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When the Hangman Lost His Nerve

By John D. Barry

The following vivid sketch by John D. Barry, the American novelist, appeared in the San Francisco Bulletin and is reproduced in Current Literature for November. It makes one not only feel but reflect:

"You have treated me so fine ever since I came in here," said the voice from the cell, "I don't see how you can have the heart to hang me tomorrow."

The heavy figure sitting in the gloom outside the cell door, moved uncomfortably. "Well, it's this way. Don't you think it's better for me to do it than somebody that don't take any interest in you at all? Now I don't want to do it, Jim. And I don't do it for the \$25 there is in it for me. When they first put it up to me some five years ago to hang a man in this place I said I wouldn't do it for any amount of money in the world. And then I thought it over. I said to myself: 'Well, it wouldn't be me that was doing it. I don't make the laws any more than any other man. I'm only here to carry them out. And I stand in good with the boys. Perhaps I can make it a bit easier for them in the last few minutes. Anyway, they'll know that I ain't doing it with any hard feelings. But every time I do it, I have to take a few drinks of whisky to keep up my nerve.'"

Out of the cell came a long sigh.

"How are you feeling?"

"Oh, not so bad. I guess I'll lie down and try to get a little sleep."

"Will you take some of the dope?"

"No thanks, Bill. I am going to see if I can't get along without it."

"Makes it easier."

"Maybe. But I don't want to have any bad dreams. It's bad enough when I doze off. It's funny I can't remember anything about killing my wife when I'm awake. I was too drunk at the time. But hundreds of times since I did it I have done it over again in my sleep, in different ways."

"Well, if there wasn't any drink in the world there wouldn't be much use for prisons."

The next morning at 10 o'clock they were ready. Jim was dressed in black with a white shirt and a white collar and a black tie. On his small feet were black socks and black felt slippers. His fresh shaven face made him look like a boy. As he stood in the center of the cell he smiled at the people around him, the warden, the two surprised priests, a tall young man in stripes, and Bill.

While the young man in stripes was pinioning Jim's arms, Bill looked sadly on, the furrows cutting deeply into his full cheeks and lines of pain crossing his forehead under his thick white hair. "Sure you won't have any whisky?" he asked.

"Thanks, I guess not. You take it."

Bill shook his head. "If you can get along without it I ought to."

The warden was looking sympathetically at Jim's face, yellow as wax.

"How are you feeling?"

"All right, warden."

"It's time," said the warden, and he bent forward to step out of the cell door.

Jim and Bill followed and walked along the corridor side by side, with the two priests behind them reciting prayers, and the figure in stripes.

The procession passed through a narrow door and entered a room crowded with men. In the center stood a slim green scaffold. The warden ascended the steps and stood at one side. Jim stood over the trap with Bill at his right hand. The two priests stood at Jim's left, continuing their prayers. The striped figure stood at the edge of the crowd.

Quickly Bill drew a narrow black belt across the calves of Jim's legs. Around the neck he adjusted the noose. Over the yellow face he pressed a black hood.

The warden nodded, almost imperceptibly.

There was silence.

The men in the crowd stood motionless.

The silence continued.

The warden's face grew paler. "Go on!"

Bill did not move.

The warden spoke sharply: "Why don't you go on?"

Still Bill did not move.

"Spring the trap."

Now Bill's lips were moving. "I can't, warden."

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I can't do it."

From under the cap came a hoarse appeal. "For God's sake, go ahead."

Again came the warden's command, "Spring the trap! Put him out of torture."

Bill walked unsteadily toward the warden. He seemed broken. "You'll have to do it yourself, Warden," he whispered.

In the warden's face there was a flush of anger. "Why should I do it? I'm not the hangman. I'm the warden."

The warden looked down on the young man in stripes at the edge of the crowd. "You come up here and spring the trap," he called out.

The young man did not stir.

"Do you hear what I say?"

"I can't do it, warden."

