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STRETCHING HEMP

How Men Are Hanged by the Necks Till Dead.

SOME HISTORIC EXECUTIONS.

How Major Andre Was Strung Up - What the Advocates of Capital Punishment Think of Hanging - How the Rope Was Used at Old Newgate Prison.

Nearly all educated men, no matter what their opinions about capital punishment, agree that hanging is a barbarous way of executing a criminal. The question has been so much agitated of late years that many prominent scientists have been making investigations as to the least painful way of legally killing a criminal. The strong advocates of capital punishment protest against this, claiming that by giving criminals a painless death all the terror of a legal execution is taken away, and tough citizens, with but little use for life anyhow, would have less compunction in committing capital crimes if the horrors of the noose and trap were taken from our their ken. But, as is well known, the advocates of painless capital punishment gained a great point when the law for execution by electricity was passed by the New York legislature.

EARLY EXECUTIONS. The first man to be executed in England by the "drop" was Earl Ferrers, May 5, 1790. Formerly malefactors stood in a cart under the gallows, with a rope round their necks, until the signal was given, when the cart was driven away and the criminal left hanging. The execution of Earl Ferrers was a very primitive one. After his arms were secured by a black sash and a common halter passed around his neck, "he then mounted a part of the scaffold eighteen inches above the rest, and the signal being given by the sheriff, that part of the floor sank under him to a level with the rest, and he remained suspended in the air."

Everybody who has read Dickens' "Bartholomew Rudge" will retain a vivid recollection of the Newgate prison hangman therein pictured with such masterful touches, especially the part in which, during the Gordon riots, he gladsly over the criminals is soon to hang. The scaffold used at the prison of Newgate has obtained a wide celebrity from its early perfection and the number whom their doom upon it. It is described in the preface to that rare and marvelous compilation, "The Newgate Calendar," as follows: "Condemned felons are executed in front of the prison on a large, movable scaffold, called the new drop, which is kept in the prison yard for this purpose. The malefactors stand on a false floor, and, when their devotions are finished, on a signal being given, the floor suddenly drops, leaving the victim suspended in the air."

The first private execution in England was carried into effect at London, within the walls of Newgate, Sept. 8, 1888. Alexander McKay was hanged for the murder of Mrs. Grossmith. The London Times said, commenting on the aspect of Newgate, as contrasted with what it used to be when executions were public: "Death by hanging now means a silent, terrible execution."

THE THEORY OF HANGING. "The theory of hanging," remarked a well known hangman, "is that the neck of the culprit should be broken. If this is done successfully second cervical vertebra is dislocated." (The tremendous learning exhibited by the hangman had a great effect on the reporter to whom he was talking, and his pencil stumbled confusedly.) "The actual process ruptures the transverse ligament of the atlas, the first bone of the neck, which sustains the globe of the neck and compresses the spinal cord against the posterior arch of the vertebrae. The cord is here just expanding into the vertebra oblongata, whence is situated the ganglion that presides over respiration." (Here the reporter collapsed completely.)

"Its compression stops respiration at once by stopping all the air for it, and death in such a case would be immediate and probably painless."

"But," interjected the reporter when he had in a measure recovered, "does death frequently take place from suffocation?"

"Yes," as frequently the second vertebra is only partially dislocated. Death then takes place from slow and painful suffocation, the victim getting just air enough through the half closed windpipe to prolong his struggles, or from apoplexy following the sudden cerebral congestion, which is caused both by the suffocation and by the pressure of the rope upon the great veins of the neck."

It is fairly settled that sensation, reflection and mental horror accompany the physical contortions of those perishing by strangulation.

Examples are frequent of those who commit suicide by hanging; attempting to regain their footing, finding the tortures of strangulation greater than they have conceived.

A criminal who was hanged, but resuscitated by the application of electricity and the skill of a surgeon, upon his final recovery has left his account of his experience: "The final prayer was said, the usual thanks tendered and greeting given, the cord was adjusted on my neck, I was placed upon the trap. I looked for the last time upon familiar objects. The cap was adjusted over my face. I felt an increased heat around my heart, a fullness of the throat, a slight weakness of the muscles of my limbs, then an involuntary shrinking of the nerves and a catching of the breath as I felt myself falling; then a fierce, fiery pain shot through my whole frame, my head seemed bursting and my consciousness was gone."

There were two notable executions of spies during the American war of independence - Nathan Hale and John Andre. The motives of the two spies and their personal history, and the history of their times, are too well known to be detailed here, but the manner of their execution will serve to throw light

on the way the death punishment was inflicted upon men something over a century ago.

Nathan Hale, the young American martyr, patriot and hero, was executed in the vicinity of (present) East Broadway and Market street, New York city, Sept. 22, 1776. The gallows was the limb of an apple tree in Col. Rutgers' orchard. A ladder was placed against the limb and Hale ascended it a few feet. The only words addressed by him to the sympathetic spectators were: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." The provost marshal gave the command, "Swing the rebel off," the ladder was turned, and Nathan Hale was no more.

Benson J. Lossing, in his work, "The Two Spies," thus describes the execution of John Andre: "At noon on the 23 day of October, 1780, Maj. Andre was executed upon an eminence near Tappan village, in the presence of a vast concourse of people. He was dressed in military costume and white top boots. He was taken to the gallows - a cross piece between two moderate sized trees - by a procession of nearly all the field officers, except Washington and his staff, who remained at headquarters. Gen. Greene led the cavalcade which passed between two files of soldiers, extending from the prison to the fatal spot. The prisoner's step was firm, and he did not falter until he saw the gallows and knew he was to be hanged as a felon and not shot as a soldier. His hesitation was only for a moment.

