



Derues

DERUES

One September afternoon in 1751, towards half-past five, about a score of small boys, chattering, pushing, and tumbling over one another like a covey of partridges, issued from one of the religious schools of Chartres. The joy of the little troop just escaped from a long and wearisome captivity was doubly great: a slight accident to one of the teachers had caused the class to be dismissed half an hour earlier than usual, and in consequence of the extra work thrown on the teaching staff the brother whose duty it was to see all the scholars safe home was compelled to omit that part of his daily task. Therefore not only thirty or forty minutes were stolen from work, but there was also unexpected, uncontrolled liberty, free from the surveillance of that black-cassocked overseer who kept order in their ranks. Thirty minutes! at that age it is a century, of laughter and prospective games! Each had promised solemnly, under pain of severe punishment, to return straight to his paternal nest without delay, but the air was so fresh and pure, the country smiled all around! The school, or preferably the cage, which had just opened, lay at the extreme edge of one of the suburbs, and it only required a few steps to slip under a cluster of trees by a sparkling brook beyond which rose undulating ground, breaking the monotony of a vast and fertile plain. Was it possible to be obedient, to refrain from the desire to spread one's wings? The scent of the meadows mounted to the heads of the steadiest among them, and intoxicated even the most timid. It was resolved to betray the confidence of the reverend fathers, even at the risk of disgrace and punishment next morning, supposing the escapade were discovered.

A flock of sparrows suddenly released from a cage could not have flown more wildly into the little wood. They were all about the same age, the eldest might be nine. They flung off coats and waistcoats, and the grass became strewn with baskets, copy-books, dictionaries, and catechisms. While the crowd of fair-haired heads, of fresh and smiling faces, noisily consulted as to which game should be chosen, a boy who had taken no part in the general gaiety, and who had been carried away by the rush without being able to escape sooner, glided slyly away among the trees, and, thinking himself unseen, was beating a hasty retreat, when one of his comrades cried out--

"Antoine is running away!"

Two of the best runners immediately started in pursuit, and the fugitive, notwithstanding his start, was speedily overtaken, seized by his collar, and brought back as a deserter.

"Where were you going?" the others demanded.

"Home to my cousins," replied the boy; "there is no harm in that."

"You canting sneak!" said another boy, putting his fist under the captive's chin; "you were going to the master to tell of us."

"Pierre," responded Antoine, "you know quite well I never tell lies."

"Indeed!--only this morning you pretended I had taken a book you had lost, and you did it because I kicked you yesterday, and you didn't dare to kick me back again."

Antoine lifted his eyes to heaven, and folding his arms on his breast--

"Dear Buttel," he said, "you are mistaken; I have always been taught to forgive injuries."

"Listen, listen! he might be saying his prayers!" cried the other boys; and a volley of offensive epithets, enforced by cuffs, was hurled at the culprit.

Derues

Pierre Buttet, whose influence was great, put a stop to this onslaught.

"Look here, Antoine, you are a bad lot, that we all know; you are a sneak and a hypocrite. It's time we put a stop to it. Take off your coat and fight it out. If you like, we will fight every morning and evening till the end of the month."

The proposition was loudly applauded, and Pierre, turning up his sleeves as far as his elbows, prepared to suit actions to words.

The challenger assuredly did not realise the full meaning, of his words; had he done so, this chivalrous defiance would simply have been an act of cowardice on his part, for there could be no doubt as to the victor in such a conflict. The one was a boy of alert and gallant bearing, strong upon his legs, supple and muscular, a vigorous man in embryo; while the other, not quite so old, small, thin, of a sickly leaden complexion, seemed as if he might be blown away by a strong puff of wind. His skinny arms and legs hung on to his body like the claws of a spider, his fair hair inclined to red, his white skin appeared nearly bloodless, and the consciousness of weakness made him timid, and gave a shifty, uneasy look to his eyes. His whole expression was uncertain, and looking only at his face it was difficult at first sight to decide to which sex he belonged. This confusion of two natures, this indefinable mixture of feminine weakness without grace, and of abortive boyhood, seemed to stamp him as something exceptional, unclassable, and once observed, it was difficult to take one's eyes from him. Had he been endowed with physical strength he would have been a terror to his comrades, exercising by fear the ascendancy which Pierre owed to his joyous temper and unwearied gaiety, for this mean exterior concealed extraordinary powers of will and dissimulation. Guided by instinct, the other children hung about Pierre and willingly accepted his leadership; by instinct also they avoided Antoine, repelled by a feeling of chill, as if from the neighbourhood of a reptile, and shunning him unless to profit in some way by their superior strength. Never would he join their games without compulsion; his thin, colourless lips seldom parted for a laugh, and even at that tender age his smile had an unpleasantly sinister expression.

"Will you fight?" again demanded Pierre.

Antoine glanced hastily round; there was no chance of escape, a double ring enclosed him. To accept or refuse seemed about equally risky; he ran a good chance of a thrashing whichever way he decided. Although his heart beat loudly, no trace of emotion appeared on his pallid cheek; an unforeseen danger would have made him shriek, but he had had time to collect himself, time to shelter behind hypocrisy. As soon as he could lie and cheat he recovered courage, and the instinct of cunning, once roused, prevailed over everything else. Instead of answering this second challenge, he knelt down and said to Pierre--

"You are much stronger than I am."

This submission disarmed his antagonist. "Get up," he replied; "I won't touch you, if you can't defend yourself."

"Pierre," continued Antoine, still on his knees, "I assure you, by God and the Holy Virgin, I was not going to tell. I was going home to my cousins to learn my lessons for to-morrow; you know how slow I am. If you think I have done you any harm, I ask your forgiveness."

Pierre held out his hand and made him get up.

"Will you be a good fellow, Antoine, and play with us?"

"Yes, I will."

"All right, then; let us forget all about it."

Derues

"What are we to play at?" asked Antoine, taking off his coat.

"Thieves and archers," cried one of the boys....

"Splendid!" said Pierre; and using his acknowledged authority, he divided them into two sides--ten highwaymen, whom he was to command, and ten archers of the guard, who were to pursue them; Antoine was among the latter.

The highwaymen, armed with swords and guns obtained from the willows which grew along the brook, moved off first, and gained the valleys between the little hills beyond the wood. The fight was to be serious, and any prisoner on either side was to be tried immediately. The robbers divided into twos and threes, and hid themselves in the ravines.

A few minutes later the archers started in pursuit. There were encounters, surprises, skirmishes; but whenever it came to close quarters, Pierre's men, skilfully distributed, united on hearing his whistle, and the Army of justice had to retreat. But there came a time when this magic signal was no longer heard, and the robbers became uneasy, and remained crouching in their hiding-places. Pierre, over-daring, had undertaken to defend alone the entrance of a dangerous passage and to stop the whole hostile troop there. Whilst he kept them engaged, half of his men, concealed on the left, were to come round the foot of the hill and make a rush on hearing his whistle; the other half, also stationed at some, little distance, were to execute the same manoeuvre from above. The archers would be caught in a trap, and attacked both in front and rear, would be obliged to surrender at discretion. Chance, which not unfrequently decides the fate of a battle, defeated this excellent stratagem. Watching intently; Pierre failed to perceive that while his whole attention was given to the ground in front, the archers had taken an entirely different road from the one they ought to have followed if his combination were to succeed. They suddenly fell upon him from behind, and before he could blow his whistle, they gagged him with a handkerchief and tied his hands. Six remained to keep the field of battle and disperse the hostile band, now deprived of its chief; the remaining four conveyed Pierre to the little wood, while the robbers, hearing no signal, did not venture to stir. According to agreement, Pierre Buttel was tried by the archers, who promptly transformed themselves into a court of justice, and as he had been taken red-handed, and did not condescend to defend himself, the trial was not a long affair. He was unanimously sentenced to be hung, and the execution was then and there carried out, at the request of the criminal himself, who wanted the game to be properly played to the end, and who actually selected a suitable tree for his own execution.

"But, Pierre," said one of the judges, "how can you be held up there?"

"How stupid you are!" returned the captive. "I shall only pretend to be hung, of course. See here!" and he fastened together several pieces strong string which had tied some of the other boys' books, piled the latter together, and standing on tiptoe on this very insecure basis, fastened one end of the cord to a horizontal bough, and put his neck into a running knot at the other end, endeavouring to imitate the contortions of an actual sufferer. Shouts of laughter greeted him, and the victim laughed loudest of all. Three archers went to call the rest to behold this amusing spectacle; one, tired out, remained with the prisoner.

"Ah, Hangman," said Pierre, putting out his tongue at him, "are the books firm? I thought I felt them give way."

"No," replied Antoine; it was he who remained. "Don't be afraid, Pierre."

"It is a good thing; for if they fell I don't think the cord is long enough."

Derues

"Don't you really think so?"

A horrible thought showed itself like a flash on the child's face. He resembled a young hyena scenting blood for the first time. He glanced at the pile of books Pierre was standing on, and compared it with the length of the cord between the branch and his neck. It was already nearly dark, the shadows were deepening in the wood, gleams of pale light penetrated between the trees, the leaves had become black and rustled in the wind. Antoine stood silent and motionless, listening if any sound could be heard near them.

It would be a curious study for the moralist to observe how the first thought of crime develops itself in the recesses of the human heart, and how this poisoned germ grows and stifles all other sentiments; an impressive lesson might be gathered from this struggle of two opposing principles, however weak it may be, in perverted natures. In cases where judgment can discern, where there is power to choose between good and evil, the guilty person has only himself to blame, and the most heinous crime is only the action of its perpetrator. It is a human action, the result of passions which might have been controlled, and one's mind is not uncertain, nor one's conscience doubtful, as to the guilt. But how can one conceive this taste for murder in a young child, how imagine it, without being tempted to exchange the idea of eternal sovereign justice for that of blind-fatality? How can one judge without hesitation between the moral sense which has given way and the instinct which displays itself? how not exclaim that the designs of a Creator who retains the one and impels the other are sometimes mysterious and inexplicable, and that one must submit without understanding?

"Do you hear them coming?" asked Pierre.

"I hear nothing," replied Antoine, and a nervous shiver ran through all his members.

"So much the worse. I am tired of being dead; I shall come to life and run after them. Hold the books, and I will undo the noose."

"If you move, the books will separate; wait, I will hold them."

And he knelt down, and collecting all his strength, gave the pile a violent push.

Pierre endeavoured to raise his hands to his throat. "What are you doing?" he cried in a suffocating voice.

"I am paying you out;" replied Antoine, folding his arms.

Pierre's feet were only a few inches from the ground, and the weight of his body at first bent the bough for a moment; but it rose again, and the unfortunate boy exhausted himself in useless efforts. At every movement the knot grew tighter, his legs struggled, his arms sought vainly something to lay hold of; then his movements slackened, his limbs stiffened, and his hands sank down. Of so much life and vigour nothing remained but the movement of an inert mass turning round and round upon itself.

Not till then did Antoine cry for help, and when the other boys hastened up they found him crying and tearing his hair. So violent indeed were his sobs and his despair that he could hardly be understood as he tried to explain how the books had given way under Pierre, and how he had vainly endeavoured to support him in his arms.

This boy, left an orphan at three years old, had been brought up at first by a relation who turned him out for theft; afterwards by two sisters, his cousins, who were already beginning to take alarm at his abnormal perversity. This pale and fragile being, an incorrigible thief, a consummate hypocrite, and a cold-blooded assassin, was predestined to an immortality of crime, and was to find a place among the most

Derues

execrable monsters for whom humanity has ever had to blush; his name was Antoine-Francois Derues.

Twenty years had gone by since this horrible and mysterious event, which no one sought to unravel at the time it occurred. One June evening, 1771, four persons were sitting in one of the rooms of a modestly furnished, dwelling on the third floor of a house in the rue Saint-Victor. The party consisted of three women and an ecclesiastic, who boarded, for meals only, with the woman who tenanted the dwelling; the other two were near neighbours. They were all friends, and often met thus in the evening to play cards. They were sitting round the card-table, but although it was nearly ten o'clock the cards had not yet been touched. They spoke in low tones, and a half-interrupted confidence had, this evening, put a check on the usual gaiety.

Someone knocked gently at the door, although no sound of steps on the creaking wooden staircase had been heard, and a wheedling voice asked for admittance. The occupier of the room, Madame Legrand, rose, and admitted a man of about six-and-twenty, at whose appearance the four friends exchanged glances, at once observed by the new-comer, who affected, however, not to see them. He bowed successively to the three women, and several times with the utmost respect to the abbe, making signs of apology for the interruption caused by his appearance; then, coughing several times, he turned to Madame Legrand, and said in a feeble voice, which seemed to betoken much suffering--

"My kind mistress, will you and these other ladies excuse my presenting myself at such an hour and in such a costume? I am ill, and I was obliged to get up."

His costume was certainly singular enough: he was wrapped in a large dressing-gown of flowered chintz; his head was adorned by a nightcap drawn up at the top and surmounted by a muslin frill. His appearance did not contradict his complaint of illness; he was barely four feet six in height, his limbs were bony, his face sharp, thin, and pale. Thus attired, coughing incessantly, dragging his feet as if he had no strength to lift them, holding a lighted candle in one hand and an egg in the other, he suggested a caricature--some imaginary invalid just escaped from M. Purgon. Nevertheless, no one ventured to smile, notwithstanding his valetudinarian appearance and his air of affected humility. The perpetual blinking of the yellow eyelids which fell over the round and hollow eyes, shining with a sombre fire which he could never entirely suppress, reminded one of a bird of prey unable to face the light, and the lines of his face, the hooked nose, and the thin, constantly quivering, drawn-in lips suggested a mixture of boldness and baseness, of cunning and sincerity. But there is no book which can instruct one to read the human countenance correctly; and some special circumstance must have roused the suspicions of these four persons so much as to cause them to make these observations, and they were not as usual deceived by the humbug of this skilled actor, a past master in the art of deception.

He continued after a moment's silence, as if he did not wish to interrupt their mute observation--

"Will you oblige me by a neighbourly kindness?"

"What is it, Derues?" asked Madame Legrand. A violent cough, which appeared to rend his chest, prevented him from answering immediately. When it ceased, he looked at the abbe, and said, with a melancholy smile--

"What I ought to ask in my present state of health is your blessing, my father, and your intercession for the pardon of my sins. But everyone clings to the life which God has given him. We do not easily abandon hope; moreover, I have always considered it wrong to neglect such means of preserving our lives as are in our power, since life is for us only a time of trial, and the longer and harder the trial the greater our

Derues

recompense in a better world. whatever befalls us, our answer should be that of the Virgin Mary to the angel who announced the mystery of the Incarnation: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.'

"You are right," said the abbe, with a severe and inquisitorial look, under which Derues remained quite untroubled; "it is an attribute of God to reward and to punish, and the Almighty is not deceived by him who deceives men. The Psalmist has said, 'Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments.'

"He has said also, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether,'" Derues promptly replied. This exchange of quotations from Scripture might have lasted for hours without his being at a loss, had the abbe thought fit to continue in this strain; but such a style of conversation, garnished with grave and solemn words, seemed almost sacrilegious in the mouth of a man of such ridiculous appearance--a profanation at once sad and grotesque. Derues seemed to comprehend the impression it produced, and tuning again to Madame Legrand, he said--

"We have got a long way from what I came to ask you, my kind friend. I was so ill that I went early to bed, but I cannot sleep, and I have no fire. Would you have the kindness to have this egg mulled for me?"

"Cannot your servant do that for you?" asked Madame Legrand.

"I gave her leave to go out this evening, and though it is late she has not yet returned. If I had a fire, I would not give you so much trouble, but I do not care to light one at this hour. You know I am always afraid of accidents, and they so easily happen!"

"Very well, then," replied Madame Legrand; "go back to your room, and my servant will bring it to you."

"Thank you," said Derues, bowing,--"many thanks."

As he turned to depart, Madame Legrand spoke again.

"This day week, Derues, you have to pay me half the twelve hundred livres due for the purchase of my business."

"So soon as that?"

"Certainly, and I want the money. Have you forgotten the date, then?"

"Oh dear, I have never looked at the agreement since it was drawn up. I did not think the time was so near, it is the fault of my bad memory; but I will contrive to pay you, although trade is very bad, and in three days I shall have to pay more than fifteen thousand livres to different people."

He bowed again and departed, apparently exhausted by the effort of sustaining so long a conversation.

As soon as they were alone, the abbe exclaimed--

"That man is assuredly an utter rascal! May God forgive him his hypocrisy! How is it possible we could allow him to deceive us for so long?"

"But, my father," interposed one of the visitors, "are you really sure of what you have just said?"

"I am not now speaking of the seventy-nine Louis d'or which have been stolen from me, although I never mentioned to anyone but you, and he was then present, that I possessed such a sum, and although that very day he made a false excuse for coming to my rooms when I was out. Theft is indeed infamous, but slander is not less so, and he has slandered you

Derues

disgracefully. Yes, he has spread a report that you, Madame Legrand, you, his former mistress and benefactress, have put temptation in his way, and desired to commit carnal sin with him. This is now whispered the neighbourhood all round us, it will soon be said aloud, and we have been so completely his dupes, we have helped him so much to acquire a reputation for uprightness, that it would now be impossible to destroy our own work; if I were to accuse him of theft, and you charged him with lying, probably neither of us would be believed. Beware, these odious tales have not been spread without a reason. Now that your eyes are open, beware of him."

"Yes," replied Madame Legrand, "my brother-in-law warned me three years ago. One day Derues said to my sister-in-law,--I remember the words perfectly,--'I should like to be a druggist, because one would always be able to punish an enemy; and if one has a quarrel with anyone it would be easy to get rid of him by means of a poisoned draught.' I neglected these warnings. I surmounted the feeling of repugnance I first felt at the sight of him; I have responded to his advances, and I greatly fear I may have cause to repent it. But you know him as well as I do, who would not have thought his piety sincere?--who would not still think so? And notwithstanding all you have said, I still hesitate to feel serious alarm; I am unwilling to believe in such utter depravity."

The conversation continued in this strain for some time, and then, as it was getting late, the party separated.

Next morning early, a large and noisy crowd was assembled in the rue Saint-Victor before Derues' shop of drugs and groceries. There was a confusion of cross questions, of inquiries which obtained no answer, of answers not addressed to the inquiry, a medley of sound, a pell-mell of unconnected words, of affirmations, contradictions, and interrupted narrations. Here, a group listened to an orator who held forth in his shirt sleeves, a little farther there were disputes, quarrels, exclamations of "Poor man!" "Such a good fellow!" "My poor gossip Derues!" "Good heavens! what will he do now?" "Alas! he is quite done for; it is to be hoped his creditors will give him time!" Above all this uproar was heard a voice, sharp and piercing like a cat's, lamenting, and relating with sobs the terrible misfortune of last night. At about three in the morning the inhabitants of the rue St. Victor had been startled out of their sleep by the cry of "Fire, fire!" A conflagration had burst forth in Derues' cellar, and though its progress had been arrested and the house saved from destruction, all the goods stored therein had perished. It apparently meant a considerable loss in barrels of oil, casks of brandy, boxes of soap, etc., which Derues estimated at not less than nine thousand livres.

By what unlucky chance the fire had been caused he had no idea. He recounted his visit to Madame Legrand, and pale, trembling, hardly able to sustain himself, he cried--

"I shall die of grief! A poor man as ill as I am! I am lost! I am ruined!"

A harsh voice interrupted his lamentations, and drew the attention of the crowd to a woman carrying printed broadsides, and who forced a passage through the crowd up to the shop door. She unfolded one of her sheets, and cried as loudly and distinctly as her husky voice permitted--

"Sentence pronounced by the Parliament of Paris against John Robert Cassel, accused and convicted of Fraudulent Bankruptcy!"

Derues looked up and saw a street-hawker who used to come to his shop for a drink, and with whom he had had a violent quarrel about a month previously, she having detected him in a piece of knavery, and abused him roundly in her own style, which was not lacking in energy. He had not seen her since. The crowd generally, and all the gossips of the quarter, who held Derues in great veneration, thought that the woman's

Derues

cry was intended as an indirect insult, and threatened to punish her for this irreverence. But, placing one hand on her hip, and with the other warning off the most pressing by a significant gesture--

"Are you still befooled by his tricks, fools that you are? Yes, no doubt there was a fire in the cellar last night, no doubt his creditors will be geese enough to let him off paying his debts! But what you don't know is, that he didn't really lose by it at all!"

"He lost all his goods!" the crowd cried on all sides. "More than nine thousand livres! Oil and brandy, do you think those won't burn? The old witch, she drinks enough to know! If one put a candle near her she would take fire, fast enough!"

"Perhaps," replied the woman, with renewed gesticulations, "perhaps; but I don't advise any of you to try. Anyhow, this fellow here is a rogue; he has been emptying his cellar for the last three nights; there were only old empty casks in it and empty packing-cases! Oh yes! I have swallowed his daily lies like everybody else, but I know the truth by now. He got his liquor taken away by Michael Lambourne's son, the cobbler in the rue de la Parcheminerie. How do I know? why, because the young man came and told me!"

"I turned that woman out of my shop a month ago, for stealing," said Derues.

Notwithstanding this retaliatory accusation, the woman's bold assertion might have changed the attitude of the crowd and chilled the enthusiasm, but at that moment a stout man pressed forward, and seizing the hawker by the arm, said--

"Go, and hold your tongue, backbiting woman!"

To this man, the honour of Derues was an article of faith; he had not yet ceased to wonder at the probity of this sainted person, and to doubt it in the least was as good as suspecting his own.

"My dear friend," he said, "we all know what to think of you. I know you well. Send to me tomorrow, and you shall have what goods you want, on credit, for as long as is necessary. Now, evil tongue, what do you say to that?"

"I say that you are as great a fool as the rest. Adieu, friend Derues; go on as you have begun, and I shall be selling your 'sentence' some day," and dispersing the crowd with a few twirls of her right arm, she passed on, crying--

"Sentence pronounced by the Parliament of Paris against John Robert Cassel, accused and convicted of Fraudulent Bankruptcy!"

This accusation emanated from too insignificant a quarter to have any effect on Derues' reputation. However resentful he may have been at the time, he got over it in consequence of the reiterated marks of interest shown by his neighbours and all the quarter on account of his supposed ruin, and the hawker's attack passed out of his mind, or probably she might have paid for her boldness with her life.

But this drunken woman had none the less uttered a prophetic word; it was the grain of sand on which, later, he was to be shipwrecked.

"All passions," says La Bruyere,--"all passions are deceitful; they disguise themselves as much as possible from the public eye; they hide from themselves. There is no vice which has not a counterfeit resemblance to some virtue, and which does not profit by it."

The whole life of Derues bears testimony to the truth of this observation. An avaricious poisoner, he attracted his victims by the pretence of fervent and devoted piety, and drew them into the snare

Derues

where he silently destroyed them. His terrible celebrity only began in 1777, caused by the double murder of Madame de Lamotte and her son, and his name, unlike those of some other great criminals, does not at first recall a long series of crimes, but when one examines this low, crooked, and obscure life, one finds a fresh stain at every step, and perhaps no one has ever surpassed him in dissimulation, in profound hypocrisy, in indefatigable depravity. Derues was executed at thirty-two, and his whole life was steeped in vice; though happily so short, it is full of horror, and is only a tissue of criminal thoughts and deeds, a very essence of evil. He had no hesitation, no remorse, no repose, no relaxation; he seemed compelled to lie, to steal, to poison! Occasionally suspicion is aroused, the public has its doubts, and vague rumours hover round him; but he burrows under new impostures, and punishment passes by. When he falls into the hands of human justice his reputation protects him, and for a few days more the legal sword is turned aside. Hypocrisy is so completely a part of his nature, that even when there is no longer any hope, when he is irrevocably sentenced, and he knows that he can no longer deceive anyone, neither mankind nor Him whose name he profanes by this last sacrilege, he yet exclaims, "O Christ! I shall suffer even as Thou." It is only by the light of his funeral pyre that the dark places of his life can be examined, that this bloody plot is unravelled, and that other victims, forgotten and lost in the shadows, arise like spectres at the foot of the scaffold, and escort the assassin to his doom.

