EXTRA

The Evening World.

EXTRA

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EXTRA

BY SHOCK

Murderer Kemmler Electrocuted at the Auburn Prison.

The First Victim to Die by Electricity Under the New Law.

Experts and Physicians and a Coroner's Jury Present.

A Crowd of Newspaper Men and Horror-Hunters Outside of the Gate.

The History of Kemmler's Crime —A Description of the Apparatus and the Law Under Which He Died.

[SPECIAL TO THE EVENING WORLD.]

AUBURN, Aug. 6.—William Kemmler is dead.

Electricity, as a legalized agent of justice, has claimed its first victim.

The electrocution took place in the room specially provided at the prison, before the jury of twelve men and the fifteen other people for whose presence the law provides.

Despite the secrecy in all the preparations a crowd of horror-hunters had scented out something near the hour for the execution and gathered outside the iron gate, gaping through the bars.

Added to the crowd were the numerous reporters whose duty kept them constantly on the alert and so brought them there.

At this moment, so soon after the occurrance of the event, details are impossible.

Kemmler's Last Dwelling and the Scene of His Death.

It is an old tradition that early in the present century, when the western part of New York was a wilderness, just beginning to put forth signs of its coming importance; when the centre of population of the Empire State was moving west instead of north from Manhattan, and moving at a lightning gait, the Legislature considered a proposition to move the capital, and among the clamoring candidates for the seat of government was the little village of Auburn, which was the most important town west of Albany in those days.

The controversy waxed warm, and finally Albany and Auburn struck a compromise. Albany took the capital and Auburn the new State prison.

The prison was finished in 1818, and in the corner-stone, at the southeast corner, was placed a bottle of whiskey, probably as symbolical of the position of chief agent of the penitentiary which the whiskey is supposed to hold.

The prison covers thirteen acres of ground in rectangular form and is surrounded by stone walls 60 feet high and 5 feet thick, except in front, where an unsightly 24-foot wall hides the beautiful prison lawns from the view of the passer.

Whether the tradition is true or not, the casual caller at Auburn will find the big prison the most prominent feature of the town that had been the home of Seward and Throop.

As one steps from the New York Central Railway train he alights almost under the walls of the prison, for the bastile is just across State street from the depot.

In the centre of the long-walled front is the "keeper's gate," a massive, iron-barred affair, swung between posts of solid stone.

Entering, one ascends a great stone flight of steps to the offices, located in a square six-story building, flanked on either side to the north or south, by long wings.

The offices for Warden Durston and the clerk are at the right and left of the entrance, and before you is "Keeper's Hall," presided over by a sergeant of the guard.

This building and the wings, each of the latter having a westward directed "L," form the eastern end of a hollow square of buildings within forty feet from the prison walls. Workshops make the rest of the square.

The wings have the 1,200 prison cells divided between them. The south wing has also the prison hospital on its top floor.

Standing sentry over this gloomy place is "Copper John," the handiwork of an old convict of half a century ago.

Copper John is perched on a bell cupola on the top of the main building. He is dressed in the blue-and-buff uniform and cocked hat of the old Continental soldiers and carries a musket with fixed bayonet.

Copper John is made of the material implied by the name, stands 11½ feet high and carries his musket at the old "shoulder arms" in his left hand. Otherwise he is very like other militiamen. He faces the rising sun, with the prison behind him.

He has given his own name as a nickname to the prison.

June 4, 1888, the Governor signed a law passed by the Legislature on the recommendation of a committee of experts, providing that the punishment for murder after Jan. 1, 1889, should be death by means of an electrical current that should be caused to pass through the body of the condemned.

Electrical experts invented a plan for the execution. Death was to be caused by applying the current to the subject while he sat in a chair made for the purpose and into which he was to be strapped.

When the law providing for executions by electricity was passed, Warden Durston had two "solitary" cells built for the reception of doomed men. These cells are located in the basement of the south wing.

