



Crime and Punishment

Tollard Royal

THE ASHCOMBE MURDER 1860

Western Circuit Devises, March 27

(Before Mr. Baron Martin)

Serafin Manzano, a Spaniard, was placed in the dock, charged with the wilful murder of Anastasia Trowbridge, at Ashcombe, on the 3rd of November last. The prisoner claimed the privilege of being tried by a mixed jury.

Mr. Edwards and Mr. Flocks were counsel for the prosecution, and Mr. H. T. Cole and Mr. W. M. Cooke defended the prisoner.

An interpreter being sworn, the prisoner pleaded "Not Guilty."

Mr. Edwards stated the case, from which it appeared that the prosecutor, the husband of the unfortunate woman, lived with his wife many years in a cottage, at a lonely place called Ashcombe, in the parish of Tollard Royal. On the morning of the 3rd day of November last, the prosecutor breakfasted with his wife at half-past six. He was in the employment of Mr. Grove, residing in the neighbourhood, and engaged on the roads about half-a-mile from his cottage. At seven o'clock he left his home for the purpose of going to his work. He stayed at work until about one o'clock, when he returned home to his dinner. There was a garden in front of the cottage, and a garden in front of the cottage, and a path leading up to the door, and when his wife went out she was in the habit of placing the key of the door in a hole they had made for that purpose. On this morning, on returning home, the prosecutor found the door locked, and on searching for the key it was not to be found. This aroused his suspicions, and he looked in at the window, but could not see anything. He then went round to the back of the house, and on looking through a window there, he saw his wife's feet on the ground, she apparently lying down. He immediately broke two panes of glass, opened the hasp of the window, and got into the room, when he discovered his wife lying with her back to the wall, her face covered with blood, quite dead. On that he immediately procured an iron bar, forced off the staple of the door into which the lock shot, came out of the house, and ran to some cottages at Ashcombe, and immediately returned to the house, accompanied by Frederick Parsons, two women, and Mr. Corbyn, the bailiff of Mr. Grove. On discovering the state of the body, the men went in different directions to give the alarm, and the two women remained with the prosecutor, who took up the body in his arms, and evinced those feelings that a man was likely to exhibit under the painful circumstances. Mr. Corbyn then returned

