

The Countess of Saint Geran eBook

The Countess of Saint Geran by Alexandre Dumas, père

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THE COUNTESS DE SAINT-GERAN—1639

About the end of the year 1639, a troop of horsemen arrived, towards midday, in a little village at the northern extremity of the province of Auvergne, from the direction of Paris. The country folk assembled at the noise, and found it to proceed from the provost of the mounted police and his men. The heat was excessive, the horses were bathed in sweat, the horsemen covered with dust, and the party seemed on its return from an important expedition. A man left the escort, and asked an old woman who was spinning at her door if there was not an inn in the place. The woman and her children showed him a bush hanging over a door at the end of the only street in the village, and the escort recommenced its march at a walk. There was noticed, among the mounted men, a young man of distinguished appearance and richly dressed, who appeared to be a prisoner. This discovery redoubled the curiosity of the villagers, who followed the cavalcade as far as the door of the wine-shop. The host came out, cap in hand, and the provost enquired of him with a swaggering air if his pothouse was large enough to accommodate his troop, men and horses. The host replied that he had the best wine in the country to give to the king's servants, and that it would be easy to collect in the neighbourhood litter and forage enough for their horses. The provost listened contemptuously to these fine promises, gave the necessary orders as to what was to be done, and slid off his horse, uttering an oath proceeding from heat and fatigue. The horsemen clustered round the young man: one held his stirrup, and the provost deferentially gave way to him to enter the inn first. No, more doubt could be entertained that he was a prisoner of importance, and all kinds of conjectures were made. The men maintained that he must be charged with a great crime, otherwise a young nobleman of his rank would never have been arrested; the women argued, on the contrary, that it was impossible for such a pretty youth not to be innocent.

Inside the inn all was bustle: the serving-lads ran from cellar to garret; the host swore and despatched his servant-girls to the neighbours, and the hostess scolded her daughter, flattening her nose against the panes of a downstairs window to admire the handsome youth.

There were two tables in the principal eating-room. The provost took possession of one, leaving the other to the soldiers, who went in turn to tether their horses under a shed in the back yard; then he pointed to a stool for the prisoner, and seated himself opposite to him, rapping the table with his thick cane.

"Ouf!" he cried, with a fresh groan of weariness, "I heartily beg your pardon, marquis, for the bad wine I am giving you!"

The young man smiled gaily.



“The wine is all very well, monsieur provost,” said he, “but I cannot conceal from you that however agreeable your company is to me, this halt is very inconvenient; I am in a hurry to get through my ridiculous situation, and I should have liked to arrive in time to stop this affair at once.”



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The girl of the house was standing before the table with a pewter pot which she had just brought, and at these words she raised her eyes on the prisoner, with a reassured look which seemed to say, "I was sure that he was innocent."

"But," continued the marquis, carrying the glass to his lips, "this wine is not so bad as you say, monsieur provost."

Then turning to the girl, who was eyeing his gloves and his ruff—

"To your health, pretty child."

"Then," said the provost, amazed at this free and easy air, "perhaps I shall have to beg you to excuse your sleeping quarters."

"What!" exclaimed the marquis, "do we sleep here?"

"My lord;" said the provost, "we have sixteen long leagues to make, our horses are done up, and so far as I am concerned I declare that I am no better than my horse."

The marquis knocked on the table, and gave every indication of being greatly annoyed. The provost meanwhile puffed and blowed, stretched out his big boots, and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He was a portly man, with a puffy face, whom fatigue rendered singularly uncomfortable.

"Marquis," said he, "although your company, which affords me the opportunity of showing you some attention, is very precious to me, you cannot doubt that I had much rather enjoy it on another footing. If it be within your power, as you say, to release yourself from the hands of justice, the sooner you do so the better I shall be pleased. But I beg you to consider the state we are in. For my part, I am unfit to keep the saddle another hour, and are you not yourself knocked up by this forced march in the great heat?"

"True, so I am," said the marquis, letting his arms fall by his side.

"Well, then, let us rest here, sup here, if we can, and we will start quite fit in the cool of the morning."

"Agreed," replied the marquis; "but then let us pass the time in a becoming manner. I have two pistoles left, let them be given to these good fellows to drink. It is only fair that I should treat them, seeing that I am the cause of giving them so much trouble."

He threw two pieces of money on the table of the soldiers, who cried in chorus, "Long live M. the marquis!" The provost rose, went to post sentinels, and then repaired to the kitchen, where he ordered the best supper that could be got. The men pulled out dice and began to drink and play. The marquis hummed an air in the middle of the room,



twirled his moustache, turning on his heel and looking cautiously around; then he gently drew a purse from his trousers pocket, and as the daughter of the house was coming and going, he threw his arms round her neck as if to kiss her, and whispered, slipping ten Louis into her hand—

“The key of the front door in my room, and a quart of liquor to the sentinels, and you save my life.”

The girl went backwards nearly to the door, and returning with an expressive look, made an affirmative sign with her hand. The provost returned, and two hours later supper was served. He ate and drank like a man more at home at table than in the saddle. The marquis plied him with bumpers, and sleepiness, added to the fumes of a very heady wine, caused him to repeat over and over again—



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“Confound it all, marquis, I can’t believe you are such a blackguard as they say you are; you seem to me a jolly good sort.”

The marquis thought he was ready to fall under the table, and was beginning to open negotiations with the daughter of the house, when, to his great disappointment, bedtime having come, the provoking provost called his sergeant, gave him instructions in an undertone, and announced that he should have the honour of conducting M. the marquis to bed, and that he should not go to bed himself before performing this duty. In fact, he posted three of his men, with torches, escorted the prisoner to his room, and left him with many profound bows.

The marquis threw himself on his bed without pulling off his boots, listening to a clock which struck nine. He heard the men come and go in the stables and in the yard.

An hour later, everybody being tired, all was perfectly still. The prisoner then rose softly, and felt about on tiptoe on the chimneypiece, on the furniture, and even in his clothes, for the key which he hoped to find. He could not find it. He could not be mistaken, nevertheless, in the tender interest of the young girl, and he could not believe that she was deceiving him. The marquis’s room had a window which opened upon the street, and a door which gave access to a shabby gallery which did duty for a balcony, whence a staircase ascended to the principal rooms of the house. This gallery hung over the courtyard, being as high above it as the window was from the street. The marquis had only to jump over one side or the other: he hesitated for some time, and just as he was deciding to leap into the street, at the risk of breaking his neck, two taps were struck on the door. He jumped for joy, saying to himself as he opened, “I am saved!” A kind of shadow glided into the room; the young girl trembled from head to foot, and could not say a word. The marquis reassured her with all sorts of caresses.

“Ah, sir,” said she, “I am dead if we are surprised.”

“Yes,” said the marquis, “but your fortune is made if you get me out of here.”

“God is my witness that I would with all my soul, but I have such a bad piece of news
_____”

She stopped, suffocated with varying emotions. The poor girl had come barefooted, for fear of making a noise, and appeared to be shivering.

“What is the matter?” impatiently asked the marquis.

“Before going to bed,” she continued, “M. the provost has required from my father all the keys of the house, and has made him take a great oath that there are no more. My father has given him all: besides, there is a sentinel at every door; but they are very



tired; I have heard them muttering and grumbling, and I have given them more wine than you told me.”

“They will sleep,” said the marquis, nowise discouraged, “and they have already shown great respect to my rank in not nailing me up in this room.”



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“There is a small kitchen garden,” continued the girl, “on the side of the fields, fenced in only by a loose hurdle, but——”

“Where is my horse?”

“No doubt in the shed with the rest.”

“I will jump into the yard.”

“You will be killed.”

“So much the better!”

“Ah monsieur marquis, what have you done?” said the young girl with grief.

“Some foolish things! nothing worth mentioning; but my head and my honour are at stake. Let us lose no time; I have made up my mind.”

“Stay,” replied the girl, grasping his arm; “at the left-hand corner of the yard there is a large heap of straw, the gallery hangs just over it——”

“Bravo! I shall make less noise, and do myself less mischief.” He made a step towards the door; the girl, hardly knowing what she was doing, tried to detain him; but he got loose from her and opened it. The moon was shining brightly into the yard; he heard no sound. He proceeded to the end of the wooden rail, and perceived the dungheap, which rose to a good height: the girl made the sign of the cross. The marquis listened once again, heard nothing, and mounted the rail. He was about to jump down, when by wonderful luck he heard murmurings from a deep voice. This proceeded from one of two horsemen, who were recommencing their conversation and passing between them a pint of wine. The marquis crept back to his door, holding his breath: the girl was awaiting him on the threshold.

“I told you it was not yet time,” said she.

“Have you never a knife,” said the marquis, “to cut those rascals’ throats with?”

“Wait, I entreat you, one hour, one hour only,” murmured the young girl; “in an hour they will all be asleep.”

The girl’s voice was so sweet, the arms which she stretched towards him were full of such gentle entreaty, that the marquis waited, and at the end of an hour it was the young girl’s turn to tell him to start.

The marquis for the last time pressed with his mouth those lips but lately so innocent, then he half opened the door, and heard nothing this time but dogs barking far away in



an otherwise silent country. He leaned over the balustrade, and saw very plainly a soldier lying prone on the straw.

“If they were to awake?” murmured the young girl in accents of anguish.

“They will not take me alive, be assured,” said the marquis.

“Adieu, then,” replied she, sobbing; “may Heaven preserve you!”

He bestrode the balustrade, spread himself out upon it, and fell heavily on the dungheap. The young girl saw him run to the shed, hastily detach a horse, pass behind the stable wall, spur his horse in both flanks, tear across the kitchen garden, drive his horse against the hurdle, knock it down, clear it, and reach the highroad across the fields.



