

FOR A HUNDRED POUNDS.

THE SLAUGHTER OF A FAMILY FOR A PURSE OF GOLD.

Story of the Mispick Tragedy of Thirty-Seven Years Ago—How Robert McKenzie and His Household Were Murdered for the Sake of Money—A Grewsome Tale of Crime.

Some months ago, there died in this city the widow of one of the principals in the Mispick Tragedy of thirty-seven years ago. She had married again, and at the time of her death few outside of her immediate friends were reminded of the story which may well be considered the most grewsome in the records of crime in this part of the world.

On the Mispick road about ten miles from St. John, may be seen today a deserted farm, some scattered brick and stone showing where had once stood the chimney of a dwelling. It is a lonely enough place though not in a desolate part of the country, and the nearest house is half a mile away. There is good fishing in the neighborhood, Beaver Lake is near at hand, and one of the city clubs—the Log Cabin, I think—has its camp in the vicinity. All who go there for the first time in search of pleasure hear more or less of the McKenzie murder, in more or less detail, but at this distance of time few can tell more than the outline of the story, and as memories are treacherous even this is not always sure to be correct. Few of those who were active in the conviction of the murderers are alive today, and even those who were present at the trial have failed to recall some of the details I have sought to obtain. In addition to the newspaper accounts, two pamphlets giving a narrative of the tragedy were published, one by Geo. W. Day and the other in New York, for "Barney" O'Brien, the well known bookseller of a generation ago. These pamphlets are now very rare.

In the house of which the ruins are now seen once lived Robert McKenzie, with his wife and four children. Of the latter the eldest was about five years old, while the youngest was about one year old. McKenzie was a native of Scotland, but had been in this country a number of years, and was by occupation a master tailor. When in business in St. John, his shop was in Bragg's building, corner of King and Canterbury street, a house famous for having been built by Benedict Arnold, and standing on the lot now occupied by John Vassie & Co. McKenzie sold out his business to A. & J. Gilmour, who continued at the stand for many years afterwards.

McKenzie had considerable money at one time. Some years before the tragedy he was believed to be worth over \$30,000, but he subsequently lost a good deal in various ventures outside of his trade. In 1851 he had a chair factory at Lower Mispick, and he owned mills with some 2,000 acres of land. He did not succeed in the lumber business, however, and he subsequently sank more money in improving his farm. He built a house, 50 feet long by 250 wide, on the farm in 1849. Here he was living with his family in the year 1857.

Apparently he lived there, lonely as it was, without fear of danger to himself or his property, for though a man of slight physique he seems to have taken no special precautions to protect the place, though he made no secret of the fact that he kept a considerable sum of money in the house. Most of the few people in that scattered neighborhood seemed to be ignorant, simple minded folk, who lived as he did, at peace with the world. Among them was Patrick Slavin and his family, who occupied a humble dwelling seven or eight miles distant from the farm. Slavin was a laboring man who had worked on the E. and N. A. railway, and at other such labor as offered from time to time.

Among these people, however, there were all sorts of belief as to McKenzie's great wealth. One rumor had it that he was worth thirty thousand pounds. He was a money lender, too, and he appeared to take a pride in making a display of his gold before those who had any transactions with him. It will thus be seen that he largely contributed to bring about his own dreadful fate, by exciting the cupidity of the wretchedly poor and ignorant people to whom gold seemed the remedy for every ill.

In the latter part of October, 1857, McKenzie was desirous of securing a farm laborer. He had a spare house, smaller and older than his own, for a man to occupy, nearly opposite the farm house, and the wages he offered were a certain sum per acre for the work done. Such a man offered in the person of Hugh Breen, who had been working on the railway up to a month or so before, but who had more recently been living at the house of Slavin. McKenzie made an agreement with Breen, and the latter agreed to bring his wife and family to occupy the small house across the road.

Up to this time McKenzie had been assisted in his work by a young man named George Leet, who lived alone in the small house. Leet was to leave on the 25th of October and Breen was to take his place. On the day in question, which was a Saturday, McKenzie and Leet worked until dusk, gathering up oats, after which the young man went home to his father's house, about five miles distant. Had he remained, as was afterwards shown, he would have been one of the victims of the tragedy at a later hour.

Breen and Slavin had determined to murder McKenzie and his family, and that night had been fixed for the deed. They expected Leet would be away, but had he remained, as Slavin said, he would have been killed, "just because he was in the way." Breen, however, had already begun to live at the small house, sleeping with Leet, and was thus aware of his intention to go.

