

Witch 065A; B3801 no 1, Nicole femme Georges Pierson Mercier, de Chenimenil

3 July 1619; informations preparatoires

Taken at Docelles by George Milot, prévôt de Bruyères, at request of substitut for PG des Vosges. Note that she is suspected of witchcraft, and particularly of making Nicolas Melian ill by touching him on shoulder, then healing him in public manner.

(1) Nicolas Melian, manoeuvrier de Chenimesnil, 28

3 weeks earlier had been drinking beer with George Pierson, when George drank to Nicole, then she to the witness. She filled the glass and handed it to him, asking him 'de luy faire raison', which he refuse on grounds he was no longer thirsty. After asking 'pourquoy il ne vouloit la pleiger et qu'il l'aprehendoit', she touched him on left shoulder saying 'bé Colas, je t'ayme bien, mais tu t'en repentira'. Immediately his shoulder, face and other parts of body became extraordinarily hot, as if he was burning, so he tore open the front of his shirt, and the imprint of her hand could be seen on his shoulder. Cheek and other places suddenly came up in small red spots; he left house of Vaultrin Pieron where it happened, and met Sr Harlachel in street. On hearing what had happened latter advised him to return and tell Nicole that unless she healed him he would have her taken and burned as a witch. Did this with aid of Jean George, who added other threats. She told him it was 'la gisse', and that he should consult Demenge Jacquemin's wife who 's'entendoit de le guerir' - did so, but she assured him it was not that sickness. On way back became so feeble he had to rest, sent his wife Chretienne to demand healing from Nicole again. She came to where he was, said he was in a bad way but it would be nothing, then made him lie down beside stream where he was. Made 'plusieurs croix et autres ceremonies' over his body, which others could say more about than him, because he became out of his mind, and when on his feet again tore up stones and collected 'bagatelles'. Arrived at her house and asked for help again; she took him to house of Aubert Jacot, where she made him lie on floor of poisle with pillow under his head, telling him he would soon sleep and then would be better. Did feel rather better when he woke, although legs were still weak, and next day asked her again for healing. She said there was no more to do, but he should eat 'une rotie sapoudrée d'anis', drink a glass of beer, and make sure to drink no water, which would give him 'le chancre'; he would vomit, but not very much. Followed advice, and things turned out as predicted, with gradual improvement until he now seemed completely recovered. Remembered that while he had been lying on ground she fanned him with her clothing.

(2) Florentin Nesgate, 36

Strong suspicions of witchcraft; on Sunday a week before, after drinking wine with her husband, had told him that she should be burned, because her actions had made her witchcraft so evident - referring to affair of previous witness.

(3) Claudine femme Jean Badounel, 30

Told how 3 weeks earlier Nicolas Melian had been outside her house shouting that he was burning and had been bewitched. She told him it was the wine

he had drunk, but he said that Nicole had given it to him. Several people gathered and saw red marks like a hand, then through several intermediaries she was fetched and performed ceremonies, but all she knew about this was that she had washed some cabbages in the stream, which added to her suspicions that she was a witch.

(4) Jean le Hault, 45

Story about Nicolas crying out beside his house, and telling story of how he had been bewitched. They advised his wife, whom they had called, to send for Nicole; she came and performed various ceremonies, muttering some words in low voice, while having his wife sit at his feet.

(5) Nicolas du Val, 28

Similar story; added that she had fetched some water from stream with which to wash him at various points.

(6) Jean George, 30

Story told again - suggestion that it looked as if he had epileptic fit when he fell to ground. Nicole had said it was 'du gisse, ou de la verole', had washed him with mixture of holy water and 'lessive'. Witness claimed to have said as he left that a witch had made him ill and a witch would cure him, 'ayant laissé ce pauvre homme comme tout hors de soy et privé de son bon sang'.

(7) Ysrael Cheburuix, 45

Had been present at altercation over drink, and during efforts to help Nicolas.

(8) Jacotte veuve Thomas Laurent, 36

She and several others suspected Nicole as a witch, because she meddled with healing horses and other animals, while another woman had told her she had said that if the witness had sent to le Bel Bernard for the health of her late husband he would not have died. Had told witness 'que si elle marchoit a Bruyeres elle en feroit marcher des autres femmes et hommes'. When Catherine wife of Sr Harlachel had told her off for taking some hay from their meadow she replied 'que quand le diable l'auroit emporté, elle en y iroit encor recueillir.'

