The Journal.

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B. O. Deininger, Associate Editor

Millheim Thursday May 15.

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THE INSURANCE MURDER TRIAL AT LEBANON, PA.

Six Men tried for the Murder of an Old Man to Obtain Insurance on His Life.

All Found Guilty of Murder in the First Degree.

LEBANON, Pa., April 26, 1879.

MESSRS. EDITORS :—It is impossible in the short space allotted to a correspondent to give a minute report of the proceedings in one of the most notable murder trials that is upon the records of the courts, and also endeavor to write a synopsis of the most important points.

As the press has generally given a full history of the life, the home and surroundings of Joseph Raber, the drowned man, it is unnecessary here. The dead body of Raber was found in the Indiantown Creek on the 8th of December last, and at the time of the finding it was supposed that he came to his death by falling into the creek and accidentally drowning, he being a man of some sixty years of age. It is alleged by the commonwealth that Joseph Raber came to his death at the hands of Charles Drews and Franklin Stickler, two of the prisoners, as testified to by Peters' son in-law of Charles Drews. Some time after the drowning of Raber suspicions were aroused and an investigation made by the insurance companies, resulting in the arrest of Josiah Hummel, Henry Wise, Israel Brant, and George Zechman, who held insurance policies on the life of Raber, also Charles Drews and Franklin Stickler, employed by the conspirators to commit the foul murder. The arrest was made upon the information of Joseph Peters and a hearing had before a Justice of the Peace, who bound them over to be tried at Court for causing the death of Joseph Raber.

Joseph Peters was the principal witness for the commonwealth. He testified substantially as follows: That Raber was drowned on the 7th or 8th of December, and that at the time he lived with Drews; that Raber was drowned on Saturday afternoon about half-past four o'clock; that when he was drowned he was up stairs in Drews' house with his wife and Penrose Drews; that he knew Raber, and he was at Drews' when he went up stairs; heard him talk below; Drews and his family were with him; heard Drews ask Raber whether he had any tobacco; Drews said he would give him some; there was no one on the first floor but Raber, Drews and his family; then Stickler came; heard them leave the house; went to the window and saw Raber, Stickler and Drews go through a corn field—Stickler first, Raber in the centre and Drews in the rear; they went to the plank; when in the middle of the plank Stickler turned around, knocked at Rabers' feet and then threw him into the creek; Raber then disappeared; afterwards went to the window again and saw Stickler and Drews returning through the corn field; then I talked with my wife; Stickler and Drews came towards the house; I then went down stairs with my wife; found the two men there with the whole family; Stickler took off his wet clothing and Drews gave him some of his own to put on; Stickler asked to have his wet clothes hung up to dry, and bid if any one came in to the house; then Stickler went away to get a team to take Brandt to Zechman's; he then came in shortly afterwards and asked Drews whether it was true that Raber was drowned, when they had a conversation about it; Drews stated that he saw Raber fall in, and when he went to see him he was dead; that Drews said as his children often fell into the stream and got out themselves without any assistance, he thought Raber might do the same.

These were the salient points in the testimony of Peters, with corroboration by other witnesses, that effected the conviction of the prisoners, and as he was put to a severe and rapid cross examination, occupying nearly a day, it would be impossible to give the details in a newspaper report.

Lenah Peters, wife of Joseph Peters, and daughter of Charles Drews, one of the prisoners, testified substantially to the same effect and state of facts with the exception of witnessing the drowning. When she was on the stand her father occupied a position in the circle of the defense directly opposite to her, yet their eyes never met, she gazing downwards, while he was ever engaged in conversation with his counsel. They presented a striking resemblance in features, but what the father lacked in cranial affectation the daughter fully made up for in blooming healthy-looking cheeks. Sitting face to face, they presented a spectacle calculated to awake a shudder at the fluctuation of life—a daughter testifying against the life of her father, for her testimony was the most strongly corroborative of Peters, the principal witness, and doing it in an exceedingly cool and calm manner. She made a very good witness, answering questions in a plain, straight-forward way, using the German language. During her testimony, the poor girl's feelings overcome her, and she burst into violent weeping, restraining herself with difficulty at times sufficient to enable her to talk. Her position under the circumstances was certainly a very trying one, and she bore up under it with remarkable fortitude.

The representatives of the insurance companies testified as to the policies taken out on the life of Joseph Raber and of their assignment to four of the prisoners; that the last premium was about to become due at the time of Raber's death; that word was sent them and the necessary death proofs were made out.