So far as I can judge, Breen was not the leader and projector in the horrid enterprise. He had previously put the idea of

making money by murder into the mind of old Slavin, and McKenzie was not the first victim suggested. Several weeks before Breen had taken Slavin to Fredericton with the idea of robbing a woman named Sally Golly, who was supposed to have money, and to murder her, if necessary. The project failed for want of a good chance, and the men returned to Mispick. Breen then told Slavin of a Mr. Corkery, who carried a great deal of money and could be robbed, and then the murder of McKenzie was discussed. Old Slavin took the credit of this to himself, afterwards declaring that "it was myself was the head and foundation and backsetting of robbing and murdering McKenzie." It was planned a week or two before it took place, and the date had been fixed for the night of Thursday, the 23rd of October. Learning that Leet expected his father and mother there that night, a postponement was made until Saturday, the 25th.

That evening, Breen, Slavin and the latter's son Pat Slavin, started on their bloody mission. Young Slavin was 15 years old, ignorant and not very bright. He knew that something bad was to be done, and no doubt he knew there was to be murder. He was under his father's orders, however, and it is quite certain he did not realize the enormity of the crime which was to be committed.

The story of how the murder was committed was told afterwards both by Breen and old Slavin, the murderers and living witnesses. Their accounts agreed in the main facts, and were given without any hope of saving themselves. Dreadful enough their stories were.

The oats had been gathered, the week's work was done, and McKenzie and his wife, unsuspecting of danger, were probably looking forward to a welcome rest on Sunday. At that season of the year the sun sets before five o'clock, and it was already dark, though early evening, when Slavin, Breen and young Slavin arrived at the small unoccupied house. Breen went up to McKenzie's house and asked him to come across to the other house. The doomed man accompanied him, supposing that Breen wished to complete the arrangements for the accommodation of his family. They reached the small house.

"Is she coming?" McKenzie asked, referring to Breen's wife.

"She is," was the reply.

"Is she near at hand?"

"Well, she is pretty near."

Slavin and his son were in the next room, but McKenzie was ignorant of their presence. Slavin had an axe in his hand. Opening the door, he came out with the axe behind his back and said, "She's on hand." The next instant he lifted the axe and hit McKenzie on the breast. McKenzie fell to the floor.

"Wherever I hit, a dead dog will tell no tales," remarked the murderer.

McKenzie was not quite dead, however, and uttered a groan. Then Slavin hit him blow after blow on the breast until life was extinct. Then they put the body down a trap-door into the cellar.

After McKenzie was killed, young Slavin secured the key of an iron chest in which the murdered man had kept his money. One version is that it fell from a pocket to the floor, and another that the boy searched the pockets until he found it. The three then made their way to McKenzie's dwelling.

Reaching the house, Breen found an axe under the porch, which he handed to Slavin. Then Breen opened the door of the common sitting room where Mrs. McKenzie and the children were. She was not surprised to see Breen, supposing no doubt that her husband was behind him. Slavin, axe in hand, looked in without being visible, planning his course of action.

Mrs. McKenzie was sitting in a rocking chair near the stove with her youngest child in her arms and the other three children around her. It was a sight to move the hardest heart, but the cruel eyes that were watching the group were of men who knew no pity.

"Is she near at hand," asked the woman, as her husband had done, referring to Breen's wife.

"Yes, she is pretty near," was again the answer.

Then Slavin stepped behind the woman, swung the axe and hit her a fearful blow on the side of the head. The child dropped from her arms to the hearth, and she lay on the floor struggling in the agonies of death. The children gathered around her and began to cry, but made no attempt to run away. One after another, in rapid succession, they fell under the murderer's axe, and then Slavin struck the mother blow after blow—as many as fifteen, he confessed, until not a trace of life remained. When the murder was completed young Slavin looked at the clock and found that the hour was half-past nine.

The three then left the house and went to the woods, near at hand. After a while they came up to the house and heard what they took to be some of the dying children moaning. They went back to the woods and remained some time. When they returned to the house all was silent.

Young Slavin began to complain of being hungry, and the three went into the pantry where they ate some bread and drank milk, returning to the woods again. Coming back, they began to search for McKenzie's money, the boy holding a light and otherwise assisting. In the iron chest they found a purse containing about one hundred pounds in gold. They had expected to get more, but after ransacking the house they concluded there was no more money to be had. They, however, secured a gold watch and some articles of clothing, to try to conceal the evidences of their crime. Going to the small house, a candle was applied to a straw bed, by young Slavin, and there was soon a fierce blaze. Leaving the place to burn, they went to the upper house, built a pile of straw and wood in the porch and ignited it. They waited about five minutes, to make sure that the building was sure to burn, when they left the premises and returned to Slavin's house. There Slavin counted his share of the money and found he had fifty sovereigns.

At the McKenzie farm the fire made rapid headway. In a short time both houses were wholly consumed, and in the ashes were the remains of the six murdered ones, charred and burned beyond recognition, and in the case of the smaller children as completely reduced to ashes as the wood which had been their funeral pile.

