THE RECENT TRAGEDY IN WHITE CROFT.

TRIAL OF THE MURDERER. SENTENCE OF DEATH.

The hawker, Joseph Laycock, who killed his wife and four children in a dingy, desolate house off White croft, either very late on the night of the 10th July or early the following morning, was sentenced yesterday afternoon in the Crown Court at Leeds Town Hall, to be hung by the neck till he is dead, in Armley Gaol. That sentence was passed on his being found guilty simply of the wilful murder of his eldest child, Sarah Ann; it was only necessary to have him convicted of one wilful murder to obtain the full penalty of the law; and although his crime was so great, still for the five murders there was but the punishment of forfeiture of his own life at the hands of the common hangman. The trial of Laycock was fixed to commence at ten o'clock yesterday morning, before Mr. Justice Mathew, and the day of trial was very well known. Still there was no crushing to get into the court, or any crowding inside, and apparently the dreadful case had less than ordinary attraction for the public. Certainly Laycock had not gained that notoriety which Charles Peace, Nurse Wilmot, or Kate Dover had, and probably by most people he was deemed an infamous criminal, and one who could not fail to receive the utmost sentence of the law. Those who were acquainted with the history of the horrible tragedy knew that it was he who took away the lives of his wife and family, and curiosity could only exist as to the nature of the defence to be set up for mitigation of punishment. The "ladies' gallery" was filled with women, but they were all evidently of the middle class, while the other gallery was only half occupied. The trial lasted but four hours, and it proceeded along in a quiet, almost monotonous, manner. Both counsel and witnesses spoke in a low tone, as if impressed with the solemnity of the issue at stake, and the only noteworthy incidents were those in the conduct of the accused.

On being brought up into the dock he gazed round in an abstracted manner, and then clutched convulsively at the front rail. When the charge was read over and he was asked whether he was guilty or not, he said, "I don't know, sir;" and burst out crying. He was accommodated with a chair, and sank back, bursting into tears. He sobbed violently during the time the jury were being sworn, and completely broke down during the opening of the case for the prosecution, burying his face in his hands, and indulging in such a passionate flood of tears that the dock attendants had to attempt to calm him. He muttered several times, "Lord have mercy on me," and when Mr. Fenwick spoke of the finding of the dead bodies of the children, prisoner cried out, "Oh, my child, my child!" He, however, gradually became somewhat calmer, though during the greater part of the case he sat with his head buried in his hands, apparently little heeding the evidence. He was described in the calendar as being 34 years of age, and he appeared a powerfully-built fellow. He has a large head, and very thick neck, but his face bore indications of great mental suffering. Around his neck was a bandage, the wound which he inflicted upon himself evidently not having thoroughly healed. Over this bandage was a common scarf. The occupants of the court could only see the surface of his head till nearly the close of the trial, as he kept his face buried in his hands, sobbing and groaning. The story of the tragedy was easily told, and then the counsel instructed by the Judge to defend rose to address the jury on behalf of the prisoner. He admitted that Laycock was the murderer of his wife and children, and all that he could really do was to suggest that there was insanity in the prisoner's family, and that he was under a delusion at the time he committed the diabolical outrage, and could not resist the impulse to murder. In this way the counsel contended that Laycock ought not to be held legally guilty. Among the witnesses called to prove hereditary insanity was the mother of the accused. She was the only one of the witnesses in whom the spectators in the court evinced curiosity, the people in the gallery above the witness box leaning over to catch a glimpse of her after her appearance in the witness box. She is rather an elderly woman, and was attired in mourning. She gave her evidence in a straightforward, intelligent way, although she showed signs at times of being painfully affected. She is a respectable, hard-working woman, and every one must have felt sympathy for her. Her son did not once look at her, but when she began to speak he violently rocked himself to and fro, and groaned out "Oh, I wish I wasn't alive." The end of the trial quickly came. The counsel for the defence pointed out that he did not wish to assert that the prisoner was now insane, but only that he was not responsible for his actions when he committed the murders. The Judge briefly told the jury what questions they had to decide, without entering into the harrowing details of the tragedy, and at one o'clock the jurors left their box for an ante-room. It being anticipated that they would not return very soon, his lordship left his seat, and those who had listened to the case were told it was lunch-time and requested to leave the court. The jurors had only been in retirement for about 25 minutes when it was intimated that they had agreed upon a verdict. They were told the judge had adjourned the court, but his lordship having been informed that the jury had come to a conclusion in the case, returned into the building. When the prisoner was brought up into the dock there would only be about a dozen persons in the court, besides the jury. He gazed eagerly at the foreman for a second or two, but seemed to read his fate. He clutched the brass rail skirting the front of the dock, and when he heard the conclusion the jury had arrived at, viz., that he was guilty of the murder of his eldest child, he appeared greatly agitated. Sentence of death was passed, and then he gasped out, "Thank your worship, thank you." As he was disappearing from view he was heard to say, "I've got my doom; it's all I crave for till the Judgment Day."

