IN COLD BLOOD.

Robert J. Bennett Shot and Killed by Omer O. Gitchell.

THE STORY OF THE CRIME.

Evidence Before the Coroner's Jury—The Culmination of a Quarrel Between Union and Non-Union Barbers—No Apparent Provocation for Gitchell's Crime, as Bennett Was Unarmed.

Another of those cold blooded murders for which our city has gained an unenviable reputation during the past two months, occurred at about 8 o'clock yesterday morning on Union avenue, directly in front of the Fariss mineral well. The few pedestrians who were on the street at the time were compelled to see, without the power of interfering, so quickly was the work done—the shooting down in cold blood, without the slightest chance for resistance or defense, of Robert Bennett, the well known proprietor of the bath house barber shop. The murderer was O. O. Gitchell, one of the proprietors of the barber shop under the Turf saloon, that has become so noted, since being opened, by the fact that it was what is known as a non-union shop, with the proprietors of whom the Barbers' union and other labor organizations of the city have been at variance. The murder was the outcome of these troubles, but it is claimed, and is in accordance with the general character of Bennett, that he, instead of trying to create trouble, acted more in the guise of a mediator and tried to settle the difficulty by arbitration, and it is generally supposed by those who are well acquainted with the deceased that it was for this purpose that he was going across the street to speak to the two men when he met his death.

Bennett had just arrived at his shop, when he saw Gitchell and Rhodes coming down the opposite side of the street, and immediately started across as if to speak to them. When within about twenty feet of them Gitchell called to him to go back and let them alone, at the same time raising his gun and firing. Bennett realizing that he had been hard hit, turned and started to run back to the shop. When he had gone a few steps the blood commenced to run from his mouth, and he stumbled along until the sidewalk was reached when he fell and was unable to rise. Just before he reached the sidewalk Gitchell fired again but the ball missed its mark and lodged in the door of a blacksmith shop across on Grand avenue.

Bennett was taken into the shop immediately and Dr. Rice was summoned, and applied restoratives, but the man died in about fifteen minutes after the shooting.

After he fired the second shot Gitchell and Rhodes started to run down Richmond avenue but were quickly halted by Officers Williford and Day. When the officers called him to halt Gitchell threw his gun down on Williford, but seeing that they were officers, quickly threw up his hands, and was taken to the city jail and from thence to the county jail about an hour afterwards. Rhodes was also arrested soon after as an accessory and now occupies an adjoining cell in the county jail.

The body of Bennett was at once removed to the undertaking rooms of McMahon & Collier, and a jury was summoned and at 2 o'clock the coroner's inquest was begun.

Officer Williford was the first witness called. He testified: I was coming down Union avenue at about five minutes to eight this morning to report off and when near the northeast corner of the Fariss house my attention was attracted by a shot almost directly across the street. I looked up quickly and saw the deceased turn and start back towards his shop. After he had gone three or four steps he threw up a lot of blood. When he was near the side walk on the north side of the street, the man on the opposite side raised his gun and fired again. I then recognized the man as a barber by the name of Gitchell. There was another man with him but I did not know him and as I did not pay much attention to him could not describe him. After Gitchell fired the second shot the men both ran around the corner and down Richmond avenue. I started after them and when about half way to Main street I called for them to halt and Gitchell turned around and threw his gun down on me, but, seeing that I was an officer, he promptly threw up his hands, and I took possession of the gun, which was a Smith & Wesson. I think it was a 32-calibre. Gitchell then put his hand in his pocket and handed me out another gun which I think is a 38-calibre "bull dog." Gitchell said, "I want you two men as witnesses, for you saw him try to strike me." Bennett was about twenty feet away from Gitchell when the first shot was fired and I was about 110 feet away. Did not see the deceased make any threatening or menacing movements. Gitchell was not out of my sight from the time he fired the first shot until I arrested him.

