

THE HEROES OF THE GUILLOTINE

AND GALLOWS,

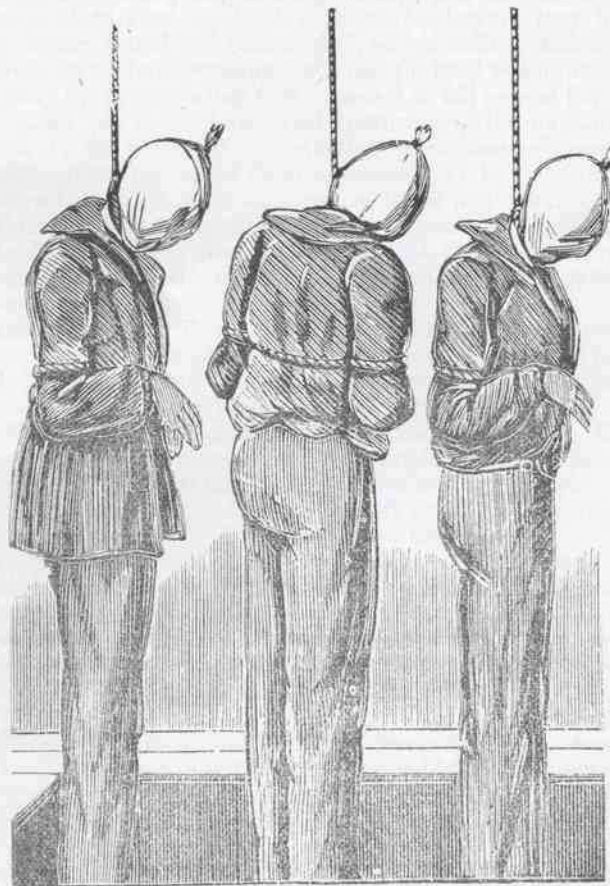
OR, THE

AWFUL ADVENTURES

OF

Askern, Smith and Calcraft, the Three Rival Hangmen

Of York Castle, Stafford Gaol and Newgate;



And SANSON, the Executioner of Paris,

With his Cabinet of Murderer's Curiosities.

FULL OF ASTONISHING DISCLOSURES

Concerning their Private and Public Lives, and Startling Incidents before and after
the performance of their dreadful office.

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THE HEROES OF THE GALLOWS AND GUILLOTINE.

"One murder makes a villain, a million a hero."

THE above words of our illustrious bard may well be re-applied to the professional manipulators of the gallows and the guillotine, in England and France. In both countries, said to be the head of European civilization, the executioner seems to be a beloved and venerated object, and regarded as a hero worthy of the support of majesty and power, while smaller and less pretending kingdoms around are, one by one, abolishing his hideous and useless office.

It is a most striking and instructive anomaly, and worthy of the statesman, the philanthropist, the Christian, and all who wish for the moral progress of society, to consider and seriously examine the seeds of evil it is sowing broadcast among the human family. France is a huge nation of contradictions, never to be thoroughly understood, and England is now, in a threefold sense, her sister! Every since their first sanguinary revolution some classes of the French people have *fondly hugged* the guillotine as a national toy of great worth, and petted three generations of *SANSONS* as their most excellent scientific headsmen; they have also at every execution followed the criminal sitting in a cart, bound and bare-necked, on his coffin, beside his confessor, and gloated with open mouths and staring eyeballs upon the descending blade and the head rolling into the basket of sawdust; and have dipped their handkerchiefs in the bloodsplashes that appeared to fall beyond the bounds of the gibbet. Other classes, of which judges and juries are made, have tried murderers of the most demoniac nature, and to the amazement of the whole world, by the fiction of "extenuating circumstances" appended to their verdicts, have saved them from capital punishment and consigned them to the galleys; in violation of their own consciences and oaths and the law, which sustains the guillotine as an engine of terror and example!

In our own country within the last few months we have witnessed the passing of a law abolishing public executions, on account of the demoralization that always attended their exhibition in the public highway, and which was complained of for many years by the virtuous and good of every class, who could discern the evils they generated and their inefficiency for either terror or example!

But oh! most singular inconsistency, with the passing of that law, and the substitution of private strangling within the prison-yard, the last tatters of the old worn-out argument in favour of executions as a terror to evil-doers and an example to embryo-offenders, are completely torn away, and yet England at this time nurses three rival hangmen in her official lap for performing her secret hanging business! The three worthies are *ASKERN*, of York Castle, *SMITH*, of Stafford-gaol, and *CALCRAFT*, of Newgate, in London. Three heroes of the gallows—three professional stranglers—yes, "three servants of the law." England can now boast of, against France's single hero of the guillotine to hang up their fellow sinners for a terror and an example! Let us now enquire of the advocates of death punishments how secret executions can terrify or afford an example in the eyes of those they are intended to influence, when they are permitted no longer to witness them?

It needs not a waste of words to prove clearly, that what was before a barbarous and demoralising exhibition, and an inefficient preventative of crime, is now a useless operation and a ghastly tragedy for sickening and torturing all those whom the law compels or the authorities permit to be personal spectators. As the daily and weekly papers published since *Calcraft's* and *Smith's* joint essays with the first private strangling machine at Maidstone, have proved, murders and other sanguinary offences tending to the same end, do not in the least decrease; but on contrary, the graphic accounts of the first private execution, and the form and action of the new method that were afterwards given in every morning and evening journal, served only to *entertain* and amuse the lovers of horrors, and were followed by a repetition of capital crimes in several places, as if no such punishment awaited the perpetrators of them. And so will it be after the second trial of the new system, on the boy *MACKAY*, at Newgate, for the Norton Forge murder, until society to its lowest depths is more moralised and humanised; and a more exacting retribution is enforced against the hardened classes, whom no law of capital punishment will now terrify into submission.

