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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CRIME OF THE BOULEVARD ***

The Crime of The Boulevard



By JULES CLARETIE

Member of the French Academy



Translated by MRS. CARLTON A. KINGSBURY



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R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

The Crime of the Boulevard

THE CRIME OF THE BOULEVARD.

CHAPTER I.

"WHERE does Bernardet live?"

"At the passage to the right—Yes, that house which you see with the grating and the garden behind it."

The man to whom a passer-by had given this information hurried away in the direction pointed

out; although gasping for breath, he tried to run, in order to more quickly reach the little house at the end of the passage of the Elysée des Beaux Arts. This passage, a sort of cul-de-sac, on either side of which were black buildings, strange old houses, and dilapidated storehouses, opened upon a boulevard filled with life and movement; with people promenading; with the noise of tramways; with gaiety and light.

The man wore the dress and had the bearing of a workman. He was very short, very fat, and his bald head was bared to the warm October rain. He was a workman, in truth, who labored in his concierge lodge, making over and mending garments for his neighbors, while his wife looked after the house, swept the staircases, and complained of her lot.

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Mme. Moniche found life hard and disagreeable, and regretted that it had not given her what it promised when, at eighteen, and very pretty, she had expected something better than to watch beside a tailor bent over his work in a concierge's lodge. Into her life a tragedy had suddenly precipitated itself, and Mme. Moniche found, that day, something to brighten up her afternoon. Entering a moment before, the apartment occupied by M. Rovère, she had found her lodger lying on his back, his eyes fixed, his arms flung out, with a gash across his throat!

M. Rovère had lived alone in the house for many years, receiving a few mysterious persons. Mme. Moniche looked after his apartment, entering by using her own key whenever it was necessary; and her lodger had given her permission to come there at any time to read the daily papers.

Mme. Moniche hurried down the stairs.

"M. Rovère is dead! M. Rovère has been murdered! His throat has been cut! He has been assassinated!" And, pushing her husband out of the door, she exclaimed:

"The police! Go for the police!"

This word "police" awakened in the tailor's mind, not the thought of the neighboring Commissary, but the thought of the man to whom he felt that he ought to appeal, whom he ought to consult. This man was the good little M. Bernardet, who passed for a man of genius of his kind, at the Sureté, and for whom Moniche had often repaired coats and rehemmed trousers.

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From the mansion in the Boulevard de Clichy, where Moniche lived, to M. Bernardet's house, was but a short distance, and the concierge knew the way very well, as he had often been there. But the poor man was so stupefied, so overwhelmed, by the sudden appearance of his wife in his room, by the brutal revelation which came to him as the blow of a fist, by the horrible manner of M. Rovère's death, that he lost his head. Horrified, breathless, he asked the first passer-by where Bernardet lived, and he ran as fast as he could in the direction pointed out.

Arrived at the grating, the worthy man, a little confused, stopped short. He was very strongly moved. It seemed to him that he had been cast into the agony of a horrible nightmare. An assassination in the house! A murder in the Boulevard de Clichy in broad daylight, just over his head, while he was quietly repairing a vest!

He stood looking at the house without ringing. M. Bernardet was, no doubt, breakfasting with his family, for it was Sunday, and the police officer, meeting Moniche the evening before, had said to him: "To-morrow is my birthday."

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Moniche hesitated a moment, then he rang the bell. He was not kept waiting; the sudden opening of the grating startled him; he pushed back the door and entered. He crossed a little court, at the end of which was a pavilion; he mounted the three steps and was met on the threshold by a little woman, as rosy and fresh as an apple, who, napkin in hand, gayly saluted him.

"Eh, Monsieur Moniche!"

It was Mme. Bernardet, a Burgundian woman, about thirty-five years of age, trim and coquettish, who stepped back so that the tailor could enter.

"What is the matter, M. Moniche?"

Poor Moniche rolled his frightened eyes around and gasped out: "I must speak to M. Bernardet."

"Nothing easier," said the little woman. "M. Bernardet is in the garden. Yes, he is taking advantage of the beautiful day; he is taking a group"—

"What group?"

"You know very well, photography is his passion. Come with me."

And Mme. Bernardet pointed to the end of the corridor, where an open door gave a glimpse of the garden at the rear of the house. M. Bernardet, the Inspector, had posed his three daughters with their mother about a small table, on which coffee had been served.

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"I had just gone in to get my napkin, when I heard you ring," Mme. Bernardet said.

Bernardet made a sign to Moniche not to advance. He was as plump and as gay as his wife. His moustache was red, his double chin smooth-shaven and rosy, his eyes had a sharp, cunning look,

his head was round and closely cropped.

The three daughters, clothed alike in Scotch plaid, were posing in front of a photographic apparatus which stood on a tripod. The eldest was about twelve years of age; the youngest a child of five. They were all three strangely alike.

M. Bernardet, in honor of his birthday, was taking a picture of his daughters. The ferret who, from morning till night, tracked robbers and malefactors into their hiding places, was taking his recreation in his damp garden. The sweet idyl of this hidden life repaid him for his unceasing investigations, for his trouble and fatiguing man-hunts through Paris.

"There!" he said, clapping the cap over the lens. "That is all! Go and play now, my dears. I am at your service, Moniche."

He shut up his photographic apparatus, pulling out the tripod from the deep soil in which it was imbedded, while his daughters joyously ran to their mother. The young girls stood gazing at Moniche with their great blue eyes, piercing and clear. Bernardet turned to look at him, and at once divined that something had happened.

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"You are as white as your handkerchief, Moniche," he said.

"Ah! Monsieur Bernardet! It is enough to terrify one! There has been a murder in the house."

"A murder?"

His face, which had been so gay and careless, suddenly took on a strange expression, at once tense and serious; the large blue eyes shone as with an inward fire.

"A murder, yes, Monsieur Bernardet. M. Rovère—you did not know him?"

"No."

"He was an original—a recluse. And now he has been assassinated. My wife went to his room to read the papers"—

Bernardet interrupted him brusquely:

"When did it happen?"

"Ah! *Dame!* Monsieur, I do not know. All I know is my wife found the body still warm. She was not afraid; she touched it."

"Still warm!"

These words struck Bernardet. He reflected a moment, then he said:

"Come; let us go to your house."

Then, struck with a sudden idea, he added: "Yes, I will take it."

He unfastened his camera from the tripod. "I have three plates left which I can use," he said.

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Mme. Bernardet, who was standing at a little distance, with the children clinging to her skirts, perceived that the concierge had brought important news. Bernardet's smiling face had suddenly changed; the expression became serious, his glance fixed and keen.

"Art thou going with him?" Mme. Bernardet asked, as she saw her husband buckle on a leather bandolier.

"Yes!" he answered.

"Ah! Mon Dieu! my poor Sunday, and this evening—can we not go to the little theatre at Montmartre this evening?"

"I do not know," he replied.

"You promised! The poor children! You promised to take them to see Closerie des Genets!"

"I cannot tell; I do not know—I will see," the little man said. "My dear Moniche, to-day is my fortieth birthday. I promised to take them to the theatre—but I must go with you." Turning to his wife, he added: "But I will come back as soon as I can. Come, Moniche, let us hasten to your M. Rovère."

He kissed his wife on the forehead, and each little girl on both cheeks, and, strapping the camera in the bandolier, he went out, followed by the tailor. As they walked quickly along Moniche kept repeating: "Still warm; yes, Monsieur Bernardet, still warm!"

CHAPTER II.

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BERNARDET was quite an original character. Among the agents, some of whom were very odd, and among the devoted subalterns, this little man, with his singular mind, with his insatiable curiosity, reading anything he could lay his hands on, passed for a literary person. His chief

sometimes laughingly said to him:

"Bernardet, take care! You have literary ambitions. You will begin to dream of writing for the papers."

"Oh, no, Monsieur Morel—but what would you?—I am simply amusing myself."

This was true. Bernardet was a born hunter. With a superior education, he might have become a savant, a frequenter of libraries, passing his life in working on documents and in deciphering manuscripts. The son of a dairyman; brought up in a Lancastrian school; reading with avidity all the daily papers; attracted by everything mysterious which happened in Paris; having accomplished his military duty, he applied for admission to the Police Bureau, as he would have embarked for the New World, for Mexico, or for Tonquin, in order to travel in a new country. Then he married, so that he might have, in his checkered existence, which was dangerous and wearying,—a haven of rest, a fireside of peaceful joy.

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So he lived a double life—tracking malefactors like a bloodhound, and cultivating his little garden. There he devoured old books, for which he had paid a few sous at some book stall; he read and pasted in old, odd leaves, re-bound them himself, and cut clippings from papers. He filled his round, bald head with a mass of facts which he investigated, classified, put into their proper place, to be brought forth as occasion demanded.

He was an inquisitive person, a very inquisitive person, indeed. Curiosity filled his life. He performed with pleasure the most fatiguing and repulsive tasks that fall to a police officer's lot. They satisfied the original need of his nature, and permitted him to see everything, to hear everything, to penetrate into the most curious mysteries. To-day, in a dress suit with white tie, carelessly glancing over the crowds at the opera, to discover the thieves who took opera glasses, which they sent to accomplices in Germany to be sold; to-morrow, going in ragged clothes to arrest a murderer in some cutthroat den in the Glacière.

M. Bernardet had taken possession of the office of the most powerful bankers, seized their books and made them go away with him in a cab. He had followed, by order, the intrigues of more than one fine lady, who owed to him her salvation. What if M. Bernardet had thought fit to speak? But he never spoke, and reporters came out worsted from any attempt at an interview with him. "An interview is silver, but silence is gold," he was wont to say, for he was not a fool.

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He had assisted at spiritual séances and attended secret meetings of Anarchists. He had occupied himself with occult matters, consulting the magicians of chance, and he had at his tongue's end the list of conspirators. He knew the true names of the famous Greeks who shuffled cards as one scouts about under an assumed name. The gambling hells were all familiar to him; he knew the churches in whose dark corners associates assembled to talk of *affaires*, who did not wish to be seen in beer shops nor spied upon in cabarets.

Of the millions in Paris, he knew the secrets of this whirlpool of humanity.

Oh! if he had ever become prefect of police, he would have studied his Paris, not at a distance, looking up statistics in books, or from the windows of a police bureau, but in the streets, in wretched lodgings, in hovels, in the asylums of misery and of crime. But Bernardet was not ambitious. Life suited him very well as he found it. His good wife had brought to him a small dower, and Bernardet, content with this poor little fortune, found that he had all the power he wanted—the power, when occasion demanded, of putting his hand on the shoulder of a former Minister and of taking a murderer by the throat.

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One day a financier, threatened with imprisonment in Mazas, pleased him very much. Bernardet entered his office to arrest him. He did not wish to have a row in the bank. The police officer and banker found themselves alone, face to face, in a very small room, a private office, with heavy curtains and a thick carpet, which stifled all noise.

"Fifty thousand francs if you will let me escape," said the banker.

"Monsieur le Comte jests"—

"A hundred thousand!"

"The pleasantry is very great, but it is a pleasantry."

Then the Count, very pale, said: "And what if I crack your head?"

"My brother officers are waiting for me," Bernardet simply replied. "They know that our interview does not promise to be a long one, and this last proposition, which I wish to forget like the others, would only aggravate, I believe, if it became known, M. le Comte's case."

Two minutes afterward the banker went out, preceding Bernardet, who followed him with bared head. The banker said to his employés, in an easy tone: "Good-by for the moment, Messieurs, I will return soon."

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It was also Bernardet who, visiting the Bank Hauts-Plateaux, said to his chief: "Monsieur Morel, something very serious is taking place there."

"What is it, Bernardet?"

"I do not know, but there is a meeting of the bank directors, and to-day, I saw two servants

carry a man in there in an invalid's chair. It was the Baron de Cheylard."

"Well?"

"Baron Cheylard, in his quality of ex-Senator of the Second Empire, of ex-President of the Council, an ex-Commissioner of Industrial Expositions, is Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor. Grand Cross—that is to say, that he cannot be pursued only after a decision of the Council of the Order. And then, you understand—if the Bank of Hauts-Plateaux demands the presence of its Vice-president, the Baron of Cheylard, paralyzed, half dead"—

"It means that it has need of a thunderbolt?"

"The Grand Cross, Monsieur. They would hesitate to deliver up to us the Grand Cross."

"You are right, Bernardet. The bank must be in a bad fix. And you are a very keen observer. The mind of a literary man, Bernardet."

"Oh, rather a photographic eye, Monsieur Morel. The habit of using a kodak."

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Thus Bernardet passed his life in Paris. Capable of amassing a fortune in some Tricoche Agency if he had wished to exploit, for his own benefit, his keen observing powers, he thought only of doing his duty, bringing up his little girls and loving his wife. Mme. Bernardet was amazed at the astonishing stories which her husband often related to her, and very proud that he was such an able man.

M. Bernardet hurried toward M. Rovère's lodgings and Moniche trotted along beside him. As they neared the house they saw that a crowd had begun to collect.

"It is known already," Moniche said. "Since I left they have begun"—

"If I enter there," interrupted the officer, "it is all right. You have a right to call any one you choose to your aid. But I am not a Magistrate. You must go for a Commissary of Police."

"Oh, M. Bernardet," Moniche exclaimed. "You are worth more than all the Commissaries put together."

"That does not make it so. A Commissary is a Commissary. Go and hunt for one."

"But since you are here"—

"But I am nothing. We must have a magistrate."

"You are not a magistrate, then?"

"I am simply a police spy."

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Then he crossed the street.

The neighbors had gathered about the door like a swarm of flies around a honey-comb. A rumor had spread about which brought together a crowd animated by the morbid curiosity which is aroused in some minds of the hint of a mystery, and attracted by that strange magnetism which that sinister thing, "a crime," arouses. The women talked in shrill tones, inventing strange stories and incredible theories. Some of the common people hurried up to learn the news.

At the moment Bernardet came up, followed by the concierge, a coupé stopped at the door and a tall man got out, asking:

"Where is M. Morel? I wish to see M. Morel."

The Chief had not yet been advised, and he was not there. But the tall young man suddenly recognized Bernardet, and laid hold of him, pulling him after him through the half-open door, which Moniche hastened to shut against the crowd.

"We must call some officers," Bernardet said to the concierge, "or the crowd will push in."

Mme. Moniche was standing at the foot of the staircase, surrounded by the lodgers, men and women, to whom she was recounting, for the twentieth time, the story of how she had found M. Rovère with his throat cut.

"I was going in to read the paper—the story—it is very interesting, that story. The moment had come when the Baron had insulted the American colonel. M. Rovère said to me only yesterday, poor man: 'I am anxious to find out which one will be killed—the colonel or the baron.' He will never know! And it is he"—

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"Mme. Moniche," interrupted Bernardet, "have you any one whom you can send for a Commissary?"

"Any one?"

"Yes," added Moniche. "M. Bernardet needs a magistrate. It is not difficult to understand."

"A Commissary?" repeated Mme. Moniche. "That is so. A Commissary; and what if I go for the Commissary myself, M. Bernardet?"

"All right, provided you do not let the crowd take the house by assault when you open the

door."

"Fear nothing," the woman said, happy in having something important to do, in relating the horrible news to the Commissary how, when she was about to enter the room for the purpose of reading, the—

While she was going toward the door Bernardet slowly mounted the two flights of stairs, followed by Moniche and the tall young man who had arrived in his coupé at a gallop, in order to get the first news of the murder and make a "scoop" for his paper.

The news had traveled fast, and his paper had sent him in haste to get all the details of the affair which could be obtained. [Pg 18]

The three men reached M. Rovère's door. Moniche unlocked it and stepped back, Bernardet, with the reporter at his heels, note book in hand, entered the room.

CHAPTER III.

NOTHING in the ante-chamber indicated that a tragedy had taken place there. There were pictures on the walls, pieces of faïence, some arms of rare kinds, Japanese swords and a Malay creese. Bernardet glanced at them as he passed by. [Pg 19]

"He is in the salon," said the concierge, in a low tone.

One of the folding doors stood open, and, stopping on the threshold, in order to take in the entire aspect of the place, Bernardet saw in the centre of the room, lying on the floor in a pool of blood, the body of M. Rovère, clothed in a long, blue dressing gown, bound at the waist with a heavy cord, which lay in coils on the floor, like a serpent. The corpse was extended between the two windows, which opened on the Boulevard de Clichy, and Bernardet's first thought was that it was a miracle that the victim could have met his death in such a horrible manner, two steps from the passers-by on the street.

"Whoever struck the blow did it quickly," thought the police officer. He advanced softly toward the body, casting his eye upon the inert mass and taking in at a glance the smallest objects near it and the most minute details. He bent over and studied it thoroughly. [Pg 20]

M. Rovère seemed living in his tragic pose. The pale face, with its pointed and well-trimmed gray beard, expressed in its fierce immobility a sort of menacing anger. This man of about fifty years had evidently died cursing some one in his supreme agony. The frightful wound seemed like a large red cravat, which harmonized strangely with the half-whitened beard, the end of which was wet with blood.

But what struck Bernardet above everything else, arrested his attention, and glued him to the spot, was the look, the extraordinary expression in the eyes. The mouth was open, as if to cry out, the eyes seemed to menace some one, and the lips about to speak.

They were frightful. Those tragic eyes were wide open, as if transfixed by fear or fury.

They seemed fathomless, staring, ready to start from their sockets. The eyebrows above them were black and bristling. They seemed living eyes in that dead face. They told of a final struggle, of some atrocious duel of looks and of words. They appeared, in their ferocious immobility, as when they gazed upon the murderer, eye to eye, face to face.

Bernardet looked at the hands.

They were contracted and seemed, in some obstinate resistance, to have clung to the neck or the clothing of the assassin. [Pg 21]

"There ought to be blood under the nails, since he made a struggle," said Bernardet, thinking aloud.

And Paul Rodier, the reporter, hurriedly wrote, "There was blood under the nails."

Bernardet returned again and again to the eyes—those wide-open eyes, frightful, terrible eyes, which, in their fierce depths, retained without doubt the image or phantom of some nightmare of death.

He touched the dead man's hand. The flesh had become cold and *rigor mortis* was beginning to set in.

The reporter saw the little man take from his pocket a sort of rusty silver ribbon and unroll it, and heard him ask Moniche to take hold of one end of it; this ribbon or thread looked to Paul Rodier like brass wire. Bernardet prepared his kodak.

"Above everything else," murmured Bernardet, "let us preserve the expression of those eyes."

"Close the shutters. The darkness will be more complete."

The reporter assisted Moniche in order to hasten the work. The shutters closed, the room was

quite dark, and Bernardet began his task. Counting off a few steps, he selected the best place from which to take the picture.

"Be kind enough to light the end of the magnesium wire," he said to the concierge. "Have you any matches?"

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"No, M. Bernardet."

The police office indicated by a sign of the head, a match safe which he had noticed on entering the room.

"There are some there."

Bernardet had with one sweeping glance of the eye taken in everything in the room; the fauteuils, scarcely moved from their places; the pictures hanging on the walls; the mirrors; the bookcases; the cabinets, etc.

Moniche went to the mantelpiece and took a match from the box. It was M. Rovère himself who furnished the light by which a picture of his own body was taken.

"We could obtain no picture in this room without the magnesium wire," said the agent, as calm while taking a photograph of the murdered man, as he had been a short time ago in his garden. "The light is insufficient. When I say: 'Go!' Moniche you must light the wire, and I will take three or four negatives. Do you understand? Stand there to my left. Now! Attention!"

Bernardet took his position and the porter stood ready, match and wire in hand, like a gunner who awaits the order to fire.

"Go!" said the agent.

A rapid, clear flame shot up; and suddenly lighted the room. The pale face seemed livid, the various objects in the room took on a fantastic appearance, in this sort of tempestuous apotheosis, and Paul Rodier hastily inscribed on his writing pad: "Picturesque—bizarre—marvelous—devilish—suggestive."

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"Let us try it again," said M. Bernardet.

For the third time in this weird light the visage of the dead man appeared, whiter, more sinister, frightful; the wound deeper, the gash redder; and the eyes, those wide-open, fixed, tragic, menacing, speaking eyes—eyes filled with scorn, with hate, with terror, with the ferocious resistance of a last struggle for life; immovable, eloquent—seemed under the fantastic light to glitter, to be alive, to menace some one.

"That is all," said Bernardet, very softly. "If with these three negatives"——

He stopped to look around toward the door, which was closed. Someone was raining ringing blows on the door, loud and imperative.

"It is the Commissary; open the door, Moniche."

The reporter was busy taking notes, describing the salon, sketching it, drawing a plan for his journal.

It was, in fact, the Commissary, who was followed by Mme. Moniche and a number of curious persons who had forced their way in when the front door was opened.

The Commissary, before entering, took a comprehensive survey of the room, and said in a short tone: "Every one must go out. Madame, make all these people go out. No one must enter."

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There arose an uproar—each one tried to explain his right to be there. They were all possessed with an irresistible desire to assist at this sinister investigation.

"But we belong to the press!"

"The reporters may enter when they have showed their cards," the Commissary replied. "The others—no!" There was a murmur from the crowd.

"The others—no!" repeated the Commissary. He made a sign to two officers who accompanied him, and they demanded the reporters' cards of identification. The concourse of curious ones rebelled, protested, growled and declaimed against the representatives of the press, who took precedence everywhere.

"The Fourth Power!" shouted an old man from the foot of the staircase. He lived in the house and passed for a correspondent of the Institute. He shouted furiously: "When a crime is committed under my very roof, I am not even allowed to write an account of it, and strangers, because they are reporters, can have the exclusive privilege of writing it up!"

The Commissary did not listen to him, but those who were his fellow-sufferers applauded him to the echo. The Commissary shrugged his shoulders at the hand-clappings.

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"It is but right," he said to the reporter, "that the agents of the press should be admitted in preference to any one else. Do you think that it is easy to discover a criminal? I have been a journalist, too. Yes, at times. In the Quartier, occasionally. I have even written a piece for the theatre. But we will not talk of that. Enter! Enter, I beg of you—and we shall see"—and elegant,

amiable, polished, smiling, he looked toward M. Bernardet, and his eyes asked the question: "Where is it?"

"Here! M. le Commissaire."

Bernardet stood respectfully in front of his superior officer, as a soldier carrying arms, and the Commissary, in his turn, approached the body, while the curious ones, quietly kept back by Moniche, formed a half circle around the pale and bloody corpse. The Commissary, like Bernardet, was struck by the haughty expression of that livid face.

"Poor man!" he said, shaking his head. "He is superb! superb! He reminds me of the dead Duke de Guise, in Paul Delaroché's picture. I have seen it also at Chantilly, in Gérôme's celebrated picture of *Le Duel de Pierrot*."

Possibly in speaking aloud his thoughts, the Commissary was talking so that the reporters might hear him. They stood, notebooks in hand, taking notes, and Paul Rodier, catching the names, wrote rapidly in his book: "M. Desbrière, the learned Commissary, so artistic, so well disposed toward the press, was at one time a journalist. He noticed that the victim's pale face, with its strong personal characteristics, resembled the dead Duke de Guise, in Gérôme's celebrated picture, which hangs in the galleries at Chantilly."

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CHAPTER IV.

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M. DESBRIÈRE now began the investigation. He questioned the porter and portress, while he studied the salon in detail. Bernardet roamed about, examining at very close range each and every object in the room, as a dog sniffs and scents about for a trail.

"What kind of a man was your lodger?" was the first question.

Moniche replied in a tone which showed that he felt that his tenant had been accused of something.

"Oh! Monsieur le Commissaire, a very worthy man, I swear it!"

"The best man in the world," added his wife, wiping her eyes.

"I am not inquiring about his moral qualities," M. Desbrière said. "What I want to know is, how did he live and whom did he receive?"

"Few people. Very few," the porter answered. "The poor man liked solitude. He lived here eight years. He received a few friends, but, I repeat, a very small number."

M. Rovère had rented the apartment in 1888, he installed himself in his rooms, with his pictures and books. The porter was much astonished at the number of pictures and volumes which the new lodger brought. It took a long time to settle, as M. Rovère was very fastidious and personally superintended the hanging of his canvases and the placing of his books. He thought that he must have been an artist, although he said that he was a retired merchant. He had heard him say one day that he had been Consul to some foreign country—Spain or South America.

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He lived quite simply, although they thought that he must be rich. Was he a miser? Not at all. Very generous, on the contrary. But, plainly, he shunned the world. He had chosen their apartment because it was in a retired spot, far from the Parisian boulevards. Four or five years before a woman, clothed in black, had come there. A woman who seemed still young—he had not seen her face, which was covered with a heavy black veil—she had visited M. Rovère quite often. He always accompanied her respectfully to the door when she went away. Once or twice he had gone out with her in a carriage. No, he did not know her name. M. Rovère's life was regulated with military precision. He usually held himself upright—of late sickness had bowed him somewhat; he went out whenever he was able, going as far as the Bois and back. Then, after breakfasting, he shut himself up in his library and read and wrote. He passed nearly all of his evenings at home.

"He never made us wait up for him, as he never went to the theatre," said Moniche.

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The malady from which he suffered, and which puzzled the physicians, had seized him on his return from a Summer sojourn at Aix-les-Bains for his health. The neighbors had at once noticed the effect produced by the cure. When he went away he had been somewhat troubled with rheumatism, but when he returned he was a confirmed sufferer. Since the beginning of September he had not been out, receiving no visits, except from his doctor, and spending whole days in his easy chair or upon his lounge, while Mme. Moniche read the daily papers to him.

"When I say that he saw no one," said the porter, "I make a mistake. There was that gentleman"—

And he looked at his wife.

"What gentleman?"

Mme. Moniche shook her head, as if he ought not to answer.

"Of whom do you speak?" repeated the Commissary, looking at both of them.

At this moment, Bernardet, standing on the threshold of the library adjoining the salon, looked searchingly about the room in which M. Rovère ordinarily spent his time, and which he had probably left to meet his fate. His ear was as quick to hear as his eye to see, and as he heard the question he softly approached and listened for the answer. [Pg 30]

"What gentleman? and what did he do?" asked the Commissary, a little brusquely, for he noticed a hesitation to reply in both Moniche and his wife.

"Well, and what does this mean?"

"Oh, well, Monsieur le Commissaire, it is this—perhaps it means nothing," and the concierge went on to tell how, one evening, a very fine gentleman, and very polished, moreover, had come to the house and asked to see M. Rovère; he had gone to his apartment, and had remained a long time. It was, he thought, about the middle of October, and Mme. Moniche, who had gone upstairs to light the gas, met the man as he was coming out of M. Rovère's rooms, and had noticed at the first glance the troubled air of the individual. (Moniche already called the gentleman *the individual*,) who was very pale and whose eyes were red.

Then, at some time or other, the individual had made another visit to M. Rovère. More than once the portress had tried to learn his name. Up to this moment she had not succeeded. One day she asked M. Rovère who it was, and he very shortly asked her what business it was of hers. She did not insist, but she watched the individual with a vague doubt.

"Instinct. Monsieur; my instinct told me"——

"Enough," interrupted M. Desbrière; "if we had only instinct to guide us we should make some famous blunders." [Pg 31]

"Oh, it was not only by instinct, Monsieur."

"Ah! ah! let us hear it"——

Bernardet, with his eyes fastened upon Mme. Moniche, did not lose a syllable of her story, which her husband occasionally interrupted to correct her or to complete a statement, or to add some detail. The corpse, with mouth open and fiery, ferocious eyes, seemed also to listen.

Mme. Moniche, as we already know, entered M. Rovère's apartment whenever she wished. She was his landlady, his reader, his friend. Rovère was brusque, but he was good. So it was nothing strange when the woman, urged by curiosity, suddenly appeared in his rooms, for him to say: "Ah, you here? Is that you? I did not call you." An electric bell connected the rooms with the concierge lodge. Usually she would reply: "I thought I heard the bell." And she would profit by the occasion to fix up the fire, which M. Rovère, busy with his reading or writing, had forgotten to attend to. She was much attached to him. She did not wish to have him suffer from the cold, and recently had entered as often as possible, under one pretext or another, knowing that he was ill, and desiring to be at hand in case of need. When, one evening, about eight days before, she had entered the room while the visitor, whom Moniche called the individual, was there, the portress had been astonished to see the two men standing before Rovère's iron safe, the door wide open and both looking at some papers spread out on the desk. [Pg 32]

Rovère, with his sallow, thin face, was holding some papers in his hand, and the other was bent over, looking with eager eyes at—Mme. Moniche had seen them well—some rent rolls, bills and deeds. Perceiving Mme. Moniche, who stood hesitating on the threshold, M. Rovère frowned, mechanically made a move as if to gather up the scattered papers. But the portress said, "Pardon!" and quickly withdrew. Only—ah! only—she had time to see, to see plainly the iron safe, the heavy doors standing open, the keys hanging from the lock, and M. Rovère in his dressing gown; the official papers, yellow and blue, others bearing seals and a ribbon, lying there before him. He seemed in a bad humor, but said nothing. Not a word.

"And the other one?"

The other man was as pale as M. Rovère. He resembled him, moreover. It was, perhaps, a relative. Mme. Moniche had noticed the expression with which he contemplated those papers and the fierce glance which he cast at her when she pushed open the door without knowing what sight awaited her. She had gone downstairs, but she did not at once tell her husband about what she had seen. It was some time afterward. The individual had come again. He remained closeted with M. Rovère for some hours. The sick man was lying on the lounge. The portress had heard them through the door talking in low tones. She did not know what they said. She could hear only a murmur. And she had very good ears, too. But she heard only confused sounds, not one plain word. When, however, the visitor was going away she heard Rovère say to him: "I ought to have told all earlier." [Pg 33]

Did the dead man possess a secret which weighed heavily upon him, and which he shared with that other? And the other? Who was he? Perhaps an accomplice. Everything she had said belonged to the Commissary of Police and to the press. She had told her story with omissions, with timorous looks, with sighs of doubts and useless gestures. Bernardet listened, noting each word, the purposes of this portress, the melodramatic gossip in certain information in which he verified the precision—all this was engraven on his brain, as earlier in the day the expression of the dead man's eyes had been reflected in the kodak.

He tried to distinguish, as best he could, the undeniable facts in this first deposition, when a woman of the people, garrulous, indiscreet, gossiping and zealous, has the joy of playing a rôle. He mentally examined her story, with the interruptions which her husband made when she accused the individual. He stopped her with a look, placing his hand on her arm and said: "One must wait! One does not know. He had the appearance of a worthy man." The woman, pointing out with a grand gesture, the body lying upon the floor, said: "Oh, well! And did not M. Rovère have the appearance of a worthy man also? And did it hinder him from coming to that?"

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Over Bernardet's face a mocking little smile passed.

"He always had the appearance of a worthy man," he said, looking at the dead man, "and he even seemed like a worthy man who looked at rascals with courage. I am certain," slowly added the officer, "that if one could know the last thought in that brain which thinks no more, could see in those unseeing eyes the last image upon which they looked, one would learn all that need be known about that individual of whom you speak and the manner of his death."

"Possibly he killed himself," said the Commissary.

But the hypothesis of suicide was not possible, as Bernardet remarked to him, much to the great contempt of the reporters who were covering their notebooks with a running handwriting and with hieroglyphics. The wound was too deep to have been made by the man's own hand. And, besides, they would find the weapon with which that horrible gash had been made, near at hand. There was no weapon of any kind near the body. The murderer had either carried it away with him in his flight or he had thrown it away in some other part of the apartment. They would soon know.

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They need not even wait for an autopsy to determine that it was an assassination. "That is evident," interrupted the Commissary; "the autopsy will be made, however."

And, with an insistence which surprised the Commissary a little, Bernardet, in courteous tones, evidently haunted by one particular idea, begged and almost supplicated M. Desbrière to send for the Attorney for the Republic, so that the corpse could be taken as soon as possible to the Morgue.

"Poor man!" exclaimed Mme. Moniche. "To the Morgue! To the Morgue!" Bernardet calmed her with a word.