Dr. C. O. Rice was the next witness called. He testified as follows: I am a practicing physician and surgeon in the city. I was called to the barber shop in the Fariss bath house this morning at about 8 o'clock to attend Robert Bennett, the deceased. I found him lying on his back in the rear of the shop, to all appearances dead. On examination I found that the heart was still beating and applied restoratives, but to no avail, and the man died in about five minutes. I immediately turned the body over to the coroner. In my opinion death was caused by internal hemorrhage, caused by a bullet wound in the right lung.

Officer Day was the next witness called and his testimony was almost identical with that of Officer Williford, with the exception that the guns were brought in to and both were proved to be 38-calibre, the one the killing was done with being a Smith & Wesson and the other a "bull dog."

Edgar D. Chandler testified: I am employed in the Farris bath house. Am acquainted with deceased, also know Gitchell by sight. Do not know the man who was with him. Saw both shots fired. The deceased was near the middle of the street when the first shot was fired, and near the sidewalk in front of his shop when the second shot was fired. Deceased carried a small walking stick. Saw no other weapons. Deceased was not making any threatening demonstrations. Did not hear him say anything to the men. I was standing in the door of the bath house when the first shot was fired and then stepped out on the sidewalk.

W. B. Slife was the next witness called: I am a barber. Am acquainted with deceased. Have been in partnership with him for about two years. I Know O. O. Gitchell, also know S. M. Rhodes. They are partners or connected in business in some way. Do not know the exact location of their shop. It is under the Turf Exchange. I came down to the shop at about o'clock this morning: I was talking for a couple of minutes to a man in the shop and during this time noticed my partner, the deceased, go out and close the door after him. Did not pay much attention to him until some cried "Look!" I jumped quickly to the window and saw deceased in the street and about twenty feet away standing on the opposite sidewalk Gitchell, with Rhodes standing close to him but a little further back. Gitchell had a gun in his right hand. He raised it, and, and resting it on his left arm, fired directly at the deceased. Bennett turned around and started back. I saw him throw up some blood and knew he had been hit and started to his assistance. When between the window and door I heard another shot. When I got outside Bennett had reached the sidewalk and was falling. I caught him by the hand and tried to assist him inside but he was too weak and had to be carried in. I did not see a weapon of any kind in his hand. Think he was in his shirt sleeves.

W. J. Switzer, a barber, who has been in the employ of the deceased testified to substantially the same facts as W. B. Slife.

The jury then adjourned until 7:30 o'clock last night. When they were called to order at that hour F. M Clark was the only witnes examined and he testified as follows: I am a painter, boarding at the Fariss House, am acquainted with deceased and have known O. O. Gitchell several times and have done work for him. Do not know Rhoads. Saw Gitchell this morning and another man that I had seen in the barber shop under the Turf was with him. Do not know the other man's name. I was near the middle of Union avenue, crossing over, when the shots were fired. As I was going up the street I saw the deceased crossing the street in his shirt sleeves, but paid no attention to him until the first shot was fired. He was then within 12 feet of where Gitchell stood. After the shot was fired the deceased turned to go back to his shop, and staggered showing that he had been hit. I was 50 or 75 feet from Bennett when the first shot was fired. He had no weapon in sight except a cane. Deceased was walking across the street at an ordinary gait and manner when I saw him and was not acting in a threatening manner. When Bennett was near the sidewalk, near the shop, Gitchell fired a second shot, which I think hit the deceased. Gitchell and Rhodes stood perfectly still until the second shot had been fired. I think Rhodes had his hands in his overcoat pockets. Deceased fell before he reached the door of his shop. I think a few words passed between Rhodes and Gitchell after the second shot. They then started on a run down Richmond avenue. I saw the officers arrest Gitchell.

As some of the witnesses were absent the jury adjourned till 9 o'clock to-day. An autopsy was held by Drs. Rice and Black, who make the following report:

The ball struck the fourth right rib, passing through, and taking a downward course to the left, passing through the apex of the right lung, through the large artery that supplies the heart and then through the large blood vessel that leads from the heart—the ball passing between the sixth and seventh ribs on the left side—taking a course to the right for three inches and lodging just under the skin on the left side. Only one shot struck him.

Gitchell Talks.

