CHAPTER VI

CRIMES OF THE INSANE

AN absolute distinction must be made between a crime committed in a moment of "madness" or "mental aberration" and one which is inspired by thwarted passion or the satisfaction of a guilty desire.

In both cases there is a "brain-storm": but whilst in the first case the culprit should be declared "irresponsible" and treated as a sick man in an asylum, in the second there are times when he should be punished without pity as a murderer fully responsible for his actions.

As an example of "madness" or "mental alienation," I shall give the terrible instance of a series of crimes committed by a demented woman of a particularly dangerous nature: Jeanne Weber, called "the Ogress." Following this I shall introduce you to another abominable crime which may be attributed to one whom we may call the "half-mad" or "tainted." I refer to the multiple murders committed by a ferocious brute named Vacher, surnamed "The Shepherd-Killer," who was declared responsible for his actions, and, as such, was executed.

Finally, to conclude this chapter, we shall narrate the crimes of those two monstrous perverts, Menesclou and Soleilland.

THE CASE OF JEANNE WEBER, SURNAMED "THE OGRESS"

The case of Jeanne Weber, which caused a tremendous sensation, involving as it did the death of a great number of innocent victims, is very characteristic of crimes committed by a homicidal maniac. Further it provoked a notable conflict between public opinion and the experts employed as instruments of justice, who—it must be confessed—were grossly in the wrong.

It is a horrible story.

In 1905, the Weber family lived at No. 1-bis of the Passage of the "Goutte d'Or," in one of the great tenements of this populous quarter whose outer walls were blackened by the smoke of factories and trains. The father was a steady workman, a time-keeper in a transport company. The woman seemed to be a good enough housekeeper, but her eyes, sometimes wandering, indicated an over-fondness for drink.

There had been three children in the family. Only one was now alive, a boy named Marcel, 7 years of age. The mother's grief over the loss of her other children was alleged to be the reason for her intemperate habits.

However that might be, the Weber household was much after

the usual type of working peoples' homes, when a singular series of children's deaths drew public attention to them.

On the 2nd March 1905, Jeanne Weber's sister-in-law having need to go to the "lavoir" (public laundry), asked her to look after her two little children, Suzanne, aged 2 years and 10 months, and Georgette, 18 months.

This woman had hardly been at the lavoir, called "Les Deux Amis" (where Emile Zola had staged the scene of the punishment inflicted on Virginie by Gervaise Macquart), when a neighbour came to tell her that her little Georgette was very ill.

Running back home, she found the child with eyes dilated and frothing at the mouth, lying in the lap of her sister-in-law who, with a hand passed under the child's clothes, seemed to be chafing her breast.

The mother took the little girl in her arms and nursed her; soon the child was better, and the mother, less uneasy, went back to her work.

On her return three hours later, she found her child dead. A witness stated that its neck was violet-coloured and pointed it out to the father. But no one paid any attention to this detail.

On the 11th March following—that is to say nine days after the death of little Georgette—Jeanne Weber, in the absence of the father and mother, took charge of Suzanne. On the return of the parents, the child, with contracted limbs and clenched teeth, gave a death-rattle and a second or two later was a corpse. The doctor put it down to convulsions.

On the 25th March Jeanne Weber asked herself to breakfast at the house of another brother-in-law, Léon Weber. In the afternoon the mother went out and entrusted her with her daughter Germaine, aged 7 months. Suddenly, the grandmother of the child, who lived a floor below, heard cries. She went up to her daughter's rooms, and found her grandchild, with a congested face, breathing with difficulty. This indisposition was short. So the grandmother went downstairs again, leaving Jeanne Weber alone. The condition of the child became worse. A neighbour who came in remarked that her neck had red marks on it. The parents came home and Jeanne Weber left.

She came back the next day; the same events occurred; the child seemed to be stifling; neighbours came in to help. On their return the child was dead.

This time death was attributed to diphtheria.

Three days later a new event occurred to sadden the Weber family. This time it was Jeanne Weber's own child, Marcel,

aged 7. He died in a convulsion on the day of the funeral of his little cousin. Again this was attributed to diphtheria.

On the 5th April following, Jeanne Weber asked her sisters-in-law to dinner—the wives of Peter and Charles Weber. The latter came with her son Maurice, 10 years of age. After dinner, Jeanne sent her relatives out to execute some commissions and remained alone with the child.

