

## *The Thirteenth Juror*

### *A Tale of Mystery*

When the criminal, Pierre Granger, escorted by four gendarmes, was place[d] in the dock of the court of [A]ssize, there was a general stir amongst the crowd, which had assembled from every quarter to be present at his trial.

Pierre Granger was not an ordinary culprit, not one of those poor wretches who the court, as a matter of form, furnishes with an advocate, judges in the presence of a heedless auditory, and sends to oblivion in the convict prisons of the state. He had figured at length in the columns of the newspapers; and while M. Lepervier had undertaken his defence—M. Tourangin, the attorney general, was to conduct the prosecution. Now, at the time which I write, the two men stood at the head of their profession.—Whenever it was known that they were to be pitted against each other in any cause, crowds immediately flocked to enjoy their eloquent sentences, sonorous periods, and phrases as round and polished as so many billiard balls. It was a perfect riot of tropes and figures, a delicious confusion of peri-phrases and metaphors. All the figures of rhetoric defiled before the charmed auditory, like Virgil's playful shepherds. There was a luxury of epithets, passing even that of the Abbe Delille! Every individual substantive was as regularly followed by its attendant adjective, as the great lady of the last century by her train-bearing page. In this pompous diction—a man becomes a mortal; a horse, a courser; the moon was styled a pale Dian. My father and mother were never called so, but invariably the authors of my being; a dream was a vision; a glass a crystal vase; a knife, a sword; a car, a chariot; and a breeze became a whirlwind; all of which tended to produce a style of exceeding sublimity and beauty. Pierre Granger was a clumsily built fellow, five feet ten in height, thirty eight years old, with foxy hair, a high color, and small cunning grey eyes. He was accused of having strangled his wife, cut the body into pieces, and then in order to conceal his crime, set fire to the house where his three children perished. Such an accumulation of horrors had shed quite a romantic halo round their perpetrator. Ladies of rank and fashion flocked to the jail to look at him; and his autograph was in wonderful request, as soon as it became known that Madame Cesarine Langelot, the lioness of the district, possessed some words of his writing in her album, placed between a ballad by a professor of rhetoric and a problem by the engineer-in-chief of the department; neither gentleman, to say the truth, being much flattered by such close juxta-position with the interesting pet prisoner.

When Pierre Granger, with his lowering brow and air of stolid cunning, was placed at the dock, the names of twelve jurors were drawn by lot, and the President demanded of the counsel on either side, whether they wished to exercise their right of challenge. Both declined offering any objection to twelve such honorable names; but the attorney general added, that he would require the drawing of a supplementary juror.—It was done; and on the paper appeared the name of Major Vernor. At the sound a slight murmur was heard amongst the spectators, while M. Tourangin and Lepervier exchanged a rapid glance, which seemed to say: 'Will you not challenge him?' But neither of them did so; an officer conducted Major Vernor into his appointed place, and amid profound silence the indictment was read.

Major Vernor had lived in the town during the last two years. Every one gave him the military title, yet none could tell when or where, or whom he had served. He seemed to have neither family nor friends, and when any of his acquaintances ventured to sound him on the subject, he always replied in a manner by no means calculated to encourage curiosity. 'Do I trouble my head about your affairs?' he would say. 'Your shabby old town suits me well enough as a residence, but if you don't think I have a right to live in it, I shall be most happy to convince you of the fact at day break to-morrow morning, with gun, sword, or pistol.' Major Vernor was precisely the very man to keep his word; the few persons who had entered his lodgings reported that his bedroom resembled an armory, so fully was it furnished with all sorts of murderous weapons. Notwithstanding this, he seemed a very respectable sort of man, regular in his habits, punctual in his payments, and fond of smoking excellent cigars, sent him he used to say by a friend in Havana. He was tall, excessively thin, bald, and always dressed in black; his moustaches curled to a point; and he invariable wore his hat cocked over his right ear. In the evenings he used to frequent the public reading room of the town; but he never played at any game, or conversed with the company, remaining absorbed in his newspaper until the clock struck ten, when he lit his cigar, twisted his moustaches, and with a stiff, silent bow took his departure. It sometimes happened that one of the company bolder than the others, said: 'Good night Major!' Then the Major would stop, fix his grey eye on the speaker, and reply; 'Good night, Monsieur;' but in so rude and angry a tone, that the words sounded more like a malediction than a polite salutation.

