

# DISAPPEARANCES.

## SOME STRANGE CASES WHICH HAVE BAFFLED THE DETECTIVES.

### A Mysterious Occurrence of Twenty-Five Years Ago—Margaret E. Sangster's Husband—Ralph Keeler's Sudden Departure—Young Women.

[New York World.]

The mysterious disappearance of Stillman S. Conant has naturally drawn attention to disappearances of that kind in this community. They have been so startlingly frequent here of late that numberless wives are nervous on the subject, fearing every morning when their husbands go away that they may not return. This refers, of course, to such women as are harmoniously married. One instance, if prominent and published, appears to produce others, and such an effect is explicable by cerebral laws. Mysterious disappearances have been a feature of the winter. It is extraordinary how many persons of position, character and influence disappear. Their disappearance creates a commotion at first; the newspapers are full of it for a day or two. Then some other, perhaps a greater sensation, arises and the disappearance slips out of the public mind.

Twenty-five years ago the husband of a lady, now widely known as an author and editor, went out to luncheon from his law office in lower Broadway, expecting to return in half an hour, and was never seen again alive. Not the least trace of him could be found, although the police and detectives labored for months on the case. The moment he reached the street he seemed to be swallowed up, as if the earth had opened and gulped him down. A good while after, his body was discovered in the bay; it would not have been recognized but for certain papers on his person. Whether he had committed suicide or fallen into the water and been drowned, or robbed and thrown into the river, nobody could tell. There were various theories on the subject, though none of them was satisfactory. We refrain from mentioning names. The bereaved lady is still a widow and still laments her loss.

The husband of another literary woman, Mrs. Margaret E. Sangster, disappeared from Brooklyn fifteen years ago, and the mystery has never been dispelled. He had been suffering from a headache—it was the evening of July 4—and the noise of fire-crackers, pistols, and small arms disturbed him sorely. He said, the weather being hot, that he would go out on the stoop for a breath of fresh air. The hour was 9, and he had on a dressing-gown, which was enough, one might think, to distinguish him anywhere. He did not expect to leave the stoop. But where he went, or what became of him, continues to be a dead secret. Inquiry, search, rigorous investigation were fruitless. Not the slightest intimation of his fate has ever been received. He, too, was a lawyer, a man of contented disposition, the soundest sense, vigorous health and perfect balance. He was devoted to his wife and had every reason to enjoy and preserve his life. It is hardly possible to construct a theory that will explain this case, which is one of the strangest on record. To disappear eternally and untraceably from door-steps in a crowded street early in the evening, within the shadow of one's own home, and in such garb as anybody must notice, defies all probability. Such an incident put into a work of fiction would be pronounced absurd.

O'Neill, a very well known boot and shoe dealer in Sixth avenue, middle-aged, a man of family, sober, intelligent, industrious, of excellent habits, prosperous, disappeared twelve or fourteen years ago and left no more vestige than if he had leaped into a blazing lime-kiln. He jumped on a passing horse-car to go down-town on business, and that was the last seen of him by his friends. Liberal rewards were offered for any intelligence of him, but none was obtained. He was engulfed in impenetrable mystery.

Seven or eight years ago a well-to-do grocer in Third avenue named Digman, if we remember, started in the evening to visit the house of a friend a few blocks away, intending to be absent but half an hour. He had an appointment with another friend at his own home the same evening, and he was one of the most punctual of men. Neither friend ever saw him. After parting with his wife, to whom he had been married less than six months, he became invisible, so far as known, to mortal eyes. He was a man of high animal spirits, regular habits, warm affections and of a thoroughly practical turn. No clue was got to his disappearance, and its obscurity has deepened with the passage of time.

Ralph Keeler, a young man who had lived in California and had come east to earn his bread by his pen, after many adventures and varied experiences in different parts of the country, disappeared some twelve years ago in the most enigmatic manner. He was at one time an assistant of William D. Howells on *The Atlantic* and had decided talent for description. But he was so much of a rover that he could not be content to stay in any one place. He contributed to the newspapers here and published various articles in the magazines. He finally decided to make a trip to Cuba, and he was traced, it was thought to the Havana steamer, but after that he could be traced no further, even inferentially. Many persons doubted that he ever went aboard the vessel or quitted New York. Divers opinions were formed about his disappearance—some asserted that he had destroyed himself; others that he had been murdered—but not one of them rested on a reasonable basis. He was very amiable and agreeable, bubbling over with sanguineness, and had, like most of his tribe, too little money to excite the cupidity of rascals. There has never been any solution to his mystery.

George A. Laxer's disappearance is too recent to require particularization. Nothing could be more mysterious or impenetrable. A girl named Lina Grietman, daughter of a German cigar-maker, disappeared from Avenue C some years ago and was never afterwards heard of or from. She was nearly 23, quite plain and not very intelligent. Nothing about her made it probable that she could have been abducted. She was employed in a shop in Eighth avenue, and set out to go there in the morning. She never reached there, and was not seen by any one acquainted with her after leaving her father's house. We might name any number of cases if we had space.

Young women frequently disappear here, and if they belong to the poorer classes not much effort is made, from lack of means, to discover their fate. When young women occupy any social rank their disappearance is kept as secret as possible for reasons needless to name. The fear is that they are not dead; many parents would be comforted by such assurance. This shows the peculiar, the wretched, relation of the other sex to conventional society. When they are missed their parents and their dearest friends are afraid to breathe the fact, which is denied to the last moment, even after denial has become useless.