

THE MOST FOUL AND UNPARALLELED MURDER
IN THE ANNALS OF CRIME.

LIFE AND CONFESSION
OF
REUBEN A. DUNBAR,
CONVICTED AND EXECUTED

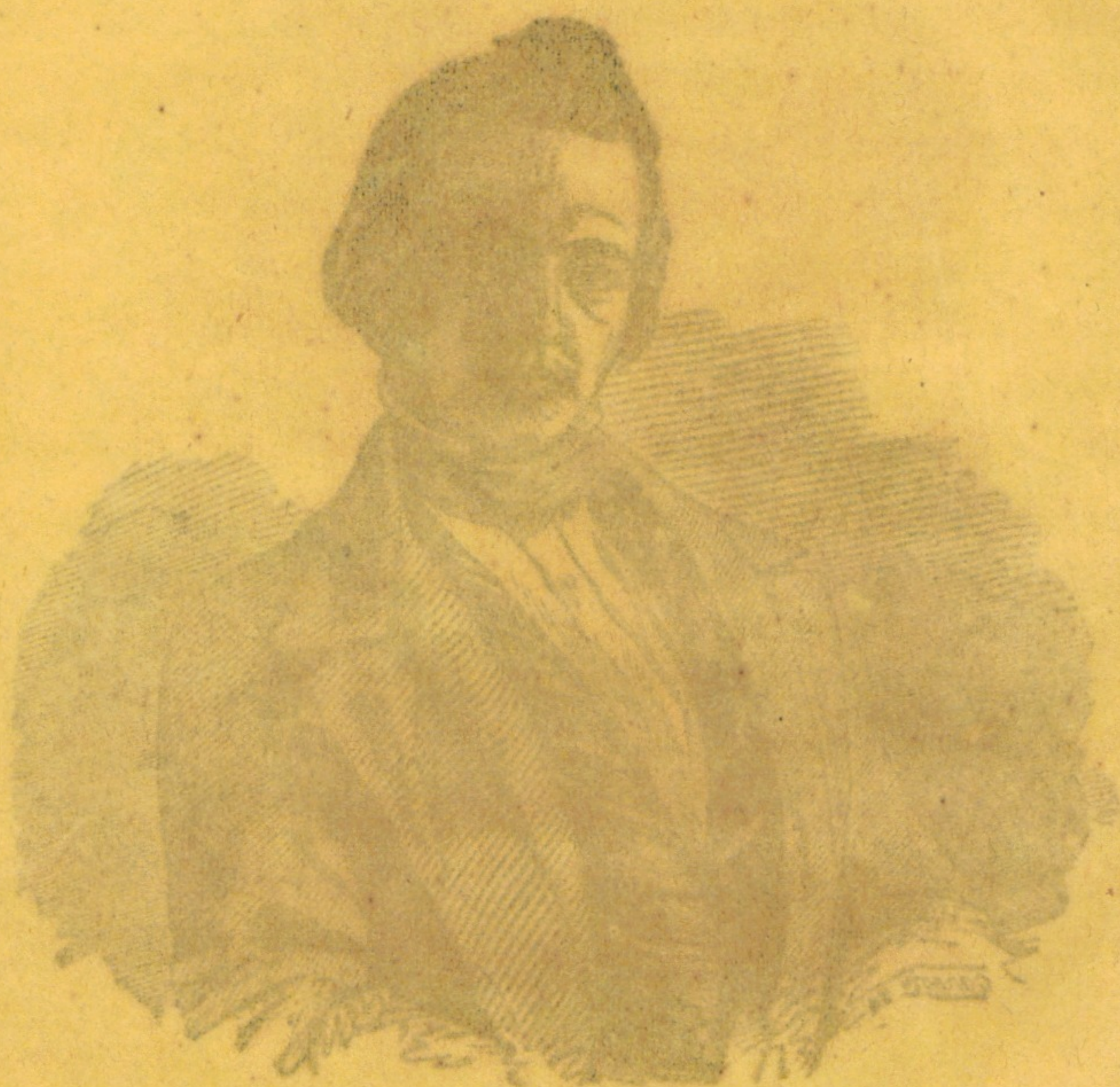


FOR THE
MURDER
OF
STEPHEN V. AND DAVID L. LESTER,
(Aged 8 and 10 Years,)
IN WESTERLO, ALBANY COUNTY,
September 20, 1850.

PUBLISHED BY JOHN D. PARSONS:
WEED, PARSONS & CO., PRINTERS.
1851.

THE MOST FOUL AND UNPARALLELED MURDER
IN THE ANNALS OF CRIME.

REUBEN A. DUNBAR,
OF
LIFE AND CONFESSION
CONVICTED AND EXECUTED



FOR THE
MURDER

OF
STEPHEN V. AND DAVID J. LESTER,

(Aged 8 and 10 Years.)

IN WESTERLO, ALBANY COUNTY,

September 20, 1850.

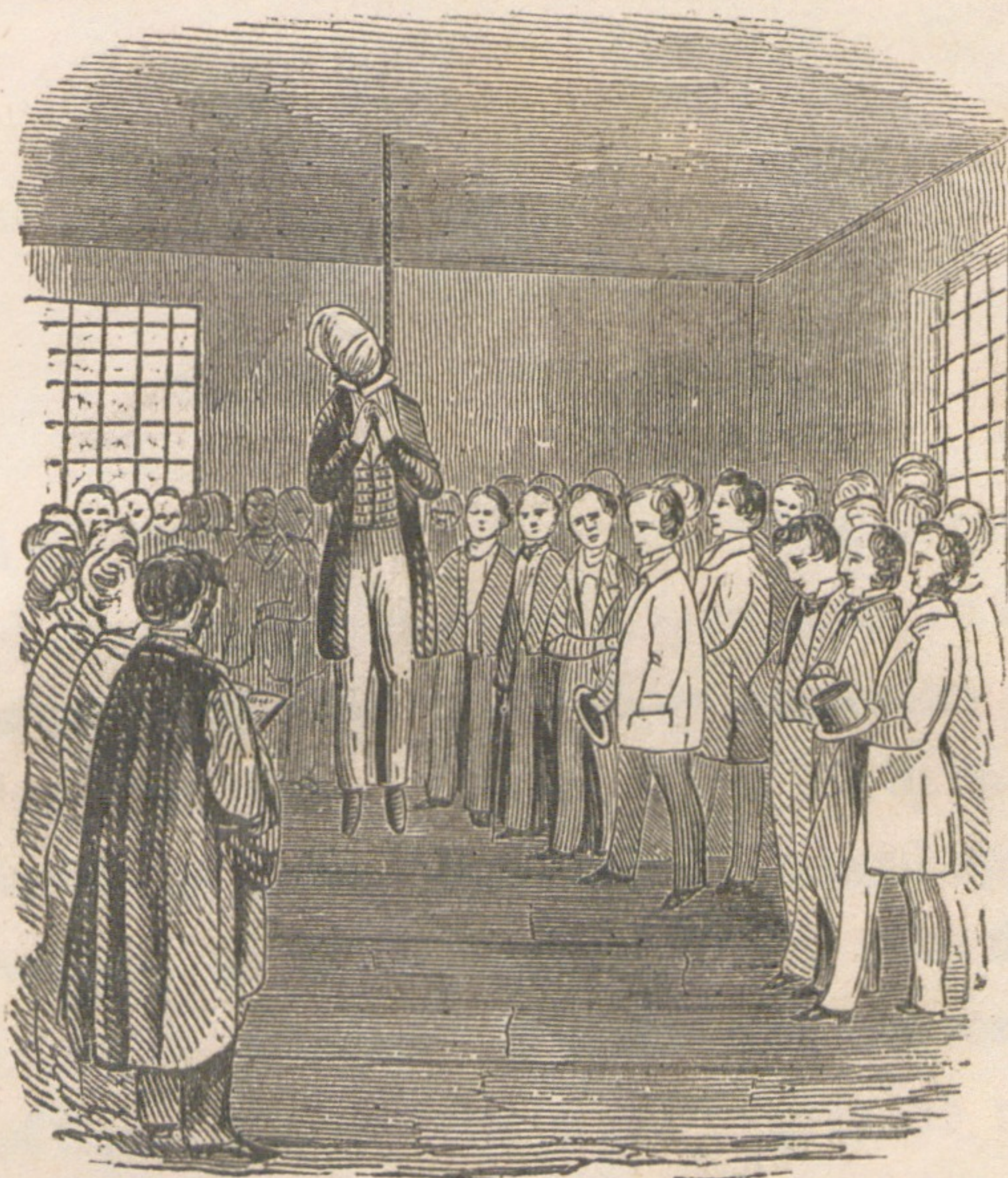
PUBLISHED BY JOHN D. PARSONS.

