

THE COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT.

I have sworn upon the Altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of Tyranny over the Mind of Man.—Thomas Jefferson

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MISCELLANEOUS.

From the Democratic Review.

HARRY BLAKE.

A STORY OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LUCY CRAWFORD.'

CHAPTER VI.

By daybreak the country around was as stirren singly, and squads of three and four—women and children old and young, the hale, the sick, the decrepit, were all in motion, and drifting, like a sluggish current, towards the scene of execution.

It was a large field, in a retired, out-of-the-way spot, hemmed in by trees; a place whose silence and solitude were rarely disturbed; yet now it hummed with life.—Fences, rocks, and every little eminence of ground, were packed with people. The trees were crowded with masses of human beings, who hung like bees from their branches, and near the foot of the gallows, the earth was black with them, crammed and wedged together,—not a foot—not an inch to spare. There was a great sea of faces, turned up at one time to the tall frame-work above them; at another, towards where the far distant road wound among the hills. Occasionally there was a scuffle, and the mass rocked to and fro, like a forest waving before the wind; and then some curses and execrations from the writhing multitude; but by degrees, the tumult subsided, and they were quiet again.

When they looked at the sun, and wondered how soon Harry would come—they were weary with waiting. Some spoke of him as of an old friend. He was a fine fellow—they had known him from childhood. Has he confessed yet? inquired one. No, not he, not he, was the reply. He'll give up till the last; it's thought he'll do it then. I heard some one say; that old Caleb Grayson was all last night in his cell, trying to pump it out of him; but he was game. Caleb could get nothing from him. 'Come, I like that,' said the other, bobbing his hands together. 'That's so of Harry; I'll bet ten to one, he'll not show the white feather at the last. Ha! who's that?'

As he spoke, he pointed to a tall swarthy man, who was seen forcing his way through the crowd; jeering them hither and thither, heeding not the grumbings and scoldings which followed him, as he dragged himself on; once or twice, as some fellow more sturdy than the rest withstood him, he turned and glanced at him, with a look such savage and bitter again, that the man was glad to let him pass. Thus on he went, until he reached the foot of the gallows; and there he fixed himself, taking no notice of no one, and regardless that even that dense crowd a small circle was formed around him, as if there were no man in his touch. Above him, from the cross-piece of the gallows, the cord hung to and fro in the wind; and at times, as he raised his eye to it, a smile crossed his face, giving to it a strangely wild expression, that was long remembered by those who saw him there.

'There'll soon be something to tighten the string,' said he, to a tall, burly man who stood nearest to him, with his good eye running from the speaker to

the cord, as if it struck him, that the weight most fitting for that purpose were nearer than he imagined.

'Yes, there will, more's the pity,' said the man, in reply to the remark, after pausing for some time, as if in doubt whether it merited one, 'I for one am sorry for it.'

'Would you have the murderer escape?' demanded the stranger.

'Let him hang when he is found, say I,' replied the man, 'but Harry Blake denies that he did it, and I believe him.'

Again that strange smile passed across the stranger's face, as he said, 'Twelve sworn men, all of whom knew and liked Blake, heard the testimony, and said that he did it. What more would you want?'

'I want Harry Blake's own confession, and we would have it if he was guilty.—That's what I want. I wish to Heaven, I had found him with the murdered man, I would have soon known the truth. I went to the spot the next day, but it was too late.'

'What do you know?' inquired the stranger with some interest.

The man moved a little aside, and showed the head of a large dog, who was seated near him, with his nose thrust forward, almost touching the stranger. 'I went with that dog to the spot, and I put his nose to the track. He went round and round, and over the ground for more than a quarter of a mile. In the woods he found an old hat, which he tore to rags. I believe it belonged to the true murderer,—(he was smelling that hat this very morning, for I took it with me.)—but he lost the scent when I carried him to Harry Blake; but he would not touch him.'

'A strange dog.'

'Damme sir!' said the man earnestly. 'Do you know that he's been sniffing about you for the last ten minutes. Curse me if I haven't my suspicions of you; and if I haven't.'

'The stranger's eyes fairly glowed as he returned his look; and then he burst into a loud laugh, and turned to those around:

'Hear him! He says I murdered Wickliffe, because his dog smells at my knee.—Ha! ha! ha! Why don't you arrest me? demanded he turning to the man.

The man evidently abashed at this abrupt question, shook his head, muttered something between his teeth, and remained silent; and the stranger, after eyeing him for several moments, seeing that he was not disposed for further conversation, and apparently not caring to be the object of attention to all eyes, as he evidently then was, moved off, among the crowd, and stationed himself on the opposite side of the gallows.

