THE CALVARY OF PETER VAUX

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I

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER

The little French village of Longepierre is situated on the right bank of the River Doubs, close to the point at which that river joins the Saône. It lies on the confines of the Burgundy country, in the department of Saône-et-Loire. In the middle of the last century, when this history opens, Longepierre numbered seven hundred inhabitants. The village itself consisted of some hundred houses grouped round the village church. These were for the most part roofed with thatch, only a few of the more important dwellings having tiled roofs.

The inhabitants of Longepierre at the time of our story, were divided sharply into two distinct groups, the well-to-do peasant proprietors, possessing their own land, and the poor, the day labourers, who worked for hire. The former class, known as 'the notables,' selfish and rapacious peasants, oppressed and exploited their less fortunate brethren; they had all the vices and none of the virtues of an aristocracy. The labourer, whose daily wage varied from twopence halfpenny to threepence, lived in a state of miserable indigence, dependent for his very existence on the favour of the notables. In nothing was the selfish unscrupulousness of the latter shown more clearly than in their treatment of the common land belonging to the village. This extended to some two hundred acres. The notables, having plenty of arable land of their own, occupied

the common land as pasturage for their cattle. The labourer, having no cattle, could take no advantage from his rights in the land. Nor had he the power to insist on any portion of it being given over to cultivation. When he tried to get some profit out of it by sending sheep and geese to feed there, the notables, through the municipal council which they controlled, forbade the feeding of sheep and geese on the common land. So things remained in Longepierre until a law passed in 1837 gave to municipal councils the right to administer and lease out common properties. But the municipal council of Longepierre showed no inclination to avail themselves of these new powers. They dreaded the greater independence of the labourer, should he become, in however modest a degree, a landed proprietor. After two years of opposition, however, the council were at length compelled to yield to the popular demands. In 1839 the common land of Longepierre was divided into allotments; these were distributed among the heads of families of the village, to be held on a nine years' leasehold.

The effect of this arrangement on the prosperity of Longepierre was immediate. Both materially and morally the change raised the village from a state of misery and ignorance to one of contentment and progress. Wages increased; the labourer found himself able for the first time to pay the small sum necessary for the education of his children; the consciousness of proprietorship gave him greater dignity and self-respect. But at this happiness and prosperity the notables looked askance. They felt that they had been humiliated by the concessions wrung from them. They hoped when the nine year leases were expired to put things back into the old condition. To them the increased wages and the loss of free pasturage were in no way compensated for by the greater happiness of their fellow-creatures.

It was in the year 1844 that there came to Longepierre as teacher in the village school the hero of this story. Peter Vaux was born on the 8th of January, 1821, at the village of Molaise in the neighbourhood of Longepierre. His father was a farmer. He died a year after the birth of Peter. His mother married again. With the help of a small factory which she set up for the making of colza oil, Peter's mother was able to bring up a large family. Peter was apprenticed at sixteen years of age to a shoemaker, but his superior intelligence marked him out for something better. He entered the Government schools and by dint of hard work and good conduct, passed out of the École Normale at Mâcon in the first class, thus qualifying himself to become a teacher in the district schools. At this moment the commune of Longepierre stood in need of a master for their local school. Peter Vaux was highly recommended to the municipal council, on whom fell the final choice, by the educational authorities of the district. In spite of some opposition, Vaux was elected to the post and in November of 1844 took up his duties at Longepierre.

It was a fatal day for Peter Vaux when the municipal council of Longepierre chose him as their schoolmaster. But the enthusiasm of youth, his natural strength of character, his self-confidence, his generosity made it seem to the young man a great day, the opening of a career in which he might fulfil his ambition to serve his fellow-men to the utmost of his powers, and serve above all the sacred cause of truth and justice. 'Do your duty come what may,' was a phrase often on his lips, and to Peter Vaux it was no idle pretence. It was an article of faith. Believing devoutly in God, not the God of a church, but a Supreme Being, the source of ultimate truth and justice, Peter Vaux had all the ardour and courage of

the true believer With the inexperience natural to youth he was rather too downright and independent to please those whose opposition or prejudice he felt it his duty to combat, but of his goodwill, his sincerity there could be no question. His personality was strong and dominating. Tall, well-built, he was a fine if not handsome man. His features, slightly marked by small-pox, were regular. The most striking of these were his eyes. They were gray, surmounted by thick eyebrows quick and penetrating in their glance, reflecting the force and energy of his will. His forehead was broad, his mouth large and with good teeth, his hair chestnut in colour. He wore what was rather unusual at the time, a short moustache. A year after he came to Longepierre, Peter Vaux married. He had met at a wedding a handsome girl named Irma Jeannin. She was the daughter of a prosperous farmer. She had received a good education which helped her to appreciate the intellectual superiority of such a man as Vaux. In spite of the fact that the schoolmaster was without any means except the salary he earned, the parents of Irma Jeannin accepted him as a son-in-law. The marriage was in every sense a happy one. Vaux showed himself to be a devoted husband and father.

Such was Peter Vaux. He had not been long in Longepierre before his energy made itself felt. He persuaded the municipal council to enlarge the village schoolroom, which was small, airless, and insanitary, and furnish it with proper desks. By a curious arrangement village schoolmasters at this time were empowered to act as secretary to the local mayor. Vaux accepted the post, but, finding the remuneration utterly inadequate, applied to the council for a modest increase of salary. This was refused him, and to the astonishment and indignation of the councillors, the schoolmaster dared to resign the office. But he

expressed his willingness to continue to discharge the duties of the post as a private individual, until a successor could be found. The firmness of Vaux's attitude and the difficulty of replacing him won the day; the increase of salary was voted, and he resumed his duties.

Another reform, far more important in character, was brought about solely by the energy and determination of Vaux. This was no less than the providing of free education for the children of the village. At the time of the appointment of Vaux the school fees were unequal; some paid fifty centimes a month, others sixty or sixty-five. Vaux pointed out this anomaly to the authorities, and was instructed to levy a uniform fee of one franc a month. The poorer members of the community complained to Vaux of this higher charge. To these the schoolmaster replied that the municipal council were in good funds, well able, if they chose, to pay the school fees out of their own pocket, and so give the village the benefit of free education. The proposal was placed before the council who received it in no friendly spirit. Those who wanted education, they said, ought to pay for it. The attitude of Vaux was resented, complaints were made to his superiors. Vaux received a letter from an inspector of schools, in which he was told that the Prefect of the department approved of the view taken by the council of Longepierre and that he was to give way, and not press the matter any further. In spite of this caution, Vaux continued his efforts, and by his energy and perseverance brought them to a successful conclusion. At the beginning of 1848 the council were compelled to vote that henceforth education in Longepierre should be free.

The year 1848 was a critical year in the history of Europe, a year of revolution. It was critical in the history of France. It began with the triumph of

democracy in the overthrow of Louis Philippe and the foundation of the Second Republic; and ended with the first step towards reaction as shown by the election of Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to the Presidency of the Republic. These events had an important bearing on the fortunes of the little village of Longepierre and on those of Peter Vaux. But before we follows these fortunes, let us pause and introduce the villain of our story, as complete and thorough-paced a villain as ever figured outside the pages of romance. In 1848 he comes on the scene as a protagonist in the tragedy. Let us see what manner of man he is.

Gallemard is his name. He is about fifty years of age. He is innkeeper, grocer, and holds the Government licence to sell tobacco to the village. He is a short, fat man with a hairless face, diffident, humble, insinuating in manner, soft-spoken, with shifty gray eyes. This 'faux bon homme' has Uriah Heep's habit of rubbing his hands and a Job Trotter-like gift of ready tears. Gallemard had begun life as a gardener to a gentleman in the neighbourhood of Longepierre. During his master's absence a considerable theft had taken place in the house. Though no legal steps were taken, the master was unkind enough to harbour a conviction that the gardener was the thief. In 1827 Gallemard had come to Longepierre and set up business as a tavern-keeper. By none too scrupulous trading and the grant of the tobacco monopoly Gallemard began to make money. He became a person of consequence in the village. He was a man to be feared, this honey-tongued publican. It was said to be dangerous to be his enemy; one had had his house burnt down; Gallemard suggested that he had set fire to it himself, and for a few days the unfortunate man was placed under arrest.

There was a bibulous old man in the village who possessed some property. Whilst under the influence

of drink in Gallemard's tavern, the old man parted with his property to the innkeeper in return for an annual allowance. Shortly after, at harvest time, Gallemard took his pensioner out with him into the fields to help him load his hay. The old man, half drunk, was standing in the cart, piling up the last bundles of hay, when suddenly the horse was whipped up. It started off with a jerk which threw the old man to the ground. He died of his injuries some months later, and was so ungenerous as to accuse with his last breath Gallemard and his son-in-law, one Pichon, of having murdered him. These sinister occurrences took place at a time when the village was too excited by other events to pay full attention to them, but they did not diminish the dislike mingled with something of fear with which the innkeeper was regarded.

Foremost among these events were the Revolution of 1848, the fall of the constitutional monarchy and the coming of the Republic. To Peter Vaux the change of government brought the keenest satisfaction. He was an ardent republican. Born of the people, his one desire was to serve the people, to be the champion of the poor and oppressed against the forces of wealth and privilege. He saw in the revolution a great opportunity for righting the wrongs of his fellow-men in Longepierre. Twenty-seven years of age, the zeal of Peter Vaux was the natural outcome of an unselfish and generous nature. He belonged to a profession notorious for their republican sympathies. Fearless where duty was concerned, he was prepared to face all danger and opposition, utterly regardless of his own interests where they conflicted with what he believed to be the interests of truth and justice. It was in vain that his wife counselled prudence, that his friends warned him that in taking up the cause of the poor against the rich, he would be

a fool for his pains. His mother-in-law on her death-bed said to him, 'Vaux, my son, you are a good man, an honest man. Bring up your children to the best of your ability, and don't busy yourself so much with the Republic. It will bring you nothing but misfortune.' But Peter Vaux was deaf to all such warnings, prophetic as they were. His heart and conscience rejected all paltering with plain duty. He must go on, come what may.

Quite other were the feelings of the notables on learning of the revolution in Paris. They saw in it the end of their reign in Longepierre. They feared the vengeance of those whom they had so long exploited to their own profit. At first they tried to suppress the news as it came through from Paris. They began furbishing up old firearms with a view to fighting the revolt which they dreaded. In the municipal council Vaux ridiculed these measures. Did they take the people of Longepierre for ruffians and brigands? he asked; how could they hope to keep back from them news that was ringing throughout France? The councillors saw the good sense of this advice. They veered round at once, planted a tree of liberty in honour of the revolution, fired off the antique weapons in the same good cause, and broached a cask of wine in the public square. But there was, as might be expected, little good faith in these demonstrations of enthusiasm. A curious incident was soon to reveal the disingenuousness of the notables. At the outbreak of the revolution some of them attended a republican congress held at Verdun, the chief town of the canton in which Longepierre was situated. A committee was chosen to consist of delegates from the different communes, but it was decided that the choice of the delegates was to be confirmed by their respective communes. On their return to Longepierre the notables failed to disclose

this important provision. But their bad faith was soon exposed, and the man who exposed it was Gallemard. He owed the notables a grudge; he had wished to become one of them; his financial position justified the hope. But they would have none of him. Powerful as he was, dispensing money and drink, they disliked and distrusted him. When the revolution came and the triumph of the popular party seemed secure, Gallemard joined Vaux and the republicans, and openly denounced the greed and treachery of the notables. He professed himself the fast friend of Vaux. He would sit with him in the inn, his arm round his neck, to all appearances his faithful and trusted adherent.

The first trial of strength between the two parties took place at the municipal election of July 1848. The municipal council of Longepierre consisted of twelve members. On the day of the election the notables went about among the electors suggesting that the fair and proper thing to do would be to elect six of their own class and six of the labouring class, and so form a council in which each party would be evenly represented. When Vaux appeared on the scene and learnt of this specious proposal, he then and there denounced it as a trap. He pointed out that if the Mayor, as was probable, were selected from among the notables, the casting vote would be with him, that an evenly divided council would be reduced to impotence, that now was the opportunity for the people to take authority to themselves; let them have no half measures, but choose a council composed entirely of their own nominees. The people followed his bidding. A council was elected consisting of twelve members of the popular party. The new council voted immediately the continuance for another eighteen years of the allotments of the common land and the inclusion among these of a hundred and

twenty-five acres of pasturage which the notables had hitherto contrived to exclude from the general division.

But the triumph of the popular party was to be short-lived. The insurrectionary outbreaks in Paris, of May and June, 1848, alarmed the party of order. The choice of Prince Louis Bonaparte as President of the Republic and the election in 1849 of a Legislative Assembly in which the republican party were in a minority, were the signal for that policy of reaction which culminated in the *coup d'état* of December, 185.. Of all the departments of France that of Saône-et-Loire was one of the most republican in feeling. In 1849 six of the deputies for the department were outlawed for taking part in the insurrection of June 13th. One of those who remained sent for Vaux to a banquet held at Verdun and there publicly commended him for his faithful republicanism. 'Courage, citizen,' he said, 'if we had but one man like you in each of the forty thousand communes of France, we should not have to struggle with such energy against the encroachments of a power that is leading us God knows where.' In the then state of affairs this was dangerous praise. At the same time Vaux had fallen out with the parish priest of Longepierre. He himself, his father and brother-in-law sang in the village choir. In 1848 the republican Government had ordered that choirs in churches were to sing 'God preserve the republic in safety.' Later the priest told them that they were to sing 'God preserve the people in safety.' Vaux refused to do this. The priest denounced him from the pulpit and Vaux and his relatives left the choir. On one occasion Vaux, by way of jest, had written under his signature to a legal document the words 'red republican,' the term used opprobriously for the members of the extreme republican party. This

was no jest in the eyes of authority. To the reactionary party Vaux became a dangerous man; in his official dossier he was marked down as 'of independent character, having suspicious connections, of a turbulent spirit, irreligious in sentiment.'

The authorities were not slow to act. In January, 1850, a law was passed giving to the Prefect of a department the right to dismiss or suspend the teachers in the Government schools. In March of that year Peter Vaux was suspended for six months from the exercise of his functions. An appeal met with no success, and a month later Vaux was dismissed altogether. Thus thrown entirely on his own resources, the father now of three children, Vaux set himself fearlessly to earn his own living. He was not altogether without the means of doing so. He had his share in the allotment of the common land; with another man he started a small factory for making bricks; he had learnt shoemaking as a boy. With the help of his many friends among the labouring class he was enabled to make a prosperous start; his influence in the village was considerably strengthened and enhanced by the sacrifice he had made in the popular cause. If his opponents had hoped that his dismissal from his post would crush him, they had been mistaken. The struggle went on, but the odds were getting daily heavier against the chances of Peter Vaux. The Mayor of Longepierre wrote to the Prefect protesting against the dismissal of Vaux. The Prefect replied by suspending the Mayor for three months, and, shortly after, the municipal council was dissolved and a commission of three appointed in its place. The elections for a new council were due to take place in November, 1850. In spite of all the efforts of the authorities and the notables, Longepierre returned twelve republicans, including Vaux

and Gallemard. Gallemard headed the poll by one vote, the result of an act of fraud on the part of that worthy and his son-in-law and confederate, Pichon. When, however, the new council assembled in the January of 1851, Vaux was chosen Mayor, receiving nine votes as against three given to Gallemard. For the post of deputy the votes were divided equally between Gallemard and John Petit. Gallemard as the older man of the two, received the office. The Prefect refused promptly to ratify the choice of Vaux as Mayor, unless he were ready to prove by his acts that he had ceased to be a red republican; he offered even to restore to him his post as schoolmaster if he would surrender his principles. Vaux replied that he could not give the lie to his conscience for the sake of a Mayor's scarf. As Vaux's election was not officially confirmed, Gallemard as deputy became the acting Mayor.

A great change had been wrought in the disposition of that ingenious gentleman. His incursion into republicanism had not brought him the gratification he had looked for. The notables had got even with him by depriving him of the tobacco monopoly, a serious loss to his pocket. The republicans, on the other hand, showed little confidence in him. It was only by the influence of Vaux, who had refused to heed the warnings of those who attacked the innkeeper's sincerity, that he had been elected on the council, and there he found that such men as Vaux and Petit were more regarded than he. Neither his greed nor his ambition had profited by his association with the popular cause; now that he saw that cause failing, he lost no time in deserting it. He became the champion of reaction in Longepierre. It was the one village in the neighbourhood that still refused to bow the knee to the new régime. Gallemard made it his business to bring it to submission. Two incidents

revealed his conversion to the service of law and order.

Owing to the attacks which the village priest had levelled against Vaux and the republicans, the council had deprived him of a sum of one hundred and fifty francs which had been voted him annually as an addition to his salary. When a new priest came to Longepierre, Gallemard tried to get the council to rescind the resolution. Vaux opposed him and the proposal was defeated by eight votes to four. A sum of one hundred francs had been voted annually to pay for the celebration of the fête of February 24th, the date on which the revolution of 1848 had broken out. The council voted the usual sum for the year 1851. Gallemard, acting as Mayor, ignored their decision and prevented the celebration from being held. The quarrel between Gallemard and his former associates became acute. It was touching the pockets of the innkeeper. He found his tavern deserted by his republican customers, who transferred their patronage to a rival establishment. One thing Gallemard saw clearly. He could never be master of Longepierre as long as Vaux, firm and incorruptible, was there to oppose him, and he wanted to be master. He had no friends; he was trusted by no one; to be powerful he must be feared. dreaded as an enemy; the weight of his displeasure must be seen to fall heavily on those of his fellow-men who crossed his path. The weapon was at hand, dark and deadly; with craft and cunning Gallemard was prepared to wield it, to brave, in his own language, the utmost terrors of hell to gain power and gold.

