

CAERLAVEROCK TRAGEDY.

TERRIBLE END TO LOVE AFFAIR.

YOUNG WOMAN DONE TO DEATH.

ASSAILANT COMMITS SUICIDE.

One of the most revolting tragedies of recent times was enacted on Sunday night at a quiet spot on the Blackshaw merse, some distance from the farm of Eastpark, in the parish of Caerlaverock, when Thomas Cowan, a Dumfries signalman, is believed to have murdered his cousin and former sweetheart, Miss Barbara Hiddleston, housekeeper at Eastpark, by stabbing her in the throat with a knife and throwing her over a bridge into the river Lochar, then followed her to her fate by cutting his own throat with a razor and dropping into the water. The man seems to have been prompted in his terrible act by feelings of jealousy, for the woman was to have been married to another man on 6th May and to have proceeded to Canada with him.

The Victim's Love Story.

It appears that Miss Hiddleston, who was an attractive woman, 31 years of age, had kept company for a period of six years with a young man named John Murray, whose father was formerly tenant of the farm of West Raffles, Ruthwell, and who now resides in the village of Carrutherston. Eight years ago Murray emigrated to Canada, where he was engaged in farming in Alberta. For some time past Cowan had been paying marked attentions to his cousin, and since she went as housekeeper to Mr David Edgar at Eastpark a year ago, he visited her frequently, staying with his mother, now Mrs Jardine, who carries on a grocery business in the village of Bankend, from which the farm of Eastpark is two-and-a-half miles distant. In the month of February Murray returned from Canada and went to live with his sister, Mrs Brown, West Raffles Cottage, Ruthwell. He immediately renewed relations with his former sweetheart, and it was arranged that they were to be married on 6th May, that Murray was to go back to Canada ten days later, and that she should follow in August.

Buying Her Trousseau.

Miss Hiddleston visited Dumfries on Saturday for the purpose of buying her trousseau, and it is believed that while in the town she met and had a conversation with Cowan, who had become aware of the approaching marriage.

On Sunday the young woman proceeded on her bicycle to visit her brother, Joseph Hiddleston, gardener with Mrs Miller Morrison at Hetland, which is but a short distance from her fiancé's temporary home. The same forenoon Cowan, who was employed as a signalman at the Noblehill junction, and lived in lodgings with Mr Laurie, Logan Bank, Noblehill, travelled to Glencaple by one of the public motors and walked over the hill to Bankend, where he spent the afternoon at his mother's house. About seven o'clock in the evening he was seen by several people going in the direction of the spot where, about three hours later, the tragedy occurred.

Scene of the Tragedy.

About the same time Miss Hiddleston, accompanied by her fiancé, started out on her return journey to Eastpark, a distance of some seven miles across country. Eastpark is reached by a narrow swing bridge across the Lochar, about a mile and a half from the mouth of the Solway, and this was the route taken by the couple. The bridge is situated about half-way between the farms of Eastpark and Nether Locharwoods, and is approached on each side by a wide stretch of meadow land, through which runs a footpath right-of-way from the Ruthwell road to the Bankend road. The bridge is a light erection about four feet wide, with wire standards, and the parapet, which is about three feet from the floor, is composed of entwined strands of thick wire. It stands in an isolated spot, amid pastoral surroundings, the nearest dwelling being about a third of a mile distant.

A Grim Meeting.

Towards this bridge Miss Hiddleston and Murray approached between half-past nine and ten o'clock in the gathering dusk, wheeling their bicycles along the grass path. In crossing the bridge Miss Hiddleston was first and Murray following. As they entered the narrow footway Cowan, who had evidently been in waiting, approached quietly from the other end, and met them just at the middle of the bridge. Miss Hiddleston, quite unsuspecting, stopped, and after greeting Cowan, who had made no remark, proceeded to introduce the two men. The mention of Murray's name seemed to inflame a murderous passion which had been smouldering in Cowan's heart, and in a few seconds the quaint rustic bridge, with the slowly moving waters of the Lochar rippling underneath, was the scene of a deadly struggle.

Struggle on the Bridge.

With the remark, "Oh, is that so?" Cowan seized Miss Hiddleston by the lapel of her coat with one hand, and raised the other as if to strike her. Murray, who was immediately behind, instantly seized the upraised arm, but Cowan shook him off, and snatching a knife from his pocket made to strike the woman. Murray, who is of slight build and physique, again caught the descending arm, but his rival, a powerful man of over six feet, pushed him back with his elbow, and losing his balance he fell over the bicycles. Cowan then stabbed the woman on the left side of the neck, severing the jugular

vein, and inflicted a similar wound on the other side of the neck. His victim sank to the floor of the bridge, and he proceeded to walk away in the direction whence he had come.

"Don't Cross That Bridge."

