

A CAUSE OF MURDER PROVED INNOCENT

Strange and Tragic Story of Jeanne Weber, a Breton Peasant, Who Endured Martyrdom and Was Held Up to Public Execution as "The Ogress of the Goutte d'Or" for Three Years

By R. Franklin.
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PARIS, Feb. 6.—One of the most extraordinary and perplexing cases among French criminal records of recent years is assuredly that of Jeanne Weber, the meek and timid little Breton woman whom the popular voice branded with the terrible name of "The Ogress of the Goutte d'Or," and who, after three years of martyrdom, has at last been released from the clutches of justice, or rather, of a judge d'instruction.

Apart from the intrinsic interest which attaches to every human tragedy, especially where there is an element of unexplained and inexplicable mystery, this case has served to throw a disquieting sidelight on the cumbersome machinery of French judicial procedure and particularly on that part which is the province of the judge d'instruction. The magistrate thus entitled is a kind of combination of judge and jury, his special mission being to dig up the criminal case against the accused and decide whether there is prima facie evidence of guilt sufficient to send him to the assizes. As this functionary does not officiate in open court, but in his private room, to which the public is, of course, denied admittance, and as the only "spectator" is the clerk, it is easy to see how ill the accused person may fare at the hands of the judge d'instruction. If the latter is inclined to play the inquisitor, such a fate at the hands of M. Belleau, the judge d'instruction of Chateauroux.

Fate Dogged Footsteps.

Fate has indeed implacably dogged the footsteps of poor Jeanne Weber since the month of March, 1906. She was then living with her husband in the Goutte d'Or, an industrial quarter in the north of Paris. Their life was that of the working population. Jeanne had been a domestic servant. She was not 30 years of age and her little boy, Marcel, was just old enough to go to school.

On March second, Georgette, her brother-in-law's little daughter, suddenly fell ill and as suddenly died. Nine days later another little niece, Suzanne, died in the same sudden manner. Her death followed after that of a third niece, Germaine, and three days later Jeanne's own little boy, Marcel. It was noticed that in each case—it was it by a strange fatality or was it by a diabolical plan?—Jeanne Weber was with the dying children. In one case the father was away at work and Jeanne sent the mother for a doctor, in another the mother was absent and the father hastily summoned, was sent back to his work with the assurance that the little girl was already better. Again the children's end was identical, the face turned purple, the limbs contracted, the eyes were staring from their sockets and they foamed at the mouth. Finally on April fifth, Jeanne's little nephew, Maurice, was attacked by the same mysterious ailment. This time, however, the mother was at hand and ran with her child to the nearest hospital.

The doctor and his assistant both diagnosed a commencement of strangulation and detected, so they said, a black line around the neck.

The whole quarter, which had been commenting in its own rough and ready fashion on this startling series of deaths in the Weber family, now with one voice accused the unhappy Jeanne Weber of being a murderer. The public prosecutor took the case, Jeanne was arrested and three experts, Drs. Brouardel, Thoinot and Descouts, were instructed to perform a post mortem examination on all the deceased children except Marcel Weber, whose death had been certified as having been caused by diphtheria.

Great Is Sensation.

The affair created a tremendous sensation. For weeks columns of matter daily appeared in the newspapers about the "Ogress of the Goutte d'Or." No one lifted his voice in her defense, for her guilt appeared beyond question. Her past life, her words, her actions, everything was sifted and scrutinized. The public voice declared her to have been a faithless wife, that she had been frequently intoxicated; that she was "something" disquieting, mysterious, diabolical, about her, though no one could quite say why. Her husband, who for children was only a pretext to get them into her clutches and so on. For 12 months the accused woman lay in prison awaiting her trial at the Seine assizes.

At last on January 29, 1908, Jeanne Weber was placed in the dock. The medical experts upon whose evidence the prisoner's guilt depended—there was not a shred of direct evidence—declared it

impossible to say whether the children's death was due to accident or a criminal hand, as far as they could tell after a minute investigation of the bodies there was no trace of violence.

To the judge's question whether the children's death could have been caused by strangulation was not put, as Dr. Thoinot who examined little Maurice Weber five days after his visit to the hospital, was unable to find the slightest trace of the alleged black line around the neck.