II

THE FIRES AT LONGEPIERRE

BETWEEN March 2nd, 1851, and March 13th in the following year eight fires broke out in the village of Longepierre, doing total damage to the extent of 160,000 francs. There could be no doubt that these fires were the work of incendiaries. They all started underneath the thatched roofs of the houses. These came down to within six feet of the ground, so that it was easy for a man of middle height to reach up and set fire to them. In many cases there were marks on the walls where matches had been struck. The fires always took place at night when the wind was in a favourable quarter for spreading the flames. The work of a secret incendiary was rendered the easier by the character of the village streets. These were dark and winding and at each side of them were hedges and ditches in which the criminal could hide himself, to say nothing of the sheds, barns, and dungheaps scattered about, offering an equally ready means of concealment. The inflammable nature of the houses served to spread the fire with amazing rapidity. An incendiary could have chosen no more propitious field for his energies than the village of Longepierre.

The first of these fires occurred between midnight and one o'clock on the night of Sunday, March 2nd, 1851. It destroyed six buildings belonging to a man of the name of Mazué, made nine families homeless, and did 14,000 francs' worth of damage. The same night at the other end of the village another house was fired, but the flames were extinguished before any damage could be done.

At the very outset a statement was made which pointed directly to Gallemard and his son-in-law, Pichon, as the guilty parties. John Petit, one of the municipal councillors, said that on the evening of March 2nd, coming out of Gallemard's tavern, about half-past eleven, he saw Pichon returning, carrying a lantern. Gallemard met him and took him inside. 'Do you still think of doing it to-night?' he asked. Pichon replied, 'Yes, it must be done now.' 'All right,' answered Gallemard. At first Petit thought that Gallemard was discussing with his son-in-law some scheme for cheating the excise, but when the fires broke out, his suspicions were aroused. He knew that Gallemard had had a lawsuit with Mazué the victim of the first fire, while the second had broken out in close proximity to the shop of Madame Frilley, who had held the tobacco monopoly since it had been taken away from Gallemard. It is a remarkable fact that of the eight fires occurring in Longepierre during this period, six took place in close proximity to Madame Frilley's shop.

On March 25th, about ten o'clock at night the house of Duperron, one of the notables, was burnt down and 25,000 francs' worth of damage done. This second fire decided Petit to communicate his suspicions to the local Justice of the Peace by means of an anonymous letter.

Something of terror began to spread through the little village. Men dreaded lest their property should be the next to suffer; night patrols were instituted; a brigade of gendarmes was sent to Longepierre. Wild rumours circulated. These fires were the work of the red republicans, determined to avenge themselves on the owners of property. A judicial investigation was opened. Locally this was conducted by the Justice of the Peace, Boulanger, acting under the supervision of the

examining magistrate attached to the Tribunal at Chalon.

To Boulanger Petit handed his anonymous letter on March 27th, and made subsequently a statement. One motive that prompted Petit to speak was the fact that Gallemard had pointed out to the Justice of the Peace two innocent men as authors of the crime, one of whom had been placed under arrest.

To understand what follows it is necessary from the first to realise the extraordinary position in which Gallemard was placed, and the skill and cunning with which he availed himself of it. In republican Longepierre he was the acknowledged champion of the reactionary authorities. He was the acting Mayor, and so had some right to take part in the investigation into the causes of the fires. But above all by his plausible and insinuating character he had acquired an almost hypnotic influence over the Justice of the Peace, Boulanger, a man of doubtful morals, mediocre intelligence, and inordinate vanity which Gallemard well knew how to feed and flatter. To every whisper, to every subtle suggestion of Gallemard, Boulanger lent a ready and attentive ear. Throughout the investigation Gallemard was at his elbow; the confidence Boulanger expressed in the zeal and truthfulness of that astute rascal he communicated to those above him. When Petit made his charge against Gallemard, the latter's answer to it was accepted almost before it was made; Petit was a republican, a friend of Vaux; the accusation was made out of revenge for Gallemard's adherence to the cause of law and order, perhaps to divert suspicion from the republicans themselves, who were the real incendiaries. This answer of Gallemard's seemed plausible enough to zealous reactionaries with little sense of strict justice where political opponents were concerned.

Foremost among these opponents, the most obstinate

and dreaded was Peter Vaux. If, as Gallemard suggested, the fires were the work of republican incendiaries, might not Vaux be implicated? There was no actual evidence against him. On the occasion of the first outbreak he had spent the night unexpectedly away from home. During that day in Gallemard's hearing he and a friend, Richard by name, had expressed their intention of going over to the neighbouring village of Ecuelles and returning by eleven o'clock the same night. But they had been delayed and did not return as a fact until the following day. During the night of the second outbreak Vaux had never left his house.

In spite of these facts Vaux from the very first was regarded with suspicion by the judicial authorities. Gallemard had spoken vaguely to the magistrates of secret meetings of Vaux and other malcontents. This was reason enough for justice to act; the inquisitorial character of preliminary investigation in France enables a person to be summoned before the magistrate and interrogated on the most trivial grounds. On April 6th, Vaux was examined for the first time:—

Q. From information received it would appear that the fires which have taken place at Longepierre are not the outcome of private spite, but of a desire for revenge on those landowners who have opposed the allotment of the common land. It would seem that you, by the violence of your language, have helped to stir up feelings of this kind.

A. I don't think that the differences caused by the allotment of the common land have had anything to do with the fires. I have certainly been in favour of such allotment.

Q. Were you at Longepierre on the night of March 2nd, the occasion of the first fire.

A. No. I had gone to Ecuelles with Richard, one of my colleagues on the municipal council, and we

only returned the following day. I was in bed when the second fire took place and was awakened by my brother-in-law.

Q. Do you believe in the suggestion made by the two municipal councillors, John Petit and Nicolot, that M. Gallemard and his son-in-law are the incendiaries in this case?

A. I have been associated with M. Gallemard; we are not so intimate now, but that does not prevent me from saying what I believe, that he and his son-in-law are incapable of committing such a crime.

It is to be observed that Gallemard, tavernkeeper and acting Mayor, is now 'Monsieur Gallemard,' in the eye of authority, the organ of public opinion in Longepierre, a trusted intelligencer, whose finger may point the way to punishment and disgrace.

On May 5th at ten o'clock at night the house of Richard, the friend of Vaux and one of the council, was fired and 21,000 francs' worth of damage done. Richard was known to be in embarrassed circumstances, but his property was not insured.

Two days later the magistrates came to Longepierre. The first person they examined was M. Gallemard. He suggested that the fire at Richard's must have started inside the house, its enclosure making it impossible for an incendiary to have entered the premises without attracting the notice of the night patrols. 'Public opinion,' of which Gallemard always professed to be the mouthpiece, attributed, he said, this last fire to the same evil disposition as the others. By insinuation he made it clear to the magistrates that Richard, who had nothing to lose by it, had himself set fire to his house, and that, by firing the property of one of their own number, the republicans were seeking to divert suspicion from themselves. The magistrates accepted this view unsupported as it was by a tittle of evidence. The same day Richard and

Vaux were arrested. With a chain round his neck Peter Vaux was led away to the prison at Verdun.

Confident in his innocence Vaux submitted cheerfully to the ignominy of arbitrary arrest. He bade farewell gaily to his friends; but, as he passed through the neighbouring villages some of his acquaintances turned away from him at the sight of his chain. On reaching Verdun he was put into a damp stone cell, with a pile of straw for a bed. Had not good friends brought him wine and meat, he would have had nothing to eat. The next day he was removed to Chalon, the assize town of the department. There he was lodged in an ordinary prison cell, large and properly furnished. The same day he writes to his wife:—

'I would a thousand times sooner be in a solitary cell than in a prison where I should be mixed up with every kind of person and where I should have no time to think. True, I am all alone; but I feel as happy as if I were in a palace. If I were only earning three francs a day here, I might perhaps never wish to come out. Only one thing worries me, your health. I am afraid lest you may give yourself up to useless tears. Remember that your health is necessary to the children, and don't be more downhearted than I am. Besides, who better than you can answer for my conduct?

The night of the first fire I was at Ecuelles.

The second I was asleep by your side.

The third I was at my post with the patrol which I never left.

As to this supposed incendiary conspiracy which has brought me here, I believe it to be a wretched slander; my enemies—political, for I have no others—have imagined these things in order to be revenged on the council and on me who still hold proudly the title of Mayor of Longepierre. They think by this means to make me lose the trust that is reposed in me,

solely because I have acted on behalf of truth and justice, and always in accordance with the law . . . Yesterday, from the depth of my cell I seemed to hear a loved voice. Sweetly and tenderly it fell on my ears. My heart stood still and two large tears fell from my eyes at the thought of Ermence (his daughter) and you. But I soon became calm and cheerful again as I am now.'

On May 12th, Vaux was interrogated by the examining magistrate. This is the only occasion from the time of his arrest—to his release on May 31st—on which he was judicially examined:—

Q. You are designated by the public voice as being, if not the actual author, at any rate the instigator of the fires which now for two months have ravaged the commune of Longepierre.

A. I protest against such a charge; if it is made against me, I can only attribute it to political hostility. Far from instigating any one to commit arson, I should be the first to denounce the guilty party, if I knew him.

Q. I would point out that your actions and general attitude confirm the public suspicions, that both on the eve and morrow of the various fires that have broken out in Longepierre, you have been seen in frequent conference with some of the most ill-reputed men in the neighbourhood.

A. I protest most decidedly against such a charge. Neither on the eve nor on the morrow of the fires have I held any mysterious conferences with other persons.

The Prefect of the department visited Vaux in his cell in Chalon prison. He had already visited Longepierre. There he had approved the final division of all the common land into allotments, the very thing for which Vaux had fought so stoutly, and more than any man helped to bring about. At the same time

the Prefect had gone out of his way to denounce Vaux to his fellow-citizens as a dangerous and seditious malcontent. He told them that his election as a municipal councillor had been an insult to the authorities. But the friends of Vaux were undismayed; the day after the Prefect's visit they went in a body and helped by their manual labour to protect his allotment from the effects of a recent flood.

The Prefect's visit to the prisoner at Chalon was sinister. Accompanied by the Sub-Prefect and other persons of importance, he entered the cell of Vaux. 'Well,' said the Prefect, 'it's sad to see you here. You will get out of it no doubt, but with your antecedents, it's unfortunate!' Vaux, without replying, folded his arms and smiled.

Every effort was made, public and private, by friends and opponents to weaken Vaux's resolution:—

'When I was at Mâcon,' he writes to his wife, 'was I not told that if I wanted to get on in the world, I must go often to confession? What a wretched idea it gave one of men's feelings about religion, to advise such hypocrisy! And later have they not told me that in my interest and yours I ought not to busy myself with the wrongs of the poor, that I should only be the dupe of my own good nature? They were right, but heart and conscience reject such advice; to keep my own self-respect I must uphold at all costs truth and justice. At Chalon they told me that discretion is wisdom, that the voice of the majority is always in accord with justice; that I ought to think of you and my family, and that if, in defending the interests of others, I compromise our own and the future of our family, it is better to be silent than to proclaim the truth. What painful thoughts, my dear Irma, are provoked by such principles as these, offensive to my heart and reason. I could not go along with such men. Above all I love the truth, it is my

God and I am born to serve it. I shall put aside men and the things of this life, and go on fearlessly in the path traced out for me by my conscience. . . . If I suffered alone, if I knew nothing of your tears and anguish, I should not heed the hours I pass in this peaceful cell—my body may be captive, but my soul is free, and laughs at prison walls and bolts.'

He signs the letter, 'Your husband, ex-teacher, Mayor of Longepierre, Vaux, *sans peur et sans reproche*.'

No martyr in the cause of truth was ever more steadfast, more sincere than Peter Vaux. Few have been called on to endure greater trial of their faith. But his spirit was equal to the test. 'Let us,' he writes, 'take all that comes, good or evil, as true stoics. The children of the poor are brought up in the midst of suffering, they have ceaselessly before their eyes the spectacle of misery and woe. It is a part of the struggles and misfortune of life.' Already in Longepierre Vaux had fought to a successful issue a battle which, as a result of his victory, had changed the whole face of life in the village, made the poor, hitherto dependent, independent, the community thriving and prosperous. Authority itself had blessed the result of his labours. But Peter Vaux was a dangerous man, the tide of reaction was coming in on the flood, and M. Gallemard was not yet the official Mayor of Longepierre.

After more than three weeks of preventive detention, Vaux and his friend Richard were released. It had been impossible to bring against them any evidence worthy of the name. There was nothing but vague or malicious gossip to connect Vaux in any way with the fires at Longepierre. And so authority had to let him go free. Vaux arrived home on June 1st. It was a Sunday morning. He went to the tavern where he and his friends were accustomed to meet: 'No sooner did they know of my return than the inn was full of people. Some took me by the hand, some embraced

me, others were too moved to speak, but I saw the tears falling down their bronzed cheeks. To me this was the best of all rewards for my devotion to the cause of these good folk whom I had sworn in my heart never to forsake. I count this day among the happiest of my life.'

If his opponents thought or hoped that imprisonment had tamed the spirit of Vaux, they were very quickly disappointed. The Sub-Prefect ordered that twelve of the notables were to be added to the municipal council for making the final arrangements in regard to the allotments of the common land. When the letter of the Sub-Prefect to this effect was read to the council, Vaux got up and declared that by law the deliberations of municipal councils were secret, that not even the President of the Republic could violate the law, and called on the notables present to leave the room. They had to obey. It was clear that something more than preventive detention was necessary to silence this pestilent demagogue, with his unfortunate habit of being generally in the right.

A few days before the release of Vaux an incident had occurred in Longepierre which, unconnected apparently with him, was in its sequel to have a powerful effect on his fortunes. There hung about the village at this time a certain Peter Balleau, a kind of tramp, tall, thin, fifty-four years of age, needy, starving, reputed a thief. His wild and rough nature kept him aloof from other men; his poverty made him the ready instrument of corruption, his hatred of work capable of the basest employment. On May 24th, this dubious individual attempted to negotiate a forged bill for thirty francs in the village of Seurre, near Longepierre. Confronted with the farmer whose name had been forged, he admitted his guilt and said that the bill had been made out for him by a certain Michaud, one of the municipal councillors of Longe-

pierre. This Michaud was a weaver by trade, a talkative fellow, making a parade of his reading, writing, and arithmetic among his less fortunate brethren in the village, acting as a kind of village lawyer, writing letters and making up the accounts of those who were unable to do these things for themselves. After the first fires at Longepierre he had been active in organising the night patrols. On hearing of Balleau's statement, Michaud did not deny that he had forged the bill. He said that he had done it out of humanity. Balleau had told him that his child was dying, that he must have help. At last in a moment of weakness he had yielded to his importunities and committed the guilty act.

On his return from Seurre, Balleau had gone at once to Gallemard, told him his story and asked his help. On June 1st, the day of the triumphal return of Vaux to Longepierre, Balleau made a deposition to the justice of the peace which gave to the incident of the forged bill a graver character. He said that the bill had been given him by Michaud as the price of silence. A day or two after the first fire in Longepierre, Michaud had met him on the site of one of the fires and invited him to join a society of four or five persons who, he said, were the real incendiaries. Balleau declined to do so, whereupon Michaud urged him to keep his secret. A little later Michaud told him the names of the four incendiaries; they were Nicolot, Petit, Savet, and himself. 'If you won't join us,' he said, 'at any rate keep our secret.'

Such was Balleau's story. Michaud met it by an absolute denial of its truth; he had, he said, had nothing to do with the fires except to organise the patrols. It was pointed out to Balleau that it was peculiar at least that after he had refused to join the incendiaries, Michaud should on a subsequent occasion have confided to him their names. Balleau replied

that they had no doubt been told him as a further inducement to join, but that he had always refused to participate in the conspiracy.

The same day Michaud in his distress of mind went to Vaux. A follower of his, looking up to him as his leader, it was natural that Michaud should turn to Vaux in his trouble. 'My dear Vaux,' he said, 'I am a lost man. I have been guilty of drawing up a forged bill for Balleau. He has been arrested and is telling all sorts of lies about me.' 'My dear fellow,' replied Vaux, 'you have done serious wrong and you must pay the penalty. There is only one thing for you to do, confess your crime and undergo patiently the punishment you have deserved. As for Balleau's lies, leave them to the judges to deal with; if your conscience is clear, you have nothing to fear from them.'

Later in the day both Michaud and Balleau were arrested, and a few days after John Petit, Nicolot, and Savet, who had been denounced by Balleau as the accomplices of Michaud.

Since Balleau had turned to M. Gallemard in his hour of need, that worthy had not been inactive. He had supplied the Justice of the Peace, Boulanger, with some questionable and inconclusive evidence against John Petit, whom Balleau had declared to be one of the chief conspirators. It will be remembered that Petit had said that he had overheard a conversation just before the first fire which had led him to believe that Gallemard and his son-in-law, Pichon, were the original incendiaries. This belief he had reiterated fearlessly ever since. It was therefore an especial satisfaction to M. Gallemard to be able to help Boulanger in building up a case against John Petit.

Into the ear of that confiding magistrate Gallemard, on June 17th, poured a long deposition which is a masterpiece of wily insinuation. He began by

suggesting that it was unlikely that Michaud, who was comparatively well-to-do, would join with Balleau in trying to get thirty francs by means of forging a bill; there must be a stronger motive to drive him to such an act than greed or humanity. But he negatived somewhat the force of this suggestion by stating at the end of his deposition that this was not the first essay of Michaud in forgery; it would appear that he had twice before committed similar acts for trifling sums. To Balleau, Gallemard gave a certificate of character that was sanguine to say the least of it. 'I do not believe Balleau,' he said, 'capable under any circumstances of inventing or sustaining anything untrue.' His character of Michaud had one significant qualification; 'Until,' he said, 'he joined the municipal council there was nothing against him. But from that moment he became an active politician. It is Vaux who has got hold of him and ruined him.'

