

## DELORAINE TRAGEDY.

### THE INQUEST.

#### STORY BY THE ACCUSED.

Launceston, November 4.

The inquest concerning the death of Margaret Catherine Ledwell was continued at Deloraine to-day. Miss Ledwell was found dead on the Chesshunt estate on Sunday, October 26, with her head partly shot off, and Joseph Henry Belbin, a youth, was in custody on a charge of having committed the murder.

Ivy Kathleen Tuck, 16 years of age, residing with her parents at Chesshunt, stated that she last saw Miss Ledwell alive on Wednesday, October 22, at the Red Hills tea meeting. She was a friend of the witness. On Wednesday afternoon she had a conversation with Miss Ledwell, who told her she was afraid of Joseph Belbin, as on the previous Sunday night he had followed her home with a gun. Miss Ledwell's sister Nellie was with her when he followed her. She did not see Belbin at the Red Hills tea meeting.

#### A Statement by the Accused.

Detective W. J. Mansfield stated, in the course of enquiries, he interviewed Belbin at Rudge's farm. The witness took a statement from Belbin, which he signed, and it was witnessed. The statement was as follows:—"I, Joseph Belbin, aged 19 years, laborer, employed by Fred. Rudge, Chesshunt Estate, hereby state that on October 26 I got up at about 7 a.m. I had breakfast and washed some clothes, which I finished about 11 a.m. I was then reading a book until dinner-time, at 12.30 p.m. I finished dinner at about 1.20 p.m., and returned, and I was reading a book until about 2 p.m. I then got a ferret and Mr. Rudge's Winchester repeating shotgun, which holds six cartridges. I took four cartridges with me, and put the ferret in a rabbit burrow on Mr. Rudge's property, about 370 yards from the house. I then put the ferret in another burrow near a stone wall on Mr. Hayward's property, where I met Mr. Hayward. That would be about 10 or 15 minutes after I left home. We both walked across to the panel, where a tree butt is lying on the track. Previous to leaving the burrow near the stone wall I fired two shots at a rabbit and killed it. Mr. Hayward did not have a gun, but two minutes after we reached the Button track I left Mr. Hayward, and continued on the up track until I came to the dead body of a woman. I then turned round to look for Mr. Hayward, and saw him about 100 yards along the track, and called out, 'Come up here, for God's sake. I want you,' and I walked down and met him. I said, 'There is someone up there behind a stump, and it looks as if they had their brains blown out.' He replied, 'Go to —.' I said, 'It is no laughing matter, Bill. Come up and have a look.' We started to walk towards the stump, and when halfway

up and have a look.' We started to walk towards the stump, and when halfway there Hayward said, 'You are not pulling my leg, are you, Pad.' I replied, 'Come along to the stump, then, and see.' We reached the stump, and he saw the body and said, 'Good God, who is this? Not one of my girls, is it?' The woman was lying on her back and her clothes were disarranged. She was holding her clothing with her left hand, and had a bunch of pansies in the same hand. Her right hand was thrown back behind her. There was a large blue felt hat over her face. I thought it was a girl by the dress she was wearing. I told Hayward to stand and keep his eye on it, while I went for McCarthy. I then got a bicycle from Mr. Rudge's place, and went and informed McCarthy and took him to where I found the body. I did not fire any shots while I was on the track or in the vicinity of the body. I could hear any shots fired from the time I got up in the morning up to the time I informed McCarthy. I last saw Maggie Ledwell alive on Saturday about dinner time, when she was driving bullocks on her father's farm. While out shooting on October 26 I did not see anyone shooting. The gun produced is the one I was using."

#### Appearance of the Body.

Plain-Clothes Sergeant John J. Dunn, stationed at Westbury, stated that on his arrival at the scene of where the body was found he saw what appeared to be human brains scattered about over an area of three yards. There was also a large bloodstain on the ground. The witness was present when Belbin made the statement already referred to by Detective Mansfield. The witness took possession of the gun produced. The stock of the gun was spotted with bloodstains. On October 28 the witness again saw Belbin, and asked him if he could give any further information concerning the death of the deceased. He replied—"I wish I could. I have told you all I know." The witness said if he knew anything he had better tell the truth, and Belbin replied, "I know nothing more." Belbin remarked that he got a shock when he found the body. He did not get to sleep till Monday morning, and had been off his food ever since. On October 29 the witness had an interview with Belbin in the presence of Mr. Gunner. The witness informed him who Detective-Sergeant Gunner was, and told him that they were not satisfied with the statement he had previously given, and that they had come to ask him some questions. The witness then cautioned him that he need not answer any of the questions put to him, and anything he might say might be used in evidence against him. He then told Belbin that as a result of an exhaustive enquiry made by the police they found no strangers were about. He said—"What about the shot Mr. Hayward stated he heard when I was with him? Why don't you find who fired that, and you might find out who shot the girl?" The witness said that Hayward did not hear it in the direction where the deceased was found

