

ISLE OF WIGHT OBSERVER Saturday 23rd September 1899

EXTRAORDINARY DEATH FROM
MISADVENTURE.

An inquest was held on Saturday afternoon, at the Oakfield Inn, by Mr HOOPER, deputy Coroner, touching the death of **Alice REED**, wife of Frederick Richard REED, of Cross Street, Oakfield, whose death occurred under the melancholy circumstances detailed in the evidence reported below. Mr WAITE was the foreman of the jury.

Mrs Ann GATRELL, of Somerset Road, High Park, deposed that the deceased, who was her niece, was confirmed on the 31st ult. Witness was with her from that time up to her death. Dr. PRESTON attended. It was deceased's first child, and for the first three or four days she seemed to be going on nicely. On the fifth day she was taken worse, and they sent for Dr. PRESTON, who came between 1 and 2 o'clock, and wrote a prescription. He did not give witness the prescription, but took it to Mr W. SMITH, who made it up. Dr. PRESTON called every day, with the exception of one, when Dr. MACKENZIE called for him. Dr. PRESTON called on Monday, September 11th, and thought deceased was a little better. He came again on Tuesday, and said she did not seem near so well, and added "Go to Mr. SMITH for this medicine." He came again Wednesday, and was surprised to find deceased so much worse. He saw the bottle of medicine on the table, and said "What have you got there?" Witness replied "That is her medicine." Dr. PRESTON said "That is not the medicine at all; I am not surprised at her going back now." Dr. PRESTON then wrote out another prescription, and told witness to take it to another chemist, and the sister of deceased fetched it from Mr POLLARD. Deceased took two doses, but she seemed to get worse, and they sent for Dr. PRESTON again. He came about 10 o'clock, and gave her medicine, but she never became conscious, and did not rally. She died about a quarter to 7 the following morning.

Kenneth Ingleby MACKENZIE, said he was the partner of Dr. PRESTON whose name had been mentioned. Last Sunday morning Dr PRESTON telephoned to him, and asked him if he was going in the direction of High Park. Witness said he was, and he then asked if he would call and see Mrs REED, who was suffering from milk fever. He told witness what he was giving her and that she was improving. He called about half-past 1, and found the patient going on satisfactorily, and told them to continue the treatment. When Dr. PRESTON went for his holidays, he gave witness a list of the patients, and put down Mrs REED to be visited. He called again on Thursday morning, and found she had died at 7 o'clock.

To what do you attribute her death? – Having only seen deceased once I cannot say very much about it, but I had Dr. PRESTON's opinion that it was a case of milk fever, and as the jury are aware people do die of milk fever. After the death occurred, I made it my business to see the Registrar, as I did not know how to act about giving a certificate. Mr WALLER said I could give the certificate as I had seen deceased. Since then, on account of some report which had been given him by the friends of the deceased, he has refused to give the burial order. I gave a certificate that death was caused by milk fever and anthenia. Before I gave the certificate I asked the Registrar whether I should telegraph for Dr. PRESTON to give the certificate, but the registrar said I could give one, as I had already seen the case. After the certificate had been given, he wrote me a note saying, as certain circumstances had been described to him by the father of deceased, he was unable to give the certificate, and should have to communicate with the police. I only saw the deceased once myself.

Was anything brought to your attention the last time you called with regard to the deceased? – No.

The Foreman. – Did you hear from Dr. PRESTON anything about the change of medicine? – Simply that Mrs REED, in having the medicine repeated, had had the wrong medicine sent.

Did Dr. PRESTON tell you that since her death? – Before her death. I have had no communication from him since. He has gone away for his holidays. I know in what part of the world he is, but I don't know his address.

Didn't he say anything which would enable you to draw a conclusion upon the case? – He simply said she had had the wrong medicine given her, and that was as he was going out of the door. I should say that the first medicine was given with the object of reducing the fever, and the next one was a tonic, and instead of repeating the tonic the chemist repeated and sent her the first mixture for reducing the fever. In milk fever the temperature runs up to a great extent, and it is necessary to give medicine to reduce it. The fever having been reduced, she was put on the tonic mixture.

The bottles of medicine were then brought in, and the witness pointed out the two of them were for reducing fever, and one, put up by Mr SMITH, a tonic, and another, put up by Mr POLLARD, also a tonic.