Here we have the keynote of Gallemard's deposition; it was a subtle and studied attempt to involve Vaux by implication in the alleged guilt of those who had been already arrested. He paints a picture of the consternation of Michaud and others on the discovery of the forged bill. 'Only the presence of Vaux,' he goes on to say, 'has reassured them.' On May 31st, Michaud was in such a desperate state of mind that he was contemplating suicide. The next day his situation is no less desperate, but on that day Vaux returns to Longepierre. Michaud sees Vaux and has a conversation with him. His position in regard to the forgery is no different; he cannot avoid punishment; therefore there is no reason why his anguish of mind should be less. But it is; he is entirely changed; people are astonished at his assurance; he sits down at table, eats well, is calm and tranquil, and finally goes before the Justice of the Peace with a confidence all the more astounding in one who,

before his conversation with Vaux, had been terrified at the thought of such an ordeal. If, Gallemard suggested, Michaud had been arrested before the return of Vaux, the authorities would have known a great deal more about the fires. The moment Vaux comes on the scene he confers with all the turbulent people in the neighbourhood, Petit and others. From him they receive their orders. Balleau knows more than he chooses to say; some of the incendiaries are in prison, but not all. It is not likely that those who have been arrested will confess; the influence of Vaux will be felt even within the walls of the prison. They have been ordered to hold their tongues, and are encouraged to hope that when, next year, Louis Napoleon is compelled by the constitution of the Republic to lay down his powers as President, the republican party will be once more in the ascendency.

In this specious statement, Gallemard ingeniously misrepresents the perfectly honest influence which Vaux exercised over his followers as the sway of a daring criminal over his fellow-criminals. Gallemard had said in this deposition of his that all the incendiaries were not yet in prison. As if to confirm the truth of his statement two new fires broke out in Longepierre, one on the 14th of September, the other on the 28th of October. The magistrates from Chalon came to the village. Needless to say Boulanger and Gallemard were not slow to direct their attention to Peter Vaux. He was described as glorying in his recent imprisonment rather than showing any signs of repentance or reformation. Examined himself, Vaux said that he believed his arrest to have been due to the enmity of his political opponents and those who had resented the allotment of the common land.

The hour was not yet ripe. Justice had up to the present no proofs of the actual participation of Vaux in the acts of incendiarism. The evidence of Balleau

was not considered sufficiently reliable to justify the further detention of those who had been arrested. In the month of November they were all released. Michaud and Balleau were sent before the Assize Court at Chalon on a charge of forgery. Michaud was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, but Balleau was acquitted. Both the prosecution and the presiding judge concurred in recommending to the jury the acquittal of Balleau. It was even hinted to them that it was necessary in the interests of justice that he should go free.

III

THE ARREST OF PETER VAUX

THE month of December, 1851, brought ruin to the hopes of Vaux and the republicans of Longepierre. The *coup d'état* destroyed the Republic, established the despotic power of Louis Napoleon, and paved the way to the Second Empire. It was the triumph of M. Gallemard and the notables. Though they disliked and distrusted the innkeeper, the latter in their selfish greed were quite ready to accept his help against their opponents and willing to bow before him as the approved representative of authority in the village. The municipal council was dissolved. The rival tavern, where the republicans had gathered after their split with Gallemard, was closed. A new council composed entirely of notables was nominated by the Prefect, and, summit of his ambition, crown of his devotion, M. Gallemard was appointed Mayor of Longepierre. This former republican now addressed to the Prince President the congratulations of the commune of Longepierre on 'the perilous and noble

enterprise' of the *coup d'état* of December 2nd, which had covered his head with an aureole of glory; 'he has crushed the hydra of Socialism, saved France and society from its ravages. God give him life and strength to defend the state against the forces of anarchy!'

But even the *coup d'état* was powerless to quench the fires of Longepierre. With the opening of the year 1852, they burnt more brightly than ever. On January 14th, and March 8th and 11th, fires broke out on the property of notables, doing damage to the extent of some 30,000 francs. Three persons were arrested. Foremost among these was John Petit. The fire of January 14th had taken place in a house next to his. A man in a white hat had been seen to cross the yard of Petit's house, which had to be traversed in order to reach the premises that had been fired. This man was seen again going in the direction of the Revignon Road. A little later after the outbreak of the fire, Pichon, Gallemard's son-in-law, was seen sitting on the roof of a house on the Revignon Road watching the conflagration; he was wearing a white hat. Next day, Petit, who was already convinced of Pichon's guilt, exclaimed as he passed the latter in the street, 'Look at his white hat; that's the man who lit the fire!'

Though no evidence was forthcoming against Petit other than that on which he had already been arrested and discharged, he was sent to prison again, and with him the two Savets, father and son, against whom there was stronger ground for suspicion.

But the best was yet to come. The dubious Balleau, released by the verdict of the jury at Chalon, had returned to Longepierre, under the protection of authority and watched over tenderly by the new mayor. Not only had M. Gallemard secured the ear of justice in the shape of Boulanger; by timely potations and

other little attentions he had nobbled the police in the person of Carrère, the head of the gendarmerie in the village. One day in April the Mayor informed his friend Carrère that he thought that he ought to see Balleau, who had something to say and had made up his mind apparently to tell all he knew. Carrère saw the needy rascal and from him learnt for the first time that the fires in Longepierre had been the work of a gang of seven incendiaries, the chief of whom Balleau now declared was Peter Vaux.

Here at last was the evidence so long and ardently desired that would connect directly the unbending republican with the crimes that were devastating the hapless village.

No time was lost. On April 22nd Balleau appeared before Boulanger. He began his deposition by saying: 'I wish to add to, and of my own free will complete my previous depositions; if I have not done so sooner, it is because I have been terrified by the threats of those persons whom I am now about to accuse.' He then said that he had learnt from Michaud that in addition to the four whom he had previously denounced as the incendiaries, Vaux, the younger Savet, and a man called Dumont were also members of the band. Asked why he had not named these persons in his original deposition, Balleau replied that he had been frightened by their threats. These, he said, had commenced after the second fire on March 25th, 1851. Vaux had then passed him in the street and said, 'You'll have cause to remember me; you will be sorry for what you have done.' 'But,' said the magistrate, 'after the second fire Vaux could have no reason for resentment against you; you hadn't denounced any of the gang, they had no reason to be alarmed. On the contrary, it was rather in the interests of Vaux to encourage you to join these of whom Michaud had already spoken to you. 'I can

only say that he said it,' answered Balleau, 'I didn't originally denounce these three because their families were influential in the neighbourhood, and I was afraid that my wife and children might be burnt while I was in prison.' 'I strongly advise you to think it all over,' said the judge, 'I will examine you again to-morrow.'

A night's reflection determined Balleau to be more precise. Next day he began on a note almost of joy. 'I am very pleased,' he said, 'to come before you again to-day, I am going to tell you the whole truth.' One day, he said, the 16th or 17th of February, 1851, Michaud had met him by the side of the river Doubs and said, 'You must come with me; there is something we want to tell you; come this evening to the house of Vaux.' Balleau agreed and that evening he went with Michaud to the house in which Peter Vaux was living. There in the kitchen he met Vaux, his wife, John Petit, the elder Savet, Nicolot, and Dumont. Savet opened the proceedings by proposing that they should burn down a whole row of houses in the village and that Michaud and Petit should be the first to get to work. 'If they won't do it,' he said, 'then I will!' It was finally decided that each man should take his turn. Vaux said, 'After this lot is done, we will arrange another.' Balleau was to be one of the last to take his turn. He said that he did not wish to do it, to which Dumont replied, 'If you mean to be one of us, you must do as we do, or you will be a coward.' A few days before the second fire there was another meeting of the conspirators at Michaud's house. It was the hour of the angelus. Michaud had invited Balleau to come, as something important was to be decided. Dumont, Savet, Petit, and Vaux were present at this meeting. It was resolved to burn down the house of Duperron, one of the notables. Alluding to the previous fire of March 2nd, Savet said, 'Two

of us have made a beginning; it is not the fault of Petit if the fires don't burn; I will carry on the good work.' Asked why he had not stated these facts before, Balleau gave the old reason that he was afraid of the vengeance of the conspirators. The judge promised to protect him against anything of the kind, and said that he still doubted whether he had told all he knew. 'I have told the whole truth this time,' replied Balleau.

The same day Vaux was sent for by Boulanger, and in his presence Balleau repeated his story. As soon as he heard it Vaux exclaimed: 'The man is an impudent liar. He has never set foot in my house. Ask him which room I inhabit.' 'The third room in the house of Jeannin (the father-in-law of Vaux, in whose house he and his family lived).' 'Sir,' replied Vaux, 'the man is clearly lying. I have never lived in the third room, which is a bakehouse. All my neighbours can tell you this.' 'It was into the bakehouse I went,' said Balleau. Vaux asked him to describe the furniture of the room. Balleau was silent. 'The witness has stated,' said Vaux, 'in his deposition that he came first into my kitchen. Will you ask him by which door he entered?' 'By the front door,' answered Balleau. 'For the second time,' exclaimed Vaux, 'this man is caught in a flagrant lie. I can call a hundred witnesses to prove that at the time at which he says he came to my house, the front door was bricked up and barricaded; it was not opened again until after the first fire.' Even the faith of Boulanger was shaken. 'You don't seem to me to be speaking the truth,' he said to Balleau, 'I cannot act on the strength of such a deposition.' In spite of his reluctance to act on such evidence, Boulanger examined Vaux again four days later. Vaux repeated his denial of the truth of Balleau's statements; Balleau had never been to his house, nor had any such meeting as he

had described been held there. ‘He has invented,’ said Vaux, ‘all that he has sworn, and in this instance I believe him to be the tool of my enemies. Boulanger suggested that Balleau’s evidence was confirmed by the threats Vaux had addressed to him, by his associating with those accused of arson and rejoicing with them over the disasters that had fallen on innocent folk. ‘I have never threatened Balleau,’ replied Vaux. ‘If I have associated with the people of whom you speak it has been by chance, and without ever the least intention of rejoicing over the unhappy events which have befallen our village.’ Boulanger next brought up against Vaux the change which he had wrought in the depressed condition of Michaud and others after his return from prison on June 1st, 1851. Vaux answered that he had merely comforted Michaud by advising him to tell all the truth about the forged bills.

Q. Your recent language proves your participation in the acts of incendiarism. For instance, on April 18th, speaking of these crimes you said, ‘None of these would have occurred if on February 24th the commune had voted the hundred francs for celebrating the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic.’ On another occasion the wife of Michaud received a letter from her husband in prison in which he told her to be very careful what she said and to observe the greatest possible discretion. On reading this letter you said. ‘There is a word of slang in this which I alone can understand.’

A. I may have made the remark attributed to me about the 24th of February, but, if so, it was a pure conjecture on my part. As to the letter of Michaud to his wife, she brought it to me and asked me to reply to it. I refused. The letter ended with a recommendation to his wife and daughter, in these words: ‘I strongly advise you to be careful what you

say.' I went back to work. Being puzzled about the meaning of the phrase, I told it to Richard and his son and to Dumont who were working with me. I said that Michaud could have no reason for thinking that his wife and daughter would invent some charge against him, and that therefore he had no need to fear any revelation coming from them. That is all that I said, anything else is pure invention.'

At the conclusion of his examination Vaux insisted again on the proof which he had already given of the incorrectness of Balleau's description of his house.

So confident was Vaux in the success with which he had confounded the evidence of his accuser that he went about his work as usual and gave little more thought to the case. He was working in his brick-yard with Dumont on April 29th when, to his surprise, the gendarmes appeared on the scene and arrested Dumont and himself. He asked permission to go home to change his clothes and get something to eat. It was granted him. He had some supper and said good-bye to his wife and their four little children; in three months time Madame Vaux was expecting once again to be a mother. Smiling and cheerful the unhappy man bade them farewell, and tried to comfort them in their grief. With a chain once more about his neck, he was put in a cart with Dumont and Nicolot and driven to Verdun. As he went away the peasants lined the road and shouted to him 'Au revoir.' Vain cry! Peter Vaux was fated never to see Longepierre again.

From Verdun Vaux was taken to Chalon. The case now passed from the hands of Justice of the Peace, Boulanger, into those of the examining magistrate attached to the Chalon court. On May 3rd Balleau was examined and gave a new and revised version of his story. He now said that on the night of the meeting in February he had entered the house of Vaux

by the door in the middle. He described the room in which the meeting was held more accurately, and gave details of the positions of those present. Vaux, for instance, was standing near the stove in the middle of the room with his back to the east. The witness explained that, if he had originally fixed his conversations with Michaud as taking place after the first fire in March, it was because he was afraid of putting the conspirators in an awkward position. 'Only after I had been liberated from prison,' he said, 'sick and weary with remorse, did I decide to tell all.'

Vaux was confronted with him. It was pointed out to him that Balleau's statement was now much more precise in its details. 'The proof that it is false,' replied Vaux, 'lies in the fact that when I first appeared before the Justice of the Peace on April 23rd, Balleau could not give these details which he has managed to find out since . . . The story of the second meeting is equally false. Balleau cannot fix a date for it; and further, I cannot understand why, if I were guilty, Balleau delayed so long before accusing me.' The official report of the examination goes on:—

'The witness persists in the truth of his statement, adding that if he did not accuse Vaux sooner it was because of the threats which he had addressed to him and the fear he felt of him.

The prisoner alleges that he never addressed any threats to the witness and had not spoken to him since the year 1850.

The witness asserts that he has told the truth.

The prisoner objects to Balleau that he did not know which room he inhabited in his father-in-law's house, that he said it was the third room, whereas it was as a fact the second.

The witness replies to this that the meeting took place in the third room and that he came in by the door in the middle.

The prisoner alleges that to get into this room there is no need to enter by the centre door, and that before the Justice of the Peace Balleau had sworn that he had come in by the front door, which at that time was walled up.

The witness replies that he came in by the front door on the east side.'

In the journal which he kept in prison, Vaux describes this interrogatory. 'On coming into the room,' he wrote, 'I saw Balleau, who had just given his evidence, but this time he had so embroidered his narrative that it lacked only one thing, truth. I tried to make some comment on it, but the magistrate stopped me and began to abuse me. I saw that they had used my explanations to coach this rascal and help to correct his previous blunders. I saw that it was a mistake for me to reply to the questions of the examining magistrate. When I realised that he was being guided in the exercise of his functions by hatred and passion rather than a desire to get at the truth, when he began to load me with curses and insults, I said that I should reserve my defence until I appear before a jury, but that I declined to answer a judge who degraded his office by insulting a prisoner.'

This examination completed the case against Vaux, who was now to await his trial in June before the Chalon Assize Court. On the uncorroborated evidence of a man of notoriously bad character, evidence which he had suppressed until more than a year after the events sworn to had taken place, Peter Vaux was to stand his trial on a charge of arson, a crime at that time punishable by death. The French historian of the case has described the reasoning in the minds of the magistrates who sent Vaux for trial on the unsupported evidence of Balleau. It is a melancholy apology. He represents them as arguing thus:—

'The persons we have arrested are in all probability

the guilty parties. In any case they are dangerous men, demagogues whose conviction will have the best possible effect. We require this conviction because first of all we must put an end to their crimes at Longepierre; and secondly, because it is inexpedient that after a year of inquiry and investigation we should have arrived at no result. Our future is at stake, our promotion hangs on it. Against the greater number of these persons we have no proof. But a witness has come forward, whose evidence agrees with our preconceived notions and gives us the means of including the whole gang, and in particular the man whom we regard as its chief, in the serious charge in which some of them are implicated. This witness is little entitled to credit, he is possibly a liar. Much of his evidence is very likely false. But he knows a great deal about the fires. The important thing is that those he has accused should be convicted. It is dangerous and inexpedient to look too closely into the actual truth of his evidence. Even supposing he is lying, his lies are useful to the good cause and the vindication of justice. It is our duty to make the best use of it we can, in order to strike once and for all at these evilly disposed persons who have so long defied us, and put a final stop to a series of crimes which we have hitherto failed either to prevent or punish.'

If the French magistrates were not to a certain extent subservient to authority, the independence of their judges less safeguarded than our own, if in certain cases judicial advancement did not depend on success in obtaining convictions, if prosecutions were conducted with the scrupulous fairness we look for in a court of justice, if the preliminary investigation into a case were not too often carried out in the worst spirit of the Inquisition, it would be difficult indeed to understand how those responsible for the due

administration of justice could take such a view of their duties towards an accused person as that set out above. One fact must always be borne in mind to appreciate rightly the conduct of criminal cases in France. The Procureurs-Généraux and their assistants who are responsible for the prosecution of criminals are at one and the same time Government officials and judges. They act as public prosecutors, but at the same time rank in the magistracy, have the privilege of selecting the judges who are to preside in the Assize Courts, wear the same red robe as the presiding judge, and sit by his side on the bench. It happens not infrequently that the magistrate who is conducting the prosecution is of higher rank in the judicial hierarchy than the President of the court. Judge and prosecution belong to the same order; they have nothing in common with the advocate who conducts the defence; the judges are not chosen from the bar; they form a distinct and separate caste. In the story we are telling these facts should be borne in mind.

To conditions at all times unfavourable to the accused we must add the special conditions of the year 1852. We are on the eve of the proclamation of the Second Empire, and with it the despotism of Napoleon III. All the forces of a highly centralised form of government are being concentrated on the destruction of republicanism and all that it entails. Prefects of departments, magistrates, mayors, all are being employed to the one common end, to repress individual liberty and compel implicit obedience to the authority of Louis Napoleon. On their zeal and energy in this cause depend advancement and honour. Some honest persons believe that there is no choice but between despotism and red anarchy; the spectre of republicanism has been invoked to justify and excuse the extinction of popular government. Woe to those who like Peter Vaux are susceptible of the charge of

being red republicans, men dangerous to public security, supposed to be capable of employing any means to further the cause of disorder and anarchy! All honour to such as M. Gallemard, Mayor of Longepierre, ever ready and willing to lend his genial assistance to the good cause of law and order!

While M. Gallemard was basking in the sunshine of official recognition, Peter Vaux was eating his heart out in his prison cell at Chalon. In his journal he records his hopes and fears, his faith in the righteousness of his cause, his mystification as to the guilt or innocence of those accused with him. He is inclined to suspect the elder Savet. 'If I thought him guilty,' he writes, 'I would hit him on the nose as hard as I could, when I think of the misery he has brought on my wife and children.' What satisfaction, he asks, can his enemies derive from his sufferings? 'What has my poor wife done, and my little children, Ermence, Armand, Mama, and you, my little Brutus? You were just beginning to walk, and I am not there to help you, to hold up your little swaying body, to stretch out my neck to those pretty arms of yours as they reach up to me in mute appeal.'

