

SOMEONE IS STEALING CHILDREN IN PARIS

On 25 June 1906 the readers of Le Matin were able to read on the second page of that great newspaper the following sensational reportage:

Someone is stealing children in Paris.

They are being stolen every day.

They are being stolen from the great boulevards and the busiest streets.

They have been stolen from the Boulevard Montmartre, the Rue Caumartin, the Rue Royale, the Rue Racine, the Avenue Niel, the Passage des Panoramas and the Cité Rougemont.

They have been stolen in broad daylight, with diabolical audacity and amazing dexterity.

They have been stolen from under the noses of the most attentive mothers.

And this is not one of those tales that made us shiver as children, a story to trouble the nights of the very young with nightmares. It is the most veritable reality, the one in which we live.

It is a certain fact, written in tears and sobs in the weekly chronicles, an undeniable fact, the terrifying gravity of which has been revealed to us by a preliminary investigation.

If this veritable epidemic continues to increase, if a powerful dam does not stop the rising flood, and if the details that we are beginning to discover are unveiled without the key to the mystery having produced a striking solution, it is not difficult to foresee that this new leprosy will make Paris weep, and horrify France and the world.

Seven children have already been snatched from their parents in a matter of days.

That is what we can affirm today, without fear of error—but we have reason to believe that the thefts are even more numerous.

Our information is very incomplete at the moment of going to press. It has been taken from a communication that reached us late in the evening. In spite of our army of reporters, the telegraph and the telephone, immediately put into action, we were unable to wait for fuller details, stopping the machines that were ready to roll for a second time and further augmenting the impatience of our rotary press operators, already irritated by the delay imposed on the printing and perhaps delaying the paper's publication.

Our readers will not miss anything, however.

The affair about which we are informing them today appears to us, at first sight so astonishing and so prodigious that all the informational resources at our disposal will be mobilized in order to arrive rapidly at the establishment of the truth.

We would have been able, nevertheless, in spite of the urgency, to recount a few precise details if we had not, at the very outset of our investigation, run into a new unexpected ill will on the part of the senior police authorities.

A DEPUTY WHO KNOWS NOTHING A CHIEF CLERK WHO SAYS NOTHING MONSIEUR HAMARD'S DISTURBANCE

At the Sûreté, no one is saying anything.

Obviously, an order has been issued.

The police, for whom the press is often a precious auxiliary, still believe that they ought to maintain the most rigorous secrecy on the subject of the thefts of children.

We shall see in due course what we ought to think of this silence.

Monsieur Plot, the deputy head of the Sûreté, adopted the most innocent expression when we questioned him.

“Thefts of children? What’s this you’re telling me? If there had been any, I would know. It’s a fairy tale.”

The fairy tale in question was not denied so energetically by Monsieur Lounergue, the distinguished chief clerk of the Sûreté. It is true that we had raced to his domicile, so he did not have time to confer with his colleagues, in order to enable him to avoid the little trap that we set for his good faith.

“Monsieur Plot” we told him, coolly, “has told us that children have been disappearing lately in considerable numbers, that no trace has been found of them, that there is anxiety about their fate, that...”

“Monsieur Plot has told you that?” he exclaimed, quite astonished, without taking account of the fact that that interrogative interruption would aggravate suspicions.

“Monsieur Plot has said that,” was the reply he received, with the calmness of a lie sure of its effect.

“Oh! Well, yes. But let’s not exaggerate. Let’s not alarm the public by overstating the case. Numerous declarations have arrived in the offices of Commissaires of Police regarding lost children. There are more than usual. Pure chance! There are weeks when it rains more, others when it rains less. With respect to the disappearances of children, we’re in a period when it rains more, that’s all.

“It happens every day that an excessively curious kid lets go of his mother’s hand and gets lost in a crowd. When he realizes that he’s alone, he cries. A compassionate passer-by questions him. He generally makes no reply. A passing policeman takes the kid, paternally, to the nearest Commissariat, where, nine times out of ten, Mama is in the process of giving a minute description, and indicating the location in which the little one must have been separated from her.

“A tender little scene terminates the drama, which finishes, in the final account, with a cream bun at the cake shop. It’s rare for a child not to be returned to the parents the same day, or the next, at the latest—except, naturally, when it’s a matter of planned escapades, young Crusoes eager for space, deserters from the paternal hearth, dreaming of realizing the exploits of the heroes of certain adventure stories.

