

A Horror From Shaker Life

From the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Lafcadio Hearn

Double Suicide Yesterday at the Farmers' Hotel.

Mother and Daughter Fly from Despondency to Death.

INTERESTING HISTORY OF A SAD EPISODE.

A very single tragedy, full of interest because of its mysterious features, and pathetic to a great degree, was enacted in a room at the Farmers' Hotel, on the northeast corner of Race and Court streets, at an early hour yesterday morning. The details, so far as ascertained, may be briefly told.

Early on Tuesday evening two women who were supposed to be sisters applied at the Farmers' Hotel for accommodation. The elder registered her name as Sallie Dill, and that of her companion as Ida May Dill. A room was assigned to them, and they returned about 6 1/2 o'clock, and retired. At 9 o'clock the two went out again and returned an hour later. The elder notified the clerk that they were weary, having traveled considerably, and wished to be called at 11 o'clock the next day.

At the appointed time a servant rapped at the door and received no answer. He rapped repeatedly, and while he was listening for a response, thought he heard a woman groaning. The proprietor was notified. He tried the door, and not being able to arouse the inmates of the room, called the attention of Officer Higgins. Higgins returned with George Meyneke, the Coroner's clerk, and they not being able to break in the door, effected an entrance by the transom.

The two women who had engaged the room were found lying on the bed together. The elder was in front, breathing heavily, and unconscious. The younger one by her side lay with her face to the wall. She was dead. On the floor was found a bottle labeled "Powers & Wightman's Morphia," which was empty. Froth was oozing from the nose and mouth of the dead girl, a mere child in appearance, and her limbs and body were drawn up as if she had died in pain. The elder lay on her back. Both were dressed, they having only removed their hats and combs before lying down.

The breathing woman, in a comatose condition, was removed to the Cincinnati Hospital, where she died at a quarter to 2 o'clock, three-quarters of an hour after her arrival there. The dead body was removed from the hotel to Habig's undertaking establishment on Sixth street. Towards evening the corpse was carried thither from the hospital.

On the persons of the dead bodies were found several letters and cards, but nothing to definitely give their history or suggest a motive for the suicide.

One was dated at Harrison, Ohio, April 15, and addressed to Sallie Dill, 97 East Third street, Cincinnati, with a change of address by the letter-carrier to No. 235 Court street, where is an intelligence office. The letter read as follows:

DEAR SALLY—You know not how I miss you. I came down this morning. It was too lovely to sit in my room. I pass the day only thinking of my friends. Sister is in the bakery writing to you, and I add a scrap. You have my kind wishes. Keep up a good

spirit, and be hopeful and cheerful, and preserve a pure spirit. Where is Ida, that she has not sent me one word? I hope she is well and happy, and doing the best she can. I send her a kiss. S. FARADAY.

P.S.—I take it on myself to inform you that G. Agnes Graves has written for a privilege. We can never take her back, if you know what she is, you will never be seen speaking to her. I should have nothing to do with her.

The other letters, both evidently written by intimate friends of the deceased, read as follows:

DEAR SALLIE—I received your two letters. Was glad to hear you arrived safe, and had good luck in getting a place for both of you in the same family, which makes it quite pleasant I hope Ida will be able to get along, and not have to work very hard. We are expecting the Ministry Tuesday. What changes they may make we can not tell. Very likely they will not make any. We are all quite well. My cold is not much better.

Nothing new has taken place since you left. Give my love to Ida and keep a good portion for yourself. I do not know when I shall be in the city. When I come, if I have time, I will call to see you—that is, if I know where to find you.

In love, LUCY.

SALLIE DILL.

SABBATH MORNING, April 14.

DEAR SALLIE—I received yours of the 12th. I began to despair of ever hearing from you when a whole week and two days had elapsed, and every evening would inquire if there was not a letter for me. But “No” was all I got in response. Forgive me if too severe. I know your time must be too well filled up with more important matters. I am very glad to hear you meet with such good success and are getting on so well; but you did not say one word about your health; I was very anxious; you seemed so unwell when you left here, and your letter, which lies before me, shows a great deal of nervousness. My dear sister, you must guard against it all you can. There is nothing, in my estimation, as deplorable as to have one’s nerves shattered. I am thankful, indeed, if I have been the least comfort to you in any way. For the short acquaintance we had, I must say that I enjoyed it very much.

