

District News.

ABERDARE.

**SMOKING MURDER.**—On Friday night last a shocking murder was committed at Aberdare. The name of the victim was Thomas Watkins; that of his murderer Benjamin Jones. Watkins was the son of a cattle dealer, living at Aberdare, and he assisted the father in the trade. He was 31 years of age, tall, muscular, and strongly built, and held in fear by all the roughs of the place, it being commonly stated that he was a match for half a dozen of them. Jones is a puddler, of middle stature, but thick set. He is 26 years of age, and married. Watkins was also married. The circumstances which led to the dreadful tragedy appear to have been these:—Watkins, as was customary with him, was at the public slaughter-house on Friday assisting the butchers, and Jones, who was killing, was about the premises all day. Early in the morning, it would seem, they began to dispute upon matters connected with the slaughtering, and high words were spoken on both sides. Jones, it appears, went so far as to threaten to "do" for Watkins before night while they were at the slaughterhouse, but nothing more serious than taunts and threats happened at this place. About 9 o'clock in the evening both men, who were somewhat under the influence of liquor, having been drinking during the greater part of the day, went off together to the Market Tavern. They entered the inn together, sat down, and called for two glasses of beer, for which the deceased Watkins paid. In a few minutes Jones, who seemed bent on picking a quarrel, resumed the dispute which had been broken off at the slaughterhouse, and, rising from his seat, challenged Watkins to fight. Watkins refused to fight, and Jones then struck him in the face with his fist. Watkins then expressed surprise, and, thinking Jones was merely joking, and not in earnest, simply pushed him back. Jones, however, came on again and struck him another blow, upon which Watkins grasped him, and they had a struggle, but were speedily separated by the landlord. One of the company then called out Jones had a knife in his hand, and finding it was discovered, he closed it, and returned it to his pocket immediately. The landlord then ordered him to go out of the house. He replied in a surly tone, "I will go," and went; but as he was to be looked at Watkins and said in Welsh, "I will be into you before I sleep to-night." Soon afterwards, Watkins's mother-in-law, hearing of the quarrel, fetched him from the public-house, and they left the place together. Jones, however, had been meditating his plan of revenge, and he awaited them outside the house with a large stone in his hand. When Watkins was about half a dozen yards from the door, Jones ran up to him, and with the stone in his hand struck him one tremendous blow on the side of the head behind the right ear, which felled him dead to the ground. His mother-in-law shrieked in a fright, and ran back to the inn, from which people rushed at the same moment to see what had happened. Fortunately, a sergeant of police was close to the spot at the time, and he, without a moment's delay, raised Watkins from the ground, and, finding that breathing had stopped, sent for a surgeon, while he was removed to his house. As they entered the house with him a glass of wine was placed to his lip, and he breathed twice and then expired. The surgeon arrived directly afterwards, but the moment he saw the face of Watkins he said he was dead. A post mortem examination was made on Saturday morning, and it was then ascertained that the skull was terribly fractured, and that there was sufficient effusion of blood upon the brain to cause instant death. Jones ran from the scene of his crime to his own house, where he was arrested a quarter of an hour afterwards by a policeman, to whom he denied that any stone had been used. On Saturday he was brought before J. C. Fowler, Esq., the stipendiary magistrate for the district, at Merthyr Police-court, and after sufficient evidence had been taken to justify a remand, he was remanded. A circumstance, which intensifies the heinous character of the crime, remains to be told. The wife of Watkins was seized with labour on Friday evening and within a quarter of an hour of the perpetration of the frightful deed, a child was born. At that time the unfortunate mother was unaware of the grievous calamity which had overtaken her. We append the details as elicited at the examination, of another of those saddening occurrences which during past years have rendered the poor coal districts of Aberdare most notorious. In this case, as in that of Coe, the prisoner is quite a youth, and utterly unlike the criminal class in general. But while Coe's fearful deed must have been done in cold blood, this would appear to be committed in the semi-insanity caused by excessive indulgence; but we forbear to pre-judge.

