

Herman Billik Simply Murderer for Business

THERE have been men who have murdered for revenge, for passion, for money, for love.

But Herman Billik didn't murder for any of these reasons. He just murdered as a business. A life might mean \$1,000 for him, or only \$500. That was all the same to him. He didn't care whether it was a little child or a grown man, filled with the joy of living. He needed the money. A death meant to him just as much as a sale to a lawyer or a new patient to a physician. He killed six times before he was caught, and now he is awaiting his own death—this means a death that ever lived.

It seems almost possible to forgive a man who kills another in the height of passion. There is sympathy sometimes for a murderer who slays because he is jealous and repents his act the moment it is done.

But Billik didn't go about his murdering in that way.

He killed carefully, methodically, averaging up something more than \$1,000 a life. He netted \$6,000 before the authorities of Chicago took a hand in his business. Now he is awaiting a hangman's noose, because they don't kill by electricity in Illinois.

COMBINED MURDER WITH FORTUNE-TELLING.

Billik isn't like Hoch, who married women to kill them. Nor was he a Holmes, the plaintiff multi-murderer. He hadn't the genius of either of them. They did their murders in a broad way. Billik was too mean to do it that way.

He killed six of the Vrzal family and tried to kill three more.

On each life there was insurance. Billik got it all. He absorbed all the Vrzal fortune, although Vrzal survivors who he tried to kill too—only enough to pay the funeral expenses of their dead.

The crime for which Billik was tried and for which he has been sentenced to death was the murder of Mary Vrzal, the eldest daughter, 22 years old. He has been charged also with the death of Martin Vrzal, the father; Tillie, the 18-year-old daughter; Rosa, who was 14, and Ella, who was 12. Mrs. Vrzal died too, but she might have taken the poison herself.

Billik killed the father first because he owed him money—\$2,000. He wiped this out and got his insurance money beside. Then he set about killing off the rest of the family systematically.

Martin Vrzal was a milk dealer. He wanted to win out over a rival, and he consulted Billik, who said he was a fortune teller. Billik saw his opportunity to murder and he took it. He had made friends with Vrzal, who was making \$4,000 a year; he got loans from him amounting to \$2,000. So he proceeded to put the head of the family out of the way rather than pay back the money.

Billik went to Chicago from Cleveland about three and one-half years ago. His business, according to the sign he hung out when he went to live in a building a few doors from the home of the Vrzals, was that of a card reader and seer. He had learned this fortune-telling business from his mother. She had found it an easy means of livelihood and a quick road to affluence. It was not rapid enough for Billik, however, and even that work he found to be too hard to suit him. But he piled his vocation steadily for some time after coming to Chicago.

It was shortly after his arrival in Chicago that he became acquainted with the Vrzals. Martin Vrzal was a hard working man. He owned a milk store and had accumulated a few thousand dollars by strict economy.

HIS CAREER OF CRIME.

Billik, with his family, consisting of his wife, two sons and a small daughter, moved into a house a few doors from the Vrzals and became a customer at the milk store. From that day the Vrzal home was turned into a house of mystery and death.

Today there is no Vrzal home, only three of the family are alive, and Billik is awaiting his sentence of death to be carried out.

When Billik began to buy milk at the Vrzal store the members of the family were all in excellent health.

Shortly after Billik made the acquaintance of Martin Vrzal he told him that a rival milk dealer was his enemy. The fortune-teller offered to cast a spell that would protect Vrzal from harm and destroy his rival's business.

There has been much speculation in financial circles as to the identity of George W. Austin and George A. Rorer, both said to be residents of New York, whose names figure in the injunction proceedings brought against Secretary Cortelyou to restrain him from completing the delivery of the Panama bonds recently allotted to Alaska. Justice Gould, of the district supreme court in Washington, has cited Secretary Cortelyou to show cause on Jan. 2, why the injunction should not be granted.

Romer is well known in the cafes of Lower Broadway and Wall street. He is also known at police headquarters as a check swindler and a hotel thief. He has twice, at least, been convicted of passing worthless checks and has served two sentences in the penitentiary on Blackwell's island. His picture was formerly No. 247 in Rogues' gallery, but was removed through the influence of Buffalo friends.

tried Vrzal agreed and a portion of powder was brewed on the stove in a home and thrown across the gateway of the home of the rival across the street.

For this service Billik refused pay, but consented to accept a loan of \$20. That was the entering wedge. Vrzal failed to experience harm from his rival; his business, fostered by his own energy, continued to increase. Billik got the credit for this good fortune.

Soon after this Billik's services were required in an affair of the heart. Emma Billik, the eldest child of the family and one of the three survivors of the family today, was courted by two men. One was a prosperous butcher named Russ; the other the man of whom she is now married, Nieman. Russ had grown indifferent to the girl. The parents wanted her to marry him. Billik took Russ to a theater and found out that the butcher had no intention of marrying the girl. Nieman was courting the girl at the time, but Mr. and Mrs. Vrzal did not favor his suit.

"I'll fix it so that Nieman will stop coming to see Emma and Russ will marry her," Billik told Mr. and Mrs. Vrzal. The parents were overjoyed at the prospect.

