

# Freedom Press

A non-profit Organisation

—publishers of—  
the fortnightly paper

## Freedom

3d. per copy. 8/6 per annum  
(specimen copy sent on request)

and of  
books and pamphlets

Our List includes:

- |                              |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Herbert Read:                | POETRY & ANARCHISM                 | 5s.                          |
|                              | THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANARCHISM        | 2s. 6d.                      |
|                              | THE EDUCATION OF FREE MEN          | 1s.                          |
| Rudolf Rucker:               | NATIONALISM & CULTURE              | 21s.                         |
| George Woodcock:             | ANARCHY OR CHAOS                   | 4s. 6d.                      |
|                              | THE BASIS OF COMMUNAL LIVING       | 1s.                          |
|                              | ANARCHISM & MORALITY               | 3d.                          |
| John Hewetson:               | ILL HEALTH, POVERTY & THE<br>STATE | 2s. 6d.                      |
|                              | MUTUAL AID & SOCIAL<br>EVOLUTION   | 1s.                          |
|                              | P. Kropotkin:                      | THE STATE: ITS HISTORIC ROLE |
| REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT     |                                    | 3d.                          |
| SELECTIONS FROM HIS WRITINGS |                                    | 8s. 6d.                      |

(A complete list of publications sent on request)

FREEDOM PRESS, 27 RED LION ST., LONDON, W.C.1

Tel: Chancery 8364

## A Handbook on Hanging



# A HANDBOOK ON HANGING

by

CHARLES DUFF

*New & Enlarged Edition.*

*Some Opinions on the First Edition :*

'Sufficient to fill with doubt the most complacent of conservative penologists.'

—*Times Literary Supplement.*

'The Handbook on Hanging has captured my imagination.'—*Clarence Darrow.*

'It is a great book, great in the sympathy which inspired it, great in a literary way.'

—*Liverpool Post and Mercury.*

'Outrageous.'—*The Tablet.*

'An ingenuity amounting to inspiration. Mr. Duff never leaves us in doubt as to the realities of the atrocities he satirises.'—*Evelyn Sharpe.*

'All jurymen should have read this book.'

—*William Gerhardt.*

'A diabolically clever book which might have been conceived and penned by Jonathan Swift himself.'—*Manchester Evening News.*

'Deadly.'—*The Observer.*

*(Continued on back flap)*

2/-

FREEDOM PRESS  
27 RED LION ST., LONDON, W.C.1

# A HANDBOOK ON HANGING

*Being a short Introduction to the fine art of Execution,  
and containing much useful information on Neck-  
breaking, Throttling, Strangling, Asphyxiation,  
Decapitation and Electrocutation; as well as  
Data and Wrinkles for Hangmen, an Account  
of the late Mr. Berry's method of Killing  
and his Working List of Drops; to  
which is added a Hangman's Ready  
Reckoner and certain other Items  
of Interest including the Great  
Nuremberg Hangings*

BY

CHARLES DUFF

THIRD EDITION ENLARGED  
DILIGENTLY COMPARED AND  
REVISED IN ACCORDANCE WITH  
THE MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

ALL VERY PROPER TO BE READ  
AND KEPT IN EVERY FAMILY

FREEDOM PRESS  
LONDON 1948



*Dedicated respectfully*  
to  
THE HANGMEN OF ENGLAND  
*and to similar*  
CONSTITUTIONAL BULWARKS  
*everywhere*

*"Dislocation of the Neck is the ideal to be aimed at"*



#### PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This new, revised edition is issued by the Freedom Press because they consider it the most damning indictment of Capital Punishment yet written. So far as the publishers are concerned, the abolition of Capital Punishment is not a question of statistics (though for the benefit of those interested in this aspect, Mr. Duff provides illuminating data); they are opposed to Capital Punishment because it is a barbarous and sadistic institution which no civilized people can justify under any circumstance.

In some countries where the death penalty has been abolished, life sentences of imprisonment have been substituted. Though the problem of alternatives lies outside the scope of the present volume it must be stated in order to avoid any misunderstandings, that the Freedom Press consider the penal system, with or without reforms, can never cease to be punitive and inhuman, and that those many well-intentioned people who attempt to reform and punish at one and the same time, ignore the most elementary factors of human psychology.

The Publishers take this opportunity to thank Messrs. John Lane the Bodley Head for their permission to publish this special edition of the *Handbook on Hanging* and Mr. Charles Duff for his generous co-operation in revising and adding new material to the Handbook at very short notice and for offering to forgo any royalties on this edition.

## Preface—1948

READERS of the following pages may be said to enjoy a rare privilege, this being the only book in the language, excepting the late Mr. Hangman Berry's *My Experiences*—quite unobtainable—which provides even a modicum of information on the oldest and hoariest of our great national institutions: HANGING. This *Handbook* is all the more instructive, entertaining and, indeed, valuable, because the only people among us who have access to the truth about our governmental neck-breakings and strangulations are public hangmen, sheriffs and under-sheriffs, prison officials, chaplains, Home Office officials and a few others, all of them pledged to secrecy about this act done in your name and mine. So, by providing the information given in these pages, the author considers himself a public benefactor almost as important as the public hangman. The weakness of the book is, of course, that it is the outcome of study and research and not of practical experience: the author has never hanged anybody nor seen anybody hanged. It is to be hoped that this weakness is not too damning, but it is only fair to point out that those who hang cannot always write and those who write cannot always hang, though they sometimes deserve to.

Almost twenty years have elapsed since the *Handbook on Hanging* first appeared. Well do I remember the September morning in 1928 when it was published, for that was the beginning of a series of pleasant surprises, the first of which was caused when the publisher informed me on the telephone that the whole edition had been sold out before noon that day. Then came the reviews: columns and columns of them; more surprises. One critic wrote of it: "Outrageous . . . Nasty jars are given to us by the author's indisputable but misplaced wit." Another called the book "Deadly". By the end of six months the reviews, it was computed at the time, amounted to the equivalent of about four hundred newspaper columns. I had done what I had never set out or thought to do. I made hanging a subject of conversation, though much of that conversation was far too polite for my liking. Under the title *Henkerfibel* the little work appeared in Weimar Germany, but when Hitler came to power it was publicly burned at Leipzig by the Nazis. I fear they did not like it.

An enlarged and greatly enhanced edition (John Lane) appeared in 1938—just ten years later—and it seems fitting that an edition further revised, amended and improved should now appear in 1948. For, hanging continues; and it continues to be debated. Besides, hanging symbolizes something. Many may have heard the old story of the sailor who was shipwrecked on the coast of England. He did not know what coast it was but, as he struggled ashore, he saw a gallows



with a felon hanging from it. The sailor heaved a sigh of relief and muttered to himself: "Thank God I have reached a civilized country!" That was in the days when they made an honest public exhibition and exhibit of hanged felons as an example to the rest of the population. There has been for nearly a century an increase in the shame which began to be attached to executions, until to-day a hanging is a sort of official secret and a top secret at that. It has become a sordid, hole-and-corner business with which all those directly concerned seem to be thoroughly out of countenance. There is something wrong and demoralising about all this—a demoralisation which, one might argue, goes to prove that the English may not be the hypocrites foreigners often think they are.

There has been a steady campaign in Britain against capital punishment for many years, and especially since the end of the Second World War. The abolitionists have gained—and lost—supporters. Sir Samuel Hoare as Home Secretary in 1938 favoured the retention of the death penalty; as Lord Templewood in 1947 he came out in favour of its abolition. He was now in the Opposition. In 1938 Mr. Chuter Ede, when a member of the Opposition, favoured abolition; and in 1947, as Home Secretary in Mr. Attlee's Labour Government, he was with the hangmen. On 27th November, 1947, in the House of Commons, Mr. Ede stated that the Government felt that they could not regard the present time as "opportune to include in the (Criminal Justice) Bill a provision for the suspension of the death penalty". Can it be that hanging has become a matter of opportunism and expediency? Are politicians more soft-hearted when in Opposition than when they hold office? It is difficult to answer these political conundrums or to explain the somersaults, but most people will agree that good policy is best founded on good morality; and that opportunism and expediency seldom produce a good policy. Perhaps there is an exception to this dictum, the exception being—hanging. Hangmen think so.

The year 1948 is an important one in the annals of hanging. An Amendment to the new Bill overhauling the Criminal Law provides for the abolition of capital punishment in this realm. Once the Bill becomes an Act, a prisoner who has committed a murder before reaching the age of 18 will not be liable to the death penalty. This is an innovation, the law hitherto being that the date of trial was what decided. But, whether or not the Amendment is passed, the facts about hanging presented in this *Handbook* should always be of interest and, if capital punishment is not abolished in Britain, they will remain of practical value. If it is abolished, then the little work takes on a new value as a treatise on an aspect of our national history hitherto far too greatly neglected in our schools and universities.

Apropos all this, in the late autumn of 1947 the Gallup Poll asked the men and women of Britain the following question:—

In this country, most people convicted of murder are sentenced to death. Do you agree with this, or do you think that the death penalty should be abolished?

The replies were:

65% said *Keep death penalty.*

25% „ *Abolish death penalty.*

10% „ *Don't know.*

Compared with a similar Poll taken nine years previously, there was a shift of 15% in favour of retaining the death penalty. Thus, the politicians in the House of Commons who, on a free vote of the House, will decide the issue, are provided with information of the feelings of a cross-section of the public at certain moments—feelings on this subject go in waves—and this, together with the governmental lead given by Home Secretary Mr. Chuter Ede, should be sufficient to enable Members of Parliament to vote coldly however heated the debate may be. The House has been informed that, because of the increase in crimes of violence in post-war years, the Government feels that the moment for abolition is inopportune. The *Manchester Guardian* (8/12/47) commented: "The expressed concern of the Government and of certain other people at the proposal to abolish the death penalty at the present time reminds one of other and more immoderate alarms to which voice was given in times past when similar reforms were advocated. Alarms which were shown to be entirely groundless when put to the test of experience. Probably the most notorious of these warnings, coming as it did from such an august source, was that of Lord Ellenborough in 1810. When Sir Samuel Romilly introduced three bills having as their modest objects the abolition of the death penalty for the crimes of stealing to the value of five shillings from a shop, stealing to the value of forty shillings from a dwelling house, and stealing to a similar value from a ship in a navigable river, Lord Ellenborough (Chief Justice) addressed the House of Lords in these terms:

"I trust your Lordships will pause before you assent to a measure pregnant with danger to the security of property. The learned judges are unanimously agreed that the expediency of justice and the public security require there should not be a remission of capital punishment in this part of the criminal law. My Lords, if we suffer this Bill to pass, we shall not know where we stand—we shall not know whether we are on our heads or on our feet! I think this is above all others a law upon which so much of the security of mankind depends in its execution that I should deem myself neglectful of my duty to the public if I failed to let the law have its course."

The above is quoted at length with some reason. To-day, the increase in the number of murders is negligible in comparison with the increase in crimes of violence in general. Hence, if the Home Secretary were logical, or if he really believed in what Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough aptly defines as 'the expediency of justice', not to mention 'the public security', he would introduce a Bill re-introducing the death penalty for the crimes against property for which it was abolished in 1810. And for many others for which it has long been abolished.



A number of murders happen every year—it is a fairly constant average even allowing for the post-war crime wave—and this is proof that the death penalty does not deter *these* murderers. That is one truth. A second truth to be considered with it is this: all statements about what *might be done* by potential murderers—that is, by those who are deterred by virtue of the existence of the death penalty—are as speculative, to put it politely, as Lord Ellenborough's were in 1810 about the abolition of the death penalty for stealing five or forty shillings worth. And they are just about as useful to guide us in making a decision. Lord Ellenborough's pompous utterance proved to be nothing but so much poppycock in so far as political justice is concerned. Those who say there would be an increase in murders in our times if hanging were abolished merely conceal the old human desire for finding scapegoats to divert attention from a public failure to solve a social problem. That is the real explanation, and it would be more honest if all advocates of the death penalty were to admit—as some do—this as the basis of their arguments, instead of shuffling about in the disgusting way they so often do. So, away with all this rubbish and hypocrisy, and get on with the hangings! Doesn't the Gallup Poll show that we are more bloodthirsty now than nine years ago? And isn't Mr. Chuter Ede the twentieth-century ghost of Lord Ellenborough? Both require hanging as a bulwark of the Constitution. Ergo, if we are to have hanging and hangings, the public must be provided with as much information as possible on the subject, and here it is in this *Handbook* all set out neatly and in a form suitable to be carried around in the pocket for reference. Hanging is a human activity with us, a knowledge of which is as indispensable to statesmen and political fugelmen as the knowledge of morbid anatomy is to the surgeon or perspective to the artist.

The recent strike of the Masters of the Guillotine in France (for better pay and conditions to meet the rising cost of living and not because they dislike their work—and this at a moment when a dozen or more clients awaited decapitation) prompted me to omit from the present edition much about guillotining. It will all be put back, with additional matter, in the definitive edition I shall duly prepare. By then, no doubt, the Frenchmen will be back at work. Readers of previous editions of the *Handbook on Hanging* will find many new tit-bits about our national art in this one. It is pleasant for an author to realize that there is unflagging interest in his subject, and especially when it treats of our oldest national institution, the bulwark of our liberties throughout the ages, the proud symbol of our principles. *Qua ducitis adsum*, as the Latin tag puts it: 'Wherever you lead, I am with you.'

I wish to thank Messrs. John Lane The Bodley Head, publishers of the *Handbook on Hanging*, for the permission they have granted to myself and the Freedom Press to enable the present edition to appear.

CHARLES DUFF

LONDON,  
January, 1948.

## A Handbook on Hanging

IT has been and still is a matter of opinion whether, if you wish to kill your undesirable, it is better to let him die quietly in a concentration camp, or flay him until he dies, or hurl him over a precipice, or burn him or drown or suffocate him; or entomb him alive and leave him to perish slowly in the silence of his grave; or asphyxiate him in a lethal chamber, or press him to death or cut off his head; or produce a sort of coma by means of an electric current and then, in the name of autopsy, permit the doctors to finish him off, as they do in certain of the United States of North America; or break his neck in strangulation by hanging as we English do. It is all a matter of taste, temperament, and fashion.

But one fact emerges: man has not grown less cruel with the passage of that illusory thing called time; though in most parts of the world he has become a far greater hypocrite than he used to be. In the Ts'in dynasty in China the heads of undesirables were expeditiously removed by a stroke of the official sword, whereas in the same country only 20 years ago men and women had their ears and strips of flesh cut off, fried, and eaten before their eyes before execution; and children were ordered to behead their parents.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the history of killing is the history of the world, and it is therefore hardly surprising to find that in nothing has man shown greater ingenuity than in inventing and perfecting methods and machines for killing his fellow man.

The present little work does not pretend to more than touch the fringe of state-killing, of which capital punishment is a less important aspect. On this smaller aspect of the bigger subject I have collected what may prove to be useful information. For my own part, having carefully turned my thoughts upon the complex problem which it presents, and maturely weighed the several schemes of governments for the dispatch of criminals, I have reached the conclusion that no people can point to a method which is more beautiful and expeditious, or which is æsthetically superior to the time-honoured British practice of breaking their necks by hanging. It may be said that there is a fascination about hanging imparting an interest to details connected with it and its heroes which the best-disposed people in the community cannot wholly gainsay.

With us the hangman is like the dog: the friend of man.

Now this is an important fact which has not yet been impressed upon the world with sufficient cogency. I do therefore propose humbly to submit such relevant information as I have been able to

<sup>1</sup> *Observer*, February 12, 1928.



collect in my leisure hours, and with it certain thoughts that have occurred to others as well as to myself: all of which being calculated towards the general advancement of mankind, cannot be liable to the least objection. This short treatise is offered to a thoughtful public, in the hope that praise may thereby be won for the common hangman; toleration he already has. After all, death is the least important event in the life of man, who is 'immortal until his work is done,' as everybody knows who reads about the casualties caused by motorists on our roads. There is an irony in life which becomes oppressive when we consider how some quite useless people live to be a hundred, while thousands of others in the prime of life are killed or mutilated by impact with those often very cheap and nearly always vulgar cars. When the great chief priest of the people of the Congo fell ill and seemed likely to die, the man who was destined to be his successor entered the pontiff's house with a rope or a club and strangled or clubbed him to death,<sup>1</sup> which shows how philosophical a race of savages could be about death. An orange-peel carelessly thrown upon the pavement may take from us a great statesman, a great poet, a great painter; or a great public nuisance. An elephant may perish by a flea-bite in the ear. On the highroads of England, '*In the midst of life we are in death*,' which truly is fortuitous in so many instances that it seems to be a matter of very small concern how or when it comes. The evidence shows that hanging is as effective as any other form, and certainly less messy and less painful and more *reasonable* than being turned into raspberry jam on the macadamized highways of civilization. Is not the hangman preferable to the incompetent, careless or drunken motorist? At all events the hangman is a close student of his work; he never leaves a job half finished, as the motorist often does.

Taking this as a basis it is possible to write calmly on the general subject of state execution. One may consider hanging from various points of view. One may, for example, treat it as one of the fine arts. One may weigh the æsthetics of hanging. One may consider it as sublime; or ridiculous. One may even take hanging as the unit of English morality. And one may delve into the history of hanging. But although it is an ancient practice, hallowed by its very antiquity, it is not my intention to write an erudite chronicle of suspension, but rather to deal with it as it is to-day and to offer suggestions for improving it generally, and thereby to increase its popularity.

Where *all* authors have failed hitherto in their treatment of hanging is that they have never for a moment considered it as a fine art. They have not considered all that goes towards making a good job of it. They have omitted to mention a thousand and one aspects of the subject of interest to the moral philosopher, and also of interest to

<sup>1</sup> Frazer's *Golden Bough*, iv, page 14.

all who are in any way concerned with hanging, from the hemp-picker who collects the raw material for making the hangman's rope to the gravedigger who prepares the secluded resting-place of the man, woman or infant who is hanged. It is my intention to attempt to remedy these grave omissions and indeed to offer a serious if brief contribution to contemporary thought on the whole subject.

Let us begin then by considering hanging as a fine art. We may almost assume that it is a fine art, and not a base mechanical trade. Is not a man an artist who can painlessly and without brutality

dispatch another man? There is a certain delicacy about the operation which needs a ready eye, a swift-working brain, cool and calculating, and a clever touch which is only to be found in the realm of the

great arts. The architect constructs a great building from a significant series of outlines; the musician constructs an entire symphony from a series of tones; but our hangman by one pull of the lever achieves far more than either. A great American critic has stated that art of the highest or finest quality involves three things. First, a reproduction of natural phenomena; second, an expression of the thoughts and emotions of the artist; and, third, an embodiment of both these features in an external product, like a symphony, a poem, a painting, a building or a statue. Or a hanging, I would add.

The hangman is, furthermore, an internationalist, in the sense that he would just as soon hang a foreigner as an Englishman, a Nordic

as a Jew, a member of the Church of England as a member of the Roman Church; or a Four-Square Gospeller. One reason for this detachment and impartiality is that he gets the same professional

fee—fifteen guineas—for breaking *any* sort of neck. He is in fact an honest working man in the fullest Marx-Engels-Leninist sense. One must confess that it is a little puzzling to know whether it would be correct to classify him under the heading 'proletarian,' for at times he has bourgeois and even aristocratic taints. So, we had better, once and for all time, simplify matters by putting him in the category of artist. Thus, we may avoid hair-splitting political arguments and, at the same time, render *some* justice to a great Civil Servant without giving the least offence to anybody.

It is, of course, true that hanging is, like scenario and script-writing for the films, an art in a class by itself. But it is one without the discords of other arts. Large numbers of people are by nature excluded from the sphere of action of the artist, and it is impossible for them to appreciate the æsthetic paradise in which the hangman lives. I confess I find some difficulty in conveying an impression of this, just as I should find difficulty, though in a lesser degree, in conveying an impression of certain of William Blake's poems. The critic

or commentator is always at a disadvantage in a description in mere words of an art in another medium. The beauty of hanging is recognized by its effects on the mind, just as the beauty of a Velasquez painting is recognized in the same way; and we must be



content to leave it at that. Benedetto Croce calls art *intuition*. Who amongst us cannot immediately recognize *by intuition* that hanging is an art, and the executioner an artist? Hanging has all the characteristics of art: conservatism, the elaboration of an instinctive mode of expression, balance, harmony in effects, rhythm, tone; and effect. Nor is it overgrown by modernist fads, fancies and 'cranky' ideas—no need to introduce into it *surréaliste* influences, Dadaism, Existentialism or what not. It works admirably without them. There is no need to labour this point unduly; though I may have to refer to it later. But here I should state that the *beaux arts* never reveal their full possibilities in a country which is not wealthy, and in which men may not devote their time in a leisurely manner to the pursuit of the beautiful. (I think Plato or Wells—or both—made this clear.) One of the chief reasons why England is supreme in hanging is because with us hanging has always been regarded rather as a spare-time employment of a cultural nature than as a utilitarian means of livelihood. Many hangmen were barbers—that is, since barber-surgeons were separated into two distinct callings. Our contemporary Hangman-in-Chief Mr. Albert Pierrepont (a descendent of the Huguenots?) keeps a public house; and a very pleasant host he is by all accounts. His favourite assistant at hangings, Mr. Harry Allenby, is also a publican. As might be expected, both have not only a sense of humour but of the fitness of things, for the name of Mr. Pierrepont's merrie hostelry is "Help the Poor Struggler" while that of Mr. Allenby is pleasantly named the "Rope and Anchor"—the word 'Anchor' being used in the symbolist sense. There is one thing which, I frankly confess, still greatly puzzles me and has so far defeated *all* my researches. I cannot quite explain why it is that so many of the hangmen of England have been and are of the Unitarian persuasion, though I have noted that most of these Unitarians show their common humanity towards the about-to-be-hanged by a last-minute assurance that "It won't hurt", sometimes varied thus: "It won't hurt a bit". Could anything be more Christian or, for that matter, more humane?

