

NOT HUNG ENOUGH.

Some Remarkable Escapes from the Gallows.

We do not, as a nation, hang so many culprits as in bygone years. We may be said to have ceased to inflict this awful punishment at all. By so long as the law, and religion, and justice, and public sentiment are considered to warrant the continuance of this ancient mode of retribution, so long ought there to be no mockery, no mistake, no trickery about it. A man convicted of a crime, without a proof of his innocence accompanying his recovery, it would be infinitely better to society (of his wretched self he would not care) that he had not been hanged at all; seeing that the sense of just punishment would be well-walled up in a kind of pity for the novelty of his position.

Now such things have occurred, sufficiently often to merit attention. Men have recovered from the gallows, or rather retained life under nearly desperate circumstances—is it possible that it should be a due infliction of the punishment of death by suspension. Something of this possibility of escape was owing to the mode in which the punishment was usually inflicted; and to many probably by unknown means. A change has been made in recent times in the construction and arrangement of the apparatus for carrying out the last great penalty of the law.

For something like six hundred years, at any rate, such escapes have been known to have occurred. In 1264 there was a woman named Inetta de Balaham condemned to death for collusion with robbers; she was hanged, and remained on the gibbet (if the records of the time are to be trusted) no less than three days; and yet she survived, and was eventually released. In 1313, Matthew of Enderby was hanged for some crime of which he had been convicted; he was cut down, and revived just before the body was to be thrown into the water. In 1363, Walter Wynkeburn was hanged, and was again cut down, he was carried in a cart to the cemetery of the Holy Sepulchre in that city; he gradually regained sensibility while the cart was rumbling along, and escaped with life. Similar cases occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The seventeenth century was exceptionally full of such instances. Dr. Plot mentions the strange lot of a Swiss, on the authority of Dr. Obadiah Walker, master of University College; this man is said to have hung no less than thirteen times without losing life, his wife having been converted by disease into substance almost as hard as bone.

No instance has been so much discussed and written about as that of Anne Green, which took place during the time of the Commonwealth. Judges and physicians alike returned to her, affording illustrations for or against legal and medical testimony. This poor girl was executed at Marston, in Oxfordshire, on December 14, 1659, for infanticide; a charge which could only be proved against her by much straining of the law; this severity, and a knowledge of the wrong she had suffered in other ways, made her an object of much public sympathy. The hanging was accompanied by certain coarse and shocking pullings and striking of the body and limbs, which in those days were supposed to insure more effectually the death of the victim, and to lessen the period of suffering. After hanging the usual time, she was cut down, actually trampled upon which produced blows and pressure were brought into relief by the straining of the law; this severity, and a knowledge of the wrong she had suffered in other ways, made her an object of much public sympathy. The hanging was accompanied by certain coarse and shocking pullings and striking of the body and limbs, which in those days were supposed to insure more effectually the death of the victim, and to lessen the period of suffering. After hanging the usual time, she was cut down, actually trampled upon which produced blows and pressure were brought into relief by the straining of the law; this severity, and a knowledge of the wrong she had suffered in other ways, made her an object of much public sympathy.

It is not stated by Dr. Plot whether the medical men satisfied themselves concerning the cause, anatomical or physiological, of her preservation; but they sought to ascertain whether there was any peculiar phenomena connected with her recovery. They found that she had a half-hour of hanging had no special impression on her memory. "She came to herself as if she had awakened out of a sleep—not recovering the usual amount of speech by slow degrees, but in a manner altogether beyond the ordinary course." Among all the printed narratives of this remarkable case there is none that offers a clear explanation; and we are left to our surmises on the subject. The various religious bias existing in the public mind at that period, and the leading to a belief in the direct interposition of Heaven in Anne Green's favor. The undergraduates of Oxford University viewed the matter in another light; they sought to exercise their wit and poetry; and there have been preserved twenty or thirty epigrams written by them, and signed with their names—one of which was "Mr. Christopher Wren." Anne Green, having received a pardon after this strange resurrection, married her friends to Steeple Barton, where she married, had a family, and died in 1653.

down, placed in a coffin, and removed in a cart to Mueselburgh by her friends, with a view to interment in the parish churchyard. The jolting of the cart, and the admission of air through some injury which the coffin sustained, appear to have combined in resuscitating the woman, for she showed evident signs of life before the cart had proceeded one-third of the distance. She was removed, revived, prayed by a minister, and received back into the church. She lived creditably many years afterwards, but she was again sold into the streets of Edinburgh—where she was known, on account of her strange escape, as "Hill-hanged Maggie."

While they were of those who had received when almost under the gallows. This man was hanged for murder, on a gibbet put up at Acton, in 1740. After hanging for twenty minutes, the body was cut down and taken to Surgeons' Hall for dissection. The attendants, who were present, and the surgeons prepared for their labor. Just as they were about to begin, however, they perceived faint signs of life in him; he roared feebly, and his breathing became gradually more and more perceptible. They beat him, and in the evening he was able to sit up again. He was conveyed back to prison; but there was too much public excitement to justify the authorities in hanging him again. In two days he recovered his health, fever and delirium had rendered his memory a blank, and he had lost all recollection of the hanging. It was supposed by the surgeons that a full flow of blood at the time had enabled his system to resist the tightening of the veins, and to have thus restored him to life—not to liberty, but for life was afterwards transported. In 1752 Ewen Macdonald was hanged for murder. After the body was cut down it was taken to Surgeons' Hall and placed ready for dissection. The operating surgeon, who was present for a short time, was surprised on his return to see the man sitting up. Professing more professional zeal than humanity, the surgeon took a mallet and killed Macdonald outright, in order not to be disappointed of an opportunity for dissection. This atrocious case gave rise to much indignant comment at the time. In 1767, a tailor, named Patrick Redmond, was hanged at Cork for highway robbery. After hanging less than the usual time, the body was cut down and conveyed back to the house of an acquaintance. The governor, who found means by friction and fumigation to revive him. Redmond had the incredible audacity to go to the theatre on the same evening, and to the horror of the audience, publicly gloried in having saved his life.

