CHAPTER IX

SOME FAMOUS WOMEN CRIMINALS

SPENCER wrote in his .Introduction to the *Study of Sociology* that " the most abstract of emotions, which is that feeling of justice regulating our conduct in everyday life, acting independent of sympathies and antipathies, is most lacking in the average woman."

This judgment has lost none of its significance since the day it was written. Women always tend more than men to conform their actions according to their desires or passions. When changing their ideas into actions, they are less restrained than men by any thought of the criminal character of their deed. To women generally it is sufficient if they have discovered a means to an end.

On the other hand, it has been recognized since Lombroso's time that a certain parallelism exists between crime and ignorance. Urged on by a thirst for wealth or by ambition or a certain desire, a man of education will find other means than violence, and a much less dangerous means, to attain his end. Even when tortured by jealousy or resentment, he is more liable to analyse his troubles, criticize his anger, and to foresee that time will mitigate his pains. Men soon convince themselves of the vanity of vengeance and understand that a brutal act will more than probably land them in trouble and bring them nothing but remorse. But with women it is different. Women do not trouble to think carefully of their desires ; they do not trouble to plan their future with a realization of the consequence of their acts—they act blindly and passionately and are therefore more disposed to have recourse to assassination than are men.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that woman's greater physical weakness and her sensibility present a serious obstacle to the undertaking of any criminal action that she may passionately have contemplated. Therefore, though women more easily entertain the idea of a criminal attempt they are as a general rule less capable of carrying out their plans to a successful finish. However, consulting the most recent statistics furnished by the Ministry of Justice on " Criminality " one finds that the number of women criminals is much less than the average citizen thinks from his daily study of a newspaper. Naturally the crime of a woman attracts so much more attention, the journalist is given so much more scope for his flaring pen and vivid imagination. In every lay life the sight of a drunken man in the street attracts little attention, but a drunken woman the world wants to see.

I give here an extract from the figures on female crime placed

before the President of the Republic by the Garde des Sceaux (Keeper of the Seals).

Women Criminals tried and found Guilty

Percentages of women brought before a Court for trial and found guilty were as follows:

1919.	29%	of women	brought up	were found guilty
1920.	24%	,,	,,	,,
1921.	23%	,,	,,	,,
1922.	21%	,,	,,	,,
1923.	17%	,,	,,	,,
1924.	16%	,,	,,	,,

This shows a steady decrease in women criminals convicted, and tends to revert to its original pre-War figure of 14%.

However, there are other facts to be considered in relation to the above figures, that is, the quickly increasing number of women who are acquitted. In 1913, for 591 charged, 167 were acquitted, yet in 1923 for 506 charged, 193 were acquitted. In fact, there is no doubt in my mind that French juries favour women to a marked degree. Yet in spite of this partiality on the part of French juries, female criminality in France is only four-fifths that of the male. One can assert that the emancipation and evolution of women so greatly favoured by the moral and economical consequences of the War have not drawn them into the ways of murder and assassination, and that women have not in this manner abused their liberties.

Among the unfortunate women who have come under my official notice and authority many stand out in vivid colours, and I cannot do better than present certain cases of special interest.

The Case of Jeanne Weiss: The Crime at Ain Fezza

In 1884, Lieutenant Weiss, a tall young man, quiet and grave, was serving in the Artillery at Villefranche-sur-Mer, when he met at a dance a young Russian girl of seventeen, Jeanne Daniloff, an orphan, whose grandmother ran a family boarding-house which she called "The Oasis."

Jeanne was a small girl, fair, slight, with big staring eyes and lightly marked eyebrows. She had wonderful hair, and her face, singularly pale, was very attractive. Further, she was full of laughter, vivacious, lively, and an accomplished musician.

In spite of her free manners, and certain rumours that were current about her, Lieutenant Weiss fell deeply in love with her, and asked her hand in marriage from her grandmother.

He was accepted without any difficulties being raised, but his own family, when informed of his intention, at once put a veto on it, basing it on the doubtful morality of the Daniloff household and also on their lack of pecuniary resources.

Unable to marry Jeanne Daniloff, Weiss decided to make her his mistress, and being appointed the following year to a captaincy at Oran, he determined to take Jeanne with him to Algeria.

A year passed, and his family, wearied with his requests, at last agreed to his marriage. The young girl not having the dowry prescribed by the military authorities, Weiss left the army to marry her, and became Native Commissioner at Ain Fezza (Algeria).

The conduct of Jeanne Daniloff was exemplary. She worked hard as a housewife, and very piously read her Bible.

Two years passed. A child was born, and the household seemed perfectly happy, when in 1888 the Algerian Railway Company sent to Ain Fezza a senior employé—an engineer by the name of Roques.

He was bright, a good talker, a musician, and he became a boarder in the Weiss household. It was not long before he became a real friend of the young couple. His love of music made a special appeal to Madame Weiss who played duets with him, and stopped reading her Bible. A year later a second child was born, binding husband and wife still closer, until, little by little, the attentions of Roques began to worry the husband; he became jealous.

His remonstrances, however, remained unheeded, and the husband tried another method. He interested himself in a young and quite pretty cousin who had arrived in Ain Fezza and whose name was Mania Traque.

Soon there were frequent storms between husband and wife, for there was no surer method of arousing his wife's interest than to allow her to think that he too had found a counter-attraction. So violent became the quarrels between them that one day the young wife threatened to commit suicide. The husband saw his chance; a reconciliation took place and a few months later she again became *enceinte*.

She profited by this by asking to go to Nice where her grandmother was, and whom she had not seen since her marriage. The couple were not well off, and Weiss, to enable his wife to carry out her wish, sold his horse and piano.

A few days later, in the month of March 1890, Madame Weiss left for France. Immediately afterwards, Roques left for the same destination.

From March to July 1890, Madame Weiss remained at Nice. Then her husband obtained leave and joined her.

Very shortly after his arrival he was taken ill in a mysterious fashion, and on the advice of a doctor went alone for a cure at Vichy. He became better at once—never had the waters of Vichy effected a cure so rapid and complete. He returned to his wife at Nice and embarked with her for Algeria on the 20th.

Madame Weiss seemed again an excellent wife, very tender when he suffered from fever, stomach trouble, cold shivers . . . preparing for him with her own hand the milk and soup he took.

M. de Guerry, his secretary, began to suspect that his chief was being poisoned, when, after visiting him one day and finding him much worse, he saw on a small table in the drawing-room an envelope addressed in the handwriting of Madame Weiss, to "Roques, Alcazar Juan, Madrid."

