

DEATH BY GUILLOTINE

The guillotine was an apparatus designed for efficiently carrying out executions by beheading. The device consists of a tall, upright frame in which a weighted and angled blade is raised to the top and suspended. The condemned person is secured with stocks at the bottom of the frame, positioning the neck directly below the blade. The blade is then released, to quickly fall and forcefully decapitate the victim with a single, clean pass so that the head falls into a basket below.

The device is best known for its use in France, in particular during the French Revolution, where it was celebrated as the people's avenger by supporters of the revolution and vilified as the pre-eminent symbol of the Reign of Terror by opponents. The name dates from this period, but similar devices had been used elsewhere in Europe over several centuries. The display of severed heads had long been one of the most common ways a European sovereign exhibited their power to their subjects.

The guillotine remained France's standard method of judicial execution until the abolition of capital punishment in 1981. The last person to be executed in France was Hamida Djandoubi, who was guillotined on 10 September 1977. This was also the last time that the government of a Western nation ever executed an individual by beheading.

Capital punishment is also prohibited in Germany by constitution. It was abolished in West Germany in 1949 and East Germany in 1987. The last person executed in Germany was the East German Werner Teske, killed in an East German prison in Leipzig in 1981.

When you think of a guillotine, your mind usually pictures a medieval setting with a castle, a crowd of peasants and villagers ready for a spectacle. Beheadings were usually an event to be witnessed during the French Revolution, after all. What you probably don't picture is a guillotine sitting in a room with florescent lighting and a man in a suit.

Marie Antoinette's execution in 1793 at the Place de la Révolution.



The use of beheading machines in Europe long predates such use during the French revolution in 1792. An early example of the principle is found in the High History of the Holy Grail, dated to about 1210. Although the device is imaginary, its function is clear. The text says:

Within these three openings are the hallows set for them. And behold what I would do to them if their three heads were therein ... She setteth her hand toward the openings and draweth forth a pin that was fastened into the wall, and a cutting blade of steel droppeth down, of steel sharper than any razor, and closeth up the three openings. "Even thus will I cut off their heads when they shall set them into those three openings thinking to adore the hallows that are beyond."

The whole French Revolution, from the taking of the Bastille to the overthrow of the Empire, was in fact one long Reign of Terror. The summary vengeance of the lanterne in the earlier years—the systematised murders of the guillotine under the Convention—the arbitrary exile to pestilential climates under the Directory—and the tortures of the dungeon and the military executions under Buonaparte—all tended, in their way and for their time, to the creation and maintenance of that grand imposture—of which, although the events and their consequences were but too real, all the motives and pretences were the falsest and most delusive that ever audacity forged, credulity believed, or cowardice obeyed. Nor have the effects of this protracted system of terror yet passed away; it poisoned in its passage the very sources of history, and has left posterity, in many respects, under the same delusions that it imposed on its contemporaries.

The subservience of the press to the dominant tyranny of the day was so general and so complete as to be now nearly incredible; those who look to the files of newspapers for information will find nothing but what, under the overwhelming terror of the moment, the ruling faction might choose to dictate to the trembling journalists:

and it is additionally important to observe, that, as it is the nature and instinct of fear to disguise and conceal itself, so, during the whole of this diversified yet unbroken reign of terror, there is nothing which all parties, both the terrorists and terrified, were anxious to hide as the omnipotent influence under which they all acted.

When, in a former essay, it was noticed this memorable fact (and good reason to say that it cannot be too often repeated), gave a striking example of that palsy of the press. It is the fashion to call the *Moniteur* the best history of the Revolution, (The Official Journal of Belgium) and its pages are universally appealed to as indisputable authority—and justly, as far as it goes; but the *Moniteur* itself is a very imperfect chronicle, and, even before it became the official paper, never ventured to say a syllable not actually dictated, or at least sanctioned, by the predominant factions. For instance, on the 22nd of January, 1793, the day after the king's murder—a somewhat remarkable event, not unworthy, should have supposed, a paragraph in a newspaper—the *Moniteur* does not so much as allude to it; and ekes out its meagre column of Parisian intelligence by a poor critique on 'Amboise—opéra comique!'



Jean-Paul Marat was a French political theorist, physician, and scientist. He was a journalist and politician during the French Revolution. He was a vigorous defender of the *sans-culottes* and seen as a radical voice. He published his views in pamphlets, placards and newspapers. His periodical *L'Ami du peuple* (*Friend of the People*) made him an unofficial link with the radical Jacobin group that came to power after June 1793.

Through his journalism, renowned for its fierce tone, advocacy of basic human rights for the poorest members of society, and uncompromising stance toward the new leaders and institutions of the revolution, he called for prisoners of the Revolution to be killed before they could be freed. His call led to the September Massacres. Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday, a Girondin sympathizer, while taking a medicinal bath for his debilitating skin condition. Corday was executed four days later for his assassination, on 17 July 1793.

And again: the assassination of Marat, which took place on the 13th July, 1793, is not mentioned till the 15th, and then only incidentally, in the report of the debates of the Convention; and the trial of Charlotte Corday, which took place on the 17th, was not reported in any of the journals till the 23rd, nor in the *Moniteur* till the 29th, and then only half was given; it was not concluded till the 30th, though the execution had taken place on the evening of the trial, almost a fortnight before. We could produce hundreds of similar instances; and, in fact, the *Moniteur* is, during the days of the National Assemblies and the Convention, of very little value, except as a convenient summary of the debates, and even as to them it is not always trustworthy,—witness the following passage of a letter addressed by the editor of the day to Robespierre, soliciting a share of the secret service fund, and found amongst his papers:—

"You must have remarked that the *Moniteur* reports the speeches of the Mountain at greater length than the rest. Given but a very slight sketch of Louvet's first accusation against you, while I gave your answer at full length. I rated the speeches for the king's death almost entire; and only gave some extracts of those on the other side—just much as was absolutely necessary to show some appearance of impartiality, & c. "Grandville." —ii. **Papiers de Robespierre, p. 131.**

And, to give the finishing touch to this remarkable instance of fraud and deception, have to add that the Committee of the Convention, to whom the examination of Robespierre's papers was referred, suppressed in their report these venal passages, which were only revealed when, after the Restoration, the original paper was brought to light.

These considerations have been recalled to our minds by the strange obscurity in which, when looking into the matter, find the early history of the Guillotine involved. Through long searches through the *Moniteur* and the other leading journals of the time—through the reports of the proceedings of the legislative assemblies—through the *Bulletin des Tribunaux*—the *Bulletin des Loix*, and in short wherever we thought the information most likely to be found, as to when and where this formidable engine made its first appearance, by what law it was sanctioned, and who were the earliest of that innumerable series of victims that perished by it. Little or nothing was to be found. It is only of late years that anyone seems to have ventured to produce any details on the subject.

In 1830 a paper, rather surgical than historical, in the 'Archives Curieuses,' and in 1835 the publication in the 'Revue Retrospective' of some documents preserved in the Hotel de Ville, threw some scanty light on this subject.

A recent pamphlet of M. Du Bois gives a more general sketch of the history of the machine itself and of its introduction into modern Revolutionary practice. All these accounts are very imperfect and unsatisfactory, but they afford us an opportunity of bringing into one view all that we have been able to collect on a subject so neglected, and yet so worthy, we think, of being accurately known and deeply considered.

