

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 1901.

Suicide and Its Causes

There were 471 suicides in the borough of Manhattan last year. Optimists may be surprised that the number is so large; pessimists that it is so small.

Of all the gruesome statistics that filter through the coroners' office and find oblivion in the pigeon holes of the health department those pertaining to the city's suicides are perhaps the most interesting to a student of life and human nature. Even the men in the coroners' office philosophize over them and it's a rare thing for a man to spin philosophical conclusions out of tragedy that is all a part of the day's work.

'These suicides always set one thinking,' said one of the amateur philosophers to a Sun reporter. 'There are so many whys in every case. It's easy enough to return a verdict of suicide by illuminating gas, or carbolic acid, or whatever the method happens to be, but there's such a lot back of all that.'

'About one person in a dozen leaves a letter. The law forbids the publication of those letters now, but the files of them make queer reading matter. Each one has its own individuality—bears the stamp of the person who wrote it. Given that letter you can construct the man. Some of them are carefully written on good paper; some of them are scrawled on scraps of paper, margins of newspapers, books or backs of envelopes. Some are in a firm, clear hand; some are blotted and almost illegible.'

'It's queer how differently men face death. Now, there are the Germans. There are more suicides among the Germans in this city than among any other nationality. Seems odd, doesn't it. One wouldn't expect a stolid, beer-drinking race to go in for suicide. A German would be the last man I would expect to see lose his balance and run smack. A dago, now or a Russian or an Irishman—that wouldn't surprise me; but, bless you, they don't commit suicide. When they get down on the world the Russian throws a bomb at somebody, the Irishman breaks somebody's head; but the German drinks his beer, goes to his room and quietly puts a bullet hole in himself.'

'They say it's racial instinct. It certainly is easier on the public than the other methods of working off steam, but we could spare other citizens better than we can spare the Germans. The trouble with the German is that he thinks too much. We've decided that down here. He usually has a decent education and poverty or disgrace go hard with him. He can't reconcile himself to failure. Then the average German seems to be a good deal of an agnostic. Half the time he doesn't believe in a hereafter of any sort, and of course it's a temptation to him to put an end to things altogether. Now a Catholic Irishman believes he'll be damned if he takes his own life, and he'd just as soon endure the damnation he's used to right here as sample another variety that may be worse.'

'Very few Hebrews commit suicide. Sometimes a man of this race will do it, but the suicide of a Jewess is a very rare thing. The Russian and Polish Hebrews on the East side look melancholy enough for anything but they usually endure life. It is the christian girl on the East side who drinks carbolic acid—not the Jewess. The American born girl is the most frequent victim too. She heads the roll of women suicides, just as the German heads the list of male suicides. Why's that? Is she more intelligent, too? Does she suffer more from unhappy conditions than the other girls, or is she more reckless, and more likely to get into trouble? Oh, I tell you, these suicide files make an interrogation point of me.'

'After the Germans on the list come the Americans, but the suicides whose nationality can't be determined are jumped in with the United States list, so it isn't quite a fair guide. Next come the Austrians and Bohemians. Then a long way behind the Irish. The other nationalities drop in by ones and twos.'

'You seldom hear of a negro suicide. A darkey is too irrepressible. No matter how hard luck goes today, he thinks it will be coming his way tomorrow, and fixed depression is absolutely impossible to him.'

When he does get worked up to suicide, he usually hangs himself. A German prefers shooting himself. They've all been soldiers more or less and feel a certain dignity connected with a gunshot wound.

'The American affects shooting, too, but has a liking for illuminating gas. The women almost always take poison or drown themselves. You see the ordinary man can swim and it's rather hard for him to drown himself. He nerves himself up for the plunge, and the water cools him off. He can swim and does. But with a woman it is different.'

'Talking about men and women, we've often noticed how few women kill themselves for love. Men do it—scores of them. A man's sweetheart jilts him, or the girl he loves will not have him, and he blows out what few brains he has. You don't, once in a blue moon, find a woman doing that sort of thing. A woman takes her own life because of disgrace, or physical suffering or discouragement, but she seldom does it because she loves a man who doesn't love her.'

