

CHAPTER IV

UNPUNISHED CRIMES

THE DEATH OF THE WIDOW BAYER—THE TRUTH ABOUT NURSE DANIELS

UNDER the heading of "Unpunished Crimes," I mean to indicate :

1. Crimes that are known but unpunished, either because their authors have not been discovered, or through failure to find enough evidence to bring the crime home to them. 2. Crimes that are overlooked, either because they have totally escaped the notice of the Police and Law, or because their authors have succeeded in masking them as suicides, accidents, or the result of some malady.

The first class are numerous ; and unfortunately in many of these affairs the task of the Police may be said to be hopeless, for often the victims cannot be identified.

Every time the Police find an anonymous corpse, they are deprived of the chief clue which should serve them as a base in hunting down the criminal.

In most cases, luckily, the identification of the victim is possible, thanks to the collaboration of the public and the family, and then the task of the Police, still very difficult, becomes possible of reaching a successful issue.

But that is not all : it is then necessary for the Police who are put on the track of the murderers to prove their guilt.

Whatever the public may think about it—to whom all the details of an Inquest and preliminary Enquiry cannot be revealed because we must avoid charging anyone against whom there is not proof positive—there are many crimes whose authorship the Police have known without being able to bring the guilty to book, for lack of sufficient evidence. They know these people have committed the crimes, but they have to let them run free, and accept from public opinion the responsibility of an unmerited failure.

It should be easy to understand that it would be nearly impossible to undertake in this work the recital, with names, of affairs of this nature, because of the risk of harming the reputation of some person who might be innocent.

Here, by way of example, is a story already old, taken from the Police archives and dated the 30th May 1879.

On this date, the widow Bayer, egg and butter merchant, was found dead in her shop. A post-mortem established the fact that she had been strangled. Further, her body bore marks of kicks given by footwear without heels.

Other tracks of feet on the ground further showed that the murderer had worn sandals.

Robbery had been the motive.

A woman Ka, who had passed the night in the purlieus of the Halles (the Covent Garden of Paris), said she had held a conversation with the woman Bayer at the door of her own house just a little before the crime, and stated she was some way off when the old fruiterer went back into her shop. She was married to a man whose means of existence were very problematical. A search carried out showed that the man Ka used heelless pumps, whose impressions resembled to perfection those found on the spot of the crime.

Questioned as to his movements on the night of the crime, Ka protested that he had been in bed, and swore by all his gods that he had not been with his wife when she had met the widow Bayer.

And the contrary could not be proved.

A bread porter, the widow Bletry, gave, however, some important evidence at the enquiry. She had seen, on the 30th May, at half-past four in the morning—that is to say at the very hour of the meeting spoken of by the woman Ka—a man talking to the fruiterer in the middle of the road. Unhappily she could not give any precise description of him.

So there were grave presumptions against the couple, Ka. At the above-mentioned hour the woman Bayer had certainly been with the woman Ka who was returning from the Halles, or her husband who had preceded her. She had certainly spoken with the husband rather than the wife, and it was precisely then that she had been strangled in a deserted road.

The Ka couple, in the absence of all certain proof, had not been arrested.

Both were incorrigible drunkards. The woman died of congestion of the brain in a gutter at the Halles. The man was later shut up in a lunatic asylum.

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As a case of this sort I could cite the murder of the girl Cabira in January 1898—an occasion when those who had taken up the enquiry knew, without being able to establish the facts with certainty, that the crime had been committed by a pimp or "bully," at the instigation of a girl of loose life in a licensed house, called Mini; or, again, the murder, in January 1898, of a workman named Cadet in a night watchman's cabin—a crime committed certainly by three people, working in the same factory, but against whom no decisive proof could be produced.

But we have especially reserved for study, whilst observing the conventionalities that are imposed on us in such delicate matters, two very recent cases which still stir public opinion, on account of the mystery in which they remain shrouded.

One is the death of Miss Daniels at Boulogne-sur-Mer. The other the murder of Madame Wilson at Le Touquet.

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THE CASE OF MISS DANIELS

On the 26th February 1927, M. Jean Euchin, cultivator, discovered in a place called "La Poterie," in the Commune of Wimille, which is in the Department of the Pas-de-Calais, at about 2000 metres from the wall that encloses the ground where the column is erected in memory of Napoleon's Grand Army, the corpse of a young girl.

The body lay on its back, arms crossed, with legs slightly drawn up, the head turned a little to one side, and was in a state of decomposition.

The head was no more than a skull with a little blackened flesh and brown hair, which was "bobbed." The sockets of the eyes were empty.

On the body was a dress which had been deep blue, reaching to the top of the stockings. The body was naked from the hips down.