One day his wife's brother comes to the prison to bring him news of his dear ones. Vaux sees him through the bars of his window. His heart beats high; at last he will hear something of his wife and children. He waits anxiously in the reception room. The door opens; there is no visitor, only a prison official who tells him that he is to be in future kept 'au secret,' that he cannot see any visitors. He is taken back to his cell where he is to remain in solitary confinement until his trial. Another day he is brought a letter with twenty-five centimes to pay on it. He sees it is from his wife, he says he will pay the surcharge. Midnight comes and he has not been given the letter, for which since morning he has been waiting.

'They are so anxious to convict me,' he writes, 'that they will stick at nothing to destroy me; if they don't succeed who knows but they may try to poison me—Bah! it's not possible!' At last he receives the letter. He learns that his wife, who is about to become a mother, has no money, and there is no one to help her. 'Poor mother! Poor little ones! There is no one but I to earn your daily bread for you, to shield you in your weakness from want and misery. And yet through the villainy of men to whom I have done no harm, I am kept here within the walls of this pitiless prison, idle and impotent, my poor wife soon to undergo the pains of childbirth. To think that when the time comes I shall still be here behind these bars! Suppose she is ill—I dare not think of it. My brain begins to give way; I think I shall go mad.'

Great as was his mental anguish in his hours of imprisonment, Vaux never lost his faith in God. He writes to his wife:—

'God has not forsaken you; rather he fills your heart with grace and strength to help you to bear the passing afflictions that he sends us. He is the master of all he has created; he alone governs the fate of men and things. Who is the man so foolish as to say in his pride, "Oh Lord, you know my innocence and yet you allow me to suffer at the hands of my enemies?" The good Master will answer him in words of compassion which carry grace and life to the man of pure heart, "Long before you and for your sake I endured cruelty and insult! Weak mortal, do not lament over a few days of persecution, as reward for which I will give you now and for ever, that supreme happiness which even in the greatest hour of prosperity you have sought everywhere and never found, the only happiness that can fill the whole heart of man, grace and faith, the love of your Creator!" . . . It is

only your grief and suffering that torment me; otherwise I am happy. I am drunk, so to speak, with my innocence and enjoying in anticipation the satisfaction I shall soon experience of exposing in all their nakedness the obstinacy and bad faith of those who are persecuting me.'

In his journal he enumerates those acts of his which have brought on him the hatred of his enemies: 'I have loved and love still the Republic! Next to God I shall love it above all things; no power on earth can make me renounce my faith and my beliefs.' He has defended the poor against the rich, he has restored the land to those from whom it had been filched, he has given to the labourer his share in the communal funds, he has taken an allowance from the priest who cares nothing for the people to bestow it on widows and orphans, he has given free education to the children of the village, he has tried to teach the poor to be proud and independent in their dealings with the rich, and for these things he is treated as a criminal. 'Oh God of infinite wisdom,' he writes, 'what is thy secret purpose? I see the things I have worshipped condemned. Invincible Right, eternal Justice, sublime Truth, the love of one's fellow-men, Devotion, Unselfishness, Public Spirit, here below all these are crimes! Oh Lord, my weak reason cannot compass the vastness of thy wisdom. Thy will be done!'

Of the absolute sincerity of Peter Vaux it is impossible to doubt, and it is this which gives such pathos to the tragedy of his story. Here is a young man, a little over thirty, full of ardent devotion to his fellow-men, who has brought about reforms admitted by authority to be just and beneficial, Christian in spirit, perhaps over-zealous—a little fault in comparison with the good he has done—a loving husband

and father, an upright and honest man in every sense of the words, lying in solitary confinement in a prison cell under a capital charge based on the evidence of a notorious scoundrel! He has been powerless to fight the sinister methods of a preliminary investigation, secret in its conduct and utterly unscrupulous in its character. His only hope rests now in the jury. He is to be tried before the Assize Court at Chalon at the end of June.

There he will appear at some disadvantage. His case is to be heard along with those of the seven others charged with being his fellow-conspirators. The large *dossier* of the case on which the prosecution has been working for months is delivered to the prisoners eight days before the trial. Only one copy is supplied which has to pass through the hands of the eight accused persons and their advocates, and be studied by them as best they can in this short space of time.

Nor was Vaux fortunate in his choice of an advocate. His friends had tried to secure the services of M. Leroyer, then one of the leading counsel at the Chalon bar, afterwards a President of the Senate under the Third Republic. Pressure of work made it impossible for him to undertake the case. He could only give Vaux some disinterested advice to the effect that he should be calm and temperate before the court, avoid posing as a victim of politics and not speak too much of the people. He advised him also to shave his moustache, which was looked on apparently at the time as a sign of extreme political opinions.

In place of M. Leroyer, Vaux had to entrust his cause to a young advocate, M. Guerrier, who is described as having neither ability nor experience, and expressing himself with difficulty. At the beginning he believed Vaux to be guilty. The first time he saw his client in his cell he said to him, 'Ah well! We must try and save your head for you.' But, as

he studied the case and talked with the prisoner, M. Guerrier came to believe in the innocence of Vaux and did his best for him at the trial.

IV

THE TRIAL

This commenced on June 23rd, 1852, before the Chalon Assize Court, at seven o'clock in the morning and lasted two days. The court was presided over by one of the judges from the Appeal Court at Dijon. The prosecution was conducted by the Procureur de la République at Chalon. Eight prisoners stood in the dock, Vaux, John Petit, Savet, father and son, Nicolot, Dumont, Malois, and Michaud who was already serving his term of imprisonment for forgery. Vaux, in spite of the advice of M. Leroyer, had not discarded his moustache; he is described as listening to the case quietly and attentively and expressing himself with ease and confidence. The face of John Petit is pleasing and intelligent; he is energetic in his speech. The elder Savet wears large black whiskers and is the only one of the prisoners whose appearance has something desperate about it. His son, a boy of eighteen, is obviously consumptive. Michaud, the 'village advocate,' gives an impression of cunning and insincerity; he feigns deafness and pretends to less intelligence than he really possesses; he speaks fluently and with an affectation of singularity in phrase.

The acts of arson charged against the prisoners were those of March 2nd and 25th, 1851, May 5th in the same year, and those of the 14th of January and 11th of March, 1852. The Act of Accusation,

read at the opening of the trial, was in this case nothing more than a vigorous opening speech for the prosecution, recapitulating those facts already known to the reader. Vaux was represented as animating and directing the other prisoners, Balleau as repudiating the charge of perjury in words forcible and impressive and driven to speak solely by his desire for the truth and the keenness of his remorse. Evidence of suspicious acts on the occasion of three of the fires was adduced against the elder Savet. No new evidence was cited against Vaux; that of Balleau remained the only evidence against him.

The first witness to be called was M. Henry Gallemard, Mayor of Longepierre. He said that public opinion had for a long time pointed out the prisoners as a band of incendiaries organised for the destruction of the commune, and Vaux, he said, was looked on as the head of the band. He spoke of the affair of the forged bills and the mysterious comings and goings of the conspirators. He answered the charge made by John Petit that he and his son-in-law were the real incendiaries by a magnificent outbreak of indignation. 'I disdain,' he said, 'even to protest against such an accusation!'

The President invited the prisoners to reply to the evidence of the Mayor. Vaux said: 'The witness has stated that public opinion pointed at me as head of a criminal conspiracy. I defy Mr Mayor to call one witness, apart from Balleau whom I have proved to be a liar, who can accuse me of a single dishonest action. My honesty is known to all. If I have had relations with most of the prisoners, there has been nothing guilty or mysterious about them. We were members of the municipal councils, we held the same opinions on the politics of the commune and we were united by a common desire to see our principles win the day. We had nothing to hide.' Vaux explained

the innocence of his relations with Michaud, and stated that he had broken off all intimacy with the elder Savet as soon as he knew that he was suspected of arson.

John Petit repeated boldly his charge against the Mayor and his son-in-law. 'I believe,' he said, 'that the fires were the work of Gallemard and his son-in-law. I told many people that the fires would begin again because I did not believe that Gallemard would stop until he had destroyed the tobacco shop. For everybody knows that all the Gallemards were furious at having lost the tobacco monopoly and had vowed a mortal hatred against Mme Frilley who had got it after them.'

The greater part of the evidence given during the first day of the trial related to the charges against Petit and the Savets. Against the former, two neighbours, a woman and her daughter, thirteen years of age, swore that Petit's little daughter, a girl of thirteen, had told them that on the night of the first fire her father had come into her room fully dressed in his Sunday best and told her to get up as there was a fire. The little girl denied that she had ever said anything of the kind. Petit said: 'After coming home from Gallemard's and hearing his conversation with his son-in-law which I have already described, and thinking that it only related to some scheme of smuggling, I went to bed and to sleep. I was roused by a neighbour. I got up and went with everybody else to the fire. I don't remember what clothes I had on. But as it was Sunday night I very likely in my haste put on the clothes I had just taken off.'

The evidence against the Savets consisted of statements as to their dubious behaviour on the occasion of some of the fires, which could not at the most be said to constitute more than a suspicion of guilt.

There was so far nothing but the vaguest evidence,

if evidence it can be called, against Vaux. A farrier in the village said: 'I know nothing about the fires. But I have often seen the prisoners, who were members of the municipal council, walking about together and going together to the tavern on Sundays and even week-days. Vaux was often one of them. In crossing the street they had to pass in front of my forge and I saw they were talking together in a mysterious way; but I could not hear what they said.'

Then followed some of that evidence which, freely given in French courts, shocks our sense of relevance, the evidence of persons called to give their opinions for what they are worth on the general character of the prisoners. The elder Savet was described as spiteful, vindictive, and disloyal. Nothing could be urged against the character of Vaux except his political opinions. A former Mayor of Longepierre, having stated he had nothing to say against any of the prisoners, was asked by the court whether he had not described Vaux as having a disastrous influence on the people. 'I may have said that,' replied the witness, 'in regard to the political opinions of Vaux, but never in regard to the fires. I know Vaux. He was my secretary during the four years I was Mayor. I have never known a more scrupulous man.'

The court adjourned at eleven o'clock at night. All the witnesses for the prosecution had been heard except Balleau. At seven o'clock the following morning, he was called. Nothing can be more favourable to a perjured witness than the French system of criminal procedure. The witness is examined first by the presiding judge, who is at liberty to handle the witness in a friendly or unfriendly spirit as the case may be. There are no rules in regard to leading questions such as prevail in our courts. There is no direct cross-examination; it is only through the judge that an advocate can address questions to a witness.

In the case of a witness such as Balleau, on whom rests the whole strength of the case for the prosecution, the attitude of the court towards him becomes all-important.

Balleau did not tell his story well, a story with which the reader is already acquainted. He was at times stammering and hesitating, at others voluble, but always turning round and looking at M. Gallemard who was seated behind him, as if for guidance and encouragement. The scandal of this became so obvious that the counsel defending the prisoners made the following formal request to the court:—

'Seeing that the man Gallemard appears by his presence, behaviour, and gestures to be exercising an influence over the witness Balleau as he gives his evidence, on these grounds we ask that the court will be pleased to order that Gallemard leave the court and do not return while the said Balleau is giving his evidence.'

The judges refused this application.

With the friendly aid of the President and the passing help of the Mayor of Longepierre, Balleau managed to tell his story. A few questions were addressed to him by the defence.

Q. You have said it was in the third room in the house inhabited by Vaux that the meeting of February 16th, 1851, took place. By which door did you enter this room?

A. By the door nearest the stables.

Q. You said in the preliminary investigation that you came in by the front door?

A. I remember now that it was by the door near the stables.

Q. What furniture was in the third room in which you say the meeting was held?

A. A bed and a stove.

Q. Had you not tried to pass forged bills before

the outbreak of the fires and before Michaud gave you the bills which you have described as the price of your silence?

A. No, never.

President.—Remember Balleau, you are in a court of justice, and giving evidence on oath. Think of the consequences of your evidence. If you have not been telling the truth, say so, now, there is yet time.

Balleau.—I have told the truth, and stick to everything I have said.

This concluded the case for the prosecution.

The first witness for the defence described the house in which Vaux lived. He said that the third room was a bakehouse used as a lumber room and had in it neither bed, stove, nor furniture of any kind. Balleau, he said, was notorious in Longepierre as a liar and rogue, who destroyed the hedges by taking away parts of them as firewood and had been caught stealing flour from a mill. 'Anybody in Longepierre,' he concluded, 'can tell you that.'

A number of witnesses having given a similar account of Balleau, the President called on M. Gallemard. That worthy was obliged to admit that Balleau had not a good reputation and had committed a number of unimportant thefts. The President asked if he had ever been convicted of theft, to which Gallemard was able to answer no. 'Then you have no right to call him a thief,' replied the President. 'Balleau,' said the Mayor, 'is a man of weak character and limited intelligence. But in spite of his bad reputation, I believe him to be incapable of inventing things that are not true, and more particularly of supporting such inventions before a court of justice.'

One witness had been told by his brother-in-law that Balleau had offered him an unsigned bill as the price of a cow. Balleau denied the truth of this.

The last witness called for the defence was

M. Coste, receiver and collector to the commune of Longepierre. He had been associated with Vaux all the time that the latter had acted as secretary to the Mayor. 'He is a man of strict honesty,' he said, 'I have had many proofs of it. In my opinion it is impossible that Vaux could be at the head of a conspiracy to bring destruction on the commune.'

On hearing this testimony to the character of Vaux, Pichon, Gallemard's son-in-law, who was sitting in court, got up and said: 'I tremble when I hear M. Coste speaking in this way. Only three weeks ago he told me that Vaux was the man who in the case of these fires was holding the strings that moved the marionettes.' 'I may,' replied M. Coste, 'have used expressions I have since regretted. If at one time I suspected Vaux, I have since become certain that my suspicions were ill-founded. What I have said to-day, speaking on oath, I say after careful thought and as my profound conviction.'

Whatever advantage was to be gained by this incident, the prosecution was determined not to let slip. Immediately after M. Coste's evidence, the court adjourned until half-past one. As soon as they reassembled the Procureur de la Republique called M. Coste to the bar. 'M. Coste,' he asked, 'did you about three months ago say to a number of persons that Vaux held in one hand the dagger of Socialism and in the other the torch of the incendiary.' 'Yes,' answered M. Coste, 'I did use those words, but——' He was not allowed to finish. 'That is enough,' said the Procureur, 'you can sit down.'

In his address to the jury the Procureur de la République described Vaux as one of the most violent of schoolmasters, who as a class had produced so many factious demagogues. 'Vaux,' he said, 'was the first to fling among a peaceful people these pregnant words *rich* and *poor*.' He had provoked quarrels,

encouraged distrust, stirred up hatred. He had been the most ardent and passionate of those who had supported the allotment of the common land. Angered by his dismissal from his post, his daring and violence had redoubled. And lastly he had written an insolent letter 'to the illustrious prince who presides over the destinies of our country' in which he dared to address him by the style of 'citizen.'

This was an allusion to a letter which Vaux had written to Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte as President of the Republic protesting against his dismissal from his position of schoolmaster. In the the ardour of his republicanism he had commenced his letter 'Citizen President.' On the eve of the proclamation of the Empire such conduct was regarded by authority as the height of insolence.

To the Procureur, Vaux was the soul of the conspiracy in Longepierre, the instigator, the brain of the crimes committed in the commune. Some of the prisoners he recommended to the jury as deserving of indulgence, that is to say extenuating circumstances which would save them from the extreme penalty; but to Vaux, Savet, Michaud, and Petit they were to show no mercy: there was no punishment however severe that could equal the hideous atrocity of their crimes.

The prime object of the prisoners' defence was to discredit the evidence of Balleau. This was not difficult. His character was bad, he had sworn five or six different depositions, some provedly untrue. Was it likely that the conspirators would have taken in and admitted to their designs such a man as Balleau, and that, after he had shown at their first meeting his unwillingness to join them, they would have invited him to a second? Could any means of buying a man's silence be more foolish or dangerous than to give him forged bills? His incorrect descriptions of

the house in which Vaux lived were enough to prove the utter untrustworthiness of his evidence. As to Vaux in particular there was absolutely no corroboration of Balleau's statements. How could the relations of Vaux with those who shared his political views, relations explicable on perfectly innocent grounds, be construed into proofs of conspiracy to commit arson?

It was nearly midnight when the speeches of the advocates were concluded. The President summed up the case to the jury in a sense highly unfavourable to all the prisoners, and at half-past three in the morning the jury retired to consider their verdict. They returned in three-quarters of an hour. They found the elder Savet guilty of kindling three out of the five fires charged in the indictment, and of complicity in the other two. Vaux, Petit, Michaud, and the younger Savet were convicted of complicity in all the five acts of incendiarism. The other three prisoners were acquitted. To all the five convicted prisoners the jury accorded extenuating circumstances. Vaux, Petit, Michaud, and the elder Savet were sentenced to penal servitude for life, the younger Savet to twelve years. On hearing his sentence Vaux exclaimed: 'I appeal to God!' As Petit was leaving the dock a voice whispered in his ear, 'You see we have found out a way to punish you! It will teach you not to talk so much!' He turned round and saw that it was Pichon, Gallemard's son-in-law, who had thus addressed him.

On reaching his cell Vaux wrote to his wife:—

'Irma Jeannin, dearest wife, whom God gave me and whom he takes from me to-day—for nothing happens but by His holy will—I restore you to your father.

Trust in God. The day of his justice will dawn for me, and villainy be exposed, I believe it firmly.

'On you, my loving and unhappy wife, and you, my dear little children, Ermence, Armand, Irma, and Junius Brutus, my fond blessing! Never forget that this cruel separation does not part us; my heart, my soul, my every thought will be with you everywhere and always.

'My dearest ones, live and grow up good children, raise your hearts and little hands to God, ask justice of him, and one day, not perhaps far distant, he will give you back your father. Whatever may befall me, whatever fate he in his omnipotence may have in store for me, always, my wife and children, hold your heads high before men, and remember that the name I have given you is without stain in the eyes of the Eternal God.