"It is necessary. It is the law. Oh, Monsieur le Commissaire, let us do it quickly, quickly. I will tell you why. Time will be gained—I mean to say, saved—and the criminal found."

Then, while M. Desbrière sent an officer to the telephone office to ask for the Attorney for the Republic to come as quickly as possible to the Boulevard de Clichy, Mme. Moniche freed her mind to the reporters in regard to some philosophical considerations upon human destiny, which condemned in so unforeseen, so odiously brutal a manner, a good lodger, as respectable as M. Rovère, to be laid upon a slab at the Morgue, like a thief or a vagabond—he who went out but seldom, and who "loved his home so much."

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"The everlasting antithesis of life!" replied Paul Rodier, who made a note of his reflection.

CHAPTER V.

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SOME time passed before the arrival of the Attorney, and through the closed Venetian blinds the murmurs of the crowd collected below could be heard. The Commissary wrote his report on the corner of a table, by the light of a single candle, and now and then asked for some detail of Bernardet, who seemed very impatient. A heavy silence had fallen on the room; those who a short time before had exchanged observations in loud tones, since the Commissary had finished with Mme. Moniche had dropped their voices and spoke in hushed tones, as if they were in a sick room. Suddenly a bell rang, sending shrill notes through the silent room. Bernardet remarked that no doubt, the Attorney had arrived. He looked at his watch, a simple, silver Geneva watch, but which he prized highly—a present from his wife—and murmured:

"There is yet time." It was, in fact, the Attorney for the Republic, who came in, accompanied by the Examining Magistrate, M. Ginory, whom criminals called "the vise," because he pressed them so hard when he got hold of them. M. Ginory was in the Attorney's office when the officer had telephoned to M. Jacquelin des Audrays, and the latter had asked him to accompany him to the scene of the murder. Bernardet knew them both well. He had more than once been associated with M. Audrays. He also knew M. Ginory as a very just, a very good man, although he was much feared, for, while searching for the truth of a matter he reserved judgment of those whom he had fastened in his vise. M. Audrays was still a young man, slender and correct, tightly buttoned up in his redingote, smooth-shaven, wearing eyeglasses.

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The red ribbon in his buttonhole seemed a little too large, like a rosette worn there through coquetry. M. Ginory, on the contrary, wore clothes too large for him; his necktie was tied as if it was a black cord; his hat was half brushed; he was short, stout and sanguine, with his little snub nose and his mouth, with its heavy jaws. He seemed, beside the worldly magistrate, like a sort of professor, or savant, or collector, who, with a leather bag stuffed with books, seemed more fitted

to pore over some brochures or precious old volumes than to spend his time over musty law documents. Robust and active, with his fifty-five years, he entered that house of crime as an expert topographer makes a map, and who scarcely needs a guide, even in an unknown country. He went straight to the body, which, as we have said, lay between the two front windows, and both he and M. Audrays stood a moment looking at it, taking in, as had the others, all the details which might serve to guide them in their researches. The Attorney for the Republic asked the Commissary if he had made his report, and the latter handed it to him. He read it with satisfied nods of his head; during this time Bernardet had approached M. Ginory, saluted him and asked for a private interview with a glance of his eye; the Examining Magistrate understood what he meant.

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"Ah! Is it you, Bernardet? You wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, Monsieur Ginory. I beg of you to get the body to the dissecting room for the autopsy as soon as possible." He had quietly and almost imperceptibly drawn the Magistrate away toward a window, away from the reporters, who wished to hear every word that was uttered, where he had him quite by himself, in a corner of the room near the library door.

"There is an experiment which must be tried, Monsieur, and it ought to tempt a man like you," he said.

Bernardet knew very well that, painstaking even to a fault, taken with any new scientific discoveries, with a receptive mind, eager to study and to learn, M. Ginory would not refuse him any help which would aid justice. Had not the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences crowned, the year before, M. Ginory's book on "The Duties of a Magistrate to the Discoveries of Science?"

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The word "experiment" was not said in order to frighten M. Ginory.

"What do you mean by that, Bernardet?" the Magistrate asked. Bernardet shook his head as if to intimate that the explanation was too long to give him there. They were not alone. Some one might hear them. And if a journal should publish the strange proposition which he wished to—

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed the Examining Magistrate, "then it is something strange, your experiment?"

"Any Magistrate but you would think it wild, unreasonable, or ridiculous, which is worse. But you—oh! I do not say it to flatter you, Monsieur," quickly added the police officer, seeing that the praise troubled this man, who always shrank from it. "I speak thus because it is the very truth, and any one else would treat me as crack-brained. But you—no!"

M. Ginory looked curiously at the little man, whose attitude was humble and even supplicating, and seemed to seek a favorable response, and whose eyes sparkled and indicated that his idea was no common one.

"What is that room there?" asked M. Ginory, pointing to the half-open library door.

"It is the study of M. Rovère—the victim"—

— "Let us go in there," said M. Ginory.

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In this room no one could hear them; they could speak freely. On entering, the Examining Magistrate mechanically cast his eye over the books, stopping at such and such a title of a rare work, and, seating himself in a low, easy chair, covered with Caramanie, he made a sign to the police officer to speak. Bernardet stood, hat in hand, in front of him.

"M. le Juge," Bernardet began, "I beg your pardon for asking you to grant me an interview. But, allowing for the difference in our positions, which is very great, I am, like you, a scholar; very curious. I shall never belong to the Institute, and you will"—

"Go on, Bernardet."

"And you will belong to it, M. Ginory, but I strive also, in my lower sphere, to keep myself *au courant* with all that is said and with all that is written. I was in the service of the Academy when your beautiful work was crowned, and when the perpetual secretary spoke of those Magistrates who knew how to unite the love of letters with a study of justice; I thought that lower down, much lower down on the ladder, M. le Juge, he might have also searched for and found some men who studied to learn and to do their best in doing their duty."

"Ah! I know you, Bernardet. Your chief has often spoken of you."

"I know that M. Leriche is very good to me. But it is not for me to boast of that. I wish only to inspire confidence in you, because what I wish to say to you is so strange—so very strange"—

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Bernardet suddenly stopped. "I know," he began, "that if I were to say to a physician what I am about to say to you he would think I ought to be shut up in Sainte-Anne. And yet I am not crazy, I beg of you to believe. No! but I have searched and searched. It seems to me that there is a mass of inventions, of discoveries, which we police officers ought to make use of. And, although I am a sub-Inspector"—

"Go on! Go on!" said the Magistrate, quickly, with a movement of the head toward the open door of the salon, where the Attorney for the Republic was conducting the investigation, and his nod seemed to say: "They are at work in there—let us make haste."

"I will be as brief as possible," said Bernardet, who understood what he meant.

"Monsieur," (and his tone became rapid, precise, running up and down like a ball), "thirty years, or, rather, to be exact, twenty-six years ago, some American journals, not political, but scientific, published the fact that the daguerrotype—we have made long strides since then in photography—had permitted them to find in the retina of a murdered man's eye the image of the one who struck him."

"Yes, I know," said M. Ginory.

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"In 1860, I was too young, and I had no desire to prove the truth of this discovery. I adore photography as I adore my profession. I pass my leisure hours in taking instantaneous pictures, in developing them, printing, and finishing them. The idea of what I am about to propose to you came to me by chance. I bought upon one of the quays a volume of the Société de Médecine Légale of 1869, in which Dr. Vernois gives an account of a communication sent to the society by a physician, who also sent photographic proofs, thus indorsed: 'Photographs taken of the retina of a woman assassinated the 14th of June, 1868.'"

"Yes," again said M. Ginory. "It was a communication from Dr. Bourion, of Darnez."

"Precisely."

"And the proof sent by the Doctor showed the instant when, after striking the mother, the assassin killed the child, while the dog sprang toward the little carriage in which the little one lay."

"Yes, Monsieur Ginory."

"Oh, well, but my poor Bernardet, Dr. Vernois, since you have read his report"—

"By chance, Monsieur, I found it on a book stall and it has kept running in my head ever since, over and over and over again."

"Dr. Vernois, my poor fellow, made many experiments. At first the proof sent was so confused, so hazy, that no one who had not seen what Bourion had written could have told what it was. If Vernois, who was a very scientific man, could find nothing—nothing, I repeat—which justified Dr. Bourion's declarations, what do you expect that any one else could make of those researches? Do not talk any more or even think any more about it."

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"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Ginory; one can and ought to think about it. In any case, I am thinking about it."

A smile of doubt crossed M. Ginory's lips. Bernardet quickly added: "Photography of the invisible has been proven. Are not the Roentgen Rays, the famous X Rays, as incredible as that photography can find the image of a murderer on the retina of a dead person's eye? They invent some foolish things, those Americans, but they often presage the truth. Do they not catch, by photography, the last sighs of the dying? Do they not fix upon the film or on plates that mysterious thing which haunts us, the occult? They throw bridges across unknown abysses as over great bodies of water or from one precipice to another, and they reach the other side. I beg your pardon, Monsieur," and the police officer stopped short in his enthusiastic defence as he caught sight of M. Ginory's astonished face; "I seem to have been making a speech, a thing I detest."

"Why do you say that to me? Because I looked astonished at what you have told me? I am not only surprised, I am charmed. Go on! Go on!"

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"Oh! well, what seemed folly yesterday will be an established fact to-morrow. A fact is a fact. Dr. Vernois had better have tested again and again his contradictory experiments. Dr. Bourion's experiments had preceded his own. If Dr. Vernois saw nothing in the picture taken of the retina of the eye of the woman assassinated June 14, 1868, I have seen something—yes, I have seen with a magnifying glass, while studying thoroughly the proof given to the society and reproduced in the bulletin of Volume I., No. 2, of 1870; I have seen deciphered the image which Dr. Bourion saw, and which Dr. Vernois did not see. Ah! it was confused, the proof was hazy. It was scarcely recognizable, I confess. But there are mirrors which are not very clear and which reflect clouded vision; nevertheless, the image is there. And I have seen, or what one calls seen, the phantom of the murderer which Dr. Bourion saw, and which escaped the eyes of the member of the Academy of Medicine and of the Hygiene Council, Honorary Physician of the Hospital, if you please."

M. Ginory, who had listened to the officer with curiosity, began to laugh, and remarked to Bernardet that, according to this reasoning, illustrated medical science would find itself sacrificed to the instinct, the divination of a provincial physician, and that it was only too easy to put the Academicians in the wrong and the Independents in the right.

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"Oh, Monsieur, pardon; I put no one in the right or wrong. Dr. Bourion believed that he had made a discovery. Dr. Vernois was persuaded that Dr. Bourion had discovered nothing at all. Each had the courage of his conviction. What I contest is that, for twenty-six years, no one has experimented, no one has made any researches, since the first experiment, and that Dr. Bourion's communication has been simply dropped and forgotten."

"I ask your pardon in my turn, Bernardet," replied M. Ginory, a little quizzically. "I have also studied the question, which seems to me a curious"—

"Have you photographed any yourself, M. Ginory?"

"No."

"Ah! There is where the proof is."

"But in 1877, the very learned Doyen of the Academy of Medicine, M. Brouardel, whose great wisdom, and whose sovereign opinion was law, one of those men who is an honor to his country, told me that when he was in Heidelberg he had heard Professor Kuhne say that he had studied this same question; he had made impressions of the retina of the eye in the following cases: After the death of a dog or a wolf, he had taken out the eye and replaced it with the back part of the eye in front; then he took a very strong light and placed it in front of the eye and between the eye and the light he placed a small grating. This grating, after an exposure of a quarter of an hour, was visible upon the retina. But those are very different experiments from the ones one hears of in America."

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"They could see the bars in the grating? If that was visible, why could not the visage of the murderer be found there?"

"Eh! Other experiments have been attempted, even after those of which Professor Kuhne told our compatriot. Every one, you understand, has borne only negative results, and M. Brouardel could tell you, better than I, that in the physiological and oculistic treatises, published during the last ten years, no allusion has been made to the preservation of the image on the retina after death. It is an *affaire classé*, Bernardet."

"Ah! Monsieur, yet"—and the police officer hesitated. Shaking his head, he again repeated: "Yet—yet!"

"You are not convinced?"

"No, Monsieur Ginory, and shall I tell you why? You, yourself, in spite of the testimony of illustrious savants, still doubt. I pray you to pardon me, but I see it in your eyes."

"That is still another way to use the retina," said Ginory, laughing. "You read one's thoughts."

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"No, Monsieur, but you are a man of too great intelligence to say to yourself that there is nothing in this world *classé*, that every matter can be taken up again. The idea has come to me to try the experiment if I am permitted. Yes, Monsieur, those eyes, did you see them, the eyes of the dead man? They seemed to speak; they seemed to see. Their expression is of lifelike intensity. They see, I tell you, they see! They perceive something which we cannot see, and which is frightful. They bear—and no one can convince me to the contrary—they bear on the retina the reflection of the last being whom the murdered man saw before he died. They keep it still, they still retain that image. They are going to hold an autopsy; they will tell us that the throat is cut. Eh! Parbleu! We know it well. We see it for ourselves. Moniche, the porter, knows it as well as any doctor. But when one questions those eyes, when one searches in that black chamber where the image appears as on a plate, when one demands of those eyes their secret, I am convinced that one will find it."

"You are obstinate, Bernardet."

"Yes, very obstinate, Monsieur Ginory, and very patient. The pictures which I took with my kodak will give us the expression, the interior, so to speak; those which we would take of the retina would reveal to us the secret of the agony. And, moreover, unless I deceive myself, what danger attends such an experiment? One opens the poor eyes, and that is sinister, certainly, but when one holds an autopsy at the Morgue, when one enlarges the gash in the throat in order to study it, when one dissects the body, is it any more respectful or proper? Ah! Monsieur, if I but had your power"——

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M. Ginory seemed quite struck with all that the police officer had said to him, but while he still held to his convictions, he did not seem quite averse to trying the experiment. Who can say to science "Halt!" and impose upon it limits which cannot be passed? No one!

"We will see, Bernardet."

And in that "we will see" there was already a half promise.

"Ah! if you only will, and what would it cost you?" added Bernardet, still urgent; indeed, almost suppliant.

"Let us finish this now. They are waiting for me," said the Examining Magistrate.

As he left M. Rovère's study, he instinctively cast a glance at the rare volumes, with their costly bindings, and he reentered the salon where M. Jacquelin des Audrays had, without doubt, finished his examination.

CHAPTER VI.

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THE attorney for the Republic called in the Examining Magistrate. Nothing more was to be

done. The Magistrate had studied the position of the corpse, examined the wound, and now, having told M. Ginory his impressions, he did not hide from him his belief that the crime had been committed by a professional, as the stroke of the knife across the throat had been given neatly, scientifically, according to all the established rules.

"One might well take it for the work of a professional butcher."

"Yes, without doubt, M. Ginory; but one does not know. Brute force—a strong blow—can produce exactly what science can."

More agitated than he wished to appear by the strange conversation between the Agent of Sureté and himself, the Examining Magistrate stood at the foot of the corpse and gazed, with a fixity almost fierce, not at the gaping wound of which M. Jacquelin des Audrays had spoken to him, but at those eyes,—those fixed eyes, those eyes which no opacity had yet invaded, which, open, frightful, seemingly burning with anger, menacing, full of accusations of some sort and animated with vengeance, gave him a look, immovable, most powerful.

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It was true! it was true! They lived! those eyes spoke. They cried to him for justice. They retained the expression of some atrocious vision: the expression of violent rage. They menaced some one—who? If the picture of some one was graven there, was it not the last image reflected on the little mirror of the retina? What if a face was reflected there! What if it was still retained in the depths of those wide-open eyes! That strange creature, Bernardet, half crazy, enthused with new ideas, with the mysteries which traverse chimerical brains, troubled him—Ginory, a man of statistics and of facts.

But truly those dead eyes seemed to appeal, to speak, to designate some one. What more eloquent, what more terrible witness could there be than the dead man himself, if it was possible for his eyes to speak; if that organ of life should contain, shut up within it, preserved, the secret of death? Bernardet, whose eyes never left the magistrate's face, ought to have been content, for it plainly expressed doubt, a hesitation, and the police officer heard him cursing under his breath.

"Folly! Stupidity! Bah! we shall see!"

Bernardet was filled with hope. M. Ginory, the Examining Magistrate, was, moreover, convinced that, for the present, and the sooner the better, the corpse should be sent to the Morgue. There, only, could a thorough and scientific examination be made. The reporter listened intently to the conversation, and Mme. Moniche clasped her hands, more and more agonized by that word Morgue, which, among the people, produces the same terror that that other word, which means, however, careful attendance, scientific treatment and safety,—hospital, does.

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Nothing was now to be done except to question some of the neighbors and to take a sketch of the salon. Bernardet said to the Magistrate: "My photograph will give you that!" While some one went out to get a hearse, the Magistrates went away, the police officer placed a guard in front of the house. The crowd was constantly increasing and becoming more and more curious, violently excited and eager to see the spectacle—the murdered man borne from his home.

Bernardet did not allow M. Ginory to go away without asking respectfully if he would be allowed to photograph the dead man's eye. Without giving him a formal answer, M. Ginory simply told him to be present at the autopsy at the Morgue. Evidently if the Magistrate had not been already full of doubt his reply would have been different. Why did that inferior officer have the audacity to give his opinion on the subject of conducting a judicial investigation? M. Ginory would long before this have sent him about his business if he had not become suddenly interested in him. In his quality of Judge he had come to know Bernardet's history and his exploits in the service. No more capable man, in his line, could be found. He was perfectly and utterly devoted to his profession. Some strange tales were told of his methods. It was he who once passed an entire night on a bench, pretending intoxication, in order to gain sufficient information to enable him to arrest a murderer in the morning in a wretched hovel at La Vilette—a murderer armed to the teeth. It was Bernardet who, without arms—as all those agents—caught the famous bandit, the noted Taureau de la Glacière, a foreign Hercules, who had strangled his mistress. Bernardet arrested him by holding to his temple the cold neck of a bottle and saying, "Hands up or I fire!" Now what the bandit took for the cold muzzle of a pistol was a vial containing some medicine which Bernardet had purchased of a pharmacist for his liver.

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Deeds of valor against thieves, malefactors and insurrectionists abounded in Bernardet's life; and M. Ginory had just discovered in this man, whom he believed simply endowed with the activity and keenness of a hunting dog, an intelligence singularly watchful, deep and complicated. Bernardet, who had nothing more to do until the body should be taken to the Morgue, left the house directly after the Magistrates.

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"Where are you going?" asked Paul Rodier, the reporter.

"Home. A few steps from here."

"May I go along with you?" asked the journalist.

"To find an occasion to make me speak? But I know nothing! I suspect nothing; I shall say nothing!"

"Do you believe that it is the work of a thief, or revenge?"

"I am certain that it was no thief. Nothing in the apartment was touched. As for the rest, who knows?"

"M. Bernardet," laughingly said the reporter, as he walked along by the officer's side, "you do not wish to speak."

"What good will that do?" Bernardet replied, also laughingly; "it will not prevent you from publishing an interview."

"You think so. *Au revoir!* I must hurry and make my copy. And you?"

"I? A photograph."

They separated, and Bernardet entered his house. His daughters had grieved over his sudden departure on Sunday on his fête day. They met him with joyous shouts when he appeared, and threw themselves upon him. "Papa! Here is papa!"

Mme. Bernardet was also happy. They could go then to the garden and finish the picture. But their joy subsided, night had fallen, and Bernardet, preoccupied, wished to shut himself up so that he might reflect on all that had happened, and perhaps to work a little, even to-day. [Pg 55]

"It is thy fête day, Bernardet. Wilt thou not rest to-day?"

"I can rest at dinner, dear. Until then, I must use the time reading over a mass of evidence."

"Then thou wilt need a lamp?" asked Mme. Bernardet.

"Yes, my dear; light the lamp."

Next to their bedchamber M. Bernardet had fitted up a little room for his private use. It was a tiny den, in which was a mahogany table loaded with books and papers, and at which he worked when he had time, reading, annotating, copying from the papers, and collecting extracts for hours at a time. No one was allowed to enter this room, filled with old papers. Mme. Bernardet well called it "a nest of microbes." Bernardet found pleasure in this sporadic place, which in Summer was stifling. In Winter he worked without a fire.

Mme. Bernardet was unhappy as she saw that their holiday was spoiled. But she very well knew that when her husband was devoured with curiosity, carried away by a desire to elucidate a puzzle, there was nothing to be said. He listened to no remonstrances, and the daughters knew that when they asked if their father was not coming to renew his games with them they were obliged to content themselves with the excuse which they knew so well from having heard it so often: "Papa is studying out a crime!" [Pg 56]

Bernardet was anxious to read over his notes, the verification of his hopes, of those so-called certainties of to-day. That is why he wished to be alone. As soon as he had closed the door he at once, from among the enormous piles of dust-laden books and files of old newspapers, with the unerring instinct of the habitual searcher who rummages through book stalls, drew forth a gray-covered pamphlet in which he had read, with feverish astonishment, the experiments and report of Dr. Vernois upon the application of photography in criminal researches. He quickly seated himself, and with trembling fingers eagerly turned over the leaves of the book so often read and studied, and came to the report of the member of the Academy of Medicine; he compared it with the proof submitted by Dr. Bourion, of the Medical Society, in which it was stated that the most learned savants had seen nothing.

"Seen nothing, or wished to see nothing, perhaps!" he murmured.

The light fell upon the photograph which had been sent, a long time before, to the Society, and Bernardet set himself to study out the old crime with the most careful attention; with the passion of a paleographer deciphering a palimpsest. This poor devil of a police officer, in his ardent desire to solve the vexing problem, brought to it the same ardor and the same faith as a bibliophile. He went over and over with the method of an Examining Magistrate all that old forgotten affair, and in the solitude and silence of his little room the last reflections of the setting sun falling on his papers and making pale the light of his lamp, he set himself the task of solving, like a mathematical problem, that question which he had studied, but which he wished to know from the very beginning, without any doubts, before seeing M. Ginory again at the Morgue, beside the body of M. Rovère. He took his pamphlet and read: "The photograph sent to the Society of Medical Jurisprudence by Dr. Bourion taken upon the retina of the eye of a woman who had been murdered the 14th of June, 1868, represents the moment when the assassin, after having struck the mother, kills the infant, and the dog belonging to the house leaps toward the unfortunate little victim to save it." [Pg 57]

Then studying, turn by turn, the photograph yellowed by time, and the article which described it, Bernardet satisfied himself, and learned the history by heart.

M. Gallard, General Secretary of the Society, after having carefully hidden the back part of the photograph, had circulated it about among the members with this note: "Enigma of Medical Jurisprudence." And no one had solved the tragic enigma. Even when he had explained, no one could see in the photograph what Dr. Bourion saw there. Some were able on examining that strange picture to see in the black and white haze some figures as singular and dissimilar as those which the amiable Polonius perceived in the clouds under the suggestion of Hamlet. [Pg 58]

Dr. Vernois, appointed to write a report on Dr. Bourion's communication, asked him then how the operation had been conducted, and Dr. Bourion had given him these details, which Bernardet was now reading and studying: The assassination had taken place on Sunday between noon and 4 o'clock; the extraction of the eyes from their orbits had not been made until the following day at 6 o'clock in the evening.

The experiment on the eyes, those terribly accusing eyes of this dead man, could be made twenty-four hours earlier than that other experiment. The image—if there was any image—ought to be, in consequence, more clearly defined than in Dr. Bourion's experiment.

"About 6 o'clock in the evening," thought Bernardet, "and the photographic light was sufficient."

Dr. Bourion had taken pictures of both of the child's eyes as well as both of the mother's eyes. The child's eyes showed nothing but hazy clouds. But the mother's eyes were different. Upon the left eye, next to a circular section back of the iris, a delicately marked image of a dog's head appeared. On the same section of the right eye, another picture; one could see the assassin raising his arm to strike and the dog leaping to protect his little charge.

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"With much good will, it must be confessed," thought Bernardet, looking again and again at the photograph, "and with much imagination, too. But it was between fifty and fifty-two hours after the murder that the proof was taken, while this time it will be while the body is still warm that the experiment will be tried."

Seventeen times already had Dr. Vernois experimented on animals; sometimes just after he had strangled them, again when they had died from Prussic acid. He had held in front of their eyes a simple object which could be easily recognized. He had taken out the eyes and hurried with them to the photographer. He had, in order to better expose the retina to photographic action, made a sort of Maltese cross, by making four incisions on the edge of the sclerotic. He removed the vitreous humor, fixed it on a piece of card with four pins and submitted the retina as quickly as possible to the camera.

In re-reading the learned man's report, Bernardet studied, pored over, carefully scrutinized the text, investigated the dozen proofs submitted to the Society of Medical Jurisprudence by Dr. Vernois:

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Retina of a cat's eye killed by Prussic acid; Vernois had held the animal in front of the bars of the cage in which it was confined. No result!

Retina of a strangled dog's eye. A watch was held in front of its eyes. No result!

Retina of a dog killed by a strangulation. A bunch of shining keys was held in front of his eyes. No result!

Retina of the eye of a strangled dog. An eyeglass held in front of its eyes. Photograph made two hours after death. Nothing! In all Dr. Vernois's experiments—nothing! Nothing!

Bernardet repeated the word angrily. Still he kept on; he read page after page. But all this was twenty-six years ago—photography has made great strides since then. What wonderful results have been obtained! The skeleton of the human body seen through the flesh! The instantaneous photograph! The kinetoscopic views! Man's voice registered for eternity in the phonograph! The mysterious dragged forth into the light of day! Many hitherto unknown secrets become common property! The invisible, even the invisible, the occult, placed before our eyes, as a spectacle!

"One does not know all that may be done with a kodak," murmured Bernardet.

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As he ascertained, in re-reading Dr. Vernois's report on "The Application of Photography to Medical Jurisprudence," the savant himself, even while denying the results of which Dr. Bourion spoke in his communication, devoted himself to the general consideration upon the rôle which photography ought to play in medical jurisprudence. Yes, in 1869, he asked that in the researches on poisonous substances, where the microscope alone had been used, photography should be applied. He advocated what in our day is so common, the photographing of the features of criminals, their deformities, their scars, their tattooings. He demanded that pictures should be taken of an accused person in many ways, without wigs and with them, with and without beards, in diverse costumes.

"These propositions," thought Bernardet, "seem hardly new; it is twenty-six years since they were discovered, and now they seem as natural as that two and two make four. In twenty-six years from now, who knows what science will have done?"

"Vernois demanded that wounds be reproduced, their size, the instruments with which the crime was committed, the leaves of plants in certain cases of poisoning, the shape of the victim's garments, the prints of their hands and feet, the interior view of their rooms, the signature of certain accused affected with nervous disorders, parts of bodies and of bones, and, in fact, everything in any way connected with the crime. It was said that he asked too much. Did he expect judges to make photographs? To-day, everything that Vernois demanded in 1869, has been done, and, in truth, the instantaneous photograph has almost superseded the minutes of an investigation.

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"We photograph a spurious bank note. It is magnified, and, by the absence of a tiny dot the

proof of the alteration is found. On account of the lack of a dot the forger is detected. The savant, Helmholtz, was the discoverer of this method of detecting these faults. Two bank notes, one authentic, the other a forgery, were placed side by side in a stereoscope of strong magnifying power, when the faults were at once detected. Helmholtz's experiment probably seemed fantastic to the forger condemned by a stereoscope. Oh, well, to-day ought not a like experiment on the retina of a dead man's eye give a like result?

"Instruments have been highly perfected since the time when Dr. Bourion made his experiments, and if the law of human physiology has not changed the seekers of invisible causes must have rapidly advanced in their mysterious pursuits. Who knows whether, at the instant of the last agony, that the dying person does not put all the intensity of life into the retina, giving a hundredfold power to that last supreme look?"

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At this point of his reflections Bernardet experienced some hesitation. While he was not thoroughly acquainted with physiology and philosophy, yet he had seen so much, so many things; had known so many strange occurrences, and had studied many men. He knew—for he had closely questioned wretches who had been saved from drowning at the very last possible moment, some of whom had attempted suicide, others who had been almost drowned through accident, and each one had told him that his whole life, from his earliest recollection, had flashed through his mind in the instant of mortal agony. Yes, a whole lifetime in one instant of cerebral excitement!

Had savants been able to solve this wonderful mystery? The *resumé* of an existence in one vibration! Was it possible? Yet—Bernardet still used the word.

And why, in an analogous sensation, could not the look of a dying man be seized in an intensity lasting an instant, as memory brought in a single flash so many diverse remembrances?

"I know, since it is the imagination, and that the dead cannot see, while the image on the retina is a fact, a fact contradicted by wiser men than I." Bernardet thought on these mysteries until his head began to ache.

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"I shall make myself ill over it," he thought. "And there is something to be done."

Then in his dusty little room, his brain overexcited, he became enthused with one idea. His surroundings fell away from him, he saw nothing—everything disappeared—the books, the papers, the walls, the visible objects, as did also the objections, the denials, the demonstrative impossibilities. And absolute conviction seized him to the exclusion of all extraneous surroundings. This conviction was absolute, instinctive, irresistible, powerful, filling him with entire faith.

"This unknown thing I will find. What is to be done I will do," he declared to himself.

He threw the pamphlet on the table, arose from his chair and descended to the dining-room, where his wife and children were waiting for him. He rubbed his hands with glee, and his face looked joyous.

"Didst thou discover the trail?" Mme. Bernardet asked very simply, as a working woman would ask her husband if he had had a good day. The eldest of the little girls rushed toward him.

"Papa, my dear little papa!"

"My darling!"

The child asked her father in a sweet voice: "Art thou satisfied with thy crime, papa?"

"We will not talk about that," Bernardet replied. "To table! After dinner I will develop the pictures which I have taken with my kodak, but let us amuse ourselves now; it is my fête day; I wish to forget all about business. Let us dine now and be as happy as possible."

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CHAPTER VII.

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THE murder of M. Rovère, committed in broad daylight, in a quarter of Paris filled with life and movement, caused a widespread sensation. There was so much mystery mixed in the affair. What could be ascertained about the dead man's life was very dramatically written up by Paul Rodier in a sketch, and this, republished everywhere and enlarged upon, soon gave to the crime of the Boulevard de Clichy the interest of a judicial romance. All that there was of vulgar curiosity in man awoke, as atavistic bestiality at the smell of blood.

What was this M. Rovère, former Consul to Buenos Ayres or Havana, amateur collector of objects of vertu, member of the Society of Bibliophiles, where he had not been seen for a long time? What enemy had entered his room for the purpose of cutting his throat? Might he not have been assassinated by some thief who knew that his rooms contained a collection of works of art? The fête at Montmartre was often in full blast in front of the house where the murder had been committed, and among the crowd of ex-prison birds and malefactors who are always attendant upon foreign kirmesses might not some one of them have returned and committed the crime? The papers took advantage of the occasion to moralize upon permitting these fêtes to be held in the

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outlying boulevards, where vice and crime seemed to spring spontaneously from the soil.

But no one, not one journal—perhaps by order—spoke of that unknown visitor whom Moniche called *the individual*, and whom the portress had seen standing beside M. Rovère in front of the open safe. Paul Rodier in his sketch scarcely referred to the fact that justice had a clew important enough to penetrate the mystery of the crime, and in the end arrest the murderer. And the readers while awaiting developments asked what mystery was hidden in this murder. Moniche at times, wore a frightened yet important air. He felt that he was an object of curiosity to many, the centre of prejudices. The porter and his wife possessed a terrible secret. They were raised in their own estimation.

"We shall appear at the trial," said Moniche, seeing himself already before the red robes, and holding up his hand to swear that he would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

And as they sat together in their little lodge they talked the matter over and over, and brought up every incident in M. Rovère's life which might have a bearing on the case.

"Do you remember the young man who came one day and insisted on seeing Monsieur le Consul?"

