

# STRANGEST POISON MYSTERY IN CRIMINAL ANNALS

## The Elosser Case in Cumberland, Md., Makes a Commonplace Little City Memorable Among the Records of Unsolved Murder Cases.



Charles E. Twigg, Fiance of Grace Elosser, Found Dead on the Eve of Their Wedding.

THE recent tragedy at Cumberland, Md., when two sweethearts, to be married the next day, were found dead from cyanide of potassium in the room where they were exchanging lovers' vows, which startled the country from coast to coast, has now, at the end of a fortnight, crystallized itself into an enigma of crime whose details rival the utmost imaginings of the most melodramatic of novelists.

Its original setting, its gruesome development, its climax—if, indeed, the climax has been reached—and now its final resolution into a problem, National-wide in interest, without solution, or hope of solution, marks it as one of the most remarkable cases in the annals of American crime.

So replete is this tragedy with enthralling mystery that the very calendar, most prosaic of things, has lent itself to add dramatic effect to the dramatic deaths of Grace Elosser and Charles Twigg.

It was just as the last sun of the year 1910 was sloping slowly to the west that Grace Elosser, the bride-elect, and Charles Twigg, the bridegroom-to-be within a few short hours, were laid with folded hands in their eternal sleep.

Instead of the orange blossoms of the gala wedding feast their portion was the immortelles and the sombre crepe of the funeral; instead of music and dancing and all the happy accompaniments of a joyous marriage feast there were but the trappings of death, made the blacker by the deep and sudden mystery of a dual tragedy.

Surely never has fiction imagined nor has fact recorded such pitiable contrast between the what-is and the what-might-have-been.

To the little City of Cumberland, nestling at the foot of the primeval hills, the pleasant holiday season came, with its midwinter playtime augmented in the pleasant surprise that its population had been found by the Government census increased beyond the expectation of the most optimistic citizen. Cumberland, on that last day of the old year, was care free and wholly happy. "If ever a community realized the holiday dream of a peace on earth, to men good will," said an old-time resident of the town to the representative of THE TIMES, "it was Cumberland on that last day of the year 1910."

And forth from out this general happiness like a lightning bolt from a silver cloud there leapt what may well be written down as the most tragic mystery of the present generation.

To realize in all its force the effect of the shock of this double death upon the people of Cumberland, it is necessary to note the characters and situation of the two victims.

First, a young woman in the full flush of womanhood; a young woman, according to the consensus of opinion in Cumberland, notably attractive and charming in person and temperament; young, but with the experience of twenty-three years overflowing with the glorious optimism that marks the healthy American girl, happy in living and loving, just on the eve of her marriage to the man who was the realization of her womanly ideals.

"Charlie is the best man that ever lived," she said to an intimate friend on the morning of the day of her death. "And I am the happiest girl in the world to get such a treasure."

Such was Grace Elosser as she appeared to friends and acquaintances within two hours just preceding her mysterious death.

And a fitting complement to this attractive girl was the young man to whom she was so soon to be wedded, Charles E. Twigg. Losing his heart to her in the Indian Summer of the last Autumn, his impetuous wooing soon won her for himself.

His, too, was a sunny, ardent, energetic, optimistic nature—a nature that was more strikingly developed along these lines, by reason of his early struggles and his early and material success.

To these two victims of tragedy, with all that life holds dear to live for; with their dream of marital bliss on the very threshold of realization, to him

who had told an intimate friend that very morning that he could now ask nothing more of fortune; to her, who had said to a girl friend at the stroke of high noon that very day, "Tomorrow I will at last commence really to live"—to these two came "death's black camel" and bore their souls away, leaving their bodies as pale

as the snow on the mountain peaks.

It is a matter of interest to know who were these Elossers and Twiggs, whence they came, how long had been their acquaintance, what were the details of this acquaintance that finally ripened into the romance that was so tragically wrecked last New Year's Eve.