'Good-bye, good-bye,

'PETER VAUX.

'Without fear and without reproach.

'On returning from the Assize Court, June 25, 1852.'

Many years later a high legal authority pronounced the conviction of Vaux to be a judicial crime. It seems certainly little short of a crime to have sent any man to penal servitude for life on the uncorroborated evidence of such a rascal as Balleau. Unfortunately, French criminal procedure, with its entire absence of all rules of evidence, makes such crimes easy. Only a few years before the conviction of Vaux, a farmer in Normandy had been twice convicted of arson on evidence of persons as worthless as Balleau and representing themselves as accomplices of the accused. Only the determined efforts of the great advocate, Berryer, saved an innocent man from the same fate as Vaux.[1] In the case of Vaux there was no Berryer with his irresistible genius to champion his cause, and so he fell and suffered It has been urged in their

[1] Case of Dehors, reported in Volume X. of Fouquier, *Causes Célèbres*.

excuse that judges and jury believed honestly in the guilt of Vaux and his companions. They could see no other explanation of the plague of fires that had afflicted Longepierre. Many of their countrymen who had witnessed the failure of the Republic to preserve law and order, believed that Louis Napoleon stood alone between them and anarchy, and that the extreme republicans were plotting to plunge the country once again into riot and confusion. Vaux was a red republican in the eyes of authority and therefore *capable de tout*. What more likely in their judgment than that he and his friends should stick at no act of lawlessness or crime to revenge themselves for the failure of their party? Thus may have reasoned honestly apprehensive men, and for that reason the original conviction of Vaux may perhaps be reduced from a judicial crime to a judicial error. The crime was yet to come.

In Longepierre itself the sentence on Vaux was a shock even to his opponents. They had sought his ruin, but they had not reckoned on so terrible a punishment. The oily Gallemard affected deep regret at the unfortunate result of his efforts. He told the advocate of Vaux that Balleau was a rogue, and probably the real incendiary. He went about saying that he feared Vaux had been wrongly convicted. 'I don't believe,' he said, 'Vaux had anything to do with the fires. But he was a man they wanted to get rid of.' When he met the children of Vaux in the street he would give them halfpennies and shed tears over their father's unhappy fate.

That fate Vaux was prepared to suffer with patience, submitting to the will of God. At first he refused to join in an appeal to the Court of Cassation against the judgment of the Assize Court. Two days after his sentence he wrote to the Procureur de la République: 'I respect the verdict of the jury,' he said, 'and cruel as

is the punishment inflicted on me, on my wife and children, I will appeal from their verdict to God alone, to the Judge of Judges who I am sure will not desert me. Do not think, sir, that I cherish against my judges any feeling of hatred. No! If one can forgive even a perjured witness, one cannot believe that honest men would violate their oath; they have been deceived. When the hour of my rehabilitation comes, when God suffers the proof of my innocence, then I am convinced that you will be the first to give me justice.' He goes on to ask that as he is young, only thirty-one, vigorous and fond of work, he should be sent to the penal settlement at Cayenne. 'A convict,' he concludes, 'may not presume to offer you his respects.' Yielding to the urgent solicitation of his friends, Vaux joined ultimately in the appeal to the Court of Cassation; but it was unsuccessful. The only hope lay in a direct appeal to the President of the Republic.

On the first of July, Vaux had the happiness to see his wife and children. Madame Vaux was now within a few days of her confinement, but she was able to make the journey from Longepierre to Chalon with their eldest child, Ermence, a little girl of six. In a letter written to his wife after their visit Vaux describes how the little girl slipped a few cherries into his hand without a word, so as not to be heard or seen by the warders. 'What was passing,' he writes, 'through her innocent soul? God alone knows!' He thanks his wife for her patience and courage: 'I shall never forget the noble words which your love for me inspired, "Your soul is my soul, as your heart is my heart. My life is bound with your life as my soul with your soul. Call me and I will come to you. Wherever fate may lead you, there will I follow."'

On the 29th a daughter was born to Vaux. He writes to his wife, rejoicing that she has come safely through her trouble. He regrets that he cannot be

with her to take his child in his arms: 'To your sorrow and mine, my dear Irma, I was born fifty years too soon. The men of our time think me dangerous, and they have done all in their power to ruin me.' But as ever he expresses his firm conviction that God will one day expose the machinations of his enemies, grant him justice and restore him to those he loves. His brother has sent him fifty francs:—

'With these I shall be able to amuse myself by giving tobacco to one, to another an apple to munch. The poor prisoners here are far more unfortunate and to be pitied than I. To the resentment of their fellow-men and the punishment of the law they have to endure in addition the remorse of a guilty conscience which leaves them neither peace nor rest. I have not met one really pure heart among them. The man from Louhans, sentenced to penal servitude for life for having whitened a halfpenny and tried to pass it as silver money seems to be, after myself, the most ill-used. For the rest some of them boast openly of their great crimes. They are wretchedly unhappy. A bit of bread, a rotten apple a pinch of tobacco, a kind word the least thing gives them so much pleasure. There are three children here about as large as our little Brutus. I can hear them crying sometimes. I feel sorry for them, especially when I think of my own. I have given them some of the cakes Mama sent me, but I hadn't the satisfaction of seeing them eat them.'

Vaux made two personal appeals to Louis Napoleon asking for justice. This time he did not address him as 'Citizen President,' but as 'August Prince.' He admitted that he had been an ardent republican but had never belonged to any club or society: 'I had the misfortune to believe those who at the time were my legitimate superiors; I wished to alleviate the misery of the unfortunate, and with that object in view I brought about the division of the common land

at Longepierre.' If it were not damaging to the reputation of justice, he writes, he could give a hundred proofs of his innocence, but he would rather die in chains than believe that justice had stooped to serve the ends of revenge; she had been deceived. It was intimated to Vaux that if he were to ask for pardon instead of justice, his appeal might be successful. His reply to such a suggestion was spirited. 'Only the guilty ask for pardon,' he writes to his wife, 'Were I to commit such an act of cowardice, I should be unworthy of you—it would cover me with shame and disgrace, it would be paying too dear for liberty—I would rather wear the livery of a convict all my life and die in jail than stoop to a disgraceful lie. I am an innocent man: I ask for justice. Pardon, never!'

A more urgent prayer was to be addressed to Louis Napoleon. In the September of 1852, he paid an official visit to Lyons. There Madame Vaux, her newly born infant in her arms, threw herself at the feet of the President and asked pardon for her husband. Persigny, then Minister of the Interior, who was accompanying his master, raised up the unhappy woman. 'I will look into your husband's case,' he said, 'I give you my word of honour.' He then took the baby in his arms and kissed it. 'When you go home,' he added, 'write to me and remind me that I kissed your little child so that I may not forget you.' This effective and discreet scene, occurring as it did on the eve of the proclamation of the Empire, was however disappointing in its result. Madame Vaux wrote to Persigny. He referred the case to the Minister of Justice, who declined to interfere with the judgment. In December Madame Vaux journeyed to Paris to see Persigny, but failed to obtain an interview. On returning to Longepierre she drew up a petition to the Minister. She had already got some sixty-four signatures and had the promise of more

than four hundred when the document was seized by M. Gallemard. Though ready to give halfpennies to the children of Vaux, the Mayor of Longepierre had no intention of helping to restore their father to his family, if he could possibly prevent it.

It is a curious fact, and a tribute to the subtle hypocrisy of Gallemard that it was only after his conduct in this matter of the petition, that Vaux realised that the Mayor was, and had been his most dangerous enemy, that his 'calculated villainy' had been the principal means of working his destruction. He saw now that his ruin had been plotted and brought about by this village Tartufe, that at the cost of even crime the Mayor had determined to get rid of him. But still he clings to the believe that before very long justice will be done. He writes to his wife:—

'It will come surely, that glorious day. It would be to strangely misunderstand Providence to believe that she has given me the love of Truth and Justice, planted in my breast this burning desire for good, pity for the unfortunate, that unselfishness which you know, of which I have always been so proud—given me all these only to send me to die in a convict prison.'

An incident that occurred when he was visited in prison by the parish priest of Longepierre affords a striking instance of the outspokenness of Vaux, his inability to conceal his opinions, of what more timid persons would describe as his want of tact.

'The priest was accompanied by the prison chaplain. After greeting me they asked me what I did. Always candid and straightforward I told them that priests had done me too much harm to lead me to accept their teaching. The chaplain said, "What harm have I done you?" I answered, "I have nothing to say against your behaviour to me. Knowing as you do my innermost thoughts and consequently my innocence, you were the first to tell me that I should leave to my

children a stainless name——" "What? What?" said the poor man, afraid of compromising himself, "I never said that." But he had said it more than once. However, his denial cut short my expressions of gratitude and approval. Alas! I sometimes think I am the only man in the world who makes truth a principle. Perhaps I am rather too proud, but, whatever happens, I shall speak the truth in all things. I could not do otherwise.'

At the time of this interview the parish priest of Longepierre knew a certain fact favourable to the innocence of Vaux which for some unexplained reason he did not divulge until nearly three years later.

At the end of November, Vaux was transferred from Chalon to the convict prison at Toulon. The journey made by road took three weeks. In a letter to his wife Vaux gives an interesting account of the condition of convict life in the French prisons of that day:—

'I have been sent into Hall 4. It is a large, dark room, serving as living room and dormitory for about fifty convicts. Two lines of beds run down the room. I was able to change my clothes and wash; I needed it badly. I have had my hair cut and been given a suit of white linen. My outfit comprises three shirts, a red cloth pair of trousers and a green cap. They have given me a white metal disc bearing the number 5613. The same day I was taken to the smithy to have the chain, which I have sketched at the side of this letter, fixed on to my leg. The large ring which you see at the lower end of the chain weighs more than two pounds. It is made up of two pieces fixed together by two iron bolts. When the leg of the patient has been put into the ring, the bolts are riveted together in such a way that the ring cannot be opened. This large ring is called the shackle. In order to prevent hurting the leg, a bit of stuff or leather is wrapped round it and the snackle put over that. The chain,

made up of nine long links, is five feet long. Each prisoner wears a leather belt with a hook on which he can hang the chain when he is walking.

A few moments before bedtime a whistle sounds which means that each man must go to his place. He gets on the bed; a warder comes bringing a large iron rod which he passes through the first link of the chain of each convict. The rod is then firmly fixed with padlocks. We are thus chained to our beds and can only move the length of our chain. . . . When everybody has been fixed up, another whistle is the signal for prayers. One of the prisoners recites them in a loud voice. When these are said each man wraps himself in his 'hood,' a blanket of thick gray wool, and lies down on his bed.

Every day we are given two pounds of bread; and at four o'clock in the afternoon on week-days, and midday on Sundays they bring buckets of soup with beans into the room. Each man helps himself to soup; he is allowed about two pints of soup and half a pint of beans. On working days we are allowed half a pint of wine; other days we get water from the fountain.

If a man has been sentenced to twenty or more years' penal servitude, he has to be 'coupled' for sixty months; that is to say his chain is fastened to that of another prisoner by means of a small shackle. One is not always coupled to the same man; sometimes the two can't agree and it is impossible for one to walk without the other.'

For three months Vaux was fortunate enough to be fastened in this way to a political prisoner, sentenced to penal servitude for having organised in a provincial town resistance to the *coup d'état*. At other times he had thieves, murderers, or coiners as his companions of the chain.

And so three years passed, Vaux still full of hope

and confidence that justice would be done to him at last. In 1855 he was removed from Toulon to Brest. The change was hard, as he had won the trust and sympathy of the authorities at Toulon and had been taken away from the ordinary work of a convict. But the same thing happened at Brest. After a few weeks he was 'uncoupled' and put to secretarial work. In the meantime events occurred at Longepierre, which gave the unhappy man only too good reason to hope that his innocence would soon be triumphantly vindicated, his enemies confounded and punished in his stead, and he himself restored to liberty.

IV

THE DEATH OF GALLEMARD

THE conviction of Vaux and his supposed accomplices in arson had not put an end to the terrors of incendiarism in Longepierre. Less than three months after the trial of Vaux another fire broke out, again in the neighbourhood of the tobacco shop of Madame Frilley. The method pursued was the same as in the previous cases; the fire had been started underneath the thatched roof, and matches struck on the wall. Within less than a year three other fires broke out, causing some 40,000 francs worth of damage. Justice in the shape of Boulanger, inspired by Gallemard, considered these fires to be acts of revenge on the part of the family and friends of Peter Vaux. Two persons were arrested in connection with them and detained for some months in prison.

Popular opinion did not share the belief of justice. It was impressed by the fact that all those whose property had suffered in these cases were persons who

had for different reasons incurred the hostility of the Mayor or his son-in-law, and that both Gallemard and Balleau had been met under highly suspicious circumstances on the night of two of the fires. But it was useless to make charges against M. Gallemard. He was now styled, not inaptly, the 'Emperor of Longepierre.' His will was law; he basked in the sunshine of official recognition; he and the Justice of the Peace had become the fastest of friends. It was dangerous to cross his path, as the fate of the woman Bonjour proved.

The woman Bonjour earned a precarious living by selling chestnuts. Her temper was violent and uncontrolled. Once her anger was aroused, her tongue knew no limits. But she was reputed truthful and honest. Her husband would seem to have exercised a mild restraint over her impetuosity, but he died in the May of 1853. One day in the following July Madame Bonjour committed unwittingly a trespass by tying up her horse on forbidden ground. She was seen to do this by M. Gallemard. He gave her no word of warning at the time, but in the evening laid an information against her. Enraged by his conduct the woman, Bonjour, the same evening told to one of the notables of the village a story regarding M. Gallemard, which, during the lifetime of her husband, she had been persuaded to keep to herself.

In February 1851, a month before the first act of incendiarism had occurred in Longepierre, a son of Madame Bonjour had been beaten by the village schoolmaster, and the day following turned out of the school. The indignant mother went to the then Mayor of the village who promised to set the matter right. As she was going home Madame Bonjour met Gallemard and his wife. She told them about her son; Gallemard said that he had been treated disgracefully and advised her to go and have it out with

the schoolmaster. At once the mother's rage was rekindled, she went straight to the schoolmaster's house, and a violent scene took place, in the course of which the woman Bonjour struck the schoolmaster. As a punishment for her violence she was sent to prison for ten days. From information that reached her from her lawyer, the woman Bonjour had reason to believe that Gallemard with characteristic duplicity had incited her to attack the schoolmaster, and had then denounced her to the authorities. She told Gallemard's son-in-law, Pichon, of her suspicions. Four days before the outbreak of the first fire in Longepierre she received a visit from Gallemard himself. He endeavoured to assuage her anger. He spoke with indignation of the fact that the right to sell tobacco in the village had been taken from him. He told her to send her children out of the room. Putting his hands in his pockets and rattling his money Gallemard said to the woman: 'Mother Bonjour, there's money to be made. I could tell it to your husband, but as he has nothing to do, I prefer to confide in you, for you can do what I want while carrying on your little business of selling chestnuts. The tobacco shop must be destroyed before long and others that people little expect.' The woman Bonjour replied that he had already got her into trouble enough and she declined to get into any further trouble on his account. 'I see,' said Gallemard, 'you are still angry with me and refuse to be brought to reason. If I become Mayor, as I soon hope to be, and I find out that you have breathed a word of what I have said to you, I will send you to rot in prison'; with that he left her.

Such was the story told by the woman Bonjour and publicly repeated in Longepierre in the August of 1853. It was impossible for Gallemard to ignore it. A local police-officer had, on his own initiative,

taken action in the matter. He had gone to the commissary of police and laid before him the woman's statement and also evidence of the suspicious movements of Gallemard on the nights of the recent fires. His zeal met with little encouragement. The Justice of the Peace told him that Gallemard was the best fellow in the world, the woman Bonjour a bad character. If, he said, Gallemard had been seen wandering about the village at night, it was due to his anxiety for the safety of the public, or to some little love affair. The unfortunate police officer found himself alternately threatened with imprisonment, or cajoled to reveal the names of those who were urging him to attack the character of the worthy Mayor. He could only reply that he had acted solely on his own responsibility. At the end of the month the woman Bonjour was arrested, and in September sentenced to a year's imprisonment for libelling the Mayor of Longepierre. The day of her arrest Gallemard was asked the cause of it. 'It is for talking too freely,' he replied, 'I have done to her as I did to John Petit.' It is little to be wondered at that from this time forth men feared to speak openly against Gallemard. Justice was blind where he was concerned and punishment swift.

A year passed; from the August of 1853 to the August of 1854, no outbreak of fire troubled the peace of Longepierre. It was a year of disappointment and thwarted ambition to M. Gallemard. Rich, powerful, feared, he felt that his proper place in the social scale of Longepierre was among the notables of the village. But they would have none of him; they despised and distrusted him; they resented his power, repelled his advances. Though none dared openly to attack him, the man was hated. His ambition was none the less insatiable. If the notables refused to gratify it, they, as their inferiors before them, must be made

to feel the weight of his resentment. Let him bring the notables to their knees, and his power in Longepierre would be absolute. It was worth the trying, the means were to hand.

Between the August of 1854 and the March of 1855 six more fires broke out in Longepierre, doing about 40,000 francs' worth of damage. All these fires consumed the property of notables, and in each case the victim had in some way or other given cause for offence to the Mayor or his son-in-law, Pichon. Gallemard suggested to the pliant Boulanger that in all the cases the owners of the property had committed arson in order to benefit by insurances. A judicial investigation took place along the lines laid down by the Mayor, and at length in March 1855 three notables were arrested and charged with arson.

But this time M. Gallemard had overreached himself. The notables could not be attacked with the same impunity as humbler folk; they were conservatives, landowners, friends to the existing régime, not red republicans. Immediately on the arrests of their fellows, twelve of them went as a deputation to the Procureur-Général of the Court of Appeal at Dijon. They complained of the conduct of Gallemard and the fatuous behaviour of the Justice of the Peace, and declared that as long as these two held office in Longepierre it was hopeless to look for the detection and punishment of the real incendiaries. The Procureur-Général lent a sympathetic ear to their protest. He came himself to Longepierre. As a result of his inquiry the arrested notables were released, Gallemard was asked to resign his office of Mayor and the Justice Boulanger transferred to another district, though strangely enough his transfer was rather in the nature of promotion than disgrace.

