

The TRUTH ABOUT THE CASE

The Experiences of M. F. Goron, Ex-Chief of the Paris Detective Police

Edited by Albert Keyzer

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(Editor's Note.—I made M. Goron's acquaintance some years ago, and was at once struck with his extraordinary powers of observation, his keen-wittedness, and his devouring energy in the discharge of his difficult duties. For it must be remembered that the Chief of the Paris Detective Police wields enormous power and is allowed a certain discretion—except, of course, when a crime has been committed—to save innocent persons the disgrace of a public scandal.

A few months ago I was smoking a pipe in his study, a room hung with trophies—a museum of crime. I saw him take up a thick, leather-bound volume, the pages covered with writing, with here and there portraits and curious-looking drawings. "This is my diary," he began, but suddenly stopped when he saw me start.

"Yes, it is my diary," he repeated; "but—what's the trouble?"

"Your diary? And you never thought of publishing it?"

"No," he retorted with a smile; "the fact is, here are all my impressions, and certain facts—"

I did not even know the end of the sentence; I took up the book and began reading at once; and the more I read the more I marveled. The next morning we commenced work, and this series is the result.—A. K.)

THE BELGIAN

Government had demanded the extradition of the swindler Karstens, and, for purposes of identification, I had asked the people who had dealings with him to come to my office.

Among those who called upon me was Charles Vernet, a financier, and, while I listened to the evidence he gave in a clear, concise manner, the conviction stole upon me that I had met him before under different circumstances. But where?—when? Although I have an excellent memory for faces, his features were not familiar to me; yet his general appearance, the way he raised his right hand when he spoke, roused old recollections.

"Who is he?" I inquired the next day of the police commissary in M. Charles Vernet's district.

"Who is he?" repeated my friend, with a touch of surprise in his voice. "My dear Goron, don't you really know Charles Vernet?"

"Well, yes, of course I understand he is a financier, with plenty of money; but I know nothing about him."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Look here, Goron, I never know when you are making fun of anybody; but if you put the question to me seriously, let me tell you that Charles Vernet is not only rich, but bears a good reputation on the Bourse, and is received everywhere."

"How long has he been in Paris?"

"About ten years. He came here with a large fortune made at the Cape, and has doubled it since."

"Who is he?" I again asked myself when I went to bed.

For days and days the man's face seemed to follow me. I mentally passed in review the various persons I had met in the course of my career, without being able to locate him. Yet I felt certain I had seen him when his name was not Charles Vernet.

I took out my journal, looking over the cases with which I had been connected since I became chief of the detective police. And still no trace of him.

I worked my way back to the days when I was assistant to M. Clement, at the Prefecture, and police commissary in the Pantin Quarter, until I came upon the murder of Moulin, the notary's clerk, by a fellow called Simon. And then I paused; for it suddenly dawned upon me that Simon was the man I must have had in my mind when I saw Charles Vernet.

Moulin lived in the Rue des Abbesses, and he and Simon were friends. One night a lodger, occupying a room below Moulin's, was awakened by the noise of a scuffle overhead, and, going to the rescue, met a man hurrying past him. Moulin was lying on his bed stabbed to the heart. When Simon was arrested the next day, the lodger recognized him as the man he had seen on the stairs. Simon, who had already been implicated in several unpleasant affairs, never admitted his guilt; and, in the absence of direct proofs, the jury brought in a verdict by which he escaped the guillotine, but was sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude.

I inquired at the Prefecture, where I learned that Simon and a man called Aymard had planned to escape from Cayenne. Aymard had succeeded in getting away, while Simon, his face battered in and his body covered with wounds, was found in a ditch. His identity had been disclosed by his jacket, which bore the number "94."

The report of Simon's death did not remove my doubts. But, as in the face of the official statement I could not well apply to the authorities for assistance, I determined to try to solve the problem myself.

