

CHAPTER VII
POLITICAL CRIMES

A PRELIMINARY question arises at the beginning of this chapter: "What is a Political Crime?"

The answer seems at first very simple. In reality, floods of ink have been let loose and have given birth to theories that are diametrically opposed.

Some have said that there are no political crimes, because what is called a "crime" to-day may be called "heroism" to-morrow.

Others recall that the French Revolution had recourse to the most drastic measures, and asked their opponents to state definitely at what moment Robespierre, Marat, and Danton ceased to be "heroes" and changed into "criminals."

It has also been stated: "Anarchism is Progress by successive Explosions."

Lombroso distinguished between Revolutions prearranged and necessary, which had a slow and destined march, in which men even of a superior type only played a secondary rôle—and Revolts, which, on the contrary, were caused by men of personality—in greater or minor degree—who precipitated actions which were only half thought out, and led to no useful result.

I could write at length on this subject, but will content myself with the remark that to the Police "crime is crime."

All violence which ends in a criminal deed is a crime with judicial consequences, for every assassination is a crime against the community.

The term "political" applied to a crime has a mere reference to its motive; faith, passion, or vengeance may inspire it. It may be for good or for evil, but it cannot change the nature of the deed, either from a moral point of view, or that of the rights of man.

One may say that the real cause of so-called political crimes is a state of social unrest.

This idea has been brought into relief by M. Bernheim, who wrote that "the Nihilists, the Anarchists, the Socialists, the Revolutionaries, the Fanatics of every kind, political and religious, become criminals by suggestion. And on days of popular effervescence, when we see a crowd that contains many people steady individually, rush, wild and bloodthirsty, on some poor inoffensive creature whom a false accusation points out as a victim, is not that a collective suggestion? One idea spreads through the crowd, and it becomes fanatic."

The logical conclusion from this thought seems to be that political criminals are recruited always from those who have a highly-strung nature, which renders them most accessible to sudden passions.

Most of the political criminals during the last few years have been people very sensitive to suggestion, fanatical, of low intelligence, and, above all, of a tremendous vanity, which in some cases attained a veritable super-egoism.

Such moral tendencies are usually represented physically, and certain abnormalities of face have been remarked in the case of a great number of regicides and revolutionaries, notably an exaggeration of the superciliary ridges, of the cheek-bones, and under-shot jaws. These were all noted in Ravailac, Fieschi, and Jacques Clément, amongst others.

I do not propose to present crimes that are old, nor shall I go back, for sake of illustration, to a date earlier than 1889.

Some have been perpetrated by our own compatriots, whilst others have been committed or prepared in France by foreigners.

The years between 1889 and 1894 were particularly fertile in such crimes.

At the beginning of 1889, the criminals were chiefly of foreign origin. The Russian "Terrorists" were at that time arranging in France the measures they later carried out in Russia.

In May of that year the Police arrested a number of Russian refugees in Paris and discovered at the house of one of them named Reinstejn three bombs and a complete outfit for making explosives.

At the houses of two other Terrorists, Stepanoff and Kachintzeff, they found similar bombs, and in the house of a woman, Bromberg, a portmanteau containing no less than fifteen bombs; finally in the quarters of Lavernius, another outfit and the chemical ingredients necessary to fill a hundred bombs.

These bombs had been made after different models. The greater number were spherical and covered with wired cloth. Their diameters varied from 4 to 7 centimetres. They were to be charged with "panclastite," that is to say, with a mixture of peroxide of azote and carbonic sulphur.

The intervention of the Police certainly stopped a great number of criminal attempts. A strict inquiry established the fact that the guilty persons had carried out a number of experiments in the Bois de Monfermeil, but no real attempt had been undertaken and the accused could only be charged with being in possession of explosive substances.

Brought up before the police court they were committed to prison for periods ranging up to three years.

Then, on the 18th November 1890, General Seliverstov, a former chief of the Russian Secret Police, was found unconscious and covered with blood in an armchair in his room at the Hotel de Bade in the Boulevard des Italiens.

He had received at the base of the skull a shot fired almost point-blank. A bloodstained paper was found at the foot of the chair. It was a letter sent by a M. Bernoff, manager of the Franco-Russian Club, asking him for a subscription to certain charities. The murderer was certainly the man who had brought this letter.

He was soon identified. He was a man named Padlewski, who lived in the Rue Simard at Montmartre and who had disappeared.

He was searched for without result, when a well-known journalist, known as Georges de Labruyère, published in the daily *Eclair* an article headed: "How I got Padlewski away."

He stated how he had no wish to join the Nihilists, but had helped to save, at Madame Severine's request and in response to the prayers of Padlewski's wife, a political partisan who thought he had carried out a work of justice.

Whatever opinions we may hold on the subject of the legitimacy of such intervention, it must be acknowledged that the means employed by Labruyère to get Padlewski out of France were very clever.

He announced that he had to go to the Tyrol to fight a duel, and that this might be a very serious affair. He was taking a friend with him—a Doctor Wolf. In this way he left Paris one evening with the sham doctor, who was no other than Padlewski.

On reaching Trieste he said good-bye to the man he had helped to escape after seeing him safely embarked on his way to the United States of America.

The article ended in this fashion:

"On the quay of Trieste I stand alone. Nothing remains of this adventure but a cloud of thick smoke, as if it had been puffed from a cigar, and which thins out on the horizon. . . .

"I have acted as I have done by free will—perhaps outside the usual conventions, but have followed our racial instinct which puts pity above the Law."

M. de Labruyère paid for his fancies, at once humanitarian and anarchistic, with thirteen months of prison.

As for Padlewski, he did not benefit from a devotion paid for

so dearly. Arrived in America he committed suicide because he was penniless. The registered letters containing money sent by his friends never reached him.

THE EPOCH OF BOMBS. RAVACHOL—VAILLANT—HENRY

Since these affairs the Nihilists have kept quiet.

The French Police had then to confront *French* Anarchists. We shall sum up in brief the attempts committed between 1891 and 1894 on French soil by our own compatriots.

In the month of March 1892, Parisians were horrified by two successive explosions. A bomb exploded in the Boulevard Saint-Germain at the threshold of the house of Judge Benoit, who, six months earlier, had sentenced three Anarchists: Leveille, Dardarre, and Decamp. The damage was considerable but happily there were no victims. The inquiry established the fact that the attempt had been carried out by one Ravachol, who lived at Saint-Denis under the name of Leger. When steps were taken to arrest him he had gone, taking his furniture away in a handcart. There was, amongst other things, a heavy case which contained dynamite, as was discovered later, and which, by way of a joke, he got his neighbour, a police "brigadier," to help him load on to the vehicle.

As he could not be traced, the journalists and song-writers wrote jestingly about it, and Albert Millaud wrote in the *Figaro* :

" Est-il blond comme un miel, brun comme un Espagnol ?
Est-il petit ? moyen ? trapu ? court ? long ? superbe ?
Gras ? maigre ? entrelardé ? chévelu ? chauve ? imberbe ?
Hélas ! qui me dirait comment est fait Ravachol ? "

A rough translation of this runs as follows :

" Is he fair as honey or bronzed like a Spaniard ?
Is he small ? middle-sized ? square ? short ? tall ? stately ?
Fat ? thin ? medium ? hairy ? bald ? or clean-shaven ?
Alas ! who will describe Ravachol to me ? "

The public laughed but not for long. On the same day that these ironic verses appeared, a tremendous explosion occurred in the basement of a house, No. 35 Rue de Clichy, whose tenant was the Advocate-General, M. Bulot. This time people were wounded and the damage was considerable.

Four days later the author of this new attempt, who was none other than Ravachol, was arrested in the Restaurant Véry. Taken before the Assize Court, he escaped with extenuating circumstances, but was sent before the Assize Courts of the Loire to answer for a murder committed by him some years previously,

when he had killed an old man, known as "The Hermit of Chambles"—a horrible crime with no excuse for it.

This time he was condemned to death and executed.

Some months later an Anarchist placed a bomb at the door of the offices of the Coal Mines of Carmaux in the Avenue de l'Opéra at Paris. The bomb was taken away to the Police Headquarters in the Rue des Bons Enfants. There it burst, killing the secretary, M. Pousset, four policemen, and the clerk of the Carmaux Mines who had carried it.

A year later, Naillant threw an explosive shell filled with nails into the "Chambre des Deputés." One member only of the House, the Abbé Lemire, was slightly wounded.

Vaillant was condemned to death and executed despite a strong representation made by the Abbé Lemire, who was insistent in trying to get him pardoned.

The day after his execution, a bomb was thrown into the crowd at the Café Terminus and killed several people. Police-Constable Poisson succeeded, after a savage struggle during which he was badly wounded, in arresting the dynamiter, Emile Henry.

The Anarchist boasted at once of being the author of the outrage in the Rue des Bons Enfants. He had committed it to avenge Ravachol, and his second attempt was to avenge Vaillant.

