

## IN STATE OF ERUPTION

CURRY COUNTY IS ON VERGE OF A GREAT LOCAL WAR.

Murder of Mrs. C. Edson and Shortage of Ex-Treasurer Averill Main Causes for Dissension.

**GOLD BEACH,** Or., Sept. 1.—Curry, the frontier coast county of Oregon, is in a state of social and political eruption. Internal dissensions are spreading through the community, producing a heated condition which at any time may give rise to an earthquake that will shake the state, and bring down the pillars of law and order and the elements of lawlessness and disorder. Nothing can stop the burning wrath of the people save a total destruction of the obnoxious material. The "committee of safety" (vigilantes) which was formed at the county seat last September is still active, its executive committee of five is backed by the citizens of the county, and the citizens of the community to proceed against law-breakers as the exigencies of any occasion may seem to require. Terror now reigns over the ranks of the desperados. The avenging sword of justice is held above every criminal neck. It may descend at any moment. The "tough" now experience the awful suspense of impending calamity, and hold themselves in awe which inflicted upon quiet citizens until the organization of the committee of safety.

It has been the purpose of the citizens' committee to act through the regularly constituted officers and forms of law, so long as effectual. But results are their chief consideration, and they intend to rid the country of winter's coat, of the crowd which for 20 years has menaced the peace and safety of the country.

Two causes are uppermost in agitating the community. The murder of Mrs. Christine Edison, for which Coleman Gillespie was last month sentenced to hang on October 5, and the shortage of ex-Treasurer James S. Averill. The condemned man, Gillespie, has stated in interview, and in court, that he was only an accomplice in the killing of the widow Edison. He declares that Charles Strahan was the principal. Gillespie was convicted on his own confession and on circumstantial evidence. The confession bears heavily upon Strahan. The accused was serving out sentence for assault to commit rape at the time the murder was committed. The deed was done at night, and Strahan was unable to go and come from the jail at night, as he pleased. The liberates given him during his incarceration, by the negligent and recreant Sheriff, are now causing Strahan no end of trouble. Had he been constantly confined to jail, according to the sentence of the court, he now could not suffer from the accusations of Gillespie, who testifies to his connection with the robbery. Strahan is in Coos County. Meanwhile, the people of Curry County are divided in opinion as to the advisability of bringing him to trial on the evidence of Gillespie. One party clamors for his arrest. The other faction is indifferent, believing that Strahan's name is brought into the case. Gillespie, on the part of the rest of the public, to pose an unimpeachable state of evidence. District Attorney George M. Brown, who has followed the case from start to finish, believes that Gillespie was alone in the murder of Mrs. Edison. And such was Gillespie's first confession. Nevertheless the continued and constant discussion of the evidence causes the people of the vicinity to look for something to sustain him, any day, but none of them pretend to predict just what that something will be.

**Shortage in the County Treasury.**

Although known to be short in his accounts, and to have committed irregularities in his books, ex-County Treasurer Averill has not been detained for examination. He travels about the state with freedom, still owing the county money which he had not turned over to him, and which he had used. The taxpayers of Curry County are indignant that this is possible. The county is already so involved that script is at a discount of 10 to 15 per cent. The property-holders who stand the brunt of careless handling of the public money are in a mood to make trouble.

Averill left the county a few days before the session of the Circuit Court which convicted Gillespie. When his shortage was discovered by the new officers who went over the books in July, Averill promised to make good every cent. He admitted having used county money in his canvass for the Legislature as the Democratic and Populist nominee for Joint Representative for Coos and Curry Counties. His father, W. H. Averill, of Browerville, came to the ex-Treasurer's rescue with an advance of \$600. Nearly \$600 of shortage was made good. Now it develops that about \$120 in script is not accounted for, and a further shortage of \$25 is reported by the expert who has gone to the scene of the trouble. Averill, before leaving Gold Beach, deposited in trust to meet any further deficit which might be discovered. The father is said to be an honorable and substantial man. He has given assurances that he will help to make up the ex-Treasurer's shortage, so that the bondsmen have not been vindictive.

