

SIR CHARLES FREDERICK GILL Q.C. - Obituary

Charles Frederick Gill, the son of Charles Gill, of Dublin, the elder brother of Mr. Arthur Gill, the Metropolitan Police Magistrate, was born on June 10, 1851, and educated at the Royal School, Dungannon. He was intended for Dublin University, but preferred to take up farming, a subject in which he retained an interest through life. It is said that an accidental visit to the Old Bailey in company with some school friends who were reading for the Bar, inspired him with a sudden resolution to follow their example. He was called in 1874 by the Middle Temple, of which he became a Bencher in 1905 and Lent Reader in 1919. He read with Douglas Straight, of the High Court of Allahabad, for whom he devilled, and in whose chambers he remained until Straight went to India.

He held many briefs with him and for Straight's great friend, Montagu Williams, and was so launched upon a first rate criminal practice in London and on the South Eastern Circuit at an early age. Thus in 1879, we find him appearing as junior to Mr. (afterwards Sir Harry) Portland for the prosecution of Perryman, who was convicted at the Old Bailey of the murder of his mother. In 1886 he received his first official appointment, that of junior counsel for the Post Office, and then by rapid steps he was made senior counsel to the Treasury at the Old Bailey, and junior and senior counsel to the London Bankers' Association, besides holding retainers for many public bodies and associations, including the Jockey Club.

Gill's first notable success, which made his name familiar to every newspaper reader and must have brought him an enormous accession of work, was his defence in 1890 before the Recorder of London, Sir Thomas Chambers, of one Butterfield, charged with criminal libel of the late Mr. Harry Marks. Sir Charles Russell (afterwards Lord Russell of Killowen) led for the prosecution, and that great advocate, then near the close of his career at the Bar, probably never had a tougher fight than with the comparatively youthful junior, who beat him handsomely at his own game. Gill's cross examination of Mr. Marks was highly approved by the Bar, and all Russell's eloquence failed to convince the jury, who brought in a verdict of "Not guilty".

About this time also Gill again fought Russell in a drawn out battle in the divorce proceedings between Miss Florence St. John and her husband, M. Marius, in which he appeared for the latter, and again when he was counsel for the co-respondent in the famous Dunlo (Belle Bilton) divorce case, also in 1890. The following year he acted as junior to Sir William Gordon-Cumming, in the Tranby Croft Baccarat case, perhaps the most sensational cause of celebration of his forensic career. In 1895 he was concerned throughout in the three Oscar Wild trials.

In 1899 Gill resigned the office of senior counsel to the Treasury on taking silk, and his name thenceforth appeared less in the public eye. Of recent years his health had not been good, and he suffered from blood pressure and increasing deafness. He had a charming country house and garden in Birchington, and limited his appearances in court to cases in which his services were specially desired.

In 1918 he was counsel in the Waterford peerage claim, and his 1st appearance in an important case was in December, 1920, when he successfully led for the Crown in the Eastbourne beach murder trial. His

opinion was to the end constantly sought in criminal matters which never saw the light of publicity, and his shrewd knowledge of human nature and affairs was invaluable in cases of blackmail and the like requiring unerring judgment and the utmost delicacy of handling. He invariably placed the facts of the case under the microscope of his mind and subjected them to a system of detailed analysis that seemed to make it impossible for the truth to be hidden. From 1920 to 1921 he was Recorder of Chichester, and was knighted in the latter year.

From his position as counsel to the Jockey Club (of which he was also an honorary member), it will be gathered that Gill was interested in sport, and country pursuits were his principal relaxations from the depressing labour of his profession. Following the tradition of the Old Bailey, he was also a patron of the drama, and at one time often seen at first night performances. He was a popular member of the Turf, Garrick, and Beefsteak, and other clubs. He married in 1878, Ada, daughter of John Crossley Fielding, who, with one son, Fielding, and daughter, Elsie, survive him.

Footnote

His son, Fielding (named after his mother's surname before marriage) was listed as a 31 year old Barrister at Law at the time of 1911 census.

His daughter Elsie Hope Gill later became Mrs Smiley.