save indulgence; but we forbear to pre-judge:— Benjamin Jones was on Monday brought up on remand before J. C. Fowler, Gwilym Williams, G. Overton, and E. J. Davies, Esqrs. The court on this occasion was crowded, but all kept perfect order throughout the proceedings; and of all the prisoner seemed to be the least interested in the events of the trial. Mr. Pies, solicitor, appeared on this occasion for the defence, and the following witnesses were examined:— Mrs. Ann Rosser, landlady of the Old Bank public-house, at Aberdare, with great discomposure, deposed: I am the wife of Thomas Rosser, landlady of the Old Bank, Aberdare, and the mother-in-law of the deceased Thomas Watkins. On Friday night last a little girl, kept at the Market Tavern, came to my house and told me that Benjamin Jones and Thomas Watkins were fighting in the Market Tavern. I then went to the Market Tavern, and as I was going in I met the prisoner coming out. I believe it was about eight o'clock. I stayed there, I think, about twenty minutes, and I sat down. I saw the deceased there. He was saying that he did not think that the prisoner was going to strike him, but he struck him in the face. I sat down with him until he came out with me. He was in drink. We went round one window on the corner of the house, where prisoner came behind me. I had hold of the arm of the deceased coming out of the house. I did not see the prisoner until he came close to the deceased, and he put his hand close to his head and struck him with something which was in his hand. It was stone or iron. I heard the sound of the blow against the deceased's head. I don't know where the prisoner was when we came out of the house. I did not see him then. I heard the blow like a rifle ball had been broken. Deceased then fell down at once; his legs seemed to drop under him. I then saw the prisoner catch a pint, and I turned round and caught a head of him. Prisoner said nothing before he struck the deceased, nor after I caught him. I held him by the wrist, and I screamed as loud as I could. I cried, "Murder; then Jones has killed Tom Watkins." Deceased did not speak a word after he had the blow. I heard the deceased saying something to himself when I met him coming out of the Market Tavern. Prisoner ran away as soon as he got leave from me. I saw him running. I then left deceased, for the prisoner pulled me after him when I was holding him, but he was too strong for me; he did not run towards the Market Tavern, but from it. I only went to the door, and I cried out that Watkins was killed. I did not see that the prisoner let anything drop from his hand; I did not see any stone in the prisoner's hand. I only heard the sound of a stone, I thought, when he struck deceased on the head.

Cross-examined by Mr. Pies: They sent for me to come to the Market Tavern, saying that Jones and Watkins were going to fight; the little girl that is kept at the Market Tavern came to tell me. I live about 100 yards from the Market Tavern; I went there with the little girl; she walked behind me; I don't know whether she was by me when I met the prisoner coming out or not. There were five or six men in the house when I went in; they did not tell me anything; deceased was telling them he did not think the prisoner was going to strike him; I did not hear that he had done anything to the prisoner; he fished his glass of beer and got up before I asked him to go home. Prisoner and deceased were usually very good friends; deceased had been carrying out meat for him that day. I did not hear him saying that the prisoner had been fighting with John Thomas that evening in the slaughter-house; somebody told me of it before that; I did not hear that that was the cause of the quarrel; deceased was telling them something when I was there, but I do not remember what he was saying; I had seen Watkins about half an hour before that; he was up at my house taking tea; he might have been drinking before; it was no secret to me that I heard of the fighting in the slaughter-house.

Richard Rosser, collier, said he was living at the Market Tavern. He was married to the landlady's daughter, and on Friday night he was in the house when Jones and Watkins came in. Watkins called for two glasses of beer and paid for them; they both then began to chaff each other, and he thought they were joking; then Jones struck Watkins twice, and drew his blood; they were both standing; they then began to fight; there were three glasses on both sides; as soon as we saw they were in earnest we stopped them; they then sat down and continued to threaten each other, and Jones asked Watkins to come out to fight him. I afterwards saw a knife in prisoner's hand; I cannot say whether it was open or shut; I think it was shut; he was then to go out when we saw the knife in his hand; I remained in the house; prisoner did not come back. He said "I'll be into you before I sleep to-night;" he said that several times before in the house. I believe prisoner had the weight of the fight. I afterwards heard a woman screaming in the street; I did not hear the words; it was directly after Watkins had gone out that it happened; prisoner had gone out a good while before that, from ten minutes to a quarter of an hour. I saw Mrs. Rosser coming into the house; I got up as soon as I heard the scream, and saw Watkins lying on the pavement dead enough; I went back to the house; I can't say why I did so; there came a good deal of people there directly; I did not see the prisoner.