“In those cases, the search is more difficult, because the fugitives hide and have generally taken enough food to last for a few days. They’re events of an extreme banality. Hazard, I repeat—mere hazard—has multiplied them this week. It’s of no importance, none at all, and your reporter’s flair can sleep easy.”

This little speech would have been fine if the children in question had been found. Unfortunately, they have not.

The head of the Sûreté, whom we succeeded in reaching shortly afterwards, was considerably more disturbed. More forthcoming than his subordinates, Monsieur Hamard did not try to hide the gravity of the situation.¹

“What? You know? I beg you, don’t publish a word about these abductions—for we find ourselves confronted with repeated, systematic, mysterious abductions. We’d like to hide the facts for a few more days. Do us the favor of helping us. I give you my word that you’ll be informed as soon as we can reveal everything, that you’ll be told before your colleagues and that we’ll give you all the information we have. For the moment, though, absolute silence...and if you promise me that, I’ll tell you, in exchange, about the capture effected yesterday in Brussels of an entire colony of chloroform thieves who have been terrorizing the hotels of Nice and San Remo this winter.

CURIOUS DETAILS

In spite of the tempting recompense offered to this reporter’s discretion, we did not hesitate to fulfill our duty, which is, first and foremost, to keep our readers informed, without worrying about the momentary convenience of the administration at the Quai des Orfèvres.

And why keep quiet about this troubling series of disappearances?

¹ Octave Hamard became head of the Sûreté in 1903 after some ten years of service in junior positions. MM. Plot and Lounergue are probably fictitious.

It might be that the police want to bring off a striking coup, trying to attenuate public emotion by announcing the arrest of the guilty party at the same time as the crimes.

Such reasons doubtless have their value.

On the other hand, however, is it not useful to inform parents that a monstrous individual is roaming the city at this moment, in quest of children—very young children—which he steals, for a purpose that has not yet been determined?

Is it, then, a bad thing to shout “Beware!” to imprudent mothers, to shout: “Watch out!”

It is all the more indispensable to divulge the danger because these thefts of children have all the characteristics of those violent events that impassion crowds: the prodigious skill of the villain, the continual repetition of typical methods.

Imagine that, one morning, a warden discovers, in a thicket in the Bois de Boulogne, a corpse bearing a wound on the left temple in the form of the ace of clubs. The newspapers publish a short article about it which appears in the inner pages, and nothing more.

Now imagine that the same warden discovers a cadaver every morning, in the same place, marked on the temple with the same fateful ace of clubs. Immediately, the case becomes famous, will be the object of special issues, will prey on all minds—and at night, before going to sleep, the fearful will look under the bed once again.

The celebrated English murder Jack the Ripper owes his international reputation, above all, to a kind of frightful trademark that he imprinted on his repeated crimes.

Now, the child-stealer also has his trademark.

The first declarations of the parents who were bandit’s victims have permitted the observation of identical singularities, which reveal that we are dealing with a tenacious and reasoned determination—unless they are the work of a madman, an odious maniac.

Thus far, the abductor has only attacked little boys.

All the boys in question are between six and seven years old.

All the boys are pale blond, with hair the color of straw.

This is more than coincidence.

Whatever the chief clerk of the Sûreté might think, mere hazard does not repeat itself with that methodical precision.

No. We are in the presence of obscure crimes, whose perpetration must be stopped, as a matter of the utmost urgency. This is a cruel problem, which cannot and must not remain insoluble any longer. It is not acceptable that the Parisian population, the ignorant victim, should abandon more children to the enigmatic sphinx that is devouring them.

LATEST NEWS *THE THEFT IN THE CHAUSÉE-D’ANTIN*

At the last moment, one of our correspondents telephoned the following information:

The Baronne de Vautremesse has just signed a statement at the Commissariat of Monsieur Fanguy, of which the following is a summary.

The lady in question was at the crossroads of the Chaussée d’Antin, on the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann, with her son André, when the latter suddenly disappeared, without the mother being able to explain how. After various searches, Madame de Vautremesse decided to inform the police.

The child is six years and three months old. He is slender for his age. He is wearing a jersey sailor suit with a large white collar edged with blue, blue socks and long yellow lace-up bootees. His beret is inscribed with the words *City of Brighton*, in golden letters. Inside, the hatmaker’s label is also English: John Chapman & Co., London. All his underwear is delicately embroidered with the overlapping initials A.V. The child is very intelligent.

A significant indication: his long curly hair is a very pale, almost colorless blond.

Will the frightful series continue?

Such was the initial reportage that *Le Matin* published about the extraordinary affair of the *Child-Stealer* who terrorized society for three months.