It seems unaccountable that the introduction of so very remarkable a change in the mode of execution should not have been a subject of general curiosity and discussion, but is it not still more strange that persons calling themselves historians—whose attention might have been excited, not merely by the novelty of the machine, but by the moral and legal questions which led to the invention, and by the terrible, the gigantic consequences which followed its adoption—take little or no notice of it? M. Thiers, for instance, mentions cursorily the death of the first and second political victims of the Revolutionary Tribunal.—



Pierre Louis de Lacretelle, in a little more detail, names the second and third;—Mignet merely says, 'some persons were condemned;'—and they all, in the course of their narrations, report the death of the King; but in none of the cases do they allude to any machine, nor employ any phrase that would not apply to an ordinary decapitation by the stroke of the headsman.

It may be said, in explanation of their silence, that the French writers have been naturally reluctant to enter into details so disgraceful to the national character, and have therefore abstained, through patriotism—as the Romans used to do through superstition—from uttering the ill-omened word.

Of the first victims of the Tribunal and the Guillotine it is said, in the very words of Mignet, 'several persons were condemned;' it does not even say executed—still less does he give any idea that they died in an unusual way; and even the King's execution is described by the words, 'the descending axe terminated his existence;' which—there having been no preceding allusion to any machine—would have equally described that of Charles I. In short, those who are hereafter to learn the French Revolution from what are called Histories will see it very much curtailed of many of its more terrible, yet most interesting features, and especially of the most prominent of them all—the Guillotine.

The Guillotine was not originally designed with any view to what turned out to be its most important characteristic—the great numbers of victims that it could dispose of in a short space of time: it is curious, and ought to be to theorists an instructive lesson, that this bloody implement was at first proposed on a combined principle of justice and mercy.

It seems almost too ludicrous for belief, but it is strictly true, that, amongst the privileges of the old Noblesse of France which the "Philosophes" taught the people to complain of, was the mode of being put to death—why should a noble be only beheaded when a commoner would be hanged? Shakespeare, who penetrated every crevice of human feeling, makes the gravedigger in Hamlet open a grievance on which the French philosophers improved—'the more pity that great folks should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian.' Why, the Philosophes asked, should the Noblesse 'have countenance' to die otherwise than the Tiers Etat? There was also another liberal opinion then afloat on the public mind—that the prejudice which visited on the innocent family of a criminal some posthumous portion of his disgrace was highly unjust and contrary to the rights of man. Now there happened to be at this time in Paris a physician, one Dr. Guillotin, who professed, probably sincerely, but somewhat ostentatiously, what it was the fashion to call philanthropy; and just before the election of the States-General he published one or two pamphlets in favour of the Tiers Etat—liberal and philosophic as he no doubt considered them, but seditious in the eyes of the Parliament of Paris, which made some show of prosecuting the author: this was enough in those days to establish any man's popularity, and Guillotin, though a person, as it turned out, of very moderate ability, was so recommended by his popular pamphlets and by the censure of the Parliament, that he was elected as one of the representatives of Paris to the National Assembly.

An abstract from a work published in the height of republican enthusiasm (1796), and certainly with no bias against the Revolution or its founders, the following account of Dr. Guillotin:—

"By what accident has a man without either talents or reputation obtained for his name a frightful immortality? He fathered a work really written by a lawyer—Hardouin—who had too much character to produce it in his own name; and this work having been censured by the Parliament, Guillotin, who assumed the responsibility of it, became the man of the day, and owed to it that gleam of reputation which ensured his election to the States-General. He was in truth a nobody, who made himself a busybody—and by meddling with everything, à tort et à travers, was at once mischievous and ridiculous."—Portraits des Personnes Célèbres, 1796.

Jules Hardouin-Mansart made several small attempts at senatorial notoriety by proposing reforms in matters of health and morals, on which he might be supposed to have some kind of professional authority, and amongst others he took up the question of capital punishment—first, with the moral but visionary object of putting down by law the popular prejudice against the families of criminals; secondly, on the political ground that punishments should be equalized; and thirdly, he contended that hanging was a lingering and therefore cruel punishment, while death by decapitation must be immediate.



Small circumstances mix themselves with great results. On the 9th of October, 1789, the National Assembly, in consequence of the tragic exodus of the Court from Versailles, resolved to transfer itself to Paris, and Dr. Guillotin, being one of the representatives of that city, thought it expedient to prepare for himself a good reception from his constituents, and on that very day he gave notice of, and on the next—the 10th—produced, the following series of propositions:—

"I. Crimes of the same kind shall be punished by the same kind of punishment, whatever be the rank of the criminal.

"II. In all cases (whatever be the crime) of capital punishment, it shall be of the same kind—that is, beheading—and it shall be executed by means of a machine [l'effet d'un simple mécanisme].

"III. Crime being personal, the punishment, whatever it may be, of a criminal shall inflict no disgrace on his family.

"IV. No one shall be allowed to reproach any citizen with the punishment of one of his relations. He that shall dare to do so shall be reprimanded by the Judge, and this reprimand shall be posted up at the door of the delinquent; and moreover shall be posted against the pillory for three months.

"V. The property of a convict shall never nor in any case be confiscated.

"VI. The bodies of executed criminals shall be delivered to their families if they demand it. In all cases the body shall be buried in the usual manner, and the registry shall contain no mention of the nature of the death."

These propositions embodying the philosophe theories, and at best unseasonable were adjourned, somewhat contemptuously as it seems, without a debate; but on the 1st of December the Doctor brought them forward again—preceding his motion by reading a long and detailed report in their favour, to which, unluckily for the history of the guillotine—the Assembly did not pay the usual compliment of printing it, and no copy was found amongst Guillotin's papers. The account of the debate in the journals is peculiarly meagre, but we gather from them and other quarters some curious circumstances.

The first proposition was voted with little or no opposition. On the second a discussion arose, and the Abbé Maury, with prophetic sagacity, objected to the adoption of decapitation as a general punishment, "because it might tend to deprave the people by familiarizing them with the sight of blood;" but Maury's objection seems to have made no great impression at a time when no one—

not even the sagacious and eloquent Abbé himself—could have foreseen such a prodigality of legal murders—such a deluge of blood as afterwards afforded so practical and so frightful a corroboration of his theoretical suggestion.

But the debate was brought to a sudden conclusion on that day by an unlucky inadvertence of Guillotin himself; who, answering some objections to the 2nd Article, and having represented hanging as evidently a tedious and torturing process, exclaimed in a tone of triumph, "Now, with my machine, I strike you off your head [*je vous fais sauter la tête*] in the twinkling of an eye, and you never feel it." "*Solvuntur risu tabulæ*"—a general laugh terminated the debate—and amongst the laughs there were scores who were destined to be early victims of the yet unborn cause of their merriment.

