

A CHRISTMAS TRAGEDY.

PART I.—CLIPPED FROM THE PAPER.

(Condensed Extract from the Sometown Morning Star of December 26th, 1879.)

Yesterday afternoon, about five o'clock, when Dr. Ryan Chesley was driving into the city his horse shied at something lying by Gardner's crossing, about half a mile out of the limits. The doctor stopped his horse and got out to see what the object was, when he discovered it to be the body of a man lying on his right side with a bicycle beside him. At first the doctor thought the man had been thrown from his wheel and stunned, but a cursory examination revealed the fact that he was dead. The doctor left the body and rode in to town where he informed the police of what he had discovered. A wagon and a posse of policeman were sent out and the body brought in. It was then discovered that a foul murder had been committed and that the murdered man was Mr. J. W. Larche, a son of our much respected Mayor. Two cuts were found in his back. They had apparently been made with a sharp instrument, and either of them would have resulted fatally. The whole affair is shrouded in mystery. Robbery was not the motive, for nothing of value was removed from his person. Mr. Larche was the Captain of the Sometown Bicycle Club, and was beloved and respected by everybody. He was a genial, kindly-natured young man, and as far as known, had not an enemy in the world. Deceased was only twenty-two, and had given evidence of those qualities that would insure his success in life. His family have the sympathy of the whole community. As yet no clue has been obtained to the perpetrator or perpetrators of the dastardly affair.

PART II.—THE CORONER'S INQUEST.

A Coroner's inquest was held on the body on the morning of the 27th. Dr. Chesley testified to the finding of the body; he also gave his medical opinion of the wounds. The blade of the knife with which the murder had been committed was four and a half inches in length. It was sharpened on both sides and tapered to a point. The blows were struck downwards as if the person who struck him had been above him, or at any rate on an equal height with him when the stabbing was done. That these blows had been given while riding on his bicycle, an examination of his machine showed. Blood had spurted from the wounds and fallen on the backbone and smaller wheel. The logical deduction was that the murderer had been on a bicycle too. Death had been instantaneous.

Further information was elicited from various witnesses, showing that the murdered man had gone from home that morning to a neighboring village. He had gone there on his bicycle, had stayed there all day and was returning when killed. As far as could be found out he had left there alone. Jules Wittmack, a German farmer, testified that he had passed him on the road about a mile on the other side of Gardner's crossing. He was then alone. No person had seen him since, as far as could be ascertained, until he had been found by the doctor. Medical testimony went to show that he had been dead fully an hour before found. No clue could be obtained to the murderer or murderers, and a verdict of "death at the hands of some person or persons unknown" was rendered.

PART III.—TOLD BY ROBERT

Lynch, Barrister, and Secretary of the Sometown Bicycle Club. Compiled from personal investigations; from the diary of Miss Lilly Moor, and from the posthumous papers of Richard T. Larche, cousin of the deceased.

There was no handsomer man in all Sometown than Jim Larche. He was tall, well built, had a well shaped head covered with closely cropped, curly auburn hair; clear cut regular features, a lovely silky mustache and a pair of equally silky side-whiskers. His

mouth and chin were rather effeminate, but he had a bright pair of dark blue eyes, that flashed with intelligence and vivacity and showed the ability to do and dare. He had plenty of money too. He dressed well, talked well, danced and walked well. He was jolly, good natured and agreeable; had a cheery smile and fascinating manners. Was it a wonder that he was everybody's favorite?

All the girls liked Jim; he was just such a fellow as they would like. His kindly courteous nature, his frank smile and winning way, and his readiness to put himself to any amount of trouble to please them made him dear to the female heart divine. I do not think I over estimate matters at all when I say that not a girl who knew him would have said "nay" to him had he propounded the eventful question to her; certainly very few would have refused the chance to "love, honor and obey" him for life, if he offered it. But though he liked all the girls in a sisterly way, there was only one who had the power to make that great mystery we call the human heart, beat faster in his bosom. That was Lilly Moor, a pretty little miss of some nineteen summers, who lived with her father in a dear little picturesque cottage on a quiet back street in Sometown. Lilly, I think, was the prettiest girl I have ever seen. A tall, finely developed girl with an oval face, large dark eyes and a wealth of rich chestnut-colored hair. She had plenty of lovers, but Jim soon distanced them all. His cousin, Dick Larche, had been her favorite until he came along, and then it was all up with Dick. In the vulgar but expressive idiom of the day, his "goose was cooked." Although Dick knew this he did not give up hope. He could not. "If I can't have her," he said to himself, "I swear Jim never shall." He ground this out through his teeth in a blood-curdling manner. "But I will have her," he continued. "If Jim comes between us let him beware." This was in the summer time. Summer is lovers' Paradise generally, and Jim took advantage of lovely moonlight nights for long strolls with his sweetheart; for boat riding on the river, when he would ship his oars and lay back in the boat letting it drift idly along with the gentle current, and for making love as steadily and as hard as he knew how. And of course she learned to love him. How could she help it? His nature was one that would win the heart of any woman. So one day it came about that when Jim dropped down on his knee in the orthodox manner and spoke the orthodox words, she blushed prettily and answered "yes," and Jim caught her in his arms and said "my darling" and talked a great deal of the nonsense that lovers do talk when they have it very bad; and he kissed her, not once, not twice, but half-a-dozen times and felt that he was the happiest man in all civilization.

