

PATHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE WICKLOW MURDER.

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DR. SYMES exhibited specimens of gunshot wounds of the skull from a case of double murder. In addition to the interest attaching to ordinary gunshot wounds, the specimens were almost unique in the fact that, although both victims were shot simultaneously, one was killed by bullets alone and the other struck by shot alone. All the evidence went to prove that only one shot was fired at these two victims. Both their heads were together in conversation at the time, but the shot was so extraordinarily disposed in the charge that all the grains of shot hit one and all the bullets hit the other. This mysterious occurrence suggested the possibility of a second shot, but the position assumed by the bodies left no room for doubt that neither could have been shot before the other. These specimens have been presented by Dr. Symes to the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

The facts are as follow :—

About two miles from Kiltegan there lived on a small farm an old man of 80 years, with his wife and servant, aged 65 and 60. He owned the farm, bore a good character, and was for years crippled with chronic rheumatism and paralysis of his lower extremities, moving about on crutches. His house consisted of three apartments—a central kitchen with a bedroom opening on either side. On the morning of 16th May, 1893, a boy returning to work at 7 a.m. saw the old man with his head out of his window shouting that “the

two women are dead, the door is locked, a man with a blackened face came in in the night, fired *two shots at them*, and I saw him go out and lock the door after him; go and fetch the police." A second labourer then arrived and found the key of the door in the centre of the yard, $7\frac{1}{2}$ yards from his window. He unlocked the door, went in, and found the two women dead. The old man's story was that "on going to bed the previous night, his wife went down from her room through the kitchen to see that the servant was comfortable for the night, as she was ill. He was getting into bed, and his wife took the candle with her. There was no other light in the house. He saw a man with a blackened face enter the house and fire *two shots* at the women, retreating immediately and locking the door behind him." The police arrived and searched the house. They found a *single barrel gun* freshly discharged over the kitchen fire, a *canister of powder* in his room, with a *pouch of shot* mixed *large and small*, and a box of gun-wads.

On examining the bodies about 10 a.m., I found both women dead in the servant's room. The wife was killed by *bullets*, and the servant by *grains of shot*. The wife lay on her back on the floor with head towards the door, her left hand crossed her breast, and the right lay by her side. She was dressed with her shawl, apron, and cap on. She lay at right angles to the bed containing the servant. On turning the body a pool of blood was found under the head. There were two holes in the bonnet, and three portions of bullets were found matted in her hair. There were two bullet wounds in the back of the head midway between the vertex and nape, one on each side of the occiput. The right was a jagged circular opening admitting the point of the index finger. The outer table was *depressed and circularly fractured* in four pieces, but not penetrating the skull cavity. The left wound was higher and smaller, and admitted little

finger; it was jagged and circular, and passed directly into the brain. Portions of brain were exuding with pieces of bones. The bone admitted the little finger, and was a shade larger than the surface wound. The bullet was found in the lower part of the anterior lobe of the right hemisphere of the brain, having passed from left to right. Fragments of bone were carried in by bullet. Death was instantaneous. She was shot, while standing over the servant's bed, from behind.

The servant lay in bed on her right side, and back, facing the door. On raising the head from the right shoulder there were fourteen *shot marks* on the right side of the head and neck; one a deep puncture in front of ear, from which blood had escaped in quantity, over *external carotid* and external jugular vein. This wound severed these vessels and entered the pharynx, air escaping from it. Her death was caused by *hæmorrhage* from this wound. She was shot with *grains of shot only*; and evidently while sitting up in bed looking at the wife, who was standing beside her; she fell back and bled to death. *There were two shot marks on the bones of right temple of different sizes.*

After the inquest the bodies were buried, but the case depending entirely upon the medical evidence, the bodies were exhumed and entrusted to me and Professor Lapper for re-examination. After eight days' examination the conclusions arrived at were:—

Both women were shot simultaneously.

Both their heads were together, as the wife stood beside the bed.

The wife was killed instantaneously, and the servant died from *hæmorrhage*.

Only eighteen different grains of shot hit the servant. The rest of a charge of shot was not discovered. *None hit either the bed[†] or wall beyond.*

One charge of *two or three bullets and a little shot mixed* best accounts for the *two deaths* ; but the defence was that it was absolutely impossible that all the shot could hit one, and all the bullets hit the other.

The husband was found guilty and sentenced to death, but afterwards reprieved; however, the mystery of the *shot wounds* and *bullet wounds* must for ever remain unsolved.

The CHAIRMAN said that with regard to the finding of the grains of shot, he thought the difficulties were not confined to country practice. In one case Dublin surgeons had, after a most careful examination, failed to find a bullet.

DR. BENNETT referred to a case brought to Baggot-street Hospital in which the combined skill of that institution was not able to discover the bullet.