

## SAD STORY OF LIFE OF "JAMES CONNORS"

The following dispatch from Mansfield clears up the mystery concerning the case of James Connors, the Butler county prisoner, who died at the penitentiary several days ago:

The complete story of John Berio, Jr., alias "James Connors," who died Monday evening at the Ohio penitentiary, has at last been brought to light and the different parts connected. Berio, alias "Connors," had served four years in the penitentiary for a crime that he never committed.

He was born in Mansfield thirty-two years ago. His father, John Berio, sr., was a respected bridge contractor for the Erie railroad. Young Berio was known as one of the brightest young men in the city in the drug business. He attended a medical college at Cincinnati and won high praise. He only attended medical school for six months, then he disappeared, and had been gone for fourteen years.

The family received no definite word from him for a number of years. It was supposed that he was killed in a great storm which swept the south. Not until he appeared before Judge Gates of Cincinnati on the charge of robbing the postoffice at Exello, Hamilton county, in November, 1898, did the family in Mansfield have any certain knowledge of his whereabouts. Then a curious chapter in his career developed. It was only known to his lawyer and family, however, as he had assumed the alias of James Connors to protect those he loved from disgrace.

About six years ago a gambling resort in Hannibal, Missouri, was raided. Berio was among the few who were unable to make their escape. A policeman struck him over the head from behind with his mace, stunning Berio, who drew a revolver and shot the officer, wounding him, but not fatally. Berio was sentenced for that crime to two years in the Missouri penitentiary. It was then that he took the fatal name of "James Connors."

Eighteen months before this time another James Connors had broken into the postoffice at Exello, Butler county, Ohio; had been caught, had broken jail at Hamilton, O., and escaped. When it became known that James Connors had been imprisoned at Hannibal, Mo., United States Marshal Devanney, who was looking for the postoffice robber, concluded that the prisoner was his man. Accom-

panied by Detective Peter Hetterick, Marshal Devanney went to Missouri and secured him. He was hastily identified by Jailkeeper Berry of Hamilton, and Detective Hetterick, and on their testimony he was sentenced to the Ohio penitentiary for ten years.

Shortly afterwards Marshal Devanney received more light on the case which led him to believe that he had made a mistake in the identification of his prisoner. He was so impressed with the idea that he secured the other two witnesses and went to the penitentiary. When they compared Berio with the description of Connors, wanted for robbing the postoffice they were positive of their error. While at the penitentiary they discovered the real James Connors sent down from Toledo on another charge, under the name of Melrose. When Berio's case was laid before him he admitted that he was the Exello robber and made affidavit to a complete confession of the crime.

Since that time Marshal Devanney has done all in his power to secure Berio's release, spending over \$300 of his own money toward that end. Affidavits were secured from two men who broke jail with Connors at Hamilton, the hotel keeper and barber at Hannibal whom Berio patronized and other people who knew him. They established beyond all controversy an alibi as well as his identity. His whereabouts in Missouri at the time of the postoffice robbery were absolutely proven. Devanney wrote letter after letter and made several trips to Washington laying the matter before the attorney general.

The boy's father secured Henry Hedges, one of Mansfield's richest and most prominent citizens, to go to Washington in the interests of his son. On the night Mr. Hedges reached the capital the Maine was blown up, making it useless to take up the prisoner's cause in those exciting times.

A second attempt was made by Berio, senior. Hon. William M. Hahn went to Washington on the same mission. When he reached there President McKinley was watching at the side of his sick wife. Mr. Hahn could not secure a hearing.

A third attempt was under way last fall, all plans had been completed to draw the president's attention to the case when he was assassinated.

The weary fight was closed Monday evening by the death of the unfortunate young man.