On her return, his mother found him stretched on a bed, his face purple, and foam on his lips. There was a blackish mark round his neck.

In her terror, she shrieked at Jeanne Weber, "Wretch—you have strangled my child." She rushed him to the Hospital Brétonneau, where Doctor Sévestre and M. Saillant, the House-Surgeon, also noted the furrow round the neck and remarked signs of suffocation.

After treatment the child recovered, but this time a formal charge was made against Jeanne Weber by her sister-in-law.

The case attracted much attention. The death of these four little ones, who had died within twenty-three days in the arms of the same woman, created violent feeling amongst the public. Previous cases were remembered, and the mysterious deaths of two other children confided to Jeanne Weber were recalled—Lucie Alexandre, aged 2 years, and Marcelle Payatos, aged 29 months.

At the judicial inquiry, Doctor Sévestre testified that he had noticed on the child he had examined: "at the back of the neck above a line connecting the ears, an incision, quite appreciable, of three to four millimetres," and M. Saillant confirmed this in these terms: "Around the neck there was a reddish furrow more accentuated at the sides than in front, where it somewhat disappeared. This furrow had the breadth of a little finger." At the time of his visit Doctor Sévestre saw the child and made a statement that this was probably a case of strangulation.

The autopsy of the three nieces of Jeanne Weber was ordered by the Judge. It was entrusted to Doctor Thoinot, Staff-Professor to the Faculté de Médecine. His findings were that the "post-mortems" on the children were not conclusive, "and I cannot state for certain whether death was caused through crime, or by accident."

This did not confirm the charge sustained by a great number of witnesses—but it did not shake it either. He cloaked himself behind his rôle of médecin-légiste, and under the circumstances made a mistake in not saying more.

We shall not enter further into the technical details of the

professor's statements; these can be found in a book by Doctors Doyen and Ferdinand Hauser, entitled *The Ogresse and the Experts.*

On the 29th January, Jeanne Weber appeared before the jury of the Seine, in spite of the negative report of Thoinot. The evidence was divided; but public opinion was against her.

We saw, seated in the dock, a woman with a round and expressionless face. President Bertulus read a summary of the charges.

Four children had died under the care of Jeanne Weber in a few weeks, and a fifth only escaped death by a miracle. Jeanne Weber was alone with a healthy baby. The parents on coming back found the child in agony. When they took it up in their arms the child revived, and when, reassured, they went away, it became worse at once. On their return they found a corpse.

The testimony against the woman was overwhelming. But Doctor Thoinot, exceeding in his oral statements the conclusions he had put into writing, and with a partiality and levity surprising in a man of science, cleared the accused with the following statement: "Science cannot tell you how these children came to die: but everything points to a natural death, and that the accused is innocent." After this declaration, what was the value of the formal evidence against the Ogress, and the carefully-weighed statements of the other doctors?

M. Seligmann, the Solicitor-General, could only abandon the charges, and did so. The task of Maître Henri Robert, who defended the accused, became easy. Ten minutes later the jury came back with a verdict of not guilty. Immediately a cry came from the end of the hall from the mother of one of the victims, Madame Charles Weber, "There is no more justice!" The father of another, M. Alexandre, jumping on a bench, called in a ringing voice: "She will begin again!"

After the acquittal of the woman whom the public named "the Ogress of the Goutte d'Or," the nine days' wonder dropped.

She returned to her lodgings, but her husband had left, and she found herself without resources.

In February she threw herself into the Seine, or rather, wetted herself lightly and pretended that she had been thrown into it by persons unknown. She then started off in search of adventure.

We do not know what she did for fifteen months.

On the 16th April 1907, she made a tragic reappearance before the public. On that date a Monsieur Bavouzet, living at Chambon, a small village on the banks of the Indre near Villedieu, called on the principal doctor there—Doctor Papazouglou—and begged him urgently to come and see his little son, aged 9, who was very ill.

When he arrived at the house, the doctor found the lifeless body of a healthy child on a bed. Beside him was a woman who said she was the sister of the deceased Madame de Bavouzet. Doctor Papazouglou noticed a black mark around the child's neck. He also noted on the body violet marks, and thinking it a case of poisoning, gave notice to the Coroner at Châteauroux.

As, after a superficial examination, the official doctor, M. Audiat, was not able to stigmatize it as a crime, the Coroner signed a permit of burial.

