

**THE
BISSINGER SUICIDE**

History of a Sad Tragedy
In Which Mrs. Bissinger made Desperate By Neglect and Ill
Treatment, Drowned Herself and Three Children In The Union Canal
At Reading, Penna.

STATEMENT OF HER BROTHER AND HUSBAND.

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DRIVEN TO HER DEATH

THE MOST FRIGHTFUL OF SUICIDES

One of the greatest poets that ever existed has written an adage which will be quoted as long as language lives. It is this: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!"

Certain it is, that the most appalling deeds of cruelty and revenge have been committed by women whose natures have been suddenly changed by ill treatment, or neglect on the part of the opposite sex.

Jealousy is generally the incentive of these wild deeds. A woman loves a man, and while that man returns her love, there is the most complete happiness. But when he begins to grow lax in his affection she begins to feel uneasy. And from that moment, peace is a stranger to the household and contentment flies away. Suspicion, distrust, fear and hate take up their abode there, and the beautiful angel of happiness never returns. Day after day the clouds grow darker and darker, until at last the storm bursts and the murky deluge destroys the home.

For the reason that woman's nature is more sensitive than man's, her acts either of love or hate are more excited and uncalculated, more spontaneous in their inception, and swifter in their execution.

We are quite apt in judging of the female character to do it the great injustice of calling it weak and uneven. This is a short sighted conclusion that has no premise in truth. There is nothing so steadfast, nothing so true, nothing so kind, nothing so bright, cheery and lovely as the disposition of a good woman. And noblest among noble women is a good devoted wife.

And when a woman who fills this description, deliberately commits an act such as that of Mrs. Bissinger's, the whole community is aroused.

In the following pages, we will find a full and impartial history of that heart rending domestic tragedy.

THE MOST FRIGHTFUL OF SUICIDES

By far the most terrible and at the same time sad and unfortunate of tragedies took place in this city – Reading – Tuesday August 17, 1875.

Toward evening of that date, the wife of Philip Bissinger and their three beautiful children came to their deaths, actuated by the feelings brought about by the domestic difficulties of the couple.

It was then that the troubled wife gathered her little flock of three children together and then a jump and a slight struggle in the water and four lives went out of the world up to the God that gave them.

According to witnesses, this well dressed and respectable looking little band were noticed crossing the Harrisburg (Penn Street) Bridge and walking on the Union Canal towpath toward the Tulpehocken Creek.

The children consisted of two girls and one boy, aged respectively nine, six and three years, all hearty in appearance. They all seemed to enjoy the ramble in the country, hopping and skipping along the side of their mother in the most gleeful manner. When a point was reached about two and a half miles above the city, the mother suddenly stopped, filled a basket which she carried with stones, and fastening it to her

waist. She picked up the small boy, kissed him and likewise took the girls, one under each arm, and jumped into the canal.

The particulars of this terrible affair show, that up until Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock, Mrs. Bissinger was in the enjoyment of all her faculties, was in good health and showed nothing that would leave anyone to suppose that she contemplated such a deed. She and the children took a Penn Street trolley in the afternoon, went to the northwestern section of the city, left the street car, and started walking along the Union Canal towpath until they reached her chosen spot and ended their lives.

The story of this most unfortunate affair properly began Tuesday at two o'clock when Mrs. Bissinger left home to make some purchases for the household. Subsequently she came back to the house, 611 Penn St. and taking the children, presumably went for a walk. They were seen boarding a street car in front of their house by an acquaintance who noticing the boy, gave him a friendly goodbye surmising they were out for a little pleasure excursion.

The little one waved his hand, as much as to say "farewell" and then turned joyfully to its mothers' side in bright anticipation of a little trip to the country. Mr. Clewell, the witness, stated that he saw the mother and the boy, Philip only; hence the two girls must have been on the other side of the car out of his line of sight.

It is supposed the little family went down Penn Street to Front, and then crossed the Harrisburg, or as it's called today, Penn Street Bridge, as a woman corresponding to Mrs. Bissinger's description, with three children, were seen crossing the bridge about the same time that the little family would have arrived there.

Upon reaching a point above Gring's Mill opposite the farm of Chas. Gring, Mrs. Bissinger was observed filling a basket with stones by a Miss Bitting who was in the area. After filling the basket and tying it to her waist, she clasped the children to her body and jumped into the waters of Union Canal Lock #49 East. A Mr. Fortney, who was passing along the road on the west bank of the Tulpehocken Creek upon hearing the screams of the children, summoned help from the home of Mr. Gring. They hastened to the canal by rowing a boat across the creek to the canal in the hope of saving the lives of the children who were struggling in the waters of the lock.

The woman had disappeared quickly beneath the surface because of the weight of the stones in the basket tied to her waist. The children clinging to her soon sank below the water surface. The men began to grapple for the victims and in a short time recovered the bodies of the three children and the mother.

CORONER SUMMONED

The bodies of the four were laid upon the east bank of the creek and Deputy Coroner Goodhart summoned. Several citizens of Reading were in the vicinity and witnessed the recovery of the bodies from the canal but could not identify them. Upon the arrival of the Coroner, the following jury was called: Penrose W. Mengel, Jacob Bitting, Herbert M. Bushong, Abraham Moyer, William K. Loose and Jacob Kissinger.

Upon viewing the bodies, and hearing the testimony of eye witnesses who described the circumstances attending the drowning, they rendered the following verdict: The woman whose name was unknown, came to her death by suicidal drowning and that the death of the children resulted from drowning caused by the willful act of the woman, supposed to be their mother who was found with them.

Undertaker E.B. Miller who had accompanied the Coroner, took charge of the bodies and brought them to his establishment in Reading. Up to the arrival of the bodies in the city, they had not been identified. After they were taken to Mr. Miller's Funeral Parlor at 420 Washington Street, a number of persons were invited to inspect the remains in the hope identification could be made. However, it was not until a Mrs. Rockmuehl, an intimate acquaintance of the deceased had viewed them that the startling truth was made known. The bodies were those of Mrs. Philip Bissinger and her three children, Mollie, Lillie and Philip.

When the startling announcement was made it then devolved upon those present to break the news to the husband, Mr. Philip Bissinger the well known restaurateur. This news created the greatest consternation and surprise everywhere, and many strong hearts were soon weighed down with sobs and tears. The news shocked everybody, with many reasons attributed as the cause of the appalling deed.

Mr. Bissinger was at Library Hall located at Fifth and Franklin Streets conducting the musical exercises of the Harmonie Mannerchor, and was totally ignorant of the affair. As it might be expected, the news of the sad affair was quite a severe shock to the husband and father of the deceased.

His feelings can be better imagined than described. He appeared to be weighed down with grief and was placed in his room with several attending physicians to care for him. All kinds of rumors prevailed about him for the next twenty-four hours.

The tavern was closed and members of the Harmonie Mannerchor took charge of the house during the night. Shortly before midnight, four boxes containing ice and the four bodies were taken to the home they had left in good health in the afternoon. Only a few friends of the family were admitted and by morning white and black crepe dangled on either side of the front doors of the home. Mr. Bissinger's mother was also weighed down with grief and humiliation.

On Wednesday, the day after the event, Mr. Bissinger asked to see a minister, resulting in a Rev. A.A. Leinbach who lived on 4th St. sent for. The Rev. had an interview with the grief stricken man. He offered spiritual consolation to the distraught husband and his mother and relatives who had arrived from Lancaster and Harrisburg.

THE NEWS IN OTHER CITIES

The newspapers of Philadelphia and New York, Harrisburg and Pottsville contained the following paragraph which had been telegraphed by the Associated Press Agent in Reading: "This afternoon the wife of Capt. Philip Bissinger, accompanied by her three children, two girls and a boy, aged nine, six, and three years, left her home in Reading and walked up the towpath of the Union Canal. When they reached a location three miles above the city near Gring's Mill, she deliberately threw herself and her children into the waters of the canal and drowned herself and the children.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHILDREN

Oldest Girl: Black hair, deep, large, black eyes, described as a very handsome little brunette nine years of age.

Her sister, age six, was of the same type and the little boy was described as a well-knitted hearty boy. All three were favorites of the community in which they moved. All were buried in Charles Evans Cemetery.

MR. WILLIAM BEHM'S STATEMENT

One of the first on the scene after the drowning. The spot where the drowning took place is along the Union Canal near a limestone quarry and about 200 yards from the farm house. It is about 2 ½ miles from the city.

On one side of the canal is a stone wall which was used by the mother to make her fatal leap. According to an eye witness that spoke to Mr. Behm, the incident was described as follows:

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT

The lady jumped into the water with her children, but because he could not swim, did not attempt to save them. He said he went to the farmhouse and told them what had happened. The people in the house went for a boat, and by the time they returned to the scene, the woman and her children had disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

The eyewitness said he could have saved the children if he was able to swim, because they were still floundering in the water when a boat was sent for. The depth of the water where they jumped in was about seven feet.

PREPARATION OF THE DEAD

Undertaker Miller had in his employ two women who took charge in preparing the remains for burial. They were a Mrs. Bausher and a Mrs. Young.

The appearance of Mrs. Bissinger in death, was considerably changed. Her face appeared broad and puffed, but still identifiable. The children looked very natural, but the sparkle of life in their black illustrious eyes was gone. It was a sad sight, and one that brought tears to many eyes where tears were comparative strangers before.

A NEWS REPORTER'S COMMENTS

As the news of the terrible tragedy by which Mrs. Philip Bissinger of Reading, put an end to her own life and those of her three children spread through the city, the excitement became intense. Business was almost stagnated. Everybody seemed to think of nothing but the tragedy itself, and of discussing the cause leading to it.

Rumors had Mr. Bissinger attempting to commit suicide himself, that he was raving crazy, and other, none of which were proven true, however, they might have been if the physicians had not labored through the night to prevent such a state of affairs.

