

PRANZINI'S THREE VICTIMS

THE TRIPLE MURDER IN THE RUE MONTAIGNE.

A PARIS ASSASSIN WHO DENIES HIS GUILT IN SPITE OF THE MOST OVERWHELMING PROOFS.

PARIS, March 30.—The triple murder in the Rue Montaigne has proved the one absorbing topic of interest in this city and France for the past 12 days, and, although the mystery which at first surrounded the awful crime, which the incapacity of the Paris police served only to deepen for a time, has been to a great extent dispelled, the crime and its cold-blooded perpetrator still continue to occupy the foremost place in the discussions of the hour. The assassination itself, involving as it does three victims, two of them sacrificed simply, it would appear, because they were unfortunate enough to witness the murder of the first, was one of the most blood-curdling of the terrible crimes for which this cosmopolitan city is noted, and this, added to the singular conduct of the assassin after he was run down, with the method of his capture, which would seem to indicate that he was an amateur in the profession of murder, have furnished to Paris a rare morsel, the sensational elements of which have not even yet been exhausted.

Among the better known of the members of the Paris *demi-monde* was until the early morning of Thursday, March 17, a woman whose real name was Mme. Regnault, but who was better known to the gay young men of the metropolis, as well as to the older men of leisure and pleasure, as Mme. de Montille, a name which she received from one of her infatuated admirers, who owed his ruin to her fatal charms. This woman occupied the third floor of the house 17 Rue Montaigne. Her apartments consisted of five rooms, a slight description of which is necessary in order to fully understand the story of the remarkable crime of March 17. Passing through the vestibule the first room on the left was the bedroom of the "de Montille;" opening out of this was the dressing room of the woman, and next to this, on the same side of the hall, with a door opening into the dressing room, was another bedroom, occupied by Mme. Regnault's servant, Annette Gremeuret, and an adopted daughter, Marie, about 12 years old. On the other side of the hall were the dining room and the *salon*.

Mme. Regnault had made a great deal of money by her shrewd dealings with the gilded youth of the gay capital, and at the age of 37 she found herself comparatively well off so far as worldly goods were concerned. Most of her wealth, in jewels and stocks, she kept securely locked in a safe which was one of the most beautiful articles of furniture in her bedchamber. This safe was inclosed in a cabinet of ebony, and was guarded by a complicated lock having 2,400 different combinations. After the tragedy it took a locksmith two hours to open this strong box. Here Mme. Regnault kept her money and such of her jewels as were not in immediate use, and the fortune which the safe in this ebony cabinet held amounted to about \$40,000. It was to secure this, so far as can be judged from the developments already made that the life, not only of the courtesan, but of her chambermaid and the little girl, was deliberately taken by an assassin.

Mme. Regnault's cook, Mme. Antoine, lived in her own apartments with her husband, and went daily to 17 Rue Montaigne to attend to the work of her mistress. At about 8 o'clock on the morning of Thursday, March 17, Mme. Antoine appeared at the house of the "de Montille," intending to begin her usual day's work. She unlocked the kitchen door, but was unable to get in, because the chain had not been taken down, as it had always been before by little Marie. The cook rang several times, but no one answering the bell she decided that everybody had overslept themselves, and went to make her purchases for breakfast. Returning about 9 o'clock, she found the chain still guarding the door, and as the bell brought no response this time the cook became alarmed. She hastened to the Police Commissary and notified him of the facts, and that functionary arrived at the house at 11 o'clock, accompanied by a locksmith. The door was soon forced, and when the two men penetrated to the house they were met by a spectacle which startled even the Commissary, accustomed as he was to tragic scenes.

