

The Poisoned Meal

By Wilkie Collins

I THE POCKETS

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the first of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one, Marie left Bayeux, and early on the same day she reached Caen. Her good manners, her excellent character, and the

modesty of her demands in the matter of wages, rendered it easy for her to find a situation. On the very evening of her arrival she was suited with a place; and her first night at Caen was passed under the roof of her new employers.

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

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

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

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

The next day being Sunday, Marie marked the occasion by putting on all the little finery she had. Her pair of festive pockets, striped with blue and white, came out of her bundle along with other things. When she had put them on, she hung the old work-a-day pockets which she had worn on leaving Bayeux, to the back of a chair in her bed-chamber. This was a little room on the ground-floor, situated close to the dining-room, and perfectly easy of access to every one in the house. Long afterwards, Marie remembered how pleasantly and quietly that Sunday passed. It was the last day of happiness the poor creature was to enjoy in the house of Madame Duparc.

On the Monday morning, she went to fetch the milk as usual. But the milkwoman was not in the shop to serve her. After returning to the house, she proposed making a second attempt; but her mistress stopped her, saying that the milk would doubtless be sent before long. This turned out to be the case, and Marie, having cleaned the saucepan for Monsieur de Beaulieu's hasty-pudding, received from the hands of Madame Duparc, the earthen vessel containing the meal used in the house. She mixed this flour and put into the saucepan in the presence of Madame Duparc and her daughter.

She had just set the saucepan on the fire, when her mistress said, with a very remarkable abruptness:

‘Have you put any salt in it?’

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

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

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

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

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

This shocking catastrophe, startling and suspicious as it was, did not appear to discompose the nerves of Madame Duparc. While her eldest son immediately left the house to inform his father (who had been absent in the country all day) of what had happened, she lost no time in sending for the nearest nurse to lay out the corpse of Monsieur de Beaulieu. On entering the chamber of death, the nurse found Marie there alone, praying by the old man’s bedside.

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

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

Soon afterwards the time came when it was customary to prepare supper. Marie went into the kitchen, mechanically, to get the meal ready. Madame Duparc, her daughter, and

her youngest son, sat down to it as usual. Madame de Beaulieu, overwhelmed by the dreadful death of her husband, was incapable of joining them.

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

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

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

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

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

II THE ARSENIC

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

While she was thus engaged, Madame Duparc and her daughter remained alone in the kitchen. When she left the stable it was time for her to lay the cloth. She was told to put plates for seven persons. Only six, however, sat down to dinner. Those six were, Madame de Beaulieu, Monsieur and Madame Duparc, the youngest of their two sons, Madame

Beauguillot (sister of Madame Duparc), and Monsieur Beauguillot (her son). Mademoiselle Duparc remained in the kitchen to help Marie in serving up the dinner, and only took her place at table after the soup had been put on. Her elder brother, after summoning his father home, had not returned to the house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III THE EVIDENCE

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

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

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

The event having taken this serious turn, the first duty of the Lieutenant-Criminel (according to the French law) was to send for the servant on whom suspicion rested, to question her, and to confront her with the Duparcs. He did nothing of the kind; he made no inquiry after the servant (being probably unwilling to expose his colleague, the Procurator, who had illegally arrested and illegally imprisoned her); he never examined the kitchen utensils which the Commissary had locked up; he never opened the servant's cupboard with the key that had been taken from her when she was searched in prison. All he did was to reduce the report of the doctors to writing, and to return to his office with his posse-comitatus at his heels.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first witness examined on the second day was Mademoiselle Duparc. She carefully followed her mother’s lead—saying as little as possible about the preparation of the hasty-pudding on the morning of Monday, and as much as possible about the pain suffered by everybody after the dinner of Tuesday. Madame Beauguillot, the next witness, added her testimony, as to the state of her own digestive organs, after partaking of the same meal—speaking at such prodigious length that the poison would appear, in

her case, to have produced its principal effect (and that of a stimulating kind) on her tongue. Her son, Monsieur de Beauguillot, was next examined, quite uselessly in relation to the death by poison which was the object of inquiry. The last witness was Madame Duparc's younger son—the same who had complained of feeling a gritty substance between his teeth at dinner. In one important respect, his evidence flatly contradicted his mother's. Madame Duparc had adroitly connected Monsieur de Beaulieu's illness with the hasty-pudding, by describing the old man as having been taken ill four or five minutes after eating it. Young Duparc, on the contrary, declared that his grandfather first felt ill at nine o'clock—exactly two hours after he had partaken of his morning meal.

