

MALAPRAXIS.

VERDICT OF MANSLAUGHTER AGAINST A MEDICAL ASSISTANT.

Copy of Evidence taken at the Inquest touching the Death of Sarah Shaw, Valley Mill, Matley, before Charles Hudson, Esq., Coroner, Friday, 24th, Monday, 27th, and Tuesday, 28th December, 1841.

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.)

William Derbyshire, sworn: Is assistant to Mr. Walton, surgeon to the Stalybridge Board of Health; the deceased was a subscriber; entitled to attendance; gave notice of confinement some weeks ago, and paid her shilling; told Mr. Walton when she would be confined; Walton promised to attend her. On Friday, 17th December, information came to the board that she was in labour; Mr. Walton and Mr. Roby being out, I went to attend her; when I arrived I found she was not in labour, but waited a little and then went back; told her if worse to let them know; her husband came on Sunday morning to say she was worse, having been so all night; Mr. Walton and Mr. Roby were both in; I went and found she was in labour; I waited till she was delivered of a female child; I left her doing pretty well a little before one; her husband came about three to say she was worse; between eight and nine, I and Mr. Roby went again, and found her dead; I found the house on Friday in a state of destitution; being sickly, I advised her to take a little tea; they had no tea, except a little hyssop tea she had been drinking all night, nor had they any kind of meat; a neighbour woman came in and gave her a crust of bread, and a shilling to buy something with; I gave her money to buy tea; she several times expressed her fear she would not get up well; on the Sunday had a little gruel and some tea; cannot say by whom provided; she was very weak and low when I first saw her from want of food; I then thought she could not get over it; a very hard and tedious labour; the presentation was natural; the cause of death, I consider, being from want of proper support, which caused exhaustion; had she been relieved when application was made, she might have recovered.

Hugh Shaw, cotton-spinner, Valley Mill, Matley, saith: Has been out of work; in work about five weeks ago; worked for B. Bradbury and Co.; had constant employment till mill stopped; had spun four and a half days since for Robert Platt; received 12s. last Tuesday night; this is since my wife died; when mill stopped had 17s. to receive for self and wife and two children to live on; my oldest girl is nine years old, the other seven years; had been working a short time, about three weeks; was not well off before; lived in Matley about ten to twelve weeks; came from Stalybridge; made no application to Matley overseers; made application to my own parish-officer on the 9th December; to Samuel Clayton; told him I was in need of relief; had neither coal nor food in the house; told him who I was, also of my father; Clayton said I was to attend vestry meeting next Thursday; would not give me anything till next Thursday, and perhaps not then; took my wife with me, and showed him her situation; he said he was not allowed to give relief without the sanction of the vestry meetings held every fourteen days; my wife employed George Ridgway to attend the vestry; she had got through her previous confinements well.

George Ridgway sworn: Is an engineer at Valley Mill, Matley; Mrs. Shaw sent me on Thursday night week to the vestry at the Royal Oak, Mill Brook; I told Clayton, and another man I don't know, that Sarah Shaw had sent me to state how they were; they had neither meat, coals, nor fire; that it was needful they should have something; Clayton told me he should neither go up nor relieve them; the other man asked if they belonged to the parish; Clayton said

that was to prove; told me to go about my business; did not tell me to apply to Matley.

Samuel Clayton sworn: Is assistant overseer of Staly; Hugh Shaw made application this day fortnight for relief; told me the state of his case; his wife was with him; she seemed near her confinement; told me of having one child; asked him the usual questions; he said his father belonged to Staly; knew his father, and that he had had relief from the board; I said you might not belong to us for all that; had no settlement himself; I told him I could not relieve him; vestry must be acquainted with his settlement first; never told him to apply to the overseer of Matley.

John Hadfield sworn: Assistant overseer of Matley; was told of the case on Friday last; on the Sunday gave them 2s. 6d.

Adjourned Inquest, Monday, 27th December.

Daniel Barker, surgeon, Stalybridge, sworn: Made a post-mortem examination on the body of Sarah Shaw, on Friday night, 24th December; no marks externally, no putrefaction, but had a fine muscular appearance, and was well furnished with adipose matter; I present a report of the examination; the appearances therein stated are correct; the deceased appeared to have given birth to a child, and appeared to be exhausted by loss of blood; do not think she had suffered from the want of food; if she had, the body would not have presented so firm an appearance; marks of putrefaction would have been visible; they generally soon appear when persons die from want, and there is seldom found any feculent matter in the large intestines; the deceased had died from flooding, caused by the placenta being left in womb partly detached; the placenta being left there is the cause of death; with proper care the placenta could not have been left there; the placenta usually comes away in thirty minutes after birth; a medical man ought not to leave the room until the placenta is removed; if any part was detached, flooding would commence, but that might not be excessive, the medical man in such cases ought to detach it; due care has not been used in this case, but gross neglect; scarcely a fifth part of the placenta is torn away.