Stretched on the floor of her bedroom at the foot of her bed, and clad only in her night dress, lay Mme. Regnault, dead. From her position it would appear that she was struck down and murdered as she was stepping from her bed. There was a long and deep gash on each side of her throat from which the blood had flowed in a thick stream, covering her white robe and forming a revolting pool around her head. In front of the door leading from the dressing room to the other bed chamber lay the dead body of Annette Gremeret, also dressed in a *robe-de-nuit*, and bearing on her throat two wounds precisely similar to those which had taken the life of her mistress. In the bed chamber beyond, lying in the bed was the body of little Marie covered with blood, the neck pierced by a blow apparently from a large butcher's cleaver, which had been struck from behind with such force that the blade passed completely through the little neck and emerged at the throat, nearly severing the head from the body. From the relative position of the bodies the police built up a theory which is undoubtedly correct, that Mme. Regnault was first killed, that Annette, hearing the noise, started from her room and was met by the assassin as she stepped through the door and killed as a dangerous witness; and that the child Marie, seeing the slaughter from her bed, was sacrificed for the same reason, to secure her silence as to the crime and its perpetrator.

The work of the assassin was evidently done suddenly and promptly, so that neither of the women had a chance to fight for her life, as there were no traces of a struggle in either of the rooms, and the apartments were not in disorder. The strong box, placed close to the bed, had not been opened, but it was slightly stained with blood, as if the murderer had tried to force it. No money or jewels were found in the pockets of Mme. Regnault or about the room, and it was evident that the assassin had taken all he could lay his hands on. The strong box when opened was found to contain about \$40,000 worth of property, but the jewelry usually left outside was gone. Among the things missing were two purses, one of gold and the other of silver. A small watch, ornamented with a diamond heart, a pair of solitaire diamond earrings, a cross set in brilliants, and a pair of gold bracelets with diamond clasps. In the room was found a pair of cuffs, evidently cut from the murderer's shirt sleeves, bearing the initials "G. G.," and a leather sumpster marked with the same initials. Two or three letters signed "Gaston Geissler" were found among the possessions of the dead courtesan, and the police at once jumped to the conclusion that Gaston Geissler was the man who had committed the terrible crime.

On this clue the Paris police went to work, and the police machinery of the Continent was put in motion to find the man Geissler. Meanwhile, on the Saturday night following the discovery of the triple murder, a man who registered as Henri Pranzini arrived at Marseilles on the midnight train, and secured a room at the Hotel de Noailles. After registering he notified the clerk that he expected a box from Paris and a letter, and then went out to see the sights. He did not return to the hotel until daylight, and then he looked as though he had spent the night carousing. His expected box came during Sunday morning, and he paid 5f. charges on it and, taking it under his arm, disappeared. That same morning Marie Favre, an inmate of a *maison de joie* in the Rue Ventoumagny, Marseilles, paid a visit to M. Court, the Commissary of Police. She told him that a man giving the name of Pranzini, who said he was a doctor, had offered her during the early morning hours of Sunday, for the small sum of 20f., a lady's gold watch, with blue enamel, ornamented with a diamond heart. Marie had noticed that the cuffs of Pranzini's shirt sleeves had been cut off and that the edges were frayed, and she told the Commissary that she believed the assassin of Mme. Regnault was in Marseilles.

This was enough for M. Court. While the Paris police were chasing a shadow he went to work briskly to capture a reality. The streets

of Marseilles were patrolled all day, and every house of questionable repute was searched, but Pranzini and his packet had disappeared. The man was traced, however, to Longchamps, where he was lost again. On Sunday night Police Agent Ceccaldi entered the Grand Theatre, where the "Barber of Seville" was being sung. Almost the first man that his eyes rested on in the audience was Pranzini, whom he recognized at once from the description given of him by Marie Favre. He arrested him at once. Pranzini turned pale and trembled for an instant, but almost at once recovered his self-possession and denounced his arrest as an outrage. He was taken to M. Court's office. Here he admitted that he had known Marie Regnault and had visited her several times, "but that does not prove," he said, in an indignant tone, "that I killed her." Asked to explain his sudden departure from Paris, he said that he had nothing to do there, and besides, hearing of the crime, he feared that it would become known that he was in the habit of visiting Mme. Regnault, and that this might cast suspicion on him. He gave his address at Paris, in the house of Mme. Sabattier, 40 Rue des Martyrs. He was taken to the Police prison and locked up, and during the night he made a rope of the lining of his great coat and attempted to hang himself. He was discovered in time to prevent the consummation of this purpose, however, and after that he was kept under a constant and watchful guard.