The Elossers, originally of Pennsylvania Dutch stock, settled some generations ago, in Winchester, Va. From there a score of years ago Mr. Elosser, father of Grace and May, removed to Flintstone, Md., and established a grocery business, from which he, for a number of years, derived a comfortable living.

Flintstone is a small settlement about twenty miles from Cumberland. It was here, while attending the public school, that May and Grace Elosser first met Charles E. Twigg. It was here also that the girls became acquainted with Willison, who appears to have been a friend of Twigg's, and who subsequently was Grace Elosser's first husband.

These four were intimate as playmates during their school days at Flintstone, but when Mr. Elosser removed later to Cumberland, where he established a grocery business, and Charles Twigg located at Keyser in West Virginia, twenty miles away, these youthful intimacies were broken up—all except that between Willison and Grace Elosser. This continued and subsequently ripened into courtship and marriage about eight years ago.

Willison, who was the owner of a prosperous livery stable in Cumberland, was a man of convivial habits. About three years after marriage his wife, Grace, became aware of what had long been known to the gossips in Cumberland—that Willison was paying marked attention to another young woman of the town. The scandal culminated in the elopement of Willison and the girl in question.

Grace Elosser Willison, however, was a young woman of determined character. Hurriedly obtaining a horse and buggy, she intercepted the fleeing couple by taking a byroad. Blocking the way with her vehicle, she halted the pair and, with whip in hand, ordered them to get out of their carriage. Then, with their vehicle in tow, she made them walk to a neighboring villa, and there called witnesses to observe the faithfulness of her spouse.

On this evidence she obtained a divorce from Willison, who later married his partner in the elopement. Grace Elosser returned to her father's house after the divorce, retaining as the only memento of her unfortunate marriage venture a horse and buggy which Willison had given to her—the one through whose ready speed she had felled her husband's elopement. Under order of court her maiden name was restored to her.

All of this was four years ago. Meantime Charles E. Twigg, the playmate of her youth, who had cast his fortunes in the West Virginia town of Keyser, had faded from her memory.

Now a word about this young Charles E. Twigg and his boyhood. He was a youth of humble parentage, possessed, when he located at Keyser, of only a common school education. Also, he brought along with him a shrewd capacity for getting along in the hard, workaday world where he had cast his lot.

Starting literally at the bottom, he beat and buffeted his way up in that primitive community, where men still had the bark on. He supplemented his common school education with learning in the stern school of the mountain plow, and coal mines, and the lumber camps—learning, saving, gathering such polish as he might from casual business acquaintances; gathering more polish and more money as the years brought success.



Miss Grace Elosser, Who Died Seated at Her Fiance's Side, Just Before Their Wedding.

Harlan Norris, Who Says He Saw Glasses in the Dead Couples' Hands.

affected a craving for the automobile which in that mountainous country marks the last word in luxurious living.

Such was Charles E. Twigg, when in October of 1909 fortune threw him across the path of his former playmates at Flintstone, the Elosser girls, whom he had meantime all but forgotten. They met at the annual fair held at Cumberland in the month of October. The gawky children of the Flintstone Public School had blossomed out, on the one hand, into two attractive young women, on the other, to a highly successful young man of most pleasing presence and the possessor of a swift automobile.

The Flintstone acquaintance, with its childhood memories bearing just enough of romance to flavor it, was renewed with energy. Twigg became a frequent caller at the Elosser home, and it was a common sight in the streets of Cumberland to see him in his car with one of the girls beside him, while the other was in the tonneau with some male acquaintance.

It was in the automobile rides that the gossip of Cumberland found tongue. Keen-eyed folk who made a specialty of attending to other people's business observed that during the first week of this renewed intimacy, evidenced by automobile excursions, the seat next to Twigg was always occupied by May Elosser. Then these same keen-eyed gossips observed that Grace Elosser had supplanted her sister in the seat of honor beside the attractive Twigg. Finally the presence of Grace became a settled thing, and in a few weeks it was an open secret that the successful merchant of Keyser was her accepted lover.