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The poor girl remained at the end of the gallery, fixing her eyes on the sleeping sentry, and ready to disappear at the slightest movement. The noise made by spurs on the pavement and by the horse at the end of the courtyard had half awakened him. He rose, and suspecting some surprise, ran to the shed. His horse was no longer there; the marquis, in his haste to escape, had taken the first which came to hand, and this was the soldier's. Then the soldier gave the alarm; his comrades woke up. They ran to the prisoner's room, and found it empty. The provost came from his bed in a dazed condition. The prisoner had escaped.

Then the young girl, pretending to have been roused by the noise, hindered the preparations by mislaying the saddlery, impeding the horsemen instead of helping them; nevertheless, after a quarter of an hour, all the party were galloping along the road. The provost swore like a pagan. The best horses led the way, and the sentinel, who rode the marquis's, and who had a greater interest in catching the prisoner, far outstripped his companions; he was followed by the sergeant, equally well mounted, and as the broken fence showed the line he had taken, after some minutes they were in view of him, but at a great distance. However, the marquis was losing ground; the horse he had taken was the worst in the troop, and he had pressed it as hard as it could go. Turning in the saddle, he saw the soldiers half a musket-shot off; he urged his horse more and more, tearing his sides with his spurs; but shortly the beast, completely winded, foundered; the marquis rolled with it in the dust, but when rolling over he caught hold of the holsters, which he found to contain pistols; he lay flat by the side of the horse, as if he had fainted, with a pistol at full cock in his hand. The sentinel, mounted on a valuable horse, and more than two hundred yards ahead of his serafile, came up to him. In a moment the marquis, jumping up before he had time to resist him, shot him through the head; the horseman fell, the marquis jumped up in his place without even setting foot in the stirrup, started off at a gallop, and went away like the wind, leaving fifty yards behind him the non-commissioned officer, dumbfounded with what had just passed before his eyes.

The main body of the escort galloped up, thinking that he was taken; and the provost shouted till he was hoarse, "Do not kill him!" But they found only the sergeant, trying to restore life to his man, whose skull was shattered, and who lay dead on the spot.

As for the marquis, he was out of sight; for, fearing a fresh pursuit, he had plunged into the cross roads, along which he rode a good hour longer at full gallop. When he felt pretty sure of having shaken the police off his track, and that their bad horses could not overtake him, he determined to slacken to recruit his horse; he was walking him along a hollow lane, when he saw a peasant approaching; he asked him the

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road to the Bourbonnais, and flung him a crown. The man took the crown and pointed out the road, but he seemed hardly to know what he was saying, and stared at the marquis in a strange manner. The marquis shouted to him to get out of the way; but the peasant remained planted on the roadside without stirring an inch. The marquis advanced with threatening looks, and asked how he dared to stare at him like that.

“The reason is,” said the peasant, “that you have——”, and he pointed to his shoulder and his ruff.

The marquis glanced at his dress, and saw that his coat was dabbled in blood, which, added to the disorder of his clothes and the dust with which he was covered, gave him a most suspicious aspect.

“I know,” said he. “I and my servant have been separated in a scuffle with some drunken Germans; it’s only a tipsy spree, and whether I have got scratched, or whether in collaring one of these fellows I have drawn some of his blood, it all arises from the row. I don’t think I am hurt a bit.” So saying, he pretended to feel all over his body.

“All the same,” he continued, “I should not be sorry to have a wash; besides, I am dying with thirst and heat, and my horse is in no better case. Do you know where I can rest and refresh myself?”

The peasant offered to guide him to his own house, only a few yards off. His wife and children, who were working, respectfully stood aside, and went to collect what was wanted—wine, water, fruit, and a large piece of black bread. The marquis sponged his coat, drank a glass of wine, and called the people of the house, whom he questioned in an indifferent manner. He once more informed himself of the different roads leading into the Bourbonnais province, where he was going to visit a relative; of the villages, cross roads, distances; and finally he spoke of the country, the harvest, and asked what news there was.

The peasant replied, with regard to this, that it was surprising to hear of disturbances on the highway at this moment, when it was patrolled by detachments of mounted police, who had just made an important capture.

“Who is that?—” asked the marquis.

“Oh,” said the peasant, “a nobleman who has done a lot of mischief in the country.”

“What! a nobleman in the hands of justice?”

“Just so; and he stands a good chance of losing his head.”



“Do they say what he has done?”

“Shocking things; horrid things; everything he shouldn’t do. All the province is exasperated with him.”

“Do you know him?”

“No, but we all have his description.”

As this news was not encouraging, the marquis, after a few more questions, saw to his horse, patted him, threw some more money to the peasant, and disappeared in the direction pointed out.



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The provost proceeded half a league farther along the road; but coming to the conclusion that pursuit was useless, he sent one of his men to headquarters, to warn all the points of exit from the province, and himself returned with his troop to the place whence he had started in the morning. The marquis had relatives in the neighbourhood, and it was quite possible that he might seek shelter with some of them. All the village ran to meet the horsemen, who were obliged to confess that they had been duped by the handsome prisoner. Different views were expressed on the event, which gave rise to much talking. The provost entered the inn, banging his fist on the furniture, and blaming everybody for the misfortune which had happened to him. The daughter of the house, at first a prey to the most grievous anxiety, had great difficulty in concealing her joy.

The provost spread his papers over the table, as if to nurse his ill-temper.

“The biggest rascal in the world!” he cried; “I ought to have suspected him.”

“What a handsome man he was!” said the hostess.

“A consummate rascal! Do you know who he is? He is the Marquis de Saint-Maixent!”

“The Marquis de Saint-Maixent!” all cried with horror.

“Yes, the very man,” replied the provost; “the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, accused, and indeed convicted, of coining and magic.”

“Ah!”

“Convicted of incest.”

“O my God!”

“Convicted of having strangled his wife to marry another, whose husband he had first stabbed.”

“Heaven help us!” All crossed themselves.

“Yes, good people,” continued the furious provost, “this is the nice boy who has just escaped the king’s justice!”

The host’s daughter left the room, for she felt she was going to faint.

“But,” said the host, “is there no hope of catching him again?”

“Not the slightest, if he has taken the road to the Bourbonnais; for I believe there are in that province noblemen belonging to his family who will not allow him to be rearrested.”



The fugitive was, indeed, no other than the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, accused of all the enormous crimes detailed by the provost, who by his audacious flight opened for himself an active part in the strange story which it remains to relate.

It came to pass, a fortnight after these events, that a mounted gentleman rang at the wicket gate of the chateau de Saint-Geran, at the gates of Moulins. It was late, and the servants were in no hurry to open. The stranger again pulled the bell in a masterful manner, and at length perceived a man running from the bottom of the avenue. The servant peered through the wicket, and making out in the twilight a very ill-appointed traveller, with a crushed hat, dusty clothes, and no sword, asked him what he wanted, receiving a blunt reply that the stranger wished to see the Count de Saint-Geran without any further loss of time. The servant replied that this was impossible; the other got into a passion.



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“Who are you?” asked the man in livery.

“You are a very ceremonious fellow!” cried the horseman. “Go and tell M. de Saint-Geran that his relative, the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, wishes to see him at once.”

The servant made humble apologies, and opened the wicket gate. He then walked before the marquis, called other servants, who came to help him to dismount, and ran to give his name in the count’s apartments. The latter was about to sit down to supper when his relative was announced; he immediately went to receive the marquis, embraced him again and again, and gave him the most friendly and gracious reception possible. He wished then to take him into the dining-room to present him to all the family; but the marquis called his attention to the disorder of his dress, and begged for a few minutes’ conversation. The count took him into his dressing-room, and had him dressed from head to foot in his own clothes, whilst they talked. The marquis then narrated a made-up story to M. de Saint-Geran relative to the accusation brought against him. This greatly impressed his relative, and gave him a secure footing in the chateau. When he had finished dressing, he followed the count, who presented him to the countess and the rest of the family.

It will now be in place to state who the inmates of the chateau were, and to relate some previous occurrences to explain subsequent ones.

The Marshal de Saint-Geran, of the illustrious house of Guiche, and governor of the Bourbonnais, had married, for his first wife, Anne de Tournon, by whom he had one son, Claude de la Guiche, and one daughter, who married the Marquis de Bouille. His wife dying, he married again with Suzanne des Epauies, who had also been previously married, being the widow of the Count de Longaunay, by whom she had Suzanne de Longaunay.

The marshal and his wife, Suzanne des Epauies, for the mutual benefit of their children by first nuptials, determined to marry them, thus sealing their own union with a double tie. Claude de Guiche, the marshal’s son, married Suzanne de Longaunay.

This alliance was much to the distaste of the Marchioness de Bouille, the marshal’s daughter, who found herself separated from her stepmother, and married to a man who, it was said, gave her great cause for complaint, the greatest being his threescore years and ten.

The contract of marriage between Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay was executed at Rouen on the 17th of February 1619; but the tender age of the bridegroom, who was then but eighteen, was the cause of his taking a tour in Italy, whence he returned after two years. The marriage was a very happy one but for one circumstance—it produced no issue. The countess could not endure a barrenness



which threatened the end of a great name, the extinction of a noble race. She made vows, pilgrimages; she consulted doctors and quacks; but to no purpose.

The Marshal de Saint-Geran died on the 10th of December 1632, having the mortification of having seen no descending issue from the marriage of his son. The latter, now Count de Saint-Geran, succeeded his father in the government of the Bourbonnais, and was named Chevalier of the King's Orders.



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Meanwhile the Marchioness de Bouille quarrelled with her old husband the marquis, separated from him after a scandalous divorce, and came to live at the chateau of Saint-Geran, quite at ease as to her brother's marriage, seeing that in default of heirs all his property would revert to her.

