



Augusta Mitchell – The Warminster Romance

Middlesex Sessions, September 4.

Before Mr. Payne

A Sad Case

Augusta Ann Mitchell, 22, a respectable looking woman, whose case some few weeks ago caused so much commiseration, was placed at the bar.

The prisoner, who has not long been in London, fell in with a groom, and after a little persuasion consented to live with him, and for five weeks did so as his wife. The groom left a £5 note and some gold in his room, which she took out and appropriated to her own use. He met her upon the Metropolitan railway with the money in her possession. In her defence the prisoner said she thought that as she had been foolishly and disgracefully living with him as his wife, she had a certain amount of right to use his money. She had only spent a few shillings of it and did not intend to deprive him of it when he gave her into custody. At the trial she was not defended by counsel, and the jury found her guilty. She then told the court a long tale about her relations, and the bad example set by her mother, who when she came to London received a large sum of money which had been left to her. Her mother has decamped with a villain who had seduced her (the mother). The judge upon the day of the trial ordered Mr. Lockyer, the sessions officer, to make inquiries into the matter, and that person has been actively engaged in doing so for the last three weeks.

The case having been called on, Lockyer said that, obedient to the orders of the court, he had seen the prisoner, and she had given him the addresses of her friends, of whom he had made inquiries. The following was a letter he had received from her grandfather at Warminster (the letter was handed into court and read by the learned judge. It was as follows:

Warminster, August 28.

Sir, your letter to hand this morning containing the statements of Augusta Ann Mitchell, which is a correct one of, I regret to say, a granddaughter, who was taken hence by her mother nearly seven years ago; since which time a complete severance has existed, the mother having come into possession of a considerable sum of money by the death of relatives, who, unfortunately (and hence the evil), left it to her own control. In the absence of her husband, then and now in Canada with his two sons, since sent over to him, as stated, she was seduced by the base and villainous fellow, K-- and eloped with him, and thus digressed from that path of rectitude and respectability which she had been reared up and lived in previously. Her age (the prisoner's) at that time, the circumstances, and the temptations of London life for youth, I sincerely trust will combine to induce the judge to temper justice with mercy, to the utmost of his

©Wiltshire OPC Project/2018/Maureen Withey

power and the circumstances will admit. It appears to me that she may be the victim of circumstances, and I cannot but regret deeply that the law does not reach the seducer more frequently, instead of the seduced and weaker sex. As to seeing her or writing to her, I am disinclined and unable to do so. Her degraded position is to my feelings most painful and harrowing, adding grief and sorrow to my fast declining years and strength. All other branches of my family are happily placed in highly respectable and good trading positions and circumstances, and I feel loth to acquaint them with it. – Yours truly, G.L.
Mr. G. Lockyer.

The prisoner pleaded hard for mercy.

The Judge said she had been guilty of a serious offence, and within his recollection she would have been hanged for it. The sentence was eight month's imprisonment, after the expiration of that sentence, the benevolent ladies who visit the prison would no doubt do something for her. He regretted her grandfather would do nothing for her.

The prisoner was removed, apparently overcome with her fate.

London Evening Standard, Thursday, 5 September 1867

The Warminster Romance

Considerable attention is being paid to this case, which is one of an exceedingly sad description. It will be remembered that Augusta Mitchell was recently arraigned before Mr. Deputy-Assistant Judge Payne, at the Middlesex Sessions, on a charge of stealing money from a man with whom she had cohabited. She was convicted, and sentenced by Mr. Payne to eight months' imprisonment with hard labour. It transpired during the trial that the poor girl had been enticed from the country (Warminster) by the prosecutor and seduced, and that at the time of the charge being brought against her she had cohabited with him for five weeks. Mr. George H. Hoare, of 30, Southampton Row, Russell Square, writes as follows:

In the case of Augusta Ann Mitchell, as a juror in attendance at the trial, though unfortunately on the reserve on that day, I beg to say that of the jurors trying the case ten were in favour of an acquittal, and that two obstinate and perverse men only were in favour of finding her guilty, and positively coerced the ten by the fear of being locked up; so they compromised with their consciences by strongly recommending her to mercy. Is it not a miserable perversion of justice that an important case should rest on the caprice of such small minorities, who feel not that the true value of a British jury consists in mitigating the harshness and severity of the law! I, with others, during the progress of the case, could not possibly refrain from expressing our indignation in terms "not loud but deep," yet so loud that my friends were afraid I should be getting into trouble by being too demonstrative.

A memorial, signed by the several members of the jury, has been sent to the Home Secretary praying for the full remission of the sentence. A second recommendation, signed by the jury, has been forwarded to Mr. Joseph Payne, with a note asking that he will endorse the same and forward it to the Home Office. It is stated that Mr. Gathorne Hardy has consented to ask her Majesty to grant an entire remission of the sentence.

Western Gazette, Friday, 20 September 1867

The Case of Augusta Mitchell

At the Middlesex session, on Tuesday, Mr. Payne alluded to the case of Augusta Mitchell, who was sentenced by him the last session to eight months' imprisonment for robbing a groom with whom she had cohabited. The case attracted much attention on account of the severity of the sentence, and memorials were presented to the Home Office praying for a remission of the punishment. Mr. Payne did not seem inclined to admit the enormity of the sentence, but sheltered himself behind the excuse that he was desirous of placing the young woman under good influences. He read Secretary Hardy's letter so that the public might judge whether, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, it amounted to revocation of the sentence. The letter directed that a pardon should be granted to the girl on condition of her being received into a London reformatory, and remaining there until ordered to be discharged. Her one month's preliminary imprisonment is to date from the day on which the sentence was passed and she is to be removed to the Reformatory on 2nd October.

Taunton Courier, 2 October 1867