

DREADFUL TRAGEDY.

SHOCKING HOMICIDE AT WASHINGTON.

Philip Barton Key Shot Dead in the Street by Daniel E. Sickles.

Sad Story of Domestic Ruin and Bloody Revenge.

SPECIAL TELEGRAPHIC DISPATCH FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

WASHINGTON, Sunday, Feb. 27—P. M.

The vulgar monotony of partisan passions and political squabbles has been terribly broken in upon to-day by an outburst of personal revenge, which has filled the city with horror and consternation,—I cannot unfortunately add, with absolute surprise.

At 2½ o'clock to-day, Mr. PHILIP BARTON KEY, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, was talking with Mr. BUTTERWORTH, of New-York, at the corner of Pennsylvania-avenue and Sixteenth-street, near the south entrance to the Executive Mansion, and some twenty yards from the Club-house on President's-square, when he was accosted by the Hon. D. E. SICKLES, of New-York. Mr. SICKLES charged Mr. KEY with destroying the honor of his wife and his own happiness, and, drawing a revolver, instantly shot him down. One ball, entering in at the left side, passed completely through the body of Mr. KEY; a second was lodged in his thigh, and a third, glancing, inflicted a slight bruise. Mr. KEY fell, imploring Mr. SICKLES not to kill him, and died in a very few minutes.

For months past the social world of Washington, always as quick to relish the details of private scandal as it is lax in its judgments of those by whom such scandal may be caused, has been busy with the names of Mrs. SICKLES and of Mr. KEY. Their intimacy was of that marked and peculiar kind which may perfectly well consist in the innocence of any absolute guilt—since while it was open to public observation, it was hardly concealed from Mr. SICKLES himself, who having married his wife, Miss BAGGOT, of New-York, in her early youth, had always treated her with extreme kindness and tenderness, and doubtless looked upon her relations with Mr. KEY as the mere expression of a girlish love of admiration, and of a vanity delighting in the sense of power over a man of fine presence, graceful address, and a certain local renown in the District for high spirit, resolution and gallantry.

During the whole of the last session of Congress the tall figure of Mr. KEY was constantly to be seen in President's-square, opposite Mr. SICKLES' Washington residence; and Mrs. SICKLES was as constantly in his company at all places of public entertainment. In the interval of the Congressional recess, Mr. KEY made a short visit to New-York, still without exciting any absolute suspicion of positive impropriety in the mind of Mr. SICKLES; although other friends of the unhappy lady, and among them her mother, repeatedly warned her of the fatal precipice on the brink of which she was permitting herself to trifle. It was hoped that the affair would come to an end of itself, and that one or both of the parties most nearly implicated, would perceive the real drift of their conduct in time to avoid its almost inevitable consequences.

But on the reassembling of Congress, and the return of Mrs. SICKLES to Washington, Mr. KEY's attentions, and the scandal consequent upon them, were revived with greater ardor than before. Mr. KEY was a particularly noticeable man in point of personal appearance; tall, well-formed, a much more athletic man than Mr. SICKLES, and especially fond of exercise on horseback. He rode an iron-grey horse; and scarcely a day has passed since the return of Mrs. SICKLES to the capital, on which his tall figure, his white riding-cap, well-trimmed moustache, and iron-grey horse might not have been seen two or three times in the course of the morning on the circuit of President's-square, or at the door of Mr. SICKLES' house, which stands quite alone on the north side of the square, and is a very conspicuous building of white stucco. It was but on Tuesday last, (so swift and fearful a dream does the whole story seem), that, on visiting Mrs. SICKLES, Tuesday being her day of reception, I found Mr. KEY there, his horse waiting for him at the door. The rooms were filled with a pleasant company; the soft Spring sunlight poured in at the open windows; and Mrs. SICKLES herself in all her almost girlish beauty, wearing a bouquet of crocuses, the firstlings of the year, seemed the very incarnation of Spring and youth, and the beautiful promise of life. What is the twilight; what the house that then was the synonym of hospitality, the most frank, and generous and easy!

In the early part of the week before last Mr. SICKLES went on to New-York. During his absence the busy spies of society observed that the attendance of Mr. KEY at his house was even more unremitting than usual. Mr. SICKLES returned to Washington on the morning of the day of the Napier Bell, and from that time up to Friday last nothing occurred to make the matter of his wife's relations with Mr. KEY more than ordinarily prominent in his mind. So far was he from manifesting anything like inordinate or tyrannical suspicion, that he allowed Mr. KEY to escort Mrs. SICKLES as usual on Pennsylvania-avenue, and I saw them, in company with Mr. HARRY WILKOFF, at the theatre on Wednesday night. On Thursday Mr. and Mrs. SICKLES entertained a large party at dinner. Over that gay and brilliant company how near and fearful a doom impended!