The shades of night were falling around the tortuous path of M. Gallemard. But he was not altogether

lost. The authorities had not made public his resignation of the mayoralty, he was still permitted to act as provisional Mayor. Nor had Boulanger quite severed his connection with Longepierre. He was due there on April 12th, on legal business. The very night of his arrival a fire broke out at a school kept by some religious sisters. It commenced at nine o'clock; the building was burnt to the ground. This time it was the property of the commune that had been destroyed by the incendiary. Either, as Gallemard suggested, the guilty notables had destroyed communal property to divert suspicion from themselves, or some incendiary maniac was at work in the village.

But, plausible as were M. Gallemard's surmises, an event occurred which gave them the lie. An energetic gendarme, named Revenu, had for some time suspected that Balleau, the chief witness against Peter Vaux, the protégé of Gallemard, the simple man of truth, was no stranger to these nocturnal conflagrations. No sooner had the fire broken out at the sisters' school than Revenu hurried to Balleau's house, distant some two hundred and fifty yards from the scene of the fire. There he found that honest man breathless and excited; his shoes were covered with thick mud. This could not have come from the roads, which at Longepierre were gravelled; but to get the shortest way from Balleau's house to the burning school was to traverse muddy fields freshly cultivated. Revenu arrested Balleau. The footsteps found in the muddy fields and those in the garden of the school were measured and compared. A woman—a mistress of Gallemard who, though a family man, would seem to have been no slave to convention——had seen Balleau crossing the fields between his house and the school. The prisoner was taken before Boulanger; Gallemard was present. After a

consultation between the Justice and the Mayor, Revenu was told to release his prisoner. He obeyed reluctantly.

Balleau was free, Gallemard warned his mistress that Balleau had already sent one relation of hers to prison for talking too much and might send her, if she were not more careful.

But the gendarme, Revenu, was a man of determination. He kept his eye on Balleau. The latter began to lose his nerve. He became wild and restless, sold his house, wandered about the neighbouring villages in a state of desperation, threatening to commit suicide. A priest called the attention of Revenu to the man's dangerous condition. Revenu arrested him. 'This time,' he said, 'I am going to take you to Chalon; and not leave you at the disposal of M. Gallemard.

Pressed to speak the truth, confronted with the evidence against him, Balleau at length confessed that it was he who had set fire to the school, that he had done it at the bidding of Gallemard, and that a thief named Quinard, and a drunkard, Moisonnier, had been his accomplices in the deed. Later Balleau made further accusations against Gallemard. He represented him as the accomplice of Vaux and the others, as having been present at the meeting at the house of Vaux, and as having been since 1851 the chief of the incendiary conspiracy.

These statements of Balleau were a serious blow to M. Gallemard. More serious still was the temper of the new Justice of the Peace who had come to Longepierre in place of Boulanger. His name was Feurtet. He was upright and energetic, determined to solve the mystery of the years of crime at Longepierre, to do justice if possible to guilty and innocent alike, remedy the culpable weakness of his unworthy predecessor. It took him but little time to become convinced of the guilt of M. Gallemard. On June

25th, Gallemard was arrested by Revenu. Brought into the police barracks at Longepierre the ex-Mayor folded his arms and said: 'Well, so they say that I am the incendiary! It was Balleau who was responsible for the first fire in Longepierre; he is a great lazy good-for-nothing!' 'Then,' said Revenu, 'you think I did the right thing in arresting him.' 'You have got two of them now,' replied Gallemard, 'they say I am the chief; there will be no more fires in Longepierre.' Confronted before the magistrates with the charges made against him by Balleau, Gallemard denounced him as a liar. When reminded that before the Assize Court at the trial of Vaux he had given Balleau the character of a man incapable of perjury, he denied that he had ever guaranteed his truthfulness or had in any way inspired his evidence.

One piece of evidence was now given against Gallemard and Balleau which, had it been produced at the trial of Vaux, might well have affected its result. The statement came from the village priest of Longepierre, who had withheld it until the hour of Gallemard's fall. He said that on the night of the fire of March 8th, 1852, which destroyed the property of one Billon, he received an unexpected visit from Gallemard. The Mayor sat down in front of the priest, his face to the window. The priest noticed that his visitor was looking at him stealthily according to his habit. Suddenly the cry of 'Fire!' was heard. The priest jumped to his feet and saw from the window the glare of the flames reflected on the roofs of the adjacent houses. 'It's a fire,' said Gallemard, 'at poor Billon's!' Next day the priest found to his surprise that Billon's farm was on the opposite side of the parsonage to the window, in front of which Gallemard had been sitting, and could not possibly be seen from any point of the priest's house. The same day he was sent for by Balleau. He found him

prostrate and greatly complaining, his countenance haggard and restless, his wife troubled and uneasy. Three days later another fire broke out. On the day following Balleau sent again for the priest and again he found him wild and wretched, unable to look his visitor in the face.

It was certainly strange that the village priest should have kept this story to himself at a time when men were being sent to penal servitude for life on the evidence of Balleau and Gallemard. But Gallemard stood well with the church. Even after his arrest two of the neighbouring priests were busy in his defence, helping him to carry on a clandestine correspondence with his wife and family. At many points the new Justice of the Peace, Feurtet, found his investigation hampered and depreciated. His colleague Boulanger carried on a veritable crusade against him, and succeeded in winning over to his side some members of the clergy. He said that the arrest of Gallemard was a 'grave mistake,' and that in eight days he would be a free man. For some mysterious reason the judicial authorities at Chalon saw fit to bestow on this unjust judge 'evidences of their great goodwill.' But all these efforts to rescue Gallemard from his fate proved unavailing in face of the energy and resolution of Feurtet. He was determined to get to the bottom of the business.

A few days before the arrest of Gallemard the Sub-Prefect of the department had written to Feurtet asking for information about Gallemard, as the authorities had a mind to recommend him for a decoration on the approaching August 15th, the Fête Day of the First Napoleon, a day of rejoicing under the Imperial régime. Feurtet asked the Sub-Prefect to wait a few days. Within a week Gallemard had been placed under arrest. Feurtet had collected four hundred depositions of witnesses

implicating the ex-Mayor of Longepierre. These he submitted to his colleague Metman, the examining magistrate at Chalon, to whom the preliminary investigation into Gallemard's case had been entrusted. Metman had been slow, as all the authorities at Chalon, to accept the proof of the guilt of Gallemard, but before the energy of Feurtet he had been obliged to give way. He sent for Feurtet to Chalon. There on August 12th, at one o'clock in the afternoon, Gallemard was brought before the two magistrates. Feurtet had prepared three hundred and fifty questions which were to be put categorically to Gallemard. The scene is best described in the words of Feurtet himself:—

'The face of Gallemard was calm enough except that from his gray eyes he cast an uneasy and sinister glance at me as he sat down. His bearing was firm. He sat in an arm-chair opposite to M. Metman and myself. There were two gendarmes on my left. After M. Metman had put some questions to Gallemard which the latter answered with a coolness that seemed to embarrass M. Metman, my colleague asked me to conduct the examination, whilst he drew up the official report of the proceedings. Before putting any questions to him, I told Gallemard that I was appealing to his honesty, if he had any left, that I did not wish to confuse him, and asked him to reply yes or no to my questions, except where they referred to some incident capable of explanation. I warned him that it was in his best interest to simply answer yes or no, for I should only put to him questions based on ample evidence, that it would be wiser for him to confess rather than deny, as I was in a position to meet his denials by unexceptionable testimony, that he might rest assured that I should not put to him any question that was not founded on facts proved by witnesses.

'I commenced my examination from the earliest occurrences at Longepierre. At first, as I had foreseen, Gallemard was inclined to be talkative, trying to discuss matters and put questions to me. I coldly persisted in my examination, until impressed by my manner of questioning him, his answers grew weaker and more uncertain. When I came to the forged bills, which Michaud had given to Balleau, I showed him one signed in blue ink "Gallemard." I asked him if it was his signature. He denied it. "Unhappy man," I said, "I am showing you this bill in order that I may not have to summon here its real author. Do you wish me to arrest your daughter as your accomplice, whom I would rather treat as your dupe?" The tears gushed from his eyes, his face assumed an expression of the utmost suffering; he asked to look again at the signature, and then, as he handed it back to me, he said in a tone of absolute sincerity, "Yes, it is my signature." It had tortured him to see his daughter involved in his crime and disgrace. In order to shield her he declared the signature to be his, when it was in fact his daughter's.

'After this incident, so distressing to his feelings as a father, he allowed my questions to go by with a mere denial, sometimes without a word; he seemed gloomy and depressed. When at six o'clock I had completed the circle of my examination he appeared to be prostrated, his mouth dry he was unable to utter a word. We had some time since, from motives of discretion, sent the two gendarmes out of the room.

'When at length Gallemard could no longer answer my questions, we decided to send him back to his cell. There were only the three of us, M. Metman, Gallemard, and myself in the magistrate's room, which is separated from the prison by a passage in the courtyard. I rose to go and fetch the warder. M. Metman made haste to go himself. "I will fetch him," he

said. He did not wish to be left alone with a man as strong, powerful, and desperate as Gallemard. I was alone with him. Hardly had M. Metman left the room than Gallemard got up from his chair and walked towards me, his gray eyes flashing, his muscles quivering. I in my turn rose and walked boldly and decidedly towards him. In face of my attitude he stopped. I advanced towards him and folding my arms with the firmness of a man who is neither surprised nor astonished, I said to him: "Well! M. Gallemard, you are very surprised to find that I know so much about your crimes! But there are mysteries still hidden in your breast which you alone can reveal. Take courage; be, if you can, an honest man, and tear aside the veil which covers your crimes at Longepierre; confess, repent; I cannot promise you the forgiveness of men, your crimes are too great, but God will take account of your confession and extend to you His mercy, all the greater for those whose crimes are the most unpardonable." He lowered his gray eyes, made no answer, turned and went back to his chair, into which he threw himself, a lion tamed by the look of one stronger than himself.

M. Metman returned with the warder, who took Gallemard back to prison. I told M. Metman how Gallemard had behaved towards me, how he had not dared to execute any sinister design on a man who had faced him with firmness and energy. M. Metman is very small and slight. We believed that if he had remained alone with Gallemard, the latter could have easily strangled him, escaped from the building which was at that time deserted, taken the train for Geneva due at that hour, and so escaped from justice.'

There is something very pleasing in the simple pride with which Feurtet describes his prowess in daunting the desperate Gallemard, and his succesful conduct of the examination in the presence of his

judicial superior. Methnan would seem to have been a weak and inefficient man by the side of his colleague.

One point that Feurtet made in his examination of Gallemard is not given in this account of the proceedings. Feurtet had obtained evidence in the village that on the evening of the fire at the Sisters' school, Gallemard had been with Balleau from five to six o'clock, and that from seven to eight o'clock he had been engaged with Balleau, Quinard, and Moisonnier, in making the matches to be used at the approaching conflagration. Gallemard had denied this and asserted that he had spent the whole evening with his friend Boulanger who had come that day to Longepierre. Feurtet wrote to his colleague asking him to recollect particularly the events of that evening. Boulanger replied that Gallemard had left him from five to six, and seven to eight o'clock. When Feurtet, in the course of the examination, told Gallemard of Boulanger's reply, the ex-Mayor exclaimed in accents of despair, 'He, too, deserts me!'

That Feurtet had broken the spirit of Gallemard was soon to be proved in startling fashion. The ex-Mayor of Longepierre returned to his cell conscious that his guilt was now fully established, that conviction, and in all probability the scaffold could be the only end. Before his arrest Gallemard had said, 'If I am to be taken, I should not allow myself to be guillotined, I would kill myself first.' When in the evening his dinner was brought to him he drank off at one gulp the bottle of wine supplied to him, but left the food untouched. He then wrote some letters. After that he drew the table up to the window, placed a stool on it, attached his napkin in the form of a noose to the horizontal bar of the window, mounted on to the stool, placed his neck in the noose, and kicking away the stool, hanged himself. He took his life about one o'clock on the morning of the 13th of August.

Among the letters he left behind was one written in the form of an adjuration to the Virgin Mary. It ran:—

'Prayer to Mary for her protection in the hour of death. You see at your feet, gentle Mother, the most guilty of creatures. I have always believed that one day I should die and be judged. But what, Mary, will be my lot in eternity after my many sins? What can await me but the hell I have so richly deserved? When I think how many times by my sins I have condemned myself, my fear is so great that I feel crushed and hopeless. Oh! comforter of the afflicted! have pity on me, I am devoured with remorse! I see that there is no good in me, I know that hell itself only awaits my death to accuse me. Divine justice must be vindicated. Alas! what will be my fate when the moment comes to decide my lot in all eternity?

Mary, gentle and compassionate Mother, without you all is lost, there can be no hope, no heaven, no God save the God of vengeance; hell rejoices at the thought of its new victim. Alas! to whom can I turn in this supreme moment? I can hear nothing but voices of reproach for the abundant graces bestowed on me and rejected. But, gentle Mother, you are the refuge and the hope of the most guilty. Kindly protectress, when this moment comes, *and it will come soon*, I shall utter cries so pitiful, and shed tears so bitter, that you will not be able to help looking towards me and recognising in me one of your children who repents and asks your help. If my words cannot move you, I will show you my heart, and on it you will find your name written in large letters, and you will then see that I love you. Merciful Mother, be at my side when your son comes to judge me, show to him my soul; will he then be able to cast me into hell?

Am I to be the first who has sought your help and

whom you have rejected? No, I still hope. I am going to pray to you, love you and try so earnestly to imitate you in pureness of heart that seeing in me a child faithfully following the path of virtue, I shall persuade you, gentle Mother, to be with me in my last hour, as with many of your servants, and to say to me, "Come, my dearly beloved son, I will lead you myself to the throne which my son has prepared for you." So be it.'

That a man should 'meet his dearest foe in heaven' has been held to be the greatest of misfortunes. What we may well ask would be the feelings of Peter Vaux if, on arriving there, he were to find Gallemard seated on a throne prepared for him by Our Lord? The selfish remorse of this scoundrel is on a level with his astonishing villainy. The three years' ascendancy of Gallemard in Longepierre is one of the most masterly efforts of crime with which we are acquainted. The entire subjection in which by fear or favour this dishonest tavern-keeper held his fellows, the cunning with which he made religion and authority his dupes, the power by means of which he inflicted dire punishment on those who stood in his way, the subtle determination with which he pursued his ambitious course might well have enabled this village tyrant, had he moved in an ampler field for his ambition, 'to wade through slaughter to a throne, and shut the gates of mercy on mankind.' That, loaded with crime, he should have cried so passionately to heaven to have mercy on himself, without any regard to the sufferings of his victims, is quite in keeping with the character of persons of this kind.

Besides his appeal to the Virgin, Gallemard had written letters to his family. In spite of the husband's infidelities the Gallemard household would appear to have been quite united among themselves, and it was no doubt to a great extent to spare them the

disgrace and inconveniences of his conviction and sentence that Gallemard took his life. In his letters he asserted his innocence, exonerated Quinard and Moisonnier of any guilt and revenged himself on Balleau, by declaring him to be the sole incendiary. How he, as an innocent man, came to be so well acquainted with the real facts as to the crimes in Longepierre, he did not explain, nor did he say one word in exoneration of Vaux, and those condemned with him.

V

THE GREAT BETRAYAL

It was as a convict at Brest that Vaux learnt of the arrest of Balleau. Now at last, after three years of waiting, his heart was filled with hope; he saw the end of his sufferings, the vindication of his honour in sight.

'At last,' he writes to his wife, 'at last Heaven has heard our prayers. The wretched Balleau is in jail, his corrupter, the infamous Gallemard, is unmasked. I thank God even for my sufferings now that he has deigned to remember me, my dear wife, and my dear little orphans. I shall be allowed to die in peace now that my innocence is at last an established fact, proved, patent to all men. . . . The preliminary investigation must result in my vindication, for it will make known who are the real culprits. Balleau, once the means of my destruction, will prove to-day the means of my salvation; for I feel sure that if it be the will of justice, she will learn from him the whole truth, all the villainy that has brought such ruin on Longepierre, and all the infamous intrigues that had wellnigh brought me to the scaffold.'

The unhappy man little realised in the hope and joy of the moment that it was not, and would not be, the will of justice that his innocence should be established. The judge of the Court of Cassation, at the final hearing of the case of Vaux and Petit, thus describes the attitude of the judicial authorities at this point in the story:—

'We regret, but it is our duty to state, that from the beginning of the proceedings taken against Gallemard, and when his arrest had been decided on, the magistrates who directed these proceedings, whether at the court at Dijon or the Tribunal at Chalon, as well as the examining magistrate attached to that court, knew perfectly well the direction which these new proceedings must take and completely realised the fact that, if the investigation by the Justice of the Peace, Feurtet, proved the complicity of Gallemard in the fires of 1851 and 1852, necessarily and logically the question of the guilt of Vaux and Petit must be reopened and the justice of the verdict of 1852, in so far as it affected these two men, become a matter of lively controversy. The duty of these magistrates in such a situation was clear and simple. They had only to let the investigation follow its course, the more so as the Justice of the Peace employed in it had been chosen by them as being peculiarly able and competent in the judicial detection of crime.'

But such was not the purpose or intention of these magistrates. From the very outset of his investigation, Feurtet was warned that in no sense was he to reopen the question of the conviction of Vaux. 'In regard to Vaux,' wrote the Procureur-Impérial at Chalon, 'it is very essential that, while collecting evidence proving the guilt of Gallemard as an accomplice of the original gang of incendiaries, you should accept officially no evidence that would presume the innocence of Vaux and his fellows. These persons, whose guilt

is denied by some, appear to have deserved the punishment inflicted on them; all that can be inferred from our present knowledge is the complicity of Gallemard, which in no way disproves the guilt of those sentenced in 1852.' Again the same magistrate tells Metman to write to Feurtet: 'Above all nothing is to be done that would justify the anticipation of any revision in the case of Vaux; it is quite likely that Gallemard was the accomplice of those whom he helped to convict; the rage with which Vaux speaks of him, without making any definite charge, appears to me to lead naturally to such a conclusion.'