But on the 10th April there was a theatrical coup. The eldest daughter of the Bavouzets, aged 12, declared that her supposed aunt was no relative but a woman her father had taken into their house since the 13th March, and that her name was not Madame Blaise but really Jeanne Weber. By accident she had just read in an old copy of the *Petit Parisien* the story of the woman Weber accused of having strangled three of her nieces and of having nearly strangled a nephew, and had recognized her from the picture published in the paper. She added that it was certainly this woman who had killed her brother Auguste.

An Examining Magistrate, M. Belleau—to whose distinction and energy we must pay tribute—was put in charge of the case at once. The post-mortem of little Auguste, carried out by Doctors Bruneau and Audiat at Châteauroux, discovered traces of violence round the neck.

Jeanne Weber—for it was she—was arrested. She wrote to ask Maître Henri Robert to defend her again. He requested a fresh post-mortem with the addition of Doctors Thoinot and Socquet to the local experts. This post-mortem was carried out on the 27th July, at 9 a.m. at Villedieu Cemetery.

The new experts took samples of flesh from the body, and on the 6th August, sent in their report. They attributed the death of the little Bavouzet to an intermittent fever.

However, Doctors Audiat and Bruneau held to their conclusions. Three new experts were then called upon : Doctors Brissot, Lande, and Mairet, who, not liking to disavow their official colleagues, MM. Thoinot and Socquet, confirmed their conclusions.

The experts and the judge at Châteauroux became the butt of public insults. The " League of the Rights of Mankind " protested against the " detention of the unfortunate woman." The Magistrate, none the less, sent Jeanne Weber up to the Assize Court.

But the Superior Court quashed the trial, and Jeanne Weber was released.

An old journalist of Châteauroux, Emile Nivet, cried out then

as did Monsieur Alexandre at the first trial: "She will begin again."

Escorted in triumph by Parisian journalists, she was handed over to M. Vonjean, a philanthropist, who took her to nurse patients at a sanatorium at Fontgombault, under the name of Marie Lemoine.

There, she was found soon after her arrival, with dilated eyes, squeezing the neck of a little boy with small-pox.

The child was saved. Jeanne Weber was sent away.

She came back to Paris, called on M. Hamard, then "Chef de la Sûreté," and confessed to the murder of her nieces. Then she retracted the statement.

She was sent to the asylum at Nanterre to be taken care of but refused to stop there.

Back in her own home, she found a letter from a man named Joly, living at Lay-Saint-Remy near Toul, offering her lodging and protection.

She went to him and became his mistress, and after that prostituted herself with many railway-workmen, finally going off with one of them, named Bouchery.

She stayed, in his company, at an inn kept by a married couple of the name of Poirot at Commercy, where she helped in the housekeeping.

One evening, she told Madame Poirot she was frightened her husband (Bouchery) would beat her when he came in, and asked for one of the two children to share her bed.

The Poirot couple acceded to her request.

About ten o'clock that night a neighbour heard a noise in the room of the so-called Mme Bouchery, and complained to the Poirots of the disturbance.

The latter went up at once, knocked in vain at the door, and then forced it open. A terrible sight met their eyes. Seated on the bed with haggard face and glaring eyes, the woman Bouchery was dragging at a blanket in an attempt to hide something.

"Where is Marcel?" cried the mother, snatching the blanket away.

The boy lay on the bed, still warm, but lifeless—strangled and covered with blood.

The gendarmes, summoned at once, discovered three twisted and blood-stained handkerchiefs in the bed, and found on the criminal a letter from Maître Henri Robert addressed to Jeanne Weber. She acknowledged her identity.

This time the crime was flagrant. The doctors who carried out

the post-mortem, MM. Thierry, Michel, and Pariseau, affirmed that the victim had been strangled.

Taken to the Lunatic Asylum at Maréville, Jeanne Weber was certified as mad. Her mental condition, which no one had suspected till then and which had led her to commit so many crimes, was clearly shown in the light thrown upon it. She passed from a stupid state to one of nervous excitement, and her clenched hands seemed always to be searching for necks to throttle.

She died in a violent convulsion, her hands around her own throat. Desperate at being unable to strangle innocent little children any more, she strove to strangle herself.