The office of hangman has never yet received its due either in praise or in rewards from the British public. It is not like the post of Public Executioner in the United States of America, where a Mr. Elliot went out to 'make his million.' In the United Kingdom there is an average of about 150 cases of murder known to the police every year. Of these only ninety are proceeded against, and in only about twenty-five are there actual convictions for murder. A mere baker's dozen of human beings is executed by us every year. It will be seen from this that, unless the emoluments of the English hangman were very high,<sup>1</sup> or at all events brought with them substantial perquisites, our public executioner could never hope merely by virtue of his office to become a rich man. Although this may be

<sup>1</sup> He is paid £15 15s. plus incidental expenses for each person he kills; the perquisites are no longer great.

in the best tradition of the Government Service, you must agree that it is deplorable. It is all the more deplorable when we compare the delicate art of the hangman with that of the 'electrocutioner' or the guillotiner, or the garotter of other countries less civilized than ourselves. What skill is required to operate a switch? What skill is required to twist a garotte? What skill is required to decapitate with the aid of an elaborate engine? I do not include in the same category as these three the German method of beheading with axe or sword. Thank Heaven there is still some art—or rather science—remaining on the Continent of Europe. The Germans used to go even further than we do in recognition of their science, for their executioner performed his ceremony in evening dress, like a violinist playing a symphony to an enraptured audience at the Wigmore Hall; or any other *virtuoso* appearing at a public function. Our hangman performs in a lounge suit; or, for all I know, in plus-fours. He certainly does not function either in evening dress or even a smoking-jacket, though in Scotland he has before now worked in kilts, and I hear that some of the moderns have taken to wearing a black coat and waistcoat and striped trousers just like many other Civil Servants. But mostly our public executioners wear a bowler hat and a dark suit like collectors of outstanding accounts, writ-servers, bailiffs (or bums as they are frequently called) and other modest personalities of our times and culture. In private life he looks just like an average man which, of course, he is *not*. This shows how casually we English treat the business.

To return to the vexed question of art. Before a man is hanged, the hangman has to assume the parts of a mathematician, a scientist, an engineer, and an expert in dynamics. Combined with these he must have the mind of a philosopher and the soul of one who practises art for art's sake. This must be so, because he is so inadequately paid that nothing but the subconscious drive which impels great artists towards their major achievements could account otherwise for his choice of this greatly under-estimated and somewhat unrespected profession. Here I would dwell for a moment upon this most delicate aspect of the hangman's calling. I mean his pay and social status.

Owing to the increased cost of living, he has not received from the public which he serves one-hundredth the consideration of which he is worthy. Art is all very well; but the artist must live. Apart altogether from the artistic side of the question, a man must be a brave man to be a hangman. I do not mean physical bravery, but moral. And I do not mean moral bravery in the sense that he need have any qualms or pangs of conscience in regard to hanging anybody; but that a great deal of moral courage is required to face the loathing, disrespect and even hatred of an ignorant and inconsiderate public. Not that there are not some people who regard him as what he truly is: a hero and an artist. Fortunately, we are not all de-



praved, and one was glad to note a recent move to treat the hangman as the image of Sublimity, with reference to the Absolute; though this is probably exaggeration.

I must not wander away from the main thread of the subject. Having measured the man to be hanged, taken his weight, examined the contours of his neck (and felt its muscles), the hangman who has a job of work on hand must next see that his apparatus is in good working order. This may appear a simple matter, but it is not really, as you will learn later. If he omits to oil his lever and bolts and also the hinges of the trap-door upon which his subject is to stand, he may easily bungle the whole thing. And this has happened. There was one man, a certain John Lee, whom they could not hang; a sort of a sport in the game who refused to succumb either to art or mechanics; either to argument or to persuasion.

John Lee is a great figure in the annals of hanging—so important that his life, like that of Nero, Joan of Arc, etc., proved interesting enough to be filmed. Alas, the film was a bad one, and omitted the most entertaining aspects of the hero's adventures (I fancy the censor cut them).

He possessed the secret, if not of eternal life, then of prolonged life. He refused to die, and it is necessary to say on behalf of the late Mr. Berry, who officiated at the long-drawn-out hanging process, that he was in every way qualified to perform the task. To judge from a perusal of his highly instructive book, Mr. Berry appeared to possess something like an ideal mental equipment for the line of work he entered upon. He had a keen eye for tone and a just appreciation of the bearing of his art upon human conduct. He had graduated in the university of wide practical experience and had all the tricks of the art at his finger tips. But the cruel fact remains.

Three times he tried to hang John Lee; and three times he failed. Unhappily, no record was kept of what Mr. Hangman Berry said or thought when he found that John Lee had bested him. It was a humiliating position for any English executioner and one can well imagine him saying the words used in Matthew xxvii. 46. Let us hope that the hangman was adequately paid for the extra work involved in this case, for there are few sadder pages in the history of the art than this tragic failure. Neither the spirit nor the flesh of the hangman was weak; though it is clear that both spirit and flesh of John Lee were strong. I take this opportunity of vindicating the honour of the great State Strangler whose services were retained for the dispatch of John Lee; and any man who imputes weakness either to the executioner or to the governor of the gaol or to the warders or to the priest of God, who was paid by a considerate Government to minister to the last spiritual needs of the man to be hanged, will certainly have to answer to me. There was an exaggeration of terseness in Mr. Berry's style, which was often a great excellence. No flaw or hitch could be discovered in the whole business. John Lee simply won the game, feet down. It has been suggested to me that

the failure to deal adequately with John Lee is a proof provided by Providence of his innocence. Maybe. I incline rather to attribute it to immunity from hanging developed by heredity in accordance with Mendel's theory; and I would also submit it as a fact tending to prove the correctness or otherwise of the Darwinian theory of evolution.

Now the chief object of this illustration is to show that hanging is an art, and not a mechanical affair. In a mechanical business such as guillotining or garotting or even electrocution, there could be no such failure; though it must be admitted that the history of electrocution is not also without its black pages. It is recognized that an art may fail by its own inherent weakness, and this is not a bad example. It is not the only case on record in which the art of hanging failed. One can still pick up in the second-hand bookshops old prints which show that, on occasion, the hangman had to climb upon the gallows and finish off his victim by jumping on his shoulders. And I have heard of cases in recent years in which the hangman had to descend into the gallows pit, seize his victim by the feet and, with a sharp and expert tug, break his neck. It is only fair to the art of hanging to mention these bunglings and miscalculations, though they must not for one moment be considered as any indication of failure of the art *as a whole*. And they must not be advanced as arguments against it. I have no doubt whatever in my own mind that John Lee could have been brought to a satisfactory end had the authorities permitted the hangman a few further attempts. I should put the limit at thirteen. After all, however artistic a hangman may be, he is human and bound to fail *sometimes*:

*To err is human, to forgive divine*

—a sentiment which, if rather old-fashioned, is not too platitudinous to be cited here.

This brings me to the qualifications of a good hangman. The case of John Lee happened within living memory and is in the nature of proof that not nearly enough care is taken in the selection of our hangmen. At present they are appointed by the old and discredited system of patronage, and it seems to be a specially 'reserved' occupation and no 'direction of labour' applies to it.

In our ordinary Civil Service patronage was abolished very many years ago. A competitive examination or choice selection now decides who shall be our important Civil Servants; and I would suggest that the competitive method apply to the office of public hangman.

That the competition would be keen<sup>1</sup> I think there is no doubt.

I submit that if a small advertisement were inserted under 'Public Appointments' in *The Times* or the *Daily Telegraph*, or even in the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, or the *Daily Herald*, the Civil Service Commissioners would be overwhelmed with applications.

<sup>1</sup> The late Mr. Berry was one of 1,400 applicants.



Imagine the thrill in Kensington and Hampstead and Mayfair on reading these words:

*A competitive examination will be held between the 1st and 14th of August next for the post of Public Hangman in England. The successful candidate will be expected to undergo two years' probation before definite appointment. Commencing salary will be at the rate of £600 os. od. per annum, plus Civil Service bonus at the current rate. Canvassing of Cabinet Ministers or Members of Parliament will disqualify. Forms of application with Birth Certificate to be sent in before the 31st May. The standard of education will be that of Pass B.A., Durham University; but a knowledge of arithmetic will be expected. The successful candidate must have a high moral character. Women may compete in this examination. Only natural-born English subjects need apply.*

If there was a rush of applicants for the post, the governing motive would not necessarily be a pathological desire for notoriety, though it might be—we have seen many examples of such a desire. But I have such faith in the patriotism of the average Englishman that I am certain there would be a shoal of applications. It would, indeed, be necessary to damp the ardour of many pathological enthusiasts; and no better way could be found than to make the examination as difficult as possible. A high standard would have to be attained in mathematics and science, as well as a keen appreciation of art and the humanities. Subtle problems could be set on the arithmetic of drops. Here is an example of the type of question I have in mind:

*You have to hang Mr. A. He is 5 ft. 10½ in. in height and weighs 12 st. 2 lb. 6 oz. 1 dwt. His neck from the Sternocleidomastoid to the Sternohyoid measures 6¾ in. The neck is strong and 17 in. in diameter. Calculate to three places of decimals the drop necessary to hang this man thoroughly, without risk of giving pain to onlookers. Also give the diameter and quality of the rope you would employ, in terms of pounds avoirdupois of strain.*

It is essential that a hangman should be a person of wide culture and sympathies. He ought to be able to take his place in any grade of society, and above all things he should not be too class-conscious. He ought to be capable of being the guide, philosopher and friend of whomsoever he must hang for us. He ought to have 'personality' in the stage sense of the word; be able to 'put it across.' It is difficult to say what a hangman ought not to be, except callous. That would be unpardonable and intolerable from the point of view of the British public, H.M. Government, the Christian religion and our daily and sabbath press. He ought also to have a good working knowledge of anatomy; and a little psychology would do no harm. There is no reason why one human neck should not be as regular as another, but experience has shown that no two are the same; and hence hangmen must move cautiously. Mostly he is

¶ Charming  
Personality of  
Hangmen

a person of great discretion and charm whose art produces a unique and delightful personality. He ought to have a good practical knowledge of railway travelling so that he could, without loss of time, keep his appointments in different parts of the Kingdom. At a pinch the public hangman ought to be able to drive a motor-car or fly an aeroplane, ride a horse or bicycle; and be a good after-dinner speaker, like Joad. All these things would add to the dignity of his office and overcome the ostracism to which it has so unworthily been subjected in the past. Is not the executioner a conceptualist? The Home Office ought to (and does, I think) provide him with a full printed List of Instructions for the performance of his difficult task; and there should always be at least two understudies, fully qualified, and not less than six probationers (*Henkersknechte*), to assist him.

Another idea which occurred to me was that a uniform should be devised for the public hangman in England, as for certain other branches of the King's services: the Army, Navy and Air Force, for example, which are employed for the killing or maiming of the King's foreign enemies in time of war. In time the public  
¶ A Uniform for Hangmen would grow to love and respect the uniform of the hangman, just as they now love and respect the uniform of other persons in His Majesty's employment. Are not the London Police regarded as marvellous and is not their uniform highly esteemed? Who does not adore the bright trappings of the Guards or indeed of the gentlemen who stand outside our picture palaces or great hotels? Women would soon learn to 'fall for' the public executioner, who would become as much sought after as a film star. It has indeed been a very complete mystery to me and to my friends why no uniform has been given to so exalted a personage as the hangman—especially when one considers all that is meant by the word uniform.

This brings me to a matter which may as well be dealt with, before proceeding further. I have often thought that it is a disgrace to our whole system of justice that the judgment in a famous libel case (quoted by the *Law Journal* of August 28, 1926) has not been reversed. The facts of the case were somewhat as follows: On the night before an execution at Norwich, a respectable citizen got out at an hotel. So ultra-respectable was this gentleman in appearance that the bystanders took him for His Majesty's hangman. An onlooker cried aloud in joy, 'You are ——' and mentioned the hangman's name.

'Not I,' replied the respectable citizen.

'Yes, you are,' persisted the ordinary citizen, and with that the mob, either incensed by the respectable citizen's cheeky attitude or feeling in a mood for a lark, threw the respectable citizen into a duckpond.

The victim of this outrage decided in his own mind  
¶ Famous Libel Case Quoted that the man who first took him for the public hangman was responsible. He consulted a lawyer and sued the originator for the assault for damages for slander. There was no doubt of the special damage; but the defence



pleaded by way of demurrer that the allegation could not possibly be defamatory.

*'The executioner,' said the defence, 'is a public official, necessary to the security of the State, and it is no more a libel to describe a man as an executioner than to say that he is a judge.'*

Now this case, like all cases, was tried by a judge, and a judge like every other human being upon this earth has his own private virtues, failings, prejudices, animosities, likes and dislikes, loves, hates, emotions, and so forth. Few indeed are the judges who can, at a moment's notice, suppress their entire personality and become a sort of abstract automaton capable of pouring out judgments that are entirely without bias and without prejudices. For some reason (which I fail to explain) the judge in this particular case rejected the contention of the defence and held that the charge of being a hangman was calculated to bring its victim into hatred, ridicule and contempt, and therefore—if not in fact justified as true—was undoubtedly actionable as defamation.

Thus, it is an extraordinary truth that a Court of Law in Great Britain has badly 'let down' one of its most important and praiseworthy auxiliaries. What was really wrong about this case was the entire *mentality* of the Court. I live in hopes that this Handbook will go a long way towards a clarification, a purification and a general rectification of such mental *malaise*. The defence might have been, on the other hand, a little more subtle. They could have said, for instance, that instead of it being a libel to call a respectable citizen the public hangman, it was rather a libel upon the hangman to confuse his appearance with that of a respectable citizen. The epithet 'respectable citizen' is *not nearly good enough* for so important a personage. It is as though one had called the late Lord Curzon a 'respectable citizen' when the world acknowledges that he was much more. This erroneous judgment must be reversed, though our present hangmen are so modest and retiring by nature that the occurrence of an occasion to justify bringing a case into Court is remote. At the same time, it must be admitted, there remains the feeling that every error has its element of truth; and in this case the Court of Law may have been right.

Let us now consider for a moment the ceremony of hanging, and if possible put forward suggestions for the improvements that could easily be made in it. Never has fortune favoured me to witness a well-ordered hanging; though out late Mr. Ellis performed it rather delicately in a play at Gravesend and in a private booth on the sands of Yarmouth where, for the modest expenditure of sixpence, one could see how well he worked. Incidentally, he was a great admirer of this modest treatise on his art, though there are parts of it which did not meet with his whole-hearted approval. But that is by the way.

A prisoner who is condemned to death is 'received' by the Governor of the gaol in which the hanging ceremony is to be performed. The warders have instructions to give the convicted man

special attention, and special nutriment. Every effort is made by the Chief Warder and his associates to make the unfortunate man happy. Sometimes they succeed; mostly they do not. However, I am not greatly concerned with the condemned man, but rather with the system, for it is the system that can be improved. The death of an individual is a trifle when we think of war and the general slaughter and butchery that is synonymous. When we think of the atomic, bacterial, etc., war that may come, what is the death of even the most important individual? And cannot death itself, even death by execution, be made and frequently is made into an admirable thing? I need say no more on this aspect of the subject but to remark (with many eminent living theologians and divines) that Christianity itself might not have taken its great hold upon the imagination of the world if Christ had not been summarily executed. Now let us return to the prison and the condemned man. A hangman is commissioned. One day he arrives bag in hand with the tools and equipment of his great art. He visits the prisoner, passes the time of day, looks him over with a skilled all-seeing eye, measures him, weighs him, examines his neck and makes a mental note of its strength, presumably looks at the prisoner's tongue, and having asked him to say 'ninety-nine,' enters it all in a notebook specially kept for the purpose. Bidding the prisoner *au revoir*, he sometimes (as the late Mr. Berry used to do) handed him a religious tract, or a few lines of 'verse' specially composed by himself to meet the circumstances of the case. This is no longer permissible. Who knows what the nation loses by the unjust suppression of the poetic impulse in our hangmen? I intend some day to take up this question with the Poet Laureate. And it has been called 'atrocious'! Having studied his notes (and worked out the correct drop) he is ready to hang the prisoner as soon

¶ **No Ill-will in** as they wish. No trouble about that. The *St. James's Gazette* provided a simple description of what happens on the morning of an execution, as recounted by an eyewitness.

Calcraft was the executioner. He took the business businesslike, and pinioned his man in his cell (with a terror-stricken half-dozen looking on) as calmly to all appearances as if he had been a tailor fitting on a coat.<sup>1</sup> The chaplain read the Burial Service, or such portions of it as are reserved for these occasions, in a thick and indistinct voice. (He may have taken something to sustain his courage during the proceedings.—Ed.) The doomed man gabbled a prayer under his breath at galloping speed, the words tumbling over one another: "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, and receive my spirit." The hapless chaplain read the service. Calcraft bustled ahead. The bell boomed. Hughes (*i.e.*, the prisoner) came to the foot of the gallows, and I counted mechanically nineteen black steps, fresh tarred and sticky. A genial warder clapped him on the shoulder, for all the world as if there had been no mischief in the business. Judging

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Calcraft was an artist of bold execution and acute reflection. He has joined the immortals.



by look and accent, the one man might have invited the other to mount the stairs of a restaurant. 'You'll get up all right,' said the warder.

He got up; and they hanged him.

So that's that, was the attitude of all.

This is a plain account, unvarnished and without the ornamentation which a sentimental writer like myself might be tempted to add. It was a straightforward job, artistically and compactly carried out to the satisfaction of Her Majesty the Queen and all members of the Royal Family. To the entire satisfaction of the members of both Houses of Parliament; of the Archbishop of Canterbury, chief representative of our official religion; and last, but not least, it was carried out to the satisfaction of the whole British public, excepting a few cranks and faddists who, almost from time immemorial, have uttered querulous protests against this extremely important aspect of public policy.

Mr. Hangman Berry, whose name is already familiar to the reader, amused his old age by writing a most delightful book called *My Experiences as an Executioner*. It is a great classic, and I shall have to refer to it again and again—perhaps one day I shall bring out a new edition, with variorum notes. I mention it here because he tells of one case of his, the hanging of a man called Goodale, at which the prisoner's head was jerked right off the body. There was something wrong somewhere, and of a hangman so great as Mr. Berry<sup>1</sup> I should not have believed this story had he not very honestly related it in cold print. Possibly he did not observe the unities; even Shakespeare neglected them at times. You will remember that it was Mr. Berry who tried three times to hang John Lee. One hour and eleven minutes were taken to hang Antonio Sprecage in Canada, 1919. These are very sad incidents in the history of the art, but they will never recur if my recommendations are accepted by the Government. In 1927 the *British Medical Journal* published another account of an ex-colonial surgeon of a botched hanging. He stated that he had to witness the execution of four coloured gentlemen. The executioner was in a hurry that day to keep another appointment, and decided to hang these four men in pairs. It must be admitted that in the case I will now cite there was a certain lack of balance on the part of the hangman. The highest beauty results from harmony in effects; and one cannot say that in this case the combination of thoughts and feelings was harmonious. I shall give the good surgeon's own words:

*'When the first pair were hanged it was my duty to determine the fact of death. As a general rule, on auscultation the heart may be heard beating for about ten minutes after the drop, and on this occasion, when the sounds had ceased, there was nothing to suggest a vital spark. The bodies were cut down after fifteen minutes and placed in an ante-chamber, when I was horrified to hear one of the supposed corpses give a gasp and find him making spasmodic respiratory efforts, evidently a prelude to revival. The two bodies*

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Berry's apologia, pages

*were quickly suspended again for a quarter of an hour longer. The executioner, who was thoroughly experienced, had done his part without a hitch, and the drop given was the regulation one according to individual physique. Dislocation of the neck is the ideal aimed at, but, out of all my postmortem findings, that has proved rather an exception, while in the majority of instances the cause of death was strangulation and asphyxia.'* Note the words I have emphasized.

Now it will be acknowledged that this sort of muddle and bungling, for it was nothing else, plays havoc with the æsthetics of hanging; and puts it on a level with crude execution in the cannibal islands. In saying this I may be libelling the cannibalistic executioner, who is often a priest of religion, and no doubt a most conscientious man on such occasions. But I should like to make it clear on behalf of the sheriffs of England, of prison governors and, above all, of our present generation of hangmen, that there is no great likelihood of their making such a mess of things. I say no great likelihood, though it must not be ruled out as an utter impossibility: I have already drawn attention to the haphazard system now in force of appointing hangmen, and there is no guarantee whatever (as there might be after appointment by open competition and examination in the manner I have already suggested) that the hangmen are *in every way* qualified for their task. It should be noted that, in accordance with instructions

issued by our Home Office to prison governors in regard to what they may say at inquests on men that are hanged, the rule is that death is always *almost instantaneous*. Caution demands the word 'almost.' **Official Secrets** Mark you, a governor is forbidden to time an execution. He must not have a stop-watch in his hand whilst it happens. Should an *inquisitive* coroner or coroner's juryman press for details of how the hangman has done his work, *the governor must hedge*. In accordance with the explicit instructions he must say, 'a very short interval elapsed, or some general expression of opinion to the same effect.'<sup>1</sup> There is no logical reason to quibble about this because the judicial sentence is: 'To be hanged by the neck *until dead*'—and therefore an hour or so one way or the other does not really matter, so far as the law of the land is concerned. After the drop, the body is left hanging for at least half an hour, which nearly always suffices to complete the killing.

In the interests, not of Justice but of that equally important thing the hangman's art, it is difficult for any of us who have this at heart to sympathize with official suppression of useful information. In the United States of America the whole business would be made clear in a closely reasoned report, with interesting tables of comparative statistics as an appendix. We must all do our utmost to erase, from the otherwise clean record of capital punishment in England, such regulations as this, for they tend to keep from the

<sup>1</sup> Home Office instructions to Prison Governors, read at the Old Bailey, December 15, 1926.



columns of the daily press, and therefore from public discussion or even scientific inquiry, vital information regarding the act of hanging. Social progress is hindered, the path of science and art is obstructed; and prison governors are placed in a false and, some would say, utterly dishonest position. A verdict is recorded; an apathetic public looks on, and the world jogs along somehow. That great institution, the Coroner's Court, is placed under an official anæsthetic, and the inquest is an insult to the dead body, to the jury, and to the solid commonsense of the English. When shall we have a jury that will stand upon its undoubted rights and *demand evidence* from governors and witnesses? Otherwise let us completely abolish inquests on executed felons, and thus clear our minds of cant.

