"INTELLECTUAL" MURDER

HISTORY OF CRIME COMMITTED BY MILLIONAIRES' SONS -

When is murder not murder, but merely "a scientific experiment"? It is when the killing is committed by two sophisticated post-graduate students on the person of a school-boy, a friend of their families, in order that the young "intellectuals" may experience how it feels to kill, and observe how a boy acts when he is killed? Several murders are committed every day in the half-dozen larger cities of the country, but the detail that has brought the Leopold-Loeb murder case now in progress in Chicago into such prominence is discovered by most commentators in the self-confessed murderers toward their crime. One of the two young men concerned in the killing is reported to have justified himself with the statement that "anything is justifiable in the interest of science. It is no crime to use a human being in the interest of scientific research. It is no more than impaling a beetle upon a pin."

The scientific attitude is modified somewhat, it is true, by the authoritive report that the two 'experimenters" made a cool and careful attempt to collect $10,000 from the father of the murdered boy, upon the promise to return him unharmed. This was after the boy had been killed and seems to add a financial aspect, if not common dishonesty, to the experiment. The killers are said, however, to take the standpoint that "each person is, after all, his own judge and jury." Their act, as well as their amazing view of it, has inspired hundreds of editorial writers, both in the religious and lay press, to ask whether the whole realm of ethics and morality is being neglected in our modern so-called "higher education." Can a man be said to be educated, or really "intellectual," when he has no knowledge of the importance of the rights and feelings of his fellow human beings? The reason why the horrible exploit of these Chicago boys gave people such a shock is that it stirred in everybody a shivering suspicion that the kind of civilization that we have set us is producing more problems than we can handle. The mechanical and intellectual sides of modern life have progressed so far beyond our moral and ethical attainments, adds another commentator, recalling a recent lecture by Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher, that the future of civilization is threatened by wars from the outside and fratricidal ruthlessness within. At any rate these two young Chicago killers are "extremely important." They must be discussed. The thing to find out what they mean, what produced them, how many like them are knocking around and how the production of such monsters can be avoided.

Seldom, if ever, has incredible incident been piled on incredible incident to create a crime story as bizarre and sensational as that of the murder of little Robert Franks, of Chicago, confessed by the two youthful dilettanti, Nathan Leopold, Jr., and Richard Loeb.

The insensate atrocity of the actual slaying—the wealth and social prominence of the families involved — the precocious brilliancy of the murderers—the complex but fatuous adroitness of their provisions for concealment, all combined to make the case more like a melodrama than life. Not the least dramatic aspect was the stunning suddenness with which the whole structure came clattering down with no previous warning to the public and very little to the culprits themselves.

At 4 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, May 21, thirteen-year old Robert Franks, son of Jacob Franks, millionaire pawnbroker and real estate investor, left the exclusive Harvard School, in the Hyde Park section of Chicago to walk a few blocks to his home. He stopped for a ball-game with some schoolmates, then went on. An automobile, described at first as a gray touring car, was standing near the curb on Ellis avenue. Little Irving Hartman, nine, saw Robert beside this vehicle. Irving turned to look at a tulip When he looked ahead again, Robert was not in sight. The car was gathering headway down the street.

That night, in the Franks home there was increasing uneasiness over the schoolboy's tardiness. The father finally sent for his friend and attorney, Samuel A. Ettelson, former Corporation Counsel of the city. At 10 P. M., while they were talking, the telephone rang. Mrs. Franks answered, and after listening for a few moments suddenly cried out and fell to the floor swooning. Revived, she turned her husband's anxiety into panic.

A man who said his name was Johnson had told her Robert was kidnapped and held for ransom.

"Don't try to trace this call to find me," he had warned. "It will be no use. We must have money. We will let you know tomorrow what we want, and if you don't give us what we ask for, we will kill the boy."

The father was for obeying the injunction implicitly. But lawyer Ettelson called the telephone superintendent and asked that record be made of the source of any other incoming calls. None came and after waiting in an agony of suspense till 2 A. M., Mr. Franks, accompanied by his friend, went to Police Headquarters and reported his trouble to the officer in command of the Detective Bureau at that hour. In his fear, he insisted on secrecy for the time being. For that reason no memorandum of his visit was left for the relieving day force when it came on duty.

At 9 A. M. on Thursday a letter was received at the Franks home, sent by special delivery and mailed somewhere in Chicago at 2 A. M., according to the collection stamp on the envelop. Inside was a typewritten note signed "George Johnson."

"Your boy is safe and you need not worry," ran the missive. "But if you let the police know, we will kill him. If you have already informed them, go no further. We want $10,000 ransom."

Then followed instructions to make up the sum in worn bills of specified denominations and place it in a cigar-box, which was to be wrapped and sealed. Mr. Franks was told he would receive a telephone call at 1 P. M., giving "all necessary information as to how you are to put the money in our possession."

