

Strange 'Witch Woman' Willed Thousands, Yet Died of Starvation



By Gerald B. Burnett

BEHIND an eight-foot high stockade, solidly boarded and topped with double strands of barbed wire practically impossible to scale, a strange old woman lived for years in the center of the city of Los Angeles. Only one door gave entrance to the property, and that was so closely fit that spying eyes of curious neighbors could not see a thing.

Only at night would the door creak open. A padlock would rasp and click shut, then she was gone for several hours. Amateur sleuths followed the mysterious woman. They saw her begging on downtown streets or piling over rubbish piles and garbage cans.

The lady next door was startled one day when the old woman approached to ask a favor. Would she buy a bit of food for a poor old soul once in a while? She was 75 now and it was becoming harder for her to get out. Money was put over the fence in a bucket and the food drawn back over the fence, when the neighbor agreed to the strange compact.

More than a year later when there had been no calls over the fence for four days, the neighbor called the police. When they broke through the door, one of the strangest cases ever to come into the public administrator's office was revealed.

DEAD from undernourishment and exposure, the body of the 75-year-old recluse lay on a bed made of newspapers on the front porch of the little house within the stockade. The door was

blockaded and officers smashed a window. They found the home to be packed solid from wall to wall and floor to ceiling with tin cans and wads of paper.

When investigators began to undo the papers, they found in the center of each, wrapped and re-wrapped in sheets of waste paper, coins—pennies, old two-cent pieces, nickels—dozens, hundreds, thousands of them. As they literally dug their way through the house, they found other money, shares of valuable stocks and dividend coupons that had never been cashed.

An old trunk came to light, and it was a faded photograph inscribed in a boyish hand. That was the only clue to the possibility of locating friends or relatives of the dead woman.

A photographer's name and an address in a little town in the mid-West were barely decipherable, and a telegram dispatched to the chief of police there asking if they knew a "Sidney Carleton," the name inscribed on the photo, brought back a response that he was a resident.

ON THE settlement of the estate it developed that this man, a brother, was the only living relative. He had given the picture to his sister 40 years before. She had been in love with a fellow in their home town, and they were to be married when the intended groom had a change of heart and ran away.

After grieving a few days the girl disappeared, also, leaving a note saying that her family would

never see her again. They never did and the brother had given her up as dead years before.

Eight thousand dollars worth of bonds, \$600 in uncollected interest coupons and \$2,000 in small change went to the brother. Twenty-three years of begging on the streets; of gathering bits from rubbish piles and selling them to junk dealers; of near starvation; went into the odd savings bank the old woman made of her home.

Ben H. Brown, public administrator of Los Angeles County, thinks the stockade case the most unusual that has ever come to his attention.

Brown's office takes charge of the property of persons dying in the county when no will has been executed, and in the absence of legal heirs entitled to be appointed administrator.

Since the estates left in his care consist of everything from purely personal belongings to real estate, stocks and bonds and sometimes yachts his duties combine those of a detective, attorney, warehouseman, appraiser,

salesman and diplomat. He is charged with caring for and selling all the properties, if necessary, to satisfy creditors and claimants.

AN AVERAGE of forty cases per month is handled by Brown and his deputies with an equal number of cases where the estates are \$200 or less. Right now he has 500 pieces of real estate on hand and holds \$4,000,000 worth of material assets which are going through the distribution process.

Where wills are found, many strange expressions of the writer's personality are revealed.

Here is one odd case handled recently:

A family servant, who worked hard and saved a large sum of money, promised at least 20 persons that they would receive all her property. Competent attorneys at different times prepared seven different wills for her and these she revised constantly. But, she never executed one of the written wills and all her money went to a distant relative, whom

she expressly desired to disinherit!

Another "black sheep" son received all of his mother's money when she failed to have her will properly witnessed.

Fate stepped into the life of a baker, killing him in an automobile crash the day before his marriage. The \$14,000 he had intended to leave his bride went to distant relatives in Europe, from whom he was estranged.

ALADY presented herself to file claims for services against an estate, and was advised she would have to present evidence of the liability for them. In a few days she returned with what she thought was a written acknowledgment by the deceased. It proved to be a genuine will in which she was left the entire estate.

A woman in poor circumstances borrowed money to make a trip from New Jersey to Los Angeles to see if a certain dead man was her long lost husband. Satisfied by her identification she went back, stating that she did not mind the sacrifice she had to

make so long as she knew where he was "for sure."