Though Dr. Guillotin had talked so peremptorily and indiscreetly about "his machine," it does not appear that he had as yet prepared even a model, and it is nearly certain that he had no concern in the actual construction of the instrument that was eventually—three years later—adopted; but to which, while yet in embryo, this unlucky burst of surgical enthusiasm was the occasion of affixing his name. It happened thus:—The celebrated Royalist Journal, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, conducted with great zeal and considerable wit by Peltier (afterwards so well known in London), assisted by Rivarol and others, seized on this phrase of Guillotin's as the subject of a song—which, as being the real baptism of the future instrument, is worth quoting:—

"*Sur l'inimitable Machine du Médecin Guillotin, propre à couper les têtes, et dite de son nom Guillotine.*"

*Guillotin,
Médecin,
Politique,
Imagine, un beau matin,
Que pendre est inhumain
Et peu patriotique;
Aussitôt
Il lui fait
Un supplice
Qui sans corde ni poteau,
Supprime du bourreau
L'office.*

*Le Romain
Guillotin,
Qui s'apprête,
Consulte gens du métier—
Barnave et Chapelier,
Même Coupe-tête;—
Et sa main
Fait soudain
La machine,
Qui 'simplement' nous tuera,
Et que l'on nommera
Guillotine!"*

It is singular enough that this song should have given its immortal name to the instrument three years before it actually existed; but it is also remarkable in another way—"Barnave and Chapelier" were two of the most violent democratic members of the National Assembly, and had been guilty of some indiscreet (to say the least of it) encouragement to the early massacres; Coupe-tête was one Jourdain (afterwards more widely celebrated for his share in the massacres of Avignon), who derived his title of Coupe-tête from having cut off the heads of the two Gardes du Corps, Messrs. Des Huttes and Varicourt, who were murdered in the palace of Versailles on the 6th of October. But—O, divine Justice!—these very patrons of massacre—Barnave, and Chapelier, and Coupe-tête—were themselves all massacred by the Guillotine: Barnave, a deep and interesting penitent, on the 29th of November, 1793; Chapelier, 17th of April, 1794; and Jourdain, covered with the blood of human hecatombs, 27th May, 1794.

The name, however, of Guillotine, thus given in derision and by anticipation, stuck, as the phrase is, in spite of a momentary attempt to call it the Louison, after M. Louis, the secretary of the College of Surgeons, who did actually preside over the construction of the machine which Guillotin had only indicated. But it was at first chiefly used as a term of reproach and ridicule; and we read in the *Moniteur* of the 18th of December, 1789, some 'Observations on the motion of Dr. Guillotin for the adoption of a machine which should behead animals in the twinkling of an eye,' censuring the "levity with which some periodical papers have made trivial and indecent remarks," &c., alluding, no doubt, to the song of the *Actes des Apôtres*, which had a great vogue; but still these 'Observations' afford no details as to any machine.

The subsequent proceedings on Guillotin's propositions are involved in some obscurity. In the reports of the debates it is stated that the discussion, interrupted on the 1st of December, was adjourned to the following day; but on that day there is no mention of it, and it is stated by Guyot that the debate was resumed on the 27th of December; but again no report of any such debate on that day, and therefore believe that all that Guyot says of this debate of the 27th of December is a confusion of three debates: the one of the 1st of December, which, just mentioned; another on the 23rd, on the right of citizenship, which touched incidentally the 3rd and 4th articles of Guillotin's proposition; and a third on the 21st January, 1790.



A remarkable circumstance in the debate of the 23rd December was, that the Count de Clermont Tonnère, one of the ablest and most amiable members of the Assembly, but who, like so many other well-meaning persons, was at the outset a dupe to that giddy mania of innovation and that wild pursuit of abstract plausibility's which blasted the first fair promises of the young Revolution—M. de Clermont Tonnère, took occasion, on the topic of the injustice of the prejudices which attached to the families of criminals, to invoke the sympathy of the Assembly for two other classes of persons who were still injuriously affected by the same kind of prejudice—he meant Actors and Executioners! If satire had been devising how to ridicule these philosophical legislators, it could scarcely have hit on anything better than an attempt to class Actors and Executioners in the same category, and to extirpate such prejudices by statute law.

It is but justice to M. de Clermont Tonnère to say that he saw very soon, though still too late, the danger of the many liberal and silly impulses to which he had at first given way, and endeavoured, but in vain, to stay the plague which he unintentionally had helped to propagate; by the recovery of his good sense he lost his popularity, and was massacred on the evening of the 10th of August in a garret where he had taken refuge, by the people whose idol he had been as long as he advocated the dignity of players and the sensibilities of the hangman.

The National Assembly seems to have been reluctant to renew the discussion on Guillotin's propositions, but a case which arose about the middle of January, 1790, proves that, although Guillotin and his machine found little favour in the Assembly, the proposition which he and M. de Clermont had advocated, of removing from a criminal's family any share in his disgrace—false in principle, and impossible in fact—had made, as such plausibility's generally do when the public mind is excited, a great popular impression. The case, very characteristic in all its circumstances, was this.

There were three brothers of a respectable family in Paris of the name of Agasse, the two eldest of whom, printers and proprietors of the *Moniteur*, were convicted for forgery of bank-notes, and sentenced to be hanged. This condemnation excited—from the youth and antecedent respectability of the parties—great public interest. It might be naturally expected that this sympathy would have exerted itself in trying to procure a pardon, or at least some commutation of punishment, for these young men, whose crime was really nothing compared with those of which Paris was the daily and hourly scene; but no! There seems, on the contrary, to have been a pretty general desire that they should suffer the full sentence of the law, in order that the National Assembly and the good people of Paris might have a practical opportunity of carrying out the new principle that the "crime does not disgrace the family."

In the evening sitting of the 21st January (a date soon to become still more remarkable in the history of the Guillotine) an Abbé Pepin mounted hastily the tribune of the National Assembly, recalled to its attention

Guillotin's propositions, which had been, he said, too long neglected, and stated that a case had now occurred which required the instant passing of the three articles which related to the abolition of the prejudice and of confiscation of property, and to the restoring the body to the family.

That most foolish of the National Assemblies loved to act by impulses, and the three articles were enthusiastically passed for the avowed purpose of being applied to the individual case—as they, in fact, were in the following extraordinary manner:—

Three days after the passing of the decree the battalion of National Guards of the district of St. Honoré, where the Agasses resided, assembled in grand parade; they voted an address to M. Agasse, the uncle of the criminals, first, to condole with his affliction, and, secondly, to announce their adoption of the whole surviving family as friends and brothers; and, as a first step, they elected the young brother and younger cousin of the culprits to be lieutenants of the Grenadier company of the battalion, and then, the battalion being drawn up in front of the Louvre, these young men were marched forth, and complimented on their new rank by M. de Lafayette, the Commander-in-Chief, accompanied by a numerous staff.

Nor was this all: a deputation of the battalion were formally introduced into the National Assembly, and were harangued and complimented by the President on this touching occasion. They were afterwards entertained at a banquet, at which Lafayette—then in more than royal power and glory—placed them at his sides, and "frequently embraced them."

They were also led in procession to St. Eustache and other churches, and paraded, with every kind of ostentation, to the public gaze. A public dinner of six hundred National Guards was got up in their honour; numerous patriotic and philanthropic toasts were drunk, and then, in an "ivresse," not altogether of wine, the newspapers say, but of patriotism and joy, the two youths were marched back through half Paris, preceded by a band of music, to the house of the uncle, where the rest of the Agasse family, old and young, male and female, came forth into the street to receive the congratulations of the tipsy crowd.

Can you imagine any greater cruelty than the making a show of the grief of these unhappy people, and thus forcing them to celebrate, as it were,—in the incongruous novelties of gold lace and military promotion, and public exhibitions,—the violent death of their nearest and dearest relations?

While these tragical farces were playing, the poor culprits, who did not at all partake of the kind of enthusiasm their case excited, were endeavouring to escape from the painful honour of having this great moral experiment made in their persons: but in vain; their appeals were rejected, and at length they were, on the 8th of February, led forth to execution in a kind of triumph—of which it was remarked that they felt nothing but the aggravation of their own personal misery,—and were hanged with as much tenderness as old Izaak Walton hooked his worm; and, that preliminary process being over, the bodies were delivered with a vast parade of reverence and delicacy to the family. The surviving brother was confirmed in the lucrative property of the *Moniteur*, which he enjoyed throughout the Revolution, as his widow did after him, under the title of "Madame Veuve Agasse," and as we believe her representative does to this hour; and in the great work of Aubert, printed by Didot, called '*Tableaux Historiques de la Revolution*,' there is a plate of the two Agasses going to be hanged, as if it had been a matter of the same historical importance as the Serment du Jeu de Paume, or the execution of the King. We hardly know a stronger instance of the characteristic perversity with which the Revolution, in all its transactions, contrived to transmute the abstract feelings of mercy and benevolence into practical absurdity, mischief, and cruelty.

