

PRIEST LEYDON'S CASE

Evidence Against the Lecherous "Father" Conclusive.

Waives Examination and Gives Bond for his Appearance in the Circuit Court—Death of the Priest's Illegitimate Child—Feeling Against the Priestly Scoundrel in Aurora Very Bitter.

When the story of Stessia Cummings' ruin, implicating Father Thomas F. Leydon, pastor of the Roman Catholic church in Aurora, Ill., was made public, we published all the facts of the case in THE AMERICAN of March 3rd.

Briefly, the story of Stessia Cummings' ruin at the hands of her lecherous priest and guardian is as follows:

In the aristocratic portion of Aurora stands the handsome church of St. Mary's. Next door to it is the pastoral residence.

Here Father Leydon lived with an intelligent and discreet housekeeper, who has been with him for twenty odd years.

Among his trusting parishioners was Pearce Cummings, who had saved a considerable sum of money. When this man was dying, he called his well-beloved priest to his bedside and gave into his keeping his three beautiful daughters, Stessia, aged 20; Elizabeth, aged 18, and Margaret, aged 15 years.

"Protect them," said he, "and save them from all harm." The priest ceased praying and said, "I will."

The man died and when his will was read the priest was left \$200 and the remainder of the estate was given to his widow and children.

A month or two rolled on and Lizzie began to notice in her sister that which was unusual. With confidence in her heart she went to Father Leydon, and called his attention to her sister. The priest told James Connolly, uncle of the orphan girls, and the family thus learned of Stessia's misfortune. She was closely questioned, and after much hesitation said Father Leydon had ruined her.

This terrible declaration appalled those who heard it. So firm were they in their confidence that they at first refused to credit what they heard. Mrs. Cummings, an honest woman, turned from her daughter. All the family save the honest old uncle turned from Stessia in her misery and despair. At last, in despair, she sent for Father Leydon, and at his expense was brought to the hospital of Dr. B. F. Colwell, at 3014 Calumet avenue in Chicago.

The uncle at last reconciled the family to Stessia and Lizzie came to see her. The charge against the priest was more firmly made and Lizzie accused Father Leydon of the crime. He denied it and hurriedly came to Chicago bringing to bear all his influence over the girl's superstition and taking advantage of her physical weakness he secured from her a brief statement exonerating him from all blame for her condition, and charging a wild young blade of Aurora, Joseph English, with the authorship of her ruin.

With this unattested paper he hurried back to Aurora and showed it to the family. They were incredulous and searched more thoroughly into the matter with the result that Father Leydon was arrested February 22 on a warrant sworn out by Stessia Cummings before Justice of the Peace Frederick Brown, charging him with the paternity her child.

At first the sympathies of Father Leydon's parishioners were strongly in his favor and they declared it a case of blackmail, but now it is different. The evidence of his victim leaves no room for doubt of his guilt and the feeling against him in Aurora is very bitter.

AURORA, May 17.—The preliminary examination of Rev. Thomas F. Leydon, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic church, charged with having betrayed Miss Stessia Cummings, a member of his church, began here yesterday. On the death of her father, Rev. Mr. Ley-



STESSIA CUMMINGS RECEIVES NEWS OF THE DEATH OF HER CHILD.

don had been appointed guardian of Miss Cummings, and he secured for her a position in the government pork inspection office in Chicago, where he visited her frequently. When it became known some time ago that she was about to give birth to a child, she caused the arrest of Rev. Mr. Leydon, charging him with its paternity. The plaintiff told a very straightforward story on the stand, and on cross-examination this afternoon her testimony could not be shaken. Attorney Alschuler tried his best to entangle the witness in some of her statements, but always the answer came straight and in a clear, expressive voice, especially so when the answer was especially damaging to the defendant.

Very much of the time was taken up by the quibbling of opposing attorneys over legal points. Miss Cummings had a memoranda of certain dates to which she referred once or twice and the defendant's lawyers wanted to see them. Her lawyers objected and were sustained by the court.

The cross-examination also attempted to draw out Miss Cummings' actions when keeping company with Dode English, but an objection by her attorneys was also sustained by the court.

Miss Cummings is a young woman whose beauty, accomplishments and intelligence is above the average, and she told the story of her wrongs from the witness stand in a calm, forcible, and convincing manner. Lines of care and sadness, resulting from her sickness and brooding over her downfall, are clearly depicted on her countenance, but the flash is still in her large blue eyes, and she keeps them steadily turned on the defendant. It is very evident that she loved and trusted her pastor with a rare devotion.

In her direct examination she told how on divers dates, extending from Thanksgiving 1891 to September 12th, 1893, she had sustained improper relations with Rev. Leydon. She gave these dates, as Thanksgiving day, 1891, June 27, August 14, and September 12, 1893, she resisting him unsuccessfully each time. At frequent intervals during these two years she said he had attempted but she had successfully resisted his designs. She also swore that such relations had never existed with anyone except Rev. Leydon, and that the first was at his mother's in Chicago, others at the parsonage in Aurora.

She had been a frequent caller at the parsonage, but always on business connected with the Sunday school; of which she was superintendent, or at Rev. Leydon's request.

