

THE CASE OF EDWARD PLUCK. FULL REPORT OF THE INQUEST.

The suicide of Edward Pluck, through being discharged from the Royal Victoria Victualling Yard, Deptford, having excited considerable attention through the questions in Parliament respecting it by Mr. Keir Hardie, the following report of the inquest may be interesting. The inquest was held at the Brown Bear public-house, High-street, Deptford, on Monday, May 29, by Mr. E. A. Carttar, Coroner for South-East London and Kent, and the first witness called was

Sarah Pluck, who said: I identify the body as that of my husband, Edward Pluck, aged sixty-five last birthday, bricklayer, of 48, Gosterwood-street, St. Paul's, Deptford. He had been very melancholy since he came out of the Royal Victoria Victualling Yard about a month ago, when he lost his work. I last saw him alive at six o'clock last Saturday evening, and at nine o'clock yesterday (Sunday) morning heard that he was in the mortuary. When he left home he was going to see my daughter up High-street, Deptford, but did not say when he would return. At seven o'clock, as he did not come home, my son Robert went to look for him, but could not find him. I cannot account for his being found as he was, except through leaving his work. He had never threatened to do himself an injury. We are not very well off, in consequence of his being out of work. We live about ten minutes' walk from the Surrey Canal. My husband had been in the Victualling Yard about eight years working for the contractor.

Robert Pluck, bricklayer, of 48, Gosterwood-street, said: Deceased was my father. He had been depressed in spirits ever since he came out of the yard. It seemed to break his heart. I last saw him alive about half-past seven on Saturday evening, when he left home saying he was going to look after my mother, who was out shopping. He seemed rather strange, and would not come into my room to see me. He said, "Good night," which was very unusual. He said some time ago that before he would go into the work-house he would make a hole in the water. That was a year ago. He worked for Mr. Holloway, the contractor under Government. He was discharged, I understood, because he was over sixty-five years of age. A petition was sent in for more money and holidays, but some got less and others got the "sack" in consequence. The petition was sent in about five weeks ago. Deceased was induced to sign it much against his wish.

Charles Ashby, police pensioner, of 48, Gosterwood-street, said: I have known the deceased about seven months. He was feeble, but not ailing. Last saw him alive about half-past eight o'clock on Saturday evening in Evelyn-street, Deptford, near the Mansion House public-house. He was walking alone towards High-street. Deceased and his wife quarrelled at times of late. They were badly off. Thought his son supported him, or he would have had nothing.

Police-constable Sidney Stanniforth, 64 M, said: I am stationed at Rotherhithe. At four o'clock on Sunday morning I was on duty on the bank of the Surrey Canal, between Knacker's Bridge and East London Railway Arch, and when about five yards from the bridge I saw the body of the deceased floating in the water with the hat on the back of the head. I got the body out. It was quite cold and dead. With assistance I took it to the mortuary. I searched the body, and found a halfpenny. Deceased was fully dressed, and the clothes were buttoned up and not disarranged. Deceased was a stranger to me, and there were no marks of violence. The appearances were consistent with drowning.

George Alfred Harvey said: I am a builder's foreman to Mr. Holloway, of Deptford, and reside at 31, South-street, Greenwich. I have known the deceased some years, and he has been under me for seven. He was not ailing. I discharged him on May 8, as he was considered too old to do his duties. He has been getting very infirm of late. He was employed in the Victualling Yard for Mr. Holloway. There was a petition sent to the Admiralty for more money, and payment for public holidays. There is a standing clause in our contract that no one over sixty-five years of age is to be employed. An assistant civil engineer came round and inspected all the men, and considered the deceased and several others too old, and we had to discharge them. I would have liked to have kept the deceased on for two years longer, but I had no alternative.

A Juror: I call it cruel—cruel.

Another Juror: There is no chance for a man with gray hair.

A third Juror: We'll have to dye it.

Police-constable Richard Wickham, 40 R R, Coroner's officer for Deptford, said: I saw the deceased's wife, who told me they lived happily together. Had heard that she had been annoying the deceased of late.

The Coroner said: I cannot understand such a regulation being made. If there was to be such a rule, it should apply to the top as well as to the bottom of the tree. It did not apply to Cabinet Ministers and bishops, who were considered competent to continue their engagements until they were over eighty or ninety years of age, and received their salaries. Some men at fifty-five years of age were not so competent as others at seventy-five. In this case the contractor appears to have had no option in the matter under the terms of the contract.

The jury returned a verdict that the deceased committed suicide by drowning in the Grand Surrey Canal, at the time labouring under mental derangement through being turned out of his employment, as over sixty-five years of age, under the terms of a Government contract.