In the good old days of public execution—in the heyday of hangmen—the public was able to judge for itself. The deliberate official suppression of details is wrong from another point of view. In the first instance, if execution is intended to frighten us potential criminals into virtue—and that is its avowed object—why is it not done publicly as in France? Secondly, why, if it *must* be done behind closed doors, is there not at least a properly equipped press gallery, with desks, telephonic facilities and so forth at the disposal of newspaper reporters? Again we must look to the excellent example of the United States. At the execution of a Mr. Grey and a lady known to posterity as the 'Iron Widow,' there was not sufficient accommodation in the death-house for the gentlemen of the press. The authorities did the only thing that was fair in the circumstances—they admitted the press *in relays*. One enterprising journalist even took a photograph of the lady in her death-throes, sitting in the 'chair.' Knowing how interested the American public is in such matters, the editor of a New York daily gave it full page reproduction. Copies of the newspaper were, as might be expected, greedily snapped up. Very soon the whole edition was sold out and the newsboys were clamouring for additional copies. The sales were a record for the sales of any newspaper in the whole of the United States. This picture has been eagerly sought by connoisseurs; often it is catalogued under *Facetiae* in the lists of secondhand booksellers. There is something touching about all this which makes one feel how much we are losing in our country, not to mention the purely financial losses to those distinguished peers of this realm and others in the newspaper business who are ever willing to provide us with the kind of news we like best. It is a public scandal. I may add, by the way, that after this execution, Mr. Robert Elliot, the 'electrocutioner,' had to take to his bed. It is not quite certain whether his indisposition was caused by killing overwork or by nervous exhaustion as a result of being over-interviewed by enthusiastic and sympathetic admirers, like royalty after a day of hand-shaking. This is a thing which we English must guard our hangmen against. Nobody fully realizes how exhausting interviewing can be to the one who is interviewed. We should therefore see that our hangmen are provided with a well-trained

Public Relations Officer, who would not only relieve them of much tedium, but would see that the right sort of material, whether 'human interest,' anecdotal, informative or straight propaganda was issued to the press. Take, for example, the efficiency of the publicity given to the electrocution of Mrs. Creighton, romantically called 'New York's Borgia Killer,' in July 1936. Cables were hot conveying to the four points of the compass the news that, for three days before her execution in Sing-Sing, she had been so paralysed with fear that she was 'unable even to feel needles thrust into her body and was unconscious when lifted from a bath-chair into the electric chair.' Sing-Sing certainly must have an excellent publicity service—not much happens in it that Americans don't read in their fine morning papers. Do not think for a moment that this pamphlet is a subtle piece of American or other propaganda; or an attempt to advocate American methods. But let honour be given where it is due, and let us also recognize that we are not respected for our hole-and-corner hangings.

In spite of the obstacles placed in their way by a grandmotherly Home Office, it must be admitted that our newspapers are not entirely bereft of the spirit of enterprise; did space but permit I could quote many *excellent* morsels of news published in recent years. This is all to the good of hanging, but it must be confessed that with a proper provision of press facilities, there is no reason why the great art should not be relieved of the gloom of darkness which now surrounds it; and in the course of time even become a deterrent to murder. Personally, I see no reason why the more important hangings should not be broadcast by wireless, just as a great fight is broadcast in America; or a Cup-final at Wembley with us. The crack like a muffled shot of a small pistol which indicates the official breaking of the criminal's neck ought to be broadcast; when the neck is not broken, listeners would hear the 'squelch'<sup>1</sup> of strangulation—which would give equal satisfaction to many. Ex-hangmen could be employed by the British Broadcasting Corporation to provide colour and background to the details and noises transmitted through the ether. They might even be commissioned to give us an occasional twenty minutes' talk on so intensely interesting a subject. This would be a remunerative little side-line which, added to fugitive appearances on the legitimate stage, to interviews on occasions when somebody is about to be or has been hanged, to the writing of *Memoirs* for the more religiously-minded of our Sunday newspapers, and to the reviewing of books such as this, would fully occupy the retirement of our public executioners; and give them that meed of life in their old age which their gallant self-sacrifice rules out whilst they are holding office. As one who has the interests of hanging greatly at heart, I devoutly pray that the day is not far distant when the cinematograph, television, the phonofilm and other ingenious inventions of this enlightened age in which we live, will be pressed into the service of the public to bring home to Mr. Everyman a just appreciation of the

<sup>1</sup> A scientific friend points out that 'squelch' should read 'dull plonk'.



nobility of the hangman's art. How instructive it would be to see a good British hanging film inspired by J. Arthur Rank, produced by Sir Alexander Korda, and, best for this purpose, directed by my friend Fritz Lang, with scenario by Mr. Winston Churchill, script by Pat Kirwin, Phil Lindsay, myself and Leo Lania, additional dialogue by T. S. Eliot, O.M., further additional dialogue by Mr. Priestley, still further supplementary additional dialogue by George Bernard Shaw, with hanging details by a Pierrepont and if possible supervised by a Home Office official. We deserve a soulful and imaginatively spectacular film of an English hanging in this year of Our Lord. By sending out to the world a work of epic grandeur dealing with capital punishment as it is ordered and inflicted here, we could show those backward countries where it has been abolished how truly backward they are. A great missionary work could thus be achieved, and we should gain for our Exchequer a vast quantity of dollars. I trust that some enlightened and influential person will put it up to Sir Stafford Cripps. As the subject illustrates the English way of death, it is one for the British Council.

### CAPITAL PUNISHMENT ABOLISHED!

By this Year of Grace 1948, capital punishment has been abolished in the following countries:

**EUROPE:** Denmark, Finland, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Roumania, Sweden, Switzerland, the Soviet Union. In Belgium and the Channel Islands, the penalty of death has not been applied for 80 years.

**AMERICA:** States of Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Rhode Island and Wisconsin in U.S.A.

Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

**ELSEWHERE:** New Zealand, Queensland (Australia), Travancore (India).

Students of capital punishment—and all who think about such things—often ask this question: What happens after the abolition of the death penalty? And perhaps this one also: How does the position *after* abolition compare with that *before*? These are highly important questions and, although it may offend those of my friends who favour the retention of hanging in this our England, I deem it necessary in the interests of British fair play to make known the awful truth: **There is no increase in the number of murders after abolition.** Here, for the contemplation of all, I must provide a summary of the position in those countries for which the information is available, and I would add that the facts disclosed are being used and no doubt will be used by those misguided citizens of our island who advocate abolition. Here is this most dangerous statistical information, which, I trust, will not be misused:

### STATISTICAL INFORMATION

**HOLLAND.** Death penalty abolished 1870. Rate per 100,000  
Murder rate for 20 years before abolition .095  
Murder rate for 20 years after abolition .093  
Murder rate for 10 pre-war years 1931-1940. .057

**DENMARK.** Death penalty abolished 1930.  
Murder rate for period before abolition 1901-1930. .040  
Murder rate for period 1931-1940. .023

**NORWAY.** Last execution 1875. Death penalty abolished 1905.  
Murder rate before total abolition 1875-1904 .122  
Murder rate after abolition 1905-1924 .060  
Murder rate for 10 pre-war years 1930-1939 .036  
(The last figure includes also manslaughter)

**SWEDEN.** Death penalty abolished 1921.  
Murder rate 15 years before abolition 1906-1920 .049  
Murder rate 15 years after abolition 1921-1935 .058

**SWITZERLAND.** Death penalty abolished in 1942.  
Murder rate in three years before abolition .237  
Murder rate in three years after abolition .163

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Homicide rates for ten years 1931-1940 in the six States which have abolished the death penalty:—

Maine	1.70 per 100,000	Michigan	4.35 per 100,000
Minnesota	2.35 per 100,000	North Dakota	1.75 per 100,000
Rhode Island	1.65 per 100,000	Wisconsin	2.05 per 100,000

Average for the six abolitionist States for the 10 years: 2.3

Average for the whole of United States for the ten years: 8.1.

But NOTE: the percentage of murders cleared up by conviction in the six abolitionist states in five years period was 75.2, whereas for the whole of the U.S.A. only 63% of murders were so cleared.

### ENGLAND AND WALES per 100,000

Murder rate for the period 1900-1919	.435
Murder rate for the period 1920-1929	.380
Murder rate for the period 1930-1939	.320
Murder rate for the period 1940-1945	.414

Summary of murders in England and Wales 1936-1945.

Total known to the Police 1520.

Murderers committed suicide in 380 cases, accounting for about 480 victims.

Persons brought to trial, 609 (40% of total cases).

Insane or guilty but insane, 265.

Acquitted, 95.

Sentenced to Death, 223 (14.7% of total cases).

Executed, 113 (7.4% of total cases).



In fairness to the reader it should be stated that the example of U.S.A. teaches the world little that is useful in regard to the abolition of the death penalty. Crime is steadily on the increase there, mainly because of the American moral code, which teaches that acquisitiveness and greed are the greatest desiderata in life. Money is held to be above all else; and, hence, men will do anything for it. The thief will commit murder for it, and, with its aid, he is almost certain to go his way unmolested. The 'apprehension' of a murderer is regarded in the same light as a thunderbolt or an earthquake would be by us—namely, as an 'Act of God.' But in regard to *all* countries and States mentioned above, one solid truth emerges. *The abolition of the death penalty has not been followed by an increase in homicides.* Nor did the social order depart, disintegrate, rot or even shake with the departure from these States of what those who believe in State Killing must regard as its keystone: the scaffold. But do not for a moment suppose that this is to be used by the English public as a powerful argument *against* hanging. Not at all. The misguided peoples who no longer hang criminals little know what they miss; and we really ought to do something to show them the error of their ways. It may even be argued that these black tracts of the earth's surface where the great salutary institution of the death penalty has been repealed by law, or left to grow mouldy with disuse, should be the object of a grand crusade. It would not be an easy crusade, because I fear that the only allies which England could find really in favour of hanging would be in our Empire, in parts of Central Europe, and in certain equally high-minded States in the American Union. From this the reader may conclude that hanging is now almost entirely an English practice. It is *essentially* English, in that it contains a sporting element which I have already illustrated by quoting the case of John Lee.

When we look at this question in the cold light of reason, is it not disgraceful that the directly civilizing and humanizing influence of hanging should be limited to the sheriffs of England, the prison officials and the clergy—men who do not really require it. Public imagination in England is so limited that it does not reap the full benefit of hangings. This defect, coupled with the official strangulation at birth of all information on the subject, causes hanging to be an almost useless institution, when it should be salutary. The present hole-and-corner method of execution in England must be abolished. Every good judge will agree with the logic of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, who, in reply to Mr. Josiah Oldfield's written question: 'Do you suggest any alternative for hanging a murderer in semi-secrecy?' wrote: '*I should hang him publicly.*'

With regard to the actual hanging process, this should be made extremely impressive if executions were held in public. To do full justice to the ceremony, it would be necessary to employ a good impresario, and then the State could reap considerable financial benefits

from public executions (to the financial and economic aspects of the question I shall return later). There are around London many admirable open spaces suitable for the execution of criminals. Shambles could be appointed in convenient parts of the Metropolis, say in Hyde Park, Regent's Park, Trafalgar Square, and on the Horse Guards Parade for the special convenience of Members of the Cabinet and their families, who from rooms in No. 10 Downing Street, the Foreign Office, the Treasury, etc., would be provided with a good view and be able to contemplate the hangman at work in reality and not in imagination. Binoculars would bring it all closer. Spectators would realize that the hangman's work is not all beer and skittles, and they would see their representative as a very worthy being, a great patriot, and a man of true virtue, acting in their name and fulfilling an unpleasant task in an estimable manner. They do not at present fully realize the virtue and quality of his act.

The massed bands of the Brigade of Guards could discourse sweet music, and a high Church dignitary, or his deputy on less important occasions, could preach a sermon based upon the text:—'*An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth,*' or they could vary this with:—'*Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man.*' Here I might interject that, although it is not generally publicized, both the hangman and the criminal are also made in the image of God. The pipers of the Scots Guards could no doubt add to the sermon a suitable lament, for the benefit of the assembled populace. There could not possibly be music more suitable than bagpipes for a hanging. The Prime Minister would be able to watch the hangman put the finishing touches to his victim, see him pause to glance to see that all is ready; the pull of the lever, the sudden fall, the crack of doom and the last paroxysms of the body. The jury who found the prisoner guilty could afterwards file up to shake hands with the executioner; and congratulate him upon his proficiency. A special gallery conveniently situated should be provided for the British Medical Association, and the Council should be present with stop-watches. As a final wind-up, the Archbishop of Canterbury or his deputy should say the Lord's Prayer emphasizing the words: '*Thy Will be do on earth as it is in Heaven.*' By way of further variety, an eminent official theologian of the modernist brand should make a speech showing that Christ was mistaken in His whole idea of redemption; that the Sermon on the Mount does not stand the test of higher criticism; or anything equally relevant that comes into his head.

The British public scarcely realizes that this is one of the most law-abiding countries in the world, mainly because bygone generations of Englishmen have insisted upon hanging the malefactor. Not very long ago hanging was extremely popular. A hundred years ago there were about 200 offences for which a man, woman or child could be hanged. In the year 1832 it was abolished for stealing horses, sheep



¶ Decline in Hanging

or cattle. In 1834 for 'returning too soon from transportation.' In 1835 for house-breaking, forgery and inflicting bodily harm dangerous to life with intent to murder. In 1841 for abusing children under ten years of age. In 1861 for arson of dwelling-houses. Sir Robert Peel was one of those execrable men who have been responsible for this steady fall in popularity of the death penalty. Indeed, there are at present only four crimes in the English criminal law which are punishable with death: High Treason; Murder; Piracy with violence; Incendiarism in dockyards. Three of these crimes are practically obsolete, and so there is really only murder for which punishment of death is inflicted. If further restrictions are placed upon the practice of the art, we shall soon not know how to hang pork, or even pictures.

This decline in popularity of hanging has been ascribed to 'advances' in our civilization and social conditions generally. If we are to believe such trustworthy historians as Mr. Belloc and the late Mr. Chesterton, we have not really progressed; and it would be an admirable thing for us to return to the rich, God-fearing and spacious conditions of the Middle Ages. Every hangman will agree with this. But the question is: Is the decline in hanging due to decadence or to progress? That is a difficult question to answer, but, as there are so many signs around us of decadence, and few of progress, it is convenient for us to attribute it to decadence. We may assume it to be decadence. One thing is certain: it is bad financially and morally for our hangmen. They have little practice nowadays in their art (more's the pity) and the sooner our legislators draw up a supplementary list of offences punishable by death the better it will be for our public safety and ultimate salvation. It would not be difficult to suggest such a list, and I do not propose to waste valuable space on it, however useful it might prove to the right kind of government. But there is one offence which must not be overlooked: the causing of mental anguish in any form to one's fellow man or woman. There ought to be a very simple code with the death penalty as a punishment

¶ Increase in Law; Decrease in Virtue

for all sorts of offences that are now either completely ignored or very lightly treated by law. Highly complex law such as that which existed in Greece in the time of Solon, in Rome in the time of Justinian, and in England since the time of Birkenhead is indicative of decadence—though neither Greece nor Rome had laws comparable in sheer stupidity with our licensing and divorce laws. We have been frightened into law-abidingness without a corresponding increase in virtue. Virtue, true virtue, has suffered at the expense of a complex legal formalism. Women in this twentieth century have grown cold, calculating and hard; in the happy Middle Ages they were frequently boiled 'to soften their nature.' It is, however, a matter of great contentment to all who have hanging seriously at heart that, after a sad lapse of seventeen years in England, there was a return to the practice of hanging women for the capital offence. Canada also (in May of 1924), after a lapse of twenty-four

years, reintroduced the same practice. Thus the horizon of hanging is not without its bright spots, and, in spite of a very considerable movement for its abolition (by a class of person described as 'Humanitarian'), we may yet see some future development in the art. We can afford to thumb noses at all 'Humane Education' societies in this age of atomic bombs and other products of a humanist science.

I often wonder if these abolitionists fully realize what they are up to, and that in this commercial and financial age they are endangering the bank balances of a whole host of people who are directly interested in hanging from a purely material point of view. Hangmen would be ruined by the success of their highly sentimentalized movement. Hemp-pickers, rope-manufacturers, carpenters, painters, bolt-makers, the makers of eyelets for the hangman's rope, printers who print the Book of Common Prayer used for the Burial Service of condemned men, lime merchants who provide the lime in which hanged convicts are often buried, and a host of others too numerous to mention would suffer severe financial losses if hanging were abolished in this realm. It is necessary to emphasize this grave commercial danger, and I trust sincerely that Bankers' Bulletins, Trade Journals and other publica-

¶ Vested Interests in Hanging

tions read by the commercial world will give it technical consideration; they are much more competent to do so than the present modest compiler. I have already discussed this aspect of the question with an eminent banker who is also interested in the daily press; he immediately saw the point. He promised me that reviews of this book will be entirely favourable in all the newspapers he helps to control—and because of this commercial danger. He entirely agreed with me that, apart from finance, hanging is necessary on moral grounds; and he epigrammatized the whole question by saying '*An irrevocable injury requires an irrevocable punishment.*'<sup>1</sup> Thus his conscience justified his action with the newspapers. The preachings of humanitarianism, like those of Christianity, tend to cloud the public reason; and there is a great danger that a sentimental government consisting of so-called humane men may be tempted to give way before the clamour of the mob in favour of abolishing capital punishment. The great British public was reassured by a statement made by the Home Secretary on the occasion of a gigantic petition for mercy for a condemned man. According to *The Times* report, the then Home Secretary<sup>2</sup>

*wanted to speak carefully, not too strongly, but sufficiently strongly to explain to the people of England that no Secretary of State worthy of his name could permit himself to be influenced in a matter of that kind by public clamour. Mob mercy was as bad as mob execution. We had heard of lynch-law in some parts of the world, and we considered it the most serious thing that could pos-*

<sup>1</sup> Or, in terms of mathematics:  $1 + 1 = 0$ .

<sup>2</sup> Mr. (afterwards Sir) Joynson Hicks and then Lord Brentford—familiarily known as Jix.



a grave reflexion on the hangman.

Hansard gives also the case of a criminal called Connor. Another bad or, as enemies of the hangman say, bungled job. In this case the rope slipped. Connor turned to the hangman and, before the second attempt was begun, he asked with characteristic Irish impertinence: 'What do you call this? Murder?'

¶ Fun for the Hangman

Alas! Poor misguided Connor! Did he not see that it was merely one of those slight miscalculations common to all spheres of life? Then there was the case of Johnson, hanged by the late Mr. Hangman Askern at Leeds. The rope broke. The contractors who supplied this rope were doubtless to blame; and it would be unjust to attribute the fault, if any, to the hangman. The public are far too quick to blame the unfortunate hangman who, in most cases, does his work conscientiously, and on occasion is even complimented by the condemned man, before the final drop is taken. This happened of a man called Rowles, at Oxford; which even so late as 1878 was a focus point of *Literæ Humaniores*. The influence of humane letters was distinctly felt on this occasion: the criminal extolled his own death, and actually kissed the rope. At the trial the jury had strongly recommended him to mercy, saying that he had been 'tempted by the devil,' which no doubt he was. He was duly hanged in the best Oxford manner.

It is not very long ago since it was alleged in Parliament that pregnant women were carefully nursed in prison until the time when, after having given birth to a child . . . they could be handed over to the hangman. We now live in a more sentimental

¶ Always Hang Women

age, and, although this is still permissible by law, it simply is not done. It will be obvious even to the most innocent reader that, not to hang pregnant women may be one way of encouraging sexual misconduct as a means to escape the gallows. Is it not ridiculous and immoral that a woman who has committed murder should escape the death penalty by amusing herself with the first man she meets? There is on record the case of a pregnant woman who procured an abortion, and after that event was arrested on a murder charge. She was found guilty and duly hanged; had she not procured the abortion, she would be alive to-day. All this must be changed. If a woman is found guilty of murder she must be hanged, pregnant or not pregnant, abortion or no abortion—and there's an end to it. As I have hinted before, we must away with sentiment.

Here I should like to display my erudition on a point not irrelevant to what may be termed the 'Inhibitions' of hanging. In the third book of his *Essays*, Montaigne (although he refers somewhat slightly to the office of executioner) opens up a new vista for hangmen in the story he relates of the daughter of Sejanus who could not (by a certain provision of Roman Law) be punished with death, because she was a virgin. In order to allow the law to take its course, she was violated by the hangman before being strangled. Montaigne

comments:—

'Not only his hand, but his soul is a slave to public convenience.'

He then refers to the hangman as worse off than the hanged; some would not believe him in regard to this. It depends on the type of woman. The sentimentalist is the curse of all good causes and when we consider this question of hanging, he enters into it like the crank who favours nature healing as against surgical operations.

Although we do not now keep women in prison until they have given birth to a child, and then calmly turn them over to the hangman, it is interesting and educative for us to contemplate what happens to an accused man who in an affray has committed a murder and has not done it without damage to his own person. Such a man is nursed back to good health and condition with all the tenderness which a benevolent government can place at his disposal, in order that he may be hale and hearty for the drop. I shall state an imaginary case to illustrate my point. One day it may be used as a contribution to a certain magazine, to which I shall refer later.

This romance (let us imagine) happened in a butcher's shop, and may be worthy of mention as an example of the elevation to which

¶ Romance in a Butcher's Shop

human sublimity can rise. The facts are simple—idyllic in their simplicity—and I think not without a touch of poetry. The *dramatis personæ* were a butcher, his assistant, and the butcher's wife. The butcher is a kindly, good-natured man, and his wife equally pleasant. But let us continue in the past tense: she was much younger than he; and the customers all spoke well of her sweet smile and generous nature. These significant facts were not lost upon the assistant, who was somewhat of a lady-killer, metaphorically speaking. He began to cast sheep's eyes (metaphorically) at the handsome wife of his employer; and his amorous advances were not unwelcome. The situation is not without parallel. A triangle—an isosceles triangle—was formed, in which the base was the wife and the sides were the butcher and his assistant.