* * *

Our good ministry wrote that they would be here last Tuesday, but failed coming on account of their horse taking sick. Yesterday Elder Henry received a postal card saying they would be here this coming Tuesday.

* * *

ETTIE FARRADY.

The address on the envelope of one of the letters led a reporter of the Commercial to No. 97 East Third street, to make inquiries at the residence of Mrs. Agnes Newlin. Mrs. Newlin stated that, having made application at the office of the Women's Christian Association for help, on last Saturday a week, two women called on her for a situation. They claimed to be mother and daughter, and gave their names as Sallie and Ida May Dill. The elder was dressed in full Shaker garb, and as neat as a pin. Her freshness and beauty were marked, and her statement that she was the mother of her companion was questioned. But she declared that she was thirty-six years of age, the widow of a soldier who died early in the war of the rebellion. Sixteen years ago, when her child was six months old, she entered the Shaker community at Whitewater, near Harrison, Ohio. The child, she said, on growing into womanhood, manifested a disposition to be schooled in the manners of the world, and for this reason they had left the Society. They had left in a friendly understanding, and on a promise that they could return at any time they chose.

The mother and child remained at Mrs. Newlin's for about ten days, the former acting in the capacity of a housekeeper and the latter as a nurse. Last Monday morning the woman rose about 5 o'clock and left the house, returning about noon. Her absence without leave or excuse was deemed sufficient for a discharge. They departed accordingly, and took with them two trunks filled with a complete assortment of clothing. The woman had expressed to another one of the servants a dissatisfaction on account of the work being harder than she had expected. Directions were left to send what mail matter might come for them to No. 235 Court street.

There is a theory that the disposition of the girl might be in some measure an explanation of the motive of suicide. She is described as being a very stubborn child, and wild in her notions.

Last evening a young woman giving the name of Lamo Brooks, a seamstress at the Orphan Asylum on Mt. Auburn, called at the Mt. Auburn Orphan Asylum, called at the Farmers' Hotel, and suited that she had known the deceased well, as mother and daughter, in the Shaker settlement of Whitewater. She herself had left the Association about three years ago. She had understood that they came to Cincinnati about three weeks ago to seek employment.

It is the opinion of some that Sallie Dill, the elder person, becoming despondent, resolved on the death of herself and daughter; that she administered the poison to the girl and then took a dose herself. The appearance of the bodies on the bed, in full dress, would indicate that suicide was contemplated by both. Of the scene in that room, however, with its preparations for the tragedy, there is no living tongue to tell.

ANTECEDENTS OF THE PARTIES AND HISTORY OF THEIR TROUBLE.

Fourteen years ago there came to the Shaker settlement of Whitewater, six miles from Harrison and one mile from New Haven, this county, a young woman, who, with her infant daughter (born out of wedlock) in her arms, sought refuge from a world in which she had met only treachery and disappointment. The father of her child, who had refused to marry her, was the son of a wealthy and well known preacher of Indianapolis. This was Sallie Dill. She called the little one, then only a year or two of age, Ida May Dill. Sallie Dill was a woman of rather attractive presence, and one of her qualifications was a fine contralto voice that soon brought her out as a leader in the choir of the "Church" or Center Society of the Shakers. In this society this young woman passed these fourteen years, an uneventful life, while her child grew up to young womanhood, and to the experience of the feelings of a fresh, warm nature, that could not well be curbed by the restraints professed by the people by whom she had found herself surrounded. A few months ago her love for the society of the younger men of the settlement, and inclination to associate as freely as