Let us trace rapidly the history of Derues' early years, effaced and forgotten in the notoriety of his death. These few pages are not written for the glorification of crime, and if in our own days, as a result of the corruption of our manners, and of a deplorable confusion of all notions of right and wrong, it has been sought to make him an object; of public interest, we, on our part, only wish to bring him into notice, and place him momentarily on a pedestal, in order to cast him still lower, that his fall may be yet greater. What has been permitted by God may be related by man. Decaying and satiated communities need not be treated as children; they require neither diplomatic handling nor precaution, and it may be good that they should see and touch the putrescent sores which canker them. Why fear to mention that which everyone knows? Why dread to sound the abyss which can be measured by everyone? Why fear to bring into the light of day unmasked wickedness, even though it confronts the public gaze unblushingly? Extreme turpitude and extreme excellence are both in the schemes of Providence; and the poet has summed up eternal morality for all ages and nations in this sublime exclamation--

"Abstulit hunc tandem Rufini poem tumultum."

Besides, and we cannot insist too earnestly that our intention must not be mistaken, if we had wished to inspire any other sentiment than that of horror, we should have chosen a more imposing personage from the annals of crime. There have been deeds which required audacity, a sort of grandeur, a false heroism; there have been criminals who held in check all the regular and legitimate forces of society, and whom one regarded with a mixture of terror and pity. There is nothing of that in Derues, not even a trace of courage; nothing but a shameless cupidity, exercising itself at first in the theft of a few pence filched from the poor; nothing but the illicit gains and rascalities of a cheating shopkeeper and vile money-lender, a depraved cowardice which dared not strike openly, but slew in the dark. It is the story of an unclean reptile which drags itself underground, leaving everywhere the trail of its poisonous saliva.

Such was the man whose life we have undertaken to narrate, a man who represents a complete type of wickedness, and who corresponds to the most hideous sketch ever devised by poet or romance-writer: Facts without importance of their own, which would be childish if recorded of anyone else, obtain a sombre reflection from other facts which precede them, and thenceforth cannot be passed over in silence. The historian is obliged to collect and note them, as showing the logical development

Derues

of this degraded being: he unites them in sequence, and counts the successive steps of the ladder mounted by the criminal.

We have seen the early exploit of this assassin by instinct; we find him, twenty years later, an incendiary and a fraudulent bankrupt. What had happened in the interval? With how much treachery and crime had he filled this space of twenty years? Let us return to his infancy.

His unconquerable taste for theft caused him to be expelled by the relations who had taken charge of him. An anecdote is told which shows his impudence and incurable perversity. One day he was caught taking some money, and was soundly whipped by his cousins. When this was over, the child, instead of showing any sorrow or asking forgiveness, ran away with a sneer, and seeing they were out of breath, exclaimed--

"You are tired, are you? Well, I am not!"

Despairing of any control over this evil disposition, the relations refused to keep him, and sent him to Chartres, where two other cousins agreed to have him, out of charity. They were simpleminded women, of great and sincere piety, who imagined that good example and religious teaching might have a happy influence on their young relation. The result was contrary to their expectation: the sole fruit of their teaching was that Derues learnt to be a cheat and a hypocrite, and to assume the mask of respectability.

Here also repeated thefts insured him sound corrections. Knowing his cousins' extreme economy, not to say avarice, he mocked them when they broke a lath over his shoulders: "There now, I am so glad; that will cost you two farthings!"

His benefactresses' patience becoming exhausted, he left their house, and was apprenticed to a tinman at Chartres. His master died, and an ironmonger of the same town took him as shop-boy, and from this he passed on to a druggist and grocer. Until now, although fifteen years old, he had shown no preference for one trade more than another, but it was now necessary he should choose some profession, and his share in the family property amounted to the modest sum of three thousand five hundred livres. His residence with this last master revealed a decided taste, but it was only another evil instinct developing itself: the poisoner had scented poison, being always surrounded with drugs which were health-giving or hurtful, according to the use made of them. Derues would probably have settled at Chartres, but repeated thefts obliged him to leave the town. The profession of druggist and grocer being one which presented most chances of fortune, and being, moreover, adapted to his tastes, his family apprenticed him to a grocer in the rue Comtesse d'Artois, paying a specified premium for him.

Derues arrived in Paris in 1760. It was a new horizon, where he was unknown; no suspicion attached to him, and he felt much at his ease. Lost in the noise and the crowd of this immense receptacle for every vice, he had time to found on hypocrisy his reputation as an honest man. When his apprenticeship expired, his master proposed to place him with his sister-in-law, who kept a similar establishment in the rue St. Victor, and who had been a widow for several years. He recommended Derues as a young man whose zeal and intelligence might be useful in her business, being ignorant of various embezzlements committed by his late apprentice, who was always clever enough to cast suspicion on others. But the negotiation nearly fell through, because, one day, Derues so far forgot his usual prudence and dissimulation as to allow himself to make the observation recorded above to his mistress. She, horrified, ordered him to be silent, and threatened to ask her husband to dismiss him. It required a double amount of hypocrisy to remove this unfavourable impression; but he spared no pains to obtain the confidence of the sister-in-law, who was much influenced in his favour. Every day he inquired what could be done for her, every evening he took a basket-load of the goods she required from the rue Comtesse d'Artois; and it excited the pity of all beholders to see this weakly young man, panting and

Derues

sweating under his heavy burden, refusing any reward, and labouring merely for the pleasure of obliging, and from natural kindness of heart! The poor widow, whose spoils he was already coveting, was completely duped. She rejected the advice of her brother-in-law, and only listened to the concert of praises sung by neighbours much edified by Derues' conduct, and touched by the interest he appeared to show her. Often he found occasion to speak of her, always with the liveliest expressions of boundless devotion. These remarks were repeated to the good woman, and seemed all the more sincere to her as they appeared to have been made quite casually, and she never suspected they were carefully calculated and thought out long before.

Derues carried dishonesty as far as possible, but he knew how to stop when suspicion was likely to be aroused, and though always planning either to deceive or to hurt, he was never taken by surprise. Like the spider which spreads the threads of her web all round her, he concealed himself in a net of falsehood which one had to traverse before arriving at his real nature. The evil destiny of this poor woman, mother of four children, caused her to engage him as her shopman in the year 1767, thereby signing the warrant for her own ruin.

Derues began life under his new mistress with a master-stroke. His exemplary piety was the talk of the whole quarter, and his first care had been to request Madame Legrand to recommend him a confessor. She sent him to the director of her late husband, Pere Cartault, of the Carmelite order, who, astonished at the devotion of his penitent, never failed, if he passed the shop, to enter and congratulate Madame Legrand on the excellent acquisition she had made in securing this young man, who would certainly bring her a blessing along with him. Derues affected the greatest modesty, and blushed at these praises, and often, when he saw the good father approaching, appeared not to see him, and found something to do elsewhere; whereby the field was left clear for his too credulous panegyrists.

But Pere Cartault appeared too indulgent, and Derues feared that his sins were too easily pardoned; and he dared not find peace in an absolution which was never refused. Therefore, before the year was out, he chose a second confessor, Pere Denys, a Franciscan, consulting both alternately, and confiding his conscientious scruples to them. Every penance appeared too easy, and he added to those enjoined by his directors continual mortifications of his own devising, so that even Tartufe himself would have owned his superiority.

He wore about him two shrouds, to which were fastened relics of Madame de Chantal, also a medal of St. Francois de Saps, and occasionally scourged himself. His mistress related that he had begged her to take a sitting at the church of St. Nicholas, in order that he might more easily attend service when he had a day out, and had brought her a small sum which he had saved, to pay half the expense.

Moreover, he had slept upon straw during the whole of Lent, and took care that Madame Legrand heard of this through the servant, pretending at first to hide it as if it were something wrong. He tried to prevent the maid from going into his room, and when she found out the straw he forbade her to mention it--which naturally made her more anxious to relate her discovery. Such a piece of piety, combined with such meritorious humility, such dread of publicity, could only increase the excellent opinion which everyone already had of him.

Every day was marked by some fresh hypocrisy. One of his sisters, a novice in the convent of the Ladies of the Visitation of the Virgin, was to take the veil at Easter. Derues obtained permission to be present at the ceremony, and was to start on foot on Good Friday. When he departed, the shop happened to be full of people, and the gossips of the neighbourhood inquired where he was going. Madame Legrand desired him to have a glass of liqueur (wine he never touched) and something to eat before starting.

Derues

"Oh, madame!" he exclaimed, "do you think I could eat on a day like this, the day on which Christ was crucified! I will take a piece of bread with me, but I shall only eat it at the inn where I intend to sleep: I mean to fast the whole way."

But this kind of thing was not sufficient. He wanted an opportunity to establish a reputation for honesty on a firm basis. Chance provided one, and he seized it immediately, although at the expense of a member of his own family.

One of his brothers, who kept a public-house at Chartres, came to see him. Derues, under pretence of showing him the sights of Paris, which he did not know, asked his mistress to allow him to take in the brother for a few days, which she granted. The last evening of his stay, Derues went up to his room, broke open the box which contained his clothes, turned over everything it contained, examined the clothes, and discovering two new cotton nightcaps, raised a cry which brought up the household. His brother just then returned, and Derues called him an infamous thief, declaring that he had stolen the money for these new articles out of the shop the evening before. His brother defended himself, protesting his innocence, and, indignant at such incomprehensible treachery, endeavoured to turn the tables by relating some of Antoine's early misdeeds. The latter, however, stopped him, by declaring on his honour that he had seen his brother the evening before go to the till, slip his hand in, and take out some money. The brother was confounded and silenced by so audacious a lie; he hesitated, stammered, and was turned out of the house. Derues worthily crowned this piece of iniquity by obliging his mistress to accept the restitution of the stolen money. It cost him three livres, twelve sons, but the interest it brought him was the power of stealing unsuspected. That evening he spent in prayer for the pardon of his brother's supposed guilt.

All these schemes had succeeded, and brought him nearer to the desired goal, for not a soul in the quarter ventured to doubt the word of this saintly individual. His fawning manners and insinuating language varied according to the people addressed. He adapted himself to all, contradicting no one, and, while austere himself, he flattered the tastes of others. In the various houses where he visited his conversation was serious, grave, and sententious; and, as we have seen, he could quote Scripture with the readiness of a theologian. In the shop, when he had to deal with the lower classes, he showed himself acquainted with their modes of expression, and spoke the Billingsgate of the market-women, which he had acquired in the rue Comtesse d'Artois, treating them familiarly, and they generally addressed him as "gossip Denies." By his own account he easily judged the characters of the various people with whom he came in contact.

However, Pere Cartault's prophecy was not fulfilled: the blessing of Heaven did not descend on the Legrand establishment. There seemed to be a succession of misfortunes which all Derues' zeal and care as shopman could neither prevent nor repair. He by no means contented himself with parading an idle and fruitless hypocrisy, and his most abominable deceptions were not those displayed in the light of day. He watched by night: his singular organisation, outside the ordinary laws of nature, appeared able to dispense with sleep. Gliding about on tiptoe, opening doors noiselessly, with all the skill of an accomplished thief, he pillaged shop and cellar, and sold his plunder in remote parts of the town under assumed names. It is difficult to understand how his strength supported the fatigue of this double existence; he had barely arrived at puberty, and art had been obliged to assist the retarded development of nature. But he lived only for evil, and the Spirit of Evil supplied the physical vigour which was wanting. An insane love of money (the only passion he knew) brought him by degrees back to his starting-point of crime; he concealed it in hiding-places wrought in the thick walls, in holes dug out by his nails. As soon as he got any, he brought it exactly as a wild beast brings a piece of bleeding flesh to his lair; and often, by the glimmer of a dark lantern, kneeling in adoration before this shameful idol, his eyes sparkling with ferocious joy, with a smile which

Derues

suggested a hyena's delight over its prey, he would contemplate his money, counting and kissing it.

These continual thefts brought trouble into the Legrand affairs, cancelled all profits, and slowly brought on ruin. The widow had no suspicion of Derues' disgraceful dealings, and he carefully referred the damage to other causes, quite worthy of himself. Sometimes it was a bottle of oil, or of brandy, or some other commodity, which was found spilt, broken, or damaged, which accidents he attributed to the enormous quantity of rats which infested the cellar and the house. At length, unable to meet her engagements, Madame Legrand made the business over to him in February, 1770. He was then twenty-five years and six months old, and was accepted as a merchant grocer in August the same year. By an agreement drawn up between them, Derues undertook to pay twelve hundred livres for the goodwill, and to lodge her rent free during the remainder of her lease, which had still nine years to run. Being thus obliged to give up business to escape bankruptcy, Madame Legrand surrendered to her creditors any goods remaining in her warehouse; and Derues easily made arrangements to take them over very cheaply. The first step thus made, he was now able to enrich himself safely and to defraud with impunity under the cover of his stolen reputation.

One of his uncles, a flour merchant at Chartres, came habitually twice a year to Paris to settle accounts with his correspondents. A sum of twelve hundred francs, locked up in a drawer, was stolen from him, and, accompanied by his nephew, he went to inform the police. On investigation being made, it was found that the chest of drawers had been broken at the top. As at the time of the theft of the seventy-nine Louis from the abbe, Derues was the only person known to have entered his uncle's room. The innkeeper swore to this, but the uncle took pains to justify his nephew, and showed his confidence shortly after by becoming surety for him to the extent of five thousand livres. Derues failed to pay when the time expired, and the holder of the note was obliged to sue the surety for it.

He made use of any means, even the most impudent, which enabled him to appropriate other people's property. A provincial grocer on one occasion sent him a thousand-weight of honey in barrels to be sold on commission. Two or three months passed, and he asked for an account of the sale. Derues replied that he had not yet been able to dispose of it advantageously, and there ensued a fresh delay, followed by the same question and the same reply. At length, when more than a year had passed, the grocer came to Paris, examined his barrels, and found that five hundred pounds were missing. He claimed damages from Derues, who declared he had never received any more, and as the honey had been sent in confidence, and there was no contract and no receipt to show, the provincial tradesman could not obtain compensation.

As though having risen by the ruin of Madame Legrand and her four children was not enough, Derues grudged even the morsel of bread he had been obliged to leave her. A few days after the fire in the cellar, which enabled him to go through a second bankruptcy, Madame Legrand, now undeceived and not believing his lamentations, demanded the money due to her, according to their agreement. Derues pretended to look for his copy of the contract, and could not find it. "Give me yours, madame," said he; "we will write the receipt upon it. Here is the money."

The widow opened her purse and took out her copy; Derues snatched it, and tore it up. "Now," he exclaimed, "you are paid; I owe you nothing now. If you like, I will declare it on oath in court, and no one will disbelieve my word."

"Wretched man," said the unfortunate widow, "may God forgive your soul; but your body will assuredly end on the gallows!"

It was in vain that she complained, and told of this abominable swindle; Derues had been beforehand with her, and the slander he had disseminated bore its fruits. It was said that his old mistress was endeavouring by

Derues

an odious falsehood to destroy the reputation of a man who had refused to be her lover. Although reduced to poverty, she left the house where she had a right to remain rent free, preferring the hardest and dreariest life to the torture of remaining under the same roof with the man who had caused her ruin.

We might relate a hundred other pieces of knavery, but it must not be supposed that having begun by murder, Derues would draw back and remain contented with theft. Two fraudulent bankruptcies would have sufficed for most people; for him they were merely a harmless pastime. Here we must place two dark and obscure stories, two crimes of which he is accused, two victims whose death groans no one heard.

The hypocrite's excellent reputation had crossed the Parisian bounds. A young man from the country, intending to start as a grocer in the capital, applied to Derues for the necessary information and begged for advice. He arrived at the latter's house with a sum of eight thousand livres, which he placed in Derues' hands, asking him for assistance in finding a business. The sight of gold was enough to rouse the instinct of crime in Derues, and the witches who hailed Macbeth with the promise of royalty did not rouse the latter's ambitious desires to a greater height than the chance of wealth did the greed of the assassin; whose hands, once closed over the eight thousand livres, were never again relaxed. He received them as a deposit, and hid them along with his previous plunder, vowing never to return them. Several days had elapsed, when one afternoon Derues returned home with an air of such unusual cheerfulness that the young man questioned him. "Have you heard some good news for me?" he asked, "or have you had some luck yourself?"

"My young friend," answered Derues, "as for me, success depends on my own efforts, and fortune smiles on me. But I have promised to be useful to you, your parents have trusted me, and I must prove that their confidence is well founded. I have heard to-day of a business for disposal in one of the best parts of Paris. You can have it for twelve thousand livres, and I wish I could lend you the amount you want. But you must write to your father, persuade him, reason with him; do not lose so good a chance. He must make a little sacrifice, and he will be grateful to me later."

In accordance with their son's request, the young man's parents despatched a sum of four thousand livres, requesting Derues to lose no time in concluding the purchase.

Three weeks later, the father, very uneasy, arrived in Paris. He came to inquire about his son, having heard nothing from him. Derues received him with the utmost astonishment, appearing convinced that the young man had returned home. One day, he said, the youth informed him that he had heard from his father, who had given up all idea of establishing him in Paris, having arranged an advantageous marriage for him near home; and he had taken his twelve thousand livres, for which Derues produced a receipt, and started on his return journey.

One evening, when nearly dark, Derues had gone out with his guest, who complained of headache and internal pains. Where did they go? No one knew; but Derues only returned at daybreak, alone, weary and exhausted, and the young man was never again heard of.

One of his apprentices was the constant object of reproof. The boy was accused of negligence, wasting his time, of spending three hours over a task which might have been done in less than one. When Derues had convinced the father, a Parisian bourgeois, that his son was a bad boy and a good-for-nothing, he came to this man one day in a state of wild excitement.

"Your son," he said, "ran away yesterday with six hundred livres, with which I had to meet a bill to-day. He knew where I kept this money, and has taken it."

Derues

He threatened to go before a magistrate and denounce the thief, and was only appeased by being paid the sum he claimed to have lost. But he had gone out with the lad the evening before, and returned alone in the early hours of the morning.

However, the veil which concealed the truth was becoming more and more transparent every day. Three bankruptcies had diminished the consideration he enjoyed, and people began to listen to complaints and accusations which till now had been considered mere inventions designed to injure him. Another attempt at trickery made him feel it desirable to leave the neighbourhood.

He had rented a house close to his own, the shop of which had been tenanted for seven or eight years by a wine merchant. He required from this man, if he wished to remain where he was, a sum of six hundred livres as a payment for goodwill. Although the wine merchant considered it an exorbitant charge, yet on reflection he decided to pay it rather than go, having established a good business on these premises, as was well known. Before long a still more arrant piece of dishonesty gave him an opportunity for revenge. A young man of good family, who was boarding with him in order to gain some business experience, having gone into Derues' shop to make some purchases, amused himself while waiting by idly writing his name on a piece of blank paper lying on the counter; which he left there without thinking more about it. Derues, knowing the young man had means, as soon as he had gone, converted the signed paper into a promissory note for two thousand livres, to his order, payable at the majority of the signer. The bill, negotiated in trade, arrived when due at the wine merchant's, who, much surprised, called his young boarder and showed him the paper adorned with his signature. The youth was utterly confounded, having no knowledge of the bill whatever, but nevertheless could not deny his signature. On examining the paper carefully, the handwriting was recognised as Derues'. The wine merchant sent for him, and when he arrived, made him enter a room, and having locked the door, produced the promissory note. Derues acknowledged having written it, and tried various falsehoods to excuse himself. No one listened to him, and the merchant threatened to place the matter in the hands of the police. Then Derues wept, implored, fell on his knees, acknowledged his guilt, and begged for mercy. He agreed to restore the six hundred livres exacted from the wine merchant, on condition that he should see the note destroyed and that the matter should end there. He was then about to be married, and dreaded a scandal.

Shortly after, he married Marie-Louise Nicolais; daughter of a harness-maker at Melun.

One's first impression in considering this marriage is one of profound sorrow and utmost pity for the young girl whose destiny was linked with that of this monster. One thinks of the horrible future; of youth and innocence blighted by the tainting breath of the homicide; of candour united to hypocrisy; of virtue to wickedness; of legitimate desires linked to disgraceful passions; of purity mixed with corruption. The thought of these contrasts is revolting, and one pities such a dreadful fate. But we must not decide hastily. Madame Denies has not been convicted of any active part in her husband's later crimes, but her history, combined with his, shows no trace of suffering, nor of any revolt against a terrible complicity. In her case the evidence is doubtful, and public opinion must decide later.

In 1773, Derues relinquished retail business, and left the Saint Victor neighbourhood, having taken an apartment in the rue des Deux Boules, near the rue Bertin-Poiree, in the parish of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, where he had been married. He first acted on commission for the Benedictine-Camalduan fathers of the forest of Senart, who had heard of him as a man wholly given to piety; then, giving himself up to usury, he undertook what is known as "business affairs," a profession which, in such hands, could not fail to be lucrative, being aided by his exemplary morals and honest appearance. It was the more easy for him to impose on others, as he could not be accused of any of the deadly vices which so

Derues

often end in ruin--gaming, wine, and women. Until now he had displayed only one passion, that of avarice, but now another developed itself, that of ambition. He bought houses and land, and when the money was due, allowed himself to be sued for it; he bought even lawsuits, which he muddled with all the skill of a rascally attorney. Experienced in bankruptcy, he undertook the management of failures, contriving to make dishonesty appear in the light of unfortunate virtue. When this demon was not occupied with poison, his hands were busy with every social iniquity; he could only live and breathe in an atmosphere of corruption.

His wife, who had already presented him with a daughter, gave birth to a son in February 1774. Derues, in order to better support the airs of grandeur and the territorial title which he had assumed, invited persons of distinction to act as sponsors. The child was baptized Tuesday, February 15th. We give the text of the baptismal register, as a curiosity:--

"Antoine-Maximilian-Joseph, son of Antoine-Francois Derues, gentleman, seigneur of Gendeville, Herchies, Viquemont, and other places, formerly merchant grocer; and of Madame Marie-Louise Nicolais, his wife. Godfathers, T. H. and T. P., lords of, etc. etc. Godmothers, Madame M. Fr. C. D. V., etc. etc.

"(Signed) A. F. DERUES, Senior."

But all this dignity did not exclude the sheriff's officers, whom, as befitted so great a man, he treated with the utmost insolence, overwhelming them with abuse when they came to enforce an execution. Such scandals had several times aroused the curiosity of his neighbours, and did not redound to his credit. His landlord, wearied of all this clamour, and most especially weary of never getting any rent without a fight for it, gave him notice to quit. Derues removed to the rue Beaubourg, where he continued to act as commission agent under the name of Cyrano Derues de Bury.

And now we will concern ourselves no more with the unravelling of this tissue of imposition; we will wander no longer in this labyrinth of fraud, of low and vile intrigue, of dark crime of which the clue disappears in the night, and of which the trace is lost in a doubtful mixture of blood and mire; we will listen no longer to the cry of the widow and her four children reduced to beggary, to the groans of obscure victims, to the cries of terror and the death-groan which echoed one night through the vaults of a country house near Beauvais. Behold other victims whose cries are yet louder, behold yet other crimes and a punishment which equals them in terror! Let these nameless ghosts, these silent spectres, lose themselves in the clear daylight which now appears, and make room for other phantoms which rend their shrouds and issue from the tomb demanding vengeance.

Derues was now soon to have a chance of obtaining immortality. Hitherto his blows had been struck by chance, henceforth he uses all the resources of his infernal imagination; he concentrates all his strength on one point--conceives and executes his crowning piece of wickedness. He employs for two years all his science as cheat, forger, and poisoner in extending the net which was to entangle a whole family; and, taken in his own snare, he struggles in vain; in vain does he seek to gnaw through the meshes which confine him. The foot placed on the last rung of this ladder of crime, stands also on the first step by which he mounts the scaffold.

