

GREAT STORY OF ROLAND B. MOLINEUX—FROM A DEATH CELL TO FREEDOM

(Continued From First Page.)

That man swore that on the 24th day of December, 1898, he received in his mailbox at the Knickerbocker Athletic Club a parcel containing a silver bottle-holder, a bottle containing a white powder that was later found to be heavily charged with cyanide of mercury, and an envelope of the description used by Tiffany when inclosing customers' cards along with gifts.

The whole was laid in a Tiffany box. He further alleged that he cut from the wrapping the address, that after search this address was recovered, and handed over to the police for identification. In those statements of the man who administered the poison is contained all the material evidence the prosecution ever obtained concerning the method of murder and the instruments of the crime.

Further investigation proved that the parcel was posted at the general post-office before 4 o'clock on the afternoon of December 23, 1898. Prof. Herman Vaulst, of Columbia College, testified that Roland Molineux had been with him that day from noon till a quarter to 5 in the afternoon on Morningside Heights.

No evidence was adduced to prove the presence of Roland Molineux anywhere in the neighborhood of the general post-office on December 23, 1898. By his own testimony the man who administered the poison showed his presence within a few rods of the general postoffice on the afternoon of December 23.

Search proved that the silver bottle holder had been purchased at a Newark jeweler's on the 21st day of December 1898. The saleswoman who made the sale had a very distinct recollection of the incident, admitted that she might not be able to identify the purchaser, but was absolutely definite in her assertion that Molineux was not the man.

No human being has ever been associated with the possession of the cyanide of mercury, of the bottle in which the poison was placed, of the Tiffany envelope, or of the Tiffany box in which

written a group of letters signed "H. C. Barnet" and "H. Cornish." All of these—to concede the theory of the prosecution—were written in disguised handwriting in two series at intervals six months apart.

The laymen believed a man might conceivably disguise his handwriting, but did not believe the disguise would approximate as closely in the two instances and yet differ so widely from the writer's accustomed handwriting.

The expert evidence practically destroyed itself. To establish a sufficient motive demanded much ingenious carpentry on the part of the prosecution. Roland Molineux was admittedly a popular man, a favorite in his clubs, one in whom his fellows placed their trust. He was a man of excellent manner, urbane, well-poised. He was an athlete in good training, one of the best amateur performers upon the horizontal bar in the country. He was sufficiently supplied with money, had been recently married to the woman he loved.

It was difficult to find a motive for his murder of Barnet, his friend, and for the attempted murder of Cornish, the paid employe of his former club, a man with whom he had never held personal relations.

Yet Asa Bird Gardiner did not hesitate to charge before the coroner's jury that Molineux had committed both murders—the murder of his friend from jealousy, the murder of Mrs. Adams, substituted for the club employe, from revenge.

Using language that nothing in the evidence had justified, in connection with a crime with which he was not charged, the then district attorney accused Roland Molineux of murdering Barnet because of Barnet's relations with Mrs. Molineux.

Not once in the trial has it been suggested that Roland Molineux even quarreled with Barnet in the presence of others or ever slackened the bonds of his comradeship.

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you will make your decision before God, I intrust the case to your hands.

With respect to the handwriting on the poison package, experts testified that Molineux had written the address and experts testified that Molineux had not written the address, until the unfortunate laymen in court knew only that the experts differed in opinion. What the laymen did discover from them, however, was that if Molineux had written the poison address, he also must have

shown what kind of a woman she is. Barnet was her man, gentlemen of the jury.

Yet the closest association which the prosecution was enabled to demonstrate between Miss Cheesbrough and Barnet was her presence one evening in Barnet's room when the Knickerbocker Athletic Club was thrown open to visitors; when Miss Cheesbrough was under Barnet's escort, with Molineux's knowledge and consent; when other club

members were presented to her and in company with her. The only documentary evidence produced against her was contained in a letter that accompanied a bunch of flowers she sent Barnet during his last illness by request of her husband—according to her own and Roland Molineux's uncontroverted evidence. The interpre-

ters of that letter must be left to the comparative purity of the minds interpreting it—the one indubitable fact is that the language itself is capable of an absolute innocent construction.