As the *Star's* special reporter's description is worth preserving in its entirety, both for what it says, and for *what it does not say*, in favour of our argument, at its conclusion, we shall transcribe it into this part of our book:

The first execution within the prison walls, and in presence only of a limited number of spectators, in accordance with the new Act of Parliament for the better regulation of capital punishment, took place on Tuesday morning, August 13th, at Maidstone Gaol. The culprit who suffered sentence was Thomas Wells, late a porter in the employ of the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway Company, who was left for death after the last asizes for the murder of Mr. Walsh, the station-master at Dover. In the course of his duties Mr. Walsh had occasion to find fault with Wells, who took reproof in very ill part, and revenged himself on the first available opportunity on the unfortunate station-master by shooting him dead as he sat alone at his work in his office. The alarm was raised, and Wells was found hiding close at hand. The proofs of his crime were so positive that he scarcely attempted to deny it, and on his trial he was at once found guilty and condemned to death. The reports which from time to time have appeared in the public prints since his condemnation have described the young man—he was little more than eighteen years of age—as sincerely penitent, and these reports are borne out by the prison officers, who seemed to have been much impressed by his quiet and decorous conduct.

The curious in such matters will note as an odd coincidence the fact that Maidstone—a town so notorious for its anti-capital punishment feeling, that lawyers will tell you it is most difficult to get a jury to return an adverse verdict against a prisoner on trial for his life—should have been the first place in which the arrangements of the death sentence under the new law should have been carried out. Whether in pursuance of this feeling the inhabitants wilfully ignored the tragedy which was about to be enacted in the immediate outskirts of their town, or whether they were indifferent to it, or whether the exact period of the execution has been hidden from them, it is impossible to say; but it is certain that, amongst the people freely scattered about the broad and handsome streets on Wednesday evening, there was not the slightest indication that anything unusual was to take place among them the following day. A travelling menagerie, which had pitched its tent close by the borders of the canal, was thronged with delighted gazers, among whom the private-soldier element was strongly represented. The local volunteers, headed by their band, were attended in their march by many of the youthful population, and a still larger gathering followed the band of the militia regiment, and grouped round them as they played in front of their headquarters, the Mitre Hotel. But in none of the crowds, composed as they were of townspeople—old and young, male and female—did one hear the least allusion, either in earnestness or

ribaldry, to the criminal who was spending his last hours within a few hundred yards of the place where this gait was being carried on, and to whose ears, deafen them how he might, abstract his senses how he would, the clangour of the drums must have been painfully audible. Nor was there any remarkable difference yesterday morning. It had been expected that a large majority of the shops would remain closed until after the execution, which was fixed to take place at half-past ten, but the shutters were taken down at the usual hour, men proceeded to their usual avocations, and there was not the smallest sign—not even that most ordinary sign of men and women conversing in knots and groups—of anything unusual being about to happen, until one reached the immediate neighbourhood of the gaol, and there, on the far side of the broad road running round by the court-house, was a thin fringe of humanity, some fifty persons in all, in one long line, looking towards the great gate of the gaol, and talking among themselves. Emphatically a “bad lot” this, tramps out on hopping excursions, beggars, a female gipsy or two,—men and women, too, the lowest scum of the population, and a dozen eager-eyed, wolfish, cunning-looking blackguard boys. They gape and stare, though there is nothing for them to look at as yet; the gaol-gate is closed, and there is no one in the immediate neighbourhood, so they take stock of the flagstaff, on which, in accordance with official injunctions, the “black flag” is to be run up at the moment of the execution, and find matter for comment in the exit from the gaol of certain stonemasons who have been at work inside the prison walls.

At half-past nine exactly a four-wheeled cab drives rapidly up the street, and pulls up at the door of the New Inn, immediately opposite the Court house. The cab door and the inn door open simultaneously; from the former descends a man, who enters the inn, the door of which is again immediately closed upon him, while the cab drives off. In two minutes this man emerges from the inn and makes for the gaol. He is an elderly man, with white hair and white beard, broad and thick-set, and dressed in black, with a peculiar tall hat, and carries a small carpet bag in his hand. This is Calcraft, the hangman. As it were intuitively the little crowd becomes aware of this, a whisper runs round among it that the bag contains his “tackle” of pinioning straps, &c., and the blackguard boys, excited beyond bearing, spring to their feet and start in pursuit. The man, taking no notice and looking doggedly before him, crosses the road, and getting close to the gaol railings, half slinks, half shambles along till he reaches the gate which opens at his approach and closes behind him. Five minutes afterwards another man issues from the inn and makes for the gaol—a tall, thin, wiry man, with a keen eye, with his cheeks and part of his forehead closely shaved, dressed in a velvet shooting coat, loose trousers, and billycock hat, and looking like an acrobat who had donned his private clothes over his professional costume. The little crowd does not know this man, though he is almost as notorious as the other. He is Smith, of Dudley, the hangman of the Birmingham district, who hanged Palmer, and who occasionally assists Calcraft on great occasions.

At ten o'clock the representatives of the press, who have been provided by the authorities with proper credentials, are admitted into the prison, and are first ushered into the round-house, a building in the debtors' division, where the turnkeys on duty pass the night. It is fitted with a desk and benches, is glazed on all sides, and overlooks the front court and several of the exercise yards. Several of the warders are here, and from them one learns that the prisoner passed a quiet night, sleeping from half-past ten till half-past four, but that the extraordinary equanimity which he had hitherto displayed is failing him now, and that he is beginning to “break down.” This conversation is carried on in a low whisper; the silence of the place is singularly oppressive; and this, combined with the knowledge of what one is about immediately to witness, renders this period one of the most painful suspense. There are five hundred prisoners within the gaol, but one might as well be in the City of the Dead for all one hears of them, the only sound, the jingling of the warders' keys, grating on the ear. A little excitement is caused by the hurried entrance of a warder from the direction in which the prisoner is known to be, and his equally hurried disappearance bearing some brandy in a tumbler, but the silence sets in afresh, and one is reduced to watching two little knots in the fore court. One of these consists of the under-sheriff (who is deeply affected), the medical officer, and a *nonchalant* person in a wideawake hat, who is said to be the governor, but who takes no part in the proceedings, and who is poking up the ground with his walking-stick in a very *degagé* manner. The other knot is formed of Calcraft, his assistant, and two of the warders who are chatting together. At twenty-five minutes past ten the party—consisting of four reporters of the London journals, six from various local papers, a carpenter who is in attendance lest his service should be required in connection with the arrangements of the drop, and a warder in plain clothes who has been sitting up all night with the prisoner—is summoned from the round-house and ushered into a narrow vaulted ante-room, whence, after five minutes' delay, they are led through a narrow passage into the presence of the gallows.