Murray, on regaining his feet, immediately started off in the other direction towards Nether Locharwoods to obtain assistance. About ninety yards from the bridge he met Mrs Gracie, Newfield Cottage, a farm worker at Eastpark, and William Blake, engineman with Mr Boyd, Clarencefield, who were proceeding towards Eastpark. Stopping momentarily, Murray warned them, "Don't cross that bridge or you will be murdered." The two, however, proceeded on their way, and a moment later the woman, looking towards the bridge, observed a flash as of a white coat going over the parapet, and exclaimed to her companion, "There's somebody being thrown over the bridge." They hurried forward to the scene of the tragedy, and made a search, but all was still, and the only evidences of the recent struggle were the two bicycles, badly damaged, lying on the

bridge along with the woman's hat and glasses and a walking-stick, with the more sinister evidence of the blood-bespattered planks and railings.

Meanwhile Murray had met and secured the assistance of James Topping and Alexander Dalziel, workers at the Board of Agriculture's colony at Nether Locharwoods, who chanced to be in the vicinity. A return was made to the bridge, and Murray and one of his companions hurried on to Eastpark to give the alarm. Running into the farm kitchen, he explained to the startled household what had occurred, and then, completely exhausted by his experiences, collapsed on the floor. Mr Edgar and a number of his farm hands proceeded at once to the scene of the murder, and with the aid of a stable lamp began a search for the bodies, but as the banks are high and taper into soft mud the task was a difficult one. Mr Edgar's nephew, who assists him in the management of the farm, set off on a bicycle to Glencaple for the police, and to secure a boat. He informed Constable Sutherland of what had occurred, and that officer got into telephonic communication with the headquarters of the County Police at Dumfries, with the result that Inspector Scott, Inspector Bowie, and a constable were soon on the scene. Mr James Wilson, fisherman, Glencaple, arranged to take a rowing boat over the hill in a cart to assist in dragging operations.

Recovering the Bodies.

As the first grey streaks of dawn were beginning to appear the body of the woman was seen lying on its back in the water, having been carried by the tide a distance of about seventy yards from the bridge, and Murray and a constable succeeded in bringing it to the shore. No sign of Cowan was to be found. The river at this part is forty to fifty feet broad, and was at the time six feet deep, the tide being on the ebb. The boat was successfully launched, and dragging operations commenced. Shortly afterwards the searchers came upon a man's body lying in the water face downwards, and when it had been brought ashore it was found to be that of Cowan, with the throat cut practically from ear to ear. The wound must have been inflicted by a very sharp instrument, probably a razor, because the body was almost decapitated.

The Final Scene.

Although no one saw this part of the tragedy, it is believed that after Murray ran off Cowan returned to the bridge, and, after throwing the body of the woman over the parapet, cut his own throat, and toppled over the low parapet into the water. There is some doubt as to whether the unfortunate woman was actually dead when she was hurled from the bridge, because when found her shoes were off, and it is thought that she may have kicked them off in an attempt to save herself by swimming, but that she had become exhausted owing to her terrible injuries. On the other hand, the mud is of the nature of a quicksand, and it may have been that her feet becoming entangled, the shoes were torn off by the force of the current. A close but unavailing search was made for the weapon or weapons with which the deed was committed.

The bodies were removed to Eastpark under the charge of the police, and later in the day were examined by Dr Hunter and Dr Glover, Dumfries. The same night they were removed to await arrangements for burial. News of the dreadful affair spread like wildfire, and created a great sensation in the district, where the parties were well known. On Monday and yesterday many people from far and near visited the scene of the occurrence.

Miss Hiddleston a Native of Dalton.

Miss Hiddleston came of a much respected Dalton family. Her father was at one time gardener at Conheth, and afterwards a carter at Dormont Grange, but both parents are now dead. For some years she kept house to her brother at Hetland Lodge, and before going to Eastpark acted for some time as housekeeper at Bellfield, Holywood. She was a young woman of very attractive presence, and had many friends.

Cowan's Cheery Disposition.

Cowan, who was 40 years of age, was a son of the late Mr Cowan, builder, Bankend. He had been twenty years in the service of the G. and S.W. Railway Company, and is described as a man of very quiet and unassuming disposition. While employed at Johnstone he lost a foot as the result of a railway accident, and had an artificial limb. He was, however, a man of powerful physique, and stood fully six feet in height. He had been employed at the Noblehill junction for ten or twelve years, and was widely known in the town. In conversation with his mother, a "Courier and Herald" representative learned that he had been speaking of getting married, but had been dissuaded on account of the scarcity of houses and the high cost of setting up in married life. On the day of the tragedy he appeared to be in his usual cheery frame of mind, and gave no indication of the startling events that were so soon to happen.

Murray's Story of Cowan's Appearance.

Our representative saw Murray at his home at Carrutherston, and found him evidently suffering acutely from the ordeal through which he had passed. In quiet tones of suppressed emotion he related simply the story of the previous night's happenings. Cowan, he said, appeared suddenly on the bridge as if he had been in hiding behind some whin bushes by the side of the river. He did not know the man, and never suspected his intentions. Cowan never uttered a word with the exception of the single sentence quoted above. The whole affair lasted but a few minutes, and the narrowness of the bridge, along with the impediment caused by the fallen bicycles, made it impossible for Miss Hiddleston and himself to escape the onslaught of their assailant.

Funerals of the Victims.

The funerals of the two victims have been fixed for to-morrow, Cowan's to Caerlaverock Churchyard and Miss Hiddleston's to Dalton Churchyard.