West. Parsons & Co. Printers.

1851.

THE MOST FOUL AND UNPARALLELED MURDER
IN THE ANNALS OF CRIME.

LIFE AND CONFESSION
OF
REUBEN A. DUNBAR,
CONVICTED AND EXECUTED



FOR THE
MURDER
OF
STEPHEN V. AND DAVID L. LESTER,
(Aged 8 and 10 Years,)
IN WESTERLO, ALBANY COUNTY,
September 28, 1850.

Second Edition.

PUBLISHED BY JOHN D. PARSONS.
WEED, PARSONS & Co., PRINTERS.
1851.

THE MOST NOTED AND DISSENTING
IN THE ANNALS OF CRIME.

LIFE AND CONFESSION

STEPHEN A. DUNBAR

COLLECTED AND EXECUTED

Entered according to act of Congress, in the Clerk's Office of the Northern
District of the State of New-York, January 25, 1851,
BY JOHN D. PARSONS,

STEPHEN A. AND DAVID L. LESTER

(LARGE E AND 10 YEARS)

IN WESTERN ALBANY COUNTY

February 28, 1850.

Second Edition.

PRINTED BY JOHN D. PARSONS

NEW-YORK: 1851.

1851

INTRODUCTION.

PREFACE.

From the moment when it was announced that two inoffensive children had been cruelly murdered in open day, in a quiet country town, in the county of Albany, the whole community were anxious to know, if possible, the real motives, which led to the commission of such a barbarous crime. Having had unusual opportunities to learn, as the Spiritual Adviser of the prisoner, from the day of his sentence to the day of his execution, his real motives and prevailing states of mind, I have been urged to give the results of my observations, together with the facts which have been revealed by the prisoner, to the public. The object of this pamphlet is to comply with that request.

L. F. B.

ALBANY, FEBRUARY 1, 1851.

INTRODUCTION.

A great crime has been committed. The quiet of the community has been broken, by the announcement that two inoffensive children, without money to tempt the avarice, and of too tender an age to excite the anger, of any, have been cruelly murdered, "slain in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks," in a neighboring town, and there left, without a trace by which to discover the doer of the deed. The tidings spread like a flame, and the whole surrounding population swarm to the spot, to aid in hunting out the infamous offender; while each mother presses her infant charge more closely to her breast, as though some unseen hand was lurking in the misty air, ready to snatch it in a moment away.

So entirely has the murderer concealed all traces of himself, that almost every man becomes an object of suspicion to every other man, till at length one in the company of searchers begins to show signs of guilt. At first, he tries to fly, under some pretence, from the scene of the murder; then he is languid and heartless in the search; then, he turns the attention of others in directions where *he* knew it would be in vain to look; and at length, as the pressure of outward circumstances accumulates, begins to invent such new circumstances as will be calculated to turn suspicion from himself. The burthen of guilt is upon his heart, and he cannot keep the outer man from making the revelation. The brooks, as they run joyously along, seem to his bewildered eyes, to bear bloody drops upon their rippling waves, and the solemn stars look down with knowing eyes upon him, "while the green forest leaves, fluttering their fresh lips together, murmur it to each other and to the wandering breezes." No longer able to suppress

the fires of remorse which are kindling in his heart, the secret is out, and the law is laid upon him in his arrest.

And now comes the double wonder that one so young, so guiltless of former crime, should find himself surrounded with such a network of circumstances, showing conclusively his guilt, and the still greater wonder that the ripened fruits of a long life of crime, should be found clustering upon so young a bough. But the case was a clear one, and after due process of primary examination, the suspected person was taken to the county prison, and there left, to await the usually slow, but in his case most rapid forms of the law. The murder was committed on Saturday, September 28th; the prisoner was arrested on the Wednesday following; he was placed on trial November 26th; received his sentence on Wednesday, December 11th; and the final sentence of the law was executed on Friday, January 31. Quick work of ruin!

When first placed upon his trial, mingled feelings of pity and indignation seemed to pervade the community; but as the trial progressed, and the strong circumstances against the prisoner, one by one, were brought out, a universal feeling of *indignation at the offence* seemed to possess all minds. The court-room was crowded to its utmost capacity; the interest in the community at large visibly increased from day to day; and when the trial resulted in conviction, and the sentence of the law doomed the prisoner to an ignominious death, all minds seemed to acquiesce in the result. The law was vindicated, and the community saved for a season, at least, from the danger of great crimes. Before proceeding further, it may not be amiss to go back and give a brief sketch of the life of one who has occupied, for a few brief months, so large a portion of the public attention; trace if possible, the motives for the deed, and the causes which led to it; and the manner in which the feeling was nurtured, which finally led to the commission of the dreadful crime.

That the reader may be satisfied that the following sketch is substantially correct, it is proper here to state that it has been carefully read by the prisoner himself, and to several members of the family, in substance, and pronounced by them correct in its facts. It has been the more carefully stated, since Rumor, with its thousand tongues, has sent abroad even on the wings of the public press, various statements, both of the life and crimes of the prisoner, which are altogether without foundation.

