



THE TRUTH WITHIN

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HISTORIC DOUBTS CONCERNING THE SUICIDE OF JOHN SADLEIR.

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[We received, several weeks ago, this thoroughly extraordinary speculation, and, we confess, hesitated to print it—thinking too superficially that the eminent, erudite, and eccentric writer had allowed that subtle and ingenious vein of his to betray him into a position, still more absurd, however logically fortified, than that in which he questioned the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte. However, as revelation after revelation of Sadleirism is recorded, each more startling and unaccountable than the last, where is the possible harm of ushering before the public one that so far surpasses and sets at naught them all?—Nation.]

Sir—When the startling intelligence first spread abroad that the notorious John Sadleir had put a sudden period to his existence, there appeared to me nothing of improbability in the occurrence. No inconsistency between the antecedents of the individual and this—the abrupt close of his career—nothing very extraordinary in such a consummation of the destiny of such a man. I really took it for granted, or for proved, that, led on by the lures and the needs of pecuniary speculation, and a political ambition—such as it was—he had first raised thousand after thousand, by daring and unscrupulous forgeries and speculations, and that, now, at last detected, or on the very brink of detection, he had, of the two alternatives before him, boldly preferred the suicide's sudden plunge into the gulf of eternity, to the felon's doom, which else inevitably awaited him.—Such were my ideas on the occasion; and I looked forward simply to the production before the public eye, of sad item after sad item of the fabrications and swindlings of the wretched self-murderer, until the entire extent and depth of his villainy was, so to speak, fathomed, and buoyed off—all the misery he had entailed on all his victims had been ascertained—and there an end. When, however, even the first imperfect details of the first day's inquest came under my notice, I could not refrain from conceiving a serious persuasion, that the reality of the case to be investigated, was not entirely of that simple, unequivocal character which the appearances seemed to denote—a persuasion which had been fortified and confirmed by subsequent reports and proceedings, to such a degree, that I do not hesitate deliberately to declare it was my conviction, that reasons of a solid, reliable character existed for believing that Mr. John Sadleir has in reality not committed suicide at all, but has simply been playing us all the slippery trick so well known both in history and romance, of a pretended death, and a suppositious corpse; has, in fact, been merely capping the climax of his forgeries, by a dexterous forgery of himself.

I dare say not a few of your readers will feel disposed to set down this assertion of mine as a little wild; nay, some, perhaps, even in some small degree, absurd. They are heartily welcome in the first instance to such an opinion, provided they will in the second put themselves to the trouble of conning over my facts and arguments; and when they have done this, to the full, I shall be able to rank them severally, I flatter myself, among the warmest partisans of my opinion.

With these prefatory remarks, I venture, Sir, to lay the following hastily written memoranda before you:—

1st. When we come to look narrowly into the features of this extraordinary case, the first fact of any leading importance that presses upon our attention is, that on the particular Saturday of the alleged suicide, a very large sum of money—thirteen hundred pounds—was paid by Mr. J. Gurney into the hands of Mr. Sadleir, a sum of which from that time to the present, not the slightest trace has been found. Mr. Keating, also on the second day's inquest, speaks of a bank note of a thousand pounds which was not to be found among Sadleir's effects. Independently, too, of this £1,300 clearly made away with, it had been reported that a large remittance which had reached his hand some days previously, had not been lodged—a further sum to be accounted for; and on the final Saturday he was endeavoring to borrow large sums from Mr. Wilkinson. Thus, then, at the very brink of the grave, when money and money's worth ought naturally cease to rate as value in his eyes, we find Mr. John Sadleir on suicide intent; intent, also, on making away with the money of others as largely as he could, and as eagerly as though he had forty full years of life before him.

Look to the dates of the letters, too. You will find that he meditated suicide for one full week before he is supposed to have effected it—during which time he was always borrowing. Then ask yourself where is—not merely their money—but all the millions of money through which he is supposed to have

gone within the last four years, and of which he says himself that no assets are available. How could he have spent such a sum?

2nd. In Paris and Fonblanque, "Medical Jurisprudence," vol. 3, page 24, I find the following important principle as to the period when 'rigor mortis,' or the state of rigidity of a dead body, becomes established:—

"It may be laid down as a general rule that the more sudden the death the longer is cadaverous stiffness from taking place."

And it is further stated as to cases of sudden death:—

"If a body in such cases be cold and stiff we may be certain that more than twelve hours have elapsed since the fatal event."

Let us apply these truths of medical jurisprudence to the case before us, and I am much mistaken if the results arrived at be not somewhat startling. Mr. Sadleir is last seen at his residence on Saturday night by Mr. Norris, his solicitor, shortly before eleven o'clock; and by Elwyn, his butler, at half-past eleven o'clock. At the inquest the latter witness states that his master must have left the house between half-past eleven o'clock, when he went to take the tea things away, and a quarter before one, when he went to fasten the front door.

Thus, in any case, Mr. Sadleir could not have reached Hampstead before twelve o'clock, at the earliest, and might not have reached it before half-past one at the latest; and supposing him to have really committed suicide, that event would have taken place at the earliest at half-past twelve o'clock, and at the latest at, say two o'clock.

