

Violent Cremation

From the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Lafcadio Hearn

Saturday Night's Horrible Crime.

A Man Murdered and Burned in a Furnace.

The Terrible Vengeance of a Father

Arrest of the Supposed Murderers.

Links of Circumstantial Evidence.

The Pitiful Testimony of a Trembling Horse.

Shocking Details of the Diabolism.

Statements and Carte de Visite of the Accused.

“One woe doth tread upon another’s heel,” so fast they follow. Scarcely have we done recording the particulars of one of the greatest conflagrations that has occurred in our city for years than we are called upon to describe the foulest murder that has ever darkened the escutcheon of our State. A murder so atrocious and so horrible that the soul sickens at its revolting details—a murder that was probably hastened by the fire; for, though vengeance could be the only prompter of two of the accused murderers.

FEAR OF A DREADFUL SECRET

Coming to light may have been partly the impelling motive that urged on the third to the bloody deed, as will be found further along in our story. The scene of the awful deed was H. Freiberg’s tannery on Livingston street and Gamble alley, just west of Central avenue, and immediately opposite the ruins of M. Werk & Co.’s candle factory.

The Dramatis Personae.

Herman Schilling, the murdered man, and Andreas Egner, George Rufer and Frederick K. Egner, his suspected murderers.

The story, as near as we can obtain it, and divested of unnecessary verbiage, is as follows: the deceased, has been employed by Mr. Freiberg for some time, and formerly boarded with the elder Egner, who keeps a saloon and boarding-house at No. 153 Findlay street, on the lot immediately west of the tannery, and connected with it by means of a gate. Egner possessed a daughter Julia, about fifteen years of age, whose morals, from common report, were none of the

best, and she and the deceased became very intimate. In fact, so intimate did they become that Schilling was found by the father late one night,

IN HER BED-ROOM,

Under circumstances that proved that they were criminally so, and Schilling only escaped the father's vengeance at the time by jumping through the window to the ground and temporary safety. Egner claimed that Schilling had seduced his daughter, which charge was denied by the accused, who, while admitting his criminal connection with the girl, alleged that he was not the first or only one so favored. At all events, the girl became pregnant and died at the Hospital on the 6th of August last from cancer of the vulva, being seven months advanced in pregnancy at the time. The same day Egner and his son Frederick attacked Schilling in the tanyard with oak barrel staves, and in all probability would have killed him then and there but for the interposition of bystanders. Schilling had the Egners arrested for this assault and battery and they were tried and convicted before Squire True, each being fined \$50 and costs for the offense, and being held in \$200 bonds to keep the peace toward him for one year. After the trial

THE ELDER EGNER SWORE,

In his own bar-room, that he would have Schilling's life for the wrong he had done him, and he has repeated these threats on several occasions since. After the discovery of his criminal intimacy with the girl, Schilling left Egner's house and took his meals thereafter at the house of C. Westenbrock, 126 Findlay street, and sleeping in a room in a shed of the tannery. Last Saturday night Schilling left Westenbrock's house about 10 o'clock for his sleeping apartment, and as far as is known this was the

LAST TIME HE WAS SEEN ALIVE

By any one who knew him except his murderers. About half past ten o'clock a stout youth of 16, named John Hollerbach, residing on Central avenue, just above Livingston street, came home and entered his residence by the rear of its yard, opening on Gamble alley. He proceeded to his room in the back of the second floor of the dwelling, and disrobed for bed. He had scarcely done so when he heard the noise of a violent scuffle, apparently proceeding from the alley back of his house, and hastily donning his garments again he dashed down stairs, to find that the noise came from the stable of the tannery, and knowing Schilling well he called to him in German: "Herman, is that you?" The reply came, "Yes, John. John, John, come and help me, some one is killing me," uttered as if the speaker was being choked or stifled. "Who is it," was the next query. The answer was so indistinct that nothing could be made of it and Hollerbach shouted "Murder, murder, let that man alone on will come in and shoot you." No response was made to his treat save the