Such was the state of affairs when the Marquis de Saint-Maixent arrived at the chateau. He was young, handsome, very cunning, and very successful with women; he even made a conquest of the dowager Countess de Saint-Geran, who lived there with her children. He soon plainly saw that he might easily enter into the most intimate relations with the Marchioness de Bouille.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent's own fortune was much impaired by his extravagance and by the exactions of the law, or rather, in plain words, he had lost it all. The marchioness was heiress presumptive to the count: he calculated that she would soon lose her own husband; in any case, the life of a septuagenarian did not much trouble a man like the marquis; he could then prevail upon the marchioness to marry him, thus giving him the command of the finest fortune in the province.

He set to work to pay his court to her, especially avoiding anything that could excite the slightest suspicion. It was, however, difficult to get on good terms with the marchioness without showing outsiders what was going on. But the marchioness, already prepossessed by the agreeable exterior of M. de Saint-Maixent, soon fell into his toils, and the unhappiness of her marriage, with the annoyances incidental to a scandalous case in the courts, left her powerless to resist his schemes. Nevertheless, they had but few opportunities of seeing one another alone: the countess innocently took a part in all their conversations; the count often came to take the marquis out hunting; the days passed in family pursuits. M. de Saint-Maixent had not so far had an opportunity of saying what a discreet woman ought to pretend not to hear; this intrigue, notwithstanding the marquis's impatience, dragged terribly.

The countess, as has been stated, had for twenty years never ceased to hope that her prayers would procure for her the grace of bearing a son to her husband. Out of sheer weariness she had given herself up to all kinds of charlatans, who at that period were well received by people of rank. On one occasion she brought from Italy a sort of astrologer, who as nearly as possible poisoned her with a horrible nostrum, and was sent back to his own country in a hurry, thanking his stars for having escaped so cheaply. This procured Madame de Saint-Geran a severe reprimand from her confessor; and, as time went on, she gradually accustomed herself to the painful conclusion that she would die childless, and cast herself into the arms of religion. The count, whose tenderness for her never failed, yet clung to the hope of an heir, and made his Will with this in view. The marchioness's hopes had become certainties, and M. de Saint-Maixent, perfectly tranquil on this head, thought only of forwarding his suit with Madame-de Bouille, when, at the end of the month of November 1640, the Count de Saint-Geran was obliged to repair to Paris in great haste on pressing duty.



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The countess, who could not bear to be separated from her husband, took the family advice as to accompanying him. The marquis, delighted at an opportunity which left him almost alone in the chateau with Madame de Bouille, painted the journey to Paris in the most attractive colours, and said all he could to decide her to go. The marchioness, for her part, worked very quietly to the same end; it was more than was needed. It was settled that the countess should go with M. de Saint-Geran. She soon made her preparations, and a few days later they set off on the journey together.

The marquis had no fears about declaring his passion; the conquest of Madame de Bouille gave him no trouble; he affected the most violent love, and she responded in the same terms. All their time was spent in excursions and walks from which the servants were excluded; the lovers, always together, passed whole days in some retired part of the park, or shut up in their apartments. It was impossible for these circumstances not to cause gossip among an army of servants, against whom they had to keep incessantly on their guard; and this naturally happened.

The marchioness soon found herself obliged to make confidantes of the sisters Quinet, her maids; she had no difficulty in gaining their support, for the girls were greatly attached to her. This was the first step of shame for Madame de Bouille, and the first step of corruption for herself and her paramour, who soon found themselves entangled in the blackest of plots. Moreover, there was at the chateau de Saint-Geran a tall, spare, yellow, stupid man, just intelligent enough to perform, if not to conceive, a bad action, who was placed in authority over the domestics; he was a common peasant whom the old marshal had deigned to notice, and whom the count had by degrees promoted to the service of major-domo on account of his long service in the house, and because he had seen him there since he himself was a child; he would not take him away as body servant, fearing that his notions of service would not do for Paris, and left him to the superintendence of the household. The marquis had a quiet talk with this man, took his measure, warped his mind as he wished, gave him some money, and acquired him body and soul. These different agents undertook to stop the chatter of the servants' hall, and thenceforward the lovers could enjoy free intercourse.

One evening, as the Marquis de Saint-Maixent was at supper in company with the marchioness, a loud knocking was heard at the gate of the chateau, to which they paid no great attention. This was followed by the appearance of a courier who had come post haste from Paris; he entered the courtyard with a letter from the Count de Saint-Geran for M. the marquis; he was announced and introduced, followed by nearly all the household. The marquis asked the meaning of all this, and dismissed all the following with a wave of the hand; but the courier explained that

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M. the count desired that the letter in his hands should be read before everyone. The marquis opened it without replying, glanced over it, and read it out loud without the slightest alteration: the count announced to his good relations and to all his household that the countess had indicated positive symptoms of pregnancy; that hardly had she arrived in Paris when she suffered from fainting fits, nausea, retching, that she bore with joy these premonitory indications, which were no longer a matter of doubt to the physicians, nor to anyone; that for his part he was overwhelmed with joy at this event, which was the crowning stroke to all his wishes; that he desired the chateau to share his satisfaction by indulging in all kinds of gaieties; and that so far as other matters were concerned they could remain as they were till the return of himself and the countess, which the letter would precede only a few days, as he was going to transport her in a litter for greater safety. Then followed the specification of certain sums of money to be distributed among the servants.

The servants uttered cries of joy; the marquis and marchioness exchanged a look, but a very troublous one; they, however, restrained themselves so far as to simulate a great satisfaction, and the marquis brought himself to congratulate the servants on their attachment to their master and mistress. After this they were left alone, looking very serious, while crackers exploded and violins resounded under the windows. For some time they preserved silence, the first thought which occurred to both being that the count and countess had allowed themselves to be deceived by trifling symptoms, that people had wished to flatter their hopes, that it was impossible for a constitution to change so suddenly after twenty years, and that it was a case of simulative pregnancy. This opinion gaining strength in their minds made them somewhat calmer.

The next day they took a walk side by side in a solitary path in the park and discussed the chances of their situation. M. de Saint-Maixent brought before the marchioness the enormous injury which this event would bring them. He then said that even supposing the news to be true, there were many rocks ahead to be weathered before the succession could be pronounced secure.

“The child may die,” he said at last.

And he uttered some sinister expressions on the slight damage caused by the loss of a puny creature without mind, interest, or consequence; nothing, he said, but a bit of ill-organised matter, which only came into the world to ruin so considerable a person as the marchioness.

“But what is the use of tormenting ourselves?” he went on impatiently; “the countess is not pregnant, nor can she be.”

A gardener working near them overheard this part of the conversation, but as they walked away from him he could not hear any more.



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A few days later, some outriders, sent before him by the count, entered the chateau, saying that their master and mistress were close at hand. In fact, they were promptly followed by brakes and travelling-carriages, and at length the countess's litter was descried, which M. de Saint-Geran, on horse back, had never lost sight of during the journey. It was a triumphal reception: all the peasants had left their work, and filled the air with shouts of welcome; the servants ran to meet their mistress; the ancient retainers wept for joy at seeing the count so happy and in the hope that his noble qualities might be perpetuated in his heir. The marquis and Madame de Bouille did their best to tune up to the pitch of this hilarity.

The dowager countess, who had arrived at the chateau the same day, unable to convince herself as to this news, had the pleasure of satisfying herself respecting it. The count and countess were much beloved in the Bourbonnais province; this event caused therein a general satisfaction, particularly in the numerous houses attached to them by consanguinity. Within a few days of their return, more than twenty ladies of quality flocked to visit them in great haste, to show the great interest they took in this pregnancy. All these ladies, on one occasion or another, convinced themselves as to its genuineness, and many of them, carrying the subject still further, in a joking manner which pleased the countess, dubbed themselves prophetesses, and predicted the birth of a boy. The usual symptoms incidental to the situation left no room for doubt: the country physicians were all agreed. The count kept one of these physicians in the chateau for two months, and spoke to the Marquis of Saint-Maixent of his intention of procuring a good mid-wife, on the same terms. Finally, the dowager countess, who was to be sponsor, ordered at a great expense a magnificent store of baby linen, which she desired to present at the birth.

The marchioness devoured her rage, and among the persons who went beside themselves with joy not one remarked the disappointment which overspread her soul. Every day she saw the marquis, who did all he could to increase her regret, and incessantly stirred up her ill-humour by repeating that the count and countess were triumphing over her misfortune, and insinuating that they were importing a supposititious child to disinherit her. As usual both in private and political affairs, he began by corrupting the marchioness's religious views, to pervert her into crime. The marquis was one of those libertines so rare at that time, a period less unhappy than is generally believed, who made science dependent upon atheism. It is remarkable that great criminals of this epoch, Sainte-Croix for instance, and Exili, the gloomy poisoner, were the first unbelievers, and that they preceded the learned of the following age both in philosophy and in the exclusive study of physical science, in which they included that of poisons. Passion, interest, hatred fought the marquis's battles in the heart of Madame de Bouille; she readily lent herself to everything that M. de Saint-Maixent wished.



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The Marquis de Saint-Maixent had a confidential servant, cunning, insolent, resourceful, whom he had brought from his estates, a servant well suited to such a master, whom he sent on errands frequently into the neighbourhood of Saint-Geran.

One evening, as the marquis was about to go to bed, this man, returning from one of his expeditions, entered his room, where he remained for a long time, telling him that he had at length found what he wanted, and giving him a small piece of paper which contained several names of places and persons.

Next morning, at daybreak, the marquis caused two of his horses to be saddled, pretended that he was summoned home on pressing business, foresaw that he should be absent for three or four days, made his excuses to the count, and set off at full gallop, followed by his servant.

They slept that night at an inn on the road to Auvergne, to put off the scent any persons who might recognise them; then, following cross-country roads, they arrived after two days at a large hamlet, which they had seemed to have passed far to their left.

