

# THE TENSAS GAZETTE

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## Historic Crimes and Mysteries

By Walt Mason

THE POETRY OF POISON.

The prison regulations at Geneva are extremely liberal, so for many years prior to 1884, hundreds of tourists from all over the world were permitted to see and converse with Marie Jeanneret, "the Swiss Ervinvillers." Marie's cell was a large, comfortable, well-lighted room, and there she sat, day after day, making lace and exulting in the fact that her fame was world-wide.

Having no conscience, and being incapable of remorse, Marie has been described by the historians of crime as a monster. However abhorrent her character may have been, there was nothing repulsive in her appearance

or manners. She was rather short

and slight and her face, pale as marble, was lighted up by large, dark, intelligent eyes, and she had masses of beautiful black hair. Her voice was soft, gentle and caressing, and all her actions seemed to indicate an affectionate, sensitive nature.

When she was tried for her crimes and convicted, she looked so much like a martyr that the jurors couldn't find it in their hearts to assess the death penalty, which was then the prescribed punishment for murder, so she was given 20 years. The canton legislators then reasoned that it would be unfair to bring any other murderer to the gallows after permitting her to escape, so they abolished capital punishment. So Marie did some good in the world.

She began experimenting with poisons when a girl. She seemed to have a fascination for her. She always kept in her room a medicine chest, and was forever toying with its little boxes and bottles. One day her room mate, Berthe Berthet, complained of feeling ill. The helpful Marie opened her medicine chest and said: "I know just what to do for you, my dear." So she mixed up a tempting effervescent beverage and handed it to Berthe, who drank it eagerly, and a few minutes later was in a paroxysm of pain. The landlady heard her screams and sent for Doctor Lambassy, who saved her life.

When Berthe had told him of the drink given her by Marie, the doctor said: "You have escaped death by a hair's breadth. The girl made a mistake that would have been fatal had there been any delay in sending for me. She gave you belladonna."

That usually was the verdict whenever Marie scored a victim. It was assumed that she had made a mistake. It was impossible to believe that a girl with such a gentle, wistful face could have administered poisons deliberately.

For a time Marie dispensed her poisons as occasion offered, but she wanted larger opportunities, so she went into training as a nurse, and, although she did not finish her course, she had no trouble in securing employment in the desired capacity. Nature evidently had designed her for service in the sick room, she was so quiet, so gentle, so patient, her hands and voice were so soothing. She went to nurse Madame Chablot, and promptly gave her poison, which brought her to the edge of the grave, but the madam was a strong woman, and she rallied.

Madame Juvet of Geneva conceived the idea of establishing a private hospital, and Marie applied for the position of head nurse.

"I don't ask for a salary," said the gentle, soft-eyed girl. "I have private means, and don't need the money. My ambition is to do what good I can, by ministering to the sick and suffering."

Madame Juvet was sure she had gained a treasure when she engaged Marie. The hospital was opened, and Marie soon was in full control. Despite her gentle, yielding manners, she had a will of iron. The madam, as well as the staff, took their orders from her. Madame Juvet had two bright children, a boy and a girl. Marie professed to be very fond of them, and one day she said to the mother: "I am afraid Julie is very delicate, and I am sure Emilie is about to be seriously sick." The mother was amused, for the children were pictures of health. Meanwhile Marie told some of the servants, in strict confidence, that she was greatly worried over Madame Juvet. "She is a doomed woman," said Marie; "I read her fate in her eyes."

Presently Julie fell sick and then little Emilie, and then Madame Juvet took to her bed, suffering miserably. The doctors came and were puzzled. They seemed to recognize the symptoms of poisoning, but poisoning was impossible. Was not all the medicine administered by that gentle creature with the yearning eyes? There was so much sickness in the house that Emilie Julie grew worse and died at Christmas time, 1867, and a month later her mother died and almost her last word was an expression of gratitude to the faithful nurse who had been at her bedside night and day through so many weary weeks.

Meanwhile Marie had not been neglecting her other opportunities. During the lingering sickness of Madame Juvet three patients in the hospital died, and it was afterwards proved that their deaths were due to

poison. When Marie had finished her campaign she and M. Juvet and a couple of servants were the only survivors of the household.