If my theory was right—that Charles Vernet and Simon were the same person—it must have been Simon who placed the telltale jacket with the number 94 on the body of Aymard, whom, no doubt, he had murdered to insure his own safety. This trick had been performed several

times and, from my recollection of Simon, he was not the man to shrink from killing his companion.

I took all the papers relating to the Simon case with me, and gathered from them an interesting fact. While under remand, Simon—probably to curry favor with the authorities—had denounced a youth named Berger, as having been concerned in a burglary in the Rue des Saints-Peres, in connection with which three men had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Berger was arrested, but, as it was proved that he had thus far borne an excellent character, and had been fooled by his companions, he got off very lightly.

I had reason to suppose that Berger, knowing it was Simon who had betrayed him, would not be sorry to get even with his enemy, and I therefore decided to have a talk with him, without, of course, letting him know more than was strictly necessary. In fact, I had to be very careful how I went to work.

So far, everything was only supposition. The official report about Simon's death might have been true, and my theory about the likeness between the two men—the financier and the convict—altogether wrong. In that case a mistake would have proved disastrous.

Twelve years had elapsed since the trial of Simon, and it was possible that Berger had disappeared. Fortunately I had a clue. Berger at the time of his arrest, was courting a woman who kept a tobacco-shop in the Latin Quarter, the widow of a man called Samson, for which reason the students had christened her "Delilah."

When I called at the little shop in the Rue Saint-Andre-des-Arts, I found it had changed hands, and in the place of the buxom Madame Delilah was a thin, good-natured looking little woman, fond of gossip. I bought some cigarettes, and she was soon giving me the biography of every member of her family. Then I deflected our talk to Madame Delilah, whereupon the lady-tobacconist looked severe.

"Did you know that person?" she asked.

"No, no," I hurriedly replied, "I have only seen her once or twice, when she was engaged to a man—a man—I can't remember his name."

The lady-tobacconist continued to look severe and, with scorn in her voice, remarked:

"Engaged, engaged—who do you think would have engaged himself to Delilah?"

"I fancy I heard she was going to marry somebody called Burger or Berger."

"Berger, you mean. That jailbird?"

"Yes. What has become of him?"

"When he was discharged from prison he took up photography, and migrated to Belleville; but that's several years ago."

In Belleville, the populous quarter, there are several establishments where the Paris workmen celebrate their weddings, and, according to custom, have themselves photographed on the important day. The restaurant of the Las Saint-Fargeau, at the top of the steep Rue de Belleville, is the most famous place for this kind of entertainments, and I decided to go there first. When I reached the establishment, at two in the afternoon, several wedding-parties had taken position of the garden, and a photographer was busy with his apparatus, while his assistant arranged the groups.

"What is the name of the artist?" I inquired of the proprietor.

"Masson," he replied.

At that moment the assistant passed us to fetch a chair from the house. I stopped him, and asked whether he knew a photographer named Berger.

He eyed me curiously.

"My name is Berger."

I had reason to congratulate myself on my luck. And, looking at the man, I detected a likeness to his portrait I had seen at the Prefecture.

I waited till the rush of work was over, and then beckoned to him. When I told him who I was, he frowned.

"M. Goron," he exclaimed, "I hoped this horrible affair was forgotten. I am earning my living honestly. Why am I again to be troubled?"

"You have nothing to fear, my good fellow. Your affair, as you call it, is dead and buried. All I ask you is to call on me, to-morrow morning at half-past ten. I have a question to put to you."

"All right, sir," he sighed.

On my return to the office I sent a note to Charles Vernet, with the request to come to me the next morning at eleven, as I wanted some more information from him regarding the Belgian swindler.

At half-past ten, punctually, Berger was announced.

"Berger," I began, "you need not look so miserable. I give you my word nobody will hurt you."

He smiled faintly.

"I want you to go into the adjoining room and wait for me."

A few minutes past eleven Vernet was introduced. I apologized for troubling him again, and handed him a

few documents relative to the Karstens affair. While he was reading them I went to Berger.

