

Henrietta Pewtner - Assaulted

Summer Assizes GLOCESTER

The Times, Sep 06, 1827

Tue Sept 4. Crown Side - Before Mr Baron Vaughan

John Ambury, aged 20, was indicted for having assaulted Henrietta Pewtner, on the evening of the 28th of August last.

Mr. Justice conducted the prosecution, and stated that he was sorry again to have to call the attention of the jury to a case similar to the one they were disgusted with yesterday, and, if possible, more atrocious. The assault was made on a young girl, scarcely 15 years of age, and it seemed that not even the presence of a child who was with her afforded any security. But by the spirit of that child, a spirit which would do credit to many men, the prosecutrix had been rescued from the brutality of the prisoner. The learned counsel then stated the facts as subsequently detailed in evidence, and concluded by observing that it had been suggested that the prisoner was deficient in intellect; but when the details of the case were before the jury, it would be for them to decide whether his brutal conduct did not evince sufficient knowledge of right and wrong to warrant them in coming to a decision on his innocence or guilt.

Henrietta Pewtner (an interesting and intelligent girl, who gave her evidence with great modesty and clearness) stated that she was 15 years of age in November next. She was apprenticed to Mrs Horslage, of Colford, but resided with her brother at Joy Croft. She was in the constant habit of going from her brother's house to her mistress's every morning, and returning at night. Amelia Simmonds always went with her and sometimes her brother came to meet her on her return. She remembered leaving Colford, with Amelia Simmonds on the evening of the 28th of August last. They met the prisoner and John Hennell, who said "Good evening" to them as they passed ; the witness made no answer to them. After they had gone a little farther, the prisoner ran after them, and took hold of the witness and said "Give us a kiss". She refused, and struggled a good deal before she got from him. He then left them, and went back. After they had got about half a mile farther beyond Berry-hill, in the Forest of Dean, the prisoner again came up to her and took hold of her round the shoulders, and said "Give us a kiss". She tried to get away from him and he threw her violently on the ground. (The witness then relaxed sufficient to show the object of the prisoner). He laid hold of her throat. Amelia Simmonds was by all the time; she pulled the prisoner's shoes off, and beat him about the head. She ran after a man who was passing, and the prisoner ran off when he found the man was coming. She called out murder several times as loudly as she could.

The prisoner being asked if he wished to put any question to the witness, replied, "No". He had seen her before, and had given her three codlings that evening. The witness denied this.

Amelia Simmonds said - I am 13 years of age, and remember meeting the prisoner on the evening of the 28th of August last. She then proceeded to detail the facts proved by the last witness and added, "When the prisoner was on the ground, I plucked his hair, and beat him, and kicked him, and I took his shoes off, and beat him about the head with them. I then saw an old man going along the forest, and I ran to him and caught him by the sleeve and told him to please to come as a man had got Henrietta down. He came part of the way as fast as he could, but the moment the prisoner saw him he ran away. When Henrietta got up, she was so weak she could hardly stand, or speak."

Joseph York stated that he was going through the forest on the evening in question, when the last witness called him to assist Miss Pewtner; he went towards the spot, and saw the prisoner run away. Miss Pewtner was very weak when he got to her.

Mrs Pewtner, mother to Henrietta, proved her daughter making immediate complaint to her, and described the torn and tumbled state of her dress.

The prisoner on being called for his defence, said he had nothing to say, and no one to speak for him but his lordship.

Mr. Baron Vaughan - I can say nothing for you.

His Lordship then proceeded to sum up the evidence, and the Jury immediately found the prisoner Guilty.

Mr. Baron Vaughan - Prisoner, you have been convicted, on. the most satisfactory testimony, of a most brutal assault; As to your pretence that you have not intellect enough to distinguish right from wrong, it would be an insult to the Court and Jury to dwell upon it for a moment, because I have with care and caution watched your conduct during the trial, in which there has been too much artifice, method, and management, to leave any doubt upon any reasonable mind respecting your knowledge of right from wrong. It is quite horrifying, in a civilized country like this, that two young women - nay two girls - cannot be permitted to walk along a public path without, being subject to such brutality. I do not think I ever witnessed in any court, more proper demeanour - more true modesty - than I did this day in the conduct of those little girls. They have been placed in the most trying situation to such modest minds, as to be compelled, after the brutality they have suffered, to appear, I may say, in a public theatre, to detail the particulars of the insults they have received. It was most fortunate for you that the little girl was present, for her spirit and good conduct have been the

means of saving your life, by preventing you from perpetrating your horrid intentions. Of your moral guilt I can have no doubt, and can think little less of it than if you had accomplished your purpose, because you have been checked and prevented in so doing only by the extraordinary exertions of that child. You select the secret recesses of the forest, and the dark hour of evening, for the accomplishment of your purpose, and chance alone defeats you. It is therefore my duty to take care, that as far as the nature of the indictment will permit, your punishment may operate as an example. The sentence of the Court therefore is, that you be imprisoned in the gaol of this county for one year."

Prisoner - Thank you, my Lord.

Mr Justice having applied to his Lordship for some allowance to Amelia Simmonds, as a token of the approbation of the Court for her conduct, his Lordship declined making any order on the county for that purpose, but with that kindness and liberality for which he is so much distinguished, sent for Henrietta Pewtner and Amelia Simmonds to the bench, and having apparently addressed some kind admonitions to them, and commended them for their good conduct, generously dismissed them with some reward from his own pocket.

Full Text: Copyright 1827, The Times.