

HUSBAND A SUSPECT

Cocking May Have Killed His Wife and Her Sister.

EXCITEMENT AT LA PLATA

Threats of Lynching Freely Made by Assembled Farmers.

VERDICT OF THE CORONER

**Merchant Cocking Tells Conflicting
Stories—His Feet Only Were Tied
and Blood Was Found on His Cloth-
ing—His Actions Have Aroused Sus-
picious That He Knows More of the
Fearful Crime Than He Has Told.
How His Wife and Miss Miller
Were Slain.**

From a Staff Correspondent.

La Plata, Md., April 24.—Mrs. Joseph Cocking, wife of Joseph Cocking, a prominent storekeeper at Hill Top, in the second district of this county, and her sister, Miss Daisy Miller, were murdered in their home last night about 12 o'clock.

The scene of the murder is about ten miles from La Plata. Their heads were cut open with a hatchet belonging to Mr. Cocking, who was found in a cellar under the store. His feet were bound with ropes when he was discovered.

The crime has caused the most intense excitement and tonight the village of Hill Top is filled with farmers from the vicinity.

The murder is a mystery to the county officials, but circumstances brought to light today cause suspicion to rest upon Joseph Cocking, husband of the murdered woman.

It was at first believed that the crime was the work of robbers, but developments indicate that this lead was false. Searching parties that took the road this morning have returned without finding a clue. As far as is known no strange or suspicious characters have been in the neighborhood recently.

COCKING IS SUSPECTED.

Bits of evidence unearthed during the day have thrown suspicion upon Cocking, though it is all circumstantial and not sufficient to warrant the sheriff in placing him under actual arrest. At the same time he is being watched. A four-year-old child slept in the room with the murdered woman and was not harmed. There are no signs of violence upon the bodies of the dead women, except those which caused death, thus effectually disposing of any theory of a further crime.

Nick Jones, an aged colored man, was the first person to discover the crime. He went to the store shortly after sunrise this morning and found the front store door unlocked. He entered and was called to by Cocking from the cellar. He went down in the cellar and found Cocking lying on his side groaning.

Cocking told the old man that he had heard a noise and came down stairs to investigate. On entering the store he was hit in the head and afterwards tied and thrown down the stairs.

COCKING'S STRANGE STORY.

He said before he came down from his bedroom he heard a groan from the room of Miss Miller, but gave no thought to it, as she had been ill for some time.

His assailants, he said, were big men, and there were not more than two. He could not tell whether they were white or black. As evidence of the truthfulness of his assertions Cocking showed the old negro two bruises, one on each temple. He said the worst blow was at the back of the neck.

When found by Nick Jones Cocking had his hands free, but his feet were tied. The negro stooped down to cut the rope binding his ankles, but found it so loosely tied that he unfastened the knot instead.

On the second floor of the building are two bedrooms. In the one on the right slept Miss Miller. When her body was found the left temple was crushed in by the head of a hatchet, and directly above it was another fracture of the skull.

On the right side of the head, above the temple, was another wound about an inch in length that had been made by the blade of a hatchet. There was no evidence of a struggle and her death must have been instantaneous. She was clad only in her night dress and the bed clothing was saturated with blood.

WIFE MADE A STRUGGLE.

Across a hall was the room in which Mrs. Cocking was murdered. The appearance here indicated that she made a struggle. A pillow gave evidence of having been used to stifle her cries. There were three wounds on Mrs. Cocking's head. She was lying on her right side and all the cuts were on the left side of her head.

The blade of the hatchet in descending in one place cut her left ear in half and sunk into the brain to a depth of over an inch. There was another cut on the head four inches long, and from this oozed the

Continued on Fourth Page.

HUSBAND A SUSPECT

Continued from First Page.

woman's brains. Above this were two other wounds about the same length.

Partly over her head was lying the pillow mentioned.

Cocking did not sleep with his wife. He had three children. The eldest slept with the mother while the youngest occupied a cot in a little room in the rear of the hall. It was in this room that Cocking says he was asleep when he heard the noises which aroused him.

An examination of the bed showed little evidence of having been occupied. The older children were not home last night, having gone to visit Mrs. Dr. J. H. Miller, their grandmother, who is the mother of Miss Miller, one of the murdered women.

EVIDENCES OF ROBBERY.

The only evidence of robbery was the slight disorder in the rooms of the dead women. A bureau drawer containing less than \$3 had been opened and the money taken. A little bank containing \$40 in the bureau drawer in Mrs. Cocking's room had not been disturbed.

The first efforts of Nick Jones were directed to getting Cocking from the cellar. After untying the rope he assisted him up the steps to the store, where he placed the injured man's head on a rolled up blanket. Cocking appeared faint and feeble, and turning to the old negro said:

"Go upstairs, Nick, and see if there is anything wrong up there."

The old man replied:
" 'Deed, Mister Cocking, I'se don't want to go inter de ladies' 'partments."

"Go on, Nick," persisted Cocking. "See if anything is the matter," and burying his face in his hands Cocking groaned aloud. Nick went upstairs and was brought face to face with the bloody work of the murderer. The little four-year-old boy of the storekeeper was found in his mother's room. Nick returned to the store below.

"What did you see?" said Cocking faintly.

"Don't like to tell you, boss, 'deed I don't," responded the old man.

At this Cocking began to cry.

FOUND THE HATCHET.

Jones moved toward the door, and in doing so sped on the counter a bloody hatchet, with which it is believed the murder was committed. A further examination of Cocking showed blood stains on his shirt and shirt sleeves. He had several scratches on his left wrist and arm and said the blood came from these wounds.

He said he made the cuts by cutting from his wrists the rope which bound them. A search for this rope was made in the cellar, but it could not be found. Cocking's shirt front was bespattered with blood and one big blotch with stains around it looked like the spurt from a severed artery.

His story is regarded with considerable doubt and the talk of the people in the county reflects much suspicion on Cocking himself.

The greatest excitement prevails. Groups of men stood around the house today and threats of lynching somebody were freely made. Those well acquainted with the family say that they lived apparently in the greatest happiness and harmony.

Cocking's business was not in the best of shape and it is known that he had been going behind in his financial affairs for some time.

MOTIVE IS LACKING.

The motive for the crime is lacking. Jones hurried from the store soon after his discovery and notified several neighbors, among them Justice of the Peace William F. Blude, who immediately impanelled a jury of inquest. States Attorney Posey directed the investigation. The members of the jury are John W. Mattingly, foreman; L. B. Owens, William Dows, John S. Green, J. W. Golden, J. P. Gibbons, Robert Ferguson, Thomas Franklin, John R. Leland, Robert Price, J. B. Wenk and Lemuel J. Padgett.

A post mortem examination was made by Drs. John T. Diggs and Benjamin Smith. The jury held their examination behind closed doors and brought in a verdict regarding the death of Miss Miller, that she died from a hatchet wound in the head, inflicted at the hands of persons unknown. They adjourned to meet tomorrow, when they will hold an inquest over Mrs. Cocking.

Sheriff Wade arrived before the conclusion of the inquest and tonight the premises, with Cocking inside, are under the surveillance of George Cross, who was deputized for the purpose. Cross is assisted by dozens of volunteers who will watch the premises all night. Cocking is himself watched closely.

The murdered sisters are the daughters of the late Dr. Miller, and were very popular in the village of Hill Top. Cocking was a farmer until three years ago, when he moved to Hill Top and opened the store where the tragedy took place.

H. L. F. A.