The funeral was to take place on Friday afternoon, and in the mean time people had ample time to ventilate the subject in general. It seems everyone without exception, that the reporter heard, condemned the husband and branded him as nothing short of a "monster," in crime. It was alleged that he had treated his wife with undue respect for years; openly courted another woman who held a conspicuous and influential standard in the German society of the city. And literally, in fact, forced his wife to the end which she finally submitted herself and children to. It was widely known that he sincerely loved his children and it was probably more for them than for the poor woman who bore his name that he grieved for.

Men and women were loud in their exclamations against him, his mother, and we may say, the paramour who was probably the heart of all difficulties in the family. Threats of all kinds were freely indulged in on every hand.

Friday, the day of the funeral, was one that will never die from the memory of our people, wrote the reporter. Such an out pouring of mostly women on an occasion of this kind, was never before known.

Early in the morning people flocked to the house where the bodies, in four separate coffins were laying in state, and by noon it was estimated that over five thousand persons had viewed them, and as many, probably, were prevented from doing so by the immense crowd and earnest efforts of the police to preserve order. Hundreds of people came out of the house with moistened and tearful eyes, showing the effect that the scene had had upon them.

REPORTERS COMMENTS CONTINUED

Many people came as far as ten miles from the country to see all this and the funeral which was to follow. In the afternoon at two o'clock the coffins were placed in two separate hearses and a closed cab.

The public excitement in regard to the frightful tragedy did not die out in the least after the burial of Mrs. Bissinger and her three children. On the contrary, it only seemed to become more and more intense, not noisy but deep and powerful.

The husband was the object of the bitterest enmity to the great majority of the people, and indeed it appeared as though he was in constant peril of his life, or of personal injury wherever he went.

THE FUNERAL

The funeral took place on Friday, August 20, 1875 at 2:00 p.m. in Charles Evans Cemetery. The mother of the deceased and her uncles and aunts were the object of sympathy from the community at large. Crowds gathered in front of the family home on Penn Street as early as 8:30 the morning of the funeral. Officers Moore, Weidner, and Talbot had trouble keeping a passage way open. Undertaker Miller, appeared with the coffins at the home causing a stir in the crowd. When it was announced that the bodies would be put on public view, the crowd became agitated and impatient.

Mrs. Bausher was considered an experienced skillful layer out of the dead, having been in the business at least 25 years. After dressing the corpses, they were laid out in their coffins at 9:00 a.m.

The deceased Mrs. Bissinger was robed in a white satin shroud that was said to look more like a bridal robe than a robe of death. Its face was like a dress of the finest white satin, with rows of pure white lace running across the bodice with fine white satin bows in the middle of each row of lace down the front. Her features were natural and lifelike. Her appearance was quiet and composed with no line upon her countenance to give the faintest hint of the terrible story of her heart pangs and sorrows in earth. Her brown hair rested on a white satin pillow shaped like a leaf of an immortelle, scalloped and fringed in imitation thereof. (Immortelle – a plant producing flowers that can be dried without losing their form or color). Her arms were crossed on her breast and a bouquet of white flowers was held there. At her feet was a wreath of flowers. Along the sides of the face of the shroud were beautiful white single roses, and about her head were nicely arranged flowers from the hot house of Alexander D. Burnett. He made sure the flowers were arranged to his satisfaction. Mrs. Bissinger's coffin was of walnut and covered with

black cloth. It also had six heavy silver handles, 3 on each side. On the lid was a beautiful silver leaf and rose bud.

Mollie, the eldest daughter's coffin was furnished in pure pearl white. The two little girls were dressed alike in Marseilles dresses trimmed in costly laces and fringes. (Marseilles – a stiff cotton fabric, resembling pique, originally made in Marseille France). The girl's coffins were finished the same as the mother's. Silver handles and mounts and rosebuds on the lids. The pearl white covering was new, specially introduced for the occasion by Undertaker Miller.

The boy's coffin was also white. Young Philip was dressed in a neat little sack and skirt of white Marseilles, trimmed with pure white lace and satin. He had flowers at his feet and a small bouquet in his hands. They all had flowers at their feet and bouquets in their hands.

Mrs. Bissinger's mother appeared frantic and would raise her hands and moan in an agonizing manner while the bodies were being dressed.

When everything was in readiness, the stricken distraught father was supported by a Doctor Rudi and led to the upper chamber of death where he looked upon the bodies of his wife and children. The sight is said to have chilled him and rooted him to the spot.

By this time it was 10 a.m. and the crowds between 7th & 8th on Penn became suffocating. The police found it impossible to keep passage ways open to the home.

The morning trains brought spectators from all parts of the county for a last look at the remains. Remarks were overheard to the effect that there was more excitement about the tragedy in the county than in the city.

After the bodies were viewed by Mr. Bissinger and his relatives, the coffins were brought downstairs and placed side by side in a rear apartment back of the barroom. The coffins rested on stands covered with white sheets. After the crowd had been notified how to act, the front door was opened and the people began to flock in. They moved silently and slowly, showing emotions of melancholy and sadness as they moved to the rear and viewed the deceased. Before 12 o'clock over 4,000 people had passed by the open coffins exiting through the backdoor into the garden and then to Court Street.

By 11:30 a.m. the crowd was so large that the officials thought it best to close the doors. Chief of police Cullen and Lt. Lutz with a squad of officers cleared the pavement in front, preventing many more people from viewing the remains. This caused some resentment, but there was no trouble.

At the appointed hour, the Rev. A.S. Leinbach began the service with the reading of the 90th Psalm in German. The service was based on the 11th verse of the 97th Psalm. At the conclusion of the service, the coffin lids were screwed down and members of the Harmonie Mannechor acting as pall bearers, carried the coffins to the horse drawn hearses. Mr. Bissinger's hearse was draped in black and drawn by black horses. The little girl's coffins were placed in a hearse of white and drawn by white horses.

The little boy's coffin was put in the cab with his father who was attended by Dr. Rudi, the family physician. The procession proceeded to Charles Evans Cemetery where internment took place.

The four graves were dug on Mr. Bissinger's lot located just below the chapel toward the railroad. There are now six graves on the lot, which is the second below the chapel walk.

Penn Street took on an air of a holiday by 2:00 p.m. with crowds lining the streets through which the funeral procession proceeded to the cemetery. Hundreds more rushed to the grave site before noon taking their lunch with them.

When the cortege arrived at the cemetery, all attention was centered on Mr. Bissinger as he ascended from the cab bearing the coffin of his young son Philip. Mr. Bissinger was bare headed and was supported by Dr. Rudi. A bodyguard of five policemen escorted his closed carriage to and from the cemetery.

The graves were not dug separately. It appears a long trench was dug and the coffins laid in the rough boxes side by side. Many women present at the grave site were overheard expressing their feelings in words of "hang him".

Mr. Bissinger at all times during the funeral had to be guarded by the squad of police that accompanied the procession, especially when he was led from the house to his cab, and at the cemetery, on which of those occasions there was a dash for him by the people, who, had they succeeded in gaining hold of him, there is no telling what the result would have been. When the funeral arrived at the cemetery, it was estimated that no less than ten thousand people had congregated there and lined the avenues on every side.

Mr. Bissinger was assisted out of the cab and stood at the grave until the last coffin had been let down. When apprehension of an assault upon him by the crowd was feared, he was shuffled back into his cab and driven off at a fast pace toward the gate of the cemetery. There a large mob of people there waiting for him. But through the earnest protestations of the police, they allowed the cab and Mr. Bissinger to pass through the gate and head toward his home without further abuse.

AROUND THE BISSINGER GRAVES

Public curiosity was satisfied in the forenoon as far as the coffins and bodies were concerned, but in the afternoon the curiosity of probably seven thousand people in the cemetery centered upon Mr. Bissinger. He came trembling from the cab supported by his doctor. He had no covering on his head and appeared full of deep emotion as he stood by the graves. After a brief service he was hustled back into the cab and driven from the cemetery in a hurry. Many law-abiding citizens could not understand why he needed a bodyguard of police. They were of the opinion that if trouble started, the small squad of police could not protect him from harm.

Even though the coffins were placed in a trench side by side, when the grave diggers finished filling in the hole, they shoveled the dirt into mounds giving the appearance of four separate graves. After Mr. Bissinger left the cemetery, interest in the graves declined, although hundreds hung around and watched the graves filled in.

MRS. BISSINGER'S LAST WORDS

Mr. Nicholas Thompson, residing at the Union Canal Office in Reading said Mrs. Bissinger and the children passed his office at 25 minutes after 5:00 p.m. on the afternoon of the tragedy. As they passed he said Mrs. Bissinger remarked how warm it was. And he replied "Yes it was". He thought she appeared distressed and looked as if she had been crying because tears were still visible on her cheeks. She crossed the lock at that point and went up the towpath without meeting anyone until she reached the Lebanon

Valley Railroad Bridge. There Mrs. Nicholas Thompson passed her but did not exchange any greeting with her. So Thompson said he was the last person she conversed with as no one passed her after that.

ECHOES OF THE SAD TRAGEDY

Mr. Louis W. Willick, a cabinetmaker formerly in the employ of Shraden, Felix, and Kline of Reading, announced that he would conduct the place of business, saloon and restaurant, No. 611 Penn Street better known as Bissinger Saloon or Maennerchor Hall. The saloon was opened Monday under new management, Mr. Bissinger being in no condition to run the business.

STATEMENT OF THE CORONER

Coroner Goodhart arrived near the spot where the people were drowned about six p.m. The bodies were lying on the towpath and he ordered them removed to the other side of the Tulpehocken where they were loaded into the undertaker's wagon. The jury held its sitting in Mr. Gring's House on the west bank of the creek. The Coroner stated that in his opinion Mrs. Bissinger must have committed the deed shortly before 5 o'clock. She fastened the basket containing about 21 pounds of stones around her waist with a thick cord, which she had taken with her, which in his opinion, together with other evidence, showed that the suicide and murder was deliberate. She must have decided the day before to commit the deed.