Averill's record for the last year of his residence at Gold Beach is enveloped in a mist of disgrace. An even-tempered man in his household which fed the gossips of this sparsely-populated region. His wife, who was an estimable and respected woman, died under the most distressing circumstances. A few weeks ago a warrant was issued for his arrest, charging him with robbery, and he fled to Coos County. The case was called at midnight before a Justice and was dismissed, but the charge which was made by the prosecuting witness had gone over the counties of Coos and Curry. The affair which led up to the arrest for robbery caused him to fall from leadership in the fusion party last June.

During the early part of the campaign Averill was king among the Democrats and Populists of this section. He won the ticket against the canneries and capitalist, R. D. Hume, the Republican nominee for joint Representative from Coos and Curry Counties. Averill won large support in certain sections of Coos County. Up to within days of election Hume's defeat was regarded as inevitable, but just at that time Averill became involved in an altercation in one of the resorts of Marshfield. An old soldier, who had drawn back pension money to the amount of \$750, was out celebrating his good fortune. Averill was in the party. He was accused of taking a large sum of the old man's money. It is said that the ex-Treasurer admitted the possession of some of the money. He claimed that he intended to only keep it until the owner might sober up. He returned all that he claimed had come into his hands. The stories which grew out of this affair tended to the undoing of Averill in Coos, the county where he had risen in fame.

Averill's bond is justified for \$6000. During the life one of the bondsmen, T. J. Cook, was allowed to withdraw. The signature was crossed off, and in its place the signature of Benjamin Guthridge was accepted. The question has been propounded to the County Court whether the subsequent mutilation does not invalidate the entire bond.

**Prisoner's Mass Liberties.**

It is a strange situation when a man incarcerated for one crime is released with committing another outside the jail. This is a notable feature of Gillespie's confession. It would seem altogether impossible, and the accusation would be taken as the wild imagination of a disordered brain were it not generally known that he was serving out his sentence Strahan used the jail as a voluntary lodgings place. The negligence and irregularity of Jesse Turner, the Sheriff, who was supposed to look after

the county's interests at the time, are responsible for the conduct of the jail, allowing Gillespie to commit his crime.

There were many people living at Gold Beach who saw Strahan enter and leave the jail and round around town at will, while he was supposed to be serving out sentence in durance vile. He was seen to take long walks on the beach; to visit his wife at her home; to wander on the suburbs of the town, and to sit on the steps of the courthouse and visit with any who came that way. It is said that he carried the key to the jail with which to lock himself in and turn himself out. The circumstance which causes belief that Gillespie had a confederate is the distance that separated Gillespie from the scene of the murder. The house he had been born in, the ride which was made by Gillespie after the robbery was most remarkable. Never will the mountain road and dangerous and narrow grades between Wedderburn and Port Orford be covered in less time than it was when in the still hours of the night Gillespie was chased over it by his guilty conscience.

**Coleman Gillespie's Case.**

Having told several different stories and not being content in all his statements, the defense of Gillespie is discredited. What he says is not taken seriously unless his testimony is borne out by circumstantial evidence, apart from anything which he may produce. He denies the forgery of the \$75 pension check, when it is plain to any expert in penmanship that he made no effort to disguise his writing in inquiring the name of Christine Edison. This piece of proof is responsible for his arrest and conviction.

Whether anyone else is ever brought into this case, Coleman Gillespie is to pay the penalty for the part he took in the crime. He conceded his doom, but said that he would slip from the end of the rope on October 5 into the mouth of hell, he will make the devil a good stoker. He jokes about how hot he will make the fires for his enemies who follow him. When interviewed by the writer, Gillespie declared that while he may deserve hanging, his name other wise deserves a man's fate.

This young man is a remarkable criminal. He is bold, audacious, reckless. He is a monster, whose ruling passion is to commit a huge joke which requires daring. During his career of 21 years he has never been deterred from any undertaking by a thought of the consequences. He is as devoid of sentiment and honor as any cannibalistic animal. Mirth is his predominant mental characteristic. His face was built to laugh, and his brain is able to perceive incongruities where no other mind suspects them. Some people think Gillespie weak-minded because of this propensity for laughing, but in this they are mistaken. He is the avenger of his associates in intelligence. He never has felt the proper sense of moral responsibility because life was to him too huge a joke to think of anything as serious.