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

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

Let us see what amount of credit can be attached to the evidence of these three witnesses.

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

Here were two separate portions of poison found, then. What did Friley do with them? Did he seal them up immediately in the presence of witnesses, and take them to the legal authorities? Nothing of the sort. On being asked what he did with the first portion, he replied that he gave it to young Monsieur Beauguillot. Beauguillot's evidence was thereupon referred to; and it was found that he had never mentioned receiving the packet of powder from Friley. He had made himself extremely officious in examining the kitchen utensils; he had been as anxious as any one to promote the discovery of arsenic; and when he had the opportunity of producing it, if Friley were to be believed, he held it

back, and said not one word about the matter. So much for the first portion of the mysterious powder, and for the credibility of Friley's evidence thus far!

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

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

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

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

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

IV THE SENTENCE

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

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

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

Careless as they were of assuming even the external decencies of justice, the legal authorities, and their friends the Duparcs, felt that there would be some risk in trying their

victim for her life on such evidence as this, in a large town like Caen. It was impossible to shift their ground and charge her with poisoning accidentally; for they either could not, or would not, account on ordinary grounds for the presence of arsenic in the house. And, even if this difficulty were overcome, and if it were alleged that arsenic purchased for killing vermin, had been carelessly placed in one of the salt-cellars on the dresser, Madame Duparc could not deny that her own hands had salted the hasty-pudding on the Monday, and that her servant had been too ill through exhaustion to cook the dinner on the Tuesday. Even supposing there were no serious interests of the vilest kind at stake, which made the girl's destruction a matter of necessity, it was clearly impossible to modify the charge against her. One other alternative remained—the alternative of adding a second accusation which might help to strengthen the first, and to degrade Marie in the estimation of those inhabitants of the town who were now disposed to sympathise with her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Requires that the prisoner shall be declared duly convicted,

‘I. Of having, on the Monday morning of the sixth of August last, cooked some hasty-pudding for Monsieur Paisant de Beaulieu, father-in-law of Monsieur Huet-Duparc, in whose house the prisoner had lived in the capacity of servant from the first day of the said month of August; and of having put arsenic in the said hasty-pudding while cooking it, by which arsenic the said Monsieur de Beaulieu died poisoned, about six o’clock on the same evening.

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

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

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

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

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

‘VII. Of being strongly suspected of stealing, at the beginning of the said month of August, from the woman Lefèvre, a piece of orange-coloured stuff.

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

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

(Signed) REVEL'

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

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

On the seventeenth of May the Rouen parliament delivered its judgment, and confirmed the original sentence.

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

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

V HUSHED-UP

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

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

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

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

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

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

That twenty-eighth of July, seventeen hundred and eighty-two, fell on a Sunday. Throughout the day and night the order lay in the office unopened. Sunday was a holiday, and Procurator Revel was not disposed to occupy it by so much as five minutes' performance of week-day work.

On Monday, the twenty-ninth, the crowd assembled to see the execution. The stake was set up, the soldiers were called out, the executioner was ready. All the preliminary horror of the torturing and burning was suffered to darken round the miserable prisoner, before the wretches in authority saw fit to open the message of mercy and to deliver it at the prison-gate.

