THE RINGWOOD MYSTERY.

CLOSE OF THE INQUEST.

LANDELLS FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER.

The adjourned inquest into the circumstances attending the death of Peter J. Sherlock was resumed yesterday before the District Coroner, Mr. Candler, and a special jury. As before, Mr. Walsh watched the case for the Crown, and Mr. Forlonge for the accused, Robert Landells; while Detectives Considine and Burrett and Mounted-constable Lawless, of Ringwood, represented the police authorities.

The following evidence was taken:—

Caleb Anderson deposed that having advertised to purchase certain mathematical instruments, he received a letter from Landells, in consequence of which he made purchases from the accused to the extent of £12, paying by cheque on the Bank of Australasia.

Robert Gillies, clerk in the Bank of Australasia, deposed to the payment of Anderson's cheque on the 2nd August.

William Samuel Husband, optician, carrying on business in Bourke-street, deposed that in July Sherlock left instruments to the value of £25 at his shop for sale. Towards the end of July Landells called at the shop and produced an order signed by Sherlock, instructing witness to hand over the property. Witness asked him to call again, as it would take time to get the things together.

Henry Vachsenne, manager for the Grand Jewellery Company, Bourke-street, deposed that the deceased had left certain articles with him for sale. In the month of July Landells called with an order for their delivery, and said that he had advanced money to Sherlock on their security. He agreed to leave the goods with witness for sale, and called several times to see whether any sales had been effected.

Henry Alfred Slater, manager for Messrs. J. Slater and Co., contractors, of Collins-street, deposed that on 1st June Sherlock left an electric machine to be sold for £7 10s. It was still in witness's possession.

James Henry Dodd, engineer, J. J. Rowe, and H. H. Baker gave evidence to a similar effect.

Hugh Tindall, ironmonger's assistant, in the employ of Messrs. Chambers and Seymour, stated that Sherlock had left a gun for sale, which was still in the possession of the firm.

Hy. A. Punton, ironmonger, of Collingwood, deposed that he was well acquainted with Sherlock. Deceased was in the habit of wearing a gold open faced watch and chain. The chain was passed through the second button of the waistcoat and the ends placed in the pocket. Deceased had left a gun for sale at witness's shop, which still remained there. On the 13th July he brought a hammerless gun, for which he asked £14. The gun produced was the one. Another gun was sold by witness on 15th July, but Sherlock had never called for the money.

John Gallagher, surgical instrument maker, of Lonsdale-street, deposed that Sherlock had called at his place on 8th June and left a skull to be sold for £1.

Thos. Thackery, a contractor, residing in Richmond, had known the deceased when he was employed in the Railway department. Witness last saw deceased at 243 Victoria-parade, on the 15th July. The deceased had lent witness some £27, for which he gave I.O.U's. The sum of £15 was repaid in January or February of the present year. He had received a letter from Robert Landells, informing him that he had been appointed to collect debts for Sherlock, and asking for prompt payment of £27. Sherlock told him that he had furnished his own rooms at Landell's place. He was confident that deceased was not in poor circumstances.

The evidence given by the accused, Robert Landells, at the opening of the inquest was read over at the request of Mr. Walsh.

Mounted-constable R. L. Carey, of Fern Tree Gully, deposed to having removed and washed the earth on which the head of the corpse was resting, the result being that from 15 to 20 grains of ragged shot were found.

Detective Flannery gave evidence that on the 26th August the accused came to the detective office and said that he thought the man found at Ringwood was identical with an acquaintance of his, named Peter J. Sherlock. His statement was written down and submitted in the following report:—

C. I. Branch, Melbourne.

Re supposed murder at Ringwood, see *Age* newspaper of 24 | 8 | 72.

Mr. Robert Landells, civil engineer, of 243 Victoria-parade, East Melbourne, called at the office today at 10 a.m., and made the following statement:—My attention was drawn to the account in the papers this morning of a supposed murder at Ringwood. I think the victim, Sherlock, is known to me as Peter J. Sherlock, who lived with me at the above address. He was a civil engineer, and he left 243 Victoria-parade on either the 21st or 22nd July last. At the time of his leaving he gave me to understand he was going up country. He was rather reserved in his habits, and was besides very mysterious. I have no idea what particular part of the country he was going to, but I know he received some communication from the Railway department about the time of his leaving regarding some contracts he had tendered for. I heard nothing of him since he left my place. He was I think an Englishman, and was about 42 years old, 5 feet 9 inches high, medium build, dark complexion, grey hair, greyish moustache, whiskers and beard, beard cut short. I cannot say how he was dressed when leaving, but I believe I could recognise some of his wearing apparel if I saw it. He was staying with me for about five months. He was not employed during that period, so far as I know. He spoke French and German. He was brought up for a time, I believe, at Antwerp, and was also at the Glasgow University. He lived some where in France before he came to my place.