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"Ah! Very well, indeed," said Moniche. "I had forgotten that one. A felt hat, his face bronzed, and a droll accent. He had come from away off somewhere. He was probably a Spaniard."

"Some beggar, likely. A poor devil whom the Consul had known in America, in the Colonies, one knows not where."

"A bad face!" said Moniche. "M. Rovère received him, however, and gave him aid, I remember. If the young man had come often, I should think that he struck the blow. And also, I ought to add, if there was not the other."

"Yes, but there is the other," his wife replied. "There is the one whom I saw standing in front of the coupons, and who was looking at those other papers with flashing eyes, I give my word. There is that one, Moniche, and I am willing to put my hand into the fire and yours, too, Moniche, if it is not he."

"If he is the one, he will be found."

"Oh! but if he has disappeared? One disappears very quickly in these days."

"We shall see! we shall see! Justice reigns, and we are here!" He said that "we are here!" as a grenadier of the guard before an important engagement.

They had taken the body to the Morgue. At the hour fixed for the autopsy Bernardet arrived. He seemed much excited, and asked M. Ginory if, since their conversation in M. Rovère's library, he had reflected and decided to permit him to make the experiment—the famous experiment reported for so many years as useless, absurd, almost ridiculous.

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"With any one but M. Ginory I should not dare to hope," thought the police officer, "but he does not sneer at strange discoveries."

He had brought his photographic apparatus, that kodak which he declared was more dangerous to the criminal than a loaded weapon. He had developed the negatives which he had taken, and of the three, two had come out in good condition. The face of the murdered man appeared with a clearness which, in the proofs, rendered it formidable as in the reality; and the eyes, those tragic, living eyes, retained their terrible, accusing expression which the supreme agony had left in them. The light had struck full on the eyes—and they spoke. Bernardet showed the proofs to M. Ginory. They examined them with a magnifying glass, but they showed only the emotion, the agony, the anger of that last moment. Bernardet hoped to convince M. Ginory that Bourion's experiment was not a failure.

Eleven o'clock was the hour named for the autopsy. Twenty minutes before, Bernardet was at the Morgue. He walked restlessly about outside among the spectators—some were women, young girls, students, and children who were hovering about the place, hoping that some chance would permit them to satisfy their morbid curiosity and to enter and gaze on those slabs whereon lay—swollen, livid, disfigured—the bodies.

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Never, perhaps, in his life had the police officer been so strongly moved with a desire to succeed. He brought to his tragic task all the ardor of an apostle. It was not the idea of success, the renown, or the possibility of advancement which urged him on; it was the joy, the glory of aiding progress, of attaching his name to a new discovery. He worked for art and the love of art. As he wandered about, his sole thought was of his desire to test Dr. Bourion's experiment; of the realization of his dream. "Ah! if M. Ginory will only permit it," he thought.

As he formulated that hope in his mind, he saw M. Ginory descend from the fiacre; he hurried up to him and saluted him respectfully. Seeing Bernardet so moved and the first one on the spot, he could not repress a smile.

"I see you are still enthused."

"I have thought of nothing else all night, Monsieur Ginory."

"Well, but," said Monsieur Ginory in a tone which seemed to Bernardet to imply hope, "no idea must be rejected, and I do not see why we should not try the experiment. I have reflected upon it. Where is the unsuitableness?"

"Ah, Monsieur le Juge," cried the agent, "if you permit it who knows but that we may revolutionize medical jurisprudence?"

"Revolutionize, revolutionize!" Would the Examining Magistrate yet find it an idiotic idea?

M. Ginory passed around the building and entered by a small door opening on the Seine. The registrar followed him, and behind him came the police agent. Bernardet wished to wait until the doctors delegated to perform the autopsy should arrive, and the head keeper of the Morgue advised him to possess himself with patience, and while he was waiting to look around and see the latest cadavers which had been brought there.

"We have had, in eight days, a larger number of women than men, which is rare. And these women were nearly all habitués of the public balls and race tracks."

"And how can you tell that?"

"Because they have pretty feet."

Professor Morin arrived with a confrère, a young Pasteurian doctor, with a singular mind, broad and receptive, and who passed among his companions for a man fond of chimeras, a little retiring, however, and giving over to making experiments and to vague dreams. Monsieur Morin saluted M. Ginory and presented to him the young doctor, Erwin by name, and said to the Magistrate that the house students had probably begun the autopsy to gain time.

The body, stripped of its clothing, lay upon the dissecting table, and three young men, in velvet skull caps, with aprons tied about their waists, were standing about the corpse; they had already begun the autopsy. The mortal wound looked redder than ever in the whiteness of the naked body.

Bernardet glided into the room, trying to keep out of sight, listening and looking, and, above everything, not losing sight of M. Ginory's face. A face in which the look was keen, penetrating, sharp as a knife, as he bent over the pale face of the murdered man, regarding it as searchingly as the surgeons' scalpels were searching the wound and the flesh. Among those men in their black clothes, some with bared heads, in order to work better; others with hats on, the stretched-out corpse seemed like a wax figure upon a marble slab. Bernardet thought of those images which he had seen copied from Rembrandt's pictures—the poet with the anatomical pincers and the shambles. The surgeons bent over the body, their hands busy and their scissors cutting the muscles. That wound, which had let out his life, that large wound, like a monstrous and grimacing mouth, they enlarged still more; the head oscillated from side to side, and they were obliged to prop it with some mats. The eyes remained the same, and, in spite of the hours which had passed, seemed as living, as menacing and eloquent as the night before; they were, however, veiled with something vitreous over the pupils, like the amaurosis of death, yet full of that anger, of that fright, or that ferocious malediction which was reproduced in a startling manner in the negatives taken by Bernardet.

"The secret of the crime is in that look," thought the police agent. "Those eyes see, those eyes speak; they tell what they know, they accuse some one."

Then, while the professor, his associates and his students went on with the autopsy, exchanging observations, following in the mutilated body, their researches for the truth, trying to be very accurate as to the nature of the wound, the form even of the knife with which it was made, Bernardet softly approached the Examining Magistrate and in a low tone, timidly, respectfully, he spoke some words, which were insistent, however, and pressing, urging the Magistrate to quickly interfere.

"Ah! Monsieur le Juge, this is the moment; you who can do everything"——

The Examining Magistrate has, with us, absolute power. He does whatever seems to him best. And he wishes to do a thing, because he wishes to do it. M. Ginory, curious by nature and because it was his duty, hesitated, scratched his ear, rubbed his nose, bit his lips, listened to the supplicating murmur of the police officer; but decided not to speak just then, and continued gazing with a fixed stare at the dead man.

This thought came to him, moreover, insistent and imperious, that he was there to testify in all things in favor of that truth, the discovery of which imposed upon him—and suddenly, his sharp voice interrupted the surgeon's work.

"Messieurs, does not the expression of the open eyes strike you?"

"Yes; they express admirably the most perfect agony," M. Morin replied.

"And does it not seem," asked the Examining Magistrate, "as if they were fixed with that expression on the murderer?"

"Without doubt! The mouth seems to curse and the eyes to menace."

"And what if the last image seen, in fact, that of the murderer, still remains upon the retina of the eyes?"

M. Morin looked at the Magistrate in astonishment, his air was slightly mocking and the lips and eyes assumed a quizzical expression. But Bernardet was very much surprised when he heard one remark. Dr. Erwin raised his head and while he seemed to approve of that which M. Ginory had advanced, he said: "That image must have disappeared from the retina some time ago."

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"Who knows?" said M. Ginory.

Bernardet experienced a profound emotion. He felt that this time the problem would be officially settled. M. Ginory had not feared ridicule when he spoke, and a discussion arose there, in that dissecting room, in the presence of the corpse. What had existed only in a dream, in Bernardet's little study, became here, in the presence of the Examining Magistrate, a member of the Institute, and the young students, almost full fledged doctors, a question frankly discussed in all its bearings. And it was he, standing back, he, a poor devil of a police officer, who had urged this Examining Magistrate to question this savant.

"At the back of the eyes," said the Professor, touching the eyes with his scalpel, "there is nothing, believe me. It is elsewhere that you must look for your proof."

"But"—and M. Ginory repeated his "Who knows?"—"What if we try it this time; will it inconvenience you, my dear Master?" M. Morin made a movement with his lips which meant *peuh!* and his whole countenance expressed his scorn. "But, I see no inconvenience." At the end of a moment he said in a sharp tone: "It will be lost time."

"A little more, a little less," replied M. Ginory, "the experiment is worth the trouble to make it."

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M. Ginory had proved without doubt that he, like Bernardet, wished to satisfy his curiosity, and in looking at the open eyes of the corpse, although in his duties he never allowed himself to be influenced by the sentimental or the dramatic, yet it seemed to him that those eyes urged him to insist, nay, even supplicated him.

"I know, I know," said M. Morin, "what you dream of in your magistrate's brain is as amusing as a tale of Edgar Poe's. But to find in those eyes the image of the murderer—come now, leave that to the inventive genius of a Rudyard Kipling, but do not mix the impossible with our researches in medical jurisprudence. Let us not make romance; let us make, you the examinations and I the dissection."

The short tone in which the Professor had spoken did not exactly please M. Ginory, who now, a little through self-conceit (since he had made the proposition), a little through curiosity, decided that he would not beat a retreat. "Is there anything to risk?" he asked. "And it might be one chance in a thousand."

"But there is no chance," quickly answered M. Morin. "None—none!"

Then, relenting a little, he entered the discussion, explaining why he had no faith.

"It is not I, M. Ginory, who will deny the possibility of such a result. But it would be miraculous. Do you believe in miracles, the impressions of heat, of the blood, of light, on our tissues are not catalogueable, if I may be allowed the expression. The impression on the retina is produced by the refraction which is called ethereal, phosphorescent, and which is almost as difficult to seize as to weigh the imponderable. To think to find on the retina a luminous impression after a certain number of hours and days would be, as Vernois has very well said, to think one can find in the organs of hearing the last sound which reverberated through them. *Peuh!* Seize the air-bubble at the end of a tube and place it in a museum as a curiosity. Is there anything left of it but a drop of water which is burst, while of the fleeting vision or the passing sound nothing remains."

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The unfortunate Bernardet suffered keenly when he heard this. He wished to answer. The words came to his lips. Ah! if he was only in M. Ginory's place. The latter, with bowed head, listened and seemed to weigh each word as it dropped from M. Morin's lips.

"Let us reason it, but," the Professor went on, "since the ophthalmoscope does not show to the oculist on the retina, any of the objects or beings which a sick man sees—you understand, not one of them—how can you think that photography can find that object or being on the retina of a dead man's eye?"

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He waited for objections from the Examining Magistrate and Bernardet hoped that M. Ginory would combat some of the Professor's arguments. He had only to say: "What of it? Let us see! Let us experiment!" And Bernardet had longed for just these words from him; but the Magistrate remained silent, his head still bent. The police agent felt, with despair, his chance slipping, slipping away from him, and that never, never again would he find a like opportunity to test the experiment. Suddenly, the strident tones of Dr. Erwin's voice rung out sharply, like an electric bell, and Bernardet experienced a sensation like that of a sudden unexpected illumination.

"My dear Master," he respectfully began, "I saw at home in Denmark, a poor devil, picked up dying, half devoured by a wolf; and who, when taken from the very jaws of the beast, still retained in the eye a very visible image in which one could see the nose and teeth of the brute. A vision! Imagination, perhaps! But the fact struck me at the time and we made a note of it."

"And?" questioned M. Morin, in a tone of raillery.

Bernardet cocked his ears as a dog does when he hears an unusual sound. M. Ginory looked at this slender young man with his long blond hair, his eyes as blue as the waters of a lake, his face

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pale and wearing the peculiar look common to searchers after the mysterious. The students and the others gathered about their master, remained motionless and listened intently as to a lecture.

"And," Dr. Erwin went on frigidly, "if we had found absolutely nothing we would, at least, have kept silent about an unsuccessful research, it is useless to say. Think, then, my dear Master, the exterior objects must have imprinted themselves on the retina, did they not? reduced in size, according to the size of the place wherein they were reflected; they appeared there, they certainly appeared there! There is—I beg your pardon for referring to it, but it is to these others (and Dr. Erwin designated M. Ginory, his registrar, and Bernardet)—there is in the retina a substance of a red color, the *pourpre retinien*, very sensitive to the light. Upon the deep red of this membrane objects are seen white. And one can fix the image. M. Edmond Perrier, professor in the Museum of Natural History, reports (you know it better than I, my dear Master), in a work on animal anatomy and physiology which our students are all familiar with, that he made an experiment. After removing a rabbit's eye, a living rabbit's eye—yes, science is cruel—he placed it in a dark room, so that he could obtain upon the retina the image of some object, a window for instance, and plunged it immediately into a solution of alum and prevented the decomposition of the *pourpre retinien*, and the window could plainly be seen, fixed on the eye. In that black chamber which we have under our eyebrows, in the orbit, is a storehouse, a storehouse of images which are retained, like the image which the old Dane's eye held of the wolf's nose and teeth. And who knows? Perhaps it is possible to ask of a dead man's eye the secret of what it saw when living."

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This was, put in more scientific terms by the young Danish doctor, the substance of what Bernardet believed possible. The young men had listened with the attractive sympathy, which is displayed when anything novel is explained. Rigid, upon the marble slab, the victim seemed to wait for the result of the discussion, deaf to all the confused sounds about him; his eye fixed upon the infinite, upon the unknowable which he now knew.

It was, however, this insensible body which had caused the discussion of what was an enigma to savants. What was the secret of his end? The last word of his agony? Who made that wound which had ended his life? And like a statue lying on its stone couch, the murdered man seemed to wait. What they knew not, he knew. What they wished to know, he still knew, perhaps! This doubt alone, rooted deep in M. Ginory's mind, was enough to urge him to have the experiment tried, and, excusing himself for his infatuation, he begged M. Morin to grant permission to try the experiment, which some of the doctors had thought would be successful.

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"We shall be relieved even if we do not succeed, and we can but add our defeat to the others."

M. Morin's face still bore its sceptical smile. But after all, the Examining Magistrate was master of the situation, and since young Dr. Erwin brought the result of the Denmark experiment—a contribution new in these researches—to add weight to the matter, the Professor requested that he should not be asked to lend himself to an experiment which he declared in advance would be a perfectly useless one.

There was a photographic apparatus at the Morgue as at the Préfecture, used for anthropometry. Bernardet, moreover, had his kodak in his hand. One could photograph the retina as soon as the membrane was separated from the eye by the autopsy, and when, like the wing of a butterfly, it had been fastened to a piece of cork. And while Bernardet was accustomed to all the horrors of crime, yet he felt his heart beat almost to suffocation during this operation. He noticed that M. Ginory became very pale, and that he bit his lips, casting occasional pitying glances toward the dead man. On the contrary, the young men bent over the body and studied it with the admiration and joy of treasure seekers digging in a mine. Each human fibre seemed to reveal to them some new truth. They were like jewelers before a casket full of gems, and what they studied, weighed, examined, was a human corpse. And when those eyes, living, terrible, accusing, were removed, leaving behind them two empty orbits, the Professor suddenly spoke with marvelous eloquence, flowing and picturesque, as if he were speaking of works of art. And it was, in truth, a work of art, this wonderful mechanism which he explained to his students, who listened eagerly to each word. It was a work of art, this eye, with its sclerotic, its transparent cornea, its aqueous and vitreous humor, its crystalline lens, and the retina, like a photographic plate in that black chamber in which the luminous rays reflect, reversed, the objects seen. And M. Morin, holding between his fingers the object which he was demonstrating, spoke of the membrane formed of fibres and of the terminal elements of the optic nerve, as a professor of painting or of sculpture speaks of a gem chased by a Benvenuto.

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"The human body is a marvel," cried M. Morin, "a marvel, Messieurs," and he held forth for several minutes upon the wonderful construction of this marvel. His enthusiasm was shared, moreover, by the young men and Dr. Erwin, who listened intently. Bernardet, ignorant and respectful, felt troubled in the presence of this renowned physiologist, and congratulated himself that it was he who had insisted on this experiment and caused a member of the Institute to hold forth thus. As for M. Ginory, he left the room a moment, feeling the need of air. The operation, which the surgeons prolonged with joy, made him ill, and he felt very faint. He quickly recovered, however, and returned to the dissecting room, so as not to lose any of the explanation which M. Morin was giving as he stood with the eye in his hand. And in that eye an image remained, perhaps. He was anxious to search for it, to find it.

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"I will take it upon myself," Bernardet said.

THE police officer did not follow the autopsical operations closely. He was eager to know—he was impatient for the moment when, having taken the picture, he might develop the negatives and study them to see if he could discover anything, could decipher any image. He had used photography in the service of anthropometry; he had taken the pictures at the Morgue with his kodak, and now, at home in his little room, which he was able to darken completely, he was developing his plates.

Mme. Bernardet and the children were much struck with the expression of his face. It was not troubled, but preoccupied and as if he were completely absorbed. He was very quiet, eating very little, and seemed thoughtful. His wife asked him, "Art thou ill?" He responded, "No, I think not." And his little girls said to each other in low tones, "Papa is on a trail!"

He was, in truth! The hunting dog smelled the scent! The pictures which he had taken of the retina and had developed showed a result sufficiently clear for Bernardet to feel confident enough to tell his chief that he distinctly saw a visage, the face of a man, confused, no doubt, but clear enough to recognize not only a type, but a distinct type. As from the depths of a cloud, in a sort of white halo, a human face appeared whose features could be distinctly seen with a magnifying glass! The face of a man with a pointed black beard, the forehead a little bald, and blackish spots which indicated the eyes. It was only a phantom, evidently, and the photographer at the Préfecture seemed more moved than Bernardet by the proofs obtained. Clearer than in spirit photographs, which so many credulous people believe in, the image showed plainly, and in studying it one could distinctly follow the contours. A spectre, perhaps, but the spectre of a man who was still young and resembled, with his pointed beard, some trooper of the sixteenth century, a phantom of some Seigneur Clouet.

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"For example," said the official photographer, "if one could discover a murderer by photographing a dead man's eyes, this would be miraculous. It is incredible!"

"Not more incredible," Bernardet replied, "than what the papers publish: Edison is experimenting on making the blind see by using the Roentgen Rays. There is a miracle!"

Then Bernardet took his proofs to M. Ginory. The police officer felt that the magistrate, the sovereign power in criminal researches, ought, above everything, to collaborate with him, to consent to these experiments which so many others had declared useless and absurd. The taste for researches, which was with M. Ginory a matter of temperament as well as a duty to his profession, was, fortunately, keen on this scent. Criminals call in their argot, the judges, "the pryers." Curiosity in this man was combined with a knowledge of profound researches.

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When Bernardet spread out on M. Ginory's desk the four photographs which he had brought with him, the first remark which the examining Magistrate made was: "But I see nothing—a cloud, a mist, and then after?" Bernardet drew a magnifying glass from his pocket and pointed out as he would have explained an enigmatical design, the lineaments, moving his finger over the contour of the face which his nail outlined, that human face which he had seen and studied in his little room in the passage of the Elysée des Beaux-Arts. He made him see—after some moments of minute examination—he made him see that face. "It is true—there is an image there," exclaimed M. Ginory. He added: "Is it plain enough for me to see it so that I can from it imagine a living being? I see the form, divined it at first, saw it clearly defined afterward. At first it seemed very vague, but I find it sufficiently well defined so that I can see each feature, but without any special character. Oh!" continued M. Ginory, excitedly, rubbing his plump little hands, "if it was only possible, if it was only possible! What a marvel!"

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"It is possible, Monsieur le Juge! have faith," Bernardet replied. "I swear to you that it is possible." This enthusiasm gained over the Examining Magistrate. Bernardet had found a fellow-sympathizer in his fantastic ideas. M. Ginory was now—if only to try the experiment—resolved to direct the investigation on this plan. He was anxious to first show the proofs to those who would be apt to recognize in them a person whom they might have once seen in the flesh. "To Moniche first and then to his wife," said Bernardet.

"Who is Moniche?"

"The concierge in the Boulevard de Clichy."

Ordered to come to the court, M. and Mme. Moniche were overjoyed. They were summoned to appear before the Judges. They had become important personages. Perhaps their pictures would be published in the papers. They dressed themselves as for a fête. Mme. Moniche in her Sunday best strove to do honor to M. Rovère. She said to Moniche in all sincerity: "Our duty is to avenge him."

While sitting on a bench in one of the long, cold corridors, the porter and his wife saw pass before them prisoners led by their jailers; some looked menacing, while others had a cringing air and seemed to try to escape notice. These two persons felt that they were playing rôles as important as those in a melodrama at the Ambigu. The time seemed long to them, and M. Ginory did not call them as soon as they wished that he would. They thought of their home, which, while they were detained there, would be invaded by the curious, the gossips and reporters.

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"How slow these Judges are," growled Moniche.

When he was conducted into the presence of M. Ginory and his registrar, and seated upon a chair, he was much confused and less bitter. He felt a vague terror of all the paraphernalia of justice which surrounded him. He felt that he was running some great danger, and to the Judge's questions he replied with extreme prudence. Thanks to him and his wife M. Ginory found out a great deal about M. Rovère's private life; he penetrated into that apparently hidden existence, he searched to see if he could discover, among the people who had visited the old ex-Consul the one among all others who might have committed the deed.

"You never saw the woman who visited Rovère?"

"Yes. The veiled lady. The Woman in Black. But I do not know her. No one knew her."

The story told by the portress about the time when she surprised the stranger and Rovère with the papers in his hand in front of the open safe made quite an impression on the Examining Magistrate.

"Do you know the name of the visitor?"

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"No, Monsieur," the portress replied.

"But if you should see him again would you recognize him?"

"Certainly! I see his face there, before me!"

She made haste to return to her home so that she might relate her impressions to her fellow gossips. The worthy couple left the court puffed up with self-esteem because of the rôle which they had been called upon to play. The obsequies were to be held the next day, and the prospect of a dramatic day in which M. and Mme. Moniche would still play this important rôle, created in them an agony which was almost joyous. The crowd around the house of the crime was always large. Some few passers-by stopped—stopped before the stone façade behind which a murder had been committed. The reporters returned again and again for news, and the couple, greedy for glory, could not open a paper without seeing their names printed in large letters. One journal had that morning even published an especial article: "Interviews with M. and Mme. Moniche."

The crowd buzzed about the lodge like a swarm of flies. M. Rovère's body had been brought back from the Morgue. The obsequies would naturally attract an enormous crowd; all the more, as the mystery was still as deep as ever. Among his papers had been found a receipt for a tomb in the cemetery at Montmartre, bought by him about a year before. In another paper, not dated, were found directions as to how his funeral was to be conducted. M. Rovère, after having passed a wandering life, wished to rest in his native country. But no other indications of his wishes, nothing about his relatives, had been found. It seemed as if he was a man without a family, without any place in society, or any claim on any one to bury him. And this distressing isolation added to the morbid curiosity which was attached to the house, now all draped in black, with the letter "R" standing out in white against its silver escutcheon.

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Who would be chief mourner? M. Rovère had appointed no one. He had asked in that paper that a short notice should be inserted in the paper giving the hour and date of the services, and giving him the simple title ex-Consul. "I hope," went on the writer, "to be taken to the cemetery quietly and followed by intimate friends, if any remain."

Intimate friends were scarce in that crowd, without doubt, but the dead man's wish could hardly be carried out. Those obsequies which he had wished to be quiet became a sort of fête, funereal and noisy; where the thousands of people crowding the Boulevard crushed each other in their desire to see, and pressed almost upon the draped funeral car which the neighbors had covered with flowers.

Everything is a spectacle for Parisians. The guardians of the peace strove to keep back the crowds; some gamins climbed into the branches of the trees. The bier had been placed at the foot of the staircase in the narrow corridor opening upon the street. Mme. Moniche had placed upon a table in the lodge some loose leaves, where Rovère's unknown friends could write their names.

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Bernardet, alert, with his eyes wide open, studying the faces, searching the eyes, mingled with the crowd, looked at the file of people, scrutinized, one by one, the signatures; Bernardet, in mourning, wearing black gloves, seemed more like an undertaker's assistant than a police spy. Once he found himself directly in front of the open door of the lodge and the table where the leaves lay covered with signatures; when in the half light of the corridor draped with black, where the bier lay, he saw a man of about fifty, pale and very sad looking. He had arrived, in his turn in the line, at the table, where he signed his name. Mme. Moniche, clothed in black, with a white handkerchief in her hand, although she was not weeping, found herself side by side with Bernardet; in fact, their elbows touched. When the man reached the table, coming from the semi-darkness of the passage, and stepped into the light which fell full on him from the window, the portress involuntarily exclaimed, "Ah!" She was evidently much excited, and caught the police officer by the hand and said:

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"I am afraid!"

She spoke in such a low tone that Bernardet divined rather than heard what she meant in that stifled cry. He looked at her from the corner of his eye. He saw that she was ghastly, and again

she spoke in a low tone: "He! he whom I saw with M. Rovère before the open safe!"

Bernardet gave the man one sweeping glance of the eye. He fairly pierced him through with his sharp look. The unknown, half bent over the table whereon lay the papers, showed a wide forehead, slightly bald, and a pointed beard, a little gray, which almost touched the white paper as he wrote his name.

Suddenly the police officer experienced a strange sensation; it seemed to him that this face, the shape of the head, the pointed beard, he had recently seen somewhere, and that this human silhouette recalled to him an image which he had recently studied. The perception of a possibility of a proof gave him a shock. This man who was there made him think suddenly of that phantom discernible in the photographs taken of the retina of the murdered man's eye.

"Who is that man?"

Bernardet shivered with pleasurable excitement, and, insisting upon his own impression that this unknown strongly recalled the image obtained, and mentally he compared this living man, bending over the table, writing his name, with that spectre which had the air of a trooper which appeared in the photograph. The contour was the same, not only of the face, but the beard. This man reminded one of a Seigneur of the time of Henry III., and Bernardet found in that face something formidable. The man had signed his name. He raised his head, and his face, of a dull white, was turned full toward the police officer; their looks crossed, keen on Bernardet's side, veiled in the unknown. But before the fixity of the officer's gaze the strange man dropped his head for a moment; then, in his turn, he fixed a piercing, almost menacing, gaze on Bernardet. Then the latter slowly dropped his eyes and bowed; the unknown went out quickly and was lost in the crowd before the house.

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"It is he! it is he!" repeated the portress, who trembled as if she had seen a ghost.

Scarcely had the unknown disappeared than the police officer took but two steps to reach the table, and bending over it in his turn, he read the name written by that man:

"Jacques Dantin."

The name awakened no remembrance in Bernardet's mind, and now it was a living problem that he had to solve.

"Tell no one that you have seen that man," he hastily said to Mme. Moniche. "No one! Do you hear?" And he hurried out into the Boulevard, picking his way through the crowd and watching out to find that Jacques Dantin, whom he wished to follow.

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CHAPTER IX.

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JACQUES DANTIN, moreover, was not difficult to find in the crowd. He stood near the funeral car; his air was very sad. Bernardet had a fine opportunity to examine him at his ease. He was an elegant looking man, slender, with a resolute air, and frowning eyebrows which gave his face a very energetic look. His head bared to the cold wind, he stood like a statue while the bearers placed the casket in the funeral car, and Bernardet noticed the shaking of the head—a distressed shaking. The longer the police officer looked at him, studied him, the stronger grew the resemblance to the image in the photograph. Bernardet would soon know who this Jacques Dantin was, and even at this moment he asked a question or two of some of the assistants.

"Do you know who that gentleman is standing near the hearse?"

"No."

"Do you know what Jacques Dantin does? Was he one of M. Rovère's intimate friends?"

"Jacques Dantin?"

"Yes; see, there, with the pointed beard."

"I do not know him."

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Bernardet thought that if he addressed the question to M. Dantin himself he might learn all he wished to know at once, and he approached him at the moment the procession started, and walked along with him almost to the cemetery, striving to enter into conversation with him. He spoke of the dead man, sadly lamenting M. Rovère's sad fate. But he found his neighbor very silent. Upon the sidewalk of the Boulevard the dense crowd stood in respectful silence and uncovered as the cortège passed, and the officer noticed that some loose petals from the flowers dropped upon the roadway.

"There are a great many flowers," he remarked to his neighbor. "It is rather surprising, as M. Rovère seemed to have so few friends."

"He has had many," the man brusquely remarked. His voice was hoarse, and quivered with emotion. Bernardet saw that he was strongly moved. Was it sorrow? Was it bitterness of spirit? Remorse, perhaps! The man did not seem, moreover, in a very softened mood. He walked along

with his eyes upon the funeral car, his head uncovered in spite of the cold, and seemed to be in deep thought. The police officer studied him from a corner of his eye. His wrinkled face was intelligent, and bore an expression of weariness, but there was something hard about the set of the mouth and insolent in the turned-up end of his mustache.

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As they approached the cemetery at Montmartre—the journey was not a long one in which to make conversation—Bernardet ventured a decisive question: "Did you know M. Rovère very well?"

The other replied: "Very well."

"And whom do you think could have had any interest in this matter?" The question was brusque and cut like a knife. Jacques Dantin hesitated in his reply, looking keenly as they walked along at this little man with his smiling aspect, whose name he did not know and who had questioned him.

"It is because I have a great interest in at once commencing my researches," said Bernardet, measuring his words in order to note the effect which they would produce on this unknown man. "I am a police detective."

Oh! This time Bernardet saw Dantin shiver. There was no doubt of it; this close contact with a police officer troubled him, and he turned pale and a quick spasm passed over his face. His anxious eyes searched Bernardet's face, but, content with stealing an occasional glance of examination toward his neighbor, the little man walked along with eyes cast toward the ground. He studied Jacques Dantin in sudden, quick turns of the eye.

The car advanced slowly, turned the corner of the Boulevard and passed into the narrow avenue which led to God's Acre. The arch of the iron bridge led to the Campo-Santo like a viaduct of living beings, over to the Land of Sleep, for it was packed with a curious crowd; it was a scene for a melodrama, the cortège and the funeral car covered with wreaths. Bernardet, still walking by Dantin's side, continued to question him. The agent noticed that these questions seemed to embarrass M. Rovère's pretended friend.

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"Is it a long time since M. Rovère and Jacques Dantin have known each other?"

"We have been friends since childhood."

"And did you see him often?"

"No. Life had separated us."

"Had you seen him recently? Mme. Moniche said that you had."

"Who is Mme. Moniche?"

"The concierge of the house, and a sort of housekeeper for M. Rovère."

"Ah! Yes!" said Jacques Dantin, as if he had just remembered some forgotten sight. Bernardet, by instinct, read this man's thoughts; saw again with him also the tragic scene when the portress, suddenly entering M. Rovère's apartments, had seen him standing, face to face with Dantin, in front of the open safe, with a great quantity of papers spread out.

"Do you believe that he had many enemies?" asked the police agent, with deliberate calculation.

"No," Dantin sharply replied, without hesitation. Bernardet waited a moment, then in a firm voice he said: "M. Ginory will no doubt count a good deal on you in order to bring about the arrest of the assassin."

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"M. Ginory?"

"The Examining Magistrate."

"Then he will have to make haste with his investigation," Jacques Dantin replied. "I shall soon be obliged to leave Paris." This reply astonished Bernardet. This departure, of which the motive was probably a simple one, seemed to him strange under the tragic circumstances. M. Dantin, moreover, did not hesitate to give him, without his asking for it, his address, adding that he would hold himself in readiness from his return from the cemetery at the disposition of the Examining Magistrate.

"The misfortune is that I can tell nothing, as I know nothing. I do not even suspect who could have any interest in killing that unfortunate man. A professional criminal, without doubt."

"I do not believe so."

