

Blood Will Tell

by George Ethelbert Walsh

The mystery surrounding the murder of the postmaster at Piketown, and the unexpected fashion in which it was cleared up—The village doctor and the part played by his blood sampling theories.

“HERE comes the doctor for his blood,” remarked Jerry, the town humorist, stepping back from the group of men.

But for once his wits failed to call even a smile to the grave faces of his townspeople. Several looked disapprovingly at him, and then turned to meet the newcomer.

“A sad piece of business, doctor; very sad,” said Simpson, the tallest man of the group, pointing a finger at the body lying stretched out before him.

“Yes, but it will give me some good material for experiment,” replied the one dignified by the term doctor. “Is the coroner here?”

“Of course I’m here to do my duty by poor Whitman; but precious little can be done. He’s past all help.”

The coroner was a thick set, dark man, but there was a genuine sympathetic moisture about his eyes.

“Then I can get what I want without any further trouble,” muttered the doctor. “See. This blood is still fresh, and it will serve my purpose. Possibly there is some of the blood of the murderer here, too. Let me see.”

He produced a microscope from his inner pocket, and slowly scanned the face and hands of the dead man, where blood had been smeared over them.

“No, no; it is all his blood”—disappointedly—“the murderer did his

work well; he left no blood marks behind. The blood of no two people is alike, and this is all from one man. Just a drop or two of this fresh stream here, coroner, if you please.”

Without waiting for permission the doctor deftly scraped a little of the blood on the end of a steel knife blade, and dropped it into a small glass phial which he carried in a pocket case.

“It is well that science can take note of these cases before the blood has entirely dried up,” he continued, as he wiped the knife blade on a piece of dry chamois. “Generally there is no one on the scene quick enough to do any good. I shall make good use of this. It must be analyzed at once. Thank you for the permission, coroner.”

When the doctor shuffled away and disappeared down the street there were various murmurs from the awestricken group. During this cold blooded performance nobody had ventured to say a word; but now that the man of science had left everybody found his tongue at once.

“He ain’t got no feeling for anything but his experiments,” indignantly muttered the coroner.

“He’s gone clean crazy over his hobby,” Simpson volunteered.

“He’s a monster!” feelingly remarked Mrs. Dillingham, who worked out by the week for a living, and never lost an opportunity to abuse the doctor.

“A bloody monster!” emphasized Jerry, with a wink at Mrs. Dillingham.

“Gentlemen, I must convene a coroner’s jury,” interposed the official representative of the county on such occasions, in his most dignified voice. “It is my sad duty to do so. Poor Whitman is dead, but we must find out the cause of his death, and then hand the matter over to the proper authorities to ferret out the murderer—murderer, I say, for I take it that he was murdered.”

“Indeed he was,” responded several.

Piketown had not received such a sensation for years as the murder of Barker Whitman, leading merchant and postmaster of the place.

Usually the town was so quiet that the young people had to go to the neighboring county seat to find the pleasures and excitements considered so essential to youth. It was therefore like a bombshell explosion in a quiet household when the news spread about from house to house. And news spread rapidly, considering the primitive condition of things.

No telephone wires disgraced the streets of Piketown, and people could not discuss the murder at long range; but everybody put on hat or shawl and hurried to the scene of the tragedy.

It was Saturday morning, and three hours before the first mail delivery. But the Piketown post office was crowded.

The coroner and his jury had difficulty in elbowing their way up to the corpse, which was stretched out on the store counter, with a white sheet thrown protectingly over the upturned face. Everybody was whispering and talking.

How was the murder committed? What enemy had Barker Whitman, one of the best men in the town? It could not be a

case of suicide, could it? Barker was so lonesome, now that his wife was dead, and he lived alone in the back part of his store!

Oh, no, there were the infallible signs of a murder.

The verdict of the coroner’s jury was delivered in a slow, stentorian voice:

“We find that Barker Whitman met his death by a blow on the forehead with a blunt instrument, held in the hands of some person or persons not yet known.”

This simple statement of facts, known already by every one, but now emphasized by official declaration, brought a sort of relief to the overstrained nerves of the crowd.

Murdered, he certainly was; but by whom? Was the murderer among them? Neighbor looked neighbor inquiringly in the eyes. Could Piketown have reared a man guilty of such a foul deed?

Numerous petty robberies had occurred lately in the town, and the theory was soon spun that the burglar, whoever he was, had been caught by the dead man in the very act of stealing, and in order to make good his escape he had killed the postmaster.