Finally a fourth expert stated that the viscera contained no trace of poison.

Didn't Remember.

Strangely enough the assistant who had diagnosed a commencement of strangulation in the case of Maurice was not present in court. He pointed from the province. He pointed out that he was away on his holidays and remembered nothing about the Weber case.

Toward the close of the second day the advocate general, speaking in a court crowded to its utmost extent, said: "There were and there still are in this case strange and mysterious circumstances which defy explanation. We are living in the twentieth century. If Jeanne Weber had lived 400 years she would have been tried as witch and burned at the stake."

In reading these words one is involuntarily reminded of the fate of one Calais, the Toulouse tradesman, who was accused of poisoning his son, found guilty and broken on the wheel in 1562. The great Voltaire, convinced of Calais' innocence, labored for three years to prove it, and at last procured the dead man's rehabilitation.

The deliberation of the jury was short. Almost immediately they returned a verdict of "not guilty," and Jeanne Weber was free.

A murmur—it was nothing more—of applause passed through the court. It was clear that the verdict was not a popular one. I remember hearing a young workman beside me say: "It will go hard with her if they catch her alone on a dark night."

Child Dies Suddenly.

Some 15 months later the child of a woodcutter named Bavouzet, in the little village of Villedieu, near Chateauroux, died suddenly and in decidedly suspicious circumstances. The little one's face was convulsed and it foamed at the mouth. The village doctor was apparently unable to state the cause of death, but as there was no reason to doubt the correctness of the diagnosis, a permit was delivered without difficulty. Only one person had been with the child in his last moments, and that was a woman who had come to the village a year before and had been installed in Bavouzet's cottage to fill the place of the woodcutter's departed wife. This woman left the cottage after the child's death and did not return till the burial was over.

All at once the news ran through the village like wildfire that the strange woman who was living in Bavouzet's cottage was none other than Jeanne Weber, the ogress of the Goutte d'Or, in disguise. The woodcutter had been an attentive reader of the reports of the Goutte d'Or mystery and when Jeanne had been tried and acquitted the honest peasant, touched by the woman's misfortune, and believing her to be a woman who had come to the village a year before and had been installed in Bavouzet's cottage to fill the place of the woodcutter's departed wife, this woman left the cottage after the child's death and did not return till the burial was over.

Here, then, were two sets of experts in forensic medicine whose reports were diametrically opposed to each other, the one set certifying that death was due to violent, and the other to natural causes.

In this dilemma, the court of Bourges, in whose jurisdiction the accused was, decided to submit the opposing reports to three of the most eminent medical authorities in France, Professor Laniel of the faculty of Bordeaux, Mariet Doyen of the faculty of Montpellier and Brousseau of the faculty of Paris. These doctors were instructed to study, each in his turn, the reports and then meet together and draw up a final report thereon.

These must have been weary months for the watched prisoner of Chateauroux, months of mental torture and despair. When all was over and her innocence finally established, Jeanne Weber lifted the veil of secrecy behind

tion on the exhumed remains of the child, Auguste Bavouzet.

Cause of Death.

After some hesitation they reported that death had been caused by a criminal hand. They testified to the presence of a dark line about three quarters of an inch broad, running round the neck, but at irregular intervals, and to a second violet line running from below the left temple to the middle of the right temple, such a mark as might have been caused by a bootlace. They summed up by declaring that violence had certainly been used on the child's neck, and possibly on the heart as well.

This damning report sealed Jeanne Weber's fate. She was arrested on suspicion of being the murderess and was locked up in the prison of Chateauroux.

