

John Devil

Prologue: One Night in London

I. The Art of Discovering the Guilty and The Book of the Amazing Adventures of John Devil the Quaker

On March 14, 1817, Gregory Temple, Chief Superintendent at Scotland Yard headquarters,ⁱ was sitting at his long black oak table, holding his forehead in his hands. He was doubtless immersed, as deeply as possible, in the expert deductive calculations that had made his name legendary in the annals of the Metropolitan Police. At that moment, he was still the most perfect image of the detective, fearless and above reproach.

The table, whose wooden surface was usually hidden beneath a multitude of scattered papers, was almost completely clear today; it was easy to count the objects on it. Directly in front of Gregory Temple was a rather voluminous file, whose cover or envelope bore these words: *Assassination of Constance Bartolozzi, February 3, 1817*. To his left was a handkerchief of fine linen and an open letter. The handkerchief was stained with two or three drops of blood and the embroidered inscription *R.T.*; the letter was signed with the same initials. Finally, to his right, there were half a dozen sprawling sheets of printer's proofs, corrected and ready to be returned.

Gregory Temple was then at the height of his well-earned fame as a sleuth. He might have been 50 or 55 years old. He was a small, slender man, very fit despite his apparent weakness, endowed with an extraordinary physical energy. As for his face, it readily assumed a distant resemblance to a bust of the elder Walpole. His forehead, fringed by fair hair that was beginning to go grey, was very highly-developed; his cheekbones stood out sharply beneath his hollow temples, after the Scottish fashion, and his jaw was rounded.

At that moment, you could have seen the strange sparkle of his wide-open eyes, between his spare, convulsively splayed fingers. The eyeballs' prominence—if one can rely on the theory of Gallⁱⁱ—was swollen by the most extensive of all his memories. His eyes were fixed with singular intensity on the coarse grey cardboard on which the name of *Constance Bartolozzi* was traced in large characters; they were exerting a powerful, formidable, desperate will. That name evidently provoked a terrible conflict in the field of his conjectures, for his breath was catching in his throat and beads of sweat were rolling slowly down his pale cheeks.

Night was already falling. The room, low-ceilinged but spacious, had no other illumination than the lamp set on the table. The light, filtered through the resinous fabric of the green lampshade, cast vague reflections on the filing cabinets that covered the four walls from top to bottom and the little panes of greenish glass in the latticed windows, behind which strong iron grilles were visible.

Every compartment in the filing cabinets bore a cardboard label. It was common knowledge that Gregory Temple retained in that somber library the key to every criminal puzzle, past, present and future. The great black book of three Kingdoms was there; more than one member of the House of Lords had a record there, it was said, as had the most profligate thieves in St. Giles's.ⁱⁱⁱ George, Prince of Wales, Regent and Heir to the Crown, was suspected of having searched that arsenal to the very depths in order to arm the battles he had fought three times over with his wife, Caroline of Brunswick.

The celebrated Police Superintendent had been silent and immobile for more than an hour, his eyes fixed upon the name of the dead woman. His two hands finally slid from his forehead, as if to clear away the heavy cloud that blinded his thoughts, and his dazzled eyes closed.

"Constance Bartolozzi," he murmured, slowly. "Prima donna at the Princess Theater. Forty years old... one might believe such actresses are eternally young. Dead in her bed on the night of the third and fourth of February, struck dead by one of those blows that are becoming less rare with every day that passes... One of those blows that terrorize the least timid and which, from the first, I have called surgical strikes, because they bring certain death rapidly and without leaving any trace... As if science herself, in these accursed times, were beginning to lend her aid to crime!"

His clenched fingers extended, as if in spite of him, to cover the name inscribed on the cover of the file.

"It's the first time," he said, through clenched teeth. "The first time that my method has failed. I have a blindfold over my eyes. Darkness surrounds me. I feel as if it will drive me mad."

He paused, and his hand swept the wayward grey hairs from his temples.

"Is it the first time, though?" he asked himself, in a lower voice, while his gaze roamed the filing cabinets and stopped at a label bearing the inscription: *Assassination of General O'Brien—John Devil—Prague, 1813.*

There was a distinctive knock upon the door of the office.

"Come in, Richard," Temple called, reflexively. Scarcely had he pronounced the name Richard, however, when his forehead was clouded more darkly than before. He caught himself up, and said, dryly: "Come in, James."

