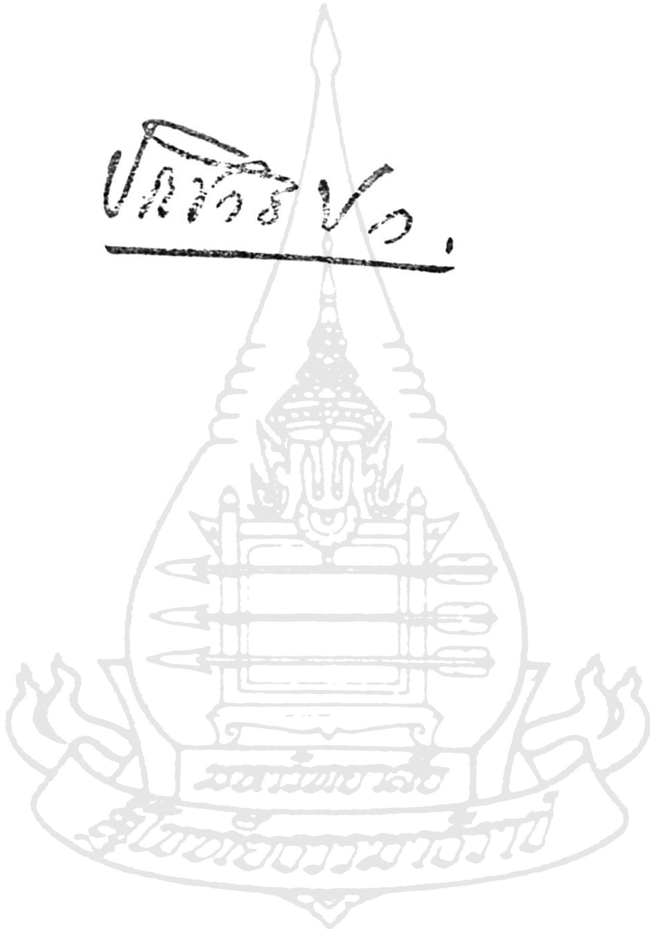
LA RONCIÈRE



La Roncière

I

THE ANONYMOUS LETTERS

In the year 1834 the Cavalry School at Saumur was under the command of General the Baron de Morell. Saumur is a small French town situated on the Loire. The function of the school was to qualify cavalry officers to become instructors, and train cadets from the Military School who were intending to join the cavalry. The family of General de Morell consisted of his wife, a son, Robert, aged twelve, and a daughter, Marie, aged sixteen. Madame de Morell was a woman of good family, a niece by marriage of Marshal Soult, Duke of Dalmatia, at this time President of the Council of Ministers. The General's family lived usually in Paris, but in the summer of each year they joined the General at Saumur for the annual inspection of the School and such social festivities as accompanied it. Madame de Morell was a handsome and attractive woman. Her daughter, Marie, had inherited much of her mother's charm. The family would seem to have been on the whole united. The father doted on the daughter; but there were occasional differences between Marie and her mother on account of the former's tendency to read novels instead of limiting her reading, according to her mother's wish, to the Bible and more serious literature. During the November of 1833 and the April of 1834, some anonymous letters had been received in Paris by Madame de Morell, in which her attention had been

called to the youth of Miss Allen, a young Englishwoman of twenty-four who acted as governess and maid to Marie de Morell, improving the mind and sweeping out the room of her pupil. The letters also warned the General's family to beware of a mysterious society known as the 'Bared-Arms,' who for some reason or other had sinister designs on their peace of mind. But nothing came of these warnings, nor could the mysterious society be identified.

In the August of 1834, Madame de Morell, her son and daughter and Miss Allen, joined the General at Saumur for the period of the annual inspection. During that month two remarkable incidents occurred in their household.

One evening Madame de Morell was playing the piano. The windows of the room were open. To her astonishment she heard some loud exclamations of admiration coming from the street. She left the piano, and looking out of the window saw a man in civilian dress, whom, however, she took to be an officer, 'expressing by gesture feelings of which she could not approve.' Marie, who had been in the room at the time, went upstairs shortly after to find some music. On her return she told her mother that she had seen a man throw himself into the river Loire, which ran immediately in front of the General's windows, but that some boatmen had come speedily to his rescue and landed him safely on the quay. Next day, Madame de Morell received an anonymous letter from the would-be suicide, in which he declared his passion for her and lamented the failure of his attempt to die. Inquiries made at a later date failed to elicit any evidence of this attempted suicide or the rescue by the boatmen.

The second incident, though apparently less serious in character, was in reality the prelude to a domestic tragedy that was to fix the attention, not

only of France, but Europe, on the General and his family.

One night at the end of August, the General gave a dinner party to which certain officers attending the cavalry school were invited. Among them was a young Lieutenant of Lancers. He was placed at dinner next to Marie de Morell. The following day Marie told her parents that, as they left the dining-room, the Lieutenant had pointed to a portrait of Madame de Morell and had said to her: 'You have a charming mother, Mademoiselle, it is a pity you resemble her so little.'

The author of this unchivalrous remark was Emile Clement de la Roncière, Lieutenant of Lancers, thirty years of age. His father, Count Clement de la Roncière, a distinguished General, Spartan in his principles, had lost an arm in the Napoleonic wars; the Emperor had appointed him Commandant of the Cavalry School at Saint-Germain, where he had made himself remarkable for the sternness of his discipline. Good-looking and distinguished in appearance, the son had inherited the physical but not the moral courage of his father, of whom he stood in considerable awe. To avoid having to pass an examination, he had entered the army as a private and worked his way up to the rank of an officer. But, ever since he had joined the army, the young La Roncière had been getting constantly into trouble with his superior officers and accumulating debts. His father, who was a poor man, sent him to join an infantry regiment at Cayenne, 'a country,' he wrote, 'where you won't want money, and will find nobody to lend it you.' On his return to France in 1828, La Roncière was gazetted to the First Regiment of Lancers, and after visiting various garrison towns, came to Saumur in 1833. The morality of La Roncière would not seem to have been very different from that of the generality of the officers

of his day. He had kept mistresses, and brought one with him when he was transferred to Saumur. She left him, however, to go to Paris. At the time of his visit to the General's house, La Roncière was lodging with a widow and her two daughters of the name of Rouault. His character was not regarded with very great favour by his superiors or his colleagues. He was reported by the former as capable of being in the first rank, but wayward and discontented, whilst his brother officers were offended by a certain hardness in his disposition and sarcasm in speech. In the social world of Saumur Lieutenant de La Roncière was regarded as a 'bambocheur,' a fast young man. But his conduct was considered to have improved during the latter part of his stay in Saumur, and for that reason General de Morell had invited him to his house in the August of 1834.

Another, but more favoured, guest at the General's house was the Lieutenant Octave d'Estouilly, a serious-minded and religious young officer. He had artistic tastes; he was fond of painting animals. On the birthday of Marie de Morell on August 15th he had been allowed by her parents to present her with a specimen of his art. D'Estouilly had intended to leave the school in the previous June, but at the special request of the General had stayed on in order to meet his wife and daughter.

If on the occasion of their first meeting the conduct of La Roncière towards Marie de Morell had been remarkable for its want of ordinary politeness, it grew very soon to all appearances stranger still. Shortly after the incident at the dinner-party Madame de Morell received the following letter signed 'E. de la R.'

'I tremble with the desire to let you know the name of him who worships you. It is the first soft feeling

that has stirred my heart; such a tribute should be very agreeable to you. I hope you have not been displeased with what I have written to your daughter; in the first place you must know that I have only spoken the truth, and secondly that before doing so, I took care to find out whether you loved her, and it was only after I had made sure that you did not, that I began to torment her. I had a great scheme in my head. I could not carry it out here, but the winter will be a fatal time for her. I have written more than thirty anonymous letters about her to people she knows in Paris; to Mlle B., who is at Neuchâtel-en-Bray; to Mme du M., who is at Ancy-le-Franc; you see, I know everybody. I shall be about your house to-day; if I see you go out, allow me to believe that you accept the tribute of the respectful love of your obedient servant,

'E. DE LA R.'

The day that Madame de Morell received this singular letter she showed it to her husband. He went to the window and there, on the bridge over the river in front of the house, the General saw La Roncière.

At the same time Marie de Morell had been sent a letter which ran as follows:

'Mademoiselle, as I don't know whether your mother shows you the letters she has received, I hasten to tell you that I have vowed a hatred against you that time cannot weaken. If I could cut you to pieces, kill you, I would do it. Later on, my hatred will rob you of all happiness and peace of mind. Not one, but three people in your household I have won over; I know everything that goes on. You found one letter in the curtains, you will find this one on the piano. Your father knows something of this, but not my letter of yesterday. Don't treat this as a joke;

death would be a boon to you, for your life will be always a torment and a misery.

'R.'

The governess, Miss Allen, was not overlooked by this mysterious correspondent. Her letter was addressed to 'Miss Hellen,' and said:—

'I am told that you are a very respectable young person, always carrying a Bible in your hand. Please tell Mlle de Morell, in quite a Christian spirit, that she is the most disagreeable person in the world; I don't know any one more common or more stupid. But her mother, she is charm personified; what an adorable woman! My God, the contrast! The daughter's forehead is wrinkled, and she looks ten years older than her delightful mother. Try then to make Mademoiselle de Morell devout; we must give ourselves to God, when the devil won't have us. She is so dreadfully ugly that she cannot expect anything in this world and certainly not a husband. Saturday's ball was delightful, but spoilt by her.

'Perhaps this will make you angry with me; then read in your Bible of the forgiveness of sins.'

These extraordinary letters had not been confined to the members of General de Morell's household. On August 20th, Lieutenant d'Estouilly received a letter posted in Saumur. It was signed 'An Officer,' and said:—

'I am neither man nor woman, angel nor demon, and for that very reason inclined to evil rather than to good. I know that you are happy, but I mean to disturb your happiness and that of the family of de Morell. I have already destroyed the happiness of three women. I have talked with Mlle de Morell

on the sofa; I have been reputed your intimate friend; Mlle. de Morell has listened to me. I said to her: " M. d'Estouilly has no intention of staying at Saumur; he is being strongly urged to go back to his family; his father has plans for him."

'An Officer.'

Puzzling over this singular communication, the only officer of his acquaintance who seemed to Lieutenant d'Estouilly to be the possible writer of the letter was La Roncière. Shortly after receiving it, d'Estouilly met Marie de Morell at a dance. He asked her carelessly whether any one had told her that he had changed his plans and was about to leave Saumur. The young lady looked down and seemed astonished. 'As a matter of fact,' she said, 'I was told that your father had sent for you to go home. But I really don't see what interest it can have for me.' 'Mademoiselle,' asked d'Estouilly, 'would you tell me the name of the person who told you this?' Marie made no reply. D'Estouilly went on, 'I think I could name him, but lest we be overheard, I will point him out as he passes by us.' A little while after La Roncière came near them. 'La Roncière is the man,' said d'Estouilly. Marie, again looking down, blushed and said in a low voice, 'Yes, Monsieur.'

Three days after this interview d'Estouilly received a second letter:—

'I wrote to-day to Marie a letter in which I said many humiliating things about her. This letter is signed d'Estouilly. I am sure it will reach her, because I have bribed a servant with five francs.'

and on September 3th, a third:—

'It seems to me that you have changed altogether

in your behaviour and without giving me warning of it. How would you wish me to help you? Many things lead me to believe that you have told all to Mme Morell; I congratulate you: you could not have hit on a better way of tormenting Marie. The very first thing her mother did was to have a scene with her. You must show great indifference and then she will be afraid that she is not going to see you again. Through a friend I have got hold of some of her handwriting; I have tried to copy it and send you the result of my labours; take this pretended letter of Marie's to her mother, whose rage will then be beyond words; your heroine will then be shut up in her room, and we shall laugh in our sleeves, my friend. For my part I promise to make life miserable for her. I have scattered about in her room and her books little pieces of paper in which she is told that she is all that is ugly, stupid, and disagreeable, which as far as I am concerned is true: I put one in her Prayer Book; that was diabolically clever.

'Good-bye, I mend my pen to say some nice things about the poor forsaken one.'

With this letter was enclosed the note purporting to be in Marie's handwriting:—

'How unkind you are not to pay any attention to me; if you only knew the distress it causes me: you did not ask me to dance on Saturday, and I wished to so much. I see that you are as hard as a rock, and I so loving, you hurt me. I pray God may change you, but he is as deaf as you. I give you my word I love you very much; you are so charming.

'MARIE DE MORELL.'

This third letter d'Estouilly felt it his duty to show to the General.

But the General himself had not been spared by the mysterious writer. The letter which had been sent to him ran:—

'General, it has been my wish to spread trouble and discord in your household; I am afraid I have not been quite successful and so I am sick with anger. Don't, however, think that I am the man to rest satisfied with these mere letters which you have received: no, I had done all that the blackest slander could do to ruin the most innocent creature in the world; such a task was worthy of me. But, unfortunately, Saumur was a stage ill suited to such a tragedy; you and your family are loved and respected; no one would listen to me. I have tried another means; a man who was in no way dependent on you, who was nothing to you, appeared to me to be the surest instrument; I therefore told him that a certain young lady had told me that she knew no one ruder or duller than he (M. d'E), that she was disgusted that he was allowed to talk to her so often; and then, when I believed the poor fellow to be thoroughly upset and excited, I wrote him a fine anonymous letter in which I spoke of pretended advances on her part; and finally I sent him a letter which was a perfect imitation of the handwriting of the innocent creature whom I was determined to ruin, and told him to show it to Mme de Morell, who, I understand, is very strict and would be likely to make a great row. I hoped that M. d'E., whose *amour propre* seemed hurt by what I had said to him, would make use of this opportunity to revenge himself. My spy having warned me that you knew of this, and M. d'E who must have recognised my ill-disguised handwriting, avoiding me, I realise now that he is the sort of cad who makes a show of fine feelings as long as he is happy and has money in his pocket. Now you have the explanation of a comedy

that should have been a tragedy. You can thank my creditors for all this; the dogs are stabbing me in the back; devil take them and me! I can only think of them, and shall not have a minute before I go to Paris to think of you. Your servant,

'M———'

The French word beginning with M, written in full at the end of the letter was the coarse expression said to have been used at the battle of Waterloo by General Cambronne, and known to history as 'le mot de Cambronne.'

In spite of the outrageous character of these communications, and the apparent evidence that they came from La Roncière, General de Morell was unwilling for his daughter's sake to take any notice of them, and begged d'Estouilly to ignore them also. But on September 14th, the latter received another letter more sinister and threatening in its tone. It said:—

'You have not followed my counsels, you have despised them; this calls for revenge; it has begun, but death alone can satisfy it. This young girl worships you; I have seen her watching secretly from her window at eleven o'clock at night in the hope of seeing you once again. Instead of treating this passion of a girl of sixteen with a coldness natural to your age, which would have made her suffer, your persistency in boring yourself by going three times a week to M. de Morell's house, your walking so often on the bridge, all these things lead a heart already captive, to believe that her love is mutual; I know your good sense well enough to believe that it is nothing of the kind, but you are well aware that a comfortable fortune can make one overlook ugliness and stupidity. You are as naughty as I am to pit your cold and calculating spirit against the kind of worship that this

girl has for you; but don't deceive yourself, in a short time this girl will be wretched and degraded, an object of pity to all; if you will still take her then, she will be thrown into your arms; her parents will be only too glad to get rid of her. She will be pure and innocent—of that I cannot rob her—but in the eyes of the world she will appear guilty. All this, my good friend, will happen in the month of January, and you will be the cause of it; for let me tell you that I love her madly, that is to say her money, after my own fashion. I should like to have won her for myself, but her little air of disdain has prevented me from speaking to her; and so I shall revenge on her her love for you. By means of the person I told you about, I have placed in her room a letter of the most ignominious and outrageous kind; since you have been fool enough to tell everything to her mother, she is worried and watched over all the time; the flames of hell will devour her!