They are isolated from the rest of the prison, are walled with steel, and have iron backs, iron floors, iron ceilings of two-inch cross-bars of angle iron, riveted with inch bolts at the cross sections, and as strong as the tomb.

None of the other prisoners ever enter this portion of the prison, and the officers, except Kemmler's own keeper, are forbidden to go near this living tomb.

So complete has been Kemmler's isolation that there was probably not a person connected with the prison, aside from Warden and Mrs. Durston, Keeper McNaughton, Chaplain Yates and the Rev. Dr. Houghton, of the First Methodist Church, who could identify him.

When he was taken out for the one occasion to visit Buffalo for resentence he was so altered that it was the subject of much remark among the Erie County officials.

The hang-dog look had gone. The hollowed cheeks had filled, a dark beard had grown, the eyes were brighter and larger and the greasy old clothing had been superseded by a new suit of dark cloth.

Keeper Griffin, who opens the portals at the main gate of Auburn Prison for the entrance and egress of every visitor, first knew that Kemmler had passed out and in again under his very eyes, shackled to a keeper, on the occasion of the visit to Buffalo, when he read it in the Buffalo despatches to the Auburn papers.

Kemmler's Life and Crime.

If vengeance were what the law seeks by capital punishment for murder it would get little satisfaction out of the event of to-day, for the poor wretch whose life has been taken within the shadows of Auburn Prison has for weeks awaited the coming of black-visored Death with a childlike expectancy, almost impatience.

Born at 2531 North Second street, in the slums of Philadelphia, in 1860, William Kemmler was one of a family of eleven children. His father was a German Lutheran, very poor.

The boy never knew a trade. As a child he attended a German school and learned a little. But he was soon taken from the school to help his father, who was a butcher, and forgot everything he had learned.

Afterwards he worked for others as a butcher. Then he sold vegetables as a huckster, and one of his customers was Mrs. Matilda Zeigler, of Camden, N. J., directly across the river from Philadelphia.

In October, 1888, Kemmler was married in Camden to a woman by the name of Ida Prter.

Two days after his wedding he deserted his bride and ran away with Mrs. Zeigler.

They went to Buffalo and became a part of the drift of the half world so unknown to the other half.

Kemmler and his paramour lived like animals in the worst district of Buffalo. Their life was a continual carouse, interrupted by frequent quarrels.

Kemmler wearied of the woman, but, like his class, he did not know how to free himself, and he remained to bicker and quarrel with her.

She filched his scanty store of money and spent it in wild debauch with other men and women, till that fatal morning of March 29, 1889, when, in the course of an unusually severe quarrel, Kemmler seized a hatchet and, in a frenzy resulting from the debauch of the night before, killed Tillie Zeigler.

She had just put their humble breakfast on the table. Kemmler upbraided her for her intimacy with a Spaniard known as "Yellow" Debella, and as she approached he seized the hatchet and sent it crushing into her forehead.

Then he hacked and chopped her head, shoulders, breast and body until they were only masses of bleeding, trembling flesh and protruding bones.

Then he dropped the implement of death and strode out of the house. Visiting several neighbors he told them, the blood dripping from his fingers and his face and clothing reeking in gore, that he had killed Tillie.

"I'm glad I've killed her," he said, not savagely nor exultingly, but as he might have said that it was a pleasant day.

"I'm glad I've killed her. I had to do it, and I'm willing to hang for it."

Tillie Zeigler's little child, that had been brought by the couple when they eloped from Camden, was found crouching in terror in one corner of the room where her mother had been butchered.

Justice was swift of foot in the case of this sottish brute, for exactly two weeks later Justice Childs, of the Erie County Court of Oyer and Terminer, sentenced William Kemmler to die by electricity within Auburn Prison, during the week beginning June 24, 1889.

The jury on the trial rendered their verdict of "guilty of murder in the first degree" on May 9, Kemmler's twenty-ninth birthday.

