

DARKEST BRUSSELS.

BELGIUM'S CAPITAL STARTLED BY MANY MURDERS.

At the Head of a Gang Who Had for Their Object Murder and Plunder—A Long List of Mysterious Crimes Explained.

THE inquiry into the murder of the aged Baroness Herby van Scherpenberg, leading to the arrest of Alexandre Courtois, formerly assistant chief of police, has brought to light one of the greatest criminal conspiracies on record in Brussels, Belgium.

The baroness, eighty years old, lived at No. 7 Rue de l'Arbre Benit, Ixelles, a suburb. On Sunday morning, April 23, she was discovered by a maid servant dead in bed, with a number of bluish marks about her neck and a gaping wound in her head. The closets of the room had been forced and ransacked. The small safe, in which the baroness had 25,000 francs (\$7,000), some bonds and stocks and rare family jewels and plate, had been carried off.

Two large watch-dogs were in the yard. They never before had failed to announce anything unusual after nightfall. The baroness' lap dog was in the room when the murderer entered, but made no sound. The servants said that the baroness' son returned home about 2:30 a. m. Sunday. He found everything as usual, except that the lap dog was in the lower hallway. The street door was fastened, the servants had retired and all was quiet. As the appearance of the small dog in the lower hall was not unusual, the young man went to bed. Two men residing in the same street, while on their way home about 2 a. m. Sunday, saw two persons standing opposite the house, but their description of those persons was most meager.

On that Sunday forenoon a well-dressed, fine-looking man presented himself at the office of a broker on the Bourse (shops are kept open in that country on Sunday morning.) He said he was an artillery officer and gave his name as Lefebvre. He had just decided to go to Ghent, with some other officers, to buy horses. He had six bonds of 1,000 francs (\$200) each which he wanted to negotiate in order to get cash for the prospective purchases. The numbers of the stolen bonds not then having been posted, the broker made the usual advances. On Monday morning a farmer living in the Commune Leeuw St. Pierre found the baroness' safe in a wheat field, broken open and its contents gone. That morning the numbers of the stolen bonds were posted on the Bourse, and the broker who had made the advances to the supposed army officer told of the circumstances. It developed that there was no officer named Lefebvre in the service. A number of photographs of persons answering the broker's description of the "officer" were laid before him and he picked out one as the picture of the man who got money from him for the bonds. It was a photograph of M. Courtois, formerly assistant chief of police in Brussels.

M. Courtois was arrested. He said there must be some mistake. The broker had not previously known him, having located in Brussels after the assistant chief had retired from the police service. M. Courtois was mixed up with a lot of prisoners and the broker was asked if the man who sold him the bonds was among the number. Without hesitation he pointed to M. Courtois.

The ex-assistant chief's house was searched, the plate was found and a coat which contained the balance of the stolen bonds. Its sleeves showed spots of blood and saliva. In other clothing were found many pawn tickets, and in the cellar a large quantity of pawn receipts, issued by brokers in cities remote from Brussels, which were regarded as evidence of other crimes.

Finally he admitted having been concerned in the negotiating of the bonds, but denied complicity in the murder.

When it was known that the ex-police official was in jail, persons whose mouths had been sealed began to give



ALEXANDRE COURTOIS, information. It was recalled that he had been accused of the robbery of the Countess of Flanders, and had been connected, as a police officer, with clearing up the mystery of the murdered Bockel English family. He had married a former servant of the Countess of Flanders, and his peculiar actions at the time the English family was murdered apparently frustrated the efforts to detect the murderers.

With the arrest of two men, named Restiau and Smitz, the brother of Courtois (also a former police officer) and three women, came the sensational report that this last murder was only one of a large number committed

in Brussels and its vicinity in seven or eight years by a band of robbers and assassins, of which Ex-Assistant Chief of Police Courtois is believed to have been the leader.