'R———'

D'Estouilly showed this letter to the General. It is a singular fact that in spite of what had happened already, La Roncière was still being invited to the General's house. He was present at a ball given three weeks later, on September 21st. The General had at length decided that he must take action in regard to what appeared to be the outrageous conduct of La Roncière. In the middle of the ball he sent for the young officer. La Roncière, on receiving his message, took up his cap that was lying on a piano in Madame de Morell's room, and passed into another room in which he found himself in the presence of the General and Captain Jacquemin, one of the instructors in the school. 'I have very good reasons,' said the General to La Roncière, 'for not receiving you any longer in this house. I must ask you not to visit here

any more.' Without a word La Roncière bowed and left the room. 'Upon my word!' exclaimed the General, 'here is a man I have entertained at my table, made free of my house, I order him out of it, and he says nothing! It is clear evidence that he is guilty!'

Next day, however, La Roncière called on Captain Jacquemin and asked him for some explanation of the incident of the previous night. The Captain told him of the anonymous letters. La Roncière protested vehemently his innocence; he said that such letters were little less cruel than murder, and disgraceful to any man, but all the more so to a soldier.

II

THE NOCTURNAL OUTRAGE

If the General thought that by forbidding his house to La Roncière he had secured his domestic peace, he was mistaken. At six o'clock on the morning of September 24th he and his wife were roused by the governess, Miss Allen, with intelligence of an outrage perpetrated on their daughter some four hours earlier.

Marie slept in a room immediately over that occupied by her parents, and communicating with an adjoining room in which Miss Allen slept. The door separating these two rooms was fastened by an ill-fitting bolt. A door at the end of a corridor shut off both rooms from the rest of the house, and was firmly secured at night. About two o'clock in the morning Marie said that she had been roused by the breaking of glass in her room. Through a hole smashed in one of the window panes she saw an arm thrust and the latch of the window slipped. A man entered the

room and moved quickly towards the door communicating with Miss Allen's room. Marie jumped out of bed and got behind a chair. The man advanced towards her. He was dressed in a cloth coat and wore a red undress military cap with silver braid; a large cravat hid his face up to his ears. 'I am going to revenge myself,' he said, as he seized the chair behind which Marie had sheltered herself, and threw it to the ground. He caught the girl by the shoulders, flung her down and dragged off the night-jacket she was wearing. Then he tied a handkerchief over her mouth to stifle her cries, and fastened a cord round her body. Having done this, the ruffian struck her several violent blows on her arms and breast, and bit her right wrist. 'I am revenging myself,' he cried, 'for what happened at M. de Morell's two days ago. But that is not all. I must revenge myself on the writer of anonymous letters.' His rage seemed to increase as he became more violent. 'Since I saw you,' he cried to his helpless victim, 'something has driven me to wish to do you some injury,' a wish he proceeded to carry out by stabbing Marie de Morell twice with some sharp instrument between the thighs. The pain of the wound caused Marie to cry out. Miss Allen in the adjoining room heard her pupil's cries and began trying to force the door between the two rooms. Hearing the noise the ruthless assailant released his unfortunate victim, saying, 'That is enough for her,' placed a letter on the chest of drawers and departed, as he came, by the window. As he got out of the window Marie heard him say, presumably to an accomplice outside, 'Hold tight.'

Such was the story Marie de Morell told to Miss Allen who, having pushed open the ill-fastened door, found her charge lying on the floor in her chemise, a handkerchief tied round her neck, a cord round her body, and by her side on the floor two or three

blood-stains. Though it was a bright moonlight night, Miss Allen could see no trace at the window of the nocturnal visitor. In ten minutes she had put Marie back into bed, but it was not until six o'clock that she roused the General and his wife to hear their daughter's story.

Who was the merciless ruffian who had committed this cruel assault on a defenceless girl? To Miss Allen, Marie said that she believed him to be La Roncière; to her father she said that owing to the darkness and his disguise she could not tell who he was; to her mother she said positively that he was La Roncière. It was not until three weeks after the occurrence that Marie told her mother of the stabs which her assailant had inflicted on her with some sharp instrument.

The vengeance of the monster, however, was not satiated by this last and crowning outrage. In the letter placed on the chest of drawers and dated 'Wednesday, one o'clock in the morning, he foretold further trouble. He wrote:—

'You alone know the real motive for the crime I have just committed; it is indeed a crime to persecute all that is purest in the world; but I must be avenged. I have loved you, worshipped you; you have repulsed me with scorn; now I choose to hate you, and I will give you the right to hate me. One day I asked you to go out and you shut yourself up in your room. For you the passion that devours and consumes me will be vengeance enough; I suffer the tortures of hell; that scoundrel has been foolish enough to tell all to M. de Morell. I have written and told him that wherever I see him I shall brand him with the seal of infamy. I wait to meet him on the field of honour. Good-bye, I leave you, only to wreck your whole life; all Paris shall know the disgrace of Saumur; I shall go

away and shall not have the joy of watching your agony, and so I shall be silent. May you suffer but the half of what I suffer on your account.'

The same morning the General received by post the following letter, dated 'Wednesday—four o'clock in the morning.'

'So you laugh at my letters! But this catastrophe will prove to you that I am more dangerous than you thought. I have to summon up all my powers of hatred to write to you. Hapless father, I made my way into your daughter's room, without help from any one, I came in by the window. The noise I made in breaking the window-pane roused her; she threw herself at the foot of the bed; I threw myself on her and nearly strangled her with a handkerchief. The pain made her fall to the ground, senseless and covered with blood: I desired her honour and her blood; I had both. After having robbed her of the former, and made her a thing of shame, I went away unseen by any one. Ah! what a night! Can you not see me loading with insult a girl senseless and cold with the coldness of death? In the next room a woman was beating on the door, the bolt of which I had fastened, and calling down curses on me. I had spied out the land the day that Mme de Morell went to Allenne, whilst your daughter had gone out for her walk with her brother and Miss Hellen. By means of a false key I got into the room and made all my preparations: my first proceeding was to shut her off from all assistance by fastening the door, whilst her physical suffering robbed her of the strength to cry out. Now that all is over, now that I can only hope that your daughter will have a pledge of her misfortune, I know and will tell you that it is Samuel who has distributed the letters for five francs each, money which I have

no wish to reclaim: I promised him 1000 francs if he would get me into the house by a less dangerous way than the window, but he refused. In three days time I shall have left Saumur; in Paris you will see your daughter's shame made public; here no one knows of it. I fear the affection and respect in which you are held by these pigs of Saumurites and my comrades who treat me so basely.'

In this letter the writer made a definite charge against Samuel Gilieron, a former servant of the General's mother, who had been now some three years in her son's service. According to him, Samuel was his confederate in distributing those anonymous letters which had been found at different times in various parts of the General's house.

To the unfortunate General himself the tragedy that had fallen on his home, the cruel outrage committed on the child he loved so dearly, were agonising in the last degree. In some lines written at the time, he expressed the intensity of his horror and indignation:–

'Oh! the shame, the horror, the misfortune, the awful recollection of a crime that will bring about the ruin of those I love, and send me to the grave! Have I the strength to recall what should be buried for ever in the lowest depths of the earth? The monster, with the help of the wretch he had suborned, climbed into my child's room through the window, and in spite of the efforts of poor Miss Allen satiated on her his savage cruelty . . . I have not the strength to write more. This devil sent from hell for our destruction has had the fiendish cruelty to boast of his crime, and to himself furnish us with its dreadful details in the letters accompanying this, which prove his guilt and may yet send him to the scaffold. In order to

spare my child public dishonour, a thousand deaths, a thousand tortures, I have had to carry out my duties as usual, and give ghastly entertainments! . . . Marie, sweet and gentle victim, you were all that I loved best in the world. Angel of virtue, hope and pride of your family, innocent lamb, treacherously slaughtered, if the world into which you had hardly entered, cast you out, you will ever find a refuge in your father's heart. But even this last hope may fail you; this suffering heart of mine will soon be withered by despair.'

Thoughts such as these, the desire to shield their child from the taint of a disgraceful scandal, decided the General and his wife to keep the outrage that had been perpetrated on Marie a secret from the world. But the persistent malignity of their enemy made it increasingly difficult to confine the knowledge of these events to a few. They followed one another with alarming rapidity. The outrage on Marie had failed to all appearances to glut the desire for revenge and love of mischief of this determined scoundrel.

Later in the morning of the day that had begun with the outrage on Marie de Morell, d'Estouilly received a letter which was clearly designed to bring about a meeting on the field of honour such as had been suggested in the letter left on her chest of drawers by Marie's assailant. It said:—

'You are a wretch and a coward; anybody but you after the letters I have written to you would have called me to account; instead of that you have chosen to go and denounce me to the General. I shall deny everything, for my only purpose has been to torment you, and in that purpose I have succeeded. I am pleased with Ambert, but you, you are only a coward who is afraid of his skin; after having brought disgrace on

your epaulette, you have hoped that by resigning it, people would forget your cowardice. If you had any spirit, you would call me out after a letter like this; but wretch that you are, you daren't.

'Accept the assurance of my contempt; one day I shall brand you with the seal of infamy; we shall see then what you will do.'

This letter was signed 'Emile de la Ron——' It was a direct challenge to d'Estouilly, and as such he accepted it. The signature seemed to leave no doubt as to the identity of the writer. Immediately on receiving it d'Estouilly wrote to La Roncière:—

'SIR,—For some time I have been receiving anonymous letters. I hated to think that an officer could be such a coward as to employ such a means of injuring another. A final letter which I have just received proves beyond all evidence that you are the author of these disgraceful things. You are unworthy of the anger of an honest man, but your epaulette makes it impossible for me to hand you over to the Public Prosecutor. I will do you the honour of crossing swords with you; I will stoop for the moment to your level.

'I have called at your house with my second; will you let me know at what time and in what place I can meet yours? I choose the sword.

'D'ESTOUILLY.

'SAUMUR, *September*, 1834.'

La Roncière expressed the utmost astonishment on receiving this letter and protested passionately his innocence in regard to the authorship of the so-called anonymous letters. To Lieutenant Ambert, a friend of his, who was acting as second to d'Estouilly he said, 'I am very unfortunate; a fatality seems to pursue

me; there is something satanic about it all. I swear that I am absolutely innocent.' Nothing, he added, was easier than to imitate a person's handwriting. 'Write something on a piece of paper,' he said to Ambert, 'and you see I will copy your handwriting then and there.'

D'Estouilly refused to listen to any expostulation on the part of La Roncière; the duel must take place. With some difficulty Lieutenant Bérail was persuaded to act as second for La Roncière. The two opponents met on the banks of the Loire. Victory was with La Roncière. D'Estouilly fell wounded in two places. As he lay bleeding on the ground La Roncière came up to him and took his hand. 'Forget what has passed,' he said, 'I am sorry, but I swear that I am innocent: leave it at that.' D'Estouilly reiterated his absolute conviction of La Roncière's guilt and said that if he would confess it, then all should be forgotten. La Roncière asked if he might have the letters to take to the Public Prosecutor, but his request was refused.

The same evening the anonymous letter writer sent news of the duel to Marie de Morell.

'I am the happiest of men,' he wrote, 'Fortune has smiled on me in the most unlooked for way; you can see how evil prospers in this world. You are the most wretched of beings and the man who was fool enough to be your champion is wellnigh dead; and all this is my handiwork. I am filled with a mad rejoicing: but the thought that gives me most pleasure is that you are now entirely dependent on me; a fearful bond unites us; in a few months' time you will have to come and ask me to give my name to you and another; nothing can save you from this last step in degradation. See where my mad passion has carried me; I have never hated, only despised you, but your mother's contempt for me has made me capable

of anything; let her kneel to me and ask my pardon, and then I will preserve your honour by marrying you. I alone can save you from eternal disgrace. By doing that I shall still be gratifying my revenge, for I know that you love another. Believe what I say.'

It was impossible that matters could remain as they were after the unsatisfactory termination of the duel. D'Estouilly and his friends were determined that, by fair means or foul, La Roncière should be made to confess himself the author of these extraordinary letters. The next day, the 25th, Bérail made a strong effort to induce La Roncière to acknowledge his guilt, but it was unsuccessful. The same day the latter received a letter from Ambert, who wrote:—

'Your affair is becoming public; there is talk of a Council of Honour. . . . Leave the school; I think the General will give you leave. Lose no time for you have many enemies.

'AMBERT.'

'PS.— You can reckon on my discretion. I owe it to your father and our former friendship.'

The statement that there was talk of a Council of Honour was not true, but it served to intimidate La Roncière. He yielded to the pressure put on him and sent to d'Estouilly through Bérail the following confession:—

Considering the material proofs against me, proofs which before a court of law would overwhelm me, it is my duty to think of my family whose honour would be smirched by such an event; my unhappy father after a brilliant career would not survive such a disgrace; if I were to be convicted his last days would be embittered cruelly; therefore, for every possible reason, I rely upon your generosity and hope

that this wretched affair will be buried in oblivion. I repudiate the terms of the letters you have received and, in confessing myself to be the author of them, offer you my excuses; accept them, sir, and be generous and discreet.

It costs me much to make this confession; I have been driven to it by no personal consideration, for my career is ruined; it is for the sake of my family that I have made it; spare them, that is all I have to ask of you, and after what you said yesterday, I think I may rely on you.

'E. DE LA RONCIÈRE,'

'SAUMUR, 25*th September*, 1834.'

To d'Estouilly, and Ambert this half-hearted admission of guilt by La Roncière seemed inadequate and inconclusive. They determined to press for a more definite acknowledgment of the actual authorship of the letters, and to gain that end were prepared to be more unscrupulous. Later in the day of the 25th, d'Estouilly from his bed of sickness wrote thus to La Roncière:—

'Lying wounded as I do, suffering from your infamous conduct, I do not make conditions, I dictate them. You have done well to confess everything, for three experts have recognised your handwriting and five years' imprisonment awaits you. But the confession you made is inadequate. I can place no greater reliance on your promises of to-day than on your feelings of yesterday. For the sake of my own future I demand that you acknowledge yourself to be the author of the anonymous letters sent to the General, to Mme de Morell and to Mlle Marie de Morell. I demand that you confess absolutely to have written to Mlle Marie de Morell a letter signed d'Estouilly, and to me another letter signed

Marie de Morell. I demand that you apply for leave to-day and quit Saumur. As to the silence you ask me to observe, unhappily for you, the affair has already begun to get talked about; it may be that your comrades will take some violent step, from which you would escape by leaving the school. Before finishing I ought to warn you that if ever the least misfortune fall on the family of de Morell and is in any way traceable to you, I shall place before a court of law the two forged signatures which you have written.

'D'ESTOUILLY.'

This letter contained one statement that was a deliberate falsehood. No experts had seen the letters; when they did see them at a later date their opinion was contrary to that represented in this letter. But the menace and threats contained in it effected the purpose of the writer. The same evening La Roncière wrote to d'Estouilly:—

'I thought that my letter of this morning would have satisfied you. You overwhelm me in my misfortune, and you ask me to retract certain letters which you mention. I am ready to do so; may this step on my part bring peace to my family! I declare then that I am the author of the anonymous letters sent to the General, to Mme de Morell and to Mlle Marie de Morell. I declare further that I have written to Mlle de Morell a letter signed d'Estouilly, and to you, sir, another letter signed Marie de Morell. I am going to apply for leave, and shall quit the school to-night. After that I have reason to hope, sir, that you will be satisfied, and that far from seeking to injure any further my unfortunate family, you will do all in your power to see that this affair is spoken of as little as possible.

