

THE CRIME OF THE BOULEVARD BY JULES CLARETIE

CHAPTER XIV.

M. Ginory was not without uneasiness when he thought of the detection of Jacques Dantini. Without doubt all prisoners, all accused persons, are reticent. They try to hide their guilt under voluntary silence. They do not speak because they have sworn not to. They are bound, one knows not by whom, by an oath which they cannot break. It is the ordinary system of the guilty who cannot defend themselves. Mystery seems to them safety.

But Dantini, intimately acquainted with Rovere's life, might be acquainted with some secret which he could not disclose and which did not remain to him at all. What secret? Had not an examining magistrate a right to know everything? Had not an accused man a right to speak? Either Dantini had nothing to reveal and he was playing a comedy and was guilty or, if by a few words, by a confidence made to the magistrate, he had escaped, he had freed himself, he had won his liberty without doubt he would speak after having kept an inexplicable silence. How could one suppose that an innocent man would hold for a long time to this mute system?

The discovery of the portrait in Mme. Colard's shop, on Sunday, finally, to give to the affair a new turn. The arrest of Charles Prades brought an important element to these researches. He would be examined by M. Ginory the next morning, after having been questioned by the commissary of police.

Bernardet, spruce, freshly shaven, was there and seemed in his well brushed redingote like a little abbe, come to assist at some curious ceremony.

On the contrary, Prades, after a sleepless night, a night of agony, paler than the evening before, his face fiercer and his muscles contracted, had a haggard expression, and he blinked his eyes like a night bird suddenly brought into glaring sunlight. He repeated before the examining magistrate what he had said to the brigadier. But his voice, vibrant a few hours before, had become heavy, almost raucous, as the haggard expression of his face had become sullen and tragic.

The examining magistrate had cited Mme. Colard, the shopkeeper, to appear before him. She instantly recognized in this Prades the man who had sold her the little panel by Paul Baudry.

He denied it. He did not know of what they were talking. He had never seen this woman. He knew nothing about any portrait.

"It belonged to M. Rovere," the magistrate replied. "M. Rovere, the murdered man, M. Rovere, who was consulted at Buenos Ayres, and you spoke yesterday at Buenos Ayres in the examination at the station house in the Rue de la Rochefoucauld."

"M. Rovere: Buenos Ayres?" repeated the young man, rolling his sombrero around his fingers.

He repeated that he did not know the ex-convict, that he had never been in South America, that he had come from Sydney.

Bernardet at this moment interrupted him by taking his hat from him without saying a word, and Prades cast a very angry look at the little man.

M. Ginory understood Bernardet's move and argued with a smile. He looked in the inside of the sombrero which Bernardet handed to him.

"But, after all," thought the magistrate, "Buenos Ayres is one of the markets for English goods."

"That is a hat bought at Sydney," Prades said, and understood only explained. Before he had decided, almost violent affirmations which Mme. Colard made that this was certainly the seller of the portrait the young man lost countenance a little. He kept saying over and over: "You deceive yourself, Madame, I have never spoken to you. I have never seen you."

When M. Ginory asked her if she still persisted in saying that this was the man who had sold her the picture, she said:

"Do I still persist? With my neck under the guillotine I would persist. And she kept repeating: "I am sure of it. I am sure of it."

This preliminary examination brought about no decisive result. It was certain if this portrait had been in the possession of this young man and been sold by him that he (Charles Prades) was an accomplice of Dantini's, if not the author of the crime. They ought, then, to be brought face to face, and possibly this might bring about an immediate result. And why not have this meeting take place at once, before Prades was sent where Dantini was at Mazas?

M. Ginory, who had uttered this word "Mazas," noticed the expression of terror which flashed across and suddenly transfigured the young man's face.

Prades stammered:

"Then, you will hold me? Then—I am not free?"

M. Ginory did not reply. He gave an order that this Prades should be guarded until the arrival of Dantini from Mazas.

polais, and Jacques Dantini recognized the staircase which he had previously mentioned that led to the examining magistrate's room. He entered the narrow room where M. Ginory awaited him. Dantini saluted the magistrate with a gesture which, though courteous, seemed to have a little bravado in it, as a salutation with a sword before a duel. Then he glanced around, astonished to see between two guards a man whom he did not recognize.

