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LEDBURY DRAPER'S ASSISTANT FOR TRIAL.

CHARGED WITH STEALING GOODS
VALUE £150.

At the Ledbury Police Court on Wednesday the magistrates were engaged in hearing the sensational charge against Clara Annie Read, whose parents reside at Stroud-road, Gloucester, of stealing a quantity of drapery goods and materials to the value of about £150 2s, the property of her employer, Mr G. W. Suter, draper and milliner, High-street, Ledbury. Prosecutor was represented by Mr H. Garrod (Ledbury), and Mr H. W. Orme (Messrs Russell and Co.) appeared for the defence.

The principal items with which prisoner was charged with stealing, and which provide interesting reading, were:—32 lengths of net and chiffon, 83 collars, 207 lengths of ribbon, 91 lengths of lace, 43 dozen buttons, 23 reels of cotton, 131 silk and linen handkerchiefs, 106 pairs of stockings, 152 pairs of gloves, 75 blouses, 32 dress skirts, 47 camisoles, 62 belts, 47 bodices, 134 ties, 63 vests, 26 knickers, 44 silk lengths, and 56 blouse pieces.

The Court was crowded with the general public, principally women.

George William Suter, draper and milliner, High-street, Ledbury, said that on Friday, September 16th, in consequence of information he received, he got someone to lock him in his premises on the following day (Saturday). Defendant arrived in the usual way and opened the premises. He then saw her take a box down and cut off three pieces of material, since valued at 8s 9d, and put it in her pocket. He immediately came from the place in which he was concealed, and asked her to produce the material she had put in her pocket. She became very upset, and appeared as if she was going to faint. It came as a great shock to witness. Afterwards he visited her lodgings in Worcester-road, and found a large quantity of goods there, which he identified as his property. The thefts must have extended over three years. The total value of the goods recovered was £151 2s. A great quantity such as stockings, etc., had been worn. When he discovered the thefts, and accused her of them, she threw up her arms and exclaimed, "Oh, what have I done?" Witness wired to defendant's father, who arrived later.

Cross-examined by Mr Orme: Until the day in question he had no suspicion whatever against defendant. He always found her an obliging assistant, and liked by most of the customers, he believed. He had never had any reason to think her strange in her manner. Defendant did not attempt to deny her guilt, but told them everything, and gave them assistance in sorting and pricing the goods. She had stolen the goods and apparently had worn some of them to save washing, such as stockings, etc. The price the goods were valued at was sale price, not cost price.

Mr Orme said that the goods should have been valued at cost price, but he would not ask the question now.

In further cross-examination, witness said that although defendant was stealing these goods at the time, defendant was in the habit of buying goods and having them entered—in fact, sometimes all her wages were swallowed up by booking, and he had had to complain to her about it. Although he took stock every year, it was difficult to detect thefts, in a case like this. He did not mind the case being settled by this Bench.

Sergt. Walker, stationed at Ledbury, gave evidence to the effect that he went to Clarence House (defendant's lodgings) on the Saturday with Mr Suter, defendant and her father. They were there till 10 o'clock at night sorting the goods. Defendant priced them and gave him every assistance. He told her she would be charged with the thefts, and she replied, "I am very, very sorry. I don't know whatever made me do it. Will Mrs Suter ever forgive me? Do you think I shall have to go to gaol?" He found some of the goods near the bed, and even between the bed and the paliasse.

Emily Barnes, defendant's landlady, gave evidence as to defendant's boxes and possessions unaccountably increasing.

Mr Orme for the defence pleaded guilty, and asked that the case might be dealt with summarily. It was the wish of defendant and her father, because they did not want to have to go through the worry and anxiety of waiting until the Sessions for the case to be settled. It would also save the county being saddled with expense.

After a consultation, the Bench decided that the case must go for trial at the Quarter Sessions.

Mr Orme therefore reserved his defence, and asked for legal aid for defendant under the Poor Prisoner's Defence Act.

The Bench decided that he must renew the application at the trial. Some defence should be made before they could grant the application.

Mr Orme hinted that it would be kleptomania.

Bail was allowed in the same sums as before, herself in £20 and her father in a similar amount.