The small room where I had left him, and to which nobody had access, opened into my office. In the door was a little hole.

"You see that hole?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Put your eye to it, and look carefully at the gentleman inside. When he is gone I shall call you."

My conversation with Charles Vernet did not last many minutes; and the moment he had left I went to Berger.

He stared at me like one in a dream.

"Well, Berger?"

He remained silent for a while, and then shook his head.

"Who is he?" he said at last.

"That is the very question I wanted to put to you."

He sat, deep in thought, one hand playing with his hat, turning it mechanically around.

"Who is he, and why did you show him to me?" he asked again.

I remained silent.

"M. Goron," he cried excitedly, "you have awakened in me a feeling I had managed to smother. You know my history. You know how I was dragged into the affair, and you know the name of the villain who brought the trouble on my head. When I was discharged from Gallion I had but one idea—to be avenged on Simon. And when I heard his body had been found in Cayenne, I thought he still might have escaped—he is so artful. Then I looked at every man in the streets, and I fancied I saw Simon. At last it became such an obsession that I felt I was growing mad under the strain, and I fought hard against it, until Simon's face ceased to haunt me. And, now, to-day, this feeling has returned in all its intensity. Why?"

"Yes—why?"

"It is the sight of the man that did it. He is not Simon. He looks quite different. Yet, something in his man-

"Nothing easier," said Camille.

Two days later I received an invitation to lunch with him and Madame S—, at Durand's. When coffee was served, Camille turned the conversation to the soiree.

"I suppose," he said, "you will, as usual, have an 'All Paris' assembly, including the financial swells?"

"Oh, the financial swells," laughed Madame S—, "are always eager to meet celebrities."

And she mentioned the names of her guests. Charles Vernet was among them.

"Why don't you invite our friend here?" asked Camille.

"What is the good?" pouted the lady. "He never comes."

"Try him again."

"Very well. M. Goron, will you give me the pleasure of your company?"

"It will be an honor to me, madame."

Madame S— clapped her hands with joy.

"I am much obliged to you, M. Goron. And I want you to contribute your share to the night's entertainment. Cannot you tell us something interesting?"

"A lecture?"

"Why not? That would be splendid."

"I doubt whether it would amuse your guests; but possibly I may find something else to suit their jaded palates. And, if it is not indiscreet on my part, will you allow me to bring my young nephew? He is here on a visit."

"By all means; I shall be delighted."

The eventful evening arrived, and I drove up to Madame S—'s with a parcel carefully wrapped in brown paper, which I left down-stairs in charge of one of the servants. As to my nephew, nobody would have guessed that the good-looking, well-dressed young man, with the gardenia in his buttonhole, was a smart de-

ing hostess has told you I would relate some of my experiences. I have no such intention, for the simple reason that you all know more about them than I do myself. Newspaper reporting has become one of the fine arts, and no sooner is a crime committed than the papers bring the fullest details. Nay, the up-to-date journalist seems even to have the gift of prophecy; for many a time I read of burglaries and attempted murders that have not yet occurred. I therefore, thought that instead of giving you narratives offering but little interest, I would draw your attention to the curious evolution which the detective's profession, like everything nowadays, has undergone.

"Years ago, the man whose duty it is to fight the enemies of society had his own powers to rely upon. Between him and the criminal it was skill against skill, art against art. Then came the modern inventions—railways, steamers, the telegraph, the telephone—and matters grew worse for the detective. Alas! it was the murderers, the forgers, who had the advantage, inasmuch as they could steal a long march upon Nemesis, and get their accomplices to use the telegraph and the telephone for their benefit.

"The question, therefore, was to discover a system by which society, and not its foes, would reap the advantage. Ladies and gentlemen, this system has been found, and the man to whom we owe it, and whose name will go down to posterity, is M. Bertillon."