The counsel for the prosecution were Mr. Fenwick and Mr. Atkinson (instructed by Mr. R. Fairburn, Sheffield); Mr. Meysey Thompson defended at the request of his lordship.

Mr. Fenwick, in opening the case, said the issue which the jury had to decide was one of the most serious they were ever called upon to try, being no less than the question whether or not this man had committed wilful murder. The prisoner's name was Joseph Laycock, and he was married to Sarah Ann Laycock, and they lived, together with four children, at a house in White croft, Sheffield. The evidence to be adduced would be to the effect that on the 10th of July the four children were seen safe at the house, and at about six o'clock the same night the prisoner at the bar went to Police-constable Kimberley and complained to him as to his wife drinking with other men, or something to that effect, and pointed out a man to the constable. This was the first they heard of the prisoner on that day. The next thing they heard was that the prisoner, together with his wife, went to a public-house in Tenter street, called the Rawson Arms. The prisoner called for some beer, and the jury would hear that the prisoner said to his wife that she might as well get drink whilst she had the chance, and offered her some, but this she refused, though the prisoner said "it might be the last time." Nothing like a quarrel took place between them, and they left together about closing time and were heard talking outside, though he believed there was nothing approaching to a quarrel. The next heard of either the prisoner or his family was shortly after eleven o'clock the same night, when a Mrs. Kidnew, who lived close by, heard some one putting up the shutters of the prisoner's house, but she did not see who it was; and at about twenty minutes to twelve she heard a woman screaming, but was unable to tell from whence the sound came. (The prisoner here muttered, "Lord, have mercy upon me.") At about twenty minutes to one o'clock on the following morning a man named Wright heard the sound apparently of a man walking up and down the yard where the prisoner lived, and he would tell them that the footsteps appeared to be of a person with heelplates upon his boots. As to what actually took place in the prisoner's house, there was no direct evidence, but between eight and nine on the following morning Mrs. Kidnew, going by the prisoner's house, noticed that the shutters were up, and this being an unusual circumstance, she tried the door, and finding it unfastened, went into the house, and there, upon the floor of the room into which she went, saw the wife of the prisoner lying, apparently weltering in blood, with her throat cut. She was naturally much horrified, and rushed out to the house of Mrs. Green to see if the children were there, and not finding them, returned to the house of the prisoner, passed through the room in which the wife was lying, and went upstairs. She there found the prisoner lying on a mattress near the door, and on another mattress she saw three little children lying bleeding, and apparently dead. One of these children was the little girl Sarah Ann, who the prisoner was now charged with murdering. (The prisoner at this stage sobbed violently, and cried out "Oh my child, my child.") Mrs. Kidnew, of course, went down to seek assistance, and whilst she was away another person came and saw the same sight—(the Prisoner: "Lord, have mercy on me")—and then, for the first time, was discovered the body of the fourth child, Maria Laycock. A surgeon was at once sent for, and the police communicated with, and an officer arrived to find the wife dead downstairs and the four children dead upstairs, but although the prisoner had inflicted severe injuries upon himself, life was not extinct. By the side of the prisoner was found lying an ordinary table knife, which would be produced, and a candlestick was in close proximity to it. The police-officer went into the room, and the prisoner exclaimed to him, "Let me die, Bob, let me lie still." The remains of the wife and four children were taken to the mortuary, and the prisoner was placed in a cab, and under the care of the police-officer taken to the Hospital, and on the way the prisoner said, "It was all through drink; it was about 12 o'clock when I did it." These were the whole of the circumstances connected with this painful case, but he thought, after hearing the evidence, that the jury would have no doubt that the whole of these four children, including the little daughter Sarah Ann, and also the life of his wife, were taken by this man. That, he apprehended, would be the first question for them to decide—"Were the lives of these people, and especially of Sarah Ann Laycock, taken by the prisoner?" If they were satisfied that the prisoner was the man who did kill this little girl, the next question for them to determine was—"At the time the prisoner committed that act did he know the character of the crime he was doing." If they came to the conclusion that he did, they must ask further, "Did he know that he was taking the life of a human being;" and then the further question would be as to whether his condition of mind was at the time he committed the act such that he could distinguish between right and wrong. If they thought that he could so distinguish, it would be their duty to find him guilty of the crime, and the burden of proof that he was not capable rested with the defence, for the law presumed that he possessed his faculties and *prima facie* that he was of sound mind until the contrary was shown.

