

III.—A CLUE.

The public sentiment of our little community, it is true, did not agree with me as to the innocence of Gordon, but I did not on that account alter my opinion, for I knew too well that public sentiment is sometimes based on false premises, when their prejudices and passions are excited. Perhaps I was aroused into becoming a warmer advocate of Gordon than I otherwise would have been, by the fact that Robert Sutton was among the loudest in denouncing him as the guilty man. I had never liked Sutton and did not wish him to win Mary away from his rival who, whatever his father might be, was in every way the best fitted to make her a good husband.

Then one day as I was riding slowly up the road, to a spot where the men were employed digging a drain, the thought darted across my mind—of a strange, suspicious looking fellow I saw on the very morning of the inquest. At last, I remembered where I had seen him—it was on Manning's farm at harvest time.

I gave some hasty directions to the men and went on immediately to Beechnut Farm where I questioned the old woman with respect to this man: and she recognized him immediately from my description. He had been employed about the farm at the busiest time and received his discharge previous to her master's death. He was a surly sort of fellow, she said, and not a bit too honest, for she had missed several things since he had left. She had forgotten all about him, and never mentioned him at the inquest, simply because no one asked her; but she did not believe he killed her master, for he had left at least a day before. I began to entertain a different opinion, however, and lost no time in setting the authorities on the alert to bring him back. When I had done this, I felt easier in my mind.

I saw Mary a few days after her father's burial, which was largely attended by people from far and near—so intense was the interest created by the case—and despite her great grief I was amazed and not displeased to find her make the first reference to the accusation under which the father of her lover was now lying in the village jail.

"Nothing," she said sobbingly, "can make me believe that poor Harry's father could ever have murdered my dear, unhappy only parent. The Almighty will bring the murderer to light, I feel as sure as I see you now before me."

Mary was likely to be well provided for, as the farm was large and in capital order. Curious to say, however, no will was to be found, though both the women were under the belief that he had made one some months previously. Neither could any money be found anywhere about the house. Mary said her father must have saved considerable, for he had always been penurious in the extreme since he had come into that part of the country. The shop-keepers with whom he did his business stated that at one time or other they had paid him a good many dollars for his grain and other produce; but they did not know any more than the members of his own household what he had been in the habit of doing with it.