Vacher the Shepherd-Killer

Vacher, "the Shepherd-Killer," who has also been called the "Jack the Ripper of the South-east"—the tragic tramp who left a trail of blood on all the roads he passed along, seems to me to be a most characteristic type of the half-mad pervert; that is to say, he belonged to a class of individuals who, troubled in mind, yet preserve their superior faculties, have a surprising memory, an unusual vivacity, and all the cunning of a crafty peasant. He managed to commit so many the more crimes before being discovered as their author, since his horrible passion, far from taking from him his wits, seems on the contrary to have sharpened them; and he was the more dangerous when he seemed to be most thick-headed.

His case has been the subject of a sharp controversy between the doctor who attended him in the prison at Belley and "experts." The latter insisted that Vacher was not insane but only pretended to be so. The prison doctor, on the other hand, affirmed that he was mentally deficient.

It is probable that the truth lies between the two opinions. Vacher was half-insane with sadistic instincts.

He had been born at Beaufort, a small village in the Isère, in a family of hard-working peasant-farmers. At the age of 18 he was admitted as "postulant" to the house of the Marist Brothers at Saint-Denis-Laval but was expelled almost at once for immorality.

In 1890 he entered the 60th Regiment of Infantry at Besançon, where he was noted and feared for his violence. He became a sergeant, hit the men right and left, and was the terror of the barracks.

Towards the end of his service, he fell in love with a young girl at Baume-les-Dames. One evening, in a fit of jealousy, he

shot her twice in the jaw and then tried to commit suicide by shooting himself in the ear. As the bullet could not be extracted, he remained deaf and paralysed on the right side of his face.

After that he gave way on several occasions to violent actions, so strange that he was not brought to account for them in court but was interned in the lunatic asylum at Saint-Robert.

On the 1st May 1894, the papers permitting him to leave it were endorsed, " Completely cured."

The doctor who signed this because he had to do with one of those half-madmen whose mental condition is hard to determine, certainly never foresaw the terrible consequences that were to ensue from his action. Besides, he might not have been able to refuse it in any case.

It was then that Vacher began his wandering life as the " tramp of tragedy."

In succession, he passed through Haute-Loire, the Isère, the Cote d'Or, the Ain, Savoy, the Ardèche, then the Drôme, and finally, in March 1896, arrived in the vicinity of Maine-et-Loire, where he was arrested on the 4th March at Chaumont for begging and assault on a watchman.

He was locked up in the prison at Beaugé.

During this long peregrination, he had already committed eight crimes, of which he had never been suspected, and one quite recent—an assault on a little girl of fourteen named Derout, which only failed through the intervention of another watchman for whom the girl acted as a servant.

This attempt was committed on the 1st of March, in the forest of Pechereul, less than 20 kilometres from Beaugé, but the inquiry did not try to identify Vacher. At that time squads of flying police did not exist in the provinces.

So, on the 4th of April, Vacher was released.

He then recommenced his monstrous course, and carried on his death-dealing habits till the 7th August 1897, when they were at last stopped by his arrest (which was very difficult to effect) following an attempted murder.

We quote the story of his arrest from the *Journal de Valence:*

" On the 7th August 1897, about 9 a.m., Madame Plantier, wife of a poor stone-mason at Champy, which is near Saint-Peray (Ardèche) happened to be on the outskirts of a wood known as Les Pelleries, and was engaged in picking up fir-cones, when a man in rabbit-skin cap, with an iron bar in his hand, a haversack slung from a shoulder and a concertina under his arm, got up quickly from a thicket where he had been hidden, and threw

himself upon her. He took her by the throat and knocked her down.

"Madame Plantier struggled so hard that she shook off the grip of the monster. Two of her children, little Fernand, aged 7, and a girl of 4, who were playing near her, fled, uttering screams of fright, towards their father, who was also collecting fir-cones a little farther off, and whom Vacher had not seen.

"Madame Plantier also fled towards her husband. Vacher chased her with uplifted bar, and was about to hit her when he found himself confronted by Plantier.

"A terrible struggle ensued between the two men. Locked together, they rolled on the ground, whilst the young Plantier, only 7 years old, with remarkable courage, picked up stones and threw them with all his little strength at the criminal.

"At one moment, Vacher thought he had the better of Plantier. He had given him, full in the face, a terrible blow with the butt of his iron bar, and the stone-mason, stunned, relaxed his hold. But he recovered at once, and floored the horrible Vacher. The latter, letting go the bar, tried in vain to stab the other in the chest with a pair of scissors which he had drawn from a pocket. But now two or three wood-cutters, attracted by the cries of the children, ran up and seized him."

