

Dr. Freudenberg - Wholesale Poisoner?

How the Graves of His Wealthy Mother-in-Law and Others Are Being Opened and Searched for Evidence to Prove What the Doctor Says Is All

a Cruel Mistake

“WHO are the richest families in town and which of them have marriageable daughters?” These, it is said, were the questions which Dr. J. A. Freudenberg asked when, fresh from medical college, penniless and unknown, he settled down to practise his profession in Markesan, Wisconsin.

The young physician had no difficulty in obtaining the information he sought, for Markesan is only a small farming village, and everybody in it is thoroughly familiar not only with the wealth or poverty but also with the marriageability of everybody else.

And the doctor was not slow to act whether these stories are true or not. Within a very short time after his arrival in Markesan he had married the richest girl in the village—Gladys Duffies, heiress to a fortune estimated at fully \$400,000—and had settled down to live with his bride and her family in the comfortable Duffies homestead.

This was in 1915. And now, five years later, the gossips of Markesan and the legal authorities of the county as well as wondering if there was not a deeper and more sinister significance than they ever suspected at the time in Dr. Freudenberg's reported interest in the financial standing of the village's marriageable girls and his speedy marriage to the richest of them all. Is all this the injustice of cruel village gossip?

If their suspicions are well founded, these moves on the physician's part were only the first steps in a carefully planned plot to obtain quick control of the Duffies family fortune—a plot that sent Mrs. Freudenberg's mother and three of her grandparents to their death.

The local authorities claim they have the evidence to prove that he is a wholesale poisoner—a man who prostituted his profession and betrayed his wife's love in the effort to gain his evil ends; who killed not once but four times, and by methods that must have been cruel torture for his helpless victims, in order to satisfy his greed for gold.

Unless these suspicions are true Dr. Freudenberg is a wickedly maligned man—a man who will be entitled to the world's sympathy that his family happiness and his professional prosperity should have been clouded by the shadow of this unjust suspicion.

Yet the Markesan authorities have found it hard to believe that an entirely innocent man could have become involved in a chain of circumstances so unusual as that which has called itself about the young Wisconsin physician. Dr. Freudenberg has been arrested charged with first degree murder for the death of his mother-in-law, and is now out on \$30,000 bail awaiting trial.

Any man can be arrested and charged with a crime, but it will require more than suspicion, curious circumstances and hearsay testimony to fasten the present charges on Dr. Freudenberg.

It was not long after the doctor's marriage that the record of good health which had been traditional in the Duffies home for almost a generation was broken by the first of the long series of serious illnesses and deaths that continued with little interruption until last Fall.

People remarked how strange it was that a household which had always been so well should be repeatedly visited by serious illness just after a physician had married into the family. But nobody thought this any more than an odd coincidence. Until a few weeks ago nobody suspected that the deaths of the four men and women which followed one another so quickly at the Duffies homestead were due to anything but natural causes.

Mrs. Mary Perry, mother of Mrs. Duffies and grandmother of the doctor's wife, was the first to fall ill. For weeks she was at death's door. Then she began slowly to recover. But before she was able to be about again her husband sickened and died after a short illness.

Again Mrs. Perry fell ill, and this time she, too, died. Before the neighbors had fairly recovered from the shock of her death, Alfred Duffies, Sr., the father of Mrs. Duffies's second husband, took to his bed and died.

Curiously enough the cemetery in Markesan adjoins the Duffies homestead. It is only a step from the front steps of the house to the acreage of the dead, and the family burying plot, boasting one of the cemetery's most conspicuous monuments, is in full view of the windows.

The last corpse to be carried from the Duffies home to a grave next door was that of Mrs. Nettie Duffies, the mother of the doctor's wife. Her death was a surprise to everybody, for she was not an old woman, and she had seemed in unusually vigorous health. In fact, according to the district attorney, at the time she was suddenly taken ill she was contemplating a third marriage.

Apparently she had had the best care. Her son-in-law, Dr. Freudenberg, was at her bedside night and day and a trained nurse was also in attendance. But all the efforts which the doctor put forth with appearance of conscientious zeal were of no avail in relieving the painful trouble from which she suffered. Solutions which he injected into the bladder to allay the woman's sufferings were not effective, and she finally died in great agony.