She said when in September last she discovered her condition she went to a doctor in Aurora, at Leydon's request. He told her there was nothing wrong with her further than some slight blood disorder, but gave her some medicine to take. She took the medicine a day or two but discontinued. Leydon urged her to continue it and urged her mother to compel her to take it regularly. Then she went, at his request, to a Chicago doctor, with the same result. After this she went to a doctor of her own choosing, and was informed of her true condition. She swore that he asked her several times to have a criminal operation performed.

The statement produced when the scandal first became known, over her signature, naming Geo. (Dode) English as the author of her trouble, she said was obtained by force in the Chicago "lying-in" hospital and was untrue. She said: "He was my priest, and I tried every way possible to shield him." Attorneys for the plaintiff offered evidence to show that she had been besieged by members of both sexes in efforts to get statements relieving defendant of all responsibility for her condition, but the court ruled it out.

The cross-examination conducted by Attorney Alschuler, though rigid and severe, failed to shake her direct testimony to any important extent, but inadvertently elicited the details of a meeting in Chicago, September 12, that had not been brought out on the direct examination. She swore that on September 10, at Sunday school he asked her to meet him at the Palmer House in Chicago, on Tuesday. She did so. They went to a restaurant for dinner. Later they went to a hotel on Jackson street between State and Dearborn, and Rev. Leydon registered as Chauncey Rhodes and sister, and were assigned adjoining rooms. After retiring to her room Leydon came in and they remained together until morning.

AURORA, Ill., May 18.—The cross-examination of Miss Stessia Cummings was continued in Justice Van Osdel's court this morning. Her direct testimony has not been shaken or weakened, but, instead, the cross-examination brought out new facts that tighten the coils about the licentious priest. An effort made to show the relations between Stessia and "Dode" English was ruled out by the court as having no bearing on the case on trial.

On redirect examination Stessia swore that Father Leydon's brother, Mike visited her frequently at the Chicago hospital and sought to turn her against her parents and to place the responsibility for her trouble on "Dole"

English. She said that about a week after she had refused to marry English Father Leydon called upon her at Dr. Colwell's hospital and said: "Stessia, when I left you the other day I never expected to come back to see you, but I love you so I cannot keep away from you."

"Yes," I replied, "you say you love me, yet you want me to marry a man whom I hate and who is innocent of my trouble." We talked on and he put his arm around me and said, "When you are out of your trouble and well again we will spend the day together somewhere, won't we?" I said, "No, sir, never."

The cross-examination was finished about 11 o'clock, when Lizzie, Stessia's sister took the stand. Her testimony up to the noon adjournment was mainly corroborative of Stessia's, no new facts being brought out.

Just as court adjourned a telegram was handed Father McLaughlin, the archbishop's representative at the trial, announcing the death of the baby born March 31. Stessia was greatly overcome and left the court room leaning heavily on the arms of friends. An intense feeling is developing against the priest and all that is lacking to inaugurate a violent scene is a leader.

AURORA, Ill., May 19.—This morning Lizzie, under cross-examination by Attorney Aldrich, said that she was employed at the Park Gate hotel, Chicago, as cashier, from June 5th to October 20, 1893. Father Leydon did not get her the position, but he had helped her to secure positions before. Her father and Father Leydon had been good friends and when the former died on October 21, 1893, he asked of Father Leydon to look after herself and her sister. Father Leydon had often sought employment for both herself and her sister.

It was on September 12th, 1893, in the parlor at her own home that she talked with Leydon of her sister's condition, she being the one that broached the subject. Soon after this she received a letter from him which began with "Dearest Lizzie" and was signed, "Your Love, Thomas." Her idea in telling Father Leydon of her sister's trouble, was to have him investigate the matter and he said that he would.

Her father trusted Rev. Leydon's implicitly. When he died he commended Stessia and herself to his keeping, saying he would die happy. Leydon was present at the time. "Little did my father dream that that man had ruined his daughter." Her cross-examination was deferred until this morning.

Joseph W. (Dode) English was put on the stand yesterday about 4 o'clock. He stated that his home was in Aurora, but at present he was working in Chicago. He had been quite intimately acquainted with Stessia, and had been in her company considerable up to a period beginning about two years ago. Her parents had objected to his calling

because he was not a Catholic, and these objections finally prevailed so that they ceased to keep company.

He had met her once, May 1st, at the C. B. & Q. depot. He did not see her again until June 23d, when he happened to meet her on the train going to Chicago. He walked across town with her and they parted at Wabash avenue, she going to the place where she was employed and he to the fair. He did not see her again until the night her father died, when he met her on the street and walked home with her.

On January 21st he (English) received a letter from Father Leydon asking him to call at the parsonage on important business. On arriving he was confronted with Stessia's statement, wrung from her by Father Leydon, incriminating him. This was the first knowledge he had of her trouble. For certain reasons he did not deny the charge and after a business talk with Father Leydon he agreed to marry the girl. The two went into Chicago next day and secured a license and a special dispensation from the archbishop, the latter being necessary because he was a Protestant. Leydon managed everything and treated him several times to beer and cigars.

