

# HE KNEW HER SECRET.

## SEQUEL TO THE SUICIDE OF MRS. OTTO HEBERER.

A Modern Version of "The Scarlet Letter" With Some Variations—An Erring Woman Hunted to Death by a Ghost of the Past.

On Thursday, September 24, Mrs. Maggie Heberer, wife of Otto Heberer, sausage-maker at 2617 South Broadway, poisoned herself and three small children with arsenic. The lives of the children were saved. Mrs. Heberer's dead body was found next day in a vacant lot some distance from her residence. The case was described in THE REPUBLIC at the time. Facts which have since come to light develop a pathetic tragedy in real life such as the press is seldom called upon to relate. And withal the story bears a moral so deep that the public is entitled to the details.

About ten years ago Miss Maggie Fath, a comely young German woman from Peoria, married Otto Heberer of this city. Heberer was a sausage maker, and very prosperous in a small way. Previous to her marriage, however, the girl had been led into a fatal indiscretion by a former lover in Peoria, who won her affections, only to betray her faith. A child was born. Before her marriage to Heberer, the girl confessed her fault, but he, believing in the sincerity of her repentance and having full faith in the future, married her. The child was placed in a German Catholic orphan asylum in this city, the expense being borne by Heberer, and there it still remains.

Maggie Fath was to Otto Heberer a true and loyal wife. She bore him three sturdy boys, and her whole life was one round of unselfish labor for her children and her husband. No breath of scandal ever touched her. She was respected by all who knew her as a model wife and mother. Her past was buried. Long years of faithful married life had wiped out the stain of youthful indiscretion.

But the memory of it—ah! that was there. The still, small voice could not be silenced. Mrs. Heberer was not a happy woman.

Sometime ago Heberer employed a buxom young German girl as kitchen maid. The girl was lively and attractive and—well, neighbors will gossip.

### THE FATAL QUARREL.

Early last Thursday morning there was a quarrel in Heberer's store between Mrs. Heberer and the girl, and Mrs. Heberer struck the latter in the face. Heberer ordered his wife into the back room. She went out and immediately gave her children a large dose of arsenic, taking a large portion of the fatal dose herself. In the confusion consequent upon the discovery of the poisoning, while the family were working over the children, Mrs. Heberer wandered away and was found dead next day.

Heberer was seen yesterday by a REPUBLIC representative. As soon as he learned that his visitor was a reporter Heberer became very angry and denounced the press in very vigorous broken English. When he was able to talk coherently he said the papers had lied about him scandalously. "I have always lived happily with my wife," he said. "We did not have any more quarrels than other married folks do. I never laid my hand on her in anger. She was a good wife and I appreciated her. She always liked the girl very much, and raised her wages three times of her own accord, besides giving her several new dresses. There was never any quarrel or hard words between them until Thursday morning, when, as we were waiting on some customers, the girl said she thought my wife was angry with her from the night before. Then my wife struck her. I took my wife by the arm and shut her in the back room and told her if she had anything to say to Lizzie to wait until the customers were gone. Then she took the poison."

"Did you know that your wife had a child when you married her?"

"Yes, I knew all about it. The child is in the city now and I pay its board. My wife always remembered that she made a mistake before she was married, and for that reason she was always suspicious of girls and ready to listen to the neighbors and her mother when they talked scandal to her. Some time ago my wife fell off a step-ladder and hurt her head, and she has never been right in her mind since. Yes, I refused to allow her mother and sister to come in here because they talked scandal about me and made trouble between me and my wife. I am the victim of women's tongues."

### THE MOTHER'S STATEMENT.

Mrs. Fath, the mother of Mrs. Heberer, lives on Sidney street near Broadway. A REPUBLIC man called on her and informed her that Heberer had charged her, among others, with making trouble between himself and his wife.

"It is not true," said Mrs. Fath indignantly. "It is too bad of Heberer to talk like that. How could I talk about him to my daughter when I have not spoken to her for two years? I lived in their house for two years until just a few days ago, but Heberer would never allow me to speak to my daughter at all. I go out to wash every day, and don't have a chance to see what goes on in the house. All I know is that the girl is pretty, and Heberer seemed to have plenty of fun with her. But the neighbors have a chance to see, and they have been talking. Yes, Heberer sent the girl away on Saturday. His brother made him do it for the sake of appearances. I hear that he sent her into the country to board for awhile."

"Who was your daughter's husband before she married Heberer?"

"I don't know—I can't tell. That was when we lived in Peoria."

"Where is the child now?"

"I don't know. I never asked any questions about that."

Heberer's neighbors were considerably excited by the recent tragic events. The greater portion of them sympathized with Mrs. Heberer, believing that she was a wronged woman, though Heberer has his partisans.

### A LIFE'S TRAGEDY.

Since the first novel was invented, a favorite and most effective plot with novelists has been the story of the unfaithful wife and the avenging husband, and human ingenuity has been taxed to its utmost to conceive and analyze new or strange variations on this old, old theme. In one of his greatest works—one which, perhaps, more than any other, contributed to the writer's greatness—Charles Reed has chosen such a plot. A woman proves false to her marital vows, and in a moment of passion betrays her husband. The latter learns of his disgrace and conceives a Machiavellian revenge. He forces her to work out her own punishment by living under the knowledge that he knew of her sin, and in the end his revenge is more complete than any the law or brute force could accomplish.

Such tragedies are not confined only to novels. Beneath the surfaces of the seemingly common-place lives about us they are being constantly enacted. The world sometimes learns the terrible sequel; the real story it is seldom given us to know. There is nothing so strange and pathetic as the truth. Such a story, almost sublime in its silent, unspeakable pathos—though the lives of the characters

are of the lowly walks of life—may lie behind the suicide of Mrs. Heberer and the attempted poisoning of her children. That tragedy of death was, perhaps, only the sequel to a greater tragedy in life. Heberer, knowing of his wife's sin before marriage. With such a knowledge an unscrupulous man might have compelled a woman to bear silent witness to all kinds of license on his part, while holding her to the strictest accountability for her own acts. But half the truth is seldom really known. The secret springs of most lives lie too deeply hid for human discovery.

Verily, the wages of sin are death.