Wishing at any cost to know why the wife of his chief was writing to Roques, whom he suspected of being her lover, he went to the post office at the time the post-bag was taken there, and while talking and joking with the postmistress, surreptitiously abstracted the letter about which he had suspicions, and slipped it into a newspaper.

Once home, he opened it with care, and read Madame Weiss's letter to Roques. It ran as follows:

"You are going to grumble at my imprudence, but I must tell you in what kind of nightmare I am living. It is the fourth day, and most of my supplies are finished. He struggles with all his vitality and instinct of preservation, and never empties his cups and glasses to the bottom.

"I fear I have not enough strength to carry it out to a finish.

"Will you not send me the antidote? You could mark it: 'Four or five pairs of baby shoes.'

"I get thinner every day. My complexion is gone, and I fear you will no longer care for me when we meet again.

"Excuse my handwriting. I am terribly nervous, and—I love you."

M. de Guerry put this letter at once in the hands of the Procureur de la République (Attorney-General), and on the 8th October a search "by order" was made in the Weiss domicile. Point-blank the official put the letter she had written under the nose of Madame Weiss and asked for an explanation.

She confessed then that Roques was her lover and was asking her to come back to him, and that she had told him to be patient as she was slowly poisoning her husband.

She seemed calm and collected; but managing to escape during the inquiry from the watch that was being kept on her, she went up to her room and drank from a flask of corrosive sublimate. She was found on her bed twisting under atrocious pain, and was taken to the hospital, where she hovered a long time between life and death.

The Court of Inquiry having sent a Special Commission to Spain, the Alcalde went on the 20th October to the house of the Roques, and found there announcements of his marriage with the "*Widow* Weiss," which this ardent successor had already had printed. They found also an enlightening correspondence.

Roques was locked up in the police station. He seized at once from a rack one of the rifles, which were all loaded, and blew his brains out.

So Madame Weiss was left alone to answer the accusations of justice as soon as she was well enough to be questioned. She said simply that she had only obeyed the man, who was her master, body and soul, and had aroused in her a spirit that was a stranger to her—violently passionate and at the same time quietly submissive. She added—and the correspondence proved it—that she had really struggled to escape from the trap, and suffered much from having to carry out a crime that filled her with horror. "I ought to have fled, but I was too good a mother to abandon my children."

The inquest established in fact that Roques, who was expecting her in Spain and had sent her a ticket to join him there, the date of which had now lapsed, ordered her to make an end of the matter. Despite her horror of the crime, she gave way to the threats of her lover, and on the 1st October had doubled the dose of Fowler's liquor with which she was poisoning her husband.

Saved from the death she had courted, Madame Weiss was brought in the following month before the Assize Court.

She defended herself with intelligence and dignity. The picture she drew of her struggle "between the two forces" that compressed her nearly carried the jury with her—because the influence of the lover over her was very apparent. However, the written evidence of her husband smashed her case. His statement was: "I cannot pardon this woman and never shall. She interests me no more."

Madame Weiss was seen to be biting at her handkerchief. Then it seemed as if she were trying to tear it, for a reason that

became apparent later, but, hampered by her gloves, she did not manage to do this.

After a short deliberation the jury accorded her "extenuating circumstances," and the Court condemned her to twenty years' hard labour.

She bowed, calm as if she were in her drawing-room, shook hands with her advocate, and whispered in his ear: "I want to free my children; I have finished with life."

In the fear that she might carry out her threats, all the clothes were searched that she had worn on entering prison. Nothing was found, but she was still closely watched. She wrote for a part of the night till about 4 a.m. and threw herself on her bed, after passing a handkerchief over her lips and drinking a glass of water.

Violent convulsions seized her at once. She cried out: "I was not deceived. I am happy. Good-bye." Then she died.

She had taken strychnine, wrapped up in a cigarette paper and hidden in the hem of her handkerchief—a deed she had attempted before in the court when her husband had refused to pardon her.

Her grandmother, aged 79, came from Nice to take her grandchild to the cemetery and walked almost alone behind the coffin.

When the body was lowered she murmured: "Adieu, Jeanne." Then turning her back, with a hesitating step she went away.

The Affair of Madame Weissmann-Bessarabo

I have chosen the affair Weissmann-Bessarabo as an example of murder coupled with the disappearance of the corpse.

It happened not so long ago and at the time created a great sensation.

It was truly a strange household kept by the Weissmann-Bessarabos. They lived at No. 3 Square de la Bruyère, in a comfortable flat, in that quarter more busy by night than day—the Butte-Montmartre.

The husband belonged to that class of business men who are occupied all day in their office or outside, and are only concerned with material affairs.

At home he had a gentle character, rather weak, inclined to avoid discussions, and giving up his point to have peace and quietude.

His wife, on the other hand, had an ardent temperament, and a will as strong as her husband's was vacillating. She was egotistical to a degree, and proud quite beyond her worth. She

CORPSE OF M. WEISSMANN-BESSARABO

belonged to that class of women who think that all the life of their neighbours must centre round themselves.

Born at Lyon on the 25th October 1868 of a family of tradesmen, she found when she left her convent school she had neither the position nor "dot" that she had expected. Her family, through unlucky speculations, was nearly ruined. She had to work.

When twenty-six years old, she left for Mexico, on business, and there she met a Monsieur Jacques, a traveller in silks, who was twenty years older than herself and comfortably off. They lived together in Paris in 1904 where a child was born—a girl—the exact image of her mother.

In obedience to her natural bent, Mme Jacques took up literature under the pseudonym of Héra Myrtel, and collected a *salon* about her—a literary *salon*, frequented especially by very young men, who felt, like her, the urge of artistic creation.

From this small court she chose many lovers in succession, but that did not prevent her from posing, as one of her admirers wrote, as "The Priestess of a Feminist Cult."

The house, a riot of untidiness, ran itself; M. Jacques, who was all kindness, supplied everything.

On the 5th March 1914, on the eve of his leaving for Mexico on business, at about eight in the morning, a maid, sent by Madame to the concierge at 107 Rue de Sèvres, stated that her master had committed suicide.

The concierge came up at once, and was received by Madame Jacques, who said: "Madame Chambre, my husband is dead. And he was quite alone . . . Georgette found him dead when she took him his chocolate."

The concierge replied: "He must have been alone, because if you had been there you would have stopped him."

However, the concierge learned during the day from the domestic, Mlle Picourla, that Mme Jacques had not told the exact truth. She herself had told the servant of her husband's suicide.