The cortège had now reached one of the side avenues; a white fog enveloped everything, and the marble tombs shone ghostly through it. The spot chosen by M. Rovère himself was at the end of the Avenue de la Cloche. The car slowly rolled toward the open grave. Mme. Moniche, overcome with grief, staggered as she walked along, but her husband, the tailor, seemed to be equal to the occasion and his rôle. They both assumed different expressions behind their dead. And Paul Rodier walked along just in front of them, note book in hand. Bernardet promised himself to keep close watch of Dantin and see in what manner he carried himself at the tomb. A pressure of the crowd separated them for a moment, but the officer was perfectly satisfied. Standing on the other side of the grave, face to face with him, was Dantin; a row of the most

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curious had pushed in ahead of Bernardet, but in this way he could better see Dantin's face, and not miss the quiver of a muscle. He stood on tiptoe and peered this way and that, between the heads, and could thus scrutinize and analyze, without being perceived himself.

Dantin was standing on the very edge of the grave. He held himself very upright, in a tense, almost aggressive way, and looked, from time to time, into the grave with an expression of anger and almost defiance. Of what was he thinking? In that attitude, which seemed to be a revolt against the destiny which had come to his friend, Bernardet read a kind of hardening of the will against an emotion which might become excessive and telltale. He was not, as yet, persuaded of the guiltiness of this man, but he did not find in that expression of defiance the tenderness which ought to be shown for a friend—a lifelong friend, as Dantin had said that Rovère was. And then the more he examined him—there, for example, seeing his dark silhouette clearly defined in front of the dense white of a neighboring column—the more the aspect of this man corresponded with that of the vision transfixed in the dead man's eye. Yes, it was the same profile of a trooper, his hand upon his hip, as if resting upon a rapier. Bernardet blinked his eyes in order to better see that man. He perceived a man who strongly recalled the vague form found in that retina, and his conviction came to the aid of his instinct, gradually increased, and became, little by little, invincible, irresistible. He repeated the address which this man had given him: "Jacques Dantin, Rue de Richelieu, 114." He would make haste to give that name to M. Ginory, and have a citation served upon him. Why should this Dantin leave Paris? What was his manner of living? his means of existence? What were the passions, the vices, of the man standing there with the austere mien of a Huguenot, in front of the open grave?

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Bernardet saw that, despite his strong will and his wish to stand there impassive, Jacques Dantin was troubled when, with a heavy sound, the casket glided over the cords down into the grave. He bit the ends of his mustache and his gloved hand made several irresistible, nervous movements. And the look cast into that grave! The look cast at that casket lying in the bottom of that grave! On that casket was a plate bearing the inscription: "Louis Pièrre Rovère." That mute look, rapid and grief-stricken, was cast upon that open casket, which contained the body—the gash across its throat, dissected, mutilated; the face with those dreadful eyes, which had been taken from their orbits, and, after delivering up their secret, replaced!

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They now defiled past the grave, and Dantin, the first, with a hand which trembled, sprinkled upon the casket those drops of water which are for our dead the last tears. Ah! but he was pale, almost livid; and how he trembled—this man with a stern face! Bernardet noticed the slightest trace of emotion. He approached in his turn and took the holy water sprinkler; then, as he turned away, desirous of catching up with M. Dantin, he heard his name called, and, turning, saw Paul Rodier, whose face was all smiles.

"Well! Monsieur Bernardet, what new?" he asked. The tall young man had a charming air.

"Nothing new," said the agent.

"You know that this murder has aroused a great deal of interest?"

"I do not doubt it."

"Leon Luzarche is enchanted. Yes, Luzarche, the novelist. He had begun a novel, of which the first instalment was published in the same paper which brought out the first news of 'The Crime of the Boulevard de Clichy,' and as the paper has sold, sold, sold, he thinks that it is his story which has caused the immense and increased sales. No one is reading 'l'Ange-Gnome,' but the murder. All novelists ought to try to have a fine assassination published at the same time as their serials, so as to increase the sales of the paper. What a fine collaboration, Monsieur! Plesantry, Monsieur! Have you any unpublished facts?"

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"No."

"Not one? Not a trace?"

"Nothing," Bernardet replied.

"Oh, well! I—I have some, Monsieur—but it will surprise you. Read my paper! Make the papers sell."

"But"—began the officer.

"See here! Professional secret! Only, have you thought of the woman in black who came occasionally to see the ex-Consul?"

"Certainly."

"Well, she must be made to come back—that woman in black. It is not an easy thing to do. But I believe that I have ferreted her out. Yes, in one of the provinces."

"Where?"

"Professional secret," repeated the reporter, laughing.

"And if M. Ginory asks for your professional secret?"

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"I will answer him as I answer you. Read my paper! Read *Lutèce!*"

"But the Judge, to him"—

"Professional secret," said Paul Rodier for the third time. "But what a romance it would make! The Woman in Black!"

While listening, Bernardet had not lost sight of M. Dantin, who, in the centre of one of the avenues, stood looking at the slowly moving crowd of curiosity seekers. He seemed to be vainly searching for a familiar face. He looked haggard. Whether it was grief or remorse, he certainly showed violent emotion. The police officer divined that a sharp struggle was taking place within that man's heart, and the sadness was great with which he watched that crowd in order to discover some familiar face, but he beheld only those of the curious. What Bernardet considered of the greatest importance was not to lose sight of this person of whose existence he was ignorant an hour before; and who, to him, was the perpetrator of the deed or an accomplice. He followed Dantin at a distance, who, from the cemetery at Montmartre went on foot directly to the Rue de Richelieu, and stopped at the number he had given, 114.

Bernardet allowed some minutes to pass after the man on whose track he was had entered. Then he asked the concierge if M. Jacques Dantin was at home. He questioned him closely and became convinced that M. Rovère's friend had really lived there two years and had no profession. [Pg 105]

"Then," said the police agent, "it is not this Dantin for whom I am looking. He is a banker." He excused himself, went out, hailed a fiacre, and gave the order: "To the Préfecture."

His report to the Chief, M. Morel, was soon made. He listened to him with attention, for he had absolute confidence in the police officer. "Never any *gaff* with Bernardet," M. Morel was wont to say. He, like Bernardet, soon felt convinced that this man was probably the murderer of the ex-Consul.

"As to the motive which led to the crime, we shall know it later."

He wished, above everything else, to have strict inquiries made into Dantin's past life, in regard to his present existence; and the inquiries would be compared with his answers to the questions which M. Ginory would ask him when he had been cited as a witness.

"Go at once to M. Ginory's room, Bernardet," said the Chief. "During this time I would learn a little about what kind of a man this is."

Bernardet had only to cross some corridors and mount a few steps to reach the gallery upon which M. Ginory's room opened. While waiting to be admitted he passed up and down; seated on benches were a number of malefactors, some of whom knew him well, who were waiting examination. He was accustomed to see this sight daily, and without being moved, but this time he was overcome by a sort of agony, a spasm which contracted even his fingers and left his nerves in as quivering a state as does insomnia. Truly, in the present case he was much more concerned than in an ordinary manhunt. The officer experienced the fear which an inventor feels before the perfection of a new discovery. He had undertaken a formidable problem, apparently insoluble, and he desired to solve it. Once or twice he took out from the pocket of his redingote an old worn case and looked at the proofs of the retina which he had pasted on a card. There could be no doubt. This figure, a little confused, had the very look of the man who had bent over the grave. M. Ginory would be struck by it when he had Jacques Dantin before him. Provided the Examining Magistrate still had the desire which Bernardet had incited in him, to push the matter to the end. Fortunately M. Ginory was very curious. With this curiosity anything might happen. The time seemed long. What if this Dantin, who spoke of leaving Paris, should disappear, should escape the examination? What miserable little affair occupied M. Ginory? Would he ever be at liberty? [Pg 106]

The door opened, a man in a blouse was led out; the registrar appeared on the threshold and Bernardet asked if he could not see M. Ginory immediately, as he had an important communication to make to him. [Pg 107]

"I will not detain him long," he said.

Far from appearing annoyed, the Magistrate seemed delighted to see the officer. He related to him all he knew, how he had seen the man at M. Rovère's funeral. That M^{me}. Moniche had recognized him as the one whom she had surprised standing with M. Rovère before the open safe. That he had signed his name and took first rank in the funeral cortège, less by reason of an old friendship which dated from childhood than by that strange and impulsive sentiment which compels the guilty man to haunt the scene of his crime, to remain near his victim, as if the murder, the blood, the corpse, held for him a morbid fascination.

"I shall soon know," said M. Ginory. He dictated to the registrar a citation to appear before him, rang the bell and gave the order to serve the notice on M. Dantin at the given address and to bring him to the Palais.

"Do not lose sight of him," he said to Bernardet, and began some other examinations. Bernardet bowed and his eyes shone like those of a sleuth hound on the scent of his prey.

BETWEEN the examining Magistrate, who questioned, and the man cited to appear before him, who replied, it was a duel; a close game, rapid and tragic, in which each feint might make a mortal wound; in which each parry and thrust might be decisive. No one in the world has the power of the man who, in a word, can change to a prisoner the one who enters the Palais as a passer-by. Behind this inquisitor of the law the prison stands; the tribunal in its red robes appears; the beams of the scaffold cast their sinister shadows, and the magistrate's cold chamber already seems to have the lugubrious humidity of the dungeons where the condemned await their fate.

Jacques Dantin arrived at the Palais in answer to the Magistrate's citation, with the apparent alacrity of a man who, regretting a friend tragically put out of the world, wishes to aid in avenging him. He did not hesitate a second, and Bernardet, who saw him enter the carriage, was struck with the seeming eagerness and haste with which he responded to the Magistrate's order. When M. Ginory was informed that Jacques Dantin had arrived, he allowed an involuntary "Ah!" to escape him. This ah! seemed to express the satisfaction of an impatient spectator when the signal is given which announces that the curtain is about to be raised. For the Examining Magistrate, the drama in which he was about to unravel the mystery was to begin. He kept his eyes fixed upon the door, attributing, correctly, a great importance to the first impression the comer would make upon him as he entered the room. M. Ginory found that he was much excited; this was to him a novel thing; but by exercising his strong will he succeeded in mastering the emotion, and his face and manner showed no trace of it.

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In the open door M. Jacques Dantin appeared. The first view, for the Magistrate, was favorable. The man was tall, well built; he bowed with grace and looked straight before him. But at the same time M. Ginory was struck by the strange resemblance of this haughty face to that image obtained by means of Bernardet's kodak. It seemed to him that this image had the same stature, the same form as that man surrounded by the hazy clouds. Upon a second examination it seemed to the Magistrate that the face betrayed a restrained violence, a latent brutality. The eyes were stern, under their bristling brows; the pointed beard, quite thin on the cheeks, showed the heavy jaws, and under the gray mustache the under lip protruded like those of certain Spanish cavaliers painted by Velasquez.

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"Prognathous," thought M. Ginory, as he noticed this characteristic. With a gesture he motioned M. Dantin to a chair. The man was there before the Judge who, with crossed hands, his elbows leaning on his papers, seemed ready to talk of insignificant things, while the registrar's bald head was bent over his black table as he rapidly took notes. The interview took on a grave tone, but as between two men who, meeting in a salon, speak of the morning or of the première of the evening before, and M. Ginory asked M. Dantin for some information in regard to M. Rovère.

"Did you know him intimately?"

"Yes, M. le Juge."

"For how many years?"

"For more than forty. We were comrades at a school in Bordeaux."

"You are a Bordelais?"

"Like Rovère, yes," Dantin replied.

"Of late, have you seen M. Rovère frequently?"

"I beg your pardon, M. le Juge, but what do you mean by of late?"

M. Ginory believed that he had discovered in this question put by a man who was himself being interrogated—a tactic—a means of finding before replying, time for reflection. He was accustomed to these manœuvres of the accused.

"When I say of late," he replied, "I mean during the past few weeks or days which preceded the murder—if that suits you."

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"I saw him often, in fact, even oftener than formerly."

"Why?"

Jacques Dantin seemed to hesitate. "I do not know—chance. In Paris one has intimate friends, one does not see them for some months; and suddenly one sees them again, and one meets them more frequently."

"Have you ever had any reason for the interruptions in your relations with M. Rovère when you ceased to see him, as you say?"

"None whatever."

"Was there between you any sort of rivalry, any motive for coldness?"

"Any motive—any rivalry. What do you mean?"

"I do not know," said the great man; "I ask you. I am questioning you."

The registrar's pen ran rapidly and noiselessly over the paper, with the speed of a bird on the

wing.

These words, "I am questioning you," seemed to make an unexpected, disagreeable impression on Dantin, and he frowned.

"When did you visit Rovère the last time?"

"The last time?"

"Yes. Strive to remember."

"Two or three days before the murder."

"It was not two or three days; it was two days exactly before the assassination."

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"You are right, I beg your pardon."

The Examining Magistrate waited a moment, looking the man full in the eyes. It seemed to him that a slight flush passed over his hitherto pale face.

"Do you suspect anyone as the murderer of Rovère?" asked M. Ginory after a moment's reflection.

"No one," said Dantin. "I have tried to think of some one."

"Had Rovère any enemies?"

"I do not know of any."

The Magistrate swung around by a detour habitual with him to Jacques Dantin's last visit to the murdered man, and begged him to be precise, and asked him if anything had especially struck him during that last interview with his friend.

"The idea of suicide having been immediately dropped on the simple examination of the wound, no doubt exists as to the cause of death. Rovère was assassinated. By whom? In your last interview was there any talk between you of any uneasiness which he felt in regard to anything? Was he occupied with any especial affair? Had he—sometimes one has presentiments—any presentiment of an impending evil, that he was running any danger?"

"No," Dantin replied. "Rovère made no allusion to me of any peril which he feared. I have asked myself who could have any interest in his death. One might have done the deed for plunder."

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"That seems very probable to me," said the Magistrate, "but the examination made in the apartment proves that not a thing had been touched. Theft was not the motive."

"Then?" asked Dantin.

The sanguine face of the Magistrate, that robust visage, with its massive jaws, lighted up with a sort of ironical expression.

"Then we are here to search for the truth and to find it." In this response, made in a mocking tone, the registrar, who knew every varying shade of tone in his Chief's voice, raised his head, for in this tone he detected a menace.

"Will you tell me all that passed in that last interview?"

"Nothing whatever which could in any way put justice on the track of the criminal."

"But yet can you, or, rather, I should say, ought you not to relate to me all that was said or done? The slightest circumstance might enlighten us."

"Rovère spoke to me of private affairs," Dantin replied, but quickly added: "They were insignificant things."

"What are insignificant things?"

"Remembrances—family matters."

"Family things are not insignificant, above all in a case like this. Had Rovère any family? No relative assisted at the obsequies."

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Jacques Dantin seemed troubled, unnerved rather, and this time it was plainly visible. He replied in a short tone, which was almost brusque:

"He talked of the past."

"What past?" asked the Judge, quickly.

"Of his youth—of moral debts."

M. Ginory turned around in his chair, leaned back, and said in a caustic tone: "Truly, Monsieur, you certainly ought to complete your information and not make an enigma of your deposition. I do not understand this useless reticence, and moral debts, to use your words; they are only to gain time. What, then, was M. Rovère's past?"

Dantin hesitated a moment; not very long. Then he firmly said: "That, Monsieur le Juge, is a

secret confided to me by my friend, and as it has nothing to do with this matter, I ask you to refrain from questioning me about it."

"I beg your pardon," the magistrate replied. "There is not, there cannot be a secret for an Examining Magistrate. In Rovère's interests, whose memory ought to have public vindication, yes, in his interests, and I ought to say also in your own, it is necessary that you should state explicitly what you have just alluded to. You tell me that there is a secret. I wish to know it."

"It is the confidence of a dead person, Monsieur," Dantin replied, in vibrating tones.

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"There are no confidences when justice is in the balance."

"But it is also the secret of a living person," said Jacques Dantin.

"Is it of yourself of whom you speak?"

He gazed keenly at the face, now tortured and contracted.

Dantin replied: "No, I do not speak of myself, but of another."

"That other—who is he?"

"It is impossible to tell you."

"Impossible?"

"Absolutely impossible!"

"I will repeat to you my first question—'Why?'"

"Because I have sworn on my honor to reveal it to no one."

"Ah, ah!" said Ginory, mockingly; "it was a vow? That is perfect!"

"Yes, Monsieur le Juge; it was a vow."

"A vow made to whom?"

"To Rovère."

"Who is no longer here to release you from it. I understand."

"And," asked Dantin, with a vehemence which made the registrar's thin hand tremble as it flew over the paper, "what do you understand?"

"Pardon," said M. Ginory; "you are not here to put questions, but to answer those which are asked you. It is certain that a vow which binds the holder of a secret is a means of defence, but the accused have, by making common use of it, rendered it useless."

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The Magistrate noticed the almost menacing frown with which Dantin looked at him at the words, "the accused."

"The accused?" said the man, turning in his chair. "Am I one of the accused?" His voice was strident, almost strangled.

"I do not know that," said M. Ginory, in a very calm tone; "I say that you wish to keep your secret, and it is a claim which I do not admit."

"I repeat, Monsieur le Juge, that the secret is not mine."

"It is no longer a secret which can remain sacred here. A murder has been committed, a murderer is to be found, and everything you know you ought to reveal to justice."

"But if I give you my word of honor that it has not the slightest bearing on the matter—with the death of Rovère?"

"I shall tell my registrar to write your very words in reply—he has done it—I shall continue to question you, precisely because you speak to me of a secret which has been confided to you and which you refuse to disclose to me. Because you do refuse?"

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"Absolutely!"

"In spite of what I have said to you? It is a warning; you know it well!"

"In spite of your warning!"

"Take care!" M. Ginory softly said. His angry face had lost its wonted amiability. The registrar quickly raised his head. He felt that a decisive moment had come. The Examining Magistrate looked directly into Dantin's eyes and slowly said: "You remember that you were seen by the portress at the moment when Rovère, standing with you in front of his open safe, showed you some valuables?"

Dantin waited a moment before he replied, as if measuring these words, and searching to find out just what M. Ginory was driving at. This silence, short and momentous, was dramatic. The Magistrate knew it well—that moment of agony when the question seems like a cord, like a lasso suddenly thrown, and tightening around one's neck. There was always, in his examination, a

tragic moment.

"I remember very well that I saw a person whom I did not know enter the room where I was with M. Rovère," Jacques Dantin replied at last.

"A person whom you did not know? You knew her very well, since you had more than once asked her if M. Rovère was at home. That person is Mme. Moniche, who has made her deposition." [Pg 118]

"And what did she say in her deposition?"

The Magistrate took a paper from the table in front of him and read: "When I entered, M. Rovère was standing before his safe, and I noticed that the individual of whom I spoke (the individual is you) cast upon the coupons a look which made me cold. I thought to myself: 'This man looks as if he is meditating some bad deed.'"

"That is to say," brusquely said Dantin, who had listened with frowning brows and with an angry expression, "that Mme. Moniche accuses me of having murdered M. Rovère!"

"You are in too much haste. Mme. Moniche has not said that precisely. She was only surprised—surprised and frightened—at your expression as you looked at the deeds, bills and coupons."

"Those coupons," asked Dantin rather anxiously, "have they, then, been stolen?"

"Ah, that we know nothing about," and the Magistrate smiled.

"One has found in Rovère's safe in the neighborhood of 460,000 francs in coupons, city of Paris bonds, shares in mining societies, rent rolls; but nothing to prove that there was before the assassination more than that sum."

"Had it been forced open?" [Pg 119]

"No; but anyone familiar with the dead man, a friend who knew the secret of the combination of the safe, the four letters forming the word, could have opened it without trouble."

Among these words Dantin heard one which struck him full in the face—"friend." M. Ginory had pronounced it in an ordinary tone, but Dantin had seized and read in it a menace. For a moment the man who was being questioned felt a peculiar sensation. It seemed to him one day when he had been almost drowned during a boating party that same agony had seized him; it seemed that he had fallen into some abyss, some icy pool, which was paralyzing him. Opposite to him the Examining Magistrate experienced a contrary feeling. The caster of a hook and line feels a similar sensation; but it was intensified a hundred times in the Magistrate, a fisher of truth, throwing the line into a human sea, the water polluted, red with blood and mixed with mud.

A friend! A friend could have abused the dead man's secret and opened that safe! And that friend—what name did he bear? Whom did M. Ginory wish to designate? Dantin, in spite of his *sang froid*, experienced a violent temptation to ask the man what he meant by those words. But the strange sensation which this interview caused him increased. It seemed to him that he had been there a long time—a very long time since he had crossed that threshold—and that this little room, separated from the world like a monk's cell, had walls thick enough to prevent any one from hearing anything outside. He felt as if hypnotized by that man, who at first had met him with a pleasant air, and who now bent upon him those hard eyes. Something doubtful, like vague danger, surrounded him, menaced him, and he mechanically followed the gesture which M. Ginory made as he touched the ivory button of an electric bell, as if on this gesture depended some event of his life. A guard entered. M. Ginory said to him in a short tone: "Have the notes been brought?" [Pg 120]

"M. Bernardet has just brought them to me, Monsieur le Juge."

"Give them to me!" He then added: "Is Monsieur Bernardet here?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Juge."

"Very well."

Jacques Dantin remembered the little man with whom he had talked in the journey from the house of death to the tomb, where he had heard some one call "Bernardet." He did not know at the time, but the name had struck him. Why did his presence seem of so much importance to this Examining Magistrate? And he looked, in his turn, at M. Ginory, who, a little near-sighted, was bending his head, with its sandy hair, its bald forehead, on which the veins stood out like cords, over his notes, which had been brought to him. Interesting notes—important, without doubt—for, visibly satisfied, M. Ginory allowed a word or two to escape him: "Good! Yes—Yes—Fine! Ah! Ah!—Very good!" Then suddenly Dantin saw Ginory raise his head and look at him—as the saying is—in the white of the eyes. He waited a moment before speaking, and suddenly put this question, thrust at Dantin like a knife-blow: [Pg 121]

"Are you a gambler, as I find?"

The question made Jacques Dantin fairly bound from his chair. A gambler! Why did this man ask him if he was a gambler? What had his habits, his customs, his vices even, to do with this cause for which he had been cited, to do with Rovère's murder?

"You are a gambler," continued the Examining Magistrate, casting from time to time a keen glance toward his notes. "One of the inspectors of gambling dens saw you lose at the Cercle des Publicistes 25,000 francs in one night."

"It is possible; the only important point is that I paid them!" The response was short, crisp, showing a little irritation and stupefaction.

"Assuredly," said the Judge. "But you have no fortune. You have recently borrowed a considerable sum from the usurers in order to pay for some losses at the Bourse."

Dantin became very pale, his lips quivered, and his hands trembled. These signs of emotion did not escape the eyes of M. Ginory nor the registrar's. [Pg 122]

"Is it from your little notes that you have learned all that?" he demanded.

"Certainly," M. Ginory replied. "We have been seeking for some hours for accurate information concerning you; started a sort of diary or rough draught of your biography. You are fond of pleasure. You are seen, in spite of your age—I pray you to pardon me, there is no malice in the remark: I am older than you—everywhere where is found the famous Tout-Paris which amuses itself. The easy life is the most difficult for those who have no fortune. And, according to these notes—I refer to them again—of fortune you have none."

"That is to say," interrupted Dantin, brusquely, "it would be very possible that, in order to obtain money for my needs, in order to steal the funds in his iron safe, I would assassinate my friend?"

M. Ginory did not allow himself to display any emotion at the insolent tone of these words, which had burst forth, almost like a cry. He looked Dantin full in the face, and with his hands crossed upon his notes, he said:

"Monsieur, in a matter of criminal investigation a Magistrate, eager for the truth ought to admit that anything is possible, even probable, but in this case I ought to recognize the fact that you have not helped me in my task. A witness finds you tête-à-tête with the victim and surprises your trouble at the moment when you are examining Rovère's papers. I ask what it was that happened between you, you reply that that is your secret, and for explanation you give me your word of honor that it had nothing whatever to do with the murder. You would yourself think that I was very foolish if I insisted any longer. True, there was no trace of any violence in the apartment, whatever subtraction may have been made from the safe. It appears that you are in a position to know the combination; it appears, also, that you are certainly in need of money; as clearly known as it is possible to learn in a hurried inquiry such as has been made, while you have been here. I question you. I let you know what you ought to know, and you fly into a passion. And note well! it is you yourself, in your anger and your violence, who speaks first the word of which I have not pronounced a syllable. It is you who have jumped straight to a logical conclusion of the suppositions which are still defective, without doubt, but are not the less suppositions; yes, it is you who say that with a little logic one can certainly accuse you of the murder of the one whom you called your friend." [Pg 123]

Each word brought to Dantin's face an angry or a frightened expression, and the more slowly M. Ginory spoke, the more measured his words, emphasizing his verbs, with a sort of professional habit, as a surgeon touches a wound with a steel instrument, the questioned man, put through a sharp cross-examination, experienced a frightful anger, a strong internal struggle, which made the blood rush to his ears and ferocious lightnings dart through his eyes. [Pg 124]

"It is easy, moreover," continued M. Ginory, in a paternal tone, "for you to reduce to nothingness all these suppositions, and the smallest expression in regard to the rôle which you played in your last interview with Rovère would put everything right."

"Ah! must we go back to that?"

"Certainly, we must go back to that! The whole question lies there! You come to an Examining Magistrate and tell him that there is a secret; you speak of a third person, of recollections of youth, of moral debts—and you are astonished that the Judge strives to wrest the truth from you?"

"I have told it."

"The whole truth?"

"It has nothing to do with Rovère's murder, and it would injure some one who knows nothing about it. I have told you so. I repeat it."

"Yes," said M. Ginory, "you hold to your enigma! Oh, well, I, the Magistrate, demand that you reveal the truth to me. I command you to tell it." [Pg 125]

The registrar's pen ran over the paper and trembled as if it scented a storm. The psychological moment approached. The registrar knew it well—that moment—and the word which the Magistrate would soon pronounce would be decisive.

A sort of struggle began in Dantin's mind—one saw his face grow haggard, his eyes change their expression. He looked at the papers upon which M. Ginory laid his fat and hairy hands; those police notes *which gossiped*, as peasants say, in speaking of papers or writing which they

cannot read and which denounce them. He asked himself what more would be disclosed by those notes of the police agents of the scandals of the club, of the neighbors, of the porters. He passed his hands over his forehead as if to wipe off the perspiration or to ease away a headache.

"Come, now, it is not very difficult, and I have the right to know," said M. Ginory. After a moment Jacques Dantin said in a strong voice: "I swear to you, Monsieur, that nothing Rovère said to me when I saw him the last time could assist justice in any whatsoever, and I beg of you not to question me further about it."

"Will you answer?"

"I cannot, Monsieur."

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"The more you hesitate the more reason you give me to think that the communication would be grave."

"Very grave, but it has nothing to do with your investigation."

"It's not for you to outline the duties of my limits or my rights. Once more, I order you to reply."

"I cannot."

"You will not."

"I cannot," brusquely said the man run to earth, with accent of violence.

The duel was finished.

M. Ginory began to laugh, or, rather, there was a nervous contraction of his mouth, and his sanguine face wore a scoffing look, while a mechanical movement of his massive jaws made him resemble a bulldog about to bite.

"Then," said he, "the situation is a very simple one and you force me to come to the end of my task. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Jacques Dantin, with the impulsive anger of a man who stumbles over an article which he has left there himself.

"You still refuse to reply?"

"I refuse. I came here as a witness. I have nothing to reproach myself with, especially as I have nothing to fear. You must do whatever you choose to do."

"I can," said the Magistrate, "change a citation for appearance to a citation for retention. I will ask you once more"—

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"It is useless," interrupted Dantin. "An assassin. I! What folly! Rovère's murderer! It seems as if I were dreaming! It is absurd, absurd, absurd!"

"Prove to me that it is absurd in truth. Do you not wish to reply?"

"I have told you all I know."

"But you have said nothing of what I have demanded of you."

"It is not my secret."

"Yes; there is your system. It is frequent, it is common. It is that of all the accused."

"Am I already accused?" asked Dantin, ironically.

M. Ginory was silent a moment, then, slowly taking from the drawer of his desk some paper upon which Dantin could discern no writing this time, but some figures, engraved in black—he knew not what they were—the Magistrate held them between his fingers so as to show them. He swung them to and fro, and the papers rustled like dry leaves. He seemed to attach great value to these papers, which the registrar looked at from a corner of his eye, guessing that they were the photographic proofs which had been taken.

"I beg of you to examine these proofs," said the Magistrate to Dantin. He held them out to him, and Dantin spread them on the table (there were four of them), then he put on his eyeglasses in order to see better. "What is that?" he asked.

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"Look carefully," replied the Magistrate. Dantin bent over the proofs, examined them one by one, divined, rather than saw, in the picture which was a little hazy, the portrait of a man; and upon close examination began to see in the spectre a vague resemblance.

"Do you not see that this picture bears a resemblance to you?"

This time Dantin seemed the prey of some nightmare, and his eyes searched M. Ginory's face with a sort of agony. The expression struck Ginory. One would have said that a ghost had suddenly appeared to Dantin.

"You say that it resembles me?"

"Yes. Look carefully! At first the portrait is vague; on closer examination it comes out from the halo which surrounds it, and the person who appears there bears your air, your features, your

characteristics"—

"It is possible," said Dantin. "It seems to resemble me; it seems as if I were looking at myself in a pocket mirror. But what does that signify?"

"That signifies—Oh! I am going to astonish you. That signifies"—M. Ginory turned toward his registrar: "You saw the other evening, Favarel, the experiment in which Dr. Oudin showed us the heart and lungs performing their functions in the thorax of a living man, made visible by the Roentgen Rays. Well! This is not any more miraculous. These photographs (he turned now toward Dantin) were taken of the retina of the dead man's eye. They are the reflection, the reproduction of the image implanted there, the picture of the last living being contemplated in the agony; the last visual sensation which the unfortunate man experienced. The retina has given to us—as a witness—the image of the living person seen by the dead man for the last time!"

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A deep silence fell upon the three men in that little room, where one of them alone, lost his foothold at this strange revelation. For the Magistrate it was a decisive moment; when all had been said, when the man having been questioned closely, jumps at the foregone conclusion. As for the registrar, however blasé he may have become by these daily experiences, it was the decisive moment! the moment when, the line drawn from the water, the fish is landed, writhing on the hook!

Jacques Dantin, with an instinctive movement, had rejected, pushed back on the table those photographs which burned his fingers like the cards in which some fortune teller has deciphered the signs of death.

"Well?" asked M. Ginory.

"Well!" repeated Dantin in a strangled tone, either not comprehending or comprehending too much, struggling as if under the oppression of a nightmare.

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"How do you explain how your face, your shadow if you prefer, was found reflected in Rovère's eyes, and that in his agony, this was probably what he saw; yes, saw bending over him?"

Dantin cast a frightened glance around the room, and asked himself if he was not shut up in a maniac's cell; if the question was real; if the voice he heard was not the voice of a dream!

"How can I explain? but I cannot explain, I do not understand, I do not know—it is madness, it is frightful, it is foolish!"

"But yet," insisted M. Ginory, "this folly, as you call it, must have some explanation."

"What do you wish to have me say? I do not understand. I repeat, I do not understand."

"What if you do not, you cannot deny your presence in the house at the moment of Rovère's death"—

"Why cannot I deny it?" Dantin interrupted.

"Because the vision is there, hidden, hazy, in the retina; because this photograph, in which you recognized yourself, denounces, points out, your presence at the moment of the last agony."

"I was not there! I swear that I was not there!" Dantin fervently declared.

"Then, explain," said the Magistrate.

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Dantin remained silent a moment, as if frightened. Then he stammered: "I am dreaming!—I dreaming!" and M. Ginory replied in a calm tone:

"Notice that I attribute no exaggerated importance to these proofs. It is not on them alone that I base the accusation. But they constitute a strange witness, very disquieting in its mute eloquence. They add to the doubt which your desire for silence has awakened. You tell me that you were not near Rovère when he died. These proofs, irrefutable as a fact, seem to prove at once the contrary. Then, the day Rovère was assassinated where were you?"