It is thought Courtois planned and helped carry out the robbery of the Countess of Flanders. It is recalled that he re-detailed certain police officers on the night of that famous robbery, which occurred during a fete when policemen had been detailed to guard the palace. The theory is that Courtois and his accomplices, among them his present wife, had so arranged matters that the robbers gained access to the secret passage leading to the palace, and that Courtois then so re-detailed the policemen not in his confidence that the robbers were able to leave the palace without detection.

The murder of Mrs. Bockel and her children is also re-called. They had gone to visit "Venice in Brussels," a Midway Pleasance on a small scale. It is believed they took a cab after the concert to drive back to the city. They were evidently driven in a wrong direction. At an appointed spot accomplices took them from the cab, murdered them and threw their bodies into the canal. Mrs. Bockel was known to carry all her money and jewels on her person. No money or jewels was found on the bodies. The magistrate who conducted the inquiry now claims, it is stated, that every effort to apprehend the guilty parties was frustrated by Courtois.

The postoffice robbers, who escaped the Ludlow Street Jail in New York, have been in jail in Brussels for months, charged with a jewelry robbery at Ostend. It is now claimed that they are innocent of the latter crime, but that members of the Courtois gang committed the deed, and recognizing these American crooks, ran them in for it. The American minister, Mr. Ewing, applied for the extradition of these post-office robbers, but this was refused until the men had served the time given them for this robbery. The finding of further evidence of the actions of Courtois and his accomplices may result in turning these post-office robbers over to the American authorities.

The gang with which Courtois surrounded himself was in the habit, it proves, of making sweethearts of servants in rich families, who kept the gang posted as to the contents of the houses and the actions of their masters.

One of the late baroness' maid servants has suddenly disappeared. She announced that her father had fallen from a building and she must go home to see him before he died. Investigation proves that the accident never happened, but thus far the detectives have been unable to locate her. It is thought that she either made it possible for the assassin to secrete himself in the baroness' room or to enter the house unobserved.

One plan of robbing residences attributed to Courtois was as novel as it was successful. When he thought a large amount of money or valuable jewelry was kept in a house, it is asserted that he would send some pals to make a feint at robbery. These feints usually consisted in sawing out the lock of the front-door entrance or leaving evidence that robbers had tried to get in through lower windows or cellars. The head of the house naturally reported the case to the police. Courtois would go to the house, the family would show him where the valuables were, he would tell how to guard them and in a short time the house would be robbed.

Courtois' parents, who live at Bruges, were soon to celebrate their diamond wedding, but the aged father, on hearing of his son's arrest and the details of the crimes accredited to him and his gang, is said to have fallen in a fit of apoplexy and is now supposed to be dying.

The laws of Belgium prescribe the death penalty for murder and some other crimes, but King Leopold has declared that no human life shall ever be taken for the commission of crime while he is king. The courts pass sentence of death, but it is not executed.

A very strong effort is being made to prove that Courtois is insane, and this in connection with the announcement that the government is to be asked to explain why he has always been given protection, has caused considerable comment in regard to the course of the magistrate, who acted, as was thought at the time, somewhat hastily, in sentencing three men who informed upon Courtois when the palace of the Count of Flanders was robbed. These men were each given a fine of 1,000 francs and one year's imprisonment for attempting to defame the character of a trusted city and government official. People are asking why this man, when accused by reputable citizens, was accredited by the authorities, and innocent men were punished.

According to the Lady Cyclist, the Sultan some time ago introduced bicycles into his harem for the punishment of refractory wives.

REAL SEA SERPENTS.

SNAKES WHOSE BITE CAUSES INSTANT DEATH.

Many of Them Are Brilliant in Glistening Colors—During the Eruption of Krakatoa They Swarmed Into the Boats of the Natives.

R. E. DITMARS, the snake expert at the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, recently read a paper on "Sea Snakes" at the last meeting of the Linnaean society. Mr. Ditmars is an authority on the subject of snakes, and his utterances have weight both in America and Europe. After advertising at length upon the innocent facts that have given rise to several of the most approved recent "sea serpent" yarns, the learned gentleman concluded that the "sea serpent," as commonly understood, is a creature of the imagination.