This plausible story found ready credence among the townspeople, and a search for evidence was undertaken by each individual.

Now, in the case of every murder somebody is sure to be suspected, watched, and finally arrested. Circumstantial evidence will weave an incriminating story around some luckless individual.

In most cases the person is acquitted for the lack of sufficient evidence, but so long as the true murderer goes uncaught his character is ruined. The jury’s “Not guilty” does not sweep away the suspicion in the minds of those who believe he is guilty. It simply gives a clean

character to the individual from a legal point of view.

Scores of suspected murderers and criminals, whose acquittal by the law has not obliterated prejudice against them from the mind of the public, are smarting under the most cruel sentence that society can pronounce upon man. Conscious of their own innocence, they are unable to bring forward the proof to clear them from all stains of guilt, and they consequently suffer all the martyrdom of saints.

The Picketown murder was no exception to the rule. In a few days the law had poor Jerry, the town humorist and loafer, in its meshes.

Jerry, who was always joking and telling stories, drinking at the corner saloon, and associating with all sorts of characters, was known to have been out late that night, or rather early Saturday morning. He was seen in the neighborhood of the post office by several reputable witnesses, and was almost the first upon the scene when the murder was discovered.

He took the whole matter of the murder as if it were a natural thing to have occurred in Picketown. He had even joked over the corpse of the man while the coroner's jury was investigating matters.

Poor Jerry! His unfortunate habit of joking had at last brought him into trouble.

No one considered Jerry absolutely bad at heart. He was simply a loafing, idling, thieving fellow, and he had committed murder to protect himself.

It was not a case of intentional murder. It was the old story of one crime leading to another. Jerry had evidently been guilty of the numerous robberies in the place, but he had committed one too many.

When arrested he took the whole

matter as a joke. Life seemed humorous to him, and he could not believe seriously that he was arrested for the murder of the postmaster.

His former friends and neighbors looked upon this exhibition of humor as a sign of depravity never before credited to him. Even while held in custody awaiting his trial, he laughed and joked and took things easy.

The day of the trial was set before Jerry fully realized that it was a serious matter, and that he was going to be brought up before the court to be tried for his life. The news dawned upon him slowly.

Then the color suddenly left his face, and he gasped out some unintelligible words. From that day on he was never seen to smile or heard to joke. The sap of his strength was suddenly absorbed.

He grew ashen in color, and in a week he was an old man. His life was broken whether he was proved guilty or not guilty.

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One man in town believed him innocent.

"He is not the murderer," said the doctor. "He's a victim of circumstantial evidence."

"How do you know it, doctor?" more than one asked.

"Well enough," was the reply. "I'll show you some day."

The doctor was a character whose opinion was variously estimated. There were some who believed him a harmless sort of lunatic, and others who would not have been surprised had he startled the world by some great act of genius.

He was a doctor without a practice, and had lived in Picketown for twenty years—a quiet, harmless, but erratic

citizen.

His hobby was blood. He was always getting the blood of a patient, prisoner, or murderer, and corking it up in little phials. He had hundreds of these. There was hardly a citizen, young or old in Picketown, whose blood he had not obtained at some time.

Years ago he had been a successful physician, and in payment for his services he would often demand a few drops of blood. A slight incision on the arm would yield him all that he needed for his purpose. He had been known to travel more than a hundred miles in order to secure the blood of some noted criminal.

"It will all tell some day," he would explain. "The blood of no two people is alike. Under my analysis I can distinguish one person from another. The microscope reveals wonders to us, but nothing more wonderful than the difference in the blood of various people. Diseases are indicated by the blood—mental and moral diseases, as well as physical."

But he did not dilate too much upon his hobby before the Picketown citizens, for they could not follow him into his profound researches, and he contented himself in pursuing his study and experiments alone.

When Jerry was arrested the doctor showed more interest in his case than he had manifested toward anything that had happened in the town for ten years.

The murder itself concerned him less than Jerry's trial. He visited the prisoner often in his cell and tried to cheer him up.

"I'll show them that you're innocent," he protested time and again. "I'll show them my blood theory in a new light."

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When the trial was finally begun great interest was manifested in it by the country people through a wide territory.

The jury impaneled consisted largely of good citizens of Picketown, men who were without prejudice, but strict in their definitions of the law. They were not disposed to condemn Jerry beforehand, but they knew about what the evidences were, and they could not help inclining toward a presumption of guilt.