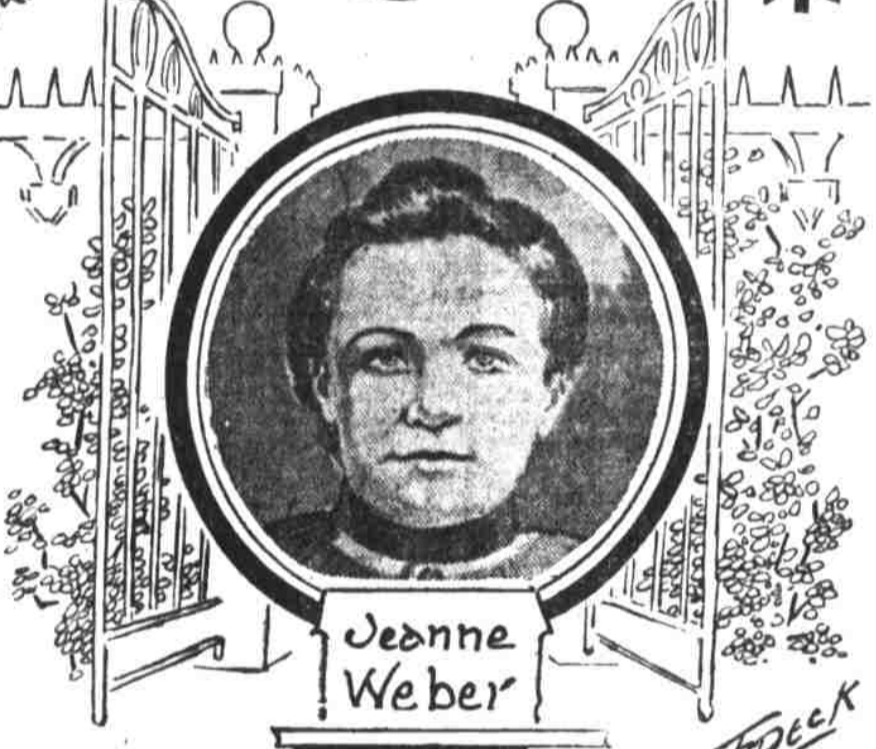


Maitre Henri Robert who twice defended Jeanne Weber

the judge d'instruction, M. Belleau, being charged to collect evidence and report whether there was a case or not.

Jeanne appealed to Maitre Henri Robert, one of the most eminent counsel of the Paris bar, who had defended her at the first trial, to watch over her interests once more, and he at once promised to do so, convinced as he was of her innocence. Maitre Henri Robert's first step was to demand that the two Paris experts, Drs. Thoinot and Socquet, should be instructed to carry out an independent autopsy on the remains of Auguste Bavouzet. This was done some weeks after death. The conclusion arrived at by Drs. Thoinot and Socquet was to the effect that their colleagues of Chateauroux were not justified in their diagnosis of strangulation, and that from certain characteristic signs in the intestines there was every reason to believe that death was due to typhoid fever.

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Jeanne Weber

doublet an excellent man, but he seems to have been dominated by two ruling ideas in this affair. The first, Jeanne Weber was guilty; and the second, that it was his sole mission to prove her so, and thus succeeding where his colleagues of Paris had failed two years previously, cover himself with glory and perhaps secure promotion in spite of advancing years.

Protested Innocence.

"Every time I was taken from my cell to be examined by him in his room at the Palais de Justice," Jeanne told me, "I protested that I was innocent, whereupon he would retort: 'It is true; I have not the formal proof that you killed little Bavouzet, but I have other proofs. I have the proof that you killed other children at

days before her release this medieval inquisitor sent for her and said: 'I have just received the experts' report. It is very long and I have no time to study it now, but I have other more important matters to attend to.' Jeanne Weber had the courage to remark that she had been already kept in prison for eight months pending the arrival of the report which was to decide her fate.

"What does that matter to me?" he is reported to have replied. "Justice holds you and will not be in a hurry to let you go. What are the conclusions of the report, even if it affirms your innocence a thousand times over, shall I believe it to be in error and shall send you before the assizes, where you will be condemned, you may count upon that."

Pitiless Tyranny.

But Belleau's pitiless tyranny was at last beginning to cause a public scandal. Throughout the length and breadth of the land the judge's inhuman conduct raised indignant protests. Several organs of the press took up the case. It had already leaked out that the final report of the medical experts was favorable to the prisoner. It had even leaked them two months and toward the middle of December it was handed to M. Belleau, the pronouncement of the steps involved that the Auguste Bavouzet died from natural causes. Belleau still refused to relinquish his prey.