About a mile from Villeneuve-le-Roi-les-Sens, there stood in 1775 a handsome house, overlooking the windings of the Yonne on one side, and on the other a garden and park belonging to the estate of Buisson-Souef. It was a large property, admirably situated, and containing productive fields, wood, and water; but not everywhere kept in good order, and showing something of the embarrassed fortune of its owner. During some years the only repairs had been those necessary in the house itself and its immediate vicinity. Here and there pieces of dilapidated wall

Derues

threatened to fall altogether, and enormous stems of ivy had invaded and stifled vigorous trees; in the remoter portions of the park briers barred the road and made walking almost impossible. This disorder was not destitute of charm, and at an epoch when landscape gardening consisted chiefly in straight alleys, and in giving to nature a cold and monotonous symmetry, one's eye rested with pleasure on these neglected clumps, on these waters which had taken a different course to that which art had assigned to them, on these unexpected and picturesque scenes.

A wide terrace, overlooking the winding river, extended along the front of the house. Three men were walking on it—two priests, and the owner of Buisson-Souef, Monsieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte. One priest was the cure of Villeneuve-le-Roi-lez-Sens, the other was a Camaldulian monk, who had come to see the cure about a clerical matter, and who was spending some days at the presbytery. The conversation did not appear to be lively. Every now and then Monsieur de Lamotte stood still, and, shading his eyes with his hand from the brilliant sunlight which flooded the plain, and was strongly reflected from the water, endeavoured to see if some new object had not appeared on the horizon, then slowly resumed his walk with a movement of uneasy impatience. The tower clock struck with a noisy resonance.

"Six o'clock already!" he exclaimed. "They will assuredly not arrive to-day."

"Why despair?" said the cure. "Your servant has gone to meet them; we might see their boat any moment."

"But, my father," returned Monsieur de Lamotte, "the long days are already past. In another hour the mist will rise, and then they would not venture on the river."

"Well, if that happens, we shall have to be patient; they will stay all night at some little distance, and you will see them to-morrow morning."

"My brother is right," said the other priest. "Come, monsieur; do not be anxious."

"You both speak with the indifference of persons to whom family troubles are unknown."

"What!" said the cure, "do you really think that because our sacred profession condemns us both to celibacy, we are therefore unable to comprehend an affection such as yours, on which I myself pronounced the hallowing benediction of the Church--if you remember--nearly fifteen years ago?"

"Is it perhaps intentionally, my father, that you recall the date of my marriage? I readily admit that the love of one's neighbour may enlighten you as to another love to which you have yourself been a stranger. I daresay it seems odd to you that a man of my age should be anxious about so little, as though he were a love-sick youth; but for some time past I have had presentiments of evil, and I am really becoming superstitious!"

He again stood still, gazing up the river, and, seeing nothing, resumed his place between the two priests, who had continued their walk.

"Yes," he continued, "I have presentiments which refuse to be shaken off. I am not so old that age can have weakened my powers and reduced me to childishness, I cannot even say what I am afraid of, but separation is painful and causes an involuntary terror. Strange, is it not? Formerly, I used to leave my wife for months together, when she was young and my son only, an infant; I loved her passionately, yet I could go with pleasure. Why, I wonder, is it so different now? Why should a journey to Paris on business, and a few hours' delay, make me so terribly uneasy? Do you remember, my father," he resumed, after a pause, turning to the cure, "do you remember how lovely Marie looked on our wedding-day? Do you remember her dazzling complexion and the innocent

Derues

candour of her expression?--the sure token of the most truthful and purest of minds! That is why I love her so much now; we do not now sigh for one another, but the second love is stronger than the first, for it is founded on recollection, and is tranquil and confident in friendship.... It is strange that they have not returned; something must have happened! If they do not return this evening, and I do not now think it possible, I shall go to Paris myself to-morrow."

"I think;" said the other priest, "that at twenty you must indeed have been excitable, a veritable tinder-box, to have retained so much energy! Come, monsieur, try to calm yourself and have patience: you yourself admit it can only be a few hours' delay."

"But my son accompanied his mother, and he is our only one, and so delicate! He alone remains of our three children, and you do not realise how the affection of parents who feel age approaching is concentrated on an only child! If I lost Edouard I should die!"

"I suppose, then, as you let him go, his presence at Paris was necessary?"

"No; his mother went to obtain a loan which is needed for the improvements required on the estate."

"Why, then, did you let him go?"

"I would willingly have kept him here, but his mother wished to take him. A separation is as trying to her as to me, and we all but quarrelled over it. I gave way."

"There was one way of satisfying all three--you might have gone also."

"Yes, but Monsieur le cure will tell you that a fortnight ago I was chained to my arm-chair, swearing under my breath like a pagan, and cursing the follies of my youth!--Forgive me, my father; I mean that I had the gout, and I forgot that I am not the only sufferer, and that it racks the old age of the philosopher quite as much as that of the courtier."

The fresh wind which often rises just at sunset was already rustling in the leaves; long shadows darkened the course of the Yonne and stretched across the plain; the water, slightly troubled, reflected a confused outline of its banks and the clouded blue of the sky. The three gentlemen stopped at the end of the terrace and gazed into the already fading distance. A black spot, which they had just observed in the middle of the river, caught a gleam of light in passing a low meadow between two hills, and for a moment took shape as a barge, then was lost again, and could not be distinguished from the water. Another moment, and it reappeared more distinctly; it was indeed a barge, and now the horse could be seen towing it against the current. Again it was lost at a bend of the river shaded by willows, and they had to resign themselves to incertitude for several minutes. Then a white handkerchief was waved on the prow of the boat, and Monsieur de Lamotte uttered a joyful exclamation.

"It is indeed they!" he cried. "Do you see them, Monsieur le cure? I see my boy; he is waving the handkerchief, and his mother is with him. But I think there is a third person--yes, there is a man, is there not? Look well."

"Indeed," said the cure, "if my bad sight does not deceive me, I should say there was someone seated near the rudder; but it looks like a child."

"Probably someone from the neighbourhood, who has profited by the chance of a lift home."

The boat was advancing rapidly; they could now hear the cracking of the

Derues

whip with which the servant urged on the tow-horse. And now it stopped, at an easy landing-place, barely fifty paces from the terrace. Madame de Lamotte landed with her son and the stranger, and her husband descended from the terrace to meet her. Long before he arrived at the garden gate, his son's arms were around his neck.

"Are you quite well, Edouard?"

"Oh yes, perfectly."

"And your mother?"

"Quite well too. She is behind, in as great a hurry to meet you as I am. But she can't run as I do, and you must go half-way."

"Whom have you brought with you?"

"A gentleman from Paris."

"From Paris?"

"Yes, a Monsieur Derues. But mamma will tell you all about that. Here she is."

The cure and the monk arrived just as Monsieur de Lamotte folded his wife in his arms. Although she had passed her fortieth year, she was still beautiful enough to justify her husband's eulogism. A moderate plumpness had preserved the freshness and softness of her skin; her smile was charming, and her large blue eyes expressed both gentleness and goodness. Seen beside this smiling and serene countenance, the appearance of the stranger was downright repulsive, and Monsieur de Lamotte could hardly repress a start of disagreeable surprise at the pitiful and sordid aspect of this diminutive person, who stood apart, looking overwhelmed by conscious inferiority. He was still more astonished when he saw his son take him by the hand with friendly kindness, and heard him say--

"Will you come with me, my friend? We will follow my father and mother."

Madame de Lamotte, having greeted the cure, looked at the monk, who was a stranger to her. A word or two explained matters, and she took her husband's arm, declining to answer any questions until she reached the louse, and laughing at his curiosity.

Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, one of the king's equerries, seigneur of Grange-Flandre, Valperfond, etc., had married Marie-Francoise Perier in 1760. Their fortune resembled many others of that period: it was more nominal than actual, more showy than solid. Not that the husband and wife had any cause for self-reproach, or that their estates had suffered from dissipation; unstained by the corrupt manners of the period, their union had been a model of sincere affection, of domestic virtue and mutual confidence. Marie-Francoise was quite beautiful enough to have made a sensation in society, but she renounced it of her own accord, in order to devote herself to the duties of a wife and mother. The only serious grief she and her husband had experienced was the loss of two young children. Edouard, though delicate from his birth, had nevertheless passed the trying years of infancy and early adolescence; he was then nearly fourteen. With a sweet and rather effeminate expression, blue eyes and a pleasant smile, he was a striking likeness of his mother. His father's affection exaggerated the dangers which threatened the boy, and in his eyes the slightest indisposition became a serious malady; his mother shared these fears, and in consequence of this anxiety Edouard's education had been much neglected. He had been brought up at Buisson-Souef, and allowed to run wild from morning till night, like a young fawn, exercising the vigour and activity of its limbs. He had still the simplicity and general ignorance of a child of nine or ten.

Derues

The necessity of appearing at court and suitably defraying the expenses of his office had made great inroads on Monsieur de Lamotte's fortune. He had of late lived at Buisson-Souef in the most complete retirement; but notwithstanding this too long deferred attention to his affairs, his property was ruining him, for the place required a large expenditure, and absorbed a large amount of his income without making any tangible return. He had always hesitated to dispose of the estate on account of its associations; it was there he had met, courted, and married his beloved wife; there that the happy days of their youth had been spent; there that they both wished to grow old together.

Such was the family to which accident had now introduced Derues. The unfavourable impression made on Monsieur de Lamotte had not passed unperceived by him; but, being quite accustomed to the instinctive repugnance which his first appearance generally inspired, Derues had made a successful study of how to combat and efface this antagonistic feeling, and replace it by confidence, using different means according to the persons he had to deal with. He understood at once that vulgar methods would be useless with Monsieur de Lamotte, whose appearance and manners indicated both the man of the world and the man of intelligence, and also he had to consider the two priests, who were both observing him attentively. Fearing a false step, he assumed the most simple and insignificant deportment he could, knowing that sooner or later a third person would rehabilitate him in the opinion of those present. Nor did he wait long.

Arrived at the drawing-room, Monsieur de Lamotte requested the company to be seated. Derues acknowledged the courtesy by a bow, and there was a moment of silence, while Edouard and his mother looked at each other and smiled. The silence was broken by Madame de Lamotte.

"Dear Pierre," she said, "you are surprised to see us accompanied by a stranger, but when you hear what he has done for us you will thank me for having induced him to return here with us."

"Allow me," interrupted Derues, "allow me to tell you what happened. The gratitude which madame imagines she owes me causes her to exaggerate a small service which anybody would have been delighted to render."

"No, monsieur; let me tell it."

"Let mamma tell the story," said Edouard.

"What is it, then? What happened?" said Monsieur de Lamotte.

"I am quite ashamed," answered Derues; "but I obey your wishes, madame."

"Yes," replied Madame de Lamotte, "keep your seat, I wish it. Imagine, Pierre, just six days ago, an accident happened to Edouard and me which might have had serious consequences."

"And you never wrote to me, Marie?"

"I should only have made you anxious, and to no purpose. I had some business in one of the most crowded parts of Paris; I took a chair, and Edouard walked beside me. In the rue Beaubourg we were suddenly surrounded by a mob of low people, who were quarrelling. Carriages stopped the way, and the horses of one of these took fright in the confusion and uproar, and bolted, in spite of the coachman's endeavours to keep them in hand. It was a horrible tumult, and I tried to get out of the chair, but at that moment the chairmen were both knocked down, and I fell. It is a miracle I was not crushed. I was dragged insensible from under the horses' feet and carried into the house before which all this took place. There, sheltered in a shop and safe from the crowd which encumbered the doorway, I recovered my senses, thanks to the assistance of Monsieur Derues, who lives there. But that is not all: when I recovered I could not walk, I had been so shaken by the fright, the fall, and the danger I had incurred, and I had to accept his

Derues

offer of finding me another chair when the crowd should disperse, and meanwhile to take shelter in his rooms with his wife, who showed me the kindest attention."

"Monsieur--" said Monsieur de Lamotte, rising. But his wife stopped him.

"Wait a moment; I have not finished yet. Monsieur Derues came back in an hour, and I was then feeling better; but before, I left I was stupid enough to say that I had been robbed in the confusion; my diamond earrings, which had belonged to my mother, were gone. You cannot imagine the trouble Monsieur Derues took to discover the thief, and all the appeals he made to the police--I was really ashamed!"

Although Monsieur de Lamotte did not yet understand what motive, other than gratitude, had induced his wife to bring this stranger home with her, he again rose from his seat, and going to Derues, held out his hand.

"I understand now the attachment my son shows for you. You are wrong in trying to lessen your good deed in order to escape from our gratitude, Monsieur Derues."

"Monsieur Derues?" inquired the monk.

"Do you know the name, my father?" asked Madame de Lamotte eagerly.

"Edouard had already told me," said the monk, approaching Derues.

"You live in the rue Beaubourg, and you are Monsieur Derues, formerly a retail grocer?"

"The same, my brother."

"Should you require a reference, I can give it. Chance, madame, has made you acquainted with a man whose reputation for piety and honour is well established; he will permit me to add my praises to yours."

"Indeed, I do not know how I deserve so much honour."

"I am, Brother Marchois, of the Camaldulian order. You see that I know you well."

The monk then proceeded to explain that his community had confided their affairs to Derues' honesty, he undertaking to dispose of the articles manufactured by the monks in their retreat. He then recounted a number of good actions and of marks of piety, which were heard with pleasure and admiration by those present. Derues received this cloud of incense with an appearance of sincere modesty and humility, which would have deceived the most skilful physiognomist.

When the eulogistic warmth of the good brother began to slacken it was already nearly dark, and the two priests had barely time to regain the presbytery without incurring the risk of breaking their necks in the rough road which led to it. They departed at once, and a room was got ready for Derues.

"To-morrow," said Madame de Lamotte as they separated, "you can discuss with my husband the business on which you came: to-morrow, or another day, for I beg that you will make yourself at home here, and the longer you will stay the better it will please us."

The night was a sleepless one for Derues, whose brain was occupied by a confusion of criminal plans. The chance which had caused his acquaintance with Madame de Lamotte, and even more the accident of Brother Marchois appearing in the nick of time, to enlarge upon the praises which gave him so excellent a character, seemed like favourable omens not to be neglected. He began to imagine fresh villainies, to outline an unheard-of crime, which as yet he could not definitely trace

Derues

out; but anyhow there would be plunder to seize and blood to spill, and the spirit of murder excited and kept him awake, just as remorse might have troubled the repose of another.

Meanwhile Madame de Lamotte, having retired with her husband, was saying to the latter--

"Well, now! what do you think of my protege, or rather, of the protector which Heaven sent me?"

"I think that physiognomy is often very deceptive, for I should have been quite willing to hang him on the strength of his."

"It is true that his appearance is not attractive, and it led me into a foolish mistake which I quickly regretted. When I recovered consciousness, and saw him attending on me, much worse and more carelessly dressed than he is to-day."

"You were frightened?"

"No, not exactly; but I thought I must be indebted to a man of the lowest class, to some poor fellow who was really starving, and my first effort at gratitude was to offer him a piece of gold."

"Did he refuse it?"

"No; he accepted it for the poor of the parish. Then he told me his name, Cyrano Derues de Bury, and told me that the shop and the goods it contained were his own property, and that he occupied an apartment in the house. I floundered in excuses, but he replied that he blessed the mistake, inasmuch as it would enable him to relieve some unfortunate people. I was so touched with his goodness that I offered him a second piece of gold."

"You were quite right, my dear; but what induced you to bring him to Buisson? I should have gone to see and thank him the first time I went to Paris, and meanwhile a letter would have been sufficient. Did he carry his complaisance and interest so far as to offer you his escort?"

"Ah! I see you cannot get over your first impression--honestly, is it not so?"

"Indeed," exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte, laughing heartily, "it is truly unlucky for a decent man to have such a face as that! He ought to give Providence no rest until he obtains the gift of another countenance."

"Always these prejudices! It is not the poor man's fault that he was born like that."

"Well, you said something about business we were to discuss together --what is it?"

"I believe he can help us to obtain the money we are in want of."

"And who told him that we wanted any?"

"I did."

"You! Come, it certainly seems that this gentleman is to be a family friend. And pray what induced you to confide in him to this extent?"

"You would have known by now, if you did not interrupt. Let me tell you all in order. The day after my accident I went out with Edouard about midday, and I went to again express my gratitude for his kindness. I was received by Madame Derues, who told me her husband was out, and that he had gone to my hotel to inquire after me and my son, and also to see if anything had been heard of my stolen earrings. She appeared a simple and very ordinary sort of person, and she begged me to sit down and wait for

Derues

her husband. I thought it would be uncivil not to do so, and Monsieur Derues appeared in about two hours. The first thing he did, after having saluted me and inquired most particularly after my health, was to ask for his children, two charming little things, fresh and rosy, whom he covered with kisses. We talked about indifferent matters, then he offered me his services, placed himself at my disposal, and begged me to spare neither his time nor his trouble. I then told him what had brought me to Paris, and also the disappointments I had encountered, for of all the people I had seen not one had given me a favourable answer. He said that he might possibly be of some use to me, and the very next day told me that he had seen a capitalist, but could do nothing without more precise information. Then I thought it might be better to bring him here, so that he might talk matters over with you. When I first asked him, he refused altogether, and only yielded to my earnest entreaties and Edouard's. This is the history, dear, of the circumstances under which I made Monsieur Derues' acquaintance. I hope you do not think I have acted foolishly?"

"Very well," said Monsieur de Lamotte, "I will talk to him to-morrow, and in any case I promise you I will be civil to him. I will not forget that he has been useful to you." with which promise the conversation came to a close.

Skilled in assuming any kind of mask and in playing every sort of part, Derues did not find it difficult to overcome Monsieur de Lamotte's prejudices, and in order to obtain the goodwill of the father he made a skilful use of the friendship which the son had formed with him. One can hardly think that he already meditated the crime which he carried out later; one prefers to believe that these atrocious plots were not invented so long beforehand. But he was already a prey to the idea, and nothing henceforth could turn him from it. By what route he should arrive at the distant goal which his greed foresaw, he knew not as yet, but he had said to himself, "One day this property shall be mine." It was the death-warrant of those who owned it.

We have no details, no information as to Derues' first visit to Buisson-Souef, but when he departed he had obtained the complete confidence of the family, and a regular correspondence was carried on between him and the Lamottes. It was thus that he was able to exercise his talent of forgery, and succeeded in imitating the writing of this unfortunate lady so as to be able even to deceive her husband. Several months passed, and none of the hopes which Derues had inspired were realised; a loan was always on the point of being arranged, and regularly failed because of some unforeseen circumstance. These pretended negotiations were managed by Derues with so much skill and cunning that instead of being suspected, he was pitied for having so much useless trouble. Meanwhile, Monsieur de Lamotte's money difficulties increased, and the sale of Buisson-Souef became inevitable. Derues offered himself as a purchaser, and actually acquired the property by private contract, dated December, 1775. It was agreed between the parties that the purchase-money of one hundred and thirty thousand livres should not be paid until 1776, in order to allow Derues to collect the various sums at his disposal. It was an important purchase, which, he said, he only made on account of his interest in Monsieur de Lamotte, and his wish to put an end to the latter's difficulties.

But when the period agreed on arrived, towards the middle of 1776, Derues found it impossible to pay. It is certain that he never meant to do so; and a special peculiarity of this dismal story is the avarice of the man, the passion for money which overruled all his actions, and occasionally caused him to neglect necessary prudence. Enriched by three bankruptcies, by continual thefts, by usury, the gold he acquired promptly seemed to disappear. He stuck at nothing to obtain it, and once in his grasp, he never let it go again. Frequently he risked the loss of his character for honest dealing rather than relinquish a fraction of his wealth. According to many credible people, it was generally believed by his contemporaries that this monster possessed treasures which he had

Derues

buried in the ground, the hiding-place of which no one knew, not even his wife. Perhaps it is only a vague and unfounded rumour, which should be rejected; or is it; perhaps, a truth which failed to reveal itself? It would be strange if after the lapse of half a century the hiding-place were to open and give up the fruit of his rapine. Who knows whether some of this treasure, accidentally discovered, may not have founded fortunes whose origin is unknown, even to their possessors?

Although it was of the utmost importance not to arouse Monsieur de Lamotte's suspicions just at the moment when he ought to be paying him so large a sum, Derues was actually at this time being sued by his creditors. But in those days ordinary lawsuits had no publicity; they struggled and died between the magistrates and advocates without causing any sound. In order to escape the arrest and detention with which he was threatened, he took refuge at Buisson-Souef with his family, and remained there from Whitsuntide till the end of November. After being treated all this time as a friend, Derues departed for Paris, in order, he said, to receive an inheritance which would enable him to pay the required purchase-money.

This pretended inheritance was that of one of his wife's relations, Monsieur Despeignes-Duplessis, who had been murdered in his country house, near Beauvais. It has been strongly suspected that Derues was guilty of this crime. There are, however, no positive proofs, and we prefer only to class it as a simple possibility.

Derues had made formal promises to Monsieur de Lamotte, and it was no longer possible for him to elude them. Either the payment must now be made, or the contract annulled. A new correspondence began between the creditors and the debtor; friendly letters were exchanged, full of protestations on one side and confidence on the other. But all Derues' skill could only obtain a delay of a few months. At length Monsieur de Lamotte, unable to leave Buisson-Souef himself, on account of important business which required his presence, gave his wife a power of attorney, consented to another separation, and sent her to Paris, accompanied by Edouard, and as if to hasten their misfortunes, sent notice of their coming to the expectant murderer.

We have passed quickly over the interval between the first meeting of Monsieur de Lamotte and Derues, and the moment when the victims fell into the trap: we might easily have invented long conversations, and episodes which would have brought Derues' profound hypocrisy into greater relief; but the reader now knows all that we care to show him. We have purposely lingered in our narration in the endeavour to explain the perversities of this mysterious organisation; we have over-loaded it with all the facts which seem to throw any light upon this sombre character. But now, after these long preparations, the drama opens, the scenes become rapid and lifelike; events, long impeded, accumulate and pass quickly before us, the action is connected and hastens to an end. We shall see Derues like an unwearied Proteus, changing names, costumes, language, multiplying himself in many forms, scattering deceptions and lies from one end of France to the other; and finally, after so many efforts, such prodigies of calculation and activity, end by wrecking himself against a corpse.

The letter written at Buisson-Souef arrived at Paris the morning of the 14th of December. In the course of the day an unknown man presented himself at the hotel where Madame de Lamotte and her son had stayed before, and inquired what rooms were vacant. There were four, and he engaged them for a certain Dumoulin, who had arrived that morning from Bordeaux, and who had passed through Paris in order to meet, at some little distance, relations who would return with him. A part of the rent was paid in advance, and it was expressly stipulated that until his return the rooms should not be let to anyone, as the aforesaid Dumoulin might return with his family and require them at any moment. The same person went to other hotels in the neighbourhood and engaged vacant rooms, sometimes for a stranger he expected, sometimes for friends whom he could not accommodate himself.

Derues

At about three o'clock, the Place de Greve was full of people, thousands of heads crowded the windows of the surrounding houses. A parricide was to pay the penalty of his crime--a crime committed under atrocious circumstances, with an unheard-of refinement of barbarity. The punishment corresponded to the crime: the wretched man was broken on the wheel. The most complete and terrible silence prevailed in the multitude eager for ghastly emotions. Three times already had been heard the heavy thud of the instrument which broke the victim's limbs, and a loud cry escaped the sufferer which made all who heard it shudder with horror, One man only, who, in spite of all his efforts, could not get through the crowd and cross the square, remained unmoved, and looking contemptuously towards the criminal, muttered, "Idiot! he was unable to deceive anyone!"

A few moments later the flames began to rise from the funeral pile, the crowd began to move, and the than was able to make his way through and reach one of the streets leading out of the square.

The sky was overcast, and the grey daylight hardly penetrated the narrow lane, hideous and gloomy as the name it bore, and which; only a few years ago, still wound like a long serpent through the mire of this quarter. Just then it was deserted, owing to the attraction of the execution close by. The man who had just left the square proceeded slowly, attentively reading all the inscriptions on the doors. He stopped at Number 75, where on the threshold of a shop sat a stout woman busily knitting, over whom one read in big yellow letters, "Widow Masson." He saluted the woman, and asked--

"Is there not a cellar to let in this house?"

"There is, master," answered the widow.

"Can I speak to the owner?"

"And that is myself, by your leave."

"Will you show me the cellar? I am a provincial wine merchant, my business often brings me to Paris, and I want a cellar where I could deposit wine which I sell on commission."