REUBEN A. DUNBAR, the subject of this brief sketch, was the son of Alexander Dunbar, and Hannah Lanphar. They were married at Westerlo, in the county of Albany, in the year 1816. Miss Lanphar, at the time of her marriage, being only sixteen years of age. As the result of this marriage, were born to these parents seven children, five sons and two daughters, of whom Reuben, the murderer of the Lester Boys, was the youngest.

Reuben was born in Westerlo, September 1st, 1830. When a little less than three years of age he had the misfortune to lose his father, who died in Westerlo, in July, 1833. At the time of the death of Mr. Dunbar, Mrs. Dunbar was left, at the age of little more than 30 years, with a young family, mostly boys, and with a farm of 180 acres, to her exclusive management. She employed Mr. David Lester, then a young man about 23 years of age, to gather in the crops, and work the farm for her; which arrangement continued only till December of the same year, when he assumed the management of the farm and the guardianship of the children, by marrying Mrs. Dunbar. Mr. Lester had no property of his own when he came on to the farm, but by various means, of which it is not the object of this sketch to speak more fully, he has come into entire possession of the whole farm, valued by many at \$6,000. Reuben, being the youngest, has always had his home on the farm, except in the instances hereafter to be narrated. The occurrences which seem to have been longest remembered by him, and which seem to have impressed themselves most deeply upon his early recollections, are the marriage of his mother to Mr. Lester, and his coming to take the charge of the farm and the household; an era, indeed, in almost any family.

From about that time, a series of steps—not always in accordance with the feelings of the older children—were entered upon for consolidating the different interests in the farm, in the hands of Mr. Lester; with what success, has been stated above. Reuben, naturally grasping in his disposition, has long felt that justice had not been done to the other children, and has recently meditated a trial by a suit at law, for the recovery back of the farm to those whom he believed were the rightful owners. Here then, far back in the earliest period of his life, we find the germs of those ill feelings, which, at the age of twenty, have borne such dreadful fruit.

The summer after the death of his father, Reuben began to attend school, and among his earliest and most agreeable recollec-

tions, were those days of innocence, in which Miss Myers, now Mrs. Samuel Baker, first directed his feet into the paths of knowledge. Had he followed her counsels, the annals of the age would not have been blackened with the records of this most unnatural crime, and this most painful sketch of youthful depravity and crime had never been written. While he remained at home, from the time he was five, till the time he was seventeen years of age, he was permitted to attend school or work on the farm, much as he pleased; so that, with a mind naturally good, he grew up, without that thorough mental and moral discipline, which a regular attendance on our public schools is calculated to give. He manifested no unusual signs of youthful depravity during this period; never evincing any delight in acts of cruelty, nor showing any *very unusual* manifestations of temper; though he has been regarded as quick tempered, and was easily roused to resent what was not in accordance with his wishes at the time. It is very evident, however, both from the appearance of the prisoner himself, and from his own statements, that his moral and religious education had been almost entirely overlooked or neglected in early life. He had no one to develop those germs of good qualities, which are found in every mind; and the extent to which he was neglected may be judged of by a single fact, viz: *he never attended a Sunday school a day in his life.* The strong passions of his uncultivated nature were left to grow unchecked, and like autumnal fruits forced to maturity in June, he has fallen; fearfully and fatally fallen, while yet the freshness of his days was upon him, and the ripened fruits of evil stand in close proximity to the tender blossom of his early years.

At the age of seventeen, and for a year afterwards, he might have been seen, day after day, passing with his team from Clarksville to Albany, in the employ of Matthew Flansburg, in whose service he was ever regarded as trusty and faithful. After employing himself thus for about one year, he went to Esperance, and commenced the study of medicine with his brother, Dr. Jared Dunbar; and although very poorly qualified on account of his previous neglect of books to begin professional study, he manifested unusual diligence, and made fair progress in his medical reading. This is stated on the authority of those qualified to judge in a matter of this kind.

In December, 1849, he left Esperance, having been with his

brother one year, to place himself under the instruction of Dr. Wickes, of Rensselaerville, where he remained till March of the following year, when he left, with the view of attending medical lectures at Castleton, Vermont. Nothing occurred during his residence at either of these places to excite unusual suspicions in regard to his character. Some, with whom he associated, regarded him as a sincere Christian ; others, and persons of *unusual penetration*, had strong suspicions even then that he was the subject of self-deception ; and that his character had much more of the *show* than of the *substance* of goodness. A lady, remarkable for her good judgment, said to her husband, that Dunbar was either a *very good man, or a great hypocrite ; she could not tell which*. This occurred long before he fell under suspicion of crime.

He was remarkable for his forwardness in attempting to speak in the little meetings of his neighborhood ; not with the design of manifesting emotions which he did not feel, but as he afterwards confessed, prompted by a feeling of vanity, because others were disposed to flatter him with the thought that he had unusual gifts, or were disposed to award to him unusual goodness. It cannot be denied, that much injury is done by older persons, thus stimulating the vanity of mere boys, putting them forward to be teachers to older and wiser men ; and that many a fair character has thus been greatly injured or irretrievably ruined.

After leaving the office of Dr. Wickes, he returned to Westerloo. Fearing that his health was not equal to a course of medicinal study, and doubtless influenced in some measure by the attachment already formed, in the same neighborhood, he gave up his plan of going to Castleton, and engaged to work for Robert Dunbar, he having taken Mr. Lester's farm to work on shares. Lester not being satisfied with Robert Dunbar's management of the farm, persuaded Reuben to take it off Dunbar's hands, which he did ; and from that time till the time of his arrest, he managed the farm for himself.

It seems, according to his statements made at different times, subsequently to his confession, that the difficulties which resulted in the murder of the children, commenced at this time. When Dunbar was solicited to take the farm on shares, he objected, on the ground that he had no one to do the in-door-work of the farm, and that he was unable to hire any one to do it, and, as his mother was not in good health, he did not wish her to be com-

pelled to do it. The arrangement was finally consummated by Mr. Lester's consenting to hire a woman to do all that Mrs. Lester was unable to do. The summer advanced, and no such person was provided.

Late in the month of August, Dunbar was married to Miss Betsey Ann Cole, daughter of J. G. Cole, of Westerlo, a girl of most delicate health, with a frail and feeble constitution, who had never been accustomed to the severer duties of farm housewifery—but a most estimable christian, over whose unsullied reputation the breath of suspicion had never cast a shadow or a stain.

After her marriage to Dunbar, she came to reside on the farm; and it was expected by Lester, that she would come in and take her share of the heavy in-door work of the family. As was natural under the circumstance, she desired frequently to visit her parents, who resided but a few miles distant, which was made a subject of remark by Lester, and which of course irritated the mind of Dunbar.