'You don't suppose that that means the men love more deeply than the women, do you? I can't see it that way. I suppose a woman's pride keeps her from acknowledging, even by death, that she was jilted. The disgrace of that acknowledgment would seem worse to her than the death. Then, too, when a man's in love and hopeless, he usually goes out and gets drunk. The depression following debauch is responsible for a big percentage of our suicides. In that depression, a fellow's love trouble looks even worse to him than it did before he got drunk. So he writes a note to the heartless charmer and makes way with himself before he is thoroughly sober.'

'The women seldom leave letters. They usually try in every way to avoid identification; but the men seem to take a certain satisfaction in the dramatic and they are making and want all the spectacular features. Of course, there are many exceptions to all these generalities, I'm only giving you my own impressions from study of the records.'

'The mothers are the persons for whom most of the letters are left. There are letters to husbands, wives, sweethearts, but a majority of the suicides seem more worried about the effect of the thing upon their mothers than about anything else. Letter after letter begs a mother to forgive and not to grieve, and a good many of them are not written to the mothers, but ask that the news should be broken to them gently, it's natural enough. A sweetheart or wife or friend is all very well, but it's a fellow's mother who is going to be hardest hit when he throws up the game; and down at the bottom of his heart the fellows know it.'

'There's one funny thing about the letters. If the writer mentions God or the hereafter at all he usually seems to feel pretty sure that God will forgive him. There's some anxiety about what surviving friends may think of the move, but a fair certainty that God knows how hard things are and will understand.'

'One class of suicides includes the cranks—all sorts and conditions of cranks. There was the man who thought he swallowed dynamite and would rather kill himself than wait to be blown up. Then there was the man who believed he was being followed and would be murdered. We've seen a number of such cases. The man who always heard angels urging him to die and come to Heaven was another; and one said he had been hypnotized by some people on the street, and his life was spoiled. Of course these men are simply insane. I'm sorry for them, but those cases aren't pitiful like some.'

'When an old man of 70 commits suicide because he can't bear being dependent upon his children any longer it makes you think. One seldom finds an old person taking his own life. Things must have been pretty hard for that old fellow. He looked like a good patient soul, too.'

'Then I always have felt sorry for the men who made away with themselves so that their wives and children could have the insurance money, and for the invalids who faced lingering death and dreaded the burden and expense for those they loved

I've never had a suicide case break me up as one did years ago. A sweet-faced, worn woman had consumption. Her husband could earn very little, and she finally got so she couldn't work at all. The children were half starved; and at last the mother just put herself out of the way, not because she minded suffering, but because that was the only way in which she could help along and make her husband's burden lighter.'

'The man who can't get work—I'm sorry for him. Of course there are charities; but some men are proud, and then a man can starve to death while the wheels are getting in motion. There's one man I suppose I ought not to sympathize with, but I can't help doing it. He's the fellow who is an out and out failure and knows it. He ought to pull himself together and make up for lost time. It's contemptible cowardice for him to confess himself beaten and chuck the whole responsibility; but when a man reaches—well, say 40—and, looking back sees failure and wasted opportunities all along the line, and realizes he's a wreck, body and soul, and he has a pretty bad quarter of an hour.'

'A good many suicides cover disgrace that never comes to the ears of the world. We don't have so many Wall Street suicides as in old days though. There seem to be more ways of wriggling out of tight financial places nowadays, or else business men have more luck.'

'By the way, there's a grim irony in one collection that has accumulated in the Coroners' office. You'd be surprised to see the number of rabbits' feet, amulets, and lucky charms of one sort or another that have been taken from the bodies of suicides and casualty cases. There used to be a drawerful of them, but I don't know what has become of them.'

'Grip has added to the number of suicides in this country, and extreme hot weather always swell the list. Comparatively few persons commit suicide during the winter. The cases begin to multiply in April and May. I suppose the spring stirs people up and makes them restless and unhappy.'