They went down together. After examining the place, and ascertaining that it was not too damp for the expensive wine which he wished to leave there, the man agreed about the rent, paid the first term in advance, and was entered on the widow Masson's books under the name of Ducoudray. It is hardly necessary to remark that it should have been Derues.

When he returned home in the evening, his wife told him that a large box had arrived.

"It is all right," he said, "the carpenter from whom I ordered it is a man of his word." Then he supped, and caressed his children. The next day being Sunday, he received the communion, to the great edification of the devout people of the neighbourhood.

On Monday the 16th Madame de Lamotte and Edouard, descending from the Montereau stagecoach, were met by Derues and his wife.

"Did my husband write to you, Monsieur Derues?" inquired Madame de Lamotte.

"Yes, madame, two days ago; and I have arranged our dwelling for your reception."

"What! but did not Monsieur de Lamotte ask you to engage the rooms I have had before at the Hotel de France?"

"He did not say so, and if that was your idea I trust you will change

Derues

it. Do not deprive me of the pleasure of offering you the hospitality which for so long I have accepted from you. Your room is quite ready, also one for this dear boy," and so saying he took Edouard's hand; "and I am sure if you ask his opinion, he will say you had better be content to stay with me."

"Undoubtedly," said the boy; "and I do not see why there need be any hesitation between friends."

Whether by accident, or secret presentiment, or because she foresaw a possibility of business discussions between them, Madame de Lamotte objected to this arrangement. Derues having a business appointment which he was bound to keep, desired his wife to accompany the Lamottes to the Hotel de France, and in case of their not being able to find rooms there, mentioned three others as the only ones in the quarter where they could be comfortably accommodated. Two hours later Madame de Lamotte and her son returned to his house in the rue Beaubourg.

The house which Derues occupied stood opposite the rue des Menoriers, and was pulled down quite lately to make way for the rue Rambuteau. In 1776 it was one of the finest houses of the rue Beaubourg, and it required a certain income to be able to live there, the rents being tolerably high. A large arched doorway gave admittance to a passage, lighted at the other end by a small court, on the far side of which was the shop into which Madame de Lamotte had been taken on the occasion of the accident. The house staircase was to the right of the passage; and the Derues' dwelling on the entresol. The first room, lighted by a window looking into the court, was used as a dining room, and led into a simply furnished sitting-room, such as was generally found among the bourgeois and tradespeople of this period. To the right of the sitting-room was a large closet, which could serve as a small study, or could hold a bed; to the left was a door opening into the Derues' bedroom, which had been prepared for Madame de Lamotte. Madame Derues would occupy one of the two beds which stood in the alcove. Derues had a bed made up in the sitting-room, and Edouard was accommodated in the little study.

Nothing particular happened during the first few days which followed the Lamottes' arrival. They had not come to Paris only on account of the Buisson-Souef affairs. Edouard was nearly sixteen, and after much hesitation his parents had decided on placing him in some school where his hitherto neglected education might receive more attention. Derues undertook to find a capable tutor, in whose house the boy would be brought up in the religious feeling which the cure of Buisson and his own exhortations had already tended to develop. These proceedings, added to Madame de Lamotte's endeavours to collect various sums due to her husband, took some time. Perhaps, when on the point of executing a terrible crime, Derues tried to postpone the fatal moment, although, considering his character, this seems unlikely, for one cannot do him the honour of crediting him with a single moment of remorse, doubt, or pity. Far from it, it appears from all the information which can be gathered, that Derues, faithful to his own traditions, was simply experimenting on his unfortunate guests, for no sooner were they in his house than both began to complain of constant nausea, which they had never suffered from before. While he thus ascertained the strength of their constitution, he was able, knowing the cause of the malady, to give them relief, so that Madame de Lamotte, although she grew daily weaker, had so much confidence in him as to think it unnecessary to call in a doctor. Fearing to alarm her husband, she never mentioned her sufferings, and her letters only spoke of the care and kind attention which she received.

On the 15th of January, 1777, Edouard was placed in a school in the rue de l'Homme Arme. His mother never saw him again. She went out once more to place her husband's power of attorney with a lawyer in the rue de Paon. On her return she felt so weak and broken-down that she was obliged to go to bed and remain there for several days. On January 29th the unfortunate lady had risen, and was sitting near the window which

Derues

overlooked the deserted rue des Menetriers, where clouds of snow were drifting before the wind. Who can guess the sad thoughts which may have possessed her?--all around dark, cold, and silent, tending to produce painful depression and involuntary dread. To escape the gloomy ideas which besieged her, her mind went back to the smiling times of her youth and marriage. She recalled the time when, alone at Buisson during her husband's enforced absences, she wandered with her child in the cool and shaded walks of the park, and sat out in the evening, inhaling the scent of the flowers, and listening to the murmur of the water, or the sound of the whispering breeze in the leaves. Then, coming back from these sweet recollections to reality, she shed tears, and called on her husband and son. So deep was her reverie that she did not hear the room door open, did not perceive that darkness had come on. The light of a candle, dispersing the shadows, made her start; she turned her head, and saw Derues coming towards her. He smiled, and she made an effort to keep back the tears which were shining in her eyes, and to appear calm.

"I am afraid I disturb you," he said. "I came to ask a favour, madame."

"What is it, Monsieur Derues?" she inquired.

"Will you allow me to have a large chest brought into this room? I ought to pack some valuable things in it which are in my charge, and are now in this cupboard. I am afraid it will be in your way."

"Is it not your own house, and is it not rather I who am in the way and a cause of trouble? Pray have it brought in, and try to forget that I am here. You are most kind to me, but I wish I could spare you all this trouble and that I were fit to go back to Buisson. I had a letter from my husband yesterday----"

"We will talk about that presently, if you wish it," said Derues. "I will go and fetch the servant to help me to carry in this chest. I have put it off hitherto, but it really must be sent in three days."

He went away, and returned in a few minutes. The chest was carried in, and placed before the cupboard at the foot of the bed. Alas! the poor lady little thought it was her own coffin which stood before her!

The maid withdrew, and Derues assisted Madame de Lamotte to a seat near the fire, which he revived with more fuel. He sat down opposite to her, and by the feeble light of the candle placed on a small table between them could contemplate at leisure the ravages wrought by poison on her wasted features.

"I saw your son to-day," he said: "he complains that you neglect him, and have not seen him for twelve days. He does not know you have been ill, nor did I tell him. The dear boy! he loves you so tenderly."

"And I also long to see him. My friend, I cannot tell you what terrible presentiments beset me; it seems as if I were threatened with some great misfortune; and just now, when you came in, I could think only of death. What is the cause of this languor and weakness? It is surely no temporary ailment. Tell me the truth: am I not dreadfully altered? and do you not think my husband will be shocked when he sees me like this?"

"You are unnecessarily anxious," replied Derues; "it is rather a failing of yours. Did I not see you last year tormenting yourself about Edouard's health, when he was not even thinking of being ill? I am not so soon alarmed. My own old profession, and that of chemistry, which I studied in my youth, have given me some acquaintance with medicine. I have frequently been consulted, and have prescribed for patients whose condition was supposed to be desperate, and I can assure you I have never seen a better and stronger constitution than yours. Try to calm yourself, and do not call up chimeras; because a mind at ease is the greatest enemy of illness. This depression will pass, and then you will regain your strength."

Derues

"May God grant it! for I feel weaker every day."

"We have still some business to transact together. The notary at Beauvais writes that the difficulties which prevented his paying over the inheritance of my wife's relation, Monsieur Duplessis, have mostly disappeared. I have a hundred thousand livres at my disposal,--that is to say, at yours,--and in a month at latest I shall be able to pay off my debt. You ask me to be sincere," he continued, with a tinge of reproachful irony; "be sincere in your turn, madame, and acknowledge that you and your husband have both felt uneasy, and that the delays I have been obliged to ask for have not seemed very encouraging to you?"

"It is true," she replied; "but we never questioned your good faith."

"And you were right. One is not always able to carry out one's intentions; events can always upset our calculations; but what really is in our power is the desire to do right--to be honest; and I can say that I never intentionally wronged anyone. And now. I am happy in being able to fulfil my promises to you. I trust when I am the owner of Buisson-Souef you will not feel obliged to leave it."

"Thank you; I should like to come occasionally, for all my happy recollections are connected with it. Is it necessary for me to accompany you to Beauvais?"

"Why should you not? The change would do you good."

She looked up at him and smiled sadly. "I am not in a fit state to undertake it."

"Not if you imagine that you are unable, certainly. Come, have you any confidence in me?"

"The most complete confidence, as you know."

"Very well, then: trust to my care. This very evening I will prepare a draught for you to take to-morrow morning, and I will even now fix the duration of this terrible malady which frightens you so much. In two days I shall fetch Edouard from his school to celebrate the beginning of your convalescence, and we will start, at latest, on February 1st. You are astonished at what I say, but you shall see if I am not a good doctor, and much cleverer than many who pass for such merely because they have obtained a diploma."

"Then, doctor, I will place myself in your hands."

"Remember what I say. You will leave this on February 1st."

"To begin this cure, can you ensure my sleeping to-night?"

"Certainly. I will go now, and send my wife to you. She will bring a draught, which you must promise to take."

"I will exactly follow your prescriptions. Goodnight, my friend."

"Good-night, madame; and take courage;" and bowing low, he left the room.

The rest of the evening was spent in preparing the fatal medicine. The next morning, an hour or two after Madame de Lamotte had swallowed it, the maid who had given it to her came and told Derues the invalid was sleeping very heavily and snoring, and asked if she ought to be awoken. He went into the room, and, opening the curtains, approached the bed. He listened for some time, and recognised that the supposed snoring was really his death-rattle. He sent the servant off into the country with a letter to one of his friends, telling her not to return until the Monday following, February 3rd. He also sent away his wife, on some unknown pretext, and remained alone with his victim.

Derues

So terrible a situation ought to have troubled the mind of the most hardened criminal. A man familiar with murder and accustomed to shed blood might have felt his heart sink, and, in the absence of pity, might have experienced disgust at the sight of this prolonged and useless torture; but Derues, calm and easy, as if unconscious of evil, sat coolly beside the bed, as any doctor might have done. From time to time he felt the slackening pulse, and looked at the glassy and sightless eyes which turned in their orbits, and he saw without terror the approach of night, which rendered this awful 'tete-a-tete' even more horrible. The most profound silence reigned in the house, the street was deserted, and the only sound heard was caused by an icy rain mixed with snow driven against the glass, and occasionally the howl of the wind, which penetrated the chimney and scattered the ashes. A single candle placed behind the curtains lighted this dismal scene, and the irregular flicker of its flame cast weird reflections and dancing shadows on the walls of the alcove. There came a lull in the wind, the rain ceased, and during this instant of calm someone knocked, at first gently, and then sharply, at the outer door. Derues dropped the dying woman's hand and bent forward to listen. The knock was repeated, and he grew pale. He threw the sheet, as if it were a shroud, over his victim's head drew the curtains of the alcove, and went to the door. "Who is there?" he inquired.

"Open, Monsieur Derues," said a voice which he recognised as that of a woman of Chartres whose affairs he managed, and who had entrusted him with sundry deeds in order that he might receive the money due to her. This woman had begun to entertain doubts as to Derues' honesty, and as she was leaving Paris the next day, had resolved to get the papers out of his hands.

"Open the door," she repeated. "Don't you know my voice?"

"I am sorry I cannot let you in. My servant is out: she has taken the key and locked the door outside."

"You must let me in," the woman continued; "it is absolutely necessary I should speak to you."

"Come to-morrow."

"I leave Paris to-morrow, and I must have those papers to-night."

He again refused, but she spoke firmly and decidedly. "I must come in. The porter said you were all out, but, from the rue des Menetriers I could see the light in your room. My brother is with me, and I left him below. I shall call him if you don't open the door."

"Come in, then," said Derues; "your papers are in the sitting-room. Wait here, and I will fetch them." The woman looked at him and took his hand. "Heavens! how pale you are! What is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter: will you wait here?" But she would not release his arm, and followed him into the sitting-room, where Derues began to seek hurriedly among the various papers which covered a table. "Here they are," he said; "now you can go."

"Really," said the woman, examining her deeds carefully, "never yet did I see you in such a hurry to give up things which don't belong to you. But do hold that candle steadily; your hand is shaking so that I cannot see to read."

At that moment the silence which prevailed all round was broken by a cry of anguish, a long groan proceeding from the chamber to the right of the sitting-room.

"What is that?" cried the woman. "Surely it is a dying person!"

Derues

The sense of the danger which threatened made Derues pull himself together. "Do not be alarmed," he said. "My wife has been seized with a violent fever; she is quite delirious now, and that is why I told the porter to let no one come up."

But the groans in the next room continued, and the unwelcome visitor, overcome by terror which she could neither surmount nor explain, took a hasty leave, and descended the staircase with all possible rapidity. As soon as he could close the door, Derues returned to the bedroom.

Nature frequently collects all her expiring strength at the last moment of existence. The unhappy lady struggled beneath her coverings; the agony she suffered had given her a convulsive energy, and inarticulate sounds proceeded from her mouth. Derues approached and held her on the bed. She sank back on the pillow, shuddering convulsively, her hands plucking and twisting the sheets, her teeth chattering and biting the loose hair which fell over her face and shoulders. "water! water!" she cried; and then, "Edouard,--my husband!--Edouard!--is it you?" Then rising with a last effort, she seized her murderer by the arm, repeating, "Edouard!--oh!" and then fell heavily, dragging Derues down with her. His face was against hers; he raised his head, but the dying hand, clenched in agony, had closed upon him like a vise. The icy fingers seemed made of iron and could not be opened, as though the victim had seized on her assassin as a prey, and clung to the proof of his crime.

Derues at last freed himself, and putting his hand on her heart, "It is over," he remarked; "she has been a long time about it. What o'clock is it? Nine! She has struggled against death for twelve hours!"

While the limbs still retained a little warmth, he drew the feet together, crossed the hands on the breast, and placed the body in the chest. When he had locked it up, he remade the bed, undressed himself, and slept comfortably in the other one.

The next day, February 1st, the day he had fixed for the "going out" of Madame de Lamotte, he caused the chest to be placed on a hand-cart and carried at about ten o'clock in the morning to the workshop of a carpenter of his acquaintance called Mouchy, who dwelt near the Louvre. The two commissionaires employed had been selected in distant quarters, and did not know each other. They were well paid, and each presented with a bottle of wine. These men could never be traced. Derues requested the carpenter's wife to allow the chest to remain in the large workshop, saying he had forgotten something at his own house, and would return to fetch it in three hours. But, instead of a few hours, he left it for two whole days--why, one does not know, but it may be supposed that he wanted the time to dig a trench in a sort of vault under the staircase leading to the cellar in the rue de la Mortellerie. Whatever the cause, the delay might have been fatal, and did occasion an unforeseen encounter which nearly betrayed him. But of all the actors in this scene he alone knew the real danger he incurred, and his coolness never deserted him for a moment.

The third day, as he walked alongside the handcart on which the chest was being conveyed, he was accosted at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois by a creditor who had obtained a writ of execution against him, and at the imperative sign made by this man the porter stopped. The creditor attacked Derues violently, reproaching him for his bad faith in language which was both energetic and uncomplimentary; to which the latter replied in as conciliatory a manner as he could assume. But it was impossible to silence the enemy, and an increasing crowd of idlers began to assemble round them.

"When will you pay me?" demanded the creditor. "I have an execution against you. What is there in that box? Valuables which you cart away secretly, in order to laugh at my just claims, as you did two years ago?"

Derues

Derues shuddered all over; he exhausted himself in protestations; but the other, almost beside himself, continued to shout.

"Oh!" he said, turning to the crowd, "all these tricks and grimaces and signs of the cross are no good. I must have my money, and as I know what his promises are worth, I will pay myself! Come, you knave, make haste. Tell me what there is in that box; open it, or I will fetch the police."

The crowd was divided between the creditor and debtor, and possibly a free fight would have begun, but the general attention was distracted by the arrival of another spectator. A voice heard above all the tumult caused a score of heads to turn, it was the voice of a woman crying:

"The abominable history of Leroi de Valine, condemned to death at the age of sixteen for having poisoned his entire family!"

Continually crying her wares, the drunken, staggering woman approached the crowd, and striking out right and left with fists and elbows, forced her way to Derues.

"Ah! ah!" said she, after looking him well over, "is it you, my gossip Derues! Have you again a little affair on hand like the one when you set fire to your shop in the rue Saint-Victor?"

Derues recognised the hawker who had abused him on the threshold of his shop some years previously, and whom he had never seen since. "Yes, yes," she continued, "you had better look at me with your little round cat's eyes. Are you going to say you don't know me?"

Derues appealed to his creditor. "You see," he said, "to what insults you are exposing me. I do not know this woman who abuses me."

"What!--you don't know me! You who accused me of being a thief! But luckily the Maniffets have been known in Paris as honest people for generations, while as for you----"

"Sir," said Derues, "this case contains valuable wine which I am commissioned to sell. To-morrow I shall receive the money for it; to-morrow, in the course of the day, I will pay what I owe you. But I am waited for now, do not in Heaven's name detain me longer, and thus deprive me of the means of paying at all."

"Don't believe him, my good man," said the hawker; "lying comes natural to him always."

"Sir, I promise on my oath you shall be paid tomorrow; you had better trust the word of an honest man rather than the ravings of a drunken woman."

The creditor still hesitated, but, another person now spoke in Derues' favour; it was the carpenter Mouchy, who had inquired the cause of the quarrel.

"For God's sake," he exclaimed, "let the gentleman go on. That chest came from my workshop, and I know there is wine inside it; he told my wife so two days ago."

"Will you be surety for me, my friend?" asked Derues.

"Certainly I will; I have not known you for ten years in order to leave you in trouble and refuse to answer for you. What the devil are respectable people to be stopped like this in a public place? Come, sir, believe his word, as I do."

After some more discussion, the porter was at last allowed to proceed with his hand-cart. The hawker wanted to interfere, but Mouchy warned her off and ordered her to be silent. "Ah! ah!" she cried, "what does it matter to me? Let him sell his wine if he can; I shall not drink any

Derues

on his premises. This is the second time he has found a surety to my knowledge; the beggar must have some special secret for encouraging the growth of fools. Good-bye, gossip Derues; you know I shall be selling your history some day. Meanwhile----

"The abominable history of Leroi de Valine, condemned to death at the age of sixteen for having poisoned his entire family!"

Whilst she amused the people by her grimaces and grotesque gestures, and while Mouchy held forth to some of them, Derues made his escape. Several times between Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and the rue de la Mortellerie he nearly fainted, and was obliged to stop. While the danger lasted, he had had sufficient self-control to confront it coolly, but now that he calculated the depth of the abyss which for a moment had opened beneath his feet, dizziness laid hold on him.

Other precautions now became necessary. His real name had been mentioned before the commissionaire, and the widow Masson, who owned the cellar, only knew him as Ducoudray. He went on in front, asked for the keys, which till then had been left with her, and the chest was got downstairs without any awkward questions. Only the porter seemed astonished that this supposed wine, which was to be sold immediately, should be put in such a place, and asked if he might come the next day and move it again. Derues replied that someone was coming for it that very day. This question, and the disgraceful scene which the man had witnessed, made it necessary to get rid of him without letting him see the pit dug under the staircase. Derues tried to drag the chest towards the hole, but all his strength was insufficient to move it. He uttered terrible imprecations when he recognised his own weakness, and saw that he would be obliged to bring another stranger, an informer perhaps, into this charnel-house, where; as yet, nothing betrayed his crimes. No sooner escaped from one peril than he encountered another, and already he had to struggle against his own deeds. He measured the length of the trench, it was too short. Derues went out and repaired to the place where he had hired the labourer who had dug it out, but he could not find the man, whom he had only seen once, and whose name he did not know. Two whole days were spent in this fruitless search, but on the third, as he was wandering on one of the quays at the time labourers were to be found there, a mason, thinking he was looking for someone, inquired what he wanted. Derues looked well at the man, and concluding from his appearance that he was probably rather simpleminded, asked--

"Would you like to earn a crown of three livres by an easy job?"

"What a question, master!" answered the mason. "Work is so scarce that I am going back into the country this very evening."

"Very well! Bring your tools, spade, and pickaxe, and follow me."

They both went down to the cellar, and the mason was ordered to dig out the pit till it was five and a half feet deep. While the man worked, Derues sat beside the chest and read. When it was half done, the mason stopped for breath, and leaning on his spade, inquired why he wanted a trench of such a depth. Derues, who had probably foreseen the question, answered at once, without being disconcerted--

"I want to bury some bottled wine which is contained in this case."

"Wine!" said the other. "Ah! you are laughing at me, because you think I look a fool! I never yet heard of such a recipe for improving wine."

"Where do you come from?"

"D'Alencon."

"Cider drinker! You were brought up in Normandy, that is clear. Well, you can learn from me, Jean-Baptiste Ducoudray, a wine grower of Tours, and a wine merchant for the last ten years, that new wine thus buried

Derues

for a year acquires the quality and characteristics of the oldest brands."

"It is possible," said the mason, again taking his spade, "but all the same it seems a little odd to me."

When he had finished, Derues asked him to help to drag the chest alongside the trench, so that it might be easier to take out the bottles and arrange them: The mason agreed, but when he moved the chest the foetid odour which proceeded from it made him draw back, declaring that a smell such as that could not possibly proceed from wine. Derues tried to persuade him that the smell came from drains under the cellar, the pipe of which could be seen. It appeared to satisfy him, and he again took hold of the chest, but immediately let it go again, and said positively that he could not execute Derues' orders, being convinced that the chest must contain a decomposing corpse. Then Derues threw himself at the man's feet and acknowledged that it was the dead body of a woman who had unfortunately lodged in his house, and who had died there suddenly from an unknown malady, and that, dreading lest he should be accused of having murdered her, he had decided to conceal the death and bury her here.

The mason listened, alarmed at this confidence, and not knowing whether to believe it or not. Derues sobbed and wept at his feet, beat his breast and tore out his hair, calling on God and the saints as witnesses of his good faith and his innocence. He showed the book he was reading while the mason excavated: it was the Seven Penitential Psalms. "How unfortunate I am!" he cried. "This woman died in my house, I assure you--died suddenly, before I could call a doctor. I was alone; I might have been accused, imprisoned, perhaps condemned for a crime I did not commit. Do not ruin me! You leave Paris to-night, you need not be uneasy; no one would know that I employed you, if this unhappy affair should ever be discovered. I do not know your name, I do not wish to know it, and I tell you mine, it is Ducoudray. I give myself up to you, but have some pity!--if not for me, yet for my wife and my two little children--for these poor creatures whose only support I am!"

Seeing that the mason was touched, Derues opened the chest.

"Look," he said, "examine the body of this woman, does it show any mark of violent death? My God!" he continued, joining his hands and in tones of despairing agony, "--my God, Thou who readest all hearts, and who knowest my innocence, canst Thou not ordain a miracle to save an honest man? Wilt Thou not command this dead body to bear witness for me?"

The mason was stupefied by this flow of language. Unable to restrain his tears, he promised to keep silence, persuaded that Derues was innocent, and that appearances only were against him. The latter, moreover, did not neglect other means of persuasion; he handed the mason two gold pieces, and between them they buried the body of Madame de Lamotte.

However extraordinary this fact, which might easily be supposed imaginary, may appear, it certainly happened. In the examination at his trial. Derues himself revealed it, repeating the story which had satisfied the mason. He believed that this man had denounced him: he was mistaken, for this confidant of his crime, who might have been the first to put justice on his track, never reappeared, and but for Derues' acknowledgment his existence would have remained unknown.

This first deed accomplished, another victim was already appointed. Trembling at first as to the consequences of his forced confession, Derues waited some days, paying, however, his creditor as promised. He redoubles his demonstrations of piety, he casts a furtive glance on everyone he meets, seeking for some expression of distrust. But no one avoids him, or points him out with a raised finger, or whispers on seeing him; everywhere he encounters the customary expression of goodwill. Nothing has changed; suspicion passes over his head without alighting there. He is reassured, and resumes his work. Moreover, had

Derues

he wished to remain passive, he could not have done so; he was now compelled to follow that fatal law of crime which demands that blood must be effaced with blood, and which is compelled to appeal again to death in order to stifle the accusing voice already issuing from the tomb.