These data being thus fixed, let us now turn to the evidence, at the inquest to ascertain when, and under what conditions the body was discovered.

Policeman S 323, deposed that he "was called to the body on Sunday about a quarter before nine in the morning," and he adds that "the body was quite cold and stiff."

And, Mr. Robert Nicholl, surgeon, of Hampstead, deposed that he "saw the dead body of Mr. Sadleir at twenty minutes before ten o'clock, and that the body was quite cold and the limbs rigid."

Regarding, then, the evidence of the surgeon as corroboratory of that of the policeman, we may safely take it as proved that the body in question, be it Mr. Sadleir's or be it not, was quite cold and stiff at a quarter before nine o'clock. But we have already established half-past twelve as the earliest hour at which a suicide could have taken place, which gives us as the greatest possible interval which could have elapsed between the supposed suicide and the finding of the body cold and stiff precisely eight hours and a quarter. A result which contrasts rather strangely with the maxim from which he started, viz., that "if a body in such cases be cold and stiff, we may be certain that more than twelve hours have elapsed since the fatal event."

All standard authorities on medical jurisprudence concur in inculcating a spirit of caution—nay, even of scepticism, as to the identification of persons 'found dead.' This quotation of the following passages may, in corroboration of this statement, be considered not altogether inappropriate.

Under the head "persons found dead," Dr. Guy, in his treatise on Medical Jurisprudence, p. 278, speaks thus:—"One general rule may be laid down. We should never content ourselves with the mere passive exercise of our senses or judgment. It is not enough to see the objects which actually present themselves to the eye. We must look for such as are not obvious at the first glance. To the correctness of good observers; we must add the intelligence and invention of an experimenter. We must beware of a hasty decision, and remember that the apparent cause of death is not always the real one. A man may die a natural death, in a situation or under circumstances which may cause suspicion to fall upon the innocent, and the murderer (or the swindler) may place his victim (or his subject) in a situation which may lead to the belief that the deceased died by his own hand."

And further—"And the place in which the body is found, the first caution is not to conclude too hastily that the spot in which a body is discovered, is that in which death actually took place."

"When witnesses," says Dr. Beck (Medical Jurisprudence, page 409), "swear to the identity of a dead person, unless their *causa scientia*, or means of identification consists in scars, tattooing, or other indelible marks, their evidence should be taken with the utmost possible caution by the jury; for very soon after death such a total change of the features takes place that it is impossible for the nearest relatives to recognise them."

To the foregoing extract I may not inappositely append the following:—

"It cannot be too generally known that upon the

discovery of a dead body, its situation and attitude should never be disturbed, until it has been examined by competent persons. We may, for example, find the deceased in a posture which he could never have himself assumed, whence we should be led to conclude that he had not fallen by his own hands. In the case of the disputed suicide of the Earl of Essex in the tower, much information was lost by the body having been stripped and removed before a due examination took place."—Paris and Fonblanque, vol. ii., p. 19.

To the foregoing passages, whose application to the case in hand is obvious to every reader, I may append the following remarks as a partial commentary:—

1st. Although such should have been done, the body was removed to the Hampstead workhouse, without having been examined by any competent person.

2nd. The body was not identified at the inquest by any individual whose *causa scientia* consisted in any knowledge of the body by marks or peculiarities of structure. Nay, extraordinary to relate, the sworn identification of the body as that of John Sadleir comes not from any relatives of John Sadleir, although several of them were in London, and appear at the adjourned inquest, but from a servant named Elwyn, who had been in Sadleir's employment but eighteen months. It is upon the evidence of this person, and this person only, that the body was identified for the jury. Indeed, it so chances that one passage in the evidence of Mr. Morris, the solicitor, enables us to estimate of what extremely little value or trustworthiness is the evidence of this same Elwyn in this particular; for, while the latter states, that "he had not observed any change in his master during the last month or two," and that his master's "manner on Saturday was the same as usual," the jury are, on the contrary, informed by Mr. Norris, that Mr. Sadleir "latterly appeared haggard," and that "he noticed an extraordinary change in his appearance during the last week"—that he "seemed to be quite borne down during the last few days"—and that "he was restless and not in his usual temperament."

As to the identification of the body, it may, in addition, be not undeserving of remark, that the reports in the public press speak of a change in the features of the deceased, and of his looking older than he really was.

3rd. In the evidence of Elwyn, the butler, one circumstance is recorded, to my mind of a most important nature, and which I cannot better introduce than by the following appropriate extract from Paris and Fonblanque, vol. 2, p. 18:—

"In conducting our inquiry, the most trifling incidents connected with the deceased should not pass unheeded; for however unimportant they may at first individually appear, we shall often find that, in combination, they will afford the principal data for the solution of our problem. With how many examples will the history of crime present us, where the most minute circumstances have alone furnished the convincing proofs of guilt? Their apparent insignificance in such cases would seem to exempt them even from the usual precautions of concealment, and more especially from those artful measures by which the designing criminal seeks to cast an impenetrable veil over the more direct evidences of his crime."

