STUDIES IN
MURDER

BY

EDMUND PEARSON

I met Murder on the way—
He had a mask like Castlereagh:
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him:

All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew.

THE MASQUE OF ANARCHY

THE
MODERN LIBRARY
NEW YORK

EDMUND LESTER PEARSON

(1880-1937)

A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR OF "STUDIES IN MURDER"

As one of the first writers of books and essays about actual cases of murder, Edmund Pearson established what has become a school, if not an industry, of criminological literature. His training in this special field did not follow the fictional tradition of famous detectives. Edmund Pearson was professionally a librarian and a bibliophile. He conducted a column in the *Boston Evening Transcript* devoted to the problems of public librarians. Subsequently he became Editor of Publications of the New York Public Library and the Literary Editor of the *Outlook*. His service on the Federal Grand Jury exposing rackets in New York City, and on a special panel to probe homicides and many other crimes during the Seabury investigation, provided him with many case histories. As a steady contributor to magazines, he became known almost exclusively as an authority on crime. But many bibliophiles best remember him as the author of *The Old Librarian's Almanack, The Library and the Librarian, Queer Books, The Librarian at Play, The Secret Book* and *Dime Novels.* Readers of murder stories, however, have shown their preference for *Studies in Murder, Five Murders* and *Instigation of the Devil.* Edmund Pearson died on August 8, 1937.

CONTENTS

THE BORDEN CASE

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook

THE BORDEN CASE

THE Borden case is without parallel in the criminal history of America. It is the most interesting, and perhaps the most puzzling murder which has occurred in this country. There are in it all the elements which make such an event worth reading about, since, in the first place, it was a mysterious crime in a class of society where such deeds of violence are not only foreign, but usually wildly impossible. It was purely a problem in murder, not complicated by scandals of the kind which lead to the *crime passionel,* nor by any of the circumstances of the political assassination. The evidence was wholly circumstantial. The perpetrator of the double murder was protected by a series of chances which might not happen again in a thousand years. And, finally, the case attracted national attention, and divided public opinion, as no criminal prosecution has done since—nor, to the best of my belief, as any murder trial in the United States had ever done before. People have become disputatious, even quarrelsome, over the probability of a verdict, one way or the other, over the justice of a verdict rendered, or over the wisdom of a commutation of sentence, in cases in which there was no doubt at all as to the identity of the

slayer. In many celebrated cases the actual murder has been done openly and in public.

But during the investigation of the Borden mystery, and during the thirteen days of the trial, families throughout the United States were divided upon the question, and argued its points with a vehement interest for which no comparison suggests itself to me except the excitement in France over the Dreyfus case. And since there were no political and no racial matters at issue, there becomes apparent the extraordinary fascination of this case as a problem in human character and in human relations.

A murder may attract national attention for any one of a number of reasons. The actors may be persons of good position and respectability, as in the slaying of Dr. Parkman by Professor Webster, which amazed everybody in the days of our grand-parents, and is still discussed by many writers on criminology. In later days, those who follow the art of yellow journalism became agitated about that miserable affair in the Madison Square Garden in 1906. In this was no mystery whatever, and there would have been little interest except for the publicity of the crime, the scandals which attended it, and the fact that the victim was famous, and the other persons notorious. Otherwise, it was cheap and shabby; a carnival for the Sunday supplements. The warfare of gamblers, half a dozen years later, which came to a climax in front of the Hotel Metropole in New York, was really an incident in the history of municipal corruption; the killing of Rosenthal belongs in the class of crimes committed during feuds, rather than that of private murders. The lonely

death of Mr. Elwell in his own home, was the subject of great interest; the opening chapter from a novel by Anna Katharine Green had been translated into reality. But it happened upon the verge of a world where such events are neither rare nor astonishing. More unusual was that scene in De Russey's Lane, New Brunswick, upon whose horrors the discoverer casually wandered, as if stepping upon a stage laden with the dreadful quarry of an Elizabethan tragedy.