that Hayward did not hear it in the direction where the deceased was found. Belbin did not reply. Detective Gunner told him that he was seen watching Ledwell's house and leaving the hunt about 10 minutes to 2 on October 26. He said, "It is a lie." Detective Gunner said, "We can prove it." He also denied following the girl on the Sunday previous to her death. He stated he saw someone whom he couldn't recognise in the dark, and did not know who it was until he went through Mr. Rudge's yard. He was told that some of the residents were accusing him of knowing more about deceased's death than he had stated. Asked what his mother would say when she heard of it, he went over and sat on his bed. In reply to other questions he stated he knew nothing about the death of girl. When reference was again made to his mother hearing about the girl's death and that he was suspected, he threw himself down on the bed and began to cry, saying, "She would not believe it." He remained there for some time crying, and then sat up. They both said to him he appeared to be worried, and that if he knew anything about the matter it would be just as well tell them, so as to make his mind easier. He made no reply, but got up, went to a box, got writing-pad, and went to a small table. He then sat down and wrote the following statement:—

#### Confession by the Accused.

"Copdale, October 29, 1913.—Having been duly warned, I, Joseph Henry Belbin, hereby make the following voluntary statement:—On Sunday, October 26, I was reading, when I got up and looked out of the door, and seeing Margaret Kathleen Ledwell coming across the flat I started off with the gun to meet her. I was anxious to speak to her on certain matters. I met the deceased on the road where the body was found, and after speaking to her I prepared to leave her. As I was leaving her I said, 'I suppose you have not got a kiss for me?' She replied, 'Go on and kiss someone else.' I said, 'I only want one.' She said, 'Well, want.' I then put my left hand on her right shoulder, with my arm around her shoulder. She was facing me. I was holding the gun by the barrel. The deceased said, 'Mind the gun,' and gave it a push over with her foot and at the same time turned to get away. When the gun went off the stock of the gun was on the ground. Whether the gun was fired off through the deceased pushing it or through it getting caught in something, I don't know. The deceased was standing when shot. I left the body as it fell and did not try to hide any of the body by placing the hat over the face. The flowers were in her hand when she was shot and the coat on her arm. The deceased was shot about 2.10 p.m. (Signed) J. H. Belbin.

"P.S.—After the shooting I went down to Mr. Hayward, intending to tell him until I got nearly down there, when I put it off. (Signed) J. H. Belbin."

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The witness said the statement was made voluntarily without any inducement or threat. There was a small pea rifle in the hut. The witness took it down and said to Belbin, "If you say you shot her standing up I cannot understand why there were no shot marks in the hat. Will you come and show us." This he agreed to do and they went across the paddocks to where the body was found. On the way Detective Gunner asked him what the certain matter was he wished to speak to deceased about, and he replied, "I decline to discuss it." He gave no reason why. When they arrived at the scene Sergeant Tom-

kinson and other members of the police were there. He told Sergeant Tomkinson in the presence of Belbin that the latter had made a statement as to how the shooting had happened and handed him the statement to read. Belbin denied interfering with the clothes of the girl, and stated that they were not disarranged when he left her. He then stated that after the shooting he got over the fence and went down along the same paddock. He passed through other paddocks and then went to Mr. Hayward's. They then returned to Mr. Rudge's house, and on the way he admitted that he wore the flannel and trousers produced on Sunday. The flannel had some scraps of the deceased girl's brains on the left shoulder, which Belbin said he had scraped off with a knife. The witness said they had to arrest him for the murder of Margaret Kathleen Ledwell, and that he (Belbin) would have to go to Deloraine. He was then arrested and brought in to Deloraine.

The further hearing was adjourned till to-morrow, but the rest of the evidence to be tendered will be merely corroborative of that already tendered.

#### BELBIN COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.

Launceston, November 5.

The inquest was concluded to-day, when Belbin again followed the evidence with close attention. Detective-Sergeant Gunner and Sergeant Tomkinson corroborated the evidence given yesterday as to Belbin's first denying that he knew anything about the girl's death and subsequently signing a statement that he shot her, but that it was an accident. He was attempting to kiss her when she kicked the weapon, and it went off.

Mr. A. R. Cooke, the accused's solicitor, stated that he would not call any evidence for the defence, as it was not within the province of the jury to determine the guilt or innocence of Belbin, but to determine the means by which Margaret Ledwell met her death.

The jury, after a brief retirement, returned the following verdict:—"That the deceased, Margaret Kathleen Ledwell, met her death on Sunday, October 26, by a gunshot wound wilfully and maliciously fired by Joseph Henry Belbin."

The accused was committed for trial.