Strongly bound, he was taken to the prison at Tournon, brought before the magistrate, and condemned, for wounding only, to some months of imprisonment.

The authorities became uneasy as to what he might have done before attacking Madame Plantier—the motive of the assault being only too apparent. It was then learned that, during the three preceding days, he had prowled near two little girls who minded sheep, apparently watching for a moment to attack one of them, when chance had brought along Madame Plantier.

The story of the attempt as published by the *Journal de Valence* drew the attention of the Magistrate at Belley, Monsieur Fourquet, who, two years before, in August 1895, had endeavoured but without success, to obtain evidence against the murderer of a boy shepherd at Benonces, one Victor Portailler, who had had his throat cut, belly ripped open, and was otherwise horribly mutilated, whilst he was watching over cows in a clover-field.

Suspicion was turned in the direction of a tramp who had prowled about the countryside the night before, and whose description corresponded with that of the tramp arrested in the Ardèche. This description corresponded equally with one published by the Dijon Court in May 1895, relative to the murder, at a place called "Au Haut du Chêne," on one side of the main

road from Paris to Dijon, of a young girl of eighteen, named Augustine Mortureux.

The Examining Magistrate at Belley having asked for the transfer of Vacher to his own jurisdiction, succeeded in making him confess, not only to the murder of the shepherd at Benonces and that of the young Mortureux, but to a whole series of crimes which had left a trail of blood all over France, and had even led to the arrest of innocent people.

The murder of Augustine Mortureux had nearly brought about a terrible judicial error. An honourable landowner in the district, M. Grenier, was brought before the Assizes for this crime, and, although acquitted, was still accused by public opinion. Nothing less than the arrest of Vacher dissipated these doubts.

It will be understood that we cannot recount the eighteen crimes confessed to by Vacher. We shall limit ourselves to giving, in chronological order, the assassination of shepherd youths and girls, of old women and little boys, victims of this terrible pervert.

29th May 1894, at Beaurepaire (Isère). Eugenie Delhomme, 20 years old, violated. Right breast torn off.

20th November 1894. Vidaubant (Var). Louise Marcel, throat cut, breast torn off.

12th May 1895. Augustine Mortureux. Throat cut. Breast mutilated.

25th April 1895, at Saint-Ours (Savoie). The widow Morand, 58 years old, violated.

22nd September 1895, at Trimas (Drome). Aline Alaise, 16 years old. Throat cut, disembowelled, and mutilated.

29th September 1895, at Saint-Etienne de Boulogne (Ardèche). Pierre Masseau, 14 years old, disembowelled.

There also exasperated public opinion accused a native of the district, and only the arrest of Vacher put an end to their muttered suspicions.

1st March 1896, at Noyennes (Sarthe). An attempted assault on Marie Derout, 14 years old.

10th September 1896, at Busset (Allier). The girl Lerue, 19, throat cut and robbed.

1st October 1896, at Varennes Saint-Honoré (Haute-Loire) Rosine Rodier, 14, disembowelled and thigh mutilated.

15th May 1897, at Tassin-la-Demi-Lune, near Lyon, the murder of Clodin Beaupied, a young vagabond, whose skeleton was found in a well.

18th June 1897, at Courzieu (Rhone). Pierre Lavieux, 13, throat cut and mutilated.

All these crimes had been committed in the country, and generally at nightfall. The sinister vagabond used to hide in a thicket like a wolf and leap out on his victims.

Sought for his crimes by the prosecuting Magistrates, the wretch only appeared on the 26th October 1898 before the Assize Court of the Ain.

There was seen in the dock a man of about 30 years of age, slim and nervous, with a colourless face and a small black beard. His eyes were deep-set, restless, always looking around, and dominated by bushy eyebrows. He was dressed in an old brown suit, and held in his hand a cap made out of white rabbit-skin, which he assiduously stroked.

During the reading of the charges, he made faces, rubbing his nose, biting his thumbs, scratching his ears like a cat which smells the rain coming, hitting his hands together as if he were playing with cymbals, and giving himself little blows on the nape of the neck—all gestures of the insane.