In sentencing Kemmler Justice Childs said:

"The testimony shows that your conduct was dissolute to a great degree; that you feared that she would leave you and return to her forsaken husband; that you forsook your wife and ruined Tillie Ziegler; that you cruelly and deliberately planned her murder and brutally executed it. The verdict was eminently just. The Court advises you to spend the remaining days of your time on earth in attempting to secure Divine pardon after due repentance. May God have mercy on your soul!"

The only person in court not stirred with emotion at this moment was Kemmler himself. He only growled a little and shuffled back to his cell in the jail.

His counsel, Mr. Hatch, excepted to the form of punishment as cruel and unusual, and within the meaning of the interdiction contained in the Constitution.

Next day, May 15, Kemmler, was taken to Auburn Prison, there to await, in solitary confinement, the coming of death.

Up to this point Kemmler's life had been hardly different from that of a brute. There had been no such thing as love in it. He had little more intelligence than an animal, and possessed not one scintilla of acquired knowledge.

He says that he was plied with liquor in the Buffalo jail, in order that a confession might be wormed out of him.

But on his arrival at Auburn he entered a new atmosphere. He was placed in one of two cells prepared especially for the reception of condemned murderers under the provisions of the Electrical Executions law.

That cell was isolated from the balance of the prison and as quiet as the tomb. It was neat and clean and furnished with a comfortable bed.

It was probably the finest apartments William Kemmler had ever occupied; the most cleanly, the most free from tumult.

Over Kemmler was placed a guard, and the man chosen, Daniel McNaughton, was a hoary-headed old Scotchman, devout and full of goodness.

At first Kemmler was morose and ugly, but little by little the gentle, silver-haired McNaughton wooed the brute that had been placed in his keeping. Wooed him from himself.

Old Daniel McNaughton is a God-fearing man, and he felt from the first that Kemmler's soul, as well as his body, was in his keeping, and he set about the deal of working the murderer into what he believed in his heart of hearts to be the only path to a future life of peace and joy.

How well his efforts have succeeded can best be gathered from the lips of the man himself. Kemmler said the other day:

"I am glad that I came to Auburn. I was never happy before. I am a new man. I have no fear of death, but I would like to be free for a little while to show the world what good I could do now that I have learned."

Kemmler could not tell me one letter of the alphabet from another, when he became Daniel McNaughton's charge.

Now he spells and reads from a pictorial primer given to him by his gentle-hearted keeper, and in an ecstasy of pride he exclaims:

"See! I didn't know anything when I came to old Daniel. Now look. I can write good."

This is what the doomed man scrawled upon a bit of paper:

William Kemmler

Will Kemmler

The Legal Fight Over the Case.

Meantime, while Keeper McNaughton was preparing the mind and heart of William Kemmler for eternity, the lawyers were trying their best to save him from the impending doom.

The day after Kemmler's conviction Charles S. Hatch, of Buffalo, applied to Justice Charles C. Dwight, of the Supreme Court, and got a writ of habeas corpus for the murderer, returnable before S. Edwin Day, then Judge of Cayuga County, alleging that the sentence of Kemmler to death by electricity involved a cruel and unusual punishment in the meaning of the phrase as used in the Constitution.

A referee was appointed to take the testimony of experts, and for four months the electrical wizards were probed for information as to the effect of the electric shock on man, W. Bourke Cockran being finally enlisted in behalf of Kemmler, and the State's Assistant Attorney-General Poste opposing the idea of the people.

On Oct. 9 last Judge Day rendered his decision in an exhaustive opinion. It was against Kemmler.

The matter was carried to the Court of Appeals, and the highest tribunal in the State decided, March 30, that the law was constitutional.

Next day Kemmler was taken to Buffalo and resentenced by Justice Childs to die during the week beginning April 20.

All preparations were made. Experts in electrical work and in surgery gathered in Auburn to witness the great experiment on a human being.