Claimants and heirs sometimes make undue trouble for the public administrator. One will, illegibly written had a sentence that might have read "valuable jewelry in safe" or "valuable jewelry in sofa." A small amount of jewelry was found in a safe, but the heir insisted that a large sofa be torn apart and into small pieces just to make sure nothing was overlooked.

In another case, a friend of the decedent insisted that all the property was promised to her and a will was hidden in the residence. It was necessary to almost dismantle the house in the search. During it, the claimant appeared several times and stated that she had visions. The will would be found in the motor of a phonograph; behind a section of wall paper; or buried at various places in the yard. No will was ever discovered despite her psychic aid.

WILLS are found in the most unusual places and on the most curious materials. Some of the writing materials used have

been window shades, backs of circular letters, handbills, bible fly-leaves and a scrap of paper sewed into a blanket. The rung of a step ladder and the side of an ordinary match box have been utilized for last wills and testaments.

A PHYSICIAN, seized by a heart attack and recognizing the short period he had left, wrote his in Spanish on a prescription blank. Notebooks, calling cards and memo books have been called into play and one will was written in shorthand.

A big warehouse that is carefully guarded protects the furnishings and other personal belongings of the estates in Brown's care. One recent estate had a large California desert turtle as a "movable asset." He was carted off to the warehouse and the guard swears that among several hundred odd sofas that are on hand, the turtle picked out the one under which he used to sleep at home and went right to it. During the winter months he disappeared entirely and it is assumed that he is hibernating in his favorite domicile.

Quirks of the human mind bring some strange will cases into the office of Ben H. Brown, public administrator for Los Angeles County, Calif. Brown, shown left, directed investigation of a strange "witch" woman, who lived in poverty yet left thousands. Right is one of the odd wills that make his duties unusual. A large estate was disposed of in this document, written on a matchbox, which is displayed by one of Administrator Brown's assistants.

Reno Preacher Says, "Real Divorce Occurs Long Before Court Renders Decision"

By Brewster Adams
For 25 Years Reno's Baptist Minister

"DO you believe in divorce?" "Do you think I am justified in taking this step?" Readers of this magazine have been writing me these questions.

Folks have been asking me the same queries for more than a score of years. Scarcely a day passes but I am anxiously solicited, not only for an opinion, but for some moral approval and support for this unfortunate undertaking as well.

Obviously it is not an easy question to answer. I think I can sympathize with the office seeker who is asked his opinion on the Townsend Plan. I have also been asked that.

But the question comes with a lot more sincerity than most people grant these divorce-seekers. It may seem otherwise to you, but for me, so daily importuned as to the right or wrong of this thing, I am impressed not with its flippancy, but rather its seriousness.

MARRIAGE vows burn a deal deeper into human hearts and conscience than most news stories would tell.

The papers will say: "Mrs. Dunn, prominent socialite of Park Avenue, was divorced in Reno today. She left immediately by plane for New York, where it is understood that she will marry James Brown, Broadway play-boy"

Sounds fitting and ephemeral, does it not? But I happen to know that while here she suffered such depression that her physician advised her to seek a clergyman.

Strange, too, one may not be

able to answer both these questions with the same affirmation. Plenty of folks, sometimes I think even a majority, have said



Brewster Adams

to me: "I don't believe in divorce, but I can see no other way out."

Indeed, I had a letter from a Bishop in the south, who asked me to call on his sister. He was very honest, yet apparently much perplexed and, good soul, his sympathies overcame his convictions. That's a thing which happens to a lot of us.

"I can't believe in divorce. But I know what my sister has gone through. What she seeks is like a release from hell. God knows, if there is any justification, she has it." His words were so vivid I have not forgotten them.

FRANKLY, I do not see how one can answer these questions for another. No man can be "conscience" for his brother. To do that for ourselves is a pretty big job. Indeed, I think a lot of the world's suffering is caused by a keen conscience which some

have, not for themselves, but for their brethren.

Again, I have noticed that people have a perverse way of getting you to approve in sympathy and then holding you responsible for their mistakes. "I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't told me it was the right thing to do," is too frequent an alibi.

The Catholic Church can answer it and I respect the consistency of its position. It believes that marriage is a sacrament—that the vow is sealed by the Church and therefore cannot be set aside—save by the Church. There can be only one conclusion to this premise and that is, that the vows taken are irrevocable. That is final, authoritative.

But our position is different and more difficult. We believe that love is the sacrament and that this affection must seal it. It is this we recognize and bless. We do not give, but only solemnize that which is given.

It is love that binds. What shall we say when love is dead? The cement which held is washed out and the walls crumble. With love, faith and trust seem to be gone. This is death—the only dying—spiritual death. Shall the dead bury their dead?

