

# Pittsburgh Gazette

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## RETRIBUTION!

### Ignominious End of Louis Lane, the Wife Poisoner.

#### RECITAL OF HIS CRIME.

#### Synopsis of the Evidence at His Trial.

#### SKETCH OF HIS LIFE.

#### Scenes and Incidents at the Scaffold.

#### HOW HE WAS PREPARED FOR DEATH, AND HOW HE DIED.

At her residence, No. 211 Wylie street, on Saturday morning, May 4th, 1888, Henrietta, wife of Louis Lane, a colored barber, who bore no very enviable reputation, died suddenly, and in such manner as to give rise to the well-founded suspicion that she had been poisoned. She had been in the enjoyment of good health up till the evening preceding her death, when she was suddenly seized with a violent sickness and continued to grow worse till death relieved her agony. The bad character of her husband, who had the reputation of having disposed in a summary manner of four wives before her, led the neighbors to suspect that he, the black blue-beard, had caused the death of his wife by administering poison to her. Alderman Butler was called upon to hold an inquest on the body of the deceased, and in the meantime Lane was arrested and committed to jail to await the result of the inquest. The stomach of the deceased was removed and handed to Dr. McNary and Black for chemical analysis of the contents. A few preliminary witnesses were examined and the inquest was adjourned till Saturday, May 10th. The main evidence adduced was to the effect that deceased had informed several witnesses that her sickness arose from drinking some whiskey out of a bottle given her that day by her husband. One colored woman heard the deceased request Lane to go for medical assistance but he would not consent to do so.

**A STRONG CIRCUMSTANCE.**  
When the prisoner was being conducted through the office to the jail, by Warden Smith, he suddenly drove from his coat pocket a small phial, which he dashed with much force into the fire place. The phial was broken into a thousand fragments, but a portion of the liquid it had contained was splashed on the back wall of the grate, and with admirable presence of mind was scraped therefrom as it was hardening, by Warden Smith, and at the subsequent trial was proved to be arsenic. The prisoner accounted for this circumstance at the time by stating that he had been suffering from a loathsome disease, which was true, and had desired to conceal the fact by destroying the medicine he was taking. Science, however, refuted this falsehood, and in his effort to destroy evidence against himself, Lane only fastened his guilt and furnished a damning link in the chain of testimony on which he was convicted.

**ACCUMULATED EVIDENCE.**  
On the 18th of May the adjourned session of the inquest was held. It was proven that the deceased was married to Lane just one year previous to her murder; that she was in delicate condition at the time of death. In her stomach Prof. Wath found, by close scientific investigation, enough arsenic to poison half a dozen persons. Several small bottles found in the prisoner's carpet bag or chest contained various kinds of deadly poisons, which went to show that he was an adept in the art of poisoning.

**THE ARRANGEMENT.**  
On Saturday, June 13th, the prisoner was brought into the Court of Oyer and Terminer and was arraigned on the indictment, charging him with murder. He pleaded not guilty, and in reply to a question propounded by the Court, stated that he had secured the services of John C. McCarthy, Esq., as counsel. Mr. McCarthy stated that inasmuch as the prisoner was poor he had volunteered to defend him, but asked that the Court assign him legal assistance. His Honor, Judge Stowe, willingly acquiesced in the request and appointed W. T. Haines, Esq., as additional counsel in the case.

**THE FIRST TRIAL.**  
On Thursday morning, June 18th, the prisoner was brought into Court for trial, Judges Sterrett and Stowe presiding on the bench. The Commonwealth was represented by District Attorney Duff and W. A. Leggate, Esq.; the defence by Messrs. Haines and McCarthy. The original plea of not guilty was permitted by the Court to be withdrawn in order that a new arraignment might be made. At this juncture, Mr. Haines moved to quash the indictment on the strength of five technical reasons submitted in writing to the Court. The motion to quash was overruled and the prisoner was arraigned, pleading not guilty and asking to be tried "by God and his country."

The jury was soon obtained and Mr. Haines opened the case. **Fleeting Kenney,** a near neighbor, was sworn—deceased was vomiting in the yard on the Thursday afternoon preceding her death; asked witness to get her whiskey to stop the vomit; witness would not do it, fearing Lane would make a fuss.

**Mrs. Grace Allen** was sworn—At eleven o'clock on Thursday, May 7th, the deceased was very well, and at half past one o'clock that afternoon she was purging and vomiting while she was sitting at the table; gave her a glass of water, when she said her insides were burning; Lane was home to dinner that day; saw no one else about the house.