The following witnesses were then called:—

Ann, wife of John Green, labourer, White croft, Sheffield, and mother of the wife of the prisoner, said: The prisoner was a hawker, and his wife was 24 years of age when she died. The prisoner had four children:—Sarah Ann, eight years; Francis George, six years; Mary Ann, four years, and Joseph, two years old last October. I last saw my daughter alive at 10 o'clock on the night of the 10th July, and the children early in the afternoon of the same day.—Mr. Thompson: The prisoner was very fond of his children?—Witness: Yes, sir.—Mr. Thompson: I think you have said that the prisoner could not have been right in his head or he would not have killed his children, he was so fond of them?—Witness: Yes. He was very fond of them.

Ada Shaw, 13 years of age, living in Tenter street, said:—The prisoner and his wife came to my father's house, the Rawson Arms, at about 10 o'clock on the night of July 10th, and the prisoner called for two pints of twopenny ale. I heard him ask his wife to drink, and she replied that she didn't want. Prisoner replied, "Drink, you might as well while you have the chance; it might be the last time you'll ever get any." She refused to drink, but they had a penny cake and a pennyworth of polony. Mrs. Laycock went out and brought these back with her, and they both had some whilst sitting down at a table in the dram shop. They were both sober, and left at five minutes to 11 o'clock. As they went away I heard them talking, and they had a quarrel at the corner. I could not hear what they said.—Mr. Thompson: They were both eating in your house, and appeared on friendly terms together?—Witness: Yes, sir.

Joseph Wright, labourer, White croft, Sheffield, said that he went home to White croft at about twenty minutes to one on the morning of the 11th July, and he heard in the court leading to where prisoner lived the noise of a man walking as if he had loose heel plates on his boots. He knew the prisoner by sight.—Cross-examined: Witness said he did not see prisoner on this morning.

Ann Kidnew, wife of John Kidnew, ironworker, 2 court, White croft, said: I live in the same court as the prisoner and his family lived. I knew prisoner's children, and saw them alive, sitting on the door step, on the night of the 10th July. At about eleven o'clock on that night I heard some one putting up the shutters, and at about twenty minutes to twelve heard a scream, but could not say where it came from or whether it was a woman's voice. At a little before nine o'clock on the following morning I noticed that the shutters of the prisoner's house were closed. They were still closed at ten o'clock, and so I tried the door. It was closed, but not fastened, and I went in. When I got inside I saw Mrs. Laycock lying on the floor on her side, with her hands to her head. There was a quantity of blood by her side, and I ran to Mrs. Green's to see if the children were there. They were not to be found, and I returned to Laycock's house and went upstairs into one of the bedrooms. I saw a man's feet. He appeared to me to be lying on a mattress; I think the man was the prisoner. I saw three of the children—Sarah Ann and the two little boys. I went downstairs, ran out of the house, called for assistance, and went to the police station.