The time lagged heavily. The crowd grew restless and uneasy; and here and there, one or two, irritated beyond their patience commenced a quarrel, which came to blows. This created a temporary excitement, but it was soon over, and by degrees they grew wearied again. They stamped their feet on the ground, to keep them warm. The farmers talked of their harvest and of their stock. Some of them gaped and yawned, and fell sound asleep as they stood there. Young girls flirted with and ogled their sweet-hearts, and there was many a pretty face in that crowd, whose owner had been induced to come only for the sake of him who was to escort her there and who was thinking more of the young fellow who stood at her side in his best apparel, than of Harry Blake. These, and the troops of liberated schoolboys, to whom a holiday was a great thing, even though bought at the life of a fellow-being, were the only persons unwearied.

But the time came at last, and a loud cry arose in the distance and swept along through that multitude, becoming louder and louder, until it reached the gallows; and the whole mass awayed backward and forward, and rushed and crowded together, as in the distance the prisoner was seen approaching. With a slow steady pace, the soldiers which escorted him came, forcing open the throng, and keeping an open

space around the cart which conveyed him. Harry Blake was exceedingly pale, but his manner was composed, and his eye calm and bright as in his best days, and many a lip as he passed, muttered a God bless him.

He spoke to no one; although his face once or twice faintly lighted with a look of recognition as he saw a familiar face.—When he reached the foot of the scaffold his eye for a moment rested on Caleb Grayson looking imploringly toward him. The old man caught his glance and exclaimed as he ascended the steps:

'New Harry do confess; do Harry—for God's sake!'

Blake shook his head. 'No Caleb, I cannot, for I am innocent.'

These were his last words; for in a few minutes the drop fell, and poor Blake's earthly career was ended.

'Ha! ha!' exclaimed the same swarthy man who had stood during the whole time at the foot of the gallows, and whom Grayson recognized as the person that he had met at the Inn the night previous. 'That business is over. That's law! And without noticing the startled looks of those about him, with the same recklessness which he had displayed in coming he forced his way through the crowd and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

About three months after the execution of Blake, the judge who presided at the trial received a note from a prisoner, under sentence of death, desiring to see him without delay, as his sentence was to be carried into effect on the day following.—On his way thither he overtook an old man walking slowly along the road on accosting whom he recognized Caleb Grayson who had been a witness at Blake's trial. The old man had received a note similar to his own; and was going to the same place, though he was equally at a loss to know the meaning of the summons. They both entered the cell together.

The prisoner was seated at a wooden table, with a small lamp in front of him, his forehead leaning on his hand which shaded his eyes from the light. He was a tall gaunt man, with dark sunken eyes, and unshorn beard and yellow cheeks. He looked like one worn down by suffering and disease; yet one whom neither disease nor suffering could conquer, and to whom remorse was unknown. He did not move when his visitors entered otherwise than raise his head. As he did so Grayson recognized at a glance the stranger whom he had seen at the tavern the night before Blake's execution; and at the gallows.

'Well judge' said he, as soon as he saw who they were, 'I sent for you to see if you can't get me out of this scrape. Must I hang to-morrow?'

The judge shook his head. 'It's idle to hope,' said he; 'nothing can prevent your execution.'

'An application might be made to the higher authorities,' said the prisoner. 'Pardons have come, you know even on the scaffold.'

'None will come in your case,' replied the magistrate. 'It is needless for me to dwell on your offence now; but it was one that had no palliation, and you may rest assured that whatever may have occurred in other cases, no pardon will come in yours. In fact, I understand that an application has been made for one, by your counsel, and has been refused.'

The features of the prisoner underwent the change; nor did the expression of his face alter in the least. But after a moment's pause, he said: 'In this true judge—upon your honor?'

'It is,' replied the judge.

'Then I know the worst,' replied the criminal coldly, 'and will now tell, what I have to communicate, which I would not have done, while there was a hope of escape. You,' said he, turning to the judge, 'presided at the trial of young Henry Blake, who was accused of murder, and sentenced him to death.'

I did.'

'And you,' said he turning to Grayson, 'were one of the witnesses against him.—You swore that you saw him stab Wickliffe. On your testimony, principally, he was hung.'

'I was,' replied the old man; 'I saw him with my own eyes.'

The prisoner uttered a low sneering laugh, as he said, turning to the judge:

'You, sir, sentenced an innocent man.'

'And you,' said he, turning to the other, 'swore to a falsehood. Harry Blake did not kill Wickliffe. He was as innocent of the sin of murder as you were—more innocent than you are now.'

The old man staggered as if he had been struck, and leaned against the table to support himself, whilst the condemned felon stood opposite him, looking at him with a cold indifferent air.

'Yes, old man,' said he sternly, 'you have blood and perjury on your soul, for I said he, stepping forward, so that the light of the lamp fell strongly upon his savage features, 'I murdered William Wickliffe! I did it! Thank God, I did it, for I had a long score to settle with him. But Blake had no hand in it. I met Wickliffe on that afternoon, alone—with none to interfere between us. I told him of the injuries he had done me, and I told him that the time was come for redress. He endeavored to escape; but I followed him up; I grappled with him, and stabbed him. As I did so, I heard the door open, and I leaped into a clump of bushes which grew at the road side. At that moment Blake came up, and found Wickliffe lying dead in the road. You know the rest. The tale he told was as true as the Gospel. He was only attempting to draw the knife from the man's breast when you came up and charged him with the crime of murder!'