"I do not know. At home, without doubt. I will have to think it over. At what hour was Rovère killed?"

M. Ginory made a gesture of ignorance and in a tone of raillery said: "That! There are others who know it better than I." And Dantin, irritated, looked at him.

"Yes," went on the Magistrate, with mocking politeness, "the surgeons who can tell the hour in which he was killed." He turned over his papers. "The assassination was about an hour before midday. In Paris, in broad daylight, at that hour, a murder was committed!"

"At that hour," said Jacques Dantin, "I was just leaving home."

"To go where?"

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"For a walk. I had a headache. I was going to walk in the Champs-Élysées to cure it."

"And did you, in your walk, meet any one whom you knew?"

"No one."

"Did you go into some shop?"

"I did not."

"In short, you have no *alibi*?"

The word made Dantin again tremble. He felt the meshes of the net closing around him.

"An *alibi*! Ah that! Decidedly. Monsieur, you accuse me of assassinating my friend," he violently said.

"I do not accuse; I ask a question." And M. Ginory in a dry tone which gradually became cutting and menacing said: "I question you, but I warn you that the interview has taken a bad turn. You do not answer; you pretend to keep secret I know not what information which concerns us. You are not yet exactly accused. But—but—but—you are going to be"—

The Magistrate waited a moment as if to give the man time to reflect, and he held his pen suspended, after dipping it in the ink, as an auctioneer holds his ivory hammer before bringing it down to close a sale. "I am going to drop the pen," it seemed to say. Dantin, very angry, remained silent. His look of bravado seemed to say: "Do you dare? If you dare, do it!"

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"You refuse to speak?" asked Ginory for the last time.

"I refuse."

"You have willed it! Do you persist in giving no explanation; do you entrench yourself behind I know not what scruple or duty to honor; do you keep to your systematic silence? For the last time, do you still persist in this?"

"I have nothing—nothing—nothing to tell you!" Dantin cried in a sort of rage.

"Oh, well! Jacques Dantin," and the Magistrate's voice was grave and suddenly solemn. "You are from this moment arrested." The pen, uplifted till this instant, fell upon the paper. It was an order for arrest. The registrar looked at the man. Jacques Dantin did not move. His expression seemed vague, the fixed expression of a person who dreams with wide-open eyes. M. Ginory touched one of the electric buttons above his table and pointed Dantin out to the guards, whose shakos suddenly darkened the doorway. "Take away the prisoner," he said shortly and mechanically, and, overcome, without revolt, Jacques Dantin allowed himself to be led through the corridors of the Palais, saying nothing, comprehending nothing, stumbling occasionally, like an intoxicated man or a somnambulist.

CHAPTER XI.

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M. BERNARDET was triumphant. He went home to dinner in a jubilant mood. His three little girls, dressed alike, clasped him round the neck, all at the same time, while Mme. Bernardet, always fresh, smiling and gay, held up her face with its soft, round, rosy cheeks to him.

"My little ones," said the officer, "I believe that I have done well, and that my chief will advance me or give me some acknowledgment. I will buy you some bracelets, my dears, if that happens. But it is not the idea of filthy lucre which has urged me on, and I believe that I have certainly made a great stride in judiciary instruction, all owing to my kodak. It would be too long an explanation and, perhaps, a perfectly useless one. Let us go to dinner. I am as hungry as a wolf."

He ate, truly, with a good appetite, scarcely stopped to tell how the assassin was under lock and key. The man had been measured and had become a number in the collection, always increasing, of accused persons in the catalogue continued each day for the Museum of Crime.

"Ah! He is not happy," said Bernardet between two spoonfuls of soup. "Not happy, not happy at all! Not happy, and astonished—protesting, moreover, his innocence, as they all do. It is customary."

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"But," sweetly asked good little Mme. Bernardet, "what if he is innocent?" And the three little girls, raising their heads, looked at their father, as if to repeat their mother's question. The eldest murmured: "Yes, what if mamma is right?"

Bernardet shrugged his shoulders.

"To hear them, if one listened to them, one would believe them all innocent, and the crimes would have to commit themselves. If this one is innocent I shall be astonished, as if I should see snow fall in Paris in June; he will have to prove that he is innocent. These things prove themselves. Give me some more soup, Mélanie."

As Mme. Bernardet turned a ladleful of hot soup into her husband's plate she softly asked: "Are there no innocent ones condemned? Do you never deceive yourself?" Bernardet did not stop eating. "I cannot say—no one is infallible, no one—the shrewdest deceive themselves; they are sometimes duped. But it is rare, very rare. As well to say that it does not happen—Lesurques, yes (and the three little girls opened wide their large blue eyes as at a play), the Lesurques of the Courier de Lyon, who has made you weep so many times at the theatre at Montmartre; one would like to revise his trial to reinstate him, but no one has been able to do it. I have studied his trial—

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by my faith, I swear, I would condemn him still—ah! what good soup!"

"But this one to-day?" asked Mme. Bernardet; "art thou certain? What is his name?"

"Dantin—Jacques Dantin. Oh! He is a gentleman. A very fine man, elegant, indeed. Some Bohemian of the upper class, who evidently needed money, and who—Rovère had some valuables in his safe. The occasion made the thief—and there it is."

"Papa," interrupted the eldest of the three little girls, "canst thou take us to see the trial, when he shall be sworn?"

"That depends! It is not easy! I will try—I will ask. If thou wilt work hard—Oh, dame!" said Bernardet, "that will be a drama!"

"I will work hard."

At dessert, after he had taken his coffee, he allowed his three little girls to dip lumps of sugar into his saucer. He threw himself into his easy chair; he gave a sigh of satisfaction, like a man whose daily, wearisome tasks are behind him, and who is catching a moment's repose.

"Ah!" he said, opening a paper which his wife had placed on a table near him, together with a little glass of cordial sent to them by some cousins in Burgundy; "I am going to see what has happened and what those good journalists have invented about the affair in the Boulevard de Clichy. It is true, it is a steeplechase between the reporters and us. Sometimes they win the race in the mornings. At other times, when they know nothing—ah! Then they invent, they embroider their histories!"

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A petroleum lamp lighted the paper which Bernardet unfolded and began to read.

"Let us see what *Lutèce* says."

He suddenly remembered what Paul Rodier had said to him. "Read my journal!" This woman in black, found in the province, did she really exist? Had the novelist written a romance in order to follow the example of his friend? He looked over the paper to see if Paul Rodier had collaborated, as his friend had. Bernardet skipped over the headlines and glanced at the theatrical news. "Politics—they are all the same to me—Ministerial crisis—nothing new about that. That could as well be published in yesterday's paper as in to-day's! 'The Crime of the Boulevard de Clichy'—ah! Good! Very good! We shall see." And he began to read. Had Paul Rodier invented all the information to which he had treated the public? What was certain was that the police officer frowned and now gave strict attention to what he was reading, as if weighing the reporter's words.

Rodier had republished the biography of the ex-Consul. M. Rovère had been mixed, in South America, in violent dramas. He was a romantic person, about whom more than one adventure in Buenos Ayres was known. The reporter had gained his information from an Argentine journal, the *Prensa*, established in Paris, and whose editor, in South America, had visited, intimately, the French Consul. The appearance of a woman in black, those visits made on fixed dates, as on anniversaries, revealed an intimacy, a relationship perhaps, of the murdered man with that unknown woman. The woman was young, elegant and did not live in Paris. Rodier had set himself to discover her retreat, her name; and perhaps, thanks to her, to unravel the mystery which still enveloped the murder.

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"*Heuh!* That is not very precise information," thought the police officer. But it at least awoke Bernardet's curiosity and intelligence. It solved no problem, but it put one. M. de Sartines's famous "*search for the woman*" came naturally to Paul Rodier's pen. And he finished the article with some details about Jacques Dantin, the intimate, the only friend of Louis Pierre Rovère; and the reporter, when he had written this, was still ignorant that Dantin was under arrest.

"To-morrow," said Bernardet to himself, "he will give us Dantin's biography. He tells me nothing new in his report. And yet"—He folded up the paper and laid it on the table, and while sipping his cordial he thought of that mysterious visitor—the woman in black—and told himself that truly the trail must be there. He would see Moniche and his wife again; he would question them; he would make a thorough search.

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"But what for? We have the guilty man. It is a hundred to one that the assassin is behind bars. The woman might be an accomplice."

Then Bernardet, filled with passion for his profession, rather than vanity—this artist in a police sense; this lover of art for art's sake—rubbed his hands and silently applauded himself because he had insisted, and, as it were, compelled M. Ginory and the doctors to adopt his idea. He, the humble, unknown sub-officer, standing back and simply striving to do his duty, had influenced distinguished persons as powerful as magistrates and members of the Academy. They had obeyed his suggestion. The little Bernardet felt that he had done a glorious deed. He had experienced a strong conviction, which would not be denied. He had proved that what had been considered only a chimera was a reality. He had accomplished a seeming impossibility. He had evoked the dead man's secret even from the tomb.

"And M. Ginory thinks that it will not help his candidature at the Academy? He will wear the green robe, and he will owe it to me. There are others who owe me something, too."

With his faculty for believing in his dreams, of seeing his visions appear, realized and living—a

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faculty which, in such a man, seemed like the strange hallucination of a poet—Bernardet did not doubt for a moment the reality of this phantom which had appeared in the retina of the eye. It was nothing more, that eye removed by the surgeon's scalpel, than an avenging mirror. It accused, it overwhelmed! Jacques Dantin was found there in all the atrocity of his crime.

"When I think, when I think that they did not wish to try the experiment. It is made now!" thought Bernardet.

M. Ginory had strongly recommended that all that part of the examination should not be made public. Absolute silence was necessary. If the press could have obtained the slightest information, every detail of the experiment would have become public property, and the account would have been embellished and made as fantastic as possible. This would have been a deep mine for Edgar A. Poe, who would have worked that lode well and made the Parisians shudder. How the ink would have been mixed with Rovère's blood! It was well understood that if the suspected man would in the end confess his guilt, the result of the singular scientifically incredible experiment should be made known. But until then absolute silence. Every thing which had been said and done around the dissecting table at the Morgue, or in the Examining Magistrate's room, would remain a secret.

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But would Dantin confess?

The next day after M. Ginory had put him under arrest Bernardet had gone to the Palais for news. He wished to consult his chief about the "Woman in Black," to ask him what he thought of the article which had been published in the paper by Paul Rodier. M. Leriche attached no great importance to it.

"A reporter's information. Very vague. There is always a woman, *parbleu!* in the life of every man. But did this one know Dantin? She seems to me simply an old, abandoned friend, and who came occasionally to ask aid of the old boy"—

"The woman noticed by Moniche is young," said Bernardet.

"Abandoned friends are often young," M. Leriche replied, visibly enchanted with his observation.

As for Dantin, he still maintained his obstinate silence. He persisted in finding iniquitous an arrest for which there was no motive, and he kept the haughty, almost provoking attitude of those whom the Chief called the greatest culprits.

"Murderers in redingotes believe that they have sprung from Jupiter's thigh, and will not admit that any one should be arrested except those who wear smocks and peaked hats. They believe in an aristocracy and its privileges, and threaten to have us removed—you know that very well, Bernardet. Then, as time passes, they become, in a measure, calm and meek as little lambs; then they whimper and confess. Dantin will do as all the others have done. For the moment he howls about his innocence, and will threaten us, you will see, with a summons from the Chamber. That is of no importance."

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The Chief then gave the officer some instructions. He need not trouble himself any more, just now, about the Dantin affair, but attend to another matter of less importance—a trivial affair. After the murder and his experiences at the Morgue this matter seemed a low one to Bernardet. But each duty has its antithesis. The police officer put into this petty affair of a theft the same zeal, the same sharp attention with which he had investigated the crime of the Boulevard de Clichy. It was his profession.

Bernardet started out on his quest. It was near the Halles (markets) that he had to work this time. The suspected man was probably one of the rascals who prowl about day and night, living on adventures, and without any home; sleeping under the bridges, or in one of the hovels on the outskirts of the Rue de Venise, where vice, distress and crime flourished. Bernardet first questioned the owner of the stolen property, obtained all the information which he could about the suspected man, and, with his keen scent for a criminal aroused, he glanced at everything—men, things, objects that would have escaped a less practised eye. He was walking slowly along toward the Permanence, looking keenly at the passers-by, the articles in the shops, the various movements in the streets, to see if he could get a hint upon which to work.

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It was his habit to thus make use of his walks. In a promenade he had more than once met a client, past or future. The boys fled before his piercing eyes; before this fat, jolly little man with the mocking smile which showed under his red mustache. This fright which he inspired made him laugh inwardly. He knew that he was respected, that he was feared. Among all these passers-by who jostled him, without knowing that he was watching them, he was a power, an unknown but sovereign power. He walked along with short, quick steps and watchful eyes, very much preoccupied with this affair, thinking of the worthless person for whom he was seeking, but he stopped occasionally to look at the wares spread out in some bric-a-brac shop or in some book store window. This also was his habit and his method. He ran his eye over the illustrated papers lying in a row in front; over the Socialistic placards, the song books. He kept himself *au courant* with everything which was thought, seen, proclaimed and sung.

"When one governs," thought Bernardet, "one ought to have the habit of going afoot in the street. One can learn nothing from the depths of a coupé, driven by a coachman wearing a tri-colored cockade." He was going to the Préfecture, the Permanence, when in the Rue des Bons-

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Enfants he was instinctively attracted to a shop window where rusty old arms, tattered uniforms, worn shakos, garments without value, smoky pictures, yellowed engravings and chance ornaments, rare old copies of books, old romances, ancient books, with eaten bindings, a mass of dissimilar objects—lost keys, belt buckles, abolished medals, battered sous—were mixed together in an oblong space as in a sort of trough. On either side of this shop window hung some soiled uniforms, a Zouave's vest, an Academician's old habit, lugubrious with its embroideries of green, a soiled costume which had been worn by some Pierrot at the Carnival. It was, in all its sad irony, the vulgar "hand-me-down that!" which makes one think of that other Morgue where the clothing has been rejected by the living or abandoned by the dead.

Bernardet was neither of a melancholy temperament nor a dreamer, and he did not give much time to the tearful side of the question, but he was possessed of a ravenous curiosity, and the sight, however frequent, of that shop window always attracted him. With, moreover, that sort of magnetism which the searchers, great or small, intuitively feel—a collector of knick-knacks, discoverers of unknown countries, book worms bent over the volumes at four sous apiece, or chemists crouched over a retort—Bernardet had been suddenly attracted by a portrait exposed as an object rarer than the others, in the midst of this detritus of abandoned luxury or of past military glory.

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Yes, among the tobacco boxes, the belt buckles, the Turkish poniards, watches with broken cases, commonplace Japanese ornaments, a painting, oval in form, lay there—a sort of large medallion without a frame, and at first sight, by a singular attraction, it drew and held the attention of the police officer.

"Ah!" said Bernardet out loud, "but this is singular."

He leaned forward until his nose touched the cold glass, and peered fixedly at the picture. This painting, as large as one's hand, was the portrait of a man, and Bernardet fully believed at the first look he recognized the person whom the painter had reproduced.

As his shadow fell across the window Bernardet could not distinctly see the painting, for it was not directly in the front line of articles displayed, and he stepped to one side to see if he could get a better view. Assuredly, there could be no doubt, the oval painting was certainly the portrait of Jacques Dantin, now accused of a crime. There was the same high forehead, the pointed beard, of the same color; the black redingote, tightly buttoned up and edged at the neck with the narrow line of a white linen collar, giving, in resembling a doublet, to this painting, the air of a trooper, of a swordsman, of a Guisard (a partisan of the Duke of Guise), of the time of Clouet.

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Something of a connoisseur in painting, without doubt, in his quality of amateur photographer, much accustomed to criticise a portrait if it was not a perfect likeness, Bernardet found in this picture a startling resemblance to Jacques Dantin; it was the very man himself! He appeared there, his thin face standing out from its greenish-black sombre background; the poise of the head displayed the same vigor as in the original; the clear-cut features looked energetic, and the skin had the same pallor which was characteristic of Dantin's complexion. This head, admirably painted, displayed an astonishing lifelike intensity. It had been done by a master hand, no doubt of that. And although in this portrait Jacques Dantin looked somewhat younger—for instance, the hair and pointed beard showed no silvery streaks in them—the resemblance was so marvelous that Bernardet immediately exclaimed: "It is he!"

And most certainly it was Jacques Dantin himself. The more the officer examined it, the more convinced he became that this was a portrait of the man whom he had accompanied to the cemetery and to prison. But how could this picture have come into this bric-a-brac shop, and of whom could the dealer have obtained it? A reply to this would probably not be very difficult to obtain, and the police officer pushed back the door and found himself in the presence of a very large woman, with a pale, puffy face, which was surrounded by a lace cap. Her huge body was enveloped in a knitted woollen shawl. She wore spectacles.

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Bernardet, without stopping to salute her, pointed out the portrait and asked to see it. When he held it in his hands he found the resemblance still more startling. It was certainly Jacques Dantin! The painting was signed "P. B., Bordeaux, 1871." It was oval in shape; the frame was gone; the edge was marked, scratched, marred, as if the frame had been roughly torn from the picture.

"Have you had this portrait a long time?" he asked of the shop woman.

"I put it in the window to-day for the first time," the huge woman answered. "Oh, it is a choice bit. It was painted by a wicked one."

"Who brought it here?"

"Some one who wished to sell it. A passer-by. If it would interest you to know his name"—

— "Yes, certainly, it would interest me to know it," Bernardet replied.

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The shop woman looked at Bernardet defiantly and asked this question:

"Do you know the man whose portrait that is?"

"No. I do not know him. But this resembles one of my relatives. It pleases me. How much is it?"

"A hundred francs," said the big woman.

Bernardet suppressed at the same time a sudden start and a smile.

"A hundred francs! *Diable!* how fast you go. It is worth sous rather than francs."

"That!" cried the woman, very indignant. "That? But look at this material, this background. It is famous, I tell you—I took it to an expert. At the public sale it might, perhaps, bring a thousand francs. My idea is that it is the picture of some renowned person. An actor or a former Minister. In fact, some historic person."

"But one must take one's chance," Bernardet replied in a jeering tone. "But one hundred francs is one hundred francs. Too much for me. Who sold you the painting?"

The woman went around behind the counter and opened a drawer, from which she took a note book, in which she kept a daily record of her sales. She turned over the leaves.

"November 12, a small oval painting bought"—She readjusted her spectacles as if to better decipher the name. [Pg 149]

"I did not write the name myself; the man wrote it himself." She spelled out:

"Charles—Charles Breton—Rue de la Condamine, 16"—

"Charles Breton," Bernardet repeated; "who is this Charles Breton? I would like to know if he painted this portrait, which seems like a family portrait and has come to sell it"—

"You know," interrupted the woman, "that that often happens. It is business. One buys or one sells all in good time."

"And this Breton; how old was he?"

"Oh, young. About thirty years old. Very good looking. Dark, with a full beard."

"Did anything about him especially strike you?"

"Nothing!" The woman shortly replied; she had become tired of these questions and looked at the little man with a troubled glance.

Bernardet readily understood; and assuming a paternal, a beaming air, he said with his sweet smile:

"I will not *fence* any more; I will tell you the truth. I am a Police Inspector, and I find that this portrait strangely resembles a man whom we have under lock and key. You understand that it is very important I should know all that is to be ascertained about this picture."

"But I have told you all I know, Monsieur," said the shopkeeper. "Charles Breton, Rue de la Condamine, 16; that is the name and address. I paid 20 francs for it. There is the receipt—read it, I beg. It is all right. We keep a good shop. Never have we, my late husband and I, been mixed with anything unlawful. Sometimes the bric-a-brac is soiled, but our hands and consciences have always been clean. Ask any one along the street about the Widow Colard. I owe no one and every one esteems me"— [Pg 150]

The Widow Colard would have gone on indefinitely if Bernardet had not stopped her. She had, at first mention of the police, suddenly turned pale, but now she was very red, and her anger displayed itself in a torrent of words. He stemmed the flood of verbs.

"I do not accuse you, Mme. Colard, and I have said only what I wished to say. I passed by chance your shop; I saw in the window a portrait which resembled some one I knew. I ask you the price and I question you about its advent into your shop. There is nothing there which concerns you personally. I do not suspect you of receiving stolen goods; I do not doubt your good faith. I repeat my question. How much do you want for this picture?"

"Twenty francs, if you please. That is what it cost me. I do not wish to have it draw me into anything troublesome. Take it for nothing, if that pleases you." [Pg 151]

"Not at all! I intend to pay you. Of what are you thinking, Mme. Colard?"

The shopwoman had, like all people of a certain class, a horror of the police. The presence of a police inspector in her house seemed at once a dishonor and a menace. She felt herself vaguely under suspicion, and she felt an impulse to shout aloud her innocence.

Always smiling, the good man, with a gesture like that of a prelate blessing his people, endeavored to reassure her, to calm her. But he could do nothing with her. She would not be appeased. In the long run this was perhaps as well, for she unconsciously, without any intention of aiding justice, put some clues into Bernardet's hands which finally aided him in tracing the man.

Mme. Colard still rebelled. Did they think she was a spy, an informer? She had never—no, never—played such a part. She did not know the young man. She had bought the picture as she bought any number of things.

"And what if they should cut off his head because he had confidence in entering my shop—I should never forgive myself, never!"

"It is not going to bring Charles Breton to the scaffold. Not at all, not at all. It is only to find out

"Nothing!" Mme. Colard responded.

She reflected a moment.

"Ah! yes; perhaps. The shape of his hat. A felt hat with wide brim, something like those worn in South America or Kareros. You know, the kind they call sombrero. The only thing I said to myself was, 'This is probably some returned traveler,' and if I had not seen at the bottom of the picture, Bordeaux, I should have thought that this might be the portrait of some Spaniard, some Peruvian."

Bernardet looked straight into Mme. Colard's spectacles and listened intently, and he suddenly remembered what Moniche had said of the odd appearance of the man who had, like the woman in black, called on M. Rovère.

"Some accomplice!" thought Bernardet.

He again asked Mme. Colard the price of the picture.

"Anything you please," said the woman, still frightened. Bernardet smiled.

"Come! come! What do you want for it? Fifty francs, eh? Fifty?"

"Away with your fifty francs! I place it at your disposal for nothing, if you need it."

Bernardet paid the sum he had named. He had always exactly, as if by principle, a fifty-franc note in his pocketbook. Very little money; a few white pieces, but always this note in reserve. One could never tell what might hinder him in his researches. He paid, then, this note, adding that in all probability Mme. Colard would soon be cited before the Examining Magistrate to tell him about this Charles Breton.

"I cannot say anything else, for I do not know anything else," said the huge widow, whose breast heaved with emotion.

She wrapped up the picture in a piece of silk paper, then in a piece of newspaper, which chanced to be the very one in which Paul Rodier had published his famous article on "The Crime of the Boulevard de Clichy." Bernardet left enchanted with his "find," and repeated over and over to himself: "It is very precious! It is a tid-bit!"

Should he keep on toward the Préfecture to show this "find" to his Chief, or should he go at once to hunt up Charles Breton at the address he had given?

Bernardet hesitated a moment, then he said to himself that, in a case like this, moments were precious; an hour lost was time wasted, and that as the address which Breton had given was not far away, he would go there first. "Rue de la Condamine, 16," that was only a short walk to such a trumper as he was. He had good feet, a sharp eye and sturdy legs; he would soon be at the Batignolles. He had taken some famous tramps in his time, notably one night when he had scoured Paris in pursuit of a malefactor. This, he admitted, had wearied him a little; but this walk from the Avenue des Bons-Enfants to the Rue de la Condamine was but a spurt. Would he find that a false name and a false address had been given? This was but the infancy of art. If, however, he found that this Charles Breton really did live at that address and that he had given his true name, it would probably be a very simple matter to obtain all the information he desired of Jacques Dantin.

"What do I risk? A short walk," thought Bernardet, "a little fatigue—that can be charged up to Profit and Loss."

He hurried toward the street and number given. It was a large house, several stories high. The concierge was sweeping the stairs, having left a card bearing this inscription tacked on the front door. "The porter is on the staircase." Bernardet hastened up the stairs, found the man and questioned him. There was no Charles Breton in the house; there never had been. The man who sold the portrait had given a false name and address. Vainly did the police officer describe the individual who had visited Mme. Colard's shop. The man insisted that he had never seen any one who in the least resembled this toreador in the big felt hat. It was useless to insist! Mme. Colard had been deceived. And now, how to find, in this immense city of Paris, this bird of passage, who had chanced to enter the bric-a-brac shop. The old adage of "the needle in the haystack" came to Bernardet's mind and greatly irritated him. But, after all, there had been others whom he looked for; there had been others whom he had found, and probably he might still be able to find another trail. He had a collaborator who seldom failed him—Chance! It was destiny which often aided him.

Bernardet took an omnibus in his haste to return to his Chief. He was anxious to show his "find" to M. Leriche. When he reached the Préfecture he was immediately received. He unwrapped the portrait and showed it to M. Leriche.

"But that is Dantin!" cried the Chief.

"Is it not?"

"Without doubt! Dantin when younger, but assuredly Dantin! And where did you dig this up?"

Bernardet related his conversation with Mme. Colard and his fruitless visit to the Rue de la Condamine.

"Oh, never mind," said M. Leriche. "This discovery is something. The man who sold this picture and Dantin are accomplices. Bravo, Bernardet! We must let M. Ginory know."

The Examining Magistrate was, like the Chief and Bernardet, struck with the resemblance of the portrait to Dantin. His first move would be to question the prisoner about the picture. He would go at once to Mazas. M. Leriche and Bernardet should accompany him. The presence of the police spy might be useful, even necessary. [Pg 156]

The Magistrate and the Chief entered a fiacre, while Bernardet mounted beside the driver. Bernardet said nothing, although the man tried to obtain some information from him. After one or two monosyllabic answers, the driver mockingly asked:

"Are you going to the Souricière (trap) to tease some fat rat?"

M. Ginory and M. Leriche talked together of the *Walkyrie*, of Bayreuth; and the Chief asked, through politeness, for news about his candidature to the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences.

"Do not let us talk of the Institute," the Magistrate replied. "It is like the beginning of a hunt; to sigh for the prize that brings unhappiness."

The sombre pile, the Mazas, opened its doors to the three men. They traversed the long corridors, with the heavy air which pervaded them in spite of all efforts to the contrary, to a small room, sparsely furnished (a table, a few chairs, a glass bookcase), which served as an office for the Examining Magistrates when they had to hold any interviews with the prisoners.

The guardian-in-chief walked along with M. Ginory, M. Leriche followed them, and Bernardet respectfully brought up the rear.

"Bring in Jacques Dantin!" M. Ginory ordered. He seated himself at the table. M. Leriche took a chair at one side, and Bernardet stood near the little bookcase, next the only window in the room. [Pg 157]

Jacques Dantin soon appeared, led in by two guards in uniform. He was very pale, but still retained his haughty air and his defiant attitude. The Magistrate saluted him with a slight movement of the head, and Dantin bowed, recognizing in Bernardet the man with whom he had walked and conversed behind Rovère's funeral car.

"Be seated, Dantin," M. Ginory said, "and explain to me, I beg, all you know about this portrait. You ought to recognize it."

He quickly held the picture before Dantin's eyes, wishing to scrutinize his face to see what sudden emotion it would display. Seeing the portrait, Dantin shivered and said in a short tone: "It is a picture which I gave to Rovère."

"Ah!" said M. Ginory, "you recognize it then?"

"It is my portrait," Jacques Dantin declared. "It was made a long time ago. Rovère kept it in his salon. How did it come here?"

"Ah!" again said the Magistrate. "Explain that to me!"

M. Ginory seemed to wish to be a little ironical. But Dantin roughly said:

"M. le Juge, I have nothing to explain to you. I understand nothing, I know nothing. Or, rather, I know that in your error—an error which you will bitterly regret some day or other, I am sure—you have arrested me, shut me up in Mazas; but that which I can assure you of is, that I have had nothing, do you hear, nothing whatever to do with the murder of my friend, and I protest with all my powers against your processes." [Pg 158]

"I comprehend that!" M. Ginory coldly replied. "Oh! I understand all the disagreeableness of being shut up within four walls. But then, it is very simple! In order to go out, one has only to give to the one who has a right to know the explanations which are asked. Do you still persist in your system? Do you still insist on keeping, I know not what secret, which you will not reveal to us?"

"I shall keep it, Monsieur, I have reflected," said Dantin. "Yes, I have reflected, and in the solitude to which you have forced me I have examined my conscience." He spoke with firmness, less violently than at the Palais de Justice, and Bernardet's penetrating little eyes never left his face; neither did the Magistrate's, nor the Chief's.

"I am persuaded," Dantin continued, "that this miserable mistake cannot last long, and you will recognize the truth. I shall go out, at least from here, without having abused a confidence which one has placed in me and which I intend to preserve." [Pg 159]

"Yes," said M. Ginory, "perfectly, I know your system. You will hold to it. It is well. Now, whose portrait is that?"

"It is mine!"

"By whom do you think it was possible that it could have been sold in the bric-a-brac shop

where it was found."

"I know nothing about it. Probably by the one who found it or stole it from M. Rovère's apartment, and who is probably, without the least doubt, his assassin."

"That seems very simple to you?"

"It seems very logical."

"Suppose that this should be the exact truth, that does not detract from the presumption which implicates you, and from Mme. Moniche's deposition, which charges you"—

"Yes, yes, I know. The open safe, the papers spread out, the tête-à-tête with Rovère, when the concierge entered the room—that signifies nothing!"

"For you, perhaps! For Justice it has a tragic signification. But let us return to the portrait. It was you, I suppose, who gave it to Rovère?"

"Yes, it was I," Dantin responded. "Rovère was an amateur in art, moreover, my intimate friend. I had no family, I had an old friend, a companion of my youth, whom I thought would highly prize that painting. It is a fine one—it is by Paul Baudry."

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"Ah!" said M. Ginory. "P. B. Those are Baudry's initials?"

"Certainly. After the war—when I had done my duty like others, I say this without any intention of defending myself—Paul Baudry was at Bordeaux. He was painting some portraits on panels, after Holbein—Edmond About's among others. He made mine. It is this one which I gave Rovère—the one you hold in your hands."

The Magistrate looked at the small oval painting and M. Leriche put on his eyeglasses to examine the quality of the painting. A Baudry!

"What are these scratches around the edge as if nails had been drawn across the places?" M. Ginory asked. He held out the portrait to Dantin.

"I do not know. Probably where the frame was taken off."

"No, no! They are rough marks; I can see that. The picture has been literally torn from the frame. You ought to know how this panel was framed."

"Very simply when I gave it to Rovère. A narrow gilt frame, nothing more."

"Had Rovère changed the frame?"

"I do not know. I do not remember. When I was at his apartment the last few times I do not remember to have seen the Baudry. I have thought of it, but I have no recollection of it."

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"Then you cannot furnish any information about the man who sold this portrait?"

"None whatever!"

"We might bring you face to face with that woman."

"So be it! She certainly would not recognize me."

"In any case, she will tell us about the man who brought the portrait to her."

"She might describe him to me accurately, and even paint him for me," said Dantin quickly. "She can neither insinuate that I know him nor prove to you that I am his accomplice. I do not know who he is nor from where he comes. I was even ignorant of his existence myself a quarter of an hour ago."

"I have only to remand you to your cell," said the Magistrate. "We will hunt for the other man."

Dantin, in his turn, said in an ironical tone: "And you will do well!"

M. Ginory made a sign. The guards led out their prisoner. Then, looking at the Chief, while Bernardet still remained standing like a soldier near the window, the Magistrate said:

"Until there are new developments, Dantin will say nothing. We must look for the man in the sombrero."

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"Necessarily!" said M. Leriche.

"The needle! The needle! And the hay stack!" thought Bernardet.

The Chief, smiling, turned toward him. "That belongs to you, Bernardet."