"A baggage wagon, bearing a plain white coffin, had been driven under the gallows. A grave had been dug near by. Into the wagon the prisoner stepped, and, taking the rope from the hangman, adjusted it to his neck and tied a white handkerchief over his eyes. * * * The wagon was driven swiftly from under him, and in a few minutes he ceased to exist."

Daniel F. Binkley, the tall, dark hangman of Kansas City, Mo., adopted the profession from pure love of it. According to The Kansas City Times, the thought of broken ropes, slow strangulation or ruptured skin was from early childhood revolting to his artistic soul. Therefore he has made a study of neckwear, and after some sixteen years of experience claims to be able to tie a hepenen cravat as skillfully as any gallows haberdasher in all the country. Binkley has witnessed fifty-six hangings and has himself executed fourteen criminals.

"People generally suppose I am cold blooded," he said, "but it is a mistaken idea. A warmer hearted man than I am does not live, but I consider it an act of charity to put men who must be hanged out of the way neatly and with dispatch. Personally I am opposed to capital punishment. I do not think it adequate to the crime."

Here the visitor attempted a correction of Mr. Binkley's quotation from the "Mikado," but was interrupted with: "But if it must be done it should be done artistically. When I go to hang a man I study his physique and past life. If he is a stout, athletic man with a strong neck I drop him seven or eight feet. If he has led a sedentary life, is thin skinned and small of neck I make the drop shorter. Now, there was Pat Harnett, who was hanged in the penitentiary at Columbus, O. My, what a botch that was!" - and Mr. Binkley's artistic nature seemed to rise up in horror at the remembrance. "Pat was a white skinned effeminate sort of fellow, but in spite of my pleadings the sheriff let him drop nine feet. The consequence was that his neck snapped like whipcord. The skin parted near the base of the neck and naturally contracted, leaving the flesh exposed well down on the shoulders. The rope tightening gathered the skin of the neck together like a tightly bound sack of grain. The headless trunk jumped and danced about exactly like a chicken with its head chopped off. I use a hemp rope altogether. I have a silk rope, but do not use it. I only use three 'wraps' in my knot. Most men use five, but I consider so many unnecessary and then they make a cumbersome looking bundle under a man's ear. With a good hemp rope and my three twists I will guarantee to break a man's neck every time."

"What do you think of the guillotine, or the New York plan of electricity?"

"Of the guillotine I know nothing, except from hearsay, and I have been in the old country and while there kept a lookout for them, but I have made a study of the electric battery plan, and I don't like it. If the machine is not placed exactly in the right position on the back of the neck death will be slow and very painful, if in fact it ensues at all. All experiments so far have been failures. They have tried it on dogs and goats and have slammed them around a room and against the walls without accomplishing the desired result. No, sir, if we must have capital punishment I believe the plain, old fashioned hanging is the best method. But, as I said before, I am opposed to it. Take Michigan for instance, where they do not resort to capital punishment. In that state the number of cases where the extreme penalty of the law - imprisonment for life - is inflicted is smaller per capita than in any other state that I know of. And that state has as rough an element in its lumber regions as any in the Union."

Binkley says that the men who show the most nerve are those who are expected to display the least.

"The worst case of weakening I ever saw was in an old man named Wagner, hanged in the Columbus penitentiary a few weeks before Harnett was executed. He had been the bully of four counties, and had murdered his brother-in-law in cold blood. When the deputies attempted to take him from his cell on the day of his execution he fell flat upon the floor and begged and prayed and screamed and cursed. On the scaffold we had to hold him up while adjusting the rope. On the other hand, Harnett, of whom no great thing was expected, showed great nerve and all the time we were trying to get Wagner from his cell kept trying him to brace up, to be a man and show some of the grit he had been boasting of. These cases where men show the white feather are the worst we have, but they don't bother me much. I have pretty strong nerves myself, and have never seen a combination of circumstances that could shake them. Hanging a man is certainly no great trial to them. I would rather see a man hanged than to see you run over by a cable car. But I have seen sheriffs faint on the gallows, and have had to take the death warrant from them and finish reading it."

Daniel F. Binkley is a peculiar fellow, and the profession he practices when opportunity affords is one few men would care to follow. But he fills a place in the great body of humanity, and is not half a bad fellow. That he has wonderful nerve one glance into his eyes will suffice to prove. They are indeed a splendid pair of eyes, clear, stern and piercing enough to cow the fiercest brute, he says. During the three years he has spent in Kansas City, a portion of which time he was a police officer, he has not officiated at a hanging here, although he assisted in the execution of Edward Ross, at Independence, Mo., in June, 1867. He is a native of Ohio.



THE OLD KNOT.



BINKLEY'S KNOT.

3 SPECIALS. 3

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We finish stock-taking on January 31st, and are trying to clear out as many goods as possible before that date. In order to do so we have put down the price in every line of goods. Our patrons can testify to the genuineness of our SEMI-ANNUAL CLEARING SALE in the past, and this one is the cheapest yet. We must reduce our stock during this month, and will make it to your advantage to assist us.

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