(9) Libaire femme Vaultrin Jeandel, 36

Some 5 years earlier she, her husband and others suspected Nicole of witchcraft. This followed incident when they and others had left goods in her house as sureties, then husband of witness was angry because a pewter plate had been changed, about which he complained, and Nicole said they would repent. 3 days later one of their horses sickened and died in 24 hours; he bought another, and within a fortnight it too sickened, becoming too weak to get out of the stable. Remembered that Nicole had washed a cloth in the spring where horses drank, as witness had seen from outside house; husband told her that the witch had done it again, and unless she healed it he would go and kill her in her house. Witness went

to Nicole's house and woke her by the window (because it was night), then they went to look at the horse - she promised to bring a drink for it in the morning, as she did, using what seemed to be spices. Horse still did not seem to improve, although she visited it again two or three times that day, and promised them that it would be better by the evening. She pushed her arm more than once right down the throat up to the elbow, despite wildness of horse; when witness expressed concern she replied 'qu'elle n'avoit pas courru trois centz lieues de terre sans avoir appris quelque chose, y adjoustant en touchant de l'une de ses mains en l'autre, qu'elle scavoit le moien de faire languir un homme un an, deux, et trois ans, et par apres que cela se pourroit faire avec des germons d'oignons'. That evening the horse started eating and recovered as promised.

Also remembered that last Assumption Day Nicole had entered their house, which adjoined theirs, swearing by her faith that Vaultrin would eat some soup she had in a bowl, but he insisted he would not, so witness said she would take some. Next day fell ill, feeling she had 'un morceau a l'estomac'; had now recovered, except for slight deafness, believing she had been cured by a soup Nicole made for her.

(10) Jacote veuve Aubert Jacot, 44

Husband had been seriously ill for 2 years, and had died about 15 months earlier; suspected Nicole might have been cause, in view of bad reputation, and fact that when husband wanted to acquire small piece of land from her to make passage for cart beside his house she had refused, saying according to neighbour 'que dieu ne luy feroit pas la grace de plus voir faire la chose'.

This was Libaire (previous witness), who confirmed story, although in her version it was 'la grace de l'avoir'; this was shortly before he went down with fatal sickness.

(11) Marguerite femme Vaultrin Pierron, 50

Brief account of events with Nicolas Melian; reputation 6 or 7 years.

(12) Claudon Blot Masson, 32

3 years earlier his wife Jennon had sometimes been cutting bracken with Nicole, and because she was in a hurry to get home and attend to house latter became angry, telling her not to be in such a hurry, 'et qu'elle n'auroit pas tousjours si bonne jambe'. On way back legs did start to hurt, so that she could scarcely reach home; when she complained Nicole told her 'qu'il estoit bien employé, et qu'elle luy avoit tousjours predit'. Was so ill for a month that she was expected to die, and someone told him that Nicole might have given her the illness, after hearing wife's account of what had happened. Sent to her for healing, and obtained a soup which seemed to be made with herbs or rice, after taking which she recovered.

About 5 weeks earlier his wife was washing clothes at the spring, when Nicole came and asked her to add 'une chevette' to her wash; she refused, at which she was angry and took it Cathelon servant of Sr Harlachel, saying that his wife had not wished to wash it but she would repent. At same hour his son Claudel, aged 9, fell so ill they thought he was dying; since they suspected Nicole his wife took child to her house and asked her to have pity on him. At first she did not want to hear, but on intervention of Jacote veuve Thomas Laurent she gave him something black

the size of a nut, which looked like dried meat, telling her to give him some on three mornings. Did so and he recovered, and he firmly believed that illness had been her doing.

Same day Substitut asked for her arrest, since she was thought to be selling her property in order to collect money and flee. Prévôt agreed and ordered that she be taken to château de Bruyères.

(4 July 1619)

(13) Mengeon fils Mongeon Aubry, 26

Said that 4 years earlier, in house of George Pierson Mercier, heard her say 'que voyant uriner un homme, elle le pourroit faire seicher et devenir eticque, au moyen de lever de la terre sur laquelle auroit tombé son urine.'

(14) Jennon femme Claudon Blot, 36

Story about bracken cutting as told by husband; became so ill that she received the sacraments, then advised by neighbour (a woman) to seek help from Nicole. What she was given was something like spices, rice or saffron, with which they made a soup. Then story about dispute over washing; it was 'une eschevette de filet noir', and she had objected that it would not get washed properly because she had no ashes to put in, to which she replied angrily that she ought to have bought some. Child who was sitting on 'fumier' nearby suddenly became ill with strange sickness, which lasted a fortnight. Told how she had been reluctant to do anything; after intervention by another woman she took her 'une choppine de millot', then she saw child and 'luy disoit de paroles emmillées bon jour te don dieu mon enfant et tu guery'.