She was now saved, as if by a miracle, for the second time! But the cell-door was still closed on her. The only chance of ever opening it—the only hope of publicly asserting her innocence, lay in appealing to the King's justice by means of a written statement of her case, presenting it exactly as it stood in all its details, from the beginning at Madame Duparc's to the end in the prison of Caen. The production of such a document as this was beset with obstacles; the chief of them being the difficulty of gaining access to the voluminous reports of the evidence given at the trial, which were only accessible in those days to persons professionally connected with the courts of law. If Marie's case was to be

placed before the King, no man in France but a lawyer could undertake the duty with the slightest chance of serving the interests of the prisoner and the interests of truth.

In this disgraceful emergency a man was found to plead the girl's cause, whose profession secured to him the privilege of examining the evidence against her. This man—a barrister, named Lecauchois—not only undertook to prepare a statement of the case from the records of the court—but further devoted himself to collecting money for Marie, from all the charitably-disposed inhabitants of the town. It is to be said to his credit that he honestly faced the difficulties of his task, and industriously completed the document which he had engaged to furnish. On the other hand, it must be recorded to his shame, that his motives were interested throughout, and that with almost incredible meanness he paid himself for the employment of his time by putting the greater part of the sum which he had collected for his client in his own pocket. With her one friend, no less than with all her enemies, it seems to have been Marie's ~rd fate to see the worst side of human nature, on every occasion when she ~'as brought into contact with her fellow-creatures.

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

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

As a necessary consequence of this change of course, the authorities of Caen began, for the first time, to feel seriously alarmed for themselves. If the parliament of Rouen dealt fairly by the prisoner, a fatal exposure of the whole party would be the certain result. Under these circumstances, Procurator Revel and his friends sent a private requisition to the authorities at Rouen, conjuring them to remember that the respectability of their professional brethren was at stake, and suggesting that the legal establishment of Marie's innocence was the error of all others which it was now most urgently necessary to avoid. The parliament of Rouen was, however, far too cautious, if not too honest, to commit itself to such an atrocious proceeding as was here plainly indicated. After gaining as much time as possible by prolonging their deliberations to the utmost, the authorities resolved on adopting a middle course, which on the one hand should not actually establish the prisoner's innocence, and, on the other, should not publicly expose the disgraceful conduct of the prosecution at Caen. Their decree, not issued until the twelfth of March, seventeen hundred and eighty-five, annulled the sentence of Procurator Revel on technical grounds; suppressed the further publication of the statement of Marie's case, which had been drawn out by the advocate Lecauchois, as libellous towards Monsieur

Revel and Madame Duparc; and announced that the prisoner was ordered to remain in confinement until more ample information could be collected relating to the doubtful question of her innocence or her guilt. No such information was at all likely to present itself (more especially after the only existing narrative of the case had been suppressed); and the practical effect of the decree, therefore, was to keep Marie in prison for an indefinite period, after she had been illegally deprived of her liberty already from August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one, to March, seventeen hundred and eighty-five. Who shall say that the respectable classes did not take good care of their respectability on the eve of the French Revolution!

Marie's only hope of recovering her freedom, and exposing her unscrupulous enemies to the obloquy and the punishment which they richly deserved, lay in calling the attention of the higher tribunals of the capital to the cruelly cunning decree of the parliament of Rouen. Accordingly, she once more petitioned the throne. The King referred the document to his council; and the council issued an order submitting the Rouen decree to the final investigation of the parliament of Paris.

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

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

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

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

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

In the first place, Madame Duparc is the only one of the dinner-party who attributes the general uneasiness to poison. She not only does this, but she indicates the kind of poison used, and declares in the kitchen that it is burnt,—so as to lead to the inference that the servant, who has removed the dishes, has thrown some of the poisoned food on the fire. Here is a foregone conclusion on the subject of arsenic in Madame Duparc's mind, and an inference in connection with it, directed at the servant by Madame Duparc's lips. In the second place, if any trust at all is to be put in the evidence touching the finding of arsenic on or about Marie's person, that trust must be reposed in the testimony of Surgeon Hébert, who first searched the girl. Where does he find the arsenic and the bread crumbs? In Marie's pockets. Who takes the most inexplicably officious notice of such a trifle as Marie's dress, at the most shockingly inappropriate time, when the father of Madame Duparc lies dead in the house? Madame Duparc herself. Who tells Marie to take off her Sunday pockets, and sends her into her own room (which she herself has not entered during the night, and which has been open to the intrusion of any one else in the house) to tie on the very pockets in which the arsenic is found? Madame Duparc. Who put the arsenic into the pockets? Is it jumping to a conclusion to answer once more—Madame Duparc?

