

## THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF GOVERNOR WALL.

A PERIOD of seventy years has now elapsed since the trial of GOVERNOR WALL, on the charge of ordering a soldier to be so unmercifully flogged as to occasion his death, and for which act Wall was executed *twenty years after its perpetration*. The circumstances of the melancholy case are narrated as follows:—

In the year 1782, Wall, with a company of artillery, formed the garrison in the Island of Goree, on the West coast of Africa. His emoluments were considerable, as besides his military appointments, he was superintendent of trade to the colony. His term of service was just terminating, when the circumstance occurred which led to his trial and condemnation. In consequence of provisions having fallen short, the soldiers had been put on short allowance, and it was the rule when that was done to give them a slight addition to their pay. This had been permitted to get into arrears, and as the soldiers understood that the Paymaster was to leave the island along with Governor Wall, they were naturally anxious to have that matter settled before his departure. A day or two before the departure of the Governor, a considerable number of soldiers were observed by the Governor going towards the Paymaster's quarters, and among these a sergeant, named BENJAMIN ARMSTRONG. The Governor stopped them, and questioned what they wanted, when he was respectfully told by Armstrong that they were going to obtain a settlement of their arrears. Governor Wall desired them to return to their barracks, and slightly menaced them with punishment, but added that he would take the matter into consideration. They returned accordingly, and waited patiently for two hours, but hearing nothing further on the subject, they were once more proceeding in the same way to the Paymaster's, when they were again stopped by the Governor, who called out Armstrong from among the rest, and spoke with him. The result was that the soldiers went back a second time to their barracks. It is thought that the Governor got alarmed at the state of affairs, for shortly afterwards the whole garrison were, by beat of drum, ordered to parade and form a circle. The Governor and a few officers of the corps were inside of it, and after they had held a short consultation, Armstrong was desired to come out from the ranks, and was told by the Governor that as his conduct had been mutinous, he was to receive *eight hundred lashes*: Armstrong stripped on being ordered to do so, was bound to a gun-carriage, and got the full punishment, which was inflicted—not as was the usual custom—by regimental drummers, but by negroes of the island, and not by the ordinary instrument of military punishment, the cat-o-nine-tails, but with a rope of an inch in thickness. The Governor attended during the punishment, and abated no part of it, though Armstrong begged for mercy and expressed contrition. Five days after receiving this fearful punishment, mortification set in, and death kindly put an end to Armstrong's intense sufferings. Two soldiers were next subjected to the same ordeal, and both of them also died from the consequences. These punishments had been inflicted on the 10th of July, and next day Governor Wall, accompanied by the Paymaster, sailed for England, leaving a successor in command.

As soon as the account of the tragic affair reached the Board of Administration a reward was offered for the arrest of Wall, and he was captured; but he contrived to escape to the continent, and lived there for some years. Part of his time was spent at Naples, where he was much countenanced by the Englishmen residing there, by which he was probably led to believe that the public indignation against him had subsided. This, and the supposition that few witnesses survived who could testify against him, induced him at last to return. Arriving in Calais, he there met with a king's messenger, whom he desired to take him into custody. The messenger declined, but recommended him to write to the Secretary of State, and offered to carry the letter. As a tempest was raging at the time, so that the ordinary packets would not sail, the messenger, whose despatches were important, had to hire a vessel for himself, and Wall was still solicitous to go with him.

This being refused, Wall wrote to the Secretary of State, but when he tried to sign the letter he hesitated, turned pale, and threw down the pen. The vessel departed with the messenger, and was wrecked on the passage, all on board perishing.

In 1797 Wall came to England, and lived for some time in London, under a false name. One day, having some repairs done to his house, he remarked to one of the masons at work that a young lad, who worked with them, appeared too delicate for the work. The man said he was, but added the words (and which must have cut Wall to the heart)—“I have no other means of supporting him, as he is quite friendless, for his parents are dead, and his only brother was flogged to death at Goree by that monster Governor Wall.”

Wall, his mind being evidently ill at ease, now wrote again to the Secretary of State, and offered to surrender himself; but it is most probable that, had he not written the letter, the matter would have been forgotten. However, he did surrender himself, and was tried at the Old Bailey, on the 20th of January, 1802. It was proved by the witnesses that Armstrong was not mutinous in his behaviour; and that Wall had urged the black men to be severe in their punishment, and the rope itself was exhibited in court. It was also said that Armstrong had declared, in his dying moments, that he was punished without any trial, and without being so much as asked whether he had anything to say in his defence. The prisoner, in his defence, urged that the deceased was guilty of mutiny; that the punishment was not so severe as reported, but that the deceased was suffered to drink strong spirits when in the hospital. Considering that Wall's position in the midst of a garrison of general disreputable characters, there was, as was admitted for the Crown and impressed on the jury by the Judge, more than the usual excuse for his getting alarmed, and taking strong measures for the suppression of insubordination which seemed to border on mutiny; and there were some extenuating circumstances in his favour. For example, the cat-o-nine-tails had been destroyed by the soldiers in the barrack-room, and the drummers were known to be disaffected. The evidence of the principal witness against him, too, was of a prejudiced character; while one whom he had summoned on his behalf, dropped suddenly dead as he was entering the court.

Wall, on the other hand, however, entirely failed to prove that any court-martial had been held on the accused, or any opportunity given him of stating his defence; and that the destruction of the ordinary instrument of punishment did not justify him in using the cruel substitute of a thick rope, every blow of which produced a fearful bruise. There was, in short, in his whole conduct, a recklessness which admitted of no valid excuse. Moreover he had made no report on the subject of the mutiny at the time to his superiors at home, as he naturally should have done; and the fact of his having so long delayed to give himself up to justice, after having evaded it, evinced that his conduct would not bear investigation.

The jury were absent from court for half an hour, and on their return the prisoner bent eagerly over the front of the dock to hear the sentence. On its being pronounced, he drew himself upright, lifting his hands and raising his eyes in apparent astonishment, commending himself at the same time to God in silent agony. On being asked what he had to say why he should not receive judgment of death, he answered only:—“I pray for a few days to prepare myself.”

As Wall had powerful friends, much exertion was made to save him, and he was twice respited; but his execution at last took place on the 28th of January, 1802. In the meantime the greatest excitement prevailed. Various editions of the trial were published, and the whole of London was placarded with prints of the transaction, headed by the offensive words which one of the witnesses swore he had used during the punishment of Armstrong. The unhappy man took an affecting leave of his wife on the day before the execution; she was allied to a noble family and had been unremitting in her exertions to get him a reprieve.