"I know it well," said the little man, "but it is not easy. Oh! It is not easy at all."

"Bah! you have unearthed more difficult things than that. Do it up brown! There is only one clew—the hat"—

"They are not uncommon, those hats, Monsieur Leriche—they are not very bad hats. But yet it is a clew—if we live, we shall see."

He stood motionless between the bookcase and the window, like a soldier carrying arms, while

M. Ginory, shaking his head, said to the chief: "And this Dantin, what impression did he make on you?"

"He is a little crack-brained!" replied the Chief.

"Certainly! But guilty—you believe him guilty?"

"Without doubt!"

"Would you condemn him?" he quickly asked as he gazed searchingly at the Chief. M. Leriche hesitated.

"Would you condemn him?" M. Ginory repeated, insistently.

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The Chief still hesitated a moment, glanced toward the impassive Bernardet without being able to read his face, and he said:

"I do not know."

CHAPTER XIII.

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"I DO not know," thought Bernardet as he returned home. "What one knows very well indeed, what one cannot deny, oh, that would be impossible! is that on the retina of the dead man's eye, reflected there at the supreme moment of the agony, is found the image of this Dantin, his face, his features; this man, in a word, denounced by this witness which is worth all other witnesses in the world! This assassinated man cast a last look upon his murderer as he called for aid; a last cry for 'Help!' in the death rattle!—and this man says: 'I do not know!' But the dead man knew; and the kodak knows, also. It has no passion, no anger, no hate, because it registers what passes; fixes that which is fleeting!"

Bernardet was obstinate in his conviction. He was perfectly rooted in it. What if he had not persisted in believing that photography would reveal the truth? What weighty reason, what even acceptable one was there which obliged Dantin to remain silent in the presence of the Examining Magistrate and his registrar—in the secret interview of an examination—when in order to escape a prison, an accusation, he had only to speak two words? But if Dantin said nothing, was it because he had nothing to say? If he had given no explanation, was it because he had none to give? An innocent man does not remain silent. If at the instant when M. Ginory pressed the ivory button the other day, if the man had been able to defend himself, would he not have done it? One knew the secret reason of criminals for keeping silent. Their best reason is their guilt.

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Only, it seemed now certain that Dantin, although guilty, had an accomplice. Yes, without doubt, the man with the sombrero, the seller of the portrait. Where could he now be in hiding?

"Not easy," Bernardet repeated the words: "Not easy; no, not easy at all to run him out of his rabbit hutch."

The Woman in Black, the visitor, would be another important clue. On this side the situation seemed a simple one. Or was this woman also an accomplice, and would she remain silent, hidden in the Province? Or would the death of Rovère draw her to Paris, where she might be recognized and become a witness for Justice?

But the days passed. What was called the mystery of the Boulevard de Clichy continued to interest and excite the public. Violent and perplexing Parliamentary discussions could not distract attention from a crime committed in broad daylight, almost as one might say, in the street, and which made one doubt the security of the city, the efficiency of the police. The fall of a Ministry, predicted each morning and anticipated in advance, could not thrust aside morbid interest in this murder. The death of the ex-Consul was a grand actuality!

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Jacques Dantin thus became a dramatic personage; the reporters created legends about him; some declared him guilty and brought up in support of their conviction some anecdotes, some tales from the clubs, given as proofs; others asked if the suppositions were sufficiently well based to accuse a man in advance of trial, and these latter ardently took up his defense. Paul Rodier had even, with much dexterity and eloquence, diplomatically written two articles, one on either side of the question.

"It is," he said to himself, "the sure way of having told the truth on one side or the other."

Bernardet did not renounce for an instant the hope of finding the man who had sold the picture. It was not the first time that he had picked the needle from a cartful of hay. Paris is large, but this human sea has its particular currents, as the ocean has special tides, and the police officer knew it well. Here or there, some day he would meet the man, cast up by the torrent like a waif.

First of all, the man was probably a stranger from some foreign land. Wearing a hat like a Spaniard, he had not had time to change the style of dress of the country from which he had come in search of adventures. Bernardet haunted the hotels, searched the registers, made conversation with the lodgers. He found poor persons who had come from foreign countries, but whose motives for coming to Paris were all right. Bernardet never stopped searching a moment;

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he went everywhere, curious and prying—and it pleased him, when he found a leisure evening, to go to some of the strange wine shops or ale houses (called cabarets) to find subjects for observation. These cabarets are very numerous on the outskirts of Montmartre, in the streets and boulevards at the foot of the Butte. Bizarre inventions, original and disagreeable creations, where the ingenuity of the enterprisers sometimes made them hideous in order to attract; to cater to the idle, and to hold the loungers from among the higher classes. Cabarets born of the need for novelty, which might stimulate the blasé; the demand for something eccentric almost to morbid irony. A *Danse Macabre* trod to the measures of an operetta; pleasantries of the bunglers adopting the cure-alls of the saw-bones, and juggling with their empty heads while dreaming the dreams of a Hamlet.

Cabaret du Squelette!

The announcement of the droll promises—apparitions, visions, phantoms—had often made him smile when he passed near there to go to the Préfecture; this wineshop, the front of which was bordered with black, like a letter announcing a death, and which bore, grating as it swung at the end of an iron rod, a red lantern for a sign.

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His little girls, when he laughingly spoke of the cabaret where the waiters were dressed like undertakers' assistants, turned pale, and plump little Mme. Bernardet, ordinarily smiling, would say with a sigh: "Is it possible that such sacrilegious things are permitted in the quarter?"

Bernardet good-naturedly replied: "Ah, my dear, where is the harm?"

"I know what I am talking about," his good wife said; "they are the pleasure of the unhealthy minded. They mock at death as they mock at everything else. Where will it all end? We shall see it"—

"Or we shall not see it," interrupted her husband, laughingly.

He went in there one evening, having a little time to himself, as he would have gone into a theatre. He knew something about this Cabaret du Squelette (meaning the wine shop of the skeleton). He found the place very droll.

A small hall which had a few months before been a common wine shop had been transformed into a lugubrious place. The walls were painted a dead black, and were hung with a large number of paintings—scenes from masked balls, gondola parades, serenades with a balcony scene, some of the lovers' rendezvous of Venice and an ideal view of Granada, with couples gazing at each other and sighing in the gondolas on the lagoons, or in the Andalusian courts—and in this strange place with its romantic pictures, souvenirs of Musset or of Carlo Gozzi, the tables were made in the form of coffins with lighted candles standing upon them, and the waiters were dressed as undertakers' assistants, with shiny black hats trimmed with crape, on their heads.

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"What poison will you drink before you die?" asked one of the creatures of Bernardet.

Bernardet sat and gazed about him. A few "high-flyers" from the other side of Paris were there. Here and there a thief from that quarter sat alone at a table. Some elegants in white cravats, who had come there in correct evening dress, were going later, after the opera, to sup with some première. The police officer understood very well why the blasé came there. They wished to jog their jaded appetites; they sought to find some *piment*, a curry, spice to season the tameness of their daily existence. The coffin-shaped tables upon which they leaned their elbows amused them. Several of them had asked for a *bavaroise*, as they were on milk diet.

They pointed out to each other the gas flaming from the jets fashioned in the form of a broken shin-bone.

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"A little patience, my friends," said a sort of manager, who was dressed in deep mourning. "Before long we will adjourn to the Cave of Death!"

The drinkers in white cravats shouted. Bernardet experienced, on the contrary, what Mme. Bernardet would have called a "creepy" sensation. Seasoned as he was to the bloody and villainous aspect of crime, he felt the instinctive shrinking of a healthy and level-headed bourgeois against these drolleries of the brain-diseased upper class and the pleasantries of the blasé decadents.

At a certain moment, and after an explanation given by the manager, the gas was turned off, and the lovers in the gondolas, the guitar players, the singers of Spanish songs, the dancers infatuated with the Moulin Rouge, changed suddenly in sinister fashion. In place of the blond heads and rosy cheeks, skulls appeared; the smiles became grins which showed the teeth in their fleshless gums. The bodies, clothed in doublets, in velvets and satins, a moment ago, were made by some interior illumination to change into hideous skeletons. In his mocking tones the manager explained and commented on the metamorphosis, adding to the funeral spectacle the pleasantry of a buffoon.

"See! diseased Parisians, what you will be on Sunday!"

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The light went out suddenly; the skeletons disappeared; the sighing lovers in the gondolas on the lagoons of Venice reappeared; the Andalusian sweethearts again gazed into each other's eyes and sang their love songs. Some of the women laughed, but the laughs sounded constrained.

"Droll! this city of Paris," Bernardet thought. He sat there, leaning back against the wall, where

verses about death were printed among the white tears—as in those lodges of Free Masons where an outsider is shut up in order to give him time to make his will—when the door opened and Bernardet saw a tall young man of stalwart and resolute mien enter. A black, curly beard surrounded his pale face. As he entered he cast a quick glance around the hall, the air of which was rather thick with cigar smoke. He seemed to be about thirty years of age, and had the air of an artist, a sculptor, or a painter, together with something military in his carriage. But what suddenly struck Bernardet was his hat, a large gray, felt hat, with a very wide brim, like the sombreros which the bull fighters wear.

Possibly, a few people passing through Paris might be found wearing such hats. But they would probably be rare, and in order to find the seller of Jacques Dantin's portrait, Bernardet had only this one clew.

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"Oh! such a mean, little, weak, clew! But one must use it, just the same!" Bernardet had said.

What if this young man with the strange hat was, by chance, the unknown for whom he was seeking? It was not at all probable. No, when one thought of it—not at all probable. But truth is sometimes made up of improbabilities, and Bernardet again experienced the same shock, the instinctive feeling that he had struck the trail, which he felt when the young man entered the wine shop.

"That hat!" murmured Bernardet, sipping his wine and stealing glances over the rim of his glass at the young man. The unknown seemed to play directly into the police officer's hand. After standing by the door a few moments, and looking about the place, he walked over to the coffin-shaped table at which Bernardet was seated, bringing himself face to face with the officer. One of the waiters in his mourning dress came to take his order, and lighted another candle, which he placed where its rays fell directly on the young man's face. Thus Bernardet was able to study him at his ease. The pale face, with its expression, uneasy and slightly intense, struck Bernardet at once. That white face, with its black beard, with its gleaming eyes, was not to be passed by with a casual glance. The waiter placed a glass of brandy before him; he placed his elbows on the table and leaned his chin upon his hands. He was evidently not a habitué of the place nor a resident of the quarter. There was something foreign about his appearance. His glance was steady, as that of one who searches the horizon, looks at running water, contemplates the sea, asking for some "good luck" of the unknown.

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"It would be strange," thought Bernardet, "if a simple hat and no other clew should put us upon the track of the man for whom we are searching."

At once, with the ingenuity of a master of dramatic art, the agent began to plot, and to put into action what lawyers, pleading and turning and twisting a cause this way and that, call *an effect*. He waited until the manager informed them that they were about to pass into the Cave of Death, and gave them all an invitation into the adjoining hall; then, profiting by the general movement, he approached the unknown, and, almost shoulder to shoulder, he walked along beside him, through a narrow, dark passage to a little room, where, on a small stage stood, upright, an empty coffin.

It was a doleful spectacle, which the Cabaret du Squelette (the wine shop of the skeleton) offered to its clientèle of idle loungers and morbid curiosity seekers attracted to its halls by these exhibitions. Bernardet knew it all very well, and he knew by just what play of lights, what common chemical illuminations, they gave to the lookers on the sinister illusion of the decomposition of a corpse in its narrow home. This phantasmagoria, to which the people from the Boulevard came, in order to be amused, he had seen many times in the little theatres in the fairs at Neuilly. The proprietor of the cabaret had explained it to him; he had been curious and very keen about it, and so he followed the crowd into this little hall, to look once more at the image of a man in the coffin. He knew well to what purpose he could put it. The place was full. Men and women were standing about; the black walls made the narrow place look still smaller. Occasional bizarre pleasantries were heard and nervous laughs rang out. Why is it, that no matter how sceptical people may be, the idea, the proximity, the appearance of death gives them an impression of uneasiness, a singular sensation which is often displayed in nervous laughs or sepulchral drolleries?

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Bernardet had not left the side of the young man with the gray felt hat. He could see his face distinctly in the light of the little hall, and could study it at his ease. In the shadows which lurked about them the young man's face seemed like a white spot. The officer's sharp eyes never left it for a moment.

The manager now asked if some one would try the experiment. This was to step into the open coffin—that box, as he said—"from which your friends, your neighbors, can see you dematerialize and return to nothingness."

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"Come, my friends," he continued, in his ironical tones, "this is a fine thing; it will permit your best friends to see you deliquesce! Are there any married people here? It is only a question of tasting, in advance, the pleasures of a widowhood. Would you like to see your husband disappear, my sister? My brother, do you wish to see your wife decompose? Sacrifice yourselves, I beg of you! Come! Come up here! Death awaits you!"

They laughed, but here and there a laugh sounded strident or hysterical; the laugh did not ring true, but had the sound of cracked crystal. No one stirred. This parody of death affected even these hardened spectators.

"Oh, well, my friends, there is a cadaver belonging to the establishment which we can use. It is a pity! You may readily understand that we do not take the dead for companions."

As no one among the spectators would enter the coffin, the manager, with a gesture, ordered one of the supernumeraries of the cabaret to enter; from an open door the figurant glided across the stage and entered the coffin, standing upright. The manager wrapped him about with a shroud, leaving only the pale face of the pretended dead man exposed above this whiteness. The man smiled.

"He laughs, Messieurs, he laughs still!" said the manager. "You will soon see him pay for that laugh. '*Rome rit et mourut!*' as Bossuet said." [Pg 176]

Some of the audience shouted applause to this quotation from a famous author. Bernardet did not listen; he was studying from a corner of his eye his neighbor's face. The man gazed with a sort of fascination at this fantastic performance which was taking place before him. He frowned, he bit his lips; his eyes were almost ferocious in expression. The figurant in the coffin continued to laugh.

"Look! look keenly!" went on the manager, "you will see your brother dematerialize after becoming changed in color. The flesh will disappear and you will see his skeleton. Think, think, my brothers, this is the fate which awaits you, perhaps, soon, on going away from here; think of the various illnesses and deaths by accidents which await you! Contemplate the magic spectacle offered by the Cabaret du Squelette and remember that you are dust and that to dust you must return! Make, wisely, this reflection, which the intoxicated man made to another man in like condition, but asleep. 'And that is how I shall be on Sunday!' While waiting, my brothers and sisters, for nothingness, look at the dematerialization of your contemporary if you please!"

The play of lights, while the man was talking, began to throw a greenish pallor and to make spots at first transparent upon the orbits of the eyes, then, little by little, the spots seemed to grow stronger, to blacken, to enlarge. The features, lightly picked out, appeared to change gradually, to take on gray and confused tints, to slowly disappear as under a veil, a damp vapor which covered, devoured that face, now unrecognizable! It has been said that the manner in which this phenomenon was managed was a remarkable thing; it is true, for this human body seemed literally to dissolve before this curious crowd, now become silent and frightened. The work of death was accomplished there publicly, thanks to the illusion of lighting. The livid man who smiled a few moments before was motionless, fixed, then passing through some singular changes, the flesh seemed to fall from him in— [Pg 177]

Suddenly the play of lights made him disappear from the eyes of the spectators and they saw, thanks to reflections made by mirrors, only a skeleton. It was the world of spectres and the secret of the tombs revealed to the crowd by a kind of scientific magic lantern.

Bernardet did not desire to wait longer to strike his blow—this was the exact moment to do it—the psychological moment!

The eager look of the man in the sombrero revealed a deep trouble. There was in this look something more than the curiosity excited by a novel spectacle. The muscles of his pale face twitched as with physical suffering; in his eyes Bernardet read an internal agony. [Pg 178]

"Ah!" thought the police officer, "the living eye is a book which one can read, as well as a dead man's eye."

Upon the stage the lights were rendering even more sinister the figurant who was giving to this morbidly curious crowd the comedy of death. One would have now thought it was one of those atrocious paintings made in the studios of certain Spanish painters in the *putridero* of a Valles Leal. The flesh, by a remarkable scientific combination of lights, was made to seem as if falling off, and presented the horrible appearance of a corpse in a state of decomposition. The lugubrious vision made a very visible shudder pass over the audience. Then Bernardet, drawing himself up to his full height so as to get a good view of the face of this man so much taller, and approaching as near to him as possible, in fact, so that his elbow and upper arm touched the young man's, he slowly, deliberately dropped, one by one, these words:

"That is about how M. Rovère ought to be now"—

And suddenly the young man's face expressed a sensation of fright, as one sees in the face of a pedestrian who suddenly finds that he is about to step upon a viper. [Pg 179]

"Or how he will be soon!" added the little man, with an amiable smile. Bernardet dissimulated under this amiability an intense joy. Holding his arm and elbow in an apparently careless manner close to his neighbor as he pronounced Rovère's name, Bernardet felt his neighbor's whole body tremble, and that he gave a very perceptible start. Why had he been so quickly moved by an unknown name if it had not recalled to his mind some frightful thought? The man might, of course, know, as the public did, all the details of the crime, but, with his strong, energetic face, his resolute look, he did not appear like a person who would be troubled by the recital of a murder, the description of a bloody affray, or even by the frightful scene which had just passed before his eyes in the hall.

"A man of that stamp is not chicken-hearted," thought Bernardet. "No! no!" Hearing those words evoked the image of the dead man, Rovère; the man was not able to master his violent emotion, and he trembled, as if under an electrical discharge. The shudder had been violent, of

short duration, however, as if he had mastered his emotion by his strong will. In his involuntary movement he had displayed a tragic eloquence. Bernardet had seen in the look, in the gesture, in the movement of the man's head, something of trouble, of doubt, of terror, as in a flash of lightning in the darkness of night one sees the bottom of a pool.

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Bernardet smilingly said to him:

"This sight is not a gay one!"

"No," the man answered, and he also attempted to smile.

He looked back to the stage, where the sombre play went on.

"That poor Rovère!" Bernardet said.

The other man now looked at Bernardet as if to read his thoughts and to learn what signification the repetition of the same name had. Bernardet sustained, with a naïve look, this mute interrogation. He allowed nothing of his thoughts to be seen in the clear, childlike depths of his eyes. He had the air of a good man, frightened by a terrible murder, and who spoke of the late victim as if he feared for himself. He waited, hoping that the man would speak.

In some of Bernardet's readings he had come across the magic rule applicable to love: "Never go! Wait for the other to come!"—"Nec ire, fac venire"—applicable also to hate, to that duel of magnetism between the hunted man and the police spy, and Bernardet waited for the other to "come!"

Brusquely, after a silence, while on the little stage the transformation was still going on, the man asked in a dry tone:

"Why do you speak to me of M. Rovère?"

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Bernardet affably replied: "I? Because every one talks of it. It is the actuality of the moment. I live in that quarter. It was quite near there that it happened, the affair"——

"I know!" interrupted the other.

The unknown had not pronounced ten words in questioning and replying, and yet Bernardet found two clues simply insignificant—terrible in reality. "I know!" was the man's reply, in a short tone, as if he wished to push aside, to thrust away, a troublesome thought. The tone, the sound of the words, had struck Bernardet. But one word especially—the word Monsieur before Rovère's name. "Monsieur Rovère? Why did he speak to me of Monsieur Rovère?" Bernardet thought.

It seemed, then, that he knew the dead man.

All the people gathered in this little hall, if asked in regard to this murder would have said: "Rovère!" "The Rovère affair!" "The Rovère murder!" Not one who had not known the victim would have said:

"Monsieur Rovère!"

The man knew him then. This simple word, in the officer's opinion, meant much.

The manager now announced that, having become a skeleton, the dear brother who had lent himself to this experiment would return to his natural state, "fresher and rosier than before." He added, pleasantly, "A thing which does not generally happen to ordinary skeletons!"

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This vulgar drollery caused a great laugh, which the audience heartily indulged in. It made an outlet for their pent-up feelings, and they all felt as if they had awakened from a nightmare. The man in the sombrero, whose pale face was paler than before, was the only one who did not smile. He even frowned fiercely (noted by Bernardet) when the manager added:

"You are not in the habit of seeing a dead man resuscitated the next day. Between us, it would keep the world pretty full."

"Evidently," thought Bernardet, "my young gentleman is ill at ease."

His only thought was to find out his name, his personality, to establish his identity and to learn where he had spent his life, and especially his last days. But how?

He did not hesitate long. He left the place, even before the man in the coffin had reappeared, smiling at the audience. He glided through the crowd, repeating, "Pardon!" "I beg pardon!" traversed rapidly the hall where newcomers were conversing over their beverages, and stepped out into the street, looked up and down. A light fog enveloped everything, and the gaslights and lights in the shop windows showed ghostly through it. The passers-by, the cabs, the tramways, bore a spectral look.

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What Bernardet was searching for was a policeman. He saw two chatting together and walking slowly along under the leafless trees. In three steps, at each step turning his head to watch the people coming out of the cabaret, he reached the men. While speaking to them he did not take his eyes from the door of that place where he had left the young man in the gray felt hat.

"Dagonin," he said, "you must follow me, if you please, and 'pull me in!' I am going to pick a drunken quarrel with a particular person. Interfere and arrest us both. Understand?"

"Perfectly," Dagonin replied.

He looked at his comrade, who carried his hand to his shako and saluted Bernardet.

The little man who had given his directions in a quick tone, was already far away. He stood near the door of the cabaret gazing searchingly at each person who came out. The looks he cast were neither direct, menacing nor even familiar. He had pulled his hat down to his eyebrows, and he cast side glances at the crowd pouring from the door of the wine shop.

He was astonished that the man in the sombrero had not yet appeared. Possibly he had stopped, on his way out, in the front hall. Glancing through the open door, Bernardet saw that he was right. The young man was seated at one of those coffin-shaped oaken tables, with a glass of greenish liquor before him. "He needs alcohol to brace him up," growled the officer. [Pg 184]

The door was shut again.

"I can wait till he has finished his absinthe," said Bernardet to himself.

He had not long to wait. After a small number of persons had left the place, the door opened and the man in the gray felt hat appeared, stopped on the threshold, and, as Bernardet had done, scanned the horizon and the street. Bernardet turned his back and seemed to be walking away from the wine shop, leaving the man free. With a keen glance or two over his shoulder toward him, Bernardet crossed the street and hurried along at a rapid pace, in order to gain on the young man, and by this manœuvre to find himself directly in front of the unknown. The man seemed to hesitate, walked quickly down the Boulevard a few steps toward the Place Pigalle, in the direction where Rovère's apartments were, but suddenly stopped, turned on his heel, repassed the Cabaret du Squelette, and went toward the Moulin Rouge, which at first, Bernardet thought, he was about to enter. As he stood there the vanes of the Moulin Rouge, turning about, lighted up the windows of the opposite buildings and made them look as if they were on fire. At last, obeying another impulse, he suddenly crossed the Boulevard, as if to return into Paris, leaving Montmartre, the cabarets, and Rovère's house behind him. He walked briskly along, and ran against a man—a little man—whom he had not noticed, who seemed to suddenly detach himself from the wall, and who fell against his breast, hiccoughing and cursing in vicious tones. [Pg 185]

"Imbecile!"

The young man wished to push away the intoxicated man who, with hat over his eyes, clung to him and kept repeating:

"The street—the street—is it not free—the street?"

Yes, it was certainly a drunken man. Not a man in a smock, but a little fellow, a bourgeois, with hat askew and thick voice.

"I—I am not stopping you. The street is free—I tell you!"

"Well, if it is free, I want it!"

The voice was vigorous, but showed sudden anger, a strident tone, a slight foreign accent, Spanish, perhaps.

The drunken man probably thought him insolent for, still hiccoughing, he answered:

"Oh, you want it, do you? You want it? I want it! The king says 'we wish!' don't you know?"

With another movement, he lost his equilibrium and half fell, his head hanging over, and he clutched the man he held in a sudden embrace. [Pg 186]

"It is mine also—the street—you know!"

With sudden violence, the man disembarassed himself of this caressing creature; he thrust aside his clinging arms with a movement so quick and strong that the intoxicated man, this time, fell, his hat rolled into the gutter, and he lay on the sidewalk.

But immediately, with a bound, he was on his feet, and as the man went calmly on his way, he followed him, seized his coat and clutched him so tightly that he could not proceed.

"Pardon;" he said, "you cannot go away like that!"

Then, as the light from a gas lamp fell on the little man's face, the young man recognized his neighbor of the cabaret, who had said to him:

"See, that is how Rovère must look!"

At this moment, Dagonin and his comrade appeared on the scene and laid vigorous hands on them both; the young man made a quick, instinctive movement toward his right pocket, where, no doubt, he kept a revolver or knife. Bernardet seized his wrist, he twisted it and said:

"Do nothing rash!"

The young man was very strong, but the huge Dagonin had Herculean biceps and the other man did not lack muscles. Fright, moreover, seemed to paralyze this tall, young gallant, who, as he saw that he was being hustled toward a police station, demanded: [Pg 187]

"Have you arrested me, and why?"

"First for having struck me," Bernardet replied, still bareheaded, and to whom a gamin now handed his soiled hat, saying to him:

"Is this yours, Monsieur Bernardet?"

Bernardet recognized in his own quarter! That was glory!

The man seemed to wish to defend himself and still struggled, but one remark of Dagonin's seemed to pacify him:

"No rebellion! There is nothing serious about your arrest. Do not make it worse."

The young man really believed that it was only a slight matter and he would be liberated at once. The only thing that disquieted him was that this intoxicated man, suddenly become sober, had spoken to him as he did a few moments before in the cabaret.

The four men walked quickly along in the shadow of the buildings, through the almost deserted streets, where the shopkeepers were putting out their lights and closing up their shops. Scarcely any one who met them would have realized that three of these men were taking the fourth to a police station.

A tri-color flag floated over a door lighted by a red lantern; the four men entered the place and found themselves in a narrow, warm hall, where the agents of the police were either sleeping on benches or reading around the stove by the light of the gas jets above their heads.

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Bernardet, looking dolefully at his broken and soiled hat, begged the young man to give his name and address to the Chief of the Post. The young man then quickly understood that his questioner of the Cabaret du Squelette had caught him in a trap. He looked at him with an expression of violent anger—of concentrated rage.

Then he said:

"My name? What do you want of that? I am an honest man. Why did you arrest me? What does it mean?"

"Your name?" repeated Bernardet.

The man hesitated.

"Oh, well! I am called Pradès. Does that help you any?"

The man wrote: "Pradès. P-r-a-d-è-s with an accent. Pradès. First name?"

"Charles, if you wish!"

"Oh!" said Bernardet, noticing the slight difference in the tone of his answer. "We wish nothing. We wish only the truth."

"I have told it."

Charles Pradès furnished some further information in regard to himself. He was staying at a hotel in the Rue de Paradis-Poissonnière, a small hotel used by commercial travelers and merchants of the second class. He had been in Paris only a month.

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Where was he from? He said that he came from Sydney, where he was connected with a commercial house. Or rather he had given up the situation to come to Paris to seek his fortune. But while speaking of Sydney he had in his rather rambling answers let fall the name of Buenos Ayres, and Bernardet remembered that Buenos Ayres was the place where M. Rovère had been French Consul. The officer paid no attention to this at the time. For what good? Pradès's real examination would be conducted by M. Ginory. He, Bernardet, was not an examining magistrate. He was the ferret who hunted out criminals.

This Pradès was stupefied, then furious, when, the examination over, he learned that he was not to be immediately set at liberty.

What! An absurd quarrel, a collision without a wound, in a street in Paris, was sufficient to hold a man and make him pass the night in the station house, with all the vagabonds of both sexes collected there!

"You may bemoan your fate to yourself to-morrow morning!" said Bernardet.

In the meantime they searched this man, who, very pale, making visibly powerful efforts to control himself, biting his lips and his black beard, while they examined his pocketbook, while they looked at a Spanish knife with a short blade, which he had (Bernardet had divined it at the time of his arrest) in his right pocket.

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The pocketbook revealed nothing. It contained some receipted weekly bills of the hotel in the Rue de Paradis, some envelopes without letters, without stamps and bearing the name, "Charles Pradès, Merchant," two bank bills of 100 francs—nothing more.

Bernardet very simply asked Pradès how it was that he had upon his person addressed letters which he evidently had not received, as they were not stamped. He replied:

"They are not letters. They are addresses which I gave instead of visiting cards, as I had not had time to procure cards."

"Then the addresses are in your writing?"

"Yes," Pradès answered.

The police officer looked at them again; then, saluting the brigadier and his men, wished them good-night, and even added a little gesture, rather mocking, in the direction of the arrested man. Pradès made an angry, almost menacing, movement toward Bernardet. The guards standing about pulled him back, while the plump, smiling little man, caressing his sandy mustache and humming a tune, went out into the street.

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As he reached the passage which led to his house this couplet came merrily from his lips as he walked quickly along:

"Prends ton fusil, Gregoire,
Prends ta gourde pourboire,
Nos Messieurs sont partis
A la chasse aux perdrix."

One would have taken M. Bernardet for a happy little bourgeois, going home from some theatre through the deserted streets and repeating a verse from some vaudeville, rather than a police spy who had just secured a prize. He walked quickly, he walked gaily. He reached his home, where Mme. Bernardet, always rosy and pleasant, awaited him, and where his three little girls were sleeping. He felt that, like the Roman emperor, he had not lost his day.

He again hummed the quatrain, and, although not in a loud tone, still it sounded like a far off fanfare of victory in the gray fog of this Paris night.

CHAPTER XIV.

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M. GINORY was not without uneasiness when he thought of the detention of Jacques Dantin. Without doubt, all prisoners, all accused persons are reticent; they try to hide their guilt under voluntary silence. They do not speak, because they have sworn not to. They are bound, one knows not by whom, by an oath which they cannot break. It is the ordinary system of the guilty who cannot defend themselves. Mystery seems to them safety.

But Dantin, intimately acquainted with Rovère's life, might be acquainted with some secret which he could not disclose and which did not pertain to him at all. What secret? Had not an examining magistrate a right to know everything? Had not an accused man a right to speak? Either Dantin had nothing to reveal and he was playing a comedy and was guilty, or, if by a few words, by a confidence made to the magistrate he could escape an accusation, recover his liberty, without doubt he would speak after having kept an inexplicable silence. How could one suppose that an innocent man would hold, for a long time, to this mute system?

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The discovery of the portrait in Mme. Colard's shop ought, naturally, to give to the affair a new turn. The arrest of Charles Pradès brought an important element to these researches. He would be examined by M. Ginory the next morning, after having been questioned by the Commissary of Police.

Bernardet, spruce, freshly shaven, was there, and seemed in his well-brushed redingote, like a little abbé come to assist at some curious ceremony.

On the contrary, Pradès, after a sleepless night, a night of agony, paler than the evening before, his face fierce and its muscles contracted, had a haggard expression, and he blinked his eyes like a night bird suddenly brought into glaring sunlight. He repeated before the Examining Magistrate what he had said to the brigadier. But his voice, vibrant a few hours before, had become heavy, almost raucous, as the haughty expression of his face had become sullen and tragic.

The Examining Magistrate had cited Mme. Colard, the shopkeeper, to appear before him. She instantly recognized in this Pradès the man who had sold her the little panel by Paul Baudry.

He denied it. He did not know of what they were talking. He had never seen this woman. He knew nothing about any portrait.

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"It belonged to M. Rovère," the magistrate replied, "M. Rovère, the murdered man; M. Rovère, who was consul at Buenos Ayres, and you spoke, yesterday, of Buenos Ayres, in the examination at the station house in the Rue de la Rochefoucauld."

"M. Rovère? Buenos Ayres?" repeated the young man, rolling his sombrero around his fingers.

He repeated that he did not know the ex-Consul, that he had never been in South America, that he had come from Sydney.

Bernardet, at this moment, interrupted him by taking his hat from him without saying a word, and Pradès cast a very angry look at the little man.

