CHAPTER ONE

GIRONDE, PARIS AND BEYOND

Son of Bordeaux

Jules Nicolas Henri Gaden was born at 11 o’clock on the morning of 24th January 1867 in Bordeaux to an haute bourgeois family that revolved in the best social circles of the city. The Gadens were wealthy wine merchants of German origin who dominated the city’s trade after the Napoleonic wars. Henri’s parents, Henri senior and Hélène Rousse, were aged 26 and 22 respectively when their first child – a son – was born, and his birth certificate bears the names of Hermann Klipsch and Octave Le Roy as witnesses.¹

Henri senior struck an imposing presence at just under six feet tall. He had deep-set eyes, a long, slightly bulbous nose, and wore a full beard. Later in life his high crown and prominent forehead were shown off to their full extent as his hair receded. He looked every inch the image of a 19th-century paterfamilias, dressed in a well-tailored grey three-piece suit. He had completed his French military service in the 143rd Infantry Regiment, being part of the class of 1861, and remained enlisted in the Infantry’s reserve corps until 1881, when at 41 years old he was granted ‘congé definitif’ – definitive leave.² Gaden’s mother, Hélène, was a petite, fine-featured woman, with black hair and tightly drawn thin lips, perhaps suggestive of a stern and humourless nature. From the one photograph that remains of her, she stares out directly at the camera, as though daring the onlooker the impertinence of breaking into a smile. Henri junior takes primarily after his mother in appearance.

Gaden had four younger sisters. Wilhelmine, the eldest of the four, wore a carefree expression as a young girl, and she matured into a slender, athletic and attractive woman, of elegant appearance and poise, whose pleasant face was dominated by thick bushy eye-brows. Only one picture remains of any of his other three sisters, Hélène, Germaine and Marie, and this is of a young woman in a nun’s habit.³ The picture was taken

¹ See Dossier Personnel, No 7Ye 486, SHAT.
² See 15 APC/10, Livret, CAOM.
³ In the photographic collection retained by Mme Conqueret-Guibourd, Bordeaux.
in the city of Orléans, and is of Hélène, who joined the Sisters of Orléans. Her deep-set eyes and imposing brow suggest the features of her father, and she is not blessed with the same comeliness as her sister Wilhelmine.

Gaden’s mother was highly religious, a Catholic by upbringing, and Henri’s three youngest sisters each took up holy orders in the Catholic Church: Hélène (Soeur Marie) joined the Orde des Rédemptoristes, and Germaine (Soeur St Paul) and Marie (Soeur Marie-Dominique) both took vows among the Petites Soeurs Dominicaines Gardes-Malades des Pauvres. Henri was much more ambivalent about religion. As a young man, Henri wanted to escape the confines of his bourgeois life in France, and perhaps too the restraint and suffocating air of middle-class respectability. The family were conservative liberals who saw the role of the state as providing laissez-faire conditions in which free trade could flourish. Henri’s politics were marked neither by radical republicanism nor by left wing posturing, both of which he detested.

In the 1860s, Henri’s family occupied an imposing four-storey, 18th-century town house at 56 quai des Chartrons, an address registered as the trading house of his father, who was a négociant working for La Maison Jules Rousse and Co. This business was owned by Henri’s maternal grandfather, Jules Rousse, and Henri’s father became associated with it in the late 1860s. Number 56 was also occupied by a watchmaker, Jean Truilhet and his wife, who lived in a small apartment in the building. By the late 1870s, Henri’s family comprised his mother and father, three of his sisters and a household retinue of an English maid, two chambermaids and a cook. Next door, at number 55, Henri’s grandfather, Hermann, lived with his family, and these premises were registered as the trading house of the wine merchants Gaden and Klipsch. By 1886, Henri’s family had moved into the larger property at number 55, and the Gaden and Klipsch company had transferred its operations to 24, cours de la Martinique, an elegant four-storey building just around the corner behind the quai. Henri left the house to take up his education in Paris that year, by which time his younger brother, Philippe, was three years old. The household’s increasing opulence at this time can be seen in the size of the Gaden’s domestic staff: now a husband and wife who worked as valet and cook respectively, another English housemaid and two chambermaids.

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4 See Annuaire Général du Commerce et de L’Industrie, Bordeaux 1867 and 1869.
5 See Recensements démographiques, La Gironde, 1872, 1876, 1881 and 1886.