It was not gathered, however, from Twigg, who was widely known as a man who never confided his personal matters even to his closest friends. Grace Elosser, however, told those most intimate with her family that she was to marry Twigg on the first day of the New Year.

Twigg kept this a secret even from his family. When he started from Keyser on Dec. 31 on that last journey to Cumberland, he avoided the questions of his friends, even those of his mother, as to his marital intentions. He did not deny, but he did not admit to any one his expectation of being married the following day.

He arrived in Cumberland shortly after noon that 31st day of December. And it is now that the mystery commences, a mystery so baffling that now, after the lapse of nearly a fortnight, the officials of Cumberland are compelled to admit they are as much

in the dark as they were when they first grappled with the case.

When he reached Cumberland, he, with all the ardor of a young and eager lover, sought his sweetheart over the telephone. She laughingly told him that she was up to her eyes in the work of preparation for their marriage on the next day, and did not have a moment's time for him that afternoon. Upon which Twigg, as any devoted lover might do, begged for a quarter

hour's interview. Of course the sweetheart could not resist such importunity—and Twigg hurried up to the Elosser home.

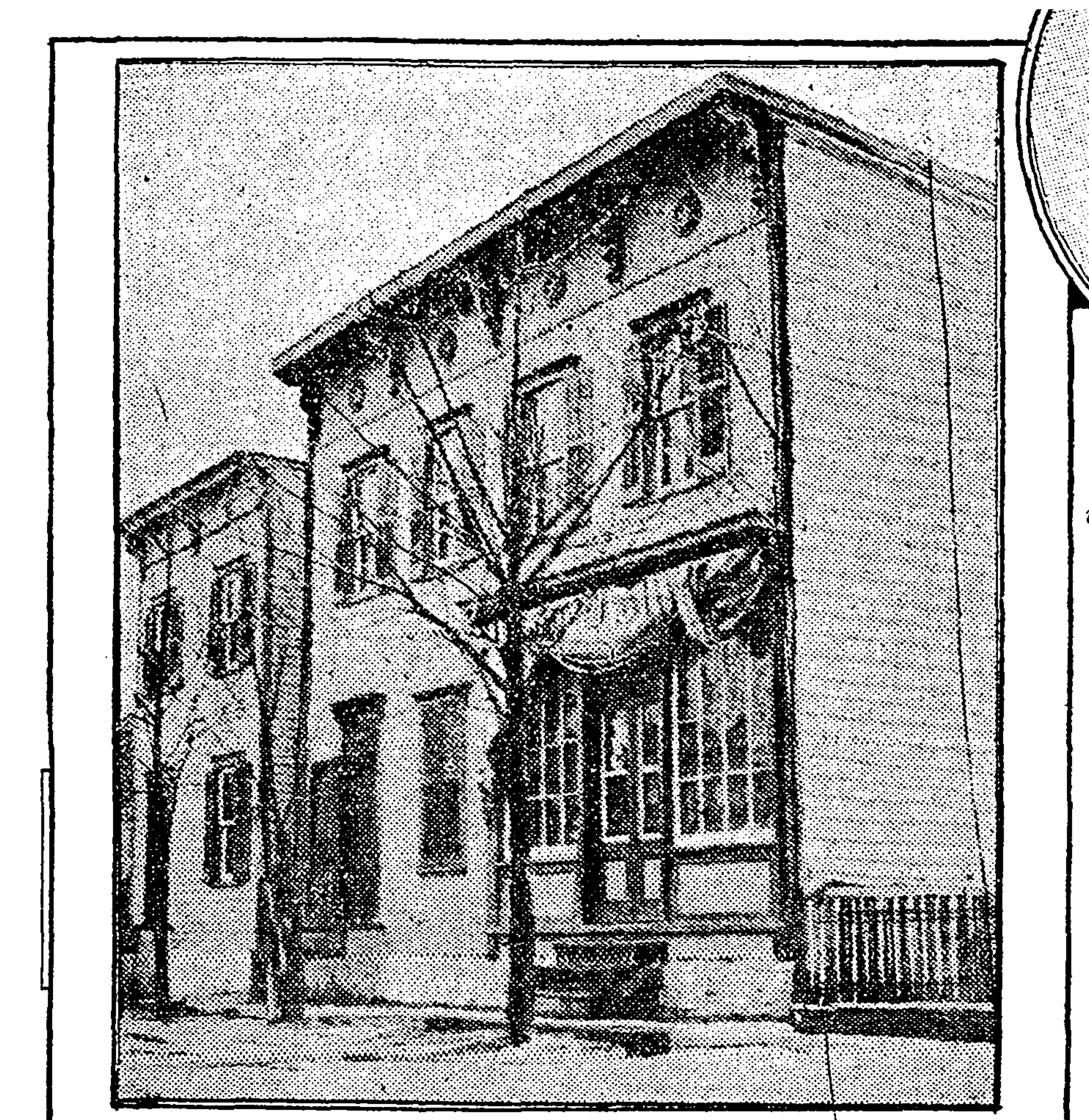
All the evidence goes to show that Miss Grace Elosser and Twigg acted on that meeting a short hour before their tragic deaths just as two fond lovers would act in meeting the day before their nuptials.