GURGLING NOISE OF THE STRANGLING MAN,

and Hollerbach frightened almost to death, started out the alley and down Livingston street in quest of a policeman. He saw the light of the lantern of the private watchman of Werk's place, but not knowing that he had the power of arrest, so run's the boy's strange story, he did not call

his attention to the matter, and after vainly seeking for a policeman on several streets without calling or making any outcry for them, he returned to his room, passing by the stable where the foul deed had been committed, hearing, he thought, a dragging noise as he went by. Upon regaining his room he was afraid to go to sleep, and sat up all night in fear and trembling.

Schilling's boarding boss, Westenbrock, who is also an employe of Mr. Freiberg, came to the grated Gamble alley gateway of the tannery to groom the horse in the stable. He found the gate locked, and called for Schilling. Of course he received no response, until his repeated calls attracted the attention of Hollerbach, who looked out his window and said, "I shouldn't wonder if Herman was killed last night" "Come here and climb the gate," said Westenbrock. Hollerbach did as desired, and opening the gate admitted his partner. The pair at once found that a dreadful deed of blood had been committed. The stable showed signs of a desperate conflict, being splashed with gore, while a

SIX-PRONGED PITCHFORK

Standing against its side was smeared with blood and hair, as was a broom and a large stick near by. Traces of blood were found leading from the stable to the door of the boiler-room, a distance of over one hundred feet, and upon examination these traces were found to lead directly to the door of the gas chamber of the furnace. The horror-struck men stood appalled for a moment as the realization of their worst fears burst upon them, and then spread the news with all the speed possible. Messengers were dispatched to the Oliver street Station-house, and Lieutenant Bierbaum arrived on the scene about half-past eight o'clock, accompanied by Officer Knoeppe. It did not take them long to determine that the body of the murdered man had been thrown into the furnace, and, aided by the spectators who had gathered to the scene by hundreds, he dampened the fire with water and then fished for the remains. These were found to consist of the head and a portion of the trunk and intestines, burned to a crisp and beyond recognition. Suspicion at once fell upon the Egners, from the fact that the gate in the fence between the tanner and their yard *was wide open* when Westenbrock and Hollerbach entered the premises.

THEY WERE AT ONCE ARRESTED

And taken to the Oliver-street Station-house, where a charge of suspicion of murder was placed against their names. Coroner Maley was notified and responded promptly to the call. No Constable being on the ground, he appointed Samuel Bloom special, and impaneled the following jury: John Cutter, Henry Britt, George Gould, Dennis O'Keefe, John Wessel and B. F. Schott. They viewed the remains, and the inquest was then adjourned until this morning at nine o'clock, the remains meanwhile being transferred to Habig's undertaking establishment, on West Sixth street. An ENQUIRER reporter visited the establishment some hours later, accompanied by Dr. Maley, and examined all so far discovered of Herman Schilling's charred corpse.

THE HIDEOUS MASS OF REEKING CINDERS,

Despite all the efforts of the brutal murderers to hide their ghastly crime, remain sufficiently intact to bear frightful witness against them.

On lifting the coffin-lid a powerful and penetrating odor, strongly resembling the smell of burnt beef, yet heavier and fouler, filled the room and almost sickened the spectators. But the

sight of the black remains was far more sickening. Laid upon the clean white lining of the coffin they rather resembled great shapeless lumps of half-burnt bituminous coal than aught else at the first hurried glance; and only a closer investigation could enable a strong-stomached observer to detect their ghastly character—masses of crumbling human bones, strung together by half-burnt sinews, or glued one upon another by a hideous adhesion of half-molten flesh, boiled brains and jellied blood mingled with coal. The

SKULL HAD BURST LIKE A SHELL

In the fierce furnace-heat, and the whole upper portion seemed as though it had been *blown out* by the steam from the boiling and bubbling brains. Only the posterior portion of the occipital and parietal bones, the inferior and superior maxillary, and some of the face-bones remained—the upper portions of the skull bones being jagged, burnt brown in some spots, and in others charred to black ashes. The brain had all boiled away, save a small wasted lump at the base of the skull about the size of a lemon. It was crisped and still warm to the touch. On pushing the finger through the crisp, the interior felt about the consistency of banana fruit, and the yellow fibers seemed to writhe like worms in the Coroners hands. The eyes were cooked to bubbled crisps in the blackened sockets, and the bones of the nose were gone, leaving a hideous hole.

