Tardy Justice

IN THE YEAR OF GRACE, 1687, Laurent Guiliemot d'Anglade lived in a fine house in the Rue Royale, at Paris, near the Bastile. He and his wife lived in a great style, kept their carriage, played high, talked incessantly of their high birth and family estate, appeared to have plenty of money—which they lent occasionally on good security—and on the strength of their own representations obtained entrance into the society of some of the best houses in Paris. For the rest, they were a worthy respectable couple, like hundreds of others; their only sin being that they gave themselves out for being richer and grander than they actually were, M. d'Anglade being a man of low birth and very moderate means. This was the beginning of all the sorrows that befell them.

M. d'Anglade and his wife occupied the greater part of the house; but, as is general in Paris, there were other inmates. A certain Count and Countess de Montgommeri occupied the ground floor and the rooms above. The ground floor consisted of three rooms, which all opened into a long corridor, at one end of which was the port-cochere of the court-yard, and at the other a staircase leading to the rooms upon the first floor, where there was a small inner closet or strong room. Here the Count and Countess kept their money and jewels. The Abbe Francoie Gagoard the Count's almoner, a page, and a valet-de-chambre, slept in one of the three rooms on the ground floor. Another was the Salle-a-Langer, and the one which opened from it served different purposes.

A friendly acquaintance soon sprang up between the d'Anglades and the Montgommeries. Soon after he entered the house the Count de Montgommeri received a large sum of money, partly in lous –d'ors, some of which were quite new, and others, *au cordon,* or old ones. The remainder of the money was in thirteen bags, each bag containing a thousand francs; also, there was a bag containing eleven thousand five hundred livres in Spanish pistols. All this money, together with a magnificent pearl necklace, estimated to be worth four thousand livres, was secured in a strong coffer, and the coffer was carefully placed in the small, inner closet we have mentioned. The d'Anglades knew all this, and had recommended an investment of his money to the count. One day M. de Montgommeri and his wife agreed to go and spend a few days at their country house of Ville Vousin, near Mont 'Here, and invited their neighbors, the d'Anglades, to accompany them. They accepted the invitation, but subsequently made some frivolous excuse for remaining at home. The count and countess set off on Monday, the 22nd of September, 1687, and gave out that they should return on the following Thursday. The Almoner, l'Abbe Gagnard, and all the servants accompanied them except a femme d'chambre, named Formerie, and one lacquey. Four sewing women, employed to embroider some hangings for Madame de Montgommeri, were also left in the house, but they were lodged in another part of the building. The key of the outer door on the first floor was entrusted to the femme-de-chambre; the Abbe Gagnard shut and double-locked the door of his room on the ground floor; and the family departed, considering that they had left everything secure. This was showing contempt for burglars that under the circumstances amounted to rashness; and they seemed to have thought so, for they returned home suddenly, twenty-four hours earlier than they had intended. The count declared that his mind was troubled by the sight of some drops of blood which he found upon a table cloth, that he determined to quit Ville Vousin that moment, having a presentiment that something had happened. The Abbe and the servants did not arrive until after him.

The first thing that struck the Abbe was finding his room door ajar, although, during the absence of the count and countess it had seemed to be closed, the abbe having double locked it with his own hands, the key had never been out of his possession. All the servants remarked the fact also, but at the moment it did not, singular to state, make much impression on them. Supper was served to the count and countess in the salle a manger, and they were still at table when their neighbor, d'Anglade, came home at eleven o'clock, accompanied by the Abbes de Fleury and de Villais, who had supped with him at the house of Presidente Robert. Finding the count and countess were returned, they all went in, and presently Madame d'Anglade joined them. After a little lively conversation they all separated for the night, and everything went on as usual.

The next morning the Count de Montgommeri discovered that he had been robbed.—The lock of his strong box had been forced, and everything it contained had been carried away.

