

Herman F. Denham

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A Double Tragedy

Herman Denham Kills His Wife and Then Himself

Cause A Mystery

Wife Was Shot as She Slept and Died Instantly

Supposed That Man Was Actuated by Jealousy--What Friends of Family Say

A double tragedy, that was premeditated and was a most complete affair, was enacted this morning about 5 o'clock at 426 8th street northeast. A letter carrier named Herman F. Denham shot and killed his wife and then ended his own life. The bullet that ended his wife's life penetrated the left temple, while the leaden missile that was sent from the weapon immediately after the first shot was fired entered the right temple of the man. Except that the husband was insanely jealous of his wife, without cause, no motive can be ascribed by friends for the man's conduct. Three nights ago Denham turned on the gas in his room after his wife had retired, but the odor of the gas was detected in time to prevent a serious ending. His explanation of his conduct was that he had been dreaming and was not responsible for what he had done.

Herman Denham had been connected with the post office for more than twelve years. He was a son of Thomas S. Denham, a painter, whose home is at 702 9th street southeast. A sister of the deceased figured in the scandal in Southeast Washington several years ago in which the Rev. Gilbert F. Williams, pastor of Christ Church, Navy Yard, gained so much notoriety. Denham was thirty-three years old and was well known in the northeast and southeast sections of the city. Beyond his display of jealousy he was of a happy disposition. Six or seven years ago he married Miss Willie M. Kilgore, daughter of Judge James Kilgore, a law clerk in the Treasury Department. He formerly lived at Newberry, S.C. Three years ago Denham built the 8th street house, where Judge Kilgore and his wife also lived. Only this summer he had the house painted from top to bottom and there was no apparent reason why he should not have been happy.

Two weeks ago he was granted his annual leave and he took two days extra in order that he might spend his time in camp with friends at Colonial Beach. His sister-in-law and her husband, Dr. Philip N. Wisner, were in the party. So far as his friends in the party know, nothing occurred during the summer outing to mar the pleasure of the two members of the Denham family, and when they returned home Wednesday night the husband was apparently in the best of spirits. It is now certain, however, that something disturbed him and his relatives are sure that when he turned on the gas in his sleeping apartment that night he did so for the purpose of ending the lives of his wife and himself. As already stated, the odor of the gas was detected and the husband was called upon for an explanation.

"I was dreaming about being in camp," he said, "and thought I was turning up the light."

The explanation was deemed a reasonable one although his wife had never known him to follow up his dreams in so dangerous a way before. Thinking over the affair afterward her mind was not clear as to her husband's conduct. They had never had any trouble, however, and she could not imagine that her husband had a desire to get rid of her. She knew that he had engaged in pistol practice while on his vacation, but she too had used the revolver in the same way and she knew she had no improper motive concerning its use. Last night Dr. Wisner and his wife were at the 8th street house with other members of the family and enjoyed a game of cards. Refreshments were served and it was late when those living away--from the Kilgore and Denham home departed. Denham went with them to the door and said

good night, as had been his habit when they called, and there was nothing about his conduct to indicate that he contemplated violence.

Shot As She Slept

He had evidently thought over what he intended doing, for he destroyed some papers before he retired. His wife went to bed ignorant of what was in store for her. The condition of the bed this morning indicated that she had been a sound sleeper, and that she had hardly moved from one spot after retiring. It had been her habit to sleep on her stomach, with one arm under her head, and it was in this position that she was lying at the time the fatal shot was fired. That she did not know of the shooting is evident. Her body had not moved and her arm was still under her head, although her mother is satisfied that the daughter was still alive when she reached the room.

Immediately after taking the life of his wife the husband turned the weapon toward his own head and fired the second shot. Lying side by side on the bed were the dying forms of the husband and wife when Judge Kilgore entered the room. It was just ten minutes past 5 o'clock when the judge entered the ninth precinct police station and said that a double tragedy had been enacted at his house. Sergt. Falvey, who was in charge of the station at the time, sent Policemen Curd and Smith to the house and he also sent for Drs. Boswell and Cole. The doctors responded promptly but death had claimed both victims, and there was nothing that they could do except to assure the elderly couple that both were dead. Coroner Nevitt was notified and he reached the house before 6 o'clock. His conclusion was that the man had murdered his wife and had then committed suicide. Certificates of death were given accordingly.