By Mr. Thompson: I never saw him ill-treat his children, indeed he always seemed very fond of them, so far as I could see.

Tom Pearson, file forger, living in Walkley street, said: I remember meeting Mrs. Kidnew on the morning of the 11th inst., and in consequence of what she said I went to the prisoner's house. I went inside and saw Mrs. Laycock lying near the front door. On going upstairs I saw the prisoner and the children. Laycock lay on his side on a mattress, and three of the children lay partly on the mattress, the fourth being at the back. The children appeared as if they had been dead a long time. All their throats were cut. I spoke to the prisoner, saying, "Good God! what have you done?" He made no reply, only lifting his hands up. I saw the knife (produced by Constable Kimberley) lying close by his hand.

Robert Hornsey, sergeant in the Sheffield police force, said: On the morning of the 11th July from something Mrs. Kidnew said to me I went to the prisoner's house. It would be about ten minutes past ten, and I was accompanied by Constable Kimberley. The witness described the position in which he found the dead bodies, and then stated: When I got to the front of Laycock he said, "Bob, let me lie, let me die." I saw the knife and also a candlestick; the latter was near his head. The prisoner had his throat cut, and it bled very much; his boots were off, and I found them downstairs near the fire-place. [The boots were here produced, the witness saying the heel plates were loose.] I also found downstairs an axe, with the handle broken.

His Lordship (to Mr. Fenwick): It is not suggested that the murders were committed with that?

Mr. Fenwick: Oh, no.

Witness, continuing, said: He was removed to the Hospital, and the dead bodies to the Mortuary. On the 25th I took him into custody, and at the Police Offices charged him with murdering his wife and four children, either on the night of the 10th July or the morning of the 11th. He made no reply.

Richard Kimberley, a police-constable, stated: When I was having the prisoner taken to the Hospital, on the 11th July, he remarked, "It's all through drink; it would be about twelve o'clock when I did it." I had seen the prisoner the previous day, about half-past six, at the end of Bank street. He was sober, and complained about his wife being with another man. Three men were standing near, and the prisoner, pointing, said, "That's the one."

Mr. H. W. Harrison, surgeon, practising at Sheffield, was next called. He said: On the morning of the 11th July I went to the prisoner's house, and found Mrs. Laycock lying downstairs, with her throat cut, dead. Upstairs I saw the prisoner and a child lying on a mattress. He was living, and I turned him over and examined him, discovering a wound in his neck, which might have been self-inflicted. In the room altogether I found four dead children. The throat of each was cut, and the wounds were such as could be inflicted by the knife already produced. Death arose from hemorrhage, caused by the cutting of the throat. I examined the body of Mrs. Laycock at the Mortuary, and found a bruise on the forehead over the right eye, and a corresponding bruise over the right cheek bone. She had far advanced in pregnancy.

By Mr. Thompson: I had a conversation with the prisoner in the house. He said when I was turning him over, "Oh, Bob, let me alone."

