

Poisoning Charge

COUPLE ARGUED WITNESS SAYS

SYDNEY, Wednesday.—A witness said to-day he had heard quarrels between a man now dead and the man's wife.

She had said the only way to get her husband into hospital was to say he had threatened to take rat poison, the witness said.

The witness, Robert Edwin Hicks, ice vendor, of Margaret-street, Newtown, was giving evidence at the trial of Yvonne Gladys Fletcher, 30, in Central Criminal Court.

The woman has been charged with having murdered her first husband, Desmond George Butler, 25, by giving him thallium, a poison used in a rat bait.

Hicks said he was a close friend of Butler for years and regularly visited his home.

He said he heard quarrels between Butler and his wife before Butler's illness.

Butler was a strong man physically, cheerful and hearty, but toward the end of 1947 he complained that his legs felt numb.

For three weeks before his admission to Callan Park, Butler was confined to his bed, Hicks said.

On one occasion, in the presence of others, including Mrs. Fletcher, Hicks said they would have to try to get Butler into hospital. She replied the only way to get him into hospital was to tell the doctor that Butler had threatened to take rat poison.

"Legs Like Jelly"

After this Butler was taken to Sydney Hospital from where police took him to the Reception House, Hicks said.

The Public Defender (Mr. Vizzard), for Fletcher: I sug-

gest that Fletcher never said anything about telling the doctor that Butler had said he had threatened to take rat poison?

Hicks: I say she did.

Referring to Butler's condition, Hicks said: "Butler became a physical wreck and his legs became like jelly."

Dr. Noel Kirkwood, form-

erly deputy medical super-

tendent at Callan Park and now superintendent at Newcastle Mental Hospital, said Butler was discharged from Callan Park three months before his death.

Dr. Kirkwood said that when Butler was admitted to Callan Park he was emotional, hysterical and depressed.

Well-built physically, he was then very sick. He had muscular weakness, his skin was dry and scaly, and his eyes were inflamed.

While Butler was in Callan Park his condition of paralysis became more definite and his hair progressively fell out, said Dr. Kirkwood.

"I'm Going"

Mrs. Edith Isobel Roache, of Ferndale-street, Newtown, a neighbour of Mrs. Fletcher, said that in July, 1948, when Butler was being brought home from Prince Alfred Hospital, Mrs. Fletcher said: "What do you think? They are bringing him home. But I'm not going to look after him. I'm going." Later that day, Butler was brought home in an ambulance and was carried into the house on a stretcher.

Butler was unable to get about on his feet, was very depressed and was completely bald. Mrs. Roache said she borrowed a wheelchair for him to use.

A few days later Butler was taken away again, she said.

Thomas Allen McDonald, Government Analyst, said he found .3 grains of thallium in 93lb. of tissue taken from Butler's exhumed body.

McDonald said he had tasted 'Thal-rat,' a rat-destroying preparation. It had very little taste, was slightly astringent and had no odour.

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"Poisoning Death"

Dr. Gordon Bruce Roy Wooster, Superintendent of Callan Park Mental Asylum, said he thought Butler died from thallium poisoning.

Dr. J. D. Golding, Superintendent of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, said that when Butler was discharged there was nothing to suggest he would be dead within eight days.

"Possibly his death resulted from a fresh intake of thallium," he said.

The hearing was adjourned till to-morrow.