

Introduction.

on the 10th of May, almost exactly a month after the removal of Harriet Staunton. There was no one at home, for the occupants were all at the inquest, and they made their entry through a back window. Going upstairs they found the front bedroom properly furnished, but the back bedroom, which had been Harriet's, was bare and dirty. There was no carpet; a piece of board was laid across three tressels, and this formed the bedstead. The mattress was very dirty, and the pillow was without a case; there was no washstand.

An important piece of evidence relating to the early stage of the story was given by Emma Denton, the nurse who had attended Harriet Staunton in her confinement. She said that Alice Rhodes acted as complete mistress of the house in Loughborough Park Road, and that Harriet frequently cried and was in deep distress over her husband's behaviour towards his sister-in-law. This witness was examined before the magistrate, but for some unexplained reason she was not called at the trial.⁵

On Saturday, the 19th of May, the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the three Stauntons and Alice Rhodes. The contradictions between their evidently concerted narrative and the cumulative testimony of a cloud of independent witnesses were overwhelming. None of the four were in Court when the finding of the jury was announced, and they surrendered by appointment to the police officers in the course of the afternoon. In staying away they had followed the advice of their counsel. Sir Douglas Straight can still recall the ferocity with which his clients were greeted as they emerged from the room in the Park Tavern where the inquiry was held. That was at a comparatively early stage in the proceedings, and the demeanour of the mob had become more threatening day by day. The sufferings of a helpless child and a half imbecile woman, the revolting revelations of the nurse, the conviction of the doctor that death was due to deliberate starvation, the adultery committed in circumstances which doubly aggravated the original guilt of both parties—all had combined to excite the crowd to frenzy.

The prisoners were taken to Maidstone Gaol, and on Monday,

⁵ See Appendix v., p. 501.