In the Assize Courts he spoke with emphasis: "Messieurs les bourgeois, you have reckoned without your hosts . . . the gauntlet has been taken up. . . . The bomb at the Café Terminus is the response."

Condemned to death, he was executed on the 24th May 1894.

THE MURDER OF PRESIDENT CARNOT

The day following the execution of Vaillant, the Anarchists in London printed this manifesto:

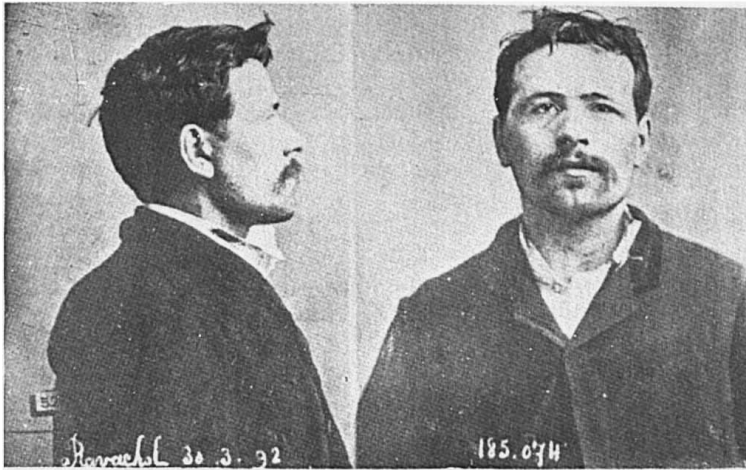
"Are you satisfied now, Carnot, in your comfortable study where so many tyrants have been your predecessors? Is not the criminal's motto: 'Your money or your life'?"

"Look out, dog! You can surround yourself with spies and like a fox lie low from the terror you feel, in your bandit lair.

"It will be useless, Sadi the Killer. The justice of the People will strike you, if nothing else does.

"You have the head of Vaillant. We shall have yours, President Carnot."

On the 2nd June, just a month after the execution of Emile Henry, President Carnot was assassinated at Lyon by an Italian Anarchist, Santo Caserio.



RAVACHOL



CASERIO

The President had gone to Lyon to open an exhibition there.

He had left the Palais de Commerce a little after 9 p.m. on the 24th June to go to a gala at the Grand Theatre. Preceded by a squad of cuirassiers, the Presidential carriage—in which were M. Carnot, together with Generals Voisin and Borius and Doctor Gailleton, the Mayor of Lyon—had just emerged from the Rue de la République and was passing the western front of the Stock Exchange when a man, "detaching himself from the crowd massed on the right-hand pavement about two yards from the carriage and on the same side as that on which the President was seated, advanced obliquely and, resting his left hand on the side of the carriage, brought his right hand against the chest of the President without any one of his entourage seeing anything but a piece of paper which stayed there for a moment as if fastened to his clothes."

It was naturally supposed that the unknown man had presented a bouquet or a petition, which had happened several times in the day.

This man retired at once, passing behind the troop of cuirassiers, and reaching the other side of the road tried to get through the crowd.

The latter, some thinking him a pickpocket and others a man whose ideas were "last come and first served," repulsed him. A slight scuffle ensued and the police intervened and arrested the man.

The carriage of the President went on for some yards. Suddenly it was seen that M. Carnot plucked off the paper on his chest to fall back unconscious. Doctor Gailleton hastened to his aid and the Generals gave orders to proceed at once to the Prefecture.

The President was placed on a bed to which were summoned all the best doctors in Lyon. These stated that a dagger had penetrated the liver and severed an important blood vessel. Internal bleeding that nothing could stop was the result.

He was dead three hours after the assault.

Meantime the dagger used had been found with the paper on it. The President himself had pulled it out and thrown it into the road.

The accused, already arrested through the action of the public, was then questioned. He confessed his crime and told quietly how he had meditated it, prepared, and carried it out.

He was a baker's boy, born on the 8th September 1873 at Motta-Visconti (Lombardy). Becoming an Anarchist at the age of eighteen through frequenting their clubs, he had been almost at once proscribed for anarchistic propaganda and sentenced to

eight years' solitary confinement. As he had not been arrested he fled to escape it and his military service also.

He went first to Lyon, then to Cette, where he worked under an employer named Viala. Though he worked regularly, he did not renounce his opinions, and only dreamed of "striking a blow." The arrival of the President at Lyon gave him the chance.

On the 23rd June, having left his employer after a quarrel, he bought from a gunsmith named Vaux at Cette a strong dagger in a scabbard and then took train to Montpellier.

From there he went to Tarascon and Avignon and after that, having looked without result for some Anarchists he knew, he proceeded to Lyon.

A paper that he bought on arrival told him of the fêtes and helped him to choose the right spot to carry out his intentions. He stationed himself on the right-hand pavement of the Rue de la République close by the Bourse, and waited.

On his own orders, the President's carriage was not protected against the crowd. Caserio, after having drawn his poignard from his pocket concealed in a piece of paper, was able to get near the vehicle and to plunge this weapon, which was more than 16 centimetres long, up to the hilt in the President's chest, crying out "Vive la Révolution!"

At his trial he told his story calmly and declared he had done a good deed and seemed perfectly satisfied with it. He joked even and, when asked if he seriously meant a remark of his: "If I were back in Italy, I would kill the Pope and the King," he answered, laughing: "Not both at once—they never go out together."

He affirmed that he had acted on his own and with free will.

After twenty minutes of deliberation, the jury returned an answer in the affirmative to every question and did not consider there were any extenuating circumstances. The Court condemned him to death.

On leaving the hall he called out: "Courage, comrades," and "Long live anarchy!"

However, a witness has stated that he died like a "child afraid of death."

On the morning of the 16th August, when they came to awaken him, he wept and was heard to say when the knife was falling: "A vieni nen." (I don't want it.)

He was, according to Doctor Lacassagne in his book on this subject, one of those "thin, pale men whom Cæsar did not trust. The execution of Vaillant and Henry had filled his heart with rancour and sown his brain with thoughts of hate and vengeance.

" The pessimistic literature he read had depicted the life of a workman in colours so black that he had soon become tired of life and thought of ending it. But how? He did not want to die in a stupid way—to drown himself or to hang himself. . . . His incurable vanity was not contented with these ideas. So he must sacrifice himself for his cause and show his comrades that he was really the strong and resolute man they thought him. His crime was really a sort of indirect suicide. . . ."

" He was not mad, but a fanatical murderer. . . ."

The crime of Caserio was the last of a long series which had begun on the 11th January 1892, with the bombs of Ravachol, and was continued by his avengers, Vaillant and Emile Henry.

The political crimes that have been committed here have not always been the logical conclusion of a theory, but have resulted from the over-excitement of certain people whose political passions have led to intense hatred.

We may include in this category the murder in 1914 of the great Tribune, Jaures, by that semi-madman Villain; and more recently the murder of Marius Plateau of the " Action Française " by Germaine Berton. Also the affray in the Rue Damrémont when several " leaguers " of the " Action Française " fell before the bullets of political enemies.

These two last affairs, so recent, the second of which took place under my own eyes, will form the subject of a special section at the end of this chapter.

France, an asylum for strangers of all nationalities and races, has become the arena for their battles. The hatred that exists between Fascists and anti-Fascists has provoked a large enough number of crimes.

One of the best known of them is the murder of M. Bonservizi, Secretary-General of the Fascisti in Paris.

THE ASSASSINATION OF M. BONSERVIZI, FASCIST SECRETARY AT PARIS, BY THE ITALIAN BONOMINI

Upon the accession to power of the Fascisti in Italy, some noted personalities amongst the Italian Colony in Paris founded, in July 1923, under the title of " Fascio de Paris," an association of propaganda and assistance, intended, so they declared, as much to enlighten foreigners on the actual state of affairs in Italy as to help all Italians morally and materially without distinction of party. Amongst the founders of this organization was M. Bonservizi, 33 years old, correspondent of the Government journal *Popolo d'Italia* and editor of *L'Italie Nouvelle*, the organ

of the group we have mentioned. His position in the Press, his work in the "Fascio," his friendly relations with M. Mussolini who had in a way accredited him in France, placed him in the front rank of the supporters of the new régime, and at the same time exposed him, more than anyone else, to the animosity of adversaries.

The latter were considerably alarmed by suspicions that, behind a mask of patriotism and philanthropy, the "Fascio de Paris" was in reality a secret police organ that kept watch over the anti-Fascist Italians who had emigrated to France.