M. Ginory studied them. If he knew this Prades, who also curiously returned the look, Jacques Dantini was a great comedian, because no indication, not the slightest involuntary shudder, not the faintest trace of an expression of having seen him before, crossed his face. Even M. Ginory's keen eyes could detect nothing. He had asked that Bernardet be present at the meeting, and the little man's face, become serious, almost severe, was turned, with eager interrogation in its expression, toward Dantini. Bernardet also was unable to detect the faintest emotion which could be construed into an acknowledgment of ever having seen this young man before. Generally prisoners would unconsciously permit a gesture, a glance, a something to escape them when they were brusquely confronted unexpectedly with some accomplice. This time not a muscle of Dantini's face moved, not an eyelash quivered.

M. Ginory motioned Jacques Dantini to seat directly in front of him, where the light would fall upon his face. Pointing out Prades, he asked:

"Do you recognize this man?"

Dantini, after a second or two, replied:

"No; I have never seen him."

"Never?"

"Believe not. He is unknown to me."

"And you, Prades, have you ever seen Jacques Dantini?"

"Never," said Prades, in his turn. His voice seemed, harshe compared with the brief, clear response made by Dantini.

"He is, however, the original of the portrait which you sold to Mme. Colard."

"Look sharply at Dantini. Look at him well," repeated M. Ginory. "You must recognize that he is the original of the portrait in question."

"Yes," Prades replied. His eyes were fixed upon the prisoner.

"Ah," the magistrate joyfully exclaimed, asking, "And how, tell me, did you so quickly recognize the original of the portrait which you saw only an instant in my room?"

"I do not know," stammered Prades, not comprehending the gravity of a question put in an insinuating, almost amiable, tone.

"Oh, well," continued M. Ginory, still in a conciliating tone, "I am going to explain to you. It is certain that you recognize these features because you had a long time in which to contemplate them; because you had it a long time in your hands when you were trying to pull out the frame."

"Ah," the magistrate asked the young man, stupefied, not taking his eyes from the magistrate's face, which seemed to him endowed with some occult power. M. Ginory went on:

"The frame which you had trouble in removing, since the scratches show in the wood. And what if, after taking the portrait to Mme. Colard's shop, you should find the frame in question at another place, at some other shop? That would not be very difficult." And M. Ginory smiled at Bernardet. "What if we could add another new deposition to that of Mme. Colard's? Yes, what if to that clear decisive deposition we could add another—what would you have to say?"

Silence! Prades turned his head around; his eyes wandered about, as if searching to find an outlet or a support, gasping like a man who has been injured.

Jacques Dantini looked at him at the same moment when the magistrate, with a glance keener, more piercing than ever, seemed to search his very soul. The young man was now pallid and unmoved.

At length Prades pronounced some words. What did he want of him? What frame was he talking of and who was this other dealer of whom the magistrate spoke and whom he had called a second time? Where was this witness with "the new deposition?"

"It is enough," he said, casting a ferocious look at the frame, which on a sign from M. Ginory, had entered, pale and full of fear.

He added in a menacing tone:

"The fingers of his right hand contracted, as if around a knife handle. At this moment Bernardet, who was studying each gesture which the man made, was convinced that the murderer of Rovere was there. He saw that hand armed with the knife, the one which had been found in his pocket, striking his victim, gashing the ex-convict's throat."

"You deceive yourself," moment Bernardet, who was studying each gesture which the man made, was convinced that the murderer of Rovere was there. He saw that hand armed with the knife, the one which had been found in his pocket, striking his victim, gashing the ex-convict's throat.

"But, then, Dantini? An accomplice, without doubt; the head, of which the adventurer was the arm. Because in the dead man's eye Dantini's image appeared, reflected as clear proof, like an accusation, showing the person who was last seen in Rovere's supreme agony, Jacques Dantini was there. The eye spoke.