**Mrs. Mary Kenny** testified that Lane would not permit any one to go into his room; he forbade any of the neighbors from associating with his wife.

**Emily Reed** testified as to the nature of the sickness of deceased and symptoms, corroborating previous witnesses in those respects. Once heard prisoner threaten to burn his wife and her bastard up when he was quarrelling with her.

**Rachel Kenny** saw through the window on Friday morning that Mrs. Lane was vomiting and purging. Could not get into her house, as the door was locked.

**Dr. McNary and Black and Prof. Otto Wath** gave evidence of the presence of poison in the deceased's stomach; of the fact that the bottle thrown into the fire place in the office of the jail contained arsenic, and also of the fact of the small bottles found in his carpet bag containing deadly poisons.

**Mr. Kenney, sworn**—Lived above prisoner in rooms of the same house. Lane and wife quarrelled nearly every night. On the Friday night Mrs. Lane was sick. Heard them quarrelling, when Mrs. Lane insisted that her husband should go for a doctor. Heard Lane refusing, saying he would give her medicine himself. She asked him about a dozen times to go for a doctor. Heard her groaning all through the night. Saw Lane on Thursday come and go as dinner and supper time. After Lane left on Friday morning he soon came back and locked the door with a padlock, saying aloud to himself, "I'll keep all you damned niggers out." He was about backward and forwards to the house on Friday. Mrs. Lane was locked in the house alone. With several other corroborative witnesses the Commonwealth closed, and the

to admit any body in to see her body after death. A fifth wife was Emma Lewis, who he married in 1859. He was found guilty in the Washington county Criminal Court, and sentenced to the Western Penitentiary in February, 1860, for the term of six years, for attempting to destroy the life of his partner by administering poison in her food. He attempted to burn her up while she was stuck in bed by locking the door and setting fire to the house. She jumped from a second story window to save her life. She is now living in Brownsville, and was in the city yesterday. Lane served his term out in the Penitentiary, and in 1867 married Henrietta, the woman for whose life the law caused him to forfeit his own yesterday.

**THE SCAFFOLD OF DEATH.**  
The scaffold on which Lane was executed was erected on Wednesday, in the southern yard of the jail. It was built with much care by Mr. Samuel Thompson, of Hazelwood, on a plan submitted by Sheriff Cluley. In our capacity as a reporter, we have seen several styles of scaffolds and unhesitatingly pronounce in favor of this one, as vastly superior to any we ever saw performing the awful work for which made. The platform of the engine of death is made with two doors resting on a letter T brace, and hinged at either side, each section calculated to fall in opposite direction, forming a sort of open square into which the dangling body of the felon dropped. The brace underneath had a thick rope tied about it, and connected with a heavy beam located about ten feet from the scaffold, and held in an inclined position by a rope tied to the trigger, ready to fall as soon as the foot touched the fatal spring. The heavy beam falling by its own weight drew out the T support from beneath the scaffold and down came the unfortunate man so far as the rope about his neck permitted him. The fall was about eighteen inches, but the scaffold is more than usually high, thus guarding against the possibility of the murderer's feet touching the ground. The scaffold is approached from the eastern side of the yard by means of a broad pair of stairs. The uprights in the centre, from which the rope will depend, are in the form of a D, but with sharply defined angles. On either side there are easily working pulleys. The rope passes up a groove in the inside of the upright and over the pulley. At the side there are arrangements for regulating the length of the rope to suit the occasion. Altogether, the scaffold is a model one, and the care with which it was prepared reflects the largest credit to Sheriff Cluley, and the engineers entrusted with its erection. Standing alone in all its ghastliness, it seemed a silent mocker of humanity, and an awful commentary on the wickedness of mankind. We hope it may never again be called into use in our country; but if it is, we should like very much to have the selection of the individuals to enjoy a swing from its cross-beam. Our discrimination would be lauded by the community.

**THE WORK.**  
The rope used was an extra quality of hemp, made expressly for the occasion. It was not stretched previous to use, as Sheriff Cluley wisely abandoned that old, and should be exploded idea, "A rope, no matter how well made, will stretch and stretch until it breaks. It is just as common thing for ropes to give away just as the man falls through the scaffold. We take large stock in the theory advanced by the Sheriff, that in placing heavy weights upon the ropes to take the stretch out, they are weakened and when used on the felon, give way, often entailing painful scenes at the gallows. This piece of information may prove useful to any of our readers engaged in cheerfully contemplating to what their present courses of living may lead them.