The family accorded them the parlor and left them to themselves. In half an hour Mrs. Elosser entered upon them, apologizing for her intrusion by explaining that the seamstress who was engaged on Grace's wedding dress desired to speak with her over the telephone. Twigg, during Grace's absence at the wire, engaged Mrs. Elosser in such airy and light talk as a young man would indulge in with his prospective mother-in-law when his mind was filled with thoughts of the important event of the next day. When Grace returned, Mrs. Elosser left, playfully shaking her finger at the couple as they sat cozily on the divan and warning them that time was too precious to spend in love-like endearments when there was so much in the way of preparation for the wedding.

That was the last seen in life of Grace Elosser or Charles Twigg. Nearly an hour later Mrs. Elosser, desiring to know what definite arrangements the couple had determined on in the matter of their wedding tour, went to the door of the parlor and softly knocked.

"I knocked on the door with a smile on my face," said Mrs. Elosser to the representative of THE TIMES, "for when I had been in the parlor before both Grace and Charles Twigg seemed so supremely happy that I could not but smile at the recollection of it. I gave a short knock and entered without waiting a reply. The doorway through which I entered is on the same wall as that against which was the sofa whereon Grace and Charles sat. I did not fully enter the room, but merely thrust in my head, saying as I did so, 'Grace, dear, I want to ask you something. You won't mind my coming in, will you?'"

"And then I stopped. There was a silence in the room, a queer, strange silence. Looking toward the sofa I saw the odd, strange attitudes of my daughter and her betrothed. It looked as though they had fallen asleep, but in a most grotesque position.



The Home of the Elossers. The Close d Shutter Is at the Parlor Window, Where the Tragedy Occurred.

hand hung down by the side of the sofa, listless and dead.

"I rushed up to her, calling her name; then I grasped her arm, calling loudly, 'Grace, Grace, speak to me! What's the matter?' Then for the first time I looked into her eyes, and there I had answer; it was death.

"I looked in the face of Mr. Twigg and saw on his face the same horrible expression. I do not know how long I stood there gazing at them. It all seems a horrible, hideous nightmare to me now. I know that for a time I was too paralyzed by the horror of it all to move a single muscle; they refused to obey my will.

"I do remember that I rushed from the other door that opens out on the street. The cold air revived me for the moment, and I gave vent to shriek after shriek. I then returned to the parlor just as Mrs. See, my married daughter, who lives next door, rushed in, attracted by my screams.