(15) Claudate femme Joseph Poirot, 36

6 years earlier their bull, after drinking at spring, rubbed itself against 'fumier' and fence of Nicole's husband, then became ill in the stable, trembling enormously. Thought she might be responsible, in view of reputation. Previous autumn had been dangerously ill, and various women informed her that Nicole had threatened her. so sent for her and asked to be healed. Proposed making her a soup, and when she said she did not know if she could eat it assured she would make it so well it would give her an appetite; made it with rice and other things, she took it several times, and was cured within 5 weeks. Did not know if she had been cause of illness, although she suspected her after what she had been told.

Previous winter, shortly after her recovery, Nicole was at table in their house, saying that she had had many evils in her time, and that her husband had often beaten her; once he had driven her out of the house, and something like a wind seemed to carry her off, so she thought that if she had not crossed herself she might have suffered some harm. She and her husband also suspected her over death of a small child in the cot, after which he told her not to make use of anything she brought to the house in future.

(16) Claude Florentin, musnier au moulin du Sr tabellion Harlachol, 38

19 weeks earlier had brought wheat to mill and wanted to go before Barbon belle fille of Nicolas Prosat, who had arrived before her, so both of them prevented this. Immediately she was knocked over by the wheel of her cart when the horse took fright, breaking a leg, while he was nearly killed when he went under the mill, losing consciousness for half an hour. In view of reputation thought she had caused all this. Had later heard her say that her husband had received 'un coup de basle' which had been poisoned, so that he would not have been healed but for her, adding 'et qu'elle en empoisonneroit bien une de mesme que cela, de laquelle un homme enblessée ne seroit jamais guery, sinon par son moyen.'

(17) Aubert fils feu Nicolas Guery, 22

Previous week had passed house and heard her arguing with husband, saying she was as clean as the Virgin Mary, to which he replied that in that case there was nothing to fear, and that many others returned. Had been in woods with her one day when she said that Vaultin Jeandel's horse would not have died if she had been asked to cure it.

Followed by statement that several witnesses were absent, whom substitut might wish to call when they were available, and prévôt had agreed.

5 July 1619; PG des Vosges orders interrogation of accused.

9 July 1619; interrogation

Said she was about 60, daughter of Jacques Jean Anthoine of Bain. First marriage had been to Philippe of Chaumont-en-Bassigny, for 10 years, by whom she had 2 children who died young, second to George Pierson Mercier, native of Fontenoy-la-Joute, near Baccarat. Asked whether she had any written proof of marriage from curé, said she had not, but marriage had been at Fontenoy on a Thursday. Rejected suggestion that she was not married, merely a concubine.

Asked about healing practices, said she had only used dried meat, from 'jour de careme entrant', to be eaten by those with fevers on three mornings, combined with a neuvaine. For horses used a pinch of pepper and 5 roots of ginger which she mixed up with wine, then gave to the animal; none of this came from the devil. Reply was that such cures must come from illicit means and teachings of Satan.

Agreed that she had been in Vautrin's house spinning when Nicolas Melian had been drinking there, but denied drinking to him or touching him on shoulder. Knew nothing about how he had become ill; had advised wife to bathe him with holy water and soap, but denied all other actions attributed to her. Said that she wished God would turn her face backwards if she had been to see him next day and given the advice about eating a roast.

Asked about illness of Thomas Laurent, said it was his father and not she who advised pilgrimage to Bel Bernard. As for Vaultrin Jeandel's horse, she denied having treated it as said; had merely been to see it with several others on Sunday. Agreed she had several times taken soup to Jeandel's house when wife was ill, but this was from pity, 'et pour avoir fait du bien elle en recoit du mal.'

Denied having been to collect bracken with Jennon Blot; also claimed that child she was supposed to have made ill and then cured had died 6 months before she asked her to wash her thread.

Agreed that she had several times been driven out by husband, but denied any 'mauvaise adventure'. In affair at mill she had been there first, but had ceded place and returned next day.

She had chapelet in her hands, one of whose crosses was missing; asked about this, she said it had broken in her pocket, and she wished she had brought one of the other 3 or 4 she had in her house.

