the tempestuous wife, for their son's sake, without doubt; it is true they had no reason to like Marie for herself. She was definitely a person hard to get on with; the many moods in which she indulged were apt to become something more than merely trying. She had been much like a person who had made a bad bargain and then saw no reason to make the best of it. Certainly until after the episode of the ball she had not shown herself prepared even to fall in with the customary routine of the household. In fact, a more unsuitable wife (apart from her money) Lafarge could not have chosen; and probably comparison with his first wife had not been complimentary to Marie.

Yet throughout the brief duration of their marriage it had been Marie who had most openly shown her disgust at the life the married couple were called upon to live. She had made no effort to take herself in hand and to live up to the marital standard prescribed by her wedding vows—and in those days there was no question of a wife "obeying" her husband. It was the very much written law of civilized society.

Bearing these facts in mind, it is admittedly not hard to imagine that Marie, considering her temperament and type, and taking into account her upbringing and what were probably the dreams and expectations of her adolescence, considered herself a woman defrauded of that which should have been hers by right. She had no inclination—and very soon showed that she had no intention—to become Lafarge's wife in actual fact, as she was in name. And it is not so very hard to realize that because Lafarge kicked against the pricks she administered she came to fear him, to fear that he would prove strong enough to exert that intangible "right" all husbands are said to possess, to fear the very picture she had painted in her mind of what his closest association with herself would mean to her; and that she came, through fearing him, to hate him. A woman of Marie Lafarge's disposition and hysterical nature, hating a man with whom she had to live out her life, could shape herself to any means that would rid her best years of their greatest encumbrance.

And, once rid of Lafarge, what had life to offer her? Omitting consideration of what in her case would be the very hypothetical possibility of a conscience, she would have been free to indulge her romantic fancy as she listed. A woman possessing the glamorous charm of "experience," young, moderately well provided for, combining a distinct personality with an innate desire to enjoy life to its full, would it have been unreasonable on her part to think that she could do better for herself than her aunt had done?

She had had enough of boorish country squires and rural ironmasters who in reality were but little tin fools. On the near horizon she saw Paris, the city she had

forsaken without troubling to understand what she wanted. And now, too late, she knew very well what she wanted.

When she purchased the arsenic for the Château rats she was a woman looking back the way she had come. She most probably felt herself justified in doing what she was about to set her hand to; yet she was careful to play her new *rôle* to the life. No one was to suspect that she was anything but the loyal-minded, loving wife. She did not pause to reckon whether she was taking too much care; it did not occur to her that the sudden change in her attitude towards her husband might be interpreted in more than one way.

Yet withal one must give her credit for putting up a brilliant performance, a performance she kept up—so perfect an actress was she—right to the end. In prison she spent a large part of her time writing her *Mémoires* and that other interesting volume *The Hours of a Prison*. In them she comforted herself with chapters of self-pity, with letting her pen fill page after page with the odd fancies and romantic conceptions that alone during those hard years provided her with spiritual stimulant.

It was gratifying to her distorted sense of proportion that those people of Europe who possessed any leisure at all read her literary products with great show of relish. How long the feeling of gratification lasted it would be hard to say. Certainly it had been dead some time before she was liberated, and although on her release she returned to her literary labours it was plain that her heart was not in the work.

She died defeated by her most persistent and ruthless enemy—herself.

VIII

EUPHRASIE MERCIER

The Sexagenarian Murderess

EUPHRASIE MERCIER

PROBABLY no single case in the annals of crime has all the fantastic trimmings, all the weird and distorted display of malignant greed opposed to an almost demented devotion, that are to be found in that of the frail-looking, wrinkled-faced murderess whose story thrilled the gay crowd thronging the Cour d'Assizes for the *département* of the Seine presided over in Paris by M. Dubard in April 1886. Barely ten months had elapsed since the notorious Albert Pel, past-master at the craft of murder, had been condemned by the same court. Fashionable Paris was becoming used to these *causes célèbres*.

Attention has already been drawn to certain similarities between the cases of Pel and Euphrasie Mercier,[1] but regarding the qualities of the respective dramas—or melodramas, if you will—there can be no doubt that for setting, motive, and interest in the individual actors those of the latter supersede in sheer emotional value the petty dreams of avarice that filled the warped mind of the Mephistophelian watchmaker of the Avenue Kléber.

Euphrasie Mercier's father had been a teacher who had later in life forsaken the classroom and set himself up as a manufacturer. At his death he left his five children a fortune of some £16,000, and upon Euphrasie, the eldest, devolved the task of looking after the others, of whom three were mad. The children were

[1] H. B. Irving, *Studies of French Criminals of the Nineteenth Century.*

Euphrasie, Zacharie, Camille, Honorine, and Sidonie. It has been said on behalf of the eldest daughter that in these early days after their father's death she showed herself resolute, shrewd, and of no little courage. However that may be, the fact remains that from the time the business passed under the management of Euphrasie ill-luck overtook the Mercier family. The year in which the father died is not known, but it is safe to assume that by 1848 the fortune he had left had been lost in one way and another; and with the passing of the Merciers' last means of support there began that strange wandering from place to place that lasted for over thirty years.

From town to town, village to village, and country to country Euphrasie shepherded the three that were her especial care, Camille, Honorine, and Sidonie. Her task was no light one. Besides having to find employment in order to keep them she had to minister to the whims and fancies of their disordered minds. Camille, for instance, was at one period of the firm conviction that his brain had been absorbed by a steam-roller. From what we know of the sequel it might very well have been! As for the two sisters, Honorine and Sidonie both suffered from an acute form of religious mania, a parental legacy. They believed themselves guilty of dark and dreadful sins; yet at the same time were confident that the Deity allowed them special privileges of communication. Needs must that they should address crazily worded letters to the Pope and their bishop, relating their experiences during these "trances." It is a matter for wonder that the eldest sister entertained the great sympathy and maternal feeling for them that she did. From her early years she grew up with a rooted

conviction that her two sisters and her younger brother were her own especial charges in this life; she must fend for them and mother them, supply their wants, clothe them and feed them, and be watchful that no trouble or unsettling anguish assailed their lives. They grew dependent upon her efforts. Whither she told them to go they went. There was no question of why or wherefore. Euphrasie said they were all to go to Vienna; they went. Euphrasie thought it best that they settled in the South of France. Very well; back they trooped to France.

During these years Euphrasie tried her hand at many crafts, but always she was struggling to make ends meet. She never stayed long in one position. Why it is difficult to say. Perhaps people became too curious about her three charges. Perhaps Euphrasie's looks did not inspire trust. That she was hypocritical and an astute liar is not surprising; her life so fashioned her—it was one round of scheming for the others, and, to her credit, adversity and ill-fortune seemed only to strengthen her loyalty to them and her determination to protect them at whatever cost to herself.

There were other worries. Honorine had a pretty face. At least, one can safely assume that this was the sole reason that made her attractive in the eyes of a certain Comte de Châteauneuf, a gentleman doubtless every whit as unsavoury as later his son proved to be. Euphrasie had also to tend her sister's illegitimate child. Another mouth to feed, more clothes to buy, and further lies to concoct to explain the child; small wonder that she grew bitter against the boy, whose evil grace and sullen demeanour were not counted to win affection. It was not long before his aunt's bitterness was extended

towards her fellows. Privation, worry, and the constant demand upon her energies made her an old woman before her time. She became arrogant, sensitive to rebuffs, and suspicious. The world, it was slowly brought home to her, was against her. And in the background of her mind hovered a thought that eventually grew into a desire of nightmarish proportions. If only she could secure a safe and sure haven for them all! If only she could settle down with no more worries, hidden from the world and prying eyes and calumnious tongues!

She thought she had achieved her desire when in 1878 a Polish countess took pity on her and offered the wanderers a refuge. But their benefactor could not stand Euphrasie's attitude, and the eccentric antics of her half-witted brood made her fear—probably not without cause—for her own safety and peace of mind. Within a few weeks the Merciers were in Paris, Euphrasie settled in a boot-shop she had opened, her sisters and brother earning what little they could in a shop near by.

Times were hard, they were growing old, and the future held nothing but uncertainty. Honorine's son, a gruff-mannered, red-haired youth with an idle disposition, had left to join the Army. But he had deserted, and for some time no word had been received from him.

Then, on a fateful day in 1882, a Mdlle. Ménétret walked into the little boot-shop in the Boulevard Haussmann. Mdlle. Ménétret had recently lost her pet dog Rigolo, and was still despairing of finding him again when, chancing to look out of the shop-window, she saw a lady passing with what she thought was her pet. Hurrying out of the shop to inquire, she found that the lady and her dog had disappeared, and returned to the woman who kept the shop feeling more disconsolate than before.

The good woman appeared to sympathize with her and, upon being asked, readily consented to keep watch for the lady with the dog that looked like the lost Rigolo. Consequently Mdlle. Ménétret found herself calling frequently at Mdlle. Mercier's shop, and, although Rigolo was not recovered, she became very friendly with the aged shopkeeper, whose strange odyssey she learned.

Mdlle. Ménétret had recently purchased a small villa in the suburb of Villemomble, and, being a lonely woman and given to sudden fits of depression, desired a companion. She put the matter tentatively to Mdlle. Mercier, and was pleased when her new-found friend agreed to accept the post she proffered. Truth to tell, there was an urgent reason why Euphrasie should jump at this opportunity: the boot-shop was on the verge of bankruptcy. So when in March of 1883 Mdlle. Ménétret moved into her new residence at Villemomble Euphrasie Mercier went with her, as housekeeper and companion.

Mdlle. Élodie Ménétret was forty-three at this time, and her life had been a queer one. Her father had been killed in Africa—the result of an amorous adventure—and after receiving a moderately good education her life had become, as one writer has expressed it, that common to "those young ladies who drift from music-lessons into dalliance". But she had been more or less fortunate. The lovers she had chosen had been generous to her. At the age of forty-two she was receiving a comfortable allowance one had made her, while in the bank she had a nest-egg amounting to some £4000.

