

THE COMET.

Saturday, February 22, 1879

AN UNHAPPY SUICIDE.

DR. GEORGE HARRISON GRAY, OF DENNISON, TEXAS, SHOTS HIMSELF THROUGH THE HEAD AT THE ST. CHARLES HOTEL—THRILLING INCIDENTS.

After the fever abated at Holly Springs, Dr. Gray went to Brownsville, Tenn., where he represented to the Howards of that place that he was sent to the plague stricken cities of the South by the Old Fellows of Missouri, and, in fact, had a letter from the Noble Grand of Old Fellows, of that State, recommending him to the Order. Col. Garland P. Ware, representing the Howards, declined to accept his services as the Association did not have the means to pay him, and he left for Memphis, which was the last we ever heard of him, until reading the following in the New Orleans Times:

Yesterday morning, Deputy Coroner Donnan, at the central station, held the inquest on the body of Dr. G. Harrison Gray, who committed suicide at half-past twelve o'clock in the morning, in one of the closets at the St. Charles Hotel.

The inquest failed to develop anything beyond the fact that about midnight the deceased entered the hotel, and without a word to any one straddled the clerk's office, across the bridge and into a closet in the rear. Shortly thereafter the report of a pistol rang out sharp and distinct, reverberating through the lofty rooms, and arousing the few present to activity.

Following the direction of the point, they hurried to the closet, but finding it locked outside a boy through the transom gave the door. The lad looked in and saw a slight cadaverous-looking man, who, for a moment, he held his breath, as if he were, all in a heap, was Dr. Gray with blood and brain oozing from a bullet hole in his right temple. His eyes, staring from their sockets, had a vacant look, and he restlessly rolled from side to side.

Behind him by a pistol, the dead instrument which he had chosen as the means of his exit from the world. The doctor was quickly opened and he was brought forth and placed on a mattress on the gallery. Meanwhile Drs. Scott and Schuppert had been summoned, and on consultation on their arrival, it was apparent to them that Gray's minutes on earth were numbered.

Gray seemed conscious of his surroundings, and increased the horrors of the scene by his efforts to speak. He struggled convulsively to make his voice perform its office, but, alas, it only resulted in a guttural sound, not in a faint word of agony.

A stretcher was sent for, on which he was laid to be borne to the station, and, at the corner of Canal and Poydras streets, he breathed his last.

After the inquest, as the unfortunate man had no friends to give the last rites, Dr. Walker Baker, Jr., came forward and took charge of the body. He held it in a spirit of humanity and commiseration, for he could not bear the idea of seeing the body of a man, a brother in the profession and one who, with him, had risked his life in the service of humanity, to be laid out in the cold arms of the earth.

Dr. Bailey saw the body of his confederate properly attended, and last evening followed it to the grave. Among Dr. Gray's papers were found his diploma, as a doctor of medicine, from the Louisiana College, Washington, D. C., under the name of a certain, signed John C. Field, M. D., secretary of the medical examining board of the 27th judicial district, Sherman, Texas, dated Nov. 15, 1876, and an appointment as acting assistant surgeon, dated United States Ship Columbia, June 16, 1871, at St. Louis, Mo., under the name of John H. Rogers, naval surgeon, commander-in-chief of the Atlantic station.

A vital of morphine and opium taken from his pockets, conveyed the story of one of his failures, and in all probability the principal cause of his act of self destruction.

Desirous of more fully ascertaining Dr. Gray's identity and his movements while in this city, a Times reporter took up the trail, accompanied by Coroner Marley and Deputy Donnan, went from place to place until every avenue of information was exhausted.

At the St. Charles it was learned that he came there on the 14th inst., registering as from Dennison, Texas. He remained at the hotel until the 12th inst., when he signified his intention of seeking more economical quarters. He left his trunk securely for the amount of his bill and went away.

For the next two days nothing could be learned of his movements, except that in the evening he was frequently seen at the Continental, corner Ball and Royal streets, in conversation with a person named Maggie Peibel, and on the 12th applied for a position as a reporter on one of the daily newspapers.

On the evening of the 14th instant, he appeared at a fashionable boarding house on Central street, and engaged a room. He brought a valise with him and apologized for the smallness of his luggage by remarking that he would get his trunk in a day or two.

TIMES WONDERFUL CHANGES.

He held her nothing on his breast, Close to his throbbing heart, "My darling," "quoth he tenderly, "We'll never, never part."

Time rolled along, their feelings changed, They always change, per force; "And now," he cried most bitterly, "I've got us a divorce."

—Old City Herald.