Edouard de Lamotte, loving his mother as much as she loved him, became uneasy at receiving no visits, and was astonished at this sudden indifference. Derues wrote to him as follows:

"I have at length some good news for you, my dear boy, but you must not tell your mother I have betrayed her secret; she would scold me, because she is planning a surprise for you, and the various steps and care necessary in arranging this important matter have caused her absence. You were to know nothing until the 11th or 12th of this month, but now that all is settled, I should blame myself if I prolonged the uncertainty in which you have been left, only you must promise me to look as much astonished as possible. Your mother, who only lives for you, is going to present you with the greatest gift a youth of your age can receive--that of liberty. Yes, dear boy, we thought we had discovered that you have no very keen taste for study, and that a secluded life will suit neither your character nor your health. In saying this I utter no reproach, for every man is born with his own decided tastes, and the way to success and happiness is--often--to allow him to follow these instincts. We have had long discussions on this subject--your mother and I--and we have thought much about your future; she has at last come to a decision, and for the last ten days has been at Versailles, endeavouring to obtain your admission as a royal page. Here is the mystery, this is the reason which has kept her from you, and as she knew you would hear it with delight, she wished to have the pleasure of telling you herself. Therefore, once again, when you see her, which will be very soon, do not let her see I have told you; appear to be greatly surprised. It is true that I am asking you to tell a lie, but it is a very innocent one, and its good intention will counteract its sinfulness--may God grant we never have worse upon our consciences! Thus, instead of lessons and the solemn precepts of your tutors, instead of a monotonous school-life, you are going to enjoy your liberty; also the pleasures of the court and the world. All that rather alarms me, and I ought to confess that I at first opposed this plan. I begged your mother to reflect, to consider that in this new existence you would run great risk of losing the religious feeling which inspires you, and which I have had the happiness, during my sojourn at Buisson-Souef, of further developing in your mind. I still recall with emotion your fervid and sincere aspirations towards the Creator when you approached the Sacred Table for the first time, and when, kneeling beside you, and envying the purity of heart and innocence of soul which appeared to animate your countenance as with a divine radiance, I besought God that, in default of my own virtue, the love for heavenly Truth with which I have inspired you might be reckoned to my account. Your piety is my work, Edouard, and I defended it against your mother's plans; but she replied that in every career a man is master of his own good or evil actions; and as I have no authority over you, and friendship only gives me the right to advise, I must give way. If this be your vocation, then follow it.

"My occupations are so numerous (I have to collect from different sources this hundred thousand livres intended to defray the greater part of the Buisson purchase) that I have not a moment in which to come and see you this week. Spend the time in reflection, and write to me fully what you think about this plan. If, like me, you feel any scruples, you must tell them to your mother, who decidedly wants only to make you happy. Speak to me freely, openly. It is arranged that I am to fetch you on the 11th of this month, and escort you to Versailles, where Madame de Lamotte will be waiting to receive you with the utmost tenderness. Adieu, dear boy; write to me. Your father knows nothing as yet; his consent will be asked after your decision."

The answer to this letter did not have to be waited for: it was such as Derues expected; the lad accepted joyfully. The answer was, for the

Derues

murderer, an arranged plea of defence, a proof which, in a given case, might link the present with the past.

On the morning of February 11th, Shrove Tuesday, he went to fetch the young de Lamotte from his school, telling the master that he was desired by the youth's mother to conduct him to Versailles. But, instead, he took him to his own house, saying that he had a letter from Madame de Lamotte asking them not to come till the next day; so they started on Ash Wednesday, Edouard having breakfasted on chocolate. Arrived at Versailles, they stopped at the Fleur-de-lys inn, but there the sickness which the boy had complained of during the journey became very serious, and the innkeeper, having young children, and believing that he recognised symptoms of smallpox, which just then was ravaging Versailles, refused to receive them, saying he had no vacant room. This might have disconcerted anyone but Derues, but his audacity, activity, and resource seemed to increase with each fresh obstacle. Leaving Edouard in a room on the ground floor which had no communication with the rest of the inn, he went at once to look for lodgings, and hastily explored the town. After a fruitless search, he found at last, at the junction of the rue Saint-Honore with that of the Orangerie, a cooper named Martin, who had a furnished room to spare. This he hired at thirty sous per day for himself and his nephew, who had been taken suddenly ill, under the name of Beaupre. To avoid being questioned later, he informed the cooper in a few words that he was a doctor; that he had come to Versailles in order to place his nephew in one of the offices of the town; that in a few days the latter's mother would arrive to join him in seeing and making application to influential persons about the court, to whom he had letters of introduction. As soon as he had delivered this fable with all the appearance of truth with which he knew so well how to disguise his falsehoods, he went back to the young de Lamotte, who was already so exhausted that he was hardly able to drag himself as far as the cooper's house. He fainted on arrival, and was carried into the hired room, where Derues begged to be left alone with him, and only asked for certain beverages which he told the people how to prepare.

Whether it was that the strength of youth fought against the poison, or that Derues took pleasure in watching the sufferings of his victim, the agony of the poor lad was prolonged until the fourth day. The sickness continuing incessantly, he sent the cooper's wife for a medicine which he prepared and administered himself. It produced terrible pain, and Edouard's cries brought the cooper and his wife upstairs. They represented to Derues that he ought to call in a doctor and consult with him, but he refused decidedly, saying that a doctor hastily fetched might prove to be an ignorant person with whom he could not agree, and that he could not allow one so dear to him to be prescribed for and nursed by anyone but himself.

"I know what the malady is," he continued, raising his eyes to heaven; "it is one that has to be concealed rather than acknowledged. Poor youth! whom I love as my own son, if God, touched by my tears and thy suffering, permits me to save thee, thy whole life will be too short for thy blessings and thy gratitude!" And as Madame Martin asked what this malady might be, he answered with hypocritical blushes--

"Do not ask, madame; there are things of which you do not know even the name."

At another time, Martin expressed his surprise that the young man's mother had not yet appeared, who, according to Derues, was to have met him at Versailles. He asked how she could know that they were lodging in his house, and if he should send to meet her at any place where she was likely to arrive.

"His mother," said Derues, looking compassionately at Edouard, who lay pale, motionless, and as if insensible,--"his mother! He calls for her incessantly. Ah! monsieur, some families are greatly to be pitied! My entreaties prevailed on her to decide on coming hither, but will she

Derues

keep her promise? Do not ask me to tell you more; it is too painful to have to accuse a mother of having forgotten her duties in the presence of her son... there are secrets which ought not to be told--unhappy woman!"

Edouard moved, extended his arms, and repeated, "Mother!... mother!"

Derues hastened to his side and took his hands in his, as if to warm them.

"My mother!" the youth repeated. "why have I not seen her? She was to have met me."

"You shall soon see her, dear boy; only keep quiet."

"But just now I thought she was dead."

"Dead!" cried Derues. "Drive away these sad thoughts. They are caused by the fever only."

"No! oh no!... I heard a secret voice which said, 'Thy mother is dead!...' And then I beheld a livid corpse before me... It was she!... I knew her well! and she seemed to have suffered so much----"

"Dear boy, your mother is not dead... My God! what terrible chimeras you conjure up! You will see her again, I assure you; she has arrived already. Is it not so, madame?" he asked, turning towards the Martins, who were both leaning against the foot of the bed, and signing to them to support this pious falsehood, in order to calm the young man. "Did she not arrive and come to his bedside and kiss him while he slept, and she will soon come again?"

"Yes, yes," said Madame Martin, wiping her eyes; "and she begged my husband and me to help your uncle to take great care of you--"

The youth moved again, and looking round him with a dazed expression, said, "My uncle--?"

"You had better go," said Derues in a whisper to the Martins. "I am afraid he is delirious again; I will prepare a draught, which will give him a little rest and sleep."

"Adieu, then, adieu," answered Madame Martin; "and may Heaven bless you for the care you bestow on this poor young man!"

On Friday evening violent vomiting appeared to have benefited the sufferer. He had rejected most of the poison, and had a fairly quiet night. But on the Saturday morning Derues sent the cooper's little girl to buy more medicine, which he prepared, himself, like the first. The day was horrible, and about six in the evening, seeing his victim was at the last gasp, he opened a little window overlooking the shop and summoned the cooper, requesting him to go at once for a priest. When the latter arrived he found Derues in tears, kneeling at the dying boy's bedside. And now, by the light of two tapers placed on a table, flanking the holy water-stoup, there began what on one side was an abominable and sacrilegious comedy, a disgraceful parody of that which Christians consider most sacred and most dear; on the other, a pious and consoling ceremony. The cooper and his wife, their eyes bathed in tears, knelt in the middle of the room, murmuring such prayers as they could remember.

Derues gave up his place to the priest, but as Edouard did not answer the latter's questions, he approached the bed, and bending over the sufferer, exhorted him to confession.

"Dear boy," he said, "take courage; your sufferings here will be counted to you above: God will weigh them in the scales of His infinite mercy. Listen to the words of His holy minister, cast your sins into His bosom, and obtain from Him forgiveness for your faults."

Derues

"I am in such terrible pain!" cried Edouard. "Water! water! Extinguish the fire which consumes me!"

A violent fit came on, succeeded by exhaustion and the death-rattle. Derues fell on his knees, and the priest administered extreme unction. There was then a moment of absolute silence, more impressive than cries and sobs. The priest collected himself for a moment, crossed himself, and began to pray. Derues also crossed himself, and repeated in a low voice, apparently choked by grief

"Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who was poured out upon thee."

The youth struggled in his bed, and a convulsive movement agitated his limbs. Derues continued--

"When thy soul departs from this body may it be admitted to the holy Mountain of Sion, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, to the numerous company of Angels, and to the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven----"

"Mother!... My mother!" cried Edouard. Derues resumed--

"Let God arise, and let the Powers of Darkness be dispersed! let the Spirits of Evil, who reign over the air, be put to flight; let them not dare to attack a soul redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

"Amen," responded the priest and the Martins.

There was another silence, broken only by the stifled sobs of Derues. The priest again crossed himself and took up the prayer.

"We beseech Thee, O beloved and only Son of God, by the merits of Thy sacred Passion, Thy Cross and Thy Death, to deliver this Thy servant from the pains of Hell, and to lead him to that happy place whither Thou didst vouchsafe to lead the thief, who, with Thee, was bound upon the Cross: Thou, who art God, living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Ghost."

"Amen," repeated those present. Derues now took up the prayer, and his voice mingled with the dying gasps of the sufferer.

"And there was a darkness over all the earth----"

"To Thee, O Lord, we commend the soul of this Thy servant, that, being dead to the world, he may, live to Thee: and the sins he hath committed through the frailty of his mortal nature, do Thou in Thy most merciful goodness, forgive and wash away. Amen."

After which all present sprinkled holy water on the body....

When the priest had retired, shown out by Madame Martin, Derues said to her husband--

"This unfortunate young man has died without the consolation of beholding his mother.... His last thought was for her.... There now remains the last duty, a very painful one to accomplish, but my poor nephew imposed it on me. A few hours ago, feeling that his end was near, he asked me, as a last mark of friendship, not to entrust these final duties to the hands of strangers."

While he applied himself to the necessary work in presence of the cooper, who was much affected by the sight of such sincere and profound affliction, Derues added, sighing--

Derues

"I shall always grieve for this dear boy. Alas! that evil living should have caused his early death!"

When he had finished laying out the body, he threw some little packets into the fire which he professed to have found in the youth's pockets, telling Martin, in order to support this assertion, that they contained drugs suitable to this disgraceful malady.

He spent the night in the room with the corpse, as he had done in the case of Madame de Lamotte, and the next day, Sunday, he sent Martin to the parish church of St. Louis, to arrange for a funeral of the simplest kind; telling him to fill up the certificate in the name of Beaupre, born at Commercy, in Lorraine. He declined himself either to go to the church or to appear at the funeral, saying that his grief was too great. Martin, returning from the funeral, found him engaged in prayer. Derues gave him the dead youth's clothes and departed, leaving some money to be given to the poor of the parish, and for masses to be said for the repose of the soul of the dead.

He arrived at home in the evening, found his wife entertaining some friends; and told them he had just come from Chartres, where he had been summoned on business. Everyone noticed his unusual air of satisfaction, and he sang several songs during supper.

Having accomplished these two crimes, Derues did not remain idle. When the murderer's part of his nature was at rest, the thief reappeared. His extreme avarice now made him regret the expense' caused by the deaths of Madame de Lamotte and her son, and he wished to recoup himself. Two days after his return from Versailles, he ventured to present himself at Edouard's school. He told the master that he had received a letter from Madame de Lamotte, saying that she wished to keep her son, and asking him to obtain Edouard's belongings. The schoolmaster's wife, who was present, replied that that could not be; that Monsieur de Lamotte would have known of his wife's intention; that she would not have taken such a step without consulting him; and that only the evening before, they had received a present of game from Buisson-Souef, with a letter in which Monsieur de Lamotte entreated them to take great care of his son.

"If what you say is true," she continued, "Madame de Lamotte is no doubt acting on your advice in taking away her son. But I will write to Buisson."

"You had better not do anything in the matter;" said Derues, turning to the schoolmaster. "It is quite possible that Monsieur de Lamotte does not know. I am aware that his wife does not always consult him. She is at Versailles, where I took Edouard to her, and I will inform her of your objection."

To insure impunity for these murders, Derues had resolved on the death of Monsieur de Lamotte; but before executing this last crime, he wished for some proof of the recent pretended agreements between himself and Madame de Lamotte. He would not wait for the disappearance of the whole family before presenting himself as the lawful proprietor, of Buisson-Souef. Prudence required him to shelter himself behind a deed which should have been executed by that lady. On February 27th he appeared at the office of Madame de Lamotte's lawyer in the rue du Paon, and, with all the persuasion of an artful tongue, demanded the power of attorney on that lady's behalf, saying that he had, by private contract, just paid a hundred thousand livres on the total amount of purchase, which money was now deposited with a notary. The lawyer, much astonished that an affair of such importance should have been arranged without any reference to himself, refused to give up the deed to anyone but Monsieur or Madame de Lamotte, and inquired why the latter did not appear herself. Derues replied that she was at Versailles, and that he was to send the deed to her there. He repeated his request and the lawyer his refusal, until Derues retired, saying he would find means to compel him to give up the deed. He actually did, the same day, present a petition to the civil authority, in which Cyrano Derues de Bury sets forth

Derues

arrangements, made with Madame de Lamotte, founded on the deed given by her husband, and requires permission to seize and withdraw said deed from the custody in which it remains at present. The petition is granted. The lawyer objects that he can only give up the deed to either Monsieur or Madame de Lamotte, unless he be otherwise ordered. Derues has the effrontery to again appeal to the civil authority, but, for the reasons given by that public officer, the affair is adjourned.

These two futile efforts might have compromised Derues had they been heard of at Buisson-Souef; but everything seemed to conspire in the criminal's favour: neither the schoolmaster's wife nor the lawyer thought of writing to Monsieur de Lamotte. The latter, as yet unsuspecting, was tormented by other anxieties, and kept at home by illness.

In these days, distance is shortened, and one can travel from Villeneuve-le-Roi-les-Sens to Paris in a few hours. This was not the case in 1777, when private industry and activity, stifled by routine and privilege, had not yet experienced the need of providing the means for rapid communication. Half a day was required to go from the capital to Versailles; a journey of twenty leagues required at least two days and a night, and bristled with obstacles and delays of all kinds. These difficulties of transport, still greater during bad weather, and a long and serious attack of gout, explain why Monsieur de Lamotte, who was so ready to take alarm, had remained separated from his wife from the middle of December to the end of February. He had received reassuring letters from her, written at first with freedom and simplicity; but he thought he noticed a gradual change in the later ones, which appeared to proceed more from the mind than the heart. A style which aimed at being natural was interspersed with unnecessary expressions of affection, unusual between married people well assured of their mutual love. Monsieur de Lamotte observed and exaggerated these peculiarities, and though endeavouring to persuade himself that he was mistaken, he could not forget them, or regain his usual tranquility. Being somewhat ashamed of his anxiety, he kept his fears to himself.

One morning, as he was sunk in a large armchair by the fire, his sitting-room door opened, and the cure entered, who was surprised by his despondent, sad, and pale appearance. "What is the matter?" he inquired, "Have you had an extra bad night?"

"Yes," answered Monsieur de Lamotte.

"Well, have you any news from Paris?"

"Nothing for a whole week: it is odd, is it not?"

"I am always hoping that this sale may fall through; it drags on for so very long; and I believe that Monsieur Derues, in spite of what your wife wrote a month ago, has not as much money as he pretends to have. Do you know that it is said that Monsieur Despeignes-Duplessis, Madame Derues' relative, whose money they inherited, was assassinated?"

"Where did you hear that?"

"It is a common report in the country, and was brought here by a man who came recently from Beauvais."

"Have the murderers been discovered?"

"Apparently not; justice seems unable to discover anything at all."

Monsieur de Lamotte hung his head, and his countenance assumed an expression of painful thought, as though this news affected him personally.

"Frankly," resumed the cure, "I believe you will remain seigneur du Buisson-Souef, and that I shall be spared the pain of writing another

Derues

name over your seat in the church of Villeneuve."

"The affair must be settled in a few days, for I can wait no longer; if the purchaser be not Monsieur Derues, it will have to be someone else. What makes you think he is short of money?"

"Oh! oh!" said the cure, "a man who has money either pays his debts, or is a cheat. Now Heaven preserve me from suspecting Monsieur Derues' honesty!"

"What do you know about him?"

"Do you remember Brother Marchois of the Camaldulians, who came to see me last spring, and who was here the day Monsieur Derues arrived, with your wife and Edouard?"

"Perfectly. well?"

"Well, I happened to tell him in one of my letters that Monsieur Derues had become the purchaser of Buisson-Souef, and that I believed the arrangements were concluded. Thereupon Brother Marchois wrote asking me to remind him that he owes them a sum of eight hundred livres, and that, so far, they have not seen a penny of it."

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Lamotte, "perhaps I should have done better not to let myself be deluded by his fine promises. He certainly has money on his tongue, and when once one begins to listen to him, one can't help doing what he wants. All the same, I had rather have had to deal with someone else."

"And is it this which worries you, and makes you seem so anxious?"

"This and other things."

"What, then?"

"I am really ashamed to own it, but I am a credulous and timid as any old woman. Now do not laugh at me too much. Do you believe in dreams?"

"Monsieur," said the cure, smiling, "you should never ask a coward whether he is afraid, you only risk his telling a lie. He will say 'No,' but he means 'Yes.'"

"And are you a coward, my father?"

"A little. I don't precisely believe all the nursery, tales, or in the favourable or unfavourable meaning of some object seen during our sleep, but--"

A sound of steps interrupted them, a servant entered, announcing Monsieur Derues.

On hearing the name, Monsieur de Lamotte felt troubled in spite of himself, but, overcoming the impression, he rose to meet the visitor.

"You had better stay," he said to the cure, who was also rising to take leave. "Stay; we have probably nothing to say which cannot be said before you."

Derues entered the room, and, after the usual compliments, sat down by the fire, opposite Monsieur de Lamotte.

"You did not expect me," he said, "and I ought to apologise for surprising you thus."

"Give me some news of my wife," asked Monsieur de Lamotte anxiously.

"She has never been better. Your son is also to perfect health."

Derues

"But why are you alone? why does not Marie accompany you? It is ten weeks since she went to Paris."

"She has not yet quite finished the business with which you entrusted her. Perhaps I am partly the cause of this long absence, but one cannot transact business as quickly as one would wish. But, you have no doubt heard from her, that all is finished, or nearly so, between us. We have drawn up a second private contract, which annuls the former agreement, and I have paid over a sum of one hundred thousand livres."

"I do not comprehend," said Monsieur de Lamotte. "What can induce my wife not to inform me of this?"

"You did not know?"

"I know nothing. I was wondering just now with Monsieur le cure why I did not hear from her."

"Madame de Lamotte was going to write to you, and I do not know what can have hindered her."

"When did you leave her?"

"Several days ago. I have not been at Paris; I am returning from Chartres. I believed you were informed of everything."

Monsieur de Lamotte remained silent for some moments. Then, fixing his eyes upon Derues' immovable countenance, he said, with some emotion--

"You are a husband and father, sir; in the name of this double and sacred affection which is, not unknown to you, do not hide anything from me: I fear some misfortune has happened to my wife which you are concealing."

Derues' physiognomy expressed nothing but a perfectly natural astonishment.

"What can have suggested such ideas to you; dear sir?" In saying this he glanced at the cure; wishing to ascertain if this distrust was Monsieur de Lamotte's own idea, or had been suggested to him. The movement was so rapid that neither of the others observed it. Like all knaves, obliged by their actions to be continually on the watch, Derues possessed to a remarkable extent the art of seeing all round him without appearing to observe anything in particular. He decided that as yet he had only to combat a suspicion unfounded on proof, and he waited till he should be attacked more seriously.

"I do not know," he said, "what may have happened during my absence; pray explain yourself, for you are making me share your disquietude."

"Yes, I am exceedingly anxious; I entreat you, tell me the whole truth. Explain this silence, and this absence prolonged beyond all expectation. You finished your business with Madame de Lamotte several days ago: once again, why did she not write? There is no letter, either from her or my son! To-morrow I shall send someone to Paris."

"Good heavens!" answered Derues, "is there nothing but an accident which could cause this delay?... well, then," he continued, with the embarrassed look of a man compelled to betray a confidence,--"well, then, I see that in order to reassure you, I shall have to give up a secret entrusted to me."

He then told Monsieur de Lamotte that his wife was no longer at Paris, but at Versailles, where she was endeavouring to obtain an important and lucrative appointment, and that, if she had left him in ignorance of her efforts in this direction; it was only to give him an agreeable surprise. He added that she had removed her son from the school, and

Derues

hoped to place him either in the riding school or amongst the royal pages. To prove his words, he opened his paper-case, and produced the letter written by Edouard in answer to the one quoted above.

All this was related so simply, and with such an appearance of good faith, that the cure was quite convinced. And to Monsieur de Lamotte the plans attributed to his wife were not entirely improbably. Derues had learnt indirectly that such a career for Edouard had been actually under consideration. However, though Monsieur de Lamotte's entire ignorance prevented him from making any serious objection, his fears were not entirely at rest, but for the present he appeared satisfied with the explanation.

The cure resumed the conversation. "what you tell us ought to drive away gloomy ideas. Just now, when you were announced, Monsieur de Lamotte was confiding his troubles to me. I was as concerned as he was, and I could say nothing to help him; never did visitor arrive more apropos. Well, my friend, what now remains of your vain terrors? what was it you were saying just as Monsieur Derues arrived?... Ah! we were discussing dreams, you asked if I believed in them."

Monsieur, de Lamotte, who had sunk back in his easy-chair and seemed lost in his reflections, started on hearing these words. He raised his head and looked again at Derues. But the latter had had time to note the impression produced by the cure's remark, and this renewed examination did not disturb him.

"Yes," said Monsieur de Lamotte, "I had asked that question."

"And I was going to answer that there are certain secret warnings which can be received by the soul long before they are intelligible to the bodily senses--revelations not understood at first, but which later connect themselves with realities of which they are in some way the precursors. Do you agree with me, Monsieur Derues?"

"I have no opinion on such a subject, and must leave the discussion to more learned people than myself. I do not know whether such apparitions really mean anything or not, and I have not sought to fathom these mysteries, thinking them outside the realm of human intelligence."

"Nevertheless," said the cure, "we are obliged to recognise their existence."

"Yes, but without either understanding or explaining them, like many other eternal truths. I follow the rule given in the Imitation of Jesus Christ: 'Beware, my son, of considering too curiously the things beyond thine intelligence.'"

"And I also submit, and avoid too curious consideration. But has not the soul knowledge of many wondrous things which we can yet neither see nor touch? I repeat, there are things which cannot be denied."