There it stands, erected under a shed at the further end of a small yard some thirty feet square, the old square gallows formed of two uprights and one crossbeam, and whose form has been familiar to us from woodcuts and description for years, only in this instance it is painted buff instead of the ordinary dead black. The uprights across have iron supports fixed into the wall, and in the crossbeam there is a hook, immediate under which stands Thomas Wells, with the rope round his neck. There is no built scaffold; the drop on which the prisoner stands is flush with the ground, and the public (if the little representative party can be so called) is placed behind a barrier breast-high, yet so close to the prisoner that they can see every movement of his face, and hear every word he utters. He looks a mere youth, short, yet strongly built. He is dressed in his railway porter's uniform of velveteen, with the company's initials in red on the collar, and in his waistcoat, just above his pinioned hand, wears a small flower. He evidently knows little of anything of what is going on around him. He is absorbed in prayer—his face, of a livid hue, is upturned, and his eyes are looking upwards. Standing by him, the chaplain, the Rev. W. C. F. Sugden Fraser, reads, in a voice broken with emotion, the burial service. Suddenly the prisoner begins, in a low, thick, trembling voice, to sing a hymn—one, as we afterwards learn, which he has been recently repeating in his cell—and continues to sing it after Calcraft has pulled the cap over his face, and the chaplain has shaken hands with him—is singing it when, at a signal from his superior, Smith pulls the bolt, and then, with a sickening rattle, the drop falls, Calcraft standing behind, and, as it were, guiding the falling figure. In our belief, life was not wholly extinct for three or four minutes after the falling of the drop. It is usual on these occasions to speak of the movements of the limbs as being “merely muscular,” in this instance there was scarcely any muscular contortion, but there were undoubtedly deep respirations and other undeniable evidence that asphyxia did not immediately happen.

Such is the history of the first private execution in England. Anticipated with just horror by those who were compelled to be present, it was carried out with every decency and all decorum, in a manner calculated to give the least pain to those whose duty it was to witness it. The presence of the representatives of the press at a private execution is a guarantee to the public, whose delegates they are, that the sentence of the law which has been passed upon a certain criminal is duly carried out. But there is no occasion to inflict upon them, as was the case at Newgate, the horror of witnessing the pinioning, the procession, and all the awful details of the scaffold. These, thanks to the visiting justices and to the under-sheriff of Kent, Mr. Furley, of Ashford, were spared at Maidstone, and will, it is to be hoped, be spared in future. Meanwhile, so far as this one instance affords means of judging, IS THE EXECUTION UNDER THE NEW LAW MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN UNDER THE OLD? We answer, decidedly, in the affirmative. The applause or censure of the mob, the desire to “die game” before his friends, had, it is acknowledged, the worst influence on the prisoner, and the solemn stillness of the little yard, with its handful of spectators, *must have been* IMPRESSIVE in the most awful degree, while a peaceful provincial town is left to its usual avocations, entirely free from the influx of pestilent blackguardism, drunkenness, and obscenity which always attended a public hanging.

For the moral purpose of our theme, there are but *three items* worth noticing in the above account; they are 1st.—The *black flag*, hoisted as a terror and example to the “bad lot” of “tramps out on hopping excursion, beggars, a female gipsy or two, men and women, the lowest scum of the population, and a dozen eager-eyed, wolfish, cunning-looking boys!” 2nd.—The officials and representatives of the press who “*anticipated with just horror*” the coming scene at which they “*were compelled to be present*,” and then when it is enacted as the primary NATIONAL PLAY for the time being, *staring* at the prisoner in his “railway porter's uniform of velveteen,” roped to the fatal beam, with a faded flower “in his waistcoat, just above his pinioned hands,” absorbed in prayer—his

face of a livid hue, upturned, and his eyes looking upwards; at the same time singing a hymn "in a low, thick, trembling voice," "after Calcraft has pulled the cap over his face," and the Chaplain, who had been reading "in a voice broken with emotion, the burial service," has shaken hands with him;" and then *listening* to the "SICKENING RATTLE" in the criminal's throat, mixed with the whirring sound of the collapsing machinery, as "Smith pulls the bolt," and "the drop falls," while "Calfcraft is standing behind, and, as it were, guiding the falling figure" into the newly-dug pit below; and 3rd—the summing-up question and answer of the reporter, after making one of a group at this disgusting performance. "Is the execution under the new law more *impressive* than under the old?" "We answer decidedly in the affirmative. The applause or censure of the mob, the desire to 'die game' before his friends, had, it is acknowledged, the worst influence on the prisoner, and the solemn stillness of the little yard, with its handful of spectators, *must have been impressive* in the most awful degree."

Impressive upon whom let us here ask? Not upon the "bad lot" contemplating the black flag! The very class who needed some wholesome impression of fear, and who never realised it at public hangings, were shut out and left to indulge their idle fancies and curious promptings—a kind of pleasure to them! If it were impressive upon the "gentlemen of England," and the representatives of the press, while looking upon a drama so horrible, we should imagine that it was in a sense different from that for which capital punishments were enacted; unless we were to believe that, notwithstanding their high refinement, they were susceptible of murderous emotions.

