

RICHESON DECLARED DEAD AT 12:17 A. M.

Confessed Poisoner of One-Time Sweetheart Maintained His Composure until Electrodes Were Adjusted.

HIS LAST WORDS WERE 'I AM WILLING TO DIE'

Replied to Spiritual Adviser in Even, Well-Modulated Tone—When Witnesses Arrived They Heard Former Clergyman and Chaplain Singing a Hymn—Left Cell Smiling.

Boston, May 23.—Clarence V. T. Richeson was electrocuted at 12:17 this morning. The current was turned on at 12:10 and the prisoner was dead at 12:17. The former Baptist clergyman, confessed poisoner of Avis Linnell of Hyannis, his one-time sweetheart, was outwardly calm when he entered the death chamber and he maintained his composure while the straps and electrodes were being adjusted as he sat in the electric chair.

Attorney Morse said that he advised Warden Bridges to make public the fact of the receipt of this powder. Richeson was entirely innocent of any knowledge of its having been sent; the attorney declared. It is expected that the wishes of the dead man will be carried out and that he will be buried beside his mother in the family lot on Richeson mountain in Amherst Courthouse, Va. A brother, Douglas of Chicago, is in Boston to take charge of the remains.

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son had been graduated. Miss Edmonds was prominent socially and was wealthy in her own right, as well as entitled to share in the estate of some \$80,000 left by her grandfather. Entrance to the exclusive home of the Edmonds had been easy to the minister as the pastor of the church the family attended, and in a short time he was accepted as suitor for the daughter's hand.

At the same time Richeson was meeting Miss Linnell as formerly. But one day he borrowed the diamond ring he had given her, on the pretext that some needed resting. He did not return. Eventually the newspapers announced the engagement of the Rev. Mr. Richeson and Miss Violet Edmonds. The Linnell family demanded an explanation. The minister promptly declared the story a "newspaper fake" and was believed.

The invitations to the wedding of Richeson and Miss Edmonds were sent out in the afternoon of Saturday, October 14. That same afternoon Richeson died with Avis Linnell at a little restaurant in the Back Bay. While there the girl appeared depressed. At times tears rolled down her cheeks. When she returned to her lodgings, however, she seemed cheerful, although quickly excusing herself and hurrying away to her room.

FOUND GIRL IN AGONY. Groans were heard coming from a bathroom of the association quarters shortly after seven o'clock that evening. The door was broken, and Miss Linnell was found partially unconscious and apparently in great agony. Half an hour later she died without recovering consciousness. A belief that the girl had committed suicide was at first general, but her family were disposed to discredit the report, and a thorough investigation was made.

Soon after the girl died, it was learned that someone had telephoned to Richeson, as the girl's nearest friend, and informed him of the circumstances. He coldly denied at first that he knew the girl at all. Then finally, admitting that she had been his former sweetheart, he suggested that her brother-in-law in Brookwater be notified. Before hanging up the receiver he asked: "Did she say anything before she died?"

The theory of suicide was dispelled when the real conditions surrounding the death of Miss Linnell were made known. The girl had been sitting in a chair with her feet in a tub of hot water while beside her was a fresh change of clothing. The autopsy revealed the fact that she had taken a dose of poison and the conclusion was drawn that she had done so in the innocent belief that it would remedy a condition that later would be a cause of great embarrassment.

HID IN THE EDMANDS HOME. On the day following the girl's death the Rev. Mr. Richeson preached what was to be his last sermon in the Cambridge church, and in his prayer referred briefly to the death of a near friend. That afternoon, dining with a member of his parish in Somerville, he was able to eat but little and spent much time on a couch in apparent misery. He explained that he was overcome by the recent death of a "dear friend." That night he went to the home of Rosemary Edmonds in Brookline, where he hid himself until the next day.

Scores of police and newspaper men took up the mystery of the death of Avis Linnell. It seemed apparent at the outset that the belief in suicide was one which the murderer had planned to foster. Given the crime and the reason for it the next step was to find the man responsible for the condition of the victim. The police had not far to seek and the newspapers made no pretense at mystery in directing their suspicions. The girl had but one sweetheart and she made no concealment of her affection for Richeson.