Forty reporters from all over the country gathered, too, for though the law prohibited the publication of any details, no newspaper worthy the name proposed to be left.

Monday dawned and waxed and waned, dragging in awful slowness over the peaceful little city of Auburn, but with how much more slowness to the dying man in that silent cell!

Warden Durston could give no idea of when the lever should be shifted that would send William Kemmler to eternity.

Tuesday dawned with a ghoulish coterie of weary-eyed reporters, faithful to their duty, watching every sign that might issue from the gloomy old prison.

The sun was nearing the zenith, and still there was no sign of the dreadful event that all were waiting for.

Kemmler had been, to all intents and purposes, dead for thirty-six hours—or at least thirty-six hours had elapsed at any moment of which the murderer might have been led out from his cell, placed in the chair and legally banished from the face of the earth, when Roger M. Sherman, of New York, stepped from a New York Central train and passed quickly across the street into the prison and straight to the office of Warden Durston.

He had in his hand a formal legal document which was almost a resurrection to the man in the death cell below stairs. It was a writ of habeas corpus granted by United States Circuit Judge William Wallace, in New York, requiring Warden Durston to produce William Kemmler before him at Canandaigua the third Monday in June, that the question of whether the State Electrocution law were not in contravention of the constitutional law of the United States in that it provided an unusual and inhuman punishment, might be decided.

Warden Durston was too evidently full of joy at this respite, though he said he had no hope of the final rescue of his prisoner. He took the news to Kemmler, and the man commented simply: "Well, I'm rather glad of that," and then returned to the childish occupation of making cat's cradles with a bit of twine.

Lawyer Sherman appeared before the full bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, to which the case was transferred a few days later, but it was useless. The appeal was dismissed.

In order to quiet the conscience of Warden Durston, who is an old lawyer himself, Judge Underwood, of Cayuga County, issued a State writ of habeas corpus, and it was signed a week after the Supreme Court's adverse decision, and, as a matter of course, dismissed.

In June, at Canandaigua, Judge Wallace went through the formality of dismissing the writ issued by him, and there seemed to be no obstacle to the execution of the murderer.

But there was one more. Mr. Hatch, of Buffalo, raised the point that the Legislature could not take from the Sheriff of Erie County his time-honored right to hold prisoners condemned to death.

This was decided against the proponent, and then an effort was made by the Westinghouse Electric Company, whose machine was to be used in dealing death to Kemmler. They attempted to institute a suit of replevin against the State to compel the return of the three machines in the three prisons to that company, on the ground that the had been procured by fraud and with the purpose of discrediting the machines.

The electrical companies are very careful to whom they sell their machines, and Harold P. Brown, who was engaged by the State Commission to procure and set up the death-dealing apparatus, was unable to procure them through the regular channels. So he engaged agents, who succeeded in purchasing at electrical junk shops the necessary appliances second-hand, and ostensibly to be used in electric lighting in cities of South America.

The machines were shipped to South America, and reshipped from there to Harold P. Brown, one for Auburn, one for Sing Sing and one for Clinton Prison, at Dannemora.

The Westinghouse Company set up this proceeding, but it was of no avail. The case never came to trial, and Kemmler was taken to Buffalo once more, and on July 3, the time for his execution was again set by Justice Childs.

By this sentence the execution was fixed for some time within the week beginning Aug. 4.

Kemmler never once suggested that he had any hope of escape from the death punishment by the law, nor complained of its severity.

He accepted it apparently, as a just punishment according to the new light he had received.

The Law and the Instruments.

The law under which William Kemmler was executed was passed by the Legislature May 11, 1888, and became a law by the signature of Gov. Hill June 4, 1888.

It was the result of an agitation started by a recommendation of Gov. Hill, in his annual message to the Legislature of Jan. 1, 1888, in which he said:

"The present mode of executing criminals by hanging has come down to us from the Dark Ages, and it may well be questioned whether the science of the present day cannot provide a means for taking the life of such as are condemned to death in a less barbarous manner. I commend this suggestion to the consideration of the Legislature."