This concluded the case for the prosecution, and

Mr. Thompson then addressed the jury on behalf of the prisoner. He said they had heard the details of one of the most horrible tragedies that probably was ever brought before a court of justice; they had heard it stated by witnesses one after another how the four children and the woman were found with their throats cut in Laycock's house, and how the prisoner was found with his throat cut, under circumstances which rendered it idle for him (the counsel) to contend for a moment that he did not cut all their throats and his own too. In fact, the prisoner had admitted that he did, and he sat in the dock as a confessed slayer of his wife and four children. It would, therefore, be quite unnecessary for him (Mr. Thompson) to enter into any of the sickening details. Nor should he attempt to appeal to their sympathies, for if it were a fact that the man deliberately, in his sober senses, without any quarrel or motive of any kind, cut the throat of the wife of his bosom and the four children, of whom it had been said he was very fond of, then nothing could be too bad for him. But if, on the other hand, they did come to the conclusion, after hearing the evidence which he should bring forward, that the prisoner at the time he committed the murders was incompetent to judge of what he was doing, that he was under some delusion or some uncontrollable impulse which compelled him to commit the crime; and if they considered what the man's condition must now be when he realised what he had done, then it would be equally idle for him (Mr. Thompson) to appeal for sympathy, for "pity" would be too mild a word for it. He was certain the jurors, under those circumstances, would have sympathy, and it was unnecessary for him (the speaker) to further ask the jurors to give the case their most anxious consideration. He should, therefore, limit himself entirely to the question whether or not the facts did not show that the prisoner must have been absolutely incapable of exercising that control over himself which would have prevented him doing that which he did. It was almost inconceivable that very shortly before the tragedy, Laycock and his wife were sitting quietly together in a public house eating their supper. They went peaceably home, and no sounds of quarrelling were heard, and nothing whatever unusual, except possibly one scream. It was also inconceivable that the prisoner, sober as he was said to have been, and if in possession of his senses, should have proceeded to these horrible acts. In considering whether he was incapable at that time of reasoning, he (the learned counsel) would call before them witnesses who would show what the prisoner's previous history had been to this extent—they would say that during a few days preceding the tragedy he was in a very low state indeed, and seemed almost dazed, wrong, distraught. His mother would state that when he was a child and up till he was seven years old he was constantly in the doctor's hands because his head was wrong. She would also say that his father and grandfather were found drowned, that one of his uncles was found dead in his bed, that another uncle was found with his throat cut, and a third uncle was found dead upon the railway. Then it would also be stated that when in the Hospital the man had the delusion that one of his children was in the ward. It was quite possible, he (Mr. Thompson) contended, that the prisoner was under a delusion at the time he committed the murders, and that he could not resist an impulse to perpetrate the deed. If he could establish this to their satisfaction, then he thought they would come to the conclusion that the prisoner was not guilty of an act which should make every one of them blush for their nature to believe he could have been guilty of in his sober senses, but that he was, on the contrary, a man almost more to be pitied than any man in this world, and that really, instead of being a man to be condemned, he was one to be taken care of, as a man absolutely incompetent to take care of himself. Mr. Thompson then called

Mr. St. Clair White, surgeon at the Public Hospital, who said he saw the prisoner on his admission to that institution on the 11th July. He was in a state of extreme mental depression, and begged for him (witness) to let him die, and asked him to cut his throat deeper. Witness observed him during the day, and once found him under the delusion that he saw one of his children in the ward. He (witness) examined the prisoner's head, and found a scar on the left side of the head. The prisoner said it had been done with a hatchet, and so it might. It was possible that if the scar were caused by a blow from a hatchet, it might affect him mentally.

Mr. Thompson: Looking at the condition in which he was when he came into the Hospital, would he, in your opinion, on the previous night have been subject to some delusion, and been incapable of resisting doing the act which he did?—It is possible.

By Mr. Fenwick: The mental depression alluded to might have been caused by what he had done.

Might not his brooding over it have accounted for the delusion?—It might.

If a man had committed an offence of this sort would not you expect to find him in a state of extreme mental depression, and would not that depression be likely to give rise to the delusion?—It might.

Does that wound appear to have been such an one as likely to affect a man's mental power?—Slight wounds have been known to affect a man's mental power.

His Lordship: Should you expect to find, in consequence of such a wound as that, insanity in the owner?—It's possible for him to be insane.

Mr. Fenwick: Do you think it is probable?—I don't feel able to give an opinion upon that.

