

# The Examiner.

## AND SEMI-WEEKLY INTELLIGENCE.

"THIS IS TRUE LIBERTY WHEN FREE-BORN MEN—HAVING TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC—MAY SPEAK FREE."—MILTON'S EURIPIDES.

New Series.

CHARLOTTETOWN, JULY 17, 1850.

Vol. 1: No. 48

### THE CONFESSION OF PROFESSOR WEBSTER, OF THE MURDER OF DR. PARKMAN.

Boston, July 2, 1850.

At the meeting of the Council, this morning, the case of Professor Webster was referred to a committee.

Before the Committee, at 12 o'clock, appeared the Rev. Dr. Putnam, the spiritual adviser of the condemned, with a petition for a commutation of the punishment, together with a confession that he killed Dr. Parkman.

The Reverend gentleman prefaced the statement by a few remarks relative to the manner in which the confession was made to him.—He stated that he had no previous acquaintanceship with Professor Webster, before being called to act in the capacity of his spiritual adviser. In the first few weeks of his visits he sought no acknowledgement of the prisoner. At length on the 23d of May, he visited him in his cell, and demanded of him, for his own well-being, that he should tell the truth in regard to the matter, and he acceded to the request, by making a statement, which was now submitted for the consideration of the Council. It was in substance as follows:

#### THE CONFESSION.

On Tuesday, 20th November, I sent the note to Dr. Parkman, which, it appears, was carried by the boy, Maxwell. I handed it to Littlefield unsealed. It was to ask Dr. Parkman to call at my rooms, on Friday, the 23d, after my lecture. He had become, of late, very importunate for his pay. He threatened me with a suit; to put an officer in my house, and to drive me from my professorship, if I did not pay him. The purport of my note was simply to ask the conference. I did not tell him, in it, what I could do, or what I had to say about the payment. I wished to gain for those few days, a release from his solicitations, to which I was liable every day, on occasions, and in a manner very disagreeable and alarming, and also to avert for so long a time, at least the fulfilment of recent threats of severe measures. I did not expect to be able to pay him when Friday should arrive. My purpose was, if he should accede to the proposed interview, to state to him my embarrassments and utter inability to pay him at present—to apologise for those things in my conduct which had offended him—to throw myself upon his mercy—to beg for further time and indulgence, for the sake of my family, to make as good promises to him as I could have any hope of keeping. I did not hear from him on that day, nor the next, (Wednesday,) but I found on Thursday he had been abroad in pursuit of me without finding me. I imagined that he had forgotten the appointment, or else did not mean to wait for it. I feared he would come in upon me at my lecture hour, or while I was preparing my experiments for it; therefore I called at his house on that morning, (Friday,) between eight and nine o'clock, to remind him of my wish to see him at the College, at half-past one—my lecture closing at one. I did not stop to talk with him, for I expected the conversation would be a long one, and I had my lecture to prepare for, for it was necessary for me to have my time, and also, to keep my mind free from other exciting matters. Dr. Parkman agreed to call on me as I proposed. He came accordingly, between half past one and two o'clock, entering at the lecture room door. I was engaged in removing some glasses from my lecture room table, into the room in the rear, called the upper laboratory. He immediately addressed me with great energy—"Are you ready for me, sir? Have you got the money?" I replied, "No, Dr. Parkman;" and I was then beginning to state my condition, and my appeal to him, but he would not listen to me, and interrupted me with much vehemence. He called me a scoundrel and liar, and went on heaping on me the most bitter taunts and opprobrious epithets. While he was speaking, he drew a handful of papers from his pocket, and took from among them my two notes, and also an old letter from Dr. Hossack, written many years ago, congratulating him on his success in getting me appointed Professor of Chemistry. "You see," he said, "I got you into office, now I will get you out of it."

He put back into his pocket all the papers except the letter and the notes. I cannot tell how long the torrent of threats and invectives continued, and I cannot recall to memory but a small portion of what he said; at first I kept interposing, trying to pacify him, so that I might obtain the object for which I sought the interview, but could not stop him, and soon my own temper was up; I did not know, or think, or care, where I should hit him, nor how hard, nor what the effect would be. It was on the side of his head, and there was nothing to

