

A Wolf's Vengeance

From the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Lafcadio Hearn

A Butcher's "Clean" Work Upon a Human Heart

THE STORY OF A SLAUGHTER-HOUSE TRAGEDY

It is a fact, we believe, that in some countries butchers are, or were, legally incompetent to serve as jurors on a murder trial. With the justices or in-justice of the statutes depriving a most useful and necessary class of citizens of their right to enjoy the privilege of sending a man to the gallows we do not propose to deal at this time.

We mention the fact only because it is so horribly suggestive in the light of the facts which we are about to narrate. If those who provide our daily markets with meat and grow fat upon the smell of blood are not properly believed to grow so callous to the sight of life-flood rushing from dying hearts as not to care much whether those hearts are human or brute, it is not because individuals of the craft fail to occasionally furnish evidence for the prosecution. In fact, it is a popular idea (we think a popular error, also), that butchers are brutal, and the laws alluded to were the natural outgrowth of that idea. What class of deeds the idea itself springs from may be gathered from a brief recital of the terrible deed with which one Wm. Wolf, "journeyman butcher," threw the extreme west of the city into an unpleasant excitement yesterday morning.

Wolf had recently sought and obtained employment at the slaughterhouse of Joseph Fieber & Co., Nos. 874 and 876 Central avenue. Little was known of him except that he had recently come from New York, that he was a desperate-looking fellow, that he had threatened to "stick" any body that displeased him. Not yet having made wages or been regularly upon the books of the establishment, it was not even known for certain that his name was Wolf. It seemed almost as though some comrade with an excellent idea of the fitness of things had nicknamed the new-cornet.

In the rear of the slaughter-house is a sleeping room which on Sunday night was occupied by three workmen, Valentine Daum, John Mauck and the man Wolf. They rose at four o'clock in the morning and went over to a neighboring beer doggery for a drink. At the saloon a quarrel which occurred between Daum and Wolf the day previous was not renewed, and nothing pointed to the awful murder which was done a few minutes later. The workmen returned to the slaughter-house, Mauck went to his duty of "cutting loins," and Daum and Wolf went up to their bed room. Soon all in the establishment heard the noise of scuffling, and it was announced that the room-mates were fighting. Persons rushed up stairs and entered the apartment. Daum was already dead. An ordinary "butcher knife," a ghastly weapon even when not smeared with blood, had been plunged through and through his heart. Wolf had disappeared. He was afterward traced down the back staircase and to the saloon which he had left, with his victim, only a few moments before. There he took a drink, muttering something about "having had his share out of him," and, picking up his change with trembling fingers, left. He is supposed to have fled to Kentucky, but, although a sharp pursuit was made by the police, up to the hour of going to press he had not been arrested.

Meanwhile a horror-stricken crowd had gathered around the corpse of Daum. He had been usually a well-behaved young man, was twenty-six years of age only, and unmarried. It was known by the little crowd that the dead man had recently been betrothed, and was to have been married in a few weeks—a circumstance not tending to lessen the sympathy of the friends and relatives, who, attracted by fast-spreading rumor, soon gathered in the death chamber. The floor was steeped in blood, which had evidently gone out of the veins of the murdered man with a rush. The blow which pierced the heart had been sent to it with fearful force from a point immediately under the left arm-pit. The assassin, probably, after brief words of quarrel, brought on with a fell purpose, had evidently lifted the arm of his enemy as he would have grasped the leg of a sheep which he was about to cut into chops, and then struck “home.” The whole scene was ghastly even for a slaughter-house.

Shortly after eleven o'clock the Coroner began an inquest. We have recited the main facts above, but for those fond of details in such matters we give, so far as yet taken:

THE TESTIMONY.

FREDERICK ZIMMERMANN, having been sworn, testified: I live on Central avenue, above Whiteman street. Recognize the body as that of Valentine Daum. He worked at the slaughter-house of Fieber & Sons, on Central avenue, between Mohawk Bridge and Clarkson street. Have known Daum for several months. He worked at Camp Washington before he came to the slaughter-house, and was a butcher by trade. He was married, but left his wife. His wife lived in Camp Washington when I last heard of her. I do not know positively that Daum has any relations in the city. I have heard that he had a cousin working in Windisch's brewery.

WM. DECKLINGBURG, next sworn, testified: I live with my parents at 48 Cross street. I work at Fieber's slaughter-house. I know the name of the man killed to be Valentine Daum. At a quarter of five o'clock this morning I reached the slaughter-house, where I went for the purpose of getting some pigs' feet for my parents. I met the man Hannes down stairs in the slaughter-house. He told me that Valentine Daum and the man Bill, whose other name I don't know, had a fuss yesterday. When he said Bill I understood him to mean the man who did the stabbing. Bill is a fat man, and has a black mustache. After I left Hannes I went up stairs to tell Bill to go down and help him render some lard. I found Bill in bed, who sleeps, as the rest of the workmen do, in the slaughter-house. He was alone in the bed-room, and lying on the bed on the north side of the room next to the north window. There were three beds in the room. He was awake when I went in. I spoke first, and said “Bill, come down and help Hannes render some lard,” He said, in German, “I will not do it.” I asked, “Why? The old man will be up after you.” Bill then said, “G-d d--n, if you don't get out I will settle you and the old man too.” At the same time he said this he reached around and took from under his pillow something that I first thought to be a revolver. It was a long instrument, and looked like a butcher-knife when I saw it. I saw it glisten. I then ran out. Bill got out of bed between his and the one next to it He started toward me, and followed as far as the foot of the steps. By this time I was out of the door. He cursed me three times, once after he jumped from his bed. The first persons I saw on coming out of the bedroom were George Kiefer and Valentine Daum. They were about twenty five or thirty feet from the door of the bedroom on the same floor. They were cutting off loins at the time. Kiefer had a saw in his hand, and Daum was using the knife. The first words that were said were from Valentine, who asked me, “Why, don't he come?” While I was in the room with Bill he said he would not work, because Valentine was drunk yesterday afternoon, and started a fuss with him. I told