Bridget Castle, sworn: Lives at Valley Mill; Sarah Shaw sent for me about four o'clock on Friday afternoon; found Derbyshire there; she was very ill; left before five; left him there; went on Sunday morning at seven; the doctor was there; he laid his hand on her; she said she was very ill; he said it was not labour, but illness all over her body; remained till she was delivered at eleven o'clock; doctor assisted her, and brought the child; brought nothing away but the child; he let the child lie a quarter of an hour; the child did not appear to breathe for a good while; he said child would come round sooner if the navel string bled; he cut the string and tied it up; the child recovered; a girl; he let her lie still for an hour; during that hour he offered to help her many times; she shrieked out, telling him to have patience and let her wait; he then said the after birth was fast, and he must take means to get it; he then pulled it (but did not introduce his hand) by bits; was a quarter of an hour about it; there was no discharge of blood except what came in lumps; he made no remarks; went at half-past twelve; he said we must undress her at four, and get her to bed and keep her warm; during the time he was in the house, was reading a book he brought with him; he was quite sober; gave her a powder three times; in about half an hour after he was gone she began to flood very ill, we assisted her with cloths, warmed a brick and put it to her feet; the husband went for the doctor about three; we told him to go; he came back about four with a bottle, a spoonful of which to be taken every hour; she still continued flooding; I gave her a spoonful; we were to get a pennyworth of vinegar and cold water, to

apply it with cloths to her belly ; we did so ; she continued to get worse, and died about seven ; she had not begun to flood much before doctor left.

Ann Thompson, sworn : Lives at Valley Mill ; went at six, a m., on Sunday, 19th December ; Derbyshire was there ; was there when delivered ; after he cut the navel string he sat a long time ; the afterbirth came away in from a hour to an hour and a half ; she seemed in great pain ; he seemed to be using means to get it away ; it did not come all at once, but in handfuls ; I did not examine it ; I would not have him to attend me.

Adjourned Inquest, Tuesday, 28th December.

Daniel Barker, re-called : Should think the birth of the child not difficult, it is an easy matter to say whether all the afterbirth is all come away ; it does sometimes happen a small portion remains in the womb.

Hugh Shaw, re-called : Entered a member of the Board of Health, Stalybridge, on July 4, 1841 ; the card produced is mine ; my family were all members ; went on the Friday for assistance, again on the Sunday morning at six o'clock ; I rang the bell ; Derbyshire got up to the window ; came down stairs ; I went with him home ; then left the house ; did not go till Derbyshire had left ; on the Sunday, at three o'clock, requested him to come up.

Ellen Ridgway, sworn : Lives at Valley Mill ; was the first there ; about five o'clock ; Sarah Shaw was very ill ; Hugh Shaw called me up when he was going for the doctor ; I went in ; she said she was very ill ; Derbyshire came in about three quarters of an hour ; he examined her ; about eleven the child was born ; he at that time assisted her ; after it was born he let it lie a considerable time before he cut the navel string ; I saw him cut it ; he then tied it up ; was then absent about three quarters of an hour ; but was present when the afterbirth was brought ; it was in lumps ; found many in the bed.

James Walton sworn : Is surgeon to the Board of Health, Stalybridge ; signed the certificate produced ; rules of the board produced ; I engaged Derbyshire, as compounder and occasional visitor, on the 1st December ; he has attended six previous midwifery cases while with me ; I took him at the recommendation of Mr. Hunt, surgeon, Ashton ; any person competent to attend a midwifery case should know when the afterbirth is come away ; we do not consider a woman safe till the placenta is come away ; if any part became detached from the womb, the vessels would become ruptured, and flooding would commence ; there does not appear to be anything particularly difficult in this case ; any surgeon who did not gently remove the placenta when there is adhesion to the uterus, would be guilty of gross neglect ; one of the previous midwifery cases was somewhat similar ; he then sent for me ; I removed the placenta ; I told him to send for me when he again found this the case ; I saw Derbyshire on his return from the labour on the Sunday ; I asked him if the labour was over ; he said it was ; I asked him if the placenta had come away ; he said it had, and that there was no flooding when he left ; when Shaw came at three to say she was flooding, I again said to him, you are sure you removed the whole of the placenta ; he said that he had.

Allen Shaw, sworn : Is collector to the Stalybridge Board of Health ; Sarah Shaw was a member and entitled to attendance.

Verdict, Manslaughter against William Derbyshire, who stands committed to the next Chester Assizes.