Turning, then, to the subject of true sea snakes, as scientists know them, Mr. Ditmars stated some interesting facts. True sea snakes exist. The Hydrophidae is a family of serpents that are truly maritime in existence. They spend their lives in the sea or large rivers, never leaving the water excepting to lay their eggs, which are deposited near high water line on sandy beaches. These reptiles are only found in the tropical seas, from the east coast of Africa eastward to the isthmus of Panama, the northern



RIVER SNAKE.

limit being the tropic of Cancer and the southern tropic of Capricorn. One species is found in the gulf of Mexico and adjacent waters. This is the blacked-back Pelamis peticolor, which is of rather small dimensions, seldom exceeding a yard in length. This family contain eight genera, comprising thirty-four species, some reaching a length of twelve feet. The average length, however, is about five feet. Little is known about the habits of this family owing to the extreme shyness of its members. A few facts have been observed. During calm weather they are often seen sleeping on the surface of the sea. When disturbed they immediately dive, leaving a long train of bubbles behind them. Being air breathers they can remain under the surface for any length of time, but swim along under the water and reappear a long distance from the former spot. Specimens of varying sizes are often hauled up in the fishermen's net, and cause great fear, as they snap and bite in all directions. Specimens captured in this manner have been sent to large zoological gardens, but they often die en route or shortly after being placed in captivity.

Sea snakes are oviparous. The eggs generally number about 15 to 25 and hatch in about three weeks' time. The young snakes seek shallow water in the vicinity of coral grounds, and are frequently seen with the prehensile tail wrapped around a projecting branch of coral and the tip of the snout elevated above the surface for breathing. In this position they remain for hours, enjoying the warm rays of the sun.

The venom of the sea snakes surpasses in virulence that of most land serpents. It is composed of much the same ingredients as that of the cobra. A large percentage is made up of an irritant, which, when injected, immediately acts on the nerves, attacking the vasomotor system, causing inability to breathe. Death is caused by asphyxiation. This kind of venom acts very quickly on cold blooded animals and is very effective in killing the fish which constitute their food.

The young sea snakes often fall victims to large fishes, and the adults, formidable as they may be, are preyed upon by sea eagles and sharks. The sea eagles pounce upon the snakes as they lie sleeping on the water, and, warding off the blows of the reptiles,



BANDED SEA SNAKE.

pierce their vitals with the talons. Notwithstanding these depredations upon them, the snakes exist in great numbers in the tropical seas. They are most abundant in the waters of the East Indian Archipelago. Rudolph Weber, of this museum, while traveling in Sumatra, observed about fifty miles off the coast large numbers of sea snakes. He says that as far as the eye could see the water seemed to be alive with snakes swimming in all directions. Several species were observed. While he was on shore, during heavy gales, many of these reptiles were cast on the beach, some of them dead, killed by the heavy pounding of the waves.

During the great eruption of Krakatoa the inhabitant of the eastern end of Sumatra found it necessary to leave that point of the island on account of the showers of hot ashes rained upon them by the great volcano 20 miles away. Taking to the water in boats of all descriptions, with the intention of making their way along the coast, the terror-stricken people found that escaping from the shore was not much of an improvement, for the sea snakes that abound in that region, terrified by the rapidly increasing heat of the sea, swam in circles around the boats of the refugees, and, in their frantic efforts to escape from the heated waters, tried to make their way over the gunwales of the smaller boats and crawled in numbers upon the guard chain of the fishing smack.

Mention of a few of the most common species may be of interest to give a general idea of the characteristics of the family. The genus Hydrophis contains some of the largest species, and many of them are brightly colored. The chithead, Hydrophis subulavis, a large and beautiful reptile of a sulphur yellow with broad black rings is seen sunning its gaily colored body on the surface of the sea during calm weather. A fowl bitten by one of this species died in a little over five minutes after receiving the wound. The most peculiar of all the family is the Especton, a species resembling in habits the preceding. It possesses on the forward part of the head two large horns covered with scales. Their use is not known.