The window sash through which Peters saw the act committed was exhibited on the part of the commonwealth, and proof shown that it was the same window, but that a pane of glass which was considerably broken at the time had since been put in the sash, which compared favorably with the others, made so by greasing and smoking it.

Witnesses for the defense testified that it was the same pane of glass. One of theories set up by the defense was that the bottom of the creek where Raber fell in was stony and rocky, and that Raber came to his death by falling upon the stones. In rebuttal the commonwealth proved by a number of witnesses who had known the stream for a number of years, that the bottom of the creek at the point of the drowning was never stony, but on the contrary was a sandy and muddy bottom, so that one may justly suppose that the stones were put into the creek by some one friendly to the prisoners when the terrible revelations were made.

A day and a half was consumed in the arguments of counsel to the jury. Col. Gobin, one of the counsel for the defense, and formerly from Sunbury, spoke rapidly for two hours, and did full justice to his side of the case as well as to himself, often emphasizing his comments with passionate outburst of eloquence and vindictiveness against the commonwealth's principal witness and the insurance business. At the conclusion of the argument the jury retired to their room, and after deliberating for four hours returned to the court room with a verdict of "guilty of murder in the first degree" as to all the prisoners on trial. Three-quarters of an hour was consumed in pelling the jury, after which the prisoners were remanded into custody of the Sheriff.

—*Exchange.*

A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY.

An Insane Father Kills His Five Year Old Child.

BOSTON, May 2.—Sometime yesterday Charles F. Freeman, of Pocasset, Mass., in a freak of religious frenzy killed his five year old daughter, Edith. The man is a second adventist and had become greatly excited during the last few days while attending a series of revival meetings. About a week ago he claimed to have received a "wonderful revelation," and has not eaten or slept since. He says that the Lord directed him to sacrifice his little daughter and declared that she will rise again in 3 days. The little one was transfixed with a knife by her insane father and her blood was poured out upon a table which was improvised as an altar. Freeman has driven every one from his house and has not yet been secured. He has locked and barred the doors and windows, and being supplied with firearms he threatens death to any one who shall interfere.

LATER.—It is stated that the Second Adventists held a meeting at Freeman's house the same afternoon and appeared to wish the affair kept quiet. Freeman carried the mail as usual and showed no signs of insanity. The cause of the terrible deed appears to be religious excitement alone. Freeman is now at his residence in charge of officer Redding and Dr. C. J. Wood, of Pocasset.

He informs a reporter to-day that he was told by God to offer Edith, his young and beautiful daughter, as a sacrifice to Him, and that he did so, as God would not stay his his hand. He had to do His command, and He would justify him in his act.

A FATHER'S FANATICISM.

The Man Who Murdered his Child Under Religious Excitement in Prison.

BOSTON, May 3.—Later news from Pacasset states that yesterday afternoon Deputy Sheriff Harris and Medical Examiner Smith, of Barnstable, with Medical Examiner Munson, of Hanover, arrived there and arrested Charles F. Freeman and his wife and conveyed them to Barnstable and lodged them in jail. The body of the child has been removed to a neighbor's house, and the funeral will be held on Sunday. In the railroad train on the way down Freeman addressed the passengers, loudly reiterating his convictions that he had obeyed a divine mandate, his wife seconding him, and both expressed no anxiety as to the future. Freeman was arraigned at Barnstable to-day, in company with his wife. Both maintained their composure and insist that God will fully justify their action and relieve them from all human penalties. Freeman says that for thirty-six hours it had been impressed upon him that he must kill one of his family, but he was doubtful whether it should be himself, his wife, his oldest daughter or the little girl. Finally the Lord made it clear to him that it must be the little girl. He did not tell his wife at first. He waked up at half past 2 on Thursday morning and told his wife what he was going to do. They talked it over together and both agreed that it was right. They then knelt by the bed and prayed. He did not tell his wife at first, because Abraham did not tell his wife when he went to sacrifice Isaac. After they had agreed to kill the child, both went into the room where the two little girls were sleeping together. The man went out to the shop and procured a large sheath knife with a long blade, singing all the way out and back. He said he never felt so happy in his life. He set the lamp in the chair and his wife stood by the bed looking on. He turned the bed-clothes down to expose the child, and stabbed her in the left side. She awoke, turned toward her father, stretched up her arms, and said, "Oh father." He took her and held her till she died, which was in about five minutes. The older girl became partially awake and the mother carried her out of the room before she knew of her sister's death. Freeman then got into bed with the dead child in his arms and stayed till after daylight; then he dressed and went to the station for the mail, which he carries. Meeting Alvin Wing there he asked him to notify the Second Adventists in the neighborhood of a meeting at his house at 3 o'clock that afternoon. The Adventists came, supposing it was a farewell meeting before Freeman went on his tour as preacher. In the meeting Freeman told the whole story of killing the child, and showed the body to them all. Strange as it may seem, they all kept the matter secret and told no one after the meeting dispersed.

