

B 3323 no 2; witch 026, Sebille femme Jean Pierson, de Leintrey

23 February 1602; interrogation

Had been arrested on 9 February, after denunciation by Jenotte veuve Claudon Thoussaint. Had confessed to prévôt that she was a witch, so now interrogated. Said that 4 years before had been angry (didn't know why) and had left house towards dawn, to be seduced by devil. Asked about other confessions she had made to sergeant, started to say she was not a witch at all, then gave way and repeated story of seduction with more details. Anger had been because she was asked to pay so many debts; money was leaves as usual.

A year later avoided devil by making sign of cross and calling on Jesus as he approached in form of whirlwind. Later only went out equipped with images of St Nicolas and St Claude, but previous year had still been taken to sabat. There she had seen Jenotte, la Jobarde, la grande Marye, veuve Didier Sotterel, and Mathieu Margeron, all of Leintrey, and le Petit Noel of Blesmerey. Devil had made her go by threat to beat her, 'a quoy elle respondit en soymesme qu'il ne la batteroit plus guiere, car elle avoit tant de repentance de son faict, et retourneroit de telle façon envers son dieu que tel malheur n'auroit plus de puissance sur elle.'

Had been a second time to sabat, where a resolution was taken to destroy the acorns, and indeed there had been none that year. Admitted being given powder, but had not used it.

26 February 1602; informations préparatoires

(1) Jennon veuve Claudon Jacquemin, 40

Before either Sebille or witness was married, former had reputation as a witch. Had many losses when she was their neighbour, especially of animals just after marriage 20 years earlier. Listed other losses, including that of child drowned in horsepond behind Sebille's house 17 years earlier; thought all these might have been her witchcraft. Quarrels over boundaries between gardens, some 4 years earlier.

(2) Barbelline femme Colas Goudot, 34

3 or 4 years earlier the accused, who was often in their house, gave pear to her son Nicolas; he started to vomit and was ill for a week. Had not quarrelled with her, because they feared her and took care not to, except that previous year her husband had quarrelled with husband of accused, who was herdsman, and lost 2 calves.

(3) Jehennon, veuve Jean de Chasnoy, 60

Husband died 12 years earlier, after illness lasting 5 or 6 years; this followed quarrel with accused, whom he had charged with stealing plums from his tree. 2 or 3 years before his death had taxed Sebille with having given him the illness, to which she only replied 'qu'il n'en avoit encore assé'. Reputation 20 years.

(4) Demenge Michiel Ballance, 32

7 or 8 years before had suddenly become ill when working on her chimney. Suspected her, so sent his wife Hillenix twice to ask her to visit him, but she refused, and only came on third time when he offered to reduce price of work by 2 or 3 gros. Gave him some herbs to put on arms, and he was cured in 5 or 6 days. Reputation 22 years (residence).

(5) Didier Connot, 27

3 weeks before had refused to sell Sebille straw; later she had come to veillée in his house and gave an apple to small daughter Thoussaince, who promptly became ill; a few days later saw Sebille 'tournoyer son bras sur ladite fille', who became worse and died a week later.

(6) Demenge Pierson, 30

12 or 13 years before his brother Jean had married, and a year later first child died, then husband and wife both died within a few weeks. Suspected this had been her witchcraft - but gave no reason.

(7) Nicolas Vaultrin, 32

Previous year had quarrelled with her, when she told him he was cutting more hay than was his by right, and his cart broke as he returned to village. At same time a cow became sick, and she was called to see it, but it died next day. When his wife told Sebille of this she replied 'de par dieu, il vault mieulx qu'elle soit morte que toy, ou ton mary, ou l'un de vos chevaux'.

(8) Estienne Connot, 56

Previous year had undertaken to collect debt of 20 francs which Jean Pierson owed to shepherd of Reillon. Poirson was called before prévôt at Blamont, but since witness had to go towards Dieuze, he told the shepherd to go in person. He failed to appear, leaving Pierson to make a fruitless journey, and latter went to complain at house of witness, who was then told off by his children for having anything to do with the business, in view of her reputation. A cow fell ill the same day, and a few days later after he had been drinking he called her witch; she later said she would never forget the insult. The cow recovered, but he subsequently lost 2 horses.

(9) Nicolas Simon, 33

Reported quarrel 2 years earlier arising from death of cow when her husband was herdsman. When she came to tell him he threatened to seek compensation, to which she replied 'qu'il y en mourrait bien d'autres'. Another of his cows then sickened and died.

