

# Clare Murder Case

## Farmer Before the Court

### Story of a Woman in Flames

The State Pathologist, Dr John McGrath, was the principal witness at Ennis on Monday, when Thomas McMahon (60), farmer, Ballymacrinan, Kilkub, was charged with the murder, on January 14th, of his mother-in-law, Mrs Mary Keating, aged 65, who had resided with him.

The hearing will be resumed to-day, and, as some 30 witnesses have to be examined, District Justice Gleeson said that, if necessary, he would sit throughout the week. There are over forty exhibits in the case.

Mr Sean Hooper (instructed by Mr M J Walsh, State Solicitor), prosecuting, said that in 1936 accused married a daughter of Mrs Keating. By the terms of the marriage settlement, accused was to bring a fortune of £200 into the place, and to get the farm and stock, whilst the usual provision was made that the girl's parents should have a right of residence in the house, firing, etc. The wife's parents got the impression that they should have got a fortune of £300, and pressure was put on accused to pay the extra £100. He would not agree, and disputes followed.

In 1941 James Keating, the father-in-law, died, and such was the state of feeling in the house that accused was unwilling to pay the funeral expenses. Accused's wife died in October, 1942. That left in the house at Ballymacrinan the mother-in-law, the accused and a man named Patrick Cleary.

Counsel said that in January 16 accused sent Cleary on messages. On returning Cleary saw accused with two buckets. The accused said: "Mary is on fire." Having filled the buckets with water Cleary and accused entered the house, where Mrs Keating lay on the floor on fire. They put out the flames, but she was apparently dead. Counsel added that the State were suggesting that Mrs Keating was first assaulted by accused, sustaining wounds on the head sufficient to stun her; that paraffin oil was then thrown on her, and that she was set on fire.

Dr McGrath described the burns found on the body and said there was a wound on the scalp which, in his opinion, could not have been caused by a fall from standing height to the floor or against a hard object.

Mr L M Houlahan, solicitor, defending—Do you agree that women are more liable than men to fall victims to accidental burning?—Yes; statistics show that.

Do you agree that a common way of causing accidental fire is by the handling of paraffin?—I do.

Are you satisfied from your observations in this case and from the medical evidence that you can exclude the possibility of accidental burning?—No.