No one of these, I venture to assert, equals in peculiar interest the Borden murders in Fall River. Here were concerned neither gamblers, wasters, nor criminals, but quiet folk of a kind known to all of us. They were not members of a class among which killing is a matter of momentary impulse. They were so obscure that except for the event which put their names upon everybody's lips, we should never have heard of them. They became important in the light of what happened; the case was not like a play by a lazy dramatist who shirks his work of creation, and fills his scene with personages already famous. The crime itself—unexpected, hideous, unexplained —was the central point of interest. When the trial came to an end, ten months later, and the jury considered their verdict, there was before them, of course, only the task of answering, by yes or no, the question: was the accused person guilty? Apparently, they had little trouble in finding an answer to this, but the verdict did not clear up the astonishing puzzle. If, instead of a jury bound by our laws, they had been a committee of inquiry, charged with discovering an explanation of the crime, their task would

have been as perplexing as anything which twelve men ever attempted. Each of the principal theories advanced at the time had its dark and doubtful points, and was moreover, as many reasonable men believed, in itself grossly improbable, and nearly contrary to human experience. Hardly ever was a murder committed where the limits of time and space so closed in upon the act, leaving such a narrow gap for the assassin to slip through to security.

The name Borden is found in all parts of the United States. It has been honorably associated with more than one important business, and in Canada two of the names have been eminent in politics. Many of the American Bordens are descendants of Richard and Joan Borden who came from England in 1638 to live in Rhode Island. In that State, and even more in the adjoining county of Bristol, Massachusetts (which includes the cities of Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton), the Bordens have always been numerous. The name has often been associated with that of Durfee. In 1778, when Fall River was attacked by a detachment of British troops, a Major Durfee led the citizens in a successful defence. Two of the houses burned during the fight were owned by men named Borden; one of these men was captured. In 1844, a Borden and a Durfee represented the district in the Legislature; and, in 1892, the year of the tragedy, these family names were borne by one or the other of the victims. Orin Fowler's "History of Fall River," in 1841, mentions the name Borden as second in frequency in the town. When the

name came into painful notoriety in 1892, there were a hundred and twenty-five Bordens—representing, of course, many more than that—listed in the Fall River directory. It is illustrative of the frequency of the name that the indictment for murder, found in that year against a Borden, should have been attested by two others of the name, father and son, clerk and assistant clerk of the Superior Court, but not related to the accused person.

Fall River, like Dover or Calais, is one of those cities to which few go for its own sake, compared with the thousands who pass through on their way elsewhere. To the traveler into New England from New York or the South, it is associated with the name of a steamship line, and with an early morning change from boat to train. Reuben Paine, the hero of Mr. Kipling's "Rhyme of the Three Sealers," as he lay dying in the fogs of Bering Sea, let his mind travel far over the world to regret:

> No more I'll see the trawlers drift below the
> Bass Rock ground,
> Or watch the tall Fall steamer lights tear blazing
> up the Sound.

And if nobody except Reuben Paine, that I have heard of, ever referred to them as "Fall steamers," it is best to remember not only the exigencies of verse, but that the sight of the Fall River boats, from either shore of Long Island Sound at night, or from the water, is one that might well return to a man after many years. Current and local speech has not always been so respectful toward this steamship line, but Mr. Conrad Aiken has not hesi-

tated to make one of the Sound steamers the scene of a poetical romance of much beauty.

The overwhelming importance of one industry, the manufacture of cotton goods, is perhaps what has prevented Fall River from becoming either interesting or attractive. It has its full complement of ugly streets, but of pleasant ones, fewer than such cities as Providence and Salem. Any American can see the town in his mind's eye, for there is a tedious similarity in places of this size; and the fact has been noted in the saying that West Newton, Massachusetts, extends all the way to the Pacific Coast. All have their Main Streets, under that name or another. Fall River has both the name and the thing itself. In 1892 there were a few more trees and a few less brick buildings upon it; the street-cars were not so noisy nor so many; the motion picture theatre, the motor-car and the traffic policeman were still to arrive. Otherwise it looked nearly as it does to-day. The city had not then grown to have a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants, but there were about seventy-five thousand, already including many of foreign birth, who were helping the native-born in their work, and sometimes perplexing them, and rendering them doubtful of the blessing of their presence. Citizens whose families had long been established in this country were inclined, as always, to suspect that any unusual offence was necessarily the deed of "some of those foreigners," forgetting the strange twists and distortions of which the oldest American stock has sometimes shown itself capable.