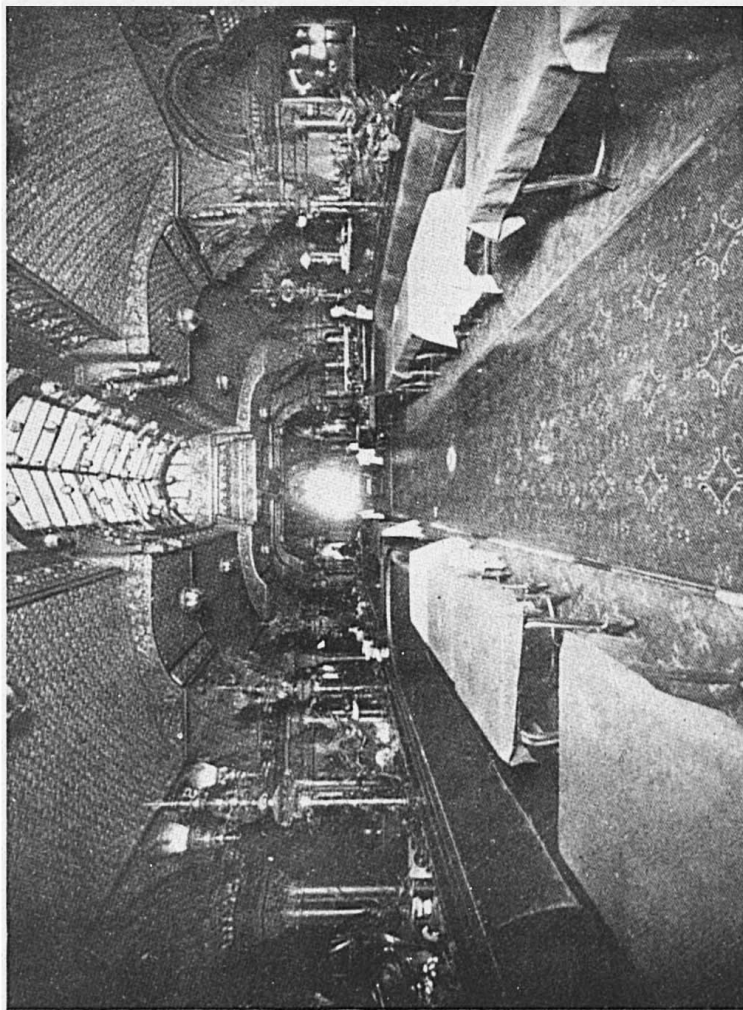
Had M. Bonservizi been warned by threats? Did he know he was in danger? Yes, assuredly, since towards the end of January 1924 he went to one of the police stations of the eighth ward and stated that he was watched perpetually, even in the hall of the building where he lived, by a man whose gestures testified to a dangerous state of excitement. The Police officer in charge hastened with him to his apartments, but when they arrived the man in question was not to be found.

On the evening of the 20th February, M. Bonservizi arrived a little later than usual at the restaurant in the Passage des Princes where he was accustomed to take his meals, and where Bonomini, as was known later, had managed to get work as a waiter the better to watch the man on whose life he had designs.

Bonomini, when his hours of duty were at an end, was told he might go, thus leaving him no opportunity to act. Pretending some imaginary work, and saying he would rather do it at once than leave it to the morrow, he remained, waiting for a propitious moment to carry out his plans. At last, at about ten o'clock, he managed to slip, hidden by flowers, behind the chair where Bonservizi sat. The café at the time was somewhat deserted. Nearly touching his victim, Bonomini fired two shots from his revolver. Then, as the other employés ran to the assistance of Bonservizi, he attempted to fire again. Only the first shot had hit Bonservizi, who slipped to the ground. The bullet had entered the skull behind the right ear, and produced a wound of such a nature that the victim succumbed on the 27th March.

Bonomini at once acknowledged entire responsibility for the crime. "My conscience," said he, "made me do it. I wished to kill the idea (Fascism) rather than the man."

Arrested, he gave his name as Ernesto Bonomini, aged 21, born at Pozzolengo, in the province of Brescia. He confessed to premeditation and presented his explanation in the following words:



SCENE OF MURDER OF M. BONSERVIZI

" I revolted against events in Italy. I am the victim of violence on the part of Fascists who would not forgive my political opinions and threatened to burn my father's mill. I became an exile. Since I came to France, I have often thought of going back to Italy to kill Mussolini, whom I consider the author of all my ills. But I renounced the idea because of its difficulties. Fate having brought me across one of Mussolini's principal agents in France, I had at once a desire to kill him. After having bought and tested a revolver, I wrote to my mother that something grave was about to happen in my life and begged her to pardon the grief I was going to inflict on her."

It was further established that when he asked for work in the restaurant of the Passage des Princes, Bonomini was working elsewhere, was much better paid, and had left. This sacrifice of pay could only be explained by his wish for an easy means of approach to M. Bonservizi, and in default of such confession by Bonomini, it was taken as an indication in support of premeditation.

Like most political criminals, Bonomini was a solitary and raised to a pitch of great exaltation by what he read. This is a description taken from the speech for the prosecution.

" The Press hostile to M. Bonservizi had no more assiduous reader than Bonomini. He himself said that reading newspapers was ' his passion.' And so he perused, in addition to the two opposing Italian papers in Paris, *L'Humanité* and *La Libertaire*, as well as *L'Action Française*, which seemed to him the organ of French Fascism.

" Bonomini at seventeen thought himself a Socialist. At twenty, after continuous reading of these papers, he believed himself an Anarchist ; and so he strengthened his opinions and also his aversion to the government of his country. He left Italy in August 1922, so as not to witness, he protested, Fascist violence—but much more certainly to escape military service.

" He was a silent man, inept in expressing his opinions. It seems probable that he never took part at Paris in furthering any propaganda connected with the opinions he confessed. ' I am a lonely man,' he said, and it seems certain that it was through his broodings, instigated by his reading, that the idea came to him of killing M. Bonservizi."

The three days of the trial were the occasion for duels of oratory between Maître Henry Torres, for the defence, and Maître Gartrot, who held a watching brief for the family of the deceased, and who naturally backed up the prosecution. Maître

Gartrot spoke of Communist violence, of which we had had a sample in the "Affair of the Rue Damrémont." Maître Henry Torres held a brief for revisionists and the methods of the anti-Fascist party. It is natural that a political crime draws to the Bar the most notable advocates, who are at the same time interested in politics; and that their pleadings, rising to levels above the actual facts presented to the jury, prolong the discussion in finding excuses for the crime. So the eloquent speech by Maître Henry Torres was a passionate oration against Fascism.

"What then is Fascism?"

"I know that at its inception Fascism had a tendency to form a rallying-point about which good men from every quarter of political thought could concentrate.

"I know that it mustered the veterans whom the War had ousted from their homes, parted from their families and their accustomed habits—the veterans for whom the problem of re-adaptation from a state of war to one of peace had not yet been solved, who brought into common life the energy of the camps, who believed that the rough trials through which they had passed gave them the right to speak out in the forum louder than others. But soon Fascism lost this character; it became a band of mercenaries, backed by the great banks and industries of Italy!

". . . You spoke just now, M. l'Avocat-Général, of the Italian elections, and you stated that these elections had given a majority to Fascism!

"Do you know anything of the story I heard told one day by M. Moro Giafferi at this bar about the elections during the *coup d'état* of 1852 to gain the 'plébiscite'?"

"Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, with a crew of adventurers who were the equals of the friends of Mussolini, seized power. They wished this act to be ratified not only by the people but by the army—after the Bonapartist legend.

"And M. Moro Giafferi related that a colonel, having paraded his regiment, spoke to them in these terms: 'The Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte asks you to express, with full liberty of conscience and with full power to vote, your opinion whether he should take to-morrow the title of Emperor of the French. I impress upon you that you are free to act as you will. This is how I shall proceed: I shall give the order 'Attention!' Those who come to attention will be considered as having voted for it. Those who do not obey will be against. . . .

" "Attention!" "

"Ah, gentlemen of the jury, but that was in Italy, and Léon Blum explained to you yesterday under what conditions the

Socialist Party was obliged to hold their meetings. . . . In Italy it was 'Attention'—followed by bloodshed. . . . I now come, gentlemen of the jury, to the Fascist régime abroad, or Fascism in Paris.

"Ah! the Fascio in Paris! With its philanthropic and humanitarian camouflage! We are known as a people who like and respect law and order, and some think they can throw dust in the eyes of our Police to register legally their 'statutes of organization,' and that after that they can carry on as they like in France—a veritable propaganda of provocation, at the same time against the workmen of Italy who have fled their country, and against French policy itself. . . . We have seen in Italy Mussolini, the Fascist leader, as a second King, as a second Prefect in his Province, just as we saw in Paris beside the Italian Ambassador a man who controlled him, who was his double. . . . It was M. Bonservizi. He was there to stimulate his zeal, to incite him to denounce to the French Police—and get easy orders for their expulsion—Italian workmen who were not in accord with the Fascio system."

Bonomini, when asked, after the speeches for and against, if he had anything to say, made this declaration :

"I am no Bolshevist. I am an enemy of Fascism—of the 'Black Shirts' as well as the 'red shirts' of Bolshevism. I am an enemy of all dictators."