But all this cruel foolery made no difference in the mode of execution; and indeed it was not yet decided that the punishment of death, in any shape, should be maintained in the new constitution. That great question was debated on the 30th of May, 1791—the committee on the Constitution, to whom the question had been referred, proposed the abolition, which, however, after a warm discussion, was negative, and capital punishment retained. This discussion was remarkable in several ways. Those who thought the maintenance of capital punishments necessary to the safety of society were the first and greatest sufferers by it; while by those who opposed it on pretended principles of humanity it was very soon perverted to the purposes of the most monstrous and bloody tyranny that the world has yet seen.

The chairman of the committee, who warmly advocated their views and his own for the abolition, was Le Pelletier de St. Fargeau, an ex-president of the Parliament of Paris, where he had been a leading frondeur: at the outset of the States-General he seemed inclined to the Royalist party, but, either from terror or a desire of popularity, soon became a Jacobin.

This strenuous advocate for the abolition of the punishment of death in any case voted for the murder of the King, and was himself on the same day assassinated by one Pâris, an ex-Garde du Corps, in a café of the Palais Royal; but a still more remarkable circumstance was, that the member who distinguished himself by the most zealous, argumentative, and feeling protest against the shedding of human blood, in any possible case or under any pretext whatsoever, was, as the reports call him, "Monsieur de Robespierre!"

The fundamental question being thus decided for the retention of capital punishment, the mode of execution came next into discussion, and on the 3rd of June, 1791, the following article was proposed:—

"Every criminal condemned to death shall be beheaded [aura la tête tranchée]."

In the debate on this question there were also some noticeable circumstances. M. La Chèze reproduced, rather more diffusely, the Abbé Maury's original objection to familiarising the people to the sight of blood; and it seemed now to produce more impression than it had formerly done. Two years of bloody anarchy had, we presume, a little sobered all minds capable of sobriety; but the Duke de Liancourt, a distinguished professor of philanthropy, employed the recent murders à la lanterne as an argument in favour of the new proposition:—

"There was one consideration," he said, "which ought to incline the Assembly to adopt the proposal for beheading—the necessity of effacing from the social system all traces of a punishment [hanging] which has lately been so irregularly applied, and which has, during the course of the Revolution, so unfortunately lent itself to popular vengeance."

Irregularly applied! What a designation of a series of most atrocious murders! But the ultra-liberal Duke had soon to learn that these irregular applications of popular vengeance were not to be controlled by fine-spun theories. He too was pursued, after the 10th of August, by the fury of a bloodthirsty populace; but, more fortunate than M. de Clermont Tonnère, he escaped from their hands, and passed over into England.

The article, however, notwithstanding M. de Liancourt's humane argument in its favour, was not passed without some difficulty, and only after two doubtful trials.

Still, however, this was a mere vote without any immediate legal effect till the whole constitution should be ratified: nor, be it observed, was anything said—either in the discussions or in the decrees—about a machine; and indeed it seems certain, from documents which we shall quote presently, that it was not yet decided that a machine should be employed at all, and that, on the contrary, the use of the sword (not even the axe and block) was still uppermost in men's minds.

At length, however, on the 21st of September, 1791, the new penal code was adopted; and on the 6th of October became, and still continues to be, the law of France. Its 2nd and 3rd articles, tit. 1, are as follow:—

"II. The punishment of death shall consist in the mere privation of life, and no kind of torture shall be ever inflicted on the condemned. "III. Every person condemned [to a capital punishment] shall be beheaded."

During all these legislative discussions the old practice of hanging seems to have been going on—sometimes, as M. de Liancourt said, "irregularly applied," under the popular cry of "Les aristocrates à la lanterne!"—sometimes also in the regular course of justice; but this last decree now put an end to the judicial practice, without having substituted any other.

At length, however, on the 24th of January, 1792, a person of the name of Nicholas Jacques Pelletier was condemned to death by the criminal tribunal of Paris, for robbery and murder. This event (decapitation being now the only legal punishment) brought the question of the precise mode of death to a practical crisis. The magistrates inquired of the Minister how the sentence was to be executed; and, after the delay of a month, the Minister himself and the Directory of the Department of Paris were obliged to have recourse to the Legislative Assembly for instructions. The letter of the Minister—Duport du Tertre—is remarkable for the reluctance with which he enters on the subject, and the deep and almost prophetic horror he expresses at having had to examine its odious details.

"It was," he said, "a kind of execution [espèce de supplice] to which he had felt himself condemned" This, alas! was but an anticipation of a fatal reality. On the 28th of November, 1793, he himself was condemned by the revolutionary tribunal, and suffered on the 29th, by the machine first used under his involuntary auspices, and in company with that same Barnave, the first and most prominent patron of revolutionary blood-shedding!

The concluding part of Duport's letter will show that at this date there was not only no adoption of, but only a very slight allusion to, a machine—the idea of which seems to have made its way very slowly; and all parties appear to have understood that the decapitation intended by the law was that which had been the usage in the case of noble criminals—by the sword. Duport states: —

"3rd March, 1792.

"It appears from the communications made to me by the executioners themselves, that, without some precautions of the nature of those which attracted for a moment the attention of the Constituent Assembly, the act of decollation will be horrible to the spectators. It will either prove the spectators to be monsters if they are able to bear such a spectacle; or the executioner, terrified himself, will be exposed to the fury of the people, whose very humanity may exasperate them, however cruelly and unjustly, against the executioner.

"I must solicit from the National Assembly an immediate decision; for a case at the moment presses for execution, which, however, is suspended by the humanity of the judges and the fright [l'effroi] of the executioner."

The representation of the Département is to the same effect, and, making no allusion whatever to mechanism, implies that death was to be by the sword:—

"3rd March, 1792.

"The executioner represents to us that he fears he cannot fulfil the intentions of the law, which is, that the criminal shall suffer nothing beyond the simple privation of life. The executioner fears that from want of experience he may make decollation a frightful torture, and we entertain the same apprehensions."

These letters, we see, refer to the opinion of the Executioner himself; and as that opinion has been preserved, our readers will not, we think, be sorry to see, as a literary curiosity, an essay by such a hand on such a subject.

"Memorandum of Observations on the Execution of Criminals by Beheading; with the nature of the various objections which it presents, and to which it is really liable— "That is to say:—

"In order that the execution may be performed according to the intention of law [simple privation of life], it is necessary that, even without any obstacle on the part of the criminal, the executioner himself should be very expert, and the criminal very firm, without which one could never get through an execution by the sword without the certainty of dangerous accidents. "After one execution, the sword will be no longer in a condition to perform another: being liable to get notched, it is absolutely necessary, if there are many persons to execute at the same time, that it should be ground and sharpened anew. It would be necessary then to have a sufficient number of swords all ready. That would lead to great and almost insurmountable difficulties.

"It is also to be remarked that swords have been very often broken in executions of this kind. "The executioner of Paris possesses only two, which were given him by the ci-devant Parliament of Paris. They cost 600 livres apiece".

