

"I AM NOT GUILTY," SAYS JOHN M. GANT

"I Was Not in Love With Mary and She Was Not With Me," Asserts Man Accused of Murder.

"I did not kill Mary Phagan. I haven't seen her within a month. They accuse me falsely. I'm innocent and will swear it by heaven above."

John M. Gant, the youthful book-keeper arrested on the charge of murdering Mary Phagan, sat in the detective chief's office at police headquarters last night, looked his questioners squarely in the eyes, and sweepingly denied all accusations.

"I went to Marietta to take charge of a farm I have bought. My folks live there. I had been planning to go for several weeks. Surely, the mere fact that I went to Marietta isn't proof conclusive that I killed the girl."

Faces the Detectives.

He talked frankly, never removing his gaze from the eyes of the detectives who quizzed him. He is a handsome youth, six feet and four inches tall, spare framed, active and supple limbed. His black, curly hair falls over the forehead, and is clipped closely in the back, while the forelocks are long and wavy.

An hour or so after he had been closeted with Chief Lanford and detective experts, he was admitted to the main room of the detectives' quarters, where he was permitted to talk to the newspaper reporters. He conversed frankly, answering questions promptly and freely.

"I'm not guilty. I might be a victim of circumstance, but they can't prove a thing on me. They might as well stop. It would save time and labor. If they'd devote the energy they're devoting to me to hunting the real murderer, they'd catch him a whole lot quicker."

There was a tone of sarcasm in his voice as he alluded to his accusers. He was not bitter, and seemed not the slightest perturbed over the predicament.

Saw Memorial Parade.

"Now, I'll tell you exactly what I did Saturday. First, I saw the Memorial parade. Then I got with some friends and we walked over town a little, here and there, but to no particular place. I was intending to leave town Monday. A pair of old shoes I had worn a month ago were down at the pencil factory. I used to work there, you know, and they were left on the first floor.

"I wanted to get them, and asked Mr. Frank, the president of the plant, if I could get into the building. He said I could, and referred me to the negro nightwatchman. I got into the building and found the shoes. I didn't stay but a short while. About 7:30 o'clock I met two friends. We went to a pool room uptown and played pool until 10:30 o'clock. I didn't play, but sat around and watched the other fellows. When I left the pool room, I went directly to my sister's home on Linden street. She met me at the door. I went straight to bed and was asleep almost the moment I hit the mattress."

Gant declares he did not see The Constitution's exclusive extra Sunday morning, and that he did not know of a murder until informed Sunday night of the story in the extra.

"Where were you when told of the murder?" he was asked.

Learns of the Murder.

"I got up late Sunday morning. That night, I went to see Miss Annie Chambers, of 18 Warren place, with whom I have been going ever since Christmas. We were sitting in the parlor. Her little brother, Philip, came in and said he had read The Constitution's story of a girl being murdered in the pencil factory.

"I was acquainted with most of the girls that worked there. I asked him what was the girl's name.

"I don't know," he answered. "They haven't identified her yet." It was about 8 o'clock at night, then. That was the first I knew of the killing. When I left Miss Chambers' home I went to my sister's house and to bed."

Declaring that he had never gone with the Phagan girl, Gant ridiculed the rumor that he was infatuated with

her. She was beautiful, he admitted, and a girl loved by every employee in the plant.

"When she was a little girl, about ten years ago," he said, "I knew her in Marietta. They lived close to the home of my family in Cobb county. Then I knew her again when she worked in the pencil factory. I had never paid her any particular attention, and was not in love with her. I don't guess she was in love with me. She never said anything, if she was, and she didn't show any signs that would indicate it."

Gant Retains Counsel.

"I could wring the neck of whoever accuses me of such a thing," he blazed. "It's the most atrocious crime I've ever heard of. I never could have conceived it, let alone commit it. The man is a murderer who would unjustifiably accuse another of such a deed."

Judge George F. Gober, a distant relative of the suspected youth, and senior member of the firm of Gober, Jackson & Leag, has been retained as counsel for Gant. He made an immediate demand Monday night for preliminary hearing. Chief Lanford declined. Gober stated that he would take out habeas corpus proceedings instantly.

The warrant against Gant was issued by Justice F. M. Powers to Detective Osborne. It charges murder.