

THE DERBY POISONER.

Confession of Mrs. Lydia Sherman, the Murderer of Three Husbands and Four Children.

The *Hartford Courant*—which is usually a much better source of information respecting news matters in New-Haven than the papers published in that city are—gives from a special correspondent the substance of the confession recently made by Mrs. Lydia Sherman, the Derby poisoner, to the jailer in New-Haven. It is a fearful story of crime, and is as follows:

Mrs. Lydia Sherman was arrested in June, 1871, at New-Brunswick, N. J., on the charge of having murdered her husband, Horatio N. Sherman, in Derby in this State, in the year 1871. She was also charged with murdering two of his children, but was only tried for the first crime. Besides these she was said to have poisoned two other husbands and several of their children. The trial occurred in March, 1872, in New-Haven, and was noticeable among "poison trials" for the very clear testimony of Prof. Barker, of Yale College, who had examined the remains of the three first-mentioned victims. His evidence was as conclusive as circumstantial evidence could be. The only question was as to the motive that could lead a sane person to such a step. The trial resulted in a verdict of murder in the second degree, the jury uniting in considering her guilty, but allowing that the circumstantial nature of the evidence permitted of a "reasonable doubt," and so did not call it of the first degree. After she was found guilty she was sent to the jail in New-Haven, and she will be taken from thence to the Superior Court to receive her sentence some day this week or next.

Since she has been imprisoned her mind has been seriously troubled, and recently she has made a full confession of her guilt, and expresses herself as much relieved thereby. On the 28th day of December, 1872, she began her story to the jailer, Capt. Webster. Mrs. Sherman is a very ignorant woman. She can scarcely write at all, and, like many persons who have done less than herself to make history, she is unable to remember dates with any accuracy, so that in parts her narrative is vague. All through her trial, in Court and to her own counsel, she positively denied ever having poisoned anybody, and she begged to be allowed to take the stand and swear thereto, but she was not allowed to by her counsel.

Mrs. Sherman's story is as follows: She was born in New-Brunswick, N. J., in 1825, and was early left an orphan. At the age of seventeen she joined the Methodist Church, and at a love-feast there she met Edward S. Struck, whom she subsequently married. Struck in time became a policeman at Yorkville, one of the suburbs of New-York City. One night there was a row in a saloon on his beat, and a detective was killed. Struck was off without leave. He was reprimanded and disgraced. It troubled him very much, and finally it weighed so on his mind that he became crazy and had softening of the brain. He then was discharged. When he recovered it was only to be very feeble physically and unable to get any work, so that he was only a burden to his wife. One day a male friend of hers suggested to her that she could get rid of the man by poison. She took kindly to the idea, and gave him arsenic in his food, and she also, with the same poison, killed their youngest two children, so that they also should not be burdens to her, and should not have, as she says, to grow up to life's cares.

She was not suspected of this murder, and soon after it went to Litchfield, in this State, to live. Here she met one Dennis Huriburt and married him, but she did not get along particularly satisfactorily to herself with him, and so she poisoned him.

Soon after his death she was told by a friend that there was a man in Derby, named Horatio N. Sherman, who had a plenty of money, and had lost his wife, and that by skillful management, if she wanted a third husband, she could probably get him. Accordingly she went there and applied to him for the place of house-keeper in his family, and he engaged her, and subsequently she succeeded in marrying him. He had two small children, Ada and Frankie, and these she determined to poison and did poison, but she did not plan to poison Sherman. She intended to employ the arsenic upon the rats in her house as well as to kill the children, and she purchased it in New-Haven, at Peck's drug-store, with the first-mentioned object. She took the package home and put it on a shelf beside a similar package of saleratus. Mr. Sherman used to drink a great deal of cider, into which he would put saleratus to make it foam. This was his favorite drink. The saleratus and the arsenic on the shelf became mixed in some way, but she did not mix them, but saw they were so. One night some friends were present, and they had some "toddy" to drink. Her husband invited her to take some, but she chose in preference to drink some of his cider prepared to foam. Soon after she took it she went out of the house to call upon a neighbor, and was taken suddenly very sick, so badly that she was utterly unable to do anything for herself, and had to be carried into the house. But she rallied in a little while. She thinks that this sickness was due to the arsenic that had been mixed with the saleratus, and that when he died, it was because of taking more of a similar preparation at a later period. In no other way did she know of his obtaining poison, and the talk of the prosecution about her putting arsenic into his tea and into "slings" and other hot drinks was all expended on a wrong track. This was not, therefore, such a clear case of murder as the others. In fact, she merely neglected to warn him of his danger, and that she did not always remember it herself is shown in the fact of her having taken some of the cider. It is curious that the only death for which she could not be held accountable, according to her story, should be that for which she has been convicted.

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