At first the new arrangement worked splendidly. Euphrasie set herself to please her mistress and to gain her confidence. By dint of flattery and by paying close attention to her whims and idiosyncrasies she made

herself indispensable. As already mentioned, Mdlle. Ménétret suffered frequently from low spirits. At times she became gloomy and miserable, regretting the past and pitying herself for what she imagined she had missed in life. Bemoaning lost youth and charms that she had squandered recklessly, she would become sullen and fretful. Her loneliness in the world preyed upon her mind, and she would imagine herself fated to spend what remained of her life as an old woman, unloved and unwanted. These moods Euphrasie set herself to dispel, and for a while she was successful. But in time her constant fussing became a nuisance to her mistress, and the latter's attitude towards her companion slowly changed. Euphrasie, however, was quick to realize the change, and moved to forestall the possibility of dismissal.

Instead of cheering her mistress during her gloomy spells she left her to herself, and, when she had become thoroughly wretched, added to her gloom by recounting tales of dark and sinister happenings at night. The consequence was that Mdlle. Ménétret's hypochondria increased until, within a short while, she was afraid to be left alone after nightfall. The darkness of the garden, peopled by the terrible beings whose deeds were related by Euphrasie, became something intangibly terrifying to the mistress's overwrought nerves. She would send for Euphrasie to stay with her until it was time to go to bed, when she would retire to dream of strange terrors befalling her, or lie awake in the candle-lit room, staring apprehensively at the wandering shadows as a draught from the window stirred the flames, and going over again Euphrasie's grim tales of ghostly visitors and of lonely women strangled in their sleep.

But Euphrasie overplayed her part. More and more

in secret her mistress was becoming afraid of her. The housekeeper's strange mutterings to herself, and the queer glances she would cast about her, almost as though some guilty conscience were pricking, worried her mistress so much that she came to brood over the old woman's mysterious habits and strange ways. She remembered the story of the two sisters and brother left in Paris. Was she wise in keeping Euphrasie? There was something about her—something that burned deep down in her eyes—that she was daily growing more afraid of. What was the secret the old woman carried locked in her brain?

During the hours when the warm sun of late spring or early summer lit and cheered the large rooms of the villa Élodie Ménétret would ponder over her companion, and pondering would bring to her mind some realization of the bad influence the old woman was exerting over her.

One day she summoned up enough courage to tell Euphrasie that she did not wish her to remain any longer at the villa.

For a moment the old woman was staggered. Dismissed! Where could she go? And her brothers and sisters? They were only just eking out an existence as it was. How could she hope to help them if she had no employment, and could not save money to send them?

Besides, she was old—past sixty now; the years hung heavily on her, and she had not much strength left to fight afresh. In truth, she had little confidence. The many defeats that had crowded her life had robbed her of hope. For a moment she was in despair. And perhaps it was in that moment when her resolution tottered that her dreadful plan first came to her mind.

Whatever happened she must remain at the villa.

She must have time in which to think, for there were many things to be thought over.

The next moment she had changed; and she had the power of making her distress seem truly pitiful. She pleaded to be allowed to remain. She was an old woman, she pointed out, and asked nothing save a roof over her head and a little bread each day. Surely the kind mistress whom she had tried to serve dutifully would not turn her adrift?

It was probably a bright, sunny day. (In fact, it must have been for Élodie so to have forgotten her habitual gloom and continued dependence on another's company.) Possibly down in the garden, now ablaze with blooms, bright-eyed birds hopped across the green lawns, chirping merrily, the song of blue skies and content warbling in their throats. And quite possibly Élodie looked at the birds and felt happier. Anyway, she was touched by the old woman's appeal, and said no more about the matter at the time.

Shortly after this Élodie was visited by a friendly neighbour, a Mdlle. Grière, whose brusque, businesslike ways were a welcome relief to her friend. To Mdlle. Grière Élodie confided her trouble with the housekeeper.

"The boot-maker frightens me," she is known to have told her. "I have dismissed her, but she obstinately refuses to go, saying she only wants food and lodging."

Mdlle. Grière being essentially a practical-minded woman, she at once sought to find a motive for the housekeeper's obstinacy. She was candid enough to admit that she had never taken to the old woman, whose saturnine appearance and hawkish face had filled her with distrust when she had first set eyes on her. After

listening to a further recital of her friend's qualms regarding the old woman Mdlle. Grière voiced her doubts as to the housekeeper's honesty.

On this score, however, the mistress was not able to agree with her. Euphrasie was honest enough. She did not so much as interest herself in anything of her mistress's.

Mdlle. Grière, nevertheless, was not reassured by this admission in the housekeeper's favour. She had her doubts, she repeated, and she considered them justified by the very look of the woman. Besides, why was she so anxious to remain? She strongly advised her friend to make an immediate inventory of her jewellery, as a measure of precaution. In that way they could very soon prove whether the old housekeeper was as genuine as she purported to be.

Mdlle. Ménétret agreed to this last proposal, and the two friends there and then prepared the inventory, and Mdlle. Grière made out a duplicate copy, which she was to keep in case the original were lost.

That meeting between the two women took place on April 18, 1883. Mdlle. Grière never saw her friend again. When she returned home she was unfortunate enough to trip over a rug and dislocate a shoulder, with the consequence that she was laid up in bed for several days. It was nearly a week before she recalled her chat with Élodie, and she was anxious to learn whether her suspicions had been well founded. She sent for a friend of both herself and Mdlle. Ménétret, a M. Grassner, and, explaining the circumstances, asked him to call on Élodie in her stead. M. Grassner, an elderly gentleman, considerably over sixty, proved quite willing to undertake the mission. He called at Élodie's villa on the twenty-fifth.

However, he was amazed to find the place shut up. His summons at the gate was answered by the appearance of Euphrasie, who abruptly informed him that her mistress had gone to Paris.

Then, in a deeper tone, she added: "Mdlle. Ménétret is dead to the world. She has entered a convent, and I have sworn not to divulge the place of her retreat."

More amazed than ever, M. Grassner turned away from the locked gate and took the strange story back to Mdlle. Grière.

A few days later another friend of Élodie's, M. Riquier, upon presenting himself at the gate of the villa, was met with the same story of the mistress's having entered a convent.

M. Riquier, however, was not satisfied with the explanation. He promptly got in touch with a niece of Élodie's, a pretty dancer named Louside Ménétret. Even when Louside presented herself at the villa she was not allowed inside. There was Euphrasie, ready with the same story, and just as ready to retire when she had repeated it. The dancer was more than annoyed at this cursory treatment; she was angry, and, like M. Riquier, suspicious. She presented herself before the Commissary of Police at Montreuil, and, telling him of the housekeeper's strange attitude, admitted that she suspected foul play.

The Commissary accordingly summoned Euphrasie Mercier to appear before him to answer certain questions he wished to put to her. Not a whit abashed, Euphrasie arrived at the time appointed, and, as an explanation to the Commissary's queries, produced a letter which she said she had recently received from Mdlle. Ménétret. It was headed, in an indefinite fashion, "Wednesday

evening." She next produced a document which she described as a "deed of gift," wherein Mdlle. Ménétret was supposed to have expressed the wish that, as she was leaving France, Mdlle. Mercier was to attend to her business matters. The strangest part about this document was that, although the characters were more or less formless, betraying the writer to be in a state of intense nervous agitation at the time, yet it was undoubtedly written by Mdlle. Ménétret. The handwriting was definitely and positively asserted to be hers. M. Oberinger, the Commissary, was perfectly satisfied that everything was as Euphrasie said it was; he bowed her good day, and she returned to the villa.

Barely a week following Euphrasie's interview with M. Oberinger at Montreuil her two younger sisters were observed parading themselves in the villa garden in clothes that were recognized as belonging to Élodie. As for Euphrasie herself, her manner and bearing during this period sufficiently confirmed, as far as most people interested were concerned, what she had told the Commissary. She acted to perfection the part of the loyal housekeeper doing her best in her mistress's absence. Those articles of her mistress's clothing that were not reserved for her own or her sisters' use she sold to a Jewish woman, with whom she drove a hard bargain. She had the garden replanted with flowers, and several fresh beds laid out, but was careful to leave strict injunctions with the gardener that a certain bed of dahlias was not to be touched. The soil was not to be turned, nor were the roots to be taken up in the autumn. The bed was to be left severely alone. In addition, on no account was a dog to be allowed into the garden. She affected a dislike for them, as they invariably ruined the

flower-beds—a dislike, however, that was not unnatural in the circumstances!

In August, six months after Mdlle. Ménétret's strange disappearance, Euphrasie, dressed in some of her mistress's best clothes, made a journey to Luxemburg. Visiting a notary, and posing as her mistress, she requested him to make out a form of general attorney for a friend named Euphrasie Mercier. She explained that she herself was settling down in Luxemburg, but that she wanted her friend to manage her property in Villemomble. The papers she presented were in order, and when the notary requested the presence of two witnesses she immediately went out to secure them. The securing of them cost her the small sum of ten francs. Her witnesses were a hairdresser and a musician, who, for five francs apiece, were perfectly willing to swear that this lady was indeed no other than the Mdlle. Élodie Ménétret whom they had known for a considerable time.

Thus Euphrasie returned to Villemomble armed with a power of attorney that enabled her to dispose of her mistress's property as she thought fit.

And now this strange household, the three demented ones and the mothering Euphrasie, settled down to a peaceful existence in the villa. One room was turned into a sort of chapel, in which was hung a richly embroidered banner containing the figure of the Virgin Mary. The banner had been worked by Honorine during the dark years of the Franco-Prussian War. Before it candles were kept constantly burning, and on certain nights strange rites were performed and even stranger services held in the "chapel."