Derues listened attentively, continually on his guard; and afraid, he knew not why, of becoming entangled in this conversation, as in a trap. He carefully watched Monsieur de Lamotte, whose eyes never left him. The cure resumed--

"Here is an instance which I was bound to accept, seeing it happened to myself. I was then twenty, and my mother lived in the neighbourhood of Tours, whilst I was at the seminary of Montpellier. After several years of separation, I had obtained permission to go and see her. I wrote, telling her of this good news, and I received her answer--full of joy and tenderness. My brother and sister were to be informed, it was to be a family meeting, a real festivity; and I started with a light and joyous heart. My impatience was so great, that, having stopped for supper at a village inn some ten leagues from Tours, I would not wait till the next morning for the coach which went that way, but continued the journey on foot and walked all night. It was a long and difficult

Derues

road, but happiness redoubled my strength. About an hour after sunrise I saw distinctly the smoke and the village roofs, and I hurried on to surprise my family a little sooner. I never felt more active, more light-hearted and gay; everything seemed to smile before and around me. Turning a corner of the hedge, I met a peasant whom I recognised. All at once it seemed as if a veil spread over my sight, all my hopes and joy suddenly vanished, a funereal idea took possession of me, and I said, taking the hand of the man, who had not yet spoken--

"My mother is dead, I am convinced my mother is dead!"

"He hung down his head and answered--

"She is to be buried this morning!"

"Now whence came this revelation? I had seen no one, spoken to no one; a moment before I had no idea of it!"

Derues made a gesture of surprise. Monsieur de Lamotte put his hand to his eyes, and said to the cure--

"Your presentiments were true; mine, happily, are unfounded. But listen, and tell me if in the state of anxiety which oppressed me I had not good reason for alarm and for fearing some fatal misfortune."

His eyes again sought Derues. "Towards the middle of last night I at length fell asleep, but, interrupted every moment, this sleep was more a fatigue than a rest; I seemed to hear confused noises all round me. I saw brilliant lights which dazzled me, and then sank back into silence and darkness. Sometimes I heard someone weeping near my bed; again plaintive voices called to me out of the darkness. I stretched out my arms, but nothing met them, I fought with phantoms; at length a cold hand grasped mine and led me rapidly forward. Under a dark and damp vault a woman lay on the ground, bleeding, inanimate--it was my wife! At the same moment, a groan made me look round, and I beheld a man striking my son with a dagger. I cried out and awoke, bathed in cold perspiration, panting under this terrible vision. I was obliged to get up, walk about, and speak aloud, in order to convince myself it was only a dream. I tried to go to sleep again, but the same visions still pursued me. I saw always the same man armed with two daggers streaming with blood; I heard always the cries of his two victims. When day came, I felt utterly broken, worn-out; and this morning, you, my father, could see by my despondency what an impression this awful night had made upon me."

During this recital Derues' calmness never gave way for a single moment, and the most skilful physiognomist could only have discovered an expression of incredulous curiosity on his countenance.

"Monsieur le cure's story," said he, "impressed me much; yours only brings back my uncertainty. It is less possible than ever to deliver any opinion on this serious question of dreams, since the second instance contradicts the first."

"It is true," answered the cure, "no possible conclusion can be drawn from two facts which contradict each other, and the best thing we can do is to choose a less dismal subject of conversation."

"Monsieur Derues;" asked Monsieur de Lamatte, "if you are not too tired with your journey, shall we go and look at the last improvements I have made? It is now your affair to decide upon them, since I shall shortly be only your guest here."

"Just as I have been yours for long enough, and I trust you will often give me the opportunity of exercising hospitality in my turn. But you are ill, the day is cold and damp; if you do not care to go out, do not let me disturb you. Had you not better stay by the fire with Monsieur le cure? For me, Heaven be thanked! I require no assistance. I will

Derues

look round the park, and come back presently to tell you what I think. Besides, we shall have plenty of time to talk about it. with your permission, I should like to stay two or three days."

"I shall be pleased if you will do so."

Derues went out, sufficiently uneasy in his mind, both on account of his reception of Monsieur de Lamotte's fears and of the manner in which the latter had watched him during the conversation. He walked quickly up and down the park--

"I have been foolish, perhaps; I have lost twelve or fifteen days, and delayed stupidly from fear of not foreseeing everything. But then, how was I to imagine that this simple, easily deceived man would all at once become suspicious? What a strange dream! If I had not been on my guard, I might have been disconcerted. Come, come, I must try to disperse these ideas and give him something else to think about."

He stopped, and after a few minutes consideration turned back towards the house.

As soon as he had left the room, Monsieur de Lamotte had bent over towards the cure, and had said--

"He did not show any emotion, did--he?"

"None whatever."

"He did not start when I spoke of the man armed with those two daggers?"

"No. But put aside these ideas; you must see they are mistaken."

"I did not tell everything, my father: this murderer whom I saw in my dream--was Derues himself! I know as well as you that it must be a delusion, I saw as well as you did that he remained quite calm, but, in spite of myself, this terrible dream haunts me.... There, do not listen to me, do not let me talk about it; it only makes me blush for myself."

Whilst Derues remained at Buisson-Souef, Monsieur de Lamotte received several letters from his wife, some from Paris, some from Versailles. She remarked that her son and herself were perfectly well.... The writing was so well imitated that no one could doubt their genuineness. However, Monsieur de Lamotte's suspicions continually increased and he ended by making the cure share his fears. He also refused to go with Derues to Paris, in spite of the latter's entreaties. Derues, alarmed at the coldness shown him, left Buisson-Souef, saying that he intended to take possession about the middle of spring.

Monsieur de Lamotte was, in spite of himself, still detained by ill-health. But a new and inexplicable circumstance made him resolve to go to Paris and endeavour to clear up the mystery which appeared to surround his wife and son. He received an unsigned letter in unknown handwriting, and in which Madame de Lamotte's reputation was attacked with a kind of would-be reticence, which hinted that she was an unfaithful wife and that in this lay the cause of her long absence. Her husband did not believe this anonymous denunciation, but the fate of the two beings dearest to him seemed shrouded in so much obscurity that he could delay no longer, and started for Paris.

His resolution not to accompany Derues had saved his life. The latter could not carry out his culminating crime at Buisson-Souef; it was only in Paris that his victims would disappear without his being called to account. Obligated to leave hold of his prey, he endeavoured to bewilder him in a labyrinth where all trace of truth might be lost. Already, as he had arranged beforehand, he had called calumny to his help, and prepared the audacious lie which was to vindicate himself should an accusation fall upon his head. He had hoped that Monsieur de Lamotte would fall defenceless into his hands; but now a careful examination of

Derues

his position, showing the impossibility of avoiding an explanation had become inevitable, made him change all his plans, and compelled him to devise an infernal plot, so skilfully laid that it bid fair to defeat all human sagacity.

Monsieur de Lamotte arrived in Paris early in March. Chance decided that he should lodge in the rue de la Mortellerie, in a house not far from the one where his wife's body lay buried. He went to see Derues, hoping to surprise him, and determined to make him speak, but found he was not at home. Madame Derues, whether acting with the discretion of an accomplice or really ignorant of her husband's proceedings, could not say where he was likely to be found. She said that he told her nothing about his actions, and that Monsieur de Lamotte must have observed during their stay at Buisson (which was true) that she never questioned him, but obeyed his wishes in everything; and that he had now gone away without saying where he was going. She acknowledged that Madame de Lamotte had lodged with them for six weeks, and that she knew that lady had been at Versailles, but since then she had heard nothing. All Monsieur de Lamotte's questions, his entreaties, prayers, or threats, obtained no other answer. He went to the lawyer in the rue de Paon, to the schoolmaster, and found the same uncertainty, the same ignorance. His wife and his son had gone to Versailles, there the clue ended which ought to guide his investigations. He went to this town; no one could give him any information, the very name of Lamotte was unknown. He returned to Paris, questioned and examined the people of the quarter, the proprietor of the Hotel de France, where his wife had stayed on her former visit; at length, wearied with useless efforts, he implored help from justice. Then his complaints ceased; he was advised to maintain a prudent silence, and to await Derues' return.

The latter thoroughly understood that, having failed to dissipate Monsieur de Lamotte's fears, there was no longer an instant to lose, and that the pretended private contract of February 12th would not of itself prove the existence of Madame de Lamotte. This is how he employed the time spent by the unhappy husband in fruitless investigation.

On March 12th, a woman, her face hidden in the hood of her cloak, or "Therese," as it was then called, appeared in the office of Maitre N-----, a notary at Lyons. She gave her name as Marie Françoise Perffier, wife of Monsieur Saint-Faust de Lamotte, but separated, as to goods and estate, from him. She caused a deed to be drawn up, authorising her husband to receive the arrears of thirty thousand livres remaining from the price of the estate of Buisson-Souef, situated near Villeneuve-le-Roi-lez-Sens. The deed was drawn up and signed by Madame de Lamotte, by the notary, and one of his colleagues.

This woman was Derues. If we remember that he only arrived at Buisson February 28th, and remained there for some days, it becomes difficult to understand how at that period so long a journey as that from Paris to Lyons could have been accomplished with such rapidity. Fear must have given him wings. We will now explain what use he intended to make of it, and what fable, a masterpiece of cunning and of lies, he had invented.

On his arrival in Paris he found a summons to appear before the magistrate of police. He expected this, and appeared quite tranquil, ready to answer any questions. Monsieur de Lamotte was present. It was a formal examination, and the magistrate first asked why he had left Paris.

"Monsieur," replied Derues, "I have nothing to hide, and none of my actions need fear the daylight, but before replying, I should like to understand my position. As a domiciled citizen I have a right to require this. Will you kindly inform me why I have been summoned to appear before you, whether on account of anything personal to myself, or simply to give information as to something which may be within my knowledge?"

"You are acquainted with this gentleman, and cannot therefore be ignorant of the cause of the present inquiry."

Derues

"I am, nevertheless, quite in ignorance of it."

"Be good enough to answer my question. Why did you leave Paris? And where have you been?"

"I was absent for business reasons."

"What business?"

"I shall say no more."

"Take care! you have incurred serious suspicions, and silence will not tend to clear you."

Derues hung down his head with an air of resignation; and Monsieur de Lamotte, seeing in this attitude a silent confession of crime, exclaimed, "Wretched man! what have you done with my wife and my son?"

"Your son!--" said Derues slowly and with peculiar emphasis. He again cast down his eyes.

The magistrate conducting the inquiry was struck by the expression of Derues' countenance and by this half answer, which appeared to hide a mystery and to aim at diverting attention by offering a bait to curiosity. He might have stopped Derues at the moment when he sought to plunge into a tortuous argument, and compelled him to answer with the same clearness and decision which distinguished Monsieur de Lamotte's question; but he reflected that the latter's inquiries, unforeseen, hasty, and passionate, were perhaps more likely to disconcert a prepared defence than cooler and more skilful tactics. He therefore changed his plans, contenting "himself for the moment with the part of an observer only, and watching a duel between two fairly matched antagonists.

"I require: you to tell me what has become of them," repeated Monsieur de Lamotte. "I have been to Versailles, you assured me they were there."

"And I told you the truth, monsieur."

"No one has seen them, no one knows them; every trace is lost. Your Honour, this man must be compelled to answer, he must say what has become of my wife and son!"

"I excuse your anxiety, I understand your trouble, but why appeal to me? Why am I supposed to know what may have happened to them?"

"Because I confided them to your care."

"As a friend, yes, I agree. Yes, it is quite true that last December I received a letter from you informing me of the impending arrival of your wife and son. I received them in my own house, and showed them the same hospitality which I had received from you. I saw them both, your son often, your wife every day, until the day she left me to go to Versailles. Yes, I also took Edouard to his mother, who was negotiating an appointment for him. I have already told you all this, and I repeat it because it is the truth. You believed me then: why do you not believe me now? Why has what I say become strange and incredible? If your wife and your son have disappeared, am I responsible? Did you transmit your authority to me? And now, in what manner are you thus calling me to account? Is it to the friend who might have pitied, who might have aided your search, that you thus address yourself? Have you come to confide in me, to ask for advice, for consolation? No, you accuse me; very well! then I refuse to speak, because, having no proofs, you yet accuse an honest man; because your fears, whether real or imaginary, do not excuse you for casting, I know not what odious suspicions, on a blameless reputation, because I have the right to be offended. Monsieur," he continued, turning to the magistrate, "I believe you will appreciate my moderation, and will allow me to retire. If charges are brought against

Derues

me, I am quite ready to meet them, and to show what they are really worth. I shall remain in Paris, I have now no business which requires my presence elsewhere."

He emphasised these last words, evidently intending to draw attention to them. It did not escape the magistrate, who inquired--

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing beyond my words, your Honour, Have I your permission to retire?"

"No, remain; you are pretending not to understand."

"I do not understand these insinuations so covertly made."

Monsieur de Lamotte rose, exclaiming--

"Insinuations! What more can I say to compel you to answer? My wife and son have disappeared. It is untrue that, as you pretend, they have been at Versailles. You deceived me at Buisson-Souef, just as you are deceiving me now, as you are endeavouring to deceive justice by inventing fresh lies. Where are they? What has become of them? I am tormented by all the fears possible to a husband and father; I imagine all the most terrible misfortunes, and I accuse you to your face of having caused their death! Is this sufficient, or do you still accuse me of covert insinuations?"

Derues turned to the magistrate. "Is this charge enough to place me in the position of a criminal if I do not give a satisfactory explanation?"

"Certainly; you should have thought of that sooner."

"Then," he continued, addressing Monsieur de Lamotte, "I understand you persist in this odious accusation?"

"I certainly persist in it."

"You have forgotten our friendship, broken all bonds between us: I am in your eyes only a miserable assassin? You consider my silence as guilty, you will ruin me if I do not speak?"

"It is true."

"There is still time for reflection; consider what you are doing; I will forget your insults and your anger. Your trouble is great enough without my reproaches being added to it. But you desire that I should speak, you desire it absolutely?"

"I do desire it."

"Very well, then; it shall be as you wish."

Derues surveyed Monsieur de Lamotte with a look which seemed to say, "I pity you." He then added, with a sigh--

"I am now ready to answer. Your Honour, will you have the kindness to resume my examination?"

Derues had succeeded in taking up an advantageous position. If he had begun narrating the extraordinary romance he had invented, the least penetrating eye must have perceived its improbability, and one would have felt it required some support at every turn. But since he had resisted being forced to tell it, and apparently only ceded to Monsieur de Lamotte's violent persistency, the situation was changed; and this refusal to speak, coming from a man who thereby compromised his personal safety, took the semblance of generosity, and was likely to arouse the magistrate's curiosity and prepare his mind for unusual and mysterious

Derues

revelations. This was exactly what Derues wanted, and he awaited the interrogation with calm and tranquillity.

"Why did you leave Paris?" the magistrate demanded a second time.

"I have already had the honour to inform you that important business necessitated my absence."

"But you refused to explain the nature of this business. Do you still persist in this refusal?"

"For the moment, yes. I will explain it later."

"Where have you been? whence do you return?"

"I have been to Lyons, and have returned thence."

"What took you there?"

"I will tell you later."

"In the month of December last, Madame de Lamotte and her son came to Paris?"

"That is so."

"They both lodged in your house?"

"I have no reason to deny it."

"But neither she herself, nor Monsieur de Lamotte, had at first intended that she should accept a lodging in the house which you occupied."

"That is quite true. We had important accounts to settle, and Madame de Lamotte told me afterwards that she feared some dispute on the question of money might arise between us--at least, that is the reason she gave me. She was mistaken, as the event proved, since I always intended to pay, and I have paid. But she may have had another reason which she preferred not to give."

"It was the distrust of this man which she felt," exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte. Derues answered only with a melancholy smile.

"Silence, monsieur," said the magistrate, "silence; do not interrupt." Then addressing Derues--

"Another motive? What motive do you suppose?"

"Possibly she preferred to be more free, and able to receive any visitor she wished."

"What do you mean?"

"It is only supposition on my part, I do not insist upon it."

"But the supposition appears to contain a hint injurious to Madame de Lamotte's reputation?"

"No, oh no!" replied Derues, after a moment's silence.

This sort of insinuation appeared strange to the magistrate, who resolved to try and force Derues to abandon these treacherous reticences behind which he sheltered himself. Again recommending silence to Monsieur de Lamotte, he continued to question Derues, not perceiving that he was only following the lead skilfully given by the latter, who drew him gradually on by withdrawing himself, and that all the time thus gained was an advantage to the accused.

Derues

"Well," said the magistrate, "whatever Madame de Lamotte's motives may have been, it ended in her coming to stay with you. How did you persuade her to take this step?"

"My wife accompanied her first to the Hotel de France, and then to other hotels. I said no more than might be deemed allowable in a friend; I could not presume to persuade her against her will. When I returned home, I was surprised to find her there with her son. She could not find a disengaged room in any of the hotels she tried, and she then accepted my offer."

"What date was this?"

"Monday, the 16th of last December."

"And when did she leave your house?"

"On the 1st of February."

"The porter cannot remember having seen her go out on that day."

"That is possible. Madame de Lamotte went and came as her affairs required. She was known, and no more attention would be paid to her than to any other inmate."

"The porter also says that for several days before this date she was ill, and obliged to keep her room?"

"Yes, it was a slight indisposition, which had no results, so slight that it seemed unnecessary to call in a doctor. Madame de Lamotte appeared preoccupied and anxious. I think her mental attitude influenced her health."

"Did you escort her to Versailles?"

"No; I went there to see her later."

"What proof can you give of her having actually stayed there?"

"None whatever, unless it be a letter which I received from her."

"You told Monsieur de Lamotte that she was exerting herself to procure her son's admission either as a king's page or into the riding school. Now, no one at Versailles has seen this lady, or even heard of her."

"I only repeated what she told me."

"Where was she staying?"

"I do not know."

"What! she wrote to you, you went to see her, and yet you do not know where she was lodging?"

"That is so."

"But it is impossible."

"There are many things which would appear impossible if I were to relate them, but which are true, nevertheless."

"Explain yourself."

"I only received one letter from Madame de Lamotte, in which she spoke of her plans for Edouard, requesting me to send her her son on a day she fixed, and I told Edouard of her projects. Not being able to go to the school to see him, I wrote, asking if he would like to give up his studies and become a royal page. When I was last at Buisson-Souef, I

Derues

showed his answer to Monsieur de Lamotte; it is here."

And he handed over a letter to the magistrate, who read it, and passing it on to Monsieur de Lamotte, inquired--

"Did you then, and do you now, recognise your son's handwriting?"

"Perfectly, monsieur."

"You took Edouard to Versailles?"

"I did."

"On what day?"

"February 11th, Shrove Tuesday. It is the only time I have been to Versailles. The contrary might be supposed; for I have allowed it to be understood that I have often seen Madame de Lamotte since she left my house, and was acquainted with all her actions, and that the former confidence and friendship still existed between us. In allowing this, I have acted a lie, and transgressed the habitual sincerity of my whole life."

This assertion produced a bad impression on the magistrate. Derues perceived it, and to avert evil consequences, hastened to add--

"My conduct can only be appreciated when it is known in entirety. I misunderstood the meaning of Madame de Lamotte's letter. She asked me to send her her son, I thought to oblige her by accompanying him, and not leaving him to go alone. So we travelled together, and arrived at Versailles about midday. As I got down from the coach I saw Madame de Lamotte at the palace gate, and observed, to my astonishment, that my presence displeased her. She was not alone."

He stopped, although he had evidently reached the most interesting point of his story.

"Go on," said the magistrate; "why do you stop now?"

"Because what I have to say is so painful--not to me, who have to justify myself, but for others, that I hesitate."

"Go on."

"Will you then interrogate me, please?"

"Well, what happened in this interview?"

Derues appeared to collect himself for a moment, and then said with the air of a man who has decide on speaking out at last--

"Madame de Lamotte was not alone; she was attended by a gentleman whom I did not know, whom I never saw either at Buisson-Souef or in Paris, and whom I have never seen again since. I will ask you to allow me to recount everything; even to the smallest details. This man's face struck me at once, on account of a singular resemblance; he paid no attention to me at first, and I was able to examine him at leisure. His manners were those of a man belonging to the highest classes of society, and his dress indicated wealth. On seeing Edouard, he said to Madame de Lamotte--

''So this is he?' and he then kissed him tenderly. This and the marks of undisguised pleasure which he evinced surprised me, and I looked at Madame de Lamotte, who then remarked with some asperity--

''I did not expect to see you, Monsieur Derues. I had not asked you to accompany my son.'

Derues

"Edouard seemed quite as much surprised as I was. The stranger gave me a look of haughty annoyance, but seeing I did not avoid his glance his countenance assumed a more gentle expression, and Madame de Lamotte introduced him as a person who took great interest in Edouard."

"It is a whole tissue of imposture!" exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte.

"Allow me to finish," answered Derues. "I understand your doubts, and that you are not anxious to believe what I say, but I have been brought here by legal summons to tell the truth, and I am going to tell it. You can then weigh the two accusations in the balance, and choose between them. The reputation of an honourable man is as sacred, as important, as worthy of credit as the reputation of a woman, and I never heard that the virtue of the one was more fragile than that of the other."

Monsieur de Lamotte, thunderstruck by such a revelation, could not contain his impatience and indignation.

"This, then," he said, "is the explanation of an anonymous letter which I received, and of the injurious suggestions' concerning my wife's honour which it contained; it was written to give an appearance of probability to this infamous legend. The whole thing is a disgraceful plot, and no doubt Monsieur Derues wrote the letter himself."

"I know nothing about it," said Derues unconcernedly, "and the explanation which you profess to find in it I should rather refer to something else I am going to mention. I did not know a secret warning had been sent to you: I now learn it from you, and I understand perfectly that such a letter, may have been written. But that you have received such a warning ought surely to be a reason for listening patiently and not denouncing all I say as imposture."

While saying this Derues mentally constructed the fresh falsehood necessitated by the interruption, but no variation of countenance betrayed his thought. He had an air of dignity natural to his position. He saw that, in spite of clear-headedness and long practice in studying the most deceptive countenances, the magistrate so far had not scented any of his falsehoods, and was getting bewildered in the windings of this long narrative, through which Derues led him as he chose; and he resumed with confidence--

"You know that I made Monsieur de Lamotte's acquaintance more than a year ago, and I had reason to believe his friendship as sincere as my own. As a friend, I could not calmly accept the suspicion which then entered my mind, nor could I conceal my surprise. Madame de Lamotte saw this, and understood from my looks that I was not satisfied with the explanation she wished me to accept. A glance of intelligence passed between her and her friend, who was still holding Edouard's hand. The day, though cold, was fine, and she proposed a walk in the park. I offered her my arm, and the stranger walked in front with Edouard. We had a short conversation, which has remained indelibly fixed in my memory.

"'Why did you come?' she inquired.

"I did not answer, but looked sternly at her, in order to discompose her. At length I said--

"'You should have written, madame, and warned me that my coming would be indiscreet.'

"She seemed much disconcerted, and exclaimed--

"'I am lost! I see you guess everything, and will tell my husband. I am an unhappy woman, and a sin once committed can never be erased from the pages of a woman's life! Listen, Monsieur Derues, listen, I implore you! You see this man, I shall not tell you who he is, I shall not give his name... but I loved him long ago; I should have been his wife, and had

Derues

he not been compelled to leave France, I should have married no one else.'" "

Monsieur de Lamotte started, and grew pale.

"What is the matter?" the magistrate inquired.

"Oh! this dastardly wretch is profiting by his knowledge of secrets which a long intimacy has enabled him to discover. Do not believe him, I entreat you, do not believe him!"

Derues resumed. "Madame de Lamotte continued: 'I saw him again sixteen years ago, always in hiding, always proscribed. To-day he reappears under a name which is not his own: he wishes to link my fate with his; he has insisted on seeing Edouard. But I shall escape him. I have invented this fiction of placing my son among the royal pages to account for my stay here. Do not contradict me, but help me; for a little time ago I met one of Monsieur de Lamotte's friends, I am afraid he suspected something. Say you have seen me several times; as you have come, let it be known that you brought Edouard here. I shall return to Buisson as soon as possible, but will you go first, see my husband, satisfy him if he is anxious? I am in your hands; my honour, my reputation, my very life, are at your mercy; you can either ruin or help to save me. I may be guilty, but I am not corrupt. I have wept for my sin day after day, and I have already cruelly expiated it.'"