Then there remains only what the conclusion of the report seems to point at, that it was impressive upon the dying criminal, thus leaving only one poor miserable pretence for sustaining the existence of the gallows as a moral preventative, and a wholesome example. Of what use to society is the transitory impression of an agonised wretch about to die unobserved by the world? None whatever, and therefore the advocates of death punishments must soon give way to those of our opinion, that the gallows is an effete institution, unfit for its purpose; and that solitary confinement and hard labour for life would not only be a greater and more deterring punishment, but a security against prematurely hurrying into eternity, as in days of old, *innocent* persons, wrongly convicted through some vile perjury of the wicked, mistaken identity, or imperfectly unravelled circumstances.

Amongst the earliest converts, we expect soon to number the reporter of the above quoted narrative, and most of his literary brethren. For promoting the cause of abolition, we have issued this pamphlet, and although we notice the awful adventures of the heroes of the gallows and guillotine in our progress, we have no wish to pander to the taste of the illiterate and depraved, but to point a moral that shall leave a trace of some good impression behind.

As we have placed ASKERN foremost in our list of modern living British hangmen, the most unknown and least experienced, we shall first give a short biographical notice of his life and professional career.

Except in the performance of their dreadful office, and the associations it brings them into, before and after every execution, there is nothing in their private antecedents and habits above the common run of men of their class. No extraordinary genius has ever been manifested by either of our gallows-heroes, beyond the horrible calling which fate has marked out for them. But under the irresistible spell of an evil destiny, they are compelled by fate to perform deeds which all other men shudder at, although they know their legal necessity; and in their endeavours to become proficient in their strangling art, so as to earn the praise of their official superiors, and the admiration of the multitude, they stand out from the rest of society with more than ordinary prominence, and in that respect are regarded as the chief of remarkable public characters. From the most reliable information current amongst the old friends and associates of Askern about York and adjacent districts, also from officials of the castle, which is now used as a gaol, a career of abject poverty, want of employment, ill-luck in almost every one of his undertakings, and a too-fast life whenever his chequered destiny placed money, in small sums at a time, within his power, led him into *temptation*, and from that temptation came the *commission* of a deed which consigned him a prisoner to York Castle, from the sombre scenes of which he never emerged, except as a convict, whom evil fate had long marked for her own! In charity, we throw a veil over his particular offence, as our object is only to here show cause and effect, and warn the yet pure and innocent from evil courses.

It was while a convicted prisoner and when an execution was pending without any hangman to do the "job," after an unsuccessful application to Calcraft of London, who was then fully engaged, that an offer of pardon was made to him on condition that he performed the office on the doomed man.

Moved by the love of liberty, which like life is said to be sweet to everyone, and promises of remuneration and perquisites, Askern accepted without much hesitation the office of public executioner, and to qualify himself in his new and ominous business, he diligently employed his time (as all others in the same line have done before him) in tying and knotting several lengths of rope after the hangman's fashion, and testing their tightening effects upon an effigy suspended to a rope stretched across the private room where he lodged. To acquire speed and precision in the tying of a hangman's "noose," also in the "turning off and cutting down" without the least blundering and rousing the execrations of the depraved mobs which generally assemble to view such ghastly sights, many trials he had to make upon the suspended figure to fit him for the work of the scaffold.

At length the fatal morning came for his first practical essay on the neck of a human being over the top of the castle wall, and in the presence of a vast hideous-looking concourse of people, who hissed at the culprit when he appeared; and strange inconsistency, also hooted the man who was employed to execute the bidding of justice on the object of their detestation!

ASKERN, at a scene so horrible and new to him, trembled, and would have rushed at once from the scaffold the very moment he had stepped upon it, if he had possessed the power and freedom to do so; but alas! for him there was no chance, his apprenticeship to the strangling trade must be fulfilled according to the prescribed conditions previously mentioned.

Therefore, *nerveless* as he felt, and ready to sink into the death-trap beneath, amongst the machinery of the drop, he had to summon up all the courage and fortitude which draughts of intoxicating liquor then plentifully supplied to him, could instil into his drooping frame.

At one bound he approached the pinioned wretch, roughly seized him, placed him under the cross-beam of the gallows quickly, with blanched features and trembling hands, hurriedly pulled the white cap down over his livid face, placed the rope over his neck, and drew the noose most scientifically as he thought, in the true Calcraft style, and as his preceding lessons had taught him; but, lo, and behold! a turnkey had no sooner hastened down and drawn the bolt that lets fall the flooring on which the murderer stands, and sets him swinging in the air, than the culprit's awful convulsions and desperate struggles to clutch the rope and free himself from the tortures he was suffering, showed the ghastly fact, that his first attempt did not succeed, and that the yelling multitude around and below, all horror-stricken at the sickening spectacle, were clamoring against the unfortunate servant of the law! Speedily he had to release the quivering half-strangled wretch, and do his work of hanging over again, ere death terminated the writhings of the doomed man, and at the same time quieted the unearthly cries of the heaving and seething crowds of men and women who had come from various distances, near and far, to behold the great NATIONAL SHOW!

Subsequent experience "got his hand in" as the saying is, and made him more adroit at strangling, but except among a very few relatives and old acquaintances, he was a man shunned and despised, and often liable to insults and desperate encounters in public company, when once the whisper went round that he was the hangman of York Castle.

Another unhappy being, fated to follow the same horrible vocation, is SMITH, of Dudley. On the outskirts of the town there used to be seen the old half-tumbled down cottage, surrounded by a marshy piece of ground, where "Dudley Smith," as he is often called, resided at the time he took it into his head to become a second rival to London's famous hangman. The news of ASKERN's exploits gave SMITH courage, but made CALCRAFT only laugh and wonder how many more fools, ambitious of a black notoriety, were going to compete with him. Events soon followed to settle the question, and afford SMITH the opportunity he sought.