He did not deny any of his crimes. He said: "I should like to point out to those whose business it is to judge me, that I shall only answer to God. I have been the blind instrument of His will. I was bitten at the age of nine by a mad dog. Since then, at one time and another, especially under a strong sun, I am liable to sudden fits of madness. Then, without knowing it, I attack the first comer, I hit, I kill innocents. That is my story, Gentlemen of the Jury. I am a victim of the doctors who set me at liberty."

When the President recalled to him that in his youth he had held anarchistic ideas, he replied: "I have nothing to do with these anarchists. I am the anarchist of God!"

On the 28th October, he was condemned to death, the doctors having pronounced him responsible for his actions.

Before leaving the Court, he cried out at the jury: "Bad luck to you all!"

He was executed on the 1st January 1899.

This monster who had massacred so many innocents, trembled before the scaffold. He had to be carried there motionless and inert, a veritable piece of human wreckage.

The Menesclou Affair

Little Louise Deu was only 4 years old, with curly hair and the eyes of an angel. She was the seventh child of a poor hard-

working family: but she was its pride and joy. Her parents lived in lodgings on the ground-floor of an old house in the Rue de Grenelle, No. 155, in the Quartier du Gros Caillou, which still keeps a provincial air, and which, at the time when our sad story was in the making, that is to say in April 1880, still resembled a rather overgrown village.

On the 15th April, Madame Deu, whose husband had been tied to his bed in a hospital for over three weeks on account of an attack of pleurisy, came home after a round of general shopping, and found, after collecting the rest of her family, that little Louise was missing.

"Go and look for her at Madame Lhoner's," she said to her eldest girl, Henriette. "She went there after lunch and may be there still." Little Henriette came back some minutes later to say that her sister was not at the Lhoner's, who had not been at home all the afternoon.

"Then she is certainly with the Menesclous. I'll go and look for her myself."

The Menesclous were a married couple, who lived on the fourth story of the same house, and although they worked for their living, were in easy circumstances. They were interested in the Deu family, and often gave the children something to eat. The father was general clerk to the Finance Minister, and his wife worked in a tobacco manufactory.

They had one son, Louis, 20 years old, who did not resemble them at all. He had spent three years on a ship as cabin-boy, but on his return to Paris he did little work, because, idle and undisciplined, he stayed nowhere for any length of time. He passed his days in dreaming, in an isolated room just above that of his parents, on the fifth story of the same building.

Madame Deu, having climbed the staircase at a run, knocked at the door of the Menesclou ménage.

There was no answer as the occupants had not yet returned.

She then went up to the room of the son. He opened the door at once, and when she asked if he had seen her little girl, he answered in quiet tones that he had not seen her all day.

Madame Deu knocked in vain at three other doors on the same floor. None of the people had returned from work.

The distracted mother went down again to the ground floor. The concierge had gone out at five o'clock, and her daughter, who had taken her place in her absence, had not seen the child.

Madame Deu then went along the Rue de Grenelle, asking questions from door to door of the concierges and shopkeepers. Nobody could give her any news about her little girl. At last

she went to the police station of the 7th Arrondissement, and then to the Commissariat of the Quartier du Gros Caillou, to make a statement about the disappearance of the child.

She was a little reassured; children straying in Paris were numerous, and it is a rare case when one is not found again in an hour or two. She was advised to come back at about eight o'clock.

She did so, and made an ominous statement. The concierge and several other people had said that young Menesclou was in the habit of attracting children by giving them sous.

As this was only second-hand evidence, Madame Deu was advised to ascertain, first of all, whether her child was not with the Menesclous or their son.

When she reached home, she went up again to the Menesclous, who denied categorically that they had seen the child. They further stated that they had been out all day.

She went up again to the fifth floor and knocked at the door of M. Menesclou's son. He had gone to bed, and answered in a surly voice: "What do you want? I have already told you that I have not seen your daughter." As Mme Deu insisted, he opened the door. She went in and, seeing no one, threw herself on her knees to look under the bed and the furniture.

She saw nothing.

"There, there," said Menesclou in a calm voice. "Are you satisfied now? Let me alone. I want to go to sleep."

However, the disappearance of the little Deu, who was known by everybody, caused a great sensation in the house, and the whole quarter. It was the sole subject of gossip that night and the next day. Despite the visits made to the Menesclou apartments, rumours began to take shape.

The concierge, a woman with decision of character, said she would get to the bottom of the matter, and find out all about this "good-for-nothing." At her order a chimney-sweep climbed up on the roof of a building which overlooked the room occupied by the younger Menesclou, whence he could see all that happened inside.