I unfolded the parcel which my "nephew," at my request, had brought upstairs.

"This box," I continued, "contains the instruments used in the anthropometrical department for the identification of those who, having previously fallen into the hands of the police, expect to escape detection by changing their names, or altering, as they think, their appearance."



"Is This meant for a Joke," he remarked.

ner, in the way he holds himself, reminds me of him. Who is he?"

"That is none of your business. Now, go home and think no more about it. I will give you an introduction to one of my friends who can put a lot of work in your way."

Berger's face brightened.

"Thank you, M. Goron; you don't know the struggle I am having."

"You will get on better now. Here is my card. And—not a word about this interview."

Berger had strengthened my suspicions, and the moment had arrived for the decisive trial. I had a difficult part to play, but I felt equal to it.

Charles Vernet entertained frequently in his tastefully furnished apartment in the Rue de la Faisanderie. He also went much into society, and was a constant guest at the house of Madame S—, the well-known sculptor, at whose receptions the elite of the artistic and literary world congregated.

Madame S—, a charming hostess, and one of the most fascinating of women, had often invited me to these gatherings, but I never found the time to attend them. Now, however, I made up my mind to go to the soiree she was giving at the end of the month, and I called on my friend, Camille L—, who, I knew, helped her with them.

"Camille," I said, "I want you to ask me to luncheon with Madame S—, and also to secure me an invitation to her reception on the 28th."

tective in whom I placed absolute reliance.

When I entered the salons the guests had nearly all arrived. I recognized Pailleron, Lucien March of the Illustration, Alphonse Daudet, Meissonnier, Puvis de Chavannes, Lamoureux, Francisque Sarcey, Benjamin Constant, Sardou, actors and actresses from the leading theaters, famous scientists—a brilliant crowd.

There was some excellent music, and then a long-haired gentleman unfolded the mysteries of the cinematograph—at that time quite a novelty. A professor from the Sorbonne showed us a new electrometer; and a Societaire from the Comedie-Francaise gave some recitations.

I was sitting in a quiet corner, watching Charles Vernet deep in conversation with three or four Stock Exchange men, when Madame came toward me, both hands extended.

"Dear M. Goron," she cried, "it is now your turn."

And, taking my arm, she led me to the center of the room. My friend Camille asked for silence for the hostess, who said:

"M. Goron, whom we are all glad to welcome here, has promised to give us some of his experiences. It is a surprise I kept in store for you."

Loud applause followed. A small table with the traditional glass of water was brought for me; the ladies sat in a semicircle, the gentlemen formed the background.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I began, when silence was restored, "our charm-

ing explained to the company the practical working of the system, and how the little instruments are applied to the head and fingers, I said:

"With your kind permission, I will now conclude with a practical demonstration, which will leave to some of you a little souvenir of my lecture. As I had already the honor to explain, the measurements of the incriminated person are put down on a card, to which his photograph is affixed, and thus we possess the infallible means of discovering, at a moment's notice, the identity of the person arrested. It is a net through whose meshes nothing can slip. I have brought some of these cards with me, and shall be happy to take the measurement of any lady or gentlemen, and present them with the card."

I never saw such excitement. Dozens of charming women made a rush for me, and sweet voices cried, "Measure me, please, M. Goron."

"One moment, ladies," I called out, "the mistress of the house first."

Madame S— came promptly forward, and, after I had attended to her and a number of ladies, my "nephew" filling up the cards, I raised my hand.

"And now the gentlemen!"

Sarcey was the first to present himself. Then came Daudet, and other distinguished personages.

All along I had kept my eye on Charles Vernet, who had remained in the background, and now slowly moved toward the door.

"M. Vernet," I said, "don't go away. Have your measurements taken."

He hesitated a moment, and then

forced smile:

"No, thank you, I have seen the thing done before."

"Well, I have set my mind upon measuring you. Ladies," I cried, to a couple of American girls, who had been among the first to be operated upon, "please take him into custody and bring him to me."