Mlle Picourla made another statement to the concierge. Some time before she had seen Mme Jacques put some white powder in her husband's soup, and warned M. Jacques, who had not taken any of it, but had it analysed by a chemist. The white powder was corrosive sublimate.

The unfortunate man, though aware that he was the object of an attempt at poisoning, had not wished to make any charge, and had even continued to live with this woman, whom he judged "capable of anything."

The concierge, who knew that M. Jacques was very unhappy in his home life, ventured to speak to him about it. One evening when her lodger came home, he entered her office and said: "Mme Chambre, I am going to tell you something of the utmost importance." He was then interrupted by the arrival of a third person, and left saying: "I will tell you to-morrow."

The next day he was dead.

His body was found in his study with a bullet through his right temple and the firearm at his feet. The inquiry came to a conclusion of suicide, in spite of the vague rumours abroad on the subject, for neither Mme Chambre nor Mlle Picourla made any definite statement to the Police.

At the worst, if there really was a crime, it was quite impossible to prove it under the circumstances.

So the widow Jacques continued the tenor of her life.

In 1915 she left for Mexico, to settle up her late husband's business interests there, and met a wood merchant of Roumanian nationality, Weissmann, who passed under the name of Bessarabo; she married him at the end of December.

After stopping a year in Mexico, she came back to France with her new husband, reopened her literary *salon*, and, although her pecuniary situation was not very brilliant, continued to live as she had lived at the time of M. Jacques—that is to say, with the single desire of satisfying her taste for luxury and pleasure.

Her husband became to her merely a source of money, and she made him aware of this fact. Thus while Madame and Mademoiselle Paule Jacques, the daughter of her first marriage and her mother's duplicate in mentality, feasted nearly every day with chosen guests, the husband ate alone.

Probably he shunned the company of his wife, who only came to him with demands for money, created violent scenes, and threatened to kill him.

She was particularly fond of the phrase: "I'll have your skin!" In fact she had already tried to have it. In 1918, the poor man had a strange awakening one night. Strong hands were around his throat strangling him. He had to make a violent effort to get free from the hands of what is called the gentler sex.

Another day, the 8th July 1920, when she was in a still worse temper than usual, on his arrival home about half-past six in the evening, she burst out at him, and seizing an automatic pistol which was on the table in the *salon*, dramatically exclaimed in the *patois* she affected: "Get out, or I'll lay you out."

The husband, who was perhaps thinking over this picturesque expression, was certainly amazed at the shot which followed it,

and which would have " laid him out " if he had not taken the precaution of falling before it was fired.

In spite of her youth, Weissmann's stepdaughter, Paule Jacques, quickly followed in the tracks of her mother. She had said one day to a witness, M. Girardot, speaking about her father-in-law : " I would like to show you how we use revolvers in Mexico."

In short, the two women acted in a fashion that fulfilled M. Weissmann-Bessarabo's presentiments that he would have a tragic end. He confided his thoughts to a friend, M. Berlioz, in this terse form : " Provided she does not deal with me as she has with the other."

At the same time as he began to understand his wife, Weissmann began to learn the adventures of her past, and the unpleasant rumours that were connected with the death of her first husband. It is apparently a fact that he would have been separated from his wife from the day after the attempt at strangulation, of which he was the victim, if she had not threatened him with blackmail if he left her, with revelations about some irregularities in his business of which she knew.

So, he continued to live with her, and looked for consolation, which he found with two stenographers who were successively his mistresses.

His wife knew of these affairs, about which she frequently made scenes, inspired less by jealousy than financial interest.

Such was the position of affairs, when on the 2nd August 1920, a chauffeur named Croix informed the Police in the Quartier Saint-Georges of the disappearance of one of his clients, Weissmann, also called Bessarabo, a commercial traveller, living at 3 Square la Bruyère, and whose offices were at 67 Rue de la Victoire.

He had left him on the 30th July at 11 p.m. at the door of his house, and had received from him an order to call for him at his office next day at 9.

Arriving there, he had waited for Weissmann until eleven o'clock without seeing him. Then he saw Mme Weissmann and her daughter arrive, and they said that his client had had to go away on business and would not be back before the 2nd August.

The driver waited, but no news came from his client on the 2nd August and, knowing something of the state of affairs between husband and wife, he thought something had happened and went to the Police.

Questioned, Mme Bessarabo stated that her husband came back on Friday at midnight, and got up next morning at seven. Then he had left the house, after making an appointment with her for

11 a.m. at the Gare du Nord where they were to take the train for their country house at Montmorency.

After having got the concierge to put two trunks on a taxi—in the bigger of which were papers her husband had asked her to bring to him in the country, where he intended to go through and destroy them—she went off at about 10.30 a.m. to rejoin him.

At the Gare du Nord she saw nothing of her husband. So, thinking he had changed his mind since the morning, and had gone off with a woman she knew, she went to the Gare de Lyon, breakfasted at the buffet, and returned to the Gare du Nord, where, this time, she met her husband.

He asked her for the large portmanteau, and had it put in his own carriage. Then he went off.

An hour later the chauffeur came back alone with the trunk, with instructions that it should be sent to Nancy. So she went to the Gare de l'Est and took a third-class ticket to Nancy, and sent the baggage off by this means.

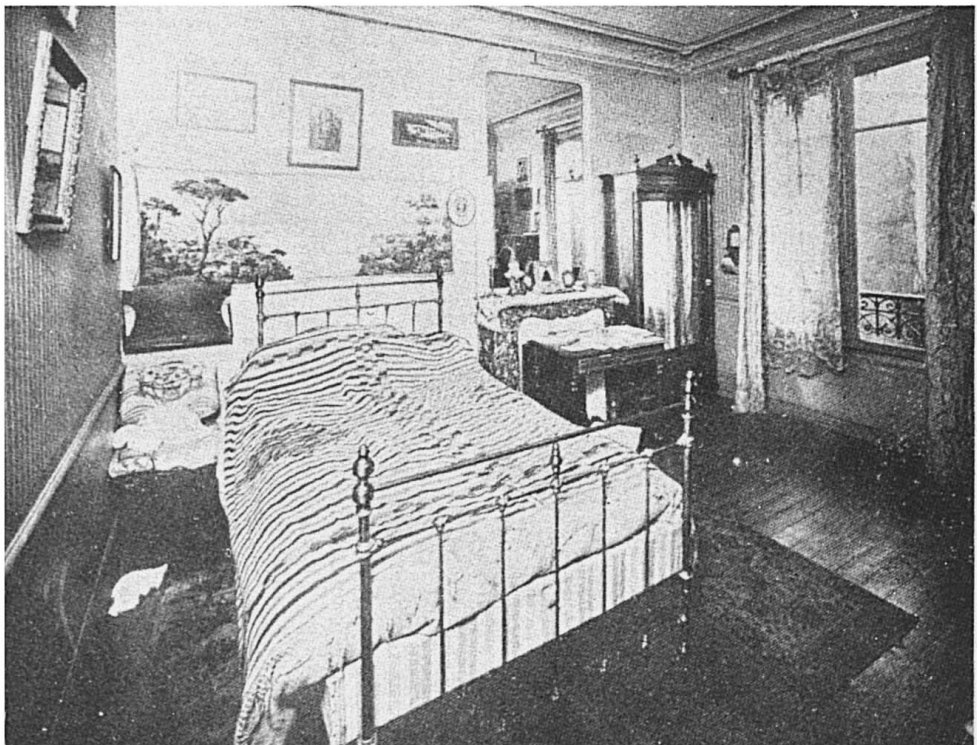
She had not seen her husband since they were at the Gare du Nord together and thought he must have left for Switzerland with his mistress.