M. Ginory understood Bernardet's move and approved with a smile. He looked in the inside of the sombrero which Bernardet handed to him.

The hat bore the address of Gordon, Smithson & Co., Berner Street, London.

"But, after all," thought the Magistrate, "Buenos Ayres is one of the markets for English goods."

"That is a hat bought at Sydney," Pradès (who had understood) explained.

Before the bold, decided, almost violent affirmations which Mme. Colard made that this was certainly the seller of the portrait, the young man lost countenance a little. He kept saying over and over: "You deceive yourself. Madame, I have never spoken to you, I have never seen you."

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When M. Ginory asked her if she still persisted in saying that this was the man who had sold her the picture, she said:

"Do I still persist? With my neck under the guillotine I would persist," and she kept repeating: "I am sure of it! I am sure of it!"

This preliminary examination brought about no decisive result. It was certain that, if this portrait had been in the possession of this young man and been sold by him, that he, Charles Pradès, was an accomplice of Dantin's, if not the author of the crime. They ought, then, to be brought face to face, and, possibly, this might bring about an immediate result. And why not have this meeting take place at once, before Pradès was sent where Dantin was, at Mazas?

M. Ginory, who had uttered this word "Mazas," noticed the expression of terror which flashed across and suddenly transfigured the young man's face.

Pradès stammered:

"Then—you will hold me? Then—I am not free?"

M. Ginory did not reply. He gave an order that this Pradès should be guarded until the arrival of Dantin from Mazas.

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In Mazas, in that walled prison, in the cell which had already made him ill, Jacques Dantin sat. This man, with the trooper's air, seemed almost to be in a state of collapse. When the guard came to his cell he drew himself up and endeavored to collect all his energy; and when the door was opened and he was called he appeared quite like himself. When he saw the prison wagon which had brought him to Mazas and now awaited to take him to the Palais de Justice he instinctively recoiled; then, recovering himself, he entered the narrow vehicle.

The idea, the sensation that he was so near all this life—yet so far—that he was going through these streets, filled with carriages, with men and women who were free, gave him a desperate, a nervous sense of irritation.

The air which they breathed, he breathed and felt fan his brow—but through a grating. They arrived at the Palais and Jacques Dantin recognized the staircases which he had previously mounted, that led to the Examining Magistrate's room. He entered the narrow room where M. Ginory awaited him. Dantin saluted the Magistrate with a gesture which, though courteous, seemed to have a little bravado in it; as a salutation with a sword before a duel. Then he glanced around, astonished to see, between two guards, a man whom he did not recognize.

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M. Ginory studied them. If he knew this Pradès, who also curiously returned his look, Jacques Dantin was a great comedian, because no indication, not the slightest involuntary shudder, not the faintest trace of an expression of having seen him before, crossed his face. Even M. Ginory's keen eyes could detect nothing. He had asked that Bernardet be present at the meeting, and the little man's face, become serious, almost severe, was turned, with eager interrogation in its expression, toward Dantin. Bernardet also was unable to detect the faintest emotion which could be construed into an acknowledgment of ever having seen this young man before. Generally prisoners would, unconsciously, permit a gesture, a glance, a something, to escape them when they were brusquely confronted, unexpectedly, with some accomplice. This time not a muscle of Dantin's face moved, not an eyelash quivered.

M. Ginory motioned Jacques Dantin to a seat directly in front of him, where the light would fall full upon his face. Pointing out Pradès, he asked:

"Do you recognize this man?"

Dantin, after a second or two, replied:

"No; I have never seen him."

"Never?"

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"I believe not; he is unknown to me!"

"And you, Pradès, have you ever seen Jacques Dantin?"

"Never," said Pradès, in his turn. His voice seemed hoarse, compared with the brief, clear response made by Dantin.

"He is, however, the original of the portrait which you sold to Mme. Colard."

"The portrait?"

"Look sharply at Dantin. Look at him well," repeated M. Ginory. "You must recognize that he is the original of the portrait in question."

"Yes;" Pradès replied. His eyes were fixed upon the prisoner.

"Ah!" the Magistrate joyously exclaimed, asking: "And how, tell me, did you so quickly recognize the original of the portrait which you saw only an instant in my room?"

"I do not know," stammered Pradès, not comprehending the gravity of a question put in an insinuating, almost amiable tone.

"Oh, well!" continued M. Ginory, still in a conciliating tone, "I am going to explain to you. It is certain that you recognize these features, because you had a long time in which to contemplate them; because you had it a long time in your hands when you were trying to pull off the frame."

"The frame? What frame?" asked the young man stupefied, not taking his eyes from the Magistrate's face, which seemed to him endowed with some occult power. M. Ginory went on:

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"The frame which you had trouble in removing, since the scratches show in the wood. And what if, after taking the portrait to Mme. Colard's shop, we should find the frame in question at another place, at some other shop—that would not be very difficult," and M. Ginory smiled at Bernardet. "What if we could add another new deposition to that of Mme. Colard's? Yes; what if to that clear, decisive deposition we could add another—what would you have to say?"

Silence! Pradès turned his head around, his eyes wandered about, as if searching to find an outlet or a support; gasping like a man who has been injured.

Jacques Dantin looked at him at the same moment when the Magistrate, with a glance keener, more piercing than ever, seemed to search his very soul. The young man was now pallid and unmanned.

At length Pradès pronounced some words. What did he want of him? What frame was he talking of? And who was this other dealer of whom the Magistrate spoke and whom he had called a second time? Where was this witness with "the new deposition?"

"One is enough!" he said, casting a ferocious look at Mme. Colard, who, on a sign from M. Ginory, had entered, pale and full of fear.

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He added in a menacing tone:

"One is even too much!"

The fingers of his right hand contracted, as if around a knife handle. At this moment Bernardet, who was studying each gesture which the man made, was convinced that the murderer of Rovère was there. He saw that hand armed with the knife, the one which had been found in his pocket, striking his victim, gashing the ex-Consul's throat.

But then, "Dantin?" An accomplice, without doubt. The head, of which the adventurer was the arm. Because, in the dead man's eye, Dantin's image appeared, reflected as clear proof, like an accusation, showing the person who was last seen in Rovère's supreme agony. Jacques Dantin was there—the eye spoke.

Mme. Colard's testimony no longer permitted M. Ginory to doubt. This Charles Pradès was certainly the man who sold the portrait.

Nothing could be proved except that the two men had never met. No sign of emotion showed that Dantin had ever seen the young man before. The latter alone betrayed himself when he was going to Mazas with the original of the portrait painted by Baudry.

But, however, as the Magistrate underlined it with precision, the fact alone of recognizing Dantin constituted against Pradès a new charge. Added to the testimony, to the formal affirmation of the shopkeeper, this charge became grave.

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Coldly, M. Ginory said to his registrar:

"An order!"

Then, when Favarel had taken a paper engraved at the top, which Pradès tried to decipher, the Magistrate began to question him. And as M. Ginory spoke slowly, Favarel filled in the blank places which made a free man, a prisoner.

"You are called?" demanded M. Ginory.

"Pradès."

"Your first name?"

"Henri."

"You said Charles to the Commissary of Police."

"Henri-Charles—Charles—Henri."

The Magistrate did not even make a sign to Favarel, seated before the table, and who wrote very quickly without M. Ginory dictating to him.

"Your profession?" continued the Magistrate.

"Commission merchant."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Your residence?"

"Sydney, Australia."

And, upon this official paper, the replies were filled in, one by one, in the blank places:

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COURT OF THE FIRST INSTANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SEINE:

Warrant of Commitment against Pradès.

Note.—Write exactly the names, Christian names, professions, age, residence and nature of charge.

Description

Height metre
centimetres

Forehead

Nose

Eyes

Mouth

Chin

Eyebrows

Hair

General Appearance

We, Edmé-Armand-Georges Ginory, Examining Magistrate of the Court of the First Instance of the Department of the Seine, command and enjoin all officers and guards of the Public Force to conduct to the Prison of Detention, called the Mazas, in conformity to the Law, Pradès (Charles Henri), aged 28 years, Commission Merchant from Sydney. Accused of complicity in the murder of Louis-Pierre Rovère. We direct the Director of said house of detention to receive and hold him till further orders. We command every man in the Public to lend assistance in order to execute the present order, in case such necessity arises, to which we attach our name and seal.

Made at the Palais de Justice, in Paris, the 12th of February, 1896.

And below, the seal was attached to the order by the registrar. M. Ginory signed it, saying to Favarel:

"The description must be left blank. They will fill it out after the measurements are taken."

Then, Pradès, stupefied till now, not seeming to realize half that was passing around him, gave a sudden, violent start. A cry burst from him.

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"Arrested! Have you arrested me?"

M. Ginory leaned over the table. He was calm and held his pen with which he had signed the order, suspended in the air. The young man rushed forward wild with anger, and if the guards had not held him back, he would have seized M. Ginory's fat neck with both hands. The guards held Pradès back, while the Examining Magistrate, carelessly pricking the table with his pen, gently said, with a smile:

"All the same, more than one malefactor has betrayed himself in a fit of anger. I have often thought that it would take very little to get myself assassinated, when I had before me an accused person whom I felt was guilty and who would not confess. Take away the man!"

While they were pushing Pradès toward the corridor he shouted: "*Canailles*." M. Ginory ordered that Dantin should be left alone with him. "Alone," he said to Bernardet, whose look was a little uneasy. The registrar half rose from his chair, picking up his papers and pushing them into the pockets of his much worn paper case.

"No; you may remain, Favarel."

"Well," said the Magistrate in a familiar tone, when he found himself face to face with Jacques Dantin. "Have you reflected?"

Jacques Dantin, his lips pressed closely together, did not reply.

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"It is a counsellor—a counsellor of an especial kind—the cell. He who invented it"—

"Yes;" Dantin brusquely interrupted. "The brain suffers between those walls. I have not slept since I went there. Not slept at all. Insomnia is killing me. It seems as if I should go crazy!"

"Then?" asked M. Ginory.

"Then"—

Jacques Dantin looked fiercely at the registrar, who sat waiting, his pen over his ear, his elbows on the table, his chin on his hands.

"Then, oh, well! Then, here it is, I wish to tell you all—all. But to you—to you"—

"To me alone?"

"Yes," said Dantin, with the same fierce expression.

"My dear Favarel," the Magistrate began.

The registrar had already risen. He slowly bowed and went out.

"Now," said the Magistrate to Jacques Dantin, "you can speak."

The man still hesitated.

"Monsieur," he asked, "will any word said here be repeated, ought it or must it be repeated in a courtroom, at the Assizes, I know not where—anywhere before the public?"

"That depends," said M. Ginory. "But what you know you owe to justice, whether it be a revelation, an accusation or a confession, I ask it of you."

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Still Dantin hesitated. Then the Magistrate spoke these words: "I demand it!"

With a violent effort the prisoner began. "So be it! But it is to a man of honor, rather than to a Magistrate, to whom I address these words. If I have hesitated to speak, if I have allowed myself to be suspected and to be accused, it is because it seemed to me impossible, absolutely impossible, that this same truth should not be revealed—I do not know in what way—that it would become known to you without compelling me to disclose a secret which was not mine."

"To an Examining Magistrate one may tell everything," said M. Ginory. "We have listened to confessions in our offices which are as inviolable as those of the confessional made to a priest."

And now, after having accused Dantin of lying, believing that he was acting a comedy, after smiling disdainfully at that common invention—a vow which one could not break—the perception of a possibility entered the Magistrate's mind that this man might be sincere. Hitherto he had closed his heart against sympathy for this man; they had met in the mutual hostility.

The manner in which Jacques Dantin approached the question, the resolution with which he spoke, no longer resembled the obstinate attitude which he had before assumed in this same room.

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Reflection, the prison—the cell, without doubt—a frightful and stifling cell—had done its work. The man who had been excited to the point of not speaking now wished to tell all.

"Yes," he said, "since nothing has happened to convince you that I am not lying."

"I am listening to you," said the Magistrate.

Then, in a long, close conference, Jacques Dantin told M. Ginory his story. He related how, from early youth, he and Rovère had been close friends; of the warm affection which had always existed between them; of the shams and deceptions of which he had been guilty; of the bitterness of his ruined life; of an existence which ought to have been beautiful, and which, so useless, the life of a *viveur*, had almost made him—why?—how?—through need of money and a lack of moral sense—almost descend to crime.

This Rovère, whom he was accused of killing, he loved, and, to tell the truth, in that strange and troublous existence which he had lived, Rovère had been the only true friend whom he had known. Rovère, a sort of pessimistic philosopher, a recluse, lycanthropic, after a life spent in feasting, having surfeited himself with pleasure, recognized also in his last years that disinterested affection is rare in this world, and his savage misanthropy softened before Jacques Dantin's warm friendship.

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"I continued to search for, in what is called pleasure and what as one's hair whitens becomes vice; in play; in the uproar of Paris, forgetfulness of life, of the dull life of a man growing old, alone, without home or family, an old, stupid fellow, whom the young people look at with hate and say to each other: 'Why is he still here?' Rovère, more and more, felt the need of withdrawing into solitude, thinking over his adventurous life, as bad and as ruined as mine, and he wished to see no one. A wolf, a wild boar in his lair! Can you understand this friendship between two old

fellows, one of whom tried in every way to direct his thoughts from himself, and the other, waiting death in a corner of his fireside, solitary, unsociable?"

"Perfectly! Go on!"

And the magistrate, with eyes riveted upon Jacques Dantin, saw this man, excited, making light of this recital of the past; evoking remembrances of forgotten events, of this lost affection; lost, as all his life was.

"This is not a conference; is it not so? You no longer believe that it is a comedy? I loved Rovère. Life had often separated us. He searched for fortune at the other end of the world. I made a mess of mine and ate it in Paris. But we always kept up our relations, and when he returned to France we were happy in again seeing each other. The grayer turned the hair, the more tender the heart became. I had always found him morose—from his twentieth year he always dragged after him a sinister companion—ennui. He had chosen a Consular career, to live far away, and in a fashion not at all like ours. I have often laughingly said to him that he probably had met with unrequited love; that he had experienced some unhappy passion. He said, no! I feigned to believe it. One is not sombre and melancholy like that without some secret grief. After all, there are others who do not feel any gayer with a smile on the lips. Sadness is no sign. Neither is gayety!"

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His face took on a weary, melancholy expression, which at first astonished the Magistrate; then he experienced a feeling of pity; he listened, silent and grave.

"I will pass over all the details of our life, shall I not? My monologue would be too long. The years of youth passed with a rapidity truly astonishing; we come to the time when we found ourselves—he weary of life, established in his chosen apartments in the Boulevard de Clichy, with his paintings and books; sitting in front of his fire and awaiting death—I continuing to spur myself on like a foundered horse. Rovère moralized to me; I jeered at his sermons, and I went to sit by his fireside and talk over the past. One of his joys had been this portrait of me, painted by Paul Baudry. He had hung it up in his salon, at the corner of the chimney piece, at the left, and he often said to me:

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"Dost thou know that when thou art not here I talk to it?"

"I was not there very often. Parisian life draws us by its thousand attractions. The days which seem interminable when one is twenty rush by as if on wings when one is fifty. One has not even time to stop to see the friends one loves. At the last moment, if one is right, one ought to say, 'How I have cast to the winds everything precious which life has given me. How foolish I have been—how stupid.' Pay no attention to my philosophisms—the cell! Mazas forces one to think!

"One day—it was one morning—on returning from the club where I had passed the night stupidly losing sums which would have given joy to hundreds of families, I found on my desk a message from Rovère. If one would look through my papers one would find it there—I kept it. Rovère begged me to come to him immediately. I shivered—a sharp presentiment of death struck me. The writing was trembling, unlike his own. I struck my forehead in anger. This message had been waiting for me since the night before, while I was spending the hours in gambling. If, when I hurried toward the Boulevard de Clichy, I had found Rovère dead on my arrival, I could not, believe me, have experienced greater despair. His assassination seemed to me atrocious; but I was at least able to assure him that his friendship was returned. I hastily read the telegram, threw myself into a fiacre, and hastened to his apartments. The woman who acted as housekeeper for him, Mme. Moniche, the portress, raising her arms as she opened the door for me, said:

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"Ah! Monsieur, but Monsieur has waited for you. He has repeated your name all night. He nearly died, but he is better now."

"Rovère, sitting the night before by his fire, had been stricken by lateral paralysis, and as soon as he could hold a pen, in spite of the orders of the physician who had been quickly called, had written and sent the message to me some hours before.

"As soon as he saw me he—the strong man, the mad misanthrope, silent and sombre—held me in his arms and burst into tears. His embrace was that of a man who concentrates in one being all that remains of hope.

"Thou! thou art here!" he said in a low tone. "If thou knewest!"

"I was moved to the depths of my heart. That manly face, usually so energetic, wore an expression of terror which was in some way almost childish, a timorous fright. The tears rose in his eyes.

"Oh! how I have waited for thee! how I have longed for thee!"

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"He repeated this phrase with anxious obstinacy. Then he seemed to be suffocating. Emotion! The sight of me recalled to him the long agony of that night when he thought that he was about to die without parting with me for the last time.

"For what I have to tell thee'—"

"He shook his head.

"It is the secret of my life!"

"He was lying on a sort of sick chair or lounge, in the library where he passed his last days with his books. He made me sit down beside him. He took my hand and said:

"I am going to die. I believed that the end had come last night. I called thee. Oh, well, if I had died there is one being in the world who would not have had the fortune which—I have'—"

"He lowered his voice as if he thought we were spied upon, as if some one could hear.

"I have a daughter. Yes, even from thee I have hidden this secret, which tortures me. A daughter who loves me and who has not the right to confess this tenderness, no more than I have the right to give her my name. Ah! our youth, sad youth! I might have had a home to-day, a fireside of my own, a dear one near me, and instead of that, an affection of which I am ashamed and which I have hidden even from thee, Jacques, from thee, dost thou comprehend?"

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"I remember each of Rovère's words as if I was hearing them now. This conversation with my poor friend is among the most poignant yet most precious of my remembrances. With much emotion, which distressed me, the poor man revealed to me the secret which he had believed it his duty to hide from me so many years, and I vowed to him—I swore to him on my honor, and that is why I hesitated to speak, or rather refused to speak, not wishing to compromise any one, neither the dead nor living—I swore to him, Monsieur le Juge, to repeat nothing of what he told me to any one, to any one but to her"—

"Her?" interrogated M. Ginory.

"His daughter," Dantin replied.

The Examining Magistrate recalled that visitor in black, who had been seen occasionally at Rovère's apartments, and the little romance of which Paul Rodier had written in his paper—the romance of the Woman in Black!

"And this daughter?"

"She bears," said Dantin, with a discouraged gesture, "the name of the father which the law gives her, and this name is a great name, an illustrious name, that of a retired general officer, living in one of the provinces, a widower, and who adores the girl who is another man's child. The mother is dead. The father has never known. When dying, the mother revealed the secret to her daughter. She came, by command of the dead, to see Rovère, but as a Sister of Charity, faithful to the name which she bears. She does not wish to marry; she will never leave the crippled old soldier who calls her his daughter, and who adores her."

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"Oh!" said M. Ginory, remaining mute a moment before this very simple drama, and in which, in that moment of reflection, he comprehended, he analyzed, nearly all of the hidden griefs, the secret tears, the stifled sobs, the stolen kisses. "And that is why you kept silent?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur. Oh! but I could not endure the torture any longer, and not seeing the expected release any nearer, I would have spoken, I would have spoken to escape that cell, that sense of suffocation, I endured there. It seemed to me, however, that I owed it to my dead friend not to reveal his secret to any one, not even to you. I shall never forget Rovère's joy, when relieved of the burden, by the confidence which he had reposed in me, he said to me, that now that she who was his daughter, and was poor, living at Blois only on the pension of a retired officer to whom she had appointed herself nurse, knowing that she was not his daughter, this innocent child, who was paying with a life of devotion for the sins of two guilty ones, would at least have happiness at last.

"She is young, and the one for whom she cares cannot live always. My fortune will give her a dowry. And then!"

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"It was to me to whom he confided this fortune. He had very little money with his notary. Erratic and distrustful, Rovère kept his valuables in his safe, as he kept his books in his library. It seemed that he was a collector, picking up all kinds of things. Avaricious? No; but he wished to have about him, under his hand, everything which belonged to him. He possibly may have wished to give what he had directly to the one to whom it seemed good to him to give it, and confide it to me in trust.

"I regret not having asked him directly that day what he counted on doing with his fortune and how he intended enriching his child, whom he had not the right to recognize. I dared, or, rather, I did not think of it. I experienced a strong emotion when I saw my friend enfeebled and almost dying. I had known him so different, so handsome. Oh! those poor, sad, restless eyes, that lowered voice, as if he feared an enemy was listening! Illness had quickly, brutally changed that vigorous man, suddenly old and timorous.

"I went away from that first interview much distressed, carrying a secret which seemed to me a heavy and cruel one; and which made me think of the uselessness, the wickedness, the vain loves of a ruined life. But I felt that Rovère owed truly his fortune to that girl who, the next day after the death of the one whom she had piously attended, found herself poor and isolated in a little house in a steep street, near the Château, above Blois. I felt that, whatever this unknown father left, ought not to go to distant relatives, who cared nothing for him; did not even know him; were ignorant of his sufferings and perhaps even of his existence, and who by law would inherit.

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"A dying man, yes! There could be no question about it, and Dr. Vilandry, whom I begged to

accompany me to see my friend, did not hide it from me. Rovère was dying of a kidney difficulty, which had made rapid progress.

"It was necessary, then, since he was not alone in the world, that he should think of the one of whom he had spoken and whom he loved.

"For I love her, that child whom I have no right to name. I love her! She is good, tender, admirable. If I did not see that she resembled me—for she does resemble me—I should tell thee that she was beautiful. I would be proud to cry aloud: "This is my daughter!" To promenade with her on my arm—and I must hide this secret from all the world. That is my torture! And it is the chastisement of all that has not been right in my life. Ah! sad, unhappy loves! That same malediction for the past came to his lips as it had come to his thoughts. The old workman, burdened with labor throughout the week, who could promenade on the Boulevard de Clichy on Sunday, with his daughter on his arm, was happier than Rovère. And—a strange thing, sentiment of shame and remorse—feeling himself traveling fast to his last resting-place in the cemetery, he expressed no wish to see that child, to send for her to come from Blois under some pretext or other, easy enough to find.

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"No, he experienced a fierce desire for solitude, he shrunk from an interview, in which he feared all his grief would rush to his lips in a torrent of words. He feared for himself, for his weakness, for the strange feeling he experienced in his head.

"It seems as if it oscillated upon my shoulders,' he said. 'If Marthe came (and he repeated the name as a child would have pronounced it who was just learning to name the letters of a word) I would give her but the sad spectacle of a broken-down man, and leave on her mind only the impression of a human ruin. And then—and then—not to see her! not to have the right to see her! that is all right—it is my chastisement!'

"Let it be so! I understood. I feared that an interview would be mortal. He had been so terribly agitated when he had sent for me that other time.

"But I, at least, wished to recall to him his former wish which he had expressed of providing for the girl's future. I desired that he should make up for the past, since money is one of the forms of reparation. But I dared not speak to him again in regard to it, or of that trust of which he had spoken.

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"He said to me, this strong man whom Death had never frightened, and whom he had braved many times, he said to me now, weakened by this illness which was killing him hour by hour:

"If I knew that my end was near I would decide—but I have time."

"Time! Each day brought him a little nearer to that life about which I feared to say to him: 'The time has come!' The fear, in urging him to a last resolution, of seeming like an executioner whose presence seemed to say: 'To-day is the day!' prevented me. You understand, Monsieur? And why not? I ought to wait no longer. Rovère's confidence had made of me a second Rovère who possessed the strength and force of will which the first one now lacked. I felt that I held in my hands, so to speak, Marthe's fate. I did not know her, but I looked upon her as a martyr in her vocation of nurse to the old paralytic to whom she was paying, in love, the debt of the dead wife. I said to myself: 'It is to me, to me alone, that Rovère must give instructions of what he wishes to leave to his daughter, and it is for me to urge him to do this, it is for me to brace his weakened will! I was resolved! It was a duty! Each day the unhappy man's strength failed. I saw it—this human ruin! One morning, when I went to his apartments, I found him in a singular state of terror. He related me a story, I knew not what, of a thief, whose victim he was; the lock of his door had been forced, his safe opened. Then, suddenly, interrupting himself, he began to laugh, a feeble laugh, which made me ill.

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"I am a fool,' he said. 'I am dreaming, awake—I continue in the daytime the nightmares of the night—a thief here! No one has come—Mme. Moniche has watched—but my head is so weak, so weak! I have known so many rascals in my life! Rascals always return, *hein!*'

"He made a sad attempt at a laugh.

"It was delirium! A delirium which soon passed away, but which frightened me. It returned with increased force each day, and at shorter intervals.

"Well, I said to myself, during a lucid interview, 'he must do what he has resolved to do, what he had willed to do—what he wishes to do!' And I decided—it was the night before the assassination—to bring him to the point, to aid his hesitation. I found him calmer that day. He was lying on his lounge, enveloped in his dressing gown, with a traveling rug thrown across his thin legs. With his black skull-cap and his grayish beard he looked like a dying Doge.

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"He held out his bony hand to me, giving me a sad smile, and said that he felt better. A period of remission in his disease, a feeling of comfort pervading his general condition.

"What if I should recover?' he said, looking me full in the face.

"I comprehended by that ardent look, which was of singular vitality, that this man, who had never feared death, still clung to life. It was instinct.

"I replied that certainly he might, and I even said that he would surely recover, but—with what grievous repugnance did I approach the subject—I asked him if, experiencing the general feeling

of ease and comfort which pervaded his being, whether he would not be even more comfortable and happy if he thought of what he ought to do for that child of whom he had spoken, and for whose future he wished to provide.

"And since thou art feeling better, my dear Rovère, it is perhaps the opportunity to put everything in order in that life which thou art about to recover, and which will be a new life.'

"He looked fixedly at me with his beautiful eyes. It was a profound regard, and I saw that he divined my thought.

"Thou art right!' he said firmly; 'no weakness.'

"Then, gathering all his forces, he arose, stood upright, refusing even the arm which I held out to him, and in his dressing gown, which hung about him, he seemed to me taller, thinner, even handsomer. He took two or three steps, at first a little unsteady, then, straightening up, he walked directly to his safe, turned the letters, and opened it, after having smiled, and said:

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"I had forgotten the word—four letters; it is, however, a little thing. My head is empty.'

"Then, the safe opened, he took out papers—of value, without doubt—papers which he took back to his lounge, spread out on a table near at hand, and said:

"Let us see! This which I am going to give thee is for her—A will, yes, I could make a will—but it would create talk—it would be asked what I had done—it would be searched out, dug out of the past, it would open a tomb—I cannot!—What I have shall be hers, thou wilt give it to her—thou'—

"And his large, haggard eyes searched through the papers.

"Ah! here!' he said; 'here are some bonds! Egyptian—of a certain value to the holder, at 3 per cent. I hid that—where did I put it?'

"He picked up the papers, turned them over and over, became alarmed, turned pale.

"But,' I said to him, 'is it not among those papers?'

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"He shrugged his shoulders, displayed with an ironical smile the engraved papers.

"Some certificates of decorations! The bric-a-brac of a Consular life.'

"Then with renewed energy he again went to the safe, opened the till, pulled it out, and searched again and again.

"Overcome with fright, he exclaimed: 'It is not there!'

"Why is it not there?'

"And he gave me another look—haggard! terrible! His face was fearfully contracted. He clasped his head with both hands, and stammered, as if coming out of a dream.

"It is true, I remember—I have hidden it! Yes, I hid it! I do not know where—in some book! In which one?'

"He looked around him with wild eyes. The cerebral anæmia which had made him fear robbery again seized him, and poor Rovère, my old friend, plainly showed that he was enduring the agony of a man who is drowning, and who does not know where to cling in order to save himself.

"He was still standing, but as he turned around, he staggered.

"He repeated in a hoarse, frightened voice: 'Where, where have I hidden that? Fool! The safe did not seem to me secure enough! Where, where have I put it?'

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"It was then, Monsieur, yes, at that moment, that the concierge entered and saw us standing face to face before those papers of which she had spoken. I must have looked greatly embarrassed, very pale, showing the violent emotion which seized me by the throat. Rovère said to her rather roughly: 'What are you here for?' and sent her away with a gesture. Mme. Moniche had had time to see the open safe and the papers spread out, which she supposed were valuable. I understand how she deceived herself, and when I think of it, I accuse myself. There was something tragic taking place between Rovère and me. This woman could not know what it was, but she felt it.

"And it was more terrible, a hundred times more terrible, when she had disappeared. There seemed to be a battle raging in Rovère's brain, as between his will and his weakness. Standing upright, striving not to give way, struggling to concentrate all his brain power in his effort to remember, to find some trace of the hidden place where he had foolishly put his fortune, between the leaves of some huge book. Rovère called violently, ardently to his aid his last remnant of strength to combat against this anæmia which took away the memory of what he had done. He rolled his eyes desperately, found nothing, remembered nothing.

"It was awful—this combat against memory, which disappeared, fled; this aspect of a panting beast, a hunted boar which seemed to seize this man—and I shivered when, with a rage, I shall never forget, the dying man rushed, in two steps, to the table, bent over the papers, snatched them up with his thin hands, crumpled them up, tore them in two and threw them under his feet,

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with an almost maniacal laugh, saying in strident tones:

"Ah! Decorations! Brevets, baubles! Childish foolishness! What good are they? Would they give her a living?"

"And he kept on laughing. He excited himself over the papers, which he stamped under his feet until he had completely exhausted himself. He gasped, 'I stifle!' and he half fell over the lounge, upon which I laid him. I fully believed that he was dying. I experienced a horrible sensation, which was agonizing. He revived, however. But how, after that swoon and that crisis, could I speak to him again of his daughter, of that which he wished to leave her, to give, in trust, to me? He became preoccupied with childish things, returning to the dreams of a rich man; he spoke of going out the next day. We would go together in the Bois. We would dine at the Pavilion. He would like to travel. And thus he rambled on.

"I said to myself, 'Wait! Let us wait! To-morrow, after a good night's sleep, he will perhaps remember. I surely have some days before me. To speak to him to-day would be to provoke a new crisis.'

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"And I helped him to put back in the safe the crushed, torn papers, without his asking me, or even himself questioning how they had come there, who had thrown them on the floor, or who had opened the safe. His face wore a slight smile, his gestures were automatic. Very weary, he at last said:

"I am very tired. I would like to sleep.' I left him. He had stretched himself out and covered himself up. He closed his eyes and said:

"It is so good to sleep!"

"I would see him to-morrow. I would try to again to-morrow awaken in him the desire which now seemed dulled. To-morrow his memory would have returned, and in some of his books where he had (like the Arabs who put their harvests in silos) placed his treasure he would find the fortune intended for his daughter.

"To-morrow! It is the word one repeats most often, and which one has the least right to use.

"I saw Rovère only after he was dead, with his throat cut—assassinated by whom? The man whom you have arrested has traveled much; he comes from a distance. Rovère was Consul at Buenos Ayres, and you know that he said to me the last day I saw him: 'I have known many rascals in my life!' Which seemed very simple when one thinks of the way he had lived.

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"This is the truth, Monsieur. I ought to have told you sooner. I repeat that I had the weakness of wishing to keep the vow given to my dead friend. I had the name of a woman to betray, the name of a man, too; innocent of Rovère's fault. And then, again, it seemed to me that this truth ought to become known of itself. When I was arrested, a sort of foolish bravado urged me to see how far the absurdity of the charge could accumulate against me seeming proofs. I am a gambler. That was a part I played against you, or rather against the foolishness of destiny. I did not take a second thought that the error could be a lasting one. I had, moreover, only a word to say, but this word, I repeat, I hesitated to speak, and I willingly supported the consequence of this hesitation, even because this word was a name."