In this environment the religious mania of the two sisters and their brother assumed the proportions of a

dominating passion. Their crazed minds sought all manner of ways of expressing their excess of fervour; they contrived and learned long, extravagantly worded prayers; they made up sombre, dirge-like rhythmic tunes to which they chanted their prayers. Both sisters believed themselves to be possessed by an evil spirit, whose noxious power could be defeated only by prayer and fasting. Yet, strange as it may seem, Sidonie and Honorine were unlike in character. Honorine was probably the most fervid zealot of them all. She was a visionary, with a pathetic belief in her own power to discern the naked truth of things spiritual. She would write complicated and involved letters to highly placed Church dignitaries, exhorting them to prove themselves more zealous in the execution of their heavenly missions. Probably unwittingly her demented mind was attempting to create a parallel between herself and Joan of Arc. She was quick to voice her arguments, and there was a restless, quenchless fire smouldering in her eyes that was slowly consuming her with its intensity. Sidonie was in many respects a complete contrast to her sister. She was gloomy, given to brooding upon the past and the future with despondency born of mental hopelessness. Ever she looked through the mirror of the world darkly. She was convinced that she was responsible for all kinds of crimes and sins. Her soul, she believed, was sullied beyond cleansing. Often she was found in some odd corner on her knees, praying in a low, choked voice, on her face stamped a horrible expression of mental torment and stress.

With Camille the world was a fairer place. He was entirely harmless, and his nature was gentle and kindly. He loved to wander about the garden, his mind a complete

blank, just drinking in the warmth of the summer sunshine, watching with unseeing yet wide-open eyes the harmonious blending of the flower-shades. His greatest joy seemed to be kneeling in wondering and trance-like silence before the stained-glass windows of the near-by church. Probably here again it was the blending of bright colours that fascinated and soothed his poor wits. Yet he was well able to associate one thing with another. For instance, he knew that a certain priest he often saw was in some way or other connected with the bright pictures in the church windows. So he formed the habit of following this particular priest about like a dog.

As for Euphrasie, during these two years she revealed herself as a strangely complexed person. The terrible secret she was concealing from the world did not prey upon her mind. Rather did she consider herself justified in having done what she had. At last she had provided a safe refuge for her sisters and brother. They at least had no worries or cares now. Food, clothes, and shelter were assured. No need to look too far ahead. Yet the deep vein of mysticism and fanaticism that she possessed in common with the others forced her to join in their weird "ceremonies" before the banner of the Virgin. At ordinary times, however, her mind was just as shrewd as it had ever been. She had a remarkable instinct in matters commercial, and was able to drive a hard bargain. There were other times, though, when she was confident that she was experiencing a personal communication from the Deity, whom she addressed in a familiar way, and whose guidance she sought when she felt she needed advice on temporal matters. The passage of many stormy years, filled with hard striving,

had made her will indomitable. She saw only one side of an argument: her own. In her brother and sisters she had come to realize that she had a sacred trust, bestowed upon her by her father. She alone was their champion; on their behalf she was prepared to combat the world. Indeed, for forty years she had!

And now, in the evening of her life, she had planned her greatest triumph for them. What was more, she had successfully carried it out, an old woman, over sixty, with a body bowed with a lifetime of toil.

On those autumn evenings when her crazy brood enacted their "ceremonies"; when Camille, bearing aloft the Virgin banner, and followed by Sidonie and Honorine, bearing guttering candles and chanting in wild, throbbing voices, paraded round the garden under the green stars; her thoughts must have ranged in strange turmoil. Possibly then, at such times, her inherent streak of fanaticism saved her from approaching a dark abyss of horror.

It is known that she would frequently join the other three in their "chapel" and prostrate herself in front of the banner, grovelling and kissing the floor as many as sixteen times. Then she would terminate the "service" by quickly rising, flinging wide the window, and calling aloud in a challenging voice:

"In the name of God, get hence, Beelzebub, Lucifer, and thou, Satan! Hence with your legions of devils! Back, judges, commissaries, Assize Court! Back, ye terrors that beset me! Back, phantoms of my garden! Family of Ménétret, rest in peace—in the peace of God and the glory of the elect! Amen!"

This singular declamation would close the "ceremony." They would troop back from the close-shuttered

"chapel," leaving the candles burning with still flames in the airless room.

However, the channels in which Euphrasie's thoughts at times ran are obvious. And at those times doubts assailed her. Only by forcibly denying fear could she retain the courage that, bred by fear, had stirred her to commit the deed that had imperilled her immortal soul. She spoke of more than one phantom in her garden, and in her cry acknowledged unknown "terrors." Yet present in her thoughts was the dread chance of discovery. Perhaps, more than any of the other references, that to the Assize Court reveals the shrinking feeling of anxiety that occasionally assailed her confidence in herself and her purpose.

It is in her very fear that we discover the human side of Euphrasie Mercier. Purpose, motive, desires—all may be false values, dependent upon some equally false distinction between right and wrong. They are but standards personal and particular to the woman herself. But her fear was the fear of every criminal who carries with him dread of detection. And it is her fear of being discovered for what she was that alone assures us of her sanity.

There is one other aspect of Euphrasie that must not be ignored. All her life she had screwed and scraped to make the most of little. Now that she no longer was compelled to haggle she found herself unable to throw off the habit. It was part of her nature to secure the best of a bargain, to procure what she could at no cost to herself. If lying would help, then she lied; if pleading, then she pleaded. She was too old to begin disregarding the petty things of life. She who had never received what she had considered her just due of this

world's abundance was now, in her turn, equally unwilling to concede to others what was theirs.

If through the bizarre pattern of Euphrasie Mercier's crime one follows closely the main thread of effect and cause, one arrives at the conclusion that it was due entirely to her niggardly nature that the sequence of events occurred which ultimately led to the disclosure of her guilt.

About two years after she had taken over possession of Élodie Ménétret's villa she had some repairs done, but when the contractor presented his bill so hated to part with the money that she left it unpaid. The contractor threatened to take action. At that she sent for her niece Adèle, the daughter of her brother Zacharie, and made a pretence of selling her the property. In this way the threatened proceedings became postponed indefinitely.

But Adèle, who was not averse to the change from her usual life afforded by her aunt's invitation, soon became bored with the humdrum round at Villemomble. So when she heard that her cousin Châteauneuf was in Brussels—a deserter from the French Army—she asked if he might also be invited to the villa.

Euphrasie did not want to lose Adèle; the contractor's attitude was still too uncertain. She decided to take the risk and smuggle Châteauneuf to Villemomble. She knew very well just what was the risk she was taking. Châteauneuf was an unpleasant individual, cynical, crafty, and wholly unscrupulous where his own advantage lay. After deserting he had managed to get to America. But this land of bright hopes and brighter illusions had turned a cold shoulder on him. He had drifted back to Europe after a short while, his

pockets as empty as when he left. In Brussels he was living a more or less hand-to-mouth existence as an adventurer.

But Euphrasie planned Châteauneuf's arrival at the villa with all care. The proprieties were to be respected; so the red-headed young man turned up in Villemomble disguised as a young woman.

One can imagine that the reunion of Honorine and her prodigal was a one-sided affair. As soon as Châteauneuf arrived his eye was upon the main chance. Where had Aunt Euphrasie got all her means? And why? Knowing his aunt's unprepossessing disposition, it was not long before he realized that the latter was the more pertinent question of the two. But he was clever enough to keep his unanswered questions to himself. Aunt Euphrasie's tongue had a sharp edge.

Doubtless he was surprised at the warmth of his welcome. But if his aunt was prepared to let bygones be bygones, he himself was equally prepared to accept her hospitality. Beggars cannot afford to be choosers; but they must be allowed their opinions, all the same. And quite often beggars' eyes are peculiarly sharp. Châteauneuf was no exception.

However, there was a sudden development Euphrasie had not foreseen. One morning it was discovered that both Châteauneuf and his cousin Adèle were missing. It was not long before the truth was known. The couple had run away to Brussels and become man and wife.

This was disturbing news to Euphrasie. It was clear that the young man had not reformed his ways, and just as clear that he had probably conceived ideas regarding his aunt that were not entirely what an aunt would expect of a dutiful and grateful nephew. She must somehow

or other manage to keep an eye on him. So she wrote a very mildly reproving letter, ending with a warm invitation to the couple to return and make their home with her.

Châteauneuf, as might be expected, saw no reason to decline. He was practically penniless—the probability is that the couple had been living on a little money Adèle had with her, and which was almost exhausted at the time the aunt's letter arrived—and, in addition, his aunt was an old woman, but apparently one with ample means. It obviously behoved him, in his own interest, first to placate her, and then to discover of what those means consisted. And, of course, there was the question of the immediate exchequer.

So back to Villemomble came the newly weds; and this time Châteauneuf had a fixed purpose in taking up his abode at the villa.

His first concern was to learn all he could about how his aunt had come to obtain the place. In the local shops he picked up the strange story of Mdlle. Ménétret's retirement to an unknown convent. But that story was now more than two years old, and had long since failed as a subject for the gossips. But Châteauneuf's suspicious nature had learned enough to set him wondering.

He began to take a special interest in the strange gibberish of his Aunt Sidonie and his mother. Odd, apparently totally irrelevant references to the dead coming to life again, to a mystery that enshrouded all their lives, to an unholy presence that haunted the garden, intrigued him. The secret of the old dahlia-bed he found food for reflection, and of the power of attorney obtained by his aunt from Luxemburg he was more than merely suspicious. As one writer has said, "he began to indulge

in that dangerous intellectual operation known as putting two and two together."

And it was not very long before he had a shrewd idea of what the answer was. But he had to verify his result.

With deep cunning he began the difficult task of "pumping" his aunt. To his satisfaction he saw that his seemingly nonchalant allusions to the previous owner of the villa frightened her. Invariably she was quick to change the subject, and always seemed put out when he mentioned the untidy appearance of the old dahlia-bed compared with the remainder of the trim-looking garden.

It was his aunt's queer invocations in the "chapel" that finally decided him that if Élodie Ménétret had disappeared she had done so in Villemomble, and, further, that Aunt Euphrasie knew all there was to know about the disappearance.