The door swung on its hinges. A young man appeared, whose tall and admirably proportioned figure was clearly outlined against the white wall of the corridor. He wore the costume of a true gentleman with strict and modest elegance: coat, waistcoat and black trousers, with a white cravat knotted in the Brummell^{iv} style, as was then the fashion. His face, shadowed by the lampshade, seemed young, symmetrical and remarkably gentle. Gregory Temple fixed him with his piercing gaze, trying in vain to conceal the fever of his impatience, and said: "What news do you have, James? Is there any trace of Richard Thompson?"

"No, sir," the newcomer replied, in a calm and respectful tone. You may be familiar with one of those harmonious male voices that reproduces, in a lower register, the female contralto; you only have to hear it once never to forget it again. Our young man had such a voice.

"That's quite inexplicable!" Temple cried, agitatedly. "Has the Earth opened up to swallow him? James Davy, I have every confidence in your judgment, despite your youth: doesn't Richard's flight seem to you to cast a terrible suspicion upon him?"

"I'm looking into it, sir," James Davy replied, coolly, only then taking a few steps into the office. "There are difficulties of an unusual kind in this case. So far as I am concerned, Richard Thompson is an honest man, until there is proof to the contrary."

"Until there is proof to the contrary..." the Superintendent repeated.

"I know that he was involved in an affair of the heart," James continued. "With whom, I don't know. He has been your secretary and your friend; he must know a great deal, for no one could be close to you without learning..."

Temple's clenched fist rapped upon the table. "I would rather believe him dead," he thought, aloud.

"Of course, sir," James replied, "but you do not have the choice. I have extended my inquiries as far as the house of his mother, Fanny Thompson, in the county of Surrey. It's a cheerful place, full of actors and actresses; Fanny is thinking of returning to the Princess Theater, where Bartolozzi has left a big gap."

Temple's pencil traced a few words on a slip of paper set beneath his hand, upon which he had already made several notes.

"Fanny Thompson," Davy continued, in the same calm manner, "adored her son Richard. If Richard were dead, I would have found the house in mourning."

"Is it true," asked the Superintendent, consulting his notes, "that a very young child is being brought up in Fanny Thompson's home?"

"That's true, sir—and the infant is named Richard, like your former secretary."

Temple indicated to Davy that he should close the door and come closer.

"Thank you, James," he said. "You've done what you can... Since you've been busy with Richard, you doubtless have nothing to tell me about this girl who served as a companion to Bartolozzi—Sarah O'Neil..."

"Sarah O'Neil will be here in a few minutes, sir," Davy put in.

"Here!" Temple exclaimed, startled. "Where was she found, James?"

"In a Lambeth lodging-house, disguised as a man."

"Who tracked her down for me?"

"Me, sir."

"By what means?"

"By following precisely—slavishly, if I may say so—the sequential calculations of probability set out in your book."

Gregory Temple cast a melancholy glance at the proofs that lay on his desk. He took Davy's hand and shook it.

"You're very pale," the young man said to him, with concern.

"Yesterday evening," Temple replied, "the Lord Chief Justice referred to me in public. His Lordship said: 'The Chief Superintendent at Police headquarters is going under, going under.' This morning, I nearly put a pistol to my head and blew my brains out."

"You! Gregory Temple, the strong man!"

"What stopped me," the Superintendent said, slowly, "was the thought of poor lovely Suzanne. If I didn't have a daughter... An angel, rather..."

"What do the words of an old fool matter?" Davy protested.

"I'm going under," Temple murmured, disconsolately. "Going under!"

"Your mind has never been clearer."

"I'm going under! His Lordship has already decided the name of my eventual successor."

"What name?"

"Richard Thompson."

"That's lunacy, sir!" James Davy said. "There must be some mistake."

The Superintendent shook his head. "From February 3 to March 14," he said, very softly, "is 38 days. That's a long time. Thirty-eight days of futile research for Gregory Temple. His Lordship's right: I *am* going under." He paused, then continued coolly: "James, I have the measure of you. You will be one of the shining lights of the force one day... But you have received my final lessons, my son, and I assure you that my career is over."

The young man sat down beside him, as if their mutual sadness had licensed the familiarity. His face, no longer eclipsed the lampshade, was brightly illuminated—but his features suddenly darkened. Despite the masculine amplitude of his face, he was as beautiful as a woman.

