

THE KLONDIKE NUGGET.

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JUSTICE FINALLY DONE

Murderers at Last Pay the Penalty of Their Crime.

THE TWO NANTUCK BOYS AND HENDERSON EXECUTED

Dawson's Hand Becomes Loose and He Creates a Scene.

Henderson Although Wasted to a Skeleton was Firm to the Last—Why the Indians Were Willing to Embrace Christianity—Incidents of the Execution.

The first official hanging which ever transpired in the Yukon territory—indeed, it may be more generally said in the entire Yukon country—will bear date of August 4, 1899. The victims of the same were Edward Henderson and Jim and Dawson Nantuck, and all of them went to their death for the crime of murder, the details of which and of the subsequent trials are fully known by readers of the NUGGET.

As contemplated by law and provided for in the plans of Sheriff Frank Harper, who came from Seattle yesterday in a skiff to perform his solemn duties, the execution was conducted in the most private way, only a few representatives of the press, the police officials, the coroner's jury, medical and spiritual attendants and the necessary guard being present.

The scaffold had been constructed in the northwest corner of the barracks. Surrounding it is a small yard, fenced by palisades 12 feet high, which connects with the interior of the jail. The scaffold was built about 14 feet high, and was also enclosed by walls, making it impossible for even a slight view of the condemned men to be had except by those inside. The drop consisted of a double trap door twelve feet long by three feet wide in the center of the platform. This was held in place by a flat iron bar at either end and which were operated simultaneously by a single movement of a lever located at one end of the enclosure. Above and reaching from end to end of the roof was a huge piece of timber, from which the three ropes were suspended over the center of the trap.

MARCH TO THE SCAFFOLD.

Henderson passed a quiet, peaceful night, his last on earth. He was deeply engrossed with the thoughts of his approaching dissolution and seemed to hardly feel the necessity of sleep. He never spoke to the death watch during the almost interminable hours except when necessary, but gave himself up entirely to reflection and the comforts which he undoubtedly gained by a reading of the Word. At an early hour he was visited by Rev. A. J. Nahler, pastor of the Church of England, who stayed with him to the end. The minister was arrayed in a surplice of spotless white. Together they prayed for forgiveness of the sin which had brought Henderson to his doom, and the condemned man expressed his conviction that his future welfare was safe.

The two Indians were alone until morning except for the death watch and passed the night in absolute quiet, Jim Nantuck sleeping soundly for several hours. They were fully aware of the nearness of the end, but were in a fairly tranquil condition.

At about 7:30 o'clock the prison attendants visited the several cells and, after Sheriff Harper had, as kindly as possible, notified the condemned men that the moment for final preparation had come, their arms were pinioned and they were led to the corridor. There a short wait was necessitated and, at two minutes to eight o'clock, the door leading to the scaffold enclosure was opened and the small procession marched in. It was made up in the order named of Sheriff Harper, Rev. Nahler, Edward Henderson and the two Indians, Raamps Peterson, together with a policeman on either side of the condemned men. As Henderson emerged into the light of day his eyes brightened up and he looked squarely in the faces of those gathered about him in a fearless yet mild and almost happy way. He walked erect, with head held high, and in his general deportment exhibited, not only a surprising amount of physical strength, but a moral courage that was not expected by those who had been accustomed to see his bed-ridden figure almost daily for over a year. The Indians, too, held up bravely, and required but little support; but the look of spiritual content which characterized Henderson was absent from their ashy-hued and stolid countenances.

ON THE TRAP.

Past the little party of spectators the procession moved up the steep flight of stairs to the scaffold platform, where they were almost, for the time being, hidden from view. The

condemned men were led to the fatal trap, and arrangements were at once made for the end of the tragedy. Henderson maintained his calm deportment and show of strength. He had nothing to say except good-bye, and he included in those final words his two companions on the long journey he was about to take; he shook hands with the sheriff, his spiritual adviser and the Indians, and then stepped gamely to a position beneath the noose that had been selected for him at the east end of the trap.