TERRIFIC BATTLE WITH A BULL.

Arnold Herman Probably Fatally Gored and Bruised.

On Thomas Flood's farm, near South Orange, N. J., a few days ago, Arnold Herman, one of Flood's employes, was terribly injured in a struggle with a bull. He was taken to Orange Memorial hospital in a serious condition. Early in the morning one of the big bulls in Flood's barn broke the chain with which he was fastened and started to fight with the other animals in the stables. In a few moments others of the animals had broken loose and a fierce combat was going on. The laborers on the farm heard the noise made by the crushing of timbers in the stable and the loud bellowing of the bulls and rushed to the scene. Herman, who was plowing in an adjoining field, ran to the assistance of the other men, who were calling for aid. Herman attempted to separate the fighting animals by using long iron rods, but finding that he was unable to do so, he jumped over a gate into the stables and attempted to get hold of the part of the chain which was still attached to the bull's head. The enraged animal rushed upon Herman with his head lowered, and, lifting him on his horns, threw him high in the air. Herman screamed with pain, and as he fell to the floor the laborers who were standing beyond the gate saw that the bull's horns were covered with blood. Herman no sooner felt to the floor than he plunged them deep into his abdomen. The other laborers vaulted over the gate, and by beating the animal's head with iron rods managed to drag Herman from the stable. The poor fellow was unconscious and blood was gushing from a score of wounds in his chest, face and abdomen, where the bull's horns had pierced his body.

FACED DEATH FOR HER CHILD.

A Brave Yankee Woman's Struggle with an Armed Madman.

At Woburn, Mass., a few days ago, a big stranger entered the home of G. Arthur Boutwell without an invitation. When he ascertained that there was no man about he took possession of the best easy chair and proceeded to entertain the ladies with an improvised shooting gallery with a human target. He espied a baby in a cradle across the room. The little one seemed to excite his anger. Slowly rising from his seat the man reached for his hip pocket and extracted from it a revolver of unusual size. He aimed the weapon in the direction of the infant. With a scream of horror Mrs. Boutwell sprang at the intruder and fought as only a mother can for the life of her child. Before she could grasp the revolver the madman had fired at the baby. Turning on the woman, with every indication of madness, he threatened to kill them in one, two, three order. Mrs. Boutwell tried to grab the baby, but he prevented her after a fierce struggle. She rushed to a neighbor's house, and, as she crossed the threshold a bullet sped toward her, fortunately missing its mark.

Terror reigned for a time, and the streets were soon filled with people. The baby and mother were both uninjured.

Drink Drives Friends to Duel.

Two farmers from Platte county, Missouri, engaged in a duel to the death with pocket-knives in a saloon. John Hornbuckle was so badly slashed and stabbed that he died within a few minutes, and Stone Steward was frightfully wounded. The men had been friends and came to town together but became intoxicated and quarreled and fought over a transaction a year ago, when Steward was arrested for shooting a man, and Hornbuckle went on his bond, from which he subsequently withdrew.

Lightning Kills Father and Sons.

John I. Wallace, a farmer of Trig county, Ky., and his three sons, aged 20, 18 and 6, were killed by lightning 12 miles south of Cadiz, several days ago. Their bodies were found under a tree by Mrs. Wallace, who went out to free them.

HIS STRANGE LIFE.

HERMIT SHUNNED THE SOCIETY OF HUMAN BEINGS.

He Wore Rags and Barked His Silver in His Cavern Home—Seldom Spoke and Transacted All His Business by Means of Signs.

HERMIT SAM, of the wild man, who lived in a cave in a hillside just north of Canaan, has been removed to the county house in Yaphank by the town authorities. Samuel Mott, who is about 70 years of age and just able to drag around

what was once a gigantic form, was named the wild man, or Hermit Sam, several years ago, says a Patchogue (L. I.) correspondent of the New York Herald. He received this name owing to the wild manner in which he lived and his dislike of human beings.