"Red-handed guilt, the child of woe" then made rapid progress, and cast a gloom over many a household in Staffordshire, and throughout the adjacent "black country." The difference of a few guineas settled the matter in the minds of the authorities of Stafford gaol, and struck the balance against the pecuniary demands of the skilful CALCRAFT, and in favour of the lesser price of the inexperienced SMITH, who, however, supplemented the want of experience with that species of brazen impudence and animal confidence which men of his class possess. Mentally and physically he was of rougher mould than either of the two former gallows heroes. Nurtured from birth among miners, the companion of the most illiterate pottery hands, and with bull-dog tastes and habits, he was well fitted for the office of public executioner. A man being wanted for the coming "job," he applied, sent in the "lowest tender," and was accepted. Visions by day and night now haunted his mind; asleep or awake the gallows and all its appurtenances dwelt strongly upon his imagination, and flitted before his eyes in his drunken moments. Coils of rope here, there, and everywhere rose up before him, and sometimes twined about his own neck in his midnight dreams, like fiery serpents. Time was getting brief, and he must prepare to perform his task neatly and expeditiously, and in dexterity equal the renowned William Calcraft. So, accordingly, after being shown the sort of rope he must use, he set himself to the work of experimenting and forming slip knots round logs of wood, knobs of furniture and fixtures, the tops of his garden rails, and sometimes round his own neck, close under the ear, and sufficiently tight to satisfy himself that it would answer at the proper time. He practised also the pinioning process on his "young woman" in secret; who, not at all enamoured at his intended profession, at first stoutly resisted, but his importunities and determination made her submit to his strange proceedings.

Without overburdening our confined space with an enumeration of the criminals he afterwards executed at Stafford and elsewhere, suffice it to say, that after a few blunders and the usual violent outcries of the brutal multitudes, he became tolerably expert, and was considered a fit assistant to Calcraft, when a change of the law and private executions were determined upon. As we have been informed in the before quoted narrative of the first private execution, on account of Calcraft's great age, and in obedience to the overtures of the authorities, SMITH performed the subordinate part of moving the bolt that supported the platform on which the criminal stood; preliminary, it is supposed, to taking Calcraft's place, if death or inability should ere long necessitate a change.

Such a change may be nearer than people suppose, for Calcraft is expected to be a successful applicant for a retiring pension, on account of his infirmities, now too plainly visible, in which event Smith might have for a competitor the notorious "LONG TOM COFFIN," a costermonger of old Clare Market, lately pulled down, and a quaint character about town, who addressed an epistle in the following form to the authorities of Newgate, which we give in its original orthography, and "with all its blushing honours" and beauties "thick upon it":—

"Wild Street, March 1st, 1868.

"To the Gaol Committee of Newgate,"

"Gentilmen,—As Ive heerd Calcraft yure ould hangmon iz goin to leeve iz plaise, Ive just takin the libertee too ask yu too chuse me, as I am villin too do the jobs on murdrers for the same pay, and vill ever bee punkshal hat it, ven ever yu vant to hang em up at the gallerse. Ive no objecshun to exshecute any vun yu pleese, without feer or favur too any relashun or aquanetense, but vill do my dooty imparshul, for vich I can git a goood karakter,"

I am Gentilmen,

Yure humbel sirvent,

THOMAS COFFIN."

"P.S.—Nevyew by my granmother's side to the late Doctur Coffin."

The secret execution of Wells, the railway porter, at Maidstone, on August 13th, 1868, marks in the criminal calendar William Calcraft's disappearance from public life. He will henceforth be surrounded by the mystery becoming his terrible office, and the rising generation of criminals who take an interest in the matter, will have

to ask their seniors what kind of man he was, and to trust to their imaginations for the picture of him. To no man probably will this mystery be more welcome than to Calcraft himself. He has shown, on more than one occasion, that his dread of facing the crowd was equal to his victim's dread of facing the gallows.

At the execution of the Manchester Fenians, and of Barrett in London, he was seen to manifest more fear and nervous weakness than any of the men whom he was to put to death. On both occasions he received violent threatening letters from the fenian friends of the culprits. He therefore shuffled about the prison yard, and seemed afraid to mount the gallows-steps, while the sweat fell from his face, and stood in large drops upon his brow. It is a great relief to him for his few remaining years, and a moral gain in every sense to society, to have lost sight of him; for after all, he constituted perhaps the most revolting part of a public execution. The strong prejudice, and the intense savage hatred of the crowd against him was, no doubt, a most unjustifiable feeling, seeing that as the mere instrument of justice and of judgment, he was neither to be hated nor to be loved; but it existed in such intensity that there was no prospect of its ever being lessened. The effect was extremely injurious even to the poor kind of morality that public executions were supposed to promote. The passive feeling of awe with which men might be disposed to look on a criminal going to a righteous doom, was changed into an active feeling of disgust and horror, when they beheld the man by whom he was publicly strangled; and there was too much reason to believe that they left the precincts of the gibbet with more of this unjust feeling uppermost in their minds, than that which open-air executions were meant to inculcate.

All this is now changed by the private system of hanging, but it also destroys every plea for retaining the use of the gallows, as we have before argued in previous pages.

In sketching the career of Calcraft, much is necessary to be said respecting his predecessor, TOM CHESHIRE, to whom he acted for some years as an assistant hangman, and who gave him during that time repeated instructions in the art of putting criminals to death.

The commencement of his professional life reaches back far into the reign of George the Third, when Tom Cheshire first employed him, and was in the height of his fame. A very remarkable character was old Cheshire, who used to wear always a snuff-brown coat reaching down to his heels, and on that account was often hooted at wherever he was seen, as the "snuffy skull thatcher!" Many of the ancient customs of Newgate he was an eye-witness of, and which will be interesting to mention here.