Amid shouts of laughter they seized him and pulled him toward the table. This time he scowled.

"Is this meant for a joke?" he remarked.

"Of course. It is part of the fun."

Either my suspicions were unfounded, or the man had marvelous self-possession. He never moved a muscle while being measured.

Others were now pressing forward, but, on the pretext that I had no more cards, I withdrew to the smoking-room, whither Vernet had gone, followed by my detective. The latter had given Vernet a prepared card, and had quickly slipped into my hand the one he had just filled up; whereupon I went into a corner to compare it with the official document relative to Simon, which I had borrowed from M. Bertillon's office.

A glance was sufficient. The figures were identical. It was not Vernet, but Simon, the escaped convict, the murder, who stood there, lighting his cigar, making an appointment with a friend to meet him the next day. The next day! And in five minutes the thunderbolt would have fallen on his head.

I went up to him.

"Have you said good-night to the lady of the house?" I asked.

He turned sharply around.

"Monsieur Goron—" he began.

"Hush! Don't make a scene. Say good-by to the hostess, and tell her you will have to leave Paris tomorrow on a long journey. You will be telling the truth. Go."

He did not move.

"For the second and last time," I whispered, "I advise you not to make a scene. It is not to Charles Vernet I am speaking, it is to Simon, the assassin of Aymard. My 'nephew' over yonder is a detective, and I have three more 'nephews' down-stairs in case of emergency."

"He thought a moment. And then—" I will go with you; but you are making a mistake you will regret."

It was the never-varying reply of the criminal at bay. Yet I could not help admiring the man's nerve. He shook hands with Madame S— and a few more people in a seemingly unconcerned manner, and walked downstairs.

In the hall, where a servant handed him his overcoat, my attendant, at a signal from me, cleverly searched Vernet's pockets, and withdrew something which he handed me. It was a small revolver.

"You were right, sir," he said; "I should not have thought of that."

At the Prefecture they were astounded. My prisoner made a plucky stand, and fought desperately against the overwhelming odds; but, finally, like all the other criminals I have seen, he broke down before the pitiless Bertillon system.

Yes, he was Simon; but as, according to law, he had to be tried in Cayenne for having escaped, and on suspicion of having murdered Aymard, he was at once conveyed to the Ile de Re to be sent out to the penal settlement.

But, despite my warning, the officials at the Ile de Re prison did not keep a careful watch on Simon, for the day before he was to have been put on board the steamer, he managed to strangle himself.

Caught at Last.

To bring about the victory of good over evil has been assumed to be the especial aim of saints and sages; but savages, it seems, may sometimes be militant in the same cause. In his recent book, "The White Waterfall," Mr. James Francis Dwyer relates the story of a missionary who preached to a tribe of blacks in northern Queensland, and told them in simple language of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The episode of the serpent much excited the converts, and when the missionary arrived at the blacks' camp on the following day, the natives had collected half a hundred or more snakes, which they brought out for the good man's inspection.

"But why do you want me to examine them?" asked the parson, puzzled.

"The chief of the tribe winked knowingly.

"You tell 'em if old snake here that mak 'em plenty trouble, Mr. Adam," he said, grinning. "We think 'em you find dat old feller with this lot."

Youth's Companion.

Woman on the Firing Line.

In one of the recent accounts around Homs, says a Tripoli dispatch, the Italian troops captured in the Turkish lines a European woman who was standing by her wounded horse.

She was armed with a rifle and about one hundred cartridges, and when captured refused to give any particulars as to her identity. The woman is being kept a prisoner of war.

Mahogany as Fuel.

Rosewood and mahogany are so plentiful in Mexico that some of the copper mines there are timbered with rosewood, while mahogany is used as fuel for the engines.

Can You Guess?

Mrs. Bacon—Did they have any long speeches at the meeting?

Mr. Bacon—Well, two ladies spoke.