So covered were the jaws and lower facial bones with coal, crusted blood and gummy flesh, that the Coroner at first supposed the lower maxillary to have been burnt away. On tearing away the frightful skull-mask of mingled flesh and coal and charred gristle, however,

THE GRINNING TEETH SHONE GHASTLY WHITE,

And both jaws were found intact. They were set together so firmly that it was found impossible to separate them, without reducing the whole mass to ashes. For so great had been the heat, that the Coroner was able to crumble one of the upper teeth in his fingers.

Besides the fragments of the skull have been found six ribs of the right side and four of the left, the middle portion of the spinal column; the liver, spleen and kidneys; the pelvic bones; the right and left humerus; the femoral bones, and the tibia and fibula of both legs. The body had burst open at the chest, and the heart and lungs had been entirely consumed. The liver was simply roasted and the kidneys fairly fried. There is a horrible probability that the wretched victim was

FORCED INTO THE FURNACE ALIVE,

And suffered all the agonies of the bitterest death which man can die, while wedged in the flaming fire. His teeth were so terribly clenched that more than one spectator of the hideous skull declared that only the most frightful agony could have set those jaws together. Perhaps, stunned and disabled by the murderous blows of his assailants, the unconscious body of the poor German was forced into the furnace. Perhaps the thrusts of the assassin's pitchfork, wedging him still further into the fiery hell, or perhaps the first agony of burning when his bloody garments took fire, revived him to meet the death of flame. Fancy the shrieks for mercy, the mad expostulation, the frightful fight for life, the superhuman struggles for existence—a century of agony crowded into a moment—the shrieks growing feebler—the desperate struggles dying into feeble writhings. And through all the grim murderers, demoniacally pitiless, devilishly desperate, gasping with their exertions to destroy a poor human life,

LOOKING ON IN SILENT TRIUMPH!

Peering into the furnace until the skull exploded and the steaming body burst, and the fiery flue hissed like a hundred snakes! It may not be true—we hope for poor humanity's sake it can not be true; but the frightful secrets of that fearful night are known only to the criminals and their God. They may be brought to acknowledge much; but surely never so much as that we have dared to hint at.

A FRESH TRAIL.

Immediately after the arrest of the Egners the police got news that a man named George Rufer, who had been employed in the tannery, had been discharged Saturday evening, and that he had blamed Schilling for this dismissal. Search was made for him at his residence, No. 90 Logan street, but he had gone out, and his wife, in response to questions, at first stated that he had not left the house after supper. Afterward she convicted herself, saying that he had gone to Spring street, to a friend's house, in company with her, and that he had retired at 10 o'clock.

The news of the terrible affair spread with great celerity, and though its horrible features seemed too awful for belief, for once a story passed through dozens of lips without gathering any thing by the transition,

REALITY FOR ONCE DISTANCING

The most fervid imagination. By noon the streets in the vicinity of the scene were thronged with people who eagerly caught at the slightest word dropped by any one conversant with the story of the murder, and repeated it with bated breath to fresh groups of earnest listeners. The day was fine, and in the afternoon hundreds who visited the locality merely to view the ruins of the fire learned of the still more terrible affair, and aided in swelling the crowd that

SWAYED TO AND FRO

Around the tannery like waves of the sea. About half past four o'clock the rain, which had been threatening for some time, began to descend in a lively manner, and this dispersed the throng, much to the relief of the police on guard around the premises.