One morning, in Spring, when a young man's heart turns to love, a middle-aged man's to jealousy, and an old man's to regrets, the butcher caught his assistant in the cash-desk discussing the quality of mutton with his wife. Looking about the shop for some suitable

¶ A Hypothetical Murder

tool with which to punish the young man's presumption, the butcher picked up a meat chopper, made of good Sheffield steel. He swung it dexterously, as indeed might be expected, but the assistant quite intelligently observed what was happening, and dodged cleverly. He received the mere edge of the blow, so to speak, upon his occiput. Stung to action, he drew from his belt a long, sharp knife with which he had been accustomed to slice chops, liver and steaks; and, without a moment's hesitation, he drew it cleanly across the butcher's throat. The butcher withdrew to collect his breath.

Meanwhile the wife constituted herself a referee.



A few moments later the butcher recovered and prepared to resume the fight. Raising the chopper above his head, he steadied himself, balancing upon the flat of his feet, and took scientific aim at his assistant's head. He brought the chopper down with such force and accuracy of aim that he thought the combat was over. But the assistant, by a supreme effort of will, got up and drew his knife (this

¶ End of a  
Dream

time transversely) across the jugular vein of his opponent. Both men fell to the ground, and the butcher's wife called time in a loud voice. The assistant was silent for ever. He died fighting for his love, in memorable combat. To pass over quickly the pulsating romance of this story, and to come to that part of it which bears directly upon the subject of the present treatise, the butcher is 'apprehended' for his 'altercation.' He is duly charged with murder; they place him in the ward of a prison hospital and he is given the best treatment of which modern medical science is capable. In time, his neck heals and, by the Grace of God, he fully recovers his health and spirits. He becomes *mens sana in corpore sano*, and ready for trial. During his sojourn in hospital he is given attention other than medical. A full statement, amounting to a confession, is taken by the authorities. Upon this, the man is condemned to death. And they hang him.

Now, although I am not in favour of helping the escape of anybody who ought to help swell the hangman's exchequer, I am of the opinion that this sort of thing (for although the case is hypothetical, it is just what might easily occur) illustrates a certain falling off in the sporting instincts of the English nation. Had such an incident occurred five or six hundred years ago, the butcher, instead of being treated as a felon, would have become a popular hero. Furthermore, the fact that he had survived a mighty combat would be accepted as proof, not merely of the justice of his cause, but of his innocence of any evil intent. Now we nurse him round to life—merely in order that he may be hanged by the neck until such time as it may please the All-merciful to remove life from his quivering body.

It is a fact that present methods of trial tend to make a hero of the murderer who, when he is condemned to death, completely overshadows the hangman in popularity. Of recent years there has been far too much sickly sentimentalism over criminal trials culminating in the perfectly legitimate hanging of the criminal.

¶ Popularity of  
Murder Trials The preliminaries, trial, period of rest in prison before execution, are exploited by an energetic press. The reason for all this is that the criminal risks his life at the trial, and forfeits it if he is found guilty. The public loves to see a man risk his life: think of the fun in dirt-track racing (and motor racing generally), in trapeze acts at the music-hall, in crossing the road through traffic, in an operation on an important person, in a bull-fight, in a steeplejack's job; or what not. It seems unfair that such a spectacle as a murder trial should be restricted to

the favoured few who can elbow their way into Court during a hearing. Nothing is more interesting to the student of psychology than a really good murder trial. At the same time, the proceedings could and should be brightened considerably. The space set aside for the public is not enough. The Albert Hall, the Coliseum or even the Stadium at Wembley (if equipped with loud-speakers and a good commentator) would be infinitely better for murder trials than our stuffy, uncomfortable Law Courts.

The Treasury could easily draw up a scale of charges for admission, and the money so raised could be set aside towards the provision of better remuneration and pensions for our gallant hangmen. I have no doubt but that, even allowing for generous treatment of

¶ Plan to lower  
the Income  
Tax executioners, there would still be a fair sum left over to alleviate our Income Tax, which strikes me as somewhat excessive. The fund could be further swelled by the sale of the film rights in the trial and execution of murderers and, as a sop to the

public, the Entertainments Tax on admission charges to all such ceremonies could be waived. A friend of mine (an unchartered accountant) in 1928 provided the following figures, showing how much the State could benefit if a murder trial and execution were conducted as they ought to be:

I.	Rent of Albert Hall per day	=	£200
	Salary and Pension Fund for, say one dozen hangmen	=	100
	Sale of seats per day	=	2,500
	Total daily profit	=	£2,200
II.	Sale of Film-rights—		
	(a) of one dozen good trials	=	£12,000
	(b) of one dozen good hangings	=	3,000
			£15,000

The first total represents the net profit for one day. But 100 or more days are occupied in murder trials every year at the Central Criminal Court. So,

$$£2,200 \times 100 = £220,000 \text{ per annum.}$$

This is a very useful sum of money, but, apply the same financial principles to all the murder trials held throughout the country in the course of a year, and what is the result? A sum of not less than £250,000 would find its way into the Exchequer. If the whole matter were put into the hands of a really competent impresario, I have no doubt but that the figure ultimately reached for a reduction of the Income Tax would be a very much higher one, and if the Chancellor will take this idea, he may turn it to admirable account for his next Budget. In this manner a government might be preserved in power, a little money could be set aside towards the next war to end war;



and all risks of the abolition of the death penalty removed. I am sending a copy of this booklet to our political offices, and I hope it will be of use at the next General Election. I do not expect any reward for my suggestion; as a progressive Conservative I have *only* the interests of the country at heart.

The death penalty is intended by the State to be a deterrent of murder. In proof that it does deter we have an average of about 150 murders a year in England. In the United States of America they have thousands. If further proof were necessary there is the story of the late Mr. Hespel, an executioner who deplorably 'let down' his craft by turning murderer himself. One day (when he was off duty) he committed a really artistic piece of slaughter. With all his experience of hanging as a deterrent, one might have expected that *he* would never have committed such an offence; for, as we

know, the death penalty deters and he himself had helped to inflict it on innumerable occasions. The least we can say is that he was a particularly stupid type of man, and a disgrace to the clean annals of execution. His act was, indeed, the Koh-i-noor of nonsense. It may be that for a moment he forgot himself and thought that he had in his pocket the permission of the law to kill; if so, his absent-mindedness got him into serious trouble. A hangman has only a *temporary* licence to kill—unlike doctors, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, drunken motorists, etc. Perhaps he thought that by murdering somebody, he would prevent other people from acting similarly. So far as all my researches go, I have not been able to find that he deterred one potential murderer from murdering, with the possible exception of his victim on that occasion. He was duly executed for his stupidity. This sad case is rather like a *reductio ad absurdum*, but it must not on that account be advanced as an insidious argument against hanging. When we look closely into it, there are two categories of people who commit murder: (1) Those who are sane (know the nature and quality or consequences of their act) *but hope to escape the penalty*; (2) Those who are insane, and these neither know nor care what they do. Murderers are either the one or the other, so it is difficult to appreciate the deterring effect of the death penalty upon their minds. I am not a psychologist or metaphysician, or even a theologian, so I cannot resolve this difficult problem except by saying that, if a man knows what will happen as a result of an act of his, and hopes to escape that result, but actually commits the act, a contemplation of the possible result does not seem to me to hinder him.

Whether the death penalty deters or does not deter would-be murderers from committing murder is, when we sum it up, a matter of speculation. If anything, the evidence shows that it does not deter, and most of this evidence will be found in E. Roy Calvert's admirable book, *Capital Punishment in the XXth Century*. I really ought not to mention it, as it is a work which derogates considerably

¶ Hanged for  
sheer  
Stupidity

¶ Book against  
Hanging

from the great art with which this Handbook deals. But it is necessary that we should treat hanging as objectively as possible, and the reader need not peruse Mr. Calvert's book if he is not interested in that *other* and far less important side of the question.

Let us turn now to a depressing aspect of hanging, and consider a few of its immediate effects. Apart from the public there are certain persons directly concerned in the business: the person who is hanged;

the hangman; and the prison staff. We all know the effect upon the person who is hanged. His neck is broken, or he is strangled; at all events he is killed, even if (as I have shown) the process is frequently long drawn out. The effect upon the

warders who surround the condemned man, and upon the hangman who does the job, is sometimes very disheartening for those who are in favour of a continuation of capital punishment. The strain of having to attend executions is sometimes more than even the most hardened warders can stand. In 1924 there was the case of the former chief warder at Wandsworth Prison—the late Mr. Lazell—who was so worried by his memories that he committed suicide, and even tried to reproduce a hang-house scene in so doing. It is bad enough in all conscience when a mere spectator will do this sort of thing, but it is really most depressing to find that there is a whole history of hangmen and other specialists in State execution who have, by one means or another, attempted to do away with themselves. And who have succeeded. Until recently we had with us the ex-hangman, Mr. John Ellis, who resigned his post in March 1924 after holding it honourably for twenty-five years, during which time he assisted or presided at some 200 executions, all of which were, in accordance with the Home Office instructions not to divulge facts to the contrary, carried through with expedition.

Mr. Ellis was a man of towardly parts, homely manners, renowned for his proficiency and art. It is melancholy to have to record of such a man, of whom it has been written that he was too tender-hearted to wring the neck of one of his own fowls,<sup>1</sup> that his experience in hanging the late Mrs. Thompson—who was carried unconscious from her cell to the hang-house—drove him to attempt to commit suicide. The account of it given in the press is this. Shortly

after one o'clock in the morning his family were awakened by the noise of a revolver discharge, and poor Mr. Ellis was found lying on the floor of his living-room, bleeding from the neck. A revolver lay beside him. He was brought before the magis-

¶ A famous  
modern  
Hangman

strates and charged with attempting to commit suicide. The Chairman asked him if he was prepared to give an undertaking that he would not again attempt suicide; and to this Mr. Ellis agreed. The Chairman of the Bench then replied in well-chosen words, as follows:

'I am sorry to see you here, Ellis. I have known you for a long time. If your aim had been as true as some of the drops you have

<sup>1</sup> This *et seq.* is taken from the *News of the World*, August 29, 1923.



given, it would have been a bad job for you. Your life has been given back to you, and I hope you will make good use of it, and lead a good life in atonement.'

Very fine sentiments too, except that the logic seems to be wrong; a life which has not been taken away can hardly be given back. Mr. Ellis said on this occasion that he had 'some drink taken.' One can understand why. Throughout his career he was forbidden to stay at public-houses, as his sojourn might 'attract custom.' Why not? Now a hangman has a thirst like other men, and it is quite conceivable that Mr. Ellis was enjoying the freedom of retirement, and had 'one over the eight.' There is an old saying *in vino veritas*, and this is an interesting case in human psychology, if human is the correct word. The reader will no doubt be distressed to hear that Mr. Ellis is no longer with us.

In the early months of the same year a retired German headsman (*Scharfrichter*, from *scharf*—sharp, and *richter*—judge) shot himself at Breslau, and this suicide was immediately followed by that of his successor. Then there was the Australian executioner who carved his own throat rather than hang a woman; and under Alfonso XIII the Spanish official garotter drew his own precious life to a close. Even John Hulbert, a prosperous New York executioner, apparently committed suicide (1929).

There was just then rather an epidemic of suicides amongst executioners; and for a moment it looked as though the whole question of capital punishment was taking what diplomats, with characteristic aptness, call 'a new orientation.' The case of old Herr Schweitz was undoubtedly caused by the fall in the mark. He had retired some fourteen years previously on a pension at a fixed rate, and inflation caused its value to dwindle to almost nothing. The grand old veteran—the Hindenburg of Headsmen—made a valiant attempt to supplement his mere pittance, first by writing a treatise on his speciality (it is a valuable contribution to contemporary science) and next by quixotic efforts to popularize decapitation, by lecturing upon it and by exhibiting the axe with which he had removed the most dangerous protuberance of a large number of criminals. But alas! the rise in the cost of living was so swift that, notwithstanding the literary success—it was more than a mere *succès d'estime*—of his efforts, and the undoubted popularity of his public appearances, the financial returns were disappointing. Faced with misery in his old age, there was only one course open to him; and he took it. Here is one more pathetic example of what may easily become a general practice if States neglect to reward fittingly the great public services of individuals. We must not condemn the German Government for their failure to smooth the old age of this patriot, when we ourselves make no adequate provision for the old age and decrepitude of our hangmen.

The suicide of Herr Schweitz's successor was also foreshadowed by a series of untoward incidents. Herr Paul Spaethe (that was the

¶ Executioners  
are good  
Christians

gentleman's name), like many executioners, was an extremely religious man. In time, with the practice of his science (yes, science and not *art*, as in the case of hanging) his religion grew more and more gloomy, until at last it became a sort of mania. It is to the credit of this good Christian that (in common with most State killers) he never once permitted his religious scruples to interfere with his decapitations. Just before his own decease he struck off the head of a criminal at Cologne (or Köln as the Germans persist in calling it). When he decided to commit suicide he prepared the way to depart this life by burning one candle for each head that he had severed during his short term of public office. Could *anything* be more sublime? Herr Spaethe is now in Heaven. With him is Herr Lang, the Austrian State executioner who, in the *Gleichshaltung* of 1938, committed suicide. It is necessary to pause and consider these very recent cases in order to see that, although these excellent patriots did actually commit suicide, it was not because of any jabs of conscience for having successfully performed their very important task of execution. In each case there were *other* circumstances which, if not the immediate cause of their suicide, at all events offered a contributory impulse towards it.

There is still another broad aspect of the office of public executioner which ought not to be overlooked in a treatise of this nature. In all countries there are times when the State executioner runs a certain personal risk. Towards the end of his career our own Mr. Ellis had the humiliating task of hanging persons involved in Irish political troubles. Now the Irish are a pernicious, troublesome, resentful and long-memored race, and Mr. Ellis is not the only person whose life they have made a burden. He was threatened and he sometimes had to have police protection and even to carry a revolver for his own safety. Note that Ireland pays England the delicate compliment of employing an English hangman; they cannot find one of their own in the Green Isle. I am told that in Ireland a hangman, even at the present moment, runs considerable risk and, like a person of royal blood, has to travel *incognito*.

¶ Executioners  
risk their  
Lives

Mr. Hangman Berry used to disguise himself as a woman every time he thought he ran a risk of being lynched by an inconsiderate mob as, for example, when he had to break Mrs. Maybrick's neck. When we consider the nature of their calling, it is not surprising that public executioners both here and abroad are often threatened by denizens of the criminal underworld, from which many of their clients are drawn. Of Deibler *père*, the most famous of French executioners, many stories are told of the risks he ran from dissatisfied anarchists and others upon whose friends he must needs operate. After the old man had removed the tiresome heads from Ravachol and several other anarchists, their companions swore that they would behead the surgeon himself. For a time the *Ministre de l'Interieur* was at his wits' ends to protect the unpopular public servant, and French logic



was torn between the necessity for continuing to guillotine in broad daylight in an open space, as provided by law, and the necessity of saving Monsieur Deibler's life. To operate *La Veuve M. Deibler* was indispensable. By law public execution was imperative. If M. Deibler ran the risk of being himself operated upon by the bombs of an excited and pernicky group of desperate anarchists: *Que faire?* Ceremony after ceremony was impaired. The unities and frankness of the whole business—ruined! Nevertheless, large numbers of pistoled and carbined *gendarmes* and *flics* gloriously upheld the grand tradition, and thus, by the grace of God, the public executions were performed during a very trying period of French history.

When Deibler afterwards went to Corsica, it was expected that the hot-blooded Corsicans would never permit him to return alive to

¶ **Drinking the Prisoner's Dope** *La belle France*, but, to the astonishment of the authorities, his public appearances were a great success. Thousands flocked to Porto Vecchio to see the good 'Widow' at work. So agitated was the executioner that once, inside the prison cell,

after he had trimmed the condemned man's hair and shirt-neck (to remove a possible impediment to the operation of his blade) in a moment of agitation he drank the beaker of rum and dope that was mercifully to stupefy the criminal; and was hard put to it to fulfil his office with that dispatch and skill for which his name had become a by-word amongst our gallant Allies.

It is hardly necessary for me to dwell upon this truth that public executioners and hangmen have had to run great risks in carrying out their duties, when we have these men as modern examples. Were I to quote all the incidents that I know of, in which the executioner stood in grave risk of his life, I could fill many pages; perhaps one day I shall do so in a monumental work of biography to be entitled *The Lives of the Great Executioners and Hangmen*.

¶ **Imported Hangmen** But it would hardly be fair to the reader for me to omit some mention of the really disgraceful way in which executioners were treated in Greece shortly after the introduction of capital punishment in that

country. The Government sought for an executioner within its own frontiers, but found none. Two or three were imported from abroad, from a more humanitarian and civilized country. They were duly assassinated by an enraged populace. This, in itself, *proves* that Greece must be a barbarous country, notwithstanding all the classicists may yammer about Greek culture, civilization and what not. Pshaw and fiddlesticks to them—they cannot claim civilization or culture or even common decency for people who behave in such a manner towards a useful civil servant. An attempt was made to use soldiers as executioners—a little weakness of governments in such circumstances—but this the Senate would not permit. At last a man was found who would lend a willing hand to the work of human justice. He lived alone, far from Athens, in a fortress where he was guarded by soldiers. On the eve of an execution he was brought

clandestinely in a vessel; and was hastily returned as soon as his work was completed. Before, during, and after the exercise of his State functions, he was surrounded by military to protect his life.

At the time when the State was fortunate in finding the right man for the work, there were in prison between thirty and forty persons under sentence of death. These arrears were soon worked

¶ **Sporting Instinct of the Greeks** off. It appears that in Greece a condemned man was then permitted to defend his life; which goes to show that the Greeks have more sporting instinct than history leads us to believe. The law ordained that he should walk freely to punishment, and that

his hands should not be bound. Now, the greater part of those sentenced, brigands by profession, were vigorous men, who never failed to put up a valiant struggle with the executioner. Thus every execution began by a duel in which Justice always had the upper hand, being armed with a dagger. When the culprit had received eight or ten wounds, and had lost blood and strength, he usually went freely to execution. The account ends with the significant words:

*'The people returned to the city asking themselves how they could best assassinate the executioner.'*<sup>1</sup>

I was surprised to find that so humane a man as Charles Dickens did not altogether approve of hanging and hangmen. He remarks that while all kinds of attention and consideration are lavished on the criminal, the hangman is universally avoided like a pestilence. And in this regard he asks:

*'Is it because the hangman executes a law which when they once come near it face to face, all men instinctively revolt from?'*

Dickens was another of those unrealistic humanitarians (doubtful in his private life, so we hear) who, like John Bright, believed that security for human life is best to be found in a reverence for it. Did you ever hear anything so foolish or lacking in political sense?

Of course, Charles Dickens was a confirmed sentimentalist and these words of his cannot by the most generous interpretation be considered as anything but disparaging to an official who, if not popular, ought to be. It is true that before the days of hanging in semi-secrecy, the hangman frequently wore a mask—to hide the benevolence of his countenance. It would hardly be good for the public to see him as a plain man like themselves; so he was made into a sort of bogey by the addition of a mask. The hangman can look us all in the face without a blush; and we ought to be able to look him straight in the face without a blush.

Why do we not accept the neck-breaking, throat-compressing strangler as a highly honoured and respected servant of our magnificent Government? What perverted impulse drives

¶ **Hangman who hanged his Brother** the British public to pity the condemned man and to loathe the executioner? The great Spanish author Quevedo quotes a very common-sense letter from

<sup>1</sup> Edmund About, *Greece and the Greeks*.



an uncle of his hero Paul.<sup>1</sup> This uncle was a man of virtuous leanings and well known to Segovia as a friend of the law; its final acts were 'carried out' by him. He was in fact, the King's hangman. He wrote thus to his nephew:

*My dear Paul,—The weighty affairs of this employment (in which it has pleased his Majesty to place me) have prevented me from writing to you before this; for if there be any fault to find with the King's service, it is in the hard work it entails, which is, however, in some measure requited by the honour of serving him. It grieves me to have to send you unpleasant news: your father died a week ago, with as much bravery and resolution as ever man did; I speak from personal knowledge, having hoisted him myself . . . On arrival at the gallows he set his foot on the ladder and climbed it nimbly, not crawling on all fours as some do; and noticing that one of the rungs was cracked he turned to the officers and ordered them to get it repaired for the next, because all men had not his spirit. I cannot express how well he impressed the onlookers. At the top of the ladder he sat down, shook the creases from his clothes, took hold of the rope, made the noose, and then perceiving that the priest wished to preach, he turned to him and said, Assume that your speech is ended: let us have a few staves of the Creed and have done quickly, for I hate to waste time.' When this was done he charged me to put his cap a little to one side and to wipe his slaver, which I did; and then he swung without even doubling his legs or making a grimace, but kept such solemnity of countenance that nothing better could be desired. I quartered him and the highway was his sepulchre . . . With your knowledge of Latin and rhetoric you will make an exceptional exponent of the hangman's art.*

I quote this to show the difference between Dickens the sentimentalist and Quevedo the realist—note the reference to Latin and rhetoric. Quevedo, one of the great figures in world literature, had a just estimate of the hangman's importance in the social economy. The above is an account of a man who hanged his own brother, as a

¶ **O.H.M.S.** matter of duty, in the service of his God, his King and his Country. There is not one atom of sentiment in it. That is how things ought to be. Note also the calm way in which the man took his hanging. And we speak of the romantic, excitable South! Tosh! In this country are we not ten times more sentimental? Think of the fuss we made of the Crumbles 'romance,' and of that of Mrs. Thompson and Bywaters; and of Monsieur Vaquier who not long ago was dispatched to the bourne from which no man returns. And many others.

