

The Millers of Tewkesbury

When the list of men hung by circumstantial evidence is complete, the name of Calvin Tyler, the miller of Tewkesbury, will be found thereon. One hundred and two years have passed since occurred the particulars we are about to relate, and the mill which achieved such a notoriety long ago has been swept from existence by the breath of the fiery demon.

On the night of October 20th, 1775, as several persons affirmed on solemn oath, Calvin Tyler entered his family circle and said that the faithful watch-dog of the mill had died in a fit, and was buried in the cellar whose walls were washed on one side by the water of the race.

The miller furthermore said that the dog exhibited symptoms of having been poisoned, and when his daughter asked him if he suspected any one, he said “No!” and almost immediately went to bed.

This very simple occurrence—the death of a dog—was to be commented upon and very generally disbelieved by the highest in that portion of the realm. One month afterward, Mrs. Marble gave notice to the proper authorities that her husband, a prominent merchant, had been missing for six-and-twenty days, and that she feared that foul play had befallen him.

The lady said that on the 23d of October her husband had left home at eight o’clock in the evening, saying that he was going to Tyler’s mill, the owner of which, Calvin Tyler, was to pay him six hundred pounds of borrowed money, and the interest thereon. With the intention of collecting the debt, as she supposed, Mrs. Marble saw her husband quit the house; but his absence for the following several days occasioned her no uneasiness, as he had been in the habit of making unannounced journeys to [London], where he sometimes remained a week. It was supposed that Mr. Marble had a love there which was destined to estrange him from his family.

After three weeks of continued absence, and no return, Mrs. Marble questioned the miller concerning her lord, and was informed that he (Tyler) had paid the money according to agreement, and that the merchant had left the mill by the *back door*, with intention of paying a visit to a man named Gordon, a well-known preacher, who had upon several occasions furnished the merchant’s table with the best of water-fowl.

Mrs. Marble did not prosecute her search further until she lodged information with the authorities. She afterward said that believing her husband had passed from Gordon’s to the coachstation she resolved to wait a while longer for his return.

The authorities deemed the merchant’s absence an affair of moment, and at once resolved to fathom it. If he had left the mill with six hundred pounds or more, it was possible that it had attracted the attention of some evil doer, who had forcibly made away with the merchant.

Calvin Tyler again asserted that the merchant had met him in the mill on the 23d, by appointment, and that he had there paid him the borrowed money and interest. His story, told in a straightforward manner, impressed every one, and no one for the time suspected him.

Gordon, the preacher, declared that Marble had not been to his hut for two months. The merchant was traced to the mill, but no one had seen him beyond it, and the Bow Street-runners reported that he was not in London. His disappearance no longer began to assume a serious aspect. There were several people who testified that the merchant and his debtor had quarrelled several days prior to the meeting at the mill, and accordingly Calvin Tyler was arrested for murder.

From the moment of his arrest a chain of damning circumstances began to wrap itself about him. He most strenuously denied his guilt, declared that he had paid Mr. Marble the sum of six hundred pounds, and parted with him in the best of humor. He opened the mill for inspection, and the constables spent several days in their examination, which extended from cellar to attic. They even probed the darkness of the wheel-house, but found nothing to reward their pains. But while the rigid search was going on outside, evidence was entangling the [unfortunate] miller in a network of ultimate conviction.

A man was found who happened to be slyly fishing in the mill-race before the mill on the night of the 20th. [H]e saw a man whom he recognized as David [Marble] man merchant, approach the mill; that the miller met him at the door, and that the two men went into the structure together. After a while the fisher saw a light in the mill, and heard a voice like the miller's say, "We'll settle all our scores here." Then followed two deadening blows, and all was still. Up to eleven o'clock Mr. Marble did not leave by the door which he had entered, but near that hour Calvin Tyler came out alone, locked the door, and walked homeward.

This, in brief was the evidence of the fisherman, a half-witted fellow, who said that his fear of being punished for stealing fish from the race had kept back the testimony. Other persons deposed to having seen the missing man going toward the mill; but the declaration of the miller that he had departed by the back door was not confirmed. No person had seen Marble after he had entered the mill.

Not satisfied with the search alluded to above, the authorities ordered another. It was generally believed that the old mill contained the secret of the merchant's death, for no one believed now that he was still alive. Calvin Tyler was released from jail, and ordered to direct the hunters, among whom, this time, was Gordon, the poacher.

The mill was searched systematically; the party began in the attic, and at last reached the cellar, where a terrible discovery awaited them. Barrels were opened, and their contents emptied upon the ground; long sticks were thrust into the earth and the stone walls carefully examined.

"What is this?" exclaimed a fellow, removing a large box from a corner.

His companions were attracted by the cry and saw what appeared to be loosened earth.

"There is where I buried my mill dog," the miller said. "I told my family at the time, and many tears were shed over him, for he was a faithful animal."

"Let us see the remains. It will do no harm—the digging up of him!"