About five o'clock Lieutenant Birnbaum started out on a fresh search for Rufer. Before he reached his residence, however, he found him on his way to the Station-house, he having been arrested by officers Paulus and Knoeppe at the corner of Logan and Findlay streets. When taken to the station-house he was confronted by Colonel Kiersted, who ordered him to be stripped and examined. His face was scratched and contused in a terrible manner, and presented every appearance of having been engaged in

A FEARFUL AND PROLONGED STRUGGLE.

He appeared cool and collected, considering the fearful nature of the suspicion against him. His clothing did not present any traces of blood until he had removed his pantaloons; then the knees of his drawers were found

STIFFENED WITH GORE.

He quickly exclaimed: "That is blood from the hides I handled." A gout of blood was also found on the breast of his undershirt.

HIS STORY

Was told partly in broken English and partly in German, and was substantially as follows: "Last Saturday night Mr. Freiberg told me that work was slack, and that he would have to let me go for a few days. Well, after supper I took my little child and I went down to Mr. Egner's and I had a glass of beer, and then I paid Mr. Egner my beer bill. After I had had a couple of more beers, about nine o'clock, I took my child and started home. I stopped at a frame grocery at the corner of Logan and Findlay and took a couple of glasses more beer and one of wine, and then I went to bed. Sunday morning I got up about 7 o'clock, and after breakfast I started to walk to Columbia to see the superintendent of a furniture factory there about getting a job of work. I could not find the superintendent, as two men told me he lived over the river. I met no one in Columbia that I knew, and I started to walk home after getting some beer. I got tired, and got into the Street cars and rode to the Elm street depot and then started home, when I was arrested. I did not have any trouble with Schilling. I last saw him dressing hides when I left the tannery Saturday evening. He had been in the habit of working at night. I did not know where he slept. I once heard Egner talking about Schilling and his daughter Julia's seduction, and he said that Schilling ought to be

RUN THROUGH WITH A PITCHFORK.

Another time I heard the son Fred talking about the same thing, and he said that Schilling ought to have a rope tied around his neck and be

HELD OVER THE HOT FURNACE."

When asked how he accounted for the scratches on his face, he became contradictory, first saying that he got them by jumping from a shed the night of the fire at Werk's factory, then that he refused to give his wife any money Saturday night, and that she and him had a fight, and again that he had fallen down the street. He is a man about five feet seven inches high, with a sinewy and strong frame, and is about thirty-seven years old. Our portrait is a fair reproduction of his appearance last night in his cell at the Station-house.

The most damning report against him is that the deceased, Herman Schilling, was cognizant of the fact that

"RUFER HAD SET FIRE"

To M. Werk & Co.'s candle factory Friday night last, and that he intended to apprise the police of his information. How true this report is we can not now state, but if true it would afford conclusive evidence of the reason that inclined him to share in the deep damnation of the murder.

ELDER EGNER

Is a German, about forty-three years old, slight and spare in figure, and with a forbidding but determined look. His son is a beardless boy, without any distinguishing characteristics save a sullen look of stolid indifference to his fate. His tale is that he played "tag", "catcher," etc., up till nine o'clock Saturday night, slept soundly during the night, hearing no noise, and awakening at seven o'clock in the morning, and only hearing of the murder about eight o'clock.

Egner keeps a coffee-house and a cooper-shop, just west of the tannery, his saloon being at No. 153 Findlay street.

THE DECEASED,

Herman Schilling, was a native of Westphalia, twenty-five years old, about five feet eight inches high, finely proportioned, ruddy-faced, with dark mustache and cross-eyes. He was generally spoken of yesterday evening as a very good, companionable kind of a man. He was unmarried, and has no relations that we could learn of in this city.