A small red and white dog wandered around the fields, howling mournfully in terror of the desolation it had seen. It was, apart from the murderers, the only living witness of the tragedy, and a witness

in truth it was. It had come into the room after the murderers had done their work, and on its side was a stain—the stain of human blood.

The second act in the Mispick tragedy—the discovery, the pursuit and the bringing to justice of the murders—will be told in another issue.

THE SLEEP OF PLANTS.

What Was Seen During a Nocturnal Ramble in the Garden.

To ramble at night in field or garden is to enter a strange and almost fantastic chapter of plant life, for so essential is light to healthful vegetation, that scarcely a tree, shrub, or blossom but in some way changes its aspect when daylight fades. We find ourselves in a "pleasing land of drowsyhead," where familiar plants have assumed the most whimsical postures, or even changed their posture altogether. One form of the acacia appears at night as if covered with little bits of dangling string instead of leaves; whilst a bank of nasturtiums presents a still more peculiar effect—every slender stem bent at the top, so that each round leaf is tilted on its side. We see balsams with each leaf sharply declined, lilies and eschscholtzias with closed cups and hanging heads; the lupine, "the sap lupine" of Virgil, its blue spike of blossom erect as at daytime, but with every wheel-shaped leaf drooping against the stem like a closed parasol. Lilies and scarlet-runners seem withered, all the leaflets nodding, as if broken at the jointure with the stem; the flowers of the potato plant, saucer-shaped by day, now pucker their white rims in gathers around the central stamen; and partridge-peas present a picture of drooping listlessness. Poppies, or "lords of the land of dreams," are most somnolent of all; soon after sunset, "their four damask curtains are drawn closely, the inner petals coiled within each other above a tiny crowned head, whilst the outer pair enfold all in their bivalve embrace."

All the clovers are a drowsy family, and keep early hours like the daisy, which Chaucer poetically tells us "fears night and hateth darkness."

And whanne that it is eve, I runne biithe, So soon as eve ye some sinketh west, Vaneth the flowers how she will go to rest. For fear of night, so hateth she darkness. Her cheer is plain as spread in brightness Of ye some, for then she will unclose.

The sleep of plants is so conspicuous a phenomenon that it excited discussion and speculation as early as the time of Pliny, and many explanations were given which science has since disproved. The drooping of the leaves was attributed by some botanists to an aversion to moisture, a theory which had to be abandoned when such movements were made on cloudy days and dewless nights. The clover tribe, which always close their leaves at night, reveal at rain; and nasturtiums will go through a day of tempestuous weather without showing any inclination to change their position. Linnaeus was the first to give to the subject special study and scientific research. Whilst watching the progress of some plants of lotus, he began that series of observations upon which his great work "Sleep of Plants" is based. He found that nocturnal changes are determined by temperature; and the daily alternations of light and darkness; movement is not actually caused by darkness, but by the difference in the amount of light the plants receive during the night and day. Many plants, notably the nasturtium, unless brightly illumined in the day, will not sleep at night. If two plants were brought into the centre of a room, one from the open air and the other from a dark corner, the neutral light that would cause the former to droop its leaves, would act as a stimulant upon the latter. That the nocturnal changes are necessary to the life of some plants, Darwin has proved by a number of skillful experiments. He found that leaves fixed in such a way as to be compelled to remain horizontal at night suffered much more injury from cold and dew than those allowed to assume their natural nocturnal positions, and in some cases lost color, and died in a few days. However different attitudes plants take in the day, they have, with a few exceptions, this point in common—at night, the upper surfaces of their leaves avoid the zenith, and come as closely as possible in contact with the opposite leaves. The object gained is, undoubtedly, protection for the upper surfaces from being chilled by radiation. There is nothing strange in the under parts of the leaf needing less protection, as they differ widely in function and structure. It is the radiation of heat which the peasants of Southern Europe fear, more than cold winds, for their olives, and which induces gardeners to cover seedlings with thin layers of straw and spread fir-branches over the wall-fruit trees. In the case of some plants, when the leaves droop and fold together, the petiole or leaf-stalk rises, thus making the plant more compact, and exposing a smaller surface to radiation. The tobacco plant does not droop its leaves, but folds them round the stalk, presenting much the appearance of a furled umbrella.

The drooping of foliage leaves has another use besides the prevention of excessive radiation; by this means the tissues bearing chlorophyll—the green coloring matter of plants—is preserved from injury. A low temperature destroys the normal condition of chlorophyll, a fact to which the autumn coloring of foliage is attributable.