It was remarked that whoever thus ventured to address the Major, was during the remainder of the evening, the victim of some strange ill-luck. He regularly lost at play, was sure to knock his elbow through a handsome lamp or vase, or in some way to get entangled in a misadventure. So firmly were the good townfolks persuaded that the Major possessed an 'evil eye,' that their common expression, when any one met with a misfortune was, 'he must have said 'good night' to the Major.'

This mysterious character dined every day at the ordinary of the Crown Hotel, and although habitually silent, seemed usually contented with the fare. One day, however, after having eaten some bread-soup, he cast his eye along the table, frowned, and calling the host, said: 'How comes it that the fare to-day is entirely meagre?'

'Monsieur, no doubt, forgets that this is Good Friday.'

'Send me up two mutton chops.'

'Impossible, Major, there is not an ounce of meat to be had at any butcher's shop in town.'

'Let me have some fowl.'

'That is not to be had either.'

'What a set of fools!' exclaimed the Major, striking his clenched hand on the table with such force that the bottles reeled and rocked, just as if all the wine in their bodies had gone into their heads. Then he called the waiter, and said:—'Baptiste, go to my lodging, and bring me the inlaid carbine which hangs over my pillow.'

The poor host trembled, and grew very pale, when Baptiste returned with a double-barrelled gun, beautifully inlaid with silver. The Major coolly examined the locks, put on fresh caps, cocked both barrels, and walked out, followed at a respectable distance by the inmates of the hotel. Not far off stood [an] old ivy-mantled church, whose angular projections were haunted by many ravens; two large ones flew out of the turret just as the Major came up, and he took the aim for a double shot. Down tumbled both the unclean birds at his feet.

‘*Sacrebleu!*’ cried he, as he picked them up ‘I’m regularly sold—they’re quite lean!’

He returned to the hotel, and, according to his express orders, one moiety of his illomened booty was dressed in a savory stew, and the other simply roasted. Of both dished he partook so heartily, that not a vestige of either remained, and he declared that he had never eaten more nourishing food.

From that day the Major became an object of uneasiness to some, of terror to others, of curiosity to all. Whenever he appeared on the public promenade, every one avoided him; at the theater his box was generally occupied by himself alone and each old woman that met him in the street, invariably stopped to cross herself. Major Vernor was never known to enter a church, or accept an invitation; at first he used to receive a good many of these, and the perfumed billets served him to light his segars.

Such then was the thirteenth juror drawn in the cause of Pierre Granger, and it may easily be understood why the audience were moved at hearing the name of Major Vernor.

The paper of accusation, notwithstanding, drawn up by the attorney-general with a force and peculiarity of description which horrified the ladies present, was read amid profound silence, broken only by the snoring of the prisoner, who had deliberately settled himself to sleep. The gendarmes tried to rouse him from his unnatural slumber, but they merely succeeded in making him now and then half open his dull brutish eyes.

When the clerk had ceased to read, Pierre Granger was with difficulty thoroughly awakened, and the President proceeded to question him. The interrogatory fully revealed, in all its horror, the thoroughly stupid fiendishness of the wretch. He had killed his wife, he said, because they couldn’t agree; he had set his house on fire because it was a cold night and he wanted to make a good blaze to warm himself. As to his children, they were dirty, squalling little things—no loss to him, or to any one else.

It would be tedious to pursue all the details of this disgusting trial. M. Tourangin and M. Lepervier both made marvelously eloquent speeches, but the latter deserved peculiar credit, having so very hard a cause to sustain. Although he knew well that his client was as thorough a scoundrel as ever breathed, and that his condemnation would be a blessing to society, yet he pleaded his cause with all a lawyer’s conscientiousness.—When he got to the peroration, he managed to squeeze from his lachrymal glands a few rare tears, the last and most precious, I imagine, which he carefully preserved for an especially solemn occasion—just as some families

preserve a few bottles of fine old wine, to be drunk at the marriage of a daughter, or the coming of age of a son.

At length the case closed, and the President was going to sum it up; as the heat in court was excessive, and every one present in court stood in need of refreshment, leave was given to the jury to retire for half an hour, and the hall was cleared for the same space of time, in order that it might undergo a thorough ventilation. During this interval, while twelve of the jurors were cooling themselves with ices and sherbert, the thirteenth lighted a cigar, and reclining in an arm chair, smoked away with the gravity of a Turk.