In 1886 the Society for the Prevention of Crime took the matter up, and as a result Elbridge T. Gerry, Dr. Southwick, of Buffalo, and Matthew Hale, of New York, were appointed a Commission to draft a substitute for the old law of capital punishment by hanging.

They reported in favor of executions by the electric current, and their recommendations were embodied in the present law.

By this law hanging was abolished after January 1, 1889, and death by electricity was substituted.

The law provides that the prisoner convicted of murder in the first degree should be sentenced to be put to death by electricity not less than four nor more than eight weeks from the day of sentence; that the warrant of death should be addressed to the Agent and Warden of the State prison to which convicts of that judicial district were sent, and that the Sheriff of the county in which the conviction was had should deliver the person of the convicted defendant to the Warden of the prison within ten days after sentence; that the Warden of the prison should confine the condemned prisoner in a silent cell, apart from other prisoners; that no person save the officers of the prison, his physician, his immediate family and a minister of religion, if the prisoner desired, should be permitted to visit him after sentence; that on some day within the week of the sentence, the Warden should execute the condemned by the application of a current of electricity to his body, and that only twenty-seven persons should be present—twelve citizens as a Coroner's jury; seven special deputy sheriffs, two physicians, two ministers of religion, the Judge before whom the man was tried, the Sheriff of the county in which he was convicted, and the District Attorney of that county, besides the Agent and Warden.

After all this, by the law, the body is to be buried with religious services in the prison cemetery, unless the relatives of the person so executed claim the body.

The Death Chamber and Fatal Switch.

[SPECIAL TO THE EVENING WORLD.]

AUBURN, Aug. 6.—An EVENING WORLD reporter has been permitted to make a visit to the underground room prepared for Kemmler's execution and to look upon the apparatus controlling the fatal current.

In company with Warden Durston the visitor descended the stairway leading from the chapel corridor of the prison to the long hall through which the convicts march on their way to dinner.

At the foot of the stairs, on the right, was a closed door, securely fastened, behind which the murderer was confined.

Passing along the hall about fifty feet, the Warden led the way into a large, bare room, directly under the prison clerk's office, and which was formerly used as the keepers' mess-room.

There the convict choir rehearses its hymns for Sunday and occasionally holds a select concert.

The next room that was entered was the lavatory and reception-room for newly arrived convicts, where the forger, embezzler or sneak thief all have to change their citizen's dress for the uniform of the State.

This was the room selected for the execution of Kemmler, and there were arrayed, harmless for the time, the means through which death was soon to send its summons.

The room was about 17 feet wide by 25 feet long, and was dimly lighted by two iron-grated windows, about four feet above the floor, and which looked out upon the front entrance of the prison.

Between the windows was placed the board on which were arranged the switches, voltmeter, &c.

The board was about 8 feet long and 3½ feet high.

At the left was a common electric push button, communicating with the dynamo room, 1,000 feet away, in the north wing of the prison and to be used for signalling.

Next to the electric push button on the right was a Cardrews volt-meter, to register the force of the current.

Next was a small switch to turn the current off and on at the meter. To the right of this was the reducing box for the volt-meter and electric lamp box, which is next on the right.

There were twenty-four incandescent lamps on the box, not for the purpose of lighting the room, but to show when the current was on and running steadily.

Then came the main switches.

The first one was to short-circuit the current, which, coming in the north window, was to pass through the first switch and go back on the other wire out through the same window to the dynamo.

The switch was a copper lever, about 18 inches long, and had a wooden handle which the cautious Warden proposed to have covered with rubber before the day is was to be put to use.

The other switch was the counterpart of the first one, but was to be left open until Kemmler was seated in his chair and the cap adjusted.

Then the first switch was to be opened and the second one closed.

The current of electricity would thus pass through the wire connected with Kemmler, and so through his body.