'I have the honour to sign myself,

'E. DE LA RONCIÈRE.'

Even this acknowledgment of guilt on the part of La Roncière was not ample enough to satisfy the exigencies of d'Estouilly. It was believed that La Roncière had an accomplice in the household of the General in the person of the manservant, Samuel Gilieron. Bérail was sent back to La Roncière to ask him to give up the name of his accomplice. La Roncière refused. 'Though I may,' he said, 'have confessed myself guilty when I am innocent, I am not going to accuse an innocent man.' That night La Roncière left Saumur for La Flèche. From there he wrote to Bérail on September 25th:—

'My dear Bérail, since I left you last night with nothing to think of but my unhappy situation, my poor brain has been at work, and the saddest and unhappiest thoughts have assailed me. What you told me, that d'Estouilly demanded something more of me, fills me with despair. The impossibility of satisfying him prompts me to ask you to use all your influence with him to make him satisfied and not ask of me what must bring about my ruin. Tortured as I am, I count on your good offices in this matter, to send me a word to Paris, *poste restante*. Don't forget my letters, if there are any for me, and give me all the help you can in my unhappy situation.'

During the day of the 25th, Captain Jacquemin had carried to the General the news of La Roncière's confession. The General was holding a review surrounded by his staff. Jacquemin sent him a calling card, with written on it the words: 'La Roncière confesses everything. He asks leave to go away.' As soon as the review was ended the General came up to Jacquemin, afraid that La Roncière might have confessed to the outrage on Marie which he and his wife hoped to keep secret; he asked him

excitedly, 'He confesses! To what does he confess?' His agitation was relieved when Jacquemin told him that it was only the authorship of the anonymous letters that La Roncière had admitted.

From Saumur, La Roncière had gone to La Flèche, and thence to Paris. There he found Samuel Gilieron, who, the day following La Ronciere's departure, had been dismissed from the service of General de Morell. His friend, Annette Rouault, in whose house he had lodged at Saumur, had written telling him of Samuel's dismissal and giving particulars of the coach by which he would travel to Paris. La Roncière met Samuel as he alighted from the coach. 'I want to know,' he asked the servant, 'who is the author of the anonymous letters. I am not rich, but I would give twelve hundred francs to the man who could tell me.' Samuel replied: 'I should like to know that too; and I thought that perhaps you would be able to tell me.' A few days later La Roncière called on a relative of his, a M. de Chélaincourt, a retired cavalry officer. To him he told the story of the anonymous letters and the confession that had been wrung from him. The old officer put a purse and a pistol on the table. If he were guilty, he told La Roncière, let him take the purse and leave the country, or take up the pistol and blow out his brains. La Roncière protested his innocence. He asked M. de Chélaincourt to see Samuel and try if he could to get the truth from him. M. de Chélaincourt consented. He offered Samuel money if he would name the guilty party, even were he La Roncière himself. Samuel could only reply that he knew nothing.

If General de Morell had believed that the departure of La Roncière from Saumur would put an end to his daughter's persecution, he was soon undeceived. The very day that La Roncière quitted Saumur, Mme de Morell received the following letter:—

'You think perhaps that my vengeance is satisfied; not so, Madame, a love like mine, a love despised, can only find satisfaction in much blood, many tears, many torments. I know all that goes on in your house; the foot-baths, the leeches, Miss Allen, everything goes on as usual; precautions are useless, for I have made up my mind to make all known in Paris. It would be very sweet of you if you would hasten your departure, it would please me very much. I hoped that what I said to your daughter this morning would have had that effect; I am told that since then she has been very pale and tearful. I really had one dreadful moment when I thought that I had killed her and so would have failed in my object; I should not then have done you all the harm you have done me. Your daughter will live, but no life could be more awful than hers will be; for even if she does not become pregnant, think what it is for a young and pure heart, a heart which is loving for the first time, for I have no doubt of her feelings towards M. d'Es——, to find itself soiled by a wretch like me, and no longer be fit to love; I shudder at the thought. But you, it is you who have done all the harm.

'E. DE LA R.'

In spite of her terrible experience of the night of September 23rd, Marie de Morell was able five days later to take part in and enjoy the ball and festivities which marked the conclusion of the annual inspection at Saumur. Nothing but a rather heightened colour showed any trace of the terrible ordeal through which she had passed.

For a fortnight the enemy was silent. But on October 12th, he once again addressed Madame de Morell:—

'Fifteen days of quiet may have made you think that

I was repentant and ashamed and that you were never to hear from me again; don't deceive yourself; I know all that goes on in your home; I know your daughter's sufferings; briefly, I am in correspondence with some one in your house. In order that you may not know where I am, I have sent this letter through that person telling them to put it in the post at Saumur. I know what revenge you are planning against me; you may force me to leave France; but even then my rage will pursue you with greater fury; my relations with desperate men, men with whom I have formed a kind of association, give me the means of pursuing you everywhere, in every country.'

Here we seem to be reminded of that mysterious society of the 'Bared Arms,' which as early as 1833 had threatened the peace of the family of de Morell. The writer goes on:—

'I am waiting impatiently your departure from Saumur, where your husband's high position makes it difficult for me to begin. Recollect that you have no longer the right to busy yourself with my threats. There would be one way, however, of averting the storm which gathers over your head; I pointed it out to you in my last letter; I would be willing to marry your daughter; my melancholy situation would make it impossible for me to oppose what must be the ardent desire of you all. I must even confess that such was my original plan; I hoped first of all to compromise her with M. d'Estouilly, thinking that he would boast of his success and show his letter about. I reckoned on defending her in order to put you under an obligation to me. As he did not lend himself to this, I have had to resort to other means. The love that I felt for you the very first time I saw you, having been increased and intensified by your insolent

contempt, self-interest and revenge have done their utmost. Now I am absolutely determined to satisfy the one and the other. I have had one moment of anxiety; my correspondent wrote to me that you and your husband had been heard discussing a marriage; I feared lest your plan might be to marry your daughter quickly before the end. I have learnt since that there was nothing of the kind. Besides, I should have thought these were things that a father, however greedy; a mother, however much of a coquette, would be ashamed to do, even to preserve their daughter from disgrace; but it would be the height of folly if, supposing your daughter to consent, you refused to give her to me (with a good fine dowry, of course). Your crime would in such a case be even worse than mine. If I have robbed her of her honour, you refuse to give it back to her, when you could do so by the sacrifice of money.

'Think, what do you mean to do the day that all will be made public? You can yet by means of me be happy and at peace.

'E. R.'

Receiving no reply to his proposal, the writer of the letters became more menacing in his tone. On October 21st, almost a month from the date of the outrage which Marie de Morell said had been perpetrated on her, that young lady came out of a closet adjoining her bedroom, and fell fainting to the ground, holding in her clenched hand a piece of paper. On the paper was written —

'Whilst you think yourselves safe, you are about to suffer the greatest misfortunes; in a few months' time, those you love best in the world, your father, mother, and M. d'Estouilly will have ceased to exist; you have refused me; I shall avenge myself first on him.

'E. R.'

On coming to herself Marie de Morell cried out: 'The red man! The paper! They are murdering my father and mother!' For two days she lay in a state of nervous prostration, at one time so serious that extreme unction was administered to her.

Two days later a letter was received by Madame de Morell which at length obliged the General to take action. It ran:—

'The malice with which I am pursued will be cruelly avenged. I know all your treacherous proceedings, you may be sure of that; try to do the same.

The man in your home I have won over will help me all he can, and four people in this world will learn what a man can do who is driven to extremity. I have already experienced the joy of steeping my hands in the blood of two of you. As we are now, there can be no possible hope of compromise, it is no good pretending as much. I have murderously attacked your daughter, my intention was to give her a dreadful disease in consequence of which she would have died in awful torment; I wounded her with a knife in a certain part of her body. She re-animated my courage by crying out, 'If my poor mother could hear me!' thinking that if she had told her all that had happened, she could not fail to believe that I had enjoyed her utmost favours. I wished to profit by such a misunderstanding in order to secure a fortune which I need badly. I was sure that I should find my proposal accepted with gratitude; I do not believe that M. de Morell is miser enough, or you coquette enough, not to have acquainted your daughter with my proposal; it will be rejected for the sake of the wretch who foils all my plans. Now it is nothing but revenge, revenge, blood, blood! Your powerful protector, M. Gisquet, will be able to protect you no longer. I shall begin

by flooding your house with letters; at Paris death awaits you!'

M. Gisquet was the Prefect of Police and a friend of General de Morell's. At the urgent solicitation of his wife the General left for Paris the day this last letter was received. He went to the Public Prosecutor, placed all the anonymous correspondence in his hands, as well as his own lament uttered the day after the outrage on his child, and asked for the arrest of La Roncière. On October 28th, as he was talking to a brother officer in the Rue Saint-Honoré, La Roncière was arrested. He was taken to prison and placed in solitary confinement.

But even stone walls and iron bars could not, to all appearances, suppress his epistolary energy. On November 28th, just a month after his imprisonment, M. d'Estouilly received at Saumur a letter signed 'E. de la Ronsière'; presumably solitary confinement had deprived La Roncière of the power of spelling his own name correctly. The letter was enclosed in the following note:—

'Sir,—I received yesterday a letter from M. de la Roncière, which, as he does not know your address, he asks me to convey to you, which I have the honour to do.

'Your servant,

'Victoire Moyert.'

Who was Victoire Moyert? Why should La Roncière profess not to know d'Estouilly's address? In any case 'Saumur' would have been quite sufficient address for an officer quartered there. The letter said:—

'PARIS, *Sunday*.

'From the depth of my prison, under the shadow of an accusation that will send me to the scaffold, I dare to ask your pity and beg it on my knees. I beseech you by all you hold sacred to spare me in your evidence. Having told many people in Saumur what happened on the eve of our duel, I fear that their indiscretion may have brought this to your ears, and that you are nursing a plan for revenging yourself on me; my terrible situation should disarm all hatred. Besides, you must know that if I have committed a murderous assault, you are the cause of it. I was in love with Mlle de Morell and I entered her room with the intention of murdering her, but as I threw myself on her to stifle her cries I wanted to make her tell me that she did not love you. In spite of threats and blows she would not answer a word. In my rage I gave her a dreadful wound with a knife. The noise I made having roused the person sleeping in the next room, I was obliged to flee without achieving my purpose. When I reached Paris, I got the maid, whose utmost favours I had enjoyed whilst staying at Saumur, to convey a note to Mlle de Morell, in which I threatened your life. I am told that the mere sight of this paper gave her an attack of brain fever which nearly killed her. 'I am still in touch with a servant in the house, who wrote me yesterday that her parents had discovered the cause of her illness, had blamed her severely and taken away from her a certain drawing, and that since our duel, which nearly killed her with grief, she has been in a very serious state of health.

I have confessed all to you; I can only ask pardon for my crimes. In the name of my father's wounds, his gray hairs, spare me in your evidence. I rely so confidently on your honour that I need not ask you to keep this letter to yourself; it would only add

another to the proofs against me which are already so numerous. My only means of defence is to deny everything. Don't ruin me. I rely on you, burn this letter.

'E. DE LA RONCIÈRE.'

The last of this singular series of letters was delivered with sensational audacity. Early in December, Madame de Morell and her daughter had left Saumur for Falaise in Normandy, where it was hoped that the rest and a change from the distressing associations of the garrison town would restore Marie's health. They remained in Normandy about three weeks. On December 22nd, they left Falaise for Paris. Between nine and ten o'clock the following evening as the carriage in which they travelled was nearing the General's house in the Rue de Bellechasse, Marie, whose right arm was outside the window, cried out, 'They are breaking my arm!' She drew it back into the carriage and at the same time a ball of paper fell on her knees. Marie said that she had felt a blow on her arm from a stick, her wrist seized and her arm pushed back into the carriage. Madame de Morell looked out of the window and thought she saw a woman in a bonnet, disappearing hurriedly in the darkness. The ball of paper unrolled was found to be two sheets of paper; on one was written 'Madame de Morell. Very important'; on the other:—

'I feel inclined to do you a great service. I have the honour to belong to that delightful gathering of friends who pay court to the religious lady who lives at the corner of the Rue Saint-Dominique. I am one of her favourites, and, as the friends of our friends are our friends, I want to tell you what they say about you. Listen. The less malicious say that if you had been a good mother, you would have made the sacrifice

of marrying your daughter to her seducer whom you are pleased to call her assailant, instead of exposing her name to contempt. The more malicious say that the seducer was not the son of a lieutenant-general, but a manservant; these last are the more numerous. Those kindly disposed say: If the outrage really took place, and Madame de Morell has any heart, she will marry her daughter before three months are passed so as to put an end to the disgraceful slanders that are uttered about this poor young girl. Such are the things that are said about you in the modern Babylon.'

It was suggested that the woman in the bonnet who had flung the note into the carriage was Julie Génier, a maidservant in the house of the General, who had been sent to Paris two days before Madame de Morell left Falaise, in order to prepare for the arrival of the family. Though able to prove an undisputed alibi, Julie Génier was arrested. The other servant, Samuel Gilieron, had already joined La Roncière in prison.

In the meantime the preliminary investigation into the case against La Roncière had commenced. The first interview between the prisoner and the Examining Magistrate was dramatic. Abruptly the Judge said to him: 'You are accused of the attempted murder of Marie de Morell.' At the word murder, La Roncière started to his feet, overturning the chair in which he had been sitting. 'What do you mean?' he asked. 'You have admitted it yourself,' replied the Judge, 'in letters signed with your initials.' 'I!' exclaimed La Roncière, 'I have said that I wanted to murder Mlle de Morell?' 'You have confessed,' said the Judge, 'that you are the author of certain letters, some anonymous, some signed with your initials, certain of them addressed to one of your comrades, M. d'Estouilly, the others to General de Morell, his wife, and daughter. In letters that are

in the same handwriting as those you have admitted to be yours, you describe your crime with revolting details and appear to glory in it.' 'I have never written such letters,' replied La Roncière, 'I see I have been shamefully trapped.' The letters having been shown to him, he said, 'But they are infamous, mad! That I should have put my initials at the foot of such abominations! Ah, sir, I believed that the letters of which I was asked to confess myself the author, were some foolish hoax, but I could never have been so utterly devoid of sense as to admit myself to be the author of such disgraceful letters as these; if I had, I should have deserved to be shut up as a madman.' It must be remembered that La Roncière at the time of his confession had seen only one of the letters which he was accused of having written, nor, if he were innocent, could he have heard of the nocturnal outrage on Marie de Morell which, until obliged to divulge it to the judge, her family had kept a profound secret. But, confronted with La Roncière, Marie de Morell without hesitation identified him as her assailant. 'It is impossible,' protested the prisoner, 'you cannot have recognised me, for it was not I. I was at home that night and can prove it.' 'What do you say to that, mademoiselle?' asked the judge. Marie de Morell repeated her previous statement: 'He is the man!'

And in the eyes of the majority of the public La Roncière was the man. From the very outset of the case sympathy was all with the innocent girl, victim of a cruel outrage on the part of a libertine and a scoundrel. La Roncière did not improve his position in the public estimation by the nature of his defence. He said that he believed himself to be the victim of a plot, that the attempted outrage on Marie de Morell was a pure invention, her illnesses simulated. He even suggested that she had carried on an intrigue with

d'Estouilly and that her whole story was concocted by her family for the purpose of accounting for the results of their guilty intimacy. Nor was the case of La Roncière advanced in the public estimation by the result of a commission sent to Saumur to inquire into his character and antecedents. Colonel Saint-Victor, the second in command under General de Morell, drew up a report on the moral character of the Lieutenant. It was disastrous. Wherever he had been stationed he had seduced wives and killed their husbands in duels. In one case the husband had committed suicide, the wife suffocated herself, the father died of grief. He had abducted Mélanie Lair, the mistress he had brought with him to Saumur. There he had been in the habit of taking his meals at the Hotel de l'Europe. The proprietress of the hotel having repelled his improper overtures, he had revenged himself by writing her husband anonymous letters of the most offensive character, which had finally obliged the unfortunate couple to leave the town.