Euchin found also beside the body a violet toque, a dwarf umbrella with a yellow leather handbag, which contained a comb, a brush, "rouge" of English manufacture, an embroidered handkerchief, and a hypodermic syringe.

A little later the Police, having arrived at the spot, found also an empty glass tube.

The first enquiry established the fact that she was an English nurse; a Miss Winifred Daniels, aged 21, who had disappeared in Boulogne in the first week of October 1926, when the cross-Channel excursion boat *Waverley* was about to make its last voyage.

At the coroner's inquest at Boulogne the matter was taken up, and M. Roset, examining magistrate, was in charge of the enquiry.

Miss Daniels was accompanied on her trip to France by another nurse, Miss McCarthy. Interviewed at Lincoln, Miss McCarthy's statement, however, threw no light on the darkness of this affair. The expert examination ordered by the magistrate and confided to Dr. Vallette, of Lille, proved that the glass tube and syringe found by the body had only contained water.

However, the enquiry took its course. It established a kind of time-table of the movements of the two nurses at Boulogne.

Having landed on the 6th October, at 2.45 p.m., they went to the Rue Bomarsund, near the Place des Victoires and the Rue Anglaise, and went up that road to go and see the Column. Doubtless finding the distance greater than they had thought, they changed their minds and returned towards the harbour, and took tea at about four o'clock at the Café du Port, run by Mme Brar.

Leaving the café at about 4.15, they had been seen at 5.10 on the Quai Gambetta, beside the boat, which was getting into trim to start.

It was stated that there was some difference of opinion between them: Miss Daniels wished to go on board—Miss McCarthy, taking her by the arm, dissuaded her, and drew her towards the beach called Saint Beauve, which is in the direction of Wimereux.

From this moment their joint tracks were lost; only that of Miss McCarthy alone was picked up on the 7th October, at 10 a.m. at Mme Brar's, where she had come to ask if there were any rooms to let for herself and a girl friend. Mme Brar asked them to return at 2 p.m. Miss McCarthy then went with Miss Daniels, who had probably remained in the street while her friend had parleyed with Mme Brar, to the Colonne of the Grand Armée, at Wimille—that is to say, towards the spot where the body was found. At noon, M. André Chevallier, guardian of the monument, saw the two nurses there in discussion, and the same day, about two o'clock, Miss McCarthy—who had been formally recognized by Mme Louise Hernout, grocer, at 106 Rue de Bomarsund—entered alone into her shop with a distracted air, asking to be allowed to wash and arrange her hair, then went down towards the harbour, still retaining at Mme Brar's, where she never turned up, rooms 5 and 6.

She then went to the Convent of Saint Vincent de Paul, where she was advised to go to the British Consulate, but she wandered in the Quartier Brecquerecque, where she spoke to a girl named Halot, a French nurse, to ask her the address of a Catholic convent. She was guided to the Convent of Saint Vincent de Paul, and only left it on the next day, the 8th of October, to go to the British Consulate.

A passport was given her, and the next day, the 9th, she left for England.

It is incontestable that the death of Miss Daniels was no murder. The tube and syringe found on the spot allow us to come to a very contrary conclusion.

What deductions can we draw from the facts presented to the enquiry, of which I have given the details?

I leave it to the readers to arrive at an opinion themselves; I merely draw their attention to the objects found beside the body.

THE CRIME AT LE TOUQUET

The crime at Le Touquet, one of the latest on the register of unpunished crimes, presents a case that still remains extremely mysterious, although the murder of Mrs. Wilson was committed by day and in a place that was far from unfrequented.

On the 19th May 1928, Mrs. Wilson and her husband met in the afternoon at the usual hour to take tea with some friends at the golf club at Le Touquet.

That day, at 6 p.m., Mrs. Wilson stopped playing, while her husband continued the round with other partners.

Some friends returning to Le Touquet offered Mrs. Wilson a lift in their car, but she thanked them and said she would rather walk. They then agreed to meet for apéritifs at half-past seven in an American bar at Le Touquet.

While her friends went off in their car, Mrs. Wilson, a keen walker and dancer, who, thanks to the practice of sports, had remained youthful despite her fifty-four years, took her way across the forest at Le Touquet with a quick and easy step, following the path that led to the town, alongside the tramline serving the golf course.

She did not turn up at the rendezvous as arranged, nor at dinner. Her husband and his friends sought her in vain on the road she should have followed to get back to the town, and, in despair, Mr. Wilson, before returning to his hotel, informed the Police of the disappearance of his wife.

Next morning her body was found in a thicket some yards from the path leading from the golf course to Le Touquet—about half way between them.