The newspapers of August, 1892, curiously prim and

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook

almost quaint to us to-day, contained small matter for excitement in that hot, dull season. There were speculations upon Mr. Cleveland's popularity; he was about to turn the tables on President Harrison, and defeat him in the November election. Mr. Gladstone's health was not too good. That aspiring sportsman, the Emperor Wilhelm, was racing his yacht at Cowes. John L. Sullivan was training for his last fight—with Corbett. From the port of Palos had set forth a replica of the caravel *Santa Maria,* to take part in the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery. Chicago was raising money for its World's Fair, and hoping that the cholera, reported in distant parts of Europe, was not coming as a guest. There were echoes of the Homestead strike and riot; Mr. Frick was recovering from the assault which had nearly ended his life. The *Teutonic* had broken the ocean record by crossing from Queenstown to New York in five days and eighteen hours. And the London police had caught a strange and terrible creature, named Neill Cream, and in great perplexity were uncovering a series of crimes, fiendish and inexplicable.

On the intensely hot morning of Thursday, August 4, 1892, something more than an hour before noon, an elderly gentleman named Andrew Jackson Borden was walking through South Main Street, Fall River. He was returning to his home which was only a few steps from the principal business street, and little more than around the corner from the City Hall, and the center of the town. It is probable that his mind was chiefly concerned

with business, or with his family affairs, which were disconcerting. For the personages mentioned in the morning newspapers, and for the events described in them, it is fair to suppose he had no thought. So securely is the future hidden from us, that there is no way to imagine the astonishment which would have been his, could he have had any intimation not alone of the sufficiently startling fact that the remainder of his life time was then numbered by minutes, but that his name was to engage his countrymen's attention, for weeks and months to come, as if he were somebody of national importance.

However little he may have been known elsewhere, in his own town he was certainly not obscure. He was president of the Union Savings Bank, director in one or two other banks, and a director in various companies, including the Merchants Manufacturing Company, the Globe Yarn Mills, the B. M. C. Durfee Safe Deposit and Trust Company, and the Troy Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company. His business affairs had taken him on that morning to one or more of these banks. In his early life he had been an undertaker, and either that, or the gloomy custom of mankind, led him to dress in black, and in black clothes he trudged along on this tropically hot morning. His hair was white, for he was about seventy years of age, and he wore a fringe of white whiskers under his chin and along the angle of the jaw. His expression could be kindly, but it was stern; the thin lips—he wore no moustache—met in a way that denoted a stubborn character. The New England phrase is suggested: "He was as set as the everlasting hills of Zion." I have heard

him described by one who remembers him coming from his farm—a tall and erect old man, in his black clothes, carrying a little basket of eggs. That last bit is significant; Mr. Borden owned farms across the Taunton River, in addition to more than one house in the city. He had built one of the best office buildings in Fall River and the value of his estate was between $250,000 and $300,000. Yet he was not averse to bringing a few eggs to town, and selling them to some dealer. His manner of living had not changed as he rose from lesser things to greater, from one small business to financial power which, in that time and place, was not so different from that of a millionaire in a large city to-day. His was the melancholy lot of a man grown old in the treadmill of business, with no idea that life could be enjoyed, and no diversion except the further accumulation of money. Yet a just and honorable man, respected by everybody, and loved, perhaps, by one woman. He lived simply—many would say narrowly—in a small wooden house, Number 92 (now 230) Second Street.

Mr. Borden had married twice. His first wife was a Miss Sarah A. Morse, by whom he had three children. After the death of the first Mrs. Borden, he married in 1865, Miss Abby Durfee Gray, who was six years younger than himself, and therefore in 1892 about sixty-four years old. With Mr. and Mrs. Borden there lived the two surviving daughters by the first marriage, Miss Emma L. Borden, about forty-one years old, and Miss Lizzie Andrew Borden, about thirty-two. These four persons, with a servant named Bridget Sullivan, made up the family at the Borden home.