But quite naturally Feurtet, from the moment he commenced a thorough and searching examination of the whole series of crimes at Longepierre, was led to the very opposite conclusion. Why, he asked himself, had Vaux, a man of intelligence, allowed himself to be condemned without revealing the guilt of Gallemard who, though his accomplice, was helping to bring about his ruin? In order to answer this question the judge asked the new Mayor of Longepierre and the father-in-law of Vaux to write to the convict at Brest and ask him to 'take his courage in both hands,' and tell all he knew about the crimes at Longepierre. The form of approach was not very happy. Conscious of his innocence, smarting under three years of unjust imprisonment, Vaux resented bitterly the way in which these requests were made. To the Mayor he replied: 'Either I am guilty or not. If the former, what trust can you have in me, how can you appeal to my heart or feelings? A brigand has no heart, an incendiary no feelings. If the latter, how can an honest man fling in the face of one he knows to be innocent such a heartless insult?' He said that he had done all in his power to get the truth from those who had suffered with him, and that two of them on their death-beds had called God

to witness their innocence. 'Yes,' he concluded, '*I take my courage in both hands*, but not to say what I don't know. If I take my courage in both hands, it is to find strength to endure the shameful insult you fling in my face, to bear with fortitude the burden of my chains, whilst awaiting the day which will surely come, when justice shall be done me.'

To his father-in-law the answer of Vaux was even more bitterly indignant. If, he wrote, he were not the father of his wife, he would ask how he dared to insult him by writing such words as 'guilty or not, give all the information you can.' A more disgraceful insult could not be inflicted on him: 'your son-in-law will die in prison if need be, but he will never dishonour himself. You speak of pardon. Only the guilty ask for pardon; but he asks for justice, and if his own people desert and forget him, he will yet receive it at the hands of God.'

Feurtet's comment on these answers of Vaux to his well-meant inquiries show his very real sense of justice. 'Vaux,' he wrote, 'replied with the most insolent letter imaginable, but it did not wound me. This man distrusted all judges and believed the letter to be a trap. He had suffered enough already, poor fellow, to have lost all confidence in magistrates.'

Vaux may well have lost confidence in magistrates. He was now at their hands to suffer the cruellest of disappointments. Feurtet in his determination to get at the truth had suggested that he should go himself to Brest to examine Vaux; he offered to pay his own expenses. The authorities replied by sending Vaux on August 7th to the penal settlement at Cayenne, in French Guiana. Feurtet wrote to the examining magistrate at Chalon: 'First of all I have the honour to announce to you that, in order to gratify the Procureur-Impérial, the inflexible Vaux has been sent from Brest to Guiana.' Bitter as was the blow

struck at his hopes, Vaux faced it with courage and unshaken faith in God. To his mother he wrote: 'It may be the will of God that the vengeance of men shall pursue your child to the grave. To hide their own guilt the basest criminals have not hesitated to sacrifice me, to tear me from the bosom of my family, my devoted wife, the tears, the cries of my five poor little children; I have been dragged from prison to prison, jail to jail, one climate to another, loaded with chains, wearing the garb of shame and disgrace. In the midst of every kind of torture, moral and physical, herded with the lowest criminals, God has kept me untainted; in the midst of disease He has preserved my life' He is still confident in the future: 'The hand of God has fallen heavily on my enemies, and in spite of all, while awaiting the justice of God, the justice of men will be done me here below.'

If it had been in the power of Feurtet, Vaux might have reckoned safely on his vindication at the hands of human justice. The investigation by that magistrate had not terminated with the suicide of Gallemard. It was his duty to inquire into the whole circumstances of the acts of incendiarism at Longepierre, and more particularly into the cases of Balleau, Quinard, and Moisonnier, the alleged accomplices of Gallemard, who were now awaiting trial on charges of arson. The further he prosecuted his inquiries, the more strongly he found himself forced to the conclusion that, 'while the complicity of Gallemard in all the criminal acts was everywhere apparent, that of Vaux was apparent nowhere. He found that to represent Vaux as the accomplice of Gallemard was contradicted by the fact that Vaux and Gallemard had already fallen out over the question of the mayoralty before the fires took place in Longepierre. For every one of the acts of arson, of complicity in which Vaux had been convicted, there was a clear motive ascribable to

Gallemard, a motive of greed or revenge, but none to Vaux. Vaux had no reason for wishing to destroy the property of Madame Frilley, to whom the tobacco monopoly had been granted when it was taken away from Gallemard; Vaux had no reason for attacking the property of the notables who, before the commencement of the fires, had already yielded to his demands in the matter of the division of the communal land. Gallemard, on the other hand, had threatened openly the destruction of Madame Frilley's premises, and had not forgiven the notables their share in getting the tobacco monopoly taken away from him, or their subsequent refusal to respond to his advances.

Of those convicted along with Vaux, the elder Savet appeared in the course of Feurtet's investigation to be seriously implicated as an accomplice of Gallemard, but it appeared with equal clearness that Vaux had always shunned the society of Savet. The evidence collected by Feurtet in 1855, while establishing the guilt of Gallemard, seemed with equal force to exclude that of Vaux.

There remained Balleau, the creature now cited as the accomplice of Gallemard, Balleau whose dubious evidence had played the chief part in the conviction of Vaux. On his evidence alone rested the story of the meeting of the incendiary conspirators in the house of Vaux previous to the outbreak of the first fires. He still maintained that such a meeting had taken place, but to the number of the conspirators he now added Gallemard; he represented Vaux and Gallemard as united in their determination to destroy the property of the rich. Feurtet, the more he examined the statements of Balleau, both at the trial of Vaux and after the arrest of Gallemard, realised how utterly unreliable these statements were. 'Not a witness,' he writes, 'not a word is forthcoming to corroborate Balleau; what reliance can be placed on any evidence

when it is not confirmed by my own investigations?' Vaux having been sent out of France, Feurtet now suggested that he should go to Brest to examine John Petit, who was still serving his time in the prison there. But he was told that it was useless. In September, John Petit had been sent by an administrative order to join Vaux in New Caledonia.

The only remaining hope was to get the truth, if such a thing were possible, from Balleau himself. He, along with Quinard and Moisonnier, had been sent for trial to the Assize Court at Chalon, charged with seven acts of arson committed between November 1852 and April 1855. The trial was fixed to take place at the beginning of December. At the last moment it was postponed to the next Assizes to be held in March of the following year. The December Assizes at Chalon had been presided over by one of the judges from the Appeal Court of Dijon, Grasset by name. When it was decided to postpone the hearing, President Grasset sent for Feurtet to consult him; he was to try the case himself at the March Assizes. Feurtet arrived at Chalon on December 7th. Before seeing the judge he went straight to the prison in which Balleau was confined. The moment he entered the cell, Balleau got up and said to Feurtet with some emotion, 'I was expecting a second visit from the President of the Assize Court.[1] I had made up my mind to tell him the whole truth about the crimes at Longepierre. I am glad to see you, M. Feurtet, who know all the circumstances. I am going to tell you everything.' He then went on to say: 'I was never present at any meeting of incendiaries; I do not know if any took place. Everything I swore

[1] According to the French Criminal Code it is the duty of the President of the Assize Court to interrogate secretly each prisoner before his trial in order to discover whether the prisoner persists in his statements made during the preliminary investigation into the case, or desires to modify them in any way.

to this effect was dictated to me by Gallemard; he made me repeat my lesson twenty times, and was always present when M. Boulanger examined me, and helped me by his cleverness to stick to my statements. It was he who told me to say that the first meeting took place in the third room in the house of Vaux, and as I had never been there, I was caught out on that point. I perpetrated the first fire in March 1851, at the bidding of Gallemard and Pichon; they had fixed midnight, and Gallemard came with a lantern to encourage us.'

Feurtet asked no questions. He went straight to the President of the Assize Court. Grasset received the news of this startling evidence without apparently any great interest, and merely remarked: 'That's nothing, I can easily bring Balleau round again.'

Astonished at the cool reception of his intelligence, Feurtet left the judge and went to Metman, the examining magistrate. Here his news was received more sympathetically. Metman shared his colleague's belief in the guilt of Balleau and the probable innocence of Vaux. The two magistrates decided that Metman should examine Balleau himself officially and draw up a proper legal report of his statement. They went at once to the prisoner's cell. Balleau repeated to them what he had already said to Feurtet. 'The President,' he added, 'asked me if I had been bound by any oath to secrecy, and told me that, if so, there would be no risk of incurring damnation by breaking an oath of that kind. Well, gentlemen, there was such an oath. In December 1851 Gallemard got Quinard, Moisonnier, and myself to his house, his son-in-law Pichon being present; it was in the room near the bakehouse. He made us swear never to reveal anything about the fires that had taken place, or might take place in the future.' Balleau described how in February 1851, before the fires had begun, Gallemard

had summoned the three men, and one other of the name of Nouvelot to his tavern, had plied them with drink and incited them to destroy the property of the rich. 'They are all against me,' he said, 'we must make a clean sweep of them. Will you be my men to do it?' They agreed. They were to wait till a night when the wind was in the right quarter. Such a night came on March 2nd. Balleau and Moisonnier started the first conflagration, while Quinard made an unsuccessful attempt to kindle a second in another part of the village.

If this new statement of Balleau were true, it was clear that he had committed perjury at the trial of Vaux, and that he, Quinard, and Moisonnier had committed the acts of arson on March 2nd 1851, of which Vaux and Petit had been convicted. The duty of the magistrates in the presence of this fresh development was clear. A charge of perjury should have been at once preferred against Balleau, or he and the other two men should have been tried for the acts of arson committed on March 2nd, 1851. In the event of either of these charges being proved, there would have been legal ground for the revision by the Court of Cassation of the cases of Vaux and Petit. Neither of these steps were taken, nor was the official report which had been drawn up by Metman and Feurtet of Balleau's declaration included among the documents produced in Balleau's case.

The President Grasset had said that he would bring Balleau round again. This he proceeded to do in an examination of the prisoner on February 22nd, 1856. 'Since your last interrogatory' said the judge, 'you have had time to reflect on the seriousness of the charge made against you, and the possible consequences of the revelations you have made. I now ask you if you persist in them, and I invite you to tell me all you know about the crimes which, since March

1851, have ravaged the commune of Longepierre.' In response to this rather menacing invitation Balleau now said that two meetings of the conspirators had been held in February 1851, the first, at the house of Vaux, the second at that of Michaud. At both of these Vaux had been present, and at the second he had made every one raise their hand and swear on pain of death to keep the secret of the conspiracy. While the previous statement of Balleau exculpating Vaux was kept out of the case, this later one was included in it, and used at the ensuing trial of Balleau and his confederates. M. Sevestre, the judge who reported on the case to the Court of Cassation in 1879, comments thus on the value of the recantation which the President Grasset obtained from Balleau:—

'The Court will appreciate the value of this interrogatory to which a prisoner is submitted on the very eve of his trial, knowing that he is certain to be sentenced to death, having but one thought, and that how to save his head. Add to this the fact that the judge who conducts this interrogatory is to preside at his trial, and that he is the same judge who, on hearing that Balleau had withdrawn his charges against Vaux and Petit, had made the reply which speaks for itself: "That's nothing, I will soon bring Balleau round again!"'

Feurtet still hoped to serve the ends of justice by being called as a witness at the trial of Balleau. He wrote to Grasset in February, pointing out how necessary was his appearance at the ensuing Assizes to the complete unfolding of the case against the prisoners. He promised to be careful and discreet; the President should guide him in the evidence he was to give; he would keep within the strict limits of the case and would say nothing of the new developments to which his investigations had led him. The following day he wrote to his colleague, Metman.

'When I come to Chalon,' he said, 'I will tell you what I have discovered. I mean to go on in my endeavours to ensure the safety of Longepierre, the triumph of the innocent and the execution of the guilty. God's justice must be done; I am only his humble instrument. Do not, as others do, treat me as a visionary; I am nothing of the kind. I am not working for anything so vain or contemptible as mere personal glory; my motive is a higher one; and in that lies my strength.'

The replies to his letters were not such as to bring Feurtet much encouragement in his fight for justice. Metman, who was on the eve of being promoted to a judgeship in the court at Dijon, wrote discreetly and urged caution: 'It is in this new direction in which the warmth of your heart leads you, and in which I can only follow with discretion, that there is any chance of finding a final solution to our mystery. I confess I hardly expect it, I fear the secret has gone down into the grave and that no living breast contains it. Be careful not to put forward as facts capable of legal proof, suppositions, however plausible, however capable of inspiring doubt and leading to acts of pardon and clemency. . . . I wish you could be called at the Assizes; you would give your evidence calmly and succinctly with no attempt at rhetoric; I would like the President to put to you certain questions arranged beforehand, which would enable the jury to understand the case from its outset. I suppose I ought not to express such a wish for fear of seeming the friend and accomplice of "this visionary justice of the peace," but, if you have found the light, I ask nothing better than to kindle at its flame my extinguished candle, for the love of God I will ask you to let me do it.' To such a letter Feurtet could only reply, 'Every day brings some new fact to give substance to my visions. They may belittle me, kill

me with pin-pricks; I can only answer with the faithful Galileo: "Nevertheless it does move." This may be rhetorical, but it's true.'

The answer of President Grasset to Feurtet's request to be heard as a witness was even less satisfactory. He wrote that on principle he did not approve of putting into the witness box at the Assizes the magistrate who had been investigating the case; it was lowering to his dignity to expose him to the attacks and criticisms of the advocates for the defence. As it is a frequent practice in the French Assize Courts for examining magistrates to be called as witnesses, the sensitiveness of President Grasset on this point of procedure is suspicious. Nor did it meet with the approval of the judges of the Court of Cassation in 1897. 'If,' said the judge Sevestre, 'the dignity of magistrates is to be entitled to respect, then in the interest of the very powers with which they are invested, there is one supreme consideration which dominates all others, the higher interest of truth and justice.'

Baffled in his hope of being called as a witness, Feurtet asked his judicial superiors if he might come to Chalon and be present as a spectator at the trial of Balleau. Permission was accorded him and he arrived at Chalon the day before the opening of the Assizes. The same day he had an interview with the Procureur-Général de Mongis who had come specially from the Court at Dijon to conduct the prosecution of Balleau and his accomplices. Feurtet laid before him the result of his investigations at Longepierre, and expressed his doubts as to the guilt of Vaux. The Procureur-Général was clearly impressed by the arguments of Feurtet. 'It is too late now,' he said, 'to deal with the two cases at one and the same time. But I am keenly interested in your views. After this case is finished it may well be advisable to give

them fuller consideration.' Next day the same high authority said to a brother magistrate: 'There is no doubt M. Feurtet is a remarkable man, and has got a perfectly clear grasp of the cases at Longepierre.'

To have reopened the case of Vaux at the approaching trial of Balleau would have been to upset the whole carefully devised plan of the prosecution, to exclude any possible opportunity of raising in any way during the proceedings the question of the guilt or innocence of Vaux and Petit. The Act of Accusation was throughout an ingenious attempt to reconcile the guilt of Gallemard with that of Vaux by representing them as, up to a certain point, partners in crime. The character of Gallemard, once the idol of authority, was painted in the blackest colours. He was a man decried on every hand, an ex-demagogue, a cheat, a thief, and more than likely a murderer. At first he had been on the side of Vaux; afterwards jealous of the schoolmaster's ascendancy with the popular party, he had decided on his destruction. The fires at Longepierre were represented as 'the complex work of evil passions suddenly let loose.' At first Gallemard had used Balleau to bring about the conviction of Vaux, whose guilt had been fully proved; later Balleau had been his instrument to further his own nefarious schemes.

Though Balleau confessed to having been guilty of the first act of arson in Longepierre, committed in the March of 185. and had been accused of it by Gallemard, he was only charged in the Act of Accusation with the last fire of all, that at the Sisters' school in April 1855. Quinard and Moisonnier, his fellow prisoners, were charged with acts committed since the conviction of Vaux in June 1852. Thus the conviction of these three prisoners could give no opportunity for reopening the question of the justice of the condemnation of Vaux, the acts of arson of which

he had been convicted forming no part of the proceedings in the present trial.

This commenced at the Chalon Assizes on March 15th, 1856, before Grasset. The court was crowded, but great precautions had been taken to ensure an orderly hearing of the case. The prisoner Balleau is described as tall, but thin and mean in appearance, Quinard as physically robust but nervous in bearing, Moisonnier small and round-shouldered, showing all the signs of the habitual drunkard.

President Grasset, having already in private 'brought round' Balleau to his way of thinking, had no difficulty in steering him in the same course in his public interrogatory of the prisoner. Balleau represented Vaux and Gallemard as the chiefs of the incendiary conspiracy, admitted that he with Quinard and Moisonnier had set fire to the Sisters' school, and denounced his fellow prisoners as the perpetrators of the other incendiary acts charged against them. Both Quinard and Moisonnier denied their guilt, nor can it be said that, apart from the statements of such a confirmed liar as Balleau, there was any very strong or reliable evidence against them. Their characters were bad, they were kept well supplied with drink by Gallemard, and their bearing on the occasions of some of the fires had been suspicious. But there was little more positive to be alleged against them. Nevertheless, the Procureur-Général was pitiless in his appeal to the jury to convict all the three prisoners and refuse them extenuating circumstances.

He began his speech by a discreet reference to the previous trial: 'We must,' he said, 'examine in its entirety the terrible disaster which for five years has afflicted unceasingly an unhappy commune of this department; we must link up the prisoners of to-day with the convicts of yesterday, vindicate the justice

of our country by showing that if it has not yet completed its task, it has at least made a good beginning.' He had not come to Chalon, he said, merely to give strength to the prosecution, but to protest with all the force of authority against those subversive doctrines which had kindled with the breath of Socialistic rancour the first fires at Longepierre, against the unhallowed villainy which had converted the representative of authority into the chief of a gang of incendiaries.' By such specious arguments did the official representative of justice seek to reconcile the guilt of Vaux with that of Gallemard. If any mercy were to be shown the prisoners, he said, it must not come from the jury, 'but from that merciful sovereign to whom the right to punish seems so hard, the right to pardon so easy.' 'You,' he concluded, 'have only one duty to fulfil, to punish these crimes with the same determination with which they have been executed. Strike down Balleau, Quinard, Moisonnier, as they have struck down others, mercilessly, pitilessly. For our own part, since we have ventured to introduce the name of our sovereign into these proceedings, may we be permitted to recall, in the name of our own security, those solemn words of his which proclaim the security of all: "The time has come when the virtuous shall take courage and the wicked tremble."'

