

The Archimedean.

SYRACUSE:

SATURDAY MORNING, APRIL 13.

CASE OF DR. WEBSTER.

WEAKNESS OF HIS DEFENCE—PROPRITY OF DEFERRING HIS DOOM.

Another of the acts of this grand tragedy has ended. There is but one more to come, and that the last. We expect to witness the close of this terrible scene in the violent death of the victim who has been prepared, either by his own wild passions or the demoniac arts of others, for the terrible sacrifice. If he be innocent, may Heaven interpose to save him and his family from the infamy of the scaffold. We say the *infamy*, for guilty or guiltless, he must have suffered *death* already in a thousand agonizing thoughts and harrowing emotions, each inflicting a wound upon his heart, deeper, sharper and more painful than any which could be dealt by an assassin's knife.

It is indeed an extraordinary case! A man who has grown grey in his native city without a taint upon his reputation for kindness and humanity; a man of liberal education, and scientific attainments—aye, one of the high priests of science; a man enjoying the priceless luxury of a happy home, a loving and trusting wife, and daughters just entering the innocent and beautiful spring-time of womanhood; a man surrounded by a circle of literary friends and high-minded and honorable men—such a man is revealed to us with the suddenness of the lightning's flash as the perpetrator of one of the darkest deeds recorded in the black and crowded volume of human crime.

If this man had been reared in some dark den of infamy, or if he had drawn his first breath and received his whole nurture and education upon the deck of a pirate-ship, we should have shuddered even then at the unparalleled atrocity of his offence. But, when we behold such a man as Dr. Webster performing such a deed, we are perplexed and amazed, as well as horror-struck. How can this liberal, this humane, this educated person become transformed in a moment into a mercenary assassin, and deliberately sell his honor, his peace of mind, his hopes of earth and Heaven, for a paltry sum that could not have tempted thousands of common ruffians to shed a drop of human blood?

How can with a being, the warm and generous impulses of common humanity about him, become transformed at once into an incarnate fiend?

We admit that the evidence is strong against Dr. Webster. We do not underrate its just weight because it is circumstantial testimony. Yet, if we had been on his jury, we could not have convicted him, with the *positive* testimony before us, of respectable and unimpeached witnesses, that Dr. Parkman was seen after the time when it is alleged that the murder was committed. Nor could we have conceded, even if this latter testimony had never been offered, that the body found in Webster's vault was identified beyond all doubt, as the body of Dr. Parkman. There is often so close a resemblance, even between living men, that cases have occurred of conviction of crime arising from such extraordinary resemblance. Even in our own country, the Rev. Wm. Tennent, a celebrated Presbyterian Divine, of Pennsylvania, was once arrested in New Jersey as a horse-thief, witness swearing positively to his person as the robber. The arrival of a friend of his from Pennsylvania, at the place of trial, who was able to establish his innocence, alone saved him from the penalty of the alleged crime. But there is another fact still more pertinent to the issue. The defence, it will be recollected, called several respectable witnesses, who swore positively that they saw Dr. Parkman after the period of the alleged murder. The Attorney General, in order to rebut this evidence, did not attempt to impeach the credibility of these witnesses—a clear proof that they were entirely worthy of belief—but he requested the Court to allow him to prove that there was another man living in Boston so strongly resembling Dr. Parkman that the witnesses might have mistaken him for Parkman! Yet, in the same speech that a jury is thus called upon to take it for granted that respectable and observing witnesses might have been deceived in supposing a living man (whom they met in broad daylight and were so near that they could have felt his breath upon their faces) to be Dr. Parkman, it is demanded that they should believe there can be no possible doubt in identifying, as the body of Dr. Parkman, a discolored trunk, without a head, without arms, and with but one leg! A man, according to this reasoning, is most like himself when he is least like himself! A man without a face is more easily identified than a man with a face!

Dr. Parkman was always renowned for his odities, but the most singular thing we have ever heard of him is, that he looked more like himself with his hands, arms and leg gone, than when enjoying the possession of those valuable members.

No one can read the evidence in this case and be willing to condemn the most notorious criminal on the evidence to identify Parkman's body. Why, how long is it since a man was fished up in a river near Boston whom Parkman's nearest friends believed to be Dr. Parkman? It was only upon finding another name in his pocket that this idea was dismissed. Why did not Judge Merrick refer to this fact? Indeed, Dr. Holmes, Professor of Anatomy, intimately acquainted with Dr. Parkman, and whose chair is called the Parkman Professorship, testified that, upon a connected view of all the parts of the body, he did not recognize the remains as those of Dr. Parkman. Could not the virtuous, high-minded and intelligent jury, who held in their hands the life of a brother man, have also felt themselves warranted in indulging a rational doubt as to the identity of those remains?

We do not pretend to say that Dr. Webster is not guilty. But we do pretend to say that no man, however humble—no criminal, however base—no mortal, however contemptible, (even if sunk to the grade of that most disgusting of all bipeds, *Ephraim Littlefield*), ought to be sent to an infamous death on such testimony.

This man Littlefield is the chief witness against Webster. But for his testimony, it would have been utterly impossible to produce a conviction. And how does he appear upon the witness's stand? Does he approach it with the reverence, the solemnity of demeanor, the gravity and tenderness of one who feels that his words are about to sweep a fellow-being into eternity—to blast a noble reputation—to shake the confidence of man in his brother man—to fall like a flood of burning lava upon a happy home, and bury under its molten tide a household shrine, once radiant with domestic love, bright with the buds of Hope, and fragrant with the full blown flowers of memory? Does he look and speak an act like one who appreciates the value of his victim, and whose heart sighs for the woes his lips must cause? Why, even the savage, who bow upon the princely eagle, must feel a sadness at his own success, as he sees his arrow transfixing the gallant monarch of the clouds and "drinking the life-blood" of that royal breast.—But Littlefield has no compunction in the