She was found lying on her back, with arms stretched out and knees slightly drawn up. Her underclothes had been torn, and all the lower part of her body was bare. The throat showed signs of strangling. The body had been struck again and again with a knife.

The hand-bag the victim had been carrying was found some distance away, on a cross road that the murderer appeared to have used for escaping.

The post-mortem examination, which was carried out at once, established the fact that the death of Mrs. Wilson had occurred

within two hours of her last repast, which had been tea and cakes taken at the golf club. So it must have taken place between the hours of six and seven in the evening.

It established also that death was due to strangulation by fingers. As for the knife thrusts, which seemed to indicate a fury on the part of the murderer, they were certainly dealt after the victim was dead. Most of them were superficial; some had scarcely pierced her clothes. Only one was serious, and this thrust had severed the carotid artery.

In spite of the position in which the body had been found, it was proved that no assault had taken place on the victim.

Two men only could give any evidence about this affair

The first, a road-mender, had seen on the road to the golf course, near the place where the crime had occurred, about half-past six in the evening, a man walking along in a trench coat, who was about 250 yards ahead of him, and who disappeared to the left up a cross road.

This man proclaimed himself to the Police at once; he was M. Matras, the musical conductor at the Casino. He did not dispute the statement of the road-mender, but traversed it in this way: that passing along the road he had seen, seated on a heap of sand, not far from the place where Mrs. Wilson's body was found, a stranger to the locality, whose bicycle was on the ground at the other side of the road.

The road-mender, at their confrontation, said he had not seen this individual, but it would have been impossible for him not to have seen the man if the latter had been at the spot where M. Matras had pretended to have seen him.

A second question found the two witnesses still at variance.

The road-mender averred that the man he had seen, that is to say the man he took to be M. Matras, had on a yellowish-white trench coat. M. Matras asserted that he possessed no overcoat of such a colour, and that he had on a blue suit during his walk, and carried a "beige" waterproof under his arm.

The enquiry established the fact that M. Matras was on the road to the golf course more than forty minutes after the time he had indicated.

These contradictory statements brought the enquiry to an abrupt stop. But two points had been established: 1. Mrs. Wilson, who had said she was going to the dance, where she had not been seen, was certainly in the habit of frequenting some place unknown to her acquaintances. 2. She was going to a rendezvous when she left the golf club, since, having refused the lift that her friends had offered her, she had nevertheless continued

on the road towards Le Touquet with the pace of a person in a hurry.

Granted these two points, Mrs. Wilson must have known her murderer or murderers.

First of all I must set aside the surmise of a rape, though the stage had been undoubtedly set to give that illusion.

Nor was it the deed of a madman. The fourteen knife-thrusts given after her death were also part of a stage setting to lead police opinion astray.

The field of hypotheses being thus restricted, this is what seems to be the most reasonable one: The crime had been committed by someone familiar, or at least well known to Mrs. Wilson, with whom she had an interview. This man wished either to rob her—it has been established that she had valuables of some importance in her hand-bag—or to extort money from her. It would not be surprising even that he had no intention of killing her, but had done so while clutching her throat to frighten her. The strength he had employed being greater than he had intended, Mrs. Wilson had succumbed.

This theory is the more likely as traces of blood were found on the sand heap where M. Matras had seen the mysterious unknown sitting—a fact that tends to indicate that the tragedy had taken place at that spot. The assassin must then have dragged the body into a thicket, and arranged the stage setting of the crime in such a way as to suggest a rape, or the crime of a lunatic.

In what walk of life should the Police look for the mysterious man who was by the roadside at the time of the crime?

What were his relations with Mrs. Wilson? Familiar, or chance acquaintanceship? Did he belong to her present life or her past?

Mrs. Wilson loved dancing, in fact, she was mad about it. It would not be astonishing, in the opinion of the French Police and the Sûreté, that the murderer was one of those men who only attend dances to find victims whom they can blackmail.

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To finish, we shall speak of crimes that never come to light. We must here establish a very clear distinction between crimes that are never heard of, and those camouflaged as suicides, accidents, or due to various maladies.

On the one hand the discovery of unidentifiable skeletons from time to time, leads us to suspect that a crime, followed by a successful disposal of the body, has taken place at some date impossible to determine, committed by unknowns or an unknown.

Without a denunciation, it is extremely rare that researches made under these conditions lead to any result.

On the other hand, a great number of crimes remain absolutely unknown, and are not even suspected, so cleverly have they been "masked."

We do not think they add up to an important figure, because of the precautions the law takes in cases of declarations of death. But it is existent, since it is due to the repetition of certain crimes that long-previous murders, which were unknown, are subsequently brought to light.

