

THE CASE OF CONSTANCE KENT AND THE PLEA OF GUILTY.

than nothing, for it was not proved that it belonged to Constance, or that the blood was not natural, which, indeed, it would appear it was, and this accounts for its never having been seen again after having been shown to a medical man. The fact, indeed, that it was found secreted downstairs, points rather, as does another fact,† not proved in evidence, to the servants.

It is surprising that a person should have supposed for a moment that Constance should have destroyed one bloody garment and secreted another downstairs, in a place where it must have been found. The evidence, indeed, showed that she had not destroyed a nightdress, for the housemaid proved that the one which was missing was the one seen and shown to several persons on the morning of the murder; and the two others were found; and the girl had but three. The detective, whose blundering in the case strongly showed the want of persons of some intellect to undertake such cases, had got an idea into his head, just one of those ideas which ignorant persons take up so readily, and cannot bring to the test of careful and enlarged examination of all the facts. His idea was that the nightdress put into the basket was not the one worn during the bloody deed, but one put into the basket in substitution for it, and withdrawn to put in its place—leaving the absence of a third to be accounted for by a supposed loss by the laundress.

It no doubt would be absurd to suppose that Constance, a sharp, sensible girl, should have put a nightdress which had been bloody, into the basket, or that she should at once raise suspicion against herself by withdrawing one from the basket, the loss of which the

laundress was certain to discover and declare—as she did—that very day; and this although several witnesses had seen both dresses and found nothing to observe upon them. Thus she would gratuitously and unnecessarily have exposed herself to a fatal and irremovable suspicion. If her statement is true, the “detective” was wrong altogether; for she says the dress put into the basket was the one worn while she did the bloody deed. (On the probable truth of this it is enough to observe that it was too absurd ever for the detective to suppose; and no one, surely, can believe that, supposing the nightdress had such traces that she should have felt it necessary to withdraw it and incur the certainty of a removable suspicion, the persons, male and female, who had examined it on the morning of the murder, would not have observed those traces. For the present, however, it is enough to notice that if the confession is true the detective’s theory was wrong; and that the undoubted facts in the case are not to be reconciled with either the one or the other. However, there was one fact which had a fatal effect upon the girl—the nightdress, beyond a doubt, was missing. And that fact ruined her. It was a fact which could not, we think, be explained on any credible theory of her *guilt*. But, on the other hand, it could not be explained on any theory of her *innocence*, except upon this, that some one else, implicated in the crime, and an inmate of the house, had withdrawn the dress from the basket, in order to divert suspicion and throw it on Constance; and it is observable that about a week after the murder, the nurse, being then herself under suspicion and surveillance of the police, remarked upon the fact that the nightdress was missing as certain to lead to a disclosure of the guilty party; and went so far, according to two witnesses, as to state that she herself had seen the dress put into the basket, which she at once denied; but they, on their oath, asserted that she had said so, and it was one of the facts given in evidence against her.

This shows that it might have occurred to any inmate who was conscious of guilt or suspicion, to seek to throw the suspicion off in this way. Such a course has been known to be taken by a person suspected, though not guilty; and, once taken, of course could never be acknowledged; for, on the other hand, it would be deemed, in all likelihood, a fatal proof of guilt. So that the mere fact that the dress was missing proved nothing against the person to whom it belonged, as others in the house had the opportunity of removing it, and on the other hand, of course that person must always remain open to suspicion, unless its removal was brought home to any one else. The act of abstracting the dress, whoever did it, was secret, and no one would be likely to confess what it would be probably fatal to acknowledge. An attempt was made, on the hearing of the case against the nurse, to con-

In the scullery a chemise wrapped up in a thick brown paper I took it into the stable in the yard to examine it, and while so employed, police-superintendent Foley came, and I showed it to him. There was blood on it. Mr. Foley took it away, and said he would show it to a medical gentleman. I have not seen it since. The blood was on the lower part of the chemise. There was a good bit of blood about it. The blood was on both the fore and hinder part. I do not think that there was any blood on the garment about the shoulder part. The marks of blood and smears nearly covered the lower part of the dress. They were both before and behind. I found the chemise on the Saturday afternoon about four o’clock. By Mr. Rodway: ‘I don’t know, of my own knowledge, whether the chemise was ever shown to a medical man. I have never seen it since.’”

† “There is one fact which has never yet come to light, from first to last, in this case. It will be remembered that the man-servant and boys swore that when they cleaned the knives and forks in the pantry on the morning of the murder, June 30, all the knives were there, and not one was missing. Shortly after the discovery of the murder, the local police, in scrutinising the locality of the pantry, happened to take particular notice of the knife-cleaning machine. They applied a turn-screw to the screws, and found them easily yield, opened the machine, examined the inside, and a white-handled poultry knife, with spots of blood clearly visible upon the blade, was discovered hidden there. This circumstance, like that of the stained piece of linen found in the boiler flue—whether important or unimportant we do not say—was kept strictly secret, and it was only by a stratagem that the writer contrived to get an acknowledgment that such a knife, with such stains as described upon the blade, had been found in the knife-cleaning machine. This knife, when last seen, which was about four years ago, was in the possession of the police. Who knows, if this had been produced at the time, what aid it might have rendered as a link in the chain of evidence in the elucidation of the mystery?”—*Western Daily Press.*