



Crime and Punishment

Rowde

A Malicious Act

Emma Townsend, married woman, Rowde, was summoned by Mr. Frederick Franks for having done wilful and malicious damage to a shawl belonging to Charlotte Bevan, domestic servant, in the employ of his mother.

Mr. Hopkins appeared for the complainant.

Mr. Franks stated that in May he wanted to make a dummy in connection with the Yeomanry Sports, and borrowed the shawl, which was a red woollen knitted one, from Charlotte Bevan to make up the dummy with. It was a good sized shawl and was nearly new. On the evening of the 14th May he hung the shawl out to dry on the gate-post about eighty yards from the house. He went to take it away at six o'clock, but could not find it. Someone had taken it.

Defendant: it was not a woollen shawl, but a but a common worsted one, and my little girl picked it up.

Charlotte Bevan said the shawl was hers, and she valued it at 10s. Shortly after the shawl was lost, the defendant met her and asked if she had lost one, adding that she heard she had and that someone was blamed for taking it. Witness said a shawl of hers had been taken from the gate, and Mrs. Townsend said it must be the same that her little girl picked up. She subsequently sent James Drew for the shawl, but he did not get it.

James Drew said that he went for the shawl, but Mrs. Townsend would not give it to him.

A boy named Webb, who guessed his age at 14 and then put it at 15, but looked more like a lad of 12, was the next witness. He said he did not know the nature of the oath, and could not read or write, and had never been to a Sunday School. Mr. Colston asked him if he had any parents, and he said he had. With regard to the case he stated that he was working for Mrs. Franks and was sent to Mrs. Townsend for the shawl. She gave it him wrapped up in the condition it was in then. [The shawl was exhibited to the magistrates in a piece of paper, and was a mass of shreds as though it had been through a pulping machine]. The boy said that when Mrs. Townsend gave him the shawl she said she had boiled it in water in which she had put lime.

Mrs. Townsend described the boy as a "wicked story-teller," and alleged that Drew had taken a false oath. She said the affair took place in April and not in May, that she and her little girl were going "cowslipping," and that the little girl picked up "a piece" of shawl and asked if she might wrap her dolly in it. She

©Wiltshire OPC Project/2014/Teresa Lewis

permitted the child to do so, and when they got home she threw the shawl in a whitewash pail, intending to use it as a floor cloth. It was only a piece of a shawl, and when she spoke to Bevan about it the girl said that they had thought the calves had eaten it.

Mr. Franks said the shawl was nearly new and a good one. There was no calves near the place where the shawl was left.

The magistrate fined Mrs. Townsend 5s. for doing malicious damage, 7s. 6d., which they considered to be the value of the shawl, and 10s. costs. They gave her a month in which to pay; in default of payment she would be sent to prison for fourteen days.

Mrs. Townsend said she could not pay, that her husband would not pay, and that she herself would much prefer going to gaol.

The magistrates ordered her to think the matter over.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette 19 June 1890

OPC NOTE

No further reports have come to light as to whether Mrs. Townsend paid the money or whether she defaulted and was sent to prison. Probably she paid up.