I now come to yet another aspect of hanging which is of great public interest. Earlier in this Handbook I have shown that not enough attention is paid to the hanging process. I have often thought

<sup>1</sup> Quevedo's Works (Routledge, 1925). Excellently edited and translated by myself.—C.D.

that the newspaper press in this country does not make the best of State trials in which the accused looks like a man that is to be hanged, or is suitable for hanging. It must be admitted that the newspapers

¶ **The Press and Crime** do give some space to such cases; but it is not nearly enough. The drama of the law and the psychology of crime, and the sporting element that is inherent in all murder trials, are good reasons for allocating

far more space than at present to details. Why should not an intelligent press follow the life of a man accused of murder from his arrest either to the quick-limed grave or acquittal, as the case may be? People who read the daily press are men, women and children of discrimination, and a public so highly educated and thoughtful as ours is far too sophisticated to be titillated by mere scraps of gossip from the condemned cell or succulent morsels of news from the gallows. The fare is good, moral and elevating. The scheduled death always provides the right kind of sensation for the millionaire press which is read by the million. Every man to be hanged is most excellent 'copy'; every hanging is still better copy. In a democracy already sodden and saturated with sensation, in which a ridiculous sport such as dog-racing has to be invented from time to time, or some beastly form of contortionism, either in the form of music or dance, has to be paraded on the stage, and in which a street accident will bring a crowd of morbid sightseers, is it right to neglect hangings as we do? The daily press is, to the average Englishman, what the Coliseum was to the old Roman or the bull-ring is to the Spaniard; the chief thrills of life are to be found in it. The mental sadism from which the public suffers could be more adequately catered for than at present, and the freedom which our press enjoys, and the good taste for which it is noted, should be exploited to the full. As one who has the interests both of English journalism and of hanging at heart, I propose to offer certain suggestions to the editors of our great newspapers, in order that they may better provide for the requirements of a news-loving public. I am of course assuming that the paper shortage due to World War II will not continue into World War III—though such an assumption may not be entirely justified.

First, it is in the interests of Justice that newspapers should 'follow up' every crime, and especially every capital crime. They should employ men of special talents and qualifications for this task, preferably men who are in close touch with the police; ex-criminals or ex-policemen might sometimes be trusted with this work. They should

¶ **Hints for Editors** pay them liberally and give them generous allowances for essential out-of-pocket expenses; any policeman will tell you that this is essential in all criminal investigations. Whilst these men are busy

on the outside work following up the capital crime, the editorial staff should lose no time about getting ready the biography of the accused, and collect and collate full information in regard to his family, occupation, habits and customs; the name of his club, favourite author,



favourite tobacco, of his tailor if he is a 'natty' man; and any other facts likely to be of the least interest. All this should be done in the greatest detail, and there need be no editorial false delicacy in withholding from print those little failings common to everybody, which everybody would hate to read of himself, but loves to read of others. The best must be made of the murder trial itself. Special artists, photographers and writers with an eye for romance and a nose for sensation, must be commissioned. The human interest and the story are both of far more importance than accuracy in detail, and where the two collide, accuracy must go to the wall; the spirit, as in translation, is of greater importance than the letter. How deplorably some newspapers fail in regard to murder trials may be judged from the following table:

#### ENGLAND.<sup>1</sup>

##### PUBLICITY GIVEN TO—

	(A) Murder Trial (Kennedy & Brown)	(B) Death of a great man (Thomas Hardy)
<i>Daily Newspapers:</i>		
The Times . . . .	352 inches	262 inches
Daily Telegraph . . . .	361 "	320 "
Morning Post . . . .	304 "	432 "
Daily News . . . .	279 "	528 "
Daily Mail . . . .	336 "	180 "
Evening News . . . .	624 "	96 "
Star . . . .	386 "	86 "
Evening Standard . . . .	263 "	150 "
Daily Express . . . .	522 "	90 "

	(A) Murder Trial (Kennedy & Brown)	(B) Death of a great man (Thomas Hardy)
<i>Sabbath Newspapers:</i>		
Observer . . . .	22 inches	182 inches
Sunday Times . . . .	20 "	40 "
Sunday Dispatch . . . .	152 "	30 "
Sunday Express . . . .	42 "	48 "
Lloyds Sunday News . . . .	235 "	6 "
Reynolds News . . . .	240 "	12 "
News of the World . . . .	312 "	30 "

<sup>1</sup> Computed from the papers cited. Approximate figures. The *Daily News* is now the *News-Chronicle*.

#### U.S.A.<sup>1</sup>

	(A) (Snyder Case)	(B) (Thomas Hardy)
Herald-Tribune . . . .	54.5 inches	59.0 inches
New York Times . . . .	63.5 "	31.5 "
World . . . .	78.5 "	20.0 "
American . . . .	116.0 "	5.0 "
News (tabloid) . . . .	289.0 "	2.0 "

There is no better reading for Sunday than of crime and criminals, murders and hangings; and nothing more appropriate. When the English working man has been to church or, alternatively, filled himself to the neck with beer and eaten the good roast beef of old Argentine, what more is necessary to keep holy the Sabbath than to read an account of some interesting romance, in which, for preference, a murder has been committed? The more religiously-minded editors of our Sunday press have, in some measure, a hazy idea of this profound truth, and there are many praiseworthy efforts of English journalism exuded from Fleet Street every Saturday night. We are frequently regaled with elaborate accounts of the life and astonishing adventures of men to be hanged, and they often provide much of real interest to the student of life and letters. Some good poetry in the newspaper sense would have been lost to the world had not an enterprising Sunday newspaper provided us with the *Memoirs* of the quite silly Monsieur Vaquier. Editors may find on occasion that the condemned man is too depressed to write his autobiography, in which case the best course is to commission his wife or some other close relation or even a casual acquaintance to sign a ghosted story of it all.

The man who seems certain to hang should have his whole past raked up; nothing should be left unstated, since he cannot defend himself against calumny. The public should note (and free-lance journalists should note) that the market for such memoirs is both vast and remunerative. In some cases as much as one hundred guineas or more have been paid per thousand words for the life story of a man that is awaiting execution. (Think of this, in comparison with the rewards for epic poetry, which is far more difficult to write.) So long as there is one fact of interest in every twenty or thirty lines, the rest may be padded out, and an expert editorial staff will provide all the throbs and thrills and sensational details that are necessary. Inflation—journalistic inflation—need not be feared; as, indeed, it seldom is. In the story of the condemned man's life we are mercifully freed from the tyranny of the happy ending. But dramatists, film and detective story writers and others should note that, in nine cases out of ten, the hangman dispatches the unwanted character more neatly than they do.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the *New Republic*, January 25, 1928.



There is at present no serious periodical devoted to the interests of executioners—as there is to the interests of undertakers, funeral upholders and directors—although obviously such a publication is badly needed. Many of our admirable publishing houses would, I am sure, consider the proposal if it were put to them in the form of a concrete schedule. Having deeply pondered the subject I am in a position to offer certain suggestions. First, as to title. The periodical should be called *The Hangman's Magazine and Executioner's Chronicle*. It should be conducted on the sound progressive lines of, say *The Hairdresser*, or *Dogs*, *The New Statesman* or *The Tailor and Cutter*. There should be short editorial notes of interest to hanging judges, sheriffs, prison employees, and executioners of all kinds, but especially hangmen. *The Hangman's Record* lists 400 English hangings.

There should be a good leading article on some matter of immediate importance to State Killers, such as the recent strike of executioners in France. The periodical should, generally, try to advance the great cause of hanging; and agitate for better status, pay, and conditions for our public executioners. There should be a column of social gossip about leading hangmen; such information regarding their personal habits and idiosyncracies could be included, to the great advantage of posterity. (I find it ridiculously difficult to discover more than a few of the bare facts in the lives of Great Hangmen of the past.) There should be a special section devoted to new inventions and contraptions for use in dispatching criminals. There should be statistics of State killings throughout the world, with graphs showing rise or fall. There should be a technical section on the dynamics, ballistics and hydrostatics of execution. Whether it would or would not be wise to include an occasional note on bungled executions would, of course, depend upon public policy. There should above all be a section for the review of books such as this, so that the world could have the benefit of expert criticism. At present criticism must necessarily be of the lay kind, and therefore technically valueless. One does not look to *The Times Literary Supplement* for criticism of a book on pinking, bobbing or shingling; and therefore one ought not to have to rely upon it for reviews of books on capital punishment or hanging. There should be in every number a short story on a theme in some way bearing upon hanging or execution. Strictly speaking, the hangman ought always to be the hero of such stories.

There ought also to be a section for serial fiction and for this there are many books already in existence which would be eminently suitable. I have no doubt but that had Mr. Edgar Wallace or Mr. Kipling been approached (in the right manner) they could have found both the time and the inspiration to provide the right type of serial. We still have with us Mr. Priestley and Mr. Graham Greene—and there are others who would come forward if the terms were good. It is well worth considering. And the Order of Merit should be given for the best execution.

It is a difficult problem for prison authorities to find ways and

means of amusing men who are awaiting strangulation, and I doubt my ability to do so. As a rule condemned men are hard to please. An approved system is to overwhelm them with religious advice and consolation; which takes the form of prayers and exhortations to repentance and faith in the glorious life to come. This, far from

being an entertainment, is much too depressing; and if there is one man on this earth who deserves to be amused it is the unfortunate wretch under sentence of death. Heaven, we understand, is dull; and hell is uncomfortable. There are, however,

many pleasant indoor games and recreations which are in every way suitable as a means of passing the weary hours, days and weeks that intervene between the final decision of the Court of Criminal Appeal and the morning on which the State gives a man his quietus. One suitable game, well within the intelligence of most prisoners, is *Snakes and Ladders*, and there are scores of others. Furthermore, there is much good literature relevant to the conditions of men that are to take the drop (or be 'turned off' as the Newgate Calendar elegantly expresses it). Victor Hugo wrote an effective and entertaining book, *The Last Days of a Condemned Man*.

Dickens and Thackeray wrote a fair amount about crime, criminals and hangings; the American, Ambrose Bierce, wrote several masterly short stories of a type that would tend to bring comfort to a man nearing death. And then there is *The Infamous John Friend*, by Mrs. R. S. Garnett, a book which (I am glad to see) is recognized for what it is worth; it concludes with a magnificent imaginative description of the feelings of a man that was hanged.

It is also encouraging to see that some of the more intelligent of our modern writers have not overlooked the literary possibilities in the hangman's art. Mr. William Gerhardt has given us a wonderful long-short story, *A Bad End*, in which he displays a subtle and delicate appreciation of the final ceremony; the execution in this tale is an admirable conception. But it is to a young lady of marked talents and great promise that the palm must be awarded for the first full-length novel with a hangman as hero. *Hanging Johnny*, by Miss Myrtle Johnson, if written in French, would certainly have been crowned by the Academy. *A Hangman's Diary*, by Franz Schmidt, translated by C. Calvert and A. W. Gruner, is well worth perusal by all who are interested in the art. All such works are to be highly commended as tending to a dissemination of knowledge about hanging; and it is to be hoped that we shall have more in the same vein. However, fiction is not enough. What is really necessary is something more serious. A German writer, Dr. Else Angstmann, has made a good beginning with her treatise, *Der Henker in der Volksmeinung* ('Public Opinion and the Hangman'); in this book a magnificent bibliography of the subject is given. What we urgently need is an English Spengler (Toynbee?) to write a philosophic History of State Killings, and I have no doubt but that such a work would



have to be called *The Decline of Hanging*. The truth is we are in the diminuendo stage of an art which once swung forward in a grand *crescendo*. Sappho wrote:

*Where hath my maidenhead flown?*

My friend Dylan Thomas would be justified in giving us some of his delightful verse under the title:

*Incredibiliter delector.*

—and there are, of course, the Sitwells—very reliable people for State purposes.

It is, at least, satisfactory to observe that there was between the two World Wars a revival of the fine old melodrama in which fornication and death are the stock ingredients. *Maria Marten*, or *The Murder at The Red Barn*, was played to crowded houses: *Sweeney Todd*, or *The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, also did well. (*The Beggar's Opera* is rather too frivolous, but the music is delightful.) Cinematograph producers have neglected the possibilities, not of murder and violence, but of executions. The film

¶ Hanging  
on Stage  
and Screen

*Dawn*, of high entertainment value, is the one bright spot on the horizon. The financial results of all these enterprises has been good, I understand; so that although the art of State Killing may itself show a steady decline, there is no real reason why it should be ignored by the stage, the cinematograph or the printing press. Were it not that the present compiler is rushing publication of this booklet (so that he may proceed to an exegesis on that interesting apocryphal character Nahum the Elkoshite), many other instances could be quoted to show that the British public thoroughly enjoys murders and executions; and especially hangings—if they are well and neatly done.

Earlier in this booklet several instances were quoted of bunglings and failures by hangmen in their work. It is opportune that a few more be now introduced, to refresh the mind of the reader and to prevent him from losing his sense of proportion. There was the case of a gentleman named Patrick Harnet, of whom it is written:

*As the body dropped to a standstill a heavy gurgling sound was heard, and soon the blood in torrents commenced pouring on the stone floor below. The cap was raised and it was found that decapitation was almost complete, the head hanging to the body only by a small piece of skin at the back of the neck. During the half-minute or more that the heart beat, the blood was thrown against the platform above from the exposed gash caused by the head being pulled back on the shoulder.*

Can we not visualize the scene? Doubtless, at the first smile of dawn on the morning of this execution, when the early rays of Apollo were beginning to gild the hill-tops, the official hangman kicked his wife out of bed and said to her, 'Fry me a couple of eggs, dearie, and a rasher or so of bacon. I have important work to do for the Government this morning, and I must therefore eat a good breakfast.' There must necessarily have been weakness in the

¶ Still more  
Mistakes of  
Hangmen

hangman's technique in this case. But, nevertheless, the effect upon the prisoner was the same as if the *beau ideal*—i.e., dislocation of the neck—had been achieved. There is also the case of the late Mr. John Coffey, of whom it is reported:

*When the drop fell the rope broke and the body fell to the ground. The neck was not broken, but the shock caused the blood to spurt from the wretched man's ears. He was carried back . . . and while the rope was being adjusted, he regained consciousness and begged to have the cap removed and make another speech. The rope broke a second time, but the body was caught before it reached the ground. It was lifted up and held in place by Deputy Sheriffs while the noose was again adjusted. The rope held and Coffey was strangled to death, dying in twelve minutes.*

Time is not the essence of the contract in hanging; as already pointed out, the judicial sentence is 'To be hanged by the neck until dead.' For this reason it is now customary, in order to compensate for possible miscalculations, to leave the hanged man's body suspended for at least the best part of an hour; thus, if his neck is not broken he is certain to die from strangulation. The net result in every case is the same, from the point of view of prisoner and public: the man, woman or infant is killed, which is all that matters. The State is satisfied, if nobody else is.

I feel that, in the accounts I have given of mistakes by hangmen, I may have conveyed to the reader an impression that they are the *only* people concerned with the elimination of undesirables who make mistakes. Nothing could be further from my mind. In the literature of the law and State killings there is sufficient information to fill several anthologies, showing that almost every body concerned with the killing has at some time or another plunged into the grossest error. It is a happy thought that, once an accused person has been dispatched by the hangman, difficult questions about his guilt rarely arise. The law is satisfied, the hangman has probably spent his fee: and that is usually enough. The worst mistakes are those made by 'expert witnesses' who are usually medical doctors specializing in morbid pathology. Nothing is more entertaining to the non-expert person than to listen to one of these learned men combat another in the witness box:

¶ All Sorts  
make Mistakes  
—even  
Experts

*For ev'n though vanquished he could argue still;  
While words of learned length and thundering sound.*

What is even more entertaining is for you or me to read what expert witnesses of fifty (or even less) years ago said and then compare it with the knowledge which represents the present state of science. It causes us to wonder whimsically what people of fifty years hence will think of the learned evidence *now* being submitted by our contemporary experts. An appalling thought crosses our minds: Is it, as time generally proves it to be, mostly hallucination and nonsense? In the year of grace 1936, in England, a lady named



Mrs. Bryant was hanged for the murder of her husband by arsenic poisoning. Evidence was submitted to show that a tin said to have contained arsenic had been burned by her in a copper fire. The ashes were analysed and found to contain 149.6 parts of arsenic in a million which, the learned expert said, *proved that arsenic had been put on the fire*. Another learned man, a Professor of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, and one of the greatest authorities on fuels and their residues, read of this matter of arsenic in the ashes. Arsenic in ashes? Why, the Professor knew that *all* coal ash contains arsenic! He would see to it that that item of expert evidence did not pass unchallenged, but the Court of Appeal refused to hear him: no doubt on perfectly solid legal grounds. But what must have been the effect of the expert evidence at the original trial upon a jury of laymen? The number of accused is legion, and many of them have been executed. Is not this admirable from the hangman's point of view?

Some were reprieved—to be found innocent: Adolf Beck, for instance, who took *nine years* to establish his innocence. In his case the expert's evidence seemed to be overwhelming and irrefutable, and other evidence substantiated it. Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, one of our finest judges, quotes a case of a man called Dogherty as such a flagrant instance of wrongful conviction and execution that from

¶ **Hangmen not concerned with Errors of Courts** that moment the learned judge ceased to believe in capital punishment: wrongly, no doubt, for one swallow does not make a summer, nor *one* bad picture an Exhibition of the Royal Academy. William Habron was sentenced to death for a murder afterwards confessed by the late Mr. Charles

Peace. The late Mrs. Biggadyke was hanged for a murder for which a man confessed on his death-bed. And there was Tomka who, in 1923, was hanged for murder, only to be proved innocent by expert witnesses—in 1927. Jacobowski was executed in 1926, and another man was proved in 1929 to have been guilty of the crime. Other cases could be cited, but they make rather depressing reading, especially for our hangmen who are not really concerned with matters of guilt and who, no doubt, prefer to think of a Court of Law as an Infallible Institution. But let one thing be quite clear: these doubts of guilt and proofs of innocence of executed persons must not be taken to reflect upon the integrity—the absolute and unchallengeable integrity—of our hangmen. If they occasionally make mistakes, strangle instead of asphyxiate or neck-break or *vice versa*, or pull off an occasional head, such incidents are mere accidents. Do we not *all* sometimes get out of the wrong side of the bed of a morning?

It seems rather absurd that some people should object to State Killing being a long-drawn-out affair. Nobody has yet determined the *actual moment of death in any form of execution*. A distinguished scientist<sup>1</sup> writes of a decapitation:

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Frederic Gaertner.

*Immediately after the head was severed and dropped into the basket, I took charge of it. The facial expression was that of great agony, for several minutes after decapitation. He would open his eyes, also his mouth, in the process of gaping, as if he wanted to speak to me, and I am positive he could see me for several seconds after the head was severed from the body. There is no doubt that the brain was still active . . . . His decapitated body, which was previously fastened by a strap upon a bench, was in continuous spasmodic and clonic convolutions, lasting from five to six minutes, also an indication of great suffering.*

If this sort of thing happens when a body is beheaded, what happens when the neck is broken or strangulation takes place? Is it possible for any scientist to *prove* that death is instantaneous? The probabilities are in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred that in hanging it takes several minutes. Nor is there any proof of ¶ **Death never instantaneous** unconsciousness during the process; nobody who has died has ever been able to give us a description of what it is like. It is extremely doubtful if more than a tenth of one per cent. of the population would be really interested to know. So why worry?

While on this subject of decapitation by the guillotine, I might as well mention one other not irrelevant case. A Frenchman was sitting in a prison cell awaiting execution (*avoir la tête tranchée*, as they say) and when the morning came he was confessed, ¶ **Saving 'l'honneur de la belle France'** bound, his hair cut, and he was marched off to the guillotine. The priest delivered him over to the executioner, who placed his patient in position for operation. The lever was pulled, to let loose the axe and to quote an excellent account of the matter:

'The heavy triangle of iron slowly detached itself, falling by jerks down the slides until, horrible to relate, it wounded the man without killing him. The poor creature uttered a frightful cry. The disconcerted executioner hauled up the axe and let it slide down again. A second time the neck of the malefactor was wounded without being severed. Again he shrieked, the crowd joining him. The executioner raised the axe a third time, but no better effect attended the third stroke . . .'

In fact, it was a case like that of our celebrated John Lee, 'The Man they couldn't Hang,' to give him his film title. But with this difference, that the French executioner's assistant after a few of these distressing and humiliating efforts of his chief, saved the honour of France by springing upon the un-guillotined malefactor and 'slowly cut through the neck with a knife.'

What would Dr. Guillotin, the *médecin aristocrat* and humanitarian, have thought of this, plagiarist that he was of our good old English Halifax Gibbet—that wonderful decapitating machine which Guillotin submitted as his own invention to solve the execution problem of the French Revolution?

Here I would pause for a moment, and introduce a note which is



not wholly creditable to executioners as a class. The natural pride which they have in their trade or art often has an unseemly background of dishonesty, in that they often claim to have invented gadgets to expedite their work, whereas instead of being original inventors they have merely looked up and plagiarized some forgotten but useful or inspiring idea. The guillotine, that fascinating instrument favoured by the most logical of peoples, and claimed by Dr. Guillotin, is a good illustration of this. Actually the beheading machine was a very old idea, no doubt based upon the *Gules*, mentioned so far back as 1678 in Randle Holme's *Academy of Armoury*. A family (name not mentioned) bore it heraldically, and it is described thus: 'GULES: a heading block fixed between two supporters, and an axe placed therein; on the sinister side a maule, all proper.' Holme adds: '... this way of decollation was by laying the neck of the malefactor on the block, and then setting the axe upon it, which lay in a rigget (i.e. groove) on the two side-posts or supporters. The executioner, with the violence of a blow on the head of the axe with his heavy maule (mallet), forced it through the man's neck into the block.'

From the *Gules* to the *machine à décapiter* by way of the Halifax Gibbet is not a difficult stroke of engineering. The point is that Dr. Guillotin claimed the whole idea as *his own*. There is even one more discreditable feature of this plagiarism to be recorded. It was really a man named Laquiente of Strasbourg who cribbed the idea, and Guillotin cribbed it *from him*. The full credit for making a model of the 'new' machine, however, must be given to a modest but intelligent and imaginative maker of pianofortes named Schmidt;<sup>1</sup> and it was Schmidt's model which provided the scientific background for the machine finally used in the revolutionary decapitations: which machine, with a few manufacturing but no mechanical improvements is used in France to this very day. I am glad to have been able, by virtue of careful historical research, to straighten this matter out. Let honour be given where honour is due, and it is unfair that the French should have plagiarized, stolen, adapted and used an idea for eliminating undesirables humanely which is at core essentially English. It is true that the English may have plagiarized the idea from the Italian *mannaia*; and the Italians may have taken it from some other equally enlightened nation. There is nothing new under the sun, and in matters of capital punishment man has shown that he is always ready to learn from either friend or foe; and that, like so many authors, he does not always acknowledge the sources of his inspiration.