"Sarah O'Neil is downstairs," called a voice from the corridor.

"Bring her in," replied Temple, seemingly awoken from a reverie. He deftly lifted the lampshade and placed the lamp behind him, in order to put his features in darkness while illuminating the face of the person who came in.

It was an Irishwoman of 18 or 20, tall and graceful. Temple was immediately struck by her beauty, which was dazzling in spite of the absurdity of her costume.

The Irishwoman's gaze met that of James Davy, and a brief spark flared in the jet-blackness of her eyes. It might have been resentment. James Davy was as still as a statue. The two policemen who had brought Sarah in saluted the Superintendent and left.

Sarah was bare-headed. Over her masculine attire she wore one of those vast red cloaks that the daughters of Connaught drape so lavishly about their handsome stature. Such cloaks often became dull with wear in the muddy streets of the parish of St. Giles's, the hell of the Irish.

Sarah lowered her eyes now, before the Superintendent's penetrating gaze. Even so, there was no trace of fear or anxiety on her beautiful face crowned with lush black hair. One might almost have said that a smile was trying to form on her full lips.

After two or three minutes of silent examination, Gregory Temple said: "You were in service with Constance Bartolozzi as a chambermaid?"

"I read her parts to her, milord," Sarah replied, "and I slept in her room that night, because she was afraid."

"Of what was she afraid?"

"Of people who came to her home that day."

"The *Companions of the Deliverance*?"

"I think that's what they were called."

"Do you know Richard Thompson?"

"I have seen him at the house with his mother."

"Often?"

"Twice."

"Never alone?"

"Never."

Gregory Temple placed his hands on his knees and resumed his silent consideration of Sarah.

"We know nothing about this girl," he murmured, tiredly, "or where she's been?"

"Sir," James Davy said, in a respectfully moderate tone, "would you permit me to take a turn at interrogating her?"

The young woman lowered her eyes and knitted her brows. The Superintendent made a discouraged gesture.

James took up the thread. "Sarah, why did you go into hiding after the murder of Constance Bartolozzi?"

"I was afraid," the lovely woman replied. "The people of Ireland easily find themselves in jail."

"Nevertheless, you will answer my questions honestly, now?"

"One does what one can, milord. Besides, I've no reason to tell lies here; my innocence was easy enough to prove. It wasn't the Law that I was most scared of."

"Who frightened you, then?"

"The Quaker." As she pronounced this word, Sarah's voice became lower, as if in spite of herself.

The Superintendent started.

"Would you like to continue the interrogation, sir?" James Davy asked.

"Go on, James, go on," Gregory Temple replied, his voice slightly emotional. "You're a remarkable chap."

The young man collected himself momentarily before continuing. "Sarah, who do you mean by the Quaker?"

The lovely Irishwoman looked at him in astonishment. "That's what everyone calls him," she said.

"You mean—John Devil?"

"Of course—if John Devil is the man they call the Quaker."

"Why were you afraid of the Quaker?"

Sarah hesitated, then replied, with visible disgust: "Because I saw him kill Constance Bartolozzi."

James Davy stopped and turned towards Temple.

The Superintendent said nothing. He put his elbows on the desk and leaned on them. The lamplight that struck him from behind was like an aureole about his huge forehead, where his grey hairs were quivering. His eyes glinted in the shadows and his gaze enveloped the lovely young woman like a net.

"May God punish you, milords," murmured the Irishwoman, "if I ever have cause to regret having told the truth here."

"You're free to speak, and you'll remain free," the Superintendent said. "I pledge my honor on that." He lifted his hand as he added: "Have no fear, you are under the protection of the Law."

Sarah took some time to collect her thoughts, then said: "The *signora* was sound asleep. It must have been 2 a.m. I was asleep in the window-seat when I was suddenly woken up by a slight noise. By the glimmer of the nightlight, I saw a man coming out of the dressing-room. I recognized him at first glance as Prince Alexis, who had spent the evening at the house, and I thought I was dreaming, for I had shown him out myself."

"Prince Alexis!" echoed Temple. "A member of that company that meets at your mistress' home?"

"No... The evening was spent playing whist."

"A false name, then. John Devil, perhaps?"

