SYDNEY'S MOST DANGEROUS WOMAN: SWORN IN AS A J.P. WHILE AWAITING TRIAL

PHILOMENA BEST, WHO CLAIMED MINISTER OF CROWN AS FRIEND, GAOLED FOR THEFT

Vile Accusations against Police Inspector and Sergeant and White Slavery Charges against her victim mark most sensational criminal trial of the year

CHIEF CROWN WITNESS NEARLY BLOWN TO DEATH

ON FRIDAY, February 4, at No. 1 Darlinghurst Courthouse, Philomena Mary Best, of 38 Great Buckingham Street, Redfern (Sydney), was sworn in as a J.P. by Judge Cohen, who congratulated her on her appointment.

THREE WEEKS LATER—on Friday, February 25—in No. 2 Court, Judge Edwards sent the same Philomena Mary Best to prison for 12 months.

THE PREVIOUS morning, passing her at the rear of the Court, the same Judge doffed his hat to her. She was then in custody.

It is presumed it was a case of mistaken identitty.

IT IS A coincidence that the official who witnessed her signature to her two oaths as a J.P. was the same who three weeks later asked her if she had anything to say why sentence should not be passed on her.

ANOTHER STRANGE aspect of the case was that when Mrs. Best presented herself at Darlinghurst to be sworn in as a J.P., she was then under committal for trial. Moreover, she had been committed before the official publication of her elevation. Place of her committal was Bourke and the venue laid down was the Bourke Quarter Sessions.

JUDGE ARMSTRONG is the chairman of those Sessions. No Quarter Sessions Judge is more popular with Sydney lawyers whose practice is in the Criminal Courts. Consequently, when it was learned that Mrs. Best's lawyer preferred a trial in Sydney before another Judge, the uninformed wondered why.

There is a reason!

The Police Court charge sheet was not very informative. It merely set forth that at Bourke, between November 5 and 10, 1926, she stole dresses, towels, ribbons, etc., to the value of less than £40, the property of Namut Khan, an elderly Indian storekeeper.

Mrs. Best lived at 38 Great Buckingham Street, Redfern, and kept a residential. Prior to November last, two occupants of the residential were Elsie and Evelyn Hicks, sisters, aged 19 and 16 years.

It was through these girls that Mrs. Best came into touch with Namut Khan.

The girls met Khan on November 2, outside 193 Elizabeth Street, opposite Redfern Park. Khan was down from Bourke on business, and put up with fellow countrymen in the Indian and Syrian "district," which overlooks Redfern Park, a stone's throw from Mrs. Best's residential.

LEFT BOURKE SUDDENLY

Both girls wanted to go to Bourke to work for Khan. He decided on Elsie, aged 19. The terms of the engagements were arranged at 38 Great Buckingham Street. Elsie was to assist in Khan's store at £1 a week and her keep. She went to Bourke with Khan.

Khan's version of Mrs. Best's appearance in Bourke was that she had friends there and, deciding to have a holiday, asked Khan, and received from him, part of her train fare.

Mrs. Best's story was that Khan engaged her for a brief period to help him mark new stock at £4/15/- a week, and she spent a considerable portion of her time in Khan's store. Khan said her pretence was to see that Elsie was being treated all right.

Mrs. Best left Bourke suddenly. Subsequently, at the Bourke Police Station, and later at Darlinghurst, she explained her sudden departure. She endeavoured to picture the elderly Namut Khan as an "Old Sultan," and raised the question of "White Slaver."

Mrs. Best stayed 10 days in Bourke. Judged by the depletion of Khan's stock, she had a busy time there.

Unknown to Khan, she carried on an extensive parcel post trade. Khan's stock was carried through the post, addressed to fictitious persons, which persons were very much alive. Evelyn Hicks got her wants supplied. Parcels were addressed to the Paddington Post

Hicks got her wants supplied. Parcels were addressed to the Paddington Post Office, the Redfern Post Office, the railway station, and the Paddington Police Station, addressed to Plain-clothes Constable Hayes. Altogether, Hayes received seven parcels from Bourke containing Khan's stolen goods.

On her oath, at Darlinghurst, Mrs. Best swore that Hayes ("Jim," sometimes Albert Hayes) was her first cousin.

GIRL GIVEN SECOND CHANCE

Khan did not awaken to what had happened until Elsie Hicks left him suddenly. He missed money and stock, and caused her to be arrested at Nyngan. Subsequently she appeared before the magistrate at Bourke, and was fined £2 or 14 days' imprisonment.

Police at Bourke knew Khan as a decent, law-abiding citizen. They urged Khan to give the girl a chance. He did. He paid her fine, and re-employed her.

Khan, and others in Bourke, then realised that Elsie Hicks had been a tool in the hands of Mrs. Best. Her letters to the girl from Sydney, instructing her what to steal from Khan's stock, set the police to work.

On November 22, armed with a search warrant, Police Inspector Linegar and Sergeant J. J. Lynch went to 38 Great Buckingham Street. Mrs. Best denied that any stolen property was on the premises, but she lied. Hidden everywhere was Khan's stolen stock. The greater portion of this stock had been taken delivery of by Constable Hayes, and handed to the woman by him.

Mrs. Best's arrest followed. From Sydney she was remanded to Bourke.

There she arrived before the police from Sydney. They got to Bourke only to find that Mrs. Best had got Elsie under control, and it was evident from the noise made at the Bourke Police Court that Khan was in for a torrid time, and that if the allegations made against him were accepted by a jury of white men, his finish was in sight.

