

Crime and Punishment

Chippenham



Concealment of Birth at Chippenham

Jane Forward, a young girl, about sixteen years of age, and very respectably dressed, pleaded guilty to an indictment of charging her with concealing the birth of her female infant at Chippenham.

Mr. Lopes, who appeared on her behalf, briefly addressed the Court, saying it was quite clear from the evidence of the medical man that no violence had been used to the child. There was nothing to lead to the supposition that the child had been born alive. It was a most painful case, for the prisoner had been seduced under most painful circumstances, at a time when she was only 15 years of age. Up to that time she had born an extremely good character, and since her committal she had been in the care of the Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children, who spoke in the very highest terms of her, and were anxious to retain her.

Mr. Saunders, who appeared for the prosecution, said he was quite prepared to endorse all that Mr. Lopes and said, and to beg that his Lordship would extend as much mercy to the prisoner as he thought fit.

In reply to the learned Judge, it was stated that the prisoner had early lost both mother and father.

His Lordship, addressing the prisoner, said the law made it penal to conceal the birth of a child, and it was a most wholesome and indispensable condition, because if it were not for that, thousands and tens of thousands of infants would open their eyes upon the light, close them again, and never be heard of. The learned counsel on both sides had recommended the prisoner to the mercy of the Court, and his Lordship observed that she had lost her father and mother at a very early age, and had had nobody to guide her aright. He further observed from the evidence of the doctor that in his opinion there was nothing to show that the child had been born alive. The prisoner best knew whether it was or not; he proceeded upon the supposition that it was not. Still she had no business to throw the body into the river. It was an offence against the law, and taking all the circumstances into consideration, the sentence of the Court was that she be imprisoned in the house of correction and kept to hard labour for a period of one month.

Salisbury & Winchester Journal, Saturday 31 March, 1866.

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