His mind now turned to another consideration. How could he personally benefit by what he had discovered? Open blackmail would be dangerous, and he was not the kind to risk his neck. What Aunt Euphrasie had done once as a matter of expediency she could repeat as a matter of necessity. That was the rub.

The problem caused him an immense amount of speculation, and at length he came to the decision—a drastic one, considering his impecunious position and the total lack of any moral fabric in his make-up—that he would ask his aunt point-blank for some money. If she was an old fool enough to refuse him, well, the consequences were on her own head! In addition, he could preen himself with the smug assurance that

whatever happened to her could not be more than she deserved.

Once more Euphrasie's ingrained parsimony helped towards her undoing. When Châteauneuf, with a bland expression on his freckled face, approached her with the suggestion that she should supply him with funds, so that he could set up in life for himself, she indignantly refused; and probably strove to improve the occasion by reading him a lecture on the virtues of thrift and personally striving for what one wants. An ironical situation, which without doubt Châteauneuf, cynical as he was, would appreciate.

However, his annoyance at his aunt's refusal was more than he cared to reveal openly. He felt slighted, and, as is the way with such people, deprived of something that was his by right. The next thing his aunt knew about the matter was that for the second time he and Adèle had slipped away from the villa secretly one night and returned to Brussels.

In the Belgian capital Châteauneuf's petty nature gave full vent to his anger at being rebuked and disappointed. With some sort of malevolent enjoyment he wrote two denunciatory letters, one to an uncle of Élodie Ménétret, and the other to the judicial authorities in Paris. The former was couched in hypocritical terms, but its tenor was an unqualified denunciation of his aunt as the murderess of her former mistress Élodie Ménétret. In the latter he professed to describe not only the manner in which death was brought about, but also the room in which the murder was committed. He added that in the fateful room he had thoughtfully inscribed upon the wall: "Mdlle. Ménétret killed here." The murder, he said, had been perpetrated by slowly poisoning Mdlle.

Ménétret with the heads of chemical—probably phosphorus—matches ; and the body, he continued, had been subsequently burned, and the remains buried in the garden under an old dahlia-bed.

His eagerness to make amends for his dilatoriness in bringing a criminal to justice apparently ran the length of causing him to append to his letter to the authorities a diagrammatic sketch of the garden at Villemomble. Over the small rectangle representing the dahlia-bed he scrawled "Dig here."

The authorities, after receiving this communication, acted promptly. Euphrasie was arrested, and a thorough investigation was made of the house and grounds. Under the mysterious dahlia-bed the searchers discovered the charred remains of a woman's body and some human teeth, one of which had been stopped with gold. The medical experts who had been called in by the police, Dr. Riche and Dr. Brouardel, both agreed that the remains that had been uncovered were undoubtedly those of a woman of about Élodie Ménétret's age at the time of her disappearance. The police then approached Mdlle. Ménétret's dentist, and he, by reference to his books, was soon able to verify the fact that he had stopped one of her teeth.

The next expert called in by the police was a horticulturist, who was requested to examine the dahlia-bed and the old bulbs that had been found buried with the bones and teeth. After due deliberation he expressed the opinion that the bed had been broken up and the bulbs buried about three years before, in the spring of 1883. This was a real step forward for the police, for the time coincided with that of the disappearance of Mdlle. Ménétret.

Although a chopper and a large carving-knife were found in the house, as items in a chain of evidence they were useless. But the police had better fortune when they came to investigate the room in the villa that had been Mdlle. Ménétret's bedroom. Before the now rusty and stained fireplace they came upon dried blotches of a peculiarly greasy nature. These stains were sufficient to presuppose that the burning of the victim's body had been effected in that room, which, the possibilities were, had also been the death-chamber. But the investigating authorities were not taking any chances. Samples of the stale soot in the chimney of the bedroom were sent away for analysis. The analyst's reports declared that in the soot had been found organic substances similar to those contained in soot from restaurants where large quantities of meat were cooked.

However, one of the most illuminating pieces of evidence come upon by the police was a cutting from an old copy of the *Figaro*, dated October 18, 1881. The newspaper report which had been preserved contained the details concerning the murder of a priest at Imola, in Italy. When the case came forward the attention of the magistrates was directed to a certain paragraph of the cutting. The paragraph ran :

> What had become of the victim? The search for him has at last been successful. Yesterday the body of the priest was discovered in a pit of moderate depth that had been dug under the country house at Faella. It was buried at a depth of about eighteen feet, and covered over with a quantity of rice.

The cutting had been found stuffed behind an old looking-glass, and on more than one occasion it has been suggested that the grim story it contained gave Euphrasie

Mercier her idea for ridding herself of her mistress. However, against this supposition one can set two important factors. Firstly, that it was fear for her position at the villa that originally set the housekeeper against her mistress, and, secondly, that it was her concern for the half-starved brood she had left in Paris that finally decided her to become mistress of the villa in Mdlle. Ménétret's stead. The *Figaro* extract, further, was dated 1881, a year before the lost Rigolo brought the distracted Parisienne to the little boot-shop in the Boulevard Haussmann. So one may safely presume that Euphrasie found the old newspaper at the villa. Coming upon it at a moment when her thoughts regarding her mistress were particularly dark, the words may have been instrumental in suggesting to her a solution to her difficulties.

One other matter remains dubious—namely, that Mdlle. Ménétret met her death in the manner suggested by Châteauneuf. If Euphrasie Mercier had in mind the disposing of her victim's body by burning and burying the remains in the garden, the chances are that death was dealt in a far more summary manner than the slow and uncertain method of poisoning with the heads of phosphorus matches. One must remember that the mistress shortly before her disappearance had expressed her fear of the housekeeper. It is likely, then, that she was careful in the matter of what food was served her. Had she felt any pains internally her suspicions would instantly have been aroused; and to have aroused her mistress's suspicion that she was in mortal danger would have been too unsafe a card for the wily and watchful Euphrasie to have played. Her journey to Luxemburg and its object reveals how well her wits were shifting.

The evidence rather points to the fact that Châteauneuf, in his reference to the matches' heads, was drawing upon his imagination. The probability is that Mdlle. Ménétret was slain with a single determined knife-blow.

Before the trial opened further medical evidence decided that the two sisters, Honorine and Sidonie, and the brother, Camille, were not responsible for their actions or sayings. As a result of the alienists' decisions regarding the remaining inmates of the villa the authorities were not able to make any effective use of their sinister allusions to the "phantoms" in the garden. The three unfortunates were accordingly placed in the asylum of Sainte-Anne, and Euphrasie alone was called to answer the charge of the wilful murder of her mistress, Élodie Ménétret. Three eminent brain specialists decided that she was entirely responsible for her actions. While they admitted that to some extent her moods and life were controlled by the streak of religious fanaticism which she had inherited from her parents, they nevertheless were of one mind regarding her capabilities and capacities as a murderess with a rational, far-searching mind.

The trial of Euphrasie Mercier opened in Paris on April 6, 1886. M. Dubard, who presided, was the same judge who had presided over Pel's first trial. We are told that the *pieces à conviction* were the charred remains and teeth that had been dug up from the dahlia-bed. These were placed in a large jar and set on the table reserved for such grisly relics. The prosecution avowed that they were the remains of Mdlle. Élodie Ménétret.

The trial lasted for the best part of four days, and its duration provided Paris with one of the most popular "sights" of that year. Both defence and prosecution

played the bizarre and fantastic elements for all they were worth, and their histrionic endeavours were ably seconded by Euphrasie herself and the hypocritical Châteauneuf. The contest between these latter two was a scene worthy of the Italian comedy in its heyday. Châteauneuf, red-faced and red-haired, vowing his unstinted efforts to abet the cause of justice, when everyone thronging the well of the court-room knew that he was there only because he carried in his pocket a certificate allowing him free conduct and immunity from arrest for desertion; his aunt, her face alight with a fire of hate for this viper she had succoured, waving her scraggy arms and crying that God had forewarned her that her enemies would bury bones in her garden. Châteauneuf protesting with languid glance that his religious scruples alone had obliged him to discover how she had come into her fortune; his aunt, her old and wrinkled face growing more haggard as she realized that the struggle was going against her, shrieking that Châteauneuf is her murderer.

Then came the culmination of the farce.

"Why did you inform against your aunt?" Châteauneuf was asked point-blank.

Not a wit ruffled by this shrewd thrust, the hypocrite replied suavely:

"For the salvation of her soul."

Small wonder a roar of laughter rocked the court-room. But Châteauneuf was not to be put out of his stride.

"I did not want her to burn for ever in hell-fire," he explained. "I did not want the gates of Paradise to be closed to her because of an ill-gotten fortune."

Another disturbing roar of laughter, louder than the first, greeted the blandly uttered words. Shortly afterwards

Châteauneuf made ready to hurry from the witness-box. He was thinking of how many hours' grace his free-pass certificate allowed him. Should he tarry too long arrest for desertion was certain. But he had to wait while the prisoner's counsel dragged one further mean action of his into the limelight for the crowd to goggle at delightedly. He was scathingly reminded that, set against his unselfish thought for his aunt's spiritual welfare, was the known fact that he had been selling copies of a small pamphlet entitled *The Mystery of Villemomble*, by Alphonse Châteauneuf, in the neighbourhood of the court during the trial.

Châteauneuf and his wife Adèle both left the court to the accompaniment of bitter maledictions from their aunt.

The next day the trial ended. The jury retired to deliberate upon the evidence for the space of an hour and a half, and then returned with the verdict that Euphrasie Mercier, the prisoner, was guilty of all three charges of murder, theft, and forgery. She stood tottering before the judge as he delivered the maximum sentence that, in the circumstances, considering her age, could be passed upon her—twenty years' imprisonment. Being over sixty years old she escaped penal servitude. She made no moan or complaint as the sentence was delivered. Of a sudden the sheer hopelessness of her striving seemed suddenly to have penetrated her inner consciousness. She was beaten! Yet, perhaps in the very hour of her defeat, one thought consoled her in some measure. Honorine, Sidonie, and poor old Camille, with his vacant eyes, were safe; no longer would she be worried with the thought of their starving alone in Paris, without shelter, and dressed in rags, objects

of mockery to the unkindly. She had done her best for them. Now they no longer required her.