She took one child under each arm and holding the third child close to her breast, jumped into the water and they all perished together. Mrs. B. was dressed in a loose black cape and a plaid dress, which in its wet condition looked like a delaine. (delaine – a light dress fabric of wool or wool and cotton). She had a very finely worked pocket handkerchief about her, and in her dress pocket was a wallet containing about six dollars in currency. A printed slip from a newspaper containing the name of her husband and two letters were also found in the pocket.

The letters were taken by the Coroner, and they were found to be dated August 9 & 10, 1865. The letters were couched in the most endearing language, commencing and ending in the manifestation of the strongest ties of love, respect and esteem. They were signed by the first name of her husband. She probably read the two letters for the last time Tuesday on her journey up the canal towpath. Mrs. Bissinger was fully clothed except for her hat which had floated away after she jumped into the canal lock.

It was discovered that the unfortunate woman would have become a mother to another child within a few months. So five lives were snuffed out by her deed caused by her unhappiness.

The children were dressed in fine white wool marino stockings, buttoned goiters, light colored dresses, fine under clothing and their appearance, together with their mother was enough to satisfy the Coroner that they were of a good family, and not strangers to the area as had been first reported.

Mrs. August Rockmuhl of North Fifth Street was the first person to recognize the dead. She visited the undertakers after a special request was issued for people to identify the deceased. When she saw the children, she was not sure of their identity, but when she saw the woman, she exclaimed! "O God, that is Mrs. Bissinger and her children."

Mrs. Bissinger's mother, Mrs. Eben was summoned and identified the bodies. Mrs. Louisa Bissinger, the deceased was the eldest child of the late Frederick Eben who resided in Reading many years ago. She was born in Reading and lived with her parents who kept the Alenbach hall restaurant and other places. She

married Philip Bissinger about ten years ago. She had six children, three of which died as infants of natural causes.

Mr. Bissinger, after a sleepless night, was given opiates early the next morning, before dawn, by Dr. Landis. He slept about three hours and just before 9:00 a.m., asked to see the bodies of his family. He was then taken to the viewing room of the funeral parlor where the bodies were laying side by side.

THE TOPIC OF CONVERSATION

Penn Street from Fifth to Eighth was filled Tuesday night with many people eagerly discussing the tragedy, and the utmost caution was used in conveying the news to wives and children. The blow was sudden and severe and even the most disinterested people were shocked beyond measure at the awful event.

At the various public markets the next morning, the suicide was the main topic of conversation. Three of four groups along the streets of the city discussed the event to the extent of what they knew. The male members of the families having heard a rough outline of the tragedy that night, carried the news home and gave their families enough of the horrible particulars to create great excitement.

Many people were of the opinion that Mrs. Bissinger was not out of her mind, but her act was a premeditated thing, done by a desperate woman in her right mind. The causes were speculated by the public.

A difference of opinion was raised as to a person who commits suicide being in their right mind. Some argued that the lady was suffering from temporary departure from the normal, otherwise she would not have done what she did.

An acquaintance said she saw Mrs. Bissinger on the Penn Street trolley and described her as appearing calm and contented and her behavior and conversation was perfectly natural.

It appears that after Mrs. Bissinger and her children dismounted from the trolley, they walked directly to the spot along the canal. There was some conjecture that she had visited the scene previously and selected the site beforehand because it was one of the best places along the canal for her purpose.

Bissinger's saloon was the headquarters for people of the county when they visited the courts or the city to transact business. It was convenient for lunch and refreshments. The Bissinger children were friendly with the patrons of the establishment. This caused the parents to become objects of intense interest. The sad fate of the deceased created sincere sympathy by the many people who knew them.

As the news spread through the city, the excitement became intense. There was a general stagnation of business. Everyone seemed appalled and horror stricken – no one seemed desirous of working. Men discussed the incident on street corners and women brooded over the melancholy affair in their homes. Dinners were not relished, and housework was done in slow motion. The tragedy lay like a pall over the entire community.

The Lancaster Intelligence of that Wednesday afternoon said: William Shoenberger of that city, a cousin of Bissinger, received a dispatch last night informing his family of the tragic affair, resulting in his mother going to Reading that morning.

Philip Bissinger was a native of Lancaster, a son of John Bissinger; he had been a Captain in the 79th Regiment PA Volunteer during the Civil War. At the time of the Tragedy, he was the leader of the Harmonie Mannerchor in Reading, a German vocal group.

The three children were the only living offspring of Louisa (Eben) Bissinger and her husband.

Various stories were afloat that Mrs. Bissinger was jealous of her husband's attention to a young lady of Reading.

The children had accompanied their father to the Sangerfest in Lancaster earlier in the month of August and had been admired for their sprightliness.

THE STATEMENT OF MR. HENRY H. BROWN

On the day of the event, Mr. Brown said he was working on the farm of Charles Gring and toward evening he went in the house for supper. He was sitting in the house at 12 after 5 reading a book. Shortly after that, he heard a voice call out, but paid no attention because other people were about and would answer whoever was calling. The call came again, this time in a tone of voice indicating much distress. He immediately ran to the door and heard a voice cry "a woman and three children were drowning". He ran as fast as he could toward the canal, the man who gave the alarm following him with a horse and buggy. The man in the buggy motioned with his hand – up stream, so Mr. Brown ran in that direction to a place where he found two hats on the towpath. He waited for the man with the buggy to reach him because he could see nothing in the water. The man then pointed out the spot where the woman had jumped in and Mr. Brown jumped into the canal and swam toward the towpath searching for the bodies. In a few moments he found the body of the mother in the center of the canal. He took the woman's body to the towpath and then began searching for the children. Very shortly he found the body of the boy. By that time another man entered the water and together they found the bodies of the two girls. It was said that had the water been clear, the victims might have been recovered in time to save their lives. The other man's name was William Loose.

PHILIP BISSINGER MAKES A STATEMENT

At the advice of his immediate friends, Mr. Bissinger issued a statement or appeal to the community concerning the affair of his wife's suicide of which the Tribune of Reading gave the following synopsis in its issue of September eighth.

This morning there appeared in the columns of the Reading Times and Dispatch an elaborate statement purporting to have been written by Philip Bissinger, widower of the late lamented Mrs. Philip Bissinger and father of the three children which were carried with her into eternity, in which the writer wished to show to the public that he is entirely innocent of any of the deeds of cruelty and misconduct circulated about him.

The newspaper goes on to say that before he issued this statement, they had an idea that Philip Bissinger was an unprincipled wretch, but now they are at a loss for words to express their contempt at his course and his general make up as a human being, if human they can yet call him. Had he come out in a statement acknowledging the wrong which everybody knew him to be heir to, and asked the forgiveness of the people, he might have appeared more manly, and certainly encouraged his friends to holding a better feeling of him, but he came out in the most cowardly manner and puts the blame on the silent dead. He says in his statement that there is no proof of his guilt at all for any of the outrages reported to have

been perpetrated by him. As an offset of this, the paper asks if the taking of her own life and that of their children was not evidences strong enough to point out his guilt?

The paper continues with: It is unreasonable in the extreme to suppose that Mrs. Philip Bissinger would have perpetrated so horrible a deed if she had not been driven to it by some means. Can anyone suppose that that lady would have ended her days and those of her children if she had had proper attention from him? And again he speaks of their marriage being an unfortunate one. Here he speaks truly, but had he never been married to her, "Phil" Bissinger might this day be so small a mite in this world that it would be difficult to find his name mentioned even in a city directory. But let us conclude this argument for today, and only ask of the citizens of Reading whether morality is at all to be sustained in it, whether men of such principles are to be their leaders?

Follows is a note and the statement that Mr. Bissinger asked to be published in the newspapers of the day.

First the Note: "I respectfully request all newspapers that have published anything concerning the late unfortunate tragedy, or given currency to the many unfounded rumors which have arisen in reference to it, to publish my statement or give a synopsis of it. P.B."

Following is Mr. Bissinger's Statement as published in the Reading Gazette and Democate of Sat., Morn. Sept. 11, 1875

HIS SIDE OF THE STORY OF THE SAD TRAGEDY AND WHAT HE SAYS ABOUT IT. HIS ACCOUNT OF THEIR MARRIED LIFE.

In the name of justice and truth, an appeal to which is not denied to anyone, I do make the following statement and present it to the public with the request to give it a fair and impartial perusal, and then judge calmly over those probabilities that surround an unfortunate condition of affairs such as mine have been for years and are still more so at present.

PHILIP BISSINGER'S STATEMENT

I had hoped, that after the general excitement, which ran so fearfully high over the sad and lamentable death of my family, and so to the probable caused thereof, had somewhat subsided, the public would be disposed to view my case more coolly, more justly, and remember for the sake of justice that there are always two sides to each question, and that so far, the only side heard from was in the shape of public rumors.

He wants to know why these false and wild stories without the least foundation of truth were not circulated more freely before the sad occurrence. He claims to be at a lose as to why now?

He asks the public to reflect that there may be some people who are bitter toward him and have feelings of animosity and envy toward him because of his position in the community. He goes on to express his opinion that because of the success that attended his business, the strict propriety and manner in which he conducted it, and the honorable position he was allowed to occupy in society, and which he owed mainly to his own efforts and exertions in many matters and understandings, either of a sociable or public nature, this caused many naturally to view him with an eye of jealousy and envy.

He cannot help but think and ask whether they did not welcome this catastrophe as a favorable opportunity to vent upon him such feelings of ill spirit, which he says no Christian would bear towards his fellow man, and which without some assisting cause they had not dared to do even this?

Again he asks why these rumors were not set against him and brought into effect before it they are and can be proven true? He cannot help asking why their dreadful blow to him was waited for with its advantage taken of the general feeling and interest, which manifested in the sad calamity. Only then did these infamous rumors spread to find amidst the general excitement which prevailed at the time, a too eager willingness to credit almost everything that was uttered or assented as the cause of the sad affair.