On the next day (the day before yesterday) Mr. SICKLES received from some enemy of mankind an anonymous letter, stating with precision so minute as to make suspicion imperative, that Mr. KEY had rented a house on Fifteenth-street, above K-street, from a negro woman, and that he was in the habit of meeting Mrs. SICKLES there two or three times a week, or oftener. The person and dress of Mrs. SICKLES were accurately described, and the usual time of the interview specified. Accompanied by a friend, Mr. SICKLES went to the house designated and found every statement of the anonymous writer corroborated. Mr. KEY had taken the house; and he had constantly met there a lady answering very closely in description to Mrs. SICKLES.

Mr. SICKLES still clung to the hope that the person who had stooped to the baseness of making such charges under the veil of secrecy, might have thoroughly deceived him, and that Mrs. SICKLES was not the lady in question. He accordingly requested his friend, Mr. GEORGE WOODBRIDGE, of New-York, to watch the place from the window of a house just opposite.

On Saturday, no meeting took place, and the woman in charge seems to have stated that none had occurred since Wednesday.

On Saturday evening, Mr. SICKLES, resolved no longer to play the spy upon his honor, determined to confront his wife directly with his terrible suspicions. At first Mrs. SICKLES strongly denied her guilt; but on her husband's asking her whether, on the Wednesday previous, she had not entered the house on Fifteenth-street, in a certain particular dress, and concealed by a hood, she cried out, "I am betrayed and lost!" and swooned away. On recovering her senses, she admitted her guilt, and besought mercy and pardon. Mr. SICKLES calmly said he would not injure her, since he believed her the victim of a scoundrel, but that he had a right to a full confession. Two ladies in the house were sent for as witnesses, and in their presence, Mrs. SICKLES made a full confession in writing, stating that her connection with Mr. KEY had commenced in April last, under Mr. SICKLES' roof, but that Mr. KEY had since hired the house in Fifteenth-street, in which they had constantly met. Mrs. SICKLES' confession was made in the midst of the bitterest contumelious and misery. Her husband simply asked her to give him back her wedding-ring, and desired her to write to her mother to come and take her from his house forever. Mrs. SICKLES made no objections, admitting the justice of her punishment in the most affecting language. Her

mother will arrive to-morrow to remove her from this fearful scene of guilt, remorse, and blood.

Once having quitted the presence of his wife, Mr. SICKLES gave way to the most terrible emotion, and passed the night in a state bordering on distraction—a feeling which was worked into madness this morning on seeing the cause of his misery, Mr. KEY, with gay audacity pass opposite the window of his wife's room and wave his handkerchief—the usual signal for resignation.

Asking Mr. BUTTERWORTH, who was at his house, to follow KEY and engage him in conversation so that he would not get out of sight, he rushed up stairs for his pistols, and quickly following, found BUTTERWORTH and KEY together, at the corner of Sixteenth-street, when the tragedy took place.

On coming up SICKLES walked directly to KEY, and said, "You have dishonored my bed and family, you scoundrel—prepare to die!"—at the same time drawing his pistol. Almost simultaneously KEY placed his hand inside his vest, and drawing what appeared to be a pistol, but what was really an opera-glass, said, "You had better not shoot!"

SICKLES at once fired, KEY at the same time throwing his glass at him. This shot only grazed KEY, slightly raising the skin of his side, and he immediately leaped behind a tree to avoid another shot. SICKLES followed, and KEY, catching his arm, endeavored to prevent him from firing, but SICKLES disengaged himself, and firing again, shot KEY in the upper part of the right thigh, close to the main artery.

Falling on his hip and supporting himself with his hand, he cried, "Murder! don't shoot!" SICKLES still following, fired again, with his pistol close to KEY, the ball passing through his body below the breast.

In the meantime the report of the pistol and KEY's cries startled those in the neighborhood. Mr. THOMAS MARTIN, a Clerk in the Treasury Department, who happened at the moment to be leaving the Club, rushed back, and calling out, "KEY is murdered!" Mr. DOYLE, Mr. URSUR and Mr. TIDEALL, who were in the Club at the time, proceeded hastily to the spot, when they found SICKLES standing over the body of KEY, with his pistol presented at his head, and which he tried twice to discharge, but which snapped both times—and Mr. BUTTERWORTH standing by composure.

On Mr. DOYLE's touching SICKLES on the shoulder, the latter at once desisted, and turning around, said: "Gentlemen, this man has dishonored my bed!" Upon this he took BUTTERWORTH's arm, and walking from the spot with the most perfect self-possession, proceeded to Attorney General BLACK'S, and delivered himself into custody.

On Mr. SICKLES' leaving, Messrs. DOYLE, TIDBALL, URSUR and MARTIN conveyed the body, which still held faint gasps of breathing, to the parlor of the Club-house, when the Assistant Surgeon-General was at once in attendance, but KEY was beyond all medical skill. He breathed but twice after being laid upon the floor.

When MARTIN and URSUR raised KEY from the ground, the former inquired if he had anything to say. KEY made no reply, and was evidently unconscious.

In a few minutes the news spread over the city, and the streets became thronged with visitors to the scene of the terrible event, and groups were everywhere noticed engaged in excited discussion about it. The Club House was speedily surrounded by an immense crowd, eager to view the body of the ill-fated KEY. Many of the leading gentlemen of Washington drove up in their carriages, and in about a quarter of an hour the brother-in-law of the deceased, the Hon. Mr. PENDERLETON, of Ohio, arrived.