THE PREMISES

On which the bloody deed was enacted comprise a stable, harness, carriage and sleeping-room of the deceased, together with two large tan-bark sheds and a boiler shed, in which is situated the furnace wherein Schilling was cremated. The stable adjoins Gamble alley, and is about eight by ten feet square, with a loft not much higher than a man's head. It is occupied by but one horse, and presents every indication of a terrible and bloody struggle. Adjoining it is a room used for storing harness, and it is probable that in this room the murderers laid in wait for their prey. Next, west, is the carriage-room; and, by means of a door in its west partition, access is had to the room used by the deceased as his sleeping apartment. These rooms form an offset to the tan-bark sheds, and west of these is the boiler, furnace and engine rooms. Between these buildings and the others of the tannery is a large yard running east and west. To guard the premises are three immense and savage mastiffs.

THE MANNER OF THE MURDER.

Judging by all the evidence the murderers were familiar with the premises and its canine guardians; for, where they not, they could not have gained access to them without encountering the dogs, and being probably torn into fragments by them. They in all probability entered through the gate leading from Egner's to the tan-yard, and ensconced themselves in the harness-room, which they knew their victim must pass on his way to his lodging. When he entered, as was his wont, by the small gate opening on Gamble alley, they were peering through the open door of the harness room awaiting their opportunity. A few more steps in darkness and silence, and the watchman's throat is suddenly seized with a grasp of iron. Then commences

THE TERRIBLE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

The night is pitch dark, fit gloom for the dark deed it veils. The victim is a young and powerful man, muscled like Hercules; but he has been wholly taken by surprise, he is unarmed, and he finds by the strength of the grasp on his throat that his antagonist is more than a match for him in

mere brute force. A stunning blow from behind suddenly shows him that he has two enemies to deal with; and then for the first time, perhaps, the terrible knowledge of the fact his life is sought, first draws upon him. Then indeed it becomes a fierce fight for dear life. The stable shows that the victim, despairing of his ability to cope with his savage assailants, sought refuge behind the horse's hoofs; hoping at least to thus gain a moment's time to shriek for help. But there the indications are that the contest was hottest. The side of the stable is in places deeply indented by the prongs of the pitchfork—indented by such thrusts as only immense force could give—thrusts which were designed to let out the life of the victim. It was the noise of this struggle that attracted the attention of young Hollerbach, and—who knows?—but that his version of what he saw and heard of it has yet to be told in full. Certainly it seems singular that he should behave himself in the remarkable manner he states. At the hour he names as the time of the murder a dozen saloons in the immediate vicinity were in full blast and filled with patrons. Aye, even the house in which he slept—no, did not sleep, but watched—has a bar-room in it, which kept open until after midnight, and volunteers to rescue this victim could have been obtained by scores. Mr. John Hollerbach evidently knows much more than he has told of this fearful crime. It is preposterous to think that any man in his sane mind would act as he says he did. When the life of the dying man had so far ebbed that he could no longer resist his fate his murderers thought of the best place to dispose of the body.

THE FURNACE.

Within a hundred feet of the stable is the boiler-room, and this boiler is heated by a furnace of peculiar construction, being built on the principle of an air furnace for melting iron. Its fuel is tanbark, emptied in a gate through two circular openings in its top, and provided with a brick flue through which its gases pass into a chamber underneath the boiler where they are ignited. Into this chamber is a square damper opening of about twelve inches across, and to this narrow door the victim was carried by his slayers. The fire in the furnace had been dampened down, but the villains know well its mechanism, and, forcing the body through the narrow door, they endeavor to push it through into the fire. In this, however, they were balked by its size, and their work was to arrange the furnace so that its fire would burn the remains to ashes. How well they succeeded our story has told.

The Circumstantial Evidence

Is all as yet there is to found a suspicion on, but we must say that it appears to be of the most conclusive kind. Especially is this the fact in the case of Andreas Egner.