Following that article, which caused an enormous sensation, *Le Matin* printed new information every day, the series of which forms the most curious, the most extraordinary and the most exciting story that was ever imagined.

We believe that nothing would interest our readers more than the publication of a faithful and complete reprint here.

Paris, 26 June

The facts revealed in yesterday's edition have generated considerable emotion in Paris. Today, the child-stealer is the object of all conversations and all execrations.

Other newspapers are reproducing our article this morning, commenting on it on page one, or even, it must be noted, taking their concern for the new to extreme limits, supplementing it with imaginary details.

The affair that *Le Matin* has brought to public attention has thus become, overnight, the great event of reportage around which journalists are agitating in search of new information.

So much the better.

The more noise there is, the sooner we can expect the exploits of the sinister bandit to be stopped.

It is certainly a matter of a villain or a madman. Everyone is in agreement on that point. None of our colleagues is even discussing the hypothesis of simple disappearances due to deplorable hazards and mere failures of surveillance.

Hazard, we repeat, does not have this troubling persistence. It is quite obvious to everyone that a *child-stealer*, a sinister specialist, is abroad in Paris.

If any optimist, in spite of everything, dares to protest that the unfortunate little ones, gone astray in the crowd, will soon be found, we reply to him that we are now in possession of all the statements made during the last week at various commissariats by tearful parents.

None of those that mention blond children six or seven years old have obtained a favorable solution.

Whereas a dozen children with brown, chestnut, dark blond or red hair have been returned to their homes, none of the ten pale blond children who did not answer their mothers' appeals have been returned to the hearth.

Ten children!

As we foresaw, the figure of seven that we indicated yesterday, is insufficient.

In addition to little André de Vautremesse, whose name was telephoned to us at the last minute, the sad list has had to be augmented with two more young victims.

To the ten questions that everyone is asking with regard to the fate of these ten children, one can only reply with harrowing suppositions.

We shall not develop them today, out of respect for the anguish of the parents.

There will be plenty of time, if nothing occurs to clarify the problem, to print alarming hypotheses.

COMPLETE LIST OF MISSING CHILDREN SUMMARY DESCRIPTIONS

1. Bernard Flaquette, aged six, golden blond, answers to the nicknamed "Bobichon." Tall for his age. Obvious intelligence. Gray eyes. Chestnut-colored costume, with large Lavallière cravat in red satin. Father an accountant at the Gas Company, who was returning from a walk with his son when, on turning round, he observed that the child was no longer following him. Probable location in which the theft was committed: Rue Beaubourg, at the corner of the Rue des Gravilliers.

2. Paolo Palavacoccini, walking in the company of his grandmother. Scottish costume. Pitch-pine blond. Six and a half. Medium height. Speaks Italian. Speaks French with a slight southern accent. Very alert and lively. Probable location in which the theft was committed: corner of Avenue Niel and Rue Rennequin.

3. Urbain Godedouin, was with his mother. Pale blond. Abundant hair. Long curls. Six and four months. Blue eyes. Very small for his age, still wearing a dress, richly embroidered, color hazelnut. Hat, socks and shoes of the same color. Nickname Chichi. Intelligence very alert, very artful, above his age. Probable location where the theft was committed: Rue Marbeuf, near Rue François I.

4. Ange Pompaigne, was with his nurse. Light copper blond. Dressed from head to toe in white fabric, very thick. Black felt hat. Six and five months. Brown eyes, very bright. Astonishing intelligence. Probable location of abduction: Rue Racine, corner of Rue Monsieur-le-Prince.

5. Pierre-Isidore-Jules-Marie-Onésime Candelaure, was also with a maidservant. Ordinarily called, after the fashion of his governess, who is German, "Schaetzen"—which is to say, "little treasure." Milky blond. Six and two months. Small, but sturdy and very vigorous. Sparkling intelligence of Parisian urchin. Dressed in mourning, entirely in black. Round hat with crepe. Probable location of abduction: Rue Royale, corner of Faubourg-Saint-Honoré.

6. Frantz Vetyolle, son of the famous harpist, professor at the Conservatoire; was with his mother. Checkered gray suit, with long trousers and jockey cap. Thin, very tall. Blond hair, almost white. Exceptionally intelligent. Probable place of abduction: Cité Rougemont or Rue Bergère, between Rue Rougement and Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière.