"Yes, John Devil, the Quaker... But I didn't know then that he was the Quaker. He went to the *signora*'s bed, without his tread making a sound on the floor. I thought his intention was theft, because the *signora* had a golden casket studded with diamonds on her night-table—a present from the Princess of Wales—and her earrings were also diamond pendants. But the Quaker didn't touch the golden casket or the earrings. He put his left hand under the *signora*'s head and his right at her throat. The *signora* let out a faint sigh but she didn't stir. The Quaker wiped his finger with his handkerchief, because the pin of her nightgown had pricked it. I had lifted myself up on my elbow when I first saw him, but since then I had been unable to move or speak. When the Quaker, on turning around, saw me thus, mouth agape at the sight of him, he put his finger to his lips. Then he raised his hand in salute, as if by force of habit, and went back into the dressing-room. How did he get out of the house? God alone knows, for all the doors were locked.

"I went to the *signora* as soon as I could get up. I still had no suspicion that anything was wrong. I tried to wake her. She was dead—dead in her sleep. On the bedcover there was the handkerchief that you have before you now. I recognized it... The brown droplets are the blood of John Devil."

"And you are perfectly sure," the Superintendent asked, "that the false Prince Alexis bore not the slightest resemblance to the son of the actress Fanny Thompson?"

"Perfectly sure, milord."

"But the handkerchief is marked *R.T.*—Richard Thompson."

"I don't know anything about that."

"There are 10,000 people in London," murmured Davy, "who have the initials *R.T.*—and people like the Quaker use stolen handkerchiefs."

Temple picked up the open letter that was beside the handkerchief. "Do you remember reading this to your mistress?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied. "The *R.T.* at the end of that note signifies Richard Thompson. The young man announced his intention of visiting her that evening, and he did indeed come, I remember, to ask for the termination of some payments that his mother, Fanny Thompson, was making to the *signora.*"

Temple wrote some notes in pencil on his slip of paper.

"And what did you do after the murder, Sarah?" James asked.

"I ran away."

"Why didn't you give your testimony at the inquest?"

"The Quaker had put his finger to his lips."

"But now you're talking..."

"Now I have nothing more to fear."

"Why?"

"Because the Quaker has given me permission to speak."

James Davy opened his mouth to continue the interrogation, but the Superintendent silenced him with a gesture and got up.

"Sarah O'Neil," he said, sternly, "we are quite close to Newgate here. In an hour, you could be laid out beneath the Press,^v crying out for mercy with a weight of 2,000 pounds upon your breast... I forbid you to interrupt me! You haven't been accused, my girl, and no one wishes you any harm, but the interests of Justice must be served. Know that I, to whom you are speaking, would give up the last drop of my blood in an instant to know the truth. You have seen this man you call John Devil again, since he has—according to you—removed the gag from your mouth. If you will tell me where the Quaker is, at this moment, I will give you 100 guineas. If you will not, the torture ordained every year by the King and his Parliament is not yet abolished in England... God damn me! If you will not, Sarah O'Neil, so much the worse for you!"

His gaze weighed upon the lovely Irishwoman, who became very pale. He sat down, though, and looked away for a second. At that very moment, a swift glance was exchanged between Sarah and James Davy, whose eyelids were then discreetly lowered.

Sarah soon recovered her composure. "Milord," she said, as straightforwardly as could be, "everyone knows that Gregory Temple is a just and clear-sighted man. I'll not go under the Newgate Press, for sure, but I'll not get the 100 pounds either, because the Quaker gave me permission to speak at the very moment that he was boarding a ship beneath London Bridge. The wind was blowing from the northeast, milord, perfect weather for sailing down the Thames, and this was 24 hours ago. The Quaker is far away by now, if the ship has not been wrecked."

The Superintendent remained deep in thought for some time. He put the lamp back in its place, set the shade upon it again and turned his back.

"May I go?" Sarah asked.

"Not before giving us, at the very least, a description of this rogue!" cried James Davy, a soldier intent on firing his final round.

Temple was slumped in his chair. He did not deign to offer any sign of life.