"It is to be considered that, when there shall be several criminals to execute at the same time, the terror that such an execution presents, by the immensity of blood which it produces and which is scattered all about, will carry fright and weakness into the most intrepid hearts of those whose turn is to come. Such weaknesses would present an invincible obstacle to the execution. The patient being no longer able to support himself, the execution, if persisted in, will become a struggle and a massacre.

"Even in executions of another class [hanging], which do not need anything like the precision that this kind requires, we have seen criminals grow sick at the sight of the execution of their companions—at least they are liable to that weakness: all that is against beheading with the sword. In fact, who could bear the sight of so bloody an execution without feeling and showing some such weakness?

"In the other kind of execution it is easy to conceal those weaknesses from the public, because, in order to complete the operation, there is no necessity that the patient should continue firm and without fear; but in this, if the criminal falters, the execution must fail also.

"How can the executioner have the necessary power over a man who will not or cannot keep himself in a convenient posture? "It seems, however, that the National Assembly only devised this species of execution for the purpose of preventing the length to which executions in the old way were protracted.

"It is in furtherance of their humane views that I have the honour of giving this forewarning of the many accidents that these executions may produce if attempted by the sword. It is therefore indispensable that, in order to fulfil the humane intentions of the National Assembly, some means should be found to avoid delays and assure certainty, by fixing the patient so that the success of the operation shall not be doubtful".

"By this the intention of the legislature will be fulfilled, and the executioner himself protected from any accidental effervescence of the public—Charles Henry Sanson."

We think our readers will be surprised at the good sense and decency of M. Sanson's observations on a very delicate subject, and they will have noticed the gentle hint that he gives that the National Assembly had legislated on a matter they did not understand, and passed a law that would have defeated its own object; but what is most strange is that here is—not only no mention of the machine which had made so much noise three years before, but—decisive evidence that it was understood by the executioner himself, as it at first sight seems to have been by everybody else, that the law contemplated execution by the sword.

But the truth, we believe, was that Guillotin's proposition had been smothered by ridicule and by the detected insignificance of the proposer, and no one was desirous of openly associating himself to this odious invention; but that it was all along intended to adopt it seems evident from the care with which all allusion to the more obvious use of the block and axe was omitted.

The appeal, however, of the Minister of Justice obliged the Legislative Assembly to solve the question, and they referred it to a committee, who themselves consulted M. Louis, the Secretary of the Academy of Surgery, and, on the 20th of March, Carlier (of the same name as the executioner of 1684, who preceded the Sanson family in the office), brought up the report of the Committee, and on the same day the Assembly decreed— "That the mode of execution proposed by M. Louis, the Secretary of the Academy of Surgeons (which proposal is annexed to the present decree), shall be adopted throughout the kingdom."

The following is M. Louis's report, which, notwithstanding its length, we think worth reproducing—it is in truth the main feature in the history of the guillotine, and its conclusions are still the existing Law of France on the subject:—

"Report on the Mode of Decollation.

"The Committee of Legislation having done me the honour to consult me on two letters addressed to the National Assembly concerning the execution of the 3rd Art. of the 1st Title of the Penal Code, which directs that every criminal capitally convicted shall be decapitated (*aura la tête tranchée*); by these letters the Minister of Justice and the Directory of the Department of Paris, in consequence of representations made to them, are of opinion that it is instantly necessary to determine the precise mode of proceeding in the execution of this law, lest, by the defect of the means, or inexperience or awkwardness, the execution should become cruel to the patient and offensive to the spectators, in which case it might be feared that the people, out of mere humanity, might be led to take vengeance on the executioner himself—a result which it is important to prevent. I believe that these representations and fears are well founded. Experience and reason alike prove that the mode of beheading hitherto practised exposes the patient to a more frightful punishment than the mere deprivation of life, which is all the law directs. To obey strictly the law, the execution should be performed in a single moment and at one blow. All experience proves how difficult it is to accomplish this.

"We should recollect what passed at the execution of M. de Lally in 1766. He was on his knees—his eyes covered— the executioner struck him on the back of the neck—the blow did not sever the head, and could not have done so. The body, which had nothing to uphold it, fell on the face, and it was by three or four cuts of a sabre that the head was at length severed from the body. This hackery [*hacherie*], if I may be allowed to invent the word, excited the horror of the spectators.

"In Germany the executioners are more expert from the frequency of this class of execution, principally because females of whatever rank undergo no other. But even there the execution is frequently imperfect, even though they take the precaution of tying the patient in a chair.

"In Denmark there are two positions and two instruments for decapitation. The mode of execution which may be supposed to be the more honourable is by the sword, the patient kneeling with his eyes covered and his hands free. In the other, which is supposed to attach additional infamy, the patient is bound, and, lying on his face, the head is severed by the hatchet.

"Everybody knows that cutting instruments have little effect when they strike perpendicularly. If examined with a microscope it will be seen that the edges are nothing but a saw, more or less fine, which act only by sliding, as it were, over the body that they are to divide. It would be impossible to decapitate at one blow with a straight-edged axe; but with a convex edge, like the ancient battle-axes, the blow acts perpendicularly only at the very centre of the segment of the circle, but the sides have an oblique and sliding action which succeeds in separating the parts. In considering the structure of the human neck, of which the centre is the vertebral column, composed of several bones, the connexion of which forms a series of sockets, so that there can be no hitting of a joint, it is not possible to ensure a quick and perfect separation by any means which shall be liable to moral or physical variations in strength or dexterity. For such a result there is no certainty but in an invariable mechanism, of which the force and effect can be regulated and directed. This is the mode adopted in England. The body of the criminal is laid on its stomach between two posts connected at top by a cross beam, whence a convex hatchet is made to fall suddenly on the patient by the removal of a peg.

The back of the hatchet should be strong and heavy enough to perform the object like the weight with which piles are driven. The force, of course, will be in proportion to the height from which it may fall.

"It is easy to construct such an instrument, of which the effect would be certain, and the decapitation will be performed in an instant according to the letter and the spirit of the new law. It will be easy to make experiments dead bodies, or even on a living sheep. We should then see whether it might not be necessary to fix the neck of the patient in a semicircle, which should confine the neck just where it joins the hinder bone of the skull; the extremities of this semicircle might be fastened by bolts to the solid parts of the scaffold. This addition, if it shall appear necessary, would create no observation, and would be scarcely perceivable.

"Given in consultation at Paris, this 7th of March, 1792. - "Louis."

Here is no mention of nor allusion to Guillotin or any previous machine, except one supposed to be in use in England; and however strong might be the desire of keeping Guillotin out of sight, it seems hardly possible to imagine that, if he had made any model or given any distinct description of a machine, M. Louis could have treated the matter as he did. We find, however, that, while it was thus pending, Rœderer, then Procureur-Général (chief legal authority) of the Département, wrote the following private note to Dr. Guillotin:—

"Dear Sir and Ex-Colleague,—I should be very much obliged if you would be so good as to come to the office of the Department, No. 4, Place Vendôme, at your earliest convenience. The Directory [of the Department of Paris] is unfortunately about to be called upon to determine the mode of decapitation which will be henceforward employed for the execution of the 3rd article of the Penal Code. I am instructed to invite you to communicate to me the important ideas which you have collected and compared with a view of mitigating a punishment which the law does not intend to be cruel.

"Rœderer".

"10th March, 1792."—*Revue Retrospective*, p. 14.

It does not appear whether Guillotin waited on the Procureur-Général: at all events, the interview produced nothing, for we see that Louis's report had been made three days earlier, and was finally adopted without variation by the Convention 20th March.

