

The Morning Post, 11th December 1897

A collector of the Comptoir d'Escompte, a M. Lamarre, disappeared in a mysterious manner when going his round on November 30 last. He was found to have collected 18,000fr., but his character and his position were such that he could not be suspected of having absconded. Fruitless efforts to trace M. Lamarre have been made for five weeks, but yesterday M. Cochefert, chief of the detective force, obtained information which has led to the arrest of two men and a woman. One of the accused, Carrara by name, is the owner of vast mushroom beds grown in the Catacombs.

The collector Lamarre had to present a bill to Carrara, who had vainly tried to borrow 200fr. to meet it. Nevertheless, he showed the bill some days later, saying that he had paid it out of savings. Lamarre's last visit was to Carrara, who since November 30, though previously in difficulties, has spent more money than he can account for. A sum of 600fr. was found, moreover, in his house. The Catacombs wherein he grew mushrooms are being searched by engineers. The task is hard because some of the galleries are over a mile long and there are many deep pits and holes. It is thought that the body of the murdered collector may have been dropped into one of these, which could then easily have been filled up and covered with a rank growth of moss, rendering it almost undiscoverable.

One of Carrara's children told M. Cochefert that she had seen a man lying on a bed in her father's house some time ago. After being questioned for five consecutive hours by M. Cochefert, Carrara's wife burst into tears, saying: "Oh my poor children, what will become of them"? She then threw herself on her knees before the Chef de la Sureté and related how the crime was perpetrated.

Two collectors called on that day, she said, one from the Crédit Lyonnais, the other from the Comptoir d'Escompte. Carrara intended to murder the former, but he called so early that the miscreant said to his wife: "He comes too early. He cannot have collected much. I will kill the other." When M. Lamarre came Carrara told his wife to go and get the money and pay the bill, and while the collector's attention was distracted, took a large iron wrench from under his coat and struck him on the head. Lamarre fell dead without a groan. Carrara at once emptied his portfolio, finding 26,210fr. in cash, and then husband and wife went out in order to create an alibi by visiting some friends of the former, and even borrowing money from one of them.

Returning home, Carrara concealed Lamarre's corpse by hanging it attached to a strap down a shaft leading into the Catacombs. At night he took it down and cremated it in the furnace used for ventilating the subterranean galleries. The operation lasted four hours, after which he came up and told his wife that everything had disappeared, even to the victim's watch. The stolen money was hidden behind a stone in the wall, Carrara telling his wife that they must not appear to have money.

The woman's recital of her fear of the corpse being discovered by her children on return from school or by a carter who boarded with them was most dramatic. After obtaining this confession, M. Cochefert confronted Carrara and his wife, the former being completely confounded. "Well, yes," he exclaimed, "all my wife has told you is true. I killed Lamarre." The greatest credit is due to M. Cochefert for the extremely capable way in which this affair has been conducted, and his patience in dealing with the woman. He began with nothing to go on, and was handicapped by the fact that the neighbourhood in which the crime was committed is frequented by gangs of ruffians, any of whom might have committed it, and have hidden the body in one of the numerous and almost unknown

Catacombs. Moreover, but for the confession which he succeeded in obtaining, so well were Carrera's precautions taken that there would have been insufficient evidence to convict him.