He goes on to say, the entire loss of all that was dear to him, the bereavement of the whole of his family, seemed to excite little feeling of sympathy; few seemed to think that this awful calamity was more severe a punishment than all the denouncements an excited populace saw fit to credit and heap upon him.

It seemed to him almost that he had not enough to bear under, that his grief excited so little sympathy, but that there must have been a bitter and revengeful spirit which swayed and led public opinion only too successfully, and even yet does its utmost to keep a feeling of excitement by repeating and fabricating such falsehoods which keep the people from reasoning calmly.

He is only too well aware of the extreme difficulty he is placed in to offer any kind of an explanation and a vindication of himself to the public, in the face of such charges as have been set afloat against him and the consequent bitter feelings of prejudice, which were formed so hastily by a great many. They most undoubtedly fully appreciate the delicate task of observing the true respect for those that are no more, and yet at the same time attempt to offer an explanation which must necessarily have reference to some of those even if it be only in the manner of a full and true explanation of all the facts in this unfortunate state of affairs.

He had all along hoped that he might be spared the necessity of offering this explanation to the public, in the expectation that justice and reason would do more in allaying the feelings, and thereby tend to change a wrong impression in the minds of so many, that always had reason to know him better and ought not to have been carried along with the current of excitement, which burst over him so suddenly, so furiously, and so wrongly.

It seems however, that he is not to be allowed to mourn over his grievous loss quietly; an unchristian like unforebearing spirit of revengeful feeling seems to be determined to carry things still further.

In consequence of all these facts, and at the suggestion and advice of some friends, as well as prompted by a sense of duty I owe to myself, my relatives, and those friends that never lost their faith in me, I have consented to prepare this statement for the public and lay it before them, appealing through its contents to the sense of right and justice, to condemn no one until they have also heard some facts bearing upon my side of the question.

BISSINGER'S SIDE OF THE STORY

I came to Reading in the fall of 1864, shortly after having returned home from 3 years service during the late Rebellion. In the fall of 1865 I was married to my late wife, Louisa Eben.

Our marriage, however, unfortunately proved to be anything but a happy one. There has been, and was, a very sad state of affairs existing for about eight or nine years arising originally from an entire difference in the character, disposition and inclination of both of us which developed itself very soon after our marriage.

It soon became painfully evident that the individuality and natural spirit of both of us were of such a strong determination that no good could arise there from, unless we, for the sake of peace and harmony, would both sacrifice so much of these characteristics as to ensure the happiness of our household.

Explaining to my wife the various duties of man and wife in their own private and domestic affairs, as well as the more serious and sterner demands made upon man in the purpose of his business, as well as in life generally; I requested and beseeched her to give up and lay aside that portion of her individuality and try to mend those womanly failings which continually led to and gave trouble to our lives.

I often implored her to attend and live more for our own family, and let no outside influence, gossips and other evil minded persons sow a spirit of distrust and discontent between us. I even purchased books treating upon the various duties of married life. I asked their study with the most sincere and best intentions, hoping through their additional influence and beneficial lessons to bring about a change in our affairs, and thus lighten the burdens we had to carry. I begged, for the sake of our darling little children, to overcome a spirit in her, which continually led to those little family quarrels and differences, which unfortunately will occur in the lives of most married couples; and which originally trifles enough in themselves, but receiving and accumulating in the laps of time, finally aggravated matters so much that we became completely estranged from each other.

The influence of our children and for their sakes at times effected a reconciliation, which however, was not sufficient duration to ensure peace to our home, but only too soon gave way again to the unhappy condition our affairs were gradually drifting to.

Some four or five years ago we had agreed upon a separation, being then already too painfully aware of the miserable life we were leading; but at the interference and persuasion of friends, who pictured the probable consequences of such a step, and what effect it might have upon the future life of our children, we yielded to their arguments and consented to live together again.

There might be a deal more said to explain the full and entire depth of our domestic misery, but I will cease here and ask it but to be remembered, how trying and how extremely delicate a subject it is to expose one's private family affairs to the public, even if one is driven to it by fate and necessity, and if it be the only means of refuting false accusations and proving the innocence, and thereby vindicate his character and honor.

This is the true explanation of our troubles and their causes. The consequences were: That I was driven to it, followed my natural disposition, and sought to ease any burdens and crews by devoting most of my time to music, books, and similar pastimes. Most naturally would I associate myself with persons actuated by a similarity of taste and inclination, and who readily sympathizes with me in those pursuits. If in the passionate devotion to these pursuits, I erred in choice of my friends, and thereby gave occasion for such false rumors that are spread so wildly and assigned as the cause of all my troubles, regardless of the sincere purity of my motives in this choice, I must suffer fearfully for it, by the terrible affliction which has befallen me, but I must positively deny all such rumors and charges that stamp this intercourse as having been criminal in thought and deed.

My unhappy wife who failed to understand how to assimilate herself with my disposition, and thus learn how to bridge the way over our trials and troubles, would compensate and relieve herself for the unhappy life we led, by lending a too willing ear to gossips and rumors and being naturally inclined to suspicion and jealousy, only too readily believed all that was told her, too freely confided her own affairs and troubles to such, that under a false garb of sympathy and friendship, for the sake of obtaining further and

welcome material for slander and gossip, were anxious enough to draw all from her and gather it in for some future purpose.

She would repeat these rumors to me and they naturally called for the excitable and unpleasant controversies in which both of us may have said things which in cooler moments we greatly regretted and which I as a man could not overlook so easily.

No thinking, reflecting mind can fail to see wherein the origin and cause of the trouble lay, and where the errors have been committed, if they but consider impartial and justly all the unhappy circumstances and influences that surround and bear upon such a deplorable case.

Thus had time gradually estranged and embittered the feelings to such an extent that a reconciliation seemed improbable and the poor, misguided woman, in her own mind at least seemed to see no other refuge, no other remedy, for her troubles, but to take her life! Why she took the lives of those three little innocent children, I will leave to the conjectures and thoughts of those that view and judge such a deed from a standpoint of Christianity, right and justice, especially when it was a well-known and undeniable fact that there could not have been a more fond and indulgent father, one more devoted to his children and more careful and anxious for their welfare than myself.

I again most positively deny the truthfulness of all charges and rumors that accuse me of maltreatment, of threatening her life, of insults, by offering certain amounts of money to separate, of improper or criminal intercourse with others, of neglect to provide and care properly for the wants of my family, or any other such wild stories and falsehoods as have been circulated and laid to my charge and which may not all have been told to me.

This denial, as well as the statement of the cause of our troubles, can easily be corroborated by those persons who have been acquainted with me and my family for years, and have had ample opportunities for observing the true condition of affairs, either by having been residents of the house, neighbors, or frequent visitors thereto. I again appeal to all those who have ever thought to have reason to entertain any good feelings toward me, and through them to the general public.

To recollect that up to the very time of all this unhappy occurrences, nothing had ever been said against my integrity and character as a business man, or my general conduct in public or private life, and I ask all in the name of justice, not to deny me the privilege which humanity grants to everyone, that of being first heard and then judged impartially and justly, unbiased by any influences or feelings or prejudice and actuated only by that innate sense of right every human being possesses, which guides all good actions and deeds, and does not deny sympathy to one afflicted so deeply as I am.

Philip Bissinger then signed the above statement and had it sworn to in front of Alderman Matthias Mengel on September 7, 1875.

**On Saturday, September 11, 1875, the Reading Gazette published
the following statement:**

The Friends of Mrs. Bissinger Speak

Statement of Mr. Fred Eben, Brother of the Deceased Wife
What he has to say concerning the Tragedy.

After the awful calamity which befell my sister and her three little children,
I had hoped for the sake of

“JUSTICE AND TRUTH”

As well as for a proper respect for the feelings of a community already incensed and outraged, that Philip Bissinger had accrued sufficient notoriety to last him the remainder of his life, and that he would be the last man on earth to open the frightful wound which His Own Unholy Hand had made and expose his work more gaping and bloody to the public view. While I am willing that this man Bissinger may use all fair means to recover his wanting business and if he can restore himself in the confidence of a people amongst whom my old mother has lived for.

A quarter of a century and in a city where his wife – my sister – lived all her days, I will not allow him to purify through the blood of his deceased wife and his four dead children. He shall not screen himself from a just censure, cast the blame of his wrong doing upon one whose lips are sealed in death, and cannot be heard save through those who loved here while she lived and who will defend the right now that she is gone.

PHILIP BISSINGER APOLOGY

His apology shows up the man in his true light, and could have emanated only from a soul so cowardly as it is black and infamous. He broke the heart of the mother of his children while she lived by a system of harshness and cruelty unheard of in a civilized country and now seeks to cover her grave with shame and disgrace that he may live in the enjoyment of happiness and peace.

He seeks further to weigh down an old mother's heart to cover her gray hairs with shame; and if possible, to quicken and increase the sorrow for which he alone is responsible. Philip Bissinger tells the public when he came to Reading, and that it was after he had spent three years in the Rebellion – it is to be hoped that he should have had more nerve while fighting rebels than while torturing a weak woman to misery and death. However, he does not tell what he found when he came to Reading – he forgets to say how he won the affections of a young girl not yet out of her teens – how the mother of that girl took him to her home as a son, and gave him her business – stepping out, and leaving him her established trade to begin his married life.

He neglects to tell how he repaid that mother-in-law. How for weary years she was forbidden the privilege of visiting her daughter – how the children had to steal away to visit their grandmother and to keep their father in ignorance of their whereabouts – how the old lady longed to see little Philip – but was gratified only when his little hands were folded in death, and his little form lay stiff and cold. She could not harm the angel boy then and then the bitter scalding tears could furrow her cheeks, and even drop upon his little face, they were harmless, and she was permitted to enter the home which she had left years before, so happy and full of promise.