‘What a capital cigar!’ sighed one of the jurors, as he watched with an envious eye the odoriferous little clouds escaping from the smoker’s lips.

‘Would you like to try one?’ asked the Major, politely offering his cigar case.

‘If it would not trespass too much on your kindness.’

‘By no means. You are heartily welcome.’

The juror took a cigar and lighted it at that of his obliging neighbor.

‘Well! how do you like it?’ asked the Major.

‘Delicious! It has an uncommonly pleasant aroma. From whence are you supplied?’

‘From Havana.’

Several jurors now approached, casting longing glances on Major Vernor’s cigar case.

‘Gentlemen,’ said he, ‘I am really grieved that I have not a single cigar left to offer you, having just given the last to our worthy friend. Tomorrow, however, I hope to have a fresh supply and shall then ask you to do me the honor of accepting some.’

At that moment an official came in to announce that the court had resumed its sitting; the jury hastened to their box, and the President began his charge. Scarcely had he commenced, however, when the juror who had smoked the cigar rose, and in a trembling voice begged permission to retire, as he felt very ill. Indeed, while in the act of speaking, he fell backwards, and lay senseless on the floor.

The President of course, directed that he should be carefully conveyed to his home, and desired Major Vernor to take his place. Six strokes sounded from the old clock of the Town-hall as the jury retired to deliberate on their verdict in the case of Pierre Granger.

Eleven gentlemen exclaimed with one voice, that the wretched assassin’s guilt was perfectly clear, and that they could not hesitate for a moment as to their decision. Major Vernor, however,

stood up, placed his back against the door, and regarding his colleagues with a peculiar sinister expression, said slowly: 'I shall acquit Pierre Granger, and you shall all do the same!'

'Sir,' replied the foreman in a severe tone, 'you are answerable to your conscience for your own actions, but I do not see what right you have to offer us a gratuitous insult.'

'Am I, then, so unfortunate as to offend you?' asked the Major meekly.

'Certainly, in supposing us capable of breaking the solemn oath which we have taken to do impartial justice. I am a man of honor'——

'Bah!' interrupted the Major, 'are you quite sure of that?'

A general murmur of indignation arose.

'Do you know, sir, that question is a fresh insult?'

'You are quite mistaken,' said Major Vernor, 'What I said was drawn forth by a feeling of the solemn responsibility which rests on us.—Before I can resolve to make a dead corpse of a living, moving being, I must feel satisfied that both you and I are less guilty than Pierre Granger, which after all, is not so certain.'

An ominous silence ensued; the Major's words seemed to strike home to every breast; and at length one of the gentlemen said:

'You seem, sir, to regard the question in a philosophical point of view.'

'Just so, Monsieur Cerneau.'

'You know me then?' said the juror in a trembling voice.

'Not very intimately, my dear sir, but just sufficiently to appreciate your fondness for discounting bills at what your enemies might call usurious interest. I think it was about four years ago that an honest, poor man, the father of a large family, blew out his brains in despair, at being refused by you a short renewal which he had implored on his knees.'

Without replying, M. Cerneau retired to the furthest corner of the room, and wiped off the large drops of sweat which started from his brow.

'What does this mean?' asked another juror impatiently. 'Have we come hither to act a scene from the *Memoirs of the Devil*?'

'I don't know that work,' replied the Major; 'but may I advise you Monsieur de Bardine, to calm your nerves?'

'Sir, you are impertinent, and I shall certainly do myself the pleasure to chastise you.'

‘Ah, how?’

‘With my sword. I shall do you the honor to meet you to-morrow.’

‘An honor, which, being a man of sense, I must beg respectfully to decline. You don’t kill your adversaries Monsieur de [Bardine]; you assassinate them. Have you forgotten your duel with Monsieur de Sillar, which took place, as I am told, without witnesses? While he was off his guard, you treacherously struck him through the heart. The prospect of a similar catastrophe is certainly by no means enticing.’

With an instinctive movement, M. de Bardine’s neighbors drew off.

‘I admire your virtuous indignation,’ sneered the Major. ‘It especially becomes *you*, Monsieur Darin’——

‘What infamy are you going to cast in *my* teeth?’ exclaimed the gentleman addressed.