'Good, God! Can this be possible?' ejaculated the old man. 'It cannot! Villain, you are a liar!'

'Pshaw!' muttered the man. 'What could I gain by a lie? To-morrow I die.'

'I don't believe it! I don't believe it!' exclaimed Grayson, pacing the cell, and wringing his hands. 'God in mercy grant that it may be false!—that this dreadful sin may not be upon me!'

The prisoner sat down, and looked at the judge and the witness with a calmness which had something almost fiendish in it when contrasted with the extreme agitation of the one, and the mental agony of the other.

At last the old man stopped in front of him; and with a calmness so suddenly assumed in the midst of his paroxysms of remorse; that even overawed the criminal, said: 'You are one whose life has been a tissue of falsehood and crime. You must prove what you have said, or I'll not believe it.'

'Be it so,' replied the prisoner. 'I was the whole transaction, and heard all your testimony at the trial; for I was there too I'll now tell you what occurred at the spot of the murder, which you did not mention, but which I saw. When you rode up, the man with you jumped off his horse and seized Blake by the collar: your hat fell off on the pommel of your saddle, but you caught it before it reached the ground.—You then sprang off your horse, and whilst Walton held Blake, you examined the body. You attempted to pull the knife from his breast, but it was covered with blood, and slipped from your fingers. You rubbed your hand on the ground, and going to a bush on the road-side, broke off some leaves and wiped your hands upon them, and afterwards the handle of the knife.—You then drew it out, and washed it in a small puddle of water at the foot of a sumach bush. As you did so, you looked round at Blake, who was standing with his arms folded, and who said, 'Don't be uneasy about me Caleb; I didn't kill Wickliffe and don't intend to escape.' At one time you were within six feet of where I was. It's lucky you did not find me, for I was ready at that moment to send you

to keep company with Wickliffe; but I saw all, even when you stumbled and dropped your gloves as you mounted your horse.'

'God have mercy on me!' ejaculated Grayson. 'This is all true! But one word more. I heard Wickliffe, as we rode up, shriek out, 'Mercy, mercy, Harry!'

'He was begging for his life—My first name is Harry!'

The old man clasped his hand across his face, and fell senseless on the floor.

It is needless to go into the details of the prisoner's confession, which was so full and clear, that it left no doubt on the mind of the judge that he was guilty of Wickliffe's murder, and that Harry Blake was another of those who had gone to swell the list of victims to Circumstantial Evidence.

Fashion for February.—Ear drops are much worn by the ladies, and drops at the nose by small children. Cardinals are more in fashion than the cardinal virtues. Dresses are now made fuller behind than we ever saw them before, and it is quite a pleasant morning's excursion to circumnavigate a full dressed belle. Sacks are the walking costume of the gentlemen—whether given to them by the ladies or not, we cannot say. Gentlemen's boots are now made too small for the feet—so much so, that in some cases the toes peep through them. Feathers and jewels are much in vogue and much credit is given to the ladies for their taste in those particulars. Thin shoes for walking are an article of general consumption.

Motto Extra.—A paper down east has this motto over head of its editorial columns:

We'll gaily chase dull care away,
And banish every sorrow,—
Subscribers pay your debts to day;
And we'll pay ours to-morrow.

An Irishman having hired a saddle horse, mounted the animal with his face towards the tail. The hostler told him he was on wrong end foremost. 'Och! and sure, said Pat, 'and how do you know which way I'm going. So get up awkward critter.'

When a gentleman is hanged for some crime, it is impolite to throw it up in a course way, to his relations; but you may gently touch your neck, under the left ear with your finger, and simply pronounce the word 'hemn.'

Girls want nothing but husbands, and when they have got them, they want every thing;

Pretty Fair.—At a meeting on a recent occasion, in a town in New Hampshire, the preacher addressed his congregation in the following style:

'My hearers, some of our brethren tell us that the Lord is coming in power and glory on the 23d of April next, when time will end and the elements melt with fervent heat. They say they shall want nothing after the date and are consequently neglecting their fields and suffering their property to waste. Now my friends, I think this is very unwise even supposing their belief to be correct. I shall act on a different principle. The Lord should be treated as becomes his greatness and majesty. My house wants paint, and I shall paint it; and my fences need repair, and I shall repair them; so that if he does appear at the time appointed he may be decently received.'

If you meet a man who is your debtor—don't abuse him—don't dun him—but take him kindly by the hand, evince an interest for him, part with him good humoredly—if he is not a scoundrel he will resolve to pay you the earliest possible moment. When shall we all learn that kindness ever accomplishes more than anger.

Justice is a duty—generosity a virtue. Yet the world is too apt to regard the first as a favour and the latter as a costly.