He, of course, made a complaint to the lieutenant criminel of the chalet, who, with the procureur du roi and the commissary of police, lost no time in repairing to the spot. On examination they declared the robbery to have been committed by someone upon the premises, and decided on searching the whole house. D'Anglade and his wife requested that their apartments should be the first examined. Strict scrutiny was made, but nothing could be discovered in the rooms they inhabited. The officers proceeded to the attics. Madame d'Anglade excused herself from accompanying them upon the plea of sudden faintness. Up to the attics the officers went, and concealed in an old chest under wearing apparel and house linen they found a roleau of sixty louis au cordon of the years 1686 and 1687.

When d'Anglade was questioned about this money, he stammered and could give no account of how he came by it. He seemed in despair, and Madame d'Anglade said that the door of the Abbe Gagnard had not been secured as it ought to have been, and she insisted that it should likewise be searched.—This was done; it was found that money had been abstracted from five bags, each containing a thousand livres. As the Abbe Gagnard had double-locked the door before his departure, and never parted with the key out of his possession, this incident confirmed the suspicion that had rested upon d'Anglade and his wife. The lieutenant criminel went so far as to say to d'Anglade:

"Either you or I must have committed the robbery."

So convinced was he that he had secured the guilty person that he declared it useless to waste time in making further search, especially as the count said he could answer for the honesty of all his own servants.

D'Anglade and his wife were taken formally into custody; their persons were searched, and seventeen louis-d'or and a double pistole Spanish money were found in d'Anglade's purse—a circumstance which strengthened the suspicion against him, as part of the money stolen was in pistoles. It came out also that d'Anglade, who was in the habit of supping every night in town, always took the key of the street door—there being no regular porter, but upon the night upon which the robbery must have been committed, he supped at home, contrary to his usual custom. This crowning piece of circumstantial evidence seemed decisive; seals were placed on all the doors, and d'Anglade and his wife were hurried off to prison—the husband as placed in the

chatelet, and the wife in Fort l'eveque. They were each thrown into a dungeon, and the jailers were strictly charged to prevent them seeing anyone. Their confinement was made as severe as possible.—Madame d'Anglade had a dangerous miscarriage, but it brought no amelioration to the rigor of her prison.

The trial came on. Witnesses were heard for the prosecution. Among the chief were the court's servants and the Abby Gagnard, his almoner; and two of these witnesses deposed that they had seen d'Anglade near the door of the Abbe's apartment just before the arrival of the Count de Montgommeri.—Another witness swore that he knew d'Anglade to be a gambler, and that he had heard the Abbe Bouin call him an old clothes man; and this tallied with the fact that he lent money on pledges.

Another witness deposed to having heard that d'Anglade had once stolen a piece of ribbon, and that before he came to live in the Rue Royale, a quantity of silver plate had suddenly disappeared from the house where he had lodged. Many other minute facts came out, all tending to deepen the suspicion against the d'Anglades. The most damaging evidence, however, was gathered from his own replies to the interrogatories concerning his birth and sources of income. An evident mystery surrounded him. He prevaricated in his answers. At length it was made clear that instead of being, as he boasted, a gentleman of high birth and large fortune, his origin was mean and his income was not more than two thousand livres, although he lived expensively, paid for everything in ready money, and had money to lend out besides.—This at once established him as a chevalier d'industrie, and put an end to all the sympathies of honest men. Added to all these facts and suspicions, d'Anglade and his wife contradicted each other, and there were discrepancies between their statements. The case looked very black against them; but as the justice of those days would on no account condemn a prisoner without giving him every chance of confessing his doom to be well merited, d'Anglade was put to the torture. The evidence was, after all, circumstantial, and it would be a satisfaction if he could be made to confess. He was first put to the torture ordinary, and as that brought nothing they proceeded to the torture extraordinary, which brought nothing either. As d'Anglade refused to confess his guilt, there was nothing to be done but to condemn him without a confession, (for of course justice never felt a moment's hesitation as to his guilt,) and on the 16th of February, 1688, he was condemned to the gallows for nine years; his wife was banished from Paris for a like period. Also he was sentenced to pay a fine to the king, to make restitution of the stolen goods, and to pay three thousand livres to the count by way of compensation, which required more than he had in the world.

