

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, MAY 27, 1899.

## OF FRENCH POISONERS.

HOW SOME OF THEM USED TO GET RID OF ENEMIES.

Relations Between La Voisin and Mme. de Montespan—Fresh Details From Unpublished State Papers—Revelations That Shocked King Louis XIV.

M. Funk-Brentano, the French archivist, has just published in the *Revue de Paris* the results of his latest delving among unpublished French State papers. They relate to the epidemic of poisoning in France in the reign of Louis XIV., and especially to Mme. de Montespan's dealings with poisoners. The account given here is an abridgement of his articles.

The most celebrated of all the women of the seventeenth century who practiced palmistry, sorcery, divination or fortune telling, was Catherine Deshayes, the wife of a man named Monvoisin, but commonly known as "La Voisin." During her trial she confessed to Nicholas de la Reynie, Chief of the Paris police, that some of the women who consulted her asked at once how soon they could be made widows and marry the men of their choice, and that almost came for no other purpose. The Parisians of that day flocked to the house of this woman to consult her and made up parties for that purpose. The garden around her small house in the outskirts of Paris was always crowded with a joyous throng of patrons.

The Voisin woman's income at one time amounted to 150,000 francs of to-day, but she spent it all. She had many friends, whom she treated with princely liberality. Among them were the public executioner of Paris, who was fated to cut off their head, the alchemist Blesis and Lesage, who practiced magic. A good deal of her money was spent by the two last named in searching for the secret of the transmutation of metal for she was a firm believer in the alchemy and the existence of the philosopher's stone. She received her customers, who came from the highest ranks of society dressed in a mantle and a gown, woven especially for her use, a costume whose coat was equivalent 75,000 modern francs. The mantle was made of crimson velvet embroidered with 205 double-headed golden eagles, and was lined with precious furs. The skirt was of sea green velvet, trimmed with priceless point-of-France lace. The bills for this costume are still in existence.

This fortune teller always insisted that she owned success to her knowledge of physiognomy, for she read her patrons' character and fate more easily in the expression and lines of their faces than in those of their hands. She confessed to crimes of all kinds especially to sacrilege and infanticide, and made La Reynie, who had heard the confessions of all the most criminals of his time, shudder by her revelations. Yet she is described by contemporaries as a plump, pretty little woman, with extraordinarily quick and penetrating eyes. Mme. de Sevigne, who had a mania for seeing executions and saw this culprit ascend the scaffold, said: "The Voisin woman resigned her soul to the devil very prettily." Her confessor spoke of her end as "very edifying."

Louis XIV., his Ministers and his Chief of Police were astounded when the crimes of this fortune teller and others like her first came to light, for in those days chemists and physicians were unable to detect traces of poisoning after the death of the victim. A special commission, whose members were selected from the King's Privy Council was appointed to deal with the matter. This tribunal was called that of the "Lighted Chamber," because formerly similar trials were held in a room hung with black and lighted by torches or candles. It sat from April, 1679, until July, 1682, during which time it tried 367 persons. Of these 36 were convicted and sentenced to death, 5 were sent to the galleys and 23 were banished. The most guilty were found to have accomplices in quarters so high and powerful that their prosecution was decided to be wise and impolitic.

One or two accounts of crimes tried in the Court of the Lighted Chamber will serve as types for almost all the others. Thus: Mme. de Dreux, wife of a Parliamentary Magistrate, was 30 years old, graceful, delicately pretty and of very distinguished appearance and bearing. A woman named Joly, one of the fortune tellers on trial, testified that Mme. de Dreux was so much in love with the Duke of Richelieu that he only looked at another woman she wanted to put that person out of

the way; that she had poisoned two gentlemen and one of her lovers to avoid the bother of a personal rupture, and that she had tried to poison her husband and get rid of the Duke's wife by the practice of sorcery. When the confession of the woman Joly became known, Parisian society was immensely amused, and the lady's husband was made ridiculous by a shower of epigrams which Mme. de Sevigne declares were "divinely diverting." Mme. de Dreux was really too interesting to be condemned, and besides she was a cousin of one of her judges. So finally it was decided to admonish her and let her go free. As soon as she got out of prison she went back to the clairvoyants and sorceresses and received from them certain powders "to poison some one whom the Duke of Richelieu was fond of." A fresh order for her arrest was issued. This time she was warned and fled. In January, 1682, she was finally condemned to banishment, but this sentence was commuted into confinement in Paris in the same house with her husband.

While people of rank were applauding the virtual acquittal of Mme. de Dreux, the burghers and their wives were murmuring because the Widow Brunet, one of their own class who had poisoned her husband, had been condemned and executed, although no more guilty than Mme. de Dreux.