Mme. Colard's testimony no longer permitted M. Ginory to doubt. This Charles Prades was certainly the man who sold the portrait.

Nothing could be proved except that the two men had never met. No sign of emotion showed that Dantini had ever seen the young man before. The latter alone betrayed himself when he was going to Mazas with the original of the portrait painted by Baudry.

But, however, as the magistrate underlined it with precision, the fact alone of recognizing Dantini constituted against Prades a new charge. Added to the testimony, to the formal affirmation of the shopkeeper, this charge became grave.

Coldly M. Ginory said to his registrar, "An order!"

Then, when Favoré had taken a paper engraved, at the top, which Prades tried to decipher, the magistrate began to question him, and as M. Ginory spoke slowly Favoré filled in the blank places which made a free man a prisoner.

"You are called?" demanded M. Ginory.

"Prades."

"Your first name?"

"Henri."

"You said Charles to the commissary of police."

"Henri Charles—Charles—Henri."

The magistrate did not even make a sign to Favoré, seated before the table, and who wrote very quickly without M. Ginory dictating to him.

"Your profession?" continued the magistrate.

"Commission merchant."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Your residence?"

"Sydney, Australia."

And upon this official paper the replies were filled in one by one in the blank places:

We, Edme Armand-Ginory, commissary of police, do hereby certify that the above-named person, Charles Prades, is the original of the portrait in question, which was sold to Mme. Colard, on Sunday, the 12th of February, 1898.

And below the seal was attached to the order by the registrar, M. Ginory signed it, saying: "Envoilà!"

"The description must be left blank. They will fill it out after the measurements are taken."

Then Prades, stupefied till now, not seeming to realize half that was passing around him, gave a sudden, violent start. A cry burst from him:

"Arrested! Have you arrested me?"

"No," M. Ginory leaped over the table. He was calm and held his pen, with which he had signed the order, suspended in the air. The young man rushed forward with wild anger, and if the guards had not held him back he would have seized M. Ginory's fat neck with both hands.

The guards held Prades back, while the examining magistrate, carelessly pricking the table with his pen, gently said, with a smile:

"All the same, more than one malefactor has betrayed himself in a fit of anger. I have often thought that it would take very little to get myself assassinated, when I had before me an accused person whom I felt was guilty and who would not confess. Take away this paper, please."

While they were pushing Prades toward the corridor he shouted, "Canailles!" M. Ginory ordered that Dantini should be left alone with him. "Alone," he said to Bernardet, whose look was a little uneasy. The registrar had rose from his chair, picking up his papers and pushing them into the pocket of his much worn paper coat.

"No, you may remain, Favoré."

"Well," said the magistrate in a familiar tone when he found himself face to face with Jacques Dantini, "have you reflected?"

Jacques Dantini, his lips pressed closely together, did not reply.

"I am a counselor—a counselor of an especial kind—the cell. He who invented it?"

"Yes," Dantini brusquely interrupted. "The brain suffers between those walls. I have not slept since I went there, not slept at all. Insomnia is killing me. It seems as if I should go crazy."

"Then," asked M. Ginory.

Jacques Dantini looked fiercely at the registrar, who sat waiting, his pen over his ear, his elbows on the table, his chin on his hands.

"Then, oh, well! Then, here it is. I wish to tell you all—all. But to you—to you?"

"To me alone?"

"Yes," said Dantini, with the same fierce expression.

"My dear Favoré!"—the magistrate began.

The registrar had already risen. He slowly bowed and went out.

"Now," said the magistrate to Jacques Dantini, "you can speak."

"Monsieur," he asked, "will any word said here be repeated—ought it or must it be repeated—in a courtroom at the assizes—I know not where—anywhere before the public?"

"That depends," said M. Ginory.

"But what you know you owe to justice, whether it be a revelation, an accusation or a confession. I ask it of you."

Still Dantini hesitated. Then the magistrate spoke these words: "I demand it."