This astonishing story was beyond belief; and the Examining Magistrate, M. Bonin, sent inspectors at once to Nancy, to get hold of the luggage. They found it to be a large trunk securely bound with rope and at once confiscated it for official inspection. The same evening the trunk was opened and found to contain the body of a man, bound with a yellow strap and naked save for a red flannel waistcoat. The face was bleeding and swollen, it seemed to have been hammered, and there was a wound behind the head from which the brains were escaping.

Forced by this discovery to make new explanations, Mme Weissmann confessed. She said that her husband on coming home on the 30th July, near midnight, had dropped a letter from one of his mistresses, Mlle Nollet. She had demanded the dismissal of this typist. He had refused, and had threatened that if she interfered with her, he would visit it on the head of her daughter Paule. Then she snatched up the revolver and shot at her husband, who fell dead.

She said that she alone had packed the body in the trunk and sent it off to Nancy. But it was later discovered that she had forced her young daughter to help. Awakened at 8 a.m. by the sound of a shot, the young girl went to her parents' rooms, and saw on the bed a body with a blanket over it. Dazed, she called out: "Mother, what have you done?"

The mother replied: "It is only justice!"



SCENE OF MURDER OF M. WEISSMANN-BESSARABO

The daughter had wished to call out for help, but the mother had stopped her, and ordered her to go and get a trunk from the sixth storey.

When she had come back with this the body of her stepfather was in a packet, covered with a canvas sheet. Despite her revulsion she had helped her mother to get this packet into the trunk. She had then gone with her mother to the offices of M. Weissmann, where both stated that he had gone away and was not to be expected. Then they went to a general shop to buy some cord.

When the mother came back, she corded the trunk—which was not too well fastened—and carried it down with the help of the concierge. It was then put into a taxi with a valise full of blood-stained sheets.

Mme Weissmann was overcome and scarcely knew what to do. She went in succession to the Gare du Nord, then to the Gare de Lyon, and finally to the Gare de l'Est. There she said to her daughter: "Send the trunk off somewhere, the further the better, so that it will be as long as possible before it is found."

She had sent the trunk off to Nancy, and then returned to Montmorency, where the mother burned some sheets stained with blood.

Mlle Jacques also confessed that she had then made preparations to go back to Mexico. Justice believed that the truth had at last been arrived at; but on the 18th February Mme Weissmann went back on her confessions—which she pretended to have made to exculpate her daughter—and stuck to her first version. Paule Jacques followed suit and affirmed her innocence, and stated she would have more to say at the Assizes.

Their attitudes did not change until their appearance before the Courts on the 15th February 1921.

The mother, who doubtless hoped to benefit by the confusion that might be evoked in the minds of the jurymen by the different versions she had given of the crime, stuck energetically to the last one. Paule Jacques, more clever, claimed: "That there is in this matter a secret connected with my mother, which I have no right to reveal without her consent."

Many witnesses were heard, including writers. Some did not hesitate to describe Héra Myrtel as a delightful woman, gifted in every way.

The Attorney-General pointed out that this crime had deep origins—the jealousy of the wife and the hatred of the daughter-in-law towards Weissmann-Bessarabo—but that there was a further direct incentive—monetary interest. The inquiry had

in fact established that the victim would get, on the 31st July—that is to say, the day after his death—a commission of 600,000 francs from an oil company. The letter about this had disappeared at the same time as his pocket-book. But now the statements of Paule Jacques made it clear that her mother had thrown these into the Lac d'Enghien as soon as they were sure—the option not having been taken up—that the letter was valueless.

After two brilliant speeches by Maîtres Moro-Giafferi and Paul Hubert the Judge asked Mme Bessarabo if she had anything more to say.

She again protested her innocence.

As for Paule Jacques, who abandoned her second version and came back to her first statements and renewed her confessions, she ended up with a pathetic statement. " My mother said to me : ' What could I do, my child—it was either he or I ?.' "

After a short retirement the jury returned with a verdict of guilty—" but with mitigating circumstances "—against Mme Weissmann-Bessarabo and thus cleared the young girl of participation in this horrible crime. The Judge then sentenced the murderess to twenty years' penal servitude and acquitted the daughter.

Here fate played a grim part in the punishment of the daughter. For to-day, whilst the mother is still serving her sentence, the daughter, whom some still consider to be guilty and to have been the instigator of the crime, is paying a dreadful penalty : innocent or to blame for the crime in which she was mixed up. An unhappy waif, lost in Paris, she lives in misery.

The Case of Basiliondis

This crime is one of murder camouflaged as suicide, carried out by a woman of but ordinary intelligence, and brought about by the wretched conditions under which she lived.

On Monday, 23rd July 1923, about 9 a.m., Mlle Maria le Bohant, secretary-typist, and sole employée of M. Leonidas Basiliondis, a business man with offices at 10 Rue de Richelieu, had just resumed her work, after having profited by the hours of liberty of the week-end, known in France as " la semaine Anglaise."

She was astonished at not seeing on his desk the papers she had put before M. Basiliondis on Saturday for signature when she heard in the next room, which was private to her employer, a sound which made her listen attentively.

The noise at first resembled, as she stated later, a sort of

snoring, but soon she concluded that someone was straining for breath.

Uneasy, she knocked at the door, and as she obtained no answer, she opened it. Her eyes were confronted with an unforgettable picture.

M. Basiliondis was stretched out on the carpet, his head in a pool of blood. He was groaning.

The young girl cried for help. The neighbours came in at the same time as a doctor who lived in the house, Dr. Teissier. He stated that the body had a wound, produced by a shot, a little above and behind the right temple.