‘Oh, very little—a mere trifle—simply, that while Monsieur de Bardine kills *his* friend, you only dishonor *yours*. Monsieur Simon, whose house, table, and purse are yours, has a pretty wife’——

‘Major,’ cried another juror, ‘you are a villain!’

‘Pardon me, my dear Monsieur Calfat, let us call things by their proper names. The only villain amongst us, I believe, is the man himself who set fire to his house, six months after having insured it at treble its value, in four offices, whose directors were foolish enough to pay the money without making sufficient inquiry.’

A stifled groan escaped M. Calfat’s lips as he covered his face with his hands.

‘Who are you that you thus dare to constitute yourself our judge?’ asked another, looking fiercely at Vernor.

‘Who am I, Monsieur Perou? simply one who can appreciate your very rare dexterity in holding court-cards in your hand, and make the dice turn up as you please.’

M. Perou gave an involuntary start, and thenceforward held his peace. The scene, aided by the darkness of approaching night, had now assumed a terrific aspect. The voice of the Major rang in the ears of the eleven pale, trembling men, with a cold metallic distinctness, as if each word inflicted a blow.

At length Vernor burst into a strange, sharp, hissing laugh. ‘Well, my honorable colleagues,’ he exclaimed, ‘does this poor Pierre Granger still appear to you unworthy of the slightest pity? I grand you he has committed a fault, and a fault which you would not have committed in his place. He has not your cleverness in making his turpitude with a show of virtue: that was his real crime. Now, if after having killed his wife, he had paid handsomely for masses to be said for her

repose—if he had bought a burial ground, and caused to be raised to her memory a beautiful square white marble monument, with a flowery epitaph on it in gold letters—why, then, we should all have shed tears of sympathy, and eulogised Pierre Granger as the model of a tender husband. Don't you agree with me, Monsieur Norbec?

M. Norbec started as if he had received an electric [shock]. 'It is false!' he murmured. 'I did not poison Eliza: she died of pulmonary consumption.'

'True,' said the Major; 'you remind me of a circumstance which I had nearly forgotten.—Madame Norbec, who possessed a large fortune in her own right, died without issue five months after she had made you her sole legatee.'

Then the Major was silent. They were now in total darkness, and the throbbing of many agitated hearts were heard in the room. Suddenly came the sharp click of a pistol, and the obscurity was for a moment brightened by a flash; but there was no report—the weapon has missed fire. The Major burst into a long and loud fit of laughter.

'Charming! delightful! Ah, my dear sir,' he exclaimed, addressing the foreman, 'you were the only honest man of the party; and see how, to oblige me, you have made an attempt on my person, which places you on an honorable level with Pierre Granger!' Then having rung the bell, he called for candles, and when they were brought, he said: 'Come, gentlemen, I suppose you don't want to sleep here; let us make haste, and finish your business.'

Ten minutes afterwards, the foreman handed in the issue paper—a verdict of not guilty; and Pierre Granger was discharged amid the hisses and execrations of the crowd, who, indeed, were prevented only by a strong military force from assaulting both judge and jury. Major Vernor coolly walked up to the dock, and passing his arm under that of Pierre Granger, went out with him through a side door.

From that hour neither the one nor the other was ever seen again in the country. That night there was a terrific thunder storm; the ripe harvest was beaten down by hailstones as pigeons' eggs, and a flash of lightning striking the steeple of the old ivy-covered church, tore down its gilded cross.

This strange story was related to me one day last year by a convict in the infirmary of the prison at Toulon. I have given it verbatim from his lips;—and as I was leaving the building the sergeant who accompanied me said—

'So, sir, you have been listening to the wonderful rhodomontades of Number 19,888?'

'What do you mean? The history—'

'Is false from beginning to end. Number 19,888 is an atrocious criminal, who was sent to the galleys for life, and who, during the last few months, has given evident proofs of mental alienation. His monomania consists chiefly in telling stories to prove that all judges and jurors are rogues and villains. He was himself found guilty by a most respectable and upright jury, of

having robbed and tried to murder Major Vernor. He is now about to be placed in a lunatic asylum, so that you will probably be the last visitor who will hear his curious inventions.

‘And who is Major Vernor?’

‘A brave old half-pay officer, who has lived at Toulon, beloved and respected, during the last twelve years. You will probably see him to-day, smoking his Havana cigar, after the table d’hôte dinner, at the Crown Hotel.’ —[*Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*]

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