"I had then again lost my voice from the fright, and could only point to the bodies on the sofa. My daughter ran crying hysterically, but she preserved her presence of mind enough to hurry away for a doctor.

"No, there was no glass or glasses, no bottle or any other thing that could be used as a receptacle for any liquid in the room. Everything remained just as it was until Dr. Ford, whom my daughter, Mrs. See, went for, arrived. I know that there could have been nothing moved from the room after my discovery of the bodies without my knowledge, or certainly without my having noticed it."

In cases evoking such widespread and mysterious interest as the tragedy of Cumberland there are always born freaks who rush to the assistance of those officially engaged in solving the mystery with all manner of unique suggestions. "Have you gotten any freak letters on this case?" asked THE TIMES representative of Prosecuting Attorney Robb as he sat in his office in Cumberland. "Have I?" ejaculated Mr. Robb. "Just look at this bunch; all accumulated in ten days," and the Prosecuting Attorney pulled out a bulky packet of letters. Following are some characteristic excerpts from the collection:

They are exact copies, retaining the errors in spelling, grammar, &c.:

Montrose, Ia Jan 7th 1911.  
Mr. Robb, State's Attorney.  
In reading the constitution Democrat I see that the Elosser family was responsible for the death of miss grace elosser and charles e twig. I will tell you of a discovery I have made that might help solve the mystery. I am asking you as a gentleman not to tell my name. They might meet this case by hypnotism questions or controlling powers. Maybe given out on their clothes a month or 48 hours before their death. And the suggestions made upon them when they were together being the stomach in a spasmodic condition as it is called a slow poison. I am very urgent to go to the house, could be caused by such suggestions and he did not get to come could be caused from a feeling made by hypnotism used by the third party. I am asking you as a gentleman not to be proven against any body but if you have the letters read them. I am asking you as a gentleman do not let my name be made public.  
Yours very truly,  
MRS. [Name]

p s— you see these misable powers is not sold to hurt any body but the wicked world with its army and jealous nature soon finds out every thing as a secret understand.  
Atlantic City, 1-8-1911.  
Mr. Robb,  
Dear Sir—

Now I think you need some help on this mystery was this mother jells of this man and did not want Grace taken away from her. Or was she a fraud Grace would make another bulk of it her marriage and disgrace the family a gain. Or was she jells of Grace did this man court the wright daughter to suit that old woman. Didn't it appeal to you that she had the letters read them. I am asking you as a gentleman do not let my name be made public.  
I don't believe May dun that job I can't see it.  
District Attorney Robb.

Dear Sir: I have been very much interested in the case of Miss Elosser and do hope you will find the one who does such an act.  
It is something terrible from what I have learned. I believe there is more to it. I look into the Twigg's home—the will



Prosecuting Attorney David A. Robb of Cumberland, Md., Who is Investigating the Mystery.

to mother and sister and one brother—where was his mother that night. If he married the will would be changed to his wife that leaves the mother out perhaps you have no father in dream—when I read about the murder. I cried and cried I felt so bad. It was on my mind and I dreamed that the young man and young lady was poisoned by wine. It seemed a middle-aged person. I don't know much about dreams being true, but I thought I would write and tell you don't give up I hope the guilty one's conscience will bring them to justice and god bless you to find the one. The peculiar feature was the two doors and the paper to-night stated that was so. Don't leave nothing undone and God bless you in your undertakings.  
(signed) UNKNOWN.

This is romantic. I married a young man who had not met his mother in ten years. I brought his mother to his side. She took from me his love, my home and all—leaving me with a four months old baby. Today I am married to a good man—my baby is eight years old a beautiful little girl her real papa has gone wa all hope to heaven for he sleeps his eternal sleep. What do you think of that—this is a cruel world.

It was with some difficulty that THE TIMES representative obtained an interview with the family of the Elossers. Startling and sensational accusations made by unscrupulous journalists had wrought them up to a state of general hostility toward newspapers.