Permitted to come back – Ah! But only to gaze upon everything she loved within that home – cold in their houses of death.

Philip Bissinger was there too, and amid the suffering and anguish which he had caused, he could find it in his heart to exclaim, “If she had only left me the children”. It was for those she had died, and it was for those only that he cared.

Soon after their marriage, Bissinger says, it became evident, painfully so, that the natural spirit of both was so strong and determined that no good could arise from the Union unless each made sacrifices. Well, let me ask what sacrifices were made by my sister?

She gave up her mother, had to train her children to forget their grandmother, and never complain of her treatment, but bore all patiently and meekly, hoping and praying for the best and for that “happiness to enter the household”, by a perfect submission to her husband’s will, and this even to the last.

At an accidental meeting between mother and daughter at the cemetery a few months before her death, the only response to the mother’s questions as to her treatment was a bowing of the head and a gush of tears. Now what was Philip Bissinger doing toward bringing about this desired reform in his domestic affairs? He tells us that after lecturing her on private and domestic affairs and telling of the sterner demands nature had put upon man that after purchasing her books to guide her in her domestic duties he turned to “follow his natural disposition and sought to raise his burdens and cares in another channel. Most naturally would I associate myself with persons actuated by a similarity of taste and inclination. Says this man, and whilst he enjoined the most humble servitude on the part of his wife, he cut loose from all restraint himself.

He not only reveled in the society of those as debased as himself, but took a fiendish delight in dragging his dirty doings to the knowledge of his wife. This sweet spirit of like communications was met all hours upon the highways and in the by-ways in daytime and nighttime, at noon and midnight and this, of course, for the sole purpose of exchanging expressions of sympathy.

Who ever dreamed of anything criminal in this? The wife needed no sympathy. She had been taught domestic economy. Amongst the books he had purchased for her, was no doubt, “Bunyon’s Pilgrims Progress” from which she learned that to carry great burdens without complaint or murmur was a duty incumbent upon us all while the “Frenchmen’s Guide”, no doubt formed the chief study of the Model Husband for in that book he could learn how to deceive a wife and win a lady.

He often implored her to attend and live more for her own family - not to allow outside influence and a spirit of distrust to get between them. He begged her for the sake of his “darling children” to overcome her jealous notions, and to be content with her lot. He even as early as 1870 gave her the “Blessed Privilege” of accepting separate apartments from him and forcibly gave her to understand that that was his desire.

In a letter dated April of 1870 of four pages in length, he tells his wife’s mother who was then in Philadelphia, that all differences between himself and wife had been adjusted – that in the future he would be a different man – that he had returned to the one who had come between them all her Gifts and Presents and had received his from her – that he was determined to put an end to this kind of conduct in the future. This letter is in the possession of the brother and he will publish it upon the request of Mr. Bissinger for his benefit. Bissinger denied among other things, that he even offered his wife money to leave him. This is as false as the rest of his statement.

In his efforts to raise money to pay his wife to separate from him, he approached a well-known citizen of Reading, who, when told the reason for the loan, refused him with a rebuke which burned Bissinger’s ears.

Bissinger declares that no thinking, reflecting mind, can fail to see wherein the origin and cause of this trouble lay, and where the errors had been committed. The brother claims that the way Bissinger looks at the problem, it was all the wife’s fault. Bissinger claims his innocence from the fact that only after his

wife took drastic action did the wild stories and false rumors even surface. He asks why these stories were not circulated before the incident.

If he is at a loss to understand why there was nothing said before the sad event, the brother's answer is that the long-suffering wife kept her secret well.

The question is raised that perhaps the congenial spirit which he had sojourned for the past five years until one o'clock in the morning very frequently can answer his question.

This woman whose musical education was of such a character as to enable her to sap the affections of a husband and father, and whose brilliant voice had entitled her the respect among the people of her adopted city, should be able to answer the questions for this perplexed married man of her choice. Why the wife took the lives of the three innocent children the brother leaves to the thoughts and conjectures of those that view and judge such a deed from a Christian standpoint. It is his opinion that his brother-in-law's feeling about the act differ from his because his brother-in-law feels his wife committed the act for revenge towards his mis-deeds, but the brother feels his sister took the lives of the children because of a mother's love for her children.

She could not live with the conditions she found herself in, nor could she die alone. She knew that death alone would simply delight her husband, and that in a short time he would be serenely happy with the strumpet who had caused the ruin of her family-ruling and reigning over her loved ones. The awful struggle this must have cost her can only be guessed at. So her decision to take the lives of her children was made knowing that this would cause her husband anguish. She could not die and let her children be raised by someone else.

WHAT THE NEW YORK TRIBUNE HAD TO SAY

The Bissinger affair in Reading, PA is one of those bits of human history which somehow call in question all our established notions of the excellence of human law and justice. The wheel moves the great machinery smoothly enough until some minute flaw, some pebble, makes itself felt in the weak spot and all suddenly stands still-useless. In this case, the difficulty lay with the poor woman, the wife of a saloon keeper. Popular belief does not grant to such women credit for delicacy, or strength of feelings, but this poor little body had some share of both, as it appears; for when her husband, according to the newspaper account, fell in love with another woman, and offered to pay his wife two thousand dollars to go away with two of the children, leaving one to him, she refused to accept the proposal as a practical money-making woman would have done, but thought it better to take her two children in her arms and holding the third to her breast, end the whole matter by dying in the canal.

Popular excitement, we are told, ran high and lynch law was freely talked of. Of course we all know what a boon the death of four people and a story of love and jealousy left behind would be in any community. The people of Reading made the best of the sensation created by the husband being taken to the cemetery as chief mourner guarded by the police and the body of the boy beside him in the carriage as a means of keeping the mob from attack. Several shots were fired however at him during the progress of the funeral, and no doubt ill regulated minds thought it a pity none of the bullets hit the mark. Here was a man guilty of murder as sure as if the poison had been instilled day by day into his wife's body as it had been into her mind. If he had stolen a wagon, or a bag of corn, or a greenback, the law would have had a safe grip on him, and he would have had years of solitude in which to repent of his ill-doing; but he only robbed a woman of happiness, and home and life, and he goes scot free. If he had harmed her body so much as to

break a finger, there was punishment swift and sure awaiting him. But he robbed her reason, and drove her soul into depths from which there was no return. Now that the foolish creature had killed herself and her babes, no worse fate is in store for him than to marry his mistress and thank kind fortune that has rid him of encumbrances and saved him two thousand dollars.

Of course law and justice can do nothing. It is what we said one of those cases where we touch an impassable wall of injustice and wrong for which there is no redress. The case of the saloon-keeper and his wife is not a unique one. It is reduplicated a thousand times in every grade of society. In every place of summer resort you may find the married man and woman tired of the old bargain, looking with wishful eyes and more or less criminal intent into forbidden fields.

Most to blame of all perhaps are the unmarried women, who in every rank of life are too often quite as ready for flirtation with married as well as single men. The wives wait patiently for justice which seldom comes in this world, unlike the poor woman in Reading who sought hers in another.

The Harrisburg Sunday Dawn, under the head "To Husbands," dwells as follows:

"When Philip Bissinger married his wife, his condition in life was humble, and he was content to find his pleasures in the circle of a virtuous household. When fortune smiled on his enterprise, and the prize of wealth was accorded to him, he transferred his affections from his domestic helpmate to a gaudy woman. Petition and protest from the injured wife only augmented the degree of his disrespect for her and increased the strains upon her heart-strings until they snapped and let loose the uncontrollable terrors of desperation.

"A knowledge of his shame was common to the whole community, but it did not impede the steady flow of patronage, which encouraged him to heap up the measure of indignity he was daily inflicting on his family. He flaunted the evidence of a guilty life before a neighborhood of passable respectability unrebuked, and lavished luxury with a bounteous hand upon the purchases of paramour, while the necessities of life were grudgingly given to the wife. This man, lost the finer sentiment of virtuous life, still retained the instinct common to all the brute creation affection for his offspring.

The self destruction of the wife alone would have brought him no remorse, and little regret. The terrible deliberation of this woman the smothering of the maternal instincts and the fatal leap into eternity with the compelled companionship of all her children have no parallel in modern events. The hands of the perfidious husband are as much stained by the quadruple tragedy as though he compelled the fatal act by physical force. It is possible that the crime of infidelity to marital vows is so common to husbands that the whole class execute it? It is a polluted judgment which tolerates that in a man, which is condemned in a woman. The considerate attentions which before marriage absorb the thoughts of suitors, are omitted when the relation of husband and wife is assumed. Here is planted the poisonous weed, which speedily spreads its deathly shade over a household, and brings its rotatory crops of indifference, neglect and abuse. There is but this difference between this case and many others. This wife was more than ordinarily sensitive to the accumulated indignities heaped upon her and the shame of the father of her children was more widely known.

"Thousand of wives, other than those whom brutal treatment has made desperate, are living lives of increasing daily misery, caused by the neglect which springs from waning affection. It does not require a club to crush out the physical existence of a wife - the purpose can as surely be accomplished in a sensitive nature, by indifference and disrespect. Privation from food is not the only means of starvation - the withholding of affectionate courtesy will starve the soul and often produce the same result.

DESCRIPTION OF WHERE MRS. BISSINGER JUMPED IN ACCORDING TO THE READING GAZETTE OF SEPT. 11, 1875

Crossed Harrisburg Bridge (Penn St.) on North side past Frill's stone breaker. Turn right and pass through cut in the rocks down toward the Union Canal.

About 100 yards from Harrisburg Bridge was a small house along the canal where a Mr. Thompson the lock tender lived. They crossed over the canal via a foot bridge to the towpath. They then traveled along the towpath between the canal and Schuylkill River. The towpath was wet and rocky in places making walking difficult. They then passed under the Lebanon Valley Railroad Bridge to the first lock above the bridge. At this point the towpath widened and the Schuylkill bends with the Tulpehocken Creek, and joins the river a short distance above the bend.