'June is called the suicide month by statisticians, but August is usually the big month here. The heat has worked on a man's nerve by that time, and when a scorching spell comes along he's half crazed and irresponsible.'

'Suicide goes in waves, like various kinds of crime. One man uses a certain method and other cases will follow. Carbolic acid has been a great thing this last year. It is to be used always, Paris green or rat poison. Illuminating gas suicides have increased wonderfully. But, after all, it's the pistol and the water that keep the suicide records crowded.'

Electrical Possibilities.

In discussing the noiseless possibilities of the future, the editor of the Electrical Review gives this hopeful outlook for the future:

In the ideal city distracting noises will be unknown, and dirt and all unclean things will be kept without its pale. Electricity is the magician that can, and assuredly will work the change.

This admirable day may not be so far away. Electric power stations and electric light stations are being located farther and farther away from the city's heart; the horse-car, the steam locomotive, the engine in the basement, the coal stove, are one and all being replaced by the quiet, odorless and effective electric motor, by the electric heater.

The rubber-tired electromobile is rapidly replacing the driven horse, and will replace him not only for driving but for heavy hauling purposes.

The awful and constant volume of sound of his unnumbered thousands of iron shod feet hammering resounding pavements will disappear forever, and with it ninety per cent of the filth and odor of the street. With the passage of the horse will go also the stone pavements.

Not Guilty.

The following story makes one think of the old proverb about a 'guilty conscience' and 'no accuser':

'Now, boys,' said the patient Sunday-school teacher, 'surely some one of you can tell me who carried off the gates of Giza. Speak up, William.'

'I never touched 'em!' said the indignant William, with a suspicion of tears in his youthful voice. 'I don't see why folks always think when things get carried off that I've had something to do with it!'

The Russian Student Outbreak

The more or less serious disturbances caused by Russian students and others during the last few weeks in all the principal towns of Russia, are described here today for the first time by the Minister of the interior in the Government Messenger. No other paper has yet been allowed to refer to them, and in this communication no reference is made to the trouble at Odessa.

In St. Petersburg, on the morning of March 4, a crowd of students and others collected in the semicircular garden formed by the colonnade in front of the Kazan Cathedral and, after divine service, some of them attempted to make speeches. They refused to disperse, but moved to a compact body on to the Nevsky Prospect, singing songs and occupying the whole of the pavement and part of the roadway. A strong force of police managed to push them into the court yard of the municipal Douma (Rathaus or Guildhall), where the names and addresses of 244 persons were inscribed for purposes of further investigation, among them being 71 students of various high establishments of learning, no less than 128 girls attending lectures at colleges of the higher course of female instruction, 20 other women and 25 nondescripts. On the same day at Kharkoff, about 100 students of the university and technological and veterinary institutes, on leaving church, marched in groups, singing the while, toward the university buildings. Having refused to obey the police they were promptly surrounded by a sotnia of Cossacks and marched off to the police station. Another crowd of young people soon assembled here, demanding the release of their comrades, but were dispersed and their ringleaders arrested. In the evening a noisy demonstration was to be attempted in front of the newspaper office at the Southern Border, but those who started for that purpose were also surrounded and marched off by troops before even the office in question could be reached. The soldiers were again called upon, almost immediately afterwards, to quell another uproarious outbreak near the theatre. The governor of Kharkoff subsequently received notice of eight persons having been struck or injured but only case was confirmed by medical certificate. Out of 136 persons arrested only 24 were detained in custody.

