

The Lombard Street Horror.

A MYSTERY OF PHILADELPHIA

Within the past few days a discovery has been made of a deed of horror and cruelty, which has caused an intense excitement, not only in the vicinity in which it was perpetrated, but through out the entire city.

Joseph Herriges, residing in a dilapidated frame building, at the north east corner of Fourth and Lombard streets, was on Tuesday last arrested and held to bail in \$5000 for appearance at court, to answer to the charge of having held an insane brother a close prisoner within his own house for twenty years, or thereabouts, treating him during that time with the greatest neglect and cruelty.

Feeling that human nature was utterly incapable of such wickedness as the newspaper reports had represented Joseph Herriges and his mother to have been guilty of, we were inclined to regard the whole affair as a sensational story, gotten up by some enterprising reporter in search of items, and so paid but little attention to it, although living almost in sight of the house which was said to have been the prison of the poor wretch, John Herriges.

On Thursday, whilst in this state of incredulity and apathy with regard to the matter, a gentleman called upon us to ask us to go with him to the place and make an investigation of the facts. At Third and Lombard streets we became somewhat startled at the sight of an immense crowd which extended quite a distance up and down Lombard street, in the neighborhood of Fourth. As we approached the house the mob was engaged in tearing it, and the crowd was uttering most frightful threats of burning and murdering its inhabitants. After some thought we got into the house adjoining, occupied by the family of Mrs. Gibson, who gave the information which released the prisoner and caused the arrest of his jailor.

The enclosure by courtesy called a house, occupied by Mrs. Gibson, consisted of two rooms and a loft. It was in a terrible state of ruin and dilapidation. The smell from the house from which the insane man had been removed was so dense and horrible, that the friends with us were obliged to fan constantly to keep from fainting. Although made deathly sick by the terrible stench, we resolved to conquer our faintness, and to learn all that was possible to be learned of the matter.

We asked Mrs. Gibson, who by the way seems a very quiet, humane, and respectable person, to give us the particulars of the discovery that she had made. This she attempted to do, but, terrified by the noise and threats of the mob without, she became somewhat incoherent and hysterical. With much difficulty we gathered the particulars of the story, and will give them in our own words.

About two weeks ago she moved into the tenement she now occupies, owned by Joseph Herriges, paying a month's rent, sixteen dollars, in advance. She had scarcely moved into the place before the tumor reached her, through the neighbors, that a man had been imprisoned in the house of her landlord for nineteen years, and she was told that if she heard noises at night she need not be frightened. This information surprised and worried her greatly, and she found, upon looking out of her second story, that the windows of the first and second story were boarded up, and she could see between the slats, which were no wider apart than one inch, gratings of iron. She told this to her son, who regarded it as an idle rumor, and thought that, as the family had the reputation of being rich and penurious, these slats and bars were put up for a security against burglars. Mrs. Gibson, however, from the first night was kept awake by a noise like the cooing of pigeons and occasionally she thought she detected the mutterings and groans of a human voice. This she told her son, but he imagined she was nervous, and paid no attention to her representations.

On Monday of last week, her little girl, aged six years, came rushing down stairs exclaiming:

"Oh! mother, there is a man up in that room! I saw him poke his nose through the boards just like a dog!"

Being busy, she did not at this moment go up to verify the child's statement, but when she did find time to do so, she caught a glimpse of something that she thought was the hand of a human being, covered with filth, resting against the frame. Mrs. Gibson saw the prisoner in the yard, and called to the mother:

"What are you there for? Try and pull off the board!"

He made some response, indistinct, but sufficient to convince her that a human being was actually caged up in that loathsome place. Mrs. Gibson talked a good while, hoping to elicit some explanation from the old woman who was awake in the yard. No such explanation was given. She awaited the coming of her son, told him what she had seen and heard, and asked him to report the case at once to the police. Young Gibson, still doubting the existence of such barbarity, put his mother off, telling her to wait till night, and, if she again heard the noise she complained of, to awaken him, and let him discover from whence they proceeded. This she consented to do. About midnight the groans and mutterings became loud and continuous, and, calling her son, Mrs. Gibson directed his attention to them. Creeping out upon a shed which projected over the alley, young Gibson got as closely to the barred window as possible, and plainly distinguished the

words "They will murder me! George! George!" and other disjointed and incoherent sentences. Gibson then-poke, telling the prisoner to try to get out, and the latter said, "I'll promote you! I'll promote you!" Being fully convinced that a fellow creature was confined there in the midst of a horrible stench, as soon as possible the next day he reported the case at the Central Station, and asked that the condition of the imbecile should be inquired into.

In the meantime Mrs. Gibson, like a brave as well as a humane woman, went to her landlord and said, "You have a man penned up in the back part of your house! What is he there for?" After a moment's hesitation the landlord answered, "What is that your business?" She replied, "His groans and mutterings keep me awake and frighten my children." "Well then," said he, "move out as quick as you please." She answered, "I have paid my rent in advance for a month, and am too poor to lose it. Give me back the money, or give me back what is still due me of it, and I will go at once." This he refused to do, and was very insolent. She left and went into her house, resolving to watch.