Leaving his motive of jealousy, District Attorney Gardiner turned to a curiously incompatible reason for the attempt on the life of Cornish, the club employe. Roland Molineux was a libertine, so spent with debauchery, he argued, that, when the club employe in-argued, that, when the club employe insulted him he dared not answer him like a man would, but sought revenge with the cowardly weapon of poison. The then district attorney, using the privilege of his office, said:

Those letters (the letters in a disguised handwriting) were all written by a degenerate, a man who had lost his virility. You remember the remark which Cornish made to Molineux on the stairs of the Knickerbocker Athletic Club the night that Molineux resigned from the club? It was a wife name. What was that conversation? The two met on the stairs. Molineux had pursued and persecuted Cornish to his uttermost. He tried to deprive the man of his bread and butter, and when he failed Cornish applied that vile epithet to him. What was Molineux's reply? He simply said: "You win." Who but a degenerate would not have shown greater resentment to a remark like that?

It is startling to find so crude an interpretation of the citizen's duty to the statutory laws of his country, and of the gentleman's duty to the unwritten laws of his order, in the mouth of a public prosecutor!

Cornish was the paid athletic director at the Knickerbocker Athletic Club. Roland Molineux was a member of the house committee. Early in 1896 Molineux complained to Cornish, in his official capacity, of the conduct and disgusting language of an "athletic" member of the club. Cornish refused to interfere. In

April, 1897, Molineux complained of the arrangements made by Cornish for the amateur circus of that year. Shortly after his inclusion upon the house committee Molineux secured the expulsion of Cornish and a clerk named Miles from two rooms they occupied in the club on the reasonable ground that these rooms were rentable property, which ought to show a return in favor of the club.

Later, and of greatest importance, Molineux complained of the best interests of the club, nothing of personal enmity in his relations with the paid employe of the organization, nothing extraneous in his refusal to associate with him as a member. Roland B. Molineux belonged to a social grade that looked upon such an encounter as a degradation, who would have resented his engaging in such a rough and tumble as District Attorney

Gardiner indicated, as much as they would have been astounded at the suggestion that a gentlemanly answer be the stamp of a degenerate.

The motive of the crime was never proved, was never made certain, was never consistent in its internal details. Roland B. Molineux acted as any gentleman would have acted in circumstances that only a gentleman would have understood.

Today the whole country is contemplating with horror the conduct of the first trial; is re-alling with dread those fifty-seven days of the racking of an innocent man at the hands of an embittered prosecuting attorney; is regarding with aversion the attitude of the man placed over him in the position of a judge.

On the 4th day of December, 1899, Mr. Osborne rose to make his opening speech against Roland Molineux, charged with the murder of Mrs. Katherine J. Adams nearly a year before. In that speech he made a remarkable statement to the jury, a statement that found its parallel in his concluding address.

Gentlemen, I wish to say that each of you will become a judicial Frankenstein and will be able to construct the mind and body of this poisoner

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At the bar sat the pale-faced prisoner on trial for his life. And so did he sit through similar scenes on December 8, on December 15, on December 22, on December 27, on December 30, when matter of grave import came up for the decision of the recorder.

The defense wanted to show the queer family relations that existed in the Adams and Rogers family and Cornish's own family in order to create the impression that perhaps in these family relations there might in some way be a motive for a crime such as was committed. The recorder said: "I will not hear you, Mr. Weeks. It does not seem to me that this is material."

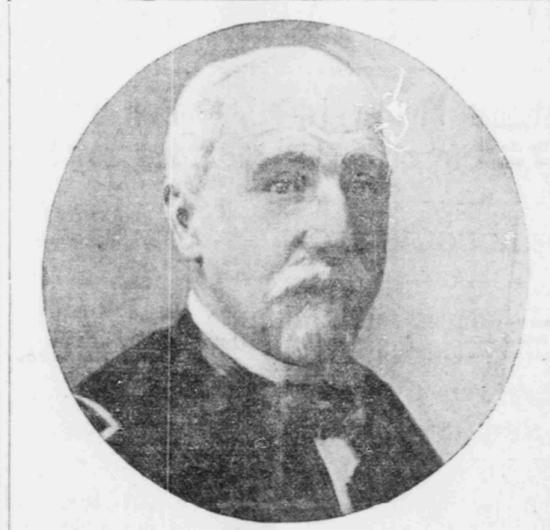
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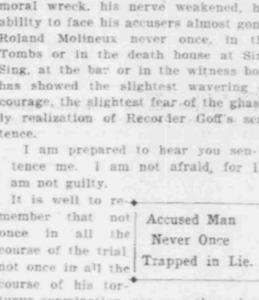
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