The carpet was deeply stained with blood where the head was resting. Near the body was an automatic pistol with seven cartridges in it. A discharged cartridge case was found in a corner.

An emergency ambulance took the dying man to the Hôpital de la Charité, where he died on arrival, without having recovered consciousness.

Everything seemed to indicate at first sight that it was a case of suicide, but an examination of the body produced a number of disquieting facts.

The dead man had a certain number of contusions on his face—one behind the angle of the right eye, another on the neck, a third, large and resembling a burn, below the right ear. Around the right forearm and the left biceps, there were marks of bruises produced by compression, and—a still more puzzling fact—there was on the outside of the wrist, between it and the thumb a deep wound.

The medico-legal expert, summoned at once, had no difficulty in stating that it was a crime. The same bullet that had wounded Basiliondis in the right temple had previously caused the wound on the right hand. Without doubt, he had instinctively put up his hand between his head and the barrel of the revolver aimed at him.

Mlle Bohant, the secretary-typist, who, on the day the drama took place, had written "They have killed him," declared that her employer had never shown any signs tending towards suicide; that she had never seen the firearm found near him in his office, and further stated that M. Basiliondis had difficulties with a former mistress, Mlle Du Bot de Talhouët, by whom he had had a son. She added that Mlle de Talhouët had threatened her employer several times, and had lately confided to her "that she had bought a revolver, and had only to get cartridges for it."

This statement was confirmed by M. Basiliondis' housekeeper, Mme Veuve Bechier. She also had been the confidential recipient of the threats of Mlle de Talhouët, and stated that the latter was in a very excited condition.

Cross-examined, Mlle de Talhouët, who lived at No. 6, Rue Linné, acknowledged at once that she had lived with Basiliondis for twenty-six years, having a son by him of the age of twenty-four whom his father had not recognized. She added she had had to separate from her lover in 1915, in consequence of his treatment of her. He gave her a small income of 100 francs a month out of which she had to pay her rent, which was 600 francs a year. She then stated that she had not seen the man in question since Friday the 20th of that month—a day when she had had an interview with him, in the public street outside the Metro station of the "Cité." She affirmed that she had never threatened Basiliondis.

Her son, Leonidas, cross-examined in his turn, said he saw M. Basiliondis for the last time on Saturday the 22nd July between eleven o'clock and midnight in his offices in the Rue de Richelieu. He had moreover been seen to enter and come out, between the hours he had indicated.

Further, the son and the mother stated that the first they had heard of the death was in the morning papers.

No clues of any use were found in the house, which was occupied by business men who had mostly been absent all Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

The concierge believed that M. Basiliondis had left his office on Saturday, 21st July, about 6 p.m., and then admitted she could not be certain of this time when she was shown the congealed blood on the carpet, indicating that the wounded man had lain there for a long time before he had been found.

It was certain, however, that it was a crime, and theft was not the motive. Nothing in the office had been disturbed.

Attention was then turned on the origin of the pistol found on the carpet, which bore the number 21,770, and was marked "Manufacture d'armes de Saint-Etienne."

Inquiry revealed that the pistol had been bought by a woman who had given her name as Eichmann, and an address at Conflans (Seine-et-Oise).

As a letter had been discovered in Basiliondis' office addressed to him by Mlle de Talhouët, in which allusion was made to Mlle Eichmann, the mother and son were summoned to the police station to give information about this person.

Both said that it was the first time they had heard this name.

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MLLE. DU BOT DE TALHOUËT

M. Chauvet, who had sold the firearm, was also summoned. Confronted by Mlle de Talhouët, he recognized her formally as the woman who had called herself Eichmann, and to whom he had sold the pistol used in the crime. Nothing now remained to her but confession.

Weeping, she related the twenty-six years of difficult life she had passed with Basiliondis, who kept nearly all his money for himself. She said he had several hundreds of thousands of francs in the bank, and a villa at Conflans-Saint-Honorine; but he never gave her enough for her needs, and had ill-treated her to such a point that she had had to leave him, despite the fact that this would leave her without any means of support. He then gave her a niggardly pension so that she would not die of hunger. Passionately she described the sheer misery that had driven her with her son to the office of her former lover. She described vividly the scene and her appeal for an increase of her pension. But Basiliondis, a cruel man with but little heart, had coldly and very firmly refused her appeal. In despair she had told him that she would commit suicide, only to receive the reply that she was free to do with herself as she thought fit.

Exasperated beyond control, she had fired at random with the result that she had killed her lover.

These two unfortunate creatures who had shown remarkable thought and skill in the carrying out of a crime to which the one had confessed, defended themselves with the art of accomplished advocates, and such was the sway the woman held over the jury and the Court that they were acquitted at the Assize Court of the Seine on 24th July 1924.

Servants who Become Criminals

To determine the specific characteristics of female criminality, I have thought that it would be interesting, not merely to analyse some types of celebrated criminals, but also to study in detail a social category which has existed, in all times, as a specially favourable forcing-house for the conception and execution of attempts against human life.

The category I refer to is domestic service, and it includes all, from the bachelor's housekeeper to the general maidservant in a middle-class family, and covers the specialized servants who are cooks, laundry-girls, housemaids, private secretaries, the confidant of an actress or music-hall star, the children's nurse, or the lady-companion of a multi-millionairess.

We have already remarked two causes which counteract in

crime, and which create a state of mind conducive to violence: physical weakness, and the sensitiveness that often stops a woman from carrying out a murderous enterprise conceived in her brain. But domestic servants usually have a strength superior to that of the average woman, while their sensitiveness is very little developed and their education elementary. Daughters of peasants or workmen, they become house-servants because the strength of their muscles has accustomed them early to hard work, and because unfavourable circumstances have prevented them rising higher in life.

The life of a servant is not one that a young girl would adopt from choice. It is the refuge of those who have found nothing better, but still must battle for their living.

Many of them change from "general servants" in a middle-class household to become nursemaids, scullery maids, or waitresses in a restaurant, hotel, or café, where they become acquainted with crooks, fall into their hands, and finally become their accomplices.

The nature of their work brings them into the intimate life of the family and so gives them incomparable opportunities to carry out certain crimes—for example, poisoning.