Here then concludes all that we have been able to find of the connexion of Guillotin with the terrible instrument to which he unfortunately became godfather. We shall add a few words on his subsequent life. Readers have seen that Rœderer addresses him as "Ex-Colleague."

The Constituent Assembly had been dissolved in the preceding autumn; and Guillotin's last labours in that assembly were of a nature that exposed him to an additional degree of ridicule and contempt; and he who

had been so lately cried up as a patriote philosophe was now by the very same voices denounced as an aristocrat.

"Guillotin le médecin aristocrate a dépensé 1,200,000 livres à remuer les plâtres, à placer et déplacer des ventouses et des latrines."—(Prudhomme, *Rev. de Paris*, 10, 543.)

Certain it is that he was not thought of for any of the subsequent assemblies. His ephemeral and accidental popularity had vanished, and the instrument which has "damned him to everlasting fame" had not yet appeared—so he seems to have sunk back into more than his original obscurity, to which was soon superadded the increasing horror of the times. His retreat, indeed, was so profound, that it was said, and readily believed, that he too had fallen a victim to his own invention. But it was not so; he was indeed imprisoned during the Jacobin reign of terror—his crime being, it is said by Guyot, that he testified an indiscreet indignation at a proposition made to him by Danton to superintend the construction of a triple guillotine. There is no doubt that a double and perhaps a triple instrument was thought of, and it is said that such a machine was made and intended to be erected in the great hall of the Palais de Justice, but it was certainly never used.

The general gaol delivery of the 9th Thermidor released Guillotin, and he afterwards lived in a decent mediocrity of fortune at Paris, esteemed, it is said, by a small circle of friends, but overwhelmed by a deep sensibility to the great, though we cannot say wholly undeserved, misfortune which had rendered his name ignominious and his very existence a subject of fearful curiosity. He just lived to see the Restoration, and died in his bed, in Paris, on the 26th of May, 1814, at the age of seventy-six.

Poor Guillotin paid dearly for the foolish vanity of affecting to be an inventor, when he was only a plagiarist; and it seems very strange how so general an opinion should have prevailed as to the novelty of the invention, when we find M. Louis, in the very first distinct description of the machine, representing it as one already known in England—indeed, his expressions seem to imply that it was then actually and habitually in use amongst us. We know not whence M. Louis could have taken up this notion.—The English mode of decapitation had always been by the block and the axe—with one ancient local exception—that of what was called the Halifax Gibbet, which was indeed a perfect guillotine, and had been, of old, employed in certain peculiar cases arising in the adjoining district.

If M. Louis had inquired a little farther, he would have found not only that the implement was not in general use in England, but had not been used for near 150 years in the small district to which it belonged. He would also have easily discovered such descriptions and portraits of the like machines as would have saved him a great deal of trouble in the actual construction of that on which he was employed.

Before us is an old print of the Halifax gibbet, with a legend, "John Hoyle, del., 1650," which had been often reproduced long before Guillotin was born—as in a little book called 'Halifax and its Gibbet Law,' 1708; and Bishop Gibson's edition of Camden's 'Britannia,' 1722.



The Halifax Gibbet was a wooden structure consisting of two wooden uprights, capped by a horizontal beam, of a total height of 4.5 metres (15 ft). The blade was an axe head weighing 3.5 kg (7.7 lb), attached to the bottom of a massive wooden block that slid up and down in grooves in the uprights.

This device was mounted on a large square platform 1.25 metres (4 ft) high. It is not known when the Halifax Gibbet was first used; the first recorded execution in Halifax dates from 1280, but that execution may have been by sword, axe, or gibbet.

The machine remained in use until Oliver Cromwell forbade capital punishment for petty theft. It was used for the last time, for the execution of two criminals on a single day, on 30 April 1650.

The Halifax Gibbet By the 16th century the town of Halifax had become a major producer of cloth, all of which had to be dried in the open air and was vulnerable to theft. Strict punishments were imposed to deter thieves including death by beheading for theft of items above a certain value.

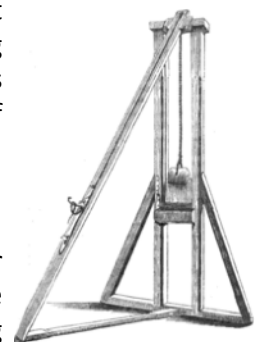
Fifty three men and women were executed by the Halifax Gibbet between 1541 and 1650 when the gibbet was dismantled, possibly as a response to the execution of King Charles I in 1649. In 1974 a replica was built on the original site in Gibbet Street, including a casting from the original blade which is now on display at the Bankfield Museum in Boothtown.



The accuracy of Hoyle's representation is additionally attested by the recent discovery of the pedestal or stone scaffold, which had been concealed under a long accumulation of rubbish and soil which had formed a grassy mound, commonly supposed to be a natural hill, on which the temporary scaffold for the gibbet was from time to time erected; but the town trustees having, a few years since, purchased the Gibbet Hill, and having determined to reduce it to the level of the surrounding fields, this curious relic of antiquity was brought to light, and has been since carefully developed; and except some dilapidation of the upper surface and of one of the steps, it presents a perfect corroboration of the evidence of the prints. The ancient axe is still in the possession of the lord of the manor of Wakefield, to which this extraordinary jurisdiction belonged. Mr. Pennant had so recently as 1774 published an account of the Halifax gibbet, as we have described it, and adds,—

"This machine of death is now destroyed; but I saw one of the same kind in a room under the Parliament House at Edinburgh, where it was introduced by the Regent Morton, who took a model of it as he passed through Halifax, and at length suffered by it himself. It is in the form of a painter's easel, and about ten feet high: at four feet from the bottom is a crossbar, on which the felon places his head, which is kept down by another placed above. In the inner edges of the frame are grooves; in these are placed a sharp axe, with a vast weight of lead, supported at the very summit by a peg; to that peg is fastened a cord, which the executioner cutting, the axe falls, and does the affair effectually."—Pennant's Tour, vol. iii. p. 365.

This instrument, strangely called the Maiden, is still in existence in Edinburgh, and as it has never, that we know of, been engraved, we think the accompanying representation will not be unacceptable to our readers. It will be observed that, in this model, the cord, instead of being cut, as stated by Pennant, was released by a kind of latch.



Pennant's representation of "The Maiden" in 1774

Near thirty years prior to Pennant's publication, the execution of the Scotch lords for the Rebellion of 1745 by the axe and block seems to have recalled the obsolete maiden to notice, for we find in the 'London Magazine' for April, 1747, the following representation of it:—



Neither Guillotin nor Louis seems to have seen any of these drawings; nor, as we have said, can we guess on what authority the latter supposes that this mode of decapitation was in actual use in England; for there had been no execution by the Halifax gibbet since 1650, and the last of the very few by the Scottish maiden were the Marquis of Argyle, in 1661, and his son the Earl, in 1685,—the latter declaring, as he pressed his lips on the block, that it was the sweetest maiden he had ever kissed.

"The Scottish machine is made of oak and consists of a sole beam 5 feet in length into which are fixed two upright posts 10 feet in height, 4 inches broad and 12 inches apart from each other, and 3 1/2 inches in thickness, with bevelled corners. These posts are kept steady by a brace at each side which springs from the end of the sole and is fastened to the uprights 4 feet from the bottom.

