

Witch 158: B8677 no 4, Meline veuve Martin Gentilhomme de St Dié

(September 1596) Confrontation of Libaire, wife of Guillaume Bouchier of St. Dié, already convicted of witchcraft (executed 30 September), and Meline, veuve Martin Gentilhomme of St. Dié, whom she had accused of being many times at sabbat with her. Libaire maintained accusations, and Meline's final remark was 'qu'il est bien possible qu'elle ayt esté au sabat et qu'elle n'en scache rien, et sy on la debvoit descoupper avec quattro haches, elle n'en sauroit dire autre chose.'

28 September 1596; informations préparatoires

(1) Brissonne veuve de Jean Mathieu de St. Dié, c. 50

More than a year before had dispute with Meline, during which latter called her a 'ribaud de pretre'. She replied that she had had served the curé of Wisembach, but this did not make her a ribaud; she would rather have served a priest than be a witch. Meline was very angry at this, and a few days later witness suffered great pains in her left side, extending down to her foot; could only move with crutches for 12 weeks, and was still in great pain and needing a crutch.

(3 October 1596)

(2) Anne femme a Colas Gentilhomme de St. Dié, c. 24

Meline lived in house adjoining hers, and at last feast of St. Dié the witness had sent some food to her other neighbour, widow of Jean l'Abbe, but not to Meline. Latter complained to the widow, saying witness didn't regard her as a friend. Next evening the pot by the fire fell over, and her year-old child was burned, and could not be cured for more than 6 weeks. Suspected Meline of causing this; long reputed a witch.

(4 October 1596)

(3) Demenge Mareschal bourgeois de St. Dié, c. 55

General reputation. Some 10 years before he had bought a small house, and evicted Meline, who was renting it, to live there himself. A week after moving in he found some powder in a horn of paper, and when it was thrown on fire it gave off a great smell; he was then seized by a strange illness, and languished more than 2 years, which he suspected had been Meline's doing.

(4) Nicolle veuve de Jean Jalley de la pouxerie, c. 30

General reputation. More than three years before had been reaping with Mengeatte Canelle and la grosse Annon when Meline passed, and witness looking at her said 'qu'elle avoit bien mal aux yeaulx'. Was angry, and touched her on shoulder as she passed while saying nothing; other women asked her why she had said this, adding that she was believed to be a witch, and commonly became angry when anyone remarked on the appearance of her eyes. Within an hour she felt great pains on side Meline had touched, had to return to town, and was in bed in great pain for 10 weeks.

(5) Nicolas Gentilhomme bourgeois de St. Dié, c. 30

3 years earlier had invited neighbours to baptism of their child, but those who gave invitations forgot Meline, whom he and his wife had told them to ask. 2 or 3 days after Meline asked his servant why she had not been invited, and said that someone would repent; child died 8 days later, and he had always suspected Meline, who had a long reputation.

(6) Lienard le Tincturier bourgeois de St. Dié, c. 67

Long reputation. Some 2 years before, when they had been neighbours, there had been a great noise from her room at night - she claimed to have been shutting door. Then a 'perche' in witness' upstairs room fell down suddenly when there was no load on it. At this time a hideous black cat began to haunt both houses, and he told Meline he would kill it if he could catch it; she said it would be easy to tell if it was an evil spirit, for it would have no tail. Never saw cat again. had also suffered various misfortunes which he thought had been witchcraft, and to which she might confess.

(7) Marion veuve de Jean Dounould de St. Dié, c. 40

Told of incident previous feast of St. Dié, when Meline had complained that Nicolas Gentilhomme was 'un bon parent' for not giving her some food, and child had been burned - since then Gentilhomme and his wife had suspected her. Recently, as rumour spread that she had been accused by Libaire, she had come to seek advice from witness whether she should flee - latter had said that if she were a good woman she should not fear. Long reputation.

(8) Jean Paulus Martin bourgeois de St. Dié, c. 42

Around previous Easter Meline had asked to buy some milk from his daughter; when she said she could not sell her any Meline replied that she would see what came of this. A few days later a cow died, for which he suspected her. Long reputation.