On the 23rd October 1924, the jury returned an affirmative verdict on the question of murder and a negative one as regards premeditation, and gave the accused the benefit of "extenuating circumstances."

In consequence the Court condemned Ernesto Bonomini to eight years' hard labour, and ten years' police supervision.

When the case was over and the court cleared, a rather violent quarrel began between Fascists and Communists, which was quelled by the Police.

THE ASSASSINATION OF M. VESHAPELY

Another murder which can be classified as a political crime was committed on the 17th June 1926. The strife on this occasion was between partisans and opponents of the Soviets.

It had begun previously on the 10th June in a café situated in the Boulevard Voltaire during a meeting of Georgians. Serious blows had been exchanged. M. Veshapely—a former deputy to the Assembly of the Free State of Georgia and director in Paris of the newspaper *La Georgie Nouvelle*—who took a leading part

in this scuffle, had laid charges against six of his political opponents.

The case was brought up on the 17th June 1926 before the Chief Police Court at Paris. After an excited hearing all the accused were acquitted.

Veshapely then left the Law Courts, hailed a taxi and got into it. Before the taxi could start, a man who had come out of the court—the Georgian Attendei Merabachvili—approached the vehicle, pushed his head through the window, and fired three times at Veshapely, who sank down mortally wounded on the cushions of the taxi.

The murderer was at once seized by policemen and witnesses, and taken into custody to await his trial.

On the 8th July 1927 he appeared before the Court of Assizes. The legal speeches were of little avail, as the prisoner, a man of resolute features and determined demeanour, claimed entire responsibility for his act and boasted of having rid the world of "a traitor to his country."

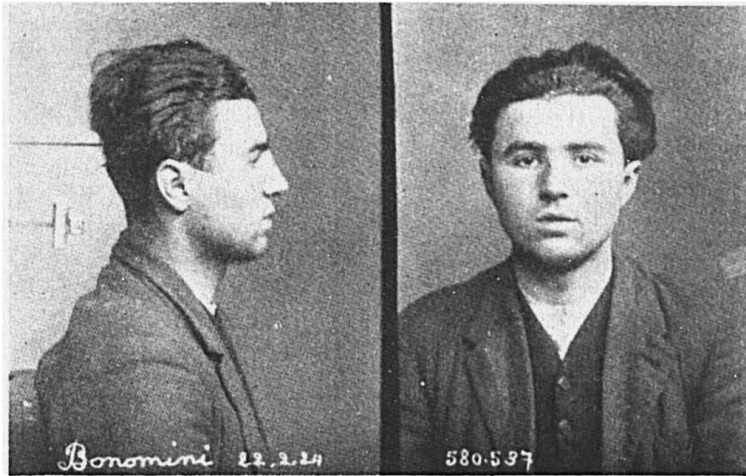
Merabachvili had, in fact, with the intention of carrying out his deed, bought a revolver previous to the 10th June. A victim of the Soviets, which had slaughtered all his family, he had noted with revulsion that Veshapely was betraying his cause, and had published in his paper, *La Georgie Nouvelle*, an article in which he stated that an understanding with the Soviets was desirable.

Merabachvili did not act immediately, but waited patiently for his opportunity, because he had just heard of fresh massacres carried out in Georgia by order of the Soviets, which Veshapely represented.

An indulgent jury, who considered the personal sufferings of Merabachvili's extenuating circumstances—quite illegally—acquitted him.

THE MURDER OF THE ATAMAN PETLIURA

Amongst the most recent political crimes, the murder of the Ataman Simon Petliura, former President of the Ukrainian Directorate, by the Jew Schalom or Samuel Schwartzbard, has a very particular interest since it is a crime without precedent in France. It put a Parisian jury in the position of having to decide a matter that concerned general humanity. It related to the ever-recurrent question of anti-Semitism, and the violence and lawlessness it produces in Slavonic lands. It was pleaded before the Western Courts that this affair should be considered more the result of the "pogroms" or massacres of the Jews, than as a murder by one man of another.



BONOMINI



MERABACHVILI

The scene of the murder was the Rue Racine, close to the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and it took place on the 26th May 1926 at about 2 p.m. A man who came out of a restaurant was accosted by a bareheaded man in a white blouse: "Pan Petliura?" he asked.

As the other did not answer at once, he reiterated his demand—in French. "You are really Monsieur Petliura?" Then pulling a revolver out of his pocket he fired five rounds at the other, crying out: "Assassin! This for your massacres! This for your pogroms!"

Petliura fell to the ground, mortally wounded. Schwartzbard still had time to discharge two more cartridges, which emptied his revolver. Already a threatening crowd was collecting at the spot and showing a hostile attitude towards the murderer.

Soon a number of policemen intervened. Schwartzbard handed over his weapon to one of them and allowed himself to be taken away to the police station, whilst Petliura was taken to the "Hôpital de la Charité," where he died on arrival without having spoken. A little later one of the police who had accompanied him came back to the station and reported his death.

Schwartzbard, who preserved a very calm demeanour, said: "I killed an assassin! I am quite content!"

Inquiries were extended over seventeen months, and the trial began before the Assize Court of the Seine on the 18th October 1927, when counsel presented to the jurymen the following picture of the two actors in the amazing drama of the Rue Racine.

The victim was portrayed as one of those strange characters who emerge periodically from the masses in troublous times—men of hardihood, whom ambition and the love of adventure push into prominence, unscrupulous men without fixed principles, who take their place in history, according to their success, perhaps as national heroes or as adventurers.

Simon Petliura, of Cossack origin, was born at Poltava. His father drove a cab; he himself had been an accountant. However, having made himself conspicuous during the Revolution and a "personage" in the eyes of the Ukrainian National Party, he became a military leader and in 1917 commanded the Ukrainian troops. On the 1st March 1918, on the day following the Peace of Brest-Litovsk between the Ukrainians and the Austro-Germans, Simon Petliura entered Kiev with the German staff. But a little later his new allies became suspicious of him for some unknown reason; he was imprisoned, subsequently being liberated for

reasons equally obscure. In December 1918, the Ukrainian Directorate succeeded the government of Skoropadsky. Petliura then reached the climax of his ambition : as President-General of the Directorate, Commander-in-Chief of the army, he held all the reins of power in his hands. This brilliant period of his life was, however, of short duration. He has been reproached—and this was the cause of the political crime of vengeance that, seven years later, cost him his life—with having abused his position by exactions and relentless persecution of the Jewish population in the Ukraine.

In January 1920, having suffered several reverses and unable to rally his army, which was broken and in revolt, Petliura fled into Poland. In June he returned to Kiev, this time with Polish troops. He fought again and, some weeks later, definitely beaten and hunted out of the Ukraine, retired once more into Poland. In 1921 he was in Paris, where he led a rather secluded existence, and his chief occupation seemed to be the management of an anti-Semitic paper : *Le Trident*.

On the other hand, Schalom Schwartzbard represented the prototype of the Russian Jew, whose incorporation into French life had freed him from the humility and hereditary resignation of his race. Born in Russia, he came of a very poor family, but succeeded all the same in learning the trade of a watchmaker. When he was about twenty years old he came to France, and whilst there the World War broke out in 1914. From that day a certain tendency was noticed in him to consider himself invested with a predestined mission to express by his personal deeds the soul of the Jewish masses. From the beginning of hostilities he enlisted as a volunteer in the French Army because he considered, as he expressed it in a letter that was to be produced later, that he had a blood-debt "to the country that emancipated the Jews during the Revolution." He fought well in the Foreign Legion, notably at the Battle of Carenay. On the 1st March 1916 he was badly wounded, his name was published in orders, and he gained the "Croix de Guerre." His brother, whom Schwartzbard's example had drawn in his wake, was also mentioned in orders and decorated for three wounds. Sent to the base in 1917 and invalided out of the army, Schwartzbard returned to Russia and stayed in the Ukraine till 1920. So he was in those districts during the period of pillage and massacre of Jews that the government had ordered—or at least tolerated—and which (this is a historical point the evidence at the trial never made clear) the Directorate was powerless to check. Schwartzbard lived in this nightmare ; he was present at those scenes of horror when

fifteen members of his own family perished by torture. He was for a moment tempted to kill himself, but he reflected on the uselessness of such an obscure death, in such a confusion of civil war, of which Western Europe was so ill-informed. The idea grew in his mind to take revenge for his race and, at the same time, to awaken the universal conscience by striking, as soon as he had the chance, at one of those most responsible, the man who was head of the Executive—Petliura. Schwartzbard came back to Paris and opened in the Boulevard Ménilmontant a small watchmaker's shop. In the spare hours allowed him by his trade and family life (he had married) he wrote some poems: efforts in Hebrew about the Jewish volunteers in France, for which he received appreciative thanks from the Grand Rabbi. Although a naturalized Frenchman, he abstained from all political action, nor did he enrol himself as a member of any party. Only the Jewish question interested him. And silently, never allowing the slightest idea of it slip out—even to his best friends—he nourished his fixed idea: *to kill Petliura*.