But, when once assured that they could safely speak without danger of misrepresentation, the entire family uttered. That they are "weary-weary" was plain from the haggard lines that marked their faces of them all. If there is one common characteristic that stands forth salient in the Elosser family it is this—gentleness. From the patient, long-suffering, and aged father to the bright-tempered Mrs. See, they show distinctively that quiet gentleness that reminds one of the patient nun. Even when explaining why they had at first been loath to meet THE TIMES representative on account of the sensational misrepresentations with which some conscienceless correspondents had abused their confidence they spoke in sorrow more than in anger. The quiet grief of Mrs. Elosser was pitiable. From time to time she would cry out in anguish to Coroner Beall, forgetting in her woe that she had but lately asked the question, "Oh, Mr. Beall, haven't you found out anything? Haven't you found who did it?"

But, of all members of the Elosser family, May is the most striking. She is a woman (say, rather, a girl; for, despite her dignified bearing, she has a frank, girlish presence) about 25 years of age. Her face is pretty, but it is more than pretty; it is the face of one who if given artistic advantages would, in a day or two, develop into an enthusiastic painter, writer, or musician. In short, the artist is written in every lineament of her features, clouded and obscured as her face was on that day from ten days' strain and grief.

She was very quiet, talking but little, but listening, with face alight with interest to the current conversation. One could readily imagine the agony she has been compelled to endure in reading the dark suspicious many papers over and over again, and her connection with the double tragedy.

And what of the crime? Who is guilty? The man who goes to Cumberland and spends a day in investigating can leave that night feeling perfectly content that he has in those few short hours arrived as near a solution of the mystery as would a host of "Finger" detectives were they to devote a year to the task.

For there is nothing but darkness there. "There is only one thing more difficult in this case," says THE TIMES representative, "a crime whose commission is surrounded by complicated circumstances," says Edgar Allan Poe—"this is a crime whose perpetrator is wholly devoid of circumstances." And this is the situation in the Cumberland mystery.

No theory of crime may be considered a satisfactory theory which is based upon a premise that some one has deliberately perjured himself. And if one follows this principle there is no solution of the Elosser mystery. The facts are so simple, naked, bald, that there is nothing for the intellect to grasp as a major premise. It is like starting with a blank sheet of paper for a basis.

Unless one believe the whole Elosser family are perjured—a premise that outrages the conscience of one who has met with and talked to them—then one is compelled to believe that Grace Elosser and her intended husband met on that fatal afternoon with no thought of feeling innocent guiltiness over their approaching wedding.

That they sat in a room, the entrances to which were practically guarded on the one side by the collected Elosser family as they moved to and fro about the house—unusually energetic as all were in preparation for the morrow's marriage—and on the other side by the Elosser family, the publicity attendant on such an entrance. That Twigg did not bring the poison with him is conclusively established, according to the testimony of the entire Elosser family, from the fact that there was no bottle or receptacle which could have contained a liquid found in the parlor after the tragedy. Nor was any such found upon the body. That the poison was administered in liquid form has been proved beyond a doubt by the unanimous expert opinion of the investigating doctors.

The case therefore is utterly without solution—unless it is believed that there is wholesale perjury deduced in the Elosser family as they moved to and fro about the house—unusually energetic as all were in preparation for the morrow's marriage—and on the other side by the Elosser family, the publicity attendant on such an entrance. That Twigg did not bring the poison with him is conclusively established, according to the testimony of the entire Elosser family, from the fact that there was no bottle or receptacle which could have contained a liquid found in the parlor after the tragedy. Nor was any such found upon the body. That the poison was administered in liquid form has been proved beyond a doubt by the unanimous expert opinion of the investigating doctors.

It can therefore be confidently stated, in the opinion of the writer, that this mystery, which ranks easily first in the criminal problems of this generation, will never be solved, and will take its rank in the historic problems with Marie Roget.