7. Nicolas Barlatescu, son of third chancellor at Rumanian consulate; was with his mother. Pale gray costume, large flat collar. Opal blond. Six and seven months. Blue eyes. Speaks Rumanian, English, German, French. Remarkable intelligence. Probable location where he was stolen: Boulevard Montmartre, between Boulevard des Italiens and Rue Vivienne.

8. Jules Bimbaleau, was with his mother. Gray chine trousers. Pleated waistcoat, black and white checks. Tarbe beret. Six and nine months. Large burn-scar on right cheek. Wheat blond. Very intelligent. Probable location where theft was committed: Passage des Panoramas.

9. Fernand Pig, was with his uncle. Beige blond hair. Dressed in dark blue, embroidered collar and ornaments. Yellow lace-up shoes. Russian bonnet. Small, plump. Astonishing intelligence. Probable location where the theft was committed: Rue Caumartin, corner of Rue Boudreau.

10. André de Vautremsse, whose description we have already published.

Such is the list that we have been able to obtain from the notebooks of the police, who, following our article, have not thought it useful to prevent us from doing our job.

What is striking about this lamentable story is the unusual dexterity of the thief. He has abducted ten children without attracting the attention of anyone, without being seen, and without leaving anything on the scene of his exploits that might one day lead to his discovery.

BERNARD, BINARD AND BARBARUS

The drama of the Child-Stealer seems bound to take on a considerable amplitude. Thus, *Le Matin* has decided to establish a reportage race between three of its best reporters.

Messieurs Bernard, Binard and Barbarus have been commissioned by our paper to track the affair of the Child-Stealer from now on. On the day when the guilty party—or the principal guilty party, if there are several—is arrested, whichever of those journalists has furnished the most interesting information will receive a bonus of 25,000 francs.

Our readers will be the judges of this original competition. When the time comes, we shall consult them regarding the attribution of the prize. Their votes will decide the winner. A committee will be appointed to scrutinize the ballot. Our colleague Harduin has been good enough to accept its chairmanship.²

TWO MORE THEFTS

Two further thefts have been recorded today.

Monsieur Fanguy, the Commissaire of Police in the Rue de Provence, has discovered a new disappearance, that of little Godefroy Pomme, blond.

On the other hand, Monsieur Péchard, Commissaire of Police in the Gaillon district, has been notified of the disappearance of Charles Clépent, six and two days, pale blond. Charles Clépent is the son of a well known stockbroker.

Godefroy Pomme was abducted at the intersection of the Boulevard Haussmann and the Rue Taitbout, Charles Clépent at the corner of the Rue de Phalbourg, outside the Parc Monceau.

The latter infant was stolen with a dexterity that is near-miraculous. The child was holding on to his mother's dress. She had just taken him in a carriage to see the goats in the Parc Monceau when, almost instantaneously, as she turned the corner of the street, she had the feeling that her son was no longer there.

She looked along the Rue de Phalbourg, by which she had arrived, but saw no one but a few inoffensive passers-by. She ran to the Rue de Thann. The street was almost empty. Only one private carriage could be seen, heading at a rapid pace toward the Place Malesherbes.

Then Madame Clépent ran into the Parc Monceau, found nothing, and came back to wander the neighboring streets, beside herself, then ran toward the Rue des Petits-Champs, where her husband's office is, but changed her mind in order to go directly to the local commissariat.

There she gave a description of her son and details of what he was wearing. At the moment of the theft, the boy was wearing a mastic velvet suit, with large horn buttons ringed with copper, and a matching hat.

Aron Barbarus

Paris, 27 June

STOLEN CHILDREN'S CLOTHING FOUND

The investigation has taken a great step forward.

In various locations, garments belonging to the stolen children have been discovered and handed in to the police.

Many of the people who had found these little costumes had kept them, either out of negligence or indifference, because they attached no importance to them or for other less noble reasons.

It is now possible, therefore, to base deductions on a few tangible clues. Thus, we expect decisive news at any moment.

² In the serial version of the story this reportage competition is embellished with a diagrammatic "scoreboard" recording the running tally of the readers' votes, the reputation of which is rather cumbersome and of no real significance, so it is unsurprising that the Tallandier edition omits it, even though the progress of the competition is of some significance to the plot.

One very curious thing, which proves that in this great city of Paris, hazard distributes its favors with a certain intelligence, it was our colleague Barbarus who picked up one of these items of jetsam: the last, the little mastic velvet costume of Charles Clépent, which he described yesterday.

BARBARUS' DISCOVERY

At about eleven o'clock in the evening, the *Matin* reporter was going past the Parc Monceau, at the location where, according to his other, little Charles had been abducted. Barbarus wanted to see the place where the theft had been carried out for himself.

