

## REMARKABLE TRIALS IN LOWER CANADA.

### No. 2. THE ST. JEROME MURDER OF 1858.

The village of St. Jerome, on the night of the 18th January, 1858, was the scene of a most atrocious and dastardly murder. The victim, Catherine Prévost, was the wife of Antoine Desforages, an inhabitant of the place, and a man bearing a tolerably fair character. About midnight, the persons in the house of Antoine Desforages aroused the neighbors with the intelligence that Catherine was dying. The first that arrived on the spot, Rosalie Baron, found life already extinct. Catherine, a woman somewhat past the middle age, had not been in very good health. She was becoming feeble and sickly, but still continued to toil uncomplainingly at the duties of her household. Her life, however, did not ebb fast enough to satisfy the inhuman desires of those around her, and her feeble health became the very means of covering up a plot for cruelly putting her to death. Suspicion, however, was awakened, and naturally fell upon the persons who were in the house at the time. These were Jean Baptiste Desforages, the brother of Catherine's husband, and a female, named Marie Anne Crispin, generally known as the widow Belisle. Antoine Desforages, the husband of deceased, was absent on that night, but he also was held to answer the charge of murder.

The trial began at Montreal on Friday, the 16th April, 1858, before the late Chief Justice Lafontaine and Mr. Justice Aylwin. Mr. Monk, Q.C., appeared for the Crown. The defence was conducted by Mr. Smyth on behalf of the two brothers Desforages, and by Messrs. Smyth and Cassidy jointly on behalf of the female prisoner.

The indictment contained three counts:—1st. Charging the Widow Belisle with the murder of Catherine Prévost, charging J. B. Desforages with assisting in the same murder, and charging Antoine Desforages with being an accessory before the fact.

2nd. Charging the Widow Belisle and Antoine Desforages with the murder, and

J. B. Desforages with being an accessory before the fact.

3rd. Charging J. B. Desforages with murder, and Widow Belisle and Antoine as accessories before the fact.

The first witness called was a neighbour, named Rosalie Baron, who resided in a house belonging to Antoine Desforages, situated at a distance of only thirty feet in the rear of Antoine's residence. At half-past five in the afternoon of the 18th, this woman, Rosalie Baron, went to Antoine's house to assist his wife in washing. The following is her account of the events of the evening and night:—

"A little after I arrived, Antoine Desforages said to me, 'My wife was very much disturbed all night, but she has been well since morning.' On this, I remarked to the deceased, 'I think you are better to-day, but not altogether well,' and she answered, 'I assure you, I am not yet better.' Shortly afterwards, about a quarter to seven the same evening, I returned to my own house. Jean Bte. Desforages came over to my residence to play cards. About half-past nine, I went over to the house of Antoine Desforages, and saw his wife Catherine in company with Widow Belisle, sitting near the fire. Catherine said to me, 'You should not have come out in the cold without covering.' Widow Belisle remarked, 'Some people don't know the effects of cold.' Shortly afterwards, I went home, and saw Jean Baptiste Desforages in my house. I told him I had seen Widow Belisle with his sister-in-law. The evening before this, Sunday evening, Jean Baptiste, when he came from prayers, seeing his brother's wife lying in bed, said, 'How much like a corpse she looks.' About a week previous to this, he told me that his brother Antoine was about to go to Chatham, and that he, Jean Baptiste, was to remain at home with his, Antoine's, wife; but, at the same time, he remarked that he would not do so for any amount, because, as she was sickly, she might die suddenly, and he might be suspected of having caused her death. On leaving my house, on the 17th, (Sunday,) Jean Baptiste remarked to me, 'Catherine has not two months to live—perhaps not a fortnight, for this day she has done her last cleaning.' I am myself aware, that deceased often complained of disease of the stomach. At midnight, on the 18th, Jean Baptiste came to inform me that Catherine was dying. I went out with him; and when we arrived at the house, she was lying