Gitchell was seen in his cell at the county jail last night by a CHIEFTAIN reporter, and when asked why he had killed Bennett replied: I was forced to do it. I recognized Bennett as the leader of the gang that attempted to hold up Mr. Rhodes and myself on the Fourth street bridge while we were on our way home a few nights ago, and Mr. Rhodes had sworn out warrants for the arrest of him and two or three others. Bennett came over to our shop yesterday afternoon and denied knowing anything at all about the matter, and said if I did not withdraw the complaint he would get me sure. He also told others that he would kill me. I was afraid of him and went armed. We had applied for police protection and there was to have been an officer detailed to accompany us to and from work and another to guard the shop. I was going down to-day to swear my life out against Bennett because I felt I was in danger. I do not blame Bennett so much because I think he was forced into it by circumstances the same as I was. When Mr. Rhodes and myself were going to work this morning and were just opposite Bennett's shop we saw him come out of the door, and then reach back in and get something. He then came on across the street and when he was about half way over he said: "Hold on, there, young fellow, I want you—I've got you now." I told him three or four times, to keep away from me but he paid no attention to what I said. I thought he was going to assault me as he had something in his hand, and as he had it a little behind him I thought it was a gun and raised mine and fired. The second shot was an accident, as in my excitement my finger got caught in the trigger and the gun went off. When I pulled my gun down on the policemen I was on my way to the city hall to give myself up and thought that some more of the barbers were after me.

Gitchell is a young man about 24 years of age; is of light complexion and has a rather pleasant expression. He and Rhodes recently came here from Denver where both have good reputations. Rhodes had a shop on Santa Fe avenue in that city and Gitchell worked for his brother who has a shop on the corner of Fifteenth and Lawrence streets. Both are members of the Denver Barbers' union in good standing, and claim that they paid their men union wages and considered that they had a perfect right to charge their customers what they pleased.

Bennett, the murdered man, is well known in this city and has never been known to have trouble with anybody. He is a native of Texas, his home being at Vernon, in that state, but has been in Colorado for four or five years, working in Denver and in this city. About two years and a half ago he started in business at his present location. He is about 38 years old and leaves a wife and three children.

The coroner's jury adjourned at 9 o'clock last night until 9 o'clock to-day, when a couple of witnesses will be examined for the purpose of establishing Rhodes' connection with the crime. Rhodes had a gun on his person when arrested by Undersheriff Herod, and it is believed by many that he was urging Gitchell on to the commision of the crime.

Action of the Union Barbers.

At a meeting of the Barbers' Union last night the following resolutions were passed:

WHEREAS, It has been our misfortune to have taken from our midst one of our beloved brethren, Robert J. Bennett, who was a good, noble and generous hearted man, therefore be it

Resolved, That we feel our loss very deeply, and hereby express our heartfelt sympathy for the bereaved family of our beloved brother.

Resolved, That these resolutions be spread upon the minutes of the union and a copy of the same be presented to the bereaved family.

J. H. PEABTREE,
F. G. BAUM,
ERNEST WALL,
Committee.

The union also prepared the following statement regarding the difficulty between it and the barber shop under the Turf:

As it has been falsely stated that the Barber's union has made threats and otherwise tried to injure the non-union men, who committed this foul murder by shooting down one of our brother barbers of Pueblo, we wish to make this statement, that the public may not be misled in the former statements: There was a committee of eight men, members of the Barber's union, appointed to visit this man Rhodes in a party, and in a gentlemanly manner to see if it was possible to induce him to join the union and come to the regular prices established by the union; and furthermore we offered to pay two months rent for him if he would do so. But he treated us very insultingly and said he would do nothing. We simply went away and left him. So far as the Barber's union being connected with any misdemeanor, we denounce it as a falsehood and nothing more. Signed by the committee.

J. L. SCOTT.
H. MITCHLER.
B. T. GRADY.
WM. J. GOWER.
MAX BUERGER.

Canon nut coal $3.75 per ton. W. R. Gregg, agent, telephone 176. tf

Merchants' lunch, hot roast beef, at the White Elephant, from 10 to 1 o'clock. tf

Freight transfer and coal. tf W. T. ALBERT, 201 Union ave.