In this hamlet was a woman who practised the avocation of midwife, and was known as such in the neighbourhood, but who had, it was said, mysterious and infamous secrets for those who paid her well. Further, she drew a good income from the influence which her art gave her over credulous people. It was all in her line to cure the king's evil, compound philtres and love potions; she was useful in a variety of ways to girls who could afford to pay her; she was a lovers' go-between, and even practised sorcery for country folk. She played her cards so well, that the only persons privy to her misdeeds were unfortunate creatures who had as strong an interest as herself in keeping them profoundly secret; and as her terms were very high, she lived comfortably enough in a house her own property, and entirely alone, for greater security. In a general way, she was considered skilful in her ostensible profession, and was held in estimation by many persons of rank. This woman's name was Louise Goillard.

Alone one evening after curfew, she heard a loud knocking at the door of her house. Accustomed to receive visits at all hours, she took her lamp without hesitation, and opened the door. An armed man, apparently much agitated, entered the room. Louise Goillard, in a great fright, fell into a chair; this man was the Marquis de Saint-Maixent.

"Calm yourself, good woman," said the stranger, panting and stammering; "be calm, I beg; for it is I, not you, who have any cause for emotion. I am not a brigand, and far from your having anything to fear, it is I, on the contrary, who am come to beg for your assistance."

He threw his cloak into a corner, unbuckled his waistbelt, and laid aside his sword. Then falling into a chair, he said—



“First of all, let me rest a little.”

The marquis wore a travelling-dress; but although he had not stated his name, Louise Goillard saw at a glance that he was a very different person from what she had thought, and that, on the contrary, he was some fine gentleman who had come on his love affairs.



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"I beg you to excuse," said she, "a fear which is insulting to you. You came in so hurriedly that I had not time to see whom I was talking to. My house is rather lonely; I am alone; ill-disposed people might easily take advantage of these circumstances to plunder a poor woman who has little enough to lose. The times are so bad! You seem tired. Will you inhale some essence?"

"Give me only a glass of water."

Louise Goillard went into the adjoining room, and returned with an ewer. The marquis affected to rinse his lips, and said—

"I come from a great distance on a most important matter. Be assured that I shall be properly grateful for your services."

He felt in his pocket, and pulled out a purse, which he rolled between his fingers.

"In the first place; you must swear to the greatest secrecy."

"There is no need of that with us," said Louise Goillard; "that is the first condition of our craft."

"I must have more express guarantees, and your oath that you will reveal to no one in the world what I am going to confide to you."

"I give you my word, then, since you demand it; but I repeat that this is superfluous; you do not know me."

"Consider that this is a most serious matter, that I am as it were placing my head in your hands, and that I would lose my life a thousand times rather than see this mystery unravelled."

"Consider also," bluntly replied the midwife, "that we ourselves are primarily interested in all the secrets entrusted to us; that an indiscretion would destroy all confidence in us, and that there are even cases——You may speak."

When the marquis had reassured her as to himself by this preface, he continued: "I know that you are a very able woman."

"I could indeed wish to be one, to serve you."

"That you have pushed the study of your art to its utmost limits."

"I fear they have been flattering your humble servant."

"And that your studies have enabled you to predict the future."



“That is all nonsense.”

“It is true; I have been told so.”

“You have been imposed upon.”

“What is the use of denying it and refusing to do me a service?”

Louise Goillard defended herself long: she could not understand a man of this quality believing in fortune-telling, which she practised only with low-class people and rich farmers; but the marquis appeared so earnest that she knew not what to think.

“Listen,” said he, “it is no use dissembling with me, I know all. Be easy; we are playing a game in which you are laying one against a thousand; moreover, here is something on account to compensate you for the trouble I am giving.”

He laid a pile of gold on the table. The matron weakly owned that she had sometimes attempted astrological combinations which were not always fortunate, and that she had been only induced to do so by the fascination of the phenomena of science. The secret of her guilty practices was drawn from her at the very outset of her defence.



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“That being so,” replied the marquis, “you must be already aware of the situation in which I find myself; you must know that, hurried away by a blind and ardent passion, I have betrayed the confidence of an old lady and violated the laws of hospitality by seducing her daughter in her own house; that matters have come to a crisis, and that this noble damsel, whom I love to distraction, being pregnant, is on the point of losing her life and honour by the discovery of her fault, which is mine.”

The matron replied that nothing could be ascertained about a person except from private questions; and to further impose upon the marquis, she fetched a kind of box marked with figures and strange emblems. Opening this, and putting together certain figures which it contained, she declared that what the marquis had told her was true, and that his situation was a most melancholy one. She added, in order to frighten him, that he was threatened by still more serious misfortunes than those which had already overtaken him, but that it was easy to anticipate and obviate these mischances by new consultations.

“Madame,” replied the marquis, “I fear only one thing in the world, the dishonour of the woman I love. Is there no method of remedying the usual embarrassment of a birth?”

“I know of none,” said the matron.

“The young lady has succeeded in concealing her condition; it would be easy for her confinement to take place privately.”

“She has already risked her life; and I cannot consent to be mixed up in this affair, for fear of the consequences.”

“Could not, for instance,” said the marquis, “a confinement be effected without pain?”

“I don’t know about that, but this I do know, that I shall take very good care not to practise any method contrary to the laws of nature.”

“You are deceiving me: you are acquainted with this method, you have already practised it upon a certain person whom I could name to you.”

“Who has dared to calumniate me thus? I operate only after the decision of the Faculty. God forbid that I should be stoned by all the physicians, and perhaps expelled from France!”

“Will you then let me die of despair? If I were capable of making a bad use of your secrets, I could have done so long ago, for I know them. In Heaven’s name, do not dissimulate any longer, and tell me how it is possible to stifle the pangs of labour. Do you want more gold? Here it is.” And he threw more Louis on the table.



“Stay,” said the matron: “there is perhaps a method which I think I have discovered, and which I have never employed, but I believe it efficacious.”

“But if you have never employed it, it may be dangerous, and risk the life of the lady whom I love.”

“When I say never, I mean that I have tried it once, and most successfully. Be at your ease.”

“Ah!” cried the marquis, “you have earned my everlasting gratitude! But,” continued he, “if we could anticipate the confinement itself, and remove from henceforth the symptoms of pregnancy?”



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“Oh, sir, that is a great crime you speak of!”

“Alas!” continued the marquis, as if speaking to himself in a fit of intense grief; “I had rather lose a dear child, the pledge of our love, than bring into the world an unhappy creature which might possibly cause its mother’s death.”

“I pray you, sir, let no more be said on the subject; it is a horrible crime even to think of such a thing.”

“But what is to be done? Is it better to destroy two persons and perhaps kill a whole family with despair? Oh, madame, I entreat you, extricate us from this extremity!”

The marquis buried his face in his hands, and sobbed as though he were weeping copiously.

“Your despair grievously affects me,” said the matron; “but consider that for a woman of my calling it is a capital offence.”

“What are you talking about? Do not our mystery, our safety, and our credit come in first?”

“They can never get at you till after the death and dishonour of all that is dear to me in the world.”

“I might then, perhaps. But in this case you must insure me against legal complications, fines, and procure me a safe exit from the kingdom.”

“Ah! that is my affair. Take my whole fortune! Take my life!”

And he threw the whole purse on the table.

“In this case, and solely to extricate you from the extreme danger in which I see you placed, I consent to give you a decoction, and certain instructions, which will instantly relieve the lady from her burden. She must use the greatest precaution, and study to carry out exactly what I am about to tell you. My God! only such desperate occasions as this one could induce me to—— Here——”

She took a flask from the bottom of a cupboard, and continued—

“Here is a liquor which never fails.”

“Oh, madame, you save my honour, which is dearer to me than life! But this is not enough: tell me what use I am to make of this liquor, and in what doses I am to administer it.”



“The patient,” replied the midwife, “must take one spoonful the first day; the second day two; the third——”

“You will obey me to the minutest particular?”

“I swear it.”

“Let us start, then.”

She asked but for time to pack a little linen, put things in order, then fastened her doors, and left the house with the marquis. A quarter of an hour later they were galloping through the night, without her knowing where the marquis was taking her.

The marquis reappeared three days later at the chateau, finding the count’s family as he had left them—that is to say, intoxicated with hope, and counting the weeks, days, and hours before the accouchement of the countess. He excused his hurried departure on the ground of the importance of the business which had summoned him away; and speaking of his journey at table, he related a story current in the country whence he came, of a surprising event which he had

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all but witnessed. It was the case of a lady of quality who suddenly found herself in the most dangerous pangs of labour. All the skill of the physicians who had been summoned proved futile; the lady was at the point of death; at last, in sheer despair, they summoned a midwife of great repute among the peasantry, but whose practice did not include the gentry. From the first treatment of this woman, who appeared modest and diffident to a degree, the pains ceased as if by enchantment; the patient fell into an indefinable calm languor, and after some hours was delivered of a beautiful infant; but after this was attacked by a violent fever which brought her to death's door. They then again had recourse to the doctors, notwithstanding the opposition of the master of the house, who had confidence in the matron. The doctors' treatment only made matters worse. In this extremity they again called in the midwife, and at the end of three weeks the lady was miraculously restored to life, thus, added the marquis, establishing the reputation of the matron, who had sprung into such vogue in the town where she lived and the neighbouring country that nothing else was talked about.

This story made a great impression on the company, on account of the condition of the countess; the dowager added that it was very wrong to ridicule these humble country experts, who often through observation and experience discovered secrets which proud doctors were unable to unravel with all their studies. Hereupon the count cried out that this midwife must be sent for, as she was just the kind of woman they wanted. After this other matters were talked about, the marquis changing the conversation; he had gained his point in quietly introducing the thin end of the wedge of his design.

