

THE EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSION IN STAFFORDSHIRE.

Our correspondent telegraphs:—The action of the Home Secretary in instructing Superintendent Williams, of Leek, to fully inquire into the deathbed confession of Brooks, the Rushton farmer, upon whose evidence the men Clowes and Johnson are now undergoing 10 years' penal servitude, is looked upon with much satisfaction in North **Staffordshire**. There is but one feeling prevalent among the people of the district respecting the confession, and that is of delight at the prospect of the early release from imprisonment of the unfortunate men. For many miles round people seem to have been persuaded that there had been a sad miscarriage of justice, while those who know the locality where the outrage was said by Brooks to have taken place, and heard the evidence upon which the men were condemned were thoroughly convinced that if Brooks had been outraged by three men it must have been in some other spot, and the event must have taken place under different circumstances to those mentioned by him at the trial. On the morning after the alleged attack the place where it is said to have taken place was carefully examined, but no foot-marks other than those which must have been made by Brooks himself were discovered. The three men who were charged here such good characters, in comparison with that of Brooks, that surprise was universal when the committal was made known, and since then it would seem that Brooks' existence in the neighbourhood has not been one of the pleasantest. The friends account for the conviction by the ready and plausible account given by Brooks of the transaction. He was notoriously gifted for concocting stories, and more than one family have had to suffer from his inventions in this respect. It is believed that the report of Superintendent Williams will be such as to justify the release of the imprisoned men in a few days.

Yesterday afternoon Sir Wm. Harcourt held a consultation at the Home Office with Mr. Justice Bowen, who was the presiding judge at **Staffordshire** assizes, when Samuel Clowes and Henry Johnson were convicted and sentenced to 10 years' penal servitude on the charge of perpetrating a diabolical outrage upon Isaac Brooks who, before his recent disease, confessed that they were innocent of the crime. The Press Association understands that the Home Secretary has directed full inquiries to be made in the locality where the outrage was committed, previous to his arriving at a final decision.

A commissioner from the Home Office was sitting yesterday at Congleton receiving statements of a large number of witnesses in respect to the alleged mutilation. The proceedings were strictly private, and the result of the inquiries will be communicated solely to the Home Secretary. Among others, Mr. Harrison, who took down the confession, and the mother of deceased, whose presence he assented to, were in attendance, as also other persons supposed to be able to afford information. Sherratt, who was tried with Johnson and Clowes and acquitted, has been interviewed. He said it was practically impossible for either of them to have been concerned in the outrage. After they left Brooks, he journeyed with them for a quarter of a mile, when Johnson turned off in the direction of his own house, and when Clowes got close to his house, he left Sherratt, who got home when Eddulph church clock struck 12. Before he left Johnson and Clowes the outrage must have been committed according to the time given by Brooks. Sherratt's son, who was with them, corroborates the statement. The following document was executed in Stafford Gaol about a month after the conviction by Johnson:—

To my trustees, Messrs William and John Corbickley, of Harton, near Leek, farmers, and to my solicitor, Mr. Frederick Greatrex, of Stafford, and to all other persons whom it may concern:—I do hereby instruct and authorize you and each of you to use every possible endeavour to obtain a remission of my sentence of 10 years' penal servitude, as I most solemnly declare that I am innocent of the charge upon which I was convicted at the assizes held at Stafford in January last, and with this view I hereby retain and engage the services of my solicitor, Mr. Frederick Greatrex, of Stafford, to thoroughly investigate the circumstances connected with the charge upon which I was indicted, and to petition the Home Secretary and do all thing necessary on my behalf, and I hereby empower and authorize my trustees, Messrs William and John **Corbickley** to retain and pay all costs, charges, and expenses which shall be incurred by them and my said solicitor out of my trust estate and property.—Dated 22d February, 1882. (Signed) Isaac Johnson.

The signature was witnessed by Mr. R. Chadby, deputy-governor of the prison, and Mr. Greatrex.

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