possible with them, in public, and honestly, brought upon her the tongue of calumny at the “confessional” of the society. Reports about her grew and increased in number, until at last her mother was told that she must leave them, as she was becoming entirely too “worldly.” There may have been no sin in this child’s heart, but she was accused of it and she must go. She must go out into a strange world, of which she knew nothing, and where her young and sensitive nature might be blasted by the first frost of unkindness, out into a cold world where she had no friends and no ties of sympathy. The mother loved her daughter; and after all the appeals that she could make for her proved to be in vain, she announced her determination to go with her. The Elders told her that she could soon find a good situation in the “world” for the child, and that she could then return to them. About three weeks ago she came to this city. One posted in the ways of Shakers tells us that it is likely that all the mother and daughter received to start them in life after fourteen years of servitude with those people was not to exceed fifteen dollars. Their life in this city appears to have only two features—their inability to find a place where they could live together permanently and the withering answers that the mother must have received from the Shakers in authority in answer to her many appeals to let her take her child back with them. In this woman’s inner life here there was the desperate thought that it would be an abandonment of the only thing she had on earth to love, to leave the daughter here to temptation and to the necessities that would force themselves upon her.

The letters that she wrote appealing for mercy for her child, and the answers that came to them, ought to be brought out to the light of a world that does not know enough, perhaps, of the practices of a community that would send a helpless young girl out into a strange world merely because she had been suspected. An idea of what was going on in the minds of these helpless ones may be gleaned from a letter that we have been permitted to copy, that was written the night before the suicide, in the atmosphere of the full determination to which they came to lay down the burden of life. It was addressed to a young man who knew these people and had seen them here. He had known them at the Shaker settlement, and had been kind to them as they had to him. He had done them some favors here, and they were grateful to him. On Tuesday afternoon the mother called on him. He knew that they left the residence of Mr. Win. Brickley, at No. 235 West Court street, where they had been stopping a short time, and they were very despondent. The mother did not tell him the nature of the letters she had received from the elders, but he surmised that she had made every effort to go back and take her child with her, and that they had failed. He made every effort to get her to tell him where they had taken lodgings after leaving the Brickleys, but she would not tell him. Yesterday afternoon he received the following sad letter:

APRIL 24.

DEAR—: I suppose you will be surprised at receiving a letter from me, and still more at what it contains. When I saw you this afternoon I was too full to give you satisfaction. I must thank you for your many kindnesses to me and mine. It seems like it has been my fate, and is still, to be an outcast. I have always felt that you were my friend, but the time has come when friendship ceases between us—you and me—for death will cause a separation. If I could recall the many harsh words I have spoken, and obliterate them from your memory, it would be a happy moment for me. But please forgive all. I wish I could look back and think that in neither thought, word nor deed had I marred your comfort. But when my spirit is wafted on the other side, think of me as one that always wished you well. Had it been in my power to do anything for you on this earth, how willingly would I have done it. But I have been placed in a situation where I could not act

my own will. Let bygones be bygones, and take the will for the deed. You remarked that you were sorry to see me so reckless; but it is not recklessness that causes me to do this. The song says "all dark clouds have a silver lining." Mine is so closely enveloped that it can not be penetrated. The refusal of one thing and the failure of many things have brought all this on. Persons whom I relied upon would not extend the hand of authority as they promised they would. There is not anyone who is really trustworthy. Mortals, oh, mortals, how weak they are, making such loud professions and fulfilling none. If you only knew one-half I have gone through you would shed tears of sympathy. But I do not expect any one to enter into my troubles and feel the weight of them. I suppose it will surprise the folks some little when they hear of it. I have nothing to censure you for on this earth. I only hope you will take care of yourself and meet me in heaven. My last thought will be of you, for Ida is going with me. Don't think me rash, for how could I see her go to ruin, as she certainly would if she staid here. And now a last farewell. For the first time, in reality, I say farewell.

SALLIE.

P.S.—I trust we will meet on the other side, where the reunion will not be broken.

To this was added a scrap in the girl's writing, as follows:

I can't leave you without saying good-bye. I thank you for befriending me so often, and trust we will meet some time, to part no more. Farewell!

IDA MAY.

This letter establishes the fact that the mother and daughter fully understood each other. They had come to the conclusion to die together and so end their troubles on this earth and go together to that future life in which they evidently trusted.