Sarah replied with good grace. "Your honors know very well, and better than me, that the Quaker has a whole shopful of faces. I've seen him twice in my life, and if he hadn't told me on the second occasion that it was him, I could have stood next to him for an age without recognizing him. On the night of the murder, he was a man of 30, fresh-faced and innocent, with blond curly hair fringing his skull. His height was about the same as Mr. Temple's, or perhaps an inch more, his eyes blue, his whiskers chestnut-colored, his nose thin and aquiline, his lips pinker than a lady's. When he stood beside me yesterday at the end of Thames Street, he was a big fellow of 40 with grey hairs in his beard and a figure..."

"Get out," the Superintendent said, tiredly.

He followed her to the door with his eyes; his brow was fiercely knitted. Before she had passed out of the corridor, he touched a brass button which stood out from the wall within arm's reach and a bell tinkled outside. A jaundiced face immediately appeared at a little door that opened in the same corner as the desk.

"A woman is going downstairs, Mr. Forster."

"Sarah O'Neil, sir."

"That's the one. Put two shadows on her, day and night."

The jaundiced face nodded to indicate obedience and disappeared. It is presumably superfluous to explain what the word "shadow" signifies in the vocabulary of the English Police.

Temple pulled the file towards him and turned its pages distractedly.

"I'm going under," he murmured. "His eminence, the Lord Chief Justice, has an eagle's eye!" Then he added, in such a low voice that even Davy could not hear him: "That fine filly is our last chance." The Superintendent paused, pensively, then continued brusquely: "What do you think of all that, James?"

"The testimony of this Sarah O'Neil..." Davy began.

Gregory Temple shrugged his shoulders and his tight lips attempted a smile. "Worthless!" he said. "This Sarah is nothing but a pawn. We have a 100 feet of turbulent water over our heads!" He continued, in a calmer vein: "You know, Davy, I once saw an old woman struck instantly blind. What do you think she said? 'I can't see any more?' No, she merely said: 'God protect us, the Sun's gone out!' It's the same with me, my good friend. I try to pull myself together, but that's the fact. It isn't the Sun that's gone out, it's me that's gone blind."

He pushed the file away with one hand, while his other made a fist to beat his forehead. The soft and intelligent gaze of the young man was still upon him.

"Whether the girl is telling the truth or lying," the Superintendent continued, in a bitterly disdainful tone, "is of little importance to us. Lies can be instructive in a criminal trial, even more so than the truth. You're wise enough already to know that. In the Munro and Tornhill case, I marched, with a sure and rapid tread, through the middle of 60 false witnesses. I've read three descriptions of John Devil in this file, all of which contradict one another and the one given by Sarah. I've gone blind, James, and I deny the Sun's existence: I have the profound, absolute, inflexible conviction that John Devil does *not* exist!"

He lifted his eyes again to look at James Davy, who was listening to him calmly and attentively. When he looked away again, Davy suppressed a sigh, seemingly by means of a tremendous effort, and a slight tremor agitated his lip-muscles.

"Sarah saw nothing," Gregory Temple continued, his tone becoming firmer in proportion to the increase in his mental effort. "I would pledge my eternal salvation that she saw nothing! No matter how low I've fallen, I can still distinguish a pack of lies from sincere testimony. Would we have the assassin if we could set our hands on the man who fed her that pack of lies? Is there an assassin? Let's see... We're not in possession of a single definite fact, except for the sudden death of a woman, in her own room, in her own bed, behind closed doors that show no evidence of a break-in. The dead woman's body shows no sign of violence save for a scarcely-perceptible mark on the Adam's apple, similar to the bruise left by the pressure of a thumb.

"Three doctors from the Royal College came to examine it, with all due ceremony. The first said that it was inflicted by a strip of whalebone, and delivered a long diatribe against corsets. The second retorted that it was the beginning of a cancerous tumor, and that his esteemed colleague was devoid of common sense. The third called his esteemed colleagues a pair of mules and said that it was an accidental strain, of a kind observed many times over in singers of both sexes. The autopsy revealed a ruptured blood-vessel, and when I said—bearing in mind that I'm a surgeon too, because it's necessary to know everything to be a Chief Superintendent of Police—when I said: 'Gentlemen, pressure has been exerted upon that spot, in such and such a fashion, by the hand of a skilled man, in order to bring about instant death,' our three doctors cried: 'What did I tell you?' That was the unanimous opinion of these knowledgeable practitioners, save that they had neglected to express it...

