TWO SINNERS.

BY MRS. DAVID G. RITCHIE.

CHAPTER IV.

There are no longer any hidden romantic spots in our Island. There is not a mountain glen among the northern hills that has not been skimmed through a thousand times; there is not a quaint dovecot of a church hidden in a Sussex dean that has not been glanced at every day of the week by the motorist and his women-folk, as they go in search of that more congenial object of art—the picturesque village inn.

Is all this laying bare of old secrets the reason, or at least one of the reasons, why our love of poetry is dying? Nothing is mysterious, nothing is left to the imagination. Everybody has seen everything, or at least everybody has hurried past everything; and even the poor have seen the world—in their picture palaces.

If rapid physical movement has helped to kill the old romance, it has also created a sort of romance of its own—or rather an illusion of its own.

The mentally, the physically inert can now delude themselves into the notion that, by arriving here and there swiftly, they are making time of real value; they seem to be actually doing something. In the case of Major Kames, however, who might have shown more mental energy if he had had less money; there was no case of self-deception when he moved about from place to place.

Behind the desire that he used to have for more or less superfluous movement was the conviction that life was probably a vicious circle, and that the slower you went the more you pandered to the false assumption that the human race was on some important high road and ought to go carefully. Possessing a certain power of artistic creation, a natural love of all the arts, of music, and poetry, Major Kames, in this rush of life, had left them uncultivated. If he
To most Englishmen who desire to see modern France strong and respected the news of the death of General Picquart on Monday, January 19 last, came as a painful shock. Even if the Dreyfus case had never intervened to reveal to the world his chivalrous integrity and unflinching rectitude, he would yet have earned his country's gratitude as a chief re-organiser of her army. He was no sooner restored, after the settlement of that affair, to the rank of which he had been temporarily deprived by the turpitude of the anti-Dreyfusard faction, than he applied himself, as Minister of War in the Cabinet of his friend M. Clemenceau, to the task of setting his country's forces in order. This was at the end of October 1906. Eighteen months before, on March 31, 1905, the French Chambers had voted a new law reducing the term of military service to two years instead of three. It had been passed hurriedly, by a Legislature that was weary of the matter and wished to get rid of it, and the provisions it contained for carrying out so radical a change without seriously endangering, for a time at least, the defences of France, were carelessly drafted, vague and inadequate. For three years Picquart worked unremittingly at a task rendered all the more arduous and complicated by the decline in the French birth-rate. One point he discerned at once—namely, the necessity of reorganising the field artillery of the French army. The number of men ready to take the field in a sudden mobilisation had to be reduced; that was unavoidable, but the artillery depends less on numbers than on equipment, instruction, and discipline. The two years' law left him plenty of men for a service that must anyhow be numerically small, and after eight months' labour he had overcome all the obstacles thrown in his way by politicians, had increased the strength of the artillery by 50 per cent., and made it the best in Europe.

Next the entire organisation of the expedition to Morocco was his work. He thought out every detail of it in advance. It proved a great success, and has won the admiration of all military critics.

1 The Editor has particular pleasure in welcoming this tribute to the memory of a great man, for the Cornhill was the only English magazine to which General Picquart ever contributed. ("Austerlitz : un centenaire," December 1905.)
At the same time there broke out an agitation culminating in a movement of revolt amongst the viticulturists of the south of France. Like the present movement of revolt in Ulster, it required discreet handling. He had to concentrate 30,000 troops in Narbonne and the surrounding country in order to cope with it, and shewed such firmness and tact as quelled disturbance everywhere in the course of twenty-four hours, yet left no resentment in the hearts of those whom he was obliged to repress. As Minister of War he also worked hard to provide new and better schools for the instruction in their duties of the officers and men of the reserve. In January 1910 he was given the command of the Second Army Corps, a position which gave him a chance of revealing at successive manoeuvres his supreme ability as a tactician. During the last months of his life he was reorganising his army corps in Picardy in accordance with the new law re-imposing a term of three years' service upon French conscripts.