With a violent effort the prisoner began: "So be it. But it is to a man of honor rather than to a magistrate to

when I address these words. If I have hesitated to speak, if I have allowed myself to be suspected and to be accused, it is because it seemed to me impossible, absolutely impossible, that this same truth should not be revealed. I do not know in what way—that it would come known to you without compelling me to disclose a secret which was not mine."

"On an examining magistrate one may tell everything," said M. Ginory. "We have listened to confessions in our offices which are as inviolable as those of the confessional made to a priest."

CHAPTER XV.

And now, after having accused Dantini of lying, believing that he was acting a comedy, after smiling disdainfully at that common invention—a vow which one could not break—the proposition of a possibility entered, the magistrate's mind that this man might be sincere. Hitherto he had closed his heart against sympathy for this man. They had met in mutual hostility.

The manner in which Jacques Dantini approached the question, the resolution with which he spoke, no longer resembled the obstinate attitude which he had before assumed in this same room.

Reflection, the prison—the cell, without doubt—a frightful and stifling cell—had done its work. The man who had been excited to the point of not speaking now wished to tell all.

"Yes," he said, "since nothing has happened to convince you that I am not lying."

"I am listening to you," said the magistrate.

Then in a long, close conference Jacques Dantini told M. Ginory his story. He related how from early youth he and Rovere had been close friends; existed between them of the same mutual deceptions of which he had been guilty; of the bitterness of his ruined life; of an existence which ought to have been beautiful, and which, so useless, the life of a vivandier, had almost made him—why?—how?—through need of money—were filled in one by one in the blank places:

We, Edme Armand-Ginory, commissary of police, do hereby certify that the above-named person, Charles Prades, is the original of the portrait in question, which was sold to Mme. Colard, on Sunday, the 12th of February, 1898.

And below the seal was attached to the order by the registrar, M. Ginory signed it, saying: "Envoilà!"

"The description must be left blank. They will fill it out after the measurements are taken."

Then Prades, stupefied till now, not seeming to realize half that was passing around him, gave a sudden, violent start. A cry burst from him:

"Arrested! Have you arrested me?"

de Clichy, I had found Rovere dead on my arrival. I could not, believe me, have experienced greater despair. His assassination seemed to me atrocious, but I was at least able to assure him that I do not know in what way—that it would come known to you without compelling me to disclose a secret which was not mine."

"On an examining magistrate one may tell everything," said M. Ginory. "We have listened to confessions in our offices which are as inviolable as those of the confessional made to a priest."

CHAPTER XV.

And now, after having accused Dantini of lying, believing that he was acting a comedy, after smiling disdainfully at that common invention—a vow which one could not break—the proposition of a possibility entered, the magistrate's mind that this man might be sincere. Hitherto he had closed his heart against sympathy for this man. They had met in mutual hostility.

The manner in which Jacques Dantini approached the question, the resolution with which he spoke, no longer resembled the obstinate attitude which he had before assumed in this same room.

Reflection, the prison—the cell, without doubt—a frightful and stifling cell—had done its work. The man who had been excited to the point of not speaking now wished to tell all.

"Yes," he said, "since nothing has happened to convince you that I am not lying."

"I am listening to you," said the magistrate.

Then in a long, close conference Jacques Dantini told M. Ginory his story. He related how from early youth he and Rovere had been close friends; existed between them of the same mutual deceptions of which he had been guilty; of the bitterness of his ruined life; of an existence which ought to have been beautiful, and which, so useless, the life of a vivandier, had almost made him—why?—how?—through need of money—were filled in one by one in the blank places:

We, Edme Armand-Ginory, commissary of police, do hereby certify that the above-named person, Charles Prades, is the original of the portrait in question, which was sold to Mme. Colard, on Sunday, the 12th of February, 1898.

And below the seal was attached to the order by the registrar, M. Ginory signed it, saying: "Envoilà!"

"The description must be left blank. They will fill it out after the measurements are taken."

Then Prades, stupefied till now, not seeming to realize half that was passing around him, gave a sudden, violent start. A cry burst from him:

"Arrested! Have you arrested me?"