It was hard to convict a man of murder solely on circumstantial evidence, but the law must be upheld at all costs. Picketown could not sacrifice its good name for a mere sentiment. If everything pointed toward conviction, they would unhesitatingly bring in such a verdict.

And the evidence did point that way. So deftly had the net been woven by an experienced detective that nothing seemed clearer to most people in the court room than Jerry's guilt.

For the purpose of disproving this story the doctor then took the stand. The whole court room was in a quiver of excitement.

"As an expert on blood I wish to say a few words for the prisoner," began the doctor slowly, looking directly at the jury. "I have spent years in examining the human blood, and I can testify that the blood of no two persons is alike.

"I have the blood of every jurymen here in this case of phials, collected by me from each individual during the last ten years, and an examination under the microscope will show to you that each is different from all the others. Here is Mr. Simpson's in this bottle, and here is our worthy coroner's. They look alike in the glass, but very different when examined under the microscope."

"Let me see mine, doctor," said the foreman of the jury, a burly blacksmith.

“Certainly. I should like all of you to examine the different samples. I have preserved them carefully.”

After the members of the jury had satisfied their curiosity in examining the contents of the doctor’s queer phials, the latter resumed:

“Now, I have here the blood of the dead man, and in this phial a few drops of the prisoner’s. They are very different. No one could mistake them. On the morning of the murder I personally visited the post office and took some of the blood fresh from the dead man’s body. Many of you saw me. I took it with the coroner’s permission.

“Now, why do you suppose I took that? Do you imagine that I wanted samples of Mr. Whitman’s blood? Have I not been his physician for years, and do you think I would let slip the opportunity of securing a few drops until after his death?”

The doctor paused dramatically. Then straightening himself he added:

“No, gentlemen, I went to the post office to find the blood of the murderer on the dead man’s body, and I found it!”

There was a scene of intense silence following this declaration.

“In that scuffle blood was shed on both sides. The murderer received some slight wound also, and he left a trail of his blood on his victim’s body. Here it is,” holding up another phial, “and here is the prisoner’s. Compare them. They are different, very different. The prisoner was not the murderer. The man whose blood resembles this, murdered Barker Whitman.”

Everybody breathed heavily. The jury seemed duly affected by the doctor’s remarks.

“But who was the murderer, doctor?” inquired the foreman, after a long

pause.

“The owner of this blood!” replied the doctor, almost fiercely.

The jury was in a quandary. Was such evidence trustworthy?

“Strange, indeed, are the effects of blood,” pursued the doctor, as if addressing himself. “It causes disease and death, it brings insanity and idiocy into the world, it propagates crime and immorality. It flows in a clean crimson tide through the body to enrich it, or it taints the soul and mind with its disease.

“Gentlemen, beware how you condemn this prisoner on circumstantial evidence. The evidence of these few drops of blood is stronger than the hearsay of man. Blood will always tell. It never lies.”

The doctor’s blood theory caused no little comment in the court room after he had finished, and the jury retired into a private room with the judge’s wise charge still ringing in their ears.

Immediately after his speech the doctor left the court room. The spectators then felt freer to discuss the merits and demerits of the case. Some were in favor of accepting the testimony of the doctor as that of a reliable expert, and others doubted the wisdom of such evidence.

But how that question was discussed in the jury room was never known outside. In half an hour they returned to the court room and pronounced the prisoner guilty of manslaughter in the second degree.

Jerry fainted at the announcement, and they carried him limp and helpless to the jail. Now that the verdict was decided upon, everybody had room for some sympathy for the prisoner.

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The second tragedy occurred in Picketown that night. On the following day the doctor was found dead in his

laboratory, surrounded by his beloved phials of blood, microscopes, and various implements of his profession.

But more important than all of these was a written confession, addressed to the judge of the court. The confession said:

“I had thought to address these words concerning my blood theory to some scientific body in the near future, but circumstances have made it necessary for me to change my plans. In my address to the jury yesterday I revealed only half what I know about the relation of blood to our bodies and minds. I tried to show only so much of my researches as was necessary to free the prisoner. But, alas! my efforts failed. It is the jury’s verdict that compels me to hasten the disclosure contained in these brief notes.

“The scientific fact has long been established that blood contains the germs of most diseases, and that it is through this vital fluid that we inherit and contract the infirmities of life. But more recently it has been attempted to show that crime is only a species of disease.