Then Marie, still intent upon doing good, went to nurse a Madame Le... and the madame's funeral occurred a few days after her arrival. By this time her reputation as a death angel was beginning to attract attention, and she found it difficult to get patients. The strange thing is that nobody seemed to suspect her up to this time. Time and again the doctors had found indications of poisoning in her suffering patients, and yet they seemed unable to believe that Marie could be anything but what she seemed. It is this that makes the story of her career remarkable. She was careless to the point of recklessness. She would predict the early death of people in perfect health, and when these people died nobody seemed to see anything strange in it. It speaks much for her ingratiating manner that she could so long be "shaking from out her corod wings invisible woe," and still avoid suspicion.

When at last she was arrested, it was easy to secure the proofs of her crimes, and the indictment against her accused her of the murder of nine persons. Her attempts at murder were too numerous for consideration.

She was an artist in crime. She had none of the ordinary motives. It was art for art's sake with her. She never tried to profit by her horrid deeds. She was willing to work for nothing any time, if it would give her a chance to remove somebody. She was absolutely pitiless and enjoyed the sufferings of her victims. "Death had such beautiful moments," she said, when asked why she committed her crimes. "There is poetry in poison," she remarked, upon another occasion.

She died in 1884, in her little white cell, and to the last she retained her weird beauty. Her marble white face, with its beautiful dark eyes, haunted the memories of the thousands who journeyed to Geneva to see the strangest criminal of modern times.

Just in Style.

"You have a complaint to make, madam?" asked the milkman.

"Yes, I have," said the lady of the house at the door. "The milk you have left for three mornings is blue—absolutely blue."

"Well, my dear madam, you must know that blue is the season's most fashionable color. Now, if it were purple or pink you might complain, but nothing can be more fashionable than blue just now, madam, I assure you."

## EGYPT An Impression



THE SHEIKH'S TOMB

A CONSIDERABLE amount of nonsense has been written about the spell of Egypt. Cheapened by exaggeration, vulgarized by familiarity, it has become for many a picture post card spell, pinned against the mind like the posters at a railway terminus. The moment Alexandria is reached, this huge post card hangs across the heavens, blazing in an over-colored sunset, composed theatrically of temple, pyramid, palm trees by the shining Nile, and the inevitable Sphinx. And the monstrosity of it paralyzes the mind. Its strident shout deafens the imagination. Memory escapes with difficulty from the insistent, gross advertisement. The post card and the poster smother sight, writes Algernon Blackwood, in *Country Life*.

Behind this glare and glitter there hides, however, another delicate yet potent thing that is somehow nameless—not acknowledged by all, perhaps because so curiously elusive yet surely felt by all because it is so true; intensely vital, certainly, since it thus survives the suffocation of its vile exaggeration. For the ordinary tourist yields to it, and not alone the excavator and archeologist; the latter, indeed, who live long in the country, cease to be aware of it as an outside influence, having changed insensibly in thought and feeling till they have become it; it is in their blood. An effect is wrought subtly upon the mind that does not pass away. Having once "gone down into Egypt," you are never quite the same again. Certain values have curiously changed, perspective has altered, emotions have shifted their specific gravity, some attitude to life, in a word, been emphasized, and another, as it were, obliterated. The spell works underground, and, being not properly comprehensible, is nameless. Moreover, it is the casual visitor, unburdened by antiquarian and historical knowledge, who may best estimate its power—the tourist who knows merely what he has gleaned, for instance, from reading over Baedeker's general synopsis on the voyage. He is aware of this floating power everywhere, yet unable to fix it to a definite cause. It remains at large, evasive, singularly fascinating.

Creates Blur in the Mind. All countries, of course, color thought and memory, and work a spell upon the imagination of any but the hopelessly inanimate. Greece, India, Japan, Ireland or the Channel Islands leave their mark and imprint—whence the educational value of travel-psy-chology—back feelings and memories he can evoke at will and label. He returns from Egypt with a marvelous blur. All, in differing terms, report a similar thing. From the first few months in Egypt, saturated maybe with overmuch, the mind recalls with definiteness—nothing. There comes to its summons a colossal medley that half stupefies; vast reaches of yellow sand drenched in a sunlight that stings; dim, solemn aisles of granite silence; stupendous monoliths that stare unblinking at the sun; the shivering river, licking softly at the lips of a murderous desert; and an enormous night sky literally drowned in stars. A score of temples melt down into a single monster; the Nile spreads everywhere; great pyramids float across the sky like clouds; palms rustle in midair; and from caverned leagues of subterranean gloom there issues a roar of voices, thunderous yet unfiled, that seem to utter the hieroglyphics of a forgotten tongue. The entire mental horizon, oddly lifted, brims with this procession of gigantic things, then empties again without a word of explanation, leaving a litter of big adjectives chasing one another chaotically—chief among them "mysterious," "unchanging," "formidable," "terrific." But the single, bigger memory that should link all these together intelligibly hides from sight the emotion too deep for specific recognition, too vast, somehow, for articulate recovery.