He was a denizen of the woods for twenty years. He had no companions and when any one accidentally came upon him in the woods he would run for sight.

His legs were wrapped in rags. He seldom spoke to a human being and then only when it was absolutely necessary. Hermit Sam is supposed to have buried a big sum of money. He always had a mania for hoarding silver in his younger days, when he occasionally worked, for of late years, when he sold game or fish, he would not accept bills in payment. The money had to be in silver, which was promptly buried.

When he was being got ready by the officials for the trip to the county house he asked to be allowed to dig up some money. Picking up a shovel, he laboriously walked to another corner of the cave and began digging in the earth. He soon unearthed some silver. More digging revealed several hundred dollars in silver.

Curio collectors have managed to get hold of some of the hermit's silver. Some of the pieces are said to be very valuable. One coin is a silver dollar of great age, worth \$500.

After Sam had tied up his money he said that if he must leave his cave and the surrounding woods that had sheltered him for years he was ready to go. Tears filled his eyes for an instant as he stepped from his odd home and closed the door. Looking about him, he said:

"I don't want to go. Mother died in that house (pointing to an old-fashioned, tumble-down house on a hill) years ago. She was the only friend I ever had. I have lived here for many years, and kept my promise to her, never to marry or desert the old place. I have kept my promise, and would rather die here now, were I left alone."

It was for fear that Hermit Sam would become ill and suffer that the authorities decided to remove him to the poorhouse.

He had a hatred of women that bordered on frenzy. It is said he has spoken to only two women in fifteen years. He has always borne a kindly feeling toward Mrs. William Mott, wife of his nephew, to whom he has spoken a half-dozen times in the last ten years.

Sam is said to have had a sweetheart years ago, of whom he was passionately fond and who jilted him. From that time he became a woman hater. He would walk a mile to escape contact with a woman. Of men he was almost equally afraid. There are not a dozen men who have spoken to him in years, and these are those whom he trusted in his younger days. One of his fears was that somebody would poison him.

Mott seldom visited Patchogue, and then only to buy a few things at the store he patronized for years. He always entered town very early in the morning or just before dark at night. He made his living by trapping and fishing. Occasionally he sold game to hunters, who would leave the money on the ground near his home where he could see it. Then he would put the game where the money had been left. For years one storekeeper bought cranberries of him in this manner.

One of Hermit Sam's freaks a few years ago was to pluck long hairs from the tail of a horse. Any horse with a long and graceful tail was a particular mark for his fancy. It is supposed he used the hair in making snares. He was a great hunter and caught many raccoons and foxes, the skins of which he used for a bed.

The hermit was once a big and powerful man. One or two old residents who knew him when he was young say he was both a powerful and handsome man. Now he has almost the appearance of a hunchback. He and his mother lived for years in a little old-fashioned house at the head of a pretty valley, just north of Canaan. No man was ever more attached to his mother than was Sam. He guarded her in her old age and when she became ill and helpless he was always at her side. After she died he became morose and refused to speak or associate with the few persons with whom he had retained a speaking acquaintance.

He stuck to the old homestead until his rotten timbers compelled him to seek another abode. Then he selected a dreary and cheerless spot at the head of the Canaan valley, just east of the house where he had lived with his mother. A deep hole was dug in the side of a hill.

A piece of pipe protruding through the top served him as a chimney. There was only one entrance to the cave, which was strongly fortified by a heavy timber door. He entered and

left his cramped quarters on his hands and knees.

His body was nearly always wrapped in rags, his hair was always worn long and his red beard gave him a wild appearance. In all his fishing and trapping expeditions he carried a keen-bladed ax. He had little to eat except what he caught in the woods or streams or raised on a little piece of cleared land near his cave.

NEW YORK'S TRUCKWOMAN.

She Is Pretty, Gentle, Businesslike and a Widow.