His Lordship: From the history of the crime, and from what you saw, should you think he was under a delusion at the time he committed the crime?—I should say he would be more likely to suffer from a delusion than an ordinary man would.

Mr. Fenwick: Wouldn't you expect to find in an ordinary man an extreme state of depression and a delusion after such an occurrence?—There might be. In further reply to Mr. Fenwick, he said he had had some experience with insanity, having been eight months in the insane ward of a workhouse.

William Smith, filecutter, Malin Bridge, said: I knew the father of the prisoner, and was a companion of his. He died some ten years ago. He was found drowned. I knew his father (the grandfather of the prisoner), but he died a natural death. I knew the brothers of the prisoner's mother, William, John, and Richard. William was found dead in his bed. John was found dead in his bed, with his throat cut, and Richard placed himself in front of an engine, and was cut to pieces.

Cross-examined by Mr. Fenwick: I do not know that shortly before the prisoner's father was found drowned he had lost heavily on racing. Richard had been in a low way for some time before he was killed. He had gone up and down as though he did not care about anything. He was also drinking before his death. As a matter of fact, I do not know the circumstances under which he was killed by the engine.

Elizabeth Platts, sister of the prisoner, said: On the Monday before the 11th July the prisoner came to my house. I was in the kitchen when he came in. He stood looking at me for a long time before he spoke, and he looked deranged, and I was afraid of him.

Cross-examined by Mr. Fenwick: I have not lived near him of late years. I have seen him several times, but not very often. He was a man of "rather spiritty" temper, and he has been in trouble for assaults and violent conduct. When he came to my house on the Monday he did not look as he used to do, and it made an impression on my mind. I took no steps to inform the prisoner's relatives, but I did tell my sister.

Sarah Spelling said: The prisoner is my son by my first husband. When he was a child he was under the treatment of Dr. Mainwaring for an affection on the head. That doctor, however, is dead. My father was found drowned—he lost his way in the Wicker. I wa not present at the inquest on my brother Richard. My son used to come and see me often before I left Sheffield. He was very fond of his children.

Cross-examined by Mr. Fenwick: My first husband (the prisoner's father) was found [illegible] I [illegible]'t know how he met with his death; an open verdict was returned. He used to bet, and had lost money the day before he died. At the inquest on my brother John the verdict was one of "temporary insanity." His family had been a great trouble to him. My husband always seemed to be a rational and sensible man. It is thought that my brother Richard met with his death through drink; he threw himself in front of an engine. Except for the drink he always appeared a sensible man until a few months before his death. I think then his mind was affected—he attempted to poison himself, but failed. My son (the prisoner) has not been a hard drinker. I never saw him but once the worse for drink in my life. He was, from three to seven years of age, attended by a doctor. He had brain fever then, and of late has had several days' sickness, and complained of his head.

Michael Allen said: I have known the prisoner for several years, and at one time lived at his house. The prisoner seemed always fond of his children. I was with him on the night of the 10th July from seven to ten o'clock, and the prisoner then seemed different from what he had been before. He said that whilst in Wakefield "doing 21 days" he dreamt that he kept a rag shop, and everything he had turned to gold. I was out hawking with him that week, and he seemed to be in very low spirits.

Cross-examined by Mr. Fenwick: The prisoner carried the bags, and I did the hawking. I thought at the time that his mind was completely altered, but I did not inform any of his friends. From his appearance I should say he had not been drinking.

Selina Hudson said: I have known the prisoner a good many years, and on Monday, the 7th inst., I saw the prisoner at Elizabeth Platts' house. I noticed that the prisoner looked wild, and I said, "Well Joe, what are you doing?" and he replied that he had been a little walk, and afterwards I went in and asked Mrs. Platts what was the matter with him.

Cross-examined by Mr. Fenwick: The prisoner looked rather wild, and it struck me he was not right. I did not communicate with his wife.