The chair was not on exhibition, but a board was nailed to the ceiling, near the centre of the room, to which the wires were to be attached, and under which the chair was to be placed.

The wires were dangling from the ceiling on the occasion of the reporter's visit.

The distance from Kemmler's cell to the spot where the chair was to be placed was only about eighteen feet.

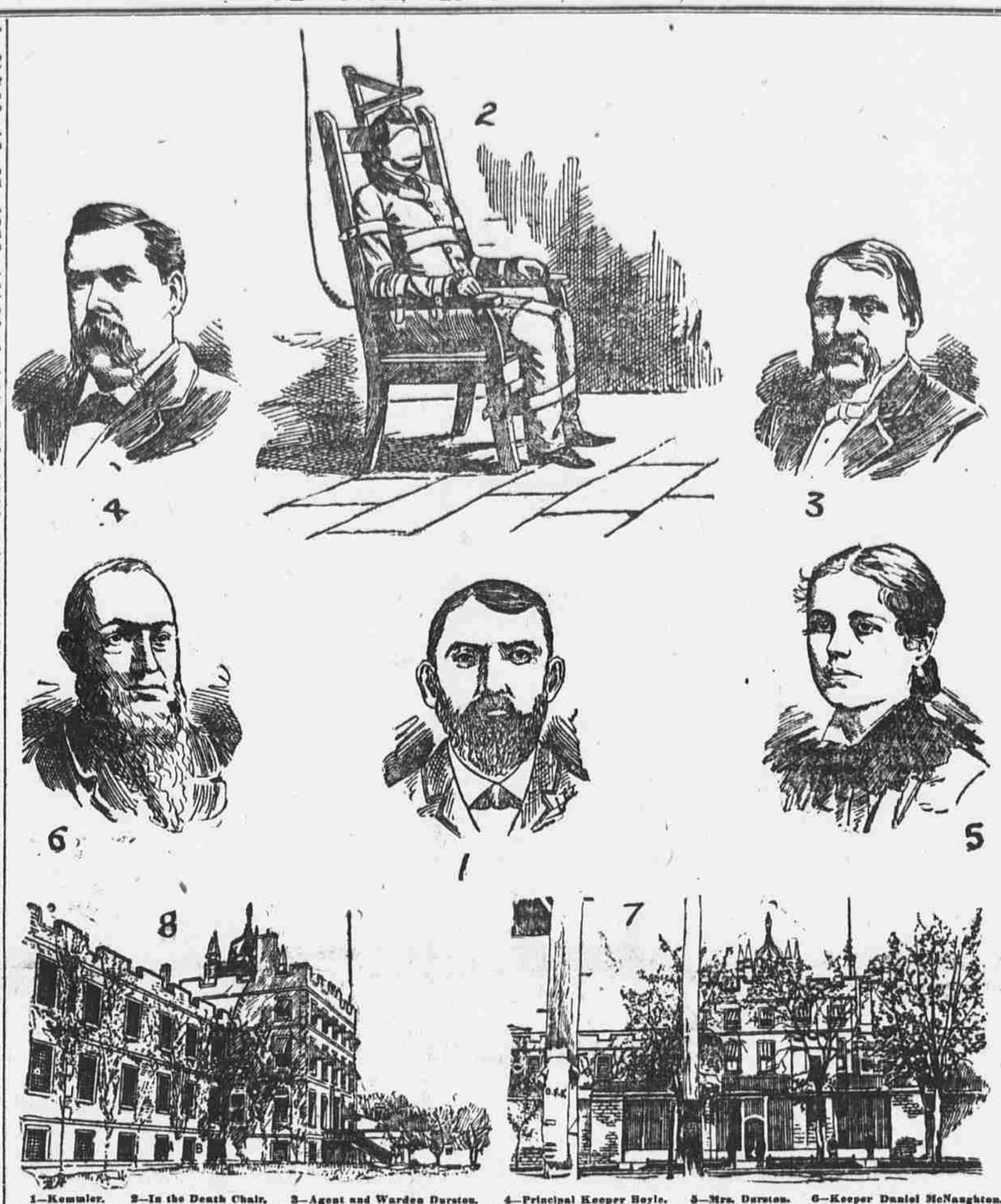
The room in which he was confined was next south of the room of execution, and the reporter could hear through the closed door the muffled tones of the prisoner and his keeper in conversation, together with the steady tread of the latter, as he paced up and down the corridor in front of the cell.

