

THEIR ONLY EPITAPH

Duluth Men Whose Lives One Word Covers.

EIGHTEEN HAVE SUICIDED

The Self Severing of Lives in This City as Recalled by Health Office Figures.

How often the old question "to be or not to be" has been argued in Duluth is something that can be told only by an examination of that record which living men know nothing of. How often life's problem has been figured out and the answer has been found less than nothing can only be a matter of conjecture. But when the inquiry resolves itself into the question of how many have decided life was not worth living and have put their ideas into fatal execution, the problem is a more simple one, for then the last chapter of the tragedy has been condensed into a single curt entry in the vital statistics of the health department.

Few people realize the romance wrapped up in these apparently dry records. Very much of the city's history is written in their pages. It is in the last chapters, to be sure, and chapters which are terribly cold in the unemphatic wording of the official entries, but between the lines are romances, sometimes comedies, more often tragedies, which eclipse in human interest any thing to be found in the most vivid pictures of the novelist or the dramatist. There are stories of broken hearts, of useful lives cut off at the point of greatest usefulness, of ruined lives dragged out beyond necessity. Stories of homes bereaved by illness and by accident, of orphaned children, of widowed wives. There is sadness beyond measure in it all.

One Word for an Epitaph.

Yet even in this record of grief there are degrees. Most pathetic in this story of universal paths are the entries scattered here and there—"suicide." One word to sum up the defeat of a life's purpose. In its letters are concealed trials, struggles, heartaches and the final bitterness of that completeness of defeat which leaves no alternative but death. One word to tell the story of such a life, no softened expression to guild the tale, only the simple fact of an exit from life's stage. There is nothing to show whether the player has been hero, villain or clown. A life whose temptations no one knows, a struggle whose terror no one can conceive, an impulse of madness, an official record for an epitaph, a life begun and ended, a tragedy in a dozen words, that is all. The world laughs, dust covers the records, tears are dried, but the story remains. No longer the stake driven through the breast and standing at the cross-road teaches that life must not be lightly resigned, but there is still a warning which may be read by those who search the records.

Only a single word, "suicide," but it teaches the same lesson as the more barbarous and cruel custom of a century ago.

Only Eighteen Suicides Here.

Fortunately for Duluth, cases of life self taken are rare in its history. The records of the department go back over a period of only nine years, and in that entire time there are recorded but eighteen suicides, and five of these were in the first year, 1885. The record begins with December 13, when H. J. Coppernall went out into the woods and shot himself through the heart. Of him it is known only that he was 45 years old, and to the record perhaps as justification, perhaps excuse, is added the single word, "married." In April, for their books at that time were not kept with their present regularity and deaths were entered in very irregular order, on the 9th day, John Norland brought this life to an abrupt termination. There is nothing to show who he was or the method used. The same is true of Christ Pfeifer, who killed himself on August 28, and August Rosenwald, whose death is entered as having occurred on January 30. The only other suicide of this year was that of C. B. Chandler, who poisoned himself and died on December 31.

Two other tragedies marked the year 1885. On Dec. 1 Andrew Kopp was murdered. On Aug. 23 John Wansanian was hanged in the county jail yard for a murder committed at Tower. His was the only legal execution which ever took place in this county.

Proof of Civilization.

In 1886 there were advancing signs of civilization and only two suicides are recorded. On May 21 Smith Debbage, a young attorney, single and 26 years old, cut his throat at the St. Louis hotel. On July 21 Thomas Walker, age 60, drowned himself at the Northern Pacific dock. This same year was marked by a tragic incident which many will remember. The great elevator fire took place in 1886, and Charles Morse and Edward Lee, who were compelled to jump from the burning building, were killed.

The year 1887 was the banner moral year. There was not a single suicide. In 1888 there were two cases of self-destruction. Jacob Veeler, age 21, and single, refreshed himself with a beverage of carbolic acid and permanently lost his thirst. Fannie Zien, age 19, came home one night from a dance and took a dose of poison. On Feb. 23 of this year occurred the dynamite explosion on Third street where men were blasting for the opening of the thoroughfare and Eric Mattson, Andrew Dahl, Aaron Erickson and Andrew Eklund lost their lives.

One of Unusual Interest

In 1889 there were three suicides, one of them involving a story of unusual interest. On April 13, Edward Jackson, 53 years old and married, cut his throat at No. 2411 West Sixth street and on October 23 Thomas Lannigan took rough on rats. The other suicide was that of Dr. A. B. Lynde who cut his throat at the St. Louis hotel. Dr. Lynde was a young doctor of unusual brilliancy and attainments. He had been living in Milwaukee and during the absence from that city of one of its most noted physicians to the West undertook the care of his practice. The strain was something terrific and to keep himself up to the work resorted to

the use of stimulants and narcotics. When relieved of the strain a result resulted, accompanied with melancholy which took a suicidal form. Dr. Lynde came to Duluth and twice attempted to take his own life. The first time he stabbed himself in the region of the heart and inflicted a severe but not fatal wound. Two days later, with the same knife, he cut his throat and died within a few moments.

Down to Later Days.

In 1890 there were three cases of self-destruction but all of them were similar to the old story of weariness and dejection. On March 7 Edward Shannon, 40, married, administered an overdose of opium. On December 25, John H. age 37, single, shot himself, and on February 27, the first case of the year, J. Tevsky cut his throat at No. 202 Lawrence south, and died after three or four days. On July 27 the boy Billy Peter fully identified, was murdered at the docks by New Orleans Murphy, who is now doing a life sentence for the crime.

Eighteen hundred and ninety-one brings the record to the time of recent history. There was but one suicide, September 23, Joseph Kriz shot himself at No. 257 West Superior street. The year, and this tragedy was but a few months ago, A. J. Scribner shot his wife and then killed himself at No. 70 W. Superior street. The circumstances of the deplorable affair are too recent need recounting. The last suicide there have been none this year, was that of "Pearl" Hillon, the unfortunate mate of one of the bargains on St. Croix avenue who, on September 18, ended his life of shame with carbolic acid.

A Noteworthy Record

It is not a long record for a city of size of Duluth, but even at best it is far enough. The records disprove, so far as Duluth is concerned, the old theory of the suicidal mania is contagious—its self destruction comes in waves—only being closely followed by another. If Duluth's history be taken as an index there is no microbe of suicide, contagious either physically or intellectually. The cases are isolated. Each independent of all others, coming at irregular intervals, and each dependant upon a train of circumstances in no way affecting affected by any other case. Resolves its simplest from the result of the study of the Duluth records, means only that in each year two people out of twenty, thirty or forty thousand, after study of life, decided that life was worth living and that it was better rather than endure the life we have to others than we know not of."