(9) Nicolas Thirion, demeurant a Saint Dié, c. 28

About three years before his wife and the daughter of the herdsman had gone out one evening to seek a missing cow, when they saw Meline on her own in the middle of a garden, accompanied by a great black dog - this suddenly vanished. At Nre Dame previous August his wife had been returning from a pilgrimage to 'la chapelle durthimont', and stopped to drink from fountain outside Grand Prevot's house. Meline came up and touched her, saying 'qu'elle pourroit bien tant boire de ladite eau qu'elle luy feroit mal'; instantly felt a severe pain, and within two days had to take to her bed, where she was still, suffering great pains, and having to be carried around like a child. No remedy had worked, and it had cost him more than 100 francs; both he and his wife believed that Meline had given her the illness. Long reputation.

(5 October 1596)

(10) Claudon Parisot des Trois Maisons, c. 54

Told how Meline had been reaping oats for him last season, when he saw a fox next to her; tried to chase it away, but it would not move, and she told him it was not 'un bon renard'.

(11) Claudatte fille a Jean Martin de St. Dié, c. 24

Repeated story about fox; it had moved away briefly each time Parisot moved towards it, then returned. Meline finally said they should take no notice of it and not look at it, since it might not be a fox but a witch. Soon after added 'que sy Il ny avoit autres personnes qu'elle qui achapte des chandelles benites pour offrir a l'eglise que nen ny en auroit poinct de chertemps.'

9 October 1596; interrogation

Age not recorded. Said she was widow of Martin Gentilhomme, bourgeois of St. Dié; he had died some 10 years before, and they had been married 23 years [so she was probably at least 55]. Claimed she had taken some 'couvrechefs' to wife of Nicolas gentilhomme to have them cut, and there had been a dispute over the share. A few days later the child died, and its parents put it about that she had killed it - but she was innocent of witchcraft, and had she been a witch would rather have killed the mother than the child. Also admitted that Nicolle had accused her of making her ill, but this too was false. Then said it was true that she had long been suspected of witchcraft 'touttesfois sy elle est sorciere elle n'a poinct faict de mal'.

Agreed to story about fox, but said she had no idea if it had been the Devil. Then was asked about accusation by Libaire, and replied 'qu'il ny a poinct d'arrest aux sorcieres et tant qu'elle vivra elle n'aura fiance en elles et ne croira rien de tout ce qu'elles diront parce que ladite Libaire la accusée a tort.' Said that if she confessed to being a witch she would damn herself, and that she would never pray for the witches now Libaire had accused her.

10 October 1596; confrontations

Admitted remark made to Brisonne, but denied making her ill. Now agreed to telling Lienard that lack of tail would show cat was an evil spirit - had heard this in town, but didn't remember where. Also agreed to having sought advice from Marion; asked why she had denied this, could only say she had forgotten. Denied having caused sickness of Nicolas Thirion's wife (who had just died). After at first denying, agreed that she had touched Nicolle, but declared that she had not caused her illness.

12 October 1596; procureur d'office asks for question ordinaire

15 October 1596; Change de Nancy agrees, with regard for her 'caducité'

6 November 1596; interrogation under torture

Was racked, but continued to deny accusations. Finally asked to be released and said that she would think again before the morrow, although she still said she was not a witch.

7 November 1596; confession

Judges went to Tour Mathatte at 8 a.m., reminding her that she had asked to be released previous day against promise that she would tell the truth, and exhorting her to tell the truth without obliging them to torture her anew. She said she had thought again, and that she had believed that she could endure the torture, but 'nul ne scait que c'esté de la question qui ne l'a essayé'.

Told how she had been seduced 8 years before, going to woods to collect firewood because she could not afford to buy it, by a white goat which promised to make her rich, and obliged her to renounce God. Had been given powder, with which she killed a pig. Later used more powder to make Nicolle ill; said there had been no reason for this, and the poor people abused by the devil were liable to harm those who had done them no harm as much as those who had. Also confessed to having killed child of Colas Gentilhomme and wife of Colas Thirion.

Confessed to having been three times to sabbat, where there were between 3 and 8 other witches, all women, according to the occasion. They danced, and on one occasion feasted, but said no word to one another. Had seen la mairesse Masson, recently executed, Barbelline veuve de Dion Chastenoy of Viel Marché, and one known as la doyenneresse de Marzellay, who had already been tortured.

Confirmed confession next day, with accusations; Rarbelline was now married to Holbin le Jalley of Trois Maisons.

11 November 1596; procureur d'office asks for death sentence

13 November 1596; Change de Nancy agrees, subject to one final interrogation to confirm confessions. This took place on 14 November, and she was executed on 19 November 1596.