In Moscow, on March 8, at noon a large crowd of young men and women assembled in front of the university and forced their way into the building, where 300 of them proceeded to hold a meeting. They threw proclamations among another 300 remaining outside in the street, and tried to incite them to take part. The university was surrounded by police, and 630 persons were arrested and lodged in the riding school. These included 517 students of different high schools and colleges in Moscow 19 outsiders and 10 women. All behaved in a very unruly manner, and when the women were allowed to go home for the night 8 of them preferred to stay in the manage with the male students. During the next twenty four hours 516 of the total number were sent to prison, and 21 belonging to the Institute of Land Surveying were surrendered to their scholastic superiors. During the evening, however, the windows of the riding manage were broken by a crowd which at one moment numbered some 700 persons, who attempted to enter into communication with the students inside. The police and Cossacks had frequently to drive them back. About 300 then marched through the principle streets, making a great noise. At midnight on the 9th a noisy crowd of about 100 students and women was prevented by police from entering Tver street. On Sunday, the 10th inst., crowds of nondescripts, instigated by members of various educational institutions, created disturbances in different parts of the centre of Moscow and were dealt with by the police and two sotnias of Cossacks. In the evening, when the rioters began to break the glass of the street lamps, two squadrons of dragoons were called into requisition. One crowd of 400 persons was then taken to the riding school and another crowd to the yard of a private house. Among those arrested were only

sixteen students, and one doctor who had been the leader. All the rest were liberated on receipt of their names and addresses. Altogether 34 persons were arrested on that day, including 9 female students and 4 outsiders. In the afternoon of the next day, the 11th, 85 more persons including 31 students, were driven into the riding school out of another disorderly mob of 150 men and women. Two of the worst of the students were kept under arrest. On the same day the police took up 25 more for street disturbances, 15 of them students, 2 of whom one man and one woman, were detained in custody.

On Sunday, March 17, in the afternoon, 70 persons, mostly students, were shut into the yard of a private house by the police of the Tver boulevard for presenting a demonstrative appearance. Then 9 women were also seized for trying to set the bystanders against the police. Of all these, 11 scholars of the technical school, 1, a university student, and 3 women were arrested. In all the disorders at Moscow there have been no fights between the crowds and police and military.

On March 17, in St. Petersburg, at 11 A. M., crowds of people of different classes began to collect round the Kazan Cathedral. At noon the arrival of many students of both sexes brought the crowd up to about 3,000 persons, who began to circulate papers and for the most part refused to obey orders to move on. One of the students, near the door of the cathedral, read out a proclamation from his St. Petersburg comrades with various demands, whereupon there was much shouting. A strong force of police and Cossacks then arrived on the scene and isolated the crowd from the spectators on the Nevsky. While they pushed the rioters back toward the doors of the cathedral a free fight ensued, in which the students and others threw stones, galoshes and lumps of snow congealed into ice at the police and Cossacks and attacked them with sticks and brass rods taken from the stair carpets of the cathedral. Red and white flags with inscriptions were wrested from several students. An iron hammer-head was thrown at the commander of the second sotnia of Cossacks, Captain Esayeff, striking him so forcibly on the head that he was at once rendered hors de combat with his face covered with blood. The Cossacks then dismounted and fought the crowd on foot. Some of the rioters were surrounded and taken away under arrest, others ran into the cathedral where they remained with their hats on and even smoked cigarettes. The door porter, who remonstrated with them, received a blow in the face. Notwithstanding the disorder and noise divine service went on till the end, and most of the congregation succeeded in leaving by side doors. The chief priest then tried to persuade the mob to leave the cathedral, but one of the students pulled the sleeve of his cassock and told him that he had better go away himself to avoid further unpleasantness. They then decided not to leave separately and to destroy everything about them compromising. At this moment, however, the police entered the sacred edifice and persuaded the crowd of about 300 persons to proceed to the police station. The arrests altogether amount 760—namely, 339 students of higher institutions of the capital, 377 women, mostly attendants at lectures of the higher courses of instruction, and 44 outsiders.

During the fighting, besides the Cossack captain already referred to, severe though not dangerous blows and injuries were inflicted on one of the colonias of police; also on 20 policemen and four Cossacks, as well as on 18 men and 14 women among the rioters arrested.

Alls Well that Ends Well.

Ab, Gwendolynne,' exclaimed the impassioned but somewhat obscure author, 'marry me! I cannot live without you. You are the well from which I draw all my inspiration.'

The maiden thought long before she framed her reply suitable to the needs of the humorist of the Kansas City Star.

'No, Harold,' she said, 'I cannot marry you and be your well, but I will always be a cistern to you.'