In the course of the judicial proceedings in the court of the Lighted Chamber, and especially during the prosecution of La Voisin, a world of crime, almost inconceivable, was brought to light. "Human life is for sale like any article of commerce and murder seems to be the usual remedy for all family perplexities; ungodliness, sacrilege and all sorts of abominations prevail in Paris and throughout France," wrote La Reynie.

As the investigation went on it was found to take in an ever-widening circle of defendants from the highest ranks of the nobility. A peculiar apprehension room made itself universally felt, a curious uneasiness, not fear of the poisoners, but of their Judges. Mme. de Sevigne, speaking of the Chief of Police, said: "That he still exists is proof enough that there are no poisoners."

The King summoned La Reynie, the president of the court of the Lighted Chamber and its Prosecuting attorney to Versailles and personally impressed upon them the necessity of doing summary justice, and he desired them to examine into the matter of the dreadful trade in poisons as thoroughly as possible in order to extirpate it, root and branch. He ended by telling them to mete out equal punishment to all found guilty, without distinction of sex or rank. La Reynie needed all his courage and resolution to execute those orders in face of the hideous revelations which were to follow. Did these revelations suddenly cause the court of Versailles to modify its orders? The Voisin woman was ordered for examination on the rack, but the manner of inflicting the torture made the performance a farce.

"She was not racked!" writes the indignant La Reynie. Some one evidently feared that the fortune teller, who had hitherto been very discreet in her admission, might, under the stress of the rack, confess too much, and, unknown to La Reynie, the executioners had received certain instructions. The judges of the court had themselves also received certain orders, and their questioning of the prisoner was so cautious that before her execution she confessed of her own accord that an immense number of persons of all conditions and ranks had come to her for the means of poisoning many and that debauchery was the incentive to most of these crimes.

After the execution of the Voisin woman the magician Lesage, his accomplice the priest Guibourg, and a daughter of the first named were examined. Louis XIV. then wrote to La Reynie: "Having seen the statements made by Margaret Monvoisin I write to inform you that my desire is that you use due diligence to bring to light all the facts contained in the said statements and that you take down in writing and retain as separate records all the minutes thereof, and that you do not hand over to my court of the Arsenal—namely the Lighted Chamber—the testimony taken at the examination of the prisoners Romani and Bertrand." Of these latter more hereafter.

Louvois, the Secretary of State and friend of Mme. de Montespan, had promised Lesage, the magician, that his life should be spared if he made full confession. Accordingly Lesage testified to a series of the most horrible happenings, the truth of which was established by another confession

made on the rack by a sorceress and fortune teller. Frances Filastre by name. Filastre's disclosures came upon Louis XIV like a clan of thunder. Orders were at once given to suppress certain parts of her testimony, and a minute to that effect was made in the official register of the Kings Privy Council. Having been a second time compelled to suppress testimony which should have gone on record, the King saw that if the examination of prisoners should continue in the regular way he would be unable to suppress their testimony, and he therefore directed that all proceedings in the Lighted Chamber court should be at once suspended. Louis XIV had received a dreadful shock. His strongest personal affections had not only been wounded, but his power as a monarch had been set at naught, and that, too, by obscure and infamous criminals on trial before his own Judges; his throne itself had been sullied. His all powerful occupant hoped with the aid of his two great Ministers, Louvois and Colbert, to put the evidence of his shame and sorrow away forever. On July 13 1709, all the secret papers were brought into the Kings study and by him personally burned in the presence of the Chancellor of France, Ponchartrain.

### SINKERS HEARS ABOUT GOLF

And Tells Sarsaparilla Reilly About a Game Like It in Germany.

When Sarsaparilla Reilly entered the little restaurant on Park row the sinker man poked his head out of the kitchen door, and, shaking hands with him, said: "Ach, Reilly, why didn't you come around for der last several weeks? I vere so lonesomeness, I believed you vere dead. I'm awful glad, howsomever, to meet you anyhow."

"And it's pleased Oi am ter meet ye," answered Reilly. "The reason Oi've been away was because Oi've been ter Van Cortland's Park watching thim golf games."

"You mean der gouch game?" remarked Sinkers.

"No," said Reilly. "Oi mean golf game. It's der owd game av shinnny on your own side, an' yer play it wid shinnny sticks an' a little ball that yer knocks along th' ground ter git into little holes wid der least number of hits. D'yer understand what Oi mean?"

"For sure," replied the Sinkers. "Every week sometimes when I go on Staten Islands I see mens play gouch on der Richmond County Country Club," corrected Reilly.