He died as he had lived. On Tuesday, January 13, his horse slipped on an icebound road near Amiens, he was thrown, and sustained in falling a bad wound on the scalp. The surgeon bade him go to bed and take the precautions which so serious a lesion called for. He refused, feeling himself to be in full possession of his wits, and continued to discharge his duties for the next four days. On Saturday night blood-poisoning set in with coma, and early on Monday he passed away. He had recovered consciousness for a few minutes on Sunday, long enough to write down, for he could not speak, his last wishes, among which was this, that he should be given a civil funeral, be cremated, and have no speeches delivered over his tomb, nor wreaths of flowers laid on it. His friend, General Lallemand, was at his bedside, and for him were traced the words: 'Le plus tôt ce sera fini... .' Renewed coma interrupted the sentence, but after a brief space he made a supreme effort, tried to smile so far as his poor distorted features allowed, and traced his last words—'Merci, bon ami.'

But it was in connection with the Dreyfus case that General Picquart by his devotion to truth and justice helped, perhaps more than any other actor in that drama, to save his country from indelible disgrace. Born at Strasbourg in September 1854, he was a man of forty years of age at the time of the first condemnation and degradation of Dreyfus. As a lad of sixteen he had witnessed the siege and capture of his native city, and when at the conclusion of the war the Germans by an act of impious brigandage tore the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine from the allegiance they loved,
and still after forty-three years love so well, Picquart opted for French citizenship, and at the age of eighteen entered the military college of Saint-Cyr. His career was brilliant from the first, and he was made a captain at twenty-six years of age on his return from a campaign against the Kabyls. Later on he served for four years in Tonquin. There he again distinguished himself, won the croix of the Legion of Honour, and on his return was made a commandant, at the age of thirty-four. He was presently made a professor of topography and geodesy in the École Supérieure de Guerre, where his command of the German, Russian, and English languages made him invaluable.

He already occupied an important position in the intelligence department of the État Majeur when Dreyfus was condemned, nominally, for the bordereau. This was a list drawn up by Commandant Walsin Esterhazy in his own handwriting of several more or less secret military documents which he had procured and was ready, for cash down, to hand over to the German military attaché in Paris, Colonel Schwartzkoppen. The latter had torn it up and thrown it in his wastepaper basket. The charwoman at the German Embassy, Bastian, who was in the pay of the French War Office, brought it thither to Colonel Henri, who pieced it together, and contrived that Dreyfus, an unpopular, but hard-working Alsatian Jew in the same office, should be accused of having written it. Henri had known Esterhazy fairly intimately for many years, and it is, to say the least, odd that he did not recognise his friend’s handwriting. Instead of doing so, he put it about in the Press that a Jewish officer was suspected of treason. Drumont, the unscrupulous editor of the Libre Parole, at once set off on the trail of a Jewish traitor, and it was fear of his clamour and threats that drove General Mercier, then Minister of War, a weak man and only anxious to ingratiate himself with the anti-Semitic Press and such organs of anti-Christian fanaticism as La Croix, to the course he took. It was held to be expedient for a mere Jew to be sacrificed. The officers who composed the court-martial were not altogether satisfied that Dreyfus was the author of the incriminating document, whereupon Henri, with the approval, if not at the instigation, of Mercier, flaunted before their eyes other documents which neither they nor Dreyfus’ defender were allowed to examine. Henri assured them that their superiors knew Dreyfus to be guilty, and urged them in the name of military discipline to obey orders and condemn him. Carried away by a blind trust in the judgment of their superiors, they did so.
Picquet was present at this court-martial, though not behind the scenes, and for months he entertained no suspicion that any injustice had been done. It was not long, however, before the same woman Bastian brought fragments of an express letter which Schwartzkoppen had written and addressed to Esterhazy (who was all along in the Paris garrison), and had then torn up and thrown away unsent. Picquart at once saw that Esterhazy was in German pay, but he did not connect him with the bordereau, for he had not as yet succeeded in obtaining any specimens of his handwriting. He merely concluded that Schwartzkoppen had a second traitor to aid him, and set himself to watch Esterhazy’s movements, hoping to take him red-handed. Meanwhile, some one in the War Office and in Picquart’s confidence—probably Henri—warned Esterhazy of the danger he was in and put him on his guard.