"That name," said M. Ginory, "I have not asked you."

"I refused it to the Magistrate," said Jacques Dantin, "but I confide it to the man of honor!"

"There is only a Magistrate here," M. Ginory replied, "but the legal inquiry has its secrets, as life has."

And Jacques Dantin gave the name which the one whom Louis-Pierre Rovère called, Marthe, bore as her rightful name.

CHAPTER XVI.

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M. GINORY, M. Leriche, the chief; Bernardet, and, in fact, all the judiciary, believed that Charles Pradès was guilty of the murder of Rovère. Bernardet, who had been an actor in this drama, had now become a spectator.

Paul Rodier, a good reporter, had learned before his confreres of the arrest of the young man, and, abandoning what he had called his trail of the Woman in Black, he abruptly whirled about and quickly invented a sensational biography of the newcomer. Charles-Henri Pradès, or rather Carlos Pradès, as he called himself, had been a *gaucho*, a buffalo tamer, a cowboy, using, turn by turn, the American revolver against the Redskins and the Mexican lasso against the Yankees.

The journalist had obtained a signature, picked up by the lodging-house keeper where the guilty man had been hunted down, and published in his paper the autographic characters; he had deduced from them some dramatic observations. Cooper, of former times; Gustave Aymard, of yesterday; Rudyard Kipling or Bret Harte, of to-day, had never met a personage more dreadful, and at the same time more heroic. Carlos Pradès used the navaja (Spanish knife) with the terrible rapidity of a Catalan. He had felt since the days of Buenos Ayres a fierce hate for the ex-Consul,

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and this crime, which some of his brother reporters, habitually indifferently informed (it was Paul Rodier who spoke), now attributed alone to the avarice of this Cambrioleur from over the sea; he, Rodier, gave this note as the cause of vengeance, and built thereupon a romance which made his readers shiver. Or, rather, he said nothing outright. He permitted one a glimpse into, he outlined, one knows not what, dark history. Soon he made this Carlos Pradès the instrument and the arm of an association of vengeance. He could even believe that there was anarchy in the affair. Then he had the young man mixed in some love affair, a drama of passion, with Argentine Republic for the theatre.

As a result he had succeeded in making interesting the man whom Bernardet had pushed a few nights before into the station house.

And, what was a singular thing, the reporter had divined part of the truth. It was still another episode in his past that Rovère expiated when he found himself one day, in his salon in the Boulevard de Clichy, face to face with the man who was to be his murderer. At Buenos Ayres, the ex-Consul had been associated in a large agricultural enterprise with a man whose hazardous speculations, play and various adventures had completely ruined him, and who had left two children—a young girl whom Rovère thought for a moment of marrying, and a son, younger—poor beings of whom the Consul, paying his partner's debts, seemed the natural protector. Jean Pradès, in committing suicide—he had killed himself, frightened at the magnitude of his debts—had commended his children to Rovère's care.

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If Carlotta had lived, without doubt Rovère would have made her his wife. He loved her with a deep and respectful tenderness. The poor girl died very suddenly, and there remained to Rovère only his dream. One of those remembrances of a fireside, one of those spectres which brush the forehead with their wings or the folds of their winding sheets, when in the solitude in which he has voluntarily buried himself the searcher after adventures recalls the past. The past of yesterday. Illusions, disillusion, old loves, miseries!

Rovère gave to this brother of the dead girl the affection which he had felt for her. He remembered, also, the father's request. Pradès's son, passionate, eager to live, tempted in all his appetites, accepted as his due Rovère's truly paternal devotion, worked on the sympathy of this man, who, through pity and duty, too, gave to Charles a little of the affection which he had felt for the sister, almost his fiancée, and for the father, dead by his own hand.

But, little by little, the solicitations, the unreasonable demands of Pradès, who, believing that he had a just claim on his father's old partner, found it very natural that Rovère should devote himself to him—these continual and pressing demands became for the Consul irritating obsessions. Rovère seemed to this young man, who was a spendthrift and a gambler—a gambler possessed with atavistic frenzy—a sort of living savings bank, from which he could draw without counting. His importunities at last seemed fatiguing and excessive, and Pradès was advised one beautiful day that he no longer need count from that moment on the generosity of his benefactor. All this happened at Buenos Ayres, and about the time of the Consul's departure for France. Rovère added to this very curt declaration a last benefit. He gave to the brother of the dead girl, to the son of Pradès, of the firm of Rovère and Pradès, a sum sufficient to enable him to live while waiting for better things, and he told the young man in proper terms that, as he had now no one to depend upon, that he had better take himself elsewhere to be hung. The word could not be, with the appetites and habits of Charles Pradès, taken in a figurative sense, and the young man continued his life of adventures, as tragic in their reality and as improbable as the reporters' melodramatic inventions.

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Then, at the end of his resources, after having searched for fortune among miners, weary of tramping about in America, he embarked one morning for Havre, with the idea that the best gold mine was still that living placer which he had exploited in Buenos Ayres, and which was called Pierre Rovère.

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At Paris, where he knew the Consul had retired, Pradès soon found trace of him, and learned where was the retreat of his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law! He pronounced the word with a wicked sneer, as if it had for him a something understood about the sweet and maiden remembrance of the dead girl. There, in gay Paris, with some resources which allowed him to pay for his board and lodging in a third-rate hotel, he searched, asked, discovered, at last, the address of the ex-Consul, and presented himself to Rovère, who felt, at sight of this spectre, his anger return.

The first time that Charles Pradès had asked at the lodge if M. Rovère was at home, the Moniches had permitted him to go upstairs, and perhaps Mme. Moniche would have suspected the man in the sombrero if she had not surprised Jacques Dantin before the open safe and the papers.

Pradès, moreover, had appeared only three times at Rovère's house, and on the day of the murder he had entered at the moment when Mme. Moniche was sweeping the upper floors, and Moniche was working in his shop in the rear of the lodge, and the staircase was empty. He rang, and Rovère, with dragging steps, came to open the door. Rovère was ill and was a little ennuied, and he believed, or instinctively hoped, that it was the woman in black—his daughter!

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Everything served Pradès's projects. He had come not to kill, but by some means to gain entrance to Rovère's apartments, and, when once there, to find some resource—a loan, more or less freely given, more or less forced—and he would leave with it.

Rovère, already worn out, weary of his former supplications, felt tempted to shut the door in his face, but Pradès pushed it back, entered, closed it, and said:

"A last interview! You will never see me again! But listen to me!"

Then, Rovère allowed him to enter the salon, and despite the terrible weakness which he experienced wished to make this a final, decisive interview; to disembarass himself once for all of this everlasting beggar, sometimes whining, sometimes threatening.

"Will you not let me die in peace?" he said. "Have I not paid my debt?"

But Pradès had seated himself in a fauteuil, crossed his legs and hung over his knee his sombrero, on which he drummed a minstrel march.

"My dear Monsieur Rovère, it is a last appeal for funds. I believe that America is better than Paris. And in order to return there or to do what I ought here, I must have what I have not—money!"

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"I am tired of giving you money!" Rovère quickly replied.

And between these two men, bound by the remembrance of the dead girl—a bond burdensome to the one, imposed upon by the other—a storm of bitter words and harsh sentiments arose and kindled fierce anger in both.

"I tried to let you remain in peace, my dear Consul. But hunger has driven the wolf out of the woods. I am very hungry. And here I am!"

"I have nothing with which to feed your appetites. You are nothing but a burden to me."

"Oh! Ingratitude!" and Pradès, with his Argentine accent, spoke his sister's name.

"My father died and Carlotta herself entrusted me to your care, my dear brother-in-law!"

It seemed to the sick man, irritated as he was, that this name—which he had buried deep in his heart with chaste tenderness—was a supreme insult.

"I forbid you to evoke that memory! You do not see, then, that the memory of that dear and saintly creature is one of the griefs of my life!"

"And it is one of my heritages! Brother-in-law of a consul, *Senor mia*, but it is a title, and I hold it!"

Rovère experienced a strong desire to call, to ring, to give an order to have this troublesome visitor put out. But energetic and fearless as he had been but a short time before, now weakened by illness, he trembled before a possible scandal. Then he, unaided, attempted to push the young man out of the salon. Pradès resisted, and, at the first touch, gave a bound, and all that was evil in him suddenly awoke.

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A struggle ensued, without a word being pronounced by either; a quick, brutal struggle. Rovère counted on his past strength, taking by the collar this Pradès who threatened him, and Pradès, while clutching the ex-Consul with his left hand, searched in his pocket for a weapon—the one which Bernardet had taken from him.

This was a sinister moment! Pradès pushed Rovère back; he staggered and fell against a piece of furniture, while the young man disengaging himself, stepped back, quickly opened his Spanish knife, then, with a bound, caught Rovère, shook him, and holding the knife uplifted, said:

"Thou hast willed it!"

It was at this instant that Rovère, whose hands were contracted, dug his nails into the assassin's neck—the nails which the Commissary Desbrière and M. Jacquelin Audrays had found still red with blood.

Pradès, who had come there either to supplicate or threaten, now had only one thought, hideous and ferocious—to kill! He did not reason. It was no more than an unchained instinct. The noise of the organs upon the Boulevard, which accompanied with their musical, dragging notes this savage scene, like a tremulo undertone to a melodrama at the theatre, he did not hear. The whole intensity of his life seemed to be concentrated in his fury, in his hand armed with the knife. He threw himself on Rovère; he struck the flesh, opening the throat, as across the water among the Gauchos he had been accustomed to kill sheep or cut the throat of an ox.

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Rovère staggered, wavered, freed from the hand which held him, and Pradès stepping back, looked at him.

Livid, the dying man seemed to live only in his eyes. He had cast upon the murderer a last meaning look—now, in a sort of supreme agony, he looked around, his eyes searched for a support, for aid, yes, they called, while from that throat horrible sounds issued.

Pradès saw with a kind of fright, Rovère, with a superhuman tragic effort, step back, staggering like a drunken man, pull with his poor contracted hands from above the chimney piece an object which the murderer had not noticed and upon which, with an ardent, prayerful expression he fixed his eyes, stammering some quick inarticulate words which Pradès could not hear or understand.

It seemed to Pradès that between his victim and himself there was a witness, and whether he thought of the value of the stones imbedded in the frame or whether he wished to take from Rovère this last support in his distress, he went to him and attempted to tear the portrait from his hands. But an extraordinary strength seemed to come to the dying man and Rovère resisted, fastening his eyes upon the portrait, casting upon it a living flame, like the last flare of a dying lamp, and with this last, despairing, agonizing look the ex-Consul breathed his last. He fell. Pradès tore the portrait from the fingers which clutched it. That frame, he could sell it. He picked up here and there some pieces which seemed to him of value, as if on a pillaging tour on the prairies. He was about to enter the library where the safe was, when the noise of the opening of the entrance door awakened his trapper's instinct. Some one was coming. Who it could be was of little importance. To remain was to expose himself, to be at once arrested. The corpse once seen, the person would cry aloud, rush out, close the door and send for the police.

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Hesitating between a desire to pillage and the necessity for fright, Pradès did not wait long to decide. Should he hide? Impossible! Then, stepping back to the salon door, he flattened himself as much as possible against the wall and waited until the door should be opened when he would be completely hidden behind it. As Mme. Moniche stepped into the room and cried out as she saw Rovère lying on the floor, Pradès slipped into the ante-chamber, found himself on the landing, closed the door, rapidly descended the stairs and stepped out upon the Boulevard de Clichy among the passers-by, even before Mme. Moniche, terrified, had called for help.

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CHAPTER XVII.

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ALL the details of that murder, M. Ginory had drawn, one by one, from Pradès in his examination. The murderer denied at first; hesitated; discussed; then at last, like a cask with the bung out, from which pours not wine, but blood, the prisoner told all; confessed; recounted; loosened his tongue; abandoned himself weakened and conquered, weary of his misery.

"I was so foolish, so stupid," he violently said, "as to keep the portrait. I believed that the frame was worth a fortune. Fool! I sold it for a hundred sous!"

He gave the merchant's address, it was on the Quai Saint Michel. Bernardet found the frame as he had found the painted panel, and this time, no great credit was due him.

"Now," said he, "the affair is ended, *classé*. My children (he was relating his adventures to his little girls), we must pass to another. And why"—

"Why, what?" asked Mme. Bernardet.

"Eh! there it is! Why—it lacks the elucidation of a problem. I will see! I will know!"

He still remembered the young Danish doctor, whom he had seen with M. Morin at the autopsy. With his knowledge of men, with the sharp, keen eye of the police officer, Bernardet had recognized a man of superior mind; a mind dreamy and mysterious. He knew where Dr. Erwin lived during his sojourn in Paris, and he went to his apartment one beautiful morning and rang the bell at the door of a hotel in the Boulevard Saint Martin, where students and strangers lodge. He might have asked advice of M. Morin, of the master of French Science, but he, the Inspector of Sureté, approach these high personages, to question them. He dared not as long as there was a Danish doctor.

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Bernardet's brain whirled. He felt almost certain that Dr. Erwin would give the same explanation which he, himself, suspected, in regard to the observed phenomenon.

"The dead man's eye has spoken and can speak," said Bernardet to himself. "Yes, surely. I am not deceived."

Dr. Erwin met Bernardet cordially and listened to him with profound attention. The police officer repeated word for word the confession drawn from Pradès. Then he asked the Danish physician if he really believed that Jacques Dantin's image had been transfixed on the retina of the dying man's eye, during the time when he had held and gazed at the portrait.

"For the proofs which I obtained were very confused," said the officer, "it is possible, and I say it is quite easy to recognize Jacques Dantin's features. We have seen it, and, according to your opinion even the painting was able to be—how shall I express myself—stored up, retained in the retina."

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"You found the proof there," said Dr. Erwin.

"So, according to your opinion, I have not deceived myself?"

"No!"

"I have truly found in the retina of the dead man's eye the last vision he saw when living?"

"Yes!"

"But the vision of a painting. A painting, Doctor."

"Why not!" Dr. Erwin responded in a sharp tone. "Do you know what happened? Knowing that he was dying the unhappy man went, urged by a tragic impulse, to that portrait which represented to him all that was left, concentrating in one image alone, all his life."

"Then it is possible? It is possible?" Bernardet repeated.

"I believe it," said the Dane. "The man is dying. He has only one thought—to go directly to the one who, surviving him, guarded his secrets and his life. He seized his portrait; he tore it from its hook with all his strength; he devoured it with his eyes; he drank it in with a look, if I may be allowed the expression. To this picture of the being whom he loved he spoke; he cried to him; telling him his last wishes; dictating to him his thoughts of vengeance. At this supreme moment his energy was increased a hundredfold, I know not what intensity of life was concentrated on this image, and gathering all his failing forces in a last look the man who wished to live; the man weakened by illness, dying, assassinated, put into that last regard the electric force, the fire which fixed the image (confused, no doubt, but recognizable since you have traced the resemblance) upon the retina. A phantom, if you wish, which is reflected in the dead man's eye."

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"And," repeated Bernardet, who wished to be perfectly assured in regard to the question, "it is not only the image of a living being, it is, to use your words, the phantom even of a painting which was retained on the retina?"

"I do not reply to you: 'That is possible!' It is you who say to me: 'I have seen it!' And you have seen it, in truth, and the form, vague though it may be, the painted figure permits you to find in a passer-by the man whose picture the retina had already shown you!"

"Oh! well! Doctor," said the little Bernardet, "I shall tell that, but they will deny it. They will say that it is impossible!"

Dr. Erwin smiled. He seemed to be looking, with his deep blue eyes, at some invisible perspective, not bounded by the rooms of little room.

"One has said," he began, "that the word *impossible* is not French. It would be more exact to affirm that it was not *human*! We attain a knowledge of the unknowable. The mysterious is approachable. One must deny nothing *a priori*; one must believe all things possible and not only a dream. Search for the truth, the *harsh* truth, as your Stendhal said. Well! the word is wrong. One ought to say justly, the *exquisite* truth, for it is a joy for those who search, that daily life where each movement marks a step advanced, where the heart beats at the thought of a rendezvous in the laboratory as at a rendezvous of love. Ah! he is happy who has given his life to science. He lives in a dream. It is the poetry, in our times of prose. The dream," continued the young doctor as in an ecstasy, while Bernardet listened, ravished, "the dream is everywhere. It is impossible to make it tangible. Thought, human thought, can sometime be deciphered like an open book. An American physician asked to be permitted to try an experiment upon the cranium of a condemned man, still living. Through the cranium he studied the man's brain. Has not Edison undertaken to give sight to the blind! But, in order to accomplish all these things, it is necessary, as in primitive times, to believe, to believe always. The twentieth century will see many others."

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"Ah! Doctor! Doctor!" cried poor little Bernardet, much moved. "I do not wish to be the ignoramus that I am, the father of a family, who has mouths to feed, and I beg of you to take me as a sweeper in your laboratory."

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He departed, enthused by the interview. Henceforth he could say that, he, the ignorant one, had, by his seemingly foolish conviction, proved the leader of an experiment which had been abandoned for some years; and the humble police officer had reopened the nearly closed door to criminal instruction.

A scruple, moreover, came to him; a doubt, an agony, and he wished to share it with M. Ginory.

All the same, with the admirable invention, he had caused an innocent man to be arrested. This thought made him very uneasy. He had produced a power which, instead of striking the guilty, had overthrown an unhappy man, and it was this famous discovery of Dr. Bourion's, persisted in by him, which had resulted in this mistake.

"It must be," he thought, "that man may be fallible even in the most marvelous discoveries. It is frightful! It is perhaps done to make us more prudent. Prudent and modest!"

Doubt now seized him. Must he stop there in these famous experiments which ended in this lie? Ought he abandon all research on a road which ended in a cul-de-sac? And he confided that unhappy scruple to the Examining Magistrate, with whom the chances of the service had put him in sympathy. M. Ginory not only was interested in strange discoveries, but he was always indulgent toward the original, little Bernardet.

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"Finally, M. le Juge," said the police officer, shaking his head, "I have thought and thought about the discovery, our discovery—that of Dr. Bourion. It is subject to errors, our discovery. It would have led us to put in prison—Jacques Dantin, and Jacques Dantin was not guilty."

"Oh, yes! M. Bernardet," said the Magistrate, who seemed thoughtful, his heavy chin resting on his hand. "It ought to make us modest. It is the fate of all human discoveries. To err—to err, is human!"

"It is not the less true," responded Bernardet, "that all which has passed opens to us the

astounding horizon of the unknown"—

"The unknowable!" murmured the Magistrate.

"A physician who sometimes asks me to his experiments invited me to his house the other evening and I saw—yes saw, or what one calls seeing, in a mirror placed before me, by the light of the X-rays—greenish rays which traversed the body—yes, Monsieur, I saw my heart beat, and my lungs perform their functions, and I am fat, and a thin person could better see himself living and breathing. Is it not fantastic, Monsieur Ginory? Would not a man have been shut up as a lunatic thirty years ago who would have pretended that he had discovered that? We shall see—we shall see many others!"

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"And will it add to the happiness of man? and will it diminish grief, wickedness and crime?"

The Magistrate spoke as if to himself, thoughtfully, sadly. Something Bernardet said brought a smile to his lips.

"This is, Monsieur le Juge, a fine ending of the chapter for the second part of your work, 'The Duty of a Magistrate Toward Scientific Discoveries.' And if the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences does not add"—

M. Ginory suddenly turned red and interrupted Bernardet with a word and a gesture.

"Monsieur Bernardet!"

"I can only repeat, Monsieur, what public opinion thinks and says," said Bernardet, bowing low. "There was an illusion to this affair written up. An amiable fellow—that Paul Rodier."

"Ah! Monsieur Bernardet, Monsieur Bernardet!" laughingly said the Magistrate, "you have a weakness for reporters. Do you want me to tell you something? You will finish by becoming a journalist."

"And you will certainly finish in the habit of a member of the Academy, Monsieur Ginory," said the little Bernardet, with his air of a mocking abbé.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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VERY often, after his release from prison, Jacques Dantin went to the corner of the cemetery at Montmartre, where his friend lay. And he always carried flowers. It had become to him, since the terrible strain of his detention, a necessity, a habit. The dead are living! They wait, they understand, they listen!

It seemed to Dantin that he had but one aim. Alas! What had been the wish, the last dream of the dead man would never be realized. That fortune which Rovère had intended for the child whom he had no right to call his own would go, was going to some far-off cousins of whose existence the ex-Consul was not even aware perhaps, and whom he certainly had never known—to some indifferent persons, chance relatives, strangers.

"I ought not to have waited for him to tell me what his intentions were regarding his daughter," Dantin often thought. What would become of her, the poor girl, who knew the secret of her birth and who remained silent, piously devoting herself to the old soldier whose name she bore?

One day in February a sad, gray day, Jacques Dantin, thinking of the past Winter so unhappy of the sad secret grave and heavy, strolled along toward that granite tomb near which Rovère slept. He recalled the curious crowd which had accompanied his dead friend to its last resting place: the flowers; the under current of excitement; the cortège. Silence now filled the place! Dark shadows could be seen here and there between the tombs at the end of paths. It was not a visiting day nor an hour usual for funerals. This solitude pleased Jacques. He felt near to him whom he loved.

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Louis-Pierre Rovère. That name, which Moniche had had engraved, evoked many remembrances for this man who had for a time been suspected of assassinating him. All his childhood, all his youth, all the past! How quickly the years had fled, such ruined years. So much of fever, of agitation—so many ambitions, deceptions, in order to end here.

"He is at rest at least," thought Dantin, remembering his own life, without aim, without happiness. And he also would rest soon, having not even a friend in this great city of Paris whom he could depend upon to pay him a last visit. A ruined, wicked, useless life!

He again bade Rovère good-bye speaking to him, calling him thee and thou as of old. Then he went slowly away. But at the end of a walk he turned around to look once more at the place where his friend lay. He saw, coming that way, between the tombs, as if by some cross alley, a woman in black, who was walking directly toward the place he had left. He stopped, waiting—yes, it was to Rovère's tomb that she was going. Tall, svelte, and as far as Jacques Dantin could see, she was young. He said to himself:

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"It is his daughter!"

The memory of their last interview came to him. He saw his unhappy friend, haggard, standing in front of his open safe, searching through his papers for those which represented his child's fortune. If this was his friend's daughter, it was to him that Rovère had looked to assure her future.

He walked slowly back to the tomb. The woman in black was now kneeling near the gray stone. Bent over, arranging a bouquet of chrysanthemums which she had brought. Dantin could see only her kneeling form and black draperies.

She was praying now!

Dantin stood looking at her, and when at last she arose he saw that she was tall and elegant in her mourning robes. He advanced toward her. The noise of his footsteps on the gravel caused her to turn her head, and Dantin saw a beautiful face, young and sad. She had blonde hair and large eyes, which opened wide in surprise. He saw the same expression of the eyes which Rovère's had borne.

The young woman instinctively made a movement as if to go away, to give place to the newcomer. But Dantin stopped her with a gesture. [Pg 248]

"Do not go away, Mademoiselle. I am the best friend of the one who sleeps here."

She stopped, pale and timid.

"I know very well that you loved him," he added.

She unconsciously let a frightened cry escape her and looked helplessly around.

"He told me all," Dantin slowly said. "I am Jacques Dantin. He has spoken to you of me, I think"—

"Yes," the young woman answered.

Dantin involuntarily shivered. Her voice had the same *timbre* as Rovère's.

In the silence of the cemetery, near the tomb, before that name, Louis-Pierre Rovère, which seemed almost like the presence of his dead friend, Dantin felt the temptation to reveal to this girl what her father had wished her to know.

They knew each other without ever having met. One word was enough, one name was sufficient, in order that the secret which united them should bring them nearer each other. What Dantin was to Rovère, Rovère had told Marthe again and again.

Then, as if from the depths of the tomb, Rovère had ordered him to speak. Jacques Dantin, in the solemn silence of that City of the Dead, confided to the young girl what her father had tried to tell him. He spoke rapidly, the words, "A legacy—in trust—a fortune" fell from his lips. But the young girl quickly interrupted him with a grand gesture. [Pg 249]

"I do not wish to know what any one has told you of me. I am the daughter of a man who awaits me at Blois, who is old, who loves only me, who needs only me, and I need nothing!"

There was in her tone an accent of command, of resolution, which Dantin recognized as one of Rovère's most remarkable characteristics.

Had Dantin known nothing, this sound in the voice, this ardent look on the pale face, would have given him a hint or a suspicion, and have obliged him to think of Rovère. Rovère lived again in this woman in black whom Jacques Dantin saw for the first time.

"Then?" asked this friend of the dead man, as if awaiting an order.

"Then," said the young girl in her deep voice, "when you meet me near this tomb do not speak to me of anything. If you should meet me outside this cemetery, do not recognize me. The secret which was confided to you by the one who sleeps there, is the secret of a dead one whom I adored—*my mother*; and of a living person whom I reverence—*my father*!"

She accented the words with a sort of tender, passionate piety, and Jacques Dantin saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Now, adieu!" she said. [Pg 250]

Jacques still wished to speak of that last confidence of the dying man, but she said again:

"Adieu!"

With her hand, gloved in black, she made the sign of the Cross, smiled sadly as she looked at the tomb where the chrysanthemums lay, then lowering her veil she went away, and Dantin, standing near the gray tomb, saw her disappear at the end of an alley.

The martyr, expiating near the old crippled man, a fault of which she was innocent, went back to him who was without suspicion; to him who adored her and to whom she was, in their poor apartment in Blois, his saint and his daughter.

She would watch, she would lose her youth, near that old soldier whose robust constitution would endure many, many long years. She would pay her dead mother's debt; she would pay it by

devoting every hour of her life to this man whose name she bore—an illustrious name, a name belonging to the victories, to the struggles, to the history of yesterday—she would be the hostage, the expiatory victim.

With all her life would she redeem the fault of that other!

"And who knows, my poor Rovère," said Jacques Dantin, "thy daughter, proud of her sacrifice, is perhaps happier in doing this!"

In his turn he left the tomb, he went out of the cemetery, he wished to walk to his lodging in the Rue Richelieu. He had only taken a few steps along the Boulevard, where—it seemed but yesterday—he had followed (talking with Bernardet) behind Rovère's funeral carriage, when he nearly ran into a little man who was hurrying along the pavement. The police officer saluted him, with a shaking of the head, which had in it regret, a little confusion, some excuses.

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"Ah! Monsieur Dantin, what a grudge you must have against me!"

"Not at all," said Dantin. "You thought that you were doing your duty, and it did not displease me to have you try to so quickly avenge my poor Rovère."

"Avenge him! Yes, he will be! I would not give four sous for Charles Pradès's head to-morrow, when he is tried. We shall see each other in court. *Au revoir*, Monsieur Dantin, and all my excuses!"

"*Au revoir*, Monsieur Bernardet, and all my compliments!"

The two men separated. Bernardet was on his way home to breakfast. He was late. Mme. Bernardet would be waiting, and a little red and breathless he hurried along. He stopped on hearing a newsboy announce the last number of *Lutèce*.

"Ask for the account of the trial to-morrow: The inquest by Paul Rodier on the crime of the Boulevard de Clichy!"

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The newsboy saluted Bernardet whom he knew very well.

"Give me a paper!" said the police officer. The boy pulled out a paper from the package he was carrying, and waved it over his head like a flag.

"Ah! I understand, that interests you, Monsieur Bernardet!"

And while the little man looked for the heading *Lutèce* in capital letters—the title which Paul Rodier had given to a series of interviews with celebrated physicians, the newsboy, giving Bernardet his change, said:

"To-morrow is the trial. But there is no doubt, is there, Monsieur Bernardet? Pradès is condemned in advance!"

"He has confessed, it is an accomplished fact," Bernardet replied, pocketing his change.

"*Au revoir* and thanks, Monsieur Bernardet."

And the newsboy, going on his way, cried out:

"Ask for *Lutèce*—The Rovère trial! The affair to-morrow! Paul Rodier's inquest on the eye of the dead man!" His voice was at last drowned in the noise of tramways and cabs.

M. Bernardet hurried on. The little ones would have become impatient, yes, yes, waiting for him, and asking for him around the table at home. He looked at the paper which he had bought. Paul Rodier, in regard to the question which he, Bernardet, had raised, had interviewed savants physiologists, psychologists, and in good journalistic style had published, the evening before the trial, the result of his inquest.

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M. Bernardet read as he hastened along the long titles in capitals in large head lines.

"A Scientific Problem Àpropos of the Rovère Affair!"

"Questions of Medical Jurisprudence!"

"The Eye of the Dead Man!"

"Interviews and Opinions of MM. Les Docteurs Brouardel, Roux, Duclaux, Pean, Robin, Pozzi, Blum, Vidal, Gilles de la Tourette"—

Bernardet turned the leaves. The interviews filled two pages at least in solid columns.

"So much the better! So much the better!" said the police officer enchanted. And hastening along even faster, he said to himself:

"I am going to read all that to the children; yes, all that—it will amuse them—life is a romance like any other! More incredible than any other! And these questions; the unknown, the invisible, all these problems—how interesting they are! And the mystery—so amusing!"

JULES CLARETIE of the French Academy; Mrs. Carlton A. Kingsbury, Translator.

Transcriber's Notes

For reasons unknown, the chapter headings show no Chapter XII and no Chapter XV. The chapter headings were left unchanged. I am told that both a copy of the physical book and the copy at The Internet Archive have the same Chapter numbering sequence.

On page 15, a quotation mark was placed before "But since you".

On page 15, a quotation mark was placed before "But I am nothing".

On page 35, "in so unforeseen" was replaced with "in so unforeseen".

On page 38, "the wordly magistrate" was replaced with "the worldly magistrate".

On page 40, the quotation mark after "which he wished to" was removed.

On page 40, "the study of M. Rovère" was replaced with "the study of M. Rovère".

On page 42, "to be exact, thirty-six" was replaced with "to be exact, twenty-six years".

On page 43, "14th of June, 1848" was replaced with "14th of June, 1868".

On page 46, "devination" was replaced with "divination".

On page 49, "reëntered the salon" was replaced with "reentered the salon".

On page 50, "des Aubrays" was replaced with "des Audrays".

On page 61, "tatoosings" was replaced with "tattoosings".

On page 64, a single quotation mark before "Art thou satisfied" was replaced with a double quotation mark.

On page 82, "acqueous" was replaced with "aqueous".

On page 85, "sixteerth" was replaced with "sixteenth".

On page 91, "Mme. Monchie" was replaced with "Mme. Moniche".

On page 99, "chosen by Mr. Rovère" was replaced with "chosen by M. Rovère".

On page 101, "mein" was replaced with "mien".

On page 111, the period after "he replied" was replaced with a comma.

On page 111, a paragraph marker was placed after "Why?".

On page 121, the quotation mark was removed after "Rovère's murder?".

On page 122, a period was placed after "of your biography".

On page 129, the quotation mark was removed after "of death."

On page 140, "Rovère's" was replaced with "Rovère's".

On page 146, "charcteristic" was replaced with "characteristic".

On page 150, "portait which resembled" was replaced with "portrait which resembled".

On page 153, "Bernadet left enchanted" was replaced with "Bernardet left enchanted".

On page 164, "retain silent" was replaced with "remain silent".

On page 171, "grey" was replaced with "gray".

On page 224, "had came there" was replaced with "had come there".

On page 230, "one mornnig" was replaced with "one morning".

On page 230, "Prades, moreover" was replaced with "Pradès, moreover".

On page 232, "my dear brother-in law" was replaced with "my dear brother-in-law".

On page 235, "necessity for fright" was replaced with "necessity for flight."

On page 241, "in the labratory" was replaced with "in the laboratory".

On page 250, "chysanthemums" was replaced with "chrysanthemums".

On page 251, "hurring" was replaced with "hurrying".

On page 251, "Prades's" was replaced with "Pradès's".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CRIME OF THE BOULEVARD ***

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