New York has a truck woman. She is not a stalwart, progressive new woman, with fondness for dress reform and a longing for woman's suffrage, but an exceedingly pretty, modest, little woman, who takes an interest in spring bonnets and is as well versed in domestic lore as she is in her business, says the New York Herald. Just off Broadway, at 2 Bend street, is a neatly painted sign, bearing the sign "W. J. Buckley, truckman." Here at all times of the day, seated on a stool, the proprietor of the business may be found. To many of the customers who tap at the window of the stand the sight of the proprietor is a most pleasant surprise. Instead of a man's form bending over the back of the firm one sees a stylishly dressed woman. At the second glance the fact that she is a pretty woman is apparent. She has good color, a well-rounded form and soft brown, rather appealing eyes. Her hair matches her eyes in color and her teeth are conspicuously beautiful. She is Mrs. Kittie Buckley, the only woman truckman in New York. Four years ago Mrs. Buckley started her career as a business woman. She took up the trucking business where her husband left it at his death and since then has not only made money but gained the respect of all the business houses with whom she deals. "My business," said Mrs. Buckley to a reporter, "is almost entirely with the book trade. I am carrying it on in just the same lines that my husband did. I have the same men with me that he hired, and work for the same firms, only I have enlarged his list of customers somewhat. The men apparently do not object to being 'bossed' by a woman, for in every way they show me great respect." Mrs. Buckley owns seven trucks and teams, and though her business is large and flourishing, she doesn't pay any extra money in engaging the services of a book keeper. She herself keeps the books, as well as attending to every other detail of the business. "Yes, I like the work," she declared. "It interests me and I really think it has benefited me physically. It has freed me out of doors every day and has certainly given me plenty of food for thought. Then it's a hobby of mine to believe a woman can't be really well and happy unless she is busy." Mrs. Buckley was born in New York city and has lived here all her life. She was married eight years ago and since her husband's death has been living with her sister on King street, not far from her office, as she calls the stand. It isn't a very large office, as it compares very favorably in size with a big packing-box, but there is room for a leather-cushioned stool and a shelf, which does duty as a desk, and when the weather is cold the steam is turned on and Mrs. Kittie Buckley, truckwoman, is just as snug and comfortable as you please.

Irreverent Anarchists.

Easter is always welcomed by churchgoers in Paris because Lent is the season during which anarchists and socialists go to extremes in showing their antagonism to religious observances. The Church of St. Vincent de Paul was recently the scene of one of these sacrilegious demonstrations. While the Abbe Dumont was preaching he was interrupted by five or six men who began to sing the "Carmagnole." Several muscular Christians armed with canes drove the disturbers into the street. Such occurrences are quite frequent in the churches in the suburbs of Paris every Lent. The anarchists seem to feel that the time for them to emphasize their atheism most forcibly is when churchgoers are engaged in the ceremonies of the penitential season.—New York World.

THE WORLD OF WOMEN.

Mrs. Cleveland has been putting on flesh rapidly in the past few years, and is now said to weigh nearly 180 pounds. As she neither skates nor plays golf nor tennis, and the president objects to bicycling for married women, she has taken to walking as hard as she can go from 10 to 12 every morning.

Though the Baroness Hirsch is nominally the universal legatee under her late husband's will, Harold Frederic declares that the bulk of Baron Hirsch's fortune, after certain philanthropic bequests are paid, will go to Lucienne, natural daughter of the baron's dead son and a French governess.

Gov. and Mrs. William McKinley, Jr., celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of their wedding on the 25th of last January. Mrs. McKinley has been something of an invalid ever since the death of her father, which occurred just before her second daughter was born. Both her children died when very young.

Cora Belle Fellows, whose marriage to Chaska, a Sioux, created a sensation some years ago, has been deserted and left in destitution by her Indian husband. She came of an excellent Washington family, but fell in love with Chaska while teaching school on the reservation near Pierre, S. D., and married him in spite of the opposition of her family.

Our liberality does not consist in what we give, but in what we have left.