

Her Angel's Face Hid a Devil's Soul?

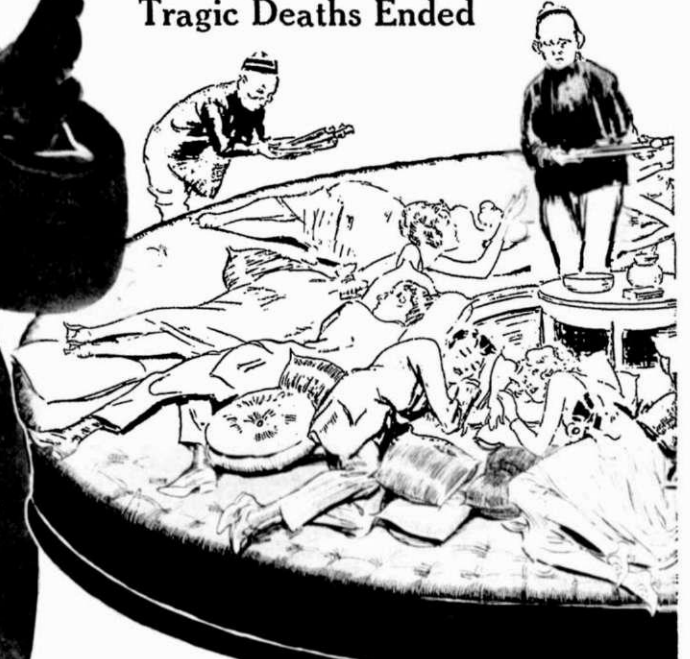


Little Josette, the Unfortunate Daughter of the Linders, Who Has Been Turned Over to Max's Brother.

Max Linder, the Funny Man of the French Films, in One of His Characteristic Poses.



Court Proceedings for Custody of the Daughter of Max Linder, Funny Man of the French Films, Reveal His Accusations That the Bride He Picked for Her Innocence Dragged Him, Even on Their Honeymoon, Into the Degradation That Only Their Tragic Deaths Ended



PARIS, Jan. 20. As a consequence of the revelations of the Max Linder case, Paris is living through the most thorough purge of "police purification" in its history.

The famous French film laugh-maker's starkly tragic private life, as unveiled in the progress of court action, and the spectacle of his infant daughter irredeemably condemned to a future of shame for her birth has given the "laughing city" pause;—vice isn't funny.

And M. Chiappe, chief of the Paris police, is proving it with a series of spectacular vice raids, which, to the three to five hundred men and women of the Paris underworld who are nightly being driven like sheep to the police pens, are not funny at all. But this temporary spasm of police activity will soon end and vice will be as brazen as usual.

The shameful secrets with which Max Linder and his attractive young wife went to the grave two years ago were carefully kept by the judicial authorities who investigated the violent end of the couple. But these were the kind of secrets that will out. A bitter court battle for the guardianship of Linder's only child and the million franc—of which the baby girl's heir was the instrument of their publication. And all Paris is stirred at the knowledge of the real causes of the young parents' double suicide.

In 1923, while he was "shooting" some outdoor scenes for his comedy, "Be My Wife," Max Linder found himself in the brilliant social winter resort, Chamonix, on the slopes of Mt. Blanc. He was a veteran of the screen. He had found film fortune in both France and America. All of which experience had made him somewhat of a woman-hater. He had met only the painted, experienced beauties of filmdom—and he avoided the opposite sex. In Paris his misogyny was proverbial. He lived in a small apartment with an eighty-year-old cook.

Then, in the corridors of a fashionable Chamonix Hotel he met a young girl whose eyes met his with frank innocence. That, at least, was the expression he read in them. He told friends enthusiastically: "She is purity—the woman without guile." Her name was Jeanne Peters.