But Mrs. Best was a desperate as well as a dangerous woman.

She openly boasted of her influence with a Minister of the Crown, and the ease with which she could get an audience with him.

She had indicated what she proposed doing with Khan when he stood in the witness-box. The suggestion that the aged storekeeper was a white slaver, and that she had fled from him when he had made overtures to her was enough to make an Oriental in White Australia shrink from the consequences.

FLEW AT HIGHER GAME

But Mrs. Best flew at higher game. She made an accusation against Inspector Linegar. Needless to remark, the fact that a nasty accusation had been made by a woman against a police inspector was eagerly seized by a Sunday scavenger, which said just sufficient to place the inspector in a false light, even if the prurient, muck-raking print had the decency to convey to its readers that the woman was thoroughly discredited. The following Sunday the same gutter-press featured a double-column photograph of Mrs. Best, and her public statement that she had not been permitted to tell her story at the inquiry.

As a matter of fact, no investigation was made into the woman's accusation against Inspector Linegar. It was unnecessary.

What, however, was done was to hold an inquiry into the part played by Constable Hayes. That inquiry concluded when Philomena Mary Best was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. She gave her version then, and a jury disbelieved her.

"FRAME UP" THAT CRASHED

It was Hayes who now stood in jeopardy. Originally he had been stationed at Redfern, and subsequently he was transferred to Paddington. He was regarded as a smart plain-clothes man.

When the thinly-veiled accusation of impropriety against Linegar fell flat, Sergeant Lynch, of No. 3 Station, received attention. A "frame-up"—an accusation of corruption, coupling his name with an Oxford Street business man—was tried on. It crashed. But it revealed Hayes as having attempted the official assassination of the sergeant.

In the meantime Mrs. Best had been sworn in a J.P. A Redfern police sergeant had certified her to be of good character. He knew nothing against her.

Her luck was in in that respect. Other police sergeants at Redfern knew her—not as Philomena Mary Best, but by another name—a woman of shady character and a frequenter of Chinese and Oriental dens in Redfern, and Waterloo, and Botany. That she visited Chinese at Botany she admitted on oath. Then she said she went on business with her husband. The latter, however, was absent from the trial.

Next move made was to secure a change of venue of the trial from Bourke to Sydney. It sounded reasonable that whereas Mrs. Best and the witnesses for her defence resided in Sydney, she should not be put to the expense of going to Bourke for trial. The Crown agreed.

The truth of the matter is Mrs. Best was fully aware that the "White Slavery" charge could not be sustained in Bourke, because out west old Khan had a decent reputation. A Sydney

Bourke, because out west old Khan had a decent reputation. A Sydney jury might accept it. As it happened, it did not.

Mrs. Best's trial was accordingly fixed for Wednesday, February 23, Mrs. Best knew it. So did Hayes.

Namut Khan, at Bourke, was ad-

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ABOUT 2 a.m. on the morning that Khan was due to appear as chief Crown witness against Best, a terrific explosion occurred at the house in which he and several other Indians were sleeping.

Enormous damage was done to this and over a dozen properties in the vicinity, but strangely enough neither Khan nor any other inmate of the house in which he was sleeping, was injured!

Police are inquiring.



CONSTABLE HAYES





NAMUT KHAN

PHILOMENA BEST, WHO CLAIMED MINISTER OF CROWN AS FRIEND

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vised to come to Sydney. He arrived early on Tuesday morning. Sergt. Lynch met him. Khan was taken to the home of a countryman at 193 Elizabeth Street, Redfern.

A man and a woman saw Khan arrive at Sydney station and saw Lynch meet him. Immediately the man and woman made a hurried departure. However, Khan's whereabouts became known.

Early on Wednesday morning a gelignite explosion took place at Elizabeth Street. It was in front of this shop that early last November Elsie and Evelyn Hicks met Namut Khan.

Where Mrs. Best resided, 38 Great Buckingham Street, is just across the park.

That the idea was to blow Namut Khan to eternity there cannot be the slightest doubt.

Inspector Linegar survived the allegation made against him by Mrs. Best.

Sergeant Lynch emerged with honour untarnished from the "frame-up."

Namut Khan lived to give evidence against Mrs. Best, evidence which a jury believed.

There still remained "the white slavery" stunt. Khan admitted giving Elsie Hicks a ring, but he didn't know whether it was a wedding ring. Did he ask Elsie to marry him? No, she asked him to marry her.

JUDGE'S SCATHING COMMENT

The police were early astir on Wednesday morning, following the explosion. Elsie and Evelyn Hicks were taken to the Detective Office to disclose what they knew, if they knew anything, of the explosion. And it was left to the police to spring a surprise on the female J.P. in the dock.

Elsie Hicks confessed that she and Mrs. Best robbed Khan, and that Mrs. Best instigated her to steal! When this admission was made in Court bang went the defence.

Before Philomena went to gaol she heard the Judge denounce her as a wicked woman. She also heard the Judge give a certificate of fairmindedness and honour to Sergeant

Judge give a certificate of fairmindedness and honour to Sergeant Lynch. He, it happened, was pictured by Mrs. Best as a cowardly man who sought to trap, bully, and terrify "a good woman." Police view her as Sydney's most dangerous woman.

They also know that it will not be from her lips that information will come which will enable them to fasten the guilt of the murderous gelignite outrage on those responsible.