He had scarcely taken thirty paces along the Rue de Thann when his attention was attracted by a small object in the middle of the thoroughfare that was scintillating in the light of a nearby gas-lamp.

If it were necessary to stop every time one encounters a stray piece of metal on the roads of Paris one would end up being a full-time rag-picker, so our colleague continued on his way.

Twenty meters further on, however, he changed his mind. Without being able to explain exactly why, the unknown object that he had glimpsed momentarily, doubtless devoid of value, was preying on his mind. One sometimes has these bizarre, incomprehensible obsessions.

In brief, while murmuring "Idiot! Cretin!" to himself, he went back and picked the object up.

It was a button.

That button had an immediate effect on our friend of shock and excitement.

That button was not just any button.

That button was made of horn, with copper trimmings.

That button was probably one of those that had fastened Charles Clépent's costume. *Large horn buttons ringed with copper*, the mother had said. The description fit.

Barbarus immediately reached a conclusion.

The villain who carried out the crime, he thought, *made his escape along the Rue de Thann.*

The button might, in fact, have been carried there after a long sequence of peregrinations, but was it not more logical to deduce that it had fallen off while the thief was making off with his living booty?

It was, therefore, more than probable, so far as Barbarus was concerned, that the mother, in the first moment of anxiety, had not immediately thought of looking in the Rue de Thann and had thus given the abductor time to flee. But these suppositions on our colleague's part, although probable at first sight, were not wholly conclusive, as you will read further on.

Barbarus resumed his route.

Twenty paces further on, he found another button similar to the first, which must have been torn away forcefully, because a shred of fabric was still adhering to it: a fragment of mastic velvet lined with beige cloth.

In the Place Malesherbes, in front of the little triangular garden that brightens the crossroads, the Omnibus Company has had one of those shelters constructed in which its patient customers are accustomed to wait. Behind that construction, the long-sighted Barbarus saw from a distance, in the semi-darkness, a vague white package.

The two discoveries he had just made had sharpened his curiosity. Driven by that clairvoyance of the soul which we call intuition, he went toward that package, picket it up, unwrapped it, and observed, almost without astonishment, that the envelope contained Charles Clépent's clothes, with the shoes, the bonnet, the socks, the sort, the underpants, the braces and one of those flannel bodices beloved by mothers who are absolutely determined to render their children sensitive, delicate and vulnerable to colds.

The buttonholes were ripped. Almost all the buttons had been torn away. The child had, therefore, been undressed violently, by a brutal and hasty hand.

CRUEL QUESTIONS

What, then, can we conclude?

Alas, it is scarcely possible to form a very precise opinion.

The suggestion of our colleague Barbarus, who thinks that the kidnapper must have fled along the Rue de Thann, does not seem irrefutable—far from it.

Even admitting that the thief took that direction, he could not have undressed the child in the middle of the road at four o'clock in the afternoon, and walked on through such a busy neighborhood dragging a naked child by the hand.

One can form more satisfactory hypotheses and reconstruct the drama with greater plausibility.

Quite probably, the thief, after having stolen the child, transported him to his lair, undressed him, and, not knowing what to do with the garments, fearing that they might one day serve as evidence to convict him, got rid of them by throwing them away in a public place. The following night, he must have retaken the route that he had followed with his prey, lost two buttons that had fallen out of the poorly-sealed wrapping-paper in the Rue de Thann and finally discarded his incriminating burden in the Place Malesherbes.

The villain must, in that case, have made the journey twice, at three o'clock to carry out the theft and sometime before eleven to throw away the garments.

In spite of the satisfaction with which we welcome the hope offered by a first glimmer of light in the darkness, there nevertheless remain a few questions, as dolorous as pincers of torture, which will undoubtedly aggravate the general anxiety.

Where are the children?

What has become of them?

What has the child-stealer done with them?

Why does he only kidnap boys?

Why does he only kidnap boys whose hair is a particular shade of blond?

By what method does he abduct them?

Why does he get rid of the clothes?

The only question to which, in the present state of the investigation, it is possible to reply is the last. We have already explained, and the idea must have occurred to everyone, that the thief does not want to keep at home items of clothing that might betray him and serve as evidence in a trial.

But if this hypothesis is plausible, it is followed fatally, with the inflexible cruelty of logic, by a terrible deduction.

We scarcely dare to write it down, remembering that among the readers of these lines are doubtless parents who are still hoping, while we are despairing.