J. C. Fowler to Mrs. Rosser: How long did you sleep in the Market Tavern?

Mrs. Rosser: About a quarter of an hour. I think.

P.S. Thorsay said he had examined the place where Watkins fell. There were no marks of blood on the pavement.

Mrs. Rosser, again called, said she held Watkins by the right arm when prisoner struck him.

Mr. Rosser said he had seen the stone, and believed it was quite capable of doing the injury marked on the head of the deceased.

P.S. Thorsay then stated that he had searched all about the road and pavement all round, but could not find another stone similar to that produced in the place. They were all small and broken. He had weighed the stone which was found near the deceased, and it weighed 2 lb. 5 oz.

The prisoner was committed to take his trial at the next assizes.

Cross-examined by Mr. Pies: They sent for me to come to the Market Tavern, saying that Jones and Watkins were going to fight; the little girl that is kept at the Market Tavern came to tell me. I live about 100 yards from the Market Tavern; I went there with the little girl; she walked behind me; I don't know whether she was by me when I met the prisoner coming out or not. There were five or six men in the house when I went in; they did not tell me anything; deceased was telling them he did not think the prisoner was going to strike him; I did not hear that he had done anything to the prisoner; he fished his glass of beer and got up before I asked him to go home. Prisoner and deceased were usually very good friends; deceased had been carrying out meat for him that day. I did not hear him saying that the prisoner had been fighting with John Thomas that evening in the slaughter-house; somebody told me of it before that; I did not hear that that was the cause of the quarrel; deceased was telling them something when I was there, but I do not remember what he was saying; I had seen Watkins about half an hour before that; he was up at my house taking tea; he might have been drinking before; it was no secret to me that I heard of the fighting in the slaughter-house.

Richard Rosser, collier, said he was living at the Market Tavern. He was married to the landlady's daughter, and on Friday night he was in the house when Jones and Watkins came in. Watkins called for two glasses of beer and paid for them; they both then began to chaff each other, and he thought they were joking; then Jones struck Watkins twice, and drew his blood; they were both standing; they then began to fight; there were three glasses on both sides; as soon as we saw they were in earnest we stopped them; they then sat down and continued to threaten each other, and Jones asked Watkins to come out to fight him. I afterwards saw a knife in prisoner's hand; I cannot say whether it was open or shut; I think it was shut; he was then to go out when we saw the knife in his hand; I remained in the house; prisoner did not come back. He said "I'll be into you before I sleep to-night;" he said that several times before in the house. I believe prisoner had the weight of the fight. I afterwards heard a woman screaming in the street; I did not hear the words; it was directly after Watkins had gone out that it happened; prisoner had gone out a good while before that, from ten minutes to a quarter of an hour. I saw Mrs. Rosser coming into the house; I got up as soon as I heard the scream, and saw Watkins lying on the pavement dead enough; I went back to the house; I can't say why I did so; there came a good deal of people there directly; I did not see the prisoner.

J. C. Fowler to Mrs. Rosser: How long did you sleep in the Market Tavern?

Mrs. Rosser: About a quarter of an hour. I think.

P.S. Thorsay said he had examined the place where Watkins fell. There were no marks of blood on the pavement.

Mrs. Rosser, again called, said she held Watkins by the right arm when prisoner struck him.

Mr. Rosser said he had seen the stone, and believed it was quite capable of doing the injury marked on the head of the deceased.

P.S. Thorsay then stated that he had searched all about the road and pavement all round, but could not find another stone similar to that produced in the place. They were all small and broken. He had weighed the stone which was found near the deceased, and it weighed 2 lb. 5 oz.

The prisoner was committed to take his trial at the next assizes.