When Schwartzbard learnt that the former Ataman-General had come to Paris is not precisely known. It is only known that at the end of 1925 he bought a revolver and secured a photograph of his "enemy," whom he did not even know by sight. Thus equipped, he searched for him a long time without success. Then twice he met him, but Petliura was accompanied each time by a woman and a young girl. Schwartzbard still waited, not wishing to kill Petliura before his relatives.

At last on the 25th May 1926 his opportunity came. Schwartzbard, who followed Petliura, saw him enter a restaurant alone. Forthwith he sent a communication to his wife, intimating his intentions—of which she was wholly ignorant—and returned to await the exit from the restaurant of the former President of the Ukrainian government. That Schwartzbard satiated his desire for revenge, after six years of premeditation, has been related.

In the Santé Prison, where he was taken to await his trial, Schwartzbard wrote to his brothers and sisters, who were still in Russia, a letter the prevailing note of which reveals the state of exaltation he felt at the accomplishment of his long-cherished scheme—which he had so long concealed—to avenge his race.

"I salute you, my nearest and dearest!

"Let them know in all the towns and villages, where the blood of Jews has been spilt, their goods pillaged and soiled, outrage committed, and their most sacred possessions burnt—give them this message—Jewish anger has had its revenge.

“ The blood of that murderer Petliura which has been shed in the great city of Paris, in the bloody month of Sivan, will awaken a sleeping world from its somnolence and reveal to it the savage crimes committed, even in these days, on the poor Jewish People !

“ . . . All that must stop for ever !

“ We are of those people who have given the World a God, the Bible, and Morality. We carry with us the great mission of Liberty and universal emancipation.

“ We are a people of consecrated martyrs, a people who would free the world from slavery and decadence.

“ We are those who have worked in foreign vineyards and neglected our own.

“ Enough ! We must begin to free ourselves, and then liberate the others.

“ I wish you, my dear friends in the unhappy Ukraine, to seek in the cemetery at Ananiev, the tomb of my father and write on it thus :—‘ Sleep in peace, great Jewish heart. Thy son has avenged the innocent blood of thy brother Israel the Saint, and of the whole people of Israel.’ ”

Schwartzbard took on himself the entire responsibility of his act. The idea that there might be complicity, a plot formed by political opponents of the victim—of whom the little watchmaker might have been only an agent—was well examined during the inquiry, but was definitely abandoned. Schwartzbard was a murderer of the “ lone hand,” and no mental stain warped his free will. His deliberate action was the expression of a symbolic vengeance.

But had he not committed an error in striking at the old Ataman General? Were not the published reports of the Ukrainian pogroms exaggerated by political journalists? And if they were true, had these pogroms been ordered by the President of the Directorate? Had not Petliura, on the other hand, done all he could to forbid and stop them?

This remarkable social controversy excited public opinion a great deal more than the murder. Whilst Schwartzbard had for his defence Me. Henry Torres, assisted by his colleagues Maitres Serge Weill, Goudchaux, and Gerard Rosenthal, three other advocates held a watching brief on behalf of the family of the victim to protect the memory of Petliura.

Documents were produced and extensive evidence recorded which proved in an irrefutable manner that during the year 1919 more than 50,000 Jews had been killed in the Ukraine under circumstances of unmentionable horror by troops of Cossacks,



GERMAINE BERTON



SCHWARTZBARD

Haidamaks and Zaparogues, belonging to the army of the Directorate.

On the other hand, the personal responsibility of Petliura for these events remained in impenetrable obscurity. Public opinion in the Ukraine accused him formally, even by the mouths of little children. Two well-known writers, MM. Joseph Kessel and Georges Suarez, visited Palestine a little before the trial, and notably the Orphanage at Hemek where the Zionist Government had gathered together about eight hundred juvenile sufferers of these pogroms. They reported that these unhappy children, whose parents had been killed in the Ukrainian massacres and many of whom had suffered odious treatment, still shook with fear at the name of Petliura, "because in the Ukraine, in the poor Jewish villages grouped about their synagogues, when in the long and bitterly cold winter nights the little children did not sleep, their mothers rocking their cradles would say: 'Get to sleep quickly, or Petliura will come.'" There was also against him the fact that the majority of the pogroms, and notably those of Jitimir and of Prokourow, had been undeniably carried out by troops belonging to Petliura's regular forces, commanded by his subordinates Palienko and Semessenko. But, on the other hand, it was equally established that on assuming power in the Ukraine, Petliura had inaugurated, in regard to the Jews, a policy of sympathy and collaboration, summoning a prominent Jew to take a seat in his ministry, publishing decrees to interdict the pogroms; and later he had even distributed material succour to the Jewish communities whose houses had been burnt by the Cossacks.

In short, counsel for the "Partie Civile" (representing the family) and those for the defence both produced official documents which, on the one hand, exhorted all men to respect the goods and persons of the Jews, and on the other, incited the Cossacks to pillage and murder the same people. It was also asserted that Petliura had at first wished to enrol the Jews among his partisans, and so desired to prevent their persecution; but at last, not being able to pay his troops, he found no other way to prevent them from deserting than by permitting and encouraging the pogroms.

Other witnesses, again, declared that Petliura had been from the very first a violent anti-Semite, a partisan for the systematic extermination of all Jewish elements in the Ukrainian population, and had only simulated a different attitude when, at the end of his resources, he had wanted to influence certain groups of Jewish financiers in favour of a loan to his Government. In the end no solution of this inextricable tangle was found.

Then the moment came to plead the cause of the murderer. Maître Henry Torres presented in broad lines a moving picture of those frightful scenes, and their echo in the heart of a Jew who had fought so well in the Great War.

“ . . . It was in Odessa that the frightened victims congregated, flying from the horror of those tragic nights when the Cossacks came destroying everything amid frightful scenes, as, for instance, in the pogroms carried out by the soldiers of Kozyr-Zyrko, a subordinate Ataman to Petliura, commanding regular troops, and the famous ‘ Company of Death.’

“ It was in the course of this pogrom that the unhappy Jews who were being massacred showed the terrible passiveness of the Ukrainian Israelite—who, gathered in the Ghettos, waiting for the Messiah for one cannot say what kind of mystical deliverance, had never known how to fight or offer resistance to violence. These unhappy Jews were assembled in the market-place; they were forced to sing; in derision old men’s beards were cut off and women were made to undress; the Cossacks came and whipped them, crying out ‘ Glory to the Ataman Kozyr-Zyrko.’ And wretched victims, who earnestly hoped for a speedy death amid these horrors, had to lift up their trembling arms and cry, to appease their executioners before their slaughter: ‘ Glory be to the Ataman Kozyr-Zyrko,’ who was their murderer.

“ I spoke just now of the passiveness of the Jews. In fact, there has never been seen in any pogrom a Jew who even lifted a stick to defend himself, so resigned is this race from ancestral times to expect organized oppression. But when a man becomes a French citizen, as Schwartzbard did, when he has found his liberty amid the masses of Paris, when he has held his heated rifle in the trenches as a French soldier, I tell you that a new soul, struggling and ardent, is born, and that it strikes on the side of Justice.”

After this speech, made on the 26th October, Schwartzbard was acquitted, and the announcement of the verdict was greeted by those present, mostly Jews, with acclamations—the loudest of which were “ Vive la France.”

THE MURDER OF MARIUS PLATEAU

I speak often of “ retributive justice,” to signify by it that the punishment fits the crime. One can say that in the Germaine Berton case the Jury of the Seine returned a very modified verdict. In fact, thanks to the eloquence of her defender, Maître Henry Torres, Germaine Berton, accused of the murder of Marius

Plateau, Secretary-General of the "Ligue d'Action Française," was manifestly acquitted because other jurymen had previously acquitted the murderer of Jaurès.

Who was Germaine Berton in the month of January 1923, the date of a political crime which was suddenly to bring her name into the first rank of notoriety? A young woman scarcely matured, without a family, without resources, without protection. A little dressmaker's designer, embittered and demoralized by misery. She had a spirit rendered turbulent and exasperated by frequenting revolutionary clubs.

She was born in Puteaux in 1902. Her mother was a school-mistress, her father a contractor, who was soon to become through the ruin of his business an employee of the Railways.

When she was 10 years old, her parents took her to Tours, where her father was called owing to a change of post. In 1919 her father died and a little later she had differences with her mother. Just then her certificates of education and an aptitude for drawing were her pride, and made her think herself an "intellectual" and an artist. She began to mix with the anarchist group in the town and called herself a determined fighter.

In 1921 she came to reside in Paris and the charge-sheet describes her as follows: "living in the company of anarchists, and preferring, instead of earning an honourable wage, to live in a wretched way on the uncertain gifts of different 'comrades of freedom,' to whom she became a passing mistress." In the same year she was condemned by the Tribunal de la Seine to three months' imprisonment for outrages and violence to the Police. A few months later she was sentenced to a fortnight for carrying prohibited arms.