Jealousy Only Known Cause

Mrs. Kilgore explained to the police that she had been awakened by hearing the reports of the pistol shots, and she thought they had been fired by some person on the lot near the house. She called her husband and sent him on a tour of inspection. He had taken but a few steps before he found that the shots had been fired in his own house. Returning to his wife's room he told her of his ghastly discovery and then went for the police. Dr. Wisner and other relatives who were at the house last night were sent for, and they returned to the house to assist the elderly couple. They discussed the affair fully, but were unable to determine what had caused the man to kill his wife and himself. Jealousy was the only reason they could assign.

"But," said Dr. Wisner to a Star reporter, "there was no occasion for jealousy. Mrs. Denham was a lovely woman, and had never done a thing that was calculated to arouse any jealous feeling the man may have harbored."

While they were at Colonial Beach, he said, her conduct was exemplary. She was in her husband's company most all the time and would have had no opportunity to have done anything out of the way had she so desired. Several friends of the family who were seen by a Star reporter told the same story of the Denhams. They all said that Denham had exhibited evidences of his jealousy ever since his marriage. Denham was on a run along H street northeast for several years, and recently he had been on duty in the vicinity of the Capitol Hill post office. He was a member of several beneficiary organizations and had a host of friends. Undertaker Scott prepared the bodies for burial, but the funeral arrangements have not yet been made. It is probable that the body of the wife will be sent to Newberry for burial and the body of the husband interred in Congressional cemetery.

The father-in-law of the dead man, J.F. Kilgore, is a well-known and much liked official of the office of the controller of the treasury. He has been a law clerk in that office for a number of years, and is at present acting as chief clerk of the office. He is originally from Newberry, S.C., where he is highly connected and has a large number of friends. Treasury officials who know Mr. Kilgore expressed deep regret that he and his family had been plunged into such a calamity.

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Were Buried Together

Herman Denham and His Wife at Rest in Congressional Cemetery

The funeral of Herman Denham and his wife, whom he shot and killed and then committed suicide Saturday morning, took place yesterday afternoon from their late residence, 426 8th street southeast. Temporary interment was made in Congressional cemetery. The service was conducted by Rev. John Dysart, rector of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, 6th and H streets northeast, assisted by Rev. D.L. Blakemore, pastor of the Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church, 7th and A streets northeast. Rev. Blakemore read the burial service as the bodies were placed side by side in the public vault in the cemetery.

One day this week further services will be held when the bodies will be laid to their final rest.

The pallbearers were selected from among the members of the Letter Carriers' Association, with which Denham was affiliated, and were George Perrott, J. William Murphy, Charles Biondi, Albert Davidson, Robert Stewart and Andrew Barnes.

It was at first proposed that the body of Mrs. Denham, who before her marriage was Miss Willie M. Kilgore, be taken to Newberry, N.C., her former home, and interred in the family burying grounds there. After consultation between the two families Saturday night, however, it was decided that Denham and his wife should be buried together in this city.

Both Judge Kilgore, father of the dead woman, and Thomas S. Denham, father of the dead man, have made a careful investigation into the sad affair, with the view to discovering a reason for the murder and suicide, but neither could find anything upon which to base a definite conclusion. The both declare that Denham must have been temporarily insane, but could not learn what induced that state of mind. They declare that there was no foundation for jealousy, and were unable to find a reason for even an imaginary wrong.

There were no financial troubles, so far as can be found.

George Perrott, president of the Letter Carriers' Association said the letter carriers held an indignation meeting at the 4th and East capitol streets substation yesterday morning and determined to protest against certain statements made in connection with the affair. "I have known Denham ever since boyhood," Mr. Perrott said, "and in common justice to him I wish to refute the rumors that have been circulated since the tragedy. Denham had been a carrier for nearly twelve years, and in all the time he was associated with us at the substation I can state positively that he never smoked or chewed tobacco, never used a profane word, nor touched intoxicants. The cause of his deed we, of course, do not know, but every man in station B can say that Herman Denham was always a straightforward man. He was very steady and reliable, and very quiet, never giving offense to any one. He never spoke of troubles at home, and I cannot believe that his deed was inspired by anything but the hallucination of a mind temporarily deranged.