12 July 1619; confrontations

Said that Nicolas Melian was a liar, a robber, and a beggar. As for Florentin Nesgate, at time about which he deposed he had been 'yvre comme une beste'. Did eventually admit that she had drunk to Melian, but denied touching the glass.

Now agreed she had given Jennon Blot's child some pork, and they still had some in the house, wrapped in paper in the bottom of a bottle.

At end of session was reproached with having failed to make any objections to witnesses, when their testimony was so damaging as to be enough to convict her. Replied after some complaints 'que s'il nous plaisoit, elle diroit, qu'elle est sorciere, et qu'elle avoit esté tentée par l'ennemy, mais que pourtant elle diroit mensonges . . .'

18 July 1619; interrogation

After hearing from doyen Demenge François that she was ready to confess, prévôt went to question her at château. Said that about a year earlier had been cutting bracken with a small servant when she cut her finger, and pain made her say 'au diable soit la coupure'. Heard a voice from a neighbouring oak saying 'Caigne je t'auray'. This was repeated when she dropped bundle on way back and sent girl on ahead, while swearing by devil again. Soon afterwards a man in black came to door begging, and did not ask in name of God; she had no bread, so gave him a small coin (blanc), at which he disappeared. Then told of other occasions when large black man appeared and struck her.

Was now told that she should proceed to proper confession, and admitted that the black man had appeared, told her frankly that he was the devil, and made her renounce God. Next Sunday night when husband was in tavern she was angry he stayed out so long, so went in search of him, but was carried off by a wind to place where 5 or 6 people were dancing back to back, masked so she could not recognize them, led by devil. When she refused to join dance he beat and kicked her. After dance they all drank a very unpleasant liquid resembling urine from a cup; it took her 3 hours to get home afterwards, and she left a slipper on the way, which she had to send a servant to find the next day. Another night he came to house and had intercourse with her, after which she was ill for a long time, because he was very cold and quite unlike a man.

20 July 1619; interrogation

After some hesitation, confirmed earlier confession. Said cause of her temptation had been anger because husband had beaten her. Asked about drugs she used, said it was just pork flesh which she gave for fevers, combined with a neuvaine. Report that someone had been sent to search house, and had found nine or ten small pieces of blackened flesh, and something which looked like soap, but

was rather blacker. She said it was just pork, as already stated, and the soap had been given to her to whiten a shirt.

Asked about those at sabbat, said that they had worn black or red masks, with a hole for the mouth, so she had recognized nobody - but had not been masked herself. Said that devil had forced something like black bread into her mouth, which she thought would choke her; a small piece fell into her clothing, and when she threw it on fire it sizzled like butter. After temptation did not go to church for a fortnight, and was told off by husband; used to go up into hayloft and weep bitterly for misfortune she had incurred.

After being taken off to prison, was brought back when she said she had more to confess. Now said that seven years earlier, when she and husband were still living at Grantviller, she had given a substance to Nicolas de Sadeches which killed him, after he had refused her some apples. A child of hers had died after taking the same substance, which a man she met on road from Pierrepont had thrown at her feet, saying it would kill those who took it.

Around same time had killed Messire Jean de Toul, previously curé of Grantviller, who had left cure and retired to St Dié, because he was always telling her off, especially after she sold 'Nicole sa tante une enfillure de cristal'. Used powder given her by Persin, which she sent to him by way of another woman from Rambervillers on pretext that it would cure him of an infirmity he was suffering. Had also killed his 'tante' Nicole, by means of peaches which she sent to her in similar fashion after Persin had prepared them to kill her - this because she was pressing her to take back the 'enfillure de cristal'. Asked how she could be sure about results, since she had not been present, said she knew about her intentions, and had always believed this was way they had met their deaths.

Asked about other visits to sabbat, claimed she had always refused to go despite beatings from master. Denied any other malefices. Now said temptation had been about 20 years earlier, at time she married present husband 'mais que ce fust tout malgré luy, a l'induction de sa mere qui l'en tansoit, de luy en avoit fait promesse, et ainsy refuser d'y entendre, ce qui la fascha et indigna tellement, d'ailluers qu'il ne luy disoit jamais un bon mot, que le mauvais se servant de l'occasion la tanta . . .'

24 July 1619; PG des Vosges asks for death sentence, but also for torture.

26 July 1619; Change de Nancy approves death sentence, but not the proposal for torture.

7 August 1619; formal sentence from bons hommes jugeants.