"I order you to do it."

"I can't help it, warden. I can't kill a man in cold blood."

The black figure was trembling.

The warden caught sight of another striped figure standing in a corner, a hale old man, more than six feet tall, with broad shoulders. "Oh, Finerty!"

The old man walked forward.

"Here," said the warden in a tone of confidence, "you've been at all these things for the past 30 years. You come up here and finish the job."

The old man's blue eyes were fixed on the warden.

"Do you hear what I say?"

"I hear, warden, and I'd like to oblige you. But it's too much for me. I killed a man once when I was drunk. But I can't kill a man in cold blood that ain't done nothin' to me."

The warden walked to the edge of the scaffold. "Is the sheriff of Plumas county here?" he asked.

A stout, red faced man raised an arm. "Say, you arrested this man. Now I want you to come up and spring the trap."

The red faced man shook his head.

"That's not my business, warden. I've done my duty and you can't expect me to do any more." He glanced furtively at the smooth faced youth of about 21 at his side. "Here's the brother of the woman that was killed. P'raps he'll do it."

"No! I couldn't do it." The reply came in a trembling voice. "I wanted to see him hanged. But now I feel different."

Jim trembled violently. He looked as if he might drop on the floor of the scaffold. Bill walked forward and put one arm around the black figure.

From out of the crowd stepped a well-dressed man of middle age, wearing large gold-bowed spectacles. "I'll do it," he said, in a low voice, addressing the warden.

The warden looked startled. "Who are you?"

"I'm a citizen of this state. I'm in favor of capital punishment. I can't see that there is any difference between hanging a man by a law that I support and hanging a man myself."

When the warden perceived that the man was sincere, he said: "Well, as there is no one else to do the job you might as well do it."

The man walked up the steps. He had a whispered talk with the warden. Bill said in a low voice: "Brace up," and stepped off the trap.

The black figure stood rigid. Then it dropped and frantically dangled at the end of the rope.

Bill seized the rope. The figure hung still, the slipped feet in the air.

The man with the gold-bowed spectacles made his way down the steps. At his approach the crowd parted. They looked at him with curiosity and horror in their eyes, as if he were different from themselves, a monster.

Coal Mined Less Than a Century.

The first mention of the occurrence of coal in the United States Geological Survey, is made in the journal of Father Hennepin, a French Jesuit missionary, who in 1679 recorded the site of a "coal mine" on Illinois River, near the present city of Ottawa, Ill.

The first actual mining of coal was in the Richmond Basin, Va., about 70 years after Father Hennepin's discovery in Illinois, but the first records of production from the Virginia mines were for the year 1822, when, according to one authority, 54,000 tons were mined. Ohio probably ranks second in priority of production, as coal was discovered there in 1755, but the records of production date back only to 1838.

The mining of anthracite in Pennsylvania began about 1790, and it is said that in 1807 55 tons were shipped to Columbia, Pa. Reports of the anthracite coal trade are usually begun with the year 1820, when 365 long tons were shipped to Philadelphia from the Lehigh region. Prior to this, however, in 1814 a shipment of 22 tons was made from Carbondale, also to Philadelphia, and in the following table the production is considered to have begun in that year. It is probable that the actual production prior to 1820 was between 2,500 and 3,000 tons.

The production for 1911 was 496,221,168 short tons.

Pheasants Eat Man's Dinner.

J. D. Meyers, the well-known gardener of East Eleventh Street, tells a good one on himself. One day during the past week he came in from his garden to get his dinner. On entering the kitchen he found two China pheasants upon the table—not cooked, but alive and helping themselves to his noonday meal which Mrs. Meyers had just prepared for him—and there he was, powerless, with a \$50 fine staring him in the face. It is said that Mr. Meyers succeeding in shooting the pair gently out the door.—Register.

Everything you can mention is in The Sentinel.

WILL MAKE SPECIALTY OF CHICKEN RAISING

Superintendent Alderman Urges Early Start in Children's Industrial Contest.