**THE NOOSE.**  
The noose through which the head of the wretched man was placed, was an ordinarily sized one, such as a person by the name of Lane would catch a pigeon by the neck. The hangman's knot was carefully tied to come under the left ear, to secure what is termed neck-breaking, but which, in reality, is merely the severing of a link in the vertebrae. On the precise location of this knot depends largely the success of the hanging. If every murderer contemplating the perpetration of a crime could imagine that his throat was encircled with such a noose as that now idly hanging to the gallows awaiting the head of the next culprit; there would be less crime committed. But murderers seldom tremble; they are content in thinking of the multitude of loop holes in the law through which they generally slip into the full enjoyment of liberty, rather than the ominous noose through which a guilty soul trebly trembles to immortality.

**SOBERED CURIOUSITY.**  
It is no pleasant thing to be either hanged or present when a fellow being is expressed by swift carriage into eternity to satisfy justice. There is something so wicked and terrible in an execution that people with correct nerves and fine sensibilities should prefer traveling a thousand miles away from such a scene rather than wear out their boots and faces in efforts to be selected as one of the small party to witness the fatal end. So depraved, however, are the tastes of mankind, that hundreds, nay

thousands of applications for the pleasure of seeing Lane switched off from the gallows, were made up till yesterday morning, and we dare say that the courteous Sheriff has secured many enemies because he found it impossible to gratify the morbid curiosities of all who wanted to peep the jail yard with their presence. As it was there were none too many in the yard and no confusion ensued, and those who were kept away, have the consolation of knowing that they were not asked for by the condemned felon or any other man.

**UNCOMFORTABLE PUNISHMENT.**  
The act of ushering an immortal soul, reeking in sin and iniquity, into the presence of his God, although accomplished in the name of justice, is not calculated to inspire any reverence for the wisdom, charity and good will of man, nor does it prove that we have advanced so close to that refinement and perfection we are vain enough to imagine attained. It is not our province here to discuss whether it is in accordance with or against the Creator's pleasure that man should deprive a fellow being of the life which belongs only to God and himself; but the cruelty and awful wickedness of avenging law, when carried to its extreme demands, cannot fail to start doubts as to its divine origin. The torture which a criminal suffers on the scaffold is a relief when compared with the pain and mental anguish he experiences from the moment the death warrant is read up to the drawing down over the eyes of the cap which forever shuts out a wicked world from view. He undergoes in the dreadful counting of fast fleeting moments, hours and weeks which lessen the distance to the grave, an agony so exquisitely painful that none who have never been similarly situated can imagine the more physical suffering, a throat, a gasping for breath, then a dash of brilliant pyrotechnic display before the eyes, and unconsciousness, all experienced in the twinkling of an instant, are mere trifles to the greater punishments not contemplated by the law, of anticipation, of waiting, of mentally undergoing death every minute until the final end is accomplished. Lane, incapable in a large measure of realizing the direful place he occupied, was a frightful example of the truth that the law of capital punishment inflicts a severer penalty than the mere taking away of life, or the letting loose of a soul for better or for worse in eternity. He up to the last had been falling and falling away, both in mind and body and the mental torture he endured cannot be described. Religion may soothe the nerves and direct the soul heavenward for hope and consolation, but it cannot tear from the inner sight the horrors of a felon's death. It is not human nature to be fearless of death or to brave and defy the dark messenger when it does come in reality; all the possible religious consolation administered to an actively believing mind, does not lessen the terror which creeps over the physical body in anticipation of the taking off, especially when the precise moment for departure and mechanical methods adopted for the shelling, are settled months in advance.

Lane suffered greatly in the terror of anticipation. He feared death, and it was only when the last few hours came that he was able to feel capable of starting face in the face. He was so cheerful, pleasant and buoyant yesterday morning, and so full of hope in the mercy of God that we cannot but believe that his heart was truly cleansed in the waters of repentance. He died game, but exhibited none of the disgusting bragging and bragging which so often mark the death of the gallows. Next a nerve quivered, although previous to yesterday his spirits had given away and his whole frame shook with paralysis. He was enthusiastic in his religious faith, and felt that the drop through the scaffold was only the momentary torture and prelude to his admittance in heaven. He died bravely and firmly—at least so far as these terms can be applied to a man who keeps his nerves up to squarely face the messenger he cannot help dreading.