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

If the poisoning of the hasty-pudding (to begin with) was accidental, the salting of it, through which the poisoning was, to all appearance, effected, must have been a part of the habitual cookery of the dish. So far, however, from this being the case, Madame Duparc had expressly warned her servant not to use salt; and only used the salt (or the arsenic) herself; after asking a question which implied a direct contradiction of her own directions, and the inconsistency of which she made no attempt whatever to explain. Again, when her father was taken ill, if Madame Duparc had been only the victim of an accident, would she have remained content with no better help than that of an apothecary's boy? Would she not have sent, as her father grew worse, for the best medical assistance which the town afforded? The facts show that she summoned just help enough, barely to save appearances, and no more. The facts show that she betrayed a singular anxiety to have the body laid out as soon as possible after life was extinct. The facts show that she maintained an unnatural composure on the day of the death. These are significant circumstances. They speak for themselves independently of the evidence given afterwards, in which she and her child contradicted each other as to the time that elapsed when the old man had eaten his fatal meal, before he was taken ill. Add to these

serious facts the mysterious disappearance from the house of the eldest son, which was never accounted for; and the rumour of purchased poison, which was never investigated. Consider, besides, whether the attempt to sacrifice the servant's life be not more consistent with the ruthless determination of a criminal, than with the terror of an innocent woman who shrinks from accepting the responsibility of a frightful accident—and determine, at the same time, whether the infinitesimal amount of injury done by the poisoned dinner can be most probably attributed to lucky accident, or to premeditated doctoring of the dishes with just arsenic enough to preserve appearances, and to implicate the servant without too seriously injuring the company on whom she waited. Give all these serious considerations their due weight; then look back to the day of Monsieur de Beaulieu's death: and say if Madame Duparc was the victim of a dreadful accident, or the perpetrator of an atrocious crime!

That she was one or the other, and that, in either case, she was the originator of the vile conspiracy against her servant which these pages disclose, was the conclusion to which Monsieur Fournel's pleading on his client's behalf inevitably led. That pleading satisfactorily demonstrated Marie's innocence of poisoning and theft, and her fair claim to the fullest legal compensation for the wrong inflicted on her. On the twenty-third of May, seventeen hundred and eighty-six, the parliament of Pans issued its decree, discharging her from the remotest suspicion of guilt, releasing her from her long imprisonment, and authorizing her to bring an action for damages against the person or persons who had falsely accused her of murder and theft. The truth had triumphed, and the poor servant-girl had found laws to protect her at last.

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

Nothing.

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

Here, then, was no less a prospect in view than the disgrace of a respectable family, and the dishonouring of the highest legal functionaries of two important provincial towns! And for what end was the dangerous exposure to be made? Merely to do justice to the daughter of a common day-labourer, who had been illegally sentenced to torture and burning, and illegally confined in prison for nearly five years. To make a wholesale sacrifice of her superiors, no matter how wicked they might be, for the sake of giving a mere servant-girl compensation for the undeserved obloquy and misery of many years, was too posterous and too suicidal an act of justice to be thought of for a moment.

Accordingly, when Marie was prepared to bring her action for damages, the lawyers laid their heads together, in the interests of society. It was found possible to put her out of court at once and for ever, by taking a technical objection to the proceedings in which she was plaintiff, at the very outset. This disgraceful means of escape once discovered, the girl's guilty persecutors instantly took advantage of it. She was formally put out of court, without the possibility of any further appeal. Procurator Revel and the other authorities retained their distinguished legal positions; and the question of the guilt or innocence of Madame Duparc, in the matter of her father's death, remains a mystery which no man can solve to this day.

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

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

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