THE EVENING NEWS.

Thursday, - - - January 4, 1872

THE PERJURY OF THE CLOCK.

On a summer evening, some years ago, a man was found murdered in a field near a certain town in the west of England. The name of the field was "Pardon's Piece."

The man was a small carpenter and builder in the town, who bore an indifferent character. On the evening in question, a distant relative of his, employed as a farm bailiff by a gentleman in the neighborhood, happened to be passing a stile which led from the field into the road, and saw a gentleman leaving the field by way of this stile, rather in a hurry. He recognized the gentleman (whom he knew by sight only) as Mr. Dubourg.

The two passed each other on the road in opposite directions. After a certain lapse of time—estimated as being half an hour—the farm bailiff had occasion to pass back along the same road. On reaching the stile, he heard an alarm raised, and entered the field to see what was the matter. He found several persons running from the farther side of Pardon's Piece towards a boy who was standing at the back of a cattle shed, in a remote part of the enclosure, screaming with terror. At the boy's feet lay, face downwards, the dead body of a man, with his head horribly beaten in. His watch was under him hanging out of his pocket by the chain. It had stopped—evidently in consequence of the concussion of its owner's fall on it—at half-past eight. The body was still warm. All the other valuables like the watch were left on it. The farm bailiff instantly recognized the man as the carpenter and builder mentioned above.

At the preliminary inquiry, the stoppage of the watch at half-past eight was taken as offering good circumstantial evidence that the blow which had killed the man had been struck at that time.

The next question was—if any one had been seen near the body at half-past eight? The farm bailiff declared that he had met Mr. Dubourg hastily leaving the field by the stile at that very time. Asked if he had looked at his watch, and owned that he had not done so. Certain previous circumstances which he mentioned as having impressed themselves on his memory, enabled him to feel sure of the truth of his assertion, without having consulted his watch. He was pressed on this important point, but he held to his declaration. At half-past eight he had seen Mr. Dubourg hurriedly leave the field. At half-past eight the watch of the murdered man had stopped.

Had any other person been observed in or near the field at that time?

No witness could be discovered who had seen anybody else near the place. Had the weapon turned up with which the blow had been struck? It had not been found. Was any one known—robbery having plainly not been the motive of the crime—to have entertained a grudge against the murdered man. It was no secret that he associated with doubtful characters, male and female; but suspicion failed to point to any one of them in particular.

In this state of things there was no alternative but to request Mr. Dubourg—well known in and out of the town as a young gentleman of independent fortune, bearing an excellent character—to give some account of himself.

He immediately admitted that he had passed through the field. But, in contradiction to the farm bailiff, he declared that he had looked at his watch at the moment, before he had crossed the stile, and that the time by it was exactly a quarter past eight. Five minutes later—that is to say ten minutes before the murder had been committed, on the evidence of the dead man's watch—he had paid a visit to a lady living near Pardon's Piece; and had remained with her until his watch, consulted once more on leaving the lady's house, informed him that it was a quarter to nine.

Here was the defence, called an "alibi." It entirely satisfied Mr. Dubourg's friends. To satisfy justice also, it was necessary to call the lady as a witness. In the meantime another purely formal question was put to Mr. Dubourg. Did he know anything of the murdered man?

With some appearance of confusion, Mr. Dubourg admitted that he had been induced (by a friend) to employ the man on some work. Further interrogation extracted from him the following statement of facts:

That the work had been badly done; that an exorbitant price had been charged for it; that the man on being remonstrated with, had behaved in a grossly impertinent manner; that an altercation had taken place between them; that Mr. Dubourg had seized the man by the collar of the coat, and had turned him out of the house; that he had called the man an infernal scoundrel (being in a passion at the time), and had threatened to "thrash him within an inch of his life" (or words to that effect) if he ever presumed to come near his house again; that he had sincerely regretted his own violence the moment he recovered his self-possession; and lastly, that, on his oath (the altercation having occurred six months ago), he had never spoken to the man, or set eyes on the man, since.

As the matter then stood, these circumstances were considered as being unfortunate circumstances for Mr. Dubourg—nothing more. He had his "alibi" to appeal to, and his character to appeal to, and nobody doubted the result.

The lady appeared as witness.

Confronted with Mr. Dubourg on the question of time, and forced to answer, she absolutely contradicted him on the testimony of the clock on her own mantlepiece. In substance her evidence was simply this, she had looked at her clock when Mr. Dubourg entered the room, thinking it rather a late hour for a visitor to call on her. The clock (regulated by the maker only the day before) pointed to twenty-five minutes to nine. Practical experiment showed that the time required to walk the distance, at a rapid pace, from the stile to the lady's house, was just five minutes.

Here, then, was the statement of the farm bailiff (himself a respectable witness) corroborated by another witness of excellent position and character. The clock on being examined next, was found to be right. The evidence of the clock-maker proved that he kept the key and there had been no necessity to set the clock and wind it up again since he had performed both those acts on the day preceding Mr. Dubourg's visit. The accuracy of the clock thus vouched for, the conclusion on the evidence was irresistible. Mr. Dubourg stood convicted of having been in the field at the time when the murder was committed; of having, by his admission, had a quarrel with the murdered man not long before, terminating in an assault and threat on his side, and lastly, of having attempted to set up an "alibi," by a false statement of the question of time. There was no alternative but to commit him to take his trial at the assizes, charged with the murder of the builder at Pardon's Piece.

To be continued.

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