In fact, the presence of the children's clothing would not be any more compromising to the malefactor than the presence of the children themselves. Thus, if he disposes of that which is less dangerous to him, would he not also dispose of that which is more dangerous?

However much tact we would like to employ in order to avoid heaping further distress on families already sorely tried, the events speak for themselves only too clearly, revealing the real meaning of prudent circumlocutions.

Given that it is futile to want to fool oneself, and not to state aloud, in all its brutal horror, what everyone is whispering.

In all probability, the children have been carried away by some sort of vampire, by a being outside humanity, by a mad savage or a savage madman, who, in some ignoble lair, of which he has made a slaughterhouse and a tomb, is murdering them for the pleasure of murdering them, and to destroy the only witnesses to his crimes.

That is what everyone is saying and that is what—we must not, in truth, abandon all hope—is presently most probable. It is certainly not consoling, and will not diminish general impatience.

The government cannot remain indifferent to these crimes. Among other measures, our colleague Bernard informs us that one of the finest agents of the Sûreté, Sub-Brigadier Habischoff, has just been recalled from London, where he was on a mission, and that he will devote himself entirely to the search for the child-stealer.

On the other hand, in consequence of a special request from our ambassador in Washington, a famous American detective, William Trisson, has been summoned by cable. He will embark on the *Savoie* in three days.

And the police are following our example. In the same way that we have offered to reward the skill the skill of our reporters, they have promised a sum of fifteen thousand francs to anyone who denounces the guilty party.

Alone in the face of so many combined efforts, the child-stealer will certainly end up being caught.

We also know that the police now possess certain extraordinarily curious clues of the greatest interest. According to this information, the abductor will prove to be a man of a character even stranger and more enigmatic than the series of crimes suggests.

Paris, 28 June

PLACES WHERE CHILDREN'S CLOTHING HAS BEEN FOUND

We owe to our colleague Bernard, who lays siege to the offices of the Sûreté every day, a list of the places where the garments of the various child victims have been discovered.

We know well enough that with regard to a crime of such enormity, and so fantastic, the slightest details had their significance and are of great interest.

Bernard Flaquette's clothes were found at the corner of the Rue de Maure and the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Martin.

Paolo Palavacoccini's were in the Rue d'Artois, at the corner of the Rue de Berri.

Urbain Godedouin's were under the Pont des Invalides, near the Quai de la Conférence.

Ange Pompaigne's were on a windowsill on the ground floor of the Restaurant Foyot in the Rue de Condé. It was in the same place, a few years ago, that a criminal placed the bomb that, by a quasi-symbolist hazard, injured the anarchist poet Laurent Tailhade.³

Pierre Camdelaur's were on the Pont d'Orsay, opposite the Gare d'Orléans.

Frantz Vetyolle's crumpled suit was behind the door of the building next door to the Salle Erard in the Rue de Mail.

Nicolas Barlatescu's pale gray costume was at the Palais-Royal, behind the Théâtre-Français.

Jules Bimbaleau's gray chine trousers and black-and-white check waistcoat of were under the peristyle of the Bourse in the Rue du Quatre-Septembre.

Fernand Pig's dark blue coat was in the Rue de Rivoli, almost directly opposite the Rue d'Alger, inside the gate of the Jardin des Tuileries.

Godefroy Pomme's clothes were at the Carrefour Gaillon.

As Barbarus informed us yesterday, the parcel containing Charles Clépent's mastic costume was next to the omnibus stop in the Place Malesherbes.

Our list makes no mention of the garments of André de Vautremesse; they have not been found as yet.

FIRST INVESTIGATION IS THE THIEF A RICH AND COMPASSIONATE MAN?

All the parcels have been carefully examined at the Sûreté, in the hope that the child-stealer, in spite of all his circumspection, might not have left, in one or two of them, one of those trivial items that reveal someone's identity.

³ The Symbolist poet Laurent Tailhade (1854-1919) obtained some notoriety when he expressed public sympathy for Alfred Vaillant, who threw a "bomb" (little more than a firework) into the Chambre des Députés in December 1893. Several months later Tailhade was injured in an incident involving a much more dangerous bomb thrown by an anarchist, causing a certain amusement among those who did not share his sympathies and resulting in some sharp comments in the press.

First of all, the various pieces of paper in which the garments were wrapped have been examined at length.

Seven of those pieces of paper are daily or evening newspapers: one *Aurore*, two *Matins*, a *Soleil*, an *Éclair*, a *Soir* and a *Temps*.