Instantly all was hurry and bustle within and without Herriges' house. The man was brought down stairs, and the work of cleansing commenced. Water was freely drawn, and our informant heard the mutterings and groans of the poor wretch as he submitted to their rough ablutions. His mother was seen brushing vermin from an old shirt in the yard. Soon the police came, and, entering the den, brought the poor prisoner out. His whole body, as we were informed by an officer, was incrustated with filth, in some places half an inch thick, and as hard as bone, utterly impenetrable by soap and water. He was barefooted. The lower part of his body was covered by a filthy petticoat, made of a salt bag. He had over his shoulders the upper part of a chemise, and over that was thrown an old wrapper, which was the best his inhuman relatives could do in the time they had between the complaint and the arrest. Thus attired he was brought out to the front door, and stood there a minute, blinded by the light of that sun whose rays for more than twenty years had never reached his darkened cell. He was covered with disgusting vermin. His hair and beard were matted into a sort of felt by filth. His nails were over an inch long, under which vermin had gathered until they had eaten his fingers into sores. Such was the condition of one of God's creatures, residing within the very heart of Civilization and Christianity, within hearing of the organ peals of four churches, surrounded by neighbors who for fully twenty years had nightly listened to his groans, and who were too cowardly or too apathetic to investigate the matter.

This was the story as told us by Mrs. Gibson, and which was verified by at least a dozen of the neighbors. She added, too, that a sister of Joseph Herriges had been there that morning and asked her to remove, saying that, if she would get out of the way, they would get her the rent back, and would reward her for going. Mrs. Gibson is poor, but, to her credit and that of her son be it said, she promptly refused the bribe, and had the woman arrested for endeavoring to tamper with a witness. The woman was put under bail of \$500 to answer at court for her effort to get the witnesses out of the way.

Just as we had gathered the whole of Mrs. Gibson's story, we heard that the mob outside had so frightened the proprietor of the place that he had left the house with the view of getting an extra police force from the Central Station for the protection of his property, and that the crowd, recognizing him, had chased him with the intention of tearing him to pieces. As most of the mob had followed him, we made our way to his door, and uttering the magic words, "Reporter of the Dispatch," were admitted by the police having charge. Immediately on entering we encountered a witch like looking old woman of eighty years of age, in a state of excitement and terror fearful to witness, who caught one of our friends by the hands, exclaiming: "Save me! save me! They are stoning the house, and threaten to burn us all to death. A moment before we had felt like joining the mob and helping to rid the world of such creatures, but the age and helplessness of the woman touched us, and, at once dispatching a messenger for a force of police sufficient to protect the house, we assured her that she should suffer no harm; told her that we had come to hear her statement of the case, see the rooms where her son had been confined, and, if possible, set the family right with the public.

A decent looking woman showed us the way up a crazy flight of stairs, which we could hardly ascend, for the frightful stench which filled the entire house was so sickening that we felt ourself in danger of suffocation. Two rooms had been appropriated to the poor boy, she told us. The lower one, which she called the parlor, contained no article of furniture but an old frame of a sofa, without a vestige of seat, save the wooden slats. Over this was thrown a filthy rag of covering, which might once have been a bed quilt or a floorcloth, but which was so stiff with dirt that its real character was not discernible. The room, six by six, and five feet from ceiling to floor, had just been whitewashed, and the floor, scrubbed and wet, was still unutterably disgusting with the unremovable filth of years. Ascending to the second floor, which had a sloping roof was in fact an attic—we found the room in which the poor prisoner had been confined. We entered his sleeping apartment; it, too, had been newly whitewashed and scrubbed, but was still so filthy that no pen could describe it faithfully. The window was still boarded up, and was without glass, we have heard told by the neighbors, either in winter or

in summer. A bed had been made up on the floor, and a tolerable spread had been thrown over it. The gentleman who accompanied us turned to the woman who had shown us up, and said: "You have put a bed in the room! There was none here when he was taken out." She said, "Oh! the bed was here, but we have only put a spread over it. We have done nothing else." Our friend replied, "Yes you have! You have scraped three inches of filth off the floor! You have whitewashed and scrubbed it, and the lime is still wet!" She answered, "Well, the poor old woman down stairs was not able to keep him clean. She is eighty years old, and has been the most devoted and loving mother possible, feeding him with her own hands, and providing for him always the delicacies of the market—strawberries and everything else!" "What was the cause of his being confined here?" we asked. "Oh!" she replied, "he was a very intellectual boy, and was preparing to enter the High School. He studied so hard that his brain was turned, and he lost his reason."

"How long has he been immured here?" we inquired. "Just tell us the whole story, for we want to print it, and we desire to do both sides justice." She said: "When first taken, his brother Joseph, who is one of the best men that ever lived, the kindest son and brother, had him removed to a public institution; but his mother being uneasy about her afflicted boy, induced his brother to bring him home. This he did, and called Dr. Goddard in to attend him. This physician told Joseph that his brother did not need anything but kindness and skilled nursing, and so they had kept him at home, and worked and slaved for him with an affection touching and beautiful to behold."