When the last night of some poor condemned wretch had arrived, at midnight, and from hour to hour, till the dawn of the execution morning, a bell man used to parade outside the prison walls under the grating of the condemned cell, and in loud solemn tones accompanied the harsh sounds of his bell with his warning-cries, to "prepare for death." With a blush of shame for our forefathers, we are obliged to confess that, MURDER BY LAW on the gallows was then so common for burglary, highway robbery, forgery, horse and sheep stealing, shop-lifting to the value of forty shillings, and other minor offences, that "hanging Monday" was regularly looked for, after every Old Bailey sessions, when a batch of males and females, sometimes amounting to half a dozen, would be hung up like so many dogs and cats on a Monday morning, although only found guilty and sentenced on the preceding Friday. Simple stealing from a house or the person was then oftener punished with death than were murderous offences. And so awfully unscrupulous were the "Bow-street runners," as the officers of police were termed, that the innocent used to be "planted" with stolen property, entrapped, sworn positively against, and put to death for the sake of the £40 "blood money" then given for every one capitally convicted. Then the horror of the "condemned cell, and pew, and press yard" were kept continually going, and the blood-thirsty monsters afterwards held their nightly saturnalias together, with spies, informers, bawdy-house pimps of both sexes, and the master and deputy-hangman amongst them; who revelled and toasted the success of their trade of blood-spilling. Then also, the "press yard" witnessed every sessions the torturing of its many youthful victims by the lead-knotted lash; and the "press room" resounded with the piercing shrieks of a prisoner undergoing the punishment awarded to those who refused to plead. Whenever a prisoner at the bar declined to say whether he was guilty or not guilty (a formality required by the law before he could be tried), he was taken to the "press room," laid on the stone floor naked, and with arms and legs extended, chained fast by the wrists and ankles; and a stout board was placed on the front of his body, on which heavy iron weights, one by one, were gradually placed, after every time he was asked if he would plead to the question first put to him, "guilty or not guilty?" Some poor tortured wretches, after a certain number of ponderous weights, never less than half-hundreds or hundreds, had been heaped upon them, would be terrified into pleading and standing the chance of their trial; but others would be obstinately dumb till such a pile of weights was added, that they were, according to the sentence of the law, crushed to death! The murderer's pew in the chapel, on the sabbath day, often presented a spectacle, that once seen, never was forgotten. While the late Rev. Dr. Cotton, then the prison chaplain, was preaching the "condemned sermon" one time scowling assassins deep-dyed with the blood of many victims would be seen grouped together; at another time youth and innocence, wrongfully condemned to die a felon's death on the gallows (as history has since proved), through perjury, or misconstrued circumstances and uncertain evidence. Amongst these we must not forget the fair and beautiful Eliza Fenning, a virtuous maiden servant of a tradesman's family in Fleet Street, who suffered death on the public gibbet for an offence which she called God to witness that she was totally innocent of! She was convicted on doubtful circumstantial evidence of attempting to poison the whole family, by putting arsenic into the flour of some dumplings she made for their dinner. All her solemn asseverations of innocence availed her not, and the best of characters was entirely useless: sentenced to die she was, and she was ruthlessly hanged by her fair neck, before a vast sympathising multitude of men, women, and children in the Old Bailey, all melted to tears, and crying out "shame," "shame!"

The beauteous innocent creature appeared on the gallows platform in a new white dress from head to foot, as spotless as her own purity; and we doubt not her soul, the moment it was released by the executioner's vile hands, was caught up by attending angels and carried to the haven of eternal bliss.

Long after it was too late to wipe out the stain of her judicial murder, her master's son confessed on his

death bed that he secretly mixed the arsenic in the flour she used, during her brief absence from the kitchen, as an act of revenge for refusing to submit to his embraces.

Tom Cheshire and Newgate has witnessed other ghastly scenes, and his predecessor has had adventures with "Sixteen-string-Jack, Jerry Abershaw, Jonathan Wild, Jack Shepherd, Betsy the bank-note forger and foot-pad, who was half executed and restored to life; when the CONDEMNED used to go in an open cart, sitting on their coffins, from Newgate all through Holborn to a public half-way house in St. Giles's, where they were allowed to stop and drink their "parting draught" with their friends, and be presented with their "last nosegay," and then resume their procession through Oxford Road, and at the top of it, in the open space facing the gates of Hyde Park, near the turnpike that then existed, to be at once executed on Tyburn's three-corner'd gibbet.

Passing to later times, CHESHIRE and his man Calcraft knew something about the noted Dr. Brooks and the dreadful secrets of old surgeon's hall at the back of Newgate. Subjects for dissection being very scarce, "BODY-SNATCHERS," sometimes called "*resurrectionists*" used to watch funerals during the day time in the churchyards of London, mark where the youngest and plumpest subjects were interred, and at night, with digging tools take them up and bag them in sacks, which they would speedily convey to a hired hackney coach standing conveniently near, and drive off with them to the said hall, or to St. Bartholomew's, according to orders. As body-snatching did not always supply enough subjects for the numerous doctors and students who required them for lectures and experiments, a viler class of offenders sprang to way-lay the friendless and unfortunate, entice them into some lonely out of way house surrounded by vacant ground walls, and there poison and smother them. These horrible villains were called Burkers, who contrived for a long time to sell the bodies of their victims undetected for large sums, as persons who had died naturally and been buried. At last a poor Italian boy who exhibited white mice in the streets, was burked by Bishop, May, and Williams, in a lone house in Bethnal-green, and one night was offered at Bartholomew's hospital. The doctor to whom they took it, feeling certain after a minute examination, that the corpse had died a violent death, quietly sent for the officers of justice, and gave them into custody. They were tried and found guilty on the clearest evidence of Italians who identified the boy, and were hanged by Calcraft and his master amidst the loudest execrations ever heard in the precincts of Newgate.