“The man who is a confirmed drunkard is suffering from a disease acquired by him, and permanently seated in his blood. The kleptomaniac is a sufferer from a disease that we have not yet defined, and also the man of evil thoughts, the immoral, and the dissolute. Diseases of this sort are only vaguely understood by us, but they nevertheless exist, and very few of us are entirely free from them.

“If these diseases are a reality, some signs of them should be visible in the blood. The blood of the professional criminal cannot be as clean as that of the moralist. It must contain the germs of his peculiar moral disease.

“Working upon this theory, I have

examined the blood of all classes of people, and I had almost reached a point where I could classify definitely the blood of the drunkard, the thief, the murderer, and the immoral.

“In the sets of phials in my laboratory you will find a classification of the blood of the criminals according to the degree of their depravity, or, more correctly speaking, according to their moral diseases. This collection I bequeath to the Academy of Sciences of Manitou, with the hope that some of its members will pursue the study along the line I have marked out.

“When I satisfied myself that moral and mental diseases were just as manifest in the blood as any of the physical disorders, I began to make elaborate experiments to prove my theory. The germs of malarial diseases are located in the blood, and to prove it one would simply have to inoculate one’s self with the blood of a sick patient.

“If this transfusion of blood was performed several times the disease would be communicated to the healthy body of the one inoculated. The same is true of typhoid, yellow fever, diphtheria, or any of the malignant types known to science. The blood contains the germs of the poison, and that blood transferred to the veins of a healthy person would soon communicate the disease to him.

“If my theory was correct, it must follow that the tainted blood of the immoral, the habitual thief, the murderer, or the drunkard, contains the germs of these less tangible diseases that science is just beginning to recognize. To prove this I began an exhaustive experiment with myself.

“As a preliminary step I obtained the blood of as many kleptomaniacs as possible, and injected it into my body. To

prevent communicating any physical diseases to my system through this experiment, I obtained the blood only from physically healthy people. I guarded carefully against any mistake, and the results of my preliminary experiments satisfied me that I could establish a great scientific principle.

“At first I noticed no perceptible change in my nature. The blood seemed to have no effect, and I increased the dose of each injection to six drops.

“I did not expect to experience any sudden revolution in my moral nature. Diseases of this kind do not develop in that way. The change is through a slow process. The blood, after all, feeds the brain, and the disease germs must affect the brain before they can manifest themselves in our actions.

“The germs either introduce a subtle poison into the brain, or fail to supply the proper nourishment to it. At any rate the blood is responsible for the proper action of the heart and brain, and whatever is introduced into this fluid must be for good or evil.

“A month passed, and one day I stood in a jewelry store in Manitou, looking at some ground glass phials, with metal covers to them, when a strong desire to put several of them in my pocket seized me.

“It was a strange feeling. I had the money to buy all I wanted, and intended to make a purchase; but the impulse to secrete one or two upon my person was so sudden and strong that I had stolen two of the choicest before I realized my actions. Then I hurriedly paid for half a dozen and left the store.

“This was my first symptom of the disease from which all kleptomaniacs suffer. While horror stricken at the crime I had committed, I still rejoiced in the name

of science that my experiment had succeeded.

“From that day on the disease increased, until I could hardly trust myself in any store. The impulse to steal some small trifle from the counter would come upon me so suddenly and irresistibly that I would be forced to yield. I always suffered untold agony while in a store for this reason, dreading the tendency to steal. My will power at such times was completely subjugated, and a horrible sense of helplessness possessed me.

“I ceased to make any further injections after that, and tried hard to control the mental disease that I had introduced into my system. But my experiments would not permit me to halt here. I would have to have more than one proof of the correctness of my theory.

“I collected the blood of burglars and robbers and injected it into my system, determined to test the whole list of mental and moral diseases. I was willing to sacrifice my life for the sake of science. I visited prisons and jails, and obtained permission to get a few drops of blood from those confined for burglary.

“I selected those who had been confirmed robbers all their lives—men who, by their persistent life of evil, exhibited an uncontrollable tendency to commit this species of crime. Released from one prison, they would immediately resort to burglary again, and so spend half their life in jail and the other half in committing crimes.

“As in the former case, the germs of this new disease did not manifest themselves for some time. Then I gradually found myself dwelling upon stories of burglaries, and unconsciously admiring the skill displayed by some expert robber in entering houses and evading capture. A strong desire to peruse

stories of robberies seized me, and I read diligently every item in the daily papers about petty thefts.