This amateur policeman came down almost at once to say that young Menesclou was occupied in lighting his stove.

This did not clear up the situation very much, but a Madame Touret, a laundress living in the same building, joined the people assembled in the concierge's lodge, and said that having heard an unusual noise in the fifth story, she had climbed up silently to see what Menesclou was doing. She had listened at the door and had heard a sound very like a "hammer striking meat."

A few minutes later the Commissaire of Gros Caillou was furnished with this statement by the godfather of the vanished child. He went at once to the lodgings of the Menesclou family and knocked. There was no answer.

But when the Commissaire set about forcing the door young Menesclou thought it better to open. Asked to state what had happened to the little Deu, he said he knew nothing about her.

And then the godfather of the child, who was with the Commissaire, lifting with his stick the cover of the stove which was alight, saw in it a black mass, soft but still bleeding, which young Menesclou had been busy burning, and which was no less than the entrails of the child.

Menesclou was searched at once, and—horrible to relate—there were found in his coat pockets the two forearms of the poor child with her hands still fixed to them.

Finally, in the oven of the stove the head was found, aud in a cupboard the rest of the body cut into thirty-five pieces.

The wretched man confessed as follows: "About four o'clock in the afternoon, going out to empty a bucket of water, I met the little Deu. I enticed her to enter my room, promising her a bunch of lilac which I had just bought. She wanted to leave at once, but I kept her there. She persisted, and I don't know what happened in my brain but I took her by the throat and strangled her with my fingers. Then I ripped open the mattress of my bed, took out some straw, and put the body inside. I lay down on my bed.

"I couldn't sleep all night. In the morning, after my parents had gone out, I undressed the child. Then I cut her in two with a kitchen knife and hammer. After that I cut her up into little pieces which I meant to burn in my stove. I began by throwing into the water-closet the blood and four portions of the body."

It will be understood that the four missing parts of the body had a peculiar significance and that it was not in any haphazard manner, as he indicated, that the culprit had chosen to get rid of their traces.

He was another piece of human flotsam who appeared before the Assize Court. What could the poor wretch say in his defence?

On the 8th September, on a cold and gloomy morning, the scaffold was erected in the Place de la Roquette and he expiated his monstrous crime.

The Soleilland Affair

The Soleilland affair belongs to the same category as that of Menesclou. Like the other it inflamed public opinion; but in

this case the culprit, who committed an abominable crime, benefited by the clemency of a President of the Republic who was opposed to capital punishment.

On the 31st January 1907, Madame Erbelding, living at 76 Rue Saint-Maur in a quarter resounding all day long with the noise of factories at work, observed a young workman—Albert Soleilland, aged 26, son of worthy people to whom she had formerly been housekeeper—return to his lodgings. He came over to her to ask if her daughter Marthe, aged 11, might go with his wife to the Concert Ba-Ta-Clan.

At first the mother refused, but Soleilland pleaded that it would give pleasure both to his wife and to the child. Madame Erbelding reflected that after all she had no real reason to refuse entrusting Marthe to this youth, who had known her as a baby and who was an habitué of the house. So she dressed the little girl, and entrusted her to Soleilland, and from her balcony called out "Au Revoir."

At 5 p.m. Albert Soleilland came to Madame Erbelding's house and asked the mother if her daughter had returned. Astonished, she replied: "No. What has happened?" He answered, "We were at the Ba-Ta-Clan. The piece interested me. The little girl went downstairs to satisfy a need. I never saw her again."

At this the mother ran to the Ba-Ta-Clan and arrived there just as the public were coming out.

She concluded at once that Soleilland and her daughter had never been there. But Soleilland continued to affirm this. He went with Madame Erbelding to the police station, saying over and over again: "I tell you I lost her." He seemed to be very upset. All the evening through, with a cleverly simulated devotion, he helped the unhappy parents search for their child.

The aspect of affairs changed next day when he had to answer to a searching cross-examination at the hands of the Police. He was obliged to indicate in detail how he had passed his time during the preceding afternoon. The lies in his statement accused him so directly that the gravest suspicions were aroused.

Further deplorable information was collected about him. Before his marriage, he had lived on the prostitution of the woman he had ultimately wedded; and had tried to abuse his sister-in-law. Finally, there was a warrant out for him and he had been condemned to eight months' imprisonment by default for obtaining money under false pretences.

