



Neighbours Quarrel at Homington

Bessie Lawes, a woman of Homington, was summoned for assaulting Annie Hart, a little girl of 12, at Homington, Thursday June 2nd, and Friday June 24th.

Mr. W. J. Trethowan appeared to prosecute, and Mr. H. Fillingham Williams appeared for the defence.

Defendant pleaded not guilty to both charges. Mr. Trethowan, in opening the case, stated that Annie Hart had just left school. Her father was groom and gardener to Mr. Morrice, and had lived in the cottage where he now was for a number of years. It adjoined that in which the defendant lived. Up to the time when Mrs. Lawes came, the Hart family had always lived in peace with their neighbours, but soon after she came there were quarrels. In his opinion there was no doubt but that the defendant had tried to make these quarrels with the neighbours, that the Hart's kept out of her way as much as possible and when the defendant found she could not get at Mrs. Hart, she endeavoured to make her suffer through the child. Mr. Trethowan went on to deal with the assaults detailed by the witnesses.

Annie Hart, the little girl, stated that she was twelve years of age, and had recently left school, having passed the fifth standard. The 2nd June she washed her hands in about a pint of water, and when she had finished she put it down the drain. The water was carried from the drain in a culvert, on which defendant's children used to sit. She did not see them on it on this occasion, or she would have poured the water on the grass, as was usual when they were there. Just after that, however, Mrs. Lawes came after her, and to avoid her she went indoors and her mother locked the door. Later she went to fetch some milk and came home with her father. Just as they got to the wicket gate in front of the house Mr. and Mrs. Lawes came out and the former asked her father what row was it going to be next. Witness was behind her father, when Mrs. Lawes rushed at her and struck her twice with a thick stick, once on her shoulder and once on her side. Since then witness had not been allowed out of doors when Mrs. Lawes was about, but on the 24th of June, as Mrs. Lawes could not be seen, she went out. As she was coming through the wicket gate a little way from the house she met Mrs. Lawes, who pushed her against another child and knocked his hat off. Mrs. Lawes threatened to kill her, and as she was going through the door of her house, a glass bottle, which Mrs. Lawes had in her hand, hit the door and smashed all to pieces. The bottle broke quite close to her head. Defendant had several times threatened to kill her and witness was afraid to come out when she was about. She had not teased the defendant's children, picked her flowers, called her names or made faces at her. Mr. Williams said he had no questions to ask. Samuel Hart, father of the last witness, said that he had lived in his present house for a number of years, and previous to Mrs. Lawes coming he had no disturbances with his neighbours whatever.

Cross-examined by Mr. Williams: Lawes had lived there about 18 months, and the quarrels began about six weeks ago. Up to that time his daughter had been at school, coming home to meals and in the evening. On the day in question she did not annoy Mrs. Lawes by any means.

Continuing, witness bore out his daughter's evidence with regard to the assault.

Alice Hart, wife of the last witness, stated that she did not see the assault with the stick on 2nd of June, but that she was behind the door when her daughter came in. Just as she got inside something went crash against the door and witness looked out and saw fragments of glass all over the bricks. The bottle was thrown with such force that the bottom of it knocked a hole in a strong tin bucket that was near the door. She had heard the defendant say that she would do for the child, and also that she would drag her out of the house by the hair and kill her.

Sophia Harwood said that she saw the defendant strike the little girl with a short stick about as thick as the child's wrist. She was standing at her gate at the time and could see perfectly well what was going on.

This concluded the case for the prosecution.

For the defence, Mr. Williams said that this was simply a little village quarrel, of which the magistrates had had many before them lately. The parties had lived on good terms up till the last six weeks, when the little girl left school. The girl was a most extremely aggravating child, and she was continually teasing the defendant's children and picking her flowers.

Mr. Trethowan objected. He distinctly asked the little girl whether she teased the children, picked defendant's flowers, called her names or made faces at her and she said "No". Mr. Williams did not cross-examine her on that point, and he therefore objected to it being brought now.

The Chairman: I noticed that.

Mr. Williams said it was no use asking the little girl that, because she would have said "NO" to everything he asked.

The Chairman: Never mind, you should have tried. She would not have foresworn herself.

The defendant said that on the 2nd June the water was put down the sink on purpose to annoy her children. It went over one of them and made him very wet. She spoke to Mrs. Hart about it, and was called a "beastly old liar", and told that Annie could do what she liked. The girl had often called her names and flicked her tongue out at her and put her fingers to her nose. On the 2nd June she did not touch Annie Hart with a stick. She admitted throwing the bottle, but the door was locked. She could give no reason for doing it. Mrs. Hart was inside calling out that she was a "beastly old liar". When pressed by the Bench for her motive in throwing the bottle at the closed door, addressing herself to the Chairman, defendant said "What would you have done if your little child had been pushed about like that. Sidney Lawes, husband of the defendant, said that it was impossible for Mrs. Harwood to see the assault from her gate. He himself did not see the child struck by his wife.

Defendant was bound over to keep the peace for three months.

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