

# MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

OF

CHARLIE CHRISTIE FROM THE INN OF CHARLESTON.

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“ And long since then of bloody men  
Whose deeds tradition saves ;  
Of lonely folk cut off unseen,  
And hid in sudden graves ;  
Of horrid stabs in groves forlorn,  
And murders done in caves.”

—Hood's "*Eugene Aram*."

THE small village of Charleston is little more than half-a-mile to the South-west of Glamis. It is situated in a hollow, and consists of some dozen or so of houses, mostly of one storey high. The longest row of the houses runs along the West side of the road leading between Glamis and Charleston, and at the South end of the row of houses stood a public-house. On the sign above the door of the public-house could be seen the name of the keeper, Margaret Davidson, painted in large letters. And a sheaf of wheat was painted above the name; this was doubtless intended to indicate that Margaret was a baker and a brewer as well as a public-house keeper.

The bake- and the brew-house stood near beside the public-house, at the time of which we write. Margaret was a managing and a prosperous woman.

The public-house was necessarily upon the public road, and she conducted a very respectable business. She sent a van round the country side with her bread and ale, and altogether she was a benefit to the district in which she lived. The country carts stopped at her door to allow the ploughmen to get refreshments, and the tired horse often got their corn there and a welcome rest. Margaret was a jolly, good kind-hearted woman, with a kind face and a welcome smile to all who came near her—kind to all in her employment, as well as to the beggar seeking alms at her door, and on good terms with all her neighbours,—just such a woman as a wise man would wish to live and die with.

Her house was well attended by the country people, and on Saturday nights it was often full, and one passing at that time

could hear the sounds of music and laughter, showing that there were merry hearts within. But the sad case of Charles Christie altered all this, although the owner of the house was perfectly innocent of the crime—if crime there was.

Before going to work with Andrew Rodger, shoemaker at Charleston, Charles Christie wrought long with a man named Alexander Findlay, a shoemaker in Kirriemuir. Charlie was a man rather short in stature, full and blythe-faced; his hair was dark, thick, and dry-looking; merry and kindly in his disposition, he gave offence to none if he could help it. He liked mirthful company, took a dram often, and enjoyed a song and a joke while he sat in the public-house; but he was trustworthy and perfectly honest, and had the good opinion of all.

He wrought, boarded and lodged with Alexander Findlay in Kirriemuir, until Findlay's trade declined so far that he could not keep a man. He then went to Charleston to work for Andrew Rodger. Andrew had a large trade for a place like Charleston, and Christie boarded and lodged with him. Rodger's trade chiefly came from the country, and when the country people came to him for shoes they often took him away to Margaret Davidson's, and Christie was often invited to go with them, which invitation he always gladly accepted.

Margaret Davidson had a baker with her at this time, named John Campbell. He was a powerful-looking man, though a little shaken with age and drink. He often sat and drank with Christie and the rest. There was also another man, named James Clarke, a native of Glamis—almost a Hercules, and of great courage; he was also a shoemaker, and often kept company with the others. These men often took a dram together, but, as far as could be seen, there was no sign of disagreement among them. They always seemed to meet and to part good company. The Writer of this Sketch knew all these men personally, and could say nothing against any of them. After Christie had worked at Charleston a long time, Rodger's trade began to decline, and he fell into difficulties. It was said that his temper became sour under his trials in life, and he seemed to drink more as he sank in the world.

On a Yule morning many years ago, Rodger, Christie, Campbell and Clarke went into Margaret Davidson's public-house together, and at that sitting they remained about an hour together and then went home. After Christie had taken his breakfast he called upon

some of his neighbours, and got some drink in their houses, as they were holding Yule. The day was cold and frosty, and much snow lay on the ground, and Christie was seen to wade through the snow to Andrew Rodger's house. He remained there until after dinner time. After they got dinner he and Rodgers went to Margaret Davidson's together, where they were shortly after joined by Campbell and Clarke.

The public-house at this time was full of country people, and some of them sat in the same room with Rodger's company until it was night. The night, like the day, was bitter cold and hard, and the people who were in the public-house were loth to leave its cosy warm fire and go out to face the cold snell blast, but Christie went out alone, without his coat and hat, and was *never seen again*.

As he did not come back to the public-house, neither it was found did he go home to his master's house; it was thought and said next day that perhaps he might have gone north to Kirriemuir, where he was well known and well liked, to hold his Yule among his old friends. When he did not turn up on the day following he was sought for in Kirriemuir, but no one had seen him there. All the woods around Glanis were searched, the big mill-dam below the village and several other places dragged, but all in vain.

Word was also sent to Dundee and all the other towns in the county, but no information about him was forthcoming. People now began to draw conclusions on the subject without facts to guide them, and Andrew Rodger, and those who were with him, were blamed for his death, and it was freely stated that they had murdered him and buried him beneath the pavement of the bakehouse.

Word was sent to the authorities at Forfar about the mysterious disappearance of poor Charlie Christie from the Inn of Charleston. The Fiscal came to Charleston and examined Roger, Campbell, and Clarke, but found no case against them. He also caused the pavement of the bakehouse to be lifted, but no dead body was found there. Baffled in their search, the authorities went back to Forfar, and the matter was allowed to rest for a time; but the people again grew clamorous, and once more the Fiscal with his men came from Forfar to see if any information could be elicited. The same men were again examined, with the same result. Many of the people of the village were likewise examined, but still no evidence was got that would justify them in arresting any one.

When the spring came and the snow melted on the hills, the

body of a poor miserable wretch was found who had perished there among the snow. The body was brought to the Parish Church at Kirriemuir, and laid out, and some said and thought that it would be the body of Charlie Christie ; but this body was identified as that of a pedler who travelled amongst the glens selling tape, thimbles, needles, and pins, and such like. Some time after this, a dead body of a man was found lying upon a desolate moor in Aberdeenshire, and again this was thought to be Charlie Christie, but the body was also identified and claimed by the dead man's friends.

All chance of finding out what had become of poor Charlie Christie was now given up as hopeless, and the people said it was strange and altogether unaccountable how no one had seen him leaving the public-house on that cold Yule night, and stranger still that he had never been seen going to any place at all, and how marvellous it all was, how could he have left the earth without being seen by some one ?

Here was a case of a man going amissing, equal in mystery to any case on record, and it was little wonder that the people asked each other if the veil would ever be lifted, and what was as yet dark brought to light. The agitation in the public mind gradually subsided, and the mystery was nearly forgotten, when one day a rat was seen coming from a hole in the floor of the stable attached to the public-house, and the report of this again set the public mind in a ferment. The floor of the stable was taken up, and some bones were found there. The bones were not so well examined as they should have been, and it would be unwise to maintain that they were human bones ; but notwithstanding this, the people came to the conclusion at once that they were the bones of the missing Charlie Christie.

Margaret Davidson had left the public-house by this time, and Rodger, Campbell, and Clarke were all three dead. There were some who said that it was a pity that they did not live to fall into the clutches of the law, as after the discovery of the bones in the stable the murder might have been brought home to them. If these men knew anything about the murder—if murder there was—they took the secret to their graves, and the mysterious disappearance of Charlie Christie is now likely to remain a mystery to the end of time.