A MISSISSIPPI TRAGEDY OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

BY ELIAS SAFFORD, ESQ.

From the Playgoer.

Reader, before beginning the perusal of the facts constituting the faithful tragic narrative about to be presented to you, look at the map of the State of Mississippi, cast your eye along the southern boundary to where it crosses the Pearl river and there you will find marked the old town of Columbia, which brings you near to what the lawyers would call the "venue" of the principal events about to be narrated.

Columbia, the county site of Marion county, is a small town, never having a population of more than a dozen families, and these mostly the families of officers of court and merchants. The map shows roads which the reader may imagine to be stage roads, but no stage was ever there, the mails being always carried on horseback. The county has an area of over 1500 square miles, with less than 600 voters. When the winter rains swell the channel of Pearl river one or two steamboats from New Orleans come up bringing freight for the country and return laden with cotton, making but few trips during the season of navigation.

The whole region thereabouts is mostly barren "pine woods," and the loneliness of the decayed old town has lately been emphasized by a telegraph line running through it between other points of importance. In 1821 the seat of the State Government, by some log-rolling or other parliamentary trickery, was fixed at Columbia, and the session of 1822 was held there, from which the old town is now sometimes facetiously spoken of as "the ancient capital of the rosin-bled empire."

The capital was then removed and Columbia became herself again. Now, reader, you may almost naturally ask what interest can possibly attach to such a region as that just described. But wait and learn. Remember "Taleonia stern and wild," and you shall see that this unpromising region possesses a weird and romantic interest beyond anything that commerce, wealth, or any of the constituents of progress could possibly throw around it; an interest, which under the gentle influence of the pen of the "wizard of the north," might have awakened to new life even the dying numbers of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel."

About three miles north of Columbia, on the road which runs parallel with the river, in a lovely spot near the road, is a spring, giving forth then as now, a copious flow of water, which had at that time acquired celebrity for its mineral and curative properties. As soon as the seat of government was located at Columbia an arrangement which, though it proved to be only temporary, was thought by many to be permanent, an enterprising and thrifty citizen by the name of Stovall conceived the idea of making that place a fashionable resort, and in pursuance of his design built at Columbia a large, and for that day, an elegant hotel, one wing of which was occupied by the Legislature during its session in that town.

He also about the same time bought the plantation at the Springs, and erected, a short distance from the Springs, a large frame hotel and the outbuildings necessary for a watering place, the whole fronting and overlooking the river. The name of "Columbia Springs," or "Stovall Springs," as they were sometimes called, spread through the country, and the attraction of the waters, and more than that the superb deer hunting and fishing facilities of the place soon attracted large numbers of Summer visitors, most of whom came from the region near the Mississippi river, between Baton Rouge and Vicksburg, including the counties of Wilkinson, Adams, Jefferson and Claiborne, and many from the cities of New Orleans and Natchez.

Nearly all came in their own conveyances, which during their stay afforded facilities for driving over the level roads in the vicinity of the Springs. Many ladies were there, and the crowd packed their trunks in fishing, shooting, hunting, fishing, and other gayeties and amusements.

In the summer of 1826, when the season was at its height, the crowd at the Springs were unusually large and brilliant, there being quite a number of distinguished persons there, and for the better preservation of order and decorum in the social arrangements of the place, the guests formed themselves into a sort of social organization, and by one of its acts a well known and prominent planter of high position living near Natchez was made master of ceremonies at the table, and to him were referred all questions of precedence as to seats, etc. Among the guests was Judge Richard Stockton, of Natchez, who, as will be seen, is the central figure of the tragedy. He was the son of the Richard Stockton, of New Jersey, who signed the Declaration of Independence, had been a Judge of the Superior Court of Mississippi, and was at the time of these events Attorney General of the State. His family name and illustrious descent gave him a prestige which was fully sustained by his splendid scholarship and judicial attainments, and his brilliant and amiable social qualities. Another visitor was a merchant of New Orleans by the name of Payson, who was accompanied by his wife.

One day a lady friend of the Paysons arrived from New Orleans, accompanied by her maid. In taking seats at the dinner table, the Paysons took the seats usually occupied by them, and, without consulting the proper authority or any one else, and as Mr. Payson afterwards declared, without intending or even thinking of any impropriety, seated their visitor by their side, thus crowding others of the company lower down the table. The mistake was at once noticed, and Stockton, who sat near Payson, made a spirited remark about it which called out from Payson a sudden, angry and insulting response. The master of ceremonies in vain called them to order. The excitement in a moment infected the whole company at the table, and both Stockton and Payson were about drawing pistols at each other, when a distinguished lady threw herself between them, and with vehement and wild protestations besought them to desist, which after some persuasion they did, and the company went on with the dinner, eating, however, hastily and in silence, the recent excitement disqualifying them for the enjoyment of their accustomed wine and cheerful conversation.