Detective-sergeant Considine deposed: On the 24th August I saw the man Robert Landells at the detective office. I said, "Is your name Landells, and do you live at 243 Victoria-parade?" He said "Yes." I said, "I believe a man named Sherlock recently lived with you." Landells said, "He did." I asked him when he last saw him, and he said on 22nd July, at the Fitzroy Gardens, near Clarendon-street. I told him I was leaving for Ringwood that day, and that he had better accompany me, which he agreed to do. We went to Ringwood together, accompanied by Messrs. Stinger and Hilton, and saw the body. Landells took the skull up in his hand and examined it as well as the hair. When we left the room, I said to Landells, "Can you identify the body as that of Sherlock?" He replied, "The features having gone, it is impossible." I said, "What do you say about the hair?" He said, "It seems to me longer, and not the same color as Sherlock's." He added—"When I last saw him, he had his hair cut. His beard also appears to be different." I then said, "What do you say to the clothes?" He replied, "I have seen him wearing clothes of the same description. But there are a lot of clothes of the same kind, and he was not wearing them the last time I saw him. He was wearing a grey tweed suit and an over-coat." The hat was the same shape as that worn by Sherlock, but there was nothing about it that is could identify. Hilton and Stinger differed from Landells, and contended that the clothes and scarf pin were those worn by Sherlock. I then went into the hotel and took statements from the three gentlemen. The statement made by Landells was as follows:

I know a man named Sherlock, a civil engineer. He formerly resided at 243 Victoria-parade. About the 6th July he spoke to me about leaving Melbourne, and said he intended to go up country and look for contracts, and would leave some of his things at my house. I last saw him at my house on 22nd July. He did not come home that night nor on the following day. On the morning of 23rd July I saw him in the Fitzroy Gardens, near Clarendon street, about 9 a.m. I spoke to him on private matters, and he said he was going to leave Melbourne. There was a lady standing a little distance away, who appeared to be waiting for him. I have never seen him alive since.

I told Landells that I would be at his house that evening to search the effects left by the deceased. Landells said, "Don't come to-night. I will be out." I then said, "Very well. I will call in the morning." I went there, and saw Landells, and he took me into a store room, which contained Sherlock's things. I opened three portmanteaus, but failed to find any documents which could throw any light on the transaction. I said to Landells, "Do you know of any letters?" Landells said, "No. I did not look for that, because he was destroying his papers and disposing of his property and few days before he left." Landells also said that Sherlock owed him a considerable sum of money. I said, "What were deceased's circumstances?" Landells replied, "Very poor indeed." He showed me a pin fire revolver and a derringer pistol, which he stated were the property of Sherlock. While I was turning over deceased's things I asked Landells if Sherlock had a banking account, and he said, "Not so far as I know." I then left and proceeded to Ringwood and visited the place where the body was discovered. I saw the earth removed from the face by Constable Lawless, and noticed that the shot had penetrated through for a depth of 2½ inches. The earth was washed by Constable Carey, and a number of pieces of shot were found. I returned to Melbourne that night, and on the following day saw Mr. Punton, in company with Detective Burrett. We called on Landells and asked to look through Sherlock's things, but asked to find anything. Landells then went out of the room and brought in an air gun, saying "I forgot to tell you about this." I said, "Have you any other property belonging to him?" Landells brought out some more which contained engineering books. I then said to him, "I have just ascertained that the deceased man left a French landing gun for sale for £8, and that he required to take £5 for it. I also know that he had no other guns, and I know where one is. Can you help us to find the other?" He said, "Oh, I bought a gun from him about 3½ months ago." Burrett said, "How much did you give him for it?" and Landells replied £5, and that he had paid for it by arrangement, and we then left the room and went out in the yard, where I said to Landells "Have you any more property belonging to the deceased man in your possession?" He said "There is an old case," pointing to one in the yard. There was nothing in it but old clothes. Landells then commenced to talk about Sherlock's eccentricity and his parsimonious habits, pointing out as a proof that he used to live on one meal a day and sit for hours moping in his room.