The "Affair Girard," of an insurance agent who poisoned with toadstools (in place of mushrooms) and with dangerous microbes his clients and friends, bears on this point in an irrefutable manner. The case would be too long to recount in all its details. We shall limit ourselves to recalling its phases concisely.

In the month of May 1918, an inspector of the Insurance Company known as the Phœnix recognized in the person of a young woman who had just drawn the insurance money for a policy taken out on the life of the widow Manin, who had been employed in the Ministry of Pensions and had died on the 1st May, someone who only three weeks before had been medically examined as being Mme Manin herself. She took the money on the policy that day under the name of Mme Drouhin.

Without this chance recognition, Justice would never have known that the death of Mme Manin, attributed to sickness, was really the result of poisoning, and that since 1911 the woman Drouhin's "friend," a man named Girard, had, to obtain the values of the assurances, poisoned five other people, or attempted to do so.

His first crime went back to the 1st December 1912, at a time when a man named Pernotte, a friend of his, died after an attack of typhoid fever, with which he had been innoculated by Girard when giving him doses of camphorated oil.

All the members of the Pernotte family besides had been struck down by the same typhoid fever, the germs of which Girard had introduced into the earthen pitchers containing their drinking water; but the mother and children had recovered.

Besides the Pernotte family, three other people whom he had persuaded to sign life assurance contracts had also been his victims, and only escaped death through circumstances he could not foresee.

Without the intelligence of the Inspector of the "Phœnix," not only would Girard's crimes never have been discovered, but there is no doubt that the series would have been long continued.

This criminal, particularly dangerous because of his scientific knowledge, escaped the scaffold that awaited him through dying of consumption in prison.

The case of Girard illustrated in a marked fashion a series of crimes camouflaged as maladies. No one having suspected them, they were at the time, and might well have remained, on the list of unsuspected crimes.

Crimes staged as suicides or accidents are numerous. If the blame for some of them is located by Police enquiries, there are as many more cases in which no proof can be established.

But there again we cannot give names, nor the circumstances that attended the crimes, in order that the honour of those who are no longer objects of pursuit, or who have been acquitted by the Law, should not be tarnished anew.

But what picturesque tales might be told!

There is the case of the young woman of the fashionable world, whom a jury, hypnotized by her counsel who persuaded them that her husband had committed suicide by shooting himself six times "in the back," acquitted.

And the recent story of that unhappy natural child of a great Seigneur, taken by her father for a walk on an "enchanted coast," whose body was found by a fisherman at the foot of a 60 metres cliff.

The father had neither looked for the child, who had disappeared in the course of the walk, nor made any declaration about it.

Hauled up before "Justice," he succeeded, however, in impressing on the jury that the reason for his silence was to avoid exposing matters that only concerned his private life. He was acquitted.

This fatal "accident" recalls another which did not take place with a romantic stage setting, but, more prosaically, on the banks of the Seine, in one of the leprous corners of the Parisian suburbs.

A hut, which was mostly plaster, built in an old quarry, some metres deep, and which served as a cellar, was the theatre of the crime. This shaky dwelling was inhabited by a man who had tried every trade, including that of receiver of stolen goods. It was also a drink-shop of ill fame. The business was regulated by a strong woman—strong in flesh, height, and colour, who was really the wife of the owner of the place.

There was little peace and quietness between the married couple; scraps between them were common—the husband being jealous of another rogue whom he believed—and with good reason—to be his rival.

Night fell one February evening, when the wind whistled

around, and the thunder-clouds chased each other across the sky.

Suddenly across the huts, scattered all over the place in chaotic manner, were heard calls: "Julie! Where are you? Answer! Ben sang!" This was repeated several times. Then after a short silence these heartbroken cries: "Ah! la la! Ah! My poor wife!"

Neighbours ran up and asked him what was the matter. The groaning bar-keeper sobbed out: "Malheur de malheur! My poor wife! She has fallen into the cellar! I have just found her on coming back home. It is a fatality. The trap-door was rotten and the landlord would do nothing about it. She fell through."

In spite of the lamentations of this Jeremiah, who had taken all precautions to cloak as an "accident" what was undoubtedly a murder, the Police were morally sure, after an hour's enquiry, that the man himself had thrown his wife head first into the quarry, about 16 feet deep. But how was it to be proved? All the neighbours gave witness to the cries of the husband on his return home. They had seen him, lantern in hand, looking for his wife. They had heard him groaning when he had found the body of the unfortunate woman.

There was no discordant voice in this chorus which proclaimed him innocent.

Pursuit had to be given up, and despite the certainty of the Police it became yet another crime added to the long list of those as yet unpunished.