"Dot's what I mean," said Sinkers. "I see der people v'elking mebbe fifty miles mit crutches in der hand to hit my der crutch der ball what push der ground over."

"Sure, they don't push no ground over," explained Reilly. "An' if yer mean to call them things crutches, you don't know what you're talking about. In golf games we call the wooden clubs brassie sticks. Then we have what we call caddies to carry the brassies in and we have baffles and baff-putters and stimpies and whims and scruffs and goose necks."

"I didn't swan no gooses on der Staten Islands blinks," said the sinker man.

"Links, not blinks," corrected Reilly.

"Vell," said Sinkers, "what dey are, but I didn't sawn no gooses over dera. I sawn only a coupler cows mit some chickens, but dey didn't play in der gouch game mit der mens which did. Dot gouch game is like I played when I vere such a little boy in Dresden, on Sixony by Germany. Ve played der mit Boston bears such a roley boley game after ve digged holes under de grass in der ground. Ve had always one which ven between four from der middle on der outside which vere in between. Dot middle hole between der four vere to put Boston beans in, und den ve commenced again by pushing a little bean roley-boley der ground over to der middle hole. Which boy first won got der bean in dot middle where he took out what was in. Understand?"

"Oi understand," said Reilly, "but yer can't tell me that Boston beans come from Germany."

"No," said Sinkers, "dot is not it. I mean der bean vere der Boston vat come from der same kind of beans. Oh, such fun ve used ter had playing gouch!"

"Golf! Golf!" corrected Reilly. "It's a Scotch word because it's th' name of a Scotch game."

"Vell," said Sinkers, "dot game vere taken to Scotland first from Germany. It vere a lovely game to play when you didn't had no valding to vall in a coupler weeks und wanted exercise. It remembers me to der time when I worked on der canal und had ter walk such a much."

"Well," it reminds me of hunting for a

piece of home-made pie on an Indian reservation," said Reilly. But a Dutchman never could learn the golf game."

"Now you're commencing again," remarked Sinkers. "Why don't yer say it vas a Irish game?"

"Well, if it's Scotch it can't be Dutch, and that's one good thing in its favor. A Dutchman couldn't learn it unless he was born in the time of Atlantis and practiced playing every day until Gabriel sounded the trumpet for kingdom come."

"Vell," said Sinkers, "I could learn it only I got too much time."

"Sure, you kudn't tell a straight-faced bulger from a cross-eyed cat," remarked Reilly.

"Are dey, too, in der game?" asked Sinkers.

"Sartinly," said Reilly. "Everything's in the game. There's tees an' rubs on the green an' hanging irons an' strichnine pills an' mashing sticks an' cayenne pepper an' blugy bogie bulger taffy bifferinos, too."

"I didn't heard all der names yet," explained Sinkers, "but I sawn one gouch player who vere playing und he told somebody to send der ink eraser to der missing link, or somet'ing like dot. Really Reilly, dot gouch language sounds like nobody could learn it, after dey speak it. Vhat?"

"You foreigners never kud learn it," said Reilly. "It's an easy game, though, an' all ye have to do when you're playing is to hit th' brassamatin wid one crack of the brassie-massie an' the octomorgorus skips along until it comes to a dead stop at the braddle-skedaddle."

"I understand what you mean," said Sinkers, "but I don't comprehension what you spoken when you speak. A friend from me, Mr. Scheffler, who plays mit Staten Island on der game, told me dot he vere half shot when he v'lants to address der ball."

"Oim feeling like getting half shot now," said Reilly. "Oim jist dying to address a ball. If ye've a bone about yer O'll permit ye to stop at Red Jerry's for the purpose of scruffing a few whiskeysiums."

"You mean ve vill play gouch?" inquired Sinkers.

"Yes, on Jerry's sawdust link's," answered Reilly.

And while the golfers scruffed whiskeysiums, Red Jerry, the bartender kept the score.

### AVISITING HOUSEKEEPER.

Novel Occupation Discovered by a Young Woman with Musical Talents.

Miss Dorothy Higgins is the old-fashioned name of a young woman who last summer discovered a new occupation for women. That is if the adjective "new" can ever be used connecting women with house-keeping. But Miss Higgins' method has many novel features and she speaks of her experience very pleasantly.

