A MURDER MYSTERY.

Norwich Excited Over Disappearance of a Preacher.

HANOVER, N. H., Jan. 25.—The town of Norwich is excited over a rumor that William Eastman has made a confession implicating himself and others in the murder of John Harrison, a colored preacher residing at Beaver Meadow, who disappeared in the fall of 1890.

On the afternoon of Dec. 19, last, Eastman was shot in self defence by Chauncy Smith, postmaster as West Norwich. A few days previous Smith had been summoned before the grand jury as a witness against Eastman in a case now pending in which Eastman is charged with breaking and entering. Eastman had called Smith to account for being a witness against him. Smith ejected Eastman from the postoffice but he returned and was so violent that finally Smith shot him.

The bullet lodged in the groin and for a time it was thought that he would die. It was during this period, according to the rumor, that Eastman, supposing himself on his deathbed, is said to have made a confession to the attending physician to the effect that he and three others murdered the negro and then buried the body in the cellar of his house.

Harrison, the negro preacher, lived in a little one story shanty which sat in a fork of the road about a mile from Beaver Meadow on the road to Sharon. The trout brook controlled by the Lake Mitchell Trout Club runs within a stone's throw of the house and the Eastman boys frequently happened along there fishing and occasionally tried to pick a row with the preacher.

One day, perhaps two weeks before Harrison disappeared, the two Eastman boys made Harrison a call, and left him for dead. The boys had pounded the negro on the head with an iron kettle until the bale broke and left a big ridge across his forehead. Meantime the negro, who was very tall and muscular, had seized the razor and dealt his adversaries some savage thrusts. Albert, the elder Eastman boy, was slashed in the shoulder, side and hip by Harrison's razor and is still carrying the scars. The boys then went up to the village and told what they had done, and it is said that they afterward boasted that they would "finish him yet."

The neighbors went to the negro's home and found him in a serious condition. In a day or two he was out again and made a complaint to Wayne Johnson, town grand juror, but he referred the preacher to the state's attorney at Bethel. Nothing was done about it.

The negro was afraid to live there alone after this and secured quarters at Gardner Reynolds'. Most of his scanty supply of furniture was moved there and, as the story goes, he told them that he would bring the rest up the next morning, but was never seen again. A few days after the gable ends of the negro's house were torn out, next the roof was torn off. By and by the frame was cut and the house was finally razed to the ground, nothing but the celler, still and part of the floor now remaining.

Search has been made in the cellar for the negro's body, but so far without success.

Harrison was an interesting character. His father was a slave and both his parents died during his infancy. He was brought up by a Christian family in northern New York until large enough to work out. When he became of age he decided to enter the ministry. He was only about 25 years of age when he came to Norwich, but was a six-footer and looked older. He lived at the Meadow, used to make frequent trips of a month or a fortnight through the neighboring towns, preaching wherever he could get a chance. He always carried a bag over his shoulder, even it is said, taking his pack into the pulpit. For a colored man he was unusually bright. He could not read or write, but on one occasion a friend called his attention to a sermon by one of his colored brethren. Harrison manifested considerable interest in the sermon and requested that it be read to him. The request was complied with, and, when it was finished, Harrison surprised everybody by starting in repeating the entire sermon from memory. The friend followed the text as the negro repeated it and he did not miss a word.

Dr. Kenny, of Sharon, denies that Eastman confessed to him. Eastman now goes on crutches and will be a cripple for life.