

MOCK WEDDING.

WEALTHY GIRL'S OFFER TO BIGAMIST.

A case possessing, as counsel remarked some very exceptional features, the recital of which included the story of a bigamous marriage as well as a mock wedding, was heard by Mr Justice Bankes, at the Somerset Assizes, Taunton.

The prisoner, a tall, well-dressed young man named **Percy Lester Haggard** an engineer, aged twenty-six, described as "of superior education and social position," was indicted at the instance of the Public Prosecutor for having, at Holy Trinity Church, Paddington, on May 4th last contracted a bigamous marriage with Mary Coles Maidment, a woman possessed of considerable means, and living at Butleigh, Somerset, his former wife, **Gertrude Geraldine**, to whom he was married on August 20th, 1904, being then alive.

To this charge the accused pleaded guilty, but he denied a second indictment charging him with having, by certain false representations, procured **Annie Baulch**, a young woman of good character, to live with him.

The prisoner, it was stated, separated from his first wife, and went to America, where he remained for twenty months. On his return she obtained a maintenance order of 30s a week against him, and they continued to live apart. In the early part of last year he became a guest at the Phoenix Hotel, Praed street, Paddington, where Miss Baulch, a tall, good-looking young woman was engaged as mother's help and assisted in waiting. He pressed her to marry him, posing, it was alleged, as a single man. Miss Baulch, it was continued, for some time refused, but ultimately consented to wed him, and by his arrangement the ceremony took place at a house at Neasden, which he said was a registry office. It was alleged that this ceremony was of a bogus character, but Miss Baulch could not identify the house where it took place. The honeymoon was spent at the Cocoa Tree Hotel, Pinner, and the couple afterwards stayed at Guildford and Birmingham.

Early this year they went to Butleigh, the girl's home, where her father is a carter. Her parents, it was added; thought she had made a grand marriage, as she had written to say that she was marrying a nephew of Mr Rider Haggard, the novelist. The prisoner denied to the Judge that he had stated this.

At Butleigh the prisoner became acquainted with Miss Maidment, from whom he borrowed £200, and whom he subsequently married at Paddington. Miss Baulch was left behind at Butleigh, where she gave birth to a daughter. The prisoner gave evidence on his own behalf. He denied the story of the bogus marriage, and said Miss Baulch agreed to live with him. The jury found the prisoner guilty. His counsel, Mr Weatherly, the well-known song writer said Miss Maidment desired him to state that she found the prisoner a very- kind and affectionate man while she lived with him, and while he had been in prison awaiting his trial she had written to him no fewer than 140 letters. Her earnest desire was to marry him when he came but of prison, his first wife having now obtained a divorce. She further stated that she gave him the £200 on account of the affection she bore him, and that he refused to take £500 which she offered him.

The Judge said no one could have listened to this story, even as told by the prisoner himself, without, feelings of the deepest indignation. The prisoner was a most despicable man, and he (the Judge). did not see one redeeming feature in his conduct.

The prisoner was sentenced to eighteen months' hard labor in the case of. Miss Baulch. and one month's hard labor in the bigamy case, the terms to run concurrently.