In a week's time material evidence began to accumulate. A woman declared that Richeson had telephoned from her home making an appointment for the afternoon of October 11 with someone at the Young Woman's Christian association rooms. Richeson, who had received her letter had returned to her with the remark that she had better wash it thoroughly as it had been used to mix paste which had contained poison. The most damaging evidence, however, came from William Hahn, a druggist of Newton Center and a friend of Richeson.

taken to police headquarters in Boston in a taxicab to be arraigned. The case was set for October 21 for a hearing and Richeson was committed to the Charles street jail without bail. Within a few days the wedding invitations to the minister and Miss Edmonds, summoning the guests to the Edmonds home on October 21, were recalled.

Before the day of the hearing arrived a special session of the grand jury was called and an indictment charging murder in the second degree was returned. It was taken into court to plead to the charge of murder on the day he was to have been married to Miss Edmonds. The trial of the case was set for January 15.

Richeson had early written to his church asking that judgment be suspended until after the grand jury sitting. On November 1 he forwarded his resignation, but the church on November 4, after a stormy meeting, refused to do so. Later a second letter of resignation was sent and accepted on November 21. The police had even at this time far from a satisfactory case against Richeson. The container of the poison which Miss Linnell had taken could not be found. It was believed some tin or box might have been left in the pocket of Miss Linnell's bathrobe, which had been hanging with her. The body was disinterred in Hyannis on October 21 and brought to Boston for a post mortem examination by five prominent physicians. The cause of death was confirmed but no additional evidence was found.

At the same time the police began an investigation into the life of Richeson. His important dates of his life from the date of his birth at Hyannis, Va., 25 years ago, until he advent in Cambridge were gone into. It was found that he went to school early at Amherst Courthouse, Va., high school, then went to Carrollton, Mo., to work for a brother and attend a local academy. Three years later he went to Liberty, Mo., and entered William Jewell college to study for the ministry. While a student at Jewell he published in Kansas City, Mo., Street, a weekly paper. He was born in Louisville, Ky., and other places.

Richeson's life had not been an undisturbed one, it was learned, and many tales were related of his entanglements with young women. At Liberty, Mo., while engaged in the ministry, he had been engaged to the daughter of a professor. The young woman had Richeson money to pursue his studies and up to the time of his coming to Hyannis believed she was to be his wife. In the meantime she developed tuberculosis, which still necessitates her remaining in Salt Lake City, Utah. The one bright ray of light in Richeson's career appeared to be that he would be able to loan him as fast as possible. The final papers were sent from Hyannis shortly before he came to Cambridge.

Richeson was expelled from William Jewell College for cheating in examinations shortly after he had been ordained at the First Baptist Church in St. Louis. After coming to Cambridge he was a member of the street cars of the city and was prominent in a strike of street car men, his fiery eloquence making him a natural leader.

While at Budd Park Baptist Church in Kansas City, Richeson became involved with a widow. One Sunday she appeared unexpectedly during the church service. Richeson, upon seeing her, fell in a faint. A brother of the woman called at Richeson's rooms and the young minister took her to his home. A note to the deacons explained that he had been driven away by jealous women.

At another church three young women interrupted the service one Sunday. Simultaneously rising each inquired of the minister if he intended to carry out his promise to marry her. The sensation led to the dismissal of the church to write for the pastor's resignation. Richeson entered Newton Theological Seminary in the fall of 1887 and graduated in 1890. During his course he earned money by working in restaurants and shoe stores. He was called to the Hyannis church in 1890 and remained there until July, when he received notice to accept the pastorate of the Immanuel Baptist Church in Cambridge. Rumors of his interest in women while a preacher in Massachusetts have been current. Miss Edmonds, upon the arrest of her fiancé, left Cambridge to escape publicity and, it is said, has been engaged in charity work.

Richeson mutilated himself. Interest in the case was intensified on December 29 when it became known that Richeson had mutilated himself in his cell at the Charles street jail. The public apparently had all sympathy for the prisoner following his strange act, which was interpreted as a confession of guilt. At Hyannis, the home of Avis Linnell, the minister was hung in effigy with a placard on the dummy reading "Guilty, Road Like Him." In Boston a conference of Baptist ministers was called and Richeson was formally deprived of his title of reverend.