At length the court of Bourges, galvanized to action by the force of public opinion, sent a peremptory order to the judge d'instruction. At once, and on the afternoon of January 6, Jeanne Weber's long martyrdom ended.

But the incident was a great crowd had collected a part being hostile and a part favorable, but all equally anxious to see the ogress of whom some compassing things had been related. It was, therefore, decided by the authorities, in order to spare her this supreme infliction that she should be taken along an underground passage connecting the prison and the Palais de Justice and be let out from the latter by a back door. In a motor car to convey Jeanne to M. Bonjean's house at Paris. She had not been there long before J. Letiers were received from the court and were waiting for her. In a day or two Jeanne will leave Paris to start life afresh. Her case, however, is to prove herself worthy of M. Bonjean's trust and kindly sympathy. "That will be my revenge on the wicked people who made me suffer so cruelly. Perhaps they will be sorry when they see that they made a martyr of an honest woman."

In conclusion, I will narrate, as it was told to a friend by Jeanne Weber herself, an incident which throws a flood of light on the machinations which so nearly worked her ruin.

It is in connection with the death of her little boy. Two days before the child died, his mother, who had been out all the afternoon, went to fetch him from school. Little Marcel was trembling and in tears. When asked what was the matter, he replied that his father had beaten him. The child's body was black and blue from the thrashing it had received. Next day M. Marcel complained of internal pain and remained in bed and 24 hours later was dead. The doctor certified diphtheria as the cause of death and Jeanne held her peace about her husband's brutality. Some of the neighbors, however, reported the matter to the police, and from that moment Jeanne's husband and her two brothers-in-law showed bitter enmity against her. They set on foot a campaign to the woodcutter Bavouzet urging him to accuse Jeanne, and adding: "You may be sure she killed your child. You will get a good action by securing her punishment. On the day of her condemnation I promise to send you 500 francs."

But M. le Juge d'instruction's self-imposed mission was to prove Jeanne's guilt, not her innocence, and so such trifles left him indifferent. It was reserved for a generous lawyer backed up by the all-powerful press to redress the leaning balance of justice.

which she had languished and told me a heartrending story of her sufferings. M. Belleau, judge d'instruction, is

renders more aid.

But Maitre Henri Robert did not intend that his generous aid should cease with Jeanne's release from prison. There is a Paris Judge, M. Bonjean by name, who is famous for his charitable life. He is the president of various benevolent societies and a great benefactor. Henri Robert had no difficulty in interesting him in Jeanne Weber's sad case. Thus it came about that M. Bonjean, who in a motor car to convey Jeanne to M. Bonjean's house at Paris. She had not been there long before J. Letiers were received from the court and were waiting for her. In a day or two Jeanne will leave Paris to start life afresh. Her case, however, is to prove herself worthy of M. Bonjean's trust and kindly sympathy. "That will be my revenge on the wicked people who made me suffer so cruelly. Perhaps they will be sorry when they see that they made a martyr of an honest woman."

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The FUNNY MEN HAVE THEIR FLING

Quincy Dinkelspiel and Jones Live Topics in Lighter Vein

IN THE TOILS OF THE TARIFF

By WEX JONES

Representative McGavin's bill imposing a tariff upon titles had become a law.

CUSTOMS inspectors arrested "John Smith" at the Pink Moon pier this morning. The prisoner was charged with smuggling in titles appraised at \$7,000,000. "Smith" protested violently against his arrest, condemning it as an outrage which would not be tolerated for five seconds in a civilized country. Search of "Smith's" baggage revealed a uniform consisting of red trousers and a yellow coat, an unpaid Vienna board bill, photographs of several American beauties, and an advertisement of a hair dye. Confronted with this evidence, "Smith" admitted that he was Count Xexizy, and being unable to pay the duty he was deported in the same steamer at the expense of the company.

The Earl of Blotter applied yesterday to have his title appraised at a less figure than \$12,000,000. The noblemen produced a list of American beauties and pointed out that none of them were worth \$12,000,000. The noblemen produced a list of American beauties and pointed out that none of them were worth \$12,000,000. The noblemen produced a list of American beauties and pointed out that none of them were worth \$12,000,000.

THE WEDDING

By WEX JONES

A hypocritical is a man dot says pleasant things about you and calls himself a liar vile he is ditting.