Both of these things, and several others of a kindred nature, had been causes of irritation to the prisoner's mind, and he had felt chafed and restive under them; and while he was planning to gain some relief from pressures, in his judgment already too heavy, the younger boy was brought home just one week before the murder, to add one to the expense, and considerably to the labor and care of the already over-burthened household. It was under such circumstances as these that the thought suggested itself of gaining relief for those with whom he sympathized, by putting these children out of the way, and doubtless added largely to the motive named in the confession, as the exciting cause of the murder.

When closely questioned in relation to the motives which led to the deed, and the peculiar means employed, he has uniformly stated that the act was not premeditated, or at least, that it had never been planned till the morning of the murder. That the thing was never *thought of* till the return of the younger boy; and that he had a strong disposition to mention his feelings to his wife or his mother, but never did so. He has often regretted that he did not mention the subject to them, for had he done so he was certain that they would have prevented him from the commission of the crime. He often stated that he had no hard feeling towards the boys; but, on the contrary, loved the older boy sincerely; had

often played with him, and chose the way in which he was killed in preference to any other, because he thought he would die the easiest in that manner. That any or all of these things form any apology for the crime, is not pretended even by himself; and are given merely to assist others in forming a true opinion as to the evil influences under which he acted when he committed the crime.

After the boys were missed on the 28th day of September, his conduct seemed to undergo a change. The deep sense of guilt which was burning in his heart, was sufficient to unman even a stouter heart than his; and, although making no *intentional* effort to mislead the people, still his actions were all unnatural, and suspicion fastened upon him almost from the beginning of the search. The overwhelming consciousness of guilt was upon him, and he was not full master of his actions. Nature, overburthened, was speaking through an hundred avenues to an hundred watchful eyes. Almost immediately after the youngest boy was found, he was arrested and charged with the murder, and the same week was brought to the county prison in Albany, which he never left till he was carried to his long home. During his confinement, previous to his trial, he was visited by but few, and to them he made most solemn protestations of his innocence; and was most seriously offended with the very excellent City Missionary, because he took leave to doubt his assertion, and talk with him plainly in reference to his true position. During the trial, he kept up unusual good spirits, under the strong hope, and the assurance of his counsel, that he would not be convicted; and when the jury returned with their verdict, he was fully persuaded in his own mind, that they had not agreed, or that they had acquitted him. But, when that terrible word fell from the lips of the foreman, GUILTY, it crushed his hopes, as in a moment, and he spent the night which succeeded, in a state of mind far different from that which he had anticipated. The next morning, he prepared himself, as well as he was able, to hear his sentence. But the circumstances of his condition were too much even for him, and he was melted into tears. He was taken back to his room in the prison—which was a large and well lighted room, 18 by 20 feet—and chained to a large ring bolt in the center of the room, and then left to his own most painful reflections. The person who afterwards acted as his spiritual adviser, visited him, by previous appointment, early in the afternoon, and found him crushed and bro-

ken in spirit. He expressed surprise at the result of his trial, wept most freely at the mention of the name of his wife, and seemed anxious to see his counsel, to learn from them if nothing more could be interposed to save him from a felon's death. He was visited by his counsel on the day following, and told that nothing more could be done for him.

The next day, and for several days, his spirits seemed to rally, and he seemed to think of little else than to devise some way by which he could escape the sentence of the law. He talked much of a petition to the Governor; but when told, as he valued his life, and his soul, not to let that petition contain one word which was not strictly true, he seemed to lose hope from that source, and began to plan ways for effecting his escape. It was about this time that he broke the shackle by which he was confined, by putting the iron poker, which was carelessly left within his reach, through one of the links of his chain, and twisting off the end which confined him to the floor. He procured two common knives at this time, through the aid of one of the other prisoners, with the hope that they might aid him in effecting his escape. But these rude instruments were quite unequal to his wishes; and it is believed no other person ever attempted to assist him in escaping from confinement.

It was about this time that he seriously meditated an attempt on his own life, and more than once put his handkerchief around his neck, and getting upon a chair, put it over a large spike which he found driven into the wall of his cell, but his courage failed him and he did not carry his designs into execution. From this till the time of his execution, he was not left alone, especially at night, and was most closely watched by his keepers. Finding all his attempts baffled, he settled down into a more quiet state of mind, and began to give his attention to better things. He had not as yet given up all hope that the Governor would interpose to save him, and was very cautious not to say anything which would look like an admission of his guilt. He made many inquiries as to the time and manner in which "Webster's" confession was made; seemed very certain that the Governor would commute his punishment to imprisonment for life; but as uniformly declared that he did not wish any change in his sentence, unless he could have a full and free pardon. On Friday, December 20, he was visited by the clergyman whom he had chosen to be with him, and the entire afternoon was spent with him.

Then, for the first time, did he seem to be in a state of mind in which it was deemed feasible to approach him on the subject of a full confession of his crime. The scriptures were read and explained to him; the portions particularly, which speak of the necessity of confession, in order to pardon. The chapter in "Abbott's corner stone," entitled "pardon," was read to him, and the case there referred to, contrasted with his own. At the close of a long interview, after asking many questions, he at length signified his readiness to make a full confession of his crime, and requested that writing materials might be brought that evening for the purpose. At a little after six o'clock the same evening, the heavy doors closed with no very pleasant sound, between the glad world without and the two sole occupants of that murderer's cell. The interview will never be forgotten for the solemnity with which it was begun, and the tragic revelation with which it ended. The deepest sorrow seemed to pervade the heart of the prisoner, while the *importance of the most perfect truthfulness* on his part, was set before him; and while most earnest prayer was offered that he might so confess and forsake, and abhor his sin in his heart, that he might be forgiven. The only place in which writing materials could be laid, was the seat of a common prison chair; the room lighted dimly by a single prison candle; the hard oak floor the most convenient seat. Under such circumstances was written out, and afterwards copied and signed, the following most extraordinary

CONFESSION.*

The narration occupied several hours, and it was near ten o'clock before it was completed. He was greatly moved, even to long weeping, while narrating the parts which referred to the outcries made by the oldest boy, and whenever reference was made to his wife. The next day the confession was carried to him, and read over slowly, with his eye resting on the page as it was read; so that he could *see* every word to which he was about to subscribe; and when asked to consider well whether that was both a *true* and *full* confession of all he knew in reference to the crime, he declared that it was, and signed his name to it.

He then kneeled down, and with many tears, asked God to ac-

* NOTE.—It was found impossible to put the confession in at this point, and it has been placed at the end of the book.

cept of that *full and free confession*, as his first outward indication of sorrow and penitence for his enormous sin. All the circumstances connected with the making of the confession, the manner of making it, its general and yet not minute agreement with the facts, as proved on the trial, were calculated to give to the person who received it, great confidence in its truth; and, on examination of the minutes kept of each interview, the opinion is there expressed, *that it is as true a confession as was ever written*.