"I came from my home in the West winter beforelast to study the violin," she says. Like many other girls of limited means, I have an unlimited ambition, and some day hope to become an artist. At the end of the season, as my funds were low, I admit I was 'disheartened. Just at this time I chanced to meet on the cars a woman whom I had known during the winter, and she inquired about my summer plans. For once in my life I was candid about my poverty, and told of her of my failure to make engagements."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "why don't some of you girls try to do housekeeping that way? That is, divide your time around among several houses. If you would only come in for a few hours, order the meal, direct the servants and do all that sort of thing, there would be no difficulty about getting employment. I have just been calling on a friend who has a cottage near my own in Newport. We are neither of us wealthy women, but we have no end of social obligations. We don't feel that we can afford a housekeeper, and yet we are actually dreading our summer move because we know how much extra exertion it will require. Now, if we could only get some one between us who understands how to do such things, to take them off our hands, we would gladly employ them for the summer, at least."

"That remark was an inspiration, and before I left the car I had engaged to call on my friend and seriously discuss the matter. To make a long story short, I engaged to divide my time between four homes in Newport for the summer acting as visiting housekeeper. Now, I had a good head and considerable knowledge about the keeping of a small house: those were my stock in trade and I meant to succeed."

"After the moving was over and each household settled down and running smoothly, I made out a regular pro-

gramme embracing my duties for every day in the week. At a stated time each morning I held consultations with the mistress of each house. I learned their plans for the day, and when possible had them give me an idea how they wished their ideas carried out. Then I made an inspection of the china closets, storerooms, cellars, &c., gave out the necessary supplies to the cooks, butlers and chambermaids, took an inventory of things to be purchased and then went to market.

"Of course, I mean I did all these things in each house before going to market, because one visit had to suffice, and you can easily see how prompt I had to be in the performance of my other duties to finish my marketing at the proper time."

"The purchasing over, I made my second round of inspection. It was this visit the servants dreaded, for I required that they have their morning's work completed, and went through each room and closet in every house. I had written out my orders for the servants on my first call. On my second call I required them to repeat those orders and tell me how they proposed to carry them out. This was the time when all my tact, good humor and firmness was required, for all errors and difficulties with the servants had to be settled in the manner least calculated to interrupt the smooth running of the house-machinery. Once a month I paid all wages and outstanding bills, went over and balanced my accounts, then turned over my books to my employers for inspection."

"Those were my regular duties, but it was my irregular duties which gave me the greatest amount of work and, I must admit, sometimes annoyance. Under the head of irregular duties I place the various entertainments given by my employers. Of course, in four homes, during a season at Newport, there were of necessity many entertainments each week, sometimes luncheons, sometimes dinners and not quite so frequently a breakfast. All these required extra work, to say nothing of the extra amount of thought about the plans, &c. On all extra occasions I made it a point to be present and personally superintend and direct the servants."

"It was a lot of trouble, perhaps you will think, but it paid, for I had the satisfaction of knowing that all my plans were well carried out, and that my employers had no reason to blush for the way in which everything was conducted. The most substantial proof of their satisfaction with my work came only the other day, when they all wrote urging me to continue with them on their return to their homes in New York. I was really sorry to say no, for I had enjoyed the work and been much benefited by the change, but as I said at the beginning, I hope some day to become a great artist. I cannot give up my violin. I have earned enough money to take me comfortably through the winter and complete my course under my present teacher. But there is one thing of which I am certain—I am giving up a very comfortable salary and pleasant duties which I hope some other girl will drop into and follow up the occupation of visiting housekeeper."

### Crown of Thorns.

M. du Mely, a distinguished French scientist, has been making inquiries as to the whereabouts of certain fragments, known to exist, of the crown of thorns worn by the Saviour at His crucifixion. M. du Mely, in reporting the results of his investigations to the Academy of Inscriptions at Paris mentioned that he could trace the history of 560 thorns, and that the most likely places in which to find them now would be the cities of Jerusalem, Paris and Constantinople. In 1239 large pieces of the crown of thorns were sent to France and in 1247 they became the property of St. Louis, who built a costly shrine in which they were securely guarded. At that time the number of thorns in the shrine was 72, but this number must have been increased within a few years, for we are assured that Louis and his immediate successors presented sixty thorns to various princes, churches and cloister throughout Europe, and yet that, after this distribution had been made, 23 thorns remained as the property of the French King. M. du Mely thinks that there is much more to be learned on this subject, and he proposes to continue his investigation until he arrives at the exact truth.

### The Coalfields of the World.

It appears from the estimates of the most reliable authorities that the coal-fields of the world cover an area of about a million and a quarter square miles. The United States, China, Australia and India are the countries in which the area of coalfields is greatest, but the output of the United Kingdom is far larger than that of any other country. We also consume far more coal than any other people. On an average every inhabitant of Great Britain uses 74 cwt. of coal annually. The Belgians come next to us in this respect with an average annual consumption of 44 cwt. per inhabitant.