The chances are that the three crazy relatives never knew what became of their lifelong protectress.

In conclusion reference may be drawn to a recent murder trial in the old-world town of Albi, in Southern France, in which many of the strange elements which are a marked feature of the Mercier case figured. An old woman, a Mme. Sandral, aged seventy, was found shot dead in the old, dilapidated Château de Bonneval. She was one of three old widows who lived together in the *château* in very poor circumstances. Her daughter-in-law, Mme. Malaterre, was accused of shooting her in order to obtain possession of the *château*. The only witness of the crime other than Mme. Malaterre herself was the latter's aged mother, who, upon being examined, was found to be insane, and was removed to an asylum.

The trial was attended by several novelists and writers of so-called "complex" plays, so interesting was the problem and the characters. It was suggested during the course of the proceedings that the three women quarrelled incessantly, from no particular cause—rather as a means of emotional expression ; and it was contended that the minds of all of them had become more or less affected by the solitude of the rambling, crumbling old mansion and the repressive life they had lived. A strange echo this—in January 1932—of a case that thrilled Paris in 1886 and was destined to become famous in the annals of crime. A further proof, too, that criminal history, like political and social, is given to repeating itself.

IX

ANNA ZWANZIGER

The Nuremberg Poisoner

ANNA ZWANZIGER

PROBABLY the best description of Anna Zwanziger's character is that written by the celebrated German jurist Paul J. A. von Feuerbach. A contemporary of this notorious poisoner, he says :

"Poison enabled her to deal death, sickness and torture to all who offended her or stood in her way ; it punished every slight ; it prevented the return of unwelcome guests ; it disturbed those social pleasures she was not permitted to share ; it afforded amusement by the contortions of her victims, and a chance of ingratiating herself by affected sympathy towards their sufferings ; it was the means of throwing suspicion upon innocent persons and of getting fellow-servants into trouble. If she flattered herself with the prospect of marrying an already married man at her will, wives descended into the grave and left their husbands free for her. In time giving poison became her constant occupation ; she practised it in jest and in earnest, and at last with real passion for poison itself."

We can discern a similarity, then, between her and Gesina Gottfried. There was this distinction, though : the latter, as we have seen, prepared her most ingenious plots for the destruction of her own husbands ; Anna Zwanziger was more intent upon the destruction of the living wives of men she hoped to make her husbands. The difference is the difference of method ; in point of result the two murderesses achieved much about the

same measure of success before the ultimate discovery. Yet it is interesting to note that Anna Zwanziger's head was struck from her trunk while Gesina Gottfried was still a girl in her teens. It seems as though the dread mantle of the one was fated to descend upon the shoulders of her sister in crime.

Anna Maria Schonleben was born in the old-world town of Nuremberg some time about 1760. The actual date is not known. She was the daughter of a successful innkeeper, a man whose jovial face and natural good-humour made him popular with his patrons and filled his drinking saloons with thirsty cronies. Herr Schonleben flourished. Industrious and mild-tempered, bearing no grievance towards his fellows, he was a man contented in mind, a man who saw only one tiny cloud of anxiety in the smiling sky : the future of his daughter Anna.

As year succeeded year, and the innkeeper saw his child fast changing from a girl into a woman, he began seriously to think of her prospects. Those were the days of early marriages and large families, and doubtless many a night he spent pondering over who among her acquaintances would make her a suitable mate. He wanted his girl to do well for herself. She would not be rich, but the Schonlebens, it was comforting to reflect, were not hard pressed for a few hundred marks, and their credit was long.

But if the features of the woman of fifty are any true indication of what were the looks of the girl of sixteen, then the daughter of Herr Schonleben was no beauty. For, according to von Feuerbach, the middle-aged widow Zwanziger was a rather unprepossessing creature. Her thin, cruel-looking lips, overhung by a thin nose, were set in an expressionless face, sallow of complexion. Under

jutting brows her dark, deep-set eyes glittered maliciously. In stature she was of medium height, but rather scrawny, her body angular, her shoulders high, and she had a habit of hunching them about her ears in a manner that frequently gave her the appearance of suffering from spinal trouble.

It seems well-nigh impossible that a woman so pictured for us could have been comely and buxom as a girl; and the fact remains that she was married for her money. Yet, strangely enough, from what we know of her life at this time, it seems that she entertained some genuine affection for the waster who became her husband. Herr Zwanziger was pleased to term himself an attorney, but what he had ever done to merit the distinction does not seem to be clear. "Of her late husband," as one modern writer remarks, "no more need be said than that he was an admirable specimen of that type of agreeable parasite who commonly marries money. He was an assiduous drinker, and a man on the whole of peculiar charm of manner, so that within a few years he and the host of friends who naturally surrounded him got through Anna's money entirely; and when, after a few years, his liver broke down under the strain of the unequal contest with his alcoholic enthusiasm, Anna was left, curiously enough, with a very sincere and beautiful affection for the late lamented scoundrel." Mr. Dearden's portrait of the husband ranks with von Feuerbach's of the wife.

However, it is with the widow that we are chiefly concerned.

Zwanziger left her a legacy of debts. Not that she attempted to keep her husband's memory honourably fresh by paying them; she placed her hands on as much ready cash as she could scrape together and tried setting

up in a modest confectionery business. Her venture, however, proved a failure, and so did that of selling toys, which she next attempted. If we are to believe herself these two failures left her almost despairing; so much so that on one occasion at least she tried to put an end to her life. But this fit of gloom was quickly succeeded by a fierce determination to win through at whatever cost. She went to Frankfort, where she was fortunate to secure a situation in a family as cook, but her incapacities very soon revealed themselves, and within a short while she was seeking a similar position with the manager of a travelling circus. She was given a trial, but evidently the *artistes'* palates were more fastidious than those of the Frankfort family, for a few days later found her tramping the streets, once more toying with the idea of destroying herself. Again, however, she could not bring herself to lose the one thing left to her. Casting the dust of Frankfort the inhospitable from her shoes, she set out by easy stages for Vienna the glamorous.

What she occupied herself with in the city on the Danube is not altogether certain. I have seen it suggested that she opened a rather high-class brothel. If she did it would not have been a venture inconsistent with her character. But what is certain is that within a very short time of her arrival in the Austrian capital of love and laxity she was again on the move. Either the authorities or her "patrons" had proved not as accommodating as she had supposed. Anyway, she next moved back to Nuremberg, the city of her childhood, but she did not linger. Leaving Nuremberg after a brief stay, she made her way to Weimar.

She was now in her late forties. What family she had brought into the world, reared, and sped on their

way we do not know. But there is evidence to show that at this time she had a married daughter in Mainbernheim. It was to this married daughter's home that she made her way after her theft of a diamond ring. This theft is the first indication we have that she was living a life of crime, and we know of this only because she referred to it later in her confession. She had stolen the ring from a woman who had found her some employment in her household, and after the loss of the ring had been reported to the police she must have had a sudden attack of cold feet. However that may be, she one day arrived unexpectedly at her daughter's, and her son-in-law, a considerate sort of individual, from what we can gather, gave her a warm welcome. She was to put her mind at rest and remain as long as she pleased. This arrangement suited Anna perfectly. But a fly very soon appeared in the ointment. The police, in their efforts to trace the ring and the missing servant, had issued a large number of handbills, containing a description of both the thief and the loot. When Anna's son-in-law, quite by chance, happened to read one of these handbills, and realized the truth, he knew there was only one thing to do : send his self-invited mother-in-law on her way. The penalty for harbouring a criminal in Germany in those days was most severe; it was considered that by aiding and abetting a law-breaker, however innocently, one was performing the equivalent of participating in the crime. And Anna's son-in-law saw no reason why his home and happiness should be jeopardized through the criminal tendencies of his mother-in-law. So that night Anna Zwanziger found herself again on her way, but in possession of the ring, which she managed successfully to dispose of,

and the money from the sale of which kept her in funds for some time.

But now she was becoming thoroughly callous in the matter of the way in which she procured a livelihood. Her knowledge of many cities and her experiences of that side of life so often termed "seamy" had left her without inclination to live "honestly." If she could live by her wits and the nimbleness of her fingers, so much the better. The chances were, so she reckoned, that those tools of nature would serve her better than any needle or scrubbing-brush. Further, she enjoyed pitting her wits against others'. She found a queer thrill in playing the hypocrite, in deceiving people—and men especially—as to the true purpose of her friendship.

Yet ostensibly she was a needlewoman. Living with every evidence of middle-aged sedateness in a little town not far from Bayreuth, there were not many who knew her but respected her. Her nocturnal excursions were sealed episodes of her life to her neighbours. She was accepted for what she purported to be. The Frau Zwanziger of the painted cheeks and high-heeled shoes, of the high-waisted gowns and roguish glances, was unknown in the little township of Pegnitz. But Anna was merely biding her time.

Already she had proved her efficiency with a bottle of arsenic. Further, she had tested herself, and sounded her own confidence in herself. She had experienced the "thrill of evil" and had been left with a desire for its prolongation. She had found that she could gratify several desires at one and the same time. With the lapse of time, however, she grew impatient. Her midnight peregrinations were not as lucrative as she desired,

and, what was more, they held the additional disadvantage —a very real one to a woman of Zwanziger's type— of providing her with little variety. In her own way she was a profound student of human nature. Her preference was to study one person for a while, to get to know that person's habits and ways, even thoughts. She became impatient for the opportunity of again practising her wiles upon some suitable person who should eventually fall a victim to her evil machinations.

And as was frequently the case, she had not long to wait. She realized that her opportunity had arrived when she learned one day that a judge named Glaser, who was living apart from his wife, was advertising for a housekeeper. From among a crowd of applicants for the post Glaser chose the Pegnitz needlewoman, whose references were poor, but whose tinted cheeks and brightened lips awoke timid speculation in the mind of this bachelor against his will.

