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HISTORIC CRIMES and MYSTERIES



THE WEBSTER-PARKMAN CASE.

No modern crime is more celebrated than the murder of Dr. George Parkman by Prof. John W. Webster of Harvard college. This because both the slayer and the slain were distinguished men, and also by reason of the grotesquely horrible circumstances attending the crime.

Doctor Parkman was a wealthy and widely known citizen of Boston, and at the time of his removal was sixty years of age. He was a man of most peculiar appearance. His face was unusually long, and terminated in a sharp chin, protruding to such an extent that it seemed a deformity. His head was bald and down the center of it ran a huge cranial ridge, suggesting that his skull had been soldered together by a poor workman. He was thin and tall, enjoyed excellent health, and was remarkably active and energetic for one of his years.

Webster was an entirely different type of man, being short, round and heavy set, with a rosy and cheerful countenance. He was popular, notwithstanding the fact that he wore side whiskers, and his attainments may be judged from the fact that he held the chair of chemistry at Harvard, and also in the Boston Medical college, where he had private offices and laboratories.

It was on Friday, November 23, 1849, that Doctor Parkman disappeared. He was a man of such regular habits that the neighbors set their clocks by him, and when he failed to come home for dinner his wife was much alarmed. She told the neighbors, but they laughed at her fears, and persuaded her that nothing could be wrong. Next morning, however, the doctor still being absent, and no message having come from him, Mrs. Parkman was seriously disturbed, and she notified the police. Then a systematic search was conducted for days together, but without results. The doctor was traced to the Boston Medical college, and there it seemed that he vanished from the face of the earth.

It was known that the doctor and Webster had some financial transac-

qualifications of a seaman. As he went about his work day by day he meditated and brooded over various things he had noticed, and he put two and two together in his mind, and concluded that they made four, and he determined to investigate. Why did the able and gifted professor keep his doors locked all the time? Why did he keep up great fires in the assay furnaces at all sorts of unholy hours? These things were suspicious. Watching his opportunities, the janitor broke through a brick wall into a vault under the laboratories, and there found parts of a human body. Again he examined the ashes and cinders from the furnaces, and found what he took to be bones. Among the things found were particles of gold, a human tooth, part of a set of false teeth. The abnormally long jaw of the missing man made identification easy and certain. Parkman's dentist recognized the false teeth at once.

When these discoveries were made known to the authorities, Webster had gone home after a day of arduous toil in chemical research, and was resting in the bosom of his family. It was decided to arrest him at once, and two or three officers went to his home in a hack. They explained to Webster that they considered it necessary to make another search of his quarters at the college and requested him to go with them. He pretended to be quite at his ease, and agreed to accompany the officers with his usual cheerfulness, but there is no doubt that he suspected the truth and realized that the truth was known. After entering the hack with the officers he



Prof. J. W. Webster.

swallowed something, and when they arrived at the jail he was frothing at the mouth and almost in convulsions.

The poison he had taken, whatever it was, caused him a great deal of physical anguish, but failed to end his life, which was the consummation he probably wished.

His trial lasted eleven days, and the evidence against him, though circumstantial, was conclusive. Many learned and distinguished men took the witness stand, testifying for or against the prisoner, among them being Oliver Wendell Holmes. Webster was found guilty and sentenced to death. He addressed the jury and tried to explain away the evidence against him, but his talk was not convincing.

He was in great anguish of mind when returned to his prison. The fortitude he had displayed during the trial deserted him, and he became a rather pitiable object. Application was made to the governor for a commutation of sentence, and in support of this application Webster made a confession he declared to be true. He admitted having killed Parkman, but insisted that the crime was unprompted, and that he suffered great provocation.

According to his story he owed Parkman money which he was unable to pay at that time. Parkman called at his office on the fatal Friday and was very angry because Webster didn't have the money ready. Webster began to make an appeal for more time, but the visitor was furiously angry, and upbraided him in the bitterest terms, applying the most contemptuous epithets. "At last," said Webster, "his fury became almost maniacal and, unable longer to endure it, when he thrust his fist immediately in my face. I struck him over the head with a stick. The blow was upon the temple, and he fell heavily to the floor. Every effort to resuscitate him was in vain, and in the agony attendant upon the discovery that I was a murderer, my first thought was how to conceal the body."

His petition for clemency failed to move the governor, and one day he walked in fear and trembling to the gallows tree, and his name was added to the long list of distinguished men who, through some moral or mental crook, have brought themselves into that shadow of disgrace which "shall be lifted nevermore."

London's Lord Mayor. Sir Charles Cheers Wakefield, lord mayor of London, is a man of large business affairs and directs the operations of one of the great English oil companies. Since 1895 he has lived in London. He started on the long road to high office in 1904, when he was elected member of the court of common council. He has been decorated by the president of France, the king of Belgium, and, in other and different ways, the kaiser. He has traveled frequently, and has written a book called "Future Trade in the Far East." The lord mayor has always been deeply interested in charitable works and prizes highly decorations of the Order of Mercy and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of which he is a knight of grace. He is also a keen art collector.

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Dr. George Parkman.

tions in the past, so the learned professor was questioned, and he said that Parkman had called upon him to collect a sum of money due on a note. He paid the money, and the note was canceled, and Parkman left his office, and that was all he knew about it. Of course it was absurd to suppose that the professor knew anything more than he disclosed, but, just for the sake of appearance, and to satisfy the public mind, which was excited to the point of frenzy, the officers asked permission to search the professor's quarters at the college. The permission was cordially given. The learned man showed the officers around everywhere, and begged them to make their search exhaustive, and they did.

They searched his offices and laboratories three separate times, and discovered nothing suspicious. Meanwhile other officers were dragging every pool and creek, and crawling under buildings, and overturning haystacks, in a vain effort to find a trace of the missing man. After a week of this sort of thing the police confessed themselves hopelessly baffled, and freely expressed the opinion that the mystery never would be solved. Everybody had a theory explaining the disappearance, and only one of all the theories entertained in Boston town came anywhere near the truth. The janitor of the college was a man named Littlefield and he had the

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