It may be that Henri did not himself share Esterhazy’s vile gains, and acted as he did merely out of fear lest his own and Mercier’s criminal intervention in the original court-martial should come to light in the course of Picquart’s new investigations. It is certain, however, and it is a suspicious circumstance, that Henri was already suggesting to his colleagues in the office, Lauth and Gribelin, that Picquart was seeking to substitute Esterhazy for the Jew Dreyfus, at a time when such an idea had never crossed Picquart’s mind. Affairs were in this posture when in September 1896 two letters written by Esterhazy were placed in Picquart’s hands. He no sooner saw them than he recognised in the writer of them the author of the bordereau. The handwriting of all three documents was identical. He was aghast. No one had been more convinced than he of the Jew’s guilt. Without a qualm he had seen him condemned, degraded, and deported to the Devil’s Island. He had read his letters, and heard his protestations of innocence, but had regarded it all as a bit of theatrical display, and now on a sudden the naked horrible truth was forced upon him. He seeks out in the archives of his office the secret dossier with which Henri had tricked the officers who had condemned Dreyfus; and his critical eye in a moment discerns that it contained nothing except one document referring to Esterhazy and another which had carried conviction to their silly minds. It was a scrap of paper on which were written in Schwartzkoppen’s hand the words: ‘Ce Canaille de D’; as if there were not hundreds of officers, not to mention civilians, whose name might begin with the letter D. The
particular scrap, moreover, referred to one Davignon, with whom the German attaché had relations.

Picquart began by juxtaposing before the eyes of Bertillon, the handwriting expert on whose evidence Dreyfus had been convicted, the bordereau together with one of Esterhazy’s letters. He was careful to withhold from Bertillon the circumstance of its being in Esterhazy’s writing. Bertillon instantly recognised that the two documents were written by one and the same person. In the sequel, however, sooner than incur the obloquy of Drumont, he pretended that Dreyfus, the traitor, had imitated Esterhazy’s writing in order to save himself! It is difficult to say whether this expert was merely a fool or a coward and a knave. He anyhow lacked the courage to avow before the world that he had been wrong in his expertise.

Picquart next acted as any conscientious man would under the circumstances have done. He laid the truth before his superiors, Generals de Boisdeffre and Gonze. They were much embarrassed, for next to Henri and Mercier they had had most to do with the condemnation of Dreyfus. Gonze listened, and merely said: ‘Then they made a mistake.’ Boisdeffre ordered him to keep the two affairs—of Esterhazy and Dreyfus—apart and not mix them up. They perhaps wanted time to make up their minds. They anyhow were not long in doing so, and their decision was to leave Esterhazy, the proved spy and traitor, undisturbed in his commission, and to keep Dreyfus, the proved innocent, in his dungeon. Picquart, whom they dreaded, they dispatched at short notice, first to a remote French garrison, and subsequently to a distant outpost in the North of Africa, where he was likely to be murdered ere long by the Dacoits of the desert. Picquart himself knew the risk, but he was resolved that the secret should not die with him; and he drew up a careful account of what he had discovered, and deposited it with his executor, who in the event of his death was to place it in the hands of the President of the French Republic. It was dated from Sousse, April 2, 1897. But already before that date one of the dramatic incidents, so frequent in the history of this case, had revealed the truth to two persons, Schwartzkoppen and Zadoc Kahn, son of the chief Rabbi. A photograph of the bordereau had in 1894 been inadvertently left in the hands of one of the handwriting experts named Teyssonières. Anxious to turn an honest penny, he sold it to the Matin newspaper, which published it in facsimile on November 10, 1896. It caught the eye
of the German attaché, who now for the first time realised with horror that Dreyfus was expiating the guilt of Esterhazy. Kahn had lent Esterhazy money, and the latter had only the day before written to his creditor begging him to grant him a delay in repayment of the loan. Kahn saw at a glance that the document of the Matin was in Esterhazy’s handwriting, and told his father of his discovery; but the latter was so satisfied of Dreyfus’ guilt that he would not even examine the evidence—so much for the accusation levelled by the French Nationalists at the French Jews, that they had vamped up the whole agitation. The young Kahn, however, communicated his discovery to others. It reached the ears of Dreyfus’ brother Matthew, and, through him, of the veteran Alsatian senator, Scheurer Kestner. From that moment a revision of the unjust verdict was inevitable.