Great indignation exists against Freeman and all the adventists. The latter srick together and even now have the effrontery to defend Freeman. Freeman said before his arrest that if those who do not believe in God would come to his house they would see the wonderful works of the Almighty God; that the child would be raised on Sunday morning and help him preach. The extremest fanaticism, almost beyond belief, seems to inspire the Adventists. When one of the neighbors first saw Mrs. Freeman she answered all inquiries about Freeman by saying: "The Lord will take of that; Abraham's God will raise her." Freeman says he never felt so tenderly toward his children as on Wednesday evening when they were put to bed, and he kissed them before he struck the fatal blow. He hoped that God would stay his hand, as he did Abraham's, but since the death of his child he says that the revelation has come that the child will be raised; if she is not raised by Sunday morning he will despair. Freeman is 34 years old. Before he became an Adventist he was a Methodist probationer. The officers have the knife with which the murder was committed. Mrs. Freeman is slight in form and 32 years of age. Neither of the two show any fear. Freeman says he had a chance to make a convert by killing his girl, and thinks he is a second Abraham; says he loves his daughter better than himself. Mrs. Freeman echoes all her husband says. Many of the neighbors of Freeman sustain him in his course, many of them being well-to-do farmers. An effort will be at once made to arrest some of those who were present at the meeting at Freeman's house on the charge of being accessories to the deed.

BOSTON, May 4.—The funeral of little Edith Freeman, the victim of her father's fanatism, took place in the Methodist church in Pocasset, this afternoon. The body was brought to the church in a casket by Alden P. Davis, a sympathizer of Freeman in his deed and one of his chief abettors, who after depositing the casket near the altar announced his intention of addressing the audience, but this he was prevented from doing by threats of arrest.

The services were brief and appropriate and were conducted by Rev. Mr. Williams, pastor of the Methodist church. The Adventists who in their blind superstitions, fully believed that the dead child would be resurrected or bodily translated to heaven, are deeply mortified that their prophecy should result in so apparently a non-fulfillment.

THE FREEMAN SACRIFICE.

Eight More Arrests Made.

POCASSET, Mass., May 5.—The select men arrived at Pocasset this morning and a public meeting was held at the Bay View house, John Becerman was chosen chairman, and David Nye, Secretary. Several persons gave in their testimony who have held conversation with those who are said to be accessories to the Freeman murder after the deed. From the evidence received it was voted unanimously to arrest the following named persons as accessories to the crime after the deed: Aldin P. Davis, C. F. Howard, Nathaniel Wing, Alvin Wing, W. H. Wing, P. Hines Gibbs, Jr., Harriet N. Surpt, and Ann Louise Howard.

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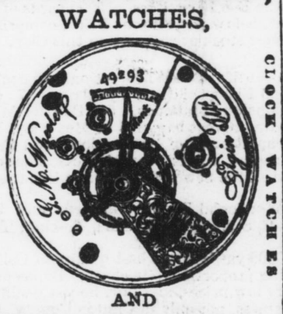

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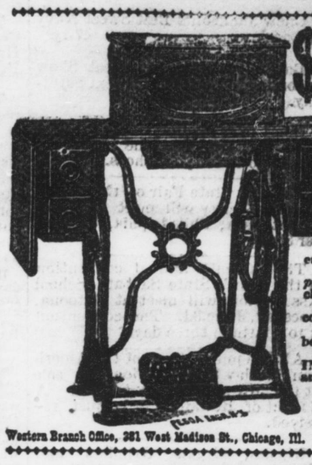

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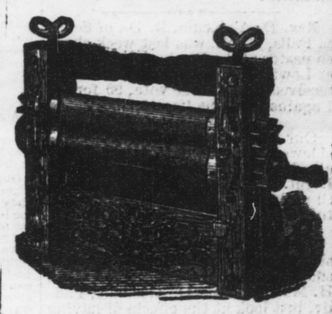

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