The Union Canal ran along the West side of the Tully with the towpath becoming wider and smoother. About half a mile further the Bushong Covered Bridge was reached at the Paper Mill. To the left of the Tully is a road that leads to Van Reed's Paper Mill.

On the right side, or East side of the Tully was Bushong's Paper Mill. About half a mile above this point, an old canal boat was nearly submerged in the waters of the canal. Above that was a coal wharf on the left and then the residence of farmer Gring. About ¼ square above Gring's was a large limekiln and about fifty yards above this spot is where Mrs. Bissinger and her children drowned.

It was a beautiful shady retreat. On one side of the Canal and on the other the Tulpehocken Creek which is wide at this point, there are rows of trees on each side and facing the spot is a hill covered with rocks and trees. About 100 yards above is a little hill over which a road leads; and coming down that hill towards Reading was a horse and carriage occupied by one man, who was probably the only one to witness the actual fatal jump into the canal. The man was an agent for a grain drill company. When he saw what was happening, he drove to the Gring farm house and gave the alarm. A young man named Brown was eating his supper in the Gring house. He was the one who ran to the scene and helped to recover the bodies.

Later when Mr. Brown was helping to load lime from the kiln, he was questioned by the authorities about the incident.

He said there was a high bank where Mrs. Bissinger jumped into the canal. The towpath was nearly at the surface of the water of the canal with the depth of the canal water being not more than five feet. Just across the stream stood another house. The spot was fully 2 ½ miles above the Penn Street Bridge. The bodies were found within fifty feet of each other and were transported by boat to the opposite shore where an inquest was held.

THE GRAVES OF MRS. BISSINGER AND HER CHILDREN

The general impression that would strike a stranger upon nearing the graves, unaware of the victims reposing in them, or the story of the horrible ending of their lives, would be that the spot was one devoted to the burial of unimportant, unknown or disrespected bodies, for a more forlorn, distressful and in every way unpresentable spot does exist anywhere within the gates of the Cemetery.

The lot in which are buried the victims is located near the southeast corner of the Chapel, in a triangular shaped plat on which three large sized elm trees, one of the latter standing within a hedge-lined lot, close

to the outer edge of which, on the southwest corner and on the southern outside of the hedge, lie the remains of Mrs. Bissinger and her five children all in a row with the mother lying at the western end and the smallest child at the eastern end, the three children subjects of the appalling tragedy lying in the same order nearest the mother.

The sun rises on the side of the children, and sets again on the side of the mother. The grass which used to grow exceedingly fine at this spot has almost been obliterated by the thousands of people who have walked over it to the grave site, despite the rules of the cemetery being against such trespassing, and next spring the entire plat will have to be resodded and fixed up in general. There are several more lots in the same plat in which rest the remains of other individuals, marked with small monuments or tombstones. It seems to be the particular desire of everybody visiting the graves to get as near as possible, which one of the cemetery hands informed the writer was the case, as could be seen by the grass, which for several feet around the foot of them is entirely erased, not even a blade of grass remaining, and thus it gradually thins out from the foot paths around about.

Many withered bouquets are lying around the heads of the graves, and on each of the graves were placed a handsome bouquet, showing that the dead are not forgotten by the masses who come to view their graves, even in this simple acknowledgment of respect, and so long as the people of our city remember the day which created this small row of monuments, so long will they continue to be a subject of their benevolence - which will be for many years to come.

The representative of the Harrisburg paper interviewed one of the cemetery employees about matters generally relating to the tragedy, upon which he was told that no less than twenty thousand persons had come and gone from the graves since they were created. In fact, every one visiting the cemetery, save those at funerals, never seemed to leave without first paying a visit to the Bissinger graves.

The graves are expected to have erected around them an iron railing to prevent them from being thrown into disorder by the trespassers. There is hardly ten minutes a day during the time the gates are open, that there is a least a dozen people standing at the graves.

No persons have been buried in any of the Berks County cemeteries up to this time who have received as many visitors to their graves as have the Bissingers. Some people have become very much affected by their visit to the graves, especially ladies, and not infrequently do they stand and sob over them as though the bodies were departed friends or relatives. Others become very much excited as they review in their minds the history of the appalling tragedy which brought the bodies there, and give utterance among themselves to bitter exclamations against the husband and father of the deceased; while others will actually covert the situation of the dead woman and say, they too have troubles that would vie with those of poor Mrs. Bissinger were she yet living.

FURTHER DETAILS

For several days previous to the awful tragedy, Mrs. Bissinger had been much depressed in spirits and it was quite evident to the perception of even an ordinary intellect that she was contemplating just such a course as she afterward took. Yet the keenest reader of human nature would never have suspected at that time, that this terrible resolution of hers included any but herself. No one could have seen in the fond yet agonized looks, which she continually turned upon her darling children, and in the loving caresses which she now and then bestowed on them, the stern resolve to take their young lives. "Shall I take you with me when I go away?" is a question which most likely the suffering mother asked those little ones over and over and over again. "Where abouts mama?" "When I go up to the woods." "Oh yes indeed we'd all like

to go with you mama.” “Will you take a basket, mama, to get flowers and nuts?” “Yes, we will take a basket along.”

It was perhaps at this point, that the surest means of self destruction came like a suggestive phantom to the mind of the distraught mother. Yet she sized it as a revelation from the hand of a good angel, a hand from Heaven, holding aloft a lamp to show her a pathway from this, to her dark, dark, world into a bliss beyond, a bliss where none could rob her anymore of happiness, where no demon of her own sex could torture her heart again.

The basket! Ha! She could take that along. No person would suspect her; no person would make any attempt to impede, to stop her in her despairing act of self sacrifice.

With the utmost coolness and deliberation she made all things ready. She cut a long piece off the end of the clothes line, wrapped it neatly in a paper, and put it in the basket. Then after she had completed her domestic duties she washed and dressed her three children and herself with great care and neatness. She then left the house, and entering a passing street car she rode to the end of the bridge crossing the Schuylkill River. There she left the trolley, and crossed the Harrisburg Bridge with her children and proceeded to walk slowly up along the path by the canal for nearly or quite two miles, until the footpath became so rough and filled with stones that the children could hardly walk over the rough path.

By this time she concluded that she had reached just the place suited to her desperate and awful purpose. So she halted and sitting down on a large rock called the three little ones to her and hugging them ever so fondly to her bosom, she petted them with all the sweet and endearing words of which her breaking heart was mistress.

“Oh my darlings! My darlings! I love you so! I am not wanted I am in the way. I am no longer loved. So I will go away, so that I will never come back. And you, sweet ones, you shall go along with me and never come back again. No! We shall never come back anymore my precious, precious babes; no more. But we shall all of us go to that better land where there will always be joy and contentment and no wicked woman to bring you and me sorrow and broken hearts.

The children all looked up at their mother’s strangely solemn, earnest face in wonderment as she uttered these words. And how natural for the oldest to have said: “What do you mean mama, where are you going to take us?”

At last the wretched mother concluded her caressings and then rose and walked close to the canal. She knelt down and her lips moved. She was praying now, though no spoken words passed her parching lips. She was praying now, that she might be forgiven for the act of taking her own life and those of her children. She was praying now so that the approaching physical and mental agonies of herself and her little ones might mercifully be shortened as much as possible.

With a smile she told each of the children to come and help her to gather some of the prettiest stones with which to fill the basket. This was a strange request; but, with merry laughing, the children obeyed and in a short space of time the basket was loaded with the cold deadly stones which were to sink the victims to the bottom of the canal.

Now came the final and heroic effort of all.

Oh, could any eyes have looked into poor self-doomed Mrs. Bissinger's heart, as with the swiftness of lightning she unrolled the newspaper from the close line, slipped the cord beneath the handle of the basket, and then twisted and knotted it securely about her waist. The whole object now seemed to be to prevent a suspicion of her intentions coming to the three children. They were close beside her. Suddenly she reached forth her arms and with each arm encircled one victim. These were the two girls. There was no escape for them now. Their fate was sealed; for the round plump, tender arms, were no longer arms of flesh; but bands of living iron. The girls were secure.

Little "Philly" the boy, his father's pet and pride, his namesake too, stood just out of reach in front. "Come her, Philly, darling, come her!" The voice did not tremor in its tones. Of what a terrible will Mrs. Bissinger was possessed. "Come here Philly." She smiled and stretched forth her hands, yet in such a manner that her clutch upon the girls was not lessened in the least. "A little bit nearer." "I can't mama, the basket won't let me."

"Lean over the basket, darling – a little bit more – just a little – there! Now I have you too. All is well! God give me strength – God forgive – Now then welcome Death!

Three children and a large basket of stone was a huge load for a little frail woman to rise with from her knees to her feet. No wonder she staggered; no wonder she nearly fell down again; no wonder that the huge beads of perspiration started forth upon her face.

Three of four of those staggering stumbling steps brought her to the edge of the canal. There she tottered, not with irresolution, but gathering all her despairing strength, to cast herself and children far out in the deepest water.

Little Philip had his back toward the water, and consequently could not see. But the two girls at this instant comprehended the danger. Who knows, perhaps, with that wonderful power implanted in children of reading the human face, the girls perceived the deadly doom fixed for them by their mother. At any rate they began to scream and struggle to escape; but though the screams attracted the attention of a man on the other side who was coming down the road, their screams were of no avail. Their mother's arms compressed them only tighter in her grip. Another instant and the out cries were hushed with a gurgling, plunging splashing of the canal waters. Then for almost a minute the breaths of the drowning came rushing to the surface in bubbles each of which burst with a sound, that in the horrible silence would perhaps have sounded to human ears like a faint sigh. At first there were quite a number of these bubbles and they were large and strong. But at the last part of the minute there came up but one or two, and these were very weak and faint in their breaking. Each contained a portion of an immortal soul. The ruffled top of the water fluttered and sent out circles of waves to each bank for about the same length of time as the bubbles were rising. Then they too, ceased; and by the time that the traveler who had witnessed the awful act, came to the spot, the surface of the water was so smooth and placid that he could not tell the place where the desperate woman had thrown herself and children in.

He calculated from surrounding trees and rocks, as nearly as possible where, and got a branch of a tree and sounded the canal there, but could feel nothing. He continued to shout at the top of his voice to bring someone who possibly might be able to swim. He could not himself or he would have entered the water and searched for the bodies. After some delay other persons came and soon a plan was put into execution for the recovery of the bodies.

The first one brought to the surface was that of the mother. Poor, poor mother, there were no children hugged to her heart. The arms that had clasped them so tightly till death came under the waves, had then

relented, and now they hung limp at her side. The little ones were “Safe in the Fold Above,” and the mother in the madness of her soul now stood pleading at the Bar to which she rushed unbidden to ask for judgment on her doings here below. Oh, Righteous Judge of all the earth, with Thee let us leave Mrs. Bissinger and her little ones.

THE TRAVELER’S ACCOUNT

This gentleman who chanced at the time of the suicide to be coming down the road on the opposite side of the canal says in a general way: “As I was driving along not thinking of anything much, I chanced to look over toward where Mrs. Bissinger was standing on the other side of the canal. It was rather an odd place for a lady to be in I thought; but still it did not strike me very forcibly. She had three children with her. She appeared to be trying to carry them, and also a basket which was in front of her. At that distance I could not distinguish very well what it was. As I was looking over I saw her stagger. The next moment I heard the screaming of the children, and scarcely did I hear this before I saw the woman, clutching them all three to her bosom, pitch herself forward into the canal.

Of course I saw then what her object had been, and I at once hurried forward at the utmost speed to rescue if I could the desperate woman. Had she not taken the precaution to tie the basket of stones to her body, I feel certain that I might have saved her and the children or at least some of them.

But when I arrived at what I supposed to be the spot from which she had leaped into the water, there was not the slightest sign by which I could tell the place. The water itself was perfectly smooth and as to the bank, there was nothing there by which I could tell.

Guessing as nearly as I was able, I got a pole or rather a tree branch and sounded for the bodies, but could feel nothing. Not being able to swim I could not enter the water, for fear of losing my own life; but I did not cease to shout for assistance and presently these outcries brought two or three persons to the scene of the tragedy, and the search being resumed, all four bodies – the mother and three children – were recovered. By this time, life was beyond doubt, extinct.

We had them conveyed to an undertaker’s; I think it was, where they were laid out to await recognition. No person knew who they were, at all, and there was nothing about their persons by which their names could be ascertained.”

The above remarks do not jibe with some of the earlier statements that said the mother’s body had a clipping in the pocket of a dress with her husband’s name listed on it.

A VISIT TO THE CEMETERY

The day was waning, and the cold winds of October made the most mournful sighing sounds among the branches of the large elm trees which shadowed the lot in which are the graves of Mrs. Bissinger and her children.

There was a peculiar lonesomeness about the cemetery, a lonesomeness that impressed itself most painfully upon the senses; that made one feel almost ready to turn and hasten forth from the dreadful place.

“Where is the burial lot of Mrs. Bissinger, the woman who drowned herself and children, Sir?” inquired we of a gentleman, well advanced in years, whom we met walking along one of the straggling paths. “There it is across there, Sir, by those three big elm trees.” We looked in the direction, and then asked:

“To the right of the pathway over by the chapel?” “I will walk back with you, Sir, replied the gentleman, and show you the grave mounds. I have just been over there myself looking at them.” “Thank you,” we answered, “No doubt there are many persons who come here upon the same errand.” “Indeed there are. Would you believe it, there have been almost a hundred people here today. Yes, full a hundred if not more. It is astonishing what effect that affair took upon the community at large.” “Yes it does seem to have done so.”

By this time we had reached the lot, and our volunteer guide halted and said: “Here are the graves, Sir. This long one is the mother’s and the three to the eastward of it are those of the children.”

There was a huskiness in the tones of the speaker that appeared strange, except upon the supposition that he was a relative or friend of the deceased.

We contemplated the mounds silently for several minutes, and, as the thought of the tragic death of each of the occupants came to mind, a feeling of the deepest sorrow and commiseration welled up within us.

Upon each grave were scattered flowers in bunches and bouquets, and even single. All these mementoes, left there from time to time since the funeral, were in various stages of decay. A large wreath upon the mother’s mound and a small one upon each of the children’s were quite fresh yet. They had been placed there, it was quite evident, on that same day by some pitying, friendly hand.

Every sigh and puff of the keen wind brought down showers of dead leaves from the elms above our heads, which bade fair to cover the graves from sight, flowers and all.

We noticed that the ground about had been so trampled over that the grass was completely killed. We made a remark to the gentleman concerning this. “Ah, my dear Sir,” said he in reply, “No wonder! There are people enough come here to kill up twice as much grass as there is here; twice as much, Sir.”

There was something about the speaker’s manner that induced us to think he was in some way connected with the victims, and we could not resist the temptation to inquire something. The result thereof was that the old gentleman gave us the history of his niece – a case quite similar to the present in its tragic result.

A SAD SAD STORY

“My niece,” commenced the old gentleman, “was a merry, vivacious girl of seventeen, full of fire and fun, handsome, with rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes and lovely hair. As a matter of course she had numerous suitors and beaux. But while she was pleasant and entertaining to all she gave preference to no one of them.

Near her eighteenth year she became acquainted with a fellow – I can call him nothing else, sir – who had been in the Confederate service at the beginning of the war; but who deserted and turned spy for the Federals. He was a dashing, handsome man, used to fix himself up in the greatest style, and was altogether just such an attractive heartless villain as was calculated to allure, deceive and ruin most any woman, even a woman of experience, much less a chip of a girl like Mary.

Well, Mary who had foolishly enough given the cold shoulder to several good, substantial loving men, fell head over ears in love with this wretch and married him. She actually married that scoundrel. I knew nothing about it at that time, or I do assure you it would never have occurred. I was living at Hamburg and she lived here in Reading.

Five months after the marriage her husband began to cool toward her. That is he began to tire of her, for he never did love her. I also think that there was another reason, in the money direction. She had the reputation of being an heiress to a lot of land in Lehigh Co. in which there was a vein of coal. That scheming villain no doubt had heard this story, and for that reason wedded with her.

She would come into possession of a little farm on the death of her mother – a patch of about eleven acres with a house and barn upon it, mortgage for about half its value. As soon as he found out the rights of the case, her husband, as I have said, cooled off considerably. She was of a high spirit and resented this in violent outbursts of temper, and the consequence was that they lived just a cat and dog life for a long, long time.

At last the mother, seeing how things were, and thinking that if she would give up the farm to her daughter and husband that Mary would receive better treatment, did so. Understand I knew nothing of this maneuver either, or that would have been quashed out also. Mary's mother did not relinquish her hold upon the farm until she made her son-in-law give her a written agreement that she should never be disturbed nor the farm sold except with her written consent.

He agreed to all this and what was the result? By a legal quirk he cheated his mother-in-law, sold the farm over her head, and moved back into Reading. There he went into business and had Mary's mother living with them. For awhile he behaved himself and treated both the women with somewhat better consideration. Then, by some means or other, he came across a woman, just about a match for himself in morality or rather, immorality.

I had forgotten to say that Mary, though a smart girl, had not much of an education while her rascally husband was well educated. This of course made a disparity between them, which disparity he was continually thrusting into her teeth.

This contemptible trick he was more guilty of after he became involved with his paramour than before. That creature used to paint finely in watercolors, sing like an opera woman, and play lively on the guitar. That's the term Mary's husband used to describe her performance. I heard her once by accident, and she did nothing that I could see, except let herself up in the throat like a sky rocket, splitting your ears almost with her screeching, and then come down like a stick to a sort of a groan or sigh. I called it firework singing. And that was just what it was. I would rather hear my little Mary, with her sweet, cheery voice, sing "Tramp, Tramp, The Boys are Marching" or "Rock Me To Sleep Mother," a dozen times over, than listen to her rival screech and squall "Norma" or "Robert le Diable."

Well, Sir, things went on from bad to worse until at last they reached a climax. One day I got a telegram to come to the house immediately. It was from Mary's mother. I dreaded something had taken place; and sure enough, that villain after selling the property, had gone off taking all the money, and with him had also disappeared the woman for whom he had cast his wife aside.

Mary and her mother were in a great way about the affair, as you may suppose; and when I arrived, Mary handed me a note which had been laid on the bed by the wretch before he left. It read thus: The speaker drew out the note from his coat pocket and opened it. It had no date nor address.

"Mary,

I am sorry to be obliged to leave you; but you do not suit me any longer. You are not well enough learned, or attractive in person. And you have a wicked disposition. So I have concluded that the best thing for me to do is to leave you. I have no doubt you can pick up a right nice husband, one of your own

liking, from among these country chaps up here abouts; who will understand you and value you more than a man of my style can. I have sold the farm and borrowed the money to see me along my way. If I ever do well enough, tell you mother I will return it with some interest. I hope you will be able to get along with the children, I think you will, for you are a good, active, industrious woman, and people will be apt to help you you know. The best way for you to do is to sue out a divorce on the ground of desertion. I am sorry for having told you the other day that I wished you and the children were all dead. I did not think at the time that I might just as well get rid of the bother of you all by leaving. If I could only have loved you, but really I never did love you. Don't forget the divorce. It is your best plan. No More.

Yours Truly

Dave."

There was only one thing left for me to do, which was to take these poor, deserted, ruined women to my house. I did so, Sir, but I also did something else, that I have always regretted, and will regret to the day of my death. I was so outrageously angry at the time, that without giving the matter a second thought, I ripped out: "Well well, Mary, what a pair of infernal fools you and your mother have been. You were a fool to marry such a blackguard, and turn away good, respectable men, who would have made you, any of them, a good husband. And your mother was worst than a fool to go to work and give up the little bit of property she had. She and you too, might have known what a scoundrel he was.