Within a very little while after being chosen as the judge's housekeeper Anna Zwanziger's nimble brain was sounding a new possibility—her chances of eventually becoming Frau Glaser. The prospect, could she lead Glaser to the altar, was alluring, for he was a man moderately endowed with this world's goods, and he had few relations who might bicker at the disposal of his wealth after his decease. In fact, the only disturbing fly in the otherwise clear amber was the present Frau Glaser, and that lady, according to all appearances, was beyond being reconciled to her amatory spouse.

So Anna Zwanziger set herself to achieve the seemingly impossible. If she could manage to bring Glaser and his wife together again, thereby, incidentally, winning the confidence and presumably the thanks of both,

the way was clear for the pursuance of her scheme. First the wife was to be disposed of. It would take a little time, of course, but time was no object, and her post was one which brought her many little privileges and comforts; she could, all things considered, afford to take her time. But once Frau Glaser was out of the way for good and all, then the application of some truly feminine sympathy, suitably alloyed with easily discernible traces of affection, should within a few weeks—a month or so at most—see a second Frau Glaser installed in the judge's comfortable home.

So she began covertly to send Frau Glaser little sympathetic notes in which she subtly introduced references to Glaser's obvious regret at his wife's continued absence. Some time had to elapse before she could become really "confiding," but gradually the wife's replies became more friendly in tone, and the "confidences" were returned. Frau Glaser admitted to her unknown friend that she was in truth longing to be back in her home, and it did not take Anna long to prepare the homecoming. The first Glaser heard of what had been transpiring was in a letter from his wife announcing her intended arrival.

At first he was staggered, then appeared overjoyed, while his housekeeper went methodically to work to make the wife's return under her husband's roof a memorable occasion. On the day of the return the judge's house was festooned with flowers, while the garden was decked out as for a *fête*, the paths lined with twinkling rows of lanterns and flapping streams of flags. The local municipal orchestra was commissioned to herald the arrival of the wife with strains of sentimental music, so dear to the true German's heart. In fact,

the plans were laid with such cunning that if Glaser himself had any doubts as to the ultimate outcome of the reunion they were swept away in his excitement at the festivities themselves. His wedding had been nothing compared with this, and, after all, was he not able to pat himself on the back and say he was a prominent man in the town? Was he not a judge, and was it not all, in some measure, homage to the success he had made of his life? So his wife's homecoming came to assume a new significance, and his housekeeper to wear the garb of some strange heaven-sent home-restorer.

So Frau Glaser was welcomed back to her husband's widespread arms with considerable pomp, old scores were discarded and forgotten in a kiss, and a fresh start was made with a mutual vow not to quarrel or bicker any more. And in the background loomed Anna, smiling sedately, her face successfully masking the ironic reflections in her mind. She was the friend and confidant of both; her position in the Glaser household was assured.

Far more so than was the newly returned wife's, for Anna was a swift worker, and she considered that she had dallied long enough. Frau Glaser had not been in her home many days before she was suffering acutely from the first dose of the housekeeper's poison, and of course it was to the sympathetic housekeeper that she turned for aid and alleviation. Anna appeared most concerned. Her expressions of regret were voluble, her tears profuse, and she seemingly spared no personal effort in her endeavours to help her suffering mistress.

It took three doses of arsenic to kill Frau Glaser. The poor woman died in horrible agony, watched closely by the smirking housekeeper, and no sooner was the

breath out of her body than the murderess retired to her room ostensibly to bear her grief alone, in reality to chortle over the success with which her vile scheme had met. Years later, recalling the occasion when she was penning her *Confessions*, she wrote :

> I intended continuing with the powder until I had finished her off, for I felt and knew that all my future happiness was at stake. If she lived, I might starve again. In one cup I handed her the powder was so thick that I feared she would see it. She did not, however, and as I watched her drinking it all unsuspectingly I said to myself, "That will do the trick." And it did.

However, retribution of a kind descended upon her head, for after his wife's terrible death Glaser was overtaken with a sudden penitence for his wasted years. He had a feeling that grew almost to a passion for being alone and avoiding the society of other women, and a few days after the wife had been buried Anna Zwanziger was amazed to learn from the judge that he wished to dispense with her services. In vain she tricked herself out in her best finery and played her feminine arts to their full. Glaser's heart seemed interred with his wife, and she could awaken no response in him. To all her entreaties he was adamant. She must go, as he wished to live henceforth a solitary existence.

With hatred blazing in her heart at this thwarting of her high hopes and precious plotting the housekeeper had to pack her bag and look round her for a new situation. Her own particular kind of luck did not forsake her. She very soon secured employment in the household of another judge, a middle-aged man plagued with gout who lived at Sanspareil. His name was Grohmann, and as far as we can learn he had few qualities to

commend him to the good graces and favour of an eligible maid or matron. Yet Anna was disturbed to learn, upon taking up her duties in his home, that Grohmann was contemplating marriage with a young woman of comely features and figure who lived not far distant from Sanspareil. Gout and temper to a person of Anna's temperament were no deterrents to matrimony, and she had no desire to see Grohmann's comfortable means bestowed upon a younger woman who had not sense enough to procure them for herself. Perhaps she suffered from some Freudian complex of inferiority, for no sooner had she installed herself in Sanspareil than she firmly made up her mind that she would, by hook or by crook, snatch her gouty and irascible employer—together with his property and banking account —away from this young woman whose bright glances and round cheeks had enslaved him.

As later evidence proved, she set herself to intercept the correspondence of Grohmann and his affianced, but in this she was only partially successful. So she resorted to her old trick of personal allure. Her most becoming gowns were again unpacked, together with her large assortment of cosmetics, and for a spell her presence in the judge's household was veritably exotic.

But Grohmann was thirty-eight, and his gout and forthcoming marriage proved enough to occupy his mind. He had no time for his housekeeper's patent artificialness. Whenever he intercepted her winning smiles he frowned. The soft colours and slim lines of her dresses gave him no delight, and he saw in her painted cheeks and lips only indications of a flippancy he was far from condoning in one whose office demanded sedateness and sobriety.

Slowly it was borne home to Anna that again she had aimed her shaft and missed, and once more hope was replaced by a hatred that soon seethed into a mild form of personal torture. To appease her own sense of injured pride and to allay the fierce burning for revenge that filled her heart Grohmann must suffer. She felt like a woman discarded, so real had been her hope and so vital her expectation of success. She considered herself flung aside in favour of this young woman whom she had not even seen. In her anger she lost all sense of proportion; even the truth of her situation she ignored; she became incapable of reasoning or controlling herself. She lived only for one thing: to satisfy the resentment that was making her life a misery.

It did not take her long to make up her mind. If Grohmann could not be hers—even for the short time she required him!—then he should be no other woman's. One strong dose of arsenic was sufficient in his case. Mixed in his soup, the bitter taste was not so noticeable. A few hours after swallowing the poison he was dead, having endured sufficient agony to satisfy his murderess's craving for vengeance.

Amazing as it may seem, Grohmann's murder was not the only poisoning in the judge's household with which this callous and wanton slayer concerned herself. She had previously poisoned two of the servants who for some reason or other had chanced to displease her. Most likely she had caught them discussing herself in no very flattering terms. Anyhow, alluding to this episode, there is a startling confession in her later writings. She writes:

> I determined to spoil their appetites, and took four pitchers of beer, in two of which I mixed tartar emetic,

and in the other two a larger dose of arsenic. I intended to give them the beer by degrees, not in order to kill them, but only to make them sick.

Whether the servants died is not clear, although, despite her own word, there can be little doubt that she really did intend killing the unfortunate pair. Killing had become not a mania with her, but, rather, a lust. She killed wittingly, because she had a deep desire to destroy; and destroying gave her pleasure. Doubtless it also afforded her some sense of power over her fellow-creatures, with the result that her manner gradually became more and more overbearing and domineering; and this alone, of course, would tend to leave her isolated by her kind, a creature disliked and possibly distrusted.

Again, it cannot be doubted that this continual surrender to her basest instincts came in time to be reflected in her facial expression. Certain it is that she was, at the time of Grohmann's murder, losing her fascination for middle-aged members of the opposite sex. Possibly the corners of her mouth were becoming too hard and merciless in expression to invoke tender reflections of linden-trees in moonlight. We know that her face as she grew older became leaner and rather wolfish; she lost her full figure, and her cheek-bones rose high under her eyes, leaving the cunning light in their depths shadowed under the drooping lids. Probably the more one studied her face closely the more repulsive she seemed. Cosmetics filled the wrinkles, which told their own story of a hard-lived life, and she was losing the *flair* for wearing her clothes as though they were part of her.

She left the Grohmann household when it was still in mourning, a disgruntled woman—untroubled by any

twinge of conscience, however—but dispirited. She was plagued by personal and bitter reflections. Was she losing her skill? It was a hard question; but the answer, when she found it, was harder. The conclusion was forced upon her, and with it arose a fresh determination to strive anew to gain what hitherto she had had snatched from her grasp through what she deemed the fickleness of Dame Fortune.

Again it was a member of the legal profession who attracted her as a fair proposition for her schemes. The bait was Herr Gebhard, a magistrate whose legal and other activities had brought him some measure of success and a fairly substantial income. At the time when the dark shadow of Anna Zwanziger crossed his threshold Herr Gebhard was a man moderately contented with what life had brought him. True, his good looks were passing, but his success was mollifying. If he was inclined to be more than a trifle bulbous above his collar, he still had a twinkling eye, and in secret still fondly imagined himself a moderately gay Lothario, although, truth to tell, he could not recall any hearts he had been instrumental in breaking. His wife was a practical-minded woman, rather a source of trouble to him at times, with her habit of close inquiry into his comings and goings. As a magistrate, he believed he should be independent; the father of a lusty and growing family, he found his hands more tied than he could have wished.