THE divorce has already taken place. Something beautiful has passed from between them. Something has gone out of the heart and taken faith and trust and love. All the courts can do is to separate the unessential. Whatever was real has already been annulled.

On the train going East I visited with a woman who had called to see me while in Reno. She spoke this truth: "I came away from Reno with my divorce. The courts have separated us; but it seems all mockery—just to satisfy a law. The divorce came years

ago. They only passed judgment on an empty shell."

So I do not want to say that I believe in divorce no more than I would say, "I believe in war." It rather seems that it is something that life has taken out of our hands. It happens—whether we would or no, courts or none.

I would rather say that I believe in happy living and companionship and going down the hill together. I think that is the way Christ taught. He held the ideal before us as to blessed living. He never spoke with exceptions or in negatives. Two of the three gospels give no reservation. A Mosaic influence is apparent in the third. He rather held up the perfect standard of true happiness. He gave us the beautiful to follow without legal loophole. For our failure, we have His forgiveness, but not His exceptions.

IF I were to put one test to divorce, it would be the need of the soul for sincerity. Folks don't have to live with each other. They do have to live with themselves. And in no narrow way, we must save our souls.

Living in suspicion and without trust, for appearance and without honesty, in hypocrisy and without genuineness, not only separates but destroys. A front before the world and an empty house within, is soon occupied by the devils which devastate. False living is a consuming flame. I can understand how a man would wish to salvage his soul when all else has burned to ashes.

Good fortune to the lad who can say:

"When evening comes I know that she will be waiting at the gate." A faith which is much better than the fear that some day "she may give him the gate."

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Are you one who is killing and letting day after day slip by? Each day you wait, allowing your sickness to develop, you are making the job harder not only for your doctor, but for yourself. Don't wait until something "hits you with a bang." Find out what is wrong—you can't afford to guess.

The following two-day examination procedure is submitted for your approval and comparison:

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| FIRST DAY OF EXAMINATION | |
| 1. Consultation—History, Symptoms, Blood Pressure, Pulse Rate and Respiratory Rate taken by the diagnostician. | 5. Electrocardiographic examination of the heart. |
| 2. Barium Meal and Fluoroscopic examination of the structure and filling time of the stomach. | 6. Full Set Dental X-rays. |
| 3. Laboratory test: (a) Complete Blood Count (red cell, white cell and differential count with hemoglobin determination). (b) Complete Chemical and Microscopic Urinalysis. | 7. Temperature Readings. |
| 4. Hearing Test. | 8. Fluoroscopic observations of the emptying time of the stomach. |
| | 9. Fluoroscopic examination of the chest, with particular reference to the heart and lungs. |
| | 10. Complete physical examination, including the chest, heart and lungs, abdomen, pelvic organs, extremities and spinal column. |
| | 11. Examination of the ears, nose and throat, including transillumination of the accessory nasal sinuses. |
| SECOND DAY OF EXAMINATION | |
| 1. Fluoroscopic examination of the intestinal tract. | 7. Basal Metabolic test to determine glandular function: (1) Schilling's Hemogram (2) Blood Sedimentation Time (3) Blood Chemistry Determination. |
| 2. X-ray of the Colon when filled by barium meal. | (4) Icterus Index (5) Wasserman Reaction (6) Kidney Function Test (7) Sputum Examination (8) Gastric Analysis (9) Fecal Analysis (10) Smear from Gums (11) Examination of any exudates. |
| 3. X-ray pictures of any part of the body as indicated by abnormalities found during the fluoroscopic examination or as indicated from the history or symptoms such as chest, sinus, head, spine, pelvic region or any joint such as shoulder, knee, hip, wrist or any bone structure. | 8. Series of X-ray examinations of the kidney or gall bladder, using a special dye when indicated. |
| 4. Ocular examination by an optometrist with explanation and recommendations. | 9. Temperature Readings. |
| 5. Examination of mouth, teeth and gums with interpretation of dental X-rays and recommendations. | 10. Suspension and diagnosis with explanation of the findings to you by the diagnostician. |
| 6. Laboratory Test: Any of the following tests are made as requested by the examining doctor, depending upon history and symptoms or physical findings, some of which are routine. | 11. Consultation with advice as to diet and treatment. |

CONCLUSION
Written details instructions are made for you following your consultation. The examination can usually be completed in two days unless longer time is required because of pathological delay.

THE TOTAL COST OF THE EXAMINATION IS \$25
Monthly payments may be arranged for any service. Consultations without charge or obligation.