

# A VIVID TEMPERANCE LECTURE.

Charles Robb Found Dead by His Neighbors in a Hovel Nauseatingly Filthy.

His Aunt Lay in Drunken Stupor Across His Almost Nude Body and His Father Was on the Verge of Delirium Tremens.

Clad only in a dirty cotton shirt and covered with a bundle of vermin-infested rags, on the carpetless floor of a miserable little room on West Thirtieth street there lay throughout the day yesterday the body of a young man whose death took place amid surroundings and under circumstances but little less dreadful than were furnished to the victims of the Black Hole of Calcutta.

For the past three years a family consisting of Andrew Robb, a widower of sixty; his maiden sister, Sarah Robb, aged fifty-seven, and his son, Charles A. Robb, thirty

years of age, have occupied a few small, ill-ventilated rooms on the second floor of the tenement-house at No. 434 West Thirtieth street. When they moved into these apartments, as is remembered by some of the old residents of the tenement, there was an air of gentility about the Robbs, strongly in contrast with many of their neighbors in that populous and not over-cleanly neighborhood. They brought but little furniture into the house, but it was observed by the other tenants that what they had was of good quality, superior to the ordinary run of

tenement-house belongings. At first it was supposed by their fellow-lodgers that the family consisted of husband, wife and son, and when the sympathetic souls thereabouts learned that the elder man had but recently lost his wife, and had installed his maiden sister as housekeeper to look after himself and the lad, they were prepared to take the Robbs at once into the intimacy of their social circle. They found this, however, a more difficult matter than would have been imagined. The maiden aunt had a way of drawing her shawl tightly about her lean shoulders as she passed her neighbors on the stairs or in the hallways, and Robb senior, except when in his cups, was a surly companion.

The apartments rented for \$9 a month, and as the rent was always promptly paid, thus forbidding the extension of sympathy

on a familiarly inviting point, the other dwellers of the tenement forbore after a time to bother themselves about the Robbs or their affairs. It was known that the old man was an experienced hostler and that he found little difficulty in obtaining employment about the numerous stables of the vicinity, and the son, when he condescended to work at all, was equally handy with horses.

The Robbs had led this exclusive if not altogether exemplary life among their neighbors for a year or more when the discovery was made that the male members of the

family did not enjoy a monopoly of the rum which went by the gallon up to their apartments on the second floor of the tenement. The maiden aunt one day upset the tower of cold reserve she had built about herself by tumbling down stairs in a condition of hopeless inebriety. This was two years ago. Since then the hill down which the Robbs have been sliding has been very steep. None of the inmates of the tenement were, however, even in the remotest manner prepared for the dreadful happenings of Saturday.

Old man Robb and his sister had long ago come to be looked upon as hopeless souls, and the pale-faced, thin-chested son as en route to an early drunkard's grave, but no one about the tenement dreamed that behind the doors of the Robb apartments there lurked the gaunt skeleton of starvation.

It was inferred from the habits of the family that a view of their rooms would not disclose any very creditable evidence of thrifty housekeeping, but it was not until the strong shoulders of a policeman forced open the double-locked doors that any conception of the horrors of filthiness and squalor behind them was possible.

John E. Gough in the days of his activity would have deemed invaluable a photograph of the room into which that policeman had forced his way. If ever the deadly work of the demon rum were pictured in vivid colors there was the meal on which that picture stood.

It had come to be known in some vague way by the other occupants of No. 434 that the young man Robb had been ill for several weeks. The old man and his white-haired, bearded sister, as once or twice a day they tramped up and down the narrow stairs in staggering journeyings to the Tenth avenue grog shop, denied to such solicitous persons as questioned them, that there was anything seriously the matter with "Charlie," but "Charlie" no longer made his appearance. He was a poor, wan-faced, spindle-shanked creature, whose wife seemed to have been long ago burned up by alcohol. Still, he was a human being and those who lived in the house with him could not help feeling anxiety concerning his condition. It was suggested to the father and to the aunt on several occasions when they staggered in and out of the narrow tenement doorway that the calling of a doctor would not be amiss.