Hanging as the English know is certainly a much better method of execution than beheading—it is far less painful for the onlookers.

This information is based upon that rare and interesting book: *History of the Guillotine*, by the Right Hon. John Wilson Croker (John Murray, 1853). Some authorities say that the first all-French guillotine was made by a Dr. Louis and used in 1792. I am told that during their occupation of France in World War II, the Nazis used an electric guillotine. I await confirmation.—C.D.

I should be wanting in method if I did not say something about the electric chair, for which great claims are advanced in certain of the United States of North America. A French scientist is of the opinion, based upon a profound knowledge of electricity and its psychological effects, that the electric chair is the most inhuman form of execution conceived by the mind of man.

He says:

*In every case of electrocution, in the way in which Ruth Schneider and Judd Gray were executed (they are reported to have been subjected to 2,200 volts), death inevitably supervenes but it may be very long, and, above all, excruciatingly painful . . . the space of time before death supervenes varies according to the subject. Some have a greater physiological resistance than others. I do not believe that anyone killed by electrocution dies instantly, no matter how weak the subject may be. In certain cases death will not have come about even though the point of contact of the electrode with the body shows distinct burns. Thus, in particular cases, the condemned person may be alive and even conscious for several minutes without it being possible for a doctor to say whether the victim is dead or not. . . . This method of execution is a form of torture.*<sup>1</sup>

An eminent pathologist, a man of great reputation and unequalled knowledge of his subject, has verbally confirmed this opinion to the compiler of the present book; he states that the real executioner in those States where electrocution is fashionable, is the doctor who does the postmortem examination. Electrocution is unsportsmanlike, and the smell of frying human flesh in the immediate neighbourhood of the chair is sometimes bad enough to nauseate even the press representatives who are present.

Amos O. Squire, M.D., Chief Physician of Sing Sing, who has attended the electrocution of one hundred and thirty-eight persons, says that when the signal is given, 'a sound comes from the electrician's niche—not unlike the sound of an X-ray apparatus, a cackle, whine and buzz. The figure in the chair gives one terrific lurch against the straps, every muscle contracting and straining. The face—all that can be seen from mouth to throat—turns crimson. Sometimes a wisp of smoke rises from the top of the head, and with it the smell of burning . . . After a few seconds the current is cut off . . . the doctor with his stethoscope listens for heartbeats—he listens to them *grow fainter and fainter*. A brief interval passes. The switch is thrown again—and after contact is broken, again the doctor listens. There is *seldom* any pulse this time . . . ' The words in italics are mine—'fainter and fainter' and then another dose of current after which there is 'seldom'—*seldom*, mark you—any pulse. That is if all goes well. But does not an electricity supply, even a good one such as that of the London Underground Railway system, sometimes behave in a disconcerting manner? To quote Dr. Squire again, 'The terrific

<sup>1</sup> Professor L. G. V. Rota, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, January 14, 1928.



current causes instantaneous contraction of all muscles in the body, resulting in severe contortions of the limbs, fingers, toes, face, and protrusion of the eyes. If applied for as long as half a minute, burning rapidly develops at the point of contact, and a postmortem examination shows eyes in a foggy condition 'with a star fracture of the lens, heart dilated and filled with fluid blood . . . in about five per cent. of cases in a contracted or tetanized condition. . . . I have seen two cases where the heart wall was ruptured,' etc., etc.—and the Doctor concludes, 'In comparing electrocution with hanging as a means of inflicting the death penalty, I believe that electrocution is *more humane and certain and less painful.*'<sup>1</sup>

Well, well, well! As if it is possible for any patriotic Englishman to swallow that story—more humane and less painful than hanging! Impossible and vainglorious statement, incapable of the least proof! We cannot and must not admit it for one moment: the honour of our nation is at stake. It is all very well for quibblers to say that they are both, to say the least, a little unpleasant at times for the onlookers. But the hangman is nevertheless a superior being in every way to the 'electrocutioner,' for, as we have seen earlier, he is an artist depending upon intuition and not upon a mere electric current for the success of his work. In the hangman there is a much more human and personal element: which is as it should be in these painful affairs.

The above opinions are quoted merely to show that, in England and elsewhere where hanging is the fashionable method of State execution, the authorities need have far less on their conscience than the unconscionable foreign barbarians who practise decapitation and electrocution. Against electrocution might also be mentioned the case of the Japanese gentleman Jugiro, who begged the Warden of Sing Sing to have him beheaded, on the principle that of all evils he preferred what he considered to be the least.

I have already referred to the bad pay and lack of pension arrangements for hangmen. In view of the delicacy and importance of their work it is remarkable that they do not receive honours or decorations; not even the humble O.B.E. ever goes the way of the hangman. It is a scandal. If *we* cannot decorate them why does not some philanthropist—an armament king, for example—offer them a prize of honour? When will there be a Nobel Prize for our hangmen, as there is for other great artists, scientists and public benefactors?

¶ **Honours for Hangmen** We never see even a statue erected to our executioners. An acquaintance would not believe me when I assured him that there was not in the whole of London a single statue of a hangman. Although I swore this to him he still remained in doubt; for he had inspected most of the existing statues, and his suspicions had been aroused. Nor are our executioners ever buried in Westminster Abbey. They pass and are forgotten. Even the name 'hangman' is discreditable

<sup>1</sup> *Sing Sing Doctor*. By Amos O. Squire. (Published Rich & Cowan, London, 1935.)

with us. In Germany they were sometimes called Master of the Gallows (*Galgenmeister*) or even Judge; until the other judges objected. Supposing some great person in history was discovered to have been an executioner, in addition to the achievements for which his name is now honoured, what then? Would we continue to honour his name? If, for example, it was proved by some of the higher critics that Christ, in addition to being a carpenter had acted as public executioner, could we still reverence Him? And supposing that the economic circumstances in which He lived drove Him (as it drove our own Mr. Berry and others) to this as the only practicable means of earning a livelihood, would we admire the state of society in which He lived? Would we admire the Roman governors for employing Him?

These questions are submitted for the consideration of the gentle reader, who will answer them in accordance with his complexes. But first of all consider this: Is there a man or woman amongst us who can honestly say that he or she does not know at least *one* person who ought to be hanged? As we look around our own circle of acquaintances and our public life (to say nothing of the stock exchanges of the world), does not the purely ethical case for capital punishment seem overwhelming? When we look back at history and

¶ **Who ought to be hanged?** think of the names of hundreds who escaped the common hangman, argument becomes needless. When we think of the gala days of the past (*gala* in Anglo-Saxon meant gallows), we realize how much we are missing. A well-conducted execution is like a sonnet by Petrarch, a statue by Michelangelo, or a painting by Velasquez; and would be a spectacle far more satisfying to the British public than a Shakespeare play, a revue by Mr. Cochran, or even a good dog-race.

There are few matters of interest that have not been touched upon by that Grand Old Irishman of English letters, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and he does not entirely fail us on capital punishment. His latest pronouncement on the subject appeared in the "Sunday Express" of 12th December, 1947. "Capital punishment is a term which indicates muddled thinking," he says and then he goes on to clarify things. What do you do with a mad dog which runs amok through the streets biting and infecting everybody it comes across? Fond as we may be of dogs, we must kill this one on the spot in the public interest. So it must be with 'mischievous human beings' who are 'vermin in

¶ **George Bernard Shaw** the commonwealth'. Humane treatment may act in certain cases and be necessary. But, 'the ungovernables, the ferocious, the conscienceless, the idiots, the self-centered myops and morons'—G.B.S. asks 'what of them?' and he answers: 'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill them. The most amiably soft-hearted monarch, confronted with a death warrant, must sign it or abdicate as unfit to reign'. Excellent. But how are we to kill them, and here, I regret to say, Mr. Shaw lets us down rather badly. He says: 'Kill (the incorrigible) kindly and apologetically, if



possible without consciousness on his part'. Euthanasia. But, wouldn't a man who was to be killed painlessly be expecting it to happen every time he fell asleep? It *sounds* all right, and I am sure that Mr. Shaw means quite well, but I have heard expert opinion that there is a good chance of a person so threatened becoming insane; and it would hardly be quite fair to kill a poor lunatic. No, Mr. Shaw, this will not do! Which brings us back to the elementary question: What's *wrong* with hanging? Where is the muddled thinking? Now, although I have not the slightest doubt but that the late Herr Hitler and our contemporary General Franco would certainly agree with Mr. Shaw's 'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill them', they would not waste time over it. There are times when Mr. Shaw seems to be a very cold bloodthirsty sort of vegetarian, which is as much a contradiction in terms as a very rich Socialist, though his wit in comparing some men to some dogs is not without its salt. But does he think for one moment that he is *progressing* when he talks of painless, friendly and apologetic killing? There is nothing whatever new in this idea, which is all covered by our well-tried and time-honoured method and manner of hanging. "It won't hurt at all," say our hangmen to their clients. And they know far more about it than even Mr. Shaw. A much more reasonable attitude is that of a good Christian who writes as follows: "The reason why the death penalty should not be abolished is because it is the Law of God (Genesis IX. 6). We in this country are more responsible than any other nation, because we have the open Bible with all God's commandments and laws written therein and we keep or break them, for our blessing if we obey them and are cursed if we disobey them. God has not changed His laws or commandments since the time He gave them—"I am the Lord, I change not." He has plainly shown us that there are two breeds in this world: children of God and children of the Devil . . . " I need not quote further, for all this writer's argument amounts to comes more or less to the same as that of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and it adds up that the children of God should kill the children of the Devil—Q.E.D. and R.I.P. Incidentally the correspondent I have quoted says that when the Lord returns to this world He will see that all His Laws are kept—and that means that if we should ever be such unbelievers as to abolish hanging in Britain, the good Lord Himself will re-impose the death penalty. Parliament, please note. Then there are the views of

Professor Dr. Joad. Dr. Cyril Edwin Mitchinson ¶ Professor Dr. Joad, everybody knows, is a great contemporary Joad, Wit and philosopher—and an essentially English one at that. Philosopher He is one of our best platform and radio turns (comic). One has seen him also on the films—in one at least, and he showed great talent. We ignore the opinion of such a philosopher at the risk of social embarrassment. Professor Dr. Joad has been writing a column of his philosophy for the "Sunday Despatch", an admirable weekly newspaper which serialized *Forever Amber* and since then has serialized the sexo-

sadistic *Flesh of the Orchid* by that new master of this branch of literature, Mr. James Hadley Chase. It also supports the Conservative-Imperialist cause. In reply to a question from one of his thousands of correspondents asking for his view on the proposal to abolish the death penalty, this great philosopher replied: "I favour its retention on humanitarian grounds", and warming to his subject he says: "The objection to the death penalty is a piece of canting sentimentality arising, I suppose, from belief to the effect that human life is sacred and should not be taken." The objection is cant, the Professor explains, cant from a most destructive generation which has killed more than 20,000,000 human beings in two wars and is now devoting big money and the best brains to the preparation of more efficient means of destruction. One can hardly restrain a cheer at such robust common sense. Hangmen in gratitude will pass round the hat for Dr. Joad, and I am not sure that guillotiners, electrocutioners, garroters, headsmen and the other ranks of State executioners will object to offering a small contribution as a token of their appreciation for as fine a piece of philosophy as this country has produced since Hobbes wrote his masterly *Leviathan*. A word of warning is, however, necessary; and it is offered in the most kindly spirit. Many of us who have hanging at heart feel that in moments of extreme creative exuberance Dr. Joad tends somewhat to confuse issues and to end up by leaving his audience or readers quite bewildered; or, which is much more amusing, by saying precisely nothing in a very laughable way. True, I have heard people say that he deserves to be hanged for some of his witticisms, one logician of my acquaintance adding, "*and drawn and quartered*"! One must not take such people too seriously. Another school of thought on the subject might be described as having the same view as Dr. Blunt (Anglican Bishop of Bradford) has on the virgin birth: "It is not easily believed; but it is merely presumption or prejudice which will easily reject it."

Forever memorable in the proud annals of execution will be the Great Hangings at Nuremberg in the Year of Grace 1946. Eleven leaders of the Nazi movement who had been tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity sat down one October (23rd) evening to their Last Supper of canned American-German sausage and cold cuts with potato salad, bread and tea. The same evening the cinema of the Court of Justice announced next day's screen attraction, which had been well chosen for the occasion. It was *Deadline for Murder*. Everything about the Nuremberg trials was excellent until they came to the great problem of what form of execution was to be used. Needless to say, hanging won—as every sensible person thought it would. Now comes a very terrible story, one which causes my inanimate typewriter to tremble with indignation as I slowly and hesitatingly tap it out. Instead of appointing an English hangman, they appointed an American! Woe, woe, *woe* that such a monumental international insult should be possible! And in the XXth century too, when international behaviour has progressed so far. I will not, I cannot dwell on the lack of tact, the lack of

¶ The Great  
Nuremberg  
Hangings



good sense, the lack of common decency shown by passing over in this way the unchallengeable claims of our British hangmen to this high honour. Not that I have any racial or anti-American feelings; nor any personal grudge against the decent man chosen to execute the awful Nazis. He was U.S.A. Army Master-Sergeant John C. Woods (43) of San Antonio who, in his 15 years as U.S. Army executioner had hanged 347 of his fellows. His record is excellent. Said he afterwards: "I hanged those ten Nazis"—Marshal Goering had dodged the event by poisoning himself—"And I am proud of it. I wasn't nervous. A fellow can't afford to have nerves in *this business*. I want to put in a good word for those G.I.'s who helped me. I am trying to get them a promotion. The way I look at *this hanging job*, somebody has to do it. I got into it kind of *by accident*, years ago in the States." This hanging job! Do you not notice a certain vulgarity about all of this statement? *This business* indeed, as if it were just a matter of filthy lucre! One would almost think he was talking of stockbroking or something of that sort, and not of *by accident*. By accident forsooth! Does not one's blood boil to read of such things about this essential work, which must never be far away from any order. The weekly "Time" (28/10/1946) published a good account of the Great Hangings at Nuremberg, but it fell to the London "Star's" veteran crime reporter and expert on hangings to make known some of the full truth. Mr. Cecil Catling of the "Star" was not the only reporter to declare that the executions had been cruelly bungled—his first-hand evidence is partly confirmed by a French report. Reporter Catling declared that there was not enough room for the men to drop, which would mean that their necks had not been properly broken and that they must have died of slow strangulation. In addition he said that they were not properly tied, so that some hit the platform with their heads as they went down and their noses were torn off. The United States Army flatly denied Mr. Catling's interpretation. Now we come to the syndicated French report, which I quote from "Le Patriote" (24/10/47) of Toulouse. When it was suggested to him by the French reporter that the men hanged had taken an 'abnormal' time to die, that they died from strangulation and not from broken necks, and that in the drop they had hit the trap, Master-Sergeant Woods replied with dignity: "The only people capable of disseminating such information are manifestly amateurs who know nothing about it"—I translate from the French—"If you doubt my word, ask the Medical Corps. The medical officer present at the execution said to me immediately afterwards: 'You have not bungled a single one'—he referred to the fact that the necks of the condemned men had been broken in their drop. As regards suffocation, my 'clients' emitted certain sounds and made certain movements after their drop; according to the doctor's opinion it is merely a question of reflexes." Master Sergeant Woods is clearly a well-educated man, and an honest one too, for, when cross-examined

#### ¶ Defence of a Hangman

about the trap being hit, he said that the hanged man would know 'nothing about it' and, as for blood found on the faces afterwards he said: "That is quite natural—it happens when the condemned opens his mouth at the moment of the drop and bites his tongue. He knows nothing about it. It is a thing which might happen in the course of any execution, however perfect it might be." Very interesting, very humane and, no doubt, very true. I am glad to be able to clear this hangman's name of sordid suspicions on the part of the ignorant and of vile accusations on the part of the malicious. Were not the ten men hanged, and did they not *die from hanging*—so why introduce subtleties about strangulation or neck-breaking or trifles about hitting the trap or bleeding? Irrelevant and absurd! Master Sergeant Woods concluded: "They are my last clients. I've had a bellyful of it (*j'en ai assez*, in the words of the French interviewer). Have you seen the British specialist in hanging who has hanged so many people? Why, his work has made an old man of him. He is all broken up and one gets the impression that his head and hands are about to fall off. That is the result of the terrible nervous tension to which the hangman is subjected." The name of the 'British specialist in hanging' is given—it is a household word with us—but, of course, delicacy prevents me from repeating it. Besides, Woods's statement may well be untrue and/or libellous, for I think that our national hangmen are made of sterner stuff than one gathers from this remark. Woods added that he always carries a couple of revolvers for self-defence, and that he can hit a bullseye shooting from both hands. How many of our hangmen can say that! Happily they do not need any sort of defence—except of course when they travel to Ireland; or abroad, as some of them did after the war. Less civilized peoples do not have the same regard for public executioners as we have for our worthy hangmen. And so some security precautions have to be taken when circumstances require them.

Those of us who have at heart the interests of hanging and hangmen can never forget the awful trepidation with which we read the recommendations of a Royal Commission which, in that terrible year, 1930, had thoroughly investigated the whole question of capital punishment. It actually recommended the abolition of the death penalty

for a 'trial' period of five years! And would you believe it, there was not *one* word of sympathy or any consideration for the hangmen of Britain in that bulky volume of pro and con evidence and testimony.

One sees, of course, that the Commission came to the conclusion that it would be 'safe' to try abolition; caution demanded that it be for a set period. For five years only. Then it could be re-considered in the light of experience. Many of us felt that at long last

*This royal throne of kings, this septer'd isle . . .*

*This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .*

*This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England*

was about to lose an institution which we have inherited from our furthest and noblest ancestry. But: time passed and the true strength



of our breed asserted itself. In other words, nothing happened. Once again the hangmen of England were able to breathe freely, to enjoy again the full flavour of their mild-and-bitter. A long and stubborn campaign by the abolitionists was thwarted, frustrated and happily brought to nothing by the sound common sense of the Conservatives then in power. Wait! Do not imagine that those defeated abolitionists took it lying down, for one must never forget that they too are English, just as English as the others. In true English fashion they took their defeat as Englishmen generally do, and merely regarded it as an experience from which useful lessons could be drawn. Hitler—and many another before him—learnt to his cost that Englishmen are not unduly alarmed about losing a battle, so long as it is not the last battle. And so it was that the campaigners against hanging got going again, and here we are in the year 1948 with the threat against our hangmen dangling right over their heads, so to speak, like one of their own ropes on execution morning, and all ready to suspend them. The decision will be made by Parliament, by a Parliament in which Labour predominates. Hangmen came to be in greater danger than ever! The anti-hanging campaigners were as lively as they had ever been, and they had gained some notable supporters, one of the most important being no other personage than Lord Templewood, perhaps better known as Sir Samuel Hoare. Sam picked up his musket and rushed into the fray with an article in the "Evening Standard" of 26th November, 1947. He said many interesting things about hanging, with which, as an ex-Home Secretary—and a very humane one—he is thoroughly acquainted. Here are some extracts from an article which can only be regarded as a stab in the back for our fine body of public executioners: "It is urged . . . that the death penalty, although it is seldom carried into effect, acts as a power in reserve to deter criminals from murder. It is further claimed that, if there were no death penalty, burglars would more often carry arms and be more ready to kill their victims in order to avoid discovery. It is not possible either to prove or disprove these arguments, except to say that when there were 250 capital offences crimes of robbery and violence were far more common than they are to-day. I can only state my own view founded upon my experience as Home Secretary. It is that most murderers do not seem to be influenced by the fear of hanging when they commit their crimes. A high percentage of the murders known to the police are committed by the insane, and most of the others are the result of fits of passion . . . The death penalty is an act of despair. The majority of murderers are not hardened criminals. Many of them are first offenders, and there is a considerable body of evidence to be had from prison officials to the effect that, where murderers are reprieved and subsequently released, they usually make good. Secondly, I am convinced that executions place an intolerable strain upon many prison governors and officers. It is not sufficiently realised that the men and women who now enter

the Prison Service rightly regard themselves as social workers with a definite vocation. To many of them an execution, with all its grim surroundings, is the very negation of their devoted work. An execution demoralises the life of a prison for weeks, besides creating the worst kind of morbid excitement outside the prison walls. Lastly, I do not consider that the State should in peacetime take human life . . . The more I have heard in recent years of the terrible number of executions on the Continent, the more deeply I have felt that it is the duty of the British Government to show by the abolition of the death penalty its refusal to fall back upon an antiquated *lex talionis* and itself to take human life. For these reasons, I consider that the abolition of capital punishment should be included in the Criminal Justice Bill, and that there should be no such compromises as a period of experiment or the grading of murder."

Constant readers of our admirable daily press (not excluding our equally admirable sabbath newspapers, some of which have a true sense of moral and other values) may have noticed that, since the end of World War II, there has been an increase in crimes of violence in this realm—as there was after World War I and, indeed, as there is everywhere after a good war. It need hardly surprise any sensible person that, when healthy young men have been trained to be ferocious

(or 'conditioned', as the new jargon has it) and to maim or, better still, kill the enemy, they bring back with them to civil life some of those very uncivil habits. One of the most important aspects of their training is to create in them a frame of mind that

they must do or die and have no regard for the consequences; that, if they make a good job of the killing when circumstances are difficult, and when it is really vital to success, they may be even rewarded by one of His Majesty's gracious decorations, or achieve preferment in their unit, or—though this does not *always* apply—be remembered for their good work when they return home in the piping days of peace. Must not one immediately admit that among many of our young men both the repugnance to taking life and the fear of losing it have been thoroughly eliminated by a sound military education? Is it any wonder, then, that in some moment of crisis in their private lives, they forget their civil obligations and remember only the killing part of their governmental education? One thing seems to be dead certain: the fact that they are likely to be hanged for a murder does not matter a hoot one way or the other. Although it may be entirely against the general principles expounded in this treatise, it seems necessary to put in a special plea on behalf of these unfortunate young men—unfortunate in the sense that the State is largely responsible in the first instance for their irresponsible civil conduct. I put forward this plea, well knowing that it is against the interests of the king's hangmen and may well be dismissed as a piece of sentimental nonsense on my part. My reply is that we must make allowances for our ex-defenders.

