

STAUNTON TRIAL.

INTRODUCTION.

On the evening of Friday, the 13th of April, 1877, a gentleman, bearing the historic but unusual name of Casabianca, was in a small shop in Forbes Road, Penge. Forbes Road happens to be on the boundary line between Kent and Surrey, and while Mr. Casabianca was despatching his business, a stranger came in and asked the shopkeeper, who was also the postmaster, where he ought to register a death which had occurred that morning at No. 34. The deceased, he added, was a lady from Cudham, in Kent. The name of Cudham excited Mr. Casabianca's curiosity; his wife's sister, Mrs. Louis Staunton, had last been heard of in that vicinity, and her family had reasons for fearing that she was the victim of serious maltreatment. Following up the clue, he had an interview next morning with Mr. Longrigg, the medical man who had attended the deceased and had signed the certificate of death. He was shown the dead body, and identified it as that of his sister-in-law, and as a result of what he told the doctor, the certificate was withdrawn, the funeral postponed, and the coroner communicated with. On the following Wednesday an inquest was begun on the body of Mrs. Staunton, in the course of which one of the strangest stories in our criminal annals was disclosed.

Harriet Staunton was by birth Harriet Richardson. Her mother had married a second time, and was now the wife of a country clergyman, the Rev. John Butterfield, of Great Burstead, Essex. By her former marriage there were four children, a son and three daughters, of whom Harriet was the youngest. An elder sister, wife of the Mr. Casabianca already referred to, had been prominently before the public eye a few years earlier in connection with the Wicklow peerage case, when, as the widow of the Hon. William