The nearest neighbors of the Robbs recalled the fact that on New Year's Day an uproar of unusual violence had occurred in the Robb's apartments. Old man Robb had been seen to make frequent visits to the saloons of the neighborhood throughout the day—travelling back and forth, in fact, as long as his legs would sustain him—and always returning with a black bottle. And Miss Robb's voice had been heard raised in a sharper key than usual in the straining of Scotch ballads, of which she was very

fond. The dwellers on the floor beneath the Robbs had been kept awake all night by the sound of plunging and uncertain footsteps, and all over the house was audible the noise of the frightful orgie in which father, sister and son were indulging.

Throughout the succeeding two months this New Year's Day spree was continued without interruption. Once or twice during this period "Charlie" Robb appeared on the street, staggering like a ghost from lamp-post to lamp-post, by which buoys and beacons he was wont to navigate to his favorite Tenth avenue gin-mill. As for Robb, sr., and his white-haired sister, it is recorded that they have not drawn a sober breath since Jan. 1, but with the cunning of innkeepers they always doubly locked the doors of their apartments on going forth, so that no conception of the condition of the rooms was possible to their neighbors. But for that precaution the Board of Health would long since have been summoned to attend to the matter.

At 10 o'clock Saturday morning last the old man, with eyes half-closed, his gray hair matted like decaying sea-weed over his dirty, furrowed brow, staggered down the stairs and out into the street. There he stood for a moment, swaying back and forth, as if trying to recall his scattered senses. It was no unusual thing for the neighbors to watch his crazy limbs go

twisting with involuntary contortions several times a day in the direction of the nearest grog-shop, but this hesitation on the sidewalk, this seeming effort to rally and to recall to his feeble memory some half-forgotten thought, was unusual. It attracted the attention of more than one of the good women who live at No. 434, and they intuitively felt that something more serious than usual had occurred in the Robb's household.

Acting upon a charitable impulse, one of these women approached the wavering old man and inquired after his son's health. The pupils of his fish-like eyes dilated and contracted by turns; the grimy nails of his dirty fingers dug into the palms of his hands; his body swung like a pendulum from side to side; he was evidently making a desperate effort to recover his senses. For at least five minutes he oscillated thus, sending an odor of rum which even in the open air was overpowering to his questioner, and then, with a supreme effort gained, "Sonny's dead."

Having thus unburdened himself of the secret which had weighed oppressively on his soul, he grinned and shambled off.

The good women lost no time in reaching the door to the Robb's apartments. It was, as usual, locked and bolted. Repeated rapping having failed to elicit any response from within, she notified the policeman on the beat and together they burst the door in.

Then was the time, if ever, for Prohibitionists to have pressed the button of a camera.

The room was carpetless and devoid of furniture save a broken cook-stove, a rickety chair and a moth-eaten lounge. On the floor in the corner was a shagreened mass of rags from which arose a nauseating stench, and with her head pillowed upon this loathsome mass was the white-haired aunt, snoring in drunken sleep.

To rattle the woman one side and with his crab sweep off the covering of rags was for the policeman but the work of a moment, and then he started back in horror, for under the rags lay the almost nude body of the woman's nephew. The face was pinched and drawn and the wide-open eyes of the corpse were staring as though some horrible vision had come simultaneously with the touch of death.

Every evidence of poverty, with attendant starvation, was to be found on the filthy premises. In three years a once prosperous family had drug themselves to this. The aunt, with the father, who was subsequently arrested staggering along the street in a state of semi-inbriety, were removed to Bellevue Hospital, both being on the verge of delirium tremens, and a policeman was left on guard to keep the rats from the corpse. Coroner Harly viewed the body where it lay among the rags yesterday, and pronounced it as his opinion that death was due to starvation and alcoholism.