(10) Nicolas Jean Gerardin, alias Chailey, 40

Claimed that 6 years earlier he had been told she had stolen some plums and some wood for a fire to dry them. When he reproached her she told him not to behave like his father-in-law Jean du Chesnoy, who had earlier made a similar accusation. He then called her witch and said she had caused Jean's death. 5 or 6 weeks later most of his animals fell ill - lost many pigs, a cow, and 2 horses.

(11) Colas Pierson, 35

Previous year had dispute with her late husband, his uncle, about putting a cow to milk. Then lost that cow and another, over which he blamed her witchcraft.

26 February 1602; interrogation

Said she was about 46, native of St Paule, daughter of late Demenge Poirot, laboureur, and his wife Jehenne. Lived at home until 20, then 3 years in service at Repas before marrying Jean Pierson and moving to Leintrey. On subject of child drowned in horsepond, said that it had been on a feast-day, and that Jennon should have been in church with child according to custom, rather than cooking at home. Agreed that Jean du Chesnoy had called her witch during his illness, but he had done her wrong, and he was already ill when he came to Leintrey. Had not taken him to law because they were too poor, and her husband 'n'est point de deffence'. Agreed that Estienne Connot had called her witch as he passed house, but he was drunk as he often was. Generally agreed to circumstantial details of quarrels, putting herself in more reasonable light than witnesses did, and denying she had done any harm.

27 February 1602; confrontations

In reply to Demenge Michiel Ballance, said that if she gave him herbs this did not mean she was cause of illness, and he already had two kinds of them. With respect to sickness of Jean du Chesnoy, said he had told her Jean Bon Claude had given it to him, in hatred because he had prevented his son marrying a girl from Autrepierre.

Jehennon veuve Claudon Jacquemin added that year after death of child Sebille told her la Jacquenatte had said 'qu'elle estoit bonne pour la mettre a la Lonotte estimant par telles parolles persuader que leurs infortunes arrivoient par le moyen de ladite Jacquenatte. Ce qui luy donna grandement a penser et demander a ladite Jacquenatte q'il estoit vray. Et de facon qu'un jour l'appercevant au puix, et ladicie Sebille passant par la rue, luy escria encore Tante Allison, la voicy celle qui m'a rapporté ces parolles et sur ce ladite Sebille passa oultre sans dire mot.' Sebille denied this, but witness insisted it was true, adding she had 'ferme oppinion qu'elle les a ruyné'.

After confrontations exhorted to think of her salvation, and started to make series of confessions to acts of maléfice, generally different from those with which she had been charged. Included killing cow belonging to curé some 4 or 5 years earlier, because his housekeeper refused her bread as alms. Had been seduced while husband was away working on ramparts at Lunéville; roof of house had collapsed, and she had to go and find him to get money; he gave her so little she did not know how to pay workmen.

28 February 1602; Procureur Fiscal asks for torture to obtain more information.

1 March 1602; Change de Nancy approves

6 March 1602; interrogation under torture

Continued previous admissions, but still denied other maléfices, despite suffering greatly on strappado. Identified some accomplices. Still denied causing misfortunes to family of Claudon Jacquemin.

6 March 1602; procureur fiscal asks for death sentence

7 March 1602; Change de Nancy approves

9 March 1602; execution carried out

Maintained charges against those she had accused, even at stake.

15 March 1602; following the execution of the first 2 witches, the procureur fiscal issued a general instruction for proceedings against the four denounced by Sebille. Displayed obvious concern about superstitious practices.

'Et comme ledit Procureur est adverty particulierement que ladite Jobarde auroit cy devant usé fort superstitieusement d'une teste de chien a guerir plusieurs bestiaulx et même en présentó une a benir au Sr Curé dudit Leintrey et depuis a son Vicaire presentement Curé d'Embermesnil: pour soub la voile et couleur de piété user d'icelle envers le simple peuple et en commettre plusieurs abus, comme elle a faict: et que ce ne peult avoir esté faict sans presomption grande de quelque pact malin qui ne doit demeurer impuni: requiert partant ledit Procureur . . . qu'attendant qu'il soit informé contre ladite Jobarde lealle soit ouye bien particulierement par sa bouche sans ministere de conseil ni d'avocat tant sur l'usage de ladite teste de chien que sur la presentation d'icelle à benir et sy auparavant elle en avoit quelqu'une beniste et par qui: qui luy en a apprins l'usage: et comment elle en usoit, quels en ont esté les effets, et qui elle cognoist en avoir et user audit Leintrey ou ailleurs.'