He was closely questioned then, and at numerous other times afterwards, to declare if any other person had any knowledge of the murder, previous to the finding of the youngest boy, and his reply has been *uniformly the same*: "*No living being knew any thing about it but myself*." A report gained circulation about this time that the wife of the prisoner was very dangerously ill, her sickness originating in her severe troubles. The fear that it would be more than she could bear, induced him to place a strict injunction on the publication of the confession till after his death. This injunction—which he was very loth to withdraw—placed the person in whose keeping the confession was deposited, in a position of great delicacy before the public; and, should any feel inclined to censure him, let them remember the extreme delicacy of the position which a person thus situated occupies, and that the page which he is now reading owes most of its interest, and still more, of the confidence with which it may be received as a statement of facts, to the fidelity with which that pledge was kept till it was subsequently withdrawn. For several days after his confession his mind seemed to be in a measure relieved of its burthen. He conversed cheerfully about his approaching end, and made many inquiries as to the manner in which *his* execution would take place; requested that a neighboring minister would preach a funeral sermon for him, and sent him the text for the occasion. He was told at that time, "O, Reuben, Reuben! these things, which relate to this world, *are* little things; but O, the FUTURE, the FUTURE! that is the great thing, and you must not let any thing interpose, to prevent you from making suitable preparation for it"

On Friday, December 27th, his wife visited him for the first time.

His room was cleaned up, and furnished with chairs, by the courtesy of the officers having him in custody; his shackle was removed, and he had dressed himself to receive her, in the same manner in which she had been accustomed to see him.

She stood at the foot of the great staircase, trembling and weeping, while the turnkey was opening the doors ; and, when all things were made ready for her reception, she seemed almost unwilling to enter a place so unlike all to which she had been previously accustomed. Their meeting was truly affecting. Her head dropped upon his shoulder, and her tears and her sobs did not cease during the entire interview of nearly two hours. They were left as nearly alone as circumstances would permit, and their conversation was not heard by any one but themselves. He seemed moved at times, even to weeping, but, for the most part, bore himself with great calmness, till they came to separate. Not being certain that their parting was not final, they seemed unable to tear themselves asunder, and returned to give the parting salutation many times.

It proved, however, not to have been the final parting. On Thursday, January 9th, she came again, attended by her father and mother, and the mother of the prisoner himself. After a few words from each of the others, he was left with his wife alone. She pressed him with great earnestness to declare, whether he had or had not killed the children ? With very great reluctance, he told her, that he *was guilty* of their death.

O what a secret, that to breathe into that ear, which had known only the gentlest whisperings of affection. She wept aloud, and told him she must now give him up, seeming to feel that he had been the cause of their present, and perhaps final separation. The iron had gone down deep into her soul, and henceforth she is to go forth *alone*, with the pure bloom upon her cheek sullied with the serpents breath, and the trail of the serpent over all her fair prospects. It may not be amiss to insert here a few verses of poetry, which were given to the prisoner by his wife, at one of these interviews ; together with his final letter to her. The language has been freely modified to prepare it for the public eye, but the subject remains a fair expression of her feelings and her heart.

FAREWELL LINES,

FROM BETSEY ANN DUNBAR, TO HER HUSBAND RUEBEN A. DUNBAR.

I.

Reuben, farewell! no more I'll see
One who was so dear to me.
Farewell! henceforth I'm all alone,
My dearest earthly friend is gone.

II.

"God's will be done," my only prayer;
I trust in his paternal care,
And if in bliss your lot should be,
O, then, dear Reuben, remember me.

III.

Could I but know that you, above,
Would stand redeemed by dying love,
When all your earthly griefs are o'er
These parting tears should flow no more.

IV.

But coming years of bitterness,
Can never make my sorrows less;
One only hope to me is given,
Rest in the grave, and rest in heaven.

V.

Farewell! O, could I know in time
That you were guiltless of this crime;
If not, no tongue can ever tell
The anguish of this last farewell.

His last letter to her was in substance as follows :

"On the 31st of August last, how little did I think that the bright sun which then rose over us, would so soon set in darkness. Your earthly hopes and mine are forever blasted, but, there is a blessed resurrection morning, when I hope we shall not be disappointed. We must all soon die, but if our names are only found written in the "Lamb's Book of Life," of what amount are all our sufferings here. Could I but come to you once more, how happy it would make me; but this cannot be, I must go to the grave, that bourne from which no traveller returns."

Below is inserted as appropriate to this sketch, a note, from S. H. Hammond, Esq., which was sent about this time, with the prisoner's reply. These are inserted verbatim.

ALBANY, *Dec. 25th*, 1850.

REUBEN DUNBAR,

Sir—My duty as a public officer, placed me in a position antagonistic to you, on the late trial for your life. That duty has been performed, and I desire that we should not *now* be enemies. We may never meet again. I ask you to say to me, that you bear me no ill will; that you do not leave the world with feelings of unkindness towards me. Man is at best but an erring creature, and if I have erred towards you, forgive me.

Yours, in pity for your lot,

S. H. HAMMOND.

To this note the following reply was promptly returned :

ALBANY, *December 25th*, 1850.

S. H. HAMMOND, Esq.,

Dear Sir—In answer to yours of this morning, I can truly say, that I have no ill will against you, for anything that you have done.

Yours in Christ,

REUBEN A. DUNBAR.

It has been already stated that he had broken his shackle. When this was discovered, another and much heavier iron was *rivited* around his ankle, to which was attached a chain of the largest size used for such purposes. This was cut off, by the cour

tesy of his keepers, that he might be allowed to see his wife as at the first.

After all the rest had retired, he expressed a desire to have the light shackle put back in place of the heavy chain. When asked if he would sacredly promise not to make any effort to break it, should it be put on again, he declined making the required promise; and when told that all efforts at self liberation were vain, he looked the speaker full in the face, and said, "*What would you have a man do then! GIVE UP?*" The reply was, "yes, the sooner the better it will be for you." In a moment he covered his face with his hands, and burst into a paroxysm of loud weeping.

Nothing of special interest occurred from day to day, till Monday of the week of the execution. On that day, his step father visited him for the first time, and they had considerable conversation together.

He was accompanied by Mrs. Lester, the mother of the prisoner, Mr. Cole and several other members of his own family; the prisoner was more excited in his feelings during this interview, than at any previous time. His mother asked him as to his guilt and the manner in which he killed the children, and he told her it would only pain her to listen to it at that time, but referred her to his confession. which would be published after his death.