We asked how long he had been incarcerated in these rooms. So said, "Not at all; he had the range of the whole house." Finding she would not own to any imprisonment, we asked, "How long has he been out of his mind?" and she replied "Somewhere about eighteen years."

We asked, "Are you a relation?" "No," said she, "only a neighbor, who came to stay with this poor old woman, who is nearly frightened to death."

"Has this poor fellow any other relations beside his mother and brother?" we inquired. "Yes," she answered, "four sisters." Just at this moment Joseph Herriges, who had been attacked by the crowd, made his appearance, all disheveled and torn, and nearly dead with fright, escorted by a police force. After waiting for a few minutes, until he had somewhat recovered from his excitement, we told him of what purpose we had come, and he seemed very glad to have an opportunity of telling his story. He said that his brother had been a very intellectual young man, and that he (Joseph) had resolved to educate him. He had got him into the public schools, also into a night school, and had had him taught penmanship as well as cigar making. The boy had attended a lecture on one occasion, and in coming down stairs fell over the banisters and struck his head, and gradually after this, he lost his mind.

"How long has it been since this accident?" we interrupted. "About twelve years," he said. Then continuing, he added, "I took him to the Almshouse, and for one month he remained there under the care of Dr. Robert K. Smith, resident physician. His mother and this sister (pointing to the one who had represented herself as a neighbor only) visited him there each day. At last I yielded to the entreaties of my mother, brought him home, and called in a physician, Dr. Gardner, who said, after attending him some time, that he could do nothing for him. I have devoted my life to the care of him. I washed him daily. Whenever I attended to his own wants I attended to his. I could not feed him. I even put the food in his mouth."

Then we asked, "How came he to be covered with vermin and filth?" "How?" he exclaimed, with a half-startled, half-shocked look, was there vermin? Well, I don't know how he got such. I never saw any."

We asked, "Was he violent, that you kept him confined in that cage?" "Oh no!" he replied, "he was docile as a lamb."

"Then," said one of our friends, "why those slats and irons in the windows?" "Well," he replied, "we were afraid a fit might come on. If he got in the street he might talk and say strange things." He added, "You will do me justice, won't you? They say that I have kept him in prison to get his share of the property. He has not a cent in the world. This one house is the property of my mother during her lifetime. This is all she has, and it has to be divided amongst six of us at her death."

"How about the two houses in Lombard street, and the two on Fourth?" interrupted the gentleman who was with us. "Oh! those are mine," he responded, "I worked and earned them myself." Our friend said, "You told me this morning that your father died in Oregon and left all this property to you alone. How about that?" He stammered out, "Don't interrupt me! You confuse me! I want to tell a straight story, and you throw me out."

He then went over all that he had said in his own defence, and begged us to report him correctly, and to ask the public not to judge the case until it should come to trial. We assured him that we would "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice," but would tell the story of Mrs. Gibson, as well as his own, precisely as we had heard them.

Another sister, who had just come in, pronounced Mrs. Gibson a liar; said the suit had been instituted through malicious motives, and entreated us not to give publicity to her statement. We, however, would not consent to suppress anything, and so left. On Friday we went in again to see if there had been any new developments. We were very cordially received by the sister who had at first represented herself as being only a neighbor—not a relative at all. She thanked us for the sympathy we had expressed for her mother; but we were really not entitled to any thanks on that score, it having been one of our friends who strove to quiet and soothe the poor old creature. She then went over her own and her brother's version of the facts, given the day before, contradicting herself many times. She said: "The papers say he was a boy of eight years when we put him in these rooms, and that is a falsehood, for he was a man of twenty three or twenty-four when he went insane."

We did not remind her that she had told us, the day before, that he was just about getting into the High School when his reason forsook him. We withdrew after this last statement, and, mingling with the crowd that surrounded the house, we heard that a rumor was in circulation to the effect that about twenty two years ago the father suddenly disappeared, and was reported to have gone West. He was never seen or heard of again by the neighbors. The poor creature, degraded so far below decency as to present scarcely any semblance to humanity, is now at the Almshouse, and the physicians there say that no such sight has ever met their gaze before, accustomed as they are to disease and filth. He is like a trained dog. When they say, "fret him!" he jumps to his feet. When they say "Lie down!" he does so, opening his mouth, &c.

He cannot tell himself, and the doctors say that he is so discolored by the absorption of filth that it will take years, if he lives so long, before he will look like a white man.

These are the facts of the case as we have gathered them from the neighbors, as well as the parties concerned. We ask, can all the annals of heritance and crime produce a more cruel and distressing story?—*Philadelphia Dispatch*

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16-46-ly

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14-12

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deceased, take notice that, by virtue of a Writ of Partition, issued out of the Orphan's Court of Centre county and to me directed, an interest will be held at the late residence of Peter Seyler deceased, in the township of Walker, and county of Centre, on Friday the 8th day of July, 1879, at 10 o'clock a. m., of said day, for the purpose of making partition of the real estate of said deceased and among his heirs and legal representatives, if the same can be done without prejudice to or spoliation of the whole; otherwise to value and appraise the same according to law, at which time and place you may be present, if you think proper. Showy's office,  
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14-11

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14-10-2

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15-2-ly

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