

From carefree children's games ... to drama

While the Rennes process dossier, handed-in in October 2019, is awaiting study by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, we will briefly resume, in future bulletins, the account of events that occurred at the home of the Poulain family, in Combours, near Rennes, on Sunday afternoon, the 23rd January 1955, and then at the Combours clinic, run by the Daughters of Providence of Saint-Brieuc.

It was around 1 p.m., after lunch, and the five-year-old Josette was having fun with her two younger brothers in the only one room which was the kitchen. The mother was away for a few minutes to collect firewood or fetch water. Meanwhile the game continued; the children were moving in circles around the table; the space was very limited. It was then that Josette brutally hit the corner of the cooker, fell to the ground, but nevertheless managed to get up.

When the mother returned, the children continued playing. After about half an hour, Josette started feeling unwell, she complained of having a headache and asked to go to bed. After twenty minutes she woke up and vomited; she could not respond to her mother who was trying to speak to her; the mother noticed a big bruise on her daughter's forehead; her gaze was lost in the void; the face had become pale; the girl could not recognize anyone; she could not react in any way, she could not make any movement, showing a symptom of the right side paralysis...

The mother realized the gravity of the situation; she panicked and called on the neighbour, Madame Lambert. The father was in Indochina. The neighbour came to the help of the mother to cope up with the worsening problem, because the little girl was already in a coma. The two women decided to call a doctor. The house was isolated in the countryside, half an hour walk from the village. At a place called La Barrière, there was neither a car nor a telephone. Mrs. Lambert asked her daughter, Marie-Ange Guitton, to go and get a doctor. It was the third doctor, Dr Galaine, doctor on duty that Sunday, who would finally intervene.

Dr. Galaine was well-known, appreciated and a highly esteemed doctor in Combours for his competence and his availability in all circumstances, including family feast days. He is still remembered at Combours up to today.

He drove to Poulain's home. It was around 5 p.m. It was an hour and a half between the departure of Marie-Ange and the arrival of the doctor at Poulain's home.

When he arrived, he inquired from the mother about the circumstances surrounding the accident and what she had observed as regards to her daughter. The observation that he made himself confirmed what the mother told him: severe bruise on the left side of the forehead, left facial paralysis and eye turned back towards the lesion, total right hemiplegic, complete insensitivity to pinching of the feet and hands, complete aphasia and very weak pulse. The girl looked as if she was asleep or dead. He did not find it useful to take the temperature, which would not have been significant.

The three women followed the doctor's investigation and noted his concern. His silence spoke volumes. He summarised his diagnosis: the child had all the symptoms of *an intracranial hematoma in formation in the temporal-parietal zone* ... He judged the case very serious and already thought that the little girl is lost, to the point that he did not consider it necessary to make a more detailed examination.