The final farewell was the most melting scene which occurred during his confinement. They come, one after another and took his hand, with much apparent feeling. When his step-father came, he said with much emotion: "*Farewell, my dear UNFORTUNATE SON, may God forgive you this sin, and prepare you and me to meet together in a better world than this.*" The mother came last, she took his hand, held it long, and with firm grasp, while the silence of the apartment was broken only by their united sobs. At length, falling upon her knees, she gave him one *last, last kiss*, one affectionate embrace, and then left him. He wept long and freely after they had gone, and seemed to realize, more fully than he had ever done before, that his end had now nearly come. He expressed at no time the wish that his execution might be postponed, and uniformly stated that he preferred death to the state prison for life. A friend offered to make an effort for a commutation of this nature, and he kindly but decidedly declined the service.

It may as well be stated here, that during his entire confinement under sentence, he received the most constant attentions

from the clergymen chosen to be with him ; nor did he, at any time, complain of neglect on their part. He received daily visits from them, and the greater portion of the time, a morning and an afternoon visit, on the same day, at which times he was conversed with freely, the scriptures read, and prayers offered in his behalf.

As he approached the time of his execution, he seemed less willing to be left alone, and desired that the visits of those who were permitted to see him, might be prolonged, or repeated. He became disturbed, and restless in his sleep, and it was deemed a necessary precaution to place more than one person in his cell at night. He continued to speak of his execution with the most perfect composure, and arranged with regard to the dress which he was to wear, and spoke of the persons who were to receive the body after the execution, with the same apparent calmness that he would have done, had they related to any other person than himself.

His *general* deportment since his sentence has been good, though not at all times without exception. He had devoted himself closely to reading the Bible and other good books, professed the most sincere penitence for the great wickedness which he has done ; and, were there nothing to set over against such professions, might have left a very favorable impression on the minds of those who had the best opportunity to judge in matters of this kind. He became, previous to his execution, entirely satisfied that what had been uniformly told him from the first, was strictly true : *that all hope that he ever was a christian previous to the murder of the boys, was utterly vain.* Though he long tried to think otherwise, he at length gave up all hope on that ground, and began to seek anew to build a hope on the Rock of Ages. With what success he did this, no mortal can tell, and it will never be known till *another tribunal shall set, and other books shall be opened, then we know that he, and all men, shall receive a just award for all their deeds.*

32

This statement is made to correct a previous
misapprehension that Mrs. Lester was opposed to the return of
Stephen to be again a member of the family. Little did he dream
when returning to meet the warm embrace of his only brother,
with what a terrible reception he would be greeted.
May this hasty sketch teach a lesson of wisdom to all, and
may this be the last—as it is believed to be the first—time that a
family of

**Sketch of the two boys, David L. and Stephen V. Lester,
who were murdered by Reuben A. Dunbar.**

As a suitable appendix to this sketch of the life of Dunbar, it will not be regarded as out of place, to give a brief sketch of the two boys, for the murder of whom he has already paid the forfeit of his life.

David L. Lester and Stephen V. Lester, were the sons of George W. Lester, and Mrs. Patience Lester. Mrs. Lester was before her marriage, Miss Patience Lake, and was married to Mr. Lester in Duaneburg, in the fall of 1838. By this marriage were born three children, two sons and a daughter. In the fall of 1844, George W. Lester died, leaving to the exclusive care of his brother, David Lester, the oldest boy, with the request that he would bring him up *as his own son*. The boy David, was immediately removed to the house of his uncle, where he continued till the time of his death. The younger son, Stephen, and the daughter, were left under the mother's control.

After struggling with much poverty for several years, in the spring of 1847, Mrs. Lester was compelled to send Stephen also to live with his uncle David, where he remained most of the time for nearly two years. In the spring of 1849, Mrs. Lester, the mother of the children, was married to Mr. Nathaniel Eggleston, he promising to take the youngest boy Stephen, and the girl, and maintain them as his own children, and in the summer of the same year, Stephen returned to his mother.

But, in the fall of 1849, Stephen was again left without a home, and was carried to Schoharie County, and placed in the family of a Mr. Briggs, with the expectation that he would remain till he was of age. About the middle of September, 1850, Mr. and Mrs. David Lester paid him a visit, and not finding him as well provided for as they desired, they *mutually agreed* to bring him

home with them. This statement is made to correct a prevalent misapprehension that Mrs. Lester was *opposed* to the return of Stephen to be again a member of the family. Little did he dream, when returning to meet the warm embrace of his only brother, with what a terrible reception he would be greeted.

May this hasty sketch, teach a lesson of wisdom to all, and may this be the last—as it is believed to be the first—time that a crime of such magnitude, shall be committed with so little to inflame the passions, and with so little to excuse the enormity of the deed.

CONFESSIOIN OF REUBEN DUNBAR,
OF THE MURDER OF
Stephen V. and David L. Lester.

Having had full opportunity for reflection, and with a clear sense of the importance of the act which I am about to perform. I hereby declare, that *I, and I only, am the murderer of Stephen V. and David L. Lester.* I desire to take the whole blame entirely upon myself; since by no word or act was I excited or encouraged to do this dreadful deed, by any other person whatsoever.

I desire to make this full and free confession to my spiritual adviser, in order that I may begin aright, to make that preparation which I know I need, for the awful end which awaits me; and I hope, and pray, that God, for Christ's sake, will grant me repentance unto life.

I make it for the further reason that I desire to make reparation, so far as it is in my power to do it to others, for the great injury that I have done them, and I pray that God will forgive me this my greatest sin, and all my other sins; as I now, and here declare, that I sincerely forgive all who have ever done me evil.

For a short time, and a short time only, before the morning of the murder, I occasionally thought if these children were out of the way, I should stand a little better chance to get at Mr. Lester's property; but I don't remember to have formed any distinct purpose to put them out of the way until Saturday, the day on which this fatal deed was done. I did not take my wife home on Friday morning, for the purpose of getting a better chance to kill the boys; nor did I know that Mr. Lester was going to mill,

either on Friday or Saturday, till the horses were harnessing on Friday morning, to take my wife over to her father's.

I had seen Stephen, the youngest boy, about the place on Saturday morning, but did not speak to him, till about ten o'clock, when he came to me, at the wagon house where I was sharpening my sickle for the purpose of cutting corn. He said to me, "I have a notion to go a fishing."

I replied, "you had better go out and gather butternuts." He said "I do not want to do *that*." When I told him he had better go and gather butternuts, I did not do it for the purpose of getting him out into a place where I could put him out of the way; nor do I think I had any *distinct* purpose at that time to kill him at all. But when he said he did not want to go after butternuts, the thought came across my mind that I could get him out into the bushes and kill him. I then asked him "if he would like to go with me up towards the line fence, and catch a woodchuck." He replied, "I should like to do *that*."