This execrable calumny was not related without frequent interruptions on the part of Monsieur de Lamotte. He was, however, obliged to own to himself that it was quite true that Marie Perier had really been promised to a man whom an unlucky affair had driven into exile, and whom he had supposed to be dead. This revelation, coming from Derues, who had the strongest interest in lying, by no means convinced him of his wife's dishonour, nor destroyed the feelings of a husband and father; but Derues was not speaking for him lone, and what appeared incredible to Monsieur de Lamotte might easily seem less improbable to the colder and less interested judgment of the magistrate.

"I was wrong," Derues continued, "in allowing myself to be touched by her tears, wrong in believing in her repentance, more wrong still in going to Buisson to satisfy her husband. But I only consented on conditions: Madame de Lamotte promised me to return shortly to Paris, vowing that her son should never know the truth, and that the rest of her life should be devoted to atoning for her sin by a boundless devotion. She then begged me to leave her, and told me she would write to me at Paris to fix the day of her return. This is what happened, and this is why I went to Buissan and gave my support to a lying fiction. With one word I might have destroyed the happiness of seventeen years. I did not wish to do so. I believed in the remorse; I believe in it still, in spite of all appearances; I have refused to speak this very day, and made every effort to prolong an illusion which I know it will be terrible to lose."

There was a moment of silence. This fable, so atrociously ingenious, was simply and impressively narrated, and with an air of candour well contrived to impose on the magistrate, or, at least, to suggest grave doubts to his mind. Derues, with his usual cunning, had conformed his language to the quality of his listener. Any tricks, profession of piety, quotations from sacred books, so largely indulged in when he wished to bamboozle people of a lower class, would here have told against him. He knew when to abstain, and carried the art of deception far enough to be able to lay aside the appearance of hypocrisy. He had described all the circumstances without affectation, and if this unexpected accusation was wholly unproved, it yet rested on a possible fact, and did not appear absolutely incredible. The magistrate went through it all again, and made him repeat every detail, without being able to make him contradict himself or show the smallest embarrassment. While interrogating Derues, he kept his eyes fixed upon him; and this double examination being quite fruitless, only increased his perplexity.

Derues

However, he never relaxed the incredulous severity of his demeanour, nor the imperative and threatening tone of his voice.

"You acknowledge having been at Lyons?" he asked.

"I have been there."

"At the beginning of this examination you said you would explain the reason of this journey later."

"I am ready to do so, for the journey is connected with the facts I have just narrated; it was caused by them."

"Explain it."

"I again ask permission to relate fully. I did not hear from Versailles: I began to fear Monsieur de Lamotte's anxiety would bring him to Paris. Bound by the promise I had made to his wife to avert all suspicion and to satisfy any doubts he might conceive, and, must I add, also remembering that it was important for me to inform him of our new arrangements, and of this payment of a hundred thousand livres."

"That payment is assuredly fictitious," interrupted Monsieur de Lamotte; "we must have some proof of it."

"I will prove it presently," answered Derues. "So I went to Buisson, as I have already told you. On my return I found a letter from Madame de Lamotte, a letter with a Paris stamp, which had arrived that morning. I was surprised that she should write, when actually in Paris; I opened the letter, and was still more surprised. I have not the letter with me, but I recollect the sense of it perfectly, if not the wording, and I can produce it if necessary. Madame de Lamotte was at Lyons with her son and this person whose name I do not know, and whom I do not care to mention before her husband. She had confided this letter to a person who was coming to Paris, and who was to bring it me; but this individual, whose name was Marquis, regretted that having to start again immediately, he was obliged to entrust it to the post. This is the sense of its contents. Madame de Lamotte wrote that she found herself obliged to follow this nameless person to Lyons; and she begged me to send her news of her husband and of the state of his affairs, but said not one single word of any probable return. I became very uneasy at the news of this clandestine departure. I had no security except a private contract annulling our first agreement on the payment of one hundred thousand livres, and that this was not a sufficient and regular receipt I knew, because the lawyer had already refused to surrender Monsieur de Lamotte's power of attorney. I thought over all the difficulties which this flight, which would have to be kept secret, was likely to produce, and I started for Lyons without writing or giving any notice of my intention. I had no information, I did not even know whether Madame de Lamotte was passing by another name, as at Versailles, but chance decreed that I met her the very day of my arrival. She was alone, and complained bitterly of her fate, saying she had been compelled to follow this individual to Lyons, but that very soon she would be free and would return to Paris. But I was struck by the uncertainty of her manner, and said I should not leave her without obtaining a deed in proof of our recent arrangements. She refused at first, saying it was unnecessary, as she would so soon return; but I insisted strongly. I told her I had already promised myself by telling Monsieur de Lamotte that she was at Versailles, endeavouring to procure an appointment for her son; that since she had been compelled to come to Lyons, the same person might take her elsewhere, so that she might disappear any day, might leave France without leaving any trace, without any written acknowledgment of her own dishonour; and that when all these falsehoods were discovered, I should appear in the light of an accomplice. I said also that, as she had unfortunately lodged in my house in Paris, and had requested me to remove her son from his school, explanations would be required from me, and perhaps I should be accused of this double disappearance. Finally, I declared that if she did not give me some proofs of her existence,

Derues

willingly or unwillingly, I would go at once to a magistrate. My firmness made her reflect. 'My good Monsieur Derues,' she said, 'I ask your forgiveness for all the trouble I have caused you. I will give you this deed to-morrow, to-day it is too late; but come to this same place to-morrow, and you shall see me again.' I hesitated, I confess, to let her go. 'Ah,' she said, grasping my hands, 'do not suspect me of intending to deceive you! I swear that I will meet you here at four o'clock. It is enough that I have ruined myself, and perhaps my son, without also entangling you in my unhappy fate. Yes, you are right; this deed is important, necessary for you, and you shall have it. But do not show yourself here; if you were seen, I might not be able to do what I ought to do. To-morrow you shall see me again, I swear it.' She then left me. The next day, the 12th, of March, I was exact at the rendezvous, and Madame de Lamotte arrived a moment later. She gave me a deed, authorising her husband to receive the arrears of thirty thousand livres remaining from the purchase-money of Buisson-Souef. I endeavoured again to express my opinion of her conduct; she listened in silence, as if my words affected her deeply. We were walking together, when she told me she had some business in a house we were passing, and asked me to wait for her. I waited more than an hour, and then discovered that this house, like many others in Lyons, had an exit in another street; and I understood that Madame de Lamotte had escaped by this passage, and that I might wait in vain. Concluding that trying to follow her would be useless, and seeing also that any remonstrance would be made in vain, I returned to Paris, deciding to say nothing as yet, and to conceal the truth as long as possible. I still had hopes, and I did not count on being so soon called on to defend myself: I thought that when I had to speak, it would be as a friend, and not as an accused person. This, sir, is the explanation of my conduct, and I regret that this justification, so easy for myself, should be so cruelly painful for another. You have seen the efforts which I made to defer it."

Monsieur de Lamotte had heard this second part of Derues' recital with a more silent indignation, not that he admitted its probability, but he was confounded by this monstrous imposture, and, as it were, terror-stricken by such profound hypocrisy. His mind revolted at the idea of his wife being accused of adultery; but while he repelled this charge with decision, he saw the confirmation of his secret terrors and presentiments, and his heart sank within him at the prospect of exploring this abyss of iniquity. He was pale, gasping for breath, as though he himself had been the criminal, while scorching tears furrowed his cheeks. He tried to speak, but his voice failed; he wanted to fling back at Derues the names of traitor and assassin, and he was obliged to bear in silence the look of mingled grief and pity which the latter bestowed upon him.

The magistrate, calmer, and master of his emotions, but tolerably bewildered in this labyrinth of cleverly connected lies, thought it desirable to ask some further questions.

"How," said he, "did you obtain this sum of a hundred thousand livres which you say you paid over to Madame de Lamotte?"

"I have been engaged in business for several years, and have acquired some fortune."

"Nevertheless, you have postponed the obligation of making this payment several times, so that Monsieur de Lamotte had begun to feel uneasiness on the subject. This was the chief reason of his wife's coming to Paris."

"One sometimes experiences momentary difficulties, which presently disappear."

"You say you have a deed given you at Lyons by Madame de Lamotte, which you were to give to her husband?"

"It is here."

Derues

The magistrate examined the deed carefully, and noted the name of the lawyer in whose office it had been drawn up.

"You may go," he said at last.

"What!" exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte.

Derues stopped, but the magistrate signed to him to go, intimating, however, that he was on no account to leave Paris.

"But," said Monsieur de Lamotte, when they were alone, "this man is indeed guilty. My wife has not betrayed me! She!--forget her duties as a wife! she was virtue incarnate! Ah! I assure you these terrible calumnies are invented to conceal double crime! I throw myself at your feet,--I implore your justice!"

"Rise, monsieur. This is only a preliminary examination, and I confess that, so far, he comes well out of it, for imagination can hardly understand such a depth of deceit. I watched him closely the whole time, and I could discover no sign of alarm, no contradiction, in either face or language; if guilty, he must be the greatest hypocrite that ever existed. But I shall neglect nothing: if a criminal is allowed to flatter himself with impunity, he frequently forgets to be prudent, and I have seen many betray themselves when they thought they had nothing to fear. Patience, and trust to the justice of both God and man."

Several days passed, and Derues flattered himself the danger was over: his every action meanwhile was most carefully watched, but so that he remained unaware of the surveillance. A police officer named Mutel, distinguished for activity and intelligence beyond his fellows, was charged with collecting information and following any trail. All his bloodhounds were in action, and hunted Paris thoroughly, but could trace nothing bearing on the fate of Madame de Lamotte and her son. Mutel, however, soon discovered that in the rue Saint Victor, Derues had failed--three successive times, that he had been pursued by numerous creditors, and been often near imprisonment for debt, and that in 1771 he had been publicly accused of incendiarism. He reported on these various circumstances, and then went himself to Derues' abode, where he obtained no results. Madame Derues declared that she knew nothing whatever, and the police, having vainly searched the whole house, had to retire. Derues himself was absent; when he returned he found another order to appear before the magistrate.

His first success had encouraged him. He appeared before the magistrate accompanied by a lawyer and full of confidence, complaining loudly that the police, in searching during his absence, had offended against the rights of a domiciled burgess, and ought to have awaited his return. Affecting a just indignation at Monsieur de Lamotte's conduct towards him, he presented a demand that the latter should be declared a calumniator, and should pay damages for the injury caused to his reputation. But this time his effrontery and audacity were of little avail, the magistrate easily detected him in flagrant lies. He declared at first that he had paid the hundred thousand livres with his own money but when reminded of his various bankruptcies, the claims of his creditors, and the judgments obtained against him as an insolvent debtor, he made a complete volte-face, and declared he had borrowed the money from an advocate named Duclos, to whom he had given a bond in presence of a notary. In spite of all his protestations, the magistrate committed him to solitary confinement at Fort l'Eveque.

As yet, nothing was publicly known; but vague reports and gossip, carried from shop to shop, circulated among the people, and began to reach the higher classes of society. The infallible instinct which is aroused among the masses is truly marvellous; a great crime is committed, which seems at first likely to defeat justice, and the public conscience is aroused. Long before the tortuous folds which envelop the mystery can be penetrated, while it is still sunk in profound obscurity,

Derues

the voice of the nation, like an excited hive, buzzes around the secret; though the magistrates doubt, the public curiosity fixes itself, and never leaves go; if the criminal's hiding-place is changed, it follows the track, points it out, describes it in the gloom. This is what happened on the news of Derues' arrest. The affair was everywhere discussed, although the information was incomplete, reports inexact, and no real publicity to be obtained. The romance which Derues had invented by way of defence, and which became known as well as Monsieur de Lamotte's accusation, obtained no credence whatever; on the contrary, all the reports to his discredit were eagerly adopted. As yet, no crime could be traced, but the public presentiment divined an atrocious one. Have we not often seen similar agitations? The names of Bastide, of Castaing, of Papavoine, had hardly been pronounced before they completely absorbed all the public attention, and this had to be satisfied, light had to be thrown on the darkness: society demanded vengeance.

Derues felt some alarm in his dungeon, but his presence of mind and his dissimulation in no wise deserted him, and he swore afresh every day to the truth of his statements. But his last false assertion turned against him: the bond for a hundred thousand livres which he professed to have given to Duclos was a counterfeit which Duclos had annulled by a sort of counter declaration made the same day. Another circumstance, intended to ensure his safety, only redoubled suspicion. On April 8th, notes payable to order to the amount of seventy-eight thousand livres, were received by Monsieur de Lamotte's lawyer, as if coming from Madame de Lamotte. It appeared extraordinary that these notes, which arrived in an ordinary stamped envelope, should not be accompanied by any letter of advice, and suspicion attached to Madame Derues, who hitherto had remained unnoticed. An inquiry as to where the packet had been posted soon revealed the office, distinguished by a letter of the alphabet, and the postmaster described a servant-maid who had brought the letter and paid for it. The description resembled the Derues' servant; and this girl, much alarmed, acknowledged, after a great deal of hesitation, that she had posted the letter in obedience to her mistress's orders. Whereupon Madame Derues was sent as a prisoner to Fort l'Eveque, and her husband transferred to the Grand-Chatelet. On being interrogated, she at length owned that she had sent these notes to Monsieur de Lamotte's lawyer, and that her husband had given them her in an envelope hidden in the soiled linen for which she had brought him clean in exchange.

All this certainly amounted to serious presumptive evidence of guilt, and if Derues had shown himself to the multitude, which followed every phase of the investigation with increasing anxiety, a thousand arms would have willingly usurped the office of the executioner; but the distance thence to actual proof of murder was enormous for the magistracy. Derues maintained his tranquillity, always asserting that Madame de Lamotte and her son were alive, and would clear him by their reappearance. Neither threats nor stratagems succeeded in making him contradict himself, and his assurance shook the strongest conviction. A new difficulty was added to so much uncertainty.

A messenger had been sent off secretly with all haste to Lyons; his return was awaited for a test which it was thought would be decisive.

One morning Derues was fetched from his prison and taken to a lower hall of the Conciergerie. He received no answers to the questions addressed to his escort, and this silence showed him the necessity of being on his guard and preserving his imperturbable demeanour whatever might happen. On arriving, he found the commissioner of police, Mutel, and some other persons. The hall being very dark, had been illuminated with several torches, and Derues was so placed that the light fell strongly on his face, and was then ordered to look towards a particular part of the hall. As he did so, a door opened, and a man entered. Derues beheld him with indifference, and seeing that the stranger was observing him attentively, he bowed to him as one might bow to an unknown person whose curiosity seems rather unusual.

Derues

It was impossible to detect the slightest trace of emotion, a hand placed on his heart would not have felt an increased pulsation, yet this stranger's recognition would be fatal!

Mutel approached the new-comer and whispered--

"Do you recognise him?"

"No, I do not."

"Have the kindness to leave the room for a moment; we will ask you to return immediately."

This individual was the lawyer in whose office at Lyons the deed had been drawn up which Derues had signed, disguised as a woman, and under the name of Marie-Francoise Perier, wife of the Sieur de Lamotte.

A woman's garments were brought in, and Derues was ordered to put them on, which he did readily, affecting much amusement. As he was assisted to disguise himself, he laughed, stroked his chin and assumed mincing airs, carrying effrontery so far as to ask for a mirror.

"I should like to see if it is becoming," he said; "perhaps I might make some conquests."

The lawyer returned: Derues was made to pass before him, to sit at a table, sign a paper, in fact to repeat everything it was imagined he might have said or done in the lawyer's office. This second attempt at identification succeeded no better than the first. The lawyer hesitated; then, understanding all the importance of his deposition, he refused to swear to anything, and finally declared that this was not the person who had come to him at Lyons.

"I am sorry, sir," said Derues, as they removed him, "that you should have been troubled by having to witness this absurd comedy. Do not blame me for it; but ask Heaven to enlighten those who do not fear to accuse me. As for me, knowing that my innocence will shortly be made clear, I pardon them henceforth."

Although justice at this period was generally expeditious, and the lives of accused persons were by no means safe-guarded as they now are, it was impossible to condemn Derues in the absence of any positive proofs of guilt. He knew this, and waited patiently in his prison for the moment when he should triumph over the capital accusation which weighed against him. The storm no longer thundered over his head, the most terrible trials were passed, the examinations became less frequent, and there were no more surprises to dread. The lamentations of Monsieur de Lamotte went to the hearts of the magistrates, but his certainty could not establish theirs, and they pitied, but could not avenge him. In certain minds a sort of reaction favourable to the prisoner began to set in. Among the dupes of Derues' seeming piety, many who at first held their peace under these crushing accusations returned to their former opinion. The bigots and devotees, all who made a profession of kneeling in the churches, of publicly crossing themselves and dipping their fingers in the holy water, and who lived on cant and repetitions of "Amen" and "Alleluia" talked of persecution, of martyrdom, until Derues nearly became a saint destined by the Almighty to find canonisation in a dungeon. Hence arose quarrels and arguments; and this abortive trial, this unproved accusation, kept the public imagination in a constant ferment.

To the greater part of those who talk of the "Supreme Being," and who expect His intervention in human affairs, "Providence" is only a word, solemn and sonorous, a sort of theatrical machine which sets all right in the end, and which they glorify with a few banalities proceeding from the lips, but not from the heart. It is true that this unknown and mysterious Cause which we call "God" or "Chance" often appears so exceedingly blind and deaf that one may be permitted to wonder whether

Derues

certain crimes are really set apart for punishment, when so many others apparently go scot-free. How many murders remain buried in the night of the tomb! how many outrageous and avowed crimes have slept peacefully in an insolent and audacious prosperity! we know the names of many criminals, but who can tell the number of unknown and forgotten victims? The history of humanity is twofold, and like that of the invisible world, which contains marvels unexplored by the science of the visible one, the history recounted in books is by no means the most curious and strange. But without delaying over questions such as these, without protesting here against sophistries which cloud the conscience and hide the presence of an avenging Deity, we leave the facts to the general judgment, and have now to relate the last episode in this long and terrible drama.

Of all the populous quarters of Paris which commented on the "affaire Derues," none showed more excitement than that of the Greve, and amongst all the surrounding streets none could boast more numerous crowds than the rue de la Mortellerie. Not that a secret instinct magnetised the crowd in the very place where the proof lay buried, but that each day its attention was aroused by a painful spectacle. A pale and grief-stricken man, whose eyes seemed quenched in tears, passed often down the street, hardly able to drag himself along; it was Monsieur de Lamotte, who lodged, as we have said, in the rue de la Mortellerie, and who seemed like a spectre wandering round a tomb. The crowd made way and uncovered before him, everybody respected such terrible misfortune, and when he had passed, the groups formed up again, and continued discussing the mystery until nightfall.

On April 17th, about four in the afternoon, a score of workmen and gossiping women had collected in front of a shop. A stout woman, standing on the lowest step, like an orator in the tribune, held forth and related for the twentieth time what she knew, or rather, did not know. There were listening ears and gaping mouths, even a slight shudder ran through the group; for the widow Masson, discovering a gift of eloquence at the age of sixty, contrived to mingle great warmth and much indignation in her recital. All at once silence fell on the crowd, and a passage was made for Monsieur de Lamotte. One man ventured to ask--

"Is there anything fresh to-day?"

A sad shake of the head was the only answer, and the unhappy man continued his way.

"Is that Monsieur de Lamotte?" inquired a particularly dirty woman, whose cap, stuck on the side of her head, allowed locks of grey hair to straggle from under it. "Ah! is that Monsieur de Lamotte?"

"Dear me!" said a neighbour, "don't you know him by this time? He passes every day."

"Excuse me! I don't belong to this quarter, and--no offence--but it is not so beautiful as to bring one out of curiosity! Nothing personal--but it is rather dirty."

"Madame is probably accustomed to use a carriage."

"That would suit you better than me, my dear, and would save your having to buy shoes to keep your feet off the ground!"

The crowd seemed inclined to hustle the speaker,--

"Wait a moment!" she continued, "I didn't mean to offend anyone. I am a poor woman, but there's no disgrace in that, and I can afford a glass of liqueur. Eh, good gossip, you understand, don't you? A drop of the best for Mother Maniffret, and if my fine friend there will drink with me to settle our difference, I will stand her a glass."

The example set by the old hawker was contagious, and instead of filling

Derues

two little glasses only, widow Masson dispensed a bottleful.

"Come, you have done well," cried Mother Maniffret; "my idea has brought you luck."

"Faith! not before it was wanted, either!"

"What! are you complaining of trade too?"

"Ah! don't mention it; it is miserable!"

"There's no trade at all. I scream myself hoarse all day, and choke myself for twopence halfpenny. I don't know what's to come of it all. But you seem to have a nice little custom."

"What's the good of that, with a whole house on one's hands? It's just my luck; the old tenants go, and the new ones don't come."

"What's the matter, then?"

"I think the devil's in it. There was a nice man on the first floor-gone; a decent family on the third, all right except that the man beat his wife every night, and made such a row that no one could sleep--gone also. I put up notices--no one even looks at them! A few months ago--it was the middle of December, the day of the last execution--"

"The 15th, then," said the hawker. "I cried it, so I know; it's my trade, that."

"Very well, then, the 15th," resumed widow Masson. "On that day, then, I let the cellar to a man who said he was a wine merchant, and who paid a term in advance, seeing that I didn't know him, and wouldn't have lent him a farthing on the strength of his good looks. He was a little bit of a man, no taller than that,"--contemptuously holding out her hand,--"and he had two round eyes which I didn't like at, all. He certainly paid, he did that, but we are more than half through the second term and I have no news of my tenant."

"And have you never seen him since?"

"Yes, once--no, twice. Let's see--three times, I am sure. He came with a hand-cart and a commissionaire, and had a big chest taken downstairs--a case which he said contained wine in bottles...."

"No, he came before that, with a workman I think."

"Really, I don't know if it was before or after--doesn't matter. Anyhow, it was bottled wine. The third time he brought a mason, and I am sure they quarreled. I heard their voices. He carried off the key, and I have seen neither him nor his wine again. I have another key, and I went down one day; perhaps the rats have drunk the wine and eaten the chest, for there certainly is nothing there any more than there is in my hand now. Nevertheless, I saw what I saw. A big chest, very big, quite new, and corded all round with strong rope."

"Now, what day was that?" asked the hawker.

"What day? Well, it was--no, I can't remember."

"Nor I either; I am getting stupid. Let's have another little glass--shall we? just to clear our memories!"

The expedient was not crowned with success, the memories failed to recover themselves. The crowd waited, attentive, as may be supposed. Suddenly the hawker exclaimed:

"What a fool I am! I am going to find that, if only I have still got

Derues

it."

She felt eagerly in the pocket of her underskirt, and produced several pieces of dirty, crumpled paper. As she unfolded one after another, she asked:

"A big chest, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very big."

"And quite new?"

"Quite new."

"And corded?"

"Yes, I can see it now."

"So can I, good gracious! It was the day when I sold the history of Leroi de Valines, the 1st of February."

"Yes, it was a Saturday; the next day was Sunday."

"That's it, that's it!--Saturday, February 1st. Well, I know that chest too! I met your wine merchant on the Place du Louvre, and he wasn't precisely enjoying himself: one of his creditors wanted to seize the chest, the wine, the whole kettle of fish! A little man, isn't he?--a scarecrow?"

"Just so."

"And has red hair?"

"That's the man."

"And looks a hypocrite?"

"You've hit it exactly."

"And he is a hypocrite! enough to make one shudder! No doubt he can't pay his rent! A thief, my dears, a beggarly thief, who set fire to his own cellar, and who accused me of trying to steal from him, while it was he who cheated me, the villain, out of a piece of twenty-four sous. It's lucky I turned up here! well, well, we shall have some fun! Here's another little business on your hands, and you will have to say where that wine has got to, my dear gossip Derues."

"Derues!" cried twenty voices all at once.

"What! Derues who is in Prison?"

"Why, that's Monsieur de Lamotte's man."

"The man who killed Madame de Lamotte?"

"The man who made away with her son?"

"A scoundrel, my dears, who accused me of stealing, an absolute monster!"

"It is just a little unfortunate," said widow Masson, "that it isn't the man. My tenant calls himself Ducoudray. There's his name on the register."