The five months he had spent in prison, during which he had lived on bread and water, with nothing but damp and rotten straw for a bed, had entirely shattered his constitution. Nevertheless, on being taken from the torture chamber he was thrown into the darkest and most frightful dungeon of the Montgommeri tower, from which he was only removed to be taken, all broken to pieces, to the chateau de la Joncelle, where he was attached to a gang of foreats. He seemed to be at the point of death; he declared he was innocent of all knowledge of the robbery, received the last sacraments with devotion, pardoned his enemies, and expected death with a composure that might arise from a sense of innocence or the prospect of release from intense suffering. He recovered, however, sufficient to depart to the galleys with the rest, but he was obliged to be conveyed in a cart, and two men were employed to lift him down every evening, and lay him on his bed of straw, and to lift him again into the cart the next morning. The Count d'Montgommeri,

who was terribly afraid that the sufferings of d'Anglade might soften the heart of Justice, or that death might deprive him of his revenge, was earnest in his solicitations for the immediate departure of d'Anglade to the galleys, and stationed himself upon the road by which he must pass, in order to feast his eyes upon the spectacle of d'Anglade's misery.

Upon the 4th of March, 1680, d'Anglade died in the hospital at Marseilles, four months after his arrival at the galleys.

No sooner was d'Anglade dead, than anonymous letters began to circulate in all directions, in which the writer declared that his conscience would give him no peace until he declared that M. d'Anglade was entirely innocent of the robbery committed upon the Count de Montgommeri, and that the real criminals were one Vincent, alias Belestre, and the Abbe Gagnard, almoner to the count. It was added that a woman named La Combia could give important evidence.

Here was a terrible revelation! The penitent prosecutor had become horror struck at the possibility of having been the means of subjecting an innocent man to so terrible a fate. He ordered a certain Degrais, (the same who was employed to persuade the prisoner, Madame de Brilliers, to leave the convent where she had taken refuge,) to make inquiries into the life and habits of the party now accused. The result was that Peter Vincent, or Belestre, the first named was discovered to be the son of a poor tanner at Mans. He had enlisted as a soldier, under the name of Belestre, and had risen to the rank of sergeant; but had been tried and condemned to the galleys for his share in one assassination of a miller. This was his first offence. His later exploits had been confined to burglary and highway robbery. After being very poor for a long time, and a vagabond besides, he had finished by purchasing an estate in the neighborhood of Mans, for which he had paid ten thousand livres. As to Abbe Gagnard, his father was a jailer to the prison at Mans, and the son had nothing to live upon when he first came to Paris, except the masses he said at St. Esprit. When he entered the house of the count de Montgommeri in quality of almoner; he was in the most abject poverty; but three months after he quitted him, he lived in something like opulence. He had never been suspected of any especial crime; but he was intimate with Belestre. He was, moreover, perfectly acquainted with everything that took place in the count's household; and, above all, he knew that the count had received a large sum of money in the month of June, 1687, and he also knew where it was kept.

They were both arrested. The woman, Combia, alias Bartant, Belestre's mistress, gave evidence which was corroborated by a crowd of other witnesses; and it was clearly proved that Belestre had committed the robbery by means of false keys, and with the assistance of Gagnard. Belestre endured the torture without confessing anything; but Gagnard had less fortitude and confessed his crime. He said, too, that he was so much alarmed when the lieutenant criminel was examining the premises, that had he asked him the smallest question he should have confessed everything. A comfortable hearing for that officer!

The gibbet relieved the world of these two scoundrels. Nothing then remained to be done, except to make amends to the victims of judicial error. Letters of revision were obtained. Parliament pronounced a decree on the 17th of June, 1693, which rehabited the memory of d'Anglade, justified the wife, and rescinded her sentence, condemned the Count Montgommeri to make restitution of the money that had been adjudged to him as reparation for the robbery, and to pay

all expenses beside. A collection was made in the court for the benefit of the daughter of M. and Madame d'Anglade, which amounted to above a hundred thousand livres.

But all this did not bring back M. d'Anglade to life again.

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