On August 4th, however, Miss Emma Borden was visiting some friends in Fairhaven, but the number in the house in Second Street remained the same, since John Vinnicum Morse, a brother of the first Mrs. Borden, had arrived the day before for a short visit. This was a man of sixty years, who lived in Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Visits to Fall River and to the Borden house were frequent with him after his return to New England from twenty years spent as a farmer in Iowa. Serious and disturbing as the consequences of this visit were to Mr. Morse, it is almost impossible to regard his casual appearance in the household, on this occasion, without amusement. Arriving, quite without baggage, on August 3rd, and solemnly pursuing for about twenty-four hours the objects of his visit—which seem to have been calls upon other relatives and the inspection of Mr. Borden's farms —he found himself entangled in events of the most dreadful and sensational nature. The innocent bystander proverbially deserves our sympathy, but seldom gets it. Excepting young Mr. Monks, embarking upon the *Herbert Fuller,* for health, rest, and recreation (as recorded later in this book) it is hard to recall any figure similar to that of John Vinnicum Morse.

Mr. Borden continued through South Main Street, up Borden Street, and thence—it could have been only a few minutes' walk, even for an elderly man—into Second Street. He arrived at his home at ten or fifteen minutes before eleven. He had some little difficulty getting admitted, going first to the side door and then to the front, (for it was a peculiar household as regards locks, bars,

and bolts) but at last he entered. Within about thirty minutes a report came to the police that Mr. Borden had died—by violence—and the investigation began.

Out of the mass of rumors and assertions, of charges and denials, it is necessary now to select certain facts which are generally admitted, and to trace the happenings of the week in Mr. Borden's home. It is useless to pretend that the family was either happy or contented. The presence in one home, of a step-mother and two daughters of mature years may be a fortunate combination with people of especially sunny disposition, but the Bordens seem to have been rather dour folk, to say the least. There was an aggrieved feeling about money on the part of the daughters, and this was of long standing. There was a perfectly comprehensible dissatisfaction with the manner of living, with the lack of such modern arrangements as a bath-room—which some parents then considered new-fangled, expensive and unnecessary. When all these difficulties were discussed in court, the best that could be done was to admit some of them, but vigorously to deny that they had any bearing on the murder, or that anything of importance could be deduced from them. But we have it, on the statement of a witness who was undisputed, that there was in the mind of that member of the family most concerned not to exaggerate the lack of harmony, a sense of impending disaster, and this only the night before the murder.

It had been a disturbing week. On Tuesday, August 2nd, Mr. and Mrs. Borden had been violently ill during the night. They were seized with vomiting. Miss Lizzie

Borden said that she herself was affected, but not so as to cause vomiting. She went, she said, to the bed-room door of the older people, and asked if she could be of any help to them, but the offer was declined. Mr. Morse who came to the house after the family had eaten their dinner, at noon, on Wednesday, was served with that meal, which he ate alone. He ate again at breakfast on Thursday with Mr. and Mrs. Borden, but seems to have suffered no harm, nor was there any other return of this mysterious sickness, except that the servant Bridget Sullivan, was, alone of the household, sick on Thursday morning, the day of the murder, when she went into the backyard where she vomited her breakfast.

On Wednesday afternoon, after his dinner, Mr. Morse went to Swansea, to Mr. Borden's farm. He returned to the house on Second Street after eight o'clock, and sat talking with Mr. and Mrs. Borden. Miss Lizzie Borden was paying a call in a neighboring street, upon Miss Alice Russell, a friend of the family. During this call there was a remarkable conversation. Miss Borden said that she had decided to follow Miss Russell's advice, and go to Marion for a vacation. But she was apprehensive and depressed. She said:

"I feel as if something was hanging over me that I cannot throw off."

She described Mr. and Mrs. Borden's sickness, the night before, and expressed a suspicion that the milk might have been intentionally poisoned! Miss Russell was incredulous, and in this there is little cause for wonder. The suggestion that some person, with the tendencies of

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook