

WZ  
100  
W454 D  
1848

## DEATH OF DR. HORACE WELLS.

---

Horace Wells, late of this city, located himself, a few weeks since, at 120 Chambers street, New York. He was the original inventor of the application of gas in surgical operations, to prevent pain. Some of his friends supposed he was somewhat deranged when he left Hartford. His mind has been a great deal excited for some time past, and he has personally experimented to a great extent in gases, prepared in different forms. The New York Herald notices the arrest of Wells, and gives the following account of his operations, while under the influence of chloroform :

“It appears that on last Thursday night, and every night since, complaints have been made by the different well-dressed girls who promenade Broadway in the evening, to the police of the Third ward, setting forth that some malicious individuals were in the habit of throwing vitriol upon their cloaks, shawls, dresses, and hats, as they passed along the streets, destroying clothing, valued at many hundred dollars. Upon this information, a close watch was kept, in order to detect the malicious scoundrel who would be guilty of an act so base. Consequently, on Friday night, between nine and ten o'clock, as Jane White and Louisa Mariad, of No. 102 Church street, were passing Broadway, near the Museum, Jane was attracted by the noise of, as she thought, some liquid being thrown from a bottle, and on turning around she saw a man in a cloak close by her, and at that moment she received a spot of vitriol on her neck, which gave her pain, when she exclaimed, ‘there, that’s the man that burns the girls with vitriol.’ The man in the cloak walked quickly off, and the aid of officer Beard, of the Third ward, was procured, who took the accused into custody; and near the place where he threw the vitriol, a glass vial was found broken on the pavement, the cork of which was slit on one side, so that by a jerk of the bottle, the vitriol could be sprinkled out at pleasure. The cloak that the accused wore, was much burned with vitriol, near the pocket, where it is supposed the vitriol was kept. On being questioned, at the station house, for the reason of such outrageous conduct and cruelty, he replied to officers Beard and Noe, that there were three others concerned with him, and that they had been injured by the girls; but that last night was the first attempt he had made, and that through the temptation of the devil, or the effects of a drug which he had been taking, called chloroform, or ether,

and while under that influence, sallied forth into the street, as he said, to sprinkle the girls; and upon the evaporation of this drug at the station house, he acknowledged his guilt, and gave his name as Jonathan Smith, but whose real name is Horace Wells, a dentist, located at No. 120 Chambers street. The story related by the accused, about his accomplices, is not credited, as it is generally believed that the crime has been perpetrated by him alone. A young girl now lies in the city hospital dangerously ill from the effects of vitriol, supposed to have been thrown on her face and neck by this monster in human shape.

The following list of females have been burnt by vitriol, and their clothing destroyed, between Monday and Friday nights: Jane Montgomery, No. 104 Church street, burnt in Broadway, on Friday night; Julia Meadows, No. 80 Read street, burnt on Tuesday night likewise; Louisa Johnson, No. 72 Duane street, burnt on Tuesday and Friday nights; Maria Taylor, No. 19 Thomas street, burnt on Tuesday and Friday nights; Jane Forrest, No. 102 Church street, burnt on Friday night, and Mary Pierce, No. 71, West Broadway, likewise. All of these young women made their affidavits as to the fact of having been burnt with vitriol; and as this man was caught in the act, it goes far to show that he is the guilty party.

---

From the New York Journal of Commerce, January 25, 1848.

On Friday evening, Mr. Horace Wells, a dentist, who kept his office in Chambers street, was arrested and committed to prison, for throwing vitriol on the dresses of some women in Broadway, and yesterday morning he was found dead in his cell, having committed suicide, during the night, by dividing the femoral artery with a razor. In his cell was found an empty bottle, labelled "chloroform," and his face was bandaged with a silk handkerchief, which covered his mouth and nose, and which, it is supposed, he had saturated with the chloroform, in order to produce insensibility. In his cell was found a letter, directed to the editor of the Journal of Commerce, detailing the circumstances of the charge on which he was arrested, and two or three other letters, which we subjoin:

NEW YORK, *January 23, 1848.*

TO THE EDITORS OF THE JOURNAL OF COMMERCE—*Gentlemen:* I wish, through the medium of your journal, to make a plain statement respecting the unhappy circumstances in which I am at present placed. My real name is now before the public as a miscreant, guilty of a most despicable act, that of wantonly destroying the property of those girls of the town who nightly promenade Broadway. The facts, so far as I am con-