The accused: Draw it mild, sergeant.

Witness continued:—

Landells went on to say that he used often to invite Sherlock in to tea, not that he liked the man, as he had dirty habits. I asked if anyone had ever visited deceased or had business transactions with him. Landells said that a man named Thackery used to visit him. Mrs. Landells told me that she last saw deceased on Saturday, 22th July, but that he was in his room on the following Sunday night. Asked how she knew this, she said that two letters which she had put into his room on the previous day had disappeared on Monday, so that he must have been in the room. The next day Burrett and myself continued our inquiries at Ringwood. I had the deceased's clothes dried in the sun, and I then noticed that the second buttonhole from the bottom of the waistcoat had been cut with some sharp instrument. The following afternoon, 28th August, Burrett and myself went to Landells's house, and saw him and his wife together. I said to him, "I want you to lend me that gun you bought from Sherlock in order to compare it with another gun." He said, "I can't." I said, "Why?" He replied, "Because I've sold it." I said, "How much did you sell it for?" He answered, "£7;" and that he had disposed of it through a Mr. Walton in answer to an advertisement. He went on, "I did not like the way you asked me about the gun on Monday last; you seem to suspect me, and to be hinting at something." I said, "That is all nonsense Mr. Landells, but I tell you what I do suspect—that you have not told the truth about deceased's affairs, and that he was not a pauper as you described him, and that you have some documents and papers in your possession belonging to him." He said, "I have written and telegraphed to his brother, who lives in New South Wales. I will see you about this matter to-morrow." I said, "To-morrow won't do for me; I give you half an hour to produce the documents." I then left, and he promised to meet me at the detective office about 10 o'clock. Shortly after 10 o'clock I saw Landells and his wife at the detective office. I said to Landells, "Have you brought up those documents?" He said, "Yes." He then handed me the two deposit receipts for £100 and £115 on the Land Credit Bank. The three IOU's of Thackery's, and a letter from a Mr. J. Henderson, a broker in New Zealand, forwarding a draft for £15 1s. 3d. for the sale of some shares, and dated 30th May, 1869; also, two receipts and a draft letter dated 24th June, 1869, signed P.J.S., and asking for payment of money. I then said to him, "I'll have to take a short statement from you of how you became possessed of these things." He made the following statement at my request:—

I know the deceased Sherlock was not a pauper, nor in financial difficulties, for when I last saw him on 22nd July he handed me two deposit receipts, I O U's and other securities all in a bundle. When I saw deceased and he gave me them I promised him that I would say nothing about them. It was in consequence of that promise that I said nothing about it at the inquest. I have never been at Ringwood in my life until I went to identify the body, nor to Ferntree Gully for years. In fact, neither on Saturday, 22nd July, nor Monday, 22nd July, was I out of Melbourne.

After I had taken this statement he turned to me and said—"Sergeant, you don't know how relieved I feel after giving those things up." I then said to Landells, "Have you got anything more belonging to him?" He said, "No." His wife said to me, "Do you think Mr. Landells will get into any trouble over this?" I said, "I don't know, but I shall take possession of these documents." The deposit receipts were then lying on the table, and Landells said, pointing to the words "Not transferable," "you see I could do nothing with them, they are of no value to anybody to get any money on them, and I have never tried to utilize them in that way." They left then, and I at once proceeded to the Land Credit and Mortgage Bank, Collins-street. About 3 o'clock the same night I saw Landells in Bourke-street. He said, "I've left a letter for you at the office; they told me down there that I should very probably see you about there. The letter contains a telegram which I have received from his brother and a memo. that I forgot to give you this morning relative to two cheques that I had from Sherlock." I went to the office and found a letter enclosing a telegram from Sherlock's brother, asking to know where his brother had been buried and the name of the officiating clergyman. There was also a memo. notifying that he had cashed two cheques—one for £5 and one for £20. The latter he had taken from a letter addressed (Sherlock in pursuance of instructions by the deceased that he (Landells) was to open all letters. On the 29th I went with Burrett to Fern Tree Gully and Ringwood. On the 30th, Friday, at 3.30 p.m. I again went with Burrett to Landells's house. I saw Landells there, and I said "Mr. Landells, I have come to see you with reference to the date on which you last saw deceased, as I want to fix it beyond doubt." I took the following statement from him:—

I am certain that it was on Monday, 22nd July last, that I saw the deceased alive in the Fitzroy Gardens. I fix the day because we were going to exchange houses with Mr Rawson, of 245 Victoria-parade. They were unable to do so as their landlord said he had intended to occupy his own house. Hence we planned to go to the Rawsons' house to-morrow, and they are at present doing what we had occupying the house which Sherlock used to occupy. This arrangement was entered into after Sherlock left. It was five weeks last Saturday, and that makes it 22nd July when I saw Sherlock. The two cheques mentioned by me for £20 and £5 I cashed. One was given me by Sherlock, the other I took from a letter which I opened in accordance with the instructions which he had left.