**Some of Gillespie's Misdeeds.**

Early in life Gillespie showed a tendency to steal. At the age of 12 he burglarized the cabin of some Germans, who were neighbors of his family. One of his prizes from this theft was a Dutch prayerbook. To have possession of a book printed in a language foreign to him so pleased the boy that he had to show it to his playmates. This led to his detection and punishment. He regarded the theft and the apprehension, even at that early age, as a very light matter.

His next notable act of appropriating other people's property was at the age of 15, when he took a team of horses, and, tying to his mother as to how he came to have them, used them about the house.

What failed to account for this he made no denial.

The building in the background is the county jail. It is a frail frame building, and would offer little or no resistance to a desperate man. Coleman Gillespie will pass the death penalty for the murder of Mrs. Edison.

**Curry County's Courthouse and Jail.**

Curry County's Courthouse is a small frame building, and on most occasions affords ample accommodation for those in attendance upon the yearly session of Circuit Court. The trial of Coleman Gillespie for the murder of Mrs. Edison proved an exception. Fully one-half of the people who desired to hear the testimony were denied the privilege, due to a lack of room.

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Mrs. Gillespie and the daughter are conducting a hotel in a building adjoining the courthouse and jail where Coleman is confined for the murder of their former employer, Mrs. Edison. The mother and daughter, while calling daily for the death cell. From their windows they can look out upon the grounds where the scaffold is to be erected. The boy will be hanged on the common, which was his favorite playground, next to his mother's doorway.

The condition of Gillespie's mother is deteriorating daily, and she looks as though she might be herself with grief. Her spirit is broken and she looks as though she might not live through the climax of the stirring events which will be reached October 5, when the sentence of the court will be executed.

## WILBUR FISK BROCK.

## ARTHUR KELLY, PATRICIDE.

Youth Who Killed His Father in the Blue Mountains.

PENDLETON, Or., Sept. 12.—Arthur Kelly, the 13-year-old lad who killed his father while the two were on a hunting trip in the fastnesses of the Blue Mountains, is confined in the county jail here pending the sitting of the Circuit Court for Umatilla County. Young Kelly, who was being questioned in his connection with the killing, has been concerned in the robbery by which he was accused of covering up his tracks.

Up to any of his escapades did Gillespie attempt to cover up his tracks. When caught, as he has always been, he has made full, and rather boastful confession. He deviated in this respect when he talked of the robbery and murder of Mrs. Edison. Consequently he has been indicted. In his connection with the killing, he was concerned in the robbery by which he was accused of covering up his tracks.

The criminal record of the last two years is enough to stir the citizens of the county to take steps for protection.

Three murders at Chetco, and one at Wedderburn, have occurred within that short space of time. The killings at Chetco were the culmination of a long period of feuds, which had been in progress for years, and which only terminated with the killing of the principals in the trouble. Such is the state of things which brought about the organization of the committee of safety.

The newly elected Republican county officials, backed up by the taxpayers, who are now thoroughly aroused, are to be seen to war with the "border" elements and ruffian gang that have been the terror of this region.

**Mrs. Edison, the Murderer's Victim.**

Mrs. Christian Edison, the victim of Gillespie's death, was a woman of 50. During the last decade it has been the scene of 10 homicides. None of those who have been concerned in this spilling of human blood have been punished.

Some of the killings are particularly revolting on account of the motives under which the offenders acted. Gillespie, by coming under the ban of the law, turns the tide of government in the right channel. Unless he cheats the gallows, he will be the first murderer to be hanged in Curry County by the regularly constituted authorities. During the early times of pioneer settlement justice was dispensed by the committee of safety.

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He took with him some \$300 and the family were destitute. The wife and daughter sought work, and kept house for the growing boy. Coleman, who did not know the whereabouts of his parents, was chaser over it by his guilty conscience.

**Gillespie's Mother and Sister.**

The widowed mother of the condemned man, Mrs. John Giese, who was born at Gold Beach, who saw Strahan enter and leave the jail and round around town at will, while he was supposed to be serving out sentence in durance vile. He was seen to take long walks on the beach; to visit his wife at her home; to wander on the suburbs of the town, and to sit on the steps of the courthouse and visit with any who came that way. It is said that he carried the key to the jail with which to lock himself in and turn himself out. The circumstance which causes belief that Gillespie had a confederate is the distance that separated Gillespie from the scene of the murder.

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