This intimacy, which is not limited to a few hours as a work-girl's is with her employer, but is continuous and extends to all the members of the family, creates, too easily, especially when the master or mistress is somewhat lacking in kindness and comprehension of human nature, a dangerous atmosphere, propitious to the birth of the bad feelings we have met with in studying the psychic origins of criminality. There are many things a servant has to suffer in silence . . . little humiliations; badly brought-up children whose unconscious cruelties must be submitted to without a word; overtures from a master who admits of no refusal; poverty rendered harder to bear because of continual contact with comfort, even luxury. Besides all this, there must be reckoned overwork, insufficient food, a gloomy and unhealthy room, abuse of authority, defective conditions of existence, which the modern laws anent work cannot touch . . . so many things to generate envy, jealousy, cupidity, and hatred in a servant's mind. In his novel, *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, Octave Mirabeau has thrown much illumination on the psychology of a class of domestic which can be singularly dangerous.

The heroine of this book, Célestine, sums up as follows her opinion of her mistress:

" . . . Ah! How much a poor servant is to be pitied, and how lonely she is. She may serve in many houses that are full of

joy and laughter—but she is always lonely. . . . Solitude need not mean living alone. It may mean living with others, among people who take no interest in you, who think less of you than their dog—people who only give you useless frocks, or spoiled remnants.

" ' You can eat this pear—it is no good. Eat this chicken in the kitchen—it smells bad.'

" Every word is a word of contempt. Every gesture is one that might be used towards a brute. . . . And no reply must be made. One must smile and say ' Thank you ' or be considered an ungrateful person, or bad-hearted.

" . . . Sometimes, dressing the hair of my mistresses, I have had the desire to tear at the napes of their necks, and scratch their breasts with my nails.

" Every virtue is expected of us, continuous resignation and sacrifice, every kind of heroism—and for vices, only those that flatter the masters and such others as would like to profit by them. Let me add that we live in perpetual worry, in continuous trouble, between ephemeral semi-luxury and distress like that which follows a strike. . . . We always have the feeling that we are suspected and this follows us everywhere.

" Every drawer is locked, bottles of wine are marked, biscuits and plums are counted, and over us always is held the threat of a police search. There is not a door, a cupboard, a drawer that might not cry out at us : ' Thief, thief, thief . . . ! '

" Let me speak also of the vexation that follows this inequality, this frightful disproportion of fate, despite smiles and presents, that puts between mistress and maid an abyss and a whole world of unexpressed hatred, envy, and future revenge—this disproportion, that every minute becomes more sensitive, more humiliating, more trying through the caprices and even the occasional kindness of these beings without justice, without love, who are rich people. Have you reflected for a moment that we servants might resent, with a mortal and lawful hatred that leads to murderous wishes, hearing our master or mistress say in front of our faces : ' A servant has only one kind of soul : and that soul is the soul of a servant ? ' Well, what do you expect we should develop into, in this kind of hell ? What is really extraordinary is that vengeance is not taken more frequently. When I think that a cook holds in her hands every day the lives of her master and mistress—a pinch of arsenic instead of salt ; a little strychnine instead of vinegar, and it is done ! . . . Perhaps we are tamed to slavery."

Célestine exaggerates. That is what the sad story told by

Mirabeau proves. There are many who appreciate a good servant, and large-hearted servants who become attached to the service of their employers, and work as they would in their own houses or for their own families. The distinction between classes has lessened, and the difficulties of the day, if they have not calmed the susceptibilities of the domestic servant, warn employers to use more prudence and tact and suggest they should use more goodwill.

This does not mean that the study of crimes committed by servants does not present the feelings analysed by Mirabeau.

Here is a characteristic example of a crime where the attempt of the maid, inspired by impulse and stupid hatred, covered by clever scheming, was at last confessed to by a most unexpected and mysterious awakening of conscience.

Some years before the War, on a December morning, an elderly landowner, Madame Montet, who lived in a lonely villa in the suburbs of Lyon, with only a general maid of sixteen, named Marie Michel, whom she had taken out of a religious orphanage, was found dead in her bed. The medical examination proved that she had been strangled. Suspicion fell on the young girl and on Louis Cauvin, a neighbour whom she had made her general legatee. After lengthy denials, Marie Michel ended by confessing that she had helped in the crime, through physical fear and the threats of Cauvin, who had forced her to become his accomplice.

Cauvin, she said, had made up his mind to kill Madame Montet because she had said to him that she might alter her will. He had asked the young servant to help him, promising to give her 3000 francs and to keep her in his service all his lifetime—but adding that he would soon get rid of her if she talked. Frightened, she agreed to hide him for a part of the evening in a corner of the house. At midnight both entered the room of the eighty-year-old woman, whom Cauvin strangled, whilst Marie Michel held her hands so that she could not defend herself.

After this confession, which seemed sincere and truthful, the Assize Court condemned Cauvin, despite his protestations of innocence, to a life sentence. Marie Michel, acquitted as having acted without responsibility, was sent back to the orphanage where she had been reared.

She was brought up again on the same charge next year before another Court, to which the young servant with great calm renewed her statements.

Five years passed before Marie Michel, the day after hearing a sermon which impressed her, went to the office of the Procureur de la République, and stated that she had falsely accused

Cauvin, and that she alone was guilty of the murder of her mistress.

The case was brought up anew; Cauvin was acquitted, and Marie Michel condemned to five years' imprisonment. During the trial she exposed the motives and circumstances of her crime:

"Madame reproached me with eating too much. All the morning she was grumbling because I had broken a dish. I told her that I was too unhappy with her—that I was going to drown myself. The day passed, however, quietly enough, but at dinner-time Madame said if I broke anything more she would cut it out of my wages. 'That will help you a lot,' I answered. 'When you are buried, your money won't be in your coffin.' Upon that Madame answered that I was insolent and I was so angered that if I had had any poison I would have put it in her soup. As I hadn't any, I waited till she was asleep to take my revenge. When she was in bed I left her door half-closed. I went to undress, and only keeping on a chemise and petticoat, I waited for two hours seated on a sack on the staircase, to be sure that Madame Montet was asleep. Then I went into her room; I darted towards the bed. I put two knees on her breast and pushed two fingers deep into her throat till she stopped breathing."

She explained that if she had at first accused Cauvin it was because she understood that she could not for long escape suspicion herself, whilst a confession of complicity was without much danger to herself because of her youth.

So the person condemned for the crime was innocent and the murderess was a woman who had killed, not for self-interest, but to satisfy the resentment felt by a scolded child, and who had been astute enough to turn aside suspicion by a lying accusation, the more perfidious and clever in that it seemed to fit in with other evidence as truth. At last, after years of silence, when there was no danger from Justice and nobody was thinking of her, she gave herself up of her own free will, because a preacher had suddenly touched at the bottom of her undeveloped soul the chord till then insensible to remorse.

. . . . . .