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It was at the end of 1922 that she conceived the idea of killing one of the Directors of the *Action Française*. She wished to strike at—I will show how events diverted her plans—either Léon Daudet, or Charles Maurras, because she thought them, as she stated after the crime, "the most dangerous enemies of the proletariat," and partly responsible for the recent occupation of the Ruhr, which in her eyes was a French aggression against Germany.

On Saturday, 20th January 1923, resolved no longer to defer the execution of her plan, she telephoned twice during the morning to the office of the *Action Française*, 14 Rue de Rome, with pretexts of revelations that she wished to make on the subject of

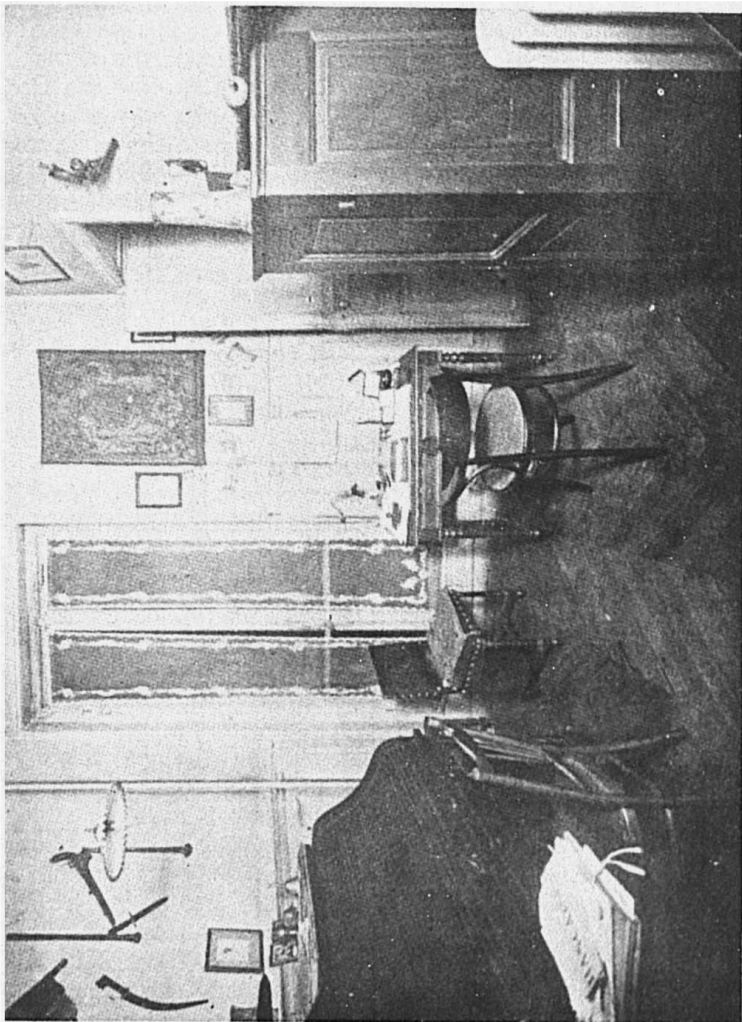
a sudden attempt the Communists were preparing against the Royalist paper. She spoke also of an attempt against M. Léon Daudet and asked if he were still living at 31 Rue de Bellechasse. She was told "yes," though this address was really that of Madame Alphonse Daudet, mother of the Director of the *Action Française*, and given owing to the rule in the office of the *Action Française* never to disclose the private address of the editor.

At once Germaine Berton, armed with a loaded automatic charged with six rounds, made her way to the Rue de Bellechasse, where she soon learned that M. Léon Daudet lived at 31 Rue Saint-Guillaume. Without delay she hastened there, and was told, according to orders, that M. Léon Daudet was "not at home." As she insisted, it was suggested to her that she should go and see his secretary, M. Allard, at the offices of the *Action Française*. Then she went away, and at once wrote a letter in which she asked to be given an interview as quickly as possible owing to the gravity and urgency of the communication she had to make. Her attitude seemed at this moment so suspicious that M. Léon Daudet thought it necessary to communicate with the Police Commissaire of the Quartier at once. He also warned M. Allard, who was a colleague, and his brother-in-law to be on their guard if she should again ask to speak to him.

That same day, towards the end of the afternoon, Germaine Berton called at the *Action Française* with a letter, addressed to "The Secretary of M. Léon Daudet," in which she explained her reasons for betraying the anarchist party to which she belonged, and proposed thenceforth to become a spy on them for the Royalist group. M. Allard then received her, but as a matter of precaution asked M. Marius Plateau to be present at the interview.

Germaine Berton then gave, under guise of pretended plans made in the name of "Liberty," information so vague that M. Marius Plateau laughed and said that his work as Secretary-General to the *Action Française* had made him aware long ago of all she was relating. Germaine Berton, who had never heard of him before, learnt at once the quality and important position there of the man who was to be her victim. The interview finished with a promise that she should bring more precise details of her party for publication. However the two men formed the impression that this "story would end, like so many others they had heard, in a demand for help."

Next day but one, the 22nd January, Germaine Berton went to the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois where the traditional Mass is celebrated for the death of Louis XVI. She hoped to meet and kill Léon Daudet there—but he was absent. The



SCENE OF MURDER OF MARIUS PLATEAU BY GERMAINE BERTON

Action Française was represented by Charles Maurras. For a moment she thought of shooting him, but a group of "leaguers" surrounded him, and she was afraid of missing.

On the same day, at about 1.30 p.m., she went again to the offices of the *Action Française* and gave the reception clerk a closed letter. On the envelope, with the letter-heading of a café near by, she had written the name of M. Plateau, followed by this remark: "This is from the person who spoke to you on Saturday with M. Allard."

The letter began with these words:

"I learned news yesterday: plenty of news"; and ended: "I was told yesterday that two plans were projected. First, to smash up the offices of the *Action Française*, secondly, to kill Daudet and Maurras; this is why I warn them not to go out alone, but better still to remain at home. But I cannot explain all in a note. Please give me an interview." A quarter of an hour later, Marius Plateau invited her into his private office and was alone with her.

The interview lasted for an hour in calm. On the other side of the door was heard at intervals the loud laugh of Marius Plateau. At about a quarter to three the Secretary-General came out for a moment to ask for some information from M. Ernest Berger, Treasurer of the League, and then went back into his private office and shut the door. A quarter of an hour later, M. Ernest Berger, M. Bernard de Vezins, President of the League of the *Action Française*, and a journalist, M. Jean Tollot, who happened to be with them, heard several rapid shots. Immediately after these, Marius Plateau opened his door, and as he crossed the room, cried out: "She has shot me! I have at least two bullets in my body."

Then he swayed into the arms of M. de Vezins, and slipped to the ground. He was taken into another room, where he succumbed.

Other people present rushed into his office. There they found Germaine Berton stretched on the ground and unconscious, with an automatic pistol beside her. She had a wound on the left side of her breast, and it was assumed she was dead. But a little later, before the Police Commissaire, whom the President of the League hastened to summon, she opened her eyes and said: "Tell my comrades of the Party that if I die I have done my duty."

"What party?" asked the Commissaire.

"The Anarchist Party—as constituted by the last congress."

Then in a low voice but very clearly she declared that after

having premeditated the murder of M. Léon Daudet and despairing of being able to reach him she had decided to kill M. Marius Plateau, and that such was her full intention when she asked for an interview with him. Very quietly she explained that after having given her victim purely imaginary revelations, she had profited by the moment when he went to the door to show her out and had turned his back on her to draw from her pocket the hidden pistol, and fire the first shot. M. Marius Plateau then turned and seemed about to throw himself upon her, and she fired again—several times, and finally turned the pistol on herself.

“I wanted freedom from bourgeois Justice, whose authority I don't recognize. I had no accomplices. I acted alone to avenge the deaths of Jaurès and d'Almeyreda for which Daudet is responsible. A friend, whose name I shall not give, procured me the firearm I used.”

Her own wound was not serious. The bullet, grazing the thorax, had lodged in the left armpit, but had ruptured the artery in the shoulder. Taken to the Beaujon Hospital, she was, after the 29th January, in a condition to be taken to the Prison of Saint-Lazare.

Marius Plateau had been struck by three bullets, which, as shown by the post-mortem carried out by Doctor Paul, had penetrated the right thigh, the stomach, the left lung, the liver, and the heart—producing mortal hemorrhage.

In the charge it was stated that “there was no evidence that the accused had committed her crime with the help of or by the instigation of accomplices. Further, that nothing showed that Germaine Berton had not acted with full mental responsibility. Also, she did not cease to boast in a proud manner of her sole responsibility and far from regretting her crime she sought to glory in it.