It is noticeable that the names of these dailies all correspond to natural phenomena of which the heavens are the origin.

As lunatics often take a great interest in astronomical and meteorological data, some people might conclude, on the basis of the comparison of these titles, that the guilty party must necessarily be insane.

Let us pass on to other, more serious observations. Two other parcels were formed with uncut weekly periodicals: the *Annales politiques et littéraires* and the *Presse Medicale*, and two more with wrapping paper, gray on one side and glossy black on the other.

Can anything be made of these observations, in the way of vague clues as to the thief's state of mind?

All shades of political opinion are represented among these periodicals. The bandit, if he has opinions, is singularly eclectic. He goes from monarchism to socialism, passing via medicine.

The simplest thing is to imagine that when he runs short of wrapping paper he buys a newspaper at random.

It is therefore better, once again, to reserve our judgment and not to seek to make too much of what we know, when we know nothing as yet, or very little.

That little is, however, rather interesting.

It unveils an extraordinary little corner of the malefactor's psychology.

Almost all the stolen children belong to well-to-do families.

Four of them were wearing small items of jewelry of a certain value. Urbain Godedouins, for example, had a ring on his finger with a beautiful emerald, and a light bracelet on his left arm formed by a slender gold thread. Pierre Candelaure was wearing a golden earring embellished with diamonds, attached to a little chain, Nicolas Barlatescu a beautiful holy medallion, similarly decorated with diamonds, and Frantz Vetyolle an Asiatic talisman representing the head of a bat, engraved on an opal, whose enormous eyes were made of rubies.

All these objects were found in the parcels.

According to the calculations made by the police, the total value of this jewelry is between fifteen and twenty thousand francs. Young Godedouins' emerald alone is valued at seven thousand francs.

That is a small fortune, tempting enough for an ordinary villain. The child-stealer, however, has scorned it.

Is he a rich man—or, at least one capable of supplying his needs? It is also possible, however, that being poor, but extremely prudent, he prefers not to keep anything, in order to minimize the chances of being caught.

We reported yesterday, by courtesy of Barbarus, how Charles Clépent's garment bore traces of a ferocious and brutal manhandling. The ripped-off buttons and the torn lining are evidence of violence. The clothes discovered since prove that not all the children were maltreated in that fashion. What our colleague reported is the worst case. Three others were in a rather poor state, which demonstrated that the thief had used force to undress his victims, but the other seven boys, probably terrified or in no state to scream or defend themselves, were undressed calmly and without effort.

One other striking and impressive observation has been made, which leaves the field free for a thousand reflections.

The thief has left a lock of hair from the stolen child in each parcel.

To what preoccupation, then, is this singular individual obedient? Is there in his soul one of those contradictions of sentiment, one of those antinomies of sensibility, that one sometimes observes with astonishment in the hardest of hearts?

What does that lock of hair signify?

Does not the bandit seem to be saying to the parents something along the lines of: *I have stolen your child; you will never see him again, but I want you to have something of his, a holy relic that you may kiss every day, while thinking about the little absentee?*

If that is the abductor's thinking, it denotes, in spite of everything, a certain capacity for emotion, unexpected in a malefactor who does not hesitate to commit the worst of crimes.

The story of a brigand with a soft heart, who robs passengers in diligences but is full of compassion for the poor man he encounters in his path, is certainly very old. This time, however. It reappears in a new and bizarre edition, curiously revised and corrected, in which the conflict of sentiments and oppositions of character, after such crimes, surpass anything that the *roman feuilleton* and popular story-tellers have dared to venture. A philanthropic brigand is still plausible, but to accumulate so many tears around oneself, to excite the horror of an entire nation, and then to abandon oneself to that kind of sentimentality is something else entirely!

Can a man capable of stealing children from their mothers, and perhaps of killing them, also be relatively human, gentle and compassionate? Can he be capable of imagining the desolate hearth, the sad meals lacking the chatter of a habitual guest, the gaiety of the household?

And, in representing these scenes of bleak despair or loud lamentations to himself, can the mysterious villain have sufficient delicacy of sentiment to imagine that a lock of hair might often soothe a pain and charm a resignation?

Alain Bernard

Paris, 29 June

*NEW DISCOVERIES
LOCKS OF BLACK HAIR, THIS TIME*

The child-stealer has not renounced his sinister occupations.

Neither the army of policemen put on the case, nor the more severe vigilance of fathers and mothers, has frightened off the bandit, ready for any audacity.

Our pessimism is motivated by the discovery of three more parcels containing children's clothes.