After dinner, the company walked on the terrace. The countess dowager not being able to walk much on account of her advanced age, the countess and Madame de Bouille took chairs beside her. The count walked up and down with M. de Saint-Maixent. The marquis naturally asked how things had been going on during his absence, and if Madame de Saint-Geran had suffered any inconvenience, for her pregnancy had become the most important affair in the household, and hardly anything else was talked about.

"By the way," said the count, "you were speaking just now of a very skilful midwife; would it not be a good step to summon her?"

"I think," replied the marquis, "that it would be an excellent selection, for I do not suppose there is one in this neighbourhood to compare to her."

"I have a great mind to send for her at once, and to keep her about the countess, whose constitution she will be all the better acquainted with if she studies it beforehand. Do you know where I can send for her?"

"Faith," said the marquis, "she lives in a village, but I don't know which."



“But at least you know her name?”

“I can hardly remember it. Louise Boyard, I think, or Polliard, one or the other.”

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“How! have you not even retained the name?”

“I heard the story, that’s all. Who the deuce can keep a name in his head which he hears in such a chance fashion?”

“But did the condition of the countess never occur to you?”

“It was so far away that I did not suppose you would send such a distance. I thought you were already provided.”

“How can we set about to find her?”

“If that is all, I have a servant who knows people in that part of the country, and who knows how to go about things: if you like, he shall go in quest of her.”

“If I like? This very moment.”

The same evening the servant started on his errand with the count’s instructions, not forgetting those of his master. He went at full speed. It may readily be supposed that he had not far to seek the woman he was to bring back with him; but he purposely kept away for three days, and at the end of this time Louise Goillard was installed in the chateau.

She was a woman of plain and severe exterior, who at once inspired confidence in everyone. The plots of the marquis and Madame de Bouille thus thrived with most baneful success; but an accident happened which threatened to nullify them, and, by causing a great disaster, to prevent a crime.

The countess, passing into her apartments, caught her foot in a carpet, and fell heavily on the floor. At the cries of a footman all the household was astir. The countess was carried to bed; the most intense alarm prevailed; but no bad consequences followed this accident, which produced only a further succession of visits from the neighbouring gentry. This happened about the end of the seventh month.

At length the moment of accouchement came. Everything had long before been arranged for the delivery, and nothing remained to be done. The marquis had employed all this time in strengthening Madame de Bouille against her scruples. He often saw Louise Goillard in private, and gave her his instructions; but he perceived that the corruption of Baulieu, the house steward, was an essential factor. Baulieu was already half gained over by the interviews of the year preceding; a large sum of ready money and many promises did the rest. This wretch was not ashamed to join a plot against a master to whom he owed everything. The marchioness for her part, and always under the instigation of M. de Saint-Maixent, secured matters all round by bringing into the abominable plot the Quinet girls, her maids; so that there was nothing but treason and



conspiracy against this worthy family among their upper servants, usually styled confidential. Thus, having prepared matters, the conspirators awaited the event.

On the 16th of August the Countess de Saint-Geran was overtaken by the pangs of labour in the chapel of the chateau, where she was hearing mass. They carried her to her room before mass was over, her women ran around her, and the countess dowager with her own hands arranged on her head a cap of the pattern worn by ladies about to be confined—a cap which is not usually removed till some time later.



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The pains recurred with terrible intensity. The count wept at his wife's cries. Many persons were present. The dowager's two daughters by her second marriage, one of whom, then sixteen years of age, afterwards married the Duke de Ventadour and was a party to the lawsuit, wished to be present at this accouchement, which was to perpetuate by a new scion an illustrious race near extinction. There were also Dame Saligny, sister of the late Marshal Saint-Geran, the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, and the Marchioness de Bouille.

Everything seemed to favour the projects of these last two persons, who took an interest in the event of a very different character from that generally felt. As the pains produced no result, and the accouchement was of the most difficult nature, while the countess was near the last extremity, expresses were sent to all the neighbouring parishes to offer prayers for the mother and the child; the Holy Sacrament was elevated in the churches at Moulins.

The midwife attended to everything herself. She maintained that the countess would be more comfortable if her slightest desires were instantly complied with. The countess herself never spoke a word, only interrupting the gloomy silence by heart-rending cries. All at once, Madame de Bouille, who affected to be bustling about, pointed out that the presence of so many persons was what hindered the countess's accouchement, and, assuming an air of authority justified by fictitious tenderness, said that everyone must retire, leaving the patient in the hands of the persons who were absolutely necessary to her, and that, to remove any possible objections, the countess dowager her mother must set the example. The opportunity was made use of to remove the count from this harrowing spectacle, and everyone followed the countess dowager. Even the countess's own maids were not allowed to remain, being sent on errands which kept them out of the way. This further reason was given, that the eldest being scarcely fifteen, they were too young to be present on such an occasion. The only persons remaining by the bedside were the Marchioness de Bouille, the midwife, and the two Quinet girls; the countess was thus in the hands of her most cruel enemies.

It was seven o'clock in the evening; the labours continued; the elder Quinet girl held the patient by the hand to soothe her. The count and the dowager sent incessantly to know the news. They were told that everything was going on well, and that shortly their wishes would be accomplished; but none of the servants were allowed to enter the room.

Three hours later, the midwife declared that the countess could not hold out any longer unless she got some rest. She made her swallow a liquor which was introduced into her mouth by spoonfuls. The countess fell into so deep a sleep that she seemed to be dead. The younger Quinet girl thought for a moment that they had killed her, and wept in a corner of the room, till Madame de Bouille reassured her.



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During this frightful night a shadowy figure prowled in the corridors, silently patrolled the rooms, and came now and then to the door of the bedroom, where he conferred in a low tone with the midwife and the Marchioness de Bouille. This was the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, who gave his orders, encouraged his people, watched over every point of his plot, himself a prey to the agonies of nervousness which accompany the preparations for a great crime.

The dowager countess, owing to her great age, had been compelled to take some rest. The count sat up, worn out with fatigue, in a downstairs room hard by that in which they were compassing the ruin of all most dear to him in the world.

The countess, in her profound lethargy, gave birth, without being aware of it, to a boy, who thus fell on his entry into the world into the hands of his enemies, his mother powerless to defend him by her cries and tears. The door was half opened, and a man who was waiting outside brought in; this was the major-domo Baulieu.

The midwife, pretending to afford the first necessary cares to the child, had taken it into a corner. Baulieu watched her movements, and springing upon her, pinioned her arms. The wretched woman dug her nails into the child's head. He snatched it from her, but the poor infant for long bore the marks of her claws.

Possibly the Marchioness de Bouille could not nerve herself to the commission of so great a crime; but it seems more probable that the steward prevented the destruction of the child under the orders of M. de Saint-Maixent. The theory is that the marquis, mistrustful of the promise made him by Madame de Bouille to marry him after the death of her husband, desired to keep the child to oblige her to keep her word, under threats of getting him acknowledged, if she proved faithless to him. No other adequate reason can be conjectured to determine a man of his character to take such great care of his victim.

Baulieu swaddled the child immediately, put it in a basket, hid it under his cloak, and went with his prey to find the marquis; they conferred together for some time, after which the house steward passed by a postern gate into the moat, thence to a terrace by which he reached a bridge leading into the park. This park had twelve gates, and he had the keys of all. He mounted a blood horse which he had left waiting behind a wall, and started off at full gallop. The same day he passed through the village of Escherolles, a league distant from Saint-Geran, where he stopped at the house of a nurse, wife of a glove-maker named Claude. This peasant woman gave her breast to the child; but the steward, not daring to stay in a village so near Saint-Geran, crossed the river Allier at the port de la Chaise, and calling at the house of a man named Boucaud, the good wife suckled the child for the second time; he then continued his journey in the direction of Auvergne.



The heat was excessive, his horse was done up, the child seemed uneasy. A carrier's cart passed him going to Riom; it was owned by a certain Paul Boithion of the town of Aigueperce, a common carrier on the road. Baulieu went alongside to put the child in the cart, which he entered himself, carrying the infant on his knees. The horse followed, fastened by the bridle to the back of the cart.



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In the conversation which he held with this man, Baulieu said that he should not take so much care of the child did it not belong to the most noble house in the Bourbonnais. They reached the village of Che at midday. The mistress of the house where he put up, who was nursing an infant, consented to give some of her milk to the child. The poor creature was covered with blood; she warmed some water, stripped off its swaddling linen, washed it from head to foot, and swathed it up again more neatly.

The carrier then took them to Riom. When they got there, Baulieu got rid of him by giving a false meeting-place for their departure; left in the direction of the abbey of Lavoine, and reached the village of Descoutoux, in the mountains, between Lavoine and Thiers. The Marchioness de Bouille had a chateau there where she occasionally spent some time.

The child was nursed at Descoutoux by Gabrielle Moini, who was paid a month in advance; but she only kept it a week or so, because they refused to tell her the father and mother and to refer her to a place where she might send reports of her charge. This woman having made these reasons public, no nurse could be found to take charge of the child, which was removed from the village of Descoutoux. The persons who removed it took the highroad to Burgundy, crossing a densely wooded country, and here they lost their way.

The above particulars were subsequently proved by the nurses, the carrier, and others who made legal depositions. They are stated at length here, as they proved very important in the great lawsuit. The compilers of the case, into which we search for information, have however omitted to tell us how the absence of the major-domo was accounted for at the castle; probably the far-sighted marquis had got an excuse ready.

The countess's state of drowsiness continued till daybreak. She woke bathed in blood, completely exhausted, but yet with a sensation of comfort which convinced her that she had been delivered from her burden. Her first words were about her child; she wished to see it, kiss it; she asked where it was. The midwife coolly told her, whilst the girls who were by were filled with amazement at her audacity, that she had not been confined at all. The countess maintained the contrary, and as she grew very excited, the midwife strove to calm her, assuring her that in any case her delivery could not be long protracted, and that, judging from all the indications of the night, she would give birth to a boy. This promise comforted the count and the countess dowager, but failed to satisfy the countess, who insisted that a child had been born.