cerned, are briefly these: On Friday evening last, a young man, with whom I had recently formed an acquaintance, went with me to my office, in Chambers street, and while there, he said that a woman of bad character had spoiled a garment for him, while walking in the streets, by throwing something like vitriol upon him; that he knew who it was, and would pay her back in the same coin. As I had some sulphuric acid in my office, which I was using in some chemical experiments, he requested the liberty of taking some of it, for this purpose. He accordingly cut a groove in the cork of a vial, so that a small quantity only might escape when it was suddenly thrust forward. He then said that he might get it upon his own clothes. I told him that I had an old cloak, which could not be much injured by the acid, as it was good for nothing. By his request, I walked into the street with him, he wearing my old cloak, and I having on my ordinary over-coat. We proceeded up Broadway, and when about opposite the theatre, he said that he saw the girl he was in pursuit of, and he soon gave her shawl a sprinkling. We then turned down Broadway, when my friend proposed to sprinkle some of the other girls. I immediately objected, and told him that what he had already done was not in accordance with my own feelings, although it was done in revenge; and when we arrived at Chambers street, I took my phial and my cloak, and at the same time two of his friends came up, and I left him, supposing I had dissuaded him from doing the mischief he proposed, which is as foreign to my nature as light is opposed to darkness. I then regretted exceedingly that I had countenanced, in any manner, the first act. On getting home, I found that my cloak had apparently received the principal part of the acid, which had escaped from my phial, as the wind was blowing towards us when the act was done. On meeting with my acquaintance, the next day, he said that himself and his two friends, whom I met the previous evening, had resolved to drive all the bad girls out of Broadway by sprinkling them with acid. I in vain reasoned with him against committing so much injury, when he had not been harmed. This was the last interview which I have had with him to the present time. I wish now to state, as I am able, what influenced me to do this act on Friday evening, which I confess was done with my own hands; and this is the only one of which I am guilty, and which resulted in my arrest. I had, during the week, been in the constant practice of inhaling chloroform for the exhilarating effect produced by it; and on Friday evening last, I lost all consciousness, before I removed the inhaler from my mouth.

How long I remained there I do not know, but on coming out of the stupor, I was exhilarated beyond measure, exceeding anything which I had ever before experienced; and seeing

the phial of acid (which had been used a few evenings previous, as above described) standing on the mantel, in my delirium I seized it, and rushed into the street, and threw it at two females. I may have thrust it at others, but I have no recollection further than this. The effects of this inhalation continued very much longer than ever before, and did not entirely pass off until some time after my arrest. I do not make this statement, expecting to free myself from all blame in this matter, yet I have been induced to make a minute statement of facts, that the public may better judge of this misdemeanor, so far as I am concerned. I state, unhesitatingly, that I would as soon, deliberately, in cold blood, go into the street and commit the gross act of wantonness which had been committed for the last few evenings, than I would cut my right hand from my body. No, I am not prone to do mischief, as all can testify who have ever known me. But now I am placed in circumstances where I am obliged to hear the reproaches of the world, for the most contemptible acts, in which I have not participated; because I did this one act, in a moment of delirium, I must bear the whole brunt. Some of the papers disbelieve my statement, about others being concerned in this business, but I am informed to-day, that while I was in close confinement last evening, the same acts were being committed in Broadway. Several were sprinkled with acid. However, my character, which I have ever prized above everything else, is gone, irrevocably gone, and I am now in the most miserable condition in which it is possible for me to be placed. One of those abandoned females who were examined yesterday, stated that I had often addressed her in Broadway.

Now, I most solemnly assert that the statement of this girl is utterly false. I never have, on any occasion, had anything to say to these miserable creatures. If myself alone was the only one who is to suffer by all the false statements which may or have been made respecting me, it would be nothing compared to the injury to my poor dear wife and child. Oh! may God protect them. I cannot proceed—my hand is too unsteady, and my whole frame is convulsed in agony—my brain is on fire.

SUNDAY EVENING, 7 o'clock.

I again take up my pen to finish what I have to say. Great God! has it come to this. Is it not all a dream? Before 12 o'clock this night, I am to pay the debt of nature. Yes, if I was to go free to-morrow, I could not live and be called a villain. God knows I am not one. O! my dear mother, brother, and sister, what can I say to you? My anguish will only allow me to bid you farewell. I die this night, believing that God, who knows all hearts, will forgive the dreadful act. I shall spend my remaining time in prayer.

Oh! what misery I shall bring upon all my near relations, and what still more distresses me, is the fact that my name is familiar to the whole scientific world, as being connected with an important discovery. And now, while I am scarcely able to hold my pen, I must bid all farewell. May God forgive me. Oh! my dear wife and child, whom I leave destitute of the means of support, I would still live and work for you, but I cannot. Were I to live, I should become a maniac. I feel that I am but little better than one already. The instrument of my destruction was obtained when the officer who had me in charge kindly permitted me to go to my room yesterday.

HORACE WELLS.

To EDITORS: My last request to editors is, that they will, while commenting on this unhappy affair, think of my poor wife and child; also, my mother, brother, and sister; all of whom are numbered among the most respectable members of society.

H. WELLS.

To MY DEAR WIFE: I feel that I am fast becoming a deranged man, or I would desist from this act. I cannot live and keep my reason, and on this account, God will forgive the deed. I can say no more—farewell.

H.

To MR. DUYER—*Dear Sir*: When you receive this I shall be no more. I wish you would take my watch and present it to my dear wife, together with the trifle I have already given you. Please to see to my burial. Let me be interred here in the most secret manner possible. I wish you or Mr. Barber would go immediately to Hartford, and reveal this misfortune to my wife, in the most unobjectionable manner possible, and attend to the business which we spoke of this morning, when you little thought of this occurrence. Yours,

H. WELLS.

To MESSRS. DUYER & BARBER, Weston Hotel.

N. B. Please tell Mr. James to write to Mr. F. W. Stowon, No. 19 Rue du Faubourg, Possonier, Paris, and tell him of my death.

---

An inquest was held on the body, and the jury returned a verdict that "Horace Wells came to his death by a wound inflicted by himself upon the thigh with a razor, while laboring under mental aberration."

