

A Way Out

Michael de Montaigne, the French essayist, spoke for most of us when he said, "It is not death, it is dying that alarms me." None of us have a choice how, when or where we take that giant step from this world into the next; but some have tried through the darkness of suicide. How pitiful when the eye of the soul grows dim from frets and worries of this life, that it cannot see, or hope, for a brighter day. How sad when the will becomes so weakened from a burden of cares, denials, disappointments or tragedies, that one more step is impossible.

Many have found themselves in this state and have elected to exit life in a way of their own choosing and in an effort to end a baneful existence, the choices have been varied. One such case took place in Clover in 1926 when a young man came into town hoping to reconcile with his estranged wife who was working in one of the mills. In his pleadings James told her he could not live without her and if she refused him to come back with him, he would do away with his life. James failed in his primary mission, but succeeded in the second. True to his promise, he dressed in his Sunday best and climbed one of the thirty-five foot steel towers of the Southern Power Company (now Duke Energy) and grabbed a feed line. The deadly current passed through his body and killed him instantly. His death was marked by a sudden intermission of power causing the lights all over town to flicker and dim, and shut down machinery in all three cotton mills. It was also noticed in York when lights dimmed a few seconds and then returned to their full brilliancy.

Another case of a broken heart that ended in suicide occurred in Rock Hill just two months before World War I ended in 1918. Private Rowell of Scotia, Hampton County was stationed at Camp Sevier near Greenville but was in Rock Hill for several days attending Federal Court. During the evening of 18 September the private and a Sergeant Holder were walking back to town from the Aragon Mill village when Chief of Police J. M. Youngblood and policeman G. C. Clyburn drove up beside them and offered them a ride. Rowell asked if they would go by the McManus home on Chatham Street where he was boarding; the sheriff willingly agreed.

When they arrived at the J. H. McManus home (who was incidentally the County Coroner), Rowell stepped inside to get a jacket. Sergeant Holder and the policeman remained on the street. Government Inspector B. B. Blanton was also boarding at the McManus home and was in the next room to Rowell when he thought he heard a shot. Momentarily Mrs. McManus came to his room and asked him to go with her to the soldier's room and see what had happened. When they opened the door they found the young man lying across the bed with blood spurting from his forehead; a pistol was in his left hand. Mrs. McManus rushed outside to tell the policemen. A quick look around by the sheriff revealed a note on the nightstand. It was addressed to Rowell's father explaining he had been driven to suicide on account of trouble with his wife. The trouble was not altogether his wife's doing as the letter proved he had not been true to his marriage vows. His family was notified by wire and preparation was made to turn the body over to an undertaker.

There was an interesting fall-out from this incident. Rowell's sergeant verified the soldier had been drinking and when the room was searched two bottles of a patent medicine marketed under the name "Paw-Paw" was found in the bottom of the washstand. This brought to Mrs. McManus' mind that the maintenance man had found a half-full bottled of the same medication under the front door steps. The police traced the medicine back to the Calhoun Drug Store on

Railroad Street and subsequently the pharmacist was arrested and charged with selling an intoxicant to a man in uniform. Calhoun was brought before US Commissioner P. W. Spencer and placed under a \$500 bond until a US Court convened in Greenville.

Henry and Emma were living on the Kirkpatrick place in 1909, with fifty-one year old Scott, a kinsman of Emma. Scott had been with the married couple for about two years and according to Henry, Scott “did not seem right in the mind,” but was good help on the farm. Also boarding with the family was Katy, a local school teacher.

On Sunday, 7 February, everyone but Scott attended church services at the Bullocks Creek Presbyterian Church. It was after three o'clock in the afternoon before they returned home, but when they tried to open the front door they found it was fastened from the inside; even the shutters were closed. Henry called out to Scott, but there was no answer. After forcing their way in, Emma went upstairs and found Scott hanging by a rope from a rafter.

Because it was the Sabbath, an inquest was not held until the following day. Emma testified that Scott had threatened several times to commit suicide, once by drowning. The magistrate questioned Emma and Henry why some of the man's clothing were missing, why a trunk lock broken and forty-five dollars was missing. Would the dead man have any reason to destroy his clothing and money? There was no explanation. What had happen that Sunday, no one will ever know the details. The jury, still with questions in their mind, came to the conclusion that Scott had killed himself.

On the same day of the inquest J. C. Hill, brother of renowned Sharon merchant, dropped dead in the York County Courthouse from an apparent heart attack. The train he had taken to York arrived late and to make his appointment he had to hurry from the depot to the courthouse, a distance of several blocks. When he arrived he was gasping for breath and it grew more and more labored until he collapsed.

There is no brighter way to end these sad stories, than a few wise words from seventeenth century English author, Owen Feltham: “This wonder we find in hope, that she is both a flatterer and a true friend. How many would die did not hope sustain them; how many have died by hoping too much!” And Shakespeare: “The miserable hath no other medicine but only hope.”