The general sorrow over Mrs. Duffies's untimely death was softened somewhat by the knowledge that her daughter, the doctor's wife, was now the richest woman in the county. Mrs. Freudenberg has always been very popular in the neighborhood and everybody was glad to know that she was the possessor of a generous fortune.

Mrs. Duffies had for years been a rich woman. And her wealth had been largely increased by the property to which she had fallen heir when her parents and her late husband's father died. Now all this was Mrs. Freudenberg's—a fortune of \$400,000 consisting of considerable cash in bank, the finest farm home in Green Lake County, and several hundred acres of rich land.

But those who supposed that Mrs. Duffies's life history was a closed book when the frozen clods of earth finally covered her coffin reckoned without her brother, Wilfred E. Perry.

Mr. Perry had long entertained a feeling of dislike for Dr. Freudenberg, the physician who had come to Markesan penniless and unknown and who had become through his marriage and through the subsequent deaths in his wife's family a man of wealth and prominence. And several things which attracted his notice during his sister's last illness made him feel that the causes of her death ought to be gone into further.

With a persistence and skill worthy of a trained criminal investigator he started digging into the matter. He had not been digging long before he uncovered circumstances so odd that when they were told to the county authorities they promptly ordered Mrs. Duffies's body exhumed for examination.

The strongest link in Mr. Perry's chain of suspicions was a deposition which he received from Mrs. Grace Brehl, a trained nurse. In her deposition it is alleged that Mrs. Brehl swore that instead of the soothing remedies which Dr. Freudenberg pretended to be administering to Mrs. Duffies he had injected a powerful, highly irritating solution of mustard.

The coroner's jury brought in the following verdict: "That the death of Nettie Duffies was caused by foul play by an injection into her bladder of some powerful substance which, according to the pathologist and other testimony, was a solution containing mustard, made and injected by one Dr. J. A. Freudenberg."

If the conclusions of the pathologist and the coroner's jury and the district attorney who caused Dr. Freudenberg's arrest are correct, and this really was murder, it was a crime so cruel for its hopeless victim



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Dr. J. A. Freudenberg, Accused of Being the "Mustard Murderer."

that she must have died in paroxysms of agony.

Mustard, as everybody knows, is highly irritating. Two of its active principles, when combined with water, produce a volatile oil powerful enough to blister the toughest skin. In fact it is almost wholly for its irritant qualities that mustard is employed in medicine.

The bladder under normal conditions is one of the most delicate organs in the human body. In Mrs. Duffies's case it was already inflamed by disease. Can anybody imagine the excruciating pain which must have followed the flooding of the delicate mucous surfaces that line the walls of the bladder with a strong mustard solution?

The wonder is that Mrs. Duffies survived, if the charge be true, the few hours that she did.

"I am not taking sides," said one of the doctors who assisted in the autopsy. "I do not like Dr. Freudenberg or approve of him, but I am not accusing him. No one has yet been informed just what Mrs. Duffies's trouble was when she was taken to her bed with her last illness. I understand this news is to be valuable testimony at the doctor's trial. After death the bladder was terribly drawn from scars which must have been caused by ulcers that had long since healed."

"It is not possible for ulcers to heal if a constant draining of pus from the kidneys is pouring over them, and that was the chronic condition of Mrs. Duffies. The scars look as if they were burned. Perhaps they are. Argyrol is healing and would not cause such a condition, even if the doctor did, as he said, inject into the bladder a solution of bismuth and argyrol."

A pathologist from the University of Wisconsin who examined the body testi-



Mother-in-Law Nettie Duffies, Who, the Authorities Say, Was Murdered.

mony that the scar tissue present in the bladder was the result of something that had burned the tissue. When asked whether a solution of bismuth and argyrol would produce such a condition he said: "Most emphatically, no." But mustard would produce just such a condition.