Der man dot nefer makes a klok is pretty sure to get kicked himself sooner or later.

Der finish of der Knocker was und his funeral chant was sung by a chorus of clams, vich is der silentest bird in der world.

Der best successora in dis world is dem dot depend on homemade success.

A financial bonfire vas der noblest work of some Society Smart Setters.

Der man dot knows ven to beat a retreat is der same man dot sometimes beats der races.

Der man dot vas driven to drink would haf walked dare any-vay.

Around the house the people crushed To view the scene the better, And those who saw the lovely bride Said, "Lucky chap to get her." She wore a diamond solitaire, No queen has got a bigger; She had a veil of priceless lace, And an almost perfect figure. The figure: \$20,000,000.

The bridegroom's visage was all smiles, His uniform all buttons; His sword was long and fierce enough To carve careers or muttons, He had an air of silent pride, And spurs with jingly rowels, His name was very long on fame, But very shy on vowels. The name: Bedfghijklmnpqrstvxz.

His heart was full of love and joy, His coat was full of shoulders; His fine appearance pleased himself As much as the beholders. He looked upon his priceless bride, And thanked his stars he'd found her, And swore no loss should'er befall. With his strong arms around her. The arms: \$20,000,000.

It was a very fine affair, The flower of modern marriages; And all the people went their way In raptures and in carriages. The bridegroom and the bride embraced, A pair of happy studs, Attended on their wedding tour By flocks and flocks of Cupids. The Cupids: \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

POURING OUT HOMES

By C. B. QUINCY

Der bottom dollar is der best dollar if you haf udder dollars to keep it in der bottom.

Ven ignorance insults you it vas folly to be a wise guy.

Vun-half der world is afraid it vill nefer get der chance to do der udder half.

Der most popular motive power of der day is der man dot chollies udder peoples along.

Sams people start out to do right but Fate hands dem a transfer.

A man mit udder enemies is der same relation to dis earth as a chelly-fish is to der ocean.

Rich peoples haf troubles vich poor peoples can refer enchoy.

Temptation always veers rubber shoes and speaks mit a visper.

BUILD-A-HOUSE-QUICK COMPANY: Gentlemen—I have received your catalogue of stock houses ready to mould in accordance with Edison's patent for casting houses of cement in one piece. The plan seems very feasible and economical, and as I have just paid the last instalment on a lot at Lonelyville, I wish to order House No. 822 in your catalogue. Yours truly, A. SUBURBS.

BUILD-A-HOUSE-QUICK COMPANY: Gentlemen—On visiting my property at Lonelyville I was astonished to find a large cement structure in the style of a German castle placed upon my ground. As my lot is Earl Colonial in character, such a style of dwelling is entirely out of keeping with it. Will you please to order the removal of this structure, and in its place build a Colonial House, ten rooms, three baths, windows, stairs, roof, etc., complete without cost to me. Kindly send for your castle at once. Yours truly, A. SUBURBS.

A. Suburbs, Esc.: Dear Sir—We regret to hear of the accident which occurred at your house, and advise you that we have shipped you day our No. 1144B ("Long Island Knicknack"). Yours truly, BUILD-A-HOUSE-QUICK COMPANY.

BUILD-A-HOUSE-QUICK COMPANY: Gentlemen—The dynamite used in removing your "Baronial Mansion" from my property has torn such a hole in the lot that only the chimney of your "Colonial" (No. 822) would appear above the surface. While this would be convenient for Santa Claus, I must cancel my order for 822A and ask instead No. 827, "English Basement" with floors, walls, steps, etc., complete—gateposts extra. Yours truly, A. SUBURBS.

BUILD-A-HOUSE-QUICK COMPANY: Gentlemen—Your "English Basement" (No. 827) was duly poured into the moulds and appeared very satisfactory until your men removed them. It then appeared that, owing to some obstruction in the moulds, the cement only half filled the hole. You will, of course, only the top story of the house. Naturally, when the moulds were removed the weight of the roof in eight places fractured the roof in eight places. Please have them promptly removed, English Basement removed, your earliest convenience. Yours truly, A. SUBURBS.

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