"Then again, I ask you, is the testimony of Constance Bartolozzi's other servants consistent with that of this Sarah? No. And who has thrown into it the name of John Devil, or the Quaker, whatever you want to call him? No one in the world. You see, Davy, there's only one undisputed fact, and that is that I'm going under!"

He continued, with a furious light in his eye: "By God, I've overturned their stupid routines! I was strong enough, it seems, when I stamped under my feet the poor mousetraps that had been rusting since the Deluge in the attics of the Metropolitan Police. I created the machinery of detection! I invented a simple, logical, solid instrument: is that so worthless that I can now be cast aside?"

"I have wondered more than once," the young man said, drawing closer, "whether all of this might be nothing but a conspiracy directed against you."

The fire in the Superintendent's eye was abruptly extinguished, and his features took on an expression of mistrust. "Ah!" he said, with a cold smile. "You've thought of that? Well, sir, you're mistaken. John Devil is a phantom, but there is a murderer, and it's behind the phantom of John Devil that the murderer is hiding. Do you know where I shall find the real name of the murderer who disguises

himself as that phantom? I'll tell you, if you can't guess. I'll find it in the long list under the hallway, which contains the names of every employee of the Metropolitan Police."

"What!" cried Davy. "Do you think...?"

Temple looked at him briefly. "Your astonishment is unwarranted," he said.

"And it has already reached its limit," the young man replied, quietly. "I had forgotten Richard Thompson."

Temple lowered his forehead into his hands again. "Richard!" he murmured. "Do you understand the nature and import of my suspicions regarding that unfortunate young man? I liked him, just as I have formed an affection for you, newly arrived as you are—but listening to you defending him... It's 27 years since I first passed over the threshold of this office. I've never known the ground give way beneath my feet in this manner—except once—but the crime was a distant one and I believed that I was blinded by the affection I had for the victim. As in this case, there was a mysterious association: the German Rosicrucians. Like the Knights of the Deliverance in the present instance, it seemed to me that they appeared solely to commit the crime. By a singular coincidence, the same name—the name of John Devil—was also thrown in..."

He paused for a moment, shrugging his shoulders. Then, in a firmer voice, he continued: "Just as I imported a heretofore unknown lever into the investigative process, it was necessary that a new formula should similarly be devised to fight the criminal efforts. When cannons are used to lay siege to citadels, they in turn lower their walls and hide their battlements behind the inclined slope of an embankment, opposing the irresistible force that can shatter granite with immovable earthworks. The world is nothing but a fencing-match, but it is not given to any newcomer to discover the perfect riposte to a clever thrust designed by a master-at-arms. It requires wisdom. That which resists me at this moment in time is the Vauban^{vi} who toys with my artillery, the Saint-Georges^{vii} who scoffs at my rapier. Not only does he know my method of attack, but I am ignorant of the sequence of his invisible parries. Henceforth, everything around me is strange, like a fever-dream!

"Thus far, the witnesses seem to have invented an uncertain and pointless crime, and the name of the dead woman pursues me like a curse. There is nothing to which I can direct my forceful hand or my inquiring gaze! At this moment, I am left confounded by the miracle, like Pharaoh's sorcerers astonished by a wand more powerful than their own.^{viii} Then I pause for reflection, reviewing my own armaments. I have observed that the ramparts of the fortress are dug in behind an embankment and that my cannonballs are not striking home. My method is a key to open locks, but if the lock is hidden, what use is a key? But the very skill of the work betrays the workman, and I cry out, sure of my facts, as if I already had a hand on the assassin's shoulder: 'You have taken your weapon from my armory! You have turned to evil purpose that which I forged for good! I recognize you: *you are my pupil!*' "

He was holding his head high. His sharp, clear eyes seemed to be penetrating the veil. His flared nostrils testified to the passion that was in him and the hollow furrows in the highly-developed forehead were full of menace. There was an incredible power of concentration in the man, combined with that redoubtable analytical mind which overcomes all obstacles slowly but surely, as a file wears away steel.

James Davy's cheeks had turned pale, doubtless by virtue of the emotion he felt in seeing for the first time the full measure of this powerful man's commitment to the game. "Sir," he murmured, "you've had other pupils besides Richard Thompson..."

"I'm no longer speaking of Richard Thompson," Temple replied, brusquely. "All those who have been close to me will be put to the test."

"You have other pupils," Davy continued, softly, "than those who have received your precious lessons directly, at close quarters."