The Acropolis, the wonders of Japan and India, the mind can grasp—or think so; but this composite enormity of Ramesseum, Serapeum, Karnak, Cheops, Sphinx, with a hundred temples and a thousand miles of sand, it knows it cannot. The mind is a blank.

Egypt, it seems, has faded. Memory certainly fails, and description wilts. There seems nothing precisely to report, no interesting, clear, intelligible thing. "What did you see in Egypt? What did you like best? What impression did Egypt make upon you?" seem questions impossible to answer. Imagination flickers, stammers and goes out. Thought hesitates and stops. A little shudder, probably, makes itself felt. There is an important attempt to describe a temple or two, an expedition on donkeyback into the desert; but it sounds unreal, the language wrong, foolish, even affected. The dreadful post card rises like a wall. "Oh, I liked it all immensely. The delightful dry heat, you know—and one can always count upon the weather for picnics arranged ahead, and—" until the conversation can be changed to theaters or the crops at home.

Yet, behind the words, behind the post card, one is aware all the time of some huge, alluring thing, alive with a pageantry of ages, strangely brilliant, dignified, magnificent, appealing almost to tears—something that drifts past like a ghostly full-rigged vessel with crowded decks and sails painted in an underworld, and yet the whole too close before the eyes for proper sight. The spell has become operative! Having been warned to expect this, I personally, had yet remained skeptical—until I experienced the truth. . . . And it was undeniably disappointing. After time and money spent, one had apparently brought back so little.

Monstrous to Some. For some, a rather dominant impression is undoubtedly "the monstrous." A splendor of awful dream, yet never quite of nightmare, stalks everywhere, suggesting an atmosphere of Khubla Khan. There is nothing lyrical. Even the silvery river, the slender palms, the fields of clover and barley and the acres of flashing popples convey no lyrical sweetness, as elsewhere they might. All moves to a stately measure. Stern issues of life and death are in the air, and in the grandeur of the tombs and temples there is a solemnity of genuine awe that makes the blood run slow a little.

Those Theban hills, where the kings and queens lay buried, are forbidding to the point of discomfort almost. The listening silence in the grim Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, the intolerable glare of sunshine on the stones, the naked absence of any sign of animal or vegetable life, the slow approach to the secret hiding place where the mummy of a once powerful monarch lies ghastly now beneath the glitter of an electric light, the implacable desert, deadly with heat and distance on every side—this picture, once seen, rather colors one's memory of the rest of Egypt with its somber and funereal character.

And with the great defile monoliths the effect is similar. Proportions and sheer size strike blow after blow upon the mind. Stupendous figures, shrouded to the eyes, shoulder their way slowly through the shifting sands, deathless themselves and half-appalling. Their attitudes and gestures express the hieroglyphic drawings come to life. Their towering heads, coiffed with zodiacal signs, or grotesque with animal or bird, bend down to watch you everywhere. There is no hurry in them; they move with the leisure of the moon, with the staidness of the sun, with the slow silence of the constellations. But they move. There is, between you and them, this effect of a screen, erected by the ages, yet that any moment may turn thin and let them through upon you. A hand of shadow, but with granite grip, may steal forth and draw you away into some region where they dwell among changeless symbols like themselves, a region vast, ancient and undifferentiated as the desert that has produced them. Their effect in the end is weird, difficult to describe, but real. Talk with a mind that has been steeped for years in their atmosphere and presence, and you will appreciate this odd reality.

The spell of Egypt is an other-worldly spell. Its vagueness, its elusiveness, its undeniable reality are ingredients, at any rate, in a total result whose detailed analysis has hidden in mystery and silence—inscrutable.

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