with Mr. Grove and searched the house, and on-going upstairs the room was found very much disturbed; the things were scattered about and on the prosecutor coming up, he discovered that some clothes had been carried away, and among other things two coats, a pair of leggings, a hat, an umbrella, and a pair of boots, one of the coats being a tweed and the other a blue coat, which had been presented to the husband of the murdered woman by an agricultural society. A doctor was sent for, and on the place being examined it was found that there were splashes of blood inside the door and about the walls, and a great smear of blood for two yards from the door into the room where the body was lying, and some outside the door; her face was dreadfully cut with some sharp instrument, and it would seem that she had been dragged along the ground to the spot where the body was lying. The lower extremities were cold, but some part of the thighs had warmth in them, and from all appearances the murder had been committed about 11 o'clock. I appeared that at the time of the murder the unfortunate woman was in the act of preparing the dinner, for the fire was nearly out, and there was a pot on it containing some turnips, and some potatoes were lying on the table peeled and prepared for boiling, and she had been ironing, as there was a shirt lying in the room already ironed. There was a saw found in the passage, which usually hung up in the house, and when the body was examined it was found that two of the blows had evidently been inflicted with the saw, because there were marks on the skull clearly showing that those blows had been so inflicted, and the white handle of a razor was found inside the back-door, and the blade at another spot; and the inference from these facts was that someone had entered the house at about 11 o'clock on that day, called the woman to the door, commenced the attack, and ultimately murdered her. It was evidently done by someone having a white-handled razor, and who came for the purpose of laying his hands on any property he could get. The evidence to connect the prisoner with the crime was as follows:- In the month of October the prisoner was wandering about the country, and applied to a Mr. Sainsbury, of Eastern-hall Farm, for employment. He was engaged for some few days, and during that time a man named Noah Sainsbury saw in the prisoner's possession a razor with a white handle, and a little looking-glass for the purpose of shaving. About the 20th of October, the prisoner left Mr. Sainsbury's employment, carrying with him the white-handled razor and the looking-glass, and after he was arrested, which was some days subsequent to the murder, the looking-glass was in his possession, but the razor was gone. Nothing was seen or heard of him from that time until the 30th of October, when he was observed in the neighbourhood of the cottage, at a place called Alvediston, about four miles from Ashcombe, in a state of great want and distress, begging bread at the house of one of the witnesses, and at about four o'clock on the same day he was seen at a house at Berwick St. John, about one mile from Ashcombe, and a man named Taylor observed that at that time he was wearing a cord waistcoat, and that cord waistcoat was, after the murder, discovered in a wood at some distance from the prosecutor's cottage. On the 31st of October, he was seen at Rashmore, a very short distance from Ashcombe, begging; the 1st of November he was seen, at seven in the morning, under a stack of oats, where he appeared to have slept during that night; the same day he was seen at another place, in Tollard Royal, and at ten o'clock he was seen at Fern-house, making signs to people to make them understand he wanted something to eat; and at half-past three he was again seen one mile off. On the 2nd of November he was seen by six witnesses in the neighbourhood, and after the murder all the clothes he had on that day were found in a wood at some distance from the cottage where the murder took place. At half-past five on the night before the murder he was seen on the Downs near the spot, and it was not known where he slept that night. On the morning of the murder two men, father and son, were working in a valley near the cottage, and at about 11 o'clock the father called to the son loudly across the valley, and immediately afterwards they saw a man come from the cottage with a bundle and make off, the man limping as he walked, and the prisoner was limping at the time he was apprehended. On the next day he was seen 20 miles off, having in his possession every single article of dress, and the umbrella as well, which had been taken away from the prosecutor's house. The blue coat he had offered for sale, and also a waistcoat for 2s., which was one of the waistcoats taken from the house. On the 7th he was seen near Wareham, offering another waistcoat for sale. On the 10th he was seen at Farley, in Hampshire, and there he sold a coat which was identified, and on the 11th he was apprehended at Southampton, one of his fingers being cut, as if by a razor or some sharp instrument.

The husband of the murdered woman was called as a witness, and subjected to a very severe cross-examination by Mr. Cole, but nothing was elicited varying from the above statement, and a number of witnesses were called who proved the other statements, after which the Court adjourned until the next morning at nine o'clock. The jury were removed under the care of a bailiff.

WEDNESDAY MORNING

The prisoner, by permission of the judge, before Mr. Cole addressed the jury, made the following statement:- "I was on Thursday afternoon, the 3d of November, with a man, woman, and child, in a shed about two miles from Trowbridge's house. I did not know who they were. We passed the night in the shed, and exchanged clothes - he giving me the bundle, which contained the clothes of Trowbridge. I went to sleep, and when I awoke in the morning the man, woman, and child were gone. I went in a direction where I hoped to find employment, and then I got rid of the clothes to maintain myself. Afterwards I arrived at the place where the police arrested me. I had before the 3d of November been in a neighbourhood begging and seeking work. The man who gave me the bundle was of greater stature than myself. I observed that he was a little lame, and wore trousers and a jacket like I have got on. I have nothing more to say."

Mr. Cole then addressed the jury on behalf of the prisoner, urging upon them that, although the case might be one of considerable suspicion, yet the proof was not sufficiently satisfactory to bring home to their minds beyond any reasonable doubt that the prisoner was the man who had committed this dreadful crime. They must recollect that the prisoner was entitled to any doubt they might entertain of his guilt.

Mr. Baron Martin having summed up with great care, the jury retired, and after the lapse of about half an hour they returned a verdict of "Guilty."

His Lordship immediately passed upon him the sentence of death.

The defence was conducted by Mr. George Chitty, of Shaftesbury, on behalf of the Spanish Government.

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