"What are you trying to say, sir?" the Superintendent demanded, impatiently.

The young man's slender white finger touched one of the printer's proof-sheets scattered on the desk. "Your book, sir," he said, "is a dangerous masterpiece."

The page proof bore the inscription, in large print: *The Art of Discovering the Guilty* by Gregory Temple - Cheap Edition.

"Believe me," James Davy said, respectfully but distinctly. "To enable crime to change the lock, it's only necessary for the Police to display their key."

Gregory Temple remained silent. A blush showed on his face, but was then replaced by a mortal pallor. His hands trembled with the effort he made to control himself. A tear appeared beneath his lowered eyelid. He took the proofs and tore them up, one after another. It was easy to see that this was a condemnation with no appeal.

At that moment, as the last sheet was ripped apart, a commotion began outside in Scotland Yard, full of hoots and bursts of laughter. One hoarse voice soon rose above the tumult in the middle of the square, in the most recent fashion of the English hawker of ha'penny pamphlets, proclaiming: "Read all about it! Hot off the presses! The ink's still wet! The most distinguished author you can buy for a ha'penny! The book of *The Amazing Adventures of John Devil the Quaker*, with portraits of the author, the famous and unfortunate Constance Bartolozzi, and Gregory Temple, Superintendent of Police..."

The conclusion of this discourse was drowned out by a new broadside of laughter, shouts and whistles.

"My father left me well provided for," Temple pronounced, painfully, between clenched teeth. "I have worked here day and night for 27 years, and I am now poor. I shall suppress my book, which is my daughter's inheritance, permanently—because what you say is true, young man: its publication was a sin of pride and a dangerous breach of trust. I have grown old. The Lord Chief Justice insults me. The people mock me. Tomorrow, the King will dismiss me. It's mob rule, James, I don't complain. On the contrary, I'm glad to drink even the dregs from the chalice... Will you do me the favor of going to buy me a copy of this pamphlet sold beneath my window for a ha'penny?"

"Master..." the young man stammered.

"That's an order, sir!"

ⁱ The Metropolitan Police, whose headquarters in 4 Whitehall Place had a door that let out into Great Scotland Yard, had not yet been founded in 1817; Robert Peel created the force in 1829. Later in the chapter, we discover that Temple has been at Scotland Yard for 27 years (since 1790), so Féval's alternative history is quite extensive, at least insofar as it pertains to English law-enforcement. Féval gives Temple's rank as *Intendant Supérieur*, which I have translated as "Chief Superintendent" as there was no such rank in the Metropolitan Police when it was first created, the senior official at the Whitehall Place headquarters being the Police Commissioner, but the literal translation seems reasonable in view of the fact that we are dealing with an imaginary institution.

ⁱⁱ The anatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) was convinced that cerebral functions were localized, so that protrusions of the skull were indicative of pronounced mental faculties; his system, which he called *craniology*, was renamed *phrenology* by his followers.

ⁱⁱⁱ The parish of St. Giles's, whose name is preserved by a road to the south of what is now New Oxford Street, was long notorious for poverty and vice.

^{iv} George "Beau" Brummell (1778-1840)—Féval has "Brummel"—was the celebrated English dandy who pioneered various fashions of male dress adopted into common usage in the 19th century.

^v A form of torture once applied to prisoners who refused to plead to a charge in an attempt to save their property from confiscation should they be found guilty. It involved placing the reluctant prisoner between two boards and piling heavy stones on the upper one. A graphic description can be found in Victor Hugo's historical novel *L'Homme qui rit* (1869; tr. as *The Man Who Laughs*), which appears to have been Hugo's response to the manner in which various feuilletonists had made free use of the substance of his early works. In a subsequent footnote, Féval claims (perhaps mistakenly) that the Press was still in use in Newgate and in the Fleet in 1820.

^{vi} The Marquis of Vauban (1633-1707) was a famous military engineer and Marshal of France, whose sieges were invariably successful and whose fortifications—arrayed along the northern frontier—were reputedly impregnable.

^{vii} The Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799), who was as famous a musician as he was a fencer, was a pillar of pre-Revolutionary high society.

^{viii} The reference is to *Exodus* 7:12, when the serpent made from Aaron's rod swallows those made from the wands of the Pharaoh's sorcerers.