If Gonze and Boisdeffre had been, I will not say gentlemen, but beings of ordinary humanity, they would have listened to Picquart’s appeal in 1896; with a stroke of the pen they could have righted the wrong; the viler organs of the Press like the Croix and Drumont’s Libre Parole might have whined a little at justice being done to a Jew, but the vast majority of French Catholics and Conservatives would have acquiesced in a revision of the case asked for and initiated by the État Majeur itself. By stifling the voice of conscience these two officers prepared a ten years’ agitation which at times almost menaced civil war, and of which the Roman Church has had to pay the cost. By their action they left to the Huguenots, the Radicals, and the Socialists the monopoly and the privilege of combating for truth and justice. They seriously damaged in the eyes of the world the reputation of French officers for chivalry, common sense, and humanity; and, worst of all, they were the occasion of many otherwise excellent people searing their consciences, of their stopping their ears to the voice of truth and reason, of their even acclaiming as ‘patriotic forgeries’ the scraps of futile nonsense concocted by Henri *ex post facto* as evidence of Dreyfus’ guilt.

A league was now rapidly formed between the État Majeur on the one hand and Esterhazy the traitor and his ally Drumont on the other, and Henri was commissioned to invent evidence in support of the original mistaken verdict. It was felt, however, from the first that Picquart’s courage and independence constituted a greater danger to their plans than any external action of politicians and civilians; and they deliberately set themselves to silence and ruin him. Ridiculous charges of espionage and treason were trumped up against him, he was arrested, court-martialled, and condemned.
par ordre supérieur to detention in a military prison. He was deprived of his rank and driven out of the army. But they could not prevent him from saying what he knew in the witness-box at the trial of Zola, and it was his testimony, given in his quiet, fearless, unostentatious, and convincing manner, that finally prevailed. ‘Colonel Picquart has lied,’ shouted Henri amidst the plaudits of a nationalist audience as Picquart gave his evidence before the court. Picquart smiled quietly and went on. In a few weeks’ time Henri, convicted of ‘patriotic’ forgery, was lying in the fort of Mt. Valérien with his throat cut, whether by himself or his accomplices no one ever knew. Picquart alone redeemed in this crisis the honour of the French army, and, alas! almost alone among his fellow-officers showed that he really had that at heart. All through the long years of persecution and calumny which he underwent, no complaint ever passed his lips. No man was ever more dignified and self-contained. During this term of enforced leisure, not being able to use his talents in behalf of the army he loved, he busied himself with music, art, literature, and philosophy, in any of which pursuits, had he not given up his life to soldiering, he might have shone.

If I were asked what most impressed me in his personality, I think I should say his modesty and simplicity. The one thing which he feared, as in death so in life, was to be applauded by the crowd and made a fuss about. He dreaded publicity; he only wanted to do his duty quietly and be let alone. In the public life of France, as of our own country, there is much cleverness, much self-advertisement, but too little character, and the contemplation of such a figure as Picquart is a useful tonic for our age. He was a patriot, but he never went about shouting; and when all were raving around him and at him, he remained sane, serene, cheerful, but unflinching in his devotion to truth and justice, to humanity and patriotism. His was a knightly figure; he was well built, lithe and graceful in his movements. You felt yourself with him in the presence of a man of natural distinction, of an aristocrat in the best sense. In conversation he was quiet, ever to the point, using words to convince himself rather than his hearers, courteous and attentive; all the time a light in his eyes, often a quiet twinkle, which rendered his countenance extraordinarily friendly and sympathetic. In manner and mode of address he reminded me, more than anyone I ever met, of my friend the late Arthur Dendy of University College, whose epitaph in our ante-chapel would serve equally well as his:

‘A man of wise counsel,
high honour and warm heart.’