But Herr Gebhard was inclined to be lazy. Trying petty thieves and sentencing beggars to be birched required no great display of intellectual versatility. In fact, Herr Gebhard had for some years past found his life becoming more and more one of a regular and unvarying routine. He sought consolation in his pipe

and in dreams of a passion that he had left far behind in his youth. Yet one would have reckoned him a happy husband; if not exactly basking in the ray of his wife's smile, at least sufficiently well favoured not to be bothered with the all-important domestic problem of how to make ends meet.

Anna Zwanziger entered the Gebhard home in the capacity of nurse and personal maid to Frau Gebhard, who was expecting another addition to the subjects of her maternal care. Anna had thought out her position well before applying for the situation. Not a bit deterred by the fact that Gebhard was married, her mind was made up that the magistrate should make her a suitable husband for a while. It would be a novel situation, she considered, to move about among her neighbours the wife of a man who demanded their deference and respect. She was not above enjoying the reflected glory of another, and she had even made up her mind that she could put up with Gebhard for a few months. At her first meeting with him she had sensed the submerged longing for a love intrigue that he fondly hugged to himself. Keen student of human nature that she was, within a very short while she knew how to tackle her task, knew exactly what she would have to do to gain her ends, and was quite prepared to wait a little longer than was usual with her. The risk—if she counted it—was what she had always encountered; and she was, in addition, more desperate for success than ever before. The fear of failure, of eking out her last days on a meagre pittance from her small savings, of knowing that she had failed when so often she had had success within her very grasp, and after hazarding so much, acted like a spur, urging her onward and conjuring her to act her *rôle* of family

sympathizer and peace-maker as she had never acted it before.

When she appeared before Gebhard for the interview that was to be the first stage in her greatest bid for ease and luxury in her old age she was a demure, gently smiling creature in sombre-shaded clothes that fitted her passing well. Her voice had a tinkle in it, and her eyes radiated mystery. Gebhard was intrigued. His inquiries became personal, and her voice remained tinkling. He liked that. Yes, looking her over, she seemed the very person they wanted. Nothing drab about her, yet, on the other hand, there was nothing to which Frau Gebhard could very well take exception. And the woman seemed pleasant company, too. Herr Gebhard may have toyed with the reflection of just how pleasant she could make herself.

When finally he told the applicant with the tinkling voice that she could consider herself engaged the two probably understood each other very well. But for Anna the most dangerous and trying stage was passed. She had secured her footing in the Gebhard home; she saw no reason to suppose that this time everything should not go according to plan.

Her meeting with the first subject of her attentions, Frau Gebhard herself, was likewise full of promise. The magistrate's wife took to the new nurse at once, and in a very short while the two appeared firm friends. Frau Gebhard soon became content to leave the entire management of her household to the capable supervision of the nurse, whose energies and good spirits seemed alike unflagging. How Anna got on with the servants is not known, but it is not improbable that this time she set herself to please everyone. The good will and better

opinion of the servants would be great assets after she had disposed of the wife. She probably took pains to reveal herself as an easygoing mistress in matters domestic, and she seems generally to have planned her campaign with all the resource and foresight of a general upon whose success or failure depends the existence of a beloved nation.

However, her method of approach this time was somewhat different from what it had been in the case of the luckless Grohmann. With the master she was always the dutiful-minded nurse, with never a thought other than for the welfare and comfort of her mistress. Plainly dressed, she nevertheless had a pleasant smile and cheery word for the magistrate, but he was given no opportunity for trying out the temper of her wit's blade. So that gradually, through very proximity and through having too much time on his hands in which to speculate idly, Gebhard conceived an idea that he was not unattractive in the eyes of this efficient and bright-eyed woman in whose face one could easily discern traces of youth, and in whose eyes could spring up a light both mystifying and entrancing. Was it not said that women were invariably cold at first to those to whom they were by nature attracted?

With such airy and flimsy notions Gebhard slowly built up a fine castle of hope. True, there was his wife. The thought caused him to frown, and, frowning, he would contrast the two women, and then frown still more, realizing that the main trouble with himself was that for years he had been robbed of life's chief spice, variety.

All this while Anna was the constant and devoted nurse at the bedside of the confined woman. Frau

Gebhard was no longer young. Constant child-bearing had sapped her youth and drained her physical resources, and during the present period she was feeling more exhausted than ever before. It was Anna's duty to keep her mistress's mind off what lay before her, to allay her thirst with cooling drinks, and to occupy her mind with light gossip and those little feminine fancies with which two women friends seem ever prepared to indulge each other.

Anna had not been installed in the house many days when it was obvious that the mistress had taken a great liking to her and wanted her constantly to be by her bedside. While the nurse busied herself about the room, straightening the cumbersome articles of furniture and dusting the many ornaments, arranging the flowers, and setting the curtains so that the sunlight did not hurt her patient's eyes, Frau Gebhard's gaze would follow her every movement.

And one day, watching Anna intently, she saw that she fumbled with a bowl of nourishing broth that had been prepared by the nurse. Quite casually the woman in bed asked what the nurse was doing.

She was surprised to see the nurse start violently, and then she caught a glimpse of something white falling in a thin stream from a packet into the bowl of broth. Again she called out, asking the nurse what she was doing.

Anna Zwanziger half turned about, muttering that she was merely putting some salt and flavouring into the broth, but in that half-motion the woman in bed had caught sight of the expression on the nurse's face, and had received a ghastly revelation. For the look the nurse had been unable to mask had been one of almost fiendish delight. In place of the cheery smile Frau

Gebhard had come to look for on the face of the woman who had tended her with such show of loving care she had seen a sneering, contemptuous smile, the lips drawn back maliciously, and in the woman's eyes a look of sheer malevolence.

As the nurse approached the bedside, once more her old self, the patient wondered whether she had been mistaken. The weather was warm, and quite frequently her eyes had been blurred with tears she had not been conscious of shedding. Yet something prompted her to ask again what it was the nurse had put in the broth. The renewal of the question must have taken the nurse somewhat unawares, for it appears that she started slightly, although in an instant she had herself under skilled control. But Frau Gebhard had observed that start, and she felt alarmed. At what, she did not know. But the recollection of the look she had seen on the nurse's face and her obvious uneasiness when the questions had been directed at her were not counted to allay her doubts. She found herself pondering over the nurse. She was a good servant, obliging, careful, and attentive to her duties, and, what was a boon in servants, she did not appear to be extravagant in her management of things. Yet it had been her husband, not herself, who had actually engaged her. What had her references said? Where had she been previously? How had she spent her life hitherto?

It was not long before these and similar questions were completely driven from the patient's mind. She was taken with a sudden and horribly painful attack of sickness. Her temperature rose alarmingly, and she seemed all at once to have developed a fever. Only one thought, terrifying in its stark significance,

filled her racked and fevered brain. That something the nurse had put into her broth—poison! She had been poisoned! Deliberately . . . she was being poisoned deliberately—murdered!

When Anna approached the bedside with her customary smile of sympathetic understanding the stricken woman raised her trembling frame and accused the nurse of poisoning her. In wild, despairing movements, she began gesticulating, and her voice rose as she became more excited.

By sheer force the nurse bore her patient down and waited, smothering her wild, accusing utterances, until her feeble force had spent itself. Then she stole from the room, and, going to Gebhard, told him that his wife had suddenly become delirious and had been raving. She must be kept quiet, she impressed upon him with great show of earnestness, and no one must go into her room except herself, or she would again become excited, and it was essential that in her present precarious condition she must be kept free from anything at all exciting. Only she, the nurse, must tend her. The situation, in short, was critical. Just how critical might be judged by the fact that only just now Frau Gebhard had been accusing her, the nurse, and others in the house of trying deliberately to poison her. The very fantasticality of the notion should show Herr Gebhard in what parlous state his wife's nerves were. She was too highly strung, and everyone must take care to move about quietly. No notice must be taken of any ravings on the patient's part. Patience and quiet attention alone would preserve her health and restore her to her anxious family. Yes, Frau Gebhard had a very trying time before her.

Herr Gebhard appeared befittingly worried, but was

quite content to leave everything in the hands of the capable nurse, whose sympathy was wanted especially at this trying time.

The rest of the household knew nothing of what went on in the stricken wife's bedroom during the next few days save the few facts recounted by the nurse, whose face now wore a serious and perplexed frown. At times muffled cries were heard, which rang in dread undertones throughout the house, and one or two of the servants began freely speculating as to what was the true cause of their mistress's ailment, which they admitted among themselves was very mysterious. But the nurse was able to silence any doubtful opinions by vague references to the patient's condition before she arrived. However, the time had come for her to play her trump card ; to call in the services of a doctor.

Herr Gebhard, when she made her request, glumly acquiesced. The doctor came, as Anna had been careful to arrange, too late, and at a time when the patient was too ill to take any interest in her surroundings. That she was dying was plain enough to the medical man, but the cause of her condition was less readily discernible. But he was not willing to confess himself at a loss for an explanation. When pressed for one by the husband he readily supported the nurse's theory. Frau Gebhard's condition arose from natural causes determined by her confinement.

A few hours after the learned man had made this pronouncement Frau Gebhard was dead. The doctor, when he was brought in again, was careful to point out that the magistrate's late wife had throughout many years been delicate and subject to constant minor illnesses. So the funeral came, and Anna Zwanziger's

latest victim was interred amid a great show of grief and flowers. Afterwards life went on very much as before in the magistrate's home, with the nurse now installed as housekeeper.

The scheming murderess had every cause to congratulate herself this time upon the success with which her plot had met. Gebhard was a man metaphorically at the end of a tether. There had arrived a sudden blank in his life, and by nature he veered towards the woman who appeared to offer not only sympathy, but real understanding. Yet, strangely enough, at the very time when Anna's plans seemed to be maturing so well, when Gebhard was daily revealing himself more and more likely to be fast caught in the carefully prepared snare stretched before him, a change became apparent in the attitude of the servants towards the housekeeper. It might have been that this partial—considerable though it was, actually—success had made her less careful in acting the *rôle* she had assumed. Perhaps something of her old jealous nature now came uppermost. With the game almost hers it is not unlikely that she grew hypersensitive to the attentions paid Gebhard by other women. His friends she cordially detested, one and all, both sexes alike. Whether she was aware that already neighbours were talking about her it is hard to say, for throughout her life she had shown herself singularly uninterested in other people's opinions of her. But she could not fail to observe the gradual change on the part of the servants.

