

Mother and Daughter in Tears As Clothing of Mary Phagan Is Exhibited in Courtroom

Solicitor Dorsey stood before Detective Starnes at the witness box yesterday afternoon and held to view a lavender frock with a bit of pink ribbon at each shoulder. In the hand that was lowered at his side he held a wee slipper.

"Do you recognize this dress?" he put to the witness.

"I do."

"To whom did it belong?"

"To Mary Phagan, the girl who was killed in the National Pencil factory."

Mother and Daughter Sob.

A moist-eyed woman, gray beginning to fleck her hair and betray her fifty years looked sadly upon the articles in the solicitor's hands. Her daughter beside her strove bravely to check her tears, but bowed her head in a sobbing fit she could not restrain.

They were Mrs. J. W. Coleman, Mary Phagan's mother, and Mary's sister, Ollie. Ollie could not remain in the courtroom and her mother lowered her head in tears as the lawyer displayed, piece by piece, every article of the slain child's garments.

The solicitor held each bit of the girl's apparel in view of the entire courtroom for identification from the witness. As Starnes would signify that he recognized the articles before him the solicitor would say:

"This is such and such an article identified as having been worn by Mary Phagan on the day of her death. Is it admissible as evidence?"

Counsel for the defense would group their heads together at their table, nod consent, and Judge Roan, upon the bench, would say:

"Admitted as evidence."

It was a cruel proceeding, no doubt thought the mother and sister, but one made necessary by law. Many of the pieces they recognized, recalling with a tear the days they worked with thread and needle to fit Mary in the best their talents and home could afford.

Proud of Her Work.

And Mary, herself, had been a competent seamstress. She had always been making something and, whether it was doll clothing or her own dresses, she was always proud of it.

There the lawyer held in his hand the pink frock which had gladdened the little girl's heart and which she had intended wearing to Marietta the next Monday. He had one of her shoes—the pair she, herself, had selected and contributed a dollar of her wages toward the purchase—and was

waiting to display when the dress was admitted.

Mrs. Coleman was crying softly—what mother, who had lost a loving daughter could have held back her tears! It was the first time she had ever been in a courtroom—she had always striven to avoid them.

People stared at them all the while. The mother and daughter sat conspicuously, as the only seats they could find were two selected for them on the rostrum. Everywhere they looked eyes would be focussed upon them.

But, even the gaze of the morbid—the sensation-seeking court auditor whom you will find at every tragedy—melted into a warming look of sympathy as his eyes met those of the sorrowing mother and sister.

Garbed in Black.

They were garbed in black—black from head to foot with no relief. Heavy, dark veils fell over their faces, and they lifted them only to dab a handkerchief to filling eyes. Mrs. Coleman has said to reporters—and so has Ollie—that they would not be at the trial were they not subpoenaed as witnesses. It is as hard for them to bear as the tragedy itself, for every phase of the proceedings brings memory of that bleak and unforgettable day when the little girl next door ran over at daybreak and said to the home-folks of Marys:

"Oh, Mrs. Coleman—Mary's been killed at the pencil factory!"

Monday morning Mrs. Coleman was the first witness called to the stand. She walked weakly and had to be assisted into the box. She whispered replies and choked back the catches in her throat. When the solicitor held the clothing of Mary before her eyes, asked her if they had been worn by the child, she tried to answer.

Breaks Down in Tears.

A sob was in her throat and a tear welled into her eye. She drew the handkerchief to her face and broke into weeping. The solicitor, as though his task were fully as distasteful as it looked, dropped the arguments to his table and began now questions.

Even Attorney Rosser, whose cross-questioning is feared by the strongest witnesses, put his questions to the sobbing mother in a tone in which his sympathy was most evident. He asked barely a half dozen questions, then said:

"You may come down, Mrs. Coleman," without giving the state a chance for examination in rebuttal, knowing that even such a relentless thing as the state would not wish to further persecute the bereaved parent.