"No," M. Ginory leaped over the table. He was calm and held his pen, with which he had signed the order, suspended in the air. The young man rushed forward with wild anger, and if the guards had not held him back he would have seized M. Ginory's fat neck with both hands.

The guards held Prades back, while the examining magistrate, carelessly pricking the table with his pen, gently said, with a smile:

"All the same, more than one malefactor has betrayed himself in a fit of anger. I have often thought that it would take very little to get myself assassinated, when I had before me an accused person whom I felt was guilty and who would not confess. Take away this paper, please."

While they were pushing Prades toward the corridor he shouted, "Canailles!" M. Ginory ordered that Dantini should be left alone with him. "Alone," he said to Bernardet, whose look was a little uneasy. The registrar had rose from his chair, picking up his papers and pushing them into the pocket of his much worn paper coat.

"No, you may remain, Favoré."

"Well," said the magistrate in a familiar tone when he found himself face to face with Jacques Dantini, "have you reflected?"

Jacques Dantini, his lips pressed closely together, did not reply.

"I am a counselor—a counselor of an especial kind—the cell. He who invented it?"

"Yes," Dantini brusquely interrupted. "The brain suffers between those walls. I have not slept since I went there, not slept at all. Insomnia is killing me. It seems as if I should go crazy."

"Then," asked M. Ginory.

Jacques Dantini looked fiercely at the registrar, who sat waiting, his pen over his ear, his elbows on the table, his chin on his hands.

"Then, oh, well! Then, here it is. I wish to tell you all—all. But to you—to you?"

"To me alone?"

"Yes," said Dantini, with the same fierce expression.

"My dear Favoré!"—the magistrate began.

view much distressed, carrying a secret which seemed to me a heavy and cruel one and which made me think of the uselessness, the wickedness, the vain losses of a ruined life. But I felt that Rovere

felt better, a period of remission in his disease, a feeling of comfort, pervading his general condition.

"What if I should recover?" he said, looking me full in the face.

"I comprehended by that ardent look, which was of singular vitality, that the man, who had never feared death, still clung to life. It was instinct. I replied that certainly he might, and I even said that he would surely recover, but—with what grievous repugnance did I approach the subject—I asked him if, experiencing the general feeling of ease and comfort which pervaded his being, he would not be even more comfortable and happy if he thought of what he ought to do for that child of whom he had spoken and for whose future he wished to provide.

"And since then art feeling better, my dear Rovere, it is perhaps the opportunity to put everything in order in that life which thou art about to recover, and which will be a new life."

"He looked fixedly at me with his beautiful eyes. It was a profound regard, and I saw that he divined my thought.

"Thou art right," he said firmly. "No useless."

Then, gathering all his forces, he arose, stood upright, refusing even the arm which I held out to him, and in his dressing gown, which hung about him, he seemed to me taller, thinner, even handsomer. He took two or three steps, at first a little unsteady; then, straightening up, he walked directly to his safe, turned the letters and opened it, after having smiled and said:

"I had forgotten the word—four letters. It is, however, a little thing. My hand is empty."

"Then the safe opened, he took out papers—of value, without doubt—papers which he took back to his lounge, spread out on a table near at hand, and said:

"Let us see. This which I am going to give to thee is for her. A will—yes, I could make a will, but it would create the chastisement of all that has not been right in my life. Ah, sad, unhappy love!"

"That same maid, the one of the past came to his lips as it had come to his thoughts. The old workman, burdened with labor throughout the week, who could promenade on the Boulevard de Clichy on Sunday, with his daughter on his arm, was happier than Rovere. And—a strange thing, sentiment of shame and remorse—feeling himself traveling fast to his last resting place in the cemetery, he desisted to wish to see that child, to send for her to come from Blois under some pretext or other, easy enough to find.

"No, he experienced a fierce desire for solitude, he shrank from an interview in which he feared all his grief would rush to his lips in a torrent of words. He feared for himself, for his weakness, for the strange feeling he experienced in his head.