“This was a flagrant crime, committed in the full possession of this woman's senses, with premeditation, without the excuse of any influence or provocation, either by the victim or his friends. The crime was preceded, on the other hand, by ruses and subterfuges, contemptible enough. It was, lastly, a crime committed on the person of a man of wide sympathies. Marius Plateau, who had been remarked during the War for his conspicuous courage, had the qualities of energy, frankness, and goodwill which won him the esteem, in spite of his combative attitude in the *Action Française*, of all political parties.” Such was the case the Jury of the Seine had to judge.

Maitre Henry Torres, defender of Germaine Berton, pleaded that it was a “symbolical” crime—an attempt at reprisals which

would lead one day to acts of violence, in which the editors of the *Action Française*, and in particular Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, were concerned ; and the deeds of "punitive" brutality, copied from the Italian Fascists, which at several times the "Camelots du Roi," of whom Marius Plateau was the chief, had directed against prominent republicans.

Especially, he evoked with moving eloquence the murder of Jaurès, and the acquittal of his assassin.

"You must acquit Germaine Berton, as you have acquitted Villain. I say 'you' because in France the Jury is *one*, like the Republic.

"You have acquitted Villain ; you know what Jaurès meant to us, and what wound still bleeds in our ribs. I ask you to cicatrise it.

"Since the death of Jaurès, a terrible account has been opened between the Royalists and the immense and unanimous crowd who followed his bier. You must acquit Germaine Berton, Gentlemen of the Jury—unless you wish to say that Plateau was the greater man.

"Your verdict may condemn these men for whom in the dawn of better times the religion of Jaurès was born. If you wish that your verdict should satisfy all you must make it agree with the wishes of him who was not slow to pardon, and anticipated that the real instigators of the crime would disavow the tool they used.

"Peace for all, Gentlemen of the Jury. Justice for all ! I don't glorify Germaine Berton—she should not be glorified. No more murders, no more blood ! But in order that blood may cease to be shed, that the dying hope of Jaurès may be effected, it is necessary that she who struck in sincere homage to his memory should be absolved equally with Villain, and that at once."

And thus was Germaine Berton acquitted.

THE SHOOTING AFFRAY IN THE RUE DAMRÉMONT

On the night of the 23rd April 1925, a little after 11 p.m., at the moment I was preparing to go to bed, the telephone bell sounded in my bedroom.

"Hullo. Who is there ?"

"Monsieur le Préfet ; I am the Brigadier of the police station in the Rue Belliard. Grave trouble is taking place between the 'Communists' and the 'Young Patriots'."

Three young men belonging to the latter group had been killed by revolver shots ; two Communists had been arrested and were at the moment at the police station.

"It was not the Police who fired?"

"No, M. le Préfet."

"Good. I am coming"

And ten minutes later I was there. The appearance of the guardroom was sinister. The Police Sergeant had difficulty in protecting himself from the indiscreet demands of journalists already looking for "copy," and the young men affiliated to the "Young Patriots" flooded the place, making complaints and boiling over with wrath.

On the slabs in the passage there were the bodies of the three young men who, as it was proved later, were excellent citizens.

After saluting them, I gave the order that measures should be taken immediately to break the news to their families. I imposed silence on those present whose noisy discussions were out of place; and entered the cells which were used for provisional arrests.

The two prisoners were covered with blood and bruises, having been roughly mauled by the angry crowd whilst being taken to the police station.

The first one, whose name was Clerc, when pressed to tell me why and how he had been a party to committing this unnecessary and deplorable crime against innocent victims who had been so unjustly struck down, said, after having stammered some incoherent answers: "I fired into the crowd because I was told Cachin had been killed."

Later he retracted this open avowal, to find a more favourable defence.

The second culprit, of brutish appearance and with a swollen face like Clerc's, was named Bernardon. In response to inquiries I could only get from him one reply: "It was not I who fired: I had no revolver." The policeman who had arrested him was standing beside me at the moment, and declared he himself had snatched a smoking pistol from Bernardon's hands. But the latter said he had just picked it up in the road.

As for me I had not the slightest doubt that the two Communists arrested were guilty, and the reports on the case, which are added, will prove it to the hilt. This did not prevent the jury, with inexcusable weakness, from giving a verdict in favour of the prisoners.

I went at once to the Home Minister, M. Schrameck, who was waiting in his office for me, to report on this grave matter; and after giving certain orders concerning the situation, we informed M. Painlevé, President of the Council.

The following is a brief summary of what really had happened. On the 23rd April 1925, M. Sabatier, a candidate for the municipal

elections in the Quartier des Grandes Carrières, conducted a controversial public meeting in the school hall situated at the corner of the Rues Championnet and du Poteau. M. Taittinger, deputy for La Seine, and President of the "Ligue des Patriotes," was to speak; also a very large number of leaguers had early taken the seats around the tribune.

On the other hand, *L'Humanité*, the paper of the Communist Party, had launched an appeal to the numerous "comrades" of the eighteenth ward to rally, and these were reinforced by members of other groups, and even from the suburbs—mainly from Asnières and Boulogne.

The meeting was noisy but without serious incident, until one of the Communist orators, "Comrade" Chasseigne, spoke very heatedly, finishing his speech with these words: "M. Taittinger has braved the workmen of the Quartier des Grandes Carrières; I hope they will consider his presence here an insult. It is the first time we have found ourselves face to face with these famous 'Young Patriots,' and I am sure that the workmen of the Quartier will know how to show them outside that they cannot insult the proletariat with impunity!"

A great number of people had not been able to secure accommodation in the hall, and were standing near by, controlled by a strong Police force. It was amongst them that public feeling was effervescing most—that collective feeling that leads to violent action. At a certain moment the rumour spread among the Communist groups which mixed with the crowd that Communists had been molested and attacked by the leaguers in the neighbourhood. The origin of these rumours was probably some other meeting, organized by another candidate, M. Edouard Jonas, which was being held at the same time as the one first mentioned. As one of the speakers, M. Henri Paté, was ceaselessly interrupted by the Communists, an electoral agent of M. Jonas thought it would be clever to try a diversion. He climbed on to the platform and cried out: "I speak to a portion of the audience, to my Communist friends, to let them know that their brothers are being assassinated at the other end of the road. We must not let them be killed!"

At once a number of Communists left the meeting and ran to the school where the Sabatier meeting was being held. There was a third meeting being held that night, at the Cirque de Paris, Avenue de la Motte-Picquet, by the aggressive members of the National Republican League. Into it there suddenly burst a young man brandishing a card of the "Young Patriots" whose identity—a singular circumstance—the inquiry failed to establish.

Breathlessly and showing symptoms of great emotion, he went to one of the stewards, M. Gaffery, and said the Taittinger meeting was in disorder and they feared a fight would take place, and that he had come for reinforcements. A number of men, some of whom belonged to the "Young Patriots," others to the "National Republican" group, and the "Union Républicaine," ran out in haste towards the Rue Championnet. Some swarmed into taxis, whilst about fifty others got into the Nord-Sud (one of the underground railway lines of Paris.)

And so all the elements of great trouble were rushing towards each other in a way that the Police could not have foreseen, and the importance and gravity of which were going to take them by surprise.

Near the Sabatier-Taittinger meeting some Communists, doubtless come from the Jonas-Paté meeting, flung themselves at the little group of "Young Patriots." Young de Lesseps, a student, was first assaulted with heavy blows by someone who wielded a thick stick, and was finally stabbed. He fell under the feet of the crowd and received more injuries. M. Carabelli, who tried to defend him, was stabbed twice in the back, and struck across the legs by someone with a cudgel. M. de la Grandière was also knocked down by blows of a club; M. Meunier-Surcouf was battered on the head and had his wrist cut by a knife. Now the party who had taken the Nord-Sud poured out at the station "Jules-Joffrin." These young men were not armed, but a certain number had sticks and umbrellas.

They "formed fours" and marched along the Rue du Poteau. When they reached the spot where the Rue Championnet crosses it—it was then 11.10 p.m.—they found that they could not enter the hall. The Police opened their cordon and told them to continue up the Rue du Rateau. The small column was howled at by the Communists, who cried: "Hurrah for the Soviets! Down with the Fascists!" About twenty men began to follow them. Several witnesses, who later gave evidence, heard cries of this nature: "Rally here, the young Communists!" "If they go as far as the fortifications, won't they catch it!" On arrival at the cross-roads formed by the Rue du Poteau with the Rues Belliard and Damrémont, the column entered the latter. Then were heard such cries as: "Clear off, bourgeois! Make yourselves scarce or your jaws will be broken!" following which some orders were given. "Skirmishers to the front. Fire!" At once four or five men aligned themselves across the Rue Damrémont, where the Rue du Poteau crosses it, and opened a salvo on the column which was marching away with their backs

towards their pursuers. Eleven victims were hit, four mortally : M. Marchal, an engineer, who had passed out first from the Polytechnic School and was father of a family, was hit in the lung—the œsophagus, the larynx, and the carotid artery all traversed by the same bullet which entered his back and came out at his throat. He died almost immediately. M. Trullet, a commercial man employed in the legal department of the "Forges et Acieries de la Marine," was killed by a bullet which entered his lungs and heart. M. Ricaud, who was a pupil at the Fine Arts School, succumbed two days later as the result of another wound. Messieurs Dollinger, Susini, Lapeyre, Wolfsperger, Brodiez, Foucault, were all seriously wounded.