The speaker was Gordon, the poacher, and there was a flash of triumph in his small dark eyes, but no one noticed it.

“Dig him up, poor Browser!” said the miller, and accordingly the men went to work.

Presently one gave a loud exclamation of horror, and sprang back, saying:

“Good God! boys! Do you call that a dog?” The hunters clustered about the excavation, and beheld a human hand, which the spade had uncovered.

Calvin Tyler gazed for a moment at the horrible spectacle, and then started back with a white face.

“Hold him!” cried the leader of the party—“don’t let him stir a foot now.”

But the miller did not attempt to fly.

“Before God, I never buried any thing in this [corner] but my poor dog,” he said, solemnly.

For several minutes the spade threw the earth out, and the body of a man exposed. The ghastly face was upturned to the lantern light, and every one recognized it as that of Mr. Marble.

“Bring him up and let him look into the hole!”

Calvin Tyler did not have to be led to the grave. He walked forward with firm step, and beheld the sickening sight.

“It is David Marble,” he said. “But God knows that I never put him there!”

A moment later he put his hand to his forehead, and reeled from the grave with a fainting cry[.]

“There’s guilt for you!” said the poacher. “I don’t believe that he ever buried a dog in this hole.”

“And the assizes will not believe it, either,” said one of his companions. The discovery in the cellar spread like wild-fire, and the body was removed from its grave of gloom. The skull was found to have been fractured by some blunt and heavy weapon, which medical men said drove pieces of the skull into the brain, which produced almost instant death.

After the removal of the corpse from the mill, the grave was further searched, but the remains of no dog were found.

The miller of Tewkesbury was now in an unfortunate situation. Before the search there were many who believed in his innocence; but now no one held to that opinion, and, foredoomed, the unhappy man went to his trial. It was in vain that his family testified to the miller’s telling them of the death and burial of the dog three days previous to Marble’s going to the mill; vain, too, the man’s aversions of his innocence. The finding of the missing man’s corpse in the cellar—in the

very corner where he had sworn to the interment of the dog—weighed most heavily against him, and he was found guilty and sentenced to be hung in chains.

But a petition praying the high court to spare his family the deep disgrace that would forever attach itself to them if the awful sentence was carried out, secured the punishment of decapitation, and the unlucky man was accordingly executed. He protested his innocence to the very last, and met his doom with much composure.

Throughout the region round about Tewkesbury it was universally believed that the guilty had been punished, and the honor of the law fully vindicated. It was noticed on the trial that Sir Percy Hasket, a celebrated surgeon, gave it as his belief that David Marble had been dispatched by one blow, whereas the thieving fisherman had sworn to having heard *two* deadened blows in the mill on the eventful night. But the surgeon's evidence did not tend to help the accused.

The miller had said that he broke in the heading of a cask with two blows, in Marble's presence; but this explanation of the noise was not credited.

Shortly after the miller's execution his family left Tewkesbury, and all traces of them became lost. The mill was shunned by the superstitious, and another had to be erected to keep the patronage at home.

Although we have followed the miller of Tewkesbury to his death, the story of the crime does not end here.

Three years after the execution, the Earl of Sudbury's gamekeeper fired at a poacher, and heard a sharp cry of pain. In the darkness search for the [thief] proved unavailing, and the matter was dismissed from the gamekeeper's mind.

Two days later, a dead man was found under a shelving bank not far from the scene of the shot. It was evident that he had been dead for twelve hours. Nobody recognized him, but the piece of paper which had dropped from his hand told a terrible story; it revealed a secret which must have haunted its guilty possessor like the ghost of the murdered dead. This document contained blood-stains, and was written in a poor, ragged hand as follows:

“I am Roswell Gordon, of Tewkesbury, dying from a shot received by Sudbury's gamekeeper, and declare before God, and with the judgment before me, that what I am going to say is true. Three years ago Calvin Tyler was executed for the murder of David Marble, merchant. He was innocent. I, Roswell Gordon, did the deed. It was in this wise. I had a key to the miller's back door, and used to get flour by theft. I saw Mr. Marble and the miller in the mill on the 20th. The miller paid him six hundred and ninety pounds. The merchant went out the back way; I followed and struck him once with a bludgeon. He fell down quite dead. After the miller left the mill I carried the body into the cellar, and buried it where I had seen the miller put his dead dog three nights before. The dog I took away and buried it near my house. I poisoned the animal, for he bothered me at the mill. I got Mr. Marbles money, and gambled it away in London. This is true, for I will soon stand before my God, and I can't die with two murders on my soul. God have mercy on my guilty soul.

“Roswell Gordon.”

Thus was the truth finally told; but the innocent had suffered for the guilty.

Justice had finally overtaken the poacher. In the night, under the bank, he died with the crimes of years on his soul, unshriven by priest, and, as we may believe, unforgiven by his God.

It was ordered that colors should be waved over the miller’s grave in token of his innocence.

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