



Extraordinary Conduct of a Gardener

WARMINSTER – At the Police-court, on Saturday, (Lord Bath in the chair), an elderly and respectable-looking man named William Henry Line, Gardener, of Codford, was charged with unlawfully and maliciously destroying certain plants and vegetable productions belonging to Mr T. K. Harding, of Ashton-house, Codford. Mr T. Ponting, prosecuted and Mr Francis, Bradford-on-Avon, defended. The defendant had been gardener in the service of Mr Harding for four or five years and on Sunday morning, the 19th instant, about eight o'clock, he called his master's attention to a vast amount of damage which had been committed in the garden during the previous night. Unripe cucumbers had been cut, the onion bed had been knocked about, fruit had been knocked off the trees and the trees pulled from the wall, strawberry plants pulled up and chrysanthemum plants in pots destroyed. It was clear that the intention of the person doing the damage had not been to steal the articles, because they were found lying about the garden. Close to the wall was a basket, and the defendant suggested that the person concerned had left the garden by that means. An examination, however, showed that no one had got over the wall. The doors had been locked overnight and the only keys belonging to them were kept by defendant and Mr Harding. On the police communicated with, a careful examination of the garden was made. Near each place where the damage was done were found distinct footmarks, and suspicion falling upon the defendant, he was directed to produce his boots. On this being done, impressions were made with them alongside those already existing, when they were found exactly similar. For the defence Mr Francis urged the absence of any reason for such conduct on the part of the defendant and pointed out that he had always borne an excellent character. The Rev. D. McLean, rector of the parish, gave the defendant an excellent character and said he was a communicant at his church. Mr Bourne, of Beckington, an old employer of defendant's also spoke to his good character. The chairman said that, after considering the evidence of the footmarks, there could be no doubt of the defendant's guilt. In consideration of his previous good character, they would not send him to gaol, but would inflict a fine of £5, including costs. Defendant paid the money.

(Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette, Thursday 30th September, 1886)