When he met Jeanne Peters, he learned that she was sixteen years old. He did not hesitate long. He returned to Paris engaged to be married, so impatient that the fiancée consented to an early wedding. It took place in August of that year at the fashionable Church of St. Honore d'Eylau and Max told his well-wishers: "I'm happy, happy! Now I can realize the dream of my life—a loving wife—children—a home!"

"She obliges me, by her fatal fascination, to follow her into places the hideousness of which you cannot even imagine," heartily wrote Max to his brother-in-law a year later. "She draws me to the infamous rendez-vous which she keeps with others. After subjecting myself to this shame what will you have me become? And the child—my Josette—the dear love that has done nothing to merit a broken life—how shall she know that her mother is the wickedest woman in Paris?"

The scenes to which the comedian referred in his letter (it was one of those found after his death) were plainly the subject of whispered comment in Paris—moral and night-life circles.

"The Linders are going the pace!" was the universal comment. The pace? Certain Paris publications seem to have no other reason for existing than is presented by their columns and columns of advertising of these dens. Ostensibly, the houses are run by a hostess whose only aim is to produce meetings between unacquainted persons. Thus, if the Parisian pleasure seeker's evening



Jeanne Peters, Whom Max Killed, Blaming Her for His Degradation—but Whose Family Say Was Herself the Innocent Victim of Her Husband's Drug-Crazed Mind.

takes him to one of the great music halls, such as the Folies Bergere or the Moulin Rouge, and he spies an attractive girl of the chorus, whose acquaintance he wishes to make, he has but to address himself to one of the rendez-vous agencies to secure their services in making an introduction—a round-about procedure which, in the case of many young ladies of these free-and-easy-going sisterhoods, is not at all necessary.

No legal way to extirpate the abuse of the "rendez-vous agency" has been found by French lawyers. A classic derision, handed down by the Seine tribunal some years ago, points out that "making people acquainted is no crime and that it is not the province of a court to decide whether ladies and gentlemen shall become acquainted in the former's homes, on a park bench, in a street car or any other place they may select. Hence the rendez-vous business flourishes unchecked by the authorities."

Max Linder's bride promptly showed an unbridled curiosity about such haunts. Back as early as the honeymoon trip, which took the bridal pair to Vienna, the comedian's eyes were opened, he said. In the gay city on the Danube, after a sojourn in one of the night resorts of the Austrian capital, Linder came home to his hotel and, his mind upset by the memory of scenes he had witnessed and in which he himself and his "guileless bride" had taken drunken part, he tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide.

The unmanly weakness of which he had been guilty in consenting to his wife's proposals to make this round of den of vice was soon increased by his drinking recourse to the false comforter, opium smoking and then morphine. Next after night would find them lying with others upon the broad circular divan of some gilded opium den, waited upon by Chinese. Or there would be a series of nights organized by various rendez-vous agencies to which they addressed themselves on their return to Paris.

That was Linder's story, denied by Jeanne's people, who say it was he who led her on.

At any rate Linder, who daily smirked into a camera lens and clownishly simpered and capered that millions might laugh, filled all his nights now with irresolute plan to murder "the demon who is eating my soul."

Jeanne sat down and, in deadly fear of death, wrote her will. It directed the fate of the baby girl that had been born in the midst of the marital nightmare: "Having been molested several times by my husband with a revolver I live in constant fear of being slain by him. If I die by his hand or by accident I will that my child Josette be confided immediately to the care of my mother. In no case must my child be surrendered to the care of my husband's relatives."

Jeanne fled to Switzerland. Max refused to forward funds to his fugitive spouse. And his claim was made, in the divorce proceedings which were begun before the fatal denouement of his life drama, that, secretly following Jeanne to Montreux, he and his detective aides discovered Jeanne supporting herself with the help of a hotel door-keeper who was helping individuals to her room.

It was on October 30, 1925, that death loosed the drug-crazed pair from the unendurable miseries of their own making. On the morrow the sordid divorce case was to have its first hearing. In the suit in the Hotel Baltimore which the couple had taken, Max and Jeanne had their supper at interview. All the world knows of that conversation that two pistol shots rang out and, when the door of the bedroom was forced, Jeanne was found lying on the bed while, still murmuring, but fatally wounded, the comedian lay at her feet, blood pouring from a wound in his temple.

A double suicide? Or murder, followed by suicide?

That was the dark question which the French courts were asked to answer. The baby, Josette, an appealing little curly headed blonde, was the bone of contention between the Peters and Linder families, both eager to undertake the guardianship of the baby girl and the

fortune she will inherit at maturity.

Maitre Paul-Boncour, the famous politician-lawyer, argued for the brother and mother of Max Linder; Miller and, one-time President of France, brought his prestige to the support of the claims of Mme Peters.

Said Maitre Paul-Boncour: "Among the letters found in the death chamber, to be dated after death, was this, in the hand-writing of Jeanne and written to her mother:

"Dear little mother, I ask pardon for all the pain I have given you—the pain I am about to give you

"Console yourself with the thought that now my suffering ends and transfer your affection to our little doll-baby, who will need it.

"Your Jeanne, who hurts so bad!"

As for Miller, he countered: "A month before the deaths, Linder met his wife in Lyon, as he was returning from Switzerland and said:

"The time all is over, I'll have your skin. All I really in Paris I'll put your pretty face to the bonnet trial. And I'll do honor you to the bonnet trial."

As for Max Linder, all was being told of his wife's conduct. Miller and his associates as "the lunatic ravings of a drug-fiend."

And after hearing all the evidence, the French courts gave little Josette to Max Linder's brother, ruling out Jeanne's kin from her care, not passing on who was to blame, but for the reason that Linder was the last to die.

Scarcely a single Paris newspaper



Max Linder and His Bride on Their Wedding Day.

Night After Night the Comic Star of the Films and His Wife Would Visit the "Exclusive" Opium Dens of Paris and, Lying With Others Upon the Luxurious Circular Divans That Are a Feature of These Places, Would Be Waited Upon by the Chinese Who Ran Them, and From Opium They Went to the Other More Deadly Drugs That at Last Destroyed Them.

the son of Parisians a figure new to the dramatic personnel of a French civic body—the vice-crusader. The Abbe Bethlem, a humble figure in a rusty old costume, with the eyes of a prophet in the face of a fanatic, began his now famous raids on Paris news-stands and book-shops showing suggestive art or selling suggestive publications. Howls of derision greeted his first outbreaks. Two young French writers, of the noisy self-advertising set of the "super-realists" saw a chance for sudden fame and retaliated on the unpopular Abbe by going into the St. Sulpice quarter and destroying some church publications and religious symbols displayed in a show window of a firm of religious publishers.

One section of the Paris press greeted the vandal as the witest sort of jokers, and their trial, at which they were very properly condemned, was turned into a sort of triumphant demonstration in their favor.

Encouraged by the event, the two youths decided to appeal their case, basing it on the fact that the Abbe Bethlem had been much less severely punished for his offenses. They set out to turn the appeal hearing into the same sort of jolly celebration that ended the trial. They persuaded a group of stage favorites to "get in on the publicity" by appearing to testify in smart epigrams that there was nothing indecent in the displays of the boulevard news-stands and that they were far more shocked by certain religious posters and symbols than by the nude ladies of the magazine covers. It was all to be too funny for words.

Then came the Linder trial and the sudden veering of public opinion. The Abbe Bethlem, who attended the trial, came out of the courtroom smiling broadly. And the popular favorites, who had gaily posed for the camera-men on the way in, evaporated one by one as they came out, and are doubtless wishing very hard that there were no such thing as witty practical jokers under the sun.

The tide of public opinion has turned in Paris for the moment, and on it M. Chiappe, with the Abbe Bethlem quietly grinning from the sidelines, is leading the bewildered police force in a series of clean-up raids, which will be as futile as similar spasmodic outbreaks of righteousness have been in the past.