Balleau, Quinard, and Moisonnier were found guilty of arson without extenuating circumstances, and sentenced to death.

The much tried inhabitants of Longepierre looked forward with some satisfaction to seeing the heads of Balleau and his accomplices fall on the scene of their misdeeds. In anticipation of their execution the public place of Longepierre was thronged on more than one morning with an expectant crowd. But this satisfaction was to be denied them. At first the authorities thought of beheading one of the prisoners

as an example to others. Feurtet was consulted as to which he would select. He replied unhesitatingly in favour of Balleau. As, however, Balleau had allowed himself to be so obligingly 'brought round' by justice, Feurtet's selection met with little favour. Finally the merciful sovereign commuted the sentence of all three to transportation for life, and sent them to join Peter Vaux in New Caledonia. There was to be no mercy for the republican schoolmaster.

Before we turn back to follow the effect of these events on the fortunes of Peter Vaux, let us finish with the story of Longepierre. The death of Gallemard had not put an end to incendiarism in the village. The contagion remained. Twice in the year 1857 fresh acts of arson were committed. Pichon, Gallemard's son-in-law, was suspected, but no case could be made out against him. Later a man, Nouvelot, and the woman Bonjour were arrested. Some evidence was collected which went to show that they had been members of Gallemard's gang, and were for private reasons continuing the good work of their late chief. In March 1858 they were convicted and sentenced to death. After that the fires at Longepierre ceased to burn, and the village disappears from the pages of history.

To Peter Vaux, in New Caledonia, news travelled, slowly and uncertainly. Letters were frequently delayed or, whether by accident or design, miscarried altogether. It was not until nearly eight months after the event that he learnt of the suicide of Gallemard. 'My dear Irma,' he writes, 'I know it is not charitable, but I am sorry that Gallemard, who has been my assassin, my tormentor, has hanged himself; the guillotine and not a napkin should have been the forfeit of his crimes.' In the December of 1856, Moisonnier arrived at New Caledonia to serve his commuted sentence of transportation for life. Vaux,

who was at that time employed as a clerk on board one of the convict ships, describes their meeting: 'I was taking down the names of the prisoners. When he gave me his, I thought the pen and paper would have fallen from my hands. My heart could not have beaten quicker had I encountered a tiger or a rattlesnake in the depths of a jungle. I felt as if I should go mad. However, I pulled myself together and went on with my work. A little later I came up to him quite calmly and asked him to explain himself. He replied that he knew nothing and was a martyr like myself. The blood rushed to my head and I said a thousand things to him that must have been very bitter and disconcerting, if he were really innocent. I don't know.' Some months later Moisonnier died miserably on his way to the hospital. 'He never would confess anything to me,' writes Vaux, 'perhaps he feared lest I should curse him!'

In November, 1857, Vaux learned of the death of his youngest child. At the same time his wife had sent him her picture. It would have been taken from him because he had not money enough to pay the dues, had not a kindly official given him the few francs needed. At the beginning of 1858, Vaux sends his wife as a New Year gift thirty francs which he has saved up from gratuities received in the course of his duties: 'It is little enough,' he writes, 'but I can see from your letters how unhappy you are. This is your New Year's present for 1858; please Heaven I shall be able to give you that of 1859 in person . . . while there's life there's hope; the future will smile on us yet.'

Vaux had interested the chaplain at Cayenne in his case. He wrote to his wife, asking her to send him all statements and testimony in his favour which she could collect. With characteristic independence he adds: 'Above all, my dear Irma, remember that your husband does not ask for one line, one word that is not

the truth, that does not represent the honest belief of those writing it . . . if you make haste, I think I can promise you from to-day that with God's help and relying on His justice, which He never denies to the widow and the fatherless, my situation will be changed before the end of the year.'

In May, Vaux was promoted to the post of librarian in the Government office at Cayenne. He writes that he will not be able to send his wife quite so much money, as his new post obliges him to spend a little more on his dress and personal appearance.

A strong effort was now made to obtain for Vaux a pardon from the Emperor. In September he received from his wife a number of testimonials to his innocence, including one from the priest of Longepierre and another from the advocate who had defended him before the Assize Court. In the January of 1859 Vaux addressed a personal petition to Napoleon III. In it he pointed out that the real criminals at Longepierre had now been convicted, and that the Legion of Honour had been conferred on M. Feurtet, who had been instrumental in bringing about their conviction. 'I was condemned,' he wrote, 'on the sole evidence of Balleau given at the instigation of Gallemard; my innocence was established when it had been proved that the first fires at Longepierre were the work of the Mayor, Gallemard, and his creature, Balleau. . . . After God, Sire, you are our only hope; my wife, my four children and I await at the hands of your Majesty that justice which, once your conscience is enlightened, you never refuse.' At the same time Admiral Baudin, the Governor of Cayenne, sent to Prince Jerome Bonaparte, then Minister for the Colonies, a memorial strongly recommending Vaux to the clemency of the Emperor. He urged, as Vaux had done, that the conviction of Balleau and the decoration of Feurtet, were equivalent to an

acknowledgment of his innocence. He spoke in the highest terms of the convict's behaviour since he had been at Cayenne, of his zeal, his honesty, and ability. Prince Jerome referred the petition to the Minister of Justice. The Minister replied:—

'Vaux, as either principal or accomplice, took an active part in the various acts of arson which during a whole year devastated one of the communes of the department of Saône-et-Loire. The great gravity of these crimes makes it impossible for the Government to consider the petition in favour of a convict whose release, in the opinion of the local authorities, would be a disastrous event. In regard to the protestations of his innocence made by Vaux, this is not the first time they have been made, and a careful examination has already shown them to be entirely baseless.'

It was in October that Vaux learnt of the failure of these efforts made on his behalf. Then for the first time in all his years of suffering, his patient confidence in ultimate justice forsook him. Sleepless and feverish, he breaks out into bitter reproaches against the people of Longepierre who, knowing his innocence, suffer him to remain a prisoner, too timid or too indifferent to press for his release. He cites them before the throne of God to answer for their crime:—

'You are happy to-day, but your happiness, as my sufferings, will have an end. You will follow me into the grave, and then before the supreme Judge, a Judge whom no toy, no mayoral scarf, or cross of honour can turn aside, will be tried the great cause between you and me. He will not say to me, "Silence, prisoner, you are a scoundrel," I shall be heard at last, and my speech will fill your hearts with terror. At the rattle of the chains which you have made me

wear, you will tremble; my wife's tears will overwhelm you as the waves of the sea; the despairing cries of my little children will echo from one end of heaven to the other to confound and destroy you.'

He bids his wife leave Longepierre her presence there can only serve to glut the hatred of his enemies. At times he reproaches her for want of zeal and energy in his behalf, for neglect in writing to him; the next moment he asks forgiveness for his impatience. He complains bitterly and with some justice of the conduct of the village priest, whose testimonial in favour of his release had consisted merely of a copy of a brief extract from a local newspaper, giving his statement as to the visit paid him by Gallemard on the night of the fire of March 8th, 1852:—

'Knowing this, your priest, he in whose hands you place the spiritual welfare of your children, this worthy man allowed us to be convicted and said no word against Gallemard who had voted in favour of the increase of his stipend. Later, when he sees that Gallemard is run to earth, he testifies against a villain from whom he can no longer expect anything. He gives his shameful evidence, I say shameful because he should have given it at once; then he would have exposed Gallemard four years sooner, and I should not be in Guiana to-day. When you ask him to support my petition, he gives you a wretched little scrap of paper; he seems afraid lest his unworthy conduct be unmasked. If this be the way in which he who should be the worthiest of men behaves, what can one expect of the other worthies of Longepierre?'

Later he writes:—

'What days, what nights I have passed since we were parted! I have prayed that the sea might engulf me, the mountains crush me, a precipice open at my

feet; I have prayed Heaven to sink me beneath the full weight of its hatred; I have asked God, who will no longer grant me justice to summon all the powers of injustice and overwhelm me with the misery and suffering that I have yet strength enough to endure. Sometimes I seem to wish that every kind of disaster might fall on me at once, that I might enjoy the full luxury of misfortune. I have read somewhere "There is no finer spectacle in this world than that of a good man struggling valiantly against misfortune." Some years ago a man whom I had tried to put once more into the right path and could find no answer to my arguments said to me, "Vaux, you are as great as the world." But no one knows better than I how poor and weak I am, how little is enough to cast me down. A word of kindness, sympathy, the mention of my wife and children bring the tears to my eyes. Where are my strength and courage? Misfortune, insult I can face calmly without a tear; no hate, no fury can blanch my cheek; but let any one speak to me of the love that is lost to me, the love of wife and child, then my strength is gone, my stoicism vanquished and the weakness of my nature reasserts itself. I give way to tears, but they are sweet tears and bring comfort to a heart that is innocent of remorse.'

The only chance of happiness on this earth now left to Peter Vaux lay in the hope that his wife and children would come out to him in Guiana. Permission was given by the authorities. Eagerly, at times impatiently, he urged his wife to hasten her preparations. At length, early in the October of 1861, Madame Vaux and her four children arrived at Cayenne. The Governor had given Vaux a plantation of two hundred and fifty acres, about forty miles from Cayenne, called the Hermitage. Here he tried to plant coffee, but without success. He then took to working in

wood, but the work was difficult and brought little profit. In 1864, Brutus Vaux, a boy of seventeen, accidentally shot dead his sister Ermence. 'Heaven have mercy on us,' writes Vaux in his journal, 'and grant the blood of my dear Ermence be not visited on Brutus. Poor boy! his sorrow is so great! For my part all the powers of Heaven have combined to crush me during the last twelve years! Would that I had died at my father's age (thirty)!' His daughter Irma married a prosperous merchant, but after three years of happiness the husband died leaving his wife with a little girl a few months old. The struggle against the unhealthiness and the hardness of the conditions was a severe one for Vaux and his family; food was scarce; mice overran the plantation; constant attacks of fever undermined the health of parents and children. Friends offered to lend Vaux money to help him to develop his holding, but he refused resolutely to incur debt in any shape or form.

When in 1870 the Empire fell and the Republic was proclaimed, for the last time the heart of Vaux beat high with new hope of justice and freedom. But again he was doomed to disappointment. The commune came, and after it the triumph once more of the forces of reaction. In spite of the efforts of his son, Armand, now grown to manhood, the republican Government was deaf to all entreaties to grant a pardon to Peter Vaux. Broken by suffering and disappointment, the health of the unhappy man began to give way. He developed a nervous affection of the hands, so that he had to be fed like a child. After four years of suffering patiently endured, Peter Vaux died on January 12th, 187[illegible].

He was fifty-three years of age and had suffered twenty-two years of punishment for a crime of which he was innocent. 'For a convict,' writes his son, 'he had a magnificent funeral. That there is in all

men an innate sense of justice is shown by the respect with which he was always treated by his fellow-convicts. He was kind to all men; to one he would give advice and encouragement; to another he, poor as the poorest of them, would give tobacco or some other modest gift. We did not dare to expostulate with him. "If I were free and rich," he would say, "the sight of all the suffering round me would make me poor in a fortnight." Though the attendance at funerals is optional, all the convicts and most of the staff followed my father to the grave.' On his grave is a cross bearing the inscription:—

HERE LIES VAUX.

HE HAS GONE TO ASK JUSTICE OF GOD.

From the moment of his father's death, Armand Vaux, with a courage and determination worthy of his name, devoted himself to the rehabilitation of his father's memory. In 1876, by the most rigid economy, he succeeded in raising sufficient money to bring his family back to France. Soon after their return Madame Vaux died and was buried near Longepierre. On her grave is the following inscription.—

IRMA JEANNIN,

LOVING MOTHER, AND THE BRAVE WIFE OF A MARTYR, LIES HERE IN PEACE, 2000 LEAGUES AWAY FROM HIM WHOSE EXILE SHE SHARED.

In 1883 a petition was drawn up, signed by one hundred and thirty seven out of the hundred and fifty electors of Longepierre, asking for the reconsideration of the case of Peter Vaux. Armand Vaux tried to interest Gambetta and Victor Hugo in his cause but without success. Hugo could for purposes of his own whitewash a ruffian such as Claude Gueux, but in the case of Peter Vaux he was deaf to the claims of

a genuine martyr to injustice. At length a deputy was found to present the petition to the Chamber. But justice pleaded its incompetence to reopen the case. It did not fall within the provisions of Article 444 of the Criminal Code which laid down the grounds on which alone a case could be submitted to the Court of Cassation for revision. In 1885 the children of Vaux addressed a petition to President Grévy setting forth the facts of the conviction of Vaux and the subsequent suicide of Gallemard. The Ministry of Justice replied that the investigation into the case of Gallemard had only served to confirm the proofs of the guilt of Vaux and his fellow prisoners.' In the same year Armand and his brother Brutus had an interview with Grévy. The President said that he was devoted to their cause but could do nothing by himself. 'As a lawyer,' he said, 'I worked for the family of Lesurques, but we could get no result. There is a serious gap in our laws which sooner or later must be filled up.' It was pointed out to him that there was no analogy between the case of Vaux and that of Lesurques. Grévy promised to recommend the case to M. Freycinet, then President of the Council of Ministers, but the latter fell from office soon after and the matter was dropped. In 1887 a rumour that the pardon of Vaux was about to be granted evoked the following semi-official statement:—

'To obtain the revision of a conviction, the heirs of the convicted person must make the demand for it within a period of two years from the conviction, which must itself be at the same time inconsistent with a previous conviction to justify revision. This period has, unfortunately for the heirs of Peter Vaux, long been passed, nor have they been able to prove that his conviction was inconsistent with those of the other persons convicted of acts of arson.'

In 1888 Armand Vaux wrote to Carnot, who had succeeded to the Presidency of the Republic, and asked him to give his support to a bill to be brought forward modifying clause 443 of the code in such a way as to permit of a re-investigation of his father's case. The President's secretary replied saying that the matter had been referred to the Ministry of Justice. 'What do you,' wrote Armand Vaux, 'who read these lines say to this treatment of my request for the pardon of my father, dead now fourteen years? The play written round Peter Vaux has been played in nearly every theatre in France; his name is more popular than that of Lesurques; our claim has wakened a response in every heart; the Government alone ignores it., Such is the result of all our efforts. However, in accordance with the solemn pledge entered into between my father and myself, I shall continue the struggle, hopeless as it may seem, fully persuaded that in crying loudly for the reform of the Criminal Code; I am fighting in a high and sacred cause, not only to achieve the rehabilitation of the name I am proud to bear, but for the sake of all those who, whatever their condition, are or may be the victims of man's justice. And thus my long and persistent efforts will not have been in vain.'

In 1889 a book was published giving the full history of the case of Peter Vaux. Already his story had been made the subject of a play, and a local newspaper in the department of Saône-et-Loire had published as a serial a portion of the book. The authors had been fortunate enough to obtain possession of the official correspondence of the Justice of the Peace, Feurtet. Though he had been decorated by the Emperor for his skill and activity in investigating the crimes of Longepierre, the magistrate himself had ever had it on his conscience that, in spite of official discouragement, he had not persisted still further in

his efforts to obtain the revision of the conviction of Peter Vaux. A few years after he had relinquished the case, he wrote thus:—

'Is it a crime to disagree with the findings of a court of justice? Is it a crime to express openly the reasons which cause heart and intellect to protest against its decisions? For six years my conscience rebels at my silence, I blush for myself, I suffer to the very depth of my soul; I ask whether there is any court of justice higher than that of the truth, and whether I should for ever smother facts, deductions which must lead to a revision, if not to a full remission, of the sentence. Whatever may be thought of me in a world in which I have already incurred the hatred of some of those in high places, I have made up my mind to put pen to paper, that I may reconcile myself with myself and rid me of a cause of cruel and ceaseless torture. I speak of the case of Peter Vaux condemned to penal servitude for life on June 23rd, 1852.'

With the aid of the papers left by Feurtet, and the documents in the case preserved in the records of the Chalon Assize Court, the authors of *The Story of Peter Vaux* were able to set before the public the real facts of the case, and expose the dishonesty of those responsible for the prosecution of Vaux and the cruel prolongation of his sufferings as a convict.

Armand Vaux, true to his word, fought on in the vindication of his father's memory. At length the electors of the Côte d'Or, the neighbouring department to that of Saône-et-Loire, in which Longepierre is situated, sent him as a deputy to the Chamber. There in the year 1895 after a struggle which had now lasted nearly twenty years, he succeeded in getting a law passed which so altered the Criminal Code as to bring his father's case within the power of the Court of Cassation, the supreme court of France, to revise. Under this law the court was given power of revision

in cases where, after a conviction, a fact had been produced or revealed, or documents discovered, which were of such a nature as to establish the innocence of the convicted person; and where, owing to the decease of the convict, a re-hearing of the case was impossible, the court had power to review the case and, if the conviction were found to be unjust, to annul the previous judgment and clear the memory of the dead man.

Under this law the cases of Peter Vaux and John Petit were heard before the Court of Cassation on December 3rd, 1897. In the appeal courts in France one of the judges of the court draws up a report on the case, which he submits to his brethren. The report of the judge, Sevestre, in this case gives a masterly exposition of the history of the martyrdom of Peter Vaux. The Procureur-Général spoke warmly in favour of revision; he did not hesitate to stigmatise the conviction and subsequent treatment of Vaux as a judicial crime, and spoke with glowing indignation of the conduct of the Imperial magistracy. After a hearing lasting five days, the court annulled the convictions of both Vaux and Petit, granting by way of compensation 100,000 francs to the family of Vaux and 50,000 to that of Petit.