The same day a scullery-maid met a woman going to the water's edge in the castle moat, with a parcel in her arms. She recognised the midwife, and asked what she was carrying and where she was going so early. The latter replied that she was very inquisitive, and that it was nothing at all; but the girl, laughingly pretending to be angry at this answer, pulled open one of the ends of the parcel before the midwife had time to stop her, and exposed to view some linen soaked in blood.



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“Madame has been confined, then?” she said to the matron.

“No,” replied she briskly, “she has not.”

The girl was unconvinced, and said, “How do you mean that she has not, when madame the marchioness, who was there, says she has?” The matron in great confusion replied, “She must have a very long tongue, if she said so.”

The girl’s evidence was later found most important.

The countess’s uneasiness made her worse the next day. She implored with sighs and tears at least to be told what had become of her child, steadily maintaining that she was not mistaken when she assured them that she had given birth to one. The midwife with great effrontery told her that the new moon was unfavourable to childbirth, and that she must wait for the wane, when it would be easier as matters were already prepared.

Invalids’ fancies do not obtain much credence; still, the persistence of the countess would have convinced everyone in the long run, had not the dowager said that she remembered at the end of the ninth month of one of her own pregnancies she had all the premonitory symptoms of lying in, but they proved false, and in fact the accouchement took place three months later.

This piece of news inspired great confidence. The marquis and Madame de Bouille did all in their power to confirm it, but the countess obstinately refused to listen to it, and her passionate transports of grief gave rise to the greatest anxiety. The midwife, who knew not how to gain time, and was losing all hope in face of the countess’s persistence, was almost frightened out of her wits; she entered into medical details, and finally said that some violent exercise must be taken to induce labour. The countess, still unconvinced, refused to obey this order; but the count, the dowager, and all the family entreated her so earnestly that she gave way.

They put her in a close carriage, and drove her a whole day over ploughed fields, by the roughest and hardest roads. She was so shaken that she lost the power of breathing; it required all the strength of her constitution to support this barbarous treatment in the delicate condition of a lady so recently confined. They put her to bed again after this cruel drive, and seeing that nobody took her view, she threw herself into the arms of Providence, and consoled herself by religion; the midwife administered violent remedies to deprive her of milk; she got over all these attempts to murder her, and slowly got better.

Time, which heals the deepest affliction, gradually soothed that of the countess; her grief nevertheless burst out periodically on the slightest cause; but eventually it died out, till the following events rekindled it.



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There had been in Paris a fencing-master who used to boast that he had a brother in the service of a great house. This fencing-master had married a certain Marie Pigoreau, daughter of an actor. He had recently died in poor circumstances, leaving her a widow with two children. This woman Pigoreau did not enjoy the best of characters, and no one knew how she made a living, when all at once, after some short absences from home and visit from a man who came in the evening, his face muffled in his cloak, she launched out into a more expensive style of living; the neighbours saw in her house costly clothes, fine swaddling-clothes, and at last it became known that she was nursing a strange child.

About the same time it also transpired that she had a deposit of two thousand livres in the hands of a grocer in the quarter, named Raguenet; some days later, as the child's baptism had doubtless been put off for fear of betraying his origin, Pigoreau had him christened at St. Jean en Greve. She did not invite any of the neighbours to the function, and gave parents' names of her own choosing at the church. For godfather she selected the parish sexton, named Paul Marmiou, who gave the child the name of Bernard. La Pigoreau remained in a confessional during the ceremony, and gave the man ten sou. The godmother was Jeanne Chevalier, a poor woman of the parish.

The entry in the register was as follows:—

“On the seventh day of March one thousand six hundred and forty-two was baptized Bernard, son of . . . and . . . his godfather being Paul Marmiou, day labourer and servant of this parish, and his godmother Jeanne Chevalier, widow of Pierre Thibou.”

A few days afterwards la Pigoreau put out the child to nurse in the village of Torcy en Brie, with a woman who had been her godmother, whose husband was called Paillard. She gave out that it was a child of quality which had been entrusted to her, and that she should not hesitate, if such a thing were necessary, to save its life by the loss of one of her own children. The nurse did not keep it long, because she fell ill; la Pigoreau went to fetch the child away, lamenting this accident, and further saying that she regretted it all the more, as the nurse would have earned enough to make her comfortable for the rest of her life. She put the infant out again in the same village, with the widow of a peasant named Marc Peguin. The monthly wage was regularly paid, and the child brought up as one of rank. La Pigoreau further told the woman that it was the son of a great nobleman, and would later make the fortunes of those who served him. An elderly man, whom the people supposed to be the child's father, but who Pigoreau assured them was her brother-in-law, often came to see him.



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When the child was eighteen months old, la Pigoreau took him away and weaned him. Of the two by her husband the elder was called Antoine, the second would have been called Henri if he had lived; but he was born on the 9th of August 1639, after the death of his father, who was killed in June of the same year, and died shortly after his birth. La Pigoreau thought fit to give the name and condition of this second son to the stranger, and thus bury for ever the secret of his birth. With this end in view, she left the quarter where she lived, and removed to conceal herself in another parish where she was not known. The child was brought up under the name and style of Henri, second son of la Pigoreau, till he was two and a half years of age; but at this time, whether she was not engaged to keep it any longer, or whether she had spent the two thousand livres deposited with the grocer Raguenet, and could get no more from the principals, she determined to get rid of it.

Her gossips used to tell this woman that she cared but little for her eldest son, because she was very confident of the second one making his fortune, and that if she were obliged to give up one of them, she had better keep the younger, who was a beautiful boy. To this she would reply that the matter did not depend upon her; that the boy's godfather was an uncle in good circumstances, who would not charge himself with any other child. She often mentioned this uncle, her brother-in-law, she said, who was major-domo in a great house.

One morning, the hall porter at the hotel de Saint-Geran came to Baulieu and told him that a woman carrying a child was asking for him at the wicket gate; this Baulieu was, in fact, the brother of the fencing master, and godfather to Pigoreau's second son. It is now supposed that he was the unknown person who had placed the child of quality with her, and who used to go and see him at his nurse's. La Pigoreau gave him a long account of her situation. The major-domo took the child with some emotion, and told la Pigoreau to wait his answer a short distance off, in a place which he pointed out.

Baulieu's wife made a great outcry at the first proposal of an increase of family; but he succeeded in pacifying her by pointing out the necessities of his sister-in-law, and how easy and inexpensive it was to do this good work in such a house as the count's. He went to his master and mistress to ask permission to bring up this child in their hotel; a kind of feeling entered into the charge he was undertaking which in some measure lessened the weight on his conscience.

The count and countess at first opposed this project; telling him that having already five children he ought not to burden himself with any more, but he petitioned so earnestly that he obtained what he wanted. The countess wished to see it, and as she was about to start for Moulins she ordered it to be put in her women's coach; when it was shown her, she cried out, "What a lovely child!" The boy was fair, with large blue eyes and very regular features. She gave him a hundred caresses, which the child returned very prettily. She at once took a great fancy to him, and said to Baulieu, "I shall not put him in my women's coach; I shall put him in my own."



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After they arrived at the chateau of Saint-Geran, her affection for Henri, the name retained by the child, increased day by day. She often contemplated him with sadness, then embraced him with tenderness, and kept him long on her bosom. The count shared this affection for the supposed nephew of Baulieu, who was adopted, so to speak, and brought up like a child of quality.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent and Madame de Bouille had not married, although the old Marquis de Bouille had long been dead. It appeared that they had given up this scheme. The marchioness no doubt felt scruples about it, and the marquis was deterred from marriage by his profligate habits. It is moreover supposed that other engagements and heavy bribes compensated the loss he derived from the marchioness's breach of faith.

He was a man about town at that period, and was making love to the demoiselle Jacqueline de la Garde; he had succeeded in gaining her affections, and brought matters to such a point that she no longer refused her favours except on the grounds of her pregnancy and the danger of an indiscretion. The marquis then offered to introduce to her a matron who could deliver women without the pangs of labour, and who had a very successful practice. The same Jacqueline de la Garde further gave evidence at the trial that M. de Saint-Maixent had often boasted, as of a scientific intrigue, of having spirited away the son of a governor of a province and grandson of a marshal of France; that he spoke of the Marchioness de Bouille, said that he had made her rich, and that it was to him she owed her great wealth; and further, that one day having taken her to a pretty country seat which belonged to him, she praised its beauty, saying "c'était un beau lieu"; he replied by a pun on a man's name, saying that he knew another Baulieu who had enabled him to make a fortune of five hundred thousand crowns. He also said to Jadelon, sieur de la Barbesange, when posting with him from Paris, that the Countess de Saint-Geran had been delivered of a son who was in his power.

The marquis had not seen Madame de Bouille for a long time; a common danger reunited them. They had both learned with terror the presence of Henri at the hotel de Saint-Geran. They consulted about this; the marquis undertook to cut the danger short. However, he dared put in practice nothing overtly against the child, a matter still more difficult just then, inasmuch as some particulars of his discreditable adventures had leaked out, and the Saint-Geran family received him more than coldly.

Baulieu, who witnessed every day the tenderness of the count and countess for the boy Henri, had been a hundred times on the point of giving himself up and confessing everything. He was torn to pieces with remorse. Remarks escaped him which he thought he might make without ulterior consequences; seeing the lapse of time, but they were noted and commented on. Sometimes he would say that he held in his

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hand the life and honour of Madame the Marchioness de Bouille; sometimes that the count and countess had more reasons than they knew of for loving Henri. One day he put a case of conscience to a confessor, thus: "Whether a man who had been concerned in the abduction of a child could not satisfy his conscience by restoring him to his father and mother without telling them who he was?" What answer the confessor made is not known, but apparently it was not what the major-domo wanted. He replied to a magistrate of Moulins, who congratulated him on having a nephew whom his masters overburdened with kind treatment, that they ought to love him, since he was nearly related to them.

