

devised by highly paid officials whose unchecked powers over criminals are greater than the powers of the judges who sentenced them to confinement. I am not sure whether it is worse to snap the brittle thread of life at once, at a time when the man is in a state of mind to make a final plea for mercy to the Almighty, or, to keep him behind prison walls in such a condition that he will rot mentally and morally, and reach his final end unable to make a last plea to God for mercy. I am not certain whether hanging is worse than life imprisonment. If the question were put before the convicts incarcerated in Kingston penitentiary under the administration which has obtained there for years past, I am not sure that the majority of them, if they had to choose between life imprisonment and hanging, would not say: Bring on your rope.

Hanging is not considered such a very serious matter after all. An Irishman once said it was not so bad when you got used to it. There are some people, holding high positions in this country and drawing big salaries, who regard the winding of a clock as of more importance than the hanging of a man, or the saving of a man from hanging. It is more than two years ago since I made the charge, which has been amply proved and which may be referred to to-night, that a certain official once reprimanded very seriously a night-watchman for stopping in his rounds in order to cut down a convict who was hanging in his cell. He reprimanded the night-watchman for being late in winding his clock and said to him, 'Let him hang, but wind your clock.'

This instance I gave to the Minister of Justice some two years ago. That man is still receiving pay from the Dominion of Canada as an official. So, I say, in some quarters the mere act of hanging is not considered so serious as my hon. friend from Montreal and the hon. member from South Renfrew seem to think it. Now, it would undoubtedly be a very serious offence if any hon. gentleman leaving this House to-night and going to his home should retire without winding the clock. If one of the family happened to be taken sick, even so sick as to be in danger of dying in a short time, he might be excused for not calling medical assistance, but he could not be excused for neglecting to wind the family clock. I hope to have something more to say in regard to this matter of prison conditions at a later stage of the session.

[Mr. Edwards.]

There is one thing further, however, in regard to capital punishment that has not been touched upon as yet. We must all admit, I think, who have followed the papers and watched matters from day to day, that there seems to be a tendency among people as soon as a man is convicted of any offence and placed behind prison bars at once to circulate petitions or get people interested in trying to get that man paroled and released from prison. Petitions are an everyday occurrence no matter what the man's sentence may be. If he has influential friends, political or clerical, or if he has friends who belong to any particular society, they at once get busy on his behalf and circulate petitions asking for his release. It is suddenly found out that the man's health is going all to pieces. I was amused in the last prison investigation in Kingston, with the gentleman who was instrumental in wrecking the Farmers' Bank and thereby imposing loss and suffering on thousands of people. He was called upon to give evidence. He declared that everything was lovely; the food was all right, the sanitary condition was perfect, there was plenty of opportunity for exercise, the officials were so angelically perfect that the wings had almost sprouted on their shoulders, everything was delightful. But his health was going to pieces under this splendid treatment. True, he was engaged in clerical work which did not impose any hardship upon him. But he declared that he should be taken out, because his health was being affected, and he gave his evidence as he did for the purpose of influencing men who possibly could give him a parole. We have had instances in this country that illustrate the tendency on the part of the people of which I have spoken. Not so long ago a man was sentenced to life imprisonment for taking the life of another. He was in prison for a short time when the prison surgeon found that his health was going to pieces. Another doctor was brought in to corroborate his finding; and within a few months this man, who had deliberately taken the life of another, was let out of prison and he is a free man to-day. So, in considering the matter of the abolition of capital punishment, one must take into account the tendency of the people to circulate these petitions to have men liberated no matter what crime they may have committed. If a man who commits a murder is to be sentenced to prison, and his friends are to be encouraged to think that in a