The dimensions of the cell-room were obtained from the Rev. G. A. Houghton, the spiritual adviser of Kemmler, the reverend gentleman measuring the room and cells with a tape, assisted by Kemmler himself.

The original room was 14 by 17 feet; but when the two steel cells were built, each of them 5½ by 8½ feet, it took up a great deal of the space.

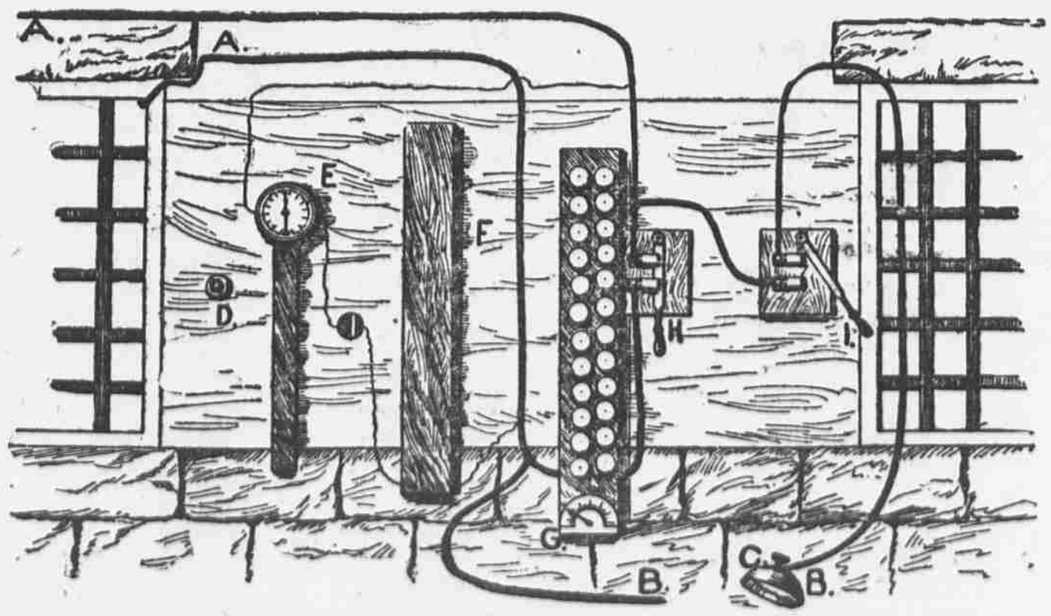
There was a 3½-foot corridor running in front of the cells and one six feet in width at the side nearest the front of the prison.

It is in these corridors that Kemmler took all of his exercise, which consisted of a promenade about twenty-four feet in extent.



1—Kemmler. 2—In the Death Chair. 3—Agent and Warden Durston. 4—Principal Keeper Boyle. 5—Mrs. Durston. 6—Keeper Daniel McNaughton. 7—Auburn Prison front from State street. 8—Prison front showing (A B) windows lighting Kemmler's Cell and Death Chamber.

THE SWITCH OF DEATH.



A A—Dynamo wire. *B B*—Wires to Connect with Kemmler's head and base of spine. *C*—Cap goes on top of Kemmler's head. *D*—Signal button to dynamo-room. *E*—Voltmeter register. *F*—Resistance box. *G*—Lamp board and register. *H*—Lamp Switch. *I*—Main switch, by handle of which executioner will connect current.