At this point, a few words must be said about the U.S.S.R., a



country which seems to have forced its way into the news in recent times. We cannot entirely ignore the Soviet Union nowadays. The democratic world was *flabbergasted* by the Kremlin Decree of May 26th, 1947, which: (1) abolished in peace-time the death penalty envisaged for crimes under Soviet Union Laws; (2)

¶ **USSR—Death Penalty Abolished!** substituted 25 years' 'confinement in reformatory labour camps' for crimes hitherto punishable by death; and (3) replaced the death penalty by 25 years' 'reformatory confinement' in the case of those

then under sentence of death. It was not only democrats who were flabbergasted when this Decree was published abroad. The people who were most shaken by it were the Friends of the Gallows, for they saw immediately that this might well prove to be an exceedingly bad example. They saw as a consequence the possible disappearance from Merrie England of the rope which holds together the substance of our law and order, the relegation to a undeserved obscurity of such public-spirited men as Mr. Hangman Pierrepont, landlord (when not O.H.M.S.) of the well-named public house "Help the Poor Struggler" at Oldham near Manchester, and immortalized by his perfect work in the **seventeen hangings in one day** of those bad men of Belsen and blonde beastess Irma Grese. There was about that episode one piece of unpleasantness, which deserves mention here. You will hardly believe it, but the government beat down Albert Pierrepont about the fee for this important piece of work! Instead of the usual fifteen guineas per drop, they offered him a *lump sum* for the seventeen necks to be broken! This characteristic piece of governmental cheese-paring the poor man accepted with the characteristic philosophy of our good hangmen, though the *Sunday Pictorial* (15/9/1946) in a masterly biographical sketch and pen-portrait records that Albert considered it to be a "tidy enough sum". To return to Russia, the worst feature of abolition of capital punishment in that country was some of the things well-known Russians said about it. Mr. A. Y. Vyshinsky, for example, went so far as to state this in writing: "It is with profound satisfaction that the Soviet people will welcome this great act of *Socialist humanism*"<sup>1</sup>—my italics. Socialist humanism!

<sup>1</sup> Many may remember that Comrade Andrei Vyshinsky was the principal prosecutor at the Moscow political trials of 1938, but they may have forgotten some of his eloquence at the end of those trials. In his well-modulated voice he cried to the judges: "Let your sentence, Comrade Judges, resound as a bell calling for new victories! Crush the accursed vipers . . . foul dogs . . . disgusting villains! We cannot leave such people alive. They can do such things in America—where Al Capone remains alive—but not here. Thank God, Russia is not America!" Political philosophers will immediately observe that for Mr. Vyshinsky to perform the somersault does not impair the validity of 'Socialist humanism', which has not changed since 1938. This humanism (and Vyshinsky's principles) can at any time be opportunely adjusted in accordance with the best doctrines of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinism, a fundamental of which is that the application of the doctrines should be in accordance with the needs of the moment. It has been noted that our Lord Templewood and our Mr. Chuter Ede have changed *their* views on capital punishment. Why should not Mr. Vyshinsky? We must leave it at that.

And a Labour Government in power in Britain! Marxist propaganda no doubt, and where is the end of it? To say the least, this sort of thing is deeply disquieting. Add to it another weird phenomenon. In our *Catholic Herald* (5/12/47) in reply to a secular letter in which the correspondent said that Catholics have been "inhibited" from taking part in anti-hanging activities" because their outlook invariably hinges on the denial of a principle which every Catholic accepts, *viz.*, the right invested in the State to inflict death where sufficiently grievous crime exists, the learned editor replied, "We do not think . . . that they (the Catholics) need have the smallest difficulty, in principle, in supporting the abolition of the death penalty." There were many other subversive suggestions in that dangerous letter, of which this may be quoted: "In a modern age where punishment is supposed to be corrective is not the continued retention of this engine of retribution an acknowledgment that society has failed?" Add this to the Soviet decision—'reformatory detention' to replace execution—and think it over. The implications which spring to mind are appalling, for one might easily draw the abominable conclusion that society has succeeded in Russia and failed in Britain: a *reductio ad absurdum*, if ever there was one. We cannot have this sort of thing, even from the editor of so democratic and liberal an organ of public opinion as the *Catholic Herald*. There is something very wrong somewhere, and I trust that all good Catholics will write to His Holiness the Pope asking for his guidance on this knotty subject. One can hardly doubt what His Holiness will say, for has he not blessed General Franco and his Falangist régime? And has not Franco achieved a high place—which he continues to hold as these lines are written—among the great executioners of history? One remembers the 30,000 which El Caudillo executed during the first month after his glorious liberation of Madrid. One may, I think, take it for granted that the Pope can be relied upon to be quite sound on all matters of faith and morals; and hanging is certainly a matter of both faith *and* morals. As history has shown. Whatever the *morals* of it may be—and they are not in great doubt—we must not ever allow our *faith* to be shaken.

The delectable threefold ceremony of hanging, drawing and quartering was invented by the English, as might be expected, and was first practised in the Year of Grace 1241. It was generally reserved for those found guilty of high treason, although, by way of diversion, it was used in other cases. Those who protested against this punishment were silenced by two sound arguments: (1) the legal, and (2) the religious. Divine authority was easily found in support of the religious argument, and Coke, one of the greatest English jurists, produced a Biblical quotation to justify each part of the ceremony. The form of sentence pronounced by His Majesty's judges was as follows:

¶ **Note on Hanging, Drawing and Quartering**

*That the traitor be dragged along the surface of the ground, tied to the tail of a horse and drawn to the gallows and there hanged by the neck until he be half dead and then cut down; and his entrails*



*be cut out of his body and burnt by the executioner; then his head is to be cut off, his body to be divided into quarters, and afterwards his head and quarters to be set up in some open places directed.*<sup>1</sup>

London Bridge and Westminster Hall were two favourite places for the exhibition of the carved-up corpse. It is interesting to trace the history of the decline in punishment through the ages, beginning with hanging, drawing and quartering; to consider the Golden Age, beginning in the reign of Henry VIII in which there were 72,000 executions; then look at the last century when there were over 200 offences for which one could be hanged; and, finally, from, say, 1850 to the present day, when we have come to the stage when only a dozen people or thereabouts are hanged every year. In

¶ **Wanted: Less** each age the supporters of the death penalty main-  
**Severity and** tained that restrictions in its application would mean  
**more Certainty** a subsequent increase in the particular crime for which it was applied. It must in fairness be said

that history has steadily given them the lie, which in many parts of the world has been nailed to the table. Chief Justice Ellenborough, speaking in the Lord's debate of 1810 regarding a suggestion to repeal the law which made hanging the penalty for theft to the value of five shillings, said: 'Repeal this law and see the contrast—no man can trust himself an hour out of doors without the most alarming apprehensions that, on his return, every vestige of his property will be swept off by the hardened robber.' This statement appears to us ridiculous. It was. The last instance of hanging and drawing occurred at Derby in 1817. It was a case of high treason. By the special mercy of the Prince Regent the quartering of the three accused persons was remitted, and beheading substituted. The execution was public and the men hung for half an hour. On the platform, in front of the gallows, were placed the block and two sacks of sawdust; and

on a bench two axes, two sharp knives, and a basket.  
¶ **Hanging, etc.,** Because of public fury the scaffold was surrounded  
**Bulwarks** by a great force of cavalry with drawn swords;  
**of the** several companies of infantry were also present. The  
**Constitution** space in front of the gaol was densely packed with spectators. The poet Shelley is said to have been

an eyewitness, which may account for certain of the things he has written. Could even the Boat Race equal the spectacle?

When Sir Samuel Romilly agitated against the continuance of hanging, drawing and quartering, the Law Officers of the Crown declared he was 'breaking down the bulwarks of the Constitution.' Glorious bulwarks. Now only hanging remains, and if that goes completely (it is already on the move) where will our Constitution be? We cannot have a Constitution without bulwarks—that is obvious, so the only thing we can do is to conserve the art of hanging by every means in our power.

If it were not that the prestige of the Church of England has so deplorably declined of late, I would suggest a strong appeal to the

<sup>1</sup> *Bygone Punishments*, by W. Andrews.

bishops on behalf of the hangman's rapidly disappearing art. Most Christian Churches can nowadays be relied upon to support State Killing: in 1810 there were six bishops and an archbishop in the majority of thirty-two votes to eleven which defeated the measure to abolish hanging for the theft of five-shillingsworth of anything. It

¶ **Official** must be a great comfort to all our hangmen to think  
**Church favours** that to-day they can be equally sure of Christian  
**Hanging** support for a continuance of their office. Indeed, when we come to look squarely at the present position in regard to the death penalty in England, it will be found that its two greatest supporters are Law and Church, as they always have been in the past; for which, may the Lord make us truly thankful.

Since this is so, we may now consider in some detail the hangman's art, as practised by one of the greatest exponents thereof who ever lived. I mean, of course, the late Mr. Berry, a bluff Yorkshireman, who was the very soul of honour and good nature. You should know

¶ **Hangmen** that there are no written regulations in England  
**born, not** governing the appointment of hangmen. Their  
**made** assistants are appointed by the Prison Commissioners for particular executions and, like doctors and lawyers, they are paid by fees for work actually done.

Chief hangmen are appointed by sheriffs from lists of assistants who have shown general aptitude and discretion; and chief hangmen are also paid by fee.

As there are some fifteen men qualified, and only about a dozen hangings in the course of a twelve-month, at fifteen guineas a drop, the rewards are not great. It is largely a labour of love—it could hardly be otherwise. Furthermore, the freedom of our hangmen is greatly restricted by a host of pernicky regulations which ought to be abolished. They may not write for the press, or go on lecture tours in America. What is the British Council thinking of to neglect the possibilities in our hangmen as exponents of the English way of death? But to return. Mr. Berry tells us that in his youth he thought he had inborn ability which (if only cultivated by a little practice and reinforced by deep study) would make his a great artist. He says that when he applied for the post it was not from any special liking for it but because he was '*simply driven to it by the poverty-stricken condition of his family.*' A curious factor that, one which has been rediscovered recently by our Industrial Health Research Board in regard to workers generally. In 1936 they announced (the Board, I mean) that 'one of the most important factors in determining efficiency and pleasure in work is the inclination or will to work, and this, in turn, is largely dependent upon the provision of effective incentives.' The Board goes on to state profoundly: 'Of these incentives the most potent is probably the weekly wage,' which shows that Mr. Berry was acting in accordance with deeply-rooted psychological principles, common to men and women in other phases of life. It is as well to bear this clearly in mind, even if the rewards for hanging



are not great. Testimonies to Mr. Berry's character show that he was a cool, businesslike, deeply religious man, and tender-hearted to a fault. The editor of his incomparable treatise<sup>1</sup> writes:

*'When he has been due to start for a place of execution, his repugnance to the task has been so great that his wife and her mother have been obliged to use the greatest possible force of persuasion to prevent him from shirking his duty.'*

One can imagine the wife saying to herself: 'If the jackass doesn't do the job, bang goes my spring costume.'

His hobbies were fishing, otter-hunting, shooting pigeons and rabbits; he adored animals. When Mr. Berry first applied for the post of executioner in 1883, there were 1,399 other applicants for the job. He was unlucky but, nothing daunted, he returned to his

studies; and later applied again. This time he was successful. As he himself says, 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, etc.' From that day he never looked back. It is, of course, by way of apology he says that he was driven to the practice of hanging

by the poverty-stricken condition of his family—mere bashfulness on his part. Obviously, he was born for the work. When he went to measure a client for the gallows, he used (after having examined the neck) to hand the condemned man a piece of paper with these lines upon it:

*My brother—sit and think,  
While yet on earth some hours are left to thee;  
Kneel to thy God, who does not from thee shrink,  
And lay thy sins on Christ, who died for thee.*

*He rests His wounded hand  
With loving-kindness on thy sin-stained brow  
And says, "Here at thy side I ready stand  
To make thy scarlet sins as white as snow.*

*I did not shed My blood  
For sinless angels good and pure and true;  
For hopeless sinners flowed that crimson blood,  
My heart's blood ran for you, My son, for you.*

*Though thou hast grieved Me sore,  
My arms of mercy still are open wide,  
I still hold open Heaven's shining door.  
Come, then, take refuge in My wounded side.*

*Men shun thee—but not I.  
Come close to Me, I love My erring sheep.  
My blood can cleanse thy sins of blackest dye.  
I understand, if thou can'st only weep.*

<sup>1</sup> *My Experiences as an Executioner*, from which all the facts about the late Mr. Hangman Berry and his art are quoted.

*Words fail thee—never mind.*

*Thy Saviour can read e'en a sigh, a tear;  
I came, sin-stricken hearts to heal and bind  
And died to save thee; to My heart thou'rt dear.*

*Come now: the time is short.*

*Longing to pardon and to bless I wait.  
Look up to Me, My sheep so dearly bought,  
And say, 'Forgive me ere it is too late'."*<sup>1</sup>

Which shows that Mr. Berry believed in God the Father, God the Son, and possibly in the Holy Ghost also. It is true that his actual performances at hanging had not the same brilliancy of style as those of the late Mr. Calcraft nor, I should say, of our contemporary, Mr. Pierrepont. Mr. Calcraft showed that, no matter how a hangman may reveal in his art the results of subconscious action, the final results are attained through lofty flights of the artist's own imagination; or else precisely as prophets receive religious truth.

Nevertheless, Mr. Berry's book is a diffusion of the ideals of a modest, laborious and useful life; it is to him that we owe many small, though important improvements in the gallows. After him we may

speak of the whole business of execution in this country as a *Scienza nuova*, of great delicacy, to be practised only by men of lyrical intuition and undoubted skill. Mr. Berry it was who laid the foundations for the mathematics of drops. His celebrated formula:

$$\frac{412}{(\text{Weight of the body in stones})^2} = \frac{\text{length of drop}}{\text{in feet}}$$

is with slight modification used to this day. He it was who discovered that a three-quarter inch rope of five strands of Italian hemp is the best for hanging men. Four strands will suffice for women; and even three work well for infants.

Mr. Berry first used the brass eyelet; a marvellous technical advance.

At this point I must beg the reader to pause with me for a moment while I refute a very wicked calumny against the well-established reputation of this notable hangman. I had heard something of it

years ago in Dublin, but not until 7th December, 1947 did I ever see the wickedness in cold print; and you would not ever suspect who was the perpetrator thereof. It was no other than Mr. James Harpole, F.R.S., one of most distinguished living surgeons

who also writes well—a rare combination. In his reminiscences (which were serialized in the *Sunday Chronicle*) appeared a statement which I had to read several times to be sure that I was not still half asleep—one of the few luxuries we can enjoy in these times of national austerity is to read the sabbath newspapers over a cup of tea in bed—

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, page 106.



when suddenly the enormity of Mr. Harpole's words struck me like the blast from an atomic bomb exploding some miles away. They were to the following effect: that a well-known figure about Trinity College, Dublin, a most benevolent septuagenarian, the Reverend Samuel Haughton, Doctor of Divinity, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Laws, Fellow of T.C.D., a Fellow of the Royal Society, formerly a Professor of Geology and famous for the treatises he had written on Mathematics, had worked out the formula for the scientific long drop since then used by our hangmen. Mr. Harpole quotes *sheer hearsay evidence* for this allegation—for which he himself takes no responsibility whatever. A third-year medical student it was who imparted the information about Sammy Haughton, saying that the latter could not bear to think of murderers strung up and left to kick and dangle until they suffocated. Hence, the Rev. gentleman used his rare combination of qualifications to work out the scientific formula by which any hangman could calculate, after weighing his client, what distance in space the body should be allowed to fall in order to fracture the neck and kill instantaneously. Mr. Harpole significantly comments: "I gazed at the old man fascinated. He looked so gentle. It seemed incongruous." Now, the whole point is that in his wonderful book Mr. Berry has established for all time the truth of the matter: that it was his predecessor in office Mr. Hangman Marwood who *invented* the long drop and that it was he, Mr. Berry, who evolved the scientific formula used by his successor in our progressive country ever since. Thus Mr. Berry occupies a place in the science of hanging as important as that of Albert Einstein in general scientific thought, and Mr. Berry's *Theory of Hanging* must be regarded as in a category hardly less nebulous than Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*. It was Mr. Berry who found the constant. I make no apology for introducing this refutation of what can only be regarded as a very wicked calumny, one started by the Lord only knows whom, disseminated by that third-year T.C.D. medical student and now brought up again by Mr. James Harpole, F.R.S. Let honour be given where it is due: to the author of that unique book of reminiscences *My Experiences as an Executioner* and perfectionist in the scientific side of the art of hanging. Having thus cleared Mr. Hangman Berry's name, we may well proceed. Before doing so, however, I think I ought to quote the very latest and most authoritative statement I know about the drop. Under the heading 'Judicial Hanging' the *British Medical Journal* (16/7/1947) published the following dialogue on death:

Q.—What is the length of the drop in a judicial hanging?

A.—On an average, six feet (1.8 metres), varying inversely with the weight of the body. The knot is placed at the angle of the jaw, and the object is to jerk the head sideways, fracture or dislocate the vertebral column, and rupture the spinal cord. This happens *almost invariably*, the dislocation usually occurring between the second and third cervical vertebrae. Although some other structures may be damaged, the strain is not nearly enough to divide the muscles

and ligaments completely.

I have italicized the words 'almost invariably', which means that the medical scientist who wrote the above is not convinced that it always happens. Nor indeed is anybody. Not that this matters greatly, because the operative word in the judge's sentence—'to be hanged by the neck until he is dead'—is *until*. 'Until he is dead' thus covers everything, including those little misfortunes of hangmen when they do a botched job on those occasions when, like the rest of us, they get out of the wrong side of the bed.

Having made this clear, we may return to our muttons.

I have no doubt that, had this particular hangman's life been spared for a few years longer, he would have done for the gallows what the ingenious German recently did for the cycle: make it capable of climbing trees or conversion into a paddle-boat. The only thing necessary to turn this world into a perfect place for Mr. Berry was a permanent jury for all murder trials in England, that jury to consist of retired hangmen, ropemakers, hemp-merchants, prison governors, eyelet makers and dignitaries of the Church, who would convict every accused man in support of their vested interests. And this in spite of the fact that Mr. Berry was not one of those men who are vindictive to five places of decimals, although he did not believe in close seasons for hanging. With these introductory remarks regarding the place of Mr. Berry in the general history of hanging, we may now consider the words of wisdom that flowed from his honest pen:

'My method,' says Mr. Berry in his *magnum opus*, 'My method of execution is the outcome of the experience of my predecessors and myself, aided by suggestions from the doctors, and is rather the result of gradual growth than the invention of any one man. The matter which requires the greatest attention in connection with an execution is the allowance of a suitable drop for each person executed, and the adjustment of this matter is not nearly so simple as an outsider would imagine. It is, of course, necessary that the drop should be of sufficient length to cause instantaneous death, that is to say, to cause death by dislocation rather than by strangulation; and on the other hand, the drop must not be so great as to *outwardly* mutilate the victim. If all murderers who have to be hanged were of precisely the same weight and build it would be very easy to find out the most suitable length of drop, and always to give the same; but as a matter of fact they differ enormously. In the earliest days of hanging it was the practice for the executioner to place his noose round the victim's neck, and then to haul upon the other end of the rope (which was passed through a ring on the scaffold pole) until the culprit was strangled without any drop at all. After a while the drop system was introduced, but the length of drop given was never more than three feet, so that death was still generally caused by strangulation, and not by dislocation, as it is at present.



'One after another, all our English executioners followed the same plan without thought of change or improvement, until Mr. Marwood took the appointment. He, as a humane man, carefully considered the subject, and came to the conclusion that the then existing method, though certain, was not so rapid or painless as it ought to be. In

consequence, he introduced his long-drop system with a fall of from seven to ten feet, which causes instantaneous death by severance of the spinal cord. ¶ **Mr. Marwood** — **Pioneer of the New Science** I was slightly acquainted with Mr. Marwood before his death, and I had gained some particulars of his method from conversation with him; so that when I undertook my first execution, at Edinburgh, I naturally worked upon his lines. This first commission was to execute Robert Vickers and William Innes, two miners, who were condemned to death for the murder of two gamekeepers. The respective weights were 10 stone 4 lb. and 9 stone 6 lb., and I gave them drops of 8 ft. 6 in. and 10 ft. respectively. In both cases death was instantaneous, and the prison surgeon gave me a testimonial to the effect that the execution was satisfactory in every respect.

'Upon this experience I based a table of weights and drops. Taking a man of 14 stone as basis, and giving him a drop of 8 ft., which is what is thought necessary, ¶ **A good Working List of Drops** I calculated that every half-stone lighter weight would require a two inches longer drop, and the full table, as I entered it in my books<sup>1</sup> at the time, stood as follows:

14 stone . . . . .	8 ft. 0 in.
13½ " . . . . .	8 ft. 2 in.
13 " . . . . .	8 ft. 4 in.
12½ " . . . . .	8 ft. 6 in.
12 " . . . . .	8 ft. 8 in.
11½ " . . . . .	8 ft. 10 in.
11 " . . . . .	9 ft. 0 in.
10½ " . . . . .	9 ft. 2 in.
10 " . . . . .	9 ft. 4 in.
9½ " . . . . .	9 ft. 6 in.
9 " . . . . .	9 ft. 8 in.
8½ " . . . . .	9 ft. 10 in.
8 " . . . . .	10 ft. 0 in.

'This table I calculated for persons of what I might call "average" build, but it could not by any means be rigidly adhered to with safety. For instance, I have more than once had to execute persons who had attempted suicide by cutting their throats, or who had been otherwise wounded about the neck, and to prevent re-opening the wounds I have reduced the drop by nearly half.