He produced some white powder, walked a mile and a half in the snow from Nieman's house toward the Vrzal home.

"That will prevent Nieman coming to see Emma," he told the Vrzals.

One day after his return from a California trip Martin Vrzal complained of not feeling well. Billik by that time had become indebted to Vrzal to the extent of about \$2,000. Billik volunteered to cast another charm and make the milk dealer well. He gave Vrzal medicine in whiskey bottles. Vrzal's "stomach trouble" grew worse, and Billik continued to give him medicine, personally, and Vrzal continued to grow worse rapidly. Then Billik left Chicago again, and while he was gone Vrzal died. Mrs. Vrzal for money to attend the funeral. It was sent, but instead of coming to person Billik sent flowers.

COLLECTING THE LIFE INSURANCE.

He tried to murder Emma Vrzal after she married Nieman. The poison made her deathly sick, but it didn't kill her. Martin Vrzal was insured for \$2,000. His wife collected the money and gave most of it to Billik at different times, until it soon was gone. The woman

was completely under the spell of the milk business left her by her husband, and for some time the proceeds from this were a source of income for Billik. The Vrzal girls, some of them, went out to work that Billik might have more money to spend.

One day Mary Vrzal went with her sister Emma to Riverside, where Billik was telling fortunes in a tent. He told their fortunes. To Emma he showed a mysteriously marked card from a pack he used in his card readings. He told her it was the "card of death" and that Mary was soon to die. Emma Nieman told this on the witness stand and identified a card in a pack belonging to Billik as the one he had showed her at Riverside that day.

A short time later Mary and her mother visited the grave of Martin Vrzal. Standing over her father's grave Mary Vrzal said to her mother: "I am not going to live long. I know it."

Mrs. Vrzal repeated Mary's words to Billik. He answered, as he had done when the father was sick, and as he afterward did when the other children were about to die:

"Never mind. It will come out all right."

Two days before Mary died her mother visited Billik in his tent at Riverside. She returned with some "medicine" for Mary. The girl died in Billik's arms in the Vrzal home. The ailment that killed Mary Vrzal was the same that killed her father, "stomach trouble." When her body was exhumed and chemists made an examination of the contents of her stomach they found it contained five grains of arsenic. Two grains are sufficient to kill the ordinary human being.

Mary's life was insured for \$800. The funeral expenses came out of this, and Billik got the rest from Mrs. Vrzal.

Martin Vrzal's death occurred March 27, 1905. Mary died July 22 of the same year. Billik, after the death of Mary, continued to come to the house and control the family.

HOUSE IN CHICAGO WHERE BILLIK LIVED.

Then Tillie became sick with "stomach trouble." She was sick two months and died.

Mrs. Vrzal, and through her Billik, collected \$620 insurance on her life. There were no more deaths in the family until Rosa, 14 years old, with \$500 life insurance, was attacked with "stomach trouble" and died. Three months later Ella, 12 years old, was taken with the same peculiar "stomach trouble" and she, too, followed the way of the three other members of the family. Only \$105 was collected on her insurance.

Billik had poisoned them all! But even this wasn't enough for



WALDEMAR POULSEN, INVENTOR OF WIRELESS PHONE.

To Waldemar Poulsen belongs the honor of establishing wireless telephone communications. He has spoken through space a distance of 250 miles. In speaking of Poulsen's achievement, Nikola Tesla says: "Telephonic communication between continents is assured. It need not be discussed. My own experiments have demonstrated its practicability. The transmission of spoken message by Poulsen between Berlin and Copenhagen should not be a subject of wonderment."

"The next surprise will be the utilization of electrical energy for the propulsion of airships, which will carry no batteries or other generators, and whose passage through the air will be controlled by electric waves generated on the earth planet."



BIGAMIST'S VICTIM FLEES, LEST SHE MEET HIM AGAIN.

To escape from her husband, Capt. Dean Reid, recently released from prison after serving a year for bigamy, Sarah Delano-Deane-Reid, has fled to San Francisco.

"He bewitched me, or I never would have married," she declared as she left. "He lied to me, and I could not bear to see his face again."

Her brothers had Miss Delano placed in an asylum for the insane in order to keep her away from Deane Reid, but for awhile she was loyal to her bigamous husband. After her eyes were opened she claimed she was "bewitched."

Capt. Dean Reid was first married in England.

Billik. He must have more. Mrs. Vrzal wanted something back. Her creditors were insistent; the business left her by her husband was going to the bad.

"You must pay me some money," Mrs. Vrzal insisted. "My mother is rich," Billik said. "I will get money from her and give it to you."

"But your mother's money is not yours," Mrs. Vrzal insisted. "I'll get it all when she dies," replied the fortune-teller. "I'll fix it." "How will you fix it?" Mrs. Vrzal asked.

"You know what I could do," the man replied. "I could kill her with my power in a week."

He was willing to poison his own mother! Then Billik wanted the Vrzal home. He persuaded the widow to sell it for \$2,000. He collected the money. She drank poison. Whether he gave it to her or not has not been determined.

But she is dead. Three of her family still live, no thanks to Billik, who awaits the noose—meanest murderer on earth! Chicago has produced many strange criminals, but Billik is the strangest of them all.—New York World.

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