Whilst foliage seems most effected by alternations of light and darkness, blossoms are most sensitive to changes of temperature. The marigold, which says Shakespeare,

Goes to bed with the sun, And with him rises weeping,

will expand its petals, in dry weather, between six and eight o'clock in the morning; but in rainy weather, or under cloudy skies it remains closed. The sensitive plant not only shuts spontaneously at sunset, but will do so whenever the temperature of the surrounding air rises above fifteen degrees Centigrade; the fifty-two degrees Centigrade causes permanent loss of mobility and death. The crocus is essentially a morning flower, and closes soon after mid-day; whilst some plants—among them the evening primrose and some forms of campion—expand only in the evening or during the night. Wood-sorrel has been found to assume "an attitude of sleep" in direct sunlight. Thus the sleep of flowers is by no means strictly nocturnal, but may be largely attributed to the laws governing pollination. The petals fold to protect the stamens and other sensitive parts of the blossoms from excessive cool-

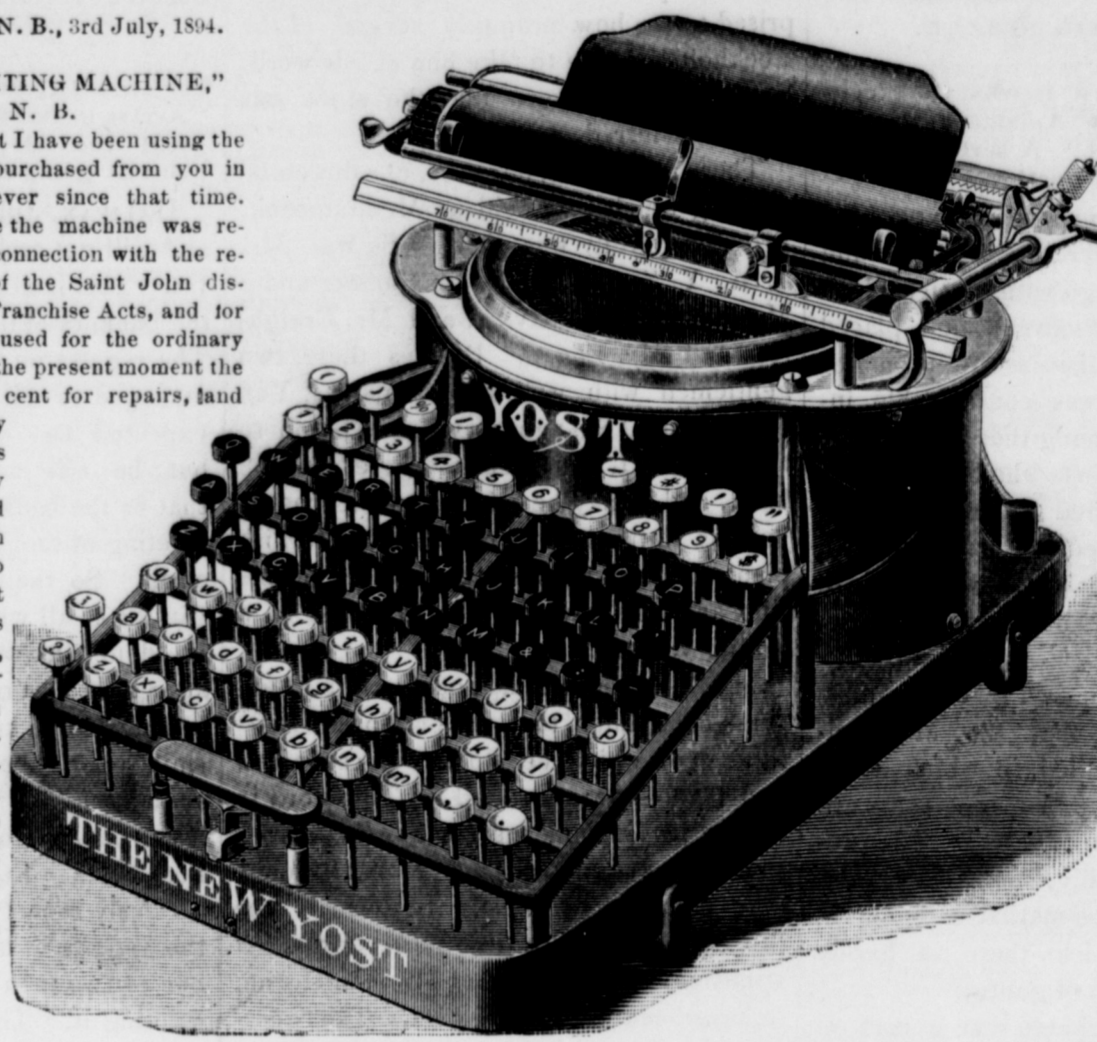
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