The first was picked up in the Rue Franklin, almost opposite the Rue des Reservoirs, in front of the Trocadéro palace. It was composed of gray and black wrapping paper analogous to that we described yesterday, containing a brown suit embroidered with large darker brown threads, underwear bearing the initials A.L., polished lace-up shoes and a lock of *black* hair.

Similarly, at the crossroads of the Rues Falguière, Dulac and Delambre, wrapped in a copy of the London Times, was one of those short jackets cut above the buttocks that the English call "Eton jackets," a large white collar, a small bowler hat, and underwear marked B.G.F. with a vicomte's crown and *a lock of black hair*.

Thirdly, the concierge of a building in the Avenue du Trocadéro found, in front of the Musée Galliera, a little blouse in blue cloth with large pleats, a pair of trousers in the same cloth with buckles on the knees, a white belt, a shirt, underpants, a woolen waistcoat, white shoes, and a golden Lourdes medallion, the underwear marked P.-S.

From the pockets of the latter garments a veritable bazaar was extracted: a spinning-top, feathers, a magnet, a penknife, three meters of gilded pastry-maker's thread, two meters of red string, a half-eaten piece of chocolate, one of those tiny little lorgnettes with bone rims, through which one can distinguish, by closing one eye and making strenuous efforts with the other, monuments and landscapes, plus twenty-five centime coin, three glass marbles, an agate whistle, a blue pencil, a shoemaker's measuring-tape, a thimble, half a pair of driving-goggles and a lock of *brown*—dark brown, almost black—hair. All of it was wrapped in an old copy of the Milan *Secolo*.

Alain Bernard, who gave us this information, has emphasized this striking new development.

Among all the other extraordinary particularities of this astounding affair, the thief's initial preference for blond-haired boys was the most curious and the most characteristic.

Either to confuse the search or because blond children are now more carefully guarded, the disconcerting brigand has abruptly changed his predilection. It is now brown- or black-haired children who have the sad privilege of awakening his covetousness.

These new facts are not calculated to calm the public emotion created by the vampire's exploits. It is increasing by the hour.

It is even threatening to become dangerous, by pushing into the background national preoccupation with grave events that are threatening world equilibrium and peace, which would have a profound, enormous and lasting impact of the social and economic fortunes of our homeland.

*A LETTER
BOHEMIANS?*

We have received a host of letters from our readers. This one is interesting because it is the echo of an opinion very widespread among the public.

Monsieur le directeur,

You might perhaps accuse me of playing an old game. Moreover, I shall not deny that I adore melodrama, its facile tears, and its stories, akin to waking dreams, always exciting and original because they are always the same.

It is because I like these fables that I am suggesting to you an idea that is perhaps, after all, no worse than any other.

Why should the child-stealer be a vampire who must be murdering these poor children?

Since we are reduced to conjectures, may we not think that the little ones who are exciting our pity might have been kidnapped by fairground performers?

You are smiling? That sort of thing no longer happens? Well, I can assure you that it does still happen.

In my travels, and not only to the Théâtre de l'Ambigu, in the midst of troupes of Bohemians, exhibitors of bears and acrobats, I have encountered children of various ages who certainly did not belong to the Romany race. The creaminess of the skin alone revealed a different origin. For these wanderers of the world, who are the true tziganes, a child is still an item of property like a horse, and, just as they steal horses when then do not have one, they steal children when there is a shortage.

One of the circumstances that militates in favor of my opinion is the miraculous skill of the thief.

Who is unaware that Bohemians, pilferers by nature, excelling in the art of deception, know all the tricks, every sleight of hand, and that they are cunning, prudent and subtle?

Far be it from me to pretend that my idea is the expression of the truth—but it might be, and it would be relatively consoling, at least by comparison with the hypothesis of a vampire massacring children.

In these circumstances, please give my letter the hospitality of your newspaper. The parents who are weeping might find a reason for hope therein.

Dr. R. de Rautchild

We have published this letter because it responds to a state of mind much more common than one might believe. Romanticism is not dead in France. We have it in our blood. We love to see, reproduced yet again before our eyes, the beautiful stories that have impassioned generations of theater-goers.

Nevertheless, in spite of our desire and the pleasure we would obtain from telling out readers a tale so certain to have an effect on sensitive hearts, we cannot, even in passing, sacrifice the truth to poetry. The coup has not been carried out by Bohemians. They would certainly have kept the clothes, and especially the valuable items. Returning them is something absolutely contrary to the traditions of their tribes.

It is necessary to search for another explanation.