



Inquest on Miss Serena F. M. Hale

Suicide in the Avon

Mr Coroner Wilson held an inquest at the Avon, on Monday, on the body of Miss Serena F. M. Hale, a student at the Diocesan Training Home for Schoolmistresses, whose body was found in the river the same morning. Mr R. B. Reid, Brighton, stated that he was at present visiting Canon Gordon, and said that that morning about ten o'clock he was fishing from the bank at the bottom of the garden attached to Canon Gordon's residence, when he saw the body of the deceased float past on the opposite side of the river. He went into the river and brought it to the shore. He endeavoured to restore animation to the deceased, but completely failed. The deceased was attired in indoor dress, and had neither hat nor cloak on. Witness sent for assistance, and after some little time, Dr Sanctuary came. When witness reached the body, it was quite warm but the pulse was not beating. Dr Thomas Sanctuary said he saw the body of the deceased about three quarters of an hour after it had been taken out of the water. It was then lying in a field opposite Archdeacon Sanctuary's house. The body was well nourished. Deceased was pale and livid, but there was no sign of respiration. He endeavoured to restore respiration for about half-an-hour, but failed. He could find no sign of violence about the body, and in his opinion, death was caused by drowning

Charles Hattatt, gardener, New Street, said as he was at work on the lawn of the Training School that morning about ten o'clock, one of the inmates came to him and asked permission to go into the kitchen garden, which was walled off from the part in which students were allowed to walk, for the purpose of gathering some woodruff. He gave the necessary permission, and as the young lady did not return he went, after some little time, into the garden to desire her not to remain there, but he than found that she was gone. He did not suspect that there was anything wrong, but thought she had left the garden unobserved by him. The water near the edge of the river bank was only about 18 inches deep, but in the middle of the stream it was about five feet deep. When the deceased came and asked permission to go into the garden she was quite calm. If anyone desired to go into the river from the garden it could be easily done.

Miss F. Rodwell, lady superintendent at the Training College, said deceased was one of the students of the Institution, having entered in January last. She was 20 years of age last June; her parents resided at Oakley Crescent, Chelsea. The letter produced was in deceased's handwriting, and was found in her desk that morning. It was not dated and ran as follows: - "Dear Ma - I am greatly grieved to tell you that I have given way to temptation. You will hear all from Miss Rodwell, our lady superintendent. She has been kind to me through it all, oh! so very kind. At the time I write this I feel out of my mind. What to do I do not know. I feel certain I shall be dismissed from college, and rather than bring disgrace upon you and my Vicar I will get rid of myself. I feel I have done much more than I can expect forgiveness for." (No signature was appended to this epistle.) She supposed the temptation of which the deceased spoke was

that she had been found to be untruthful, and in some small things her honesty had been questioned by some of her companions. As far as she was aware, however, nothing had been said about her dismissal from college. She had had a conversation with the deceased on the previous morning, and had then told her that with care on her part, she might establish her character among her companions, but that, of course, she could not but expect that suspicion would attach itself to her. The deceased came to witness again that morning and acknowledged that the suspicions entertained against her were justified, and asked to be forgiven. She then seemed very much distressed and wept a great deal, but did not give the slightest hint that she thought of destroying herself. After her interview with witness deceased had breakfast with the other students, and took her place with them in the morning class, where she remained until a quarter to ten. At that time the rest of the students left the room for the purpose of going to church, but as the deceased had to give a model lesson in one of the city schools on Tuesday she, following the usual rule, remained in the school room whilst the others were at church, for the purpose of preparing her lesson. At that time there was nothing unusual in her appearance to attract attention. In spite of the complaints that had been made against the deceased she was a general favourite amongst her fellow students.

The jury returned a verdict "That deceased committed suicide whilst in a state of temporary insanity".

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