Crimes of servants, like others, have a local colour. There are crimes specifically Parisian. Again, like the sinister murder of old Madame Montet, others carry a provincial stamp of the slow, bourgeois life which exists in some small towns so striking in contrast with the intense animation and agitation of great centres.

I will now relate the story of an attempt that was told me by

one of my foreign colleagues who had come to Paris to study. In this there appears some of the coloured imagination and theatrical manner usually associated with Italian bandits.

The manager of a branch of the Bank of Sicily, and his wife, who had their private quarters in the same building as the Bank, were asked permission by their servant to take in a trunk which she said belonged to her mother, and which she wished to save from sequestration by order of the Courts. They consented with goodwill, and a heavy box carried by two porters was put into a dark room. Just then the manager's small dog stopped by the box and began to bark furiously. They tried to get him away, but he was obstinate and continued to yap. The maid explained that probably her mother had put a parcel of meat among the clothes, and on being asked to open the box she said she would go and get the key, disappeared, and did not return.

Intrigued, the bank manager sent for a locksmith, and four policemen armed with carbines. The lid was forced open, and then, like a jack-in-the-box, there jumped up a fellow who charged head down and knife in hand on the men standing near-by. Mastered with great difficulty by the policemen, not without having wounded one of them, the miscreant was searched, and a pistol and burglar's tools were found in his pockets. A search was at once undertaken by the Police in every corner of the building, and they found, crouched in a large kitchen furnace, a second armed man. The idea of these two had been, no doubt, to murder the manager and his family during the night, and to seize all the gold and valuables in the Bank.

Amongst crimes committed by women servants, there are many of which the employer's child is the victim. Indeed I have purposely excluded abortion and infanticide; not because these two classes of crimes are numerically less. On the contrary, alas! . . .

The daily papers commented much some years ago on a certain case before the Coroner's Quest at Darmstadt. Inquiring into the affair of a young servant suspected of having thrown her baby into the Rhine, the Examining Magistrate was troubled by the fact that no body had been found.

After asking the burgomasters along the river bank if the body of an unknown child had been taken out of the river, they received thirty-two affirmative replies. . . . There is not a river or stream or drain where these sad relics are not to be found.

But the Protection Society against crimes of this kind depends much less on police investigation and punishment exacted by the Law than on a reform of our own prejudices, which obstinately

insist that maternity without marriage is a dishonour, though a softening of the laws concerning such births is, happily, under way.

Already at the end of the century before last, Mirabeau suggested that a girl-mother coming out of a lying-in hospital "should receive fifteen crowns for the present she has made the State." During the heroic years at the Consulate and the epic time of the Empire, foundlings were officially named "Children of the State." And to-day, more than ever, we should consider that every child born is a precious gift from above and that every woman who brings a child into the world is doing a service to her country.

There are other servants as blameworthy as the unhappy one who clandestinely gets rid of, at the peril of her health, the result of a moment of weakness to which she gave way, so as not to lose her employment. I refer to those who avenge themselves like cowards on these defenceless little beings by unspeakable cruelties, to balance the troubles they think they have suffered at the hands of their employers.

Among the traditional headlines of our papers there is that of the "Infant Martyr." Such cases are usually those of bad parents. But to these may be added "spiteful servants." These pass on to the child under their charge every severity, every change of temper, every humiliation they have suffered from the father and mother, with implacable punctuality. Luckily, these hidden reprisals do not always amount to crime. Usually, they are limited to petty matters—food badly prepared, served cold or too hot, wilful negligence in the matter of supervision of linen. . . . But it happens still that the servant sometimes pushes her ill-will so far as murdering the child, and often without the semblance of an excuse or complaint against the parents.

Consider the case of a young Belgian girl of fifteen, engaged by a family at Lille to take care of two little children of four and five years of age. She poisoned these unfortunate children with phosphorus obtained from a box of matches. Questioned, she stated that she was bored and had committed this double murder solely to have the chance of going out to have some distraction by seeing the doctor and the chemist!

Consider again the case of another nurse-girl who stifled her little charge under a mattress, because, through reading a book of general facts, she had discovered that it is difficult to differentiate between death by suffocation and a natural one, and her sole object was to be able to go out on Sunday.

And finally this story. A baby of eleven months disappeared

mysteriously from her cradle and all search for her was in vain. The father and mother were arrested on suspicion. During the course of the inquiry, the nurse-girl confessed that she had thrown the child into the river. Why? Because she thought that if she were relieved of her duties as nurse she would the more often get leave to see her parents.

. . . . . .

The woman who has had no chance of being refined by education, except in a very slight degree, often reveals in her temperament a certain depth of violence, characterized by an extraordinary ease of conception of some attempt against human life and the means of carrying it out.

On the 4th June 1903, a servant recently engaged fired six revolver shots at the daughter of her former mistress, and wounded her seriously. Premeditation could not be denied. The firearm had been bought some days before the crime. The girl, in ambush behind a door, had fired four shots point-blank at her as she came out of the house. Then, as her victim sank down on the pavement, she pressed the pistol to the nape of her neck, and fired the last two shots into it.

What was the reason for this ferocious hatred? Simply that the young girl, charged by her mother with the duty of writing out a testimonial, had only stated the length of time she had worked in the house, and omitted all words of praise!

A young nurse of twenty-three, who came from Auvergne, threw a phial of vitriol at the head of a compatriot—a coal merchant in the Rue de Bourgogne at Paris. Arrested, she pretended the coal merchant had seduced her and then abandoned her; but the inquiry showed that she had several lovers, and the unfortunate man was not even one of them. His sole crime was to get engaged to another Auvergnate, which for some reason aroused the ire of his murderess!

Happily, resentment often takes a less dramatic turn, under forms which may be rather likened to audacious jokes. Here, for example, is a very Parisian story of recent date, and yet it might be taken from the pages of Boccaccio. A commercial man from Sentier, a lover of adventure, and rather inclined to indulge in luxuries, had furnished a small house in which to instal a mistress. Two young Provençales were engaged for household work, one as housemaid and the other as cook; both of them well-mannered and quite intelligent, they understood the situation so well that their master did not hesitate to exercise "le droit du Seigneur," and there was not the slightest shadow of discord.

This delightful household of four might have continued for as long a time as many legitimate unions, if the titular mistress, who suspected nothing, had not become a rather too serious mistress of the house. She thus aroused the resentment of the soubrettes, who decided to avenge themselves.