The tops of the posts are fixed into a cross rail 2 feet in length. The block is a transverse bar 3 1/4 feet from the bottom, 8 inches in breadth and 4 1/2 inches in thickness, and a hollow on the upper edge of this bar is filled with lead... The axe consists of a plate of iron faced with steel; it measures 13 inches in length and 10 1/2 inches in breadth. On the upper edge of the plate was

fixed a mass of lead 75 lbs in weight. This blade works in grooves cut on the inner edges of the uprights, which are lined with copper..." -- Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland, Vol.III, 1886-8.

The Maiden was constructed in 1564 for the Provost and Magistrates of Edinburgh, and it was in use from April 1565 to 1710. One of those executed was James Douglas, 4th Earl of Morton, in 1581, and a 1644 publication began circulating the legend that Morton himself had commissioned the Maiden after he had seen the Halifax Gibbet. The Maiden was readily dismantled for storage and transport, and it is now on display in the National Museum of Scotland.

For a period of time after its invention, the guillotine was called a lousiette. However, it was later named after French Physician and Freemason Dr. Joseph-Ignace Guillotin who proposed on 10 October 1789 the use of a device to carry out death penalties in France, as a less painful method of execution or as Capital Punishment instead of Breaking wheel to Louis XVI of France. While he did not invent the guillotine, and in fact opposed the death penalty, his name became an eponym for it.

He was a Founding member, Grand Orient of France Lodge of the Nine Sisters, Paris Master, Concorde Fraternelle Lodge. Paris, 1719 and Lodge of Fortitude and Old Cumberland No. 12: member.



The History of Freemasonry in England is clouded in the mists of time but there is some positive evidence of the existence of speculative as distinct from operative Masonry in the 17th Century. Lodges of Freemasons at this period were largely occasional in the sense that they were summoned at irregular intervals and according to circumstances. Nevertheless the making of Masons continued in London and the Provinces with sufficient regularity so as to preserve knowledge of the procedures and tenets of the Craft. The upsurge in speculative masonry, giving rise to the as yet unidentified events which led to the formation of a Grand Lodge, took place in London. It is accepted that four Lodges, then meeting in taverns in London, came together and agreed to establish a Grand Lodge. The process by which agreement was reached is unknown but it is known that the premier Grand Lodge was established on 24 June 1717, St John's Day, when a feast was held at the Goose and Gridiron Ale House in St Paul's Churchyard.

The four Lodges involved met at the Goose and Gridiron, the Crown Ale House in Parkers Lane (near the present building in Great Queen Street), The Apple Tree Tavern in Charles Street, Covent Garden and the Runner and Grapes Tavern in Channel Row, Westminster. Three still survive and are now known as Lodge of Antiquity No 2, Fortitude and Old Cumberland Lodge No 12 (originally No 3) and Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No IV. These are known as "time immemorial lodges" the only lodges within the English constitution, with this distinction. They, together with Grand Stewards' Lodge, have the ability to operate without a warrant.

Introduction in France



Portrait of Guillotin

On 10 October 1789, physician Joseph-Ignace Guillotin proposed to the National Assembly that capital punishment should always take the form of decapitation "by means of a simple mechanism."

Sensing the growing discontent, Louis XVI banned the use of the breaking wheel. In 1791, as the French Revolution progressed, the National Assembly researched a new method to be used on all condemned people regardless of class, consistent with the idea that the purpose of capital punishment was simply to end life rather than to inflict pain.

A committee was formed under Antoine Louis, physician to the King and Secretary to the Academy of Surgery. Guillotin was also on the committee. The group was influenced by the Italian Mannaia (or Mannaja: which had been used ever since Roman times), the Scottish Maiden and the Halifax Gibbet, which was fitted with an axe head weighing 7 pounds 12 ounces (3.5 kg).

While these prior instruments usually crushed the neck or used blunt force to take off a head, devices also usually used a crescent blade and a lunette (a hinged two part yoke to immobilize the victim's neck).

Laquante, an officer of the Strasbourg criminal court, designed a beheading machine and employed Tobias Schmidt, a German engineer and harpsichord maker, to construct a prototype. Antoine Louis is also credited with the design of the prototype.

The memoirs of the official executioner claim that King Louis XVI (an amateur locksmith) recommended that an oblique blade be used instead of a crescent blade, lest the blade not fit all necks (ironically, the king's own was offered up discreetly as an example).



The first execution by guillotine was performed on highwayman Nicolas Jacques Pelletier on 25 April 1792. He was executed in front of what is now the city hall of Paris (Place de l'hôtel de ville). All citizens deemed guilty of a crime punishable by death were from then on executed there, until the scaffold was moved on 21 August to the Place du Carrousel.

The machine was successful because it was considered a humane form of execution, contrasting with the methods used in the pre-revolutionary Ancient

Régime.

In France, before the invention of the guillotine, members of the nobility were beheaded with a sword or an axe, which often took two or more blows to kill the condemned. (The condemned or their families would sometimes pay the executioner to ensure that the blade was sharp, to achieve a quick and relatively painless death.) Commoners were usually hanged, which could take many minutes. In the early phase of the French Revolution, the slogan *À la lanterne* (in English: To the Lamp Post!, String Them Up! or Hang Them!) had become a symbol of popular justice in revolutionary France. The revolutionary radicals hanged officials and aristocrats from street lanterns. Other more gruesome methods of execution were also used, such as the wheel or burning at the stake.

The guillotine was thus perceived to deliver an immediate death without risk of suffocation. Furthermore, having only one method of civil execution was seen as an expression of equality among citizens. The guillotine was then the only civil legal execution method in France until the abolition of the death penalty in 1981, apart from certain crimes against the security of the state, or for the death sentences passed by military courts, which entailed execution by firing squad.

For a period of time after its invention, the guillotine was called a *louisette*. However, it was later named after Guillotin who had proposed that a less painful method of execution should be found in place of the breaking wheel, though he opposed the death penalty and bemoaned the association of the guillotine with his name.

An anonymous friend of Dr. Guillotin's, quoted by Guyot, states that his ideas were formed, not from these English precedents—about which he probably knew nothing, though recalled to public attention in the then so recent work of Pennant—but from a passage in an anonymous work called '*Voyage Historique et Politique de Suisse, d'Italie, et d'Allemagne*', printed from 1736 to 1743, in which is found the following account of the execution at Milan, in 1702, of a Count Bozelli:—

"A large scaffold was prepared in the great square, and covered with black. In the middle of it was placed a great block, of the height to allow the criminal, when kneeling, to lay his neck on it between a kind of gibbet which supported a hatchet one foot deep and one and a half wide, which was confined by a groove.

The hatchet was loaded with a hundred pounds weight of lead, and was suspended by a rope made fast to the gibbet.

After the criminal had confessed himself, the penitents, who are for the most part of noble families, led him up on the scaffold, and, making him kneel before the block, one of the penitents held the head under the



hatchet; the priest then reading the prayers usual on such occasions, the executioner had nothing to do but cut the cord that held up the hatchet, which, descending with violence, severed the head, which the penitent still held in his hands, so that the executioner never touched it. This mode of executing is so sure that the hatchet entered the block above two inches."—Guyot.

This was the same machine which, under the name of "mannaia," was common in Italy, and is described very minutely and technically by Le Père Labat in his 'Voyage en Italie,' 1730, as the more honorific mode of capital punishment.

But the most curious, though not the most exact, of all the precedents for the guillotine is that which is found in Randle Holme's 'Academy of Armoury,' 1678, in which he describes a family (whose name is not given) as bearing heraldically,— "Gules, a heading-block fixed between two supporters, and an axe placed therein; on the sinister side a maule: all proper."

