

# **LIFE'S TRAGIC SIDE**

## **A WOMAN'S DEATH.**

### **INTERFERENCE WITH MOTHERHOOD.**

#### **REMARKS BY CORONER.**

Mrs Mary Elizabeth Nelson, wife of William Nelson, of Thompson street, South Melbourne, laborer, died in the Melbourne Hospital on December 3 from blood poisoning.

The Coroner, as already reported, was notified of Mrs Nelson's death, and he gave directions for an inquiry, which was held at the Morgue.

Sub-Inspector Carter and Detective Arthur appeared on behalf of the police.

#### **THE MEDICAL EVIDENCE.**

Dr Mollison, who made the autopsy, stated that death was due to an irregularity having taken place in relation to motherhood. He could not definitely say whether the irregularity was natural or had been induced by mechanical means. There was evidence of an operation having been performed, but he could not say whether it had been carried out before or after the irregularity had taken place.

Dr Wilson, medical practitioner, residing at the Melbourne Hospital, said that when deceased was admitted to the institution she stated that an irregularity had taken place. When death occurred a partial post-mortem examination showed that an instrument had

occurred a partial post-mortem examination showed that an instrument had been used.

#### THE HUSBAND'S EVIDENCE.

William Nelson, husband of deceased, stated that on November 20 his wife assisted to lift a wardrobe, and afterwards complained of pain. She was subsequently ill, but did not inform witness that any irregularity had taken place. She had never expressed herself averse to motherhood. Dr. Rosenfield attended his wife from November 20. He said to witness, "Your wife's illness has been brought on by herself." Witness said, "I don't think that she would do anything like that. She hurt herself lifting a wardrobe." Dr. Rosenfield said his charge for an operation would be L3 3s.

Dr. Rosenfield: Did you not know that I was attending your wife before November 20?

Witness : No. I was home on holidays all that week, and did not know it.

#### A NEIGHBOR'S STATEMENT.

Nellie Woolcock, married woman, residing in Coventry street, South Melbourne, stated that on November 24 deceased, who appeared to be ill, stated that she was in a certain condition and had strained herself. At about noon

Dr. Rosenfield arrived, and deceased was put under chloroform. An operation was then performed by Dr. Rosenfield, at which witness was present. When it was over, Dr. Rosenfield stated that he had been misled, but did not explain what he meant.

To Sub-inspector Carter : Mrs Nelson

To Sub-inspector Carter : Mrs Nelson had always expressed herself as being very fond of children.

Minnie Nelson, sister-in-law of deceased, stated that she was present when the operation took place. Dr. Rosenfield stated that he had carried out an operation, but had been misled by the symptoms.

#### MRS ELSIE HALL'S STATEMENT.

Elsie Hall, married woman, residing in Balmoral place, stated that she nursed Mrs Nelson in her illness. On November 25 witness discovered that deceased had been prematurely confined, subsequent to the operation.

#### DR. MOLLISON RECALLED.

The Coroner: Dr Rosenfield might or might not have accelerated deceased's death. It is my duty to warn him. He need not give evidence unless he wishes to.

Dr. Rosenfield: I desire to give evidence. Before that I would like to ask Dr. Mollison a question.

Dr. Mollison was recalled, and Dr. Rosenfield asked him whether, supposing the patient was in a septic condition when the operation took place, any harm could result?

Dr. Mollison: It would not accentuate the septic condition very much. There was a local abscess.

Dr. Rosenfield: I want to show that the local abscess was there at the time of the operation, and that general peritonitis did not ensue.

The Coroner: Do you think that the ir-

**The Coroner:** Do you think that the irregularity was caused by deceased lifting furniture?

**Witness:** It could be caused in that way.

Do you consider that Dr. Rosenfield was justified in carrying out the operation?—Yes.

#### **DR. ROSENFELD'S STATEMENT.**

Reuben L. Rosenfield, a duly qualified medical practitioner, stated that he first attended deceased prior to November 20. He found evidence of a septic condition, and ascertained that deceased was in a condition of motherhood. He recognised that her illness was serious when he performed the operation. This was for the purpose of removing the septic matter. He came to the conclusion, as the patient did not improve after the operation, that interference had taken place before he attended deceased. He asked her, but received a negative answer.

**The Coroner:** What do you mean by "interference?"

**Witness:** I mean illegal interference by mechanical means.

Dr Rosenfield, continuing, stated that he had frequently attended cases in which there had been interference.

**The Coroner:** Have you not informed

---

the police?—No. I do not consider that it is my duty to do so.

But do you know definitely of such cases?—Yes. I know of five cases within the last few weeks in which

in the last few weeks in which women have been criminally interfered with.

And you have not informed the police. Have you ever heard of compounding a felony?—Yes, but it is known to other people than the women themselves.

But don't you think that such people should be brought to justice?—In none of these cases has death resulted. I would report the matter if I knew that the interference was on the part of people other than the women themselves.

But self-interference is a felony?—I believe that it is.

Dr Rosenfield, continuing, said that he was frequently called in to treat cases such as that of the deceased. In this instance he had done all he could purely in the interests of the patient.

The Coroner: That is not controverted.

Dr. Rosenfield: But it has been made to appear that I had other motives.

#### THE CORONER'S VERDICT.

The Coroner said that the case presented peculiar features. The deceased had died from blood poisoning. The post-mortem examination showed that an injury had been caused by mechanical means, and it had accelerated death. Dr. Rosenfield had used an instrument in an operation, and it was possible that the injury was caused during this operation, without any gross negligence on Dr. Rosenfield's part. On the other hand, it might have been caused previously. He (the Coroner) was inclined to think that the injury was caused during the operation, and

was caused during the operation, and that there was no evidence of gross negligence. He was disinclined to accept the hypothesis that deceased had interfered with herself. It was a great shame that women, and especially married women, should mechanically interfere with motherhood. It was one of the greatest vices of the present day civilisation. He did not think, in regard to Dr. Rosenfield, that he was to blame in this case, but if medical men set their faces against the practice of illegal interference more than they did, and cleansed their own ranks of those who encouraged the practice, it would go far towards its complete discouragement. It was the opportunity to do ill deeds that often caused ill deeds to be done.

The Coroner then returned the following verdict:—I find that deceased died from blood poisoning and exhaustion, the result of premature confinement. I am of opinion that death was due to misadventure.

---