It was nothing to those who already believed in the guilt of La Roncière that not one of the charges made in Colonel Saint-Victor's report could be substantiated. There was no word of truth in the stories of his duels, the suicides and abductions. It was true that Mélanie Lair had been his mistress, but there had been no question of abduction. It was true that the proprietor of the Hotel de l'Europe at Saumur had received anonymous letters, but he had never attributed them to La Roncière. Beyond a habit of getting into debt and a certain lightness of character, the conduct of La Roncière had differed little from that of the ordinary officer of the day. But all this mattered little. To a large section of the public La Roncière was a monster of wickedness, his victim a model of innocence. One legal writer has said that in reading the facts of La

Roncière's case, he got an 'irritating impression of general aberration.'

Certainly, as the case went on, men's sanity and judgment seemed to forsake them in presence of the interesting and sympathetic victim of an alleged cruel outrage and fiendish persecution. Even the report of the experts in handwriting, appointed by the magistrate to examine the anonymous letters and compare them with the handwriting of La Roncière and that of Marie de Morell, availed but little to stem the tide of prejudice. Of the four experts all were agreed that the same hand had written all the letters, that it was not the hand of La Roncière, and that the letter, sent to d'Estouilly and signed Marie de Morell, was written by a woman. Two went further and declared that not only were none of the letters in the handwriting of La Roncière, but that the letter to d'Estouilly, signed Marie de Morell, and the note from Victoire Moyert were both clearly in the handwriting of Marie de Morell, and that the handwriting of the eighteen other letters, though disguised, so closely resembled that of Marie de Morell that they likewise should be attributed to her.

This report of the experts raised a new question. Could it be that La Roncière was the innocent victim of a wicked girl, who out of pure love of mischief had deliberately written shocking letters, invented a cruel accusation and was now ready to allow an innocent man to suffer perhaps capital punishment for an imaginary crime? To this question the great majority of the public would appear to have answered that such a thing was impossible, that to imagine a girl of good family, well brought up and religiously educated, capable of such an infamy was utterly beyond the bounds of all probability; that, unreasonable and eccentric as his proceedings may appear to have been, the more likely explanation was that La Roncière was

a satanic monster, a slave to evil passions, delighting in the torture of a pure and innocent girl. And had he not confessed his guilt?

The preliminary investigation into the case lasted eight months. It was not until June 1835, that La Roncière and the two servants were sent for trial before the Paris Assize Court. The trial promised to be an exciting contest. It was to be a fight to the death between the party of La Roncière and that of Marie de Morell. For such a fight the French criminal procedure offered every facility. In criminal cases the injured party is allowed to intervene, either personally, or, in a case of murder, by the nearest of kin, and claim as *partie civile* damages against the offender. They are represented by counsel, and so it often happens that the prosecution in a criminal case finds its most powerful ally in the advocate who is pleading for the injured party. Where the advocate is an able one, he may be often more successful than the official representative of the prosecution in obtaining a conviction. The family of de Morell as *partie civile* against La Roncière were determined that their case should lose nothing for want of powerful advocacy. They entrusted their interests to two of the leading advocates of the day, Odilon Barrot and the great Berryer. Odilon Barrot is perhaps better known to history as a not very successful statesman. Loyal and honest, he was at the same time inclined to be solemn and ineffective. 'There is no man' said a friend of his, 'who thinks so deeply—of nothing!' As an advocate, Odilon Barrot was subtle in argument, sophistical if need be, with a supreme confidence in himself that was not shaken even by facts. His colleague, Berryer, may perhaps be reckoned the greatest French advocate of the nineteenth century, by some held to be the greatest French orator since Mirabeau. Noble in character and physique, gifted

with a wonderful voice and the power to use it to the best effect there was something almost irresistible in the *élan* of his genius, when once his faith and sympathy were aroused in the cause he pleaded. 'He only pleaded,' wrote an ardent friend of his, 'causes which commended themselves to his conscience or compassion.' In the course of a case, in which by his generous efforts he procured the reversal of a gross miscarriage of justice, he said, in replying to certain compliments paid him by his opponent, 'No, I have no ability, I know myself; I know what is in me. I am naturally impressionable and, when I am convinced, I cannot help speaking with passion; but it is not ability, no, it is conviction.' Berryer was convinced that Marie de Morell was a cruelly injured girl, La Roncière a villain; to sustain that belief all his lofty and passionate eloquence was placed at the service of the *partie civile*.

Whatever their differences or difficulties in the past, General de la Roncière forgot all these in his desire to prove the innocence of his son, and secure for him the best possible defence in the approaching struggle. He was satisfied that his son, with all his faults and weaknesses, was incapable of the abominable conduct of the writer of the letter and the alleged assailant of Marie de Morell. He placed his case first in the hands of Philip Dupin, a distinguished lawyer, at that time holding the honourable post of 'bâtonnier,' or president of the Order of Advocates. For one month Dupin kept the papers, and then three weeks before the trial returned them saying that he could not undertake a case which did not seem to him to admit of defence. Such extraordinary conduct, so singular an opinion on the part of a man at the head of his profession go to prove the strength of the prejudice against La Roncière and the powerful influence of those who were seeking to prove his guilt.

In his desperation General de la Roncière turned to a man, younger, but one whose reputation at the bar and particularly at the bar of the Assize Court, was in a sense unequalled. Of the three advocates engaged in the case Chaix d'Est Ange, as advocate pure and simple, was probably the most consummate. 'To a gift of passionate eloquence,' says one writer, 'more superficial though often just as persuasive as that of Berryer, he added a sureness of vision, a quickness of understanding which enabled him to appreciate at once the general aspect and the actual details of a case.' His words, his effects as a speaker were above all spontaneous. 'I study my cases,' he said of himself, 'but I do not prepare my speeches. All men will do me that justice; some even make it a reproach. I have not the advantage that some of us have of being able to quietly prepare cold and cutting shafts of malice, polish up witticisms delivered with apparent spontaneity and more or less success. No! I have too much heart and too little wit; my words come too quickly to enable me to indulge in those feats of memory which impress me so little.' It was this very spontaneity, this inspiration of the moment that gave at times to the eloquence of Chaix d'Est Ange such overwhelming force. He is probably the only advocate who, by the mere power of his eloquence, can claim to have wrung from a guilty man a confession of his crime. This feat he had performed in 1831, at the trial of one Benoit, charged with the murder of a companion in debauchery, and suspected also of having murdered his mother. So vividly did Chaix d'Est Ange, appearing for the *partie civile*, picture the conduct of the murderer on the night of his mother's death, his refusal to look at her body, the unspeakable terror which prevented him from entering the room in which his dead mother lay, 'as though at the sight of him the corpse would suddenly come to life again and,

raising its arm in one last effort, points with an accusing finger at the cowering parricide,' so tremendous was the effect of the words, the voice, the gesture of the advocate that the guilty man sank back in the dock and gasped out 'Ah! God! My mother! I! I! It is I!' Such was the advocate who was to defend La Roncière. His past successes gave good hope that, even in the face of the prejudice against his client, he might succeed in persuading a jury that La Roncière was neither the writer of the anonymous letters, nor the perpetrator of the outrage on Marie de Morell.

That prejudice was fed and encouraged by an act of injustice on the part of a newspaper, of which shortly before his trial La Roncière was made the victim. The *Gazette des Tribunaux*, the leading legal journal of Paris, obtained by some means a copy of the Act of Accusation against La Roncière, and a fortnight before the opening of the Assizes published it in its columns. It introduced the document to its readers in these words:—

'On Monday, June 29th, will commence the trial of a case which will occupy many sittings of the court, and is destined to take a notable place in our judicial records. The social rank of the prisoner, son of a Lieutenant-General, and nephew of a peer of France; the character of the crime and the refinement of perversity with which it was conceived; the dreadful audacity with which it was accomplished; the legitimate and sympathetic interest felt for a girl of sixteen, whose reason is hardly yet recovered from the shock of this nocturnal outrage, and whose evidence can only be heard at a night sitting of the court, because it is only after midnight that the unhappy girl enjoys a few lucid moments; the presence at the trial of the victim's family as *partie civile*; the anonymous letters with which the house of General de Morell was

inundated, the romantic and mysterious circumstances that surrounded them, and the astonishing opinion of the experts; all these things combine to excite the keenest interest on the part of the public and make this criminal trial noteworthy and remarkable.'

After this extraordinary exordium in which the guilt of the prisoner was assumed, followed the Act of Accusation, in which his guilt was treated as established and the story told by Marie de Morell implicitly accepted. Though intended to be an indictment, the Act of Accusation in France is nothing more than an opening speech for the prosecution, only too frequently unscrupulous and misleading. That in the case of La Roncière was no exception to the rule. Facts were stated against him of which no proof was given at the trial; two women in Saumur were described as his mistresses; the anonymous letters at the Hotel de l'Europe were attributed to him. The story of Marie de Morell was accepted and related with full dramatic effect. The statement of the handwriting experts in favour of La Roncière was discounted. The suggestion that the letters had been written by Marie de Morell was opposed by the 'moral impossibility' of considering her as their author.

Nothing could have created greater prejudice against La Roncière than the premature publication of this specious indictment, which was to remain for a fortnight unanswered, the case for the defence unheard. La Roncière wrote from prison to the editor of the newspaper protesting against the publication:—

'It is a regrettable precedent that allows the publication of an Act of Accusation a fortnight before the trial, and leaves the accused person for so long a

time under the weight of an accusation to which, whether just or not, he has no means of replying. It seems to me that in a case so serious, the interests of the defendant should be considered before the curiosity of the public. As to the particular charge made against me and so cleverly devised, it would require a whole speech for the defence to answer it. I will content myself with saying that this romance will fall to pieces and that since this Act of Accusation has been published, no one awaits more eagerly than I and my family the day of trial. There is nothing astonishing as you would suggest about the report of the experts; what is astonishing is that every day men are being condemned for forgery by the Assize Court on the evidence of such experts, and that to-day, when their investigations into a serious case have been exhaustive, they should be made light of by you and the prosecution. When the time comes everything will be tested in the broad light of a court of justice, and I hope that my situation as an accused person will entitle me to that impartiality of treatment which, in spite of the influence of my opponents, the press is accustomed to observe in criminal cases.

'E. DE LA RONCIÈRE.'

The *Gazette des Tribunaux* did not insert La Roncière's letter, but it appeared in other newspapers. Accordingly, the *Gazette* thought fit to justify its attitude. They wrote that in publishing the Act of Accusation they had merely followed their usual custom and that until it had been placed in their hands they had refrained, unlike many other papers, from publishing any details of the case. Their reflections on the case, of which M. de la Roncière had complained, had been limited to their description of the report of the handwriting experts as astonishing, an expression of opinion which did not appear to them

to justify M. de La Roncière in describing the whole Act of Accusation as a 'romance.'

II

THE TRIAL OF LA RONCIÈRE

AND so, in an atmosphere charged with bitterness and passion, commenced the trial of a case that of all others called for close and passionless investigation. It was to the onlookers the trial of Marie de Morell as much as that of La Roncière. On her story the prosecution relied. That story, before it could be accepted, demanded a rigorous and searching examination. What opportunity would the trial afford for testing its validity? On the strength of her evidence, La Roncière was charged with an attempted outrage on Marie de Morell, at that time a capital offence, and with maliciously wounding her; the two servants with aiding and abetting him in his felonious purpose. If the girl's evidence were true, a foul enough plot; if false, as diabolical a piece of mischief as ever entered a young person's head.

To seek the solution of this problem all Paris had assembled in the Assize Court on Monday, June 29th, 1835. Leaders of society, soldiers, judges, artists, among them Victor Hugo, made up the expectant audience. The presiding judge, M. Ferey, formerly a pupil of Berryer, was remarkable as a judge of assize for the dignity and impartiality with which he conducted a criminal trial. There was little in the appearance of the three prisoners to suggest the horrid charge brought against them. La Roncière is described as a pleasant-looking young man, distinguished in his bearing, fashionably attired, and

wearing a slight moustache. Beneath him sat his father, the General, who had lost an arm in the service of his country; on his breast he wore the Legion of Honour. 'Courage my son,' he said, 'you have nothing to fear; you are innocent; bear yourself like a man!'

Immediately after the reading of the Act of Accusation an incident occurred, which seemed to render it doubtful whether the evidence of Marie de Morell would be given under conditions favourable to such a strict examination of it, as the circumstances of the case demanded. Two doctors were called before the court who stated that during the last three days the young lady had been subject to periodical attacks of a nervous character, occurring four times daily, one lasting from four o'clock in the morning till six o'clock in the evening, another from eight to a quarter-past ten, and a third from eleven until midnight. In their opinion midnight would be best time at which to hear her evidence. It was decided that she should be called at that hour. It is a curious circumstance that the most remarkable incidents in the alleged persecution of Marie de Morell by La Roncière had occurred periodically during the last days of the month. At the end of August took place the incident of their first meeting at the dinner-table; at the end of September the alleged outrage; at the end of October the dramatic discovery of the letter in the closet; at the end of December the letter thrown into the carriage; and now at the end of June, Marie de Morell is found to be in a state of nervous excitement which only permits of brief intervals during which her condition is sufficiently normal to allow her to be called as a witness.

The opening of the President's interrogatory of La Roncière dealt with his career previous to his coming to Saumur. Nothing was proved against him

except a certain lightness and insubordination in conduct and a habit of getting into debt. Asked as to his rudeness towards Marie de Morell at their first meeting, he protested as a man of the world against the likelihood of such behaviour on his part, and of the General having, after such behaviour, invited him again to his house. Asked to explain the fact of the writer of the first letter signed 'E. de la R,' having said that he would be in front of the General's house the same day, and the General looking out of the window immediately after the receipt of the letter and seeing La Roncière on the bridge, he said: 'There was nothing very extraordinary in that; after our work we used to go for a walk, and we had nowhere else to walk except on the bridge of Saumur.' He said that he could not otherwise explain the coincidence, but that, if he had written such a letter, he should not have been such a fool as to have signed it.

The President came to the incident of September 21st, when General de Morell, after a number of anonymous letters had been received by the members of his family, had sent for La Roncière during a party that he was giving and dismissed him from his house.

Q. You said nothing in reply?

A. No, sir.

Q. What! You did not ask for any explanation?

A. My military rank made that impossible

Q. You were not on service at the time; you were in a drawing-room; you could have asked perfectly politely for an explanation and have got it.

A. The scene did not take place in the drawing-room, but in the ante-room in presence of Captain Jacquemin. I counted on seeing the General the next day and asking for an explanation.

Q. But the very privacy of the occasion made it

easier for you to go into the whole question of your expulsion and ask the reason of it.

A. Certainly I might have done so; I did not, because I was afraid a discussion might attract the attention of the people in the card-room.

Q. Did you next day ask the General for an explanation?

A. No, sir. M. Jacquemin gave it me. He told me that I was believed to be the author of the anonymous letters, that the General did not wish to discuss the matter with me, and that if he did it would be in the presence of the Minister of War, my father, and General Préval.

Q. Did you write to the General?

A. No, Captain Jacquemin advised me not to, and told me that he would himself convey to the General the explanations I had given him.