“Next my attention was called to the fact that while walking out in the cool of the evening I began to muse about the best methods of entering the various houses. This one I thought could be entered the easiest through the back window, that one by climbing up the trailing vines to the second story window, and the next through the cellar door.

“I was startled at these thoughts. It dawned upon me that the new disease was developing within my system. I was gradually acquiring the instinct of the habitual robber.

“To my great mortification, I put my desires into practice one night. Passing a quiet country house on the outskirts of Piketown, I saw an open window. Just to see how easily I could enter the house I vaulted quietly over the fence and drew myself up to a level with the window sill. Then I dropped as lightly as a cat inside.

“I found myself in the dining room, with the table already spread for an early breakfast. An irresistible desire to take some of the silver cutlery seized me, and after gathering all within sight, I left the house as I had entered.

“I mention this in detail because it was the first of a series of similar robberies. I soon found that I had a great fondness for prowling around at night and hiding in the shadow of houses and trees, to avoid meeting any of the Piketown people. Every time I found a window open I felt drawn toward it, and eventually I entered the house.

“I was heartily ashamed of myself by this time, and I decided to cure myself of the temptation at once. I had given my theory a good test, and it worked well. I needed no further proof.

“But alas! for the shortsightedness of human beings! I had poisoned my system with the germs of a disease that could not be easily eradicated.

“I fought nobly to suppress the desire to prow around at night, but it was of no avail. I was as helpless as the drunkard when he has tasted of wine, or the opium eater when he needs a new injection. The desire seized me at night, and, instead of abating, it increased its hold upon me.

“I became a confirmed burglar. From entering open windows to take a few articles I degenerated into a robber against whose skill no doors or windows were proof. I found it easy to gather together all the things I needed, and I began to forge false and skeleton keys.

“No man knows the horror of my situation. From a moral, upright man I had developed into a wily, unscrupulous robber. The horrible disease made me a helpless victim. My conscience was still sensitive, and through the long hours of the day I suffered the pangs of hell.

“But as night approached I grew restless and nervous, and despite all the firm resolutions I had made, I would be drawn out of doors upon another midnight adventure. I was a changed man then. I was the skilled, professional burglar, and not the quiet, peace loving man of science.

“I would return home toward morning and fall into a deep slumber. It would all seem like a horrible dream to me, but upon awakening, there were the signs of my crime, the plunder gathered from the houses I had entered.

“A cunning, deceitful nature developed with my new disease. I was often astonished at the skillful way in which I would cover up my tracks. I avoided detection by arts that seemed wonderful to me in my sober senses.

“For the sake of science I would have been satisfied if at this point I could have stopped the course of the disease, but the poison was permanently settled within me. My brain had been affected by the germs that had been carried to it through my blood. It was impossible to eradicate the evil.

“As this truth dawned upon me, my life became a curse. The horrible exposure of my crimes, I knew, must come in time, and the humiliation would be terrible. But even this fear could not check me.

But the climax has come at last, and I am not sorry to end my existence. In taking my own life I consider my sin lessened by the thought that I can only hope to live a life of crime. I have fought nobly to control the disease, but alas! I have discovered a way of introducing the disease into my system, but no remedy for it. It is better then that I should eradicate it by death.

“But my experiments will serve a good purpose to humanity. Crime is a disease that can easily be propagated, but who knows the cure? Let some noble, humanity loving scientist devote his life to experimenting with these disease germs,

not for the purpose of spreading them, but to check and destroy them.

“No greater work can be performed for the poor criminals, who are simply obeying the impulses of a horrible disease that has been inherited by them.

“This ends my blood theory and my confessions. The point of my whole argument is clear by this time, or should be. The blood I took from the corpse of Barker Whitman is contained in phial 300, and next to it, in 301, are the drops taken from my own veins.

“Compare them. They are identically the same! *And the owner of the blood taken from the corpse was the murderer!* and not poor, innocent Jerry, whose happiness I fear has been sacrificed to science as well as my own.

“It is not necessary for me to make a plea for mercy. I am not a born murderer, nor have the horrible instincts of a murderer been implanted within me through blood transfusion; but the desire to avoid capture is as strong in the burglar as the desire to commit robbery.

“And that accounts for all! My hand was not raised to slay, but simply to protect me from capture and exposure.”