This concluded the evidence for the defence, and

Mr. Thompson, addressing the jury, submitted that it amply bore out what he submitted in his former address, that the prisoner, at the time he committed this crime, was not responsible for his actions. He did not mean to argue that the prisoner was a lunatic in the ordinary sense of the word, or an idiot, nor that he was insane at the present moment; but that at the time he committed the murders he was unanswerable for his crime. Supposing that the wound which the prisoner had inflicted on his throat had been a little deeper, and that he had died from the effects of that injury, and the jury were sitting, not to try him for murder, but as a coroner's jury to investigate the cause of his death, was there a man amongst them who would hesitate, after the evidence laid before them, to return a verdict that at the time he was, at least, temporarily insane? There appeared to him to be little difference between the two positions, and he ventured to assert that sufficient had been adduced to allow them to find that the prisoner was incapable of judging right from wrong on the night in question.

Mr. Fenwick, replying on behalf of the prosecution, argued that the extreme mental depression from which the prisoner suffered when seen by Dr. White was only such as one would expect to find in a man who had committed such a terrible offence as this. As to the evidence of the witnesses who saw the prisoner shortly before the crime, although they professed to have noticed a change in his manner, they did not at that time appear to have been sufficiently impressed to have communicated with his friends. It was natural that, after the crime, one should look round for an explanation or motive; but the proper way to look at evidence of this character was to judge of the witnesses' conduct at the time they professed to notice the strange behaviour. There was no doubt that insanity was hereditary, but what was the proof of insanity in this man's family? The prisoner's father was found drowned, but under what circumstances was not known to them, and even his widow did not suggest that he was of weak intellect, or suffered from mental incapacity. As to the death of the uncle William there was surely, in spite of the opening of the counsel for the prisoner, no evidence that his death was anything but a natural one. The other two uncles, John and Richard, had committed suicide, no doubt, but this was only apparently after a term of drinking and various troubles; but so far as the evidence went there was nothing to lead the jury to think that these men were judged by their friends to be insane. No member of the prisoner's family had been confined in a lunatic asylum, and as to the prisoner's suffering from an affection of the head, so far from that having permanently affected him, the evidence showed that the prisoner grew out of it, and was regarded up to the time of this occurrence as a capable and sensible man. Mr. Fenwick then alluded to the evidence as to the conversation between the prisoner and his wife on the night before the murder, and also to the conversation with the policeman afterwards "that it was all through drink," and asked them to carefully consider what was the state of the prisoner's mind on this night, and also whether he was the person who committed the murder. If they came to the conclusion that the prisoner did not commit the murder, or that he did commit the murder, but that at the time he was irresponsible for his actions, they would, of course, return a verdict in his favour. But if, on the other hand, they found that the life of this little girl and the other persons found in that house were taken by the prisoner, and that the learned counsel had failed to prove the insanity or irresponsibility of the prisoner, then it would be their painful duty—but, nevertheless, their duty—to say that he was guilty of the serious charge made against him.

