

Manuella Mary Meager and Frederick Bernard Meager

Hampshire Advertiser - 18 December 1878

Deaths

On the 13th inst., after a short illness, Manuella Mary, aged 2 years and 10 months, and on the 17th instant, Frederick Bernard, her brother, aged 13 months, only children of Mr. F. B. Meager, of 110, High-street, Newport, Isle of Wight, tailor.

Hampshire Advertiser - 21 December 1878

Newport

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF TWO CHILDREN

At the adjourned coroner's inquest on Manuella Mary Meager, at the Town-hall on Wednesday evening, Mr. F. Blake, coroner, held an inquiry, taking the same jury, on the body of Frederick Bernard Meager, infant brother of the above named deceased, who died since the opening of the coroner's inquest last Saturday.

Mr. Frederick Bernard Meager said,- I am the father of the deceased child, who bore my christian names. Up to the time of his last illness, his health was good. He was taken ill shortly after midnight of Monday week, when he was attacked with violent diarrhoea. At dinner on Monday he had boiled rice and milk, and, about 5 p.m., he had some milk and water for tea, and I think a biscuit or two, or crusts, nothing more that I am aware of after that, except, perhaps, one of Huntley's biscuits before going to bed. He had been weaned about eight days. He was thirteen months and two weeks old. On Wednesday I sent for a powder, and after that I sent for Dr. Castle, who attended him till his death, yesterday morning at 8 o'clock. On the Monday night that he was taken ill he slept in the servant's room as he had done the previous seven nights. I heard him crying very much on Monday night, and his mother, I think, knocked the wall, but did not go to the room. I don't think he had any food on Monday night. He took nothing on Wednesday. I know the rice was not boiled in a copper vessel. On the Tuesday morning the little girl deceased, slept till a quarter past nine, she usually woke about eight o'clock. The room in which she slept was fresh papered about a fortnight before this; it was white paper; no green in it.

Dr. Castle was called to see this deceased boy on Wednesday and found griping and loss of appetite. There was no evidence of any direct irritation of the mouth or tongue; deceased was evidently suffering from diarrhoea. Early next morning he was no better, and at midday I was told he was worse, and that the little girl was poorly, and she, in spite of all I did got worse. The boy's symptoms were precisely like those of the little girl's but not so severe. The little boy died yesterday morning at 8 o'clock, having been under my care six days. Mr. Foster during part of that time saw both patients, and we agreed that the children were suffering from some extreme irritation of the stomach and bowels, and that that was the cause of death. The inflammation which caused death must have been caused by the inherent properties of some irritant from without. This morning, assisted by my son and Mr. Foster, I made a post-mortem examination. The appearances throughout were of precisely the same character as those found in the body of the girl, as described in my evidence of Saturday last, modified by initial severity and by longer duration. The post-mortem appearances confirmed the previous diagnosis. The fact that a child in rude health is suddenly seized and died within the short period of a week, together with the appearances after death, is prima facie, a ground for suspecting the disease to have been factitious. It was not the result of natural causes. Possibly the boy took less quantity of whatever it was and struggled on longer than the girl. The irritant, whatever it was, did not manifest itself at the same time in each case. Any irritant which would produce such appearances must of necessity be poisonous.

Mr. William F. Foster since Thursday had seen the deceased boy up to his death. I agree with Dr. Castle as to the treatment he adopted. At the first I entertained but little hope of recovery owing to extensive irritation, as indicated by the persistent diarrhoea, coupled with the serious shock and collapse. The sufferings of the boy for the last day or two were intense and uninfluenced by treatment. I am of opinion that death in this case was from nervous shock and exhaustion, which symptoms are not to be explained by any form of disease, but such as would probably be produced by an irritant. The *post mortem* examination fully carries out the opinion I had previously formed.

The inquest was adjourned till Monday, the 30th inst., at 7 p.m., when a report of the analysis of the viscera, &c., would be produced. Mary Leal, the servant in the house, was bound over in the sum of £20 to appear as a witness at the adjourned meeting.

Hampshire Advertiser - 8 January 1879

Newport

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF TWO CHILDREN

On Monday evening, at the Townhall, Mr. F. Blake, coroner, resumed the inquest on the bodies of the two children of Mr. F. B. Meager, of 118, High-street, who died after a short illness, apparently from some irritant poison, the girl, Manuella Mary, aged 2 years and 10 months, on the 13th ult., and her brother, Frederick Bernard, aged 13 months, on the 20th ult.

Superintendent Ross, of the police, deposed to delivery of the five sealed jars containing specified matter for analysis.

The Coroner read the report of Mr. Otto Hebner, F.C.S., public analyst for the Isle of Wight, and Fellow of the Institute of Chemistry of Great Britain, in which he said, "I included in my search every metal known to possess poisonous properties, and employed methods capable of detecting as small quantities as a hundredth, or even a thousandth part of a grain of poison. *** My search furnished completely negative results, and I can confidently state that no metallic poison was present in any of the organs submitted to me. *** A sample of plate powder submitted to me, I tested and found it quite harmless and free of any metallic substance." In an accompanying letter to the coroner, the analyst said, "Of course in spite of the analysis, the children may have died from poison, but this must either have been taken in infinitesimal quantities, or it must, by vomiting and purging been removed from the body." Dr. Castle and Mr. W. F. Foster, in answer to a question put by the jury, replied to the effect that they were still of the opinion that some irritant poison was the cause of death in both cases, and that opinion was consistent with the remark on the point made by the analyst in his letter to the coroner.

Mary Leal said she was servant to the family of Mr. Meager at the time of the illnesses and death of the deceased children. Had been in his service seventeen months. The little boy was first taken ill. It was early in the morning. He slept in the bassinet by the side of her bed. He was taken with diarrhoea. He had taken nothing during the night after his tea in the evening, when he had milk and water and biscuits. He was not sick. He had been weaned, she thought, about seven days. During that time his diet was plain boiled rice and milk, and rice pudding. The milk was brought daily by a little boy. He had no previous symptoms of diarrhoea. On the evening of the day before the deceased girl was taken ill she spent sometime with witness and a friend of hers in the kitchen, when she was rather fretful. No sweets were given to her. She had nothing to eat or drink in the kitchen that evening. The following morning Mrs. Meager came into the kitchen and said the little girl was poorly. Mrs. Meager prepared deceased's food. When the boy was being weaned he had nothing from the druggist except a powder from Mr. Millidge, when he was taken ill.

The Coroner pointed out that there was no other than the medical evidence on which a verdict could be based. The evidence, so far as the two medical attendants on the deceased children went, was positive as to some irritant being the cause of death, and they had the opinion of the analyst that the poison might have passed from the system and left no trace.

The jury having retired about an hour, returned a verdict in strict accordance with the medical evidence, which was to the effect that the deceased children died from the effects of some irritant poison, but how or by what means such irritant was received into the system there was no evidence to show.

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