

## VI

Having sent 11 *filles publiques* from Madame Le Gendre's *maison de débauche* to the General Hospital, M. le *Centenier* Le Cronier (whose son John and grandson Maxwell were doctors, the former a founding member of the *Société Jerseyaise*, the latter the first president of the Jersey Wanderers Football Club, a post he held for a quarter of a century) returned to Mulberry Cottage.

Was Le Cronier following normal procedure in sending the young women to the General Hospital? The surviving hospital records of that time are very sparse, one of the only documents I managed to find being the hospital admission book for 1849. All this contains is the name of the patients received, their age, and the reason for, and date of, their admission. They are written in French.

The General Hospital was clearly very general, being an institution of diffuse purpose. One man was received there for murder, and two for crime. Only a relatively few were received for illness in general, frenzy, venereal disease, blindness, *aliénation mentale* and epilepsy being other (and rare) categories. The overwhelming majority of the 2,025 patients received that year, if that is what they should be called, were suffering from intemperance or destitution. However, there were 63 admissions for prostitution, involving 50 women, 13 of whom were admitted twice.

Most of the admissions were for women acting singly, but there were two occasions when a brothel seems to have been cleared out when eight women were admitted on the same day, one of whom on each occasion was conspicuously older than the rest, being 48 and 47 years, and who may therefore be presumed to have been the *madame* of the enterprise. The youngest woman admitted for prostitution was 17.

The women taken on those occasions might be presumed to be professional, as perhaps were those single operators who were

admitted twice. But prostitution was clearly a seasonal business in Jersey, for almost all the admissions were in the summer months. There is more than one possible explanation of this seasonality, of course. It is possible that some women (local or foreign) took the opportunity to earn a little extra money provided by the increasing number of English visitors to the island, it having become a tourist destination in that decade. It is possible that, the weather being clement, the prostitutes were more inclined to solicit in the streets than at other times of the year, thus making themselves more visible to the police. It is possible that the police themselves were more active in the summer months, preferring to stay indoors when it was cold. What one can say is that the admission of prostitutes to the General Hospital was as seasonal (at least in 1849) as the potato harvest.

Prostitution was evidently quite widespread in St Helier in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps not surprisingly because, according to Victor Hugo<sup>1</sup>, who was exiled from France to Jersey for four years before moving to Guernsey, St Helier was the seventh largest port town or city of Great Britain, and it also had quite a large garrison of soldiers. Fort Regent was built during the Napoleonic Wars as a bulwark against possible French invasion, and designed for 31 officers and 448 non-commissioned officers and privates, though in its time it had housed up to 1,468 soldiers.<sup>2</sup> The men were without their families, if indeed they had one; it was not surprising, then, that there were streetwalkers in St Helier.

The records do not state whether the *filles publiques*, once in hospital, underwent medical examination for venereal disease; nor what work they were put to once held there, or for how long. They could not have been held for very long, however, for by the latter half of the season the proportion of them admitted for a second time in the year went up dramatically. Among their number was one called Ann Le Noble, aged 25. She could not have been the daughter of Marie Le Noble (or Le Gendre), owner of the Mulberry Cottage brothel; the census of 1841 does not

record an Ann Le Noble living with Marie Le Noble at that time. It is probable, however, that she was a cousin. And it is likely that several pairs of sisters were involved in the trade; for example, Esther and Ellen Syvret, 22 and 27 years old respectively. Ann de Jersey, aged 19 and one of the women admitted twice to the hospital, was recorded as having been born in the hospital, a sign that she was illegitimate and quite possibly the daughter herself of a prostitute. Her surname was suggestive of her lack of parentage, although the family name of de Jersey does exist.

It is unlikely that the police removed all the prostitutes of the town into the hospital. Why these, then? A scandal occurring later in the century, known as ‘the Paid Police Scandal’, might explain why Elizabeth Garland and Jane Brown, the two presumptive brothel-keepers, were selected. The police were accused in 1895 both of procuring for the brothel-keepers and of running a protection racket. In his *Brothels and Houses of Ill-fame in Jersey 1790 – 1918*, Nicholas Le Cornu relates details of the trial. ‘A Mrs Brett, when asked if she kept a house of ill-fame in Hilary Street, replied “she had a kind of lodging house (laughter in the Court)... she gave [the Police] money because they showed gentlemen to her house and brought friends to the door.”’