On searching the portmanteau left by Pranzini at the Hotel de Noailles the police found a pair of trousers with blood stains on the waistband and a pair of women's stockings also stained with blood. When asked to explain the presence of the blood he refused to answer. Asked how he came to have the watch which he had offered to Marie Favre he said it was given to him, but refused to say by whom. The packet which he received from Paris, he said, contained works for watches, which had been sent him to work upon, but he admitted that he had gone to Longchamps and thrown the package away. The police searched every lake and puddle at Longchamps for the missing packet in vain, but finally it was fished out of a pool behind a gas factory, and the articles it contained were recovered. They proved to be a pair of gold bracelets, a small mirror set in gold, a silver match box, and a number of small articles of jewelry. These were all identified by friends of Mme. Regnault as having belonged to her, as were the watch offered to Marie Favre and a pair of diamond earrings found on the person of Pranzini. The man continued to deny that he was the author of the triple murder, but he refused persistently to give any explanation of his possession of these incriminating articles. To all questions he steadily responded: "You will find out that you have made a mistake some day. The murderer will be found."

It was the opinion of the Marseilles authorities that the murderer was already found, and four days ago Pranzini was turned over to the Paris police and brought here. Once here he was submitted to a new series of interrogatories, but he continued to deny his guilt, as he has done persistently up to this time. Here, however, he has been confronted with a new source of danger. When his address was first sent to the Paris police Mme. Sabattier, with whom he had lived here for a long time, was arrested as a witness. She did her best to save her lover at that time by insisting that on the Thursday night of the murder Pranzini was at her house and did not leave it for an instant until the next day. This, if she could have sustained it, would have proved a complete alibi for the prisoner. But Mme. Sabattier, as the news of the articles found in her lover's possession came to her, saw the uselessness of longer persisting in this story. Perhaps, too, her confinement had a weakening effect on her love for the murderer, and she realized that she, too, was in some danger as a suspected accessory after the crime. At any rate, when she was confronted with Pranzini last Saturday the woman swore that her lover had not been with her at any time during the night of the crime.

Despite his self-control Pranzini burst into tears when the woman gave this evidence. "She's mistaken! She's mistaken!" he whimpered. "I was in the house early that night. If she did not see me it was because she was asleep, and I slept on the sofa so as not to disturb her."

"No," said the woman, who was also crying. "I have told the truth." Then, turning to the prisoner: "You tell the truth, too. Confess that you did not sleep at home that night."

Pranzini shrugged his shoulders, dried his eyes, straightened himself up, and said coldly: "I don't know what you want me to do. I know nothing of this murder, and I don't see why you wish me to tell a lie to convict myself."

Mme. Sabattier says that she spent the day after the triple murder with the prisoner. They dined at a restaurant and then went to the circus. On returning to her house he sat on a sofa and began to cry. He said he had met Mme. Regnault in the street the night before, and she had asked him to her house to take a cup of tea. While with her she heard some one coming in, and begged him to hide in a closet. Twenty minutes after he left his place of concealment and saw the three dead bodies. He rushed out of the house into the streets, where he wandered all night. He said he must leave Paris at once, as his visiting card was in the house, and suspicion would point to him. She sold her jewels, gave him the money, and saw him off to Marseilles. That was the last she heard of him until his arrest.

A singular story is told by a man named Huser, who was in the habit of visiting Mme. Regnault. He says that he once overheard a dispute between Pranzini and Marie Regnault. Pranzini insisted upon the woman giving up her lovers and marrying him, and Marie Regnault answered that it was impossible, whereupon he exclaimed, "You will only die by my hand." Huser rushed with Annette Gremeret into the room, and found Pranzini brandishing a knife and holding Marie Regnault by the throat. Huser threw himself on Pranzini, and wrested the knife from his grasp.

The crime of Pranzini is regarded as fully established by the examining magistrate, and he will undoubtedly be tried for it before the Assizes. It will be one of the most celebrated murder trials on record, as the man is one of the most remarkable criminals that even Paris has ever produced.