During the earlier times of that awful looking gail, the classification and administration were so loose as to render it a perfect HELL ON EARTH. Depravity, ribaldry, drunkenness, gambling and debauchery there reigned unchecked in its dark dungeon, between gaolers and the lowest of their male and female prisoners. The latter sex often times exchanged clothes with their keepers, when the governor was, at night, fast asleep, and in their cells they carried on whatever lewd revels they had a fancy for, and made a pandemonium of the prison. At the death of Cheshire, Calcraft became principal executioner. He was previously a private watchman at Reid's brewery, Liquorpond Street, and by trade a lady's shoemaker. He is also celebrated as a first-class rabbit-fancier, whose breed has won prizes, and unknown, has graced the festive board of many London families. At the Tiger public house, corner of Devizes Street, near the Rosemary Branch, Hoxton, next door to his old residence in his younger days, he used to meet great numbers of his brother snobs, rabbit-breeders, and skittle players, and there held jollifications and played skittles with them. On account of the prejudice of the neighbours, and the too-great freedom of impudent boys in calling out "Jack Ketch," his habit was to go out very early in the morning and after dark. He is married, and is the parent of a goodly number of sons and daughters, morally brought up and schooled, who have sometimes, been unjustly annoyed by ignorant people on account of their unfortunate parentage. To show the full force of this prejudice we will mention a curious circumstance that happened to one of his daughters.

She was accustomed to meet and court a young mechanic at a friend's house. One night a supper was appointed to be held there, and the sweetheart had promise of a good merry-making with mutual acquaintances of both sexes, not one of whom knew Miss Calcraft by her paternal name. Through some mysterious cause we have never had explained, just as all were comfortably seated around the smoking viands on the table, and were pledging the lovers and each other in preliminary bumpers of beer and gin, strange footsteps were heard on the stairs, followed by a knock at the door, and when it was opened, the whole company, especially Miss Calcraft's lover, were suddenly petrified with horror. No sooner was the fatal name pronounced and a recognition passed between father and daughter, than the young man at one bound cleared the table, rushed down the stairs, ran fast away from the house and was seen no more; thus proving again to the deserted hangman's daughter, that "the course of true love never runs smooth."

A parallel to the iniquities of the old Bow Street runners are to be found in the records of our modern police force of London. "Jack Ketch's warren" was well supplied by police scoundrels from many quarters of the poverty stricken districts. One of the most infamous was the "prig's haunt" in Tyndal's Buildings, Gray's Inn Lane, inhabited by low Irish, where KING, a policeman in disguise, attended daily when off duty, to teach pocket-picking and all the arts of burglary to poor outcast boys. Between experiments with various instruments, and lessons on the way to use them, a coat was swung across a line, and the young ones were shown how to pick the pocket single-handed when a thief was by himself, and when they went together in twos and threes. As fast as they became adepts in the art and went into the streets to obtain their living by it, King, who always knew their walks, watched them in his uniform, and the moment they committed a robbery, pounced upon them and procured their conviction, for which he obtained the praise of his superiors for extraordinary vigilance, and rewards, besides court-fees at the sessions. At last this vile thief-trainer became too clever; he was denounced by some boys sharper than himself, and some of his honest brother-constables took the clue up, unravelled it to the end, and on the clearest evidence got him sentenced to penal servitude for life. A more recent proof, while we are penning this, has come out, that perjury is still rife in the Metropolitan police force. Three policemen have been wrongfully procuring the conviction of a drover on the charge of stealing several sheep from a field at Tottenham, and have received their "blood money" from the County of Middlesex funds. Since their poor victim has been suffering incarceration, the real thief, at the trial of one of his confederates, has confessed to his own guilt, and

declared the entire innocence of the man formerly sworn to by the said policemen. May justice soon overtake them.

Returning to Calcraft and his latter days, we have to congratulate our readers upon his religious conversion, and regular Sunday attendance with his wife, at a church near Poole-street, Islington. He has long ceased to love his office and make money by sales of the clothes of the numerous culprits, and bits of the ropes that hanged them. The ancient ceremony of swearing in the executioner was an awful one. Amidst a collection of ropes, fetters and handcuffs, with his hand upon the bible, he was required to solemnly swear that he would execute every criminal condemned to die, without favouring father or mother, or any friend whatsoever; and when he had taken the horrible oath he was dismissed with the ominous words—"GET THEE HENCE WRETCH!"

The latest performance of Calcraft is reported below, and shows that the first private execution at Newgate was like the one at Maidstone, privately barbarous and publicly useless.

At nine o'clock in the morning of September 8th, the first private execution in London took place in the interior of Newgate Prison. The culprit was Alexander Arthur Mackay, a youth of only eighteen years of age, who, on the 8th of May last murdered a woman Emma Grossmith in whose service he was, at 11, Artillery-passage, Norton Folgate. It now only remains to tell how he expired his crime upon the scaffold in the presence not of a roaring, surging mob, but in the solitude of a prison, and before a few persons, whose number did not much exceed a score.

Inside the gaol the scene was solemn to the last degree. The representatives of the morning newspapers whose duty it was to witness the execution were admitted to Newgate at half-past eight, and after traversing several gloomy corridors found themselves in an inclosed yard near the prison chapel, in front of the scaffold. A few words will enable the reader to picture for himself the scene.