Talking matters over on their way to the hospital English said: "Well if I marry Stessia I will have to take her back home at once. I can't stand \$10 a week board." "Oh! never mind that," answered Leydon. "I have paid that up three or four weeks in advance and when her trouble is over you can bring her back and I will see that you have a house and lot and nice little home all your own. You'll be fixed in nice shape." He asked me if I knew of any married men, or others, with whom Stessia had kept company, and I told him I did not.

H. F. H. Hoffman, the contractor, who lives at 278 North avenue, next door east of the Cummings' home, was next sworn. He had seen Father Leydon frequently call at the Cummings' residence, usually twice a week. He sometimes left after 10 o'clock. Often came through the alley. After he entered the house each time he had noticed the lights would be turned down and the curtains drawn. He had been coming to the house about two years. One evening over a year ago some mischievous boys played "tick tack" on Father Leydon while he was at Cummings'. Witness was home the day Pierce Cummings died. On that day he saw a brother of Mr. Cummings knock at both the front and back doors of the house, but there was no response. Leydon and Stessia were in the house at the time.

He thought it was no nearer from Father Leydon's house to the Cummings' house through the alley than by the street.

AURORA, Ill., May 21.—The celebrated scandal suit of Father Leydon, pastor of St. Mary's church here,

charged with the ruin of Miss Stessia Cummings, one of the prettiest and wealthiest girls in Aurora, and a member of his parish, came to a sudden end to-day. The prosecution had introduced evidence that was so conclusive against the priest that on the advice of his attorneys he waived examination, giving bonds of \$2,500 for his appearance in the circuit court. But it is the general opinion that the disgraced priest will never appear in court, but will flee the country.

CORMACK SUSPENDED

And Shoop Restored to His Position by the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners.

The board of fire and police commissioners met in special session Friday and Saturday of last week to hear and investigate the charges preferred against Sergeant W. H. Shoop by Captain and at that time acting Chief of Police Thomas Cormack for wilful disobedience of orders and neglect of duty in not remaining on duty until relieved by the proper officer, also the charges preferred against Captain Cormack by Sergeant Shoop for conduct unbecoming of an officer, and for assault and battery. The full board was in attendance, Mayor Bemis, Chas. Hartman, Wm. Coburn, V. O. Strickler and H. V. Smith, the latter being selected by the board to conduct the investigation, and it is only proper here to state that the investigation was conducted in a most impartial manner with a due regard to fairness on both sides. Judge Doane appeared as counsel for Sergeant Shoop and Attorney Frank Ransom for Captain Cormack. After patiently listening to a great many witnesses on both sides, the board retired to consider the case and at 5:35 Saturday afternoon gave their decision which was to the effect that Captain Cormack's charges against Sergeant Shoop were not sustained but that the charges preferred by Shoop against Cormack were sustained and that Captain Cormack be suspended from duty pending further action on the part of the board and that Sergeant Shoop be restored to his former position on the force. The decision as arrived at by the board was the only one possible under the circumstances, and was fully sustained by the evidence. It is a step in the right direction and will give general satisfaction to the citizens of Omaha.

One interesting and significant feature of the proceedings was the nervous and hesitating manner in which some of the witnesses, members of the police force, gave their evidence, as if afraid of "the powers that be." Captain Cormack in the course of his evidence swore that he did not strike Shoop, but in the charge to the board by his attorney at the closing, it was admitted that he did strike Shoop. The evidence in this respect was too strong for further denial.

It is generally understood that the action of the board in merely suspending Cormack pending further action on their part is so as to allow Cormack a chance to resign and thus avoid the disgrace of dismissal. Both the fire and police departments of this city are to receive an overhauling at the hands of the board in the near future, when it is generally expected that something sharp, sudden, and decisive will drop, and that several of the officers at present in charge in both departments will be seeking other employment. It is the prevailing opinion that radical measures will have to be resorted to in order to restore both departments to a proper degree of efficiency.

Will Have a Flag.

The flag presentation of the Thurston Rifles, to be held Monday evening, May 28, at the Coliseum, is the biggest affair yet planned by the citizen warriors. The Omaha Guards and gaiting section, and Dodge Light Guards of Council Bluffs have been invited to take part. Speeches will be made by Governor Crouse, General Cowin, John M. Thurston, Rev. Dr. S. Wright Butler, Mayor Bemis and others. The soldiers will assemble at 7:15 at Fifteenth and Douglas, and headed by the governor and his staff in carriages, will march to the music of the Second Infantry band to the Coliseum.

Funds for the big American flag and two guidons were raised by the ladies' auxiliary. Embroidered upon the flag are the words, "Thurston Rifles, organized September 13, 1893." The guidons are of blue silk, 18x20 inches, embroidered in raised white silk letters. The program for the evening begins with guard mount. Then there will be an exhibition drill of each company. Mrs. Fisher, president of the auxiliary, will hand the flag to General Cowin with a little speech and he in turn will make the formal presentation. Dr. Butler, the chaplain, will respond. After the program a military ball will take place.