Jim Nantuck alone of the two Indians was able to talk. "Tell my mother," he said to his faithful friend Raamps Peterson, "that her son Jim died bravely." He was erect and strong in the courage born of high resolve. Dawson, however, was seen to weaken from the moment he stepped upon the scaffold, and as the hangman and attendants began to bind his hands with straps he became a trembling, willing coward. His knees bent from under him and his body swayed until he would have fallen had he not been supported by strong arms. Asked by Mr. Peterson if he wanted anything he said a "drink" and then broke into convulsive sobs. Jim, his brother, tried to buoy him

when the trap was sprung, the strap holding his left hand to his side broke loose. Instinctively, he reached up and took hold of the noose which encircled his neck, though he had not strength to raise himself. For what seemed to the spectators an age but was in reality but a few moments, he hung thus, his body drawing up and down convulsively as he gasped for breath, while gurgling noises from his throat also evidenced the struggle which he was making. Then the body was seen to be raised a few feet, the hand of the hangman broke that of the wretched Indian loose from the rope and he was allowed to fall back. The struggles continued for a few moments longer, then gradually grew fainter till at last all was quiet.

For 20 minutes the bodies were allowed to hang, then Drs. Thompson and Hurdman declared the three men to be dead.

After the coroner's jury had viewed the remains, the bodies were cut down, placed in pine coffins, covered over with lime and interred in graves located near the barracks hospital.

When the drop was sprung a black flag was



up. "There's no use crying," he said; "we have got to die and we might as well die gamely." Dawson was too far gone, however, and the words of courage were lost upon him.

THE DROP TO DEATH.

Though it takes considerable space to describe these incidents, it was in reality only a couple of minutes before the three men were pinioned, the black cap over their faces and the nooses about their necks. The work had been done expeditiously, and all present seemed anxious to hurry on the end. The two men at either end of the drop stood upright and expectant; Dawson, however, continued to sway backward and forward, and was only kept partially in place by the supporting hands of the attendants; sobs continued to emerge in muffled tones from beneath the cap which enshrouded his face, and his condition of collapse was so pitiable that Raamps Peterson could stand it no longer and walked off the platform.

Finally the supreme moment arrived. Sheriff Harper's eyes were bent upon the watch he held, and as its hands indicated 8:01 o'clock he gave the hangman an almost imperceptible signal. Instantly the trap was sprung, the three veiled figures shot down a distance of six feet, there was a thud as the ropes felt the weight of the bodies and the structure shook with the strain. The spectators were taken so completely unawares that as the bodies dropped into view they instinctively recoiled. Not a word was spoken by anyone.

SLOWLY STRANGLED

Henderson and Jim Nantuck undoubtedly

run to the top of a flag-pole at one corner of the scaffold to notify the many watchers outside that the tragedy was over, and was allowed to hang there until the bodies were cut down.

Their Last Hours.

The condemned men passed their last few days on earth tranquilly and almost without incident. Henderson lay in bed, as has been his custom almost from the time of his arrival here, his mind tranquil and his spirit resigned to the approaching fate. His constant friend was the Bible, which he read with evident relish daily. He has also been the recipient of frequent calls from Protestant clergymen, and evidently drew much consolation from intercourse with them and the interest they showed in his spiritual welfare. It may be said that he was perfectly resigned and that he died with Christian fortitude, if not hope.

The two Indians were in an equally tranquil state during their last hours on earth, but it was only the stoicism of their race. For two weeks past a Catholic priest had made almost daily calls upon them and exhorted them to accept Christianity. The men steadfastly refused to do so until one day last week, when they told the priest they would accept his proposition and become Christians, but only upon the expressed condition that they be liberated.

On Sunday the death warrant was read to them by 'Raamps' Peterson, who has acted as interpreter for them since their arrival here. They exhibited no emotion to speak of, Jim



passed away without pain; there was not a struggle on the part of either, and after a few twinges were seen to pass over their frames they hung limp and motionless. Their necks were undoubtedly broken, though no investigation was made. In the case of Dawson, however, slow death from strangulation ensued. Owing to the position in which his body was

alone showing a slight quaver in his voice as he said it was not right that six of them should die for the killing of but one white man. This has been the one central idea with them since their conviction, and they have often expressed it in words. They claimed that, in addition to the two Nantucks who died, the white men killed two others of their comrades after the

murder of Meechan. They asked Mr. Peterson to express to Sheriff Harper and the police at the barracks their thanks for the kind way in which they had always been treated.