Mr TUTTE. – Would it be very detrimental for her to have taken this reducing mixture? – Well, coming after taking a tonic, it would no doubt have the effect of reducing her a great deal more, and rendering her less able to bear up.

William SMITH, chemist, of High Street, was then called, and deposed that on the 5th of September he dispensed the prescription produced for “Mrs REED, of Cross Street, Oakfield.” A boy waited in the shop and paid for it. The next order he received for “Mrs REED, Cross Street, Oakfield,” was on September 11th. This order was “repeat mixture.” He had had only one prescription for “Mrs REED, Cross Street, Oakfield,” and the writing was that of Dr. PRESTON. He dispensed it, and sent it to the address. He should state, however, that on the 8th of September he had an order from Dr. PRESTON “Mrs REED, Eastfield,” which he dispensed at the time. He thought it was not the same Mrs REED, for it did not occur to him that Mrs REED, of Cross Street Oakfield, could be the same as Mrs REED, of Eastfield, and he repeated the medicine which he had made for Mrs REED, of Cross Street, Oakfield. He had four of five Mrs REED's on his books.

A Juror explained to the Coroner that the locality in which the deceased had lived was known indifferently as Cross Street, Oakfield, and Eastfield, but it was really all the same place.

Mr TUTTE said that sometimes it was called Castle Street, sometimes High Street, sometimes Eastfield. Further on the same road was sometimes called Vectis Road, because of the Vectis Steam Laundry.

The Coroner asked witness if he thought the unfortunate alteration in the medicine would have had any effect on the deceased.

Witness said he was not in a position to judge.

No doubt it would weaken her very much? – No doubt it would.

In reply to further questions, Mr SMITH said the prescriptions were given in writing, and he produced them as copied in his book.

P.S. SHARPE said he had given Mr SMITH notice to bring the original prescriptions.

Mr SMITH said they were accurately copied into his book, but the second one was not a prescription at all, it was simply an order which might have been telephoned to them.

Mr TUTTE said the only mistake seemed to be in the addresses.

P.S. SHARP (to Mr SMITH). – I asked you to send up the prescription, not the copies.

The Foreman. – I take it that on the 5th of September you made up a prescription from Dr. PRESTON – a medicine to reduce fever. Then on the 8th you made up another prescription for an altered medicine.

Mr SMITH – Yes; but I was not aware it was the same Mrs REED.

Mr WAITE. – Then, when you got “repeat mixture” you fell back on the medicine of the 5th. You thought the one in between was for another Mrs REED? – Witness. – I did not think at all. I felt certain it was for another person altogether. I never associated Eastfield with Oakfield at all. There is an Eastfield in quite another part of the town.

P.S. SHARPE said it was a pity that Dr. PRESTON could not be there, as he would elucidate the matter. He asked Dr. MACKENZIE when he would be likely to be back?

Dr. MACKENZIE said that Dr. MACKENZIE had gone away for three weeks or a month.

Mr. WAITE asked Dr. MACKENZIE whether he would advise them to adjourn for the purpose of hearing any explanation Dr. PRESTON might wish to give.

Dr. MACKENZIE said he did not think that Dr. PRESTON would be able to add much more to it, and he did not want to bring him home from North Devonshire. It appeared to him that names of places in this part of the town varied. From his own experience he knew that some people called part of the district Oakfield, while other people called it quite a different name. It was very much the same up at Haylands. He did not think that Dr. PRESTON could tell them more than they had heard, but he could tell them more of the details of the case and the effect when the medicine was changed.

The Coroner said his own impression was that Dr. PRESTON could add very little to what they already knew.

Mr TUTTE pointed out to one of the jury that the same thing might occur to him, as he lived in a road known indifferently as Butler’s Road, and St. John’s Wood Road, and if anyone were to receive two orders, one “Mr DORE, Butler’s Road,” and the other “Mr DORE, St. John’s Wood Road,” they would very naturally think that there were two different persons.

The Coroner pointed out that it was possible the poor woman’s illness might have ended fatally, whether she had taken the wrong medicine or not. It, however, probably accelerated her death.

After some consideration the jury returned the verdict that the deceased “died of milk fever and that her death was probably accelerated by the delivery of the wrong medicine.”