The present century has not been without its instances. About fifty years ago, a servant girl was convicted of administering poison to the household of a farmer, in a fit of passion at some personal grievance. A great doubt having led to a postponement of the execution, the steady demeanor of the girl led to her being employed as a servant by the jailer at Durham. One morning the governor received, much to his regret, and to the regret of many of the citizens, an order for the immediate execution of the girl. She was hanged, but the rope broke; and the wretched girl remained crying at the foot of the gallows, while a man hastened off on horseback to fetch a new rope. This distressing scene was perhaps never saved in point, so much as concerns resuscitation after hanging; but it is one of the instances of deferred executions, which are so sad, because they give rise to hopes destined to disappointment. In another instance, mentioned, like the foregoing, in *Notes and Queries*, the story is that a man was capitally convicted, but reprieved indefinitely on account of his youth. He remained in the jail at Worcester, was found to be a docile lad, and became a general favorite both with the jailer and the governor. It was found that his full pardon would come some day, and he was playing at ball in the yard, full of life and cheer, when suddenly, to the utter dismay of the jailer and the inmates of the prison, an order was issued for the execution of the man. Accordingly took place. An instance more in point is that of a man who was executed at Tyburn, and whose apparently dead body was carried by a surgeon for dissection, and brought to his quarters, where he was found sitting upright on the dissecting table. The surgeon, a humane man, shipped him off quietly to America, where he amassed a fortune, which he afterwards bequeathed to his benefactor, Sir Jonah Barrington, the late Personal Secretary to the Duke of Devonshire.

Some of these momentous escapes have probably depended on the reflex actions of the gizzard as compared with the drop. The reflex actions led to the abandonment of the one kind of dread apparatus for the other. Several statements have been made in the public journals, but many of these are destitute of meaning, unless we take into account the exact particulars of each case. In 1856 the *Examiner* said:—"A few days ago (April), the last gibbet erected in England was demolished by the workmen employed in making the extension of the Great Northern Railway Company, at Jarro Slake, on the Tyne." This statement was shortly afterwards disputed; for, later in the same year, a gibbet was still left standing on the site of the Common, in Sussex. It was known among the surrounding villages as "Jacob's Post," being named after a culprit concerning whom a copy of verses was long current in the neighborhood, recording, among other things, that—

"Horsham Gallows he was hanged there,
The thirty-first of August was the day,
And where he did the crime, they took the pains
To bring him back, and hang him up in chains."

It has been stated that the last gibbet erected in England was at Saffron Lane, near Leicester, in 1832; it was soon afterwards removed by order of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. Whatever may be the exact date, however, when the last gibbet was erected, and the last demolished, it is certain that the drop has been abolished, not substituted for it in England. In the old gibbet, the culprit was turned off from a ladder at a height of about twenty feet; the rope was fastened to the top of the ladder, and the culprit was suspended by the neck; the drop consisted of a trap-door, which, being suddenly opened, caused the withdrawal of the bolts underneath, and the whole weight of the culprit's body, including an instant at the mercy of the noose. Some of the instances of escape are doubtless attributable to the careless way in which the prisoner was turned off the scaffold, or rather ladder, on which he ascended to the gibbet; some to the insertion of a tube which might have caused constriction of the throat; some to the opening of an orifice in the windpipe by an expert surgeon; some to a natural hardening of the windpipe, which occasionally happens; and some to a steel collar, connected with an elastic band, by means of which the neck was secured, and which was fastened to the collar and bandages. These various explanations of most of the cases of resuscitation that have been recorded.

Did Sir Walter Scott rely on his imagination alone, or was he depending on fact, when he wrote the striking scene of Bonnhorn's execution in the "Fair Maid of Perth"? It will be remembered, by the readers of that novel, that Bonnhorn received a hint from Davina, the physician, that an attempt would be made to prevent him from being hanged, and that the hangman would be a party to the maneuver. The execution took place, apparently in the usual way, and the hangman remained near the suspended body for some hours after the usual manner. Bonnhorn had been specially prepared to undergo his execution scatheless. He pointed out that death by hanging results from a compression of the veins, which drives the blood to the brain instead of to the heart, and also that the lungs, owing to the ligature of the cord around the thorax, no longer receiving the needful supply of air, another cause of suffocation arises. The problem would be, therefore, how to effect the hanging so that neither the veins nor the windpipe should be too much compressed. Davina solved this problem thus, as described by himself:—"I get me certain bandages, made of the same substance with your hose, and I wrap special care that they are of a kind which will not shrink on being strained, since that would spoil my experiment. One loop of this substance is drawn under each foot, and returns up either side of the leg to a cinchure with which it is united; these cinchures are connected by a broad strap, which passes and back, in order to divide the weight, and there are sundry other conveniences for easing the patient; but the chief is this. The straps or ligatures are attached to a broad steel collar, curving outwards, and having a hook at each end, for the better security of the matter which is friendly executioner passes around that part of the machine, instead of applying it to the bare throat of the patient. Thus, when thrown off from the ladder, the sufferer will find himself suspended, not by the neck, if it please you, but by the steel circle that supports the loops in which his feet are placed, and on which his weight really rests, diminished a little by similar supports under each arm. Thus neither the windpipe nor the veins, being most important to breathe as free, and his blood, saving from fright and novelty of situation, will flow as temperately as your valencies, when you stand up in stirrups to view a field of battle."

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