I saw Mr Rawson in his presence, and he corroborated the statement affecting the date of his occupying the house. We then left, and about 9 a.m. on Monday, 2nd September, I again went with Burrett to Landells's house shortly after 9 a.m. We saw him there alone, at my request. I said then, "Mr. Landells, I have come to obtain an explanation from you as to certain circumstances which connect you with the death of Mr. Sherlock. In the first place, I will recapitulate to you all that has taken place at our various interviews, and if I am wrong I will thank you to correct me." I then repeated to him the evidence that I have given here to-day. He admitted to me that it was correct. I then said to him, "In the first place, when you gave me up the deposit receipts and other documents on Wednesday, 28th August, you never said one word about having received the cheques from him, namely the £20 cheque and the £5 cheque which I have traced to your possession." He said, "That was an omission on my part. I wrote that slip prior to seeing you at the detective office, and forgot to give it you." I said, "That's all nonsense, that slip and that letter were written at the same time. Besides, what occasion was there for you to write a slip? You had not got the cheques to give me, and you could have told me that you had cashed them." He said, "I did write it, however." I said to him, "I'll tell you why you wrote it. You knew very well that I should make inquiries at the bank, and be consequently informed of those cheques having been cashed. Besides, according to your own statement, you got one of those cheques from Sherlock, the other you got from a letter addressed to him, which you opened, and by the wording of that cheque you are acting as if you knew the man was dead (in fact, you are acting as his executor. Can you produce any written authority for so doing?" He said, "I deny; I've only his verbal instructions." I said, "Put yourself in any other man's place, and what would your opinion be of any man who has acted as you have?" He said, "I know things look very black against me, but I can't help it." I said, "Look here, Mr. Landells, even now you are concealing something from me as to Sherlock's affairs; the very state of Sherlock's affairs was brought to the ground when." He made no reply to this, and I said, "Is that not so?" and he repeated, "Why didn't you tell me so?" He replied, "Because you didn't ask me." I said, "This man, whom you have already admitted was your uncle as a pauper, appears to have been possessed of considerable property, and there is only one conjecture that I can put upon your conduct. Have you any explanation to give me?" He said, "I can give no further explanation." I said, "You have yourself woven a web of circumstantial evidence around you which you will find it hard to break, and I now ask you for an explanation for the last time, as I shall not come to your house for one day more after this. I do not know you of murdering Sherlock, but there are very damaging circumstances, in fact they are almost clearly circumstances. Two former occasions, one in also accidentally, and the survivor doesn't the moral courage to report the matter to the proper authorities;" and I added, "Come, Mr. Landells, am I to go or stay?" He did not answer for a few minutes, and then said, "If I'll you allow me to have five minutes' conversation with my wife?" I said "Yes;" called Mrs. Landells in, and Burrett and myself left them together. We remained in there for 5 or 10 minutes, and when we came out Burrett and I went into the room again. Landells was sitting in a chair, holding his hands, and said at once, "Sergeant, allow me to congratulate you upon your acuteness. You have solved the mystery. It is just as you thought. I shot Sherlock, but I did it accidentally." He was then proceeding to tell me how it occurred, but I told him I preferred to take his statement in writing, and I did so to present. Afterwards I said to Landells, "You have admitted shooting Sherlock, as you say, accidentally. I cannot constitute myself judge and jury in the case, and I shall have to request you to accompany me to the detective office." At the office, I said to Landells, "The statement I have taken down is in good form, for your own safety, I propose to have that statement re-written in ink. I will read that statement and have it signed. If it is not correct or good enough to sign it." I then read my notes and Burrett made a transcript of them as follows:—

I left Melbourne on Monday, 22nd July, and went with the deceased by J. J. Sherlock to Ringwood train. Deceased had a gun. We went with a view of seeing about the water carriage for the Fern Tree Gully station. We arrived at Ringwood shortly before 10 o'clock. We walked from the Ringwood