

THE CHUDLEIGH TRAGEDY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MERCURY.

Sir,—My attention has just been drawn to the letter of your Launceston correspondent, published in your issue of the 8th instant, containing some severe strictures upon the conduct of some of the public officials, at Deloraine, in reference to the late tragic occurrence at Mole Creek.

Had your correspondent applied to me, I would have given him all the particulars of the above case, and then I would have been spared the trouble of writing this letter in my own defence, and in order that the public may know the true facts of the case, which are as follows :—

On Tuesday, the 2nd of November, at half-past 1 p.m., I received information that a woman, Riches (this I have ascertained is the correct name), had been found murdered in a hut at Mole Creek, 17 miles from Deloraine, that a man named John Lambert had been found hanging in a hut close to the hut, and that the woman's husband, Isaac Riches, was missing. I at once got ready to start for the scene of the outrage, but before doing so, I had to see the Coroner (Mr. Douglas) and get him to sign a precept, so that I could summon a jury for the inquest on the bodies of Lambert and Mrs. Riches. While waiting for the Coroner's signature to the precept, I was shown a document which was in the possession of the man Riches on the previous day, purporting to be an agreement between Isaac Riches and John Lambert, and containing a clause to the effect that if anything happened to John Lambert within twelve months from date, all his (Lambert's) property was to go to Riches. It was this which caused me to suspect Riches of having committed the murder. I then sent a telegram to the Superintendent of Police, Launceston, apprising him of the occurrence, and describing Riches. I gave the telegram to the clerk at the Deloraine station, at 2.15, and at once started for Mole Creek. When about two miles from Deloraine I received a message from Constable Flynn, who is stationed at Chudleigh, to say that when he arrived at Lambert's hut, about half-past 10 in the morning, he found Riches in the bedroom of the hut with his head fractured, but still alive. I sent a messenger back to Deloraine to tell Sub-inspector Lane to see Dr. Rock at once and ask him to follow me to Mole Creek to attend the man Riches. From Chudleigh I sent a constable to Mr. James Ritchie, J.P., to ask that gentleman if he would accompany me to Mole Creek to take the dying deposition of Riches. After half an hour absence the constable returned to say that Mr. Ritchie would not come. I then proceeded to Mole Creek at which place I arrived about 5 p.m. I found Riches alive but almost unconscious. When I asked him if he knew me he replied in the affirmative, but I failed to obtain any information from him. I remained with him till 7 o'clock, and as it was then dark and the doctor had not arrived, I started back to Deloraine to procure medical assistance, leaving two constables in charge of the place. At Chudleigh I learned that Dr. Rock had refused to attend that evening owing, I believe, to the inclemency of weather. Upon my arrival in Deloraine I arranged with Dr. McNall to attend Riches in the morning. I was at Lambert's hut the next morning when Dr. McNall arrived, and after examining Riches he gave as his opinion that he would not live 24 hours.

On the same day, an inquest was held on the bodies of Lambert and Mrs. Riches, and before leaving in the evening I employed a man to attend Riches. On Friday, the 5th inst., when the Chudleigh mail arrived, I received intelligence that the unfortunate Riches was still alive; I accompanied the Rev. Mr. Adams to see him, and we remained with him until he died at 4 o'clock the same day.

You are, doubtless, aware of the difficulty there always is in an affair of this kind of getting a true statement of facts at once, and also of forming correct conclusions—as in this case. The first report I received stated that the man Riches was missing, as the persons who found the bodies of the murdered woman and Lambert did not see him in the hut. Hence, the telegram alluded to with the description of the supposed missing man. On my way to Mole Creek, I first heard that Riches was found, as before stated. It is a pity that your Launceston correspondent did not take the trouble to ascertain these facts before he forwarded for publication such an incorrect statement

take the trouble to ascertain these facts before he forwarded for publication such an incorrect statement in reference to my conduct in the above melancholy affair. He says he would be sorry to unwittingly do me an injustice; and as I have no reason to think otherwise, I must only conclude that the injustice already done is unintentional.

Your insertion of this letter will greatly oblige,

D. D. GRIFFIN,
Superintendent of Police.

Deloraine,
13th November, 1875.