"Confound it, that doesn't look like it at all," said the hawker: "now that's a bore! Oh yes, I have a grudge against that thief, who accused me of stealing. I told him I should sell his history some day. When that happens, I'll treat you all round."

Derues

As a foretaste of the fulfilment of this promise, the company disposed of a second bottle of liqueur, and, becoming excited, they chattered at random for some time, but at length slowly dispersed, and the street relapsed into the silence of night. But, a few hours later, the inhabitants were surprised to see the two ends occupied by unknown people, while other sinister-looking persons patrolled it all night, as if keeping guard. The next morning a carriage escorted by police stopped at the widow Masson's door. An officer of police got out and entered a neighbouring house, whence he emerged a quarter of an hour later with Monsieur de Lamotte leaning on his arm. The officer demanded the key of the cellar which last December had been hired from the widow Masson by a person named Ducoudray, and went down to it with Monsieur de Lamotte and one of his subordinates.

The carriage standing at the door, the presence of the commissioner Mutel, the chatter of the previous evening, had naturally roused everybody's imagination. But this excitement had to be kept for home use: the whole street was under arrest, and its inhabitants were forbidden to leave their houses. The windows, crammed with anxious faces, questioning each other, in the expectation of something wonderful, were a curious sight; and the ignorance in which they remained, these mysterious preparations, these orders silently executed, doubled the curiosity, and added a sort of terror: no one could see the persons who had accompanied the police officer; three men remained in the carriage, one guarded by the two others. When the heavy coach turned into the rue de la Mortellerie, this man had bent towards the closed window and asked--

"Where are we?"

And when they answered him, he said--

"I do not know this street; I was never in it."

After saying this quite quietly, he asked--

"Why am I brought here?"

As no one replied, he resumed his look of indifference, and betrayed no emotion, neither when the carriage stopped nor when he saw Monsieur de Lamotte enter the widow Masson's house.

The officer reappeared on the threshold, and ordered Derues to be brought in.

The previous evening, detectives, mingling with the crowd, had listened to the hawker's story of having met Derues near the Louvre escorting a large chest. The police magistrate was informed in the course of the evening. It was an indication, a ray of light, perhaps the actual truth, detached from obscurity by chance gossip; and measures were instantly taken to prevent anyone either entering or leaving the street without being followed and examined. Mutel thought he was on the track, but the criminal might have accomplices also on the watch, who, warned in time, might be able to remove the proofs of the crime, if any existed.

Derues was placed between two men who each held an arm. A third went before, holding a torch. The commissioner, followed by men also carrying torches, and provided with spades and pickaxes, came behind, and in this order they descended to the vault. It was a dismal and terrifying procession; anyone beholding these dark and sad countenances, this pale and resigned man, passing thus into these damp vaults illuminated by the flickering glare of torches, might well have thought himself the victim of illusion and watching some gloomy execution in a dream. But all was real and when light penetrated this dismal charnel-house it seemed at once to illuminate its secret depths, so that the light of truth might at length penetrate these dark shadows, and that the voice of the dead would speak from the earth and the walls.

Derues

"Wretch!" exclaimed Monsieur de Lamotte, when he saw Derues appear, "is it here that you murdered my wife and my son?"

Derues looked calmly at him, and replied--

"I beg you, sir, not to add insult to the misfortunes you have already caused. If you stood in my place and I were in yours, I should feel some pity and respect for so terrible a position. What do you want me? and why am I brought here?"

He did not know the events of last evening, and could only mentally accuse the mason who had helped to bury the chest. He felt that he was lost, but his audacity never forsook him.

"You are here, in the first place, to be confronted with this woman," said the officer, causing the widow Masson to stand opposite to him.

"I do not know her."

"But I know you, and know you well. It was you who hired this cellar under the name of Ducoudray."

Derues shrugged his shoulders and answered bitterly--

"I can understand a man being condemned to the torture if he is guilty, but that in order to accomplish one's mission as accuser, and to discover a criminal, false witnesses who can give no evidence should be brought a hundred leagues, that the rabble should be roused up, that divers faces and imaginary names should be bestowed on an innocent man, in order to turn a movement of surprise or an indignant gesture to his disadvantage, all this is iniquitous, and goes beyond the right of judgment bestowed upon men by God. I do not know this woman, and no matter what she says or does, I shall say no more."

Neither the skill nor threats of the police officer could shake this resolution. It was to no purpose that the widow Masson repeated and asseverated that she recognised him as her tenant Ducoudray, and that he had had a large case of wine taken down into the cellar; Derues folded his arms, and remained as motionless as if he had been blind and deaf.

The walls were sounded, the stones composing them carefully examined, the floor pierced in several places, but nothing unusual was discovered.

Would they have to give it up? Already the officer was making signs to this effect, when the man who had remained at first below with Monsieur de Lamotte, and who, standing in shadow, had carefully watched Derues when he was brought down, came forward, and pointing to the recess under the stairs, said--

"Examine this corner. The prisoner glanced involuntarily in this direction when he came down; I have watched him, and it is the only sign he has given. I was the only person who could see him, and he did not see me. He is very clever, but one can't be for ever on one's guard, and may the devil take me if I haven't scented the hiding-place."

"Wretch!" said Derues to himself, "then you have had your hand on me for a whole hour, and amused yourself by prolonging my agony! Oh! I ought to have known it; I have found my master. Never mind, you shall learn nothing from my face, nor yet from the decaying body you will find; worms and poison can only have left an unrecognisable corpse."

An iron rod sunk into the ground, encountered a hard substance some four feet below. Two men set to work, and dug with energy. Every eye was fixed upon this trench increasing in depth with every shovelful of earth which the two labourers cast aside. Monsieur de Lamotte was nearly fainting, and his emotion impressed everyone except Derues. At length the silence was broken by the spades striking heavily on wood, and the

Derues

noise made everyone shudder. The chest was uncovered and hoisted out of the trench; it was opened, and the body of a woman was seen, clad only in a chemise, with a red and white headband, face downwards. The body was turned over, and Monsieur de Lamotte recognised his wife, not yet disfigured.

The feeling of horror was so great that no one spoke or uttered a sound. Derues, occupied in considering the few chances which remained to him, had not observed that, by the officer's order, one of the guards had left the cellar before the men began to dig. Everybody had drawn back both from the corpse and the murderer, who alone had not moved, and who was repeating prayers. The flame of the torches placed on the ground cast a reddish light on this silent and terrible scene.

Derues started and turned round on hearing a terrified cry behind him. His wife had just been brought to the cellar. The commissioner seized her with one hand, and taking a torch in the other, compelled her to look down on the body.

"It is Madame de Lamotte!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, yes," she answered, overwhelmed with terror,--"yes, I recognise her!"

Unable to support the sight any longer, she grew pale and fainted away. She and her husband were removed separately. One would have supposed the discovery was already known outside, for the people showered curses and cries of "Assassin!" and "Poisoner!" on the carriage which conveyed Derues. He remained silent during the drive, but before re-entering his dungeon, he said--

"I must have been mad when I sought to hide the death and burial of Madame de Lamotte from public knowledge. It is the only sin I have committed, and, innocent of aught else, I resign myself as a Christian to the judgment of God."

It was the only line of defence which remained open to him, and he clung to it, with the hope of imposing on the magistrates by redoubled hypocrisy and pious observances. But all this laboriously constructed scaffolding of lies was shaken to its base and fell away piece by piece. Every moment brought fresh and overwhelming revelations. He professed that Madame de Lamotte had died suddenly in his house, and that, fearing suspicion, he had buried her secretly. But the doctors called on to examine the body declared that she had been poisoned with corrosive sublimate and opium. The pretended payment was clearly an odious imposture, the receipt a forgery! Then, like a threatening spectre, arose another question, to which he found no reply, and his own invention turned against him.

Why, knowing his mother was no more, had he taken young de Lamotte to Versailles? what had become of the youth? what had befallen him? Once on the track, the cooper with whom he had lodged on the 12th of February was soon discovered, and an Act of Parliament ordered the exhumation of the corpse buried under the name of Beaupre, which the cooper identified by a shirt which he had given for the burial. Derues, confounded by the evidence, asserted that the youth died of indigestion and venereal disease. But the doctors again declared the presence of corrosive sublimate and opium. All this evidence of guilt he met with assumed resignation, lamenting incessantly for Edouard, whom he declared he had loved as his own son. "Alas!" he said, "I see that poor boy every night! But it softens my grief to know that he was not deprived of the last consolations of religion! God, who sees me, and who knows my innocence, will enlighten the magistrates, and my honour will be vindicated."

The evidence being complete, Derues was condemned by sentence of the Chatelet, pronounced April 30th, and confirmed by Parliament, May 5th. We give the decree as it is found in the archives:

Derues

"This Court having considered the trial held before the Provost of Paris, or his Deputy-Lieutenant at the Chatelet, for the satisfaction of the aforesaid Deputy at the aforesaid Chatelet, at the request of the Deputy of the King's Attorney General at the aforesaid Court, summoner and plaintiff, against Antoine-Francois Derues, and Marie-Louise Nicolais, his wife, defendants and accused, prisoners in the prisons of the Conciergerie of the Palace at Paris, who have appealed from the sentence given at the aforesaid trial, the thirtieth day of April 1777, by which the aforesaid Antoine-Francois Derues has been declared duly attainted and convicted of attempting unlawfully to appropriate without payment, the estate of Buissony Souef, belonging to the Sieur and Dame de Saint Faust de Lamotte, from whom he had bought the said estate by private contract on the twenty-second day of December 1775, and also of having unworthily abused the hospitality shown by him since the sixteenth day of December last towards the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, who arrived in Paris on the aforesaid day in order to conclude with him the bargain agreed on in December 1775, and who, for this purpose, and at his request, lodged with her son in the house of the said Derues, who of premeditated design poisoned the said Dame de Lamotte, whether by a medicine composed and prepared by him on the thirtieth day of January last, or by the beverages and drinks administered by him after the aforesaid medicine (he having taken the precaution to send his servant into the country for two or three days), and to keep away strangers from the room where the said Dame de Lamotte was lying), from the effects of which poison the said Dame de Lamotte died on the night of the said thirty-first day of January last; also of having kept her demise secret, and of having himself enclosed in a chest the body of the said Dame de Lamotte, which he then caused to be secretly transported to a cellar in the rue de la Mortellerie hired by him for this purpose, under the assumed name of Ducoudray, wherein he buried it himself, or caused it to be buried; also of having persuaded the son of the above Dame de Lamotte (who, with his mother, had lodged in his house from the time of their arrival in Paris until the fifteenth day of January, last,--and who had then been placed in a school that the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte was at Versailles and desired him to join her there, and, under this pretence, of having conducted the said younger Sieur de Lamotte, the twelfth day of February (after having given him some chocolate), to the aforesaid town of Versailles, to a lodging hired at a cooper's, and of having there wilfully poisoned him, either in the chocolate taken by the said younger Sieur de Lamotte before starting, or in beverages and medicaments which the said Derues himself prepared, mixed, and administered to the aforesaid Sieur de Lamotte the younger, during the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth days of February last, having kept him lying ill in the aforesaid hired room, and having refused to call in physicians or surgeons, notwithstanding the progress of the malady, and the representations made to him on the subject, saying that he himself was a physician and surgeon; from which poison the said Sieur de Lamotte the younger died on the fifteenth day of February last, at nine o'clock in the evening, in the arms of the aforesaid Derues, who, affecting the deepest grief, and shedding tears, actually exhorted the aforesaid Sieur de Lamotte to confession, and repeated the prayers for the dying; after which he himself laid out the body for burial, saying that the deceased had begged him to do so, and telling the people of the house that he had died of venereal disease; also of having caused him to be buried the next day in the churchyard of the parish church of Saint Louis at the aforesaid Versailles, and of having entered the deceased in the register of the said parish under a false birthplace, and the false name of Beaupre, which name the said Derues had himself assumed on arriving at the said lodging, and had given to the said Sieur de Lamotte the younger, whom he declared to be his nephew. Also, to cover these atrocities, and in order to appropriate to himself the aforesaid estate of Buisson-Souef, he is convicted of having calumniated the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, and of having used various manoeuvres and practised several deceptions, to wit--

"First, in signing, or causing to be signed, the names of the above Dame de Lamotte to a deed of private contract between the said Derues and his wife on one side and the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte by right of a power

Derues

of attorney given by her husband on the other (the which deed is dated the twelfth day of February, and was therefore written after the decease of the said Dame de Lamotte); by which deed the said Dame de Lamotte appears to change the previous conventions agreed on in the first deed of the twenty-second of December in the year 1775, and acknowledges receipt from the said Derues of a sum of one hundred thousand livres, as being the price of the estate of Buisson;

"Secondly, in signing before a notary, the ninth day of February last, a feigned acknowledgment for a third part of a hundred thousand livres, in order to give credence to the pretended payment made by him;

"Thirdly, in announcing and publishing, and attesting even by oath at the time of an examination before the commissioner Mutel, that he had really paid in cash to the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte the aforesaid hundred thousand livres, and that she, being provided with this money, had fled with her son and a certain person unknown;

"Fourthly, in depositing with a notary the deed of private contract bearing the pretended receipt for the above sum of one hundred thousand livres, and pursuing at law the execution of this deed and of his claim to the possession of the said estate;

"Fifthly, in signing or causing to be signed by another person, before the notaries of the town of Lyons, whither he had gone for this purpose, a deed dated the twelfth day of March, by which the supposed Dame de Lamotte appeared to accept the payment of the hundred thousand livres, and to give authority to the Sieur de Lamotte, her husband, to receive the arrears of the remainder of the price of the said estate, the which deed he produced as a proof of the existence of the said Dame de Lamotte;

"Sixthly, in causing to be sent, by other hands, under the name of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, to a lawyer, on the eighth day of April 1777 (at a time when he was in prison, and had been compelled to abandon the fable that he had paid the aforesaid sum of one hundred thousand livres in hard cash, and had substituted a pretended payment made in notes), the notes pretended to have been given by him in payment to the said Dame de Lamotte;

"Seventh, and finally, in maintaining constantly, until the discovery of the body of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte, that the said Dame was still alive, and that he had seen her at the town of Lyons, as has been stated above.

"In atonement has been condemned, etc. etc. etc.

"His goods are hereby declared acquired and confiscated to the King, or to whomsoever His Majesty shall appoint, first deducting the sum of two hundred livres as fine for the King, in case the confiscation is not to the sole profit of His Majesty; and also the sum of six hundred livres for masses to be said for the repose of the souls of the aforesaid Dame de Lamotte and her son. And, before being executed, the said Antoine-Francois Derues shall suffer the question ordinary and extraordinary, in order that from his mouth may be learned the truth of these facts, and also the names of his accomplices. And the decision of the judges in the proceedings with regard to the above-mentioned Marie-Louise Nicolais, wife of Derues, is delayed until after the execution of the above sentence. It is also decreed that the mortuary act of the aforesaid de Lamotte the younger, dated the sixteenth day of February last, in the register of deaths belonging to the parish church of Saint-Louis at Versailles, be amended, and his correct names be substituted, in order that the said Sieur de Lamotte, the father, and other persons interested, may produce said names before the magistrates if required. And it is also decreed that this sentence be printed and published by the deputy of the Attorney-General at the Chatelet, and affixed to the walls in the usual places and cross roads of the town, provostship and viscounty of Paris, and wherever else requisite.

Derues

"With regard to the petition of Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, a Royal Equerry, Sieur de Grange-Flandre, Buisson-Souef, Valperfond, and other places, widower and inheritor of Marie Francois Perier, his wife, according to their marriage contract signed before Baron and partner, notaries at Paris, the fifth day of September 1762, whereby he desires to intervene in the action brought against Derues and his accomplices, concerning the assassination and poisoning committed on the persons of the wife and son of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, on the accusation made by him to the Deputy Attorney-General of the King at the Chatelet at present pending in the Court, on the report of the final judgment given in the said action the 30th of April last, and which allowed the intervention; it is decreed that there shall be levied on the goods left by the condemned, before the rights of the Treasury, and separate from them, the sum of six thousand livres, or such other sum as it shall please the Court to award; from which sum the said Saint-Faust de Lamotte shall consent to deduct the sum of two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight livres, which he acknowledges has been sent or remitted to him by the said Derues and his wife at different times; which first sum of six thousand livres, or such other, shall be employed by the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, who is authorised to found therewith, in the parish church of Saint Nicholas de Villeneuve-le-Roy, in which parish the estate of Buisson-Souef is situate, and which is mentioned in the action, an annual and perpetual service for the repose of the souls of the wife and son of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, of which an act shall be inserted in the decree of intervention, and a copy of this act or decree shall be inscribed upon a stone which shall be set in the wall of the said church of Saint Nicholas de Villeneuve-le-Roy, in such place as is expedient. And the deed of contract for private sale, made between the late spouse of the said Sieur de Saint-Faust de Lamotte and the above-named Derues and his wife, is hereby declared null and void, as having had no value in absence of any payment or realisation of contract before a notary; and the pretended agreement of the twelfth day of February last, as also all other deeds fabricated by the said Derues or others, named in the above action, as also any which may hereafter be presented, are hereby declared to be null and void.

"The Court declares the judgment pronounced by the magistrates of the Chatelet against the above named Derues to be good and right, and his appeal against the same to be bad and ill-founded.

"It is decreed that the sentence shall lose its full and entire effect with regard to Marie-Louise Nicolais, who is condemned to the ordinary fine of twelve livres. The necessary relief granted on the petition of Pierre-Etienne de Saint-Faust de Lamotte, the second day of May this present month, and delay accorded until after the suspended judgment pronounced with regard to the said Marie-Louise Nicolais.

"(Signed) De Gourgues, President.

"OUTREMONT, Councillor."

Derues' assurance and calmness never deserted him for one moment. For three-quarters of an hour he harangued the Parliament, and his defence was remarkable both for its presence of mind and the art with which he made the most of any circumstances likely to suggest doubts to the magistrates and soften the severity of the first sentence. Found guilty on every point, he yet protested that he was innocent of poisoning. Remorse, which often merely means fear of punishment, had no place in his soul, and torture he seemed not to dread. As strong in will as he was weak in body, he desired to die like a martyr in the faith of his religion, which was hypocrisy, and the God whom he gloried on the scaffold was the god of lies.

On May 6th, at seven in the morning, the sentence of execution was read to him. He listened calmly, and when it was finished, remarked:

Derues

"I had not anticipated so severe a sentence."

A few hours later the instruments of torture were got ready. He was told that this part of his punishment would be remitted if he would confess his crimes and the names of his accomplices. He replied:

"I have no more to say. I know what terrible torture awaits me, I know I must die to-day, but I have nothing to confess."

He made no resistance when his knees and legs were bound, and endured the torture courageously. Only, in a moment of agony, he exclaimed:

"Accursed money! has thou reduced me to this?"

Thinking that pain would overcome his resolution, the presiding magistrate bent towards him, and said:

"Unhappy man! confess thy crime, since death is near at hand."

He recovered his firmness, and, looking at the magistrate, replied:

"I know it, monseigneur; I have perhaps not three hours to live."

Thinking that his apparently feeble frame could not endure the last wedges, the executioner was ordered to stop. He was unbound and laid on a mattress, and a glass of wine was brought, of which he only drank a few drops; after this, he made his confession to the priest. For, dinner, they brought him soup and stew, which he ate eagerly, and inquiring of the gaoler if he could have something more, an entree was brought in addition. One might have thought that this final repast heralded, not death but deliverance. At length three o'clock struck the hour appointed for leaving the prison.

According to the report of credible persons whom we have consulted, Paris on this occasion presented a remarkable appearance, which those who saw it were never able to forget. The great anthill was troubled to its very lowest depth. Whether by accident or design, the same day had been fixed for a function which ought to have proved a considerable counter attraction. A great festival in honour of a German prince was given on the Plaine de Grenelle, at which all the court was present; and probably more than one great lady regretted missing the emotions of the Place de Greve, abandoned to the rabble and the bourgeoisie. The rest of the city was deserted, the streets silent, the houses closed. A stranger transported suddenly into such a solitude might have reasonably thought that during the night the town had been smitten by the Angel of Death, and that only a labyrinth of vacant buildings remained, testifying to the life and turmoil of the preceding day. A dark and dense atmosphere hung over the abandoned town; lightning furrowed the heavy motionless clouds; in the distance the occasional rumble of thunder was heard, answered by the cannon of the royal fete. The crowd was divided between the powers of heaven and earth: the terrible majesty of the Eternal on one side, on the other the frivolous pomp of royalty--eternal punishment and transient grandeur in opposition. Like the waters of a flood leaving dry the fields which they have covered, so the waves of the multitude forsook their usual course. Thousands of men and women crowded together along the route which the death-cart would take; an ocean of heads undulated like the ears in a wheatfield. The old houses, hired at high rates, quivered under the weight of eager spectators, and the window sashes had been removed to afford a better view.

Attired in the shirt worn by condemned criminals, and bearing a placard both in front and behind, with the words "wilful Poisoner," Derues descended the great staircase of the Chatelet with a firm step. It was at this moment, on seeing the crucifix, that he exclaimed, "O Christ, I shall suffer like Thee!" He mounted the tumbril, looking right and left amongst the crowd. During the progress he recognised and bowed to several of his old associates, and bade adieu in a clear voice to the

Derues

former mistress of his 'prentice days, who has recorded that she never saw him look so pleasant. Arrived at the door of Notre Dame, where the clerk was awaiting him, he descended from the tumbril without assistance, took a lighted wax taper weighing two pounds in his hand, and did penance, kneeling, bareheaded and barefooted, a rope round his neck, repeating the words of the death-warrant. He then reascended the cart in the midst of the cries and execrations of the populace, to which he appeared quite insensible. One voice only, endeavouring to dominate the tumult, caused him to turn his head: it was that of the hawker who was crying his sentence, and who broke off now and then to say--

"Well! my poor gossip Derues, how do you like that fine carriage you're in? Oh yes, mutter your prayers and look up to heaven as much as you like, you won't take us in now. Ah! thief who said I stole from you! Wasn't I right when I said I should be selling your sentence some day?"

Then, adding her own wrongs to the list of crimes, she declared that the Parliament had condemned him as much for having falsely accused her of theft as for having poisoned Madame de Lamotte and her son!

When arrived at the scaffold, he gazed around him, and a sort of shiver of impatience ran through the crowd. He smiled, and as if anxious to trick mankind for the last time, asked to be taken to the Hotel de Ville, which was granted, in the hope that he would at last make some confession; but he only persisted in saying that he was guiltless of poisoning. He had an interview with his wife, who nearly fainted on seeing him, and remained for more than a quarter of an hour unable to say a word. He lavished tender names upon her, and professed much affliction at seeing her in so miserable a condition.

When she was taken away, he asked permission to embrace her, and took a most touching farewell. His last words have been preserved.

"My dear wife," he said, "I recommend our beloved children to your care: bring them up in the fear of God. You must go to Chartres, you will there see the bishop, on whom I had the honour of waiting when I was there last, and who has always been kind to me; I believe he has thought well of me, and that I may hope he will take pity on you and on our children."

It was now seven in the evening, and the crowd began to murmur at the long delay. At length the criminal reappeared. An onlooker who saw him go to the Hotel de Ville, and who was carried by the movement of the crowd to the foot of the scaffold, says that when handed over to the executioner he took off his clothes himself. He kissed the instrument of punishment with devotion, then extended himself on the St. Andrew's cross, asking with a resigned smile that they would make his sufferings as short as possible. As soon as his head was covered, the executioner gave the signal. One would have thought a very few blows would have finished so frail a being, but he seemed as hard to kill as the venomous reptiles which must be crushed and cut to pieces before life is extinct, and the coup de grace was found necessary. The executioner uncovered his head and showed the confessor that the eyes were closed and that the heart had ceased to beat. The body was then removed from the cross, the hands and feet fastened together, and it was thrown on the funeral pile.

While the execution was proceeding the people applauded. On the morrow they bought up the fragments of bone, and hastened to buy lottery tickets, in the firm conviction that these precious relics would bring luck to the fortunate possessors!

In 1777, Madame Derues was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, and confined at the Salpetriere. She was one of the first victims who perished in the prison massacres.

Derues