break the force of the blow.—He fell instantly upon the pavement. There was no second blow; he did not move. I stooped down over him, and he seemed to be lifeless. Blood flowed from his mouth, and I got a sponge and wiped it away. I got some ammonia and applied it to his nose, but without effect. Perhaps I spent ten minutes in attempts to resuscitate him, but I found he was absolutely dead. In my horror and consternation, I ran instinctively to the doors and bolted them, the doors of the lecture room and the laboratory below. And then, what was I to do? It never occurred to me to go out and declare what had been done, and obtain assistance. I saw nothing but the alternative of a successful movement and concealment of the body on the one hand, and of infamy and destruction on the other. The first thing I did, as soon as I could do anything, was to draw the body into the private room adjoining, where I took off the clothes, and began putting them into the fire, which was burning in the upper laboratory. They were all consumed there that afternoon, with papers, pocket-book, and whatever they contained. I did not examine the pockets, nor remove anything, except the watch. I saw that, or the chain of it, hanging out. I took it, and threw it over the bridge as I went to Cambridge.—My next move was to get the body into the sink, which stands in the small private room; by setting the body partially erect against the corner, and by getting up into the sink myself, I succeeded in drawing it up there. It was entirely dismembered. It was quickly done, as a work of terrible and desperate necessity. The only instrument was the knife found by the officers, in the tea chest, which I kept for cutting corks. I made no use of the Turkish knife, as it was called at the trial.—That had long been kept on my parlor mantelpiece in Cambridge, as a curious ornament. My daughters frequently cleaned it; hence the marks of whitening found on it. I had lately brought it into Boston to get the silver sheath repaired. While dismembering the body, a stream of Cochituate water was running through the sink, carrying off the blood in a pipe that passed through the lower laboratory. There must have been a leak in the pipe, for the ceiling below was stained immediately around it. There was a fire burning in the furnace of the lower laboratory.—Littlefield was mistaken in thinking there had never been a fire there. He had probably never kindled one, but I had done it myself several times. I had done it that day for the purpose of making oxygen gas. The head and viscera was put into the furnace that day, and fuel heaped on. I did not examine at night to see to what degree they were consumed. Some of the extremities were put in there, I believe, on that day; the pelvis, and some of the limbs, perhaps, were all put under the lid of the lecture room table, in what is called the well—a deep sink, lined with lead; a stream of Cochituate was turned into it, and kept running through it all Friday night; the thorax was put into a similar well, in the lower laboratory, which I filled with water, and threw in a quantity of potash, which I found there. This disposition of the remains were not changed till after the visit of the officers on Monday. When the body had thus been disposed of, I cleared away all traces of what had been done. I think the stick with which the fatal blow had been struck proved to be a piece of the stump of a large grape vine—say two inches in diameter, and two feet long. It was one of the several pieces which I had carried in from Cambridge long before, for the purpose of showing the effect of certain chemical fluids in colouring wood, by being absorbed into the pores. The grape vine, being a very porous wood, was well adapted for this purpose. Another long stick had been used as intended, and exhibited to the students. This one had not been used. I put into the fire. I took up the two notes either from the table or the floor. I think the table, close by where Dr. P. had fallen. I seized an old metallic pen lying on the table, dashed it across the face and through the signatures, and put them in my pocket. I do not why I did this rather than put them into the fire, for I had not considered for a moment what effect either mode of disposing of them would have on the mortgage or my indebtedness to Dr. P. and the other persons interested, and I had not yet given a single thought to the question as to what account I should give of the object or result of my interview with Dr. Parkman. I never saw the sledge hammer spoken of by Littlefield; never knew of its existence, at least I have no recollection of it. I left the College to go home as late as six o'clock. I collected myself as well as I could, that I might meet my family and others with composure. On Saturday, I visited my rooms at the College, but made no change

in the disposition of the remains, and laid no plans as to my future course. On Saturday evening, I read the notice in the *Transcript*, respecting his disappearance. I was then deeply impressed with the necessity of immediately taking some ground as to the character of my interview with Dr. Parkman, for I saw that it must become known that I had had such an interview, as I had appointed it first by an unsealed note on Tuesday, and on Friday had myself called at his house in open day, and ratified the arrangement, and had there been seen, and had probably been overheard by the man servant, and I knew not by how many persons. Dr. P. might have been seen entering my rooms, or how many persons he might have told by the way where he was going—the interview would in all probability be known, and I must be ready to explain it. The question exercised me much, but on Sunday my course was taken. I would go into Boston and be the first to declare myself the person, as yet unknown, with whom Dr. P. made the appointment. I would take the ground that I had invited him to the College to pay him the money, and that I had paid it. Accordingly, I fixed upon the sum by taking the small note and adding interest, which it appears I cast erroneously. If I had thought of this course earlier, I should not have deposited Pettee's check for \$90 in the Charles River Bank on Saturday, but should have suppressed it, as going so far to make up the sum which I was to have professed to have paid the day before, and which Pettee knew I had by me at the hour of interview; it had not occurred to me that I should ever show the notes cancelled in proof of it, or I should have destroyed the large note, and let it be inferred that it was gone with the missing man, and I should have kept the small one which was all that I could pretend to have paid. My single thought was concealment and safety; every thing else was incidental to that. I was in no state to consider my ulterior pecuniary interest. Money, though I needed it much, was of no account with me in that condition of mind. If I had designed and premeditated the homicide of Dr. Parkman, in order to get the possession of the notes and cancel my debt, I should not only have deposited Pettee's check the next day, but should have made some show of getting and having the money the morning before. I should have drawn my money from the bank and taken occasion to mention to the cashier that I had a sum to make up that day for Dr. Parkman, and the same to Henchman when I borrowed the \$10. I should have remarked that I was so much short of a sum that I was to pay Parkman. I borrowed the money from Henchman as mere pocket money for the day. If I had intended the homicide of Dr. P. I should not have made the appointment with him twice and each time in so open a manner that other persons would almost certainly know of it; and I should not have invited him to my rooms at an hour when the College would be full of students and others, and at an hour when I was most likely to receive a call from others, for that was the hour just after the lecture, at which persons having business with me, or in my rooms, were always directed to call. I looked into my rooms on Sunday afternoon, but did nothing. After the first visit of the officers, I took the pelvis and some of the limbs from the upper well and threw them into the vault under the privy. I took the thorax from the well below, and packed it in the tea chest, as found. My own impression has been, that this was not done till after the second visit of the officers, which was on Tuesday, but Kingsley's testimony shows that it must have been done sooner. The perforation of the thorax has been made by the knife. At the time of removing the viscera, on Wednesday, I put on kindlings and made a fire in the furnace below, having first poked down the ashes. Some of the limbs, I cannot remember which or how many, were consumed at that time. This was the last I had to do with the remains. The tin box was designed to receive the thorax, though I had not concluded where I should finally put the box. The fish hooks, tied up as grapples, were to be used for drawing up the parts in the vault, whenever I should determine how to dispose of them, and get strains enough. I had a confused double object in ordering the box, and making the grapples. I had, before, intended to get such things to send to Fayal; the box to hold the plants and other articles which I wished to protect from the salt water and the sea air, and the hooks to be used there in obtaining coralline plants from the sea.

It was this previously intended use of them that suggested and mixed itself up with the idea of other application. I doubt even now, to which use they would