From time to time the happy man, called to the provinces or abroad by his business, was obliged to leave his harem alone for several days. During one of these absences, the two Provençales entered the room of the favourite in the middle of the night, bound her, and shut her up in a dark closet, with no other clothes than a dressing-gown. In short, these two servants made a prisoner in her own home of their former mistress, visiting her daily and giving her food, punishing her with a cane, and administering only bread and water as her diet in the event of her crying out. This treatment went on for several days until friends of the mistress became suspicious and informed the Police. However, the affair ended with the disappearance of the maids and the silence of the mistress.

Again, a young laundry-girl had managed, by means of false certificates, to obtain a post as chambermaid to a Brazilian lady in Paris, who intended to return soon to Sao-Paulo. The lady was rich but old and in precarious health, and was, moreover, rather simple in mind. The soubrette, who was cunning, did not need more than two months to capture her entire confidence, and in fact to rule her household. But she began to weary of Brazil and to feel the want of another change in life. She persuaded her mistress that a winter passed on the Riviera, after a short stay in Paris to buy some dresses, would do her the greatest good. One morning the two women arrived at the Gare Montparnasse. The maid took charge of the luggage, which contained several hundred thousand francs' worth of jewellery and securities, and then disappeared, leaving her mistress in a waiting-room.

The poor old lady, without resources, was obliged to apply to one of her own countrywomen, whilst the ex-laundry-girl blossomed into the Comtesse de Lassarthe (she happened to have been born near Mamers), and hiring fashionable rooms in the Quartier de l'Etoile, led a joyous life. Six months went by before she was discovered and arrested.

In his book, *Parallels in Crime*, Tarde notes that in the seventeenth century, at the era of the Marquise de Brinvilliers, the fashionable crime of the day was poisoning, which has become in our time the crime of the stupid, since it is now generally discovered. Resort to it has fallen off just as general instruction

has advanced. Men resolved to do wrong are usually educated: it is only necessary for them to study the papers to know that their chances of immunity are much less to-day than heretofore, because Science succeeds, by new methods of analysis, in revealing the slightest trace of poison in a body.

The reactions of a drug which might formerly have passed unnoticed would be discovered at the first scrutiny. It may almost be said that to be a good poisoner one must first be a specialist in toxicology.

But we have pointed out that in domestic service is ignorance most widely spread. Further, poisoning is a woman's crime rather than a man's, because no physical strength is needed; because there is no necessity to deal blows, or to shed blood; because it is much simpler to carry out where the murderess is living in intimacy with the victim, enjoys his or her confidence, and prepares the meals. These are enough reasons to show why poisoners belong, for the most part, to the domestic and similar classes.

If we look into some celebrated cases we see, by way of example, that of Marie Jeanneret, who confessed to nine cases of poisoning that led to death, and who was a private nurse. She did not kill for gain, nor for vengeance, but through the perversion of a mind that had a scientific bent. It was just to see the effects of the poisons she used, for the satisfaction of describing in advance to her friends and neighbours the symptoms and sufferings before death of such and such a sick person whom she had been tending. She wept over each victim, and kept as souvenir a lock of hair cut from each!

The Dutch woman, Van der Linden de Leyde, was also a private nurse, to whom the Royal Court at the Hague gave a life sentence, for a hundred and two attempted poisonings by arsenic. She administered it in very small doses to get the doles for cases of sickness and the funeral expenses that certain Societies give their members. She sent in the names of her patients, unknown to them, and paid up their instalments. There was monomania in her case, because, even in prison, she tried to poison a fellow-prisoner with a cup of coffee she had tampered with. She had put into it mercury scratched from the back of a pocket mirror.

Helen Jagado, who was condemned to death and executed at Rennes, was convicted for having committed, in eighteen years, twenty-six murders by poisoning, and was further charged with eight other attempts, all by means of arsenic. At the time of her arrest she was the servant of a Curé.

In every house she had entered a death had followed, but she

escaped suspicion so well that she continued in positions of trust. Her conduct was irreproachable: she was perfectly honest and moral. When she was reproached with the trail of mourning she had left behind her in all the houses she hed served in, she said sadly: "It is a fatality. I bring no luck to anyone."

She killed for revenge, for a slight reproach, for some remark that had displeased her, and once to obtain a small legacy that was to come to her.

Again, in Hungary in 1895, an organized band existed of woman poisoners, all nurses with diplomas.. They specialized in rich clients, choosing for preference patients only slightly ill to whom they administered slow poison, after insuring their lives in their own favour. When the invalid was dead they stated that they had taken out these insurances in advance to cover their expenses.

Luckily, in France, we have no longer these female ogres. And that is due, as I have already pointed out, mostly to the progress of the medico-legal doctors, thanks to whom the classic methods of poisoning can scarcely be said any longer to insure immunity. It is due also to the wise precautions which have been taken of late years, notably to render it impossible to have the same prescription made up twice on a single order, where the medicine contains a poisonous ingredient, but making it necessary to obtain a new order.

. . . . . .

A commercial traveller, who used to have his letters sent to a poste-restante, marked only with his initials, found amongst them one day a letter obviously meant for another correspondent with the same initials.

It ran as follows:

"My dearest love—I have seen your husband. I remarked with satisfaction that his illness makes some progress. His lips are blanched, his eyes hollowed, his cheeks are pale! I hope we shall be rid of him before the month is out.

"P.S. I shall bring you again to-morrow another small packet."

The commercial traveller took this at once to Detective Headquarters. A watch set at the post office led to the arrest of a young and fashionably dressed girl, who had come to look for her correspondence, addressed to the same initials as those of the traveller.

Taken before M. Goron, she tried at first to carry off matters with a high hand, but the sight of her lover's letter floored her.

She said then: "I love the young man who wrote that. I love him very much indeed. When my husband embraces me, and his lips touch mine, I feel as if I were branded with a hot iron; I chose crime rather than this continual punishment."

Two hours later, agents brought in the young man, smiling and calm. The Police had never seen such a gay young murderer.

He acknowledged at once to the Chief that Madame X, whom he considered mentally weak, had told him one night that "her husband, being in the way of their union, must die."

"You want some poison? Well, you shall have it."

Since then he had sent his mistress many packets of poison that she had asked for—but the packets had only contained bi-carbonate of soda!

Inquiry proved that he had spoken the truth.

The scene that followed was high comedy. When her lover confessed in front of her what he had done, the woman said at first in a grave and sad voice: "You are lying, Léon. Confess! I would rather be in prison than endure this shame!"

The lover having reasserted his statement, she leapt up and cried out: "Wretch! Coward! I believed in your love! You have mocked me, but I hope you will go to prison."

Then turning towards the judge she cried: "If only there were a dungeon so deep there that he could never get out of it!"