'Again, in the case of persons of very fleshy build, who often have

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Berry was a most methodical man. There is a chapter of his book on 'The Business Side of Hanging'. He kept his accounts very carefully.

¶ **Doctors' Advice on Hanging**

weak bones and muscles about the neck, I have reduced the drop by a quarter or half of the distance indicated by the table. If I had not done so, no doubt two or three of those whom I have executed would have had their heads entirely jerked off;<sup>1</sup>— which did occur in one case to which I shall again refer. In the case of persons with scrofulous tendencies, it is especially necessary that the fall should be unusually short, and in these cases I have at times received useful hints from the gaol doctors.

'Until November 30, 1885, I worked to the scale already given, but on that date I had the awful experience above referred to, which caused me to reconsider the whole subject and to construct a general table on what I believe to be a *truly scientific basis* . . . The man with whom it occurred was Robert Goodale, whom I executed at Norwich

Castle. He weighed 15 stone, and the drop indicated by the first table would therefore be 7 ft. 8 in., but in consequence of his appearance I reduced it to 5 ft. 9 in., because the muscles of his neck did not appear well developed and strong. But even this,

as it turned out, was not short enough, and the result was *one* of the most horrible mishaps that I have ever had. As will be seen from the full report of this case . . . the coroner exonerated me from all blame, and testified to the careful way in which I had done my work; but I felt that it was most necessary to take every possible precaution against the recurrence of such an affair. I, therefore, worked out a table of the striking force of falling bodies of various weights falling through different distances.<sup>2</sup> Working with this, I calculate that an "average" man, of any weight, requires a fall that will finish with a striking force of 24 cwt., and if the convict seems to require less, I mentally estimate the striking force that is necessary, and then by referring to the table I can instantly find the length of drop required. To see how this new table works out we may take the case of Robert Goodale again. As he weighed 15 stone his striking force with a drop of 2 ft. would be 21 cwt. 21 lb., or with a drop of 3 ft., 26 cwt. 7 lb., so that if he were a man of ordinary build the drop necessary would be 2 ft. 6 in. As I estimated from his appearance that his drop ought to have been about one-sixth less than the standard, I should have given him, working on this new table, about 2 ft. 1 in. instead of the 5 ft. 9 in. which was actually given. This is an extreme case, with a very heavy man, but all through the table it will be found that the drop works out shorter than in the first table. For instance, Vickers and Innes, the two Edinburgh murderers previously referred to, would have had their drops reduced from 8 ft. 6 in. and 10 ft. to 5 ft. 6 in. and 7 ft. respectively, if they had been treated according to the present revised table.

'On August 20, 1891, at Kirkdale Gaol, Liverpool, at the execution of John Conway, an attempt was made to dictate to me the length

<sup>1</sup> See page 18.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ready Reckoner for Hangmen*, Appendix, page 79.



of drop, and a most unfortunate scene ensued. From seeing the convict, Conway, I had decided<sup>1</sup> that the drop ought to be 4 ft. 6 in., a little under the scale rate, and I was surprised and annoyed at being told by Dr. Barr,<sup>2</sup> acting, I believe, under authority, that I was to give a drop of 6 ft. 9 in. I said that it would pull the man's head off altogether, and finally refused to go on with the execution if such a long drop were given. Dr. Barr then measured off a shorter drop, some ten or twelve inches shorter, but still much longer than I thought necessary, and I reluctantly agreed to go on. The result, everyone knows. The drop was not so long as to absolutely pull off the victim's head, but it ruptured the principle blood vessels of the neck.

'I do not know who was really responsible for the interference with my calculation, but do not think that the long drop was Dr. Barr's own idea, as the drop which I suggested was on the same system as he had previously commended, and was almost identical with the drop that would have worked out on the basis of his own recommendation in a letter to *The Times* some years ago.

'Dr. Barr's letter to me, written in 1884, was as follows:

1, St. Domingo Grove,  
Everton, Liverpool,  
Sept. 2nd, 1884.

Sir,

*In compliance with your request, I have pleasure in giving you a certificate as to the manner in which you conducted the execution of Peter Cassidy in H.M. Prison, Kirkdale. I may now repeat the statement which I gave in evidence at the Inquest, "that I have never seen an execution more satisfactorily performed." This was very gratifying to me.*

*Your rope was of excellent quality; fine, soft, pliable, and strong. You adjusted the ring directed forwards in the manner in which I have recommended in my pamphlet, Judicial Hang-*

¶ **A Hangman's Diploma** *ing. You gave a sufficient length of drop, considering the weight of the culprit, and completely dis-*

*located the atlas and axis (first and second vertebrae). I have reckoned that the weight of the criminal, multiplied by the length of the drop, might range from 1,120 to 1,260 foot pounds, and I have calculated that this vis viva in the case of Cassidy amounted to 1,140 foot pounds.*

*The pinioning and other details were carried out with due decorum. I hope, whoever be appointed to the post of public*

<sup>1</sup> i.e. by mental arithmetic.

<sup>2</sup> As will be seen later, Dr. Barr made amends for his interference.

*Executioner may be prohibited from also performing the part of a "showman" to gratify a depraved and morbid public curiosity.<sup>1</sup>*

James Barr, M.D.,

Medical Officer, H.M. Prison, Kirkdale,

*To Mr. James Berry.*

'The rope I use is thirteen feet long and has a one-inch brass ring worked into one end, through which the other end of the rope is passed to form the noose. A leather washer, which fits the rope pretty tightly, is used to slip up behind the brass ring, in order to prevent the noose slipping or slackening after it has been adjusted.

'In using the rope I always adjust it with the ring just behind the left ear. This position I never alter, though, of course, if there were any special reason for doing so, for instance, if the convict had attempted suicide and were wounded on the side of the throat, death could be caused by placing the ring under the chin or even behind the head.

'The position behind the ear, however, has distinct advantages and is the best calculated to cause instantaneous and painless death, because it acts in three different ways towards the same end. In the first place, it will cause death by strangulation, which was really the only cause of death in the old method of hanging, before the long drop was introduced. Secondly, it dislocates the vertebrae, which is now the actual cause of death. And thirdly, if a third factor were necessary, it has a tendency to internally rupture the jugular vein, which in itself is sufficient to cause practically instantaneous death.

'The pinioning arrangement, like the rest of the arrangements for an execution, is very simple. A broad leather bodybelt is clasped round the convict's waist, and to this the arm-straps are fastened. Two straps, an inch and a half wide, with strong steel buckles, clasp the elbows and fasten them to the body-belt, while another strap of the same strength goes round the wrists, and is fastened into the body-belt in front. The legs are pinioned by means of a single two-inch strap below the knees. The rest of the apparatus consists of a white<sup>2</sup> cap, shaped somewhat like a bag, which pulls down over the eyes of the criminal to prevent his seeing the final preparations.

'Until recently, the scaffolds in use in the various gaols differed very much in the details of their construction, as there was no official model, but in each case the local authorities followed their own idea. In 1885, however, a design was drawn, in the Surveyor's Department of the Home Office, by Lieut.-Col. Alten Beamish, R.E. Before

<sup>1</sup> This generous testimony is quoted to show the magnanimity of Dr. Barr. The reader will obtain from this long quotation from Mr. Berry's book an extraordinarily fine picture of the mentality of a hangman; and will realize what a matter-of-fact view of the business is taken.

<sup>2</sup> White, to distinguish it from the judge's black cap.



being finally adopted, the design was submitted to me; and it seemed a thoroughly good one, as, indeed, it has since proved to be, in actual practice. The design is supplied to the authorities of any gaol where a scaffold is to be erected, from the Engineer's Department at the Home Office; and, with a slight alteration, has been the pattern in general use to the present day. The alteration of which I speak, is a little one suggested by myself, and consists of the substitution of a slope, or a level gangway, in place of steps. I have found, in some cases, when the criminals were nervous or prostrated, that the steps formed a practical difficulty. The slope, or gangway, was approved by the Home Office, and was first used on April 15, 1890, at Kirkdale Gaol, for the execution of Wm. Chadwick. It was a simple improvement, but it has turned out to be a very useful one.' (Mr. Berry's inborn modesty will be observed throughout this description of his official duties. Incidentally, it was only in 1937 that modern science was able to improve on his machinery.) 'At most of the gaols in the country the scaffold is taken to pieces and laid away immediately after use, but in Newgate, Wandsworth, Liverpool, and Strangeways (Manchester), it is kept standing permanently. The essential parts of the scaffold are few. There is a heavy crossbeam, into which bolts terminating in hooks are usually fastened. In some cases this crossbeam stands on two upright posts, but usually its ends are let into the walls of the scaffold house. Of course, the hooks fastened to it are intended to hold the rope. The scaffold proper, or trap, or drop, as it is variously called, is the portion of the structure to which most importance is attached, and of which the Government furnishes a plan. It consists of two massive oaken doors, fixed in an oak framework on a level with the floor, and over a deep, bricked pit. The arrangement is a very good one; as both doors must necessarily fall at exactly the same moment.' (At a recent execution, a hangman's engineer fell into the pit with the client. At another, the drop worked but did not kill the client, who remarked: 'What do you take me for—a b—— Yo-Yo!') 'Their great weight—for they are of three-inch oak—causes them to drop very suddenly, even without the weight of the criminal, and they are caught by spring catches to prevent any possibility of rebound.

'The hour fixed for executions is 8.0 a.m., in all the prisons, except Wandsworth and Lincoln, where it is 9.0 a.m.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the scaffold and rope are arranged, and the drop decided, beforehand. I calculate for three minutes to be occupied from the time of entering the condemned cell to the finish of life's great tragedy for the doomed man, so I enter the cell punctually at three minutes to eight. In order that my action in hanging a man may be legal, it is necessary that I should have what is known as an "authority to

¶ **Hangman describes Hanging**

<sup>1</sup> Owing to public demonstrations outside prisons likely to obstruct traffic, etc., it has been found necessary recently to vary the hour.

hang," which is drawn up and signed by the Sheriff, and handed to me a few minutes before the time of the execution. Its form varies a good deal. In some cases it is a long wordy document, full of the "wherefores," and "whatsoevers" in which the law delights. But usually it is a simple, official-looking form, engrossed by the gaol clerk, and running somewhat as follows:

¶ **An 'Order to Hang'**

'To JAMES BERRY

'I....., of....., in the County of....., Esquire, Sheriff of the said County of....., do hereby authorize you to hang A..... B..... who now lies under Sentence of Death in Her Majesty's Prison at .....  
'Dated this.....day of.....,.....  
.....Sheriff.

*This is folded in three,<sup>1</sup> and endorsed outside,*

Re A..... B.....

AUTHORITY TO HANG.

.....Sheriff.  
.....shire.

'When we enter the condemned cell, the chaplain is already there, and has been for some time. Two attendants, who have watched through the convict's last night on earth, are also present. At my appearance the convict takes leave of his attendants, to whom he generally gives some little token or keepsake, and I at once proceed to pinion his arms. As soon as the pinioning is done, a procession is formed, and it used to be in the following order:—

	Chief Warder.	
Warder.		Warder.
	Chaplain.	
Warder.	Convict.	Warder.
	Executioner.	
Principal Warder.		Principal Warder.
Warder.		Warder.
	Governor and Sheriff.	
Wand Bearer. <sup>2</sup>		Wand Bearer.
	Gaol Surgeon and Attendant.	

Mr. Berry continues: 'In some few cases, where the prisoner has not confessed before the time for the execution, I have approached him in the cell in a kindly manner, asking him, as it can make no difference to his fate, to confess the justice of the sentence, in order

<sup>1</sup> Note Mr. Berry's eye for detail.

<sup>2</sup> The last poor remnant of official pageantry in hanging.



that I may feel sure that I am not hanging an innocent person. (Note Mr. Berry's precaution on behalf of his conscience). In most cases they have done so, either in the cell, or at the last moment on the scaffold. Of course, the confidences reposed in me at such moments I have never divulged, and it would be most improper to do so; but I am at liberty to state, that of all the people I have executed, only two or three have died without fully and freely confessing their guilt.

'On the way from the cell to the scaffold the chaplain reads the service for the burial of the dead, and as the procession moves I place the white cap upon the head of the convict. Just as we reach the scaffold I pull the cap over his eyes. Then I place the convict

¶ Last Scene  
of all

under the beam, pinion the legs just below the knees, with a strap similar to the one used for the elbows, adjust the rope, pull the bolt and the trap falls. Death is instantaneous, but the body is left hanging for at least half an hour in case of accidents (see page 49), and is then lowered into a coffin, made in the prison, and carried to the mortuary to await the inquest. The inquest usually takes place at ten o'clock, but in some few places it is held at noon. After the inquest the body is buried in the prison grounds.' There is now no quick-lime used, and only the prison authorities know the exact place of burial.

As Mr. Berry remarks, 'In carrying out the last penalty of the law, *everything* is conducted with decorum and solemnity.' It is comforting to have this assurance from a disinterested party, and if hangmen *do* sometimes make mistakes, we must not be hard on them.

They are not always to blame.

For many years there have been few changes in what happens in our prisons, and what is quoted above may be taken as including the fundamentals, except that nowadays a hanging is more perfunctory and accompanied by less solemnity and pageantry than in better and more spacious days. That Holy Procession is not always formed and, if there is a procession, it is the procession of a drab age. I am deeply indebted to the *News of the World* (11/3/45) which, with our legal publications, is a most reliable guide to criminal happenings. Here is what is justifiably claimed by that excellent newspaper to be 'an authentic description of the last fleeting hours' of a man about to be hanged: "At ten o'clock on the night before the execution two of six prison officers who have shared the death-watch shake their prisoner by the hand and wish him good-bye. Two others will have

¶ Those last  
fleeting  
Hours

done the same thing eight hours earlier. The remaining couple take over from 10 p.m. until 7 a.m. next day. From the latter hour two officers who had not previously "sat" with the condemned man keep the remaining two hours of the watch and accompany their prisoner to the execution shed. He will probably have

spent most of his last night writing letters or playing cards with his guards. Few condemned men sleep at the end, though invariably they are quite calm and self-possessed when the realisation comes that there is no more hope. At 7 a.m. the clothing in which the man has been tried and condemned is given to him minus collar and tie, and the prison attire destroyed. This, however, was not the procedure in the case of Karl Hulten, who, so it has been disclosed, went to the scaffold wearing prison clothes, doubtless to preserve his American uniform from ignominy. For breakfast, porridge, bacon, bread and butter are served to men who are to die within the hour. Some eat, some decline. The majority are content with a cup of tea and unlimited cigarettes. Between 8.30 and 9 the chaplain enters the condemned cell to give spiritual consolation. If he wishes the prisoner may take Holy Communion. The chaplain usually stays in the death cell until nine o'clock. At that moment the following will be standing quietly outside the door: The governor of the prison, the under-

¶ Hangman  
shakes Hands  
and gets busy

sheriff of the county, the executioner, assistant executioner, medical officer of the prison, chief officer of the prison, hospital orderly, and prison engineer. On the stroke of nine the cell door opens and the governor says to the under-sheriff, 'Your prisoner, sir.' Condemned persons are the prisoners of the High Sheriff of the County. At the same time the executioner steps in front of the condemned man and offers to shake hands with him. The gesture is invariably acknowledged. The hospital orderly proffers a tot of brandy, and the executioner's assistant pinions the condemned man's arms behind him above the elbow. All this takes a matter of seconds. The two officers of the death watch then lead the condemned out of the cell to the execution shed, usually but a few steps away. Here he is guided to a chalk-mark on the trap. The executioner then pulls a white cap over the head and face of the prisoner, adjusts the noose of the rope already suspended just above by a single thread. At the same time the assistant executioner straps the prisoner's ankles. The executioner gives a sign for everyone to step off the trap, and quickly kicks the release bolt from the lever. It is all over."

As we look round this world to-day, this rather sad world of wars, revolutions, unrest and political puzzles, we find that there is at least one admirable tradition in the history of man which always survives the worst upheavals: the scaffold, or its equivalent. Leaders of

¶ Scaffold  
unaffected by  
Progress,  
Revolutions  
or Select  
Committees

revolutions, dictators, statesmen and political philosophers—whatever their creed or colour—are all agreed on at least one point, and it is that, if society is to be reformed, pruned, polished and improved, the reforms, prunings, polishings and improvements cannot *possibly* be achieved without the aid of that oldest of institutions, the death penalty. It is true that there are countries and moments in which the legal erasure of human life is temporarily abolished, but sooner or



later a Leader of enlightenment appears who reverts to the good old tradition. Take Italy, for example. Capital punishment was abolished there in 1889, with the remarkable result that the homicide rate decreased steadily each year from 10.64 pr 100,000 of the population per annum to 3.48. But in our own times a great ruler appeared there who, in 1928, reintroduced the death penalty for attempts on his own life or even that of the king; and also for any crime 'endangering the safety of the state.' Thus, at one brilliant stroke, enlightenment came into its own again. In Germany the death penalty was almost entirely in abeyance until a statesman-prophet came into power in the nineteen-thirties. Then the supreme penalty was not only restored to its proper place in public affairs, but it was extended. In Austria also capital punishment was abolished in 1919, to be reintroduced in 1934 by the government of the late Doctor Dollfuss.

And so it seems, from the experience of our very own times, that the scaffold is the *only political edifice which cannot be swept away by the most enlightened revolution*. Indeed, it has always been the same—everywhere, as a little research indicates.

Our hangmen may feel secure in their jobs.

If any reassurance is required by them on this point, it may be found in the exhaustive *Report from the Select Committee on Capital Punishment* which was ordered to be printed by the House of Commons on December 9, 1930. That Committee held sittings on thirty-one days and 'heard a large number of witnesses, representing all aspects of the question'—to quote the Report. Its *Definite Recommendations* included: (a) The introduction and passage of a Bill immediately, providing 'for the abolition of the Death Penalty for an experimental period of five years'; (b) a Resolution to be passed by the House of Commons recommending commutation of Death Sentences by the King; (c) as substitution for the Death Penalty, there should be as in the case of reprieved murderers, a life sentence.

What was the result of all this? Parliament refused to be moved. The result was, therefore, precisely nothing—except a most interesting Report of nearly seven hundred closely printed pages. Parliament saw to that. Which just shows what a fine conservative people we are. The hangman is; and the hangman will remain. And why not, bless his heart!

The tide against capital punishment in general and against hanging in particular, swells to such dimensions that one day we may see the disappearance of an official whose place in our history is assured.

When hangings cease there will be no increase in crime: because there will be more convictions for murder, or, in other words, punishment will be more

certain than it is at present. The hangman's rope and eyelet, his pinions and all the accoutrements of his great art will find their place in the museums and in Tussauds.

Alas! my friends, is not that a sad, sad prospect for humanity?



APPENDIX

A READY RECKONER FOR HANGMEN.

*RULE.*—Take the weight of the Client in Stones and look down the column of weights until you reach the figures nearest to 24 cwt., and the figure in the left-hand column will be the DROP. See page 69 of this Handbook.

Distance falling in feet. Zero.	8 Stone	9 Stone	10 Stone	11 Stone	12 Stone	13 Stone	14 Stone	15 Stone	16 Stone	17 Stone	18 Stone	19 Stone
	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.	cwt. qr. lb.
1 ft.	8 0 0	9 0 0	10 0 0	11 0 0	12 0 0	13 0 0	14 0 0	15 0 0	16 0 0	17 0 0	18 0 0	19 0 0
2 ft.	11 1 15	12 2 23	14 0 14	15 2 4	16 3 22	18 1 12	19 3 2	21 0 21	22 2 11	24 0 1	25 1 19	26 3 9
3 ft.	13 3 16	15 2 15	17 1 14	19 0 12	20 3 11	22 2 9	24 1 8	26 0 7	27 3 5	29 2 4	31 1 2	33 0 1
4 ft.	16 0 0	18 0 0	20 0 0	22 0 0	24 0 0	26 0 0	28 0 0	30 0 0	32 0 0	34 0 0	36 0 0	40 0 0
5 ft.	17 2 11	19 3 5	22 0 0	24 0 22	26 1 16	28 2 11	30 3 5	33 0 0	35 0 22	37 0 16	39 2 11	41 3 15
6 ft.	19 2 11	22 0 5	24 2 0	26 3 22	29 0 16	31 3 11	34 1 5	36 3 0	39 0 22	41 2 16	44 0 11	46 2 5
7 ft.	21 0 22	23 3 11	26 2 0	29 0 16	31 3 5	34 1 22	37 0 11	39 3 0	41 1 16	45 0 5	47 2 22	50 1 11
8 ft.	22 2 22	25 2 4	28 1 14	31 0 23	34 0 5	36 3 15	39 2 25	42 2 7	45 1 16	48 0 26	51 0 8	53 3 18
9 ft.	24 0 11	27 0 12	30 0 14	33 0 23	36 0 16	39 0 18	42 0 19	45 0 21	48 0 22	51 0 23	54 0 25	57 0 26
10 ft.	25 1 5	28 1 23	31 2 14	34 3 4	37 3 22	41 0 12	44 1 2	47 1 21	50 2 11	53 3 1	56 3 19	60 0 9



---

EXPRESS PRINTERS,  
LONDON—E.I.

---

‘Had I the power, I would see that a copy was deposited on every breakfast table in London.’

—*Norman Douglas.*

‘A remarkable, effective sustained piece of irony, not unworthy to be mentioned with Fielding’s *Jonathan Wilde*.’

—*British Medical Journal.*

‘Worthy to rank with De Quincey’s *Murder as a Fine Art*.’—*Daily Herald.*

‘Who is Mr. Duff? Why is he not as famous as Mr. George Bernard Shaw? He writes as well.’—*Liverpool Courier.*

‘Admirable treatise.’—*Wyndham Lewis.*

‘Excellent . . . the satire is kept up right through.’—*Cambridge Review.*

‘Of more than ordinary interest, a well-written satirical disquisition on the humane practice.’

—*Leonard Woolf.*

‘A modern Defoe . . . an exquisite piece of irony. De Quincey could not have made a better job of it.’—*John o’ London.*