As the guests were retiring, Stockton made a remark to the effect that he would have satisfaction from Payson, which, being overheard by the latter, he gave back words which greatly aggravated the quarrel. All was now intense excitement, and the talk was entirely of redress under "the code of honor," which was considered the proper thing at that day. Stockton must of course challenge Payson, but here the difficulty arose. As Mr. Payson had few if any acquaintances at the Springs, his social status was not satisfactorily defined, and, as he was not known by Judge Stockton to be a gentleman, the friends of the latter insisted that he should not compromise himself by sending a challenge. Payson signified his assent to this mode of arbitration; but, for the reason just given, arrangement could be made. Thus with the feeling augmented by delay the matter remained in suspense for two or three days and nights, when, to the relief of all concerned, General Ripley, of New Orleans, arrived. Payson said he would refer the question to General Ripley, who, being a military man, was well known to the friends of the history of our second war with Great Britain, would give to his decision a character beyond question. On being inquired of, General Ripley said in substance that he knew Mr. Payson well, that he knew him to be a gentleman, and that where he was known he was so recognized. On one of the friends of Stockton suggesting that he had heard something disparaging of Payson, General Ripley promptly replied, "I have said Mr. Payson was a gentleman, and if it is disputed, I profess myself to be one." Finding that the old soldier "meant business," the question was treated as settled, the challenge to fight was accepted, arrangements were made, and by the earliest opportunity was given for arrangements, a few days during the season of navigation, the two were to meet and fight at New Orleans.

While negotiations were going on at the Springs, a quarrel on the all engrossing topic arose between two young gentlemen named Ross and Gibbs, the one a wealthy planter and the other a young lawyer residing in Jefferson county. This dispute at the Springs culminated in a duel between the two young men, which was fought shortly afterwards, on the west bank of the Mississippi river, opposite Grand Gulf. The weapons used were muskets. At the first fire both parties fell, mortally wounded. They were immediately brought across the river to the house of a friend and placed in the same room. Forgivenesses were interchanged and one died in a few hours. The other languished several months and then died of his wound.

At the time designated for the purpose, Stockton and Payson met at New Orleans and fought with pistols. At the first fire Stockton was shot through the head, and in a moment the gifted son of an illustrious house lay dead upon the field of honor! Before leaving the ground the seconds found a paper in the pocket of Stockton, written by himself stating in substance that his own conduct had been rash and wrong from the beginning, and that it was his intention, if he should survive the first fire, to acknowledge his error and make the amende honorable. But, alas! His good intentions came too late. Mr. Payson, the survivor, lived a year or two and was accidentally drowned in the Mississippi River at New Orleans.

Here the reader will permit an episode which may prove interesting. Among the lady guests at the Springs at the time of the events above narrated, was a wealthy and accomplished middle aged widow, who was recognized as a leader in the society of the place. Stockton, who was a bachelor, was thought to be a suitor for her hand. In the year 1812, when she was quite young, she was engaged to be married to a brilliant young lawyer, of a wealthy family. He became involved in a quarrel which led to a duel in which he was killed. The next year, 1813, at which time we were at war with Great Britain, his antagonist, who had military command, was assigned for duty at Fort Mimms in Alabama. In the memorable Indian attack and massacre at the Fort, he was killed. The lady, some time after the affair at the Springs, married a worthy and talented gentleman, who was afterwards a United States Senator. This lady distinguished herself by a noble act of philanthropy; which has become a part of the judicial history of the State. She and her gifted husband are long since dead and have left honored memories.

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The thrilling events here narrated could not be forgotten, but continued to "live in awe-struck minds of men," and would not "down." The "season" at the Springs never opened again, and from thenceforward, the place, as a fashionable resort, became deserted and a ruin.

Soon after the Springs closed as a public resort, the property was purchased for cultivation by a planter named Martin Lewis, whose name is given by the writer of this article as a tribute to his moral worth, and as a token of gratitude for the kindness of which he has been the recipient in his hospitable home many days and nights in the years gone by when planter hospitality was something worth realizing. This excellent old man died many years ago, and was buried in the family grave, near the Springs, where a marble slab with the epitaph, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," marks the last resting place of Martin Lewis. Peace to his ashes and glory to his memory.