On the night of the 23rd, that of the attempted outrage on Marie de Moreil, the General had seen La Roncière at the theatre. After the play La Roncière said that he had gone home to his lodgings in the Rue Saint-Nicolas.

Q. Who lived in the house?

A. The landlord and Madame Rouault and her two daughters.

Q. Had you been intimate with Elisa Rouault?

A. No.

Q. With Annette Rouault?

A. No.

Q. Was the house-door shut at night?

A. Yes.

Q. I suppose they took care to ascertain first whether the lodgers were all in?

A. Yes; often they used to come up to my room to see if I had come in.

Q. When you got home, was Elisa Rouault at home?

A. She was at the window and told me to shut the door.

Q. How did you shut it?

A. By drawing the bolt.

No evidence was called by the prosecution to support the allegation of any intimacy between La Roncière and the three women mentioned by the judge.

La Roncière denied that he was the man alleged to have entered the bedroom of Marie de Morell on the night of the 23rd.

Q. How then could Mlle de Morell have given the actual words used by a person whom she recognised as you?

A. I don't know.

Q. You were confronted with Mlle de Morell during the preliminary investigation; she stated positively that she recognised you.

A. That is not surprising; she had seen me at her father's house and knew me well.

Q. She was warned that she was making a very serious charge. But she persisted in it. How could she have made such a charge if you were not the man?

A. I cannot tell you. I can only swear that I was not the man.

La Roncière was greatly distressed when the President suggested that he had not fought fairly in the duel with d'Estouilly. The suggestion was quite unfounded and repudiated later by those who had been present at the encounter. But that did not prevent its being introduced into the proceedings. It served to dissolve La Roncière in tears and led to a moving embrace between father and son.

The President asked La Roncière to explain his subsequent confessions of the authorship of the anonymous letters.

Q. How is it that, after having shown considerable firmness, you calmly and deliberately admitted yourself guilty of such conduct?

A. I thought I was lost; they told me that experts had declared the letters to be in my handwriting. Gentlemen (turning to the jury, his voice broken with sobs) think of my father, his declining days darkened by such a charge brought against his son; I thought of his grief if the case were put in the hands of the police; I wrote that letter to avoid being brought into court. I feared to distress my father's peace of mind, I who had already caused him so much trouble. But it was not I who wrote those letters.

Q. You would have best considered your father and his peace of mind by going straight to him and not by declaring yourself guilty, if you were really innocent.

A. I hoped that my confession would not be made public and that in time the real writer of the letters would be discovered.

Q. M. d'Estouilly, not satisfied with your first letter of confession, insisted that you should admit the authorship of all the letters, and you did so.

A. Yes, I saw myself threatened with legal proceedings; I was afraid that my first confession would be sufficient to convict me; that and the other reasons which I have given you prompted me to write the second letter.

Q. It only served to aggravate your position. A first confession is followed by one still more astonishing, and all the more so because you knew already that it was the anonymous letters that had brought about your expulsion from the General's house?

A. I did not know the contents of the letters; I thought they were trifling in character; if I had known that they were full of such horrible things,

do you think that I would ever have admitted myself to be the author of them?

Q. You must have thought them very serious to have caused the General to order you out of his house?

A. Any anonymous letters, whatever their contents, are sufficient to turn a man out of any decent house.

The letters, alleged to have been written by La Roncière after his imprisonment, he characterised as only worthy of a lunatic. A letter written to Captain Jacquemin, in which La Roncière had suggested that the accusation made against him by the parents of Marie de Morell was an attempt to account for their daughter's condition, led the President to ask the prisoner:—

Q. Was it Samuel who told you that Mlle de Morell was in an interesting condition?

A. No, but he had told me of frequent quarrels and disputes between her and her mother on the subject of her behaviour.

Q. What connection could there be between these quarrels and such a condition?

A. There might be some.

The servant, Samuel, was the next of the prisoners to be interrogated by the President. He answered his questions quietly and calmly. He denied that it was he who had taken the anonymous letters into the General's house:

Q. Whom do you suspect of having taken them there?

A. I don't want to suspect any one, lest I do them an injustice; I might make a mistake about them just as they have made a mistake about me.

Q. Did you not say that if you were confronted with Mlle de Morell, you would make her confess that it was she?

A. Yes, I said that, because I believed it. But

to-day when I see what a mistake is being made in accusing me, I am afraid to accuse any one myself lest I make the same mistake.

The President suggested that it was from the attic above Marie de Morell's room, in which Samuel slept, that the rope ladder had been suspended by means of which La Roncière had obtained entrance to her chamber on the night of the outrage. Samuel replied that on that night, and for two days previous, he had been ill in bed, and when asked how it was that on the following day he looked pale and exhausted, he explained the fact by his illness.

The maid, Julie Génier, said that she had never met La Roncière or had anything whatever to do with him, until she saw him after her arrest. Mlle de Morell had pointed him out to her on one occasion and said to her, 'There is M. de la Roncière,' in such a way as to suggest to the girl that she should try to 'make a conquest of him.' She described Marie de Morell as gay, singing and joking at the ball which she attended four days after the outrage. She said that Marie de Morell appeared to take a great interest in M. d'Estouilly and after the duel had asked anxiously for news of him. Asked whether she was the woman in the bonnet, who had thrown the letter into the carriage in Paris, she said that she had never worn a bonnet, and was in another part of Paris at the time.

It was five o'clock in the evening when the interrogatories of the prisoners were concluded. The court then adjourned until eight o'clock the same evening. At that hour the night sitting commenced with the hearing of the witnesses for the prosecution. General de Morell, his wife, and Miss Allen were the first to be called. They all gave their evidence in low voices and were treated with the utmost consideration by the President. There was no attempt at cross-examination of any kind. Their evidence added little

or nothing to the facts already given. The General said that the anonymous letters emanating from the band of the 'Bared-Arms,' which had been received in his house in 1833 appeared to be in the same handwriting, though more disguised, as those received at Saumur.

Madame de Morell was questioned as to the morning following the outrage:—

Q. At what time did you wake on the morning of September 24th?

A. It was daylight but I don't know the time.

Q. Didn't you rebuke Miss Allen for waiting so long before rousing you, and what did she say?

A. I did rebuke her, but she told me that she dared not leave Marie alone in the state in which she was; that fear, terror had restrained her.

Q. Didn't you think it extraordinary that Miss Allen had heard nothing, the entrance of the stranger, the bolting of the door, your daughter's cries; had heard nothing till it was all over?

A. Miss Allen sleeps very heavily.

Asked whether she had tried to find out from her daughter the exact nature of the outrage perpetrated on her, Madame de Morell replied: 'Think! Only sixteen years of age—the nature of her bringing up—all these things obliged me to be very careful—I respected her youth.'

Q. Did your daughter tell you of any act of violence committed on her?

A. She spoke to me of bites, bruises, and scratches.

Q. Did you examine them for yourself?

A. Only in one place—the arm.

Q. What was there on the arm?

A. A tear, a bite.

Q. When did your daughter tell you of the other acts of violence?

A. Three weeks after. One evening in the drawing-room she began to cry, and asked me to forgive her for her silence; she said that violence had been done her that night, cuts with a knife inflicted on her which had caused the blood I had noticed on the morning of the 24th.

Q. To what had you attributed that blood?

A. I thought it had come from her mouth.

Q. Did you at once call in a medical man?

A. No.

Q. Did you tell Miss Allen of these injuries?

A. No.

Miss Allen, who is described as very pretty and giving her evidence with 'English prudery,' said that on the night of September 23rd she had been waked by groans and what seemed broken voices in the room adjoining hers: 'I tried to open the door which in a few minutes yielded to my efforts.'

Q. When you entered the room did you see any one leaving it?

A. No one.

Q. Did you see a rope ladder at the window or the trace of any one who had got out of it?

A. I did not look as I came into the room, but afterwards I looked and saw nothing.

Q. What was the position of Mlle de Morell when you came in?

A. She was lying on the floor bleeding; she had a cord round her body and a handkerchief round her neck.

Q. Had she any bruises?

A. Yes.

Q. And blood on her face?

A. Yes, sir, and on her fichu.

Q. Had she her nightdress on?

A. No.

Q. Had she wounds, bites, or bruises?

A. Yes, chiefly on the wrist.

Q. Were the injuries considerable?

A. No, sir, there were the marks of teeth, but they had not penetrated deep.

Q. Did you get a light?

A. No, it was bright moonlight.

Q. Was the moonlight strong enough to show you the bites and bruises?

A. I did not see them by the light of the moon, I saw them next day.

Miss Allen said that the moment she came into the room Marie told her that her assailant was La Roncière. Asked why in the preliminary investigation, she had said that Marie had told her that she *believed* him to be La Roncière, she replied that she must have expressed herself badly. Asked why, on hearing of the outrage, she had not immediately roused the house, she said that she had never thought of it.

At a quarter past eleven the court adjourned until midnight. At that hour Marie de Morell, leaning on the arm of an elderly lady, entered the court and advanced to a large arm-chair placed there for her convenience.

The President had previously invited the spectators to receive her without movement of any kind. 'We hope,' he said, 'that under the circumstances curiosity will give way before the respect due to her situation.' Her beauty is described as remarkable. Slowly but quite calmly she faced the expectant audience, and in a low voice, firm and self-possessed, answered the questions of the presiding judge. She described the assault on her:—

'I was asleep when a sudden noise roused me; it was the breaking of a pane of glass. Turning round, I heard a man jump into my room. He was wearing an undress cap. Positively and immediately I saw him to be M. de la Roncière. He tore off my nightdress,

tied a handkerchief round my neck and a cord round my body. He said he had come to revenge himself. He struck me blows on my arms and legs, bit me, trampled on me. All the time he said that he was revenging himself. At last my stifled cries and groans were heard. Miss Allen was striking and pushing at the door. M. de la Roncière escaped by the way he came. I heard him say as he went away, "That is enough for her." I managed to open my eyes which had been shut, and saw that he had gone. I heard him say quite distinctly "Hold tight."'

The President asked her solemnly, 'Are you sure that the man who entered your room was La Roncière?' 'I am quite sure it was he,' was the immediate answer. The President reminded the witness that she had described the cap worn by La Roncière as red, whereas the Lancer regiment to which he belonged was the only one in the service which wore a blue cap. 'I may have made a mistake,' she replied. The President told her to look well at La Roncière and say if she recognised him. Marie lifted her veil, looked at him calmly and said, 'Yes, I recognise him.'

The President.—Samuel Gilieron says that, having one day entered the drawing-room and looked in vain to see if he could find any anonymous letters there, he made sure that there were none, and that a few moments later he heard you say that you had found another on the staircase pinned to the wall. He says that it would have been impossible to have fixed a pin into that wall.

Marie de Morell made no reply.

The Avocat-Général (Appearing for the prosecution) You recognised La Roncière by his face and his voice?

Marie de M.—Yes

President.—Prisoner, what have you to say?

La R.—I protest against the evidence of Mlle de

Morell; before God and man I say that it is absolutely false.

Avocat-Général.—You have no other answer to make?

La R.—My answer covers all.

President.—To what motive do you attribute Mlle de Morell's false statement?

La R.—I don't know; I cannot say what can have induced Mlle de Morell to accuse me of an atrocious crime of which I am innocent.

President.—Do you believe that the family of de Morell cherish a feeling of animosity against you?

La R.—I have never done them any harm; I cannot understand why they should seek to ruin me.

The President reminded the witness that according to Miss Allen's original evidence she had told her that she thought her assailant was La Roncière; was she now positive that it was he? Marie answered with firmness. 'Yes.' After a few unimportant questions from M. Chaix d'Est Ange, the President told Mlle de Morell that she might withdraw, and begged the audience to remain silent whilst she did so. As she left the court Marie de Morell exchanged greetings with several persons of her acquaintance.

M. d'Estouilly was the first important witness to be called on the second day of the trial. He described the events leading up to and following the duel. He roused the indignation of La Roncière by describing him as having gone down on his knees and protesting in that ignominious posture that he was not the writer of the letters. 'Thirty years,' exclaimed the accused man, 'I have been a soldier and never have I knelt to any man.' Not content with this protest he went on to accuse d'Estouilly of a reluctance to fight, but the President warned him not to go too far. He said that he had been accused of treachery in the duel, by catching hold of his opponent's sword

with his left hand, and asked d'Estouilly what he had to say in regard to this. The witness answered that the seconds could reply to that question better than he.

Lieutenant Ambert, who had acted as second to d'Estouilly, was the next witness. Asked why he had told La Roncière after the duel that experts had examined the letters and declared them to be in his handwriting, he said that he had merely told him that people to whom he had shown the letters had recognised his handwriting. But in the letter written by d'Estouilly at the dictation of Ambert, the fact of the opinion of the experts is distinctly stated. Asked by La Roncière whether he had seen him go on his knees to d'Estouilly he said that he had not, but that La Roncière had said 'My dear d'Estouilly I go on my knees to you.' A rather heated discussion ensued:—

La R.—Does M. Ambert believe me capable of an act of cowardice?

Ambert.—I cannot answer that question as long as M. de la Roncière is surrounded by guards. If he were in a different situation, I should know how to answer it.

La R.—In a word, do you believe me capable of such an act?

Ambert.—It would be an act of cowardice on my part to say that you were, as long as you are under arrest.

La R.—That is as much as saying that I am.

M. Chaix d'Est Ange.—And saying it with some assurance.

Ambert.—If I were to say that M. de la Roncière is a brave man, I should be asked 'Do you really think so?' But if I said he was a coward I should be committing an act of cowardice myself. You can interpret my silence; I am in a very delicate position. I could

answer the question if M. de la Roncière were at liberty.

La R.—But that is a challenge. Say what you mean.

Ambert.—That would be little use now; if you are acquitted, I will answer you.

President.—The court cannot listen to explanations of this kind; the matter must be dropped.

M. Berryer.—The witness's meaning is quite clear. When the prisoner spoke of going on his knees it was to add force to his words, not to avoid a duel.

Ambert.—That was my meaning. Besides, I have already stated that he fought quite fairly.

President.—Why did your relations with the prisoner cease? (Ambert had been at one time friendly with La Roncière, and they had been in the habit of taking their meals together.)

Ambert.—Because our habits and tastes were different. But I never saw La Roncière frequent cafés or gamble, there was nothing about his way of living that I disapproved of.

Avocat-Général.—Have you heard La Roncière say that he had the means of forcing a wealthy family to give him their daughter in marriage?

Ambert.—I never heard him say it to me, but I often heard it said in society. In Saumur it was a general subject of conversation.

Lieutenant Bérail, the second of La Roncière in the duel, confirmed the fact that at the time he wrote the letters of confession La Roncière had never ceased to protest his innocence, and had refused positively to implicate anybody else in his admissions. In answer to a question from M. Odilon Barrot, the witness said that Ambert had accused La Roncière of ingratitude, and stated that he had helped him with his purse and his sword. But Ambert, in answer to La Roncière, said that he had no recollection of having said anything of the kind, and had never fought a duel on his behalf.

The evidence of Captain Jacquemin led to an exciting and, to the frivolous audience, amusing episode. The gallant Captain, having admitted that he had a liking for La Roncière, in spite of his debts and mistresses, failings for which he confessed himself indulgent, was asked by Odilon Barrot whether he had heard from officers intimate with La Roncière that on one occasion the prisoner had furnished one of them with a rope ladder. The captain admitted that this was so, and that he had seen the ladder in question. Asked to name the officer Jacquemin hesitated, when suddenly Lieutenant Ambert rose from the back of the court and said, 'It was I!' It appeared that at the beginning of 1834 Ambert stood in need of the services of a rope ladder to reach the apartment of some lady-love. He had already a rope ladder in his possession, but La Roncière, seeing it, expressed an unfavourable opinion as to its usefulness. He said that he could make a better one, and did so. It was a ladder the ends of which were triangular in shape. To use it effectually according to Ambert, it required the help of two persons who 'understood each other.' He said that the ladder was at his house at Tours. It was admitted that this ladder could not have been the one alleged to have been used by La Roncière.