The grimy boards forming the floor of the loft of the stable are covered with festoons of heavy cobwebs; and through the chinks hay-seed has been constantly drifting down and lodging in the glutinous film spun by the gray spiders below. Moreover, the floor of the stable is thickly covered with poplar shavings. Suspicion being once fastened upon Andreas Egner, search was made in his house for articles of clothing or other things which might serve as a clue for tracing up the crime. A bundle of clothes was one of the first things pounced upon, including an old hat, a pair of low shoes, and a well-worn pair of coarse cassimere pants. The pants bore great stains of candle-grease, but there were no stains of blood, although some strange dark spots warranted a keen investigation. Yet the other garments afforded terrible witness against him. His hat was

found to be covered with just such cobwebs and hay-seed as hung from the roof of the stable; and his does were found full of the very poplar shavings which covered the stable-floor.

Rufer's clothes, which are also in the hands of the police, afford only

THE EVIDENCE OF BLOOD,

But there is plenty of it. It has stained the bosom of his coarse checked shirt a muddy red. It has trickled in thick streams upon the legs of his jeans, and stained them dark below the knees. He accounts for the blood on his shirt by the fact that it has been a part of his duties in the tannery to handle fresh hides. The gore on his pants he declares to have come from the veins of a chicken which he had killed the night before. There does not seem to be any more than a general suspicion against the boy Fred Egner.

THE SHUDDERING HORSE.

There are several instances connected with the scene of the horrible tragedy which must come under the head of circumstantial evidence. We have already referred to the great size and ferocity of the dogs guarding the premises, and their peculiar quietness during the performance of the hideous crime as conclusive proof that the murderers must have both been very familiar with the premises and the mastiffs. When we visited the tannery late last evening in company with Messrs. Farny and Duveneck to take sketches of the building, we found it impossible to gain entrance by reason of the dog's ferocity. Mother curious fact is the condition in which the horse, the dumb witness of that frightful crime, was found this morning—shuddering and trembling from head to hoof, his eyes wild with terror. Petting and caressing availed nothing; and the whole forenoon the animal was in a perfect tremor of fear.

THE FIVE-PRONGED FORK,

Used by the murderers either to kill their victim, or to stuff his body into the furnace, was found in the stable, with blood and hair still adhering to it, and a suspender-buckle on the fourth prong. It is curious that a similar suspender-buckle was found among the ashes of the furnace.

Besides the fork, a long stake, sharpened to a spear-like point and dyed at the smaller end with blood, appears to have served in the deed of murder. A small broom had evidently been used to brush up the blood, as it was completely coated with thickly crusted gore. How it happened that the murderers could have been careless enough to leave such damning evidence against them, we can scarcely imagine.

THE LATEST.

John Hollerbach, by order of Chief Kiersted was arrested in his bed at two o'clock this morning by Lieutenant Benninger, and locked up in the Oliver-street Station-house as a witness. He stuck to his apocryphal story. In conversation with a reporter this morning Rufer said if he had killed Schilling, he would have put him in a better place—a tank of salt-water under the tannery, where he never would have smelt. Would that tank not be a good place to drag for bloody clothes?

The following witnesses will be examined at the Coroner's inquest this morning: Wm. Hollerbach, Jr., C. Westenbrock, N. Westenberger, Ban Fruink, Jos. Schlingrop, R. Mellenbrook, Henry Korte, E. Kerr, Wm. Osterhage, Henry Korte, Jr., Isadore Freiberg, Henry Freiberg.

George Rufer stated that his wife was at the house of her sister, Mrs. Peter Eckert, the officers who were sent in search of her having failed to find her at her home on Dunlap street.

Rufer couldn't tell where Mrs. Eckert lived. Lieutenant Wersel, without any guide except that the husband of Mrs. Eckert was a potter, set out in search of her, and after a tramp of three or four miles, calling at a dozen houses, found her on Western avenue.

She stated that Mrs. Rufer was not with her, had not been with her, that they were not on good terms, and did not visit each other. This leaves the whereabouts of Mrs. Rufer still a mystery.

A little after midnight an officer of the Oliver-street Station came running into the station-house with a statement that rumors were afloat that a band had organized to take the prisoners out of their cells and lynch them. A good reserve of police was afterward kept at the station.