Valentine this, and he said "I will go in and ask him why he will not work." I stayed outside with Kiefer while Valentine went into Bill's room. I saw him go into the room. I could not see Bill standing in the room. About two minutes after Daum went into the room, I heard two stamps, as if made by the feet. It was five minutes after I heard this that a man came out. I saw him fall about about fifteen feet from the door of the mom. Running to the man, I found him to be Daum. I heard no words pass between the two men when they were in the room. I was too far off to hear. I think I would heard a noise if there had been any in the room. When Valentine fell I said, "O! George, some one has fallen, I don't know who it is." I ran to him right away. The blood was flowing from the left side freely. When Valentine went into the bed-room he left his knife on the bench. He made no threats on starting from the room. I said to Kiefer, "Let us see if we can't catch Bill." Kiefer was afraid to go. We hallooted to Hannes and Louis Henning. They came up, and these two, Mr. Richman, and I went into the room together. We did not see any thing in the room but two bunches of hair on the floor. The back door was standing open, but Bill was not there. I have not seen him since. Mr. Korzenborn afterward told us that he came to his saloon and drank a glass of whisky. There were some spots of blood on the trunk. [The hair found on the floor was here shown to witness, who said he thought it to be Bill's hair.]

Adjourned until 8 o'clock.

The inquest was resumed at three o'clock, and the following testimony taken:

JOHN MARK, being sworn, testified: I board at Joseph Fieber's on Central avenue, near Mohawk bridge, and work at Fieber's slaughter-house; I render lard at the slaughter-house; have been engaged there five months; recognize the deceased as Valentine Daum; have known him two and a half years; when I first became acquainted with him he was working with Charles Hoffman; he has a cousin working with Hauck & Windisch; this morning, at the time deceased was stabbed, I was down in the fat shop; I had sent up William Decklenburg to tell Bill to throw down fat from upstairs to place where I work; I heard in a minute or two Bill say to Win. Decklenburg to make haste and get out, or he would stab him; I don't think Decklenburg was in the room with Bill longer than six minutes. I heard Decldenburg go out of the bed-room, and then I heard some one else go to Bill's bed-room. The man whom I recognized as Valentine Daum, by his voice, said something to Bill in the bed-room, which I could not understand. I heard Bill's voice two or three times while Valentine was in the room. I could not understand what either of them said. I heard, also, something like a fuss or scuffling in the room. I heard only the two persons in the room, so far as I could tell. Valentine was in the room with Bill perhaps four or five minutes. I heard Valentine go out of the bed-room, walking up the steps, and the next thing I hard was George Kiefer calling to me to come up, that Valentine was stabbed. I ran up stairs, and saw Valentine lying on the floor, beside the scraping-bench, dead. I then went into the bed-room for two or three minutes with Louis Henning. The chute or hatch-way through which we throw the fat down into the fat-mom was standing open as I rushed in, and I fell through it, as it is located just within the door. I fell down into the fat-room, and then getting a lamp I came back again and went into the bed-room again. I did not see Bill when I went into the bed-room, but I saw blood about the room and the appearance of there having been a scuffle in the room. I also saw some hair on the floor. Last night I slept in the same room with Bill. Three beds were in the room, and four men. Valentine, Bill, Louis and I slept in the room. I slept with Valentine in the same bed, and our bed was the furthest from Bill's. Bill went to bed last night early in the evening, and I at about 11 o'clock last night. Valentine retired after I went to bed, but I don't know at what hour, as I was asleep. I awoke this morning at about three o'clock and made a light. Bill was then awake. Valentine and Louis also then got up and we went to work leaving

Bill in bed. After we had loaded the wagon I went back to the bed-room and asked him to get up and throw some fat down. He said he would not, and that he intended to quit work. I did not go back again to the bed-room until after the stabbing. Val was not in the bed-room from three o'clock this morning until he was stabbed. The stabbing took place this morning at a little before six o'clock.

Bill and Val had a quarrel yesterday afternoon about four o'clock at the slaughterhouse. I was present when the quarrel commenced and remained with them about fifteen minutes. Then I went into the sausage-shop where I could still hear them. They began quarreling about sausage. They fought a little then; no one was knocked down. No weapons were used or shown. I have seen no other quarrel between these men. I heard Bill say that if any of them bothered him he would run a knife through him. This was about eight days ago I heard him make this threat. I neglected to state that I had opened the hatch-hold this morning myself at about five o'clock.

JOSEPH FIEBER, one of the firm of Joseph Fieber & Bro. engaged in slaughtering, recognized deceased as Val Daum. I have known him two or three years. The name of the man who is supposed to have done the stabbing is Bill, but I have not got his name on my books, as he has not made wages with us. He has been there with us about a week, and I have heard that his name is Wolf—William Wolf—but am not sure about that being correct.

At this point the inquest was adjourned until this morning at 8 o'clock.