

[Powell, George W.]

DRUSE MURDER RECALLED.

Rev. George W. Powell, an inmate at the Masonic home at Utica, committed suicide Tuesday by drinking laudanum while temporarily insane. Mr. Powell and wife have been inmates of the home for more than a year. The death of Powell recalls the unsavory Druse murder case, which was a sensation in Central New York from December, 1884 to February, 1887. William Druse was a farmer in the town of Warren, near Castle Corners, with very little energy, and notorious for his shiftlessness and untidy habits. He lived on very disagreeable terms with his family, which consisted of his wife, a grown up daughter and a younger son. The family troubles and the alleged circumstances connected with them were such as tended to isolate the family from their neighbors, and Druse had disappeared several days before the neighbors were aware of the fact. An investigation was finally begun and the family were placed under arrest. Mrs. Druse was put on trial and convicted in September, 1885, and sentenced to death, the daughter pleading guilty to murder in the second degree and receiving a sentence of imprisonment for life. Mrs. Druse was ably defended by H. D. Luce, of Richfield Springs, who carried the case to the court of appeals. There was, however, no doubt about the facts and no extenuating circumstances. In fact, it was held by many that there were matters connected with it which greatly aggravated the crime.

Rev. Mr. Powell was pastor of the Universalist church at Herkimer at the time, and on being constituted by Mrs. Druse her spiritual adviser, took up the matter with great energy, championing her case in season and out of season. Great pressure was brought to bear on Governor Hill, but he refused to grant a commutation. Mrs. Druse was executed at Herkimer in February, 1887. At the execution Rev. Mr. Powell made himself conspicuous by his conduct at the last moment, holding back the final act of the tragedy, while the unfortunate woman stood shivering in the biting mid-winter weather and trembling on the brink of eternity, only kept from total collapse by the use of stimulants, while he theatrically protested against capital punishment and left the scaffold until it was all over. He afterward delivered a funeral discourse, remarkable for anything rather than good taste, in the courthouse, this congregation objecting to the use of the church for that purpose, and finally, his usefulness as a pastor being at an end, severed pastoral relations at Herkimer.

[A long paragraph relating to the Druse family is omitted here.]

*Fulton County Tribune*, Johnstown NY, Thu. 4 Aug 1904