Richeson confessed his guilt in a statement written by himself on January 2, and given out by his counsel on January 6. The confession was addressed to his counsel and read: "Deeply penitent before my sins, and earnestly desiring as far as in my power, to make atonement, I hereby confess that I am guilty of the offense of which I stand indicted. I am moved to do this by the understanding of self-mutilation of leniency. It was not my crime, God has not wholly abandoned me, and my conscience and manhood, however depraved and blighted, will not admit of my still further wronging by a public trial for whose pure young life I have destroyed."

Richeson's body at morgue. Circumstances arise which prevent its removal to household home in Virginia.

Richeson, on April 22, sent a petition for commutation of sentence to Governor Ross. It read: "I respectfully request that the sentence of death pronounced against me by the superior court for the county of Suffolk be commuted to imprisonment for life, and I leave the presentation of this request and the reasons in support thereof to my counsel, Clarence V. T. Richeson."

Simultaneously with the presentation of the petition, Counsel W. A. Morse and Philip R. Dunbar of Boston and John L. Lee, of Lynchburg, Va., filed numerous depositions relating to evidence of insanity on the part of members of the Richeson family in Virginia and as to peculiar acts and traits of the prisoner.

Before Dr. Bridges reported, Governor Ross had reports from two alienists setting for the defense. These were Doctors E. R. Lane and I. H. Corbit, both of whom declared that Richeson was insane. After receiving Dr. Bridges' report the Governor was still undecided and on May 11 he formally appointed an insanity commission for the commonwealth. This was made up of Dr. Henry K. Steadman, chairman of the board of trustees of the Taunton Insane Hospital, Dr. George T. Tuttle, superintendent of the Melrose Insane Hospital, and Dr. Henry P. Frost, superintendent of the Boston State Hospital.

MADE THREE EXAMINATIONS. The commission examined Richeson upon three occasions, and its report was made public by the Governor on May 16. In effect, the commission declared Richeson sane, although suffering at times from emotional disturbances which were variously described as "hysterical insanity," and "hysterical delirium." Governor Ross issued a statement saying he found no reason for referring the case to his council, which has the sole right of commutation of sentence, and announced that he would not recommend executive clemency. He explained that he had appointed the commission for the protection of the commonwealth inasmuch as Richeson had never been tried, having been sentenced on his own confession, and that he did not wish the question of Richeson's sanity, either at the time of the commission of the crime or at the time of his execution to be questioned.

The condemned man was removed from the Charles street jail to the death chamber in the Charlestown State prison on May 12, the day before the announcement of the Governor's finding. At the prison Richeson asked for the services of the Rev. Herbert S. Johnson, pastor of the Warren Avenue Baptist Church, as his spiritual adviser. At the same time expressing a wish that the prison chaplain, the Rev. Herbert W. Stebbins, continue to visit him. In order that one or the other of the ministers might be with him constantly an arrangement was made whereby the two clergymen relieved each other, and Richeson had their constant attendance from the time of his entering the death house until his execution.

COLLAPSE OF THE PRISONER. On Friday night before the execution, and following soon after the news given him of the Governor's decision, Richeson collapsed. The nervous strain proved too much to withstand. His collapse resembled attacks to which he had been subject at intervals for years. In a partly unconscious state he rolled about on his bed, delirious, moaning and groaning. At times he raved against two men who were watching him and following him, doubtless referring to the two guards forming his death watch. The prison physician administered sedatives and the prisoner fell into a sleep for 14 hours.

From that time until his execution Richeson appeared resigned to his fate. He chatted freely with his spiritual advisers and counsel regarding the disposition of his affairs and events of his past life.

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some step will be taken in aid of the students at once. PLEASD WITH HONOR SYSTEM. Montpelier, May 21.—A. B. Forbush of Berlin, N. H., Edwin L. Page and N. H. Page of Concord, N. H., members of a commission appointed by the Legislature of New Hampshire to investigate prison conditions in other States, called at the Washington county jail this morning and had a long talk with Sheriff F. H. Tracy in regard to the application of the honor system. Sheriff Tracy explained that the men are credited with all their earnings above \$1 a day, to be paid at the expiration of their sentences. Nearly 1,000 men have been employed without guards, everywhere about the city, in groups and singly, with three attempts at escape and less than two per cent. falling victims to the drink habit. The New Hampshire men appeared to be much impressed with the success of the system here. They will inspect the house of correction at Rutland to-morrow. The funeral of Auguste Strindberg, novelist and dramatist, was attended by 2,000 people at Stockholm.