Immediately she suspected rivalry with herself. But who could be the rival? Who among the servants could aspire to outplace her?

One of the maids was a pretty girl with fresh looks

and trim figure. The jealous woman soon came to see in the girl the one she had to fear in the race to win Gebhard's rather belated affections. Worse still for Anna's peace of mind, the girl was very friendly with a quick-witted page-boy, whom she suspected of listening at keyholes and of prying into matters which did not concern him. Whenever she came upon the two together a right royal rage possessed her, and she had great work in controlling her true feelings. It was all very harrowing, especially as she could not be sure.

But couldn't she?

The remedy, when she looked for it, was very close to hand, as it had always been. One day after her jealous hate against the young maid had burned particularly fiercely she went out of her way to be kind to the girl, and herself prepared her some coffee. The outcome can well be imagined: the girl was violently ill. However, she recovered in time to be about again when her friend the page was taken queer with awful pains in his stomach.

But Anna was too careful to risk any further deaths just at present. A little while elapsed, and Gebhard, good liver that he was, began to tire of his self-imposed hermit-like existence. He longed for the bright lights again and the laughter of friends well content with his fare. So he made arrangements for a dinner-party that was to herald his return to a more normal existence.

The housekeeper did her best to dissuade him from what he had made up his mind to do, and when at last she realized that her efforts and pleading in his wife's name were to be unavailing she experienced a return of the old hatred against those who stepped between Gebhard and herself. Gebhard was to have his dinner and his friends were to have their merriment; there

would probably be jokes and quips about the next Frau Gebhard, and the thought galled her. Long before she knew who were to be invited she had decided upon what she considered a measure of precaution.

She poisoned the food of everyone at the dinner-table except the host himself, and the jovial feast ended miserably, with the guests doubled up in their chairs, groaning and complaining bitterly. Gebhard was furious. He did not stop to consider the cause. It was sufficient that his housekeeper was at fault; she it was who had ruined his dinner-party. Indeed, he remembered afterwards that it had been she who had tried to persuade him to give up the idea of holding it.

Two days after the fiasco Anna Zwanziger was amazed to hear Gebhard give her notice to leave. In desperation she resorted to every trick of enticement she knew, but the fat little magistrate was adamant. His guests had been made ill in his house, partaking of his food, and he had been made to look a fool. His pride had been hurt beyond the hurter's healing. To every plea the housekeeper put forward he had the same reply. She must prepare to leave.

Finally she made her way back to her room, defeated. She was in the same position as she had been when Grohmann had told her to go. But this time her rage was more bitter. Gebhard had turned her down after having almost given in to her. She felt that she had been cheated, and most unfairly; cheated when her very persistency deserved success. It was more than she could accept with any show of meekness. Somehow or other she must give expression to the hatred which consumed her. She had to suffer again. Very well, others should also suffer.

The laughter of the servants, who had learned of what had taken place, floated up to her, and slowly she began to lose what little control she retained over herself. It was a hideous world. Everyone was against her; everyone hated her. There was no room in the world for her. Her leaving would merely bring smiles to the faces she hated.

But not for long. She promised herself that much, and found consolation in the promise. The next day all the servants who had partaken of the midday meal she had prepared were taken ill, suffering from convulsive pains and burning in the throat. The maids, who hitherto had voiced their suspicions only among themselves, now insisted upon what remained of the meal being examined. Gebhard, at last genuinely perturbed, agreed; and when a chemist's analysis revealed that a considerable quantity of arsenic had been mixed with the food the little magistrate was thoroughly alarmed. Hideous possibilities occurred to his mind, possibilities that made him tremble with fear. And the scandal, if this thing became known! Try as he would, he could not bring himself to agree to face that. There might even be those uncharitable ones who would say that he had himself been party to his wife's *murder*. Yet the word had an ominous sound. No, the better way, if the thing could be arranged, was to keep quiet, let the woman go her way. The affair would then die down and he would not have to face the horrors of a most undesirable publicity, that might even result in his having to renounce his office.

Gebhard's vain little world was tumbling. It crashed finally when his youngest child was suddenly taken queer, complaining of awful pains in the stomach,

and it was learned that the housekeeper had previously given it a biscuit soaked in milk.

Now thoroughly aroused, probably in fear of his own safety also, Gebhard went to the police, and an investigation into Ann Zwanziger's past was at once begun. In the meantime the housekeeper, having spread death broadcast in her wake, had made her way from Pegnitz to Bayreuth. From there she addressed a most heart-stirring letter to her late employer, in which she alluded to all that she had done for his family and the great affection she had come to entertain for himself. However, receiving no reply to this letter, she moved on to Nuremberg, still on the look-out for suitable victims. But her luck now seemed to have deserted her entirely. Still no reply came from Gebhard, and her endeavours in other directions brought no results. Her means were fast disappearing, and, almost on the verge of despair, she made her way again to Mainbernheim, with the intention of securing help from her son-in-law. However, she arrived in the little town only to discover that another avenue was closed to her. The son-in-law, she learned, was in prison, working off a long sentence for larceny and embezzlement.

She had reached the last of her resources. No door remained open to her. She was an outcast, unwanted. The picture she had painted for herself in Gebhard's home, and which had become a nightmare to her, was now reality. Her nightmare was now real and was with her.

In a black mood of despair, hardly realizing where she intended to take herself, she retraced her way to Nuremberg. Somehow she was lured by a large city and its many streets. It was a fatal lure, for upon her return

to the old town with its familiar streets she was arrested, charged with the murders of Frau Glaser and Frau Gebhard.

For the last time she roused herself to take an interest in a life that was shortly to be over—though a long way from being forgotten. Not knowing how much the authorities had discovered since her flight from Herr Gebhard's house, she stoutly maintained her innocence when asked what she had to say to the charge. She did not know that the bodies of the two women and also that of Grohmann had been disinterred, and that definite traces of arsenic had been found in both the former, while the medical evidence had likewise found symptoms of arsenical poisoning in the case of the latter. Throughout the time she spent in prison, and during the trial, which lasted a long while, she successfully maintained her attitude of injured innocence. Indeed, the battle for her life, for the life she had tried so hard to insure, roused a new and keen enthusiasm in her. Her wits proved their nimbleness, for she even advanced theories—plausible enough when considered by themselves—of how she had been made the victim of others' hate. She drew a pitiful picture of herself having to submit to the injustices of those who were jealous of her. It was a clever reversal of the actual facts, and so cleverly did she act her new part that she imparted a verisimilitude to her tale that took a good deal of breaking down by the prosecution.

When the verdict was read aloud, however, the last spark of resistance died in her. She collapsed. In fact, there is a pen-drawing extant that shows this very episode. Two court ushers are hurrying to her assistance. She lies, a thin figure on whose face is a look of horrified

realization, on the floor where she has fallen, one foot crooked under the other, her long skirts drawn about her; a thin figure, yet there is something terrible in her attitude, in the gesture of the two tightly clenched hands, raised as though to buffet the first person to approach her.

Her collapse was mental as well as physical. The time remaining to her was spent in alternately boasting of her fiendish accomplishments and in denying them. The *Confessions*, that gruesome revelation she had compiled in her more excited hours, she now desperately denied. It was, she asserted time and again, nothing but a collection of wild and improbable fictions that she had written at various times when she had been depressed in spirit. Despite her last avowals, however, the world has agreed to accept the work as a genuine account of the evil deeds of one of the blackest-souled women who ever lived. Anna Zwanziger was one of the few queens of crime who had nothing lovable in her nature. When she was led out to be decapitated, in July 1811, she was merely a dried husk of a woman; withered by the fierceness of her own selfish emotions. A woman given to extreme sexual indulgences, without pity or remorse, who knew no sense of loyalty, whose every soft word was a lie, who killed for the sense of power it gave her, and who wanted that sense of power solely to gratify a nature that was inadequate to provide her with any remotest feeling of contentment, she died as she had lived—with her heart filled with hatred against humankind. After the grisly execution her shrivelled body was publicly displayed, bound to a huge wheel. In death she was denied the one decency that in life she might have pleaded for!

It is perhaps only natural that a certain number of stories should have sprung up about such a personality as Anna Zwanziger. The present writer is little inclined to give credence to them. For instance, the following description of her (admittedly it does not follow Feuerbach) seems only too obviously composed by a writer determined to procure effect: "Small, short, thin, muddy complexion, small ratlike eyes, thin lips, thin high-pitched voice, an excess of hair on her upper lip and chin." A woman with such singular lack of charm could hardly remain throughout her life "vain, fond of flattery, and desired the admiration of men."

On the other hand, the story told of how she procured her first packet of arsenic, and why, rather suggests another type of woman. She had entered a chemist's shop and inquired about some suitable preparations for beautifying the skin. The chemist, on her finally choosing arsenic, made a joke about its being a dangerous substance to get on one's lips.

Again, it has been stated that Anna Zwanziger was recommended to Herr Gebhard by the doctor who had attended Herr Grohmann. This again sounds just a trifle tall, a story told for effect only. The present writer also doubts very much the veracity of what has been declared to be her comment to the judge after sentence had been passed: "It is perhaps better for the community that I should die, as it would be quite impossible for me to give up the practice of poisoning people."

However much one might agree with the first part, and however much believe the second, remembering that her trial had been a most stormy one, that it had lasted, on and off, for almost a year, so baffled had been the prosecution in their endeavours to substantiate their

charges against her, that she had contradicted herself so many times that both defence and prosecution had been in a whirl of confusion regarding the very issue they were fighting, it would have been too much like pantomime for her to have rung down the curtain with such easy submission to a fate almost as terrible as—certainly far more barbaric than—that she had meted out to her many victims.