We started together, and went towards the barn, when I took up the swingle which stood by the post at the side of the great barn door; we then crawled through a hole from the barn into the stable, and from the stable through a hole in the back part, out into the meadow towards the woods, and went down into the edge of the bushes, he all the while keeping a little in advance of me. When we got into the bushes, we went in a northerly direction, till we came to the place where he was afterward found. I then told him "to look out north, towards some bushes, which I pointed out, and see if he could see the woodchuck," and as he stood looking, I struck him a heavy blow with the swingle just over the

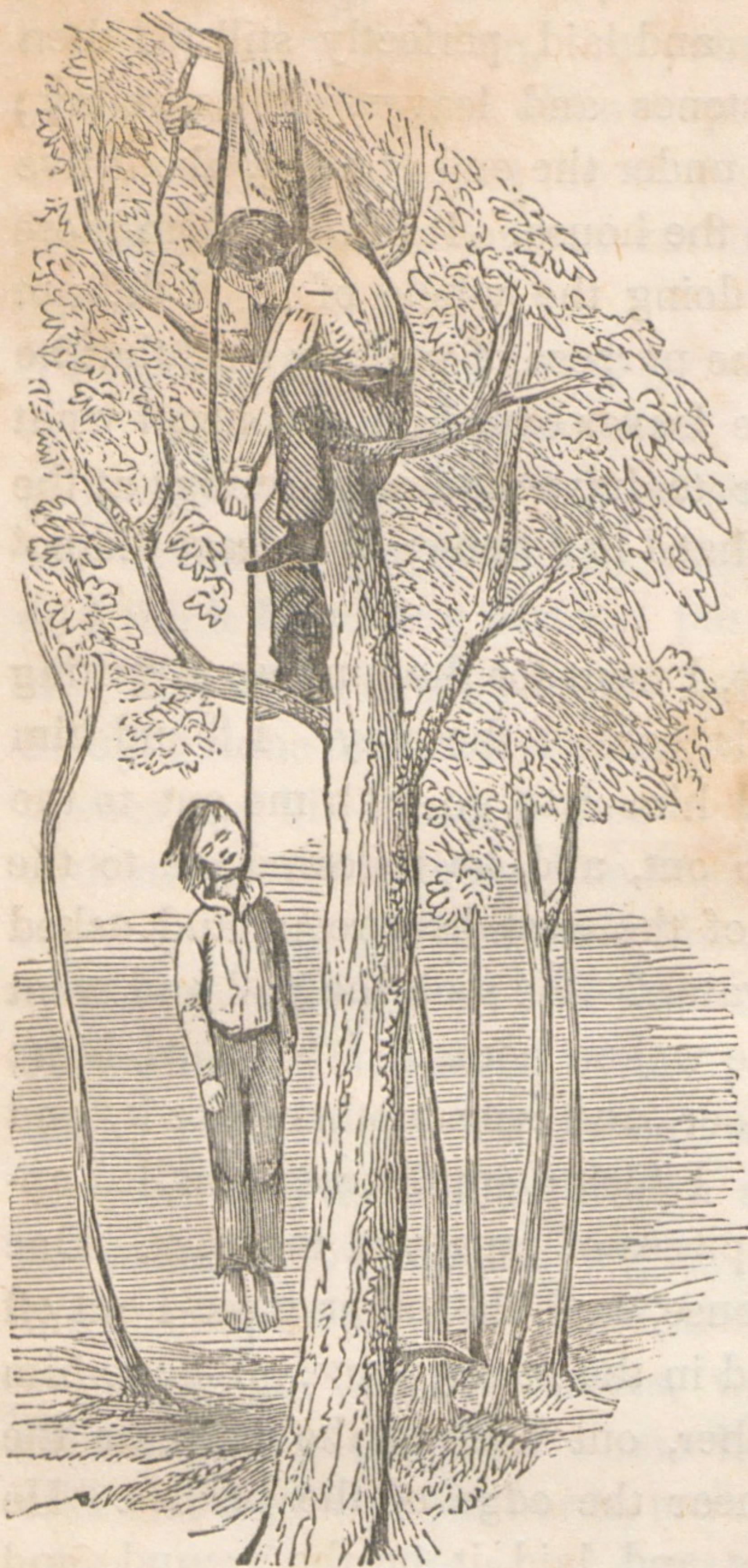


right eye. He fell senseless upon his side, he made no struggles, and uttered no cry. I stood and looked at him about a minute,

and then struck him another blow with the swingle across the back of the head. He made no sound, but stretched out straight, and turned over on his back, and laid perfectly still. I then covered him up hastily with stones and leaves, just as he lay; carried the swingle and stuck it under the end of a log, about five rods south, and then returned to the house. It did not seem more than two minutes while I was doing the whole of it. I did not throw the stones upon him for the purpose of making sure that he was dead, but laid them and the leaves over him to conceal what I had done. I do not remember to have had any feelings at the time, nor did I seem to realize what I had done; or at least did not realize it as I did afterward.

When I left to go to the house, I went for the purpose of getting David, that I might put him, also, out of the way. I found him standing at the table, and asked him "to go with me out to the wagon house." I started to go out, and he followed me to the door, when mother came out of the west bed room and asked David "to get her a pail of water." He took the pail and went for the water, and I went to the wagon house. I watched him; saw him carry the pail to the door, and saw mother take it, and then he came out where I was. I took a small cross-handled apple basket, and put into it two pieces of rope tied together. One piece I found in the wagon house, and the other piece I cut off from another rope which I found in the same place. I gave him the basket and we went together, out back of the barn, to the butternut tree, which stands near the edge of the bushes. He took the rope out of the basket and laid it on the ground, and commenced picking up butternuts. I went out through the bars, towards the corn field, hung my sickle on a stump in the meadow, went back to the tree where he was, picked up the rope and asked him, "if he did not want to go up on the hill, and look for a crow's nest." He replied, "I *will* go if you want me to." He manifested no reluctance to go. We went together up the hill, till we came on the top of the rocks, and then went west till we came to the tree where he was afterwards found. When we came to the tree, I told him "to climb up and see if he could see the nest." He climbed up the tree, some fifteen or twenty feet, and I climbed up after him, taking the rope up with me. I tied one end of the rope round the tree, and then told him "to look out into another tree," which I pointed out, "and see if he could see the crows;" and as he was looking, I prepared a slip-noose on the end of the rope, and slipped it over his head, when I *shoved it up, close around his*

neck, he cried out, "DON'T, *Reuben*, DON'T," and as he cried out



I shoved him off the limb on which he was standing. He dropped but a short distance, with his arm over the limb on which his hand was resting before I pushed him off. He did not struggle, that I noticed, after I pushed him off. I took off his cap, hung it on a limb just over his head, came down from the tree and left him. I looked back but once, after I left the tree, and he hung perfectly still, and I never saw him afterward.

I went back to the butternut tree, took up the basket, partly filled with butternuts, carried them to the wagon house, put them into the sleigh, over head, remained there a few minutes, and then went into the house.