The circumstance, in the evidence of Elwyn, the butler, to which I allude, is the following. After reading to the jury the memoranda in which his master directs him to get the essential oil of almonds at Maitland's, the following testimony is given by him (I quote from the Times):—

"Mr. Sadleir had previously that evening asked him to clean two bottles, and place them on the sideboard, which he did. He (witness) did not know that it was poison that he had to get at Mr. Maitland's. He thought it was some ingredient in a hair wash, which his master was going to mix in the two bottles which had been placed on the sideboard."

A truly singular, a most extraordinary piece of evidence, this—a man who has just posted a letter to his sister-in-law, informing her of his intention to commit suicide, who has sent out to the Chemist's for a bottle of poison, and who has the cares of half a dozen tottering Banks and Railways, to say nothing of frauds and forgeries beyond count, crushing his racked and guilty brain into a mummy, is engaged as a prelude to his extraordinary end in preparing—a hair wash!

It is a fact—and I thought it rather a coincidence—that almost immediately previous to reading the piece of evidence just cited, I had been reading in the very work of Dr. Taylor, the toxicologist which Sadleir, it is stated, had been perusing on the day of his alleged death, Dr. T.'s discussion of the question, as to whether dark hair can be artificially changed to light, and his account of sundry washes

of recent invention which effectually produce the result.

One thing I hold to be abundantly clear, that no theory as to the fate of Sadleir can be satisfactory which will not take the account of, and satisfactorily account for, this singular item of Elwyn's evidence.

4th. One word as to the place in which the body was found. It has appeared to me very strange, that a man intending to make away with himself, by a poison, instantaneous in its effects, should trudge out to Hampstead Heath, in the middle of the night, for the purpose, first putting into his pocket a piece of paper to tell his name. In short the doing so, were putting oneself to a deal of trouble, for no intelligible purpose. But a very intelligible purpose is suggested by the following head of inquiry, extracted from a long list of such from the 2nd vol. of Paris and Fonblanque's Medical Jurisprudence:—

"Whether the spot in question be of a description to explain the cause of the deceased having been found there, or how far its retired situation excites the suspicion that the body had been conveyed for concealment or some other purpose."

I had intended adding some remarks upon the excessive ease with which a body for the nonce could be procured among the 2½ millions of the population of London, as well as some other points which might be of interest to your readers, but as this paper has already exceeded its limits, I forbear, at least for the present.

WHO USES THE IRISH ESTABLISHMENT?

(From the Weekly Register.)

St. Francis of Sales (says the compiler of the beautiful little book called his "Esprit," one of the works which in modern English are called—ana), complained of a preacher who preached against those who neglect sermons. "We were there," said the Saint "and he should have preached to us, not to those who had staid away." We are in some danger of a like reproof when we write of the Irish Establishment. The Protestants of England have the power to do away with that organised iniquity, far the most monstrous on the face of the earth, and we believe the majority of them would insist on doing away with it, if they knew its real deformity; but unhappily there are few precepts of the moral law which they would not rather break than their rule of never reading anything which they know to be written by an English or Irish Catholic, and no article of their faith which they would not rather reject than believe what he writes, even if it had the luck to be brought before them. Catholics in England, and even more in Ireland, may ask, Why tell us what we know only too well, but cannot help? The fact is, however, that all of us need to have what we know kept before our eyes, and still more those who have a general knowledge want details, not for their own satisfaction, but to answer the unscrupulous assertions of opponents. Besides, the Weekly Register circulates not in England and Ireland only, but on the Continent, in the Colonies, in the United States, and elsewhere. The English people and the English Government are heartily ashamed of the monstrous injustice of the Irish Establishment. They would gladly be rid of it if they could without trouble; but our Constitution makes all changes slow, and changes which are opposed by any strong interest almost impossible. The (so-called) Ecclesiastical Courts which pollute the name of justice in Doctors' Commons, and still more in Dublin, have been condemned by all parties for a quarter of a century. Eighteen bills have been brought into Parliament for their abolition. They exist, though no one can defend them, because a powerful body of legal practitioners would be mortally offended by their abolition. Our best chance of overcoming this *vis inertia*, which enables a few Irish Protestants to maintain the monster abuse of Ireland (nay, of the whole world, for where is there anything else like it?) is to shame Englishmen by the public opinion of the world. Already it is easy to see the discomfort of any educated Englishman abroad if the Irish Establishment is mentioned. He will do anything to change the subject. He is sure to wish to discuss the young Prince Imperial, or the war in the Crimea, or the Hotel du Louvre, or anything else in Heaven, or Earth, or under the Earth, rather than that odious subject. If he is not very scrupulous indeed, he will deny the facts; and he is generally so ignorant of them, that he may do so without outraging his conscience. The Times, a little more than a year ago, assured him that conversions to Protestantism, aided by the famine and emigration, had so much changed the country, that the Catholic religion would soon be as little remembered in Ireland as the worship of Woden and Thor. What the Times says is not always gospel; but who would reject a statement he would give so much to be able to believe? It is therefore impor-