Colonel Saint-Victor, the author of the grossly unjust report on the career of La Roncière made during the preliminary investigation, showed a similar spirit in his evidence. He said that Ambert had told him that La Roncière had boasted to him that he knew how to find himself a rich wife, that he would carry on an intrigue with the daughter of wealthy parents and get her into such a condition as to oblige her to marry him. To this Ambert replied that he had never said anything of the kind to Colonel Saint-Victor, and that La Roncière had never said anything of the

kind to him. A suggestion on the part of the Colonel that La Roncière had pilfered a small sum of money from Ambert proved to be quite innocent in character.

To prove an alibi on the part of La Roncière, Elisa Rouault, a sempstress, in whose house La Roncière had lodged at Saumur, was called. She said that on the night of September 23rd, La Roncière had come in about eleven o'clock. She asked him if he were going out again, and on his replying in the negative, locked the front door and put the key in her pocket; it was her custom to do this when she was sitting up at night alone, working. On other nights the front door was fastened with a bolt and she would then lock her bedroom door; but when she was working with an iron and burning a large fire she kept the door of her room open to get air, and locked the front door out of a feeling of nervousness. One inhabitant of the house was called and said that in all the eighteen years he had lived there he had never seen a key to the front door, but another said that he had seen such a key and had known the front door to be locked with it.

Annette Rouault, a sister of Elisa, was accused of having acted as an agent between La Roncière and the servant, Samuel. 'I have never seen nor known Samuel,' she protested, 'The newspapers have said that I knew him, but they have said all sorts of things. It is very unpleasant. I would like to see the person who says that I have ever seen Samuel or spoken to him. It is disgraceful; like the report circulated that I have been intimate with M. de la Roncière. It's shocking! People seem to think that, because we are poor and lonely women, we can be slandered with impunity.' An advocate of Saumur whom La Roncière had consulted on the subject of the letters attributed to him, was asked as to the characters of Annette Rouault and her sister. He said that they were young ladies about whom people talked, but

were not so discredited, in his opinion, as to render their evidence unworthy of belief. After this singular evidence, the court adjourned until the following day.

The first witness called on July 1st was a glazier employed on September 29th to mend the broken window-pane in Marie de Morell's bedroom. He said that the hole was in the lower square of the left hand pane of the window about four or five inches long. The hasp fastening the two panes of the window which opened door-fashion from the middle was about two feet above the sill of the window. 'A hand,' he said, 'could pass through the hole, but to move the hasp it would be necessary to pass the arm through it; if that had been done the rest of the square of the pane would have been broken; the place in which the hole was must have hampered the movements. To unfix the hasp it was necessary to lift it up; which would have meant raising the arm still higher.' The broken portions of the pane, he said, were *outside* and not inside the window.

The second witness was an architect, Giraud, who had examined the exterior of Marie's room, and the attic above from which it was suggested that Samuel had lowered the rope ladder that had enabled La Roncière to obtain access to the young lady's chamber. He could find no trace on the masonry whatever of any such thing having been attempted, nor on the stone floor of Marie de Morell's bedroom could he find any marks of blood. 'One might,' he said, 'in some extraordinary way put a ladder against a wall and climb up it, but to do it carefully and in a way to leave no trace, it would have required a ladder thirty or forty feet long, and the assistance of two capable workmen accustomed to such a job.'

Berryer.—The witness is giving us his suppositions. I will ask him this question: If a mattress had been placed on the tiles of the projection of the roof between

the attic and the bedroom, does he think that a rope ladder could have come down from above without leaving any trace on the tiles?

Giraud.—I think the mattress might have prevented any trace, but it would have depended on the thickness of the mattress. However, some slates . . . well, it is possible.

Naudin (Judge).—Suppose the ladder to be climbed up from below, how many people would be necessary to fix it?

Giraud.—Three, I think.

Naudin.—Suppose it to be climbed down from the attic above, and a buttress made to avoid its coming in contact with the projecting slates, the ladder would necessarily be at a distance from the wall and the sill of the bedroom window (which did not project beyond the wall of the house.)

Giraud.—Certainly it would.

Naudin.—What, on this supposition, would be the distance between the ladder coming from above and the window-sill?

Giraud.—About eighteen or nineteen inches.

Miss Allen, recalled, said that she had swept the floor of Marie's room, but not on the day after the outrage, and had found glass there which she had put in the fireplace. A servant who had been in the habit at that time of sweeping the same room said that she had never found any glass. Miss Allen and the glazier were asked to show the jury on one of the panes of glass of the court the nature of the hole made in the window-pane. Miss Allen drew a perpendicular line on the left side of the left square of the pane showing the glass to have fallen out from top to bottom, up to the place where the hasp was fixed in the woodwork, so that it would have been easy to have reached the hasp with the hand. The glazier showed the glass to have been broken only in the lower part of the

square, so that there was some distance from the angle formed by the break in the glass to the hasp of the window, which could not be reached by the hand alone. In answer to a juryman, Miss Allen said that, until the outrage of September 24th, Marie de Morell had enjoyed perfect health. Asked how it was that, having applied leeches to Marie de Morell shortly after the outrage, she had not seen the injuries which she alleged to have been inflicted on her, she said that Mlle de Morell put them on herself under the counterpane.

The experts on handwriting were the next witnesses to be called. The first of them said that he had examined fourteen letters in all. They were all written by one hand and that hand clever, light in touch and accomplished. They were not all written in the same way. One of them, the smallest, signed 'Marie de Morell,' and addressed to d'Estouilly, was written freely and represented the real handwriting without disguise or imitation of the person who had written and signed that letter. The other letters were a childish attempt to disguise the real handwriting of the writer. He had examined the admitted handwriting of La Roncière. Comparing it with the fourteen letters placed in his hands, he found differences not only in the formation of the letters, but in the character of the writing, the grouping of the letters and the way of making them. It was proved conclusively to his mind that La Roncière was not the author of the anonymous letters.

Against this gentleman's opinion the prosecution set up that of Lieutenant Ambert, who was recalled and asked whether he had not attributed one of the anonymous letters to La Roncière. With quite unnecessary heat he asserted positively that the letter of provocation to d'Estouilly beginning, 'You are a wretch and a coward,' could only be in the handwriting

of La Roncière. 'If all the experts in the world,' he said, 'were to tell me that this letter was not in the handwriting of La Roncière, I should still say that it was. I am convinced that it is his, and his alone!' He then went on to say that La Roncière had always been fond of drawing, making silhouettes, sewing, and making slippers, and other pursuits which showed manual dexterity, though he admitted that if he had tried his hand at imitating other people's handwriting he would have been turned out of the school. As, what he called a moral proof, that La Roncière was the writer of the letter in question, Lieutenant Ambert quoted the phrase in it, 'I am pleased with Ambert.' He said that just before the duel La Roncière had used exactly the same phrase to him: 'M. Ambert; I am pleased with you.'

The third expert went further than his colleagues. He said that the prisoner could not have written the anonymous letters because his own handwriting was very indifferent and inferior to that of the letters. He said that the small letter signed Marie de Morell was in the handwriting of that lady, and so were all the others.

A lively discussion ensued between the last two experts and the advocates of the *partie civile*, as to the possibility of Marie de Morell being the author of the letters. But as the prisoner's advocate pointed out, for him the one and only question was whether La Roncière was the writer of the letters; if he were not, he was entitled to acquittal. The President agreed that that was the principal question to be decided. On that question the experts were unanimous in spite of the vehemence of Lieutenant Ambert

The evidence for the prosecution concluded with that of the medical men who had attended Marie de Morell. It appeared that, though not subject to actual nervous seizures before September 24th, 1834,

she had always been of a very impressionable disposition. After that date she had been the victim of periodical attacks which one doctor described as of a cataleptic or somnambulistic nature, while another found them to be merely nervous in character. The patient would be seized with a violent pain in the head, her face would be contorted, her head hang from right to left, and she would put her hands at the sides of her nose; her limbs would be convulsed and there would be an entire absence of sensibility. If any attempt were made to check the convulsive movements, the limbs became rigid. At the same time there was no suggestion of mental disease; outside these nervous attacks the mental condition of Marie de Morell was perfectly normal.

The expectation of hearing the speeches of three celebrated advocates on the third day of the trial made the public all the more eager to be present. When the President, owing to the crowded state of the court, ordered all those who could not find a seat to leave, fashionable women, regardless of their crumpled frocks, were seen to kneel or crouch down in order to avoid expulsion.

In the absence of all cross-examination, it is on his address to the jury that the French advocate concentrates all his efforts. Indeed, he will go so far as to decline to cross-examine rather than anticipate his speech. Pressed by Odilon Barrot to question one of the witnesses who had testified against his client, Chaix d'Est Ange said: 'I shall have many things to say about the witness's evidence, but they will be part of my speech; it is only in my speech that I shall show the inconsistencies of the witness's evidence.' Much then would depend on the speeches of the advocates. As the trial had proceeded, it had become evident that the sympathies of those present were on the side of injured innocence against heartless villainy.

At times it had shown itself so perceptibly that the President had been obliged to check it, and the prisoner's advocate to protest against it. Chaix d'Est Ange, matched against Odilon Barrot and above all Berryer, was confronted with a task that would tax to the utmost his skill and resource.

After a few witnesses had been called by the defence who spoke favourably of the general character of La Roncière, Odilon Barrot rose to address the jury on behalf of the *partie civile*. He began by expressing his 'profound conviction of the prisoner's guilt. He spoke of his bad reputation; it was not because of his debts and mistresses; towards these military men showed themselves indulgent; but because of his hard cruel disposition, the cold deliberation which accompanied his misdeeds; it was for this reason that he had passed through five or six regiments before he had reached the age of twenty-nine:—

'If as the cause of these frequent changes I were to consult his record at the War Office, you would see there the reasons for his bad reputation; a groom, a dealer in oats cruelly beaten; a horse driven at a gallop through a crowd of women and children; his fashion of dealing with peasants; and lastly, a mayor arriving, girt in his scarf of office, grossly insulted. So it is that I was not surprised when Ambert said to you, "I did not break with La Roncière because of women or play, because of his youthful escapades, but because of his character which did not accord with mine." So it was that when all the young officers learnt of the fearful crime of September 23rd, when they discussed the anonymous letters, one and all cried out, "It is La Roncière." There was no moment of doubt, of hesitation. One and all knew the character of La Roncière, one and all named him as the guilty man.'

It may be observed in passing, that not one of these

facts alleged against La Roncière on the strength of the War Office record had been proved in evidence, and that Ambert had stated that it was the tastes and habits of La Roncière, not his character, with which he found himself out of sympathy.

Though admitting the strangeness, and at times fatuity of the writer of the anonymous letters, Odilon Barrot saw clearly the motive of the writer. He was going to wreak vengeance simultaneously on four persons, a father who had turned him out of his house, a mother who had rejected his advances, a girl who had told of his rudeness towards her, and a young officer who had been received into the family on more intimate terms than he; 'on the same day, at the same moment he would wreak this quadruple act of vengeance.'

The advocate made a great point of La Roncière's confession. 'You,' he cried, addressing the prisoner, 'you who weep at the suggestion that you have not fought loyally in a duel, you do not shrink from a confession imposed on you under the most insulting conditions; you beseech d'Estouilly not to press you to name your accomplice lest it bring about your ruin.' The prisoner had written to Ambert: 'I know that I am hopelessly sunk in your opinion; I know that it would be painful to you to have to be with me during my few last moments in Saumur.' 'Did not the man,' asked Odilon Barrot, 'who wrote these lines know that he was guilty, realise the feeling of repulsion that he inspired?' He was no less severe on the suggestion made by La Roncière that it was to conceal their daughter's shame that the family of de Morell had brought this charge against him. 'We know,' exclaimed the advocate, 'these men who weep when they are accused of fighting disloyally, of not having fought fiercely enough to take the life of a fellow-man. They weep forsooth! But when it comes to dishonouring a

helpless child, spreading against her some foul slander, perpetrating on her a moral outrage more cowardly and disgraceful than the actual offence, degrading her and all her family, they do it with calmness, carelessness, refinement, as though it were some mere trifling jest. Ah! gentlemen such a defence is characteristic. I do not see in it the cry of innocence. I see in it the handiwork of a man whose whole life has been a challenge to virtue, who seeks to consummate in the temple of justice what he has begun in the sanctuary of the home.'

Against this picture Odilon Barrot set that of the virtuous child, 'an angel of purity and innocence,' who had never been to the theatre and read nothing but the Bible, a girl of sixteen brought up in the severest principles of religion and morality, the most innocent of virgins. 'If,' he said, again addressing the prisoner, 'this child has not invented the horrible charge against you, if this imagination of sixteen years old has not given birth to this infamous plot, if here in this court of justice she has told the truth and not disgraced herself by a dreadful act of perjury, if she is to be believed and be not a monster of iniquity, then you, La Roncière, you are the guilty man!'

As all the experts were against him it was natural that Odilon Barrot should seek to laugh their evidence out of court. He told the usual stories of their failures. He quoted the opinion of one of their own number: 'There can be no doubt that it is the general opinion of the learned that there must always be doubt and uncertainty in the comparison of handwriting; it cannot do more than furnish a presumption such as it is (*telle quelle*)' 'Open the dictionary of the academy,' said Odilon Barrot 'at the words 'telle quelle,' and you will see their meaning defined as "worse rather than better."' . . . 'I will cite you a case recently come under my notice. A magistrate handed some

documents to experts, on one of which he had made a note in his own handwriting; the experts fixing at once their attention on the note, declared the forger to be—who?—the magistrate himself! . . . There is one expert,' said the advocate, 'more infallible, more certain than the material expert, and that is the moral expert.' In that capacity he asked the jury to regard the letters:—

'Gentlemen—you are some of you fathers! I ask you if a hundred experts were to tell you that these letters, redolent with all the cynicism of vice, stamped with the mark of a fallen and degraded man, these letters which even a dramatist, anxious to portray on the stage the lowest corruption of the human heart, could hardly bring his pen to write; if all the experts in the world were to tell you that these letters had been written by your daughter, a girl of sixteen, brought up in the strictest principles of religion and morality, you would answer them, "No, it is impossible, you lie to me!" You would say it with all the righteous indignation of a father's heart, and you would be right!'

The conclusion of Odilon Barrot's speech was received with considerable emotion on the part of the audience; his colleagues at the bar crowded round him in congratulation, as did the family of de Morell, tears in their eyes. La Roncière is described as having listened to the orator calmly and with an occasional smile.

Chaix d'Est Ange said that he would prefer to commence his speech for the defence on the following day. Before the court adjourned he asked that a paper manufacturer should be called. The witness said that he had compared some of the anonymous letters with a sheet taken from one of the exercise-books of Marie de Morell. The paper was identical; he had placed the sheet on the top of one of the letters and there was not a hairbreadth of difference in the

size of the two; the paper was uncommon in character, being the largest size of school paper with which he was acquainted. The letter alleged to have been thrown into the carriage in Paris was, he said, written on very common paper and appeared to have been torn out of an account book or register of some sort.

