

Mrs. Frank 'Fine, Brave Woman,' Slaton Opines; Silent on Case

By BOYD TAYLOR.

If former Governor John M. Slaton had any special knowledge on which he acted when he commuted the death sentence of Leo Frank to life imprisonment, as intimated by Judge Arthur G. Powell in his widely discussed book, he will take the secret with him to the grave.

"Whatever I might say now with regard to the Frank case would add fuel to the fires of controversy," the former Governor told The Constitution. "No good purpose can be served by such a statement now and I do not want to quarrel with anyone."

Although Slaton avoided any direct comment on this point, the reporter came away from the interview with the definite conviction that the former Governor was guided at the time by the firm belief that Frank's guilt was at least open to suspicion and that justice would be served by sparing the man's life.

Leo Frank had been accused of the murder of Mary Phagan and had been convicted on circumstantial evidence. Men who know Georgia law point out that in such cases the trial judge usually has the power to impose a life sentence.

"There is so much that people do not understand," explained Slaton in support of his avowed intention to remain aloof from any controversy.

"Sometimes it is difficult for the layman to realize that in Georgia the Governor was a part of the judicial system.

"Matters of clemency were not personal matters. Their performance was a duty and obligation of the official.

"No personal consideration entered into the Frank decision. I never saw Leo Frank. I never saw Mrs. Frank.

"But from the statement given by Mrs. Frank in an interview in The Constitution, I am convinced that she is a very fine, brave woman. The thoughts she uttered could never have come from an ordinary person.

"I was especially touched by her observation that you cannot run away from memories.

"I wish to commend the reporter who prepared that article. I realize that the most difficult thing in the world is to state something simply and so clearly that it can be understood in only one way. I would that I had

the reporter's facility in this line.

"If lawyers and others who draw up wills could express the true wishes of the person making the will, so much litigation and unfortunate bitterness in the world could be avoided. They can take a cue from the simplicity of expression and accuracy generally found in the modern daily newspaper."

Court Limitations.

The former governor, who, despite advanced years, conducts a large law practice from his suite in the 22 Marietta Street building, explained the limitations imposed by the Georgia constitution on the higher courts.

He pointed out one Georgia supreme court decision not related to the Frank case in which the high court announced it did not believe the convicted man guilty. Yet the only thing the supreme court could do in the matter was to grant a new trial. The court could not free the prisoner. On

second trial the accused was convicted again. The case finally ended when the governor granted a full pardon.

Slaton was in New York when the controversy over Judge Powell's book flared.

"Didn't Tell Anything."

"It seemed that every newspaper and every news agency in New York called me and insisted on an interview. I was called by long distance even from Atlanta and asked about the case," Slaton said.

"I didn't tell them anything."

The Constitution found the former governor at lunch in his private office.

"I brought it from home," he said. "For 35 years I have brought my lunch every day. Here you see a homemade sandwich, a hard-boiled egg from my own hen house and a bottle of milk from my own cow. The menu changes but little, but I can't beat it at any restaurant."