A Miss Denman, a prostitute living in Miss Brett’s house, told the court that two policemen, Huggins and McFarling, had brought a gentleman to the house, and afterwards requested money from her for providing the customer. She gave them a shilling each, they called back the following day, unsatisfied, and unsuccessfully demanded more from Mrs Brett.<sup>3</sup>

The brothels, such as that at Mulberry Cottage, probably catered to a different class of client from that of the single streetwalker, though the personnel overlapped. Two of the women taken in the round-ups at brothels were also taken singly at other times; while four of the women, presumably more professional, were removed from both brothels. Madame Le Gendre probably catered for the upper or courtesan end of the market, for it was

noted at the time, not without a certain *frisson* of outrage, that Mulberry Cottage ‘had iron gates and a 12-foot wall topped with broken bottles, obscuring the view of passers-by. The windows had shutters that excluded all light and inside was a well-furnished ballroom with rugs, sofas, three gold clocks and a timepiece.’<sup>4</sup>

These effects were subsequently sold at auction, in the presence of a legal officer, and ‘the crowd that had rushed to see the *maison de débauche* after the crime rushed likewise to the sale.’<sup>5</sup>

The 1830s, that is to say the end of the pre-Victorian era, were the high point of police action against brothels on Jersey. In that decade there were nine prosecutions for keeping them; in every other decade until the turn of the century (when the population was larger), there were only four per decade on average.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1870s there existed in Jersey the equivalent of the lap-dancing club, though somewhat more forthright. In 1871 there was a house in Charles Street, run by Charles Laray and wife in which ‘four French prostitutes were being forced to perform before groups of six to 20 men, who paid to enter and drink champagne, and watch naked scenes of “which modesty does not permit description.”’

It was to be part of Madame Le Gendre’s defence that she was not the only one to run a *maison de débauche*, with the implication that it was unfair or unjust that she should have been singled out.

## VII

On the day, Thursday, before he was fatally wounded, Le Cronier returned to Mulberry Cottage with four of the women he had caused to be admitted to the hospital and who needed their clothes that were still at the cottage. Madame Le Gendre refused to hand them over, claiming that they belonged to her. According to the *Chronique de Jersey*, Émile Cousin visited Madame Le Gendre that same evening. Mme Le Gendre was clearly furious at the actions of Le Cronier. ‘I am buggered,’<sup>1</sup> she apparently, said, ‘if I don’t take the knife and rip his guts.’

‘She appeared angry,’ said Cousin, ‘but completely sane. She was seated in a chair next to the fire and said this to me quietly. Her husband Pierre Le Gendre was also in the room, and hearing her say this, he said “*Oh! bah, bah, ma fille, tu ne voudrais pas le faire.*”’<sup>2</sup>

The next day, Friday, the junior police officer, Henry-Luce Manuel, went to Le Cronier’s home, where he found him writing a report about someone called Eva at whose house there had been some kind of uproar the previous Sunday. Le Cronier was writing the names of four ‘*filles*’ who had been seized at Eva’s house (more prostitutes, perhaps) when he suddenly said to Manuel, ‘Oh, I have orders to seize Madame Le Gendre, to bring her to court tomorrow,’ and he asked Manuel to accompany him to Mulberry Cottage.

Apparently the authorities had received a letter of complaint from neighbours about the constant disorders at that address, and deemed it time to act. Le Cronier and Manuel set out.

As luck, or perhaps premeditation, would have it, Madame Le Gendre had a large carving knife professionally sharpened the very morning of Le Cronier’s next appearance at Mulberry Cottage.

She had been talking in her house to her neighbour, M. Philippe De Gruchy, when Le Cronier appeared on the horizon

with Manuel. De Gruchy came to ask Madame Le Gendre for repayment of a small debt, but she said that she could not pay because Le Cronier had deprived her of her living. The police had seized her girls, she said; she was surprised that they were so severe with her when there were so many other such houses kept by foreigners that were much more disorderly than hers, and she being a native of the country. She said that if the authorities would not give her justice, she would take it for herself. De Gruchy told her to pipe down or she would get into trouble; she maintained that she had said no more to him than she had said to Le Cronier himself. De Gruchy then left, Madame Le Gendre following him, outdoors reiterating how Le Cronier had seized her girls. It was then that she saw Le Cronier approach, whereupon she exclaimed, '*Voici venir le vieux batarde.*'<sup>3</sup> ('Here comes the old bastard.')

According to Manuel, both he and Le Cronier had gone to Mulberry Cottage completely unarmed, without even their truncheons, because they anticipated no resistance from Madame Le Gendre. When she saw them, she ran into the cottage, going into a parlour on the left. She had time, it appears, to warn the two young women who had come to lodge with her three days before, presumably as partial replacements for the 11 young women removed to hospital the previous Sunday<sup>4</sup>, to hide upstairs.

Mr Le Cronier said a few words to Mr De Gruchy, and then followed Madame Le Gendre into the parlour. She stood by a table between two windows overlooking the garden. She asked Mr Le Cronier what he wanted; he replied that he had orders that she should appear before the court tomorrow. Madame Le Gendre replied, 'Of course, you know perfectly well, M. Le Cronier, that I can justify myself.' He said, 'And you know perfectly well that it is not to me that you have to justify yourself, but to the court.' Then he added that she had to furnish bail to appear in court the following day at 11 o'clock.

Madame Le Gendre said, 'My husband is not here, so I cannot give you bail.' 'In that case,' replied Le Cronier, 'you will

have to come with me to prison.’ She refused three times, saying ‘I’m not going.’ Then, ‘calmly’, she half-turned to the table and sprang towards Le Cronier, plunging a knife (the one she had had sharpened, that she had presumably placed on the table earlier) into his stomach. Here I may add that Madame Le Gendre was a professional, not an amateur: she struck upwards, which is dangerous, not downwards, which is theatrical. In doing so, she uttered a single, highly expressive syllable: *La!*

Whether she said anything else it is not possible now to determine, although in the Bodleian Library’s copy of *An Account of the Island of Jersey* by W. Plees (‘Many years resident in that island’), published in 1817, there are, unaccountably, a miscellany of newspaper cuttings, including from the English press of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, one of which claims that Madame Le Gendre said, on stabbing Le Cronier, ‘Take that, you \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup>, that’s my security!’

Le Cronier let out a loud cry; and in the same instant, Madame Le Gendre hurled herself at Henry-Luce Manuel, as if she would stab him too. He ran out, pursued by her with the knife still in her hand and covered in blood. He shouted ‘Murder!’ and signalled to the people in the street to come to his assistance. Instead, they went into a shop; Mr Manuel later followed in their direction and said ‘For God’s sake, come and help me, Mr Le Cronier has been murdered!’<sup>6</sup>

Mr Le Cronier had run out into the street, where Mr Manuel joined him. Mr Le Cronier said, ‘*Oh, mon garçon, je suis stabbé!*’

Madame Le Gendre approached them, knife still in hand; but then she suddenly turned away towards a wall, over which she flung the knife. Mr Manuel asked the people who had come back out into the street to try to arrest the woman: he had now to attend to Mr Le Cronier. (Perhaps this was the wrong way round: he should have tried to arrest Madame Le Gendre, while they attended to Mr Le Cronier. But it was all in the heat of the moment.) When he reached Mr Le Cronier, the latter threw himself into his arms.

## The Policeman And The Brothel

The fate of the knife in those days before there was much in the way of forensic testing was as follows: William Woodberry, aged 35, happened to be passing by with his cart at the material time when he saw M. Manuel leave the cottage and heard him shout 'Murder!' Then came M. Le Cronier, followed by Madame Le Gendre with a knife in her hand. Woodberry saw that Le Cronier had blood on his hands, at first thinking that Madame Le Gendre had merely stabbed his hands. He saw her throw the knife over the wall, and went to pick it up. As a crowd gathered to observe, or to gawp, and the news of the murderous attack spread, he gave the knife to a man called William-Visconte Le Quesne, aged 31, telling him that it was the knife that Madame Le Gendre had used. Le Quesne said that he could see no one in authority to take care of the knife, so he thought it was his duty to do so. Presumably Le Quesne was of higher social class than Woodberry, an employee of a coal-merchant, and in a hierarchical society being of higher social class was authority in itself. Le Quesne then gave the knife to the first police officer whom he found, M. Thomas Bichard. Bichard made a notch on its handle, to give it a distinguishing mark. It was later produced at the trial, where several people recognised it.