At about three the Coroner's Inquest was held in the parlor, where the body lay, when sufficient facts were elicited to show that deceased was killed by DANIEL E. SICKLES, and a verdict was rendered accordingly.

While I write, the body of KEY is being removed to his late residence on C-street, nearly opposite Colonel BENTON'S house.

The parties involved in this sad story all lived within the immediate circle of our daily Washington life; two, at least, of them being also as well known in New-York as in the Federal Metropolis. KEY was about 42 years of age, tall in stature, about six feet, with an easy and fashionable air, but by no means prepossessing in appearance otherwise. His face had a sickly hue, and he had been for some time suffering from heart-disease, or imagined he was, which gave him a soured and discontented look. Otherwise he was extremely popular, and those who knew him best said his eccentricities of manner covered a very kind and generous heart. His father, FRANCIS S. KEY, was the author of the national song, the "Star-Spangled Banner." He was a widower with four children. On his marriage he narrowly escaped a duel with Colonel MAY, who conceived that he had unfairly ousted him from the affections of the lady who became his wife, and who was a beautiful and charming woman.

Mr. SICKLES, the member for the Third District of New-York, is a native of this City, and was originally a printer by occupation. He is a man of nearly forty years of age; of good presence and graceful manners. As a member of the State Senate, as well as in the House of Representatives, he had made himself remarkable by a quite unusual coolness and self-possession, which gave him great advantages in debate, and had acquired for him a well-deserved reputation as a rising young leader of the Democratic Party. In 1853, Mr. SICKLES was married to his wife, now ruined and heart-broken, then a young girl fresh from her school-life, and remarkable then as now for something especially soft, lovely and youthful in the type of her very peculiar beauty. She is of Italian origin, and possesses all the Italian lustre and depth of eye, united with a singular candor and delicacy of feature.

Mr. SICKLES had seen her grow up from childhood, and was attached to her with an almost idiotic affection. Shortly after their marriage, Mr. SICKLES was appointed Secretary of the American Legation at London, in the household of Mr. BUCKRAN, and his beautiful bride won universal admiration abroad, not more by her charms of person and manner than by the gayety and innocent joyousness of her character. On their return to America they resided for some time on the Bloomingdale Road, in a charming house overlooking the Hudson River; and, on his election to Congress, Mr. SICKLES took his present house on President's-square. It faces directly the Club house, to which was brought to-day the corpse of the man who himself had slain all that made the life of that mansion, but a few days since so gay among the gayest, and so hospitable among the most hospitable, of the homes of Washington.

Mrs. SICKLES may be 22, and has two children. She is the daughter of BAUOUI, the celebrated music-teacher, of Fourteenth-street. Amid the general gloom which this sad affair has cast over the city, many a sorrowing thought is cast towards her whose guilty surrender to the wiles of a villain has resulted so tragically, for she has been much liked, and those who have known her will grieve sorely at the necessity of giving her up as lost. Few women are better calculated to win their way in polite society, or to contribute more to its vivacity.

Popular sympathy, as usual in such cases, is almost unanimsly with Mr. SICKLES, the prosecution being deemed ample justification for the deed, and when the facts as yet unknown come to be developed, this feeling will grow still stronger, and read a fearful lesson to those who may attempt to invade the honor and happiness of another's home.

A few of KEY's personal friends profess to disbelieve his conduct to have been actually criminal, and

maintain that it was the result merely of inordinate personal vanity which led him to seek the appearance of being a favorite with the lady in question. Their theory is utterly dissipated by the confession of the now heartbroken victim.

When Mr. SICKLES surrendered himself to Attorney-General BLACK he requested such disposition to be made of him as was proper. The Attorney-General sent for a magistrate, who, with the Chief of Police, came speedily. Soon after the Mayor arrived, announcing the death of KEY, and Mr. SICKLES was conducted in a carriage to the jail, where he now is, awaiting an examination. I called upon him this evening and found him surrounded by several colleagues and other sympathizing friends. He was evidently laboring under strong mental excitement, and his haggard countenance presented marked evidence of the effects of the fearful emotions which have harrowed his very soul during the last twenty-four hours. Nevertheless, his manner was calm and collected, with his nerves steady. Of course, I did not question him relative to the affair. He volunteered the remark, however, that it was unavoidable, and that he could not have done otherwise. He added: "Satisfied as I was of his guilt, we could not live together upon the same planet."

The Hon. ROBERT J. WALKER and Messrs. CARMEL and RATCLIFF have been retained as his counsel. They will bring him before Judge CRAWFORD to-morrow on a writ of habeas corpus, and move his discharge upon bail. There is little doubt that it will be allowed, and he be released from custody. The general opinion seems to be that no Grand Jury will ever indict him.

KEY left no property. His family connections it is understood are able, and will provide for his children. Some of KEY's friends intimate threats of summary vengeance against SICKLES if he appears in public where they can reach him.

S.