IV

THE DEFENCE

WHEN the court met on the morning of July 3rd, Chaix d'Est Ange rose to address the jury. He spoke of the prejudice against his client, so strong that even in his own case he had refused at first to undertake his defence. 'I,' he had said to his father, 'I defend your son! No, he has done a vile thing. I only wish I had been retained for the *partie civile*. I should have regarded the day on which I obtained a verdict against your son as a great day in my life.' But when he had looked into the case, his opinion changed. He realised that it was his duty as an advocate to defend a man unjustly accused by a powerful family, unjustly condemned by blind prejudice. He would pass by a libellous and disgraceful pamphlet which at the beginning of the trial had been sent to the judges, and come straight to the facts of La Roncière's career. He pictured his client's father, a man in whom a purely military life had intensified a natural punctiliousness and marked severity of disposition. He had carried into his home the temper of the camp. His son's character was difficult and he sought to tame it by excessive severity. There was no mutual confidence between father and son, and the latter, as boy and afterwards as a young officer, knew only too well

that if he committed a fault, he could look for no indulgence in his father's heart. The advocate claimed that, but for youthful escapades and those habits of life which were accepted in the army as pardonable in the young officer of the day, nothing serious, in spite of the most inquisitorial and hostile examination could be alleged against La Roncière. 'I would like to know,' asked Chaix d'Est Ange, 'what officer in the school at Saumur, from the General commanding down to the most junior sub-lieutenant, looking back over his whole life, has the right to cast a stone at La Roncière?'

Chaix d'Est Ange quoted passages from a number of letters written by his client to his mistress, Mélanie Lair, as showing the gentle and considerate character of the young man, the unlikelihood of his being the demon of villainy pictured by the prosecution. He showed the absurdity, the folly of the behaviour of the writer of the anonymous letters, the ridiculousness of the suggestion that he had first loved the mother and then the daughter, the strangeness with which he never sought to conceal his identity and openly glorified in his crime. 'You have here,' he said, 'an inconceivable crime committed in an inconceivable way, which reads more like a dream, a nightmare, or some fantastic story from the *Arabian Nights*.' It was suggested that La Roncière had had accomplices in the house:—

'They were no doubt won over by gold; he had bought their services and their silence. But you forget that La Roncière was weighed down with debt, without a penny to bless himself with. In one of his letters, not certainly written for publication, he says, "I have forty sous with which to get through the month, and owe ten francs to Ambert." Are we to believe that these servants in the house of de Morell would risk their place, their honour and their safety

for an insolvent penniless man who could neither purchase their fidelity nor reward their treachery towards their master?'

Of the letters alleged to have been written by La Roncière after his imprisonment, Chaix d'Est Ange was scornful. La Roncière is in prison, an accused man, denying his guilt, and he sits down and writes a letter signed 'La Ronsière,' in which he confesses his guilt. 'No doubt in his agitation,' said the advocate, 'he had forgotten how to save his own skin and write his own name.' As to the letter said to have been thrown into the carriage, Chaix d'Est Ange said: 'Apparently this man, shut up in prison, contrives to find a confederate ready faithfully to carry out his bidding, a confederate who mounts guard in the Rue de Belle chasse, who, without knowing the time or date of the arrival, in the depth of winter, close to a police station, under the very eyes of an officer, patiently and courageously awaits the coming of the carriage. He advances, no one sees him, he strikes the arm of Marie de Morell a violent blow with a stick, seizes her hand and flings it back into the carriage; and yet no one sees him, not the servant on the box, nor the people inside. The blow leaves no trace, and not a soul has seen one single incident of this extraordinary method of delivering a letter.' As to the paper on which it had been written: 'It is a sheet torn from a common and ordinary account book or register. You say it comes from La Roncière who is in prison and has no writing paper and only inferior ink. But you are wrong. He has always had the very best writing-paper, and has used it constantly. I have letters from him written in prison; you can see for yourselves; in writing a letter he has not been reduced to tearing sheets out of some sort of account book. Does it not seem more likely that some traveller, not having at hand his ordinary writing

materials, stops at an inn, finds there an old account book, tears out a sheet and with the muddy ink provided by the inn, writes this letter?'

While not placing extravagant reliance on the judgment of experts, Chaix d'Est Ange accepts their opinion that La Roncière was not the author of the letters:—

'The best of all reasons is that, in order to have written the anonymous letters, he could not have so improved on his own indifferent handwriting. These letters, especially the little one signed "Marie de Morell," are written in a practised and accomplished hand. I know that M. Ambert has said that La Roncière must have written with a good hand because he drew so well; if that were so, then the finest painters in Europe would also write the best hands in Europe. And here I feel it my duty to make a significant comment. You will observe that for the purposes of the examination made by these experts, no search has been made in the house of M. de Morell. You,' addressing the General, 'have never been questioned except on the days, at the hours and times that suited you. When you were first asked for specimens of your daughter's handwriting, you said twice that you had not got any. In the end you brought to the magistrate just such specimens as you chose. That is how the whole case has been conducted. The bare word of the house of de Morell has been held sufficient. Proofs! Can one ask proofs of the Baron and Baroness de Morell? . . . Such is the treatment accorded to the accuser. But for the accused, his whole life is ransacked and ravaged, the inmost secrets of his heart laid bare. . . . And what is the result? I am no expert, but I declare to you gentlemen, on my soul and conscience, that the handwriting of La Roncière is not a good handwriting, but heavy, cramped, and awkward. And not only is it alleged that La Roncière

wrote the so-called anonymous letters, all of which give evidence of a well-taught hand, but that he wrote also the note signed " Marie de Morell." That letter is written in a light, ready, and accomplished hand; it is written from start to finish without hesitation or mistake. Are we to believe that for three months the defendant has been busy tracing the different words used in this letter and reproducing them with all the skill that a practised forger would devote to a single signature? No. It is not suggested that Marie de Morell has ever sent him a model of this letter. One thing is certain; no forger, however skilled, could have reproduced so exactly in every point this light and elegant hand, the hand of a woman accustomed to writing, and writing well. Look, I ask you, look at that little letter signed " Marie de Morell," say if it be in the handwriting of La Roncière, say if it be not rather word for word in the handwriting of Mlle de Morell.'

Chaix d'Est Ange dismissed as unimportant the fact that when the General sent for La Roncière to order him from his house, the latter had picked up his cap before going into the General's presence. But why did he accept the General's dismissal without a word of protest? That the advocate attributed to his client's want of moral courage, a man physically brave, but morally weak to the last degree. He contrasted the spirit with which La Roncière, alone with the examining magistrate, had faced the charges made against him, with the weakness and embarrassment he had shown in the open court: 'In presence of an audience who stare and murmur at him, he stammers, he is troubled and bewildered. If he can give a bad answer, a bad reason, he gives them; when he is pressed for an answer or explanation which he has given a hundred times before the magistrate, he turns to me and says, " My advocate will answer for me "

. . . Forgive him; we, though we have not been his friends or comrades, we will not call him a coward because he has not that sort of courage which enables a man to keep calm and collected in the dock, and meet with calm assurance a charge of which he knows that he is innocent.'

Chaix d'Est Ange did not seek to minimise the more serious fact against La Roncière—his confession of the authorship of the anonymous letters. He reminded the jury of the young man's stormy past and recalled his father's words to him: 'If you commit one more offence, I shall no longer recognise you as my son.' He reminded them that, before he went out to fight d'Estouilly, he had said to his second, Bérail, 'I am innocent; here is some of my handwriting; if I fall, compare it with this anonymous letter about which we are fighting; and defend me yourself against these odious charges.'

In the following passage Chaix d'Est Ange summed up the causes that had led to his client's avowal of guilt:—

'Gentlemen, in former days when in the torture chamber, stretched on the rack, a wretched prisoner cried out for mercy and in the agony of his suffering exclaimed, "I am dying! I confess my guilt!"—would you have believed such a confession? And if, after he were set free, he had said, "See how my limbs shake; all life and strength had gone from me when I confessed; but before God I swear that I am innocent," would you have answered that he had confessed and therefore must be guilty? Gentlemen, with some men there is a moral torture more powerful than the physical. For such men you may prepare your rack, heat your irons, boil your water, no physical suffering will daunt their courage. But moral pain, that they cannot endure. La Roncière is one of these. He is ready to face torture, death; but at the idea of

a court martial, the report of experts, who, he is told, have decided unanimously against him, in the presence of such considerations he is afraid. His courage fails him. To avoid a scandal he writes, "I am guilty." But don't forget that at the very moment that he writes the letter, that he delivers it, he says, "I swear on my honour that I am innocent, my only hope in confessing is to spare my family pain?" I repeat, gentlemen, if a wretched man, overcome by physical suffering allows a confession to escape his lips, you would not have the courage to say, "This man is guilty; he has confessed; true, his confession has been wrung from him by pain; but no matter, he has confessed, he must die." I ask you to treat La Roncière in the same way; do not accept his confession; it is not free, spontaneous, but dragged from him by moral torture, the result of that weakness, that want of moral courage which you know now to be a part of his character.'

Chaix d'Est Ange went on to deal with the events of the night of September 23rd. He showed that on that night La Roncière had been seen at the theatre by the General himself, and proved the worthlessness of the statement made by a witness who had not come forward till the first day of the trial, to the effect that he had seen the servant Samuel meet a man in a gray cloak outside the General's house about nine o'clock the same evening. He defended the characters of the Rouault sisters with whom La Roncière lodged against the attacks made on them:—

'M. de Saint-Victor, who has collected so assiduously all sorts of false rumours and slanders on the antecedents of the defendant, has dared to say that, if the Rouault girls were not inscribed in the police register, they deserved to be. You heard the reply of these young women, "Because we are poor and defenceless they seek to cast stones at us." Words

only too true, alas! words which fill me with indignation. Are we in the sanctuary of justice? Are the scales held fairly for all? Or has the bandage been torn from her eyes, equality banished from her temple? A girl, rich and influential, appears on the scene; she is at once surrounded with every form of consideration and protection. A word of doubt, a breath of suspicion uttered against her! Good God! Such a thing is an unpardonable offence which even the rights of the defence cannot excuse! But let a poor girl appear, humble and unprotected, and what licence is extended to the evidence of the witnesses, and the rights of the prosecution!'

It had been suggested that La Roncière after the house-door of his lodging had been shut, might have got out by the window, but no trace of such a proceeding had been found by the architect who had examined the house. How had La Roncière got into the chamber of Marie de Morell? The front of the General's house was covered with white chalk. There was a sentry box on the other side of the bridge, and a patrol crossing and re-crossing it. It was a bright moonlight night. It was unlikely that a man would not have been seen against the white wall of the house ascending and descending a rope ladder. Of this ladder no trace had been found, in spite of the most exhaustive search in shops, wells, ditches, everywhere. On the front of the house there was no trace of this escalade by means of a ladder forty feet long, perpetrated by a man in a large military cloak and wearing on his head his cap, which had apparently never left it during the whole of this agitating exploit. As to the condition of the broken pane of glass, the advocate said that he preferred the evidence of the honest glazier, whose business it was to attend to it, to that of Miss Allen or that of a gentleman who, eight months after the event, said that he had driven

by the General's house and noticed on the second floor a pane of glass broken diagonally.

Chaix d Est Ange made a strong point of the fact that, during the whole of the alleged scene between Marie and her assailant, the girl had never uttered any cry to rouse the house to her assistance. Miss Allen was only next door; without uttering a sound Marie de Morell allows a man to enter her room, throw her down, tie her up and gag her ineffectually with a small pocket handkerchief. Not until the villain has completed his handiwork does she cry out; and Miss Allen, roused by Marie's cries, realising the horror of the situation, striving to open the door between their two rooms, would seem to have been equally silent. And then, after this awful thing has happened, appalling, terrible, the young lady waits four hours before acquainting her father and mother with the dreadful event.

And the parents! The day following the outrage, the writer tells them that he has robbed their daughter of her honour. What steps do they take to find out the truth of this shocking statement? None! Why? Because, says her mother, of her daughter's virtue, her innocence, her sixteen years. Not until three months after the occurrence is any examination made of their daughter's real condition.

The advocate approached the most delicate part of his task:—

'I am told that this is a duel between my client and the family of de Morell; either this man must be convicted or the family are ruined. I am convinced of the innocence of La Roncière, at the same time I have not the heart to accuse you, but you force me to it, take me by the throat and insist that I shall not escape. If I refuse, you will say that it is because I believe my client guilty. Very well! persuaded of his innocence, I will refuse no longer. Though public

sympathy is against me, though even the honest words of an advoca e are greeted here wi*h murmurs of dissent, I will no., I dare not be silent.'

Chaix d'Est Ange began by suggesting that it was not impossible for a young girl, however strictly educated, to have heard or een on walls the coarse words contained in the letters; and he asked whether any mother in the world could say for certain that her daughter had never r ad a novel. He spoke of the anonymous letters received in the General's house in the November of 1833, and the April of 1834; and of the story, apparently without foundation, which Marie had told to her mother of the man throwing himself into the river and being fished out by the watermen. The very day following this occurrence he reminded the jury that an anonymous letter had been found in the General's house. 'Have we not here,' asked Chaix d'Est Ange, 'the beginnings of a distressing form of illness which induces dreams and hallucinations? You, my opponents, and you who, forgetting the place you are in and the consideration due to the defence of an accused man, murmur at my words, you should be the first to appreciate the reticence I employ when I say that here we have to deal with some indefinable complaint which troubles Mlle de Morell, which works on her imagination, makes her believe herself the victim of a man who is pursuing her, and throws her into the arms of the strange and marvellous.'

In conclusion Chaix d'Est Ange alluded to a case that had occurred in 1813, in which a certain Countess de Noirmont had been found one morning, dragged apparently from her bed into an adjoining room, laid on a sofa and there forced to drink a poisonous mixture containing turpentine. The same morning a packet of letters had been found under the windows of the Countess's house which implicated Julie

Jacquemin, a former maidservant of the Countess, in the commission of the crime. It was only after Julie Jacquemin had been convicted and sentenced to death, that it was proved that the whole story told by the Countess was a fabrication; a new trial was granted and the unfortunate maidservant acquitted.

'What had driven this woman of title, of high social rank, to tell all these lies? Who had tied her up and forced her to drink the poison with which her lips and breast were blackened? Who had accumulated all these proofs of outrage? Why! She herself! A fearful love of the marvellous had impelled her to these falsehoods. And so it is that into the hands of Mlle de Morell, brought up, I willingly admit, strictly, severely, a novel happens to fall. Little accustomed to such literature, impressionable in character, the effect of such reading becomes all the more disastrous when it coincides in point of time with the first symptoms of that dreadful illness which affects her mind and disturbs her imagination. You cannot on the evidence of such a witness, on the sole word of Mlle de Morell, find M. de la Roncière guilty of committing a crime which would prove him to be the most infamous of men, of committing without motive, in the teeth of all likelihood and probability, the most cowardly, the most disgraceful, the most atrocious of outrages.'

Brilliant as was the speech of Chaix d'Est Ange in the estimation of those who heard it, it was not received sympathetically by the majority of the listeners. He himself had complained of the unfriendly interruptions which had greeted certain of his arguments. Very different was the reception accorded to the comparatively brief reply of Berryer.

The orator began by contrasting Marie de Morell and La Roncière much to the advantage of the former. The jury would have to judge which of the two was

the more likely to be guilty. 'My choice is made,' he said, 'I have no doubt, no uncertainty, I am deeply, immovably convinced that La Roncière, and he alone, is the guilty man.' As to his motives Berryer frankly declined to attempt to specify them:—

'Do you think to shake my judgment by asking me to explain this crime, to tell the jury the motives of this fearful offence? No, gentlemen, there are certain conceptions of the human mind that I am proud not to be able to understand; there are acts of wickedness which I can believe, though I cannot conceive; happy are those honest men who, whilst compelled to recognise the existence of devilish ideas and infamous acts, cannot bring their intelligence to comprehend them. Do not expect me to explain to you what is inexplicable in the proceedings of the prisoner; do not expect me to enter into his strange, his various, his monstrous ideas.'