Mother had gone up stairs, and was lying down, she not feeling well that day; I called to her, and told her, "that it

was dinner time." She replied, "I do not care about eating, as I do not feel very well; but you can go into the buttery and eat." I did so, went out after having eaten; fed the hogs; got my sickle, and then, for the first time, went into the field and commenced cutting corn. I then began to be conscious of what I had done. These were the first feelings of sorrow or regret which I remember to have felt. I thought, "What would my wife say, if she should find out what I had done." I thought she would mourn herself to death about it, if it should be found out. I felt as if I would give the whole world, if I could only bring the boys back to life again.

I then began to think what I would do when I went into the house, to keep mother from suspecting that I had killed the boys. I could think of nothing else, only to tell her, that Stephen had said, "that he had a notion to go a fishing." After cutting corn

about an hour, I went into the house and asked mother; "if she knew where the little boys were?" She said, "I have not seen Stephen since his uncle went away, and I have not seen David since he went out just behind you." She then asked me, "if I knew where they had gone?" and I told her, "perhaps they had gone a fishing." She said, "Have you heard them say anything about it?" I replied, "Stephen spoke about going." Nothing further passed between us at that time.

I then went out to the corn field, remained about half an hour, and was then driven in by the rain. I had been in the house but a few minutes when mother came in from the garden, and asked me if I had seen anything of the children? I told her I had not. I then went out again to the corn field, took my sickle, went back to the house, and mother asked me again about the children. She asked me to go, after the shower was over, down the creek to Mr. Robert Dunbar's, and see if I could find them, that perhaps they had got into the creek.

After the shower was over, I went down the creek to Mr. Dunbar's and asked "if they had seen the children?" They said they had not. As I went out of the house, I met Mr. Lester returning from mill, and I asked him if he had seen anything of the little boys down the road? He said he had not, and asked me where they were? I told him "perhaps they have gone a fishing, that Stephen had spoken about it." He said, "you had better go down to Finkle's, and if you don't hear anything of them, come back up the creek. I went down to Finkle's and asked if they had seen the boys? They said they had not. I came back up the creek, and Mr. Lester asked me, if I had heard anything of the boys? I told him I had not. It was now night. Mr. Lester, mother, and myself, spent the evening together; the children were frequently mentioned, and they thought perhaps the boys had gone over to Mr. Hallenbecks. I went to bed about nine o'clock; I then began to realize more fully what I had done. I kept thinking, "what *would* my wife say if she should know it." I did not sleep much that night; every time I fell asleep, I could hear the little boy cry, "*dont, dont,*" and that would wake me up. The next morning being Sunday, after I had done the chores, I went down to the place where Stephen was, looked at him a few minutes, put a few more leaves over him, went back to the house, and got ready for church. I felt very sorry that I had killed the

boys, and thought I would give all I had in the world if I could only bring them back to life again.

Mr. Lester had gone down to Mr. Hallenbeck's to see if the children were there ; I got up the horses to go to meeting, and asked mother if we should wait for Mr. Lester ? She said : " He told me not to wait for him, if he did not get back in season." We started for church, went down the lane as far as the road, where we met Mr. Lester, and he requested me to go back and help search for the children. I went back, put up the horses, and continued the search till about three or four o'clock, then took the horses, went for my wife, and returned with her about 6 o'clock. The next day and Tuesday we continued searching, and on Wednesday about noon, the youngest boy was found ; almost immediately after which, suspicion falling upon me, I was arrested. The next day the oldest boy was found ; I did not at any time during the search *intend* to send any person away from the places where I knew the bodies were ; nor did I have any idea at the time I killed the boys, of so disposing of them, that the persons who found them would think that the older boy had killed the younger, and then hanged himself ; I hanged David because I thought he would die easier than I thought he would do, if I killed him as I did Stephen ; I wanted the people to find the boys and bury them, if they could, without my telling them where they were, for I did not think that any one would suspect that I had killed them ; I supposed they would think some one else had done it ; I hardly know what led me to kill the boys ; I cannot recall any *distinct* motive for doing it, only I thought if they were out of the way, they could not come into possession of property to which they had no rights ; and I thought perhaps I might stand a little better chance of getting the property ; I never had any hard feelings towards the boys themselves.

From the time of the murder till the evening of December 20th, I have uniformly denied all knowledge of it, that I might have a fair trial, and that I might have a better chance of getting clear of punishment. I did not confess my guilt to either of my counsel, but uniformly insisted that I was innocent. I am very sorry that I have brought this terrible disgrace upon my family, and especially upon my wife, for whose sake I would be willing to suffer any infliction, and to spare her feelings as much as possible. I have directed that this paper shall not be made public till after my death. And now, all that remains for me to do in this world is,

to commend myself to the mercy of that God, whose laws I have so shamefully violated ; and beg that he will make this, my humble confession, prove the means of effectually deterring all others from following me, in the paths of evil.

Having carefully considered all that this paper contains, I hereby declare that I have kept back nothing, nor have I knowingly misstated anything ; and by my signature, in my own name, declare this to be MY ONLY CONFESSION.

REUBEN A. DUNBAR.

ALBANY, *December 21st*, 1850.

I hereby certify that this confession is printed from the original copy, made by Reuben Dunbar previous to his execution.

ALBANY, *January 29th*, 1851.

WILLIAM BEARDSLEY,
Sheriff, Albany County, N. Y.

The Cheapest Bookstore in Albany!

**E. H. BENDER,
BOOKSELLER, STATIONER,**

AND

Blank Book Manufacturer,

No. 75 STATE STREET,

ALBANY,

HAS CONSTANTLY ON HAND A GENERAL ASSORTMENT OF

SCHOOL BOOKS,

For sale, wholesale and retail, at the lowest rates. Liberal Discounts
made to Teachers.

SCHOOL LIBRARY BOOKS.

A very large assortment of Books suitable for District School Libraries.


—ALSO—

Maps, Globes, and Scientific Apparatus,

FOR SALE LOW.

Bibles in various styles of binding, from large Pulpit and Family, down to Pew and Pocket Bibles. Also an assortment of all the various kinds of Hymn Books used in the different churches, together with an assortment of Prayer Books, Standard, Miscellaneous, Theological, Medical, Law and Classical Books, in every variety.

A large assortment of Law and Justices' Blanks, Mortgages, Deeds, &c., &c., constantly on hand.

 BOOKS of every description bound to order.

A large quantity of Paper and Stationery of every description, at the lowest cash prices.

Randall's Series of New Reading Books,

AND

CRUTTENDEN'S SYSTEMATIC ARITHMETIC,

PUBLISHED BY E. H. BENDER.

The attention of Teachers, Superintendents, and School Committees, is called to this valuable Series of Reading Books, compiled by S. S. Randall, General Deputy Superintendent of Common Schools for the State of New-York, Editor of the District School Journal, Author of Mental and Moral Culture, Common School Digest, &c., &c.

EDUCATIONAL READER.
MORAL CLASS BOOK.

PRIMARY READER.
RURAL READER.