"And no just see what you have got for it all. Here your mother is ruined, made a beggar of, and you, you are ruined too, and got two children to drag you down!"

They were beautiful boys, Sir, twins, and I had already made up my mind to take care of them for Mary's sake. But my harsh and inadvertent words had an effect that I little thought of, Sir, or God knows, I would never have uttered them.

Mary loved that man with a love that amounted to idolatry; and now his desertion, and I expect my rough, thoughtless language together precipitated the catastrophe which followed.

One evening I went home and we waited supper for her. Her mother had the meal already to put on the table. But I said not to do so till Mame should come. Mame was what we used to call her. She had dressed the two children and taken them out walking. Well, Sir, we waited and waited, but still no Mary. The clock on the mantel struck the hours up to ten before I said I couldn't stand the waiting any longer. I put my hat and coat on and went out to find her. Her mother said she did not know where I should start looking for her. She nor I have any acquaintances here. Mary said she was just going out for a walk, for she was not feeling well. As I started out the door it came upon me like a flash, Mary has done away with herself. I didn't say anything to her mother, for I had not the heart or courage to mention it.

From that time until three in the morning, Sir, I was searching in all directions for that poor girl. Every railroad station, every police station, every hotel or prominent place where it would have been likely that there was someone who might have noticed Mary go by. I visited them all. But not a trace could be found of them. One place near the river, there was a man that said he saw a young woman and two children pass by, going he thought, in the direction of the river; but about that he could not be sure. Nor could he tell me the exact hour at which he had seen her, although as nearly I could judge, it was about the time it would have required her to reach that spot from the house.

With my heart bowed down between conflicting hope and fear I returned home. There was awaiting me a confirmation of my worst dread.

As I entered the house, I was met by several neighbor women who explained to me that, just after I had gone out, they had been attracted by the screams of Mary's mother. Rushing in they found her half wild, tearing her hair and going on like a mad woman.

After I had left she had gone up to Mary's room and there, in the exact place on the bed, on which her runaway husband's letter to her had been laid, now lay a letter, addressed to me and her mother jointly. She opened it and read the contents, with the result I had described. Here it is, Sir, read it, for I cannot.

The old gentleman handed us the envelope with was well worn, showing as well as the sheet of note paper itself that he often read it and often baptized it with his tears, for it was full of spots made in such a way. There was a strange firmness about the chirography which showed the awful determination of the writer. These were the words written in the note: Dear Mother, Dear Uncle, I know I have been very foolish and hadn't any sense to do what I did. But I loved Dave. Indeed I did; and I love him yet, although he has done so bad by me, and so bad by you mother.

When you took me home, Uncle, I thought I would get work, and support the two children and myself and mother. But I was disheartened after you scolded so. I knew I was to blame for all the trouble. I ought to have had more sense. But it made me feel bad to hear you, and I have been thinking all day – suppose I get sick and the children get sick, then we will be a drag and a load on you. This I could not stand at all, for I am worried enough now. And I am getting sick now. I feel it. My head aches, too. So I will dress the children and go away, and when you read this note we shall all three be at the bottom of the river, and shall no more be a load on you. God forgive me and God bless you both mother and dear Uncle, good bye.

Mary

We were not ashamed of the tears that sprang to our eyes as we refolded the touching epistle, and handed it back to the old gentleman who took it almost reverently placed it back in his pocketbook and after a long pause concluded his narrative as follows:

“Ah, Sir, that was a fearful sunrise for me that morning. I tried while even my own heart was crushing me, to administer comfort and consolation to Mary's mother; but it was of no avail whatever. The more I talked to her the more violent became her anguish. Continually she cried and screamed and sobbed, and called wildly for Mary until at last she fell into convulsions. From one fit she went into another, and the next night at half past nine o'clock, expired.

All that day and all that night poor Mary and her little ones were lying beneath the river; for the search for the bodies was unsuccessful until the following day, at about four o'clock when the grapplers got them and brought them to the surface.

Word was sent to me of the discovery and for me to come down immediately. Do you know, Sir, I actually dreaded to go. I felt almost unable to control myself while I should gaze upon those three wet, pale dead faces. But knowing it had to be done, I forced myself to do it, and so I went. I need try to describe to you what my emotions were when I actually beheld the corpses, for that would be utterly impossible. The Coroner was there and he at once gave me a permit to have the bodies removed to my house. Two days later, they were buried together with the mother.

The funeral was attended by nearly the whole population of the city. And I do not think that all came out just for idle curiosity. Everyone who learned of the sad details of the tragedy was filled with pity and commiseration for Mary especially, and it would have been a bad thing for her rascally husband to have been caught in the area; for he would have been lynched, as sure as fate.

“Are they buried here, Sir?” we asked as the old gentleman paused again. “Yes Sir.” “I would much like to see their graves.” “This way, Sir.” Our companion was too full of grief to say more than these three short words, but he was evidently gratified that we showed so much interest.

The lot in which Mary, her mother and her two children slumbered was quite a pretty enclosure, and at each grave was a simple, neat, tombstone bearing in sunken letters, the name and age of the sleeper beneath. Much care and taste were evinced in the decorations of the mounds and the arrangement of the flowers.

After lingering sometime at the graves we both turned away and walked out of the cemetery. We said: “I suppose the similarity of the two cases caused you, Sir, to take a passing interest in the graves of the victims under the elm trees at which I found you when I entered here.”

“Yes, Sir, the two were very much alike indeed. They’re exactly alike as far as the results went. It is a comfort at least to know that there will be justice meted out to such villains when they reach the other land.” We heartily assented to this bitterly expressed opinion of the old gentleman, and remarked:

“They say that Bissinger excused himself for the treatment of his wife on account of the difference in his and her temperament, and their diversity of tastes and inclinations.”

“Yes, that may all be, but what a lame, impotent excuse is such a one as that. It is supposed that a man when he is courting a woman ascertains all about her tastes and temperaments, and that having obtained this knowledge he decides whether she will suit him for a wife or not.

No, Sir, the grand trouble now a days is, that a man of bad morals can get away from his wife too easily when he is tired of her. Not only that; but society is too ready to excuse such conduct. When I say that I refer more particularly to women themselves.

Now I will guarantee that scoundrel might go and tell the history of his ill assorted marriage with Mary to a dozen women, and eleven out of that dozen women, for all the enormity of the offence, will be ready to turn around and flirt with the villain, think him a sort of a hero, aye and even marry him.”

We had some further conversation with the old gentleman, and then bidding him good evening, for the sun had set, we left him to take his way homeward while we strolled toward our hotel filled with the saddest of reflections.

PUBLIC OPINION

In all directions the opinions of the masses of the people were of the boldest and most outspoken character toward the husband of the victim. Here and there one or two persons would take his part, and argue that the wife was not in her right senses. All these few dwelt with emphasis upon the contrariety of tastes and disposition of the two. They said that, as she was a dull, uneducated body, while he was much better educated, and had very refined tastes, was of a jovial temperament – a man who could make himself

popular, she could never make him happy, that they were altogether incompatible and should never have been married to each other.

The stories about his offering her money to go away, and take with her the two girls and to leave the boy was denied point blank, and stamped as a wicked invention – an invention to ruin his reputation.

On the other had, parties, holding a different opinion, pertinently remarked:

“Why he had no enemies, till his treatment of his wife came out, and she in her desperation committed suicide, and forced her offspring to join her in giving the cold hearted husband the liberty he wanted.”

It was argued also that there was no real trouble until the woman who made it came in the way.

“Had the poor woman’s husband loved her one half as well as she loved him, he would have given this other woman the cold shoulder. He would have remained the true affectionate husband that he should have been and then instead of she and her three little children being in their graves, they would have been living and happy today.”

This was the general opinion of nearly everyone.

We conclude this sad, heart sickening tragedy with an appropriate editorial taken from the Reading Tribune.

The great tragedy which has been appalling our community and giving it popularity all over the country during the last few weeks, wrested from us a tender hearted lady and three loved children of who she was the mother, has not failed to leave a most valuable and beneficial effect upon the morals of our country wherever the true story relating to it has been told or read. First came the terrible picture of the drowning – the tragedy in itself – then the story in which was imbedded an explanation of the circumstances which led the unfortunate lady to the perpetration of so horrible a deed, and then the moral lesson to those whom God has united as man and wife or those who are yet contemplating such a union. It has told us that the punishment for unfaithfulness to those who have thrown their lives, their all into our hands may not always be drowned beneath the billows of time without bitter atonement. It has told us that no matter how high and popular we may stand in society and a community who little dream of the tyranny in our hearts towards those whom we are duty bound to respect, that in a single day through improper behavior we may sink even beyond the recognition of a dog. It has illustrated to us in the most striking manner how utterly useless it is for man to battle against morality and yet hold character in anything like good society.

Look at the advantages, young men, and old ones too may not review the circumstances without benefit in many cases, that Philip Bissinger has had in this world, right here in our midst, to rise into prominence as a man among men. He was really ascending the ladder which leads to prosperity with unmolested and seldom surpassed rapidity, but he carried with him in that ascent, a burden which eventually became too heavy for his own shoulders. He entered life with a fair companion who was then by far his superior in all respects save one, that he was a man and his aid a woman, but after she had helped him on until he was able himself to rise above her by the aid thrown him from an admiring public – he forgot her, and sought the companionship of another who in his eyes stood nearer the top of the ladder which he had so far ascended.

But could he proceed after this? Did morality have to stand back for him when he reached the upper bar upon which are inscribed in flaming letters those words: “Morality?” Nay! Nor will it stand aside for

anyone else. No matter how far we may ascend the ladder leading to the best society before we can enter its kingdom, we have first to cross the threshold of Morality, and if we fail there, we are apt to fall, fall, forever fall.

THE END