**THE LAST NIGHT ON EARTH.**  
Rev. Father Kerr, a good hearted and zealous priest was with the prisoner all Wednesday night and up to Thursday morning at two o'clock, when he retired and the wretched culprit took a brief sleep, awakening at six in the morning. Nothing happened during the night worthy record, save the exclamation of the prisoner, as the full toned alarm bell pealed forth the hour of midnight unheeded by thousands of calm and peaceful sleepers. "Tis midnight. This time to-morrow night I will be in company with angels chanting praise before the throne of God." He laid down to rest at two o'clock and slept soundly till six in the morning, when he awoke with a tremor, and looking about him in a frightful manner called for Father Kerr. "When will that his spiritual adviser and savior be here? I must be with him, Lane remarked, "well the poor man must be tired. He has been faithful to me, and I know is much worried that I must die."

**THE LAST BREAKFAST.**  
A dainty breakfast was spread before the prisoner by Warden Scandred, and everything calculated to coax the appetite was upon the table. The prisoner merely tasted of the viands, saying that he had no appetite. He was very cheerful and good natured and conversed freely with

those who called in his cell. He frequently referred to the kindness of Sheriff Cluley and the Warden, Messrs. Scandred and Smith, by whom he said he had been made so comfortable.

**THE DRESS FOR DEATH.**  
After partaking of his breakfast the prisoner unlocked his trunk and drew therefrom a suit of fine black clothes, a white dress shirt and paper collar, in which he arrayed himself for death. He carefully washed his suit from neck to chest, and when he had donned his clothing and combed his hair looked like a new man. His coat was of superior broadcloth, made into dress style, and his vest of black silk. He wore a pair of bright polished little slippers. One would have thought from the neatness of his attire, that he was dressed for a party rather than for a coffin, so fastidious did he appear.

**THE SISTERS OF MERCY.**  
At eight o'clock two good Sisters of Mercy, from the Webster street Convent, visited the cell and were cordially met by the prisoner. They knelt down and prayed with him fully a quarter of an hour, when, after affectionately bidding him adieu forever, they took their departure. As they left, the prisoner turned to the jailor and said, "I'll see angels like them very soon in heaven." The Sisters were very faithful in their attentions to the poor black culprit, and contributed much by their zeal and piety to wards preparing him for the future state. They visited and prayed with him every day since the death warrant was signed, and strove earnestly to impress him with the awful solemnity of his position. God bless such women!

**THE FINAL PREPARATION.**  
A few minutes after eight o'clock Fathers Kerr, Devlin and O'Rourke entered the prisoner's cell. They found him cheerful and buoyant, and ready for death. Father Kerr introduced Father O'Rourke to Lane, whereupon the latter remarked, "I am glad to know you, Holy Father. Had it not been for my good Father here, (Rev. Kerr) I should have gone to hell to-day. Six weeks ago I made his acquaintance. He has pointed out the road to heaven. I am going to travel soon in that direction. I know I have been wicked, but my forgiveness has been recorded above, at least I pray that God will pardon me. To the priest (Father Kerr) I am indebted for learning me the means of my soul's salvation, but oh! pray for me when all is over." Father O'Rourke assured the prisoner of his belief that all was well, and that he need not fear for his soul, when the prisoner said, "my time is short but God is merciful, and will take me home."

Fathers Kerr, Devlin and O'Rourke then entered into prayer with the prisoner, reciting the litanies of the Saints and of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Lane was asked whether he firmly and truly believed in the Catholic religion. He responded firmly, "I believe in no other faith; I want to die in it." The priest then bade him kneel down, and Father Devlin standing as God-father, the culprit was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and made a member of the Catholic Church. Fathers Devlin and O'Rourke retired, when the prisoner made a private confession of his sins to Father Kerr, recited an act of contrition and was absolved. He subsequently partook of the Holy Sacrament, and at eleven o'clock was ready for death.

**A PARTING INTERVIEW.**  
At half past eleven o'clock we were permitted to enter the cell of the prisoner. He arose and cheerfully welcomed us and took the writer by the hand in a manner to impress the cordiality intended. He was cheerful and pleasant, and was decidedly more buoyant than we had ever noticed him. We told him that we had called to bid him last and long good bye, when he reached forth his hands, and with a genial smile said: "I am soon to go home. Angels will keep me company. I hope to meet you all in the better land." We said, "Mr. Lane, it is painful to say good bye, but we must do it. In a few minutes all will be over, may God receive and have mercy on your soul." He replied, "I am happy and resigned, I am going home. All will be well. Hope to meet you gentlemen above the skies." Father Kerr here spoke and said that Lane was ready to die, and waited impatiently for meeting his Father in Heaven, and fell not only resigned to his fate but prepared for the change from life to death. He did not dread the momentary pain on the scaffold as he felt sure of immediately entering into the happiness of eternity. "Oh yes," said Lane, "I am happy. I am going home, and is not dying. I wish to meet you all in Heaven. Good bye." We retired, feeling in our hearts that God's benign influence must have wrought a change in his heart that we had previously thought incapable of entertaining a noble sentiment or hope for forgiveness.