If Mrs. Duffies was murdered then it is not unreasonable to suspect that the deaths of her parents and her husband's father were also due to unnatural causes. This can be determined only by exhumation of the bodies and a careful examination of their vital organs for signs that the "medicines" with which Dr. Freudenberg had dosed them were really poison. But, of course, if the doctor should be convicted of the murder of Mrs. Duffies it will be unnecessary to go to the trouble of trying to fasten other crimes upon him.

What could have been the motive for these murders, if murders they were? "Greed," says the District Attorney. "An uncontrollable itching on Dr. Freudenberg's part for the fortunes belonging to his wife's family formed the motive for the series of crimes of which Mrs. Duffies's murder was probably the climax."

Such a theory is ridiculous, the doctor's friends maintain. Eventually his wife would have inherited all this money, anyway, they argue; and Dr. Freudenberg is too sensible a man not to have been will-



Residence of Mother-in-Law Mrs. Nettie Duffies, Which Faced the Cemetery Where the Grave of Her Husband Could Be Seen—and Where Her Own Body Was Soon Buried and Then Exhumed by the Authorities and Examined for Evidences of Her Murder.

twenty miles in zero weather to carry the certificates of deposit which saved him from a night in the county jail.

But it is not surprising to find the wife loyal to her husband in his hour of trouble. If she may have had doubts and misgivings, she may know things which the public and the authorities do not know, which now makes her believe her husband innocent.

Aside from her conviction of his innocence there is another theory for Mrs. Freudenberg's attitude—her devotion to her only child, Jane, now eighteen months old. As anybody can see, all her interest in life is centered in this baby girl.

Anxiety about the child's welfare overshadows even the grief over her mother's death and the worry over her husband's predicament.

Can it be that mother love has risen to such heights in Mrs. Freudenberg's heart that she can forgive her mother's murder and conceal her husband's guilt in order to save her little daughter from lifelong disgrace if her husband is guilty?

This is one of the many interesting questions to which perhaps the trial of Dr. Freudenberg will supply a satisfactory answer.

Dr. Freudenberg, the central figure in this strange case, is thirty-seven years old. He was a total stranger to Markesan when he settled and began practice there several years ago.

He was graduated from the Loyola University Medical School in Chicago in 1912. Before his graduation he sued a young woman for the value of a diamond ring and other presents which he had given her. Later he was involved in a suit over alleged malpractice.

The most striking feature about the doctor's personal appearance are his eyes—very large, very brown, very lustrous. They are what the girls of Markesan like to describe as "mysteriously dreamy."

In speech and manner he gives no evidences of being anything but the mildest, most even-tempered of men. There is a gentle, kindly way about him that makes it hard for many of his neighbors to believe him capable of wishing harm to any one, much less of planning and putting it into deadly execution.

If this mild-mannered man is guilty of the crime with which he is charged—if he did inject the mustard solution into his mother-in-law's bladder and stand calmly by while she writhed in the death agonies which it caused—he is certainly one of the strangest complexes of good and evil which criminology has ever had the opportunity of studying.



Mrs. Dr. J. A. Freudenberg, Who Says She Believes Her Husband Is Innocent.

ing to wait a few years and let life and death take their natural course. But the District Attorney says he has arguments to overthrow all these. He maintains that had Mrs. Duffies's parents and her husband's father lived, at least a part of their wealth would have been diverted from the Freudenberg family. He claims to have evidence that the elder Mr. Duffies's death came just in time to prevent his making a will bequeathing the bulk of his estate to a brother in Washington.

And had Mrs. Duffies lived, the District Attorney contends, she would have married again and in this way still more of the money would have gone to others. According to the case which rests on these theories, four lives stood between Dr. Freudenberg and the virtual possession of a \$400,000 fortune—the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Perry, the elder Mr. Duffies and Mrs. Nettie Duffies. And the District Attorney will undertake to prove the physician deliberately snuffed out these four lives one after the other with fiendish cruelty.

Something that makes this amazing case still more amazing is the attitude of Gladys Freudenberg, the doctor's wife.

Immediately after her mother's death it is said that she openly charged that her husband was responsible for it. Yet, since the coroner's inquest and the doctor's arrest, she has been strong in defense of his innocence. After his indictment she drove