All the buildings erected for the use of the watering place have long since decayed or been removed, except the main building, a large two-story house, which is still there and occupied by a planter. The large hall on the first floor with its high ceiling, frescoed and elaborately carved wooden mantelpieces, is still there, a ghastly reminder of the gay throng who once floated through the mazy dance. But now,

"The lights are fled, its garlands dead," and the place is a desolation. The events herein described were once matters of well known public history; but of living witnesses only a few survive, and in a few years more they will be gone. The Springs is still there near the roadside, occasionally visited by a traveler, with that wistful interest which we may suppose to attach to the spring of Sybil Grey so beautifully described in Aristotle. It still gurgles up from its fountain depths low trickles, and dances down its gravelly descent to the "branch" below, unchanging ever. Just as it ran when the morning stars sang the hymn of the new born creation, like the brook immortalized by the sweet lines of Tennyson, it flows on singing,

"Men may come and men may go, But I go on forever."

DELAWARE.—The Governor of Delaware is a country merchant—his predecessor is a farmer—and his predecessor's predecessor is a doctor, and a Southern professor of congressmen is a farmer—the incoming one a doctor. There is not a lawyer in either branch of the Legislature. Newspapers, no libraries, no bookstores, and no local office in the State from Gloucester to Conestoga, and no State debt and no penitentiary. Blessed are the Blue Hen's chickens.—Fort Union Herald.

Proposed to His Grandmother.

Colonel Thornton, of the East India service, says the Washington Capital, tells thus the romance of his youth: "One clear starlight evening in June, Helen and I were walking on the terrace among the flower beds that were cut in the soft green turf. Inspired by the stillness and odoriferous influence of the air, I told her my secret, with all its hopes and fears. She looked up at me wonderingly, and tears glistened in her beautiful eyes as she said:

'Ah, Captain Thornton, are you sure? Do you—do you love me? It cannot be. No, never.' 'Why,' I cried, impudently pressing my suit and her, 'you love another?' 'Sir,' she said, almost sharply, 'do you know who I am?' 'The loveliest girl in England.' 'No, sir; I am not. Great heavens, Captain Thornton, I am your grandmother!'

'My grandmother! Talk of sudden shocks after that, won't you? I tried to speak, but my voice failed me. I reached out my hand and touched her. Yes, she was there, real enough, and I was not dreaming. 'Tell me all,' I gasped. 'Any standing there, by the broad stone coping she told me all. How her parents had died when she was little more than an infant, and Sir John, her guardian and my grandfather, had watched over her with jealous care, always keeping her at school, however, and he brought her home—a young lady.

'Then while I was in India, the poor old man fell suddenly ill, and on his dying bed persuaded his young ward to marry him, just in order to inherit his vast estate, which she had refused to take as a legacy. 'And believe me,' said Helen, 'I did it only to keep it for you, the rightful heir, whose widowhood had temporarily provoked the old gentleman!'

In the Hands of His Friends. Detroit Free Press. While a Woodward Avenue merchant was yesterday standing in his door to boss the job of cleaning out the icy walk, he was approached by a stranger who was badly warped in looks and dress. The merchant had already made up his mind not to give the fellow a nickel, when he said:

'If you were me would you take the Berlin mission?' 'You take the Berlin mission?' gasped the merchant. 'Just so, I can take it like a book, but I don't want to if it will hurt anybody's feelings. I thought I would inquire and see how the public felt.'

'You'd better take a wash and then a walk!' exclaimed the astonished merchant, as he got his breath. 'Very well,' was the quick reply. 'If you think I'd better take a wash I'll drop the Berlin mission. I am in the hands of my friends—good day!'

He walked away as stiff as a beam-pole, and the German vacancy isn't likely to be filled from Detroit.

Chicago, Ill., Town. Atlanta Constitution. An eternal warfare seems to rage between the country negro and the town darkey. This was illustrated at the passenger depot yesterday. A colored youth from Pike county approached a town negro, and the following conversation ensued:

"Right dar' fo' yo' eyes?" "Fo' whose eyes?" "Yone." "Is you de ticket office?" "Look yo' eye, nigger, don't you gimme none yo' foolishness. I want de ticket. 'I'm a mighty sleek man,' when I gets up."

"An' you'll git stirred up of you stan' room' yer foin' longer me." "Dat's de kinder excise w'at I'm a plin' fer."

"And w'at thar they clinched and had a right lively tussle. They were separated, however, before a policeman came along, and the Pike county darkey found the ticket office. The town negro, it may be well to mention, was badly used up."

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