The yard is a square one, entered by a wicket gate at the south-east corner, and in the corner to the north-west stands the scaffold. In the south-west corner, near the grating through which prisoners undergoing punishment hold converse with their friends at periods arranged for by the prison rules, is a space called off for the representatives of the press, and standing at intervals of a few yards apart are men of the City police, occupying the remainder of the yard. Behind the scaffold the prison buildings rear their massive walls, and from the roof peers down upon the solemn scene below a stolid warder stationed there in order that, so soon as the ghastly business is at an end, he may signal the man in whose hands are the ropes to hoist the black flag, as a witness to the outside world that justice is satisfied; on the opposite side of the yard are other prison buildings with grated windows, but no outward sign of the life within, while flanking the yard north and south are walls—the one is topped by a terrible *cheveaux de frise*, and over the other hangs suspended a large cloth, the sound of whose rustling, as shaken by the wind—it beat against the prison wall,—was as the flapping wing of a huge bird of prey. The silent expectation of the twenty minutes spent in that dreadful yard was the most painful experience of the present writer's life. Absence of sound when a man is alone in the heart of a trackless forest is said by travellers to be fearfully oppressive, but the involuntary silence of twenty men waiting the entrance of the messengers of death and their victim becomes painful to the last degree. Sometimes there is a slight murmur heard from the outside of the prison, with now and again the clanking of a latch or the grating of a bolt within the gaol itself, and occasionally a low hum of conversation in the yard—these are the only sounds heard, and they only serve to intensify the oppressiveness of the silent intervals that intervene. What was going on within the prison during this time was not known to the representatives of the press. Under the new Act of Parliament they are excluded from what was known as the pinioning room, and only see the very last scene of all, an altar on very agreeable to the feelings of gentlemen upon whom is imposed a most painful duty. They learned after the execution that Mackay had since his condemnation conducted himself with great decorum, had frequently expressed his great sorrow for the crime he had committed, and his perfect readiness to die. The poor youth, we were told, lost his own mother when he was about the same age as one of his victim's children, and this deepened in his own mind the intense feelings of poignant regret he seemed to experience between his sentence being pronounced and carried into effect. He was most attentive to the ministrations of the Rev. Mr. Jones, ordinary of Newgate, and took the sacrament at his hands on Sunday. The condemned youth slept soundly until about six o'clock in the morning, when he rose and remained in communion with his spiritual adviser until the last. So much for the interior of the prison; outside the silence remained unbroken, save by the sounds of which we have spoken, until within a quarter of an hour of nine, when from the neighbouring church of St. Sepulchre a passing bell began to toll, and a slightly increased murmur from the outside world reached the ears of those who waited within the prison. At about this time Mr. Sheriff McArthur, with his under sheriffs, Messrs. Roche and Davidson Mr. Jones, the governor; and Mr. Gibson, the surgeon of Newgate, entered the yard, and having satisfied themselves that all the arrangements were complete, retired, leaving the space again to the reporters and policemen, one of the latter body having some few minutes earlier turned sick and left the yard. This almost unbearable suspense lasted until the clocks in the neighbourhood were heard to strike the hour, and then the clanking of a latch behind the black screen surrounding the scaffold was followed by the appearance of the Rev. Mr. Jones, who supported the doomed man as he ascended the few steps leading from the ground to the drop. The chaplain, whose voice trembled with emotion, read the *Litanies* from the Church of England Prayer-book, and Mackay joined with a loud, clear voice in the responses, his voice being heard distinctly over the yard, even after he was capped and noosed. Just at this supreme moment the young man's firmness seemed about to forsake him, and he tottered as though to fall, but the hand of the chaplain laid upon his arm sustained him, and in another second the trap on which the unhappy man was standing fell, and he hung suspended. The fall was a very short one, and signs of life were visible for a longer time after the bolt was drawn than we remember to have seen on any similar occasion. As soon as possible every one concerned in the ghastly business was glad to make his escape from this last act in a dreadful drama. To the spectators, judging from our own experience, and the appearance of many persons present, nothing could have been more terrible than this sight of a man, calmly, methodically strangled under shadow of a prison wall, without any of the frothy excitement that has up to within a very short time formed part of an execution ceremony. Few things could be more impressive, so far as the outside spectators were concerned (by reason of its fearful suggestiveness) than the silent running up of a black flag from the gaol wall just as the murderer passed down into the valley of the shadow of death; and nothing we should say could have been more awful than the sight of those four high, hard, pitiless walls to the wretch brought forth to die. Such is an account of the first execution of a murderer in London that has taken place out of sight of such as chose to brave the horrors of an execution crowd in order to see a fellow-creature die a shameful death.

The body, after hanging an hour, was cut down, and a coroner's inquest, as prescribed by the Act of Parliament, was held in the course of the afternoon, previous to burying it.

The last personage we shall record here as a fit companion to all the before-mentioned, is SANSON, the renowned HERO OF THE GUILLOTINE. On the outskirts of old Paris, in a small neat cottage overlooking the banks of the Seine, surrounded by palings at the front, and thick hawthorn hedges at the sides and back, lives secluded from vulgar gaze a descendant of three generations of the Sansons, who from father to son have inherited the office of public executioner. He is a grim-looking old man of strong build, and is complacent to all visitors whose curiosity leads them to see and converse with him, and view his curious cabinet of murderers' relics and criminals' curiosities; and who make their request with becoming civility. He is full of anecdotes about the exploits of his ancestors at chopping off the heads of Louis the XVI, Maria Antonette, Charlotte Corday, the authoress of the famous saying "O! liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name," as she was about to put her neck under the guillotine knife. He will exhibit at the same time, models of guillotines, instruments of torture, amongst them spokes of the blood-stained breaking wheel of former days, locks of the hair of various nobles and their ladies, rings, brooches, and other trinkets of the victims of the bloody Robespierre, with pieces of the robes and surplices of the bishops and priests who were then brought out of dungeons and guillotined in multitudes early every morning for weeks together, till the ground where the scaffold stood ran with blood. A few skulls and finger-bones of remarkable persons he will also show, and tell how he obtained them. We will now spare our reader's feelings, and conclude by hoping that the day is not far off, when the awful adventures of the heroes of the gallows and guillotine will be numbered among the things of the past.

THE END.