**PUNISHED FOR DEATH.**  
At the stroke of the great bell announcing twelve o'clock, noon the priest who had been engaged in religious exercises with him, Lane, threw open the door of the cell and awaited the coming of Sheriff Cluley to lead the culprit to death. That officer soon made his appearance, accompanied by Deputy

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**MARCH TO DEATH.**  
The solemn cortege moved slowly through the jail to the yard in which was erected the scaffold, as follows: Sheriff Cluley, Louis Lane, Ex-Sheriff Stewart, Father Kerr, Father Devlin, Deputy Sheriffs, Reporters of the Press, Warden Scandred and Jail Officials and Jailors.

In the jail yard there had assembled about forty persons as witnesses of the last sad scene, including jurors, physicians, officers of the court, journalists and privileged visitors. Every ray was raised as the procession reached the yard, and the utmost silence reigned. The clergy recited prayers set apart by the Catholic church for the departing soul, on the march to the scaffold, the prisoner responding in a clear, firm voice.

**ON THE SCAFFOLD.**  
He marched up the stairs leading to the platform without a tremor, and standing squarely in the centre, looked appealingly towards heaven and then around the jail yard. He was asked by the Sheriff if he had anything to say and replied "I have nothing to say." The priest and Sheriff took their leave of the prisoner, and Deputy Sheriff Fife drew down over his face the white cap which shut out forever his view of things earthly, and fixed the noose about his neck. In retiring from the scaffold the Sheriff stepped on the trigger but the drop failed to fall as the wet weather had swollen the wood work. With remarkable presence of mind the Sheriff advanced to the timber connecting the main stay of the platform and gave it a pull, and Louis Lane was dangling between heaven and earth.

In ninety seconds the pulse ceased to beat. In forty seconds thereafter it returned and the small frame of the culprit shook in convulsions. Inside of fifteen more seconds the soul departed and the cunning wife poisoner was no more. Death might in this case be termed instantaneous.

**AFTER DEATH.**  
At twenty-five minutes to one o'clock the body was cut down and placed in an imitation rosewood coffin, furnished by W. H. Devora, undertaker. The deceased looked very natural, not being the least disfigured. Drs. McNary and Gilmore decided that death resulted from strangulation, an opinion to which Dr. Kern dissented. A post mortem examination was held, and it was found that the neck was dislocated.

**DISPOSITION OF THE BODY.**  
Lane was anxious that he should be properly buried after death, and was much pleased when the priests assented to take charge of his remains. It appears, however, that the medical gentlemen claim, under the law, the corpse for dissecting purposes. We hope Sheriff Cluley will not permit them to take into their possession. Lane, when living, willed his remains to his Spiritual Advisers, and they alone should be permitted to make the final disposition by interment in the cemetery, as was faithfully promised the unfortunate man before death. Last night the rigid corpse, already mutilated, by the knife of science, was kept in a dark corner of the jail, and there it will remain as a mark of vindicated law.

**THE ARRANGEMENTS.**  
Sheriff Cluley, his deputies and Warden Scandred, and Smith, cannot be awarded too much credit for the manner in which they conducted the execution. Notwithstanding the great pressure brought to bear on the Sheriff for passes, only some forty-three were issued, and none without cards were admitted. Mr. Diehl, the courteous and obliging chief clerk of the Sheriff, kept the Fifth Avenue gate, and sternly refused as many as a hundred prominent gentlemen admittance on account of their having no tickets. A large force of police under Lieut. Seth Willmot were stationed about the yard to prevent disturbance and intrusion. Altogether, the arrangements were most complete, and the execution was one of the best conducted and most orderly ever held in our country.

**ZEALOUS AND DEVOTED.**  
Rev. Father Kerr, of the Cathedral, Rev. Father Devlin and the Sisters of Mercy were untiring in their efforts to prepare the unfortunate victim for death. Father Kerr, especially, who was chief spiritual adviser, won the golden opinion of all through his ceaseless and devoted attention to the poor and friendless

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