HENDERSON'S CRIME.

Edward Henderson was born at Blackburn, Lancashire, England, about 50 years ago, but for some time before leaving for the Klondike he was employed by the Seattle Electric Light & Gas Co. In the summer of 1897 he left for the north in the company of two men named Gale and Peterson. The men reached Lake LeBarge in September and on the night of the 17th of that month they occupied the same tent there. At an early hour in the morning Gale was awakened by hearing an altercation between the two men, followed by a pistol shot and a groan. He got up and found that Henderson had shot Peterson. The former claimed that Peterson had assaulted him because a can which he had used while in bed had been overturned and the contents spilled upon him; that Peterson put his knee into the other's groin in such a way as to cause excruciating pain, besides beating him on the head and face; that he was in mortal fear of his life and, reaching out where he knew a pistol to be, he grasped it and fired to save his own life. He made no effort to escape and was taken into custody.

The prisoner was first taken to Forty-Mile for keeping, and while there appeared to be very ill and in constant pain, which was alleviated by daily injections of morphine. He generally kept to his bed and seemed unable to walk. Later he was brought to Dawson for trial and his weakness was so great that he had to be carried to the court. He pleaded self-defense as the reason of his crime, but the evidence of Gale proved very damaging, while the testimony of an expert witness showed that it was impossible for Peterson to have been in the position claimed. The jury found him guilty of murder in the first degree and he was sentenced to be hanged on November 1, 1898.

CRIME OF THE INDIANS.

The crime for which the two Nantucks suffered death occurred during June of 1898. Wm. Meechan, a New Englander, and C. A. Fox of Pennsylvania had made their way over the ice and snow to a point on the McClintock river, about thirty miles from Lake Marsh, where they built a boat and prepared for the ride to the Klondike in the spring. During this time they were alone except for visits which they received from neighboring Indians, among whom four brothers were especially friendly. These were Frank, Joe, Jim and Dawson Nantuck. In due time the ice went out, the boat was loaded and the two voyagers, bidding good-bye to the Indians, started on their journey. At a bend in the river twelve miles from its mouth they were met by a volley of rifle shots from the brush on shore. Meechan was killed and fell into the river. Fox received a ball in one of his lungs and also fell into the water. He retained consciousness, however, and made his way to shore, from which he made his way to a camp at the mouth of the river and told his story. He was himself in a very dangerous condition, but in time recovered his health. The police at once took the trail and were not long in running down two of the murderers; they were scouring the woods in search of Fox, and after being induced to admit the killing they pointed out the place where it had occurred. The other Nantuck took flight and passed through several tribes before the police finally arrested them. They were brought to Dawson for trial, but Joe never lived to be arraigned, dying quite soon from the effects of his confinement. The other three were found guilty and sentenced to death, but the jury recommended mercy in the case of Frank on account of his youth, and the government commuted his sentence to imprisonment for life. He also succumbed to the evils of close confinement, however, and died about four months ago. Their hanging was also set for November 1.

THE REPRIEVE.

On the morning of the day set for the execution of Henderson and the Indians, Sheriff Harper was served with a reprieve issued by Judge Dugas, the reason for the reprieve being that the occasion was All Saints' Day, a statutory holiday in Canada. The attorneys for the condemned men saw in the incident a chance to save their clients and they set to work with a will. The sheriff continued his preparations for the hanging of the men on Wednesday, Nov. 2, but before the close of Tuesday the lawyers had made a successful plea to Judge Dugas. They contended that there was no legal warrant for the hanging on Wednesday or any other day, and that otherwise it would simply be judicial murder. Judge Dugas finally consented to again reprieve the men for four months, which would give the attorney general at Ottawa an opportunity to pass upon the question. The government was finally heard from and August 4, 1899, was set as the day of execution.

NOTES.

Raamps Peterson says that Dawson Nantuck is about 19 years of age and Jim is 22. They belong to the Tachik tribe, but speak the language of the Dyea Indians. Jim was married and leaves a widow.

Since the departure of Sheriff Harper on his vacation, the condemned men had been in the custody of Deputy Sheriff Carter and the arrangements for their execution up to midnight were in his care. The careful manner in which everything was treated after and the smoothness with which the execution took place is a compliment to the young man's ability and nerve.

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