"It seems as if it oscillated upon my shoulders," he said. "If Marthe came"—and he repeated the name as a child would have pronounced it who was just learning to name the letters of a word—"I would give her the sad spectacle of a broken-down man and have to explain to her the impression of a human ruin. And then—then—not to see her, not to have the right to see her, that is all right—it is my chastisement."

"Let it be so, I understood. I feared that an interview would be mortal; he had been so terribly agitated when he had sent for me that other time."

"But I at least wished to recall to him his former wish which he had expressed of providing for the girl's future. I desired that he should make up for the past, since money is one of the forms of reparation. But I dared not speak to him again in regard to it or of that trust of which he had spoken."

"He said to me, this strong man whose death had never frightened and whom he had braved many times, he said to me now, weakened by this illness which was killing him hour by hour:

"If I knew that my end was near, I would decide. But I have time."

"Time? Each day brought him a little nearer to that life about which I feared to say to him. The time has passed, the fear, in urging him to a last resolution, of seeming like an executioner whose presence seemed to say, "Today is the day," prevented me. You understand, Monsieur? And why not? I ought to wait no longer. Rovere's confidence had more than a second Rovere who possessed the strength and force of will which the first one now lacked. I felt that I held in my hands, so to speak, Marthe's fate. I did not know her, but I looked upon her as a martyr in her vocation of nurse to the old paralytic to whom she was paying, in love, the debt of the dead wife. I said to myself: "It is to me, to me alone, that Rovere must give instructions of what he wishes to leave to his daughter, and it is for me to urge him to do this. It is for me to trace his weakened will."

I was resolved. It was a duty. Each day the unhappy man's strength failed. I saw that this human ruin. One morning, when I went to his apartments, I found him in a singular state of terror. He related to me a story, I knew not what, of a thief, whose victim he was. The lock of his door had been forced, his safe opened. Then suddenly, interrupting himself, he began to laugh—a feeble laugh, which made me ill.

"I am a fool," he said. "I am dreaming awake. I continue in the daytime the nightmares of the night. A thief here! No one has come. Mme. Moniche has watched. But my head is so weak, so weak! I have known so many rascals in my life. Rascals always return, hein?"

"He made a sad attempt at a laugh. "It was delirium—a delirium which soon passed away, but which frightened me. It returned with increased force each day and at shorter intervals."

"Well, I said to myself, during a lucid interval. "He must do what he has resolved to do, what he had willed to do, what he wishes to do." And I decided—it was the night before the assassination—to bring him to the point of aid his hesitation. I found him calm that day. He was lying on his lounge enveloped in his dressing gown, with a traveling rug thrown across his thin legs. With his back still up and his rays heard he looked like a dying man.

"He held out his bony hand to me, giving me a sad smile, and said that he

felt better, a period of remission in his disease, a feeling of comfort, pervading his general condition.

"What if I should recover?" he said, looking me full in the face.

"I comprehended by that ardent look, which was of singular vitality, that the man, who had never feared death, still clung to life. It was instinct. I replied that certainly he might, and I even said that he would surely recover, but—with what grievous repugnance did I approach the subject—I asked him if, experiencing the general feeling of ease and comfort which pervaded his being, he would not be even more comfortable and happy if he thought of what he ought to do for that child of whom he had spoken and for whose future he wished to provide.

"And since then art feeling better, my dear Rovere, it is perhaps the opportunity to put everything in order in that life which thou art about to recover, and which will be a new life."

"He looked fixedly at me with his beautiful eyes. It was a profound regard, and I saw that he divined my thought.

"Thou art right," he said firmly. "No useless."

Then, gathering all his forces, he arose, stood upright, refusing even the arm which I held out to him, and in his dressing gown, which hung about him, he seemed to me taller, thinner, even handsomer. He took two or three steps, at first a little unsteady; then, straightening up, he walked directly to his safe, turned the letters and opened it, after having smiled and said:

"I had forgotten the word—four letters. It is, however, a little thing. My hand is empty."

"Then the safe opened, he took out papers—of value, without doubt—papers which he took back to his lounge, spread out on a table near at hand, and said: