

Tragic Memories.

MADAME STEINHEIL'S LIFE STORY

On April 18th, under the title of "My Memories" Mme. Marguerite Steinheil gave her life story to the world. When first we behold her she is five years old, happiest of children, adoring—and adored by—her mother and father, M. and Mme. Japy. At the age of twenty she marries M. Steinheil, twenty years her senior, a cousin of Meissonier and himself a painter—but colourless in character as in his work, a man "sans volonté," a weakling, the very last companion for the young, vivacious, and brilliant Marguerite—"Meg," as she is familiarly called. A year after marriage there takes place a domestic rupture so serious, so complete that when matters of importance have to be discussed, M. and Mme. Steinheil, although living under the same roof, discuss those matters by letter; the correspondence being carried from room to room by Mariette Wolff, the wrinkled, brown-faced old cook.

M. Steinheil produces mediocre pictures in his studio, whilst Madame entertains so charmingly, so brilliantly that her salon becomes one of the favourite places of rendezvous of "le Tout Paris," Cabinet ministers, judges, magistrates, elegant worldlings, everyone "who counts" in the Amazing City takes tea in the tastefully-furnished house in the Impasse Ronsin. Here is Zola. Over there are Massenet, Boumet, Anatole France, Pierre Loti, Francois Coppee, President Felix Faure meets Mme. Steinheil, and immediately is captivated by her wit and beauty. "Flowers and invitations are rained" upon her from the Elysee. She becomes the President's confidante, even his counsellor. Until the sudden death in 1898 of Felix Faure, Mme. Steinheil is the "Queen of Paris." But ten years later, during the night of the 30th and 31st May, 1908, the elegant, the much sought-after house in the Impasse Ronsin is the scene of the appalling double murder of M. Steinheil and his mother-in-law, Mme. Japy; and "le Tout Paris" shuns the salon, and terrible insinuations are made here, there, and everywhere against Mme. Steinheil.

In November of 1908, arrest of the "Queen of Paris" on the charge of strangling her husband and her mother. For a whole year she remains in prison, is bullied and distracted by M. Andre, the examining magistrate. After an eleven days' trial in the dim, stifling, oak-panelled Paris Assize Court, Mme. Steinheil is acquitted. And she seeks refuge in England, where she begins the writing of her Memoirs.

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS.

In the short compass of a newspaper article it is impossible to do justice to one of the most dramatic, one of the most extraordinary autobiographies ever presented to the public. Four hundred and seventy pages, and not a page that does not thrill or mystify, excite pity or indignation, set one marvelling at the social, political, and judicial life of the Third French Republic. The Affaire Steinheil is as complicated as the Dreyfus Affair, and no less ugly and sinister. It bewilders, it terrifies, it depresses; and finally Mme. Steinheil leaves it where it originally was—a ghastly, and impenetrable mystery.

As in the Paris Assize Court, Mme. Steinheil here declares that the assassins of her mother and her husband were three men in black robes and a red-haired woman, who, ere committing the double crime, bound her (Mme. Steinheil) down to her bed and dealt her so violent a blow that she lost consciousness. Money and jewellery were carried away—but for the first time Mme. Steinheil now expresses the opinion that the assassins had come in search of certain private documents belonging to the late Felix Faure which they knew to be hidden in the house of the Impasse Ronsin. These documents were the President's Memoirs, a "secret history" of the Third Republic, in which Mme. Steinheil had collaborated during her almost daily visits to the Elysee. The President had begged her to remove them to her own home for safety. They were of the highest political significance. And there was a conspiracy on foot to obtain possession of them.

For pages and pages Mme. Steinheil holds forth upon these documents and also upon a mysterious pearl necklace given to her by Felix Faure, which was also coveted by "conspirators." As in the Dreyfus affair, any amount of vague, shadowy conspirators—particularly a

"mysterious German," who lurked about the Impasse Ronsin and, after the murder, disappeared, and has been seen no more. From this point onwards in Mme. Steinheil's volume, one lives in an atmosphere of the dizziest incoherency and mystery. The Yellow Journalists of Paris invade her house, threaten and terrify her until, in her desperation, she loses her head and makes all kinds of false accusations.

A disgrace to France are the methods of the Examining Magistrate and the tactics of certain French yellow journalists. Some of these actually plot to kidnap Mdlle. Marthe Steinheil and keep her a prisoner in a country house and the plot is only discovered and frustrated in the very nick of time. The "dossier" against Mme. Steinheil, prepared by the examining magistrate, numbers 15,000 pages—2 million words; and through studying the dossier the unhappy woman discovers that friends and acquaintances once so eager to pay court to the "Queen of Paris" in the Impasse Ronsin salon now repudiate and calumniate her, that her replies to the examining magistrate have been distorted and that her past life (yes; even at the age of five!) has been so misrepresented as to make her out a monster of "lepravity."

For weeks, Mme. Steinheil lies in a nursing home in the country—the Yellow Journalists introducing themselves into that establishment under all kinds of pretexts and in all manner of disguises. Then, one night, the journey to London in the charge of a doctor, but London has been informed of the "Tragic Widows" arrival.

A PROJECTED "DISAPPEARANCE."

But if Mme. Steinheil's autobiography is crammed with drama, tragedy, and mystery, throughout it there runs a note of poetry, of humour, of sound common-sense. Without the latter quality, how could she have been the counsellor and confidante of the late Felix Faure! Dur-

ing the Fashoda crisis and in the early frenzied days of the Dreyfus Affair, he told her all his fears, anxieties, woes. Had it remained with the President of the Republic, England and France would have been at war.

But of Mme. Steinheil, he had an extraordinary idea. Once whilst at Havre, the President invited her, her sister, and a friend to take an afternoon sea-trip on his yacht. When some way from shore he led Mme. Steinheil aside and said—"There are supplies and coal on this vessel for many days. We are going to cruise for a week or so. Let those who are responsible for the present state of affairs extricate themselves as best they can from the disgraceful position in which they have placed themselves—and me." The "present state of affair" was the Dreyfus Affair—and Felix Faure, a confirmed anti-Dreyfusard, was "blind with anger." It needed all Mme. Steinheil's powers of persuasion to induce Felix Faure to return to harbour. She told him, "A President cannot disappear for a week."

Through Felix Faure's influence, Mme. Steinheil secured all kinds of Government appointments for her friends—who promptly deserted and repudiated her after the Impasse Ronsin murders.

After being the "elegant," the "brilliant" Mme. Steinheil (after being—to her friends—the "radiant" and "irresistible" "Meg") she becomes the "Tragic Widow," and the "Red Widow," and (in the words of savage, hoarse-voiced old Henri Rochefort "the Black Panther." Never—even in Paris—such a life story. Never such a history of intrigues sentimental, political, judicial; of mysteries sombre and lurid; of power, triumph, and terrific downfall. But... Mme. Steinheil has triumphed once again. At the close of her "Memoirs" she writes—"I cannot doubt that by now my innocence is established in the eyes of the reader; I even venture to believe that I may have won his, or her, sympathy."

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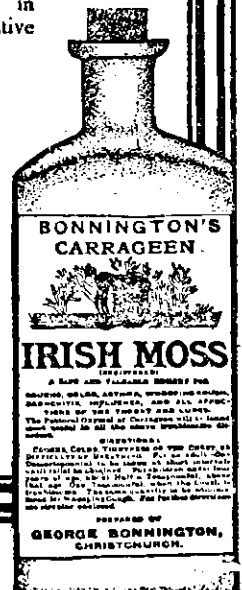
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