Another skirmish took place a little later. A few minutes before the close of the meeting, at the moment M. Taittinger was leaving the school surrounded by an escort of about fifty youths of the "Young Patriots," cries were raised of "Smash them—Taittinger's band!" Then a little farther on, in the Rue Championnet, several revolver shots were fired at the group by a man who was hidden in a doorway. A student, M. Detraux, was seriously wounded. Near the Metro station, Simplon, towards which they were going, M. Taittinger's escort was again attacked. M. Meaux was struck by bludgeons and stabbed in the back. At the station the Communists pursued the "Young Patriots" on to the platform; M. Dubois de la Rue, a student, was knocked down with cudgels, and beside a mutilated head received a knife slash in the face. M. d'Aste, secretary to M. Taittinger, in trying to help him, was also struck and had his wrist cut. M. Grasset, an advertising agent, and M. Liger de Thouigny received violent blows on the head. The Communists allowed the greater part of their adversaries to enter the Nord-Sud, then, when only a few were left, they assaulted them. M. de Lomerie received a knife-thrust in the forearm; M. Philippet, a student, was knocked down by a violent blow given with a stick on the nape of the neck.

The confusion attendant on these successive scuffles made the work of the Police particularly difficult. Most of the victims, struck from behind, could not identify their aggressors. A few witnesses only had been able to give descriptions, which were rather vague. Some, at first precise, were retracted next day—no doubt from fear of Communist reprisals. The confrontations that took place gave no certain results, but were often contradictory.

And that is why only two arrests could be maintained. But

the Minister of Justice was able in some measure to prove to the jury :

1. That the two prisoners to be judged were carrying two of the revolvers which had been used in the salvo of the Rue Damrémont.

2. That it was incontestable that one revolver was that with which Messieurs Trullet, Lapeyre, Dollinger, and Susini had been killed, and the other was the one which had caused the death of Messieurs Ricaud and Tilla.

These two accused were Jean Pierre Clerc, engraver, born at Perpignan on the 29th September 1888, and Marc Joseph Bernardon, varnisher, born at Paris on the 12th January 1898. The spot from which the assassins had stopped to fire at the backs of the column that had turned into the Rue Damrémont, was only about a hundred yards from the police station in the Rue Belliard. Hearing the report, two of the Police force came out and saw about twenty people running from the direction in which the shots had been fired. They thought at first that these were the people who had been shot at ; but when about ten paces away, the running men, seeing the Police, turned sharply about. And realizing these were the gunmen, the Police ran after them. One of the quarry—Clerc—was caught at the corner of the Rues du Poteau and Damrémont. Seized by the constable, Clerc pointed at him a revolver he managed to pull from his pocket, but the former, twisting his wrist, managed to get it away from him.

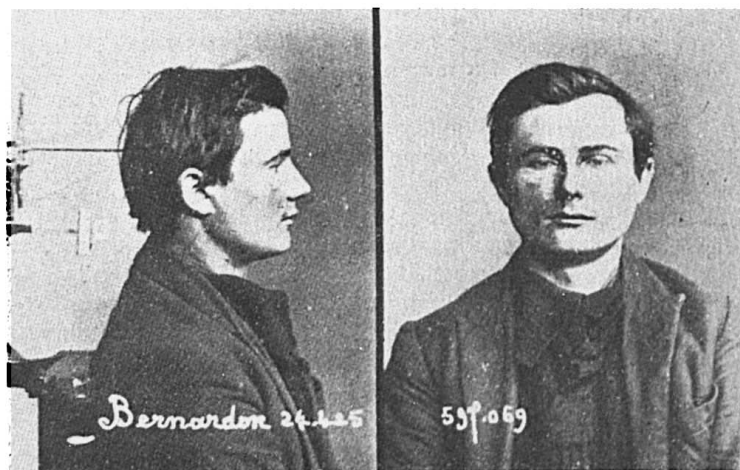
Some others in flight had passed down the Rue du Poteau towards the fortifications. One of them—it was Bernardon—fell. The second constable leapt upon him and seized him by the collar. He also had a revolver which he tried to use, and which was wrested from him.

Then the captives were taken to the police station. But the *mélée* between the two parties of demonstrators was so fierce that the Police were hustled, and Clerc and Bernardon were man-handled by the Communists, who took them to be " Patriots " and yelled " Death to Taittinger ! We will have his skin ! " The two constables who tried to protect them received numerous kicks and blows, and this scene was continued even inside the police station, which the crowd invaded.

Clerc and Bernardon had been captured in possession of fire-arms, and had been members of a group running away from the spot where the fusillade had taken place. On Clerc were found, besides the automatic (calibre 7.65) seized by the constable, which had been emptied, another clip with nine cartridges in it,



CLERC



BERNARDON

a short club, and a whistle. A search in his rooms led to the discovery of three belts of cartridges for a machine gun, another club, and Communist insignia. Further, he did not deny having fired ; but protested that he fired at hazard without taking aim, to open up a path for himself through the struggle by intimidating the attackers. He stated, moreover, that he was on his own, that he had not been one of a party of gunmen, and the whistle found on him had not been intended to give orders with, but was purely and simply an instrument of electoral manifestation.

The revolver taken from Bernardon was of the same calibre, 7.65, and contained an empty clip ; also an ox-muscle twisted into a spiral. He protested that the Police had slipped it into his pocket on his arrest, then that it was a pistol thrown away by someone, which he had kicked by accident and just picked up when the constable had jumped upon him.

These two avenues of defence, despite their weakness, might have gained his acquittal had not M. Bayle, Director of Judicial Identification, succeeded in establishing, first, that the shooting had been from volleys in line, secondly, that the pistols found on Clerc and Bernardon had been used in it, and lastly he demonstrated in a convincing manner that the bullets extracted from the victims whose names we have given came from the weapons of Clerc and Bernardon. As soon as a sufficient force of Police had arrived to clear the battleground, there were found on the pavement, at the entrance of the Rue Damrémont where it joins the Rue du Poteau, twenty-one empty cartridge cases lying right across the width of the road and covering a strip of ground about a yard wide. This was enough proof that the shots had been fired by men shoulder to shoulder from one side to the other. Starting with this assured fact, M. Bayle proceeded thus :

“ It is possible to determine if a cartridge has been fired from a particular pistol. At the moment of discharge the case is strongly expanded in the chamber and marks in the same are reproduced on it. The hammer, the mechanism of projection, all vary a little in different weapons. It is proof enough to find out whether or no a cartridge case comes from a particular pistol to fire other shots from the same weapon and to compare the empty cases with those under consideration. By means of a microscope, or better still by photographic enlargements, it can be ascertained whether they are identical or not. By this method we can show that eight of the twenty-one cartridge cases found in the Rue Damrémont came from Clerc's pistol, and another eight from that of Bernardon.

“ But further, it is necessary, to complete the charge of murder,

to prove that the wounds have been caused by the bullets discharged by these same cartridges."

A second demonstration, carried out with the same strictness as the first, followed. "After a bullet has been fired, accidental roughness in the barrel leaves fine traces. These marks would not be found on all the bullets from the same pistol, because a bullet might clean out the barrel, and there would be no reason for traces left. But if we find marks on a bullet, whose origin we seek, and a sufficient number of characteristic traces on it are identical with those on another bullet which we have fired, we can say that the first bullet must have been fired from the same weapon. To make comparisons more easy a thin coat of tin is put on each bullet which records with great precision the finest scratches. These are enlarged by photography on a sufficient scale, and both are compared."

And in this manner the prosecution upheld their demand for the condemnation of two of the principal men alleged to be guilty of the affray on the 23rd April.

Thanks to the number of watching briefs held on behalf of the wounded, to the names of the families of the dead, also to the quality and political leanings of the defending counsel, who were *Maitres* Fournier and Berton, both deputies belonging to the Communist Party, and *Maitre* Henry Torres—the case swelled into a great social controversy. The debates were impassioned, often uproarious, reflecting the confusion of the affray itself.

Finally, taking advantage of the incidents that we have related and which had led certain groups of Communists to believe that their comrades were the objects of aggression by the "Young Patriots," the defence persuaded the jury that Clerc had the excuse of provocation, and his sentence was three years' imprisonment.

As for Bernardon, defended with as much cleverness as with animation and emotion by *Maitre* Henry Torres, he had the benefit of the evidence that he was not among the firing party. The revolver found upon him had killed—as M. Bayle demonstrated—but was it in his hands or in the hands of another at the moment it had been used?

The journeyman varnisher was acquitted.