On the 3rd February, although there was no definite evidence against him, it was decided to arrest him, on account of his aforesaid default.

SOLEILLAND

MENESCLOU

As soon as he was arrested, he cried out: "It is for the little Erbelding!"

The suspicions that were settling about him were further confirmed when a witness came forward to assert that he had seen him in company with the little girl at the window of his lodging on the 31st January at half-past two in the afternoon, that is to say at the time he should have been with her at the Concert Ba-Ta-Clan.

The accused then decided to disclose something of the truth. He confessed to having taken the little Marthe to his own lodgings and said she had refused to go to the concert without his wife. He stated that he had taken advantage of her, and the child having cried out, he had unconsciously compressed her throat too hard, and then found out with horror that he had strangled her.

Taking a square of canvas, he had made a parcel of the body and taken it by tramway to the cloak-room of the Gare de l'Est.

It was after these different operations, which testified to a horrible coldness, that he went—showing outward signs of uneasiness—to the parents of the victim.

In verification of his statement, there was discovered at the Gare de l'Est a round package covered with grey canvas. This contained the body of Marthe Erbelding, which had been re-dressed and doubled up.

The post-mortem, which took place two days later, showed in an irrefutable manner that Soleilland had not told all the truth. And that was of a more monstrous nature still. Around the neck were marks of strangulation, and on the chest was a triangular wound, eleven centimetres deep. The heart had been pierced.

So Soleilland had not limited himself, as he had stated, to obscene touches. He had violated her, strangled her, and then stabbed her.

He persisted during the inquiry in stating that he had no recollection of the rape nor of the knife-thrust.

The story of another rape was reconstituted, which he had attempted in March 1910 on his sister-in-law, Julia Bremard, aged 22. He had invited her into his room under some pretext, had thrown her on the ground, ill-treated her till blood flowed from her mouth, and finally threatened her with an awl if she resisted any more. The young woman only managed to escape by pretending to yield, and so gained a moment of respite, when she managed to get away.

The violation and murder of little Marthe had certainly been somewhat similar. He had threatened the child with a knife to

get her silence and consent. In desperation she had cried out and struggled. It was then that he had both strangled and stabbed her.

The charge-sheet also accused him of different thefts, both from his parents and employers.

A large crowd assembled on the 2nd July 1907, in the Assize Court, to hear the case.

When he was brought in, he hung his head and tried to avoid being looked at. He was a small man, pale of face, with light chestnut hair, and a very slight moustache. On examining him attentively, there might be noticed a displeasing squint. His features generally gave the impression of a bird of prey. His bearing was correct and almost distinguished.

In spite of the depositions against him, he persisted in his system of defence which consisted in saying that he remembered nothing of the rape or the knife-thrust.

The doctor, an expert in lunacy, charged with his examination, stated that this partial amnesia was probably simulated. He considered that Soleilland had carried out his crime with a clear mind and knowledge of what he was doing.

The coolness of Soleilland, mounting to the roof of a tram with his terrible and weighty parcel, was emphasized by the conductor who declared: "I took him for a butcher's assistant and said to him, 'Is it meat that you are carrying there?' He did not answer."

The Advocate-General, Trouart-Riolle, pointed out that this crime was the more horrible because of the circumstance connected with it. Soleilland had known his victim for ten years, and had seen her growing up. Yet neither her tears, nor the affection he should have had for her, had checked his bestial instincts, or his murderous arm. "Never had such a monster," said he, "appeared in the dock."

Despite a clever speech by Maître Robert Bernstein, the jury, after half an hour's deliberation, returned an affirmative answer on every point of the charges and said nothing about extenuating circumstances.

Soleilland, overwhelmed and in tears, heard himself some minutes later condemned to death.

A painful incident marked the end of the sitting. Standing up in the centre of the court a woman shouted, "Let me kill him, the wretch! To dishonour a child. It is horrible!" It was Madame Soleilland, who hurled these words at the accused as he was led out.

But as was said at the beginning of this section, this wretched

crime was in part condoned. President Fallières, who pardoned by principle all who were condemned to death, reprieved Soleilland as he had all others, in spite of the anticipated protests of the public and the Press, and thereby gained unpopularity to a great degree.

The man who benefited by the pardon is to-day alive in a convict prison. He lives a peaceful life. The adversaries of the death penalty should be satisfied.