State Superintendent Alderman has sent out the following urgent appeal for an early start in the School Children's Industrial Contest for 1913: "To Parents and School Children:

"If you would catch a train start in time. No matter how fast you run if you start too late. If you would win a prize in the School Children's Industrial Contest next year, begin now. Parents, if you would have your children grow up to be industrious, law-abiding, useful citizens, winners in the race of life, start them in early in the right direction.

"We are all agreed that an education is an essential to success, but what is education? True education is that which fits us for the duties of life. The old pedagogical idea was to cram the child with text-books. The new idea is that we must know how to apply our knowledge to practical uses—that we must know how to use the hand with the head. Thus the need for, and popularity of, industrial education along with the 'mental cramming.'"

"Though started late and with lack of organization in many instances, the result of the state-wide movement inaugurated this year are quite encouraging, and inspires us all, I trust, to greater efforts the coming year. Many of your children entered this contest this year, and whether they won a prize or not they are all stronger in every way from the exercise and experience, and what they have learned to do with their hands will always be an available and valuable asset. We hope to have every school boy and girl in the state receive a personal benefit by entering this contest this year. Will you cooperate by giving your children an opportunity by giving them a little ground to cultivate, and starting them in the chicken business in a small way, and perhaps giving the boy a brood sow or a pig to feed? And most important of all by allowing them to have as their very own the profits of their effort? Very much depends upon the parents as to how great a success can be made of this movement.

"While it is not the intention to slight any of the other lines of activity taken up this year, it is the plan to make poultry-raising the leading feature of the school children's contest the coming year. There is scarcely a boy or girl in city, village or country, but who could take care of a few chickens or ducks without interference with their school system, and it is our ambition to have the school children increase the production of poultry and eggs enough to cover that expense. Children, wouldn't you be proud to be able to say 'It doesn't cost the state anything to educate us. We pay the bill with our chickens and eggs'?"

The result is easily possible, and to reach it each school boy and girl would only have to keep a few fowls. I do not know of anything that would attract more favorable attention to Oregon than the fact that all her school children are raising poultry and producing thereby more than enough wealth to meet the expense of the public school system.

"The poultry on the farm is a secondary consideration with most people. Little attention is paid to it as a rule and its importance and possibilities are not conceived. We have no reliable statistics later than those of the U. S. census for the year 1899. That year there were 7,709,970 dozens of eggs produced in Oregon, which, at an average price of 25 cents, were worth \$1,927,492.50. The value of all poultry raised in the state in 1899 was \$826,687. The poultry product that year was worth considerable more than either of the following products, viz: Animals slaughtered, hops, fruits of all kinds, and was almost equal to the oats crop in value, and was almost a third as great as the wheat crop. Since 1899 there has been a big increase in the production of poultry and eggs, but there has also been a big increase in consumption, and last year there was about a million dollars' worth of poultry and eggs shipped into Portland from the east. That million dollars might just as well go into the pockets of the school boys and girls of Oregon as to the farmers of the east, and while you are earning it you will be occupying part of your time in healthful and interesting pastime and be learning how to do something worth while—how to do business, to depend upon your own efforts and to be an important factor in society.

"An elementary poultry bulletin will be issued by the Oregon Agricultural College after a little, which will give valuable information upon how to raise and care for poultry. In the meantime be talking it over with your parents and making preparations for starting a little flock, if you have not already got one. Get a little garden patch ready to plant also, and win some of the fine prizes that will be offered this year, both at your local fair and at the state fair."

SIMPLE MIXTURE FOR COTTAGE GROVE

That simple remedy again been proven. The New Era Store reports that many people are receiving QUICK relief from simple buckthorn bark, as mixed in Adler-ika, the pendiculus remedy. A SIDA helps sour stomach, gas, and constipation INSTANTLY this simple mixture acts on digestive organs and draws purities.

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