The father had promised to go to City Hall that forenoon and report the kidnapping to Chief of Police Collins. But in his frantic fear he determined to pay the sum demanded and get his boy back. He got the $10,000 from his bank, wrapped it up in the cigar-box and waited as best he could till 1 o'clock, when the telephone bell rang.

Answering, he found his agony still further stretched out. He was told to go to a drug store at No. 1465 East Sixty-third Street, where further instructions would be waiting. He was warned again that interference by the police would bring death to Robert.

Mr. Franks sat out alone in a car with his cigar-box of currency. But in his excitement he had forgotten the address of the drug store. While he was hunting for it a startling development saved him from being further deluded, though it brought crushing grief.

About 9.30 that morning a laborer had been tramping a marshy ditch alongside the Pennsylvania Railroad right-of-way at One Hundred and Nineteenth St. From a culvert connecting two small ponds on either side of the track he saw something white protruding. It was the nude body of a boy. The Coroner and the police were called. They found several wounds on the head of the corpse, and brown stains on the face and lips. Search of the vicinity yielded only two clues—a single woolen stocking and a pair of shell rimmed spectacles, which an undertaker's assistant stuck upon the face of the dead boy before he was taken to the morgue.

The afternoon papers printed the story, and lawyer Ettelson read it just after Jacob Franks had set out with the ransom money.

At once, Robert's Uncle was driven to the morgue, where he identified the culvert victim as his nephew. Mr. Franks was found and saved from further suspense.

On Friday, the second day after the abduction, the horn-rimmed spectacles began to come in for attention and the mistake made by the Coroner's assistant was rectified. Robert Franks had never worn glasses. Aside from the one stocking, they afforded the only clue to be found near the culvert.

But another forward step had been taken through examination of the typewritten note received by Mr. Franks. An expert was sure it had been written on a portable machine of a certain make, built prior to April, 1914, when the manufacturers had changed the arrangement of their keyboard.

Another mystery surrounded the selection of the Sixty-third Street drug store as a rendezvous for the collection of the ransom. Inquiry showed that no one had telephoned Mr. Franks from that establishment. But on Thursday afternoon two calls had been received there asking whether he had arrived.

These precautions for the delivery of the money were quite in line with the regular methods of kidnappers. Nevertheless, the authorities had a strong conviction they were not dealing with professional criminals. The ransom letter, free of genuine or pretended illiteracy and of the terrifying phrases usual in such cases, struck them as the work of an amateur. It seemed probable, too, that the abductor must have been an acquaintance of Robert Franks, who was not a boy likely to accept a lift from a stranger or submit to forcible seizure without resistance and outcry.

On Sunday "George Johnson" suddenly made an invisible reappearance in Chicago. A floral wreath bearing his condolences was delivered at the Franks home. It had been purchased in a shop at No. 356 East Forty-third Street. The florist described his customer as a man about thirty-eight years old, five feet eleven inches tall, slender, smooth faced, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles.

Those glasses had been the object of a thorough inquiry. They were unusual. Their thick lenses betrayed their wearer as squinty-eyed and myopic. The frame, only six inches wide at the temples, indicated an extremely narrow head. It was even possible the wearer had been a woman.

Criminal investigation is at present the reverse of an exact science. It employs the slow and cumbersome technique of hit or miss—run down every clue till you run down the right one. And the horn-rimmed glasses were the right clue in this case.

First, after many days of investigation, the manufacturer of the spectacles was found—an optical company in Brooklyn. Then the Chicago distributor, an optical supply house, was discovered. In the files of this supply house were thousands of prescriptions, which had to be gone over patiently, one by one, till the right one was unearthed. Thus at last the oculist was found.

His office records in turn disclosed the name and address of a patient. Promptly followed two arrests which at first made all Chicago reel with incredulous amazement.

Nathan Leopold, Jr., and Richard Loeb, both about nineteen, were accused of the murder. Both were counted the youngest, most brilliant and most promising graduates of their respective universities, Chigago and Michigan. Both were post-graduate students at the University of Chicago. Both had attended the Harvard School. Both were scions of leading Jewish families of the city. Leopold's father had been for years a commanding figure in lake transportation, and was rated many times a millionaire. Albert H. Loeb, Richard's father, was vice-president of the great mail-order house of Sears, Roebuck & Co.

Leopold, identified as the owner of the glasses, accepted his predicament with an equanimity which will long be remembered by those who were present. First he denied the ownership of the glasses. He had a pair like them, but they were at his home. Confronted then by the empty case which had been found in his father's residence, he wondered if he had lost the spectacles the Saturday before the murder. He had that day been, as it happened, close to that sepulchral culvert in the marshy prairie—a locality he often visited to study bird life, being an ornithologist of parts.

Yes, he mused aloud, he must have dropped them in the grass there.

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