The advocate contended strongly for the reality of the illness of Marie, and dismissed the idea that it was hallucinatory in character. 'That is no hallucination which leaves marks of bites on the wrist, which inflicts wounds on the body, scratches on the arms, bruises on the breast.' At the time at which he was speaking, Berryer may be pardoned if he were insufficiently versed in the accomplishments of hysteria.

It cannot be said that the speech of Berryer added much to the arguments already adduced by Odilon Barrot. It was rather by the moving character of his eloquence and the power of his personality that he was expected to add strength to the cause of the family of de Morell. 'To read the speeches of Berryer,' said one critic, 'is like trying to realise the grandeur of a volcanic eruption by gazing on the morrow at the hot ashes and charred minerals.' The power of his speeches lay in the man; without his magic presence, his look, his gesture, they make but indifferent reading.

What all the magnificent periods in the world could not attain Berryer could achieve by one word, one significant movement—by that indefinable something that is called genius. At the end of his speech in La Roncière's case everybody was weeping, the orator himself, the family of de Morell, the whole audience. In the last of the anonymous letters a suggestion had been made that Marie de Morell had been seduced by a manservant:—

'Ah, poor mother! Hapless father! a prey to severe illness you sit listening to me motionless, unable even to shed a tear; in order to stifle your awful secret you were obliged to give ghastly entertainments. When at length this unhappy man (pointing to the General) has been dragged into court, you (pointing to La Roncière) say to him, "Fearful for the honour of your child you will never face a public trial, you will resist it to the utmost rather than publish to the world the fact that your daughter has been ignominiously ruined by a manservant; you will never dare to face such an exposure, and I shall be saved." That was your hope, to terrify father and mother into silence—and so you wrote that letter, you, La Roncière, you!'

Dealing with the silence of Marie de Morell on the night of the outrage, of which Chaix d'Est Ange had made so great a point, Berryer said:—

'Surprise has been expressed, gentlemen, at the silence of Mlle de Morell on the night of September 23rd. These two young women, agitated, bewildered as they were, uttered no cry—and you bring it up against them! But how could it be otherwise? This very silence of theirs is the most conclusive proof of the reality of the crime and the truth of their story. If it had been a thief, a man breaking in to steal money or jewellery—if the whole thing had been an invention—ah! then they would have roused the whole house, waked all the inmates by their cries, or trusted to the

night, the darkness to conceal their trick. But this is different; it is an outrage, the shame of it restrains this young girl—" What has he seen?" she cries, "What has he done? Hide me, Miss Allen"—Ah! I can well understand why she did not cry out! She is a virgin, she is filled with shame, she dares not show herself to her mother who has taught her so often the lesson of modesty. When in the daylight she does see her, she still hides her body from her. "Allen! Allen! Go and tell my mother; go and find her" . . . I, a man, I may not be able to understand why she is so tortured at having to make known to all her humiliation. But I appeal to the heart of every mother!"

At the conclusion of the speech of Berryer which, comparatively brief as it had been, had powerfully affected a friendly audience, the court adjourned.

July 4th was the last day of the trial. After a speech in defence of Samuel and a few words on behalf of the maid, Julie, against whom the prosecution had announced their intention of not asking for a verdict, it was the turn of Chaix d'Est Ange to make his final reply on the whole case. One of the most effective portions of his speech was his reply to Berryer on the subject of the defendant's motive:—

'Yesterday I saw how you were at a loss to explain anything, and trusted to the poetic inspiration of your genius to get you out of the difficulty. You sought from this genius of yours explanations which you could not get from the facts, or shall we say that it impelled you to confess that you could explain nothing? and therefore you exclaimed, "Is it for me to fathom the motives in such a case? I am too honest a man to understand things of this sort." And so because you are an honest man, you think the prosecution are absolved from explaining anything; because you, a man of character, are the accuser, you need prove nothing. Entrenched behind this character of yours,

too innocent to understand such a crime, all you can say is "Take my word for it." In vain I ask you to explain the charge, to give me proofs, to meet all the moral and material impossibilities in the case. What are these miserable requirements of an ordinary prosecution to you? For you it is sufficient to reply "I am an honest man; there is the culprit, take my word for it, he is guilty, and convict him." I say no, a thousand times no. Justice, whose duty it is to protect the innocent, cannot be put off by tricks of speech. Away with all these appeals to the emotion, to tears, to passion! Let us come to the facts; proofs are what the jury want, not tears which you have brought even to my eyes; proofs are what they ask before sending a hapless man to the scaffold; proofs they demand and proofs they must have.'

Having shown once again the extraordinary difficulties in the way of accepting the story of La Roncière's climbing by means of a rope ladder into the chamber of Marie de Morell, Chaix d'Est Ange recalled to the jury the fact, overlooked during the progress of the trial, that it lay with the prosecution to prove the commission of the alleged crime. 'You are asked,' he said, 'to explain how it happened, and you answer, "I am not obliged to explain it." I reply the prosecution must explain, must prove all that they allege. If you can only lay to our charge a crime that is inexplicable and impossible, you fail, and all your eloquence, that most mischievous of weapons against an innocent man, cannot save you from disaster.'

The points he had made in his previous speech Chaix d'Est Ange emphasised in his second. Toward its close he began to show signs of exhaustion, of the strain to which now for the sixth day in succession he had been subjected in fighting for his client against the strong prejudices of a hostile environment. After dwelling on the singular conduct of Marie de Morell,

on the strange occurrences that had taken place even before La Roncière had come on the scene, on the peculiar nature of her illness, he concluded:—

'I know nothing, nor is it my duty to explain the mystery. It is my duty to tell you that the defendant is innocent. I say and I aver it, though in doing so I am sustaining a cause which it has required some courage to defend and which I confess I had hesitated before defending. But it is a noble task, yes, gentlemen, I repeat, a noble task for an advocate, it is his right and his privilege to take up a case in the face of public opinion, to defend an unhappy man who is being hurried to the scaffold by blind prejudice, to fight with his back to the wall against men who judge without thinking, condemn without knowing, who show openly their dislike and distrust of his client, merely because they refuse to listen to a word of the defence, and accept blindly all the allegations of the prosecution. Yes, it is the high and sacred duty of our profession to stand by and defend a man deserted by those nearest to him, renounced by his friends, rejected by all the world; it is as the duty of the priest who is faithful to the condemned man placed in his charge, who in face of the clamour of the mob accompanies him to the scaffold and sends him absolved before his Maker. So am I faithful to this innocent man. In the face of the angry murmurs of his enemies I raise my voice on his behalf, and send him absolved before his fellow-men. You, gentlemen, in your turn fulfil your duty. In the midst of all the uncertainties and improbabilities that surround this case, in the face of the impenetrable mystery that enfolds it, put your hands on your hearts and say, "Go free." It is life or death which we await at your hands.'

V

THE JUDGMENT

It now only remained for the President to sum up the case to the jury. There are few verbatim reports of the charges of Presidents of Assize; if reported at all, they are generally given in a very condensed form. But of President Ferey's charge in this case, we have a complete report. It is a model of the strictest impartiality and so stands out in strong contrast with the usual tone of such addresses. In 1881 the summing-up by the presiding judge was abolished on the ground that the attitude of the Presidents of Assize was as a rule so hostile to the prisoners that, in most cases, the summing-up was little better than another speech for the prosecution. No such reproach could be urged against that of President Ferey. The first part of his charge was a statement of the arguments adduced by the prosecution, and the second a fuller statement of those urged by the defence.

Two points raised by the defence were, he said, of capital importance in regard to the letters. Most of the letters were undated and had not gone through the post; those alleged to have been written by La Roncière from Paris, after he left Saumur, bore the Saumur postmark. Therefore coincidences drawn from the letters between statements contained in them and the acts of La Roncière were of little value. For instance the letter, in which La Roncière had said he would be waiting in front of the house and was then seen on the bridge by the General, bore neither date nor stamp.

The President showed that the alleged motives of

La Roncière in writing the letters were unreasonable in the highest degree. Did he wish to avenge himself for the disdain with which Marie de Morell had treated him? But he had hardly ever spoken to her and had never shown her any attentions. Did he wish to seduce her and then oblige her parents to give her to him in marriage? If so, he had adopted the most insane means for arriving at such a result. Was it to punish the General for having dismissed him from his house? But the letters had begun before that incident and La Roncière had written to a third party expressing gratitude toward the General for having invited him to his parties. Was it jealousy of d'Estouilly? But there was no evidence of any projected marriage between that officer and Marie, and La Roncière had no reason to be jealous of any greater favour shown to d'Estouilly, considering that he had never paid any attention to Marie de Morell himself. 'There is,' he said, in stating these arguments for the defence, 'no probable or possible motive for the crime; it is provedly preposterous.'

In reference to the illness of Marie de Morell, the President commented on its mysterious and indefinable character. 'Are there not,' he asked, 'fearful diseases which not only affect the body but attack also the imagination and so disturb it as to give to a person's acts all the appearance of perversity, while leaving the soul itself pure and innocent? May not such a malady have attacked Mlle de Morell? May we not find in that the clue to an apparently insoluble mystery?' The defence, he said, had pointed out that the real question for the jury was simply the guilt or innocence of La Roncière: 'The alternative the prosecution would seek to force on you of choosing between the guilt of La Roncière or Mlle de Morell might well result in a miscarriage of justice, for it would oblige you to choose between

two probabilities, whereas it is on certainty alone that your verdict should be based.

The judge put these points as points for the defence, but he was careful, too careful perhaps, to refrain from giving the jury any hint as to his own opinion. If it be the duty of a judge in charging a jury to help them to a decision by the benefit of his experience and the indication of the relative value of the evidence this President Ferey failed to do. He ended his charge by telling the jury that they must look to their consciences as their true guide; these would be unmoved by mere speeches and would not suffer them to be diverted from the truth by extraneous considerations; they would reject whatever was doubtful, knowing that their verdict must be founded on clear, sure, and incontestable proof.

At a quarter to five the jury retired. They were out altogether six hours and ten minutes. A little before eleven they came back into court. By a majority of more than seven they found La Roncière guilty of having attempted to commit an outrage on Marie de Morell, of having failed in that attempt through circumstances independent of his own will, and of having wilfully wounded Marie de Morell. By a majority also of more than seven they gave the prisoner the benefit of extenuating circumstances. Samuel Gilieron and Julie Génier were acquitted. The court condemned La Roncière to ten years' imprisonment. The prisoner who, in spite of the comforting assurances of his advocate, had anticipated an unfavourable verdict, received his judgment in silence. To Chaix d'Est Ange, the verdict of the jury came as a stupefying blow.

An appeal was taken to the Court of Cassation, but it was unsuccessful.

After the conviction of La Roncière, public opinion veered round in his favour. It was felt that possibly

a miscarriage of justice had taken place. The fact that the jury had accorded extenuating circumstances to the perpetrator of an outrage which, if committed, had no circumstances of extenuation about it, was looked on as implying a doubt on the part of the jury as to the correctness of their verdict. In the same way have our own Home Secretaries commuted the death penalty in certain cases of murder where only a doubt as to the satisfactoriness of the jury's verdict could justify such clemency towards the perpetrator of the crime. The President Ferey is reported to have said, 'I would sooner have cut off my hand than have signed such a judgment,' and shortly after the trial he made more than one effort to procure a revision of the sentence. Berryer himself, a few years later, speaking of the case said: 'That verdict, till now a subject of regret, is beginning to become one of remorse.'

The prisoner's father was untiring in his efforts to plead his son's cause with the world. Hearing that Lord Abinger, formerly Sir James Scarlett and at this time Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer, had written to a friend who was a member of the French Government expressing his surprise at the verdict, General de la Roncière asked the judge whether he would send him an expression of his opinion on the conviction of his son, which he might be at liberty to make public. This Lord Abinger consented to do. He said that the confession of La Roncière of which so much had been made, seemed to him to have been wrung from him by threats and inducements such as deprived it of all weight judicially, and pointed out that in an English trial such a confession would not have been admitted as evidence. An examination of the specimens of handwriting, which the General had sent him, confirmed his opinion that La Roncière was not the author of the letters. Lord Abinger criticised

the circumstances under which Marie de Morell had been allowed to give her evidence, 'circumstances which prevented all possibility of cross-examination by the counsel for the defence, and gave the whole trial a powerful dramatic effect little calculated to preserve that atmosphere of calmness and tranquillity necessary to the impartial administration of criminal justice.' 'You sir,' he concluded, 'as a father may well cherish the conviction of your son's innocence. As a foreigner, having no other interest than a love of justice and the ordinary feelings of humanity, it is enough for me to say that neither the brilliance of the advocates nor the weight of the evidence adduced against the defendant carry sufficient force to persuade me of his guilt.' This expression of Lord Abinger's opinion did not have altogether the effect that General de la Roncière had hoped. By many of his own countrymen it was looked on as an unnecessary and impertinent reflection on the administration of justice in France and, worse still, as reflecting on the conduct of French officers.

From Germany, in the person of a Dr Matthaei, one of the physicians of the King of Hanover, came medical testimony to what was really the crucial point of the case, the mental and physical condition of the alleged victim of the crime. He cited a number of cases in which young women had concocted false charges and inflicted injuries on themselves as the outcome of a peculiar mental condition. To-day cases of this kind are recognised as occurring under the influence of that most protean of diseases, hysteria; to-day, in the present state of medical knowledge of nervous disease, the conviction of La Roncière would be an impossibility. But in 1835 these things were but imperfectly understood. Auto-suggestion, hallucination, pathological lying, are now acknowledged symptoms of certain forms of hysteria. Already

before she met La Roncière, Marie de Morell had been guilty of writing anonymous letters and inventing untrue stories. Growing into womanhood this aberration became erotic and periodical in its manifestations. She meets La Roncière, this gay dog, this reputed Don Juan, this type of the attractive villain of the romances of the day. The morbid imagination of the girl is fired, and in the accesses of hysterical attacks she invents a story which would seem in some perverse way to have gratified her immature desires. That this girl should have allowed an innocent man to go to prison, possibly to have gone to the scaffold, on her own false evidence is unfortunately quite consistent with this particular form of feminine crime. 'The condition,' writes one authority on hysterical disease, 'which in 1835 M. Chaix d'Est Ange described as indefinable, we recognise to-day as hysteria. A distinguished alienist who sat near Mlle de Morell during the trial has told us that the hysterical character of her nervous condition was undoubted.'[1] It is a significant fact that during her later life Marie de Morell was a regular patient of the famous Dr Charcot.[2]

The powerful influence of Marshal Soult, who was related to Mme de Morell, the high social position of the family were successfully exerted to prevent any immediate reconsideration of La Roncière's case. In 1843 however, the King, Louis-Philippe, remitted two years of his sentence. In 1849, after the fall of the July Monarchy, Odilon Barrot, then Minister of Justice, reported favourably on the rehabilitation of La Roncière, and in 1850, after a full inquiry into the case, he was made a Commandant in the National Guard. He afterwards held a number of high colonial

[1] Legrand du Soulle, *Les Hysteriques, État Physique et État Mental*, Paris, 1891.

[2] Fourquet, *Les Faux Témoins*, Chalon-sur-Saône, 1901.

appointments and retired in 1869, having received the Legion of Honour. He died in 1874.

Marie de Morell some few years after the trial married a distinguished diplomatist, the Marquis d'Eyrargues. After her marriage she retired into Normandy, where she enjoyed the reputation of being a good mother and a kind and charitable lady. Lieutenant d'Estouilly left the army soon after the events of the trial, became a religious mystic and died at an early age in a convent in Syria. Ambert rose to be a general in the army and was the author of some religious works. He died in 1890.