These remarks were noticed by others than those principally concerned. One day a wine merchant came to propose to Baulieu the purchase of a pipe of Spanish wine, of which he gave him a sample bottle; in the evening he was taken violently ill. They carried him to bed, where he writhed, uttering horrible cries. One sole thought possessed him when his sufferings left him a lucid interval, and in his agony he repeated over and over again that he wished to implore pardon from the count and countess for a great injury which he had done them. The people round about him told him that was a trifle, and that he ought not to let it embitter his last moments, but he begged so piteously that he got them to promise that they should be sent for.

The count thought it was some trifling irregularity, some misappropriation in the house accounts; and fearing to hasten the death of the sufferer by the shame of the confession of a fault, he sent word that he heartily forgave him, that he might die tranquil, and refused to see him. Baulieu expired, taking his secret with him. This happened in 1648.

The child was then seven years old. His charming manners grew with his age, and the count and countess felt their love for him increase. They caused him to be taught dancing and fencing, put him into breeches and hose, and a page's suit of their livery, in which capacity he served them. The marquis turned his attack to this quarter. He was doubtless preparing some plot as criminal as the preceding, when justice overtook him for some other great crimes of which he had been guilty. He was arrested one day in the street when conversing with one of the Saint-Geran footmen, and taken to the Conciergerie of the Palace of Justice.

Whether owing to these occurrences, or to grounds for suspicion before mentioned, certain reports spread in the Bourbonnais embodying some of the real facts; portions of them reached the ears of the count and countess, but they had only the effect of renewing their grief without furnishing a clue to the truth.

Meanwhile, the count went to take the waters at Vichy. The countess and Madame de Bouille followed him, and there they chanced to encounter Louise Goillard, the midwife. This woman renewed her acquaintance with the house, and in particular often visited



the Marchioness de Bouille. One day the countess, unexpectedly entering the marchioness's room, found them both conversing in an undertone. They stopped talking immediately, and appeared disconcerted.



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The countess noticed this without attaching any importance to it, and asked the subject of their conversation.

“Oh, nothing,” said the marchioness.

“But what is it?” insisted the countess, seeing that she blushed.

The marchioness, no longer able to evade the question, and feeling her difficulties increase, replied—

“Dame Louise is praising my brother for bearing no ill-will to her.”

“Why?” said the countess, turning to the midwife,—“why should you fear any ill-will on the part of my husband?”

“I was afraid,” said Louise Goillard awkwardly, “that he might have taken a dislike to me on account of all that happened when you expected to be confined.”

The obscurity of these words and embarrassment of the two women produced a lively effect upon the countess; but she controlled herself and let the subject drop. Her agitation, however, did not escape the notice of the marchioness, who the next day had horses put to her coach and retired to her estate of Lavoine. This clumsy proceeding strengthened suspicion.

The first determination of the countess was to arrest Louise Goillard; but she saw that in so serious a matter every step must be taken with precaution. She consulted the count and the countess dowager. They quietly summoned the midwife, to question her without any preliminaries. She prevaricated and contradicted herself over and over again; moreover, her state of terror alone sufficed to convict her of a crime. They handed her over to the law, and the Count de Saint-Geran filed an information before the vice-seneschal of Moulins.

The midwife underwent a first interrogatory. She confessed the truth of the accouchement, but she added that the countess had given birth to a still-born daughter, which she had buried under a stone near the step of the barn in the back yard. The judge, accompanied by a physician and a surgeon, repaired to the place, where he found neither stone, nor foetus, nor any indications of an interment. They searched unsuccessfully in other places.

When the dowager countess heard this statement, she demanded that this horrible woman should be put on her trial. The civil lieutenant, in the absence of the criminal lieutenant, commenced the proceedings.

In a second interrogation, Louise Goillard positively declared that the countess had never been confined;



In a third, that she had been delivered of a mole;

In a fourth, that she had been confined of a male infant, which Baulieu had carried away in a basket;



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And in a fifth, in which she answered from the dock, she maintained that her evidence of the countess's accouchement had been extorted from her by violence. She made no charges against either Madame de Bouille or the Marquis de Saint Maixent. On the other hand, no sooner was she under lock and key than she despatched her son Guillemin to the marchioness to inform her that she was arrested. The marchioness recognised how threatening things were, and was in a state of consternation; she immediately sent the sieur de la Foresterie, her steward, to the lieutenant-general, her counsel, a mortal enemy of the count, that he might advise her in this conjuncture, and suggest a means for helping the matron without appearing openly in the matter. The lieutenant's advice was to quash the proceedings and obtain an injunction against the continuance of the preliminaries to the action. The marchioness spent a large sum of money, and obtained this injunction; but it was immediately reversed, and the bar to the suit removed.

La Foresterie was then ordered to pass to Riom, where the sisters Quinet lived, and to bribe them heavily to secrecy. The elder one, on leaving the marchioness's service, had shaken her fist in her face, feeling secure with the secrets in her knowledge, and told her that she would repent having dismissed her and her sister, and that she would make a clean breast of the whole affair, even were she to be hung first. These girls then sent word that they wished to enter her service again; that the countess had promised them handsome terms if they would speak; and that they had even been questioned in her name by a Capuchin superior, but that they said nothing, in order to give time to prepare an answer for them. The marchioness found herself obliged to take back the girls; she kept the younger, and married the elder to Delisle, her house steward. But la Foresterie, finding himself in this network of intrigue, grew disgusted at serving such a mistress, and left her house. The marchioness told him on his departure that if he were so indiscreet as to repeat a word of what he had learned from the Quinet girls, she would punish him with a hundred poniard stabs from her major-domo Delisle. Having thus fortified her position, she thought herself secure against any hostile steps; but it happened that a certain prudent Berger, gentleman and page to the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, who enjoyed his master's confidence and went to see him in the Conciergerie, where he was imprisoned, threw some strange light on this affair. His master had narrated to him all the particulars of the accouchement of the countess and of the abduction of the child.

"I am astonished, my lord," replied the page, "that having so many dangerous affairs on hand; you did not relieve your conscience of this one."

"I intend," replied the marquis, "to restore this child to his father: I have been ordered to do so by a Capuchin to whom I confessed having carried off from the midst of the family, without their knowing it, a grandson of a marshal of France and son of a governor of a province."



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The marquis had at that time permission to go out from prison occasionally on his parole. This will not surprise anyone acquainted with the ideas which prevailed at that period on the honour of a nobleman, even the greatest criminal. The marquis, profiting by this facility, took the page to see a child of about seven years of age, fair and with a beautiful countenance.

“Page,” said he, “look well at this child, so that you may know him again when I shall send you to inquire about him.”

He then informed him that this was the Count de Saint-Geran’s son whom he had carried away.

Information of these matters coming to the ears of justice, decisive proofs were hoped for; but this happened just when other criminal informations were lodged against the marquis, which left him helpless to prevent the exposure of his crimes. Police officers were despatched in all haste to the Conciergerie; they were stopped by the gaolers, who told them that the marquis, feeling ill, was engaged with a priest who was administering the sacraments to him. As they insisted on seeing him, the warders approached the cell: the priest came out, crying that persons must be sought to whom the sick man had a secret to reveal; that he was in a desperate state, and said he had just poisoned himself; all entered the cell.

M. de Saint-Maixent was writhing on a pallet, in a pitiable condition, sometimes shrieking like a wild beast, sometimes stammering disconnected words. All that the officers could hear was—

“Monsieur le Comte . . . call . . . the Countess . . . de Saint-Geran . . . let them come. . . .” The officers earnestly begged him to try to be more explicit.

The marquis had another fit; when he opened his eyes, he said—

“Send for the countess . . . let them forgive me . . . I wish to tell them everything.” The police officers asked him to speak; one even told him that the count was there. The marquis feebly murmured—

“I am going to tell you——” Then he gave a loud cry and fell back dead.

It thus seemed as if fate took pains to close every mouth from which the truth might escape. Still, this avowal of a deathbed revelation to be made to the Count de Saint-Geran and the deposition of the priest who had administered the last sacraments formed a strong link in the chain of evidence.

The judge of first instruction, collecting all the information he had got, made a report the weight of which was overwhelming. The carters, the nurse, the domestic servants, all



gave accounts consistent with each other; the route and the various adventures of the child were plainly detailed, from its birth till its arrival at the village of Descoutoux.

Justice, thus tracing crime to its sources, had no option but to issue a warrant for the arrest of the Marchioness de Bouille; but it seems probable that it was not served owing to the strenuous efforts of the Count de Saint-Geran, who could not bring himself to ruin his sister, seeing that her dishonour would have been reflected on him. The marchioness hid her remorse in solitude, and appeared again no more. She died shortly after, carrying the weight of her secret till she drew her last breath.



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The judge of Moulins at length pronounced sentence on the midwife, whom he declared arraigned and convicted of having suppressed the child born to the countess; for which he condemned her to be tortured and then hanged. The matron lodged an appeal against this sentence, and the case was referred to the Conciergerie.

No sooner had the count and countess seen the successive proofs of the procedure, than tenderness and natural feelings accomplished the rest. They no longer doubted that their page was their son; they stripped him at once of his livery and gave him his rank and prerogatives, under the title of the Count de la Palice.