This was in the latter part of September. On the first of November the engagement was "given out." That is to say, Lilly told a couple of her friends about it in the strictest confidence and then of course everybody knew it. When Richard heard of it he was in agony. It was told him down town one evening by his cousin, "Congratulate me, Dick," he said, "Lilly and I are going to be married!" It came on him suddenly and he felt it, but only for an instant. Then the Judas smile came on his lips and the Judas words came from them. "Dear old man, let me give you every congratulation, I wish you every joy." Then he had gone away to his room and locked himself in. He sat down by the window and looked out on the calm beauty of the autumn night. The trees were stripped of their clothing and the branches looked bare and bleak, yet strangely, sadly beautiful. Down by the fence a row of evergreens stood and far beyond them he could catch glimpses of the light and brightness of the city. The moon was struggling to show itself through a splash of grey clouds that came straggling across the sky's blue face. The whole scene was beautiful but dreary. But in his present mood he took no

thought of what was before him. Thoughts of Jim and of Lilly filled his mind. He was deeply in love with the girl; madly, passionately. He loved her with all the fervor of his strong nature and he was willing to sacrifice anything, even life itself, for her. But he could not bear the thought of another having her. He wanted her for himself. And he told himself that he would have her. "If I can't I swear that Jim never shall. I'll kill him first!" The words came from his lips before he thought them. But he caught their purport as they fell. The thought had been lurking in his mind all along though he had not dared to face it. Now that he was face to face with it he kept it before him. For an hour or more he sat there arguing the subject with himself. "Yes," he said at last, even that. Then he arose and went to bed and slept soundly. But he had fully made up his mind that if necessary he would kill his cousin to prevent his marrying Lilly.

Christmas Day dawned bright and fair. Early in the morning Jim arose, oiled his bicycle and made preparations to ride to Snakeville. It had been a uniformly mild winter and to-day there was no snow on the ground. There had been a rather sharp frost the night before and the morning was a cool, bracing one. Jim, as he rode along, felt light of heart and as happy as a bird. Some catchy tune came to his lips and he hummed the jingling verse that accompanied it and fancied that the quiet buzz of his wheel was a merry orchestral strain that chimed in with his song. No premonition of the fate that was in store for him ere the day's close came to him. It seemed to him that he had never been so completely happy, so entirely free from care or worry as he was now. Everything was prospering with him; even the course of his true love had run smooth. And a week from to-day he would be married. Married! There was bliss in the word. "Dear little sweetheart," he said to himself, "how I love you!" At last he reached Snakeville. It was eleven o'clock when he got there and at half-past two he started to return. The pale, wintry sun was shining down as he left the village. It shone upon the tall spire of the little village church and seemed to cover its glittering surface with a veil of gold. The door of the sacred edifice was open as he went past, and he could catch a glimpse inside of a large stained glass window in the far end through which the sun-beams fell, filling the church with a glory of colored light. Two or three peaceful groups of children were strolling through "God's acre," stopping now and then to look at the tombstones that bore the name of many a departed one who had gone let us hope to a better land. A half smothered sigh came from his heart to his lips as he passed it all. The sight of the children in all the ruddy health of glorious youth, wandering through the city of the dead, in his mind, somehow, connected itself with the line, "In the midst of life we are in death." Somehow, the words seemed to haunt him. They rang in his ears and made him feel gloomy and sad. "Who knows," he thought, "which one of us shall see the light of another day?" But he cast his gloomy thoughts away with a slight effort. He told himself he had no right to feel miserable now when he was so near his marriage with Lilly. And was not to-day Christmas day when all the world should be light of heart and gay? This was the day of days; the day that Christ was born! He reverently bowed his head as this thought came into his mind. Then he thought of his little love at home, and his heart bounded with joy as he did it. Along he went, whirling the wire wheel under his toe and growing quite happy again thinking of his sweetheart. He felt at peace with all the world and never wondered if all the world was at peace with him. So he went along. Time was flying apace and the shadows which fall early in winter were deepening slightly as the afternoon wore away.