His Lordship, in summing up, said the sole inquiry for them was as to the mental condition of the prisoner. The very atrocity of the crime suggested that it was not the act of a sane man. But there might be motives which they could not fathom and which were not disclosed, which might make the act not that of a madman, but of an atrocious villain. In deciding upon the mental condition of a man charged with a crime of this kind, a jury could derive no very great help from the medical men. In this particular case it appeared to him, upon reading the depositions, that it would not be right that the case should be submitted to them upon the materials which the prosecution proposed to offer, and to offer alone. The witnesses examined before the coroner merely stated the circumstances of the discovery of the dead bodies. In that way no doubt a *prima facie* case was established against the prisoner, but it seemed to him (the Judge) that it would be altogether wrong that they should act upon the strong presumptions which, according to the rules of the law, were those by which a coroner's jury would be guided. A man was presumed to be sane, and it was for him to prove that he was not. Using the power which, happily, he could not help thinking, was confided to the judges in such cases, he asked a learned member of the bar to defend the prisoner, and even empowered him to obtain the assistance of a professional man, and to have such enquiries made as a professional man could make into the circumstances of the crime which it would be proper to lay before the jury. They had heard the results of the efforts that had been made for the defence of the prisoner, and they might safely assume that all that had been laid before them was all that could be. He could not help saying that perhaps it would be better, in some such case as this, that some public functionary should undertake, in the interests of the community, a full investigation of the facts, and that they should be assisted by medical evidence called on the part of the Crown in the first instance, or called in answer to the medical evidence adduced on behalf of the prisoner. That was not the way in which business had hitherto been done. It was to be hoped that there might be a reform in judicial procedure in the direction pointed to. What they (the jury) had now to decide was whether it was satisfactorily shown that at the time the murder was committed by the prisoner he was under the influence of an illusion which rendered him insensible to the nature and character of the crime. If they were satisfied there was insanity in the family of the prisoner, then it helped them in dealing with the rest of the case. If they became satisfied that the prisoner took the lives of these creatures knowing what he was doing and that it was a wrong, then it would be their duty to bring in a verdict of guilty. If, on the other hand, they came to the conclusion that he was under an illusion which rendered him insensible to the nature of the act, they must acquit him. In that case he (the judge) need not say what the prisoner's fate would be; he would be kept safe during her Majesty's pleasure.

The jury were then asked to consider their verdict. They retired, and it now being the time when this court was usually adjourned for luncheon, his lordship left his seat, and the people were cleared out of the court. In about a quarter of an hour afterwards it was known the jury had agreed upon a verdict, and his lordship, upon being acquainted with the fact, at once returned. Laycock was brought again to the front of the dock, and when the verdict was announced there were scarcely a dozen persons in the court except the officials and the jury.

The Clerk of Arraigns (addressing the jury), said: Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict? How say you, do you find the prisoner, Joseph Laycock, guilty or not guilty?

The Foreman: Guilty.

The Clerk of Arraigns (to the prisoner): Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?

The prisoner made no reply.

His lordship then assumed the black cap, and, addressing the prisoner, who clutched the rails and appeared very greatly agitated, said:—Joseph Laycock, I will not add to the terror and misery of your position by one word of comment on the terrible offence of which you have been convicted. It is my duty to pass upon you the sentence of the law, and that sentence is that you be taken from hence to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you be dead, and that your body be afterwards buried within the precincts of the prison where you were last confined. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

The prisoner's whole frame shook as he heard the dread sentence, and he gazed towards the judge in a stupefied sort of way. He continued his clutch upon the rail, and the warders had to use a little force to cause him to release his grasp. He then muttered, "Thank your worship, thank you." As he was about to step out of the dock he remarked dolefully, looking towards Mr. Harrison, surgeon, and two other persons who stood near, "I've got my doom; it's all I craved for till the Judgment Day." He was hurried out of sight, and so ended another chapter in the history of "The Whitecroft tragedy."

EXTRAORDINARY POISONING CASE NEAR RIPLEY.

An inquest was held at the Jessop's Arms, Codnor, on Monday evening, before Mr. W. Whiston, coroner, on the body of a child three years old, named Joseph Fletcher, the son of Samuel Fletcher, of Codnor, who died on Saturday night.—Susan Fletcher, the mother, said deceased was all right on Friday night. She got a pint of milk for her husband's supper that night, but as he did not drink it she left it in a jug on the table all night. There was a brass table spoon in it. The next morning deceased and the other child, his brother, six years of age, asked for something to drink. Witness poured some of the milk out for deceased, some of which he drank, and the other child drank the remainder. Deceased was sick, as was also his brother.—Dr. Woolley said he was sent for, and found deceased and the other child suffering from diarrhœa, vomiting, and a state of collapse. The eldest child recovered, but the youngest died. The chemical action of the milk upon the brass spoon would produce verdigris in seven or eight hours, sufficient in quantity to poison a young child. Verdigris or subacetate of copper was a powerful irritant, and would produce vomiting.—The jury returned a verdict that "Deceased died from poisoning by verdigris."

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