Meanwhile, a private person named Sequeville informed the countess that he had made a very important discovery; that a child had been baptized in 1642 at St. Jean-en-Greve, and that a woman named Marie Pigoreau had taken a leading part in the affair. Thereupon inquiries were made, and it was discovered that this child had been nursed in the village of Torcy. The count obtained a warrant which enabled him to get evidence before the judge of Torcy; nothing was left undone to elicit the whole truth; he also obtained a warrant through which he obtained more information, and published a monitory. The elder of the Quinet girls on this told the Marquis de Canillac that the count was searching at a distance for things very near him. The truth shone out with great lustre through these new facts which gushed from all this fresh information. The child, exhibited in the presence of a legal commissary to the nurses and witnesses of Torcy, was identified, as much by the scars left by the midwife's nails on his head, as by his fair hair and blue eyes. This ineffaceable vestige of the woman's cruelty was the principal proof; the witnesses testified that la Pigoreau, when she visited this child with a man who appeared to be of condition, always asserted that he was the son of a great nobleman who had been entrusted to her care, and that she hoped he would make her fortune and that of those who had reared him.

The child's godfather, Paul Marmiou, a common labourer; the grocer Ragueneau, who had charge of the two thousand livres; the servant of la Pigoreau, who had heard her say that the count was obliged to take this child; the witnesses who proved that la Pigoreau had told them that the child was too well born to wear a page's livery, all furnished convincing proofs; but others were forthcoming.

It was at la Pigoreau's that the Marquis de Saint-Maixent, living then at the hotel de Saint-Geran, went to see the child, kept in her house as if it were hers. Prudent Berger, the marquis's page, perfectly well remembered la Pigoreau, and also the child, whom he had seen at her house and whose history the marquis had related to him. Finally, many other witnesses heard in the course of the case, both before the three chambers of nobles, clergy, and the tiers etat, and before the judges of Torcy, Cusset, and other local magistrates, made the facts so clear and conclusive in favour of the legitimacy of the young count, that it was impossible to avoid impeaching the guilty parties. The count ordered the summons in person of la Pigoreau, who had not been compromised

in the original preliminary proceedings. This drastic measure threw the intriguing woman on her beam ends, but she strove hard to right herself.



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The widowed Duchess de Ventadour, daughter by her mother's second marriage of the Countess dowager of Saint-Geran, and half-sister of the count, and the Countess de Lude, daughter of the Marchioness de Bouille, from whom the young count carried away the Saint-Geran inheritance, were very warm in the matter, and spoke of disputing the judgment. La Pigoreau went to see them, and joined in concert with them.

Then commenced this famous lawsuit, which long occupied all France, and is parallel in some respects, but not in the time occupied in the hearing, to the case heard by Solomon, in which one child was claimed by two mothers.

The Marquis de Saint-Maixent and Madame de Bouille being dead, were naturally no parties to the suit, which was fought against the Saint-Geran family by la Pigoreau and Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour. These ladies no doubt acted in good faith, at first at any rate, in refusing to believe the crime; for if they had originally known the truth it is incredible that they could have fought the case so long and so obstinately.

They first of all went to the aid of the midwife, who had fallen sick in prison; they then consulted together, and resolved as follows:

That the accused should appeal against criminal proceedings;

That la Pigoreau should lodge a civil petition against the judgments which ordered her arrest and the confronting of witnesses;

That they should appeal against the abuse of obtaining and publishing monitories, and lodge an interpleader against the sentence of the judge of first instruction, who had condemned the matron to capital punishment;

And that finally, to carry the war into the enemy's camp, la Pigoreau should impugn the maternity of the countess, claiming the child as her own; and that the ladies should depose that the countess's accouchement was an imposture invented to cause it to be supposed that she had given birth to a child.

For more safety and apparent absence of collusion, Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour pretended to have no communication with la Pigoreau.

About this time the midwife died in prison, from an illness which vexation and remorse had aggravated. After her death, her son Guillemine confessed that she had often told him that the countess had given birth to a son whom Baulieu had carried off, and that the child entrusted to Baulieu at the chateau Saint-Geran was the same as the one recovered; the youth added that he had concealed this fact so long as it might injure his mother, and he further stated that the ladies de Ventadour and du Lude had helped her in prison with money and advice—another strong piece of presumptive evidence.



The petitions of the accused and the interpleadings of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour were discussed in seven hearings, before three courts convened. The suit proceeded with all the languor and chicanery of the period.

After long and specious arguments, the attorney general Bijnon gave his decision in favour of the Count and Countess of Saint-Geran, concluding thus:—

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“The court rejects the civil appeal of la Pigoreau; and all the opposition and appeals of the appellants and the defendants; condemns them to fine and in costs; and seeing that the charges against la Pigoreau were of a serious nature, and that a personal summons had been decreed against her, orders her committal, recommending her to the indulgence of the court.”

By a judgment given in a sitting at the Tournelle by M. de Mesmes, on the 18th of August 1657, the appellant ladies' and the defendants' opposition was rejected with fine and costs. La Pigoreau was forbidden to leave the city and suburbs of Paris under penalty of summary conviction. The judgment in the case followed the rejection of the appeal.

This reverse at first extinguished the litigation of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour, but it soon revived more briskly than ever. These ladies, who had taken la Pigoreau in their coach to all the hearings, prompted her, in order to procrastinate, to file a fresh petition, in which she demanded the confrontment of all the witnesses to the pregnancy, and the confinement. On hearing this petition, the court gave on the 28th of August 1658 a decree ordering the confrontment, but on condition that for three days previously la Pigoreau should deliver herself a prisoner in the Conciergerie.

This judgment, the consequences of which greatly alarmed la Pigoreau, produced such an effect upon her that, after having weighed the interest she had in the suit, which she would lose by flight, against the danger to her life if she ventured her person into the hands of justice, she abandoned her false plea of maternity, and took refuge abroad. This last circumstance was a heavy blow to Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour; but they were not at the end of their resources and their obstinacy.

Contempt of court being decreed against la Pigoreau, and the case being got up against the other defendants, the Count de Saint-Geran left for the Bourbonnais, to put in execution the order to confront the witnesses. Scarcely had he arrived in the province when he was obliged to interrupt his work to receive the king and the queen mother, who were returning from Lyons and passing through Moulins. He presented the Count de la Palice to their Majesties as his son; they received him as such. But during the visit of the king and queen the Count de Saint-Geran fell ill, over fatigued, no doubt, by the trouble he had taken to give them a suitable reception, over and above the worry of his own affairs.

During his illness, which only lasted a week, he made in his will a new acknowledgment of his son, naming his executors M. de Barriere, intendant of the province, and the sieur Violet, treasurer of France, desiring them to bring the lawsuit to an end. His last words were for his wife and child; his only regret that he had not been able to terminate this affair. He died on the 31st of January 1659.

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The maternal tenderness of the countess did not need stimulating by the injunctions of her husband, and she took up the suit with energy. The ladies de Ventadour and du Lude obtained by default letters of administration as heiresses without liability, which were granted out of the Chatelet. At the same time they appealed against the judgment of the lieutenant-general of the Bourbonnais, giving the tutelage of the young count to the countess his mother, and his guardianship to sieur de Bompre. The countess, on her side, interpleaded an appeal against the granting of letters of administration without liability, and did all in her power to bring back the case to the Tournelle. The other ladies carried their appeal to the high court, pleading that they were not parties to the lawsuit in the Tournelle.

It would serve no purpose to follow the obscure labyrinth of legal procedure of that period, and to recite all the marches and countermarches which legal subtlety suggested to the litigants. At the end of three years, on the 9th of April 1661, the countess obtained a judgment by which the king in person—

“Assuming to his own decision the civil suit pending at the Tournelle, as well as the appeals pled by both parties, and the last petition of Mesdames du Lude and de Ventadour, sends back the whole case to the three assembled chambers of the States General, to be by them decided on its merits either jointly or separately, as they may deem fit.”

The countess thus returned to her first battlefield. Legal science produced an immense quantity of manuscript, barristers and attorneys greatly distinguishing themselves in their calling. After an interminable hearing, and pleadings longer and more complicated than ever, which however did not bamboozle the court, judgment was pronounced in conformity with the summing up of the attorney-general, thus—

“That passing over the petition of Mesdames Marie de la Guiche and Eleonore de Bouille, on the grounds,” *etc. etc.*;

“Evidence taken,” *etc.*;

“Appeals, judgments annulled,” *etc.*;

“With regard to the petition of the late Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay, dated 12th August 1658,”

“Ordered,

“That the rule be made absolute;

“Which being done, Bernard de la Guiche is pronounced, maintained, and declared the lawfully born and legitimate son of Claude de la Guiche and Suzanne de Longaunay; in possession and enjoyment of the name and arms of the house of Guiche, and of all the



goods left by Claude de la Guiche, his father; and Marie de la Guiche and Eleonore de Bouille are interdicted from interfering with him;

“The petitions of Eleonore de Bouille and Marie de la Guiche, dated 4th June 1664, 4th August 1665, 6th January, 10th February, 12th March, 15th April, and 2nd June, 1666, are dismissed with costs;

“Declared,



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“That the defaults against la Pigoreau are confirmed; and that she, arraigned and convicted of the offences imputed to her, is condemned to be hung and strangled at a gallows erected in the Place de Greve in this city, if taken and apprehended; otherwise, in effigy at a gallows erected in the Place de Greve aforesaid; that all her property subject to confiscation is seized and confiscated from whomsoever may be in possession of it; on which property and other not subject to confiscation, is levied a fine of eight hundred Paris livres, to be paid to the King, and applied to the maintenance of prisoners in the Conciergerie of the Palace of justice, and to the costs.”

Possibly a more obstinate legal contest was never waged, on both sides, but especially by those who lost it. The countess, who played the part of the true mother in the Bible, had the case so much to heart that she often told the judges, when pleading her cause, that if her son were not recognised as such, she would marry him, and convey all her property to him.

The young Count de la Palice became Count de Saint-Geran through the death of his father, married, in 1667, Claude Francoise Madeleine de Farignies, only daughter of Francois de Monfreville and of Marguerite Jourdain de Carbone de Canisi. He had only one daughter, born in 1688, who became a nun. He died at the age of fifty-five years, and thus this illustrious family became extinct.