Holme adds, "That this was the Jews' and Romans' way of beheading offenders, as some write, though others say that they used to cut off the heads of such with a sharp two-handed sword. However, this way of decollation was by laying the neck of the malefactor on the block, and then setting the axe upon it, which lay in a rigget [groove] on the two side-posts or supporters. The executioner, with the violence of a blow on the head of the axe with his heavy maule [mallet], forced it through the man's neck into the block. I have seen a draught of the like heading instrument, where the weighty axe (made heavy for that purpose) was raised up, and fell down in such a rigged frame, which being suddenly let to fall, the weight of it was sufficient to cut off a man's head at one blow."

We know not where it is written by any contemporaneous authority that this was a mode of execution among the Jews and Romans, but there are engravings and woodcuts of the sixteenth century which carry back guillotines of great, elaboration to the times of antiquity.

We have now before us two copperplate engravings of the German school, the one by George Pencz (who died in 1550), and the other by Henry Aldegraver, which bears the date of 1553, both representing the death of the son of Titus Manlius, by an instrument in principle identical with the guillotine, though somewhat more decorated.

The frontispiece of these pages is a copy of Aldegraver's print, which we have selected for that purpose, because it carries its own date.



Also, a carving 'Symbolicæ Questiones de universo Geneve,' by Achilles Bocchi, quarto, 1555, of which the eighteenth symbol represents a Spartan about to die by a kind of guillotine.

The metrical legend of the symbol runs:—

" Damnatuſ ab Ephoriſ, Lacon Cum duceretur ad necem, et vultu admodum Hilari eſſet ac læto, &c. &c."

Spartan about to die by a kind of guillotine (Bocchi, 1555).png

In Lucas Cranach's woodcuts of the 'Martyrdom of the Apostles,' printed at Wittenberg in 1539, and reprinted in 1549, there is the following representation of the death of St. Matthew

Martyr of St. Matthew (Cranach, 1549) by the guillotine, with a legend to this effect—"it is ſaid that hiſ head waſ chopped off by a falling-axe (falbiel), after the manner of the Romans."

In a journal of the late Mr. J. G. Children, F.R.S., dated in 1840, that he found "on one of the walls of the Rathhaus of Nuremberg, a painting of a man being beheaded by a guillotine—the painting is 319 years old." Mr. Children unluckily does not mention the ſubject of the freſco, but, as the Rathhaus waſ painted by Albert Durer, it may have been that of the German . prints of Tituſ Manliuſ, which are much in hiſ ſtyle.

The representation of the martyrdom of St. Matthew may have been Handle Holme's authority for saying that it was a "Jewish and Roman" practice, though the usual symbol of that Evangelist is a hatchet or halbert, such as the attendants carry in the preceding cut, with one of which it is generally said he was beheaded.

But it may surprise still more to find that Ireland is represented as having had her guillotine as early as 1307.

The following cut is an illustration of a passage in Hollinshed's 'Chronicles of Ireland,' (Edition 1577):—



"In the yeere 1307, the first of April, Murcod Ballagh was beheaded near to Merton by Sir David Cauntoun, Knight."

Murcod Ballagh beheaded 1307 (Holinshed, 1577).

The foregoing prints or cuts are, of course, no evidence that such a mode of execution was practised at the assigned dates. They only prove that it was known to the illustrators of the works where they appear.

It is sufficiently curious that none of the French literati or legislators who originally busied themselves with this subject should have happened to meet with any of these representations of the machine, which are, as we see, by no means rare; but it is still more strange that they should not have recollected its existence in their own comparatively modern history.

We read, in the 'Mémoires de Puysegur,' that the great Marshal de Montmorenci was beheaded at Toulouse in 1632 by such an instrument:—

"In that province they make use [for capital executions] of a kind of hatchet, which runs between two pieces of wood; and when the head is placed on the block below, the cord is let go, and the hatchet descends and severs the head from the body. When he [M. de M.] had put his head on the block, his wound [received in the fight in which he was taken] hurt him, and he moved his head, but said, 'I don't do so from fear, but from the soreness of my wound.' Father Arnoul was close to him when they let go the cord of the hatchet: the head was separated clean from the body, and they fell one on one side and the other on the other."—Mem. de Puys., vol. i. p. 137.

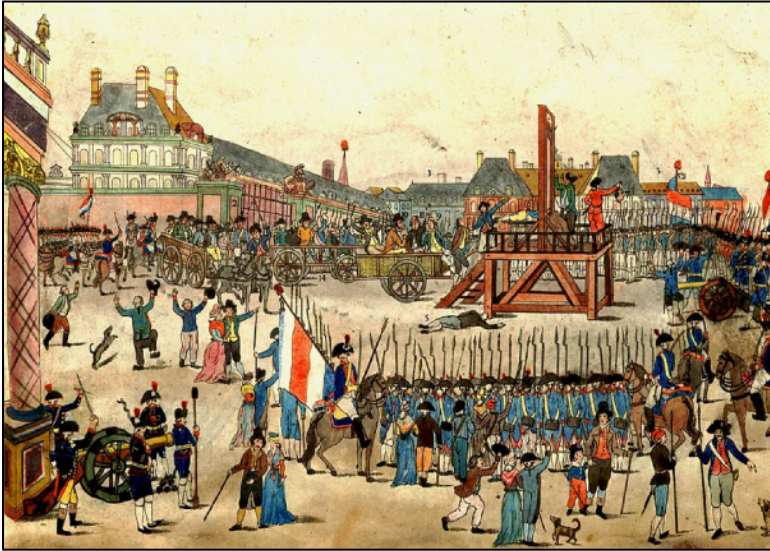
You may conclude from all this that this mode of execution was common on the Continent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and yet had passed into such entire desuetude and oblivion as to have appeared as a perfect novelty when proposed by Dr. Guillotin; and this is still more surprising, because it seems that an execution by a similar instrument had been a year or two before the Revolution exhibited in Paris, at one of the minor theatres of the Boulevard, in a harlequin farce called 'Les Quatre Fils Aymon.'

This is certainly a striking illustration of the proverb that there is nothing new under the sun; and we are at a loss to account for the negligence of both Guillotin and Louis, who, being aware that such an instrument had been in use in Italy and England, seem to have made no inquiry after plans or drawings; though we have little doubt that all thus mentioned, and perhaps many more, were to be found in the Bibliotheque of the Rue de Richelieu.

But, after all, it was neither Guillotin nor Louis who constructed (invention is out of the question) the instrument which was actually adapted: for while all these proceedings were going on in Paris, the same difficulties as to the execution of malefactors had occurred in the departmental tribunals, and an officer of the criminal court at Strasburg, named Laquiente, had made a design of a machine à décapiter, and employed one Schmidt, a forte-piano maker, to execute it. Dubois gives a copy of this design, which was very ill-contrived, being more like Handle Holme's armorial bearings than the perfect guillotine.

Reign of Terror

The execution of Robespierre and his supporters on 28 July 1794. Note: the beheaded man is not Robespierre, but Couthon: Maximilien Robespierre is shown sitting on the cart, dressed in brown, wearing



a hat, and holding a handkerchief to his mouth. His younger brother Augustin is being led up the steps to the scaffold.

Louis Collenot d'Angremont was a royalist famed for having been the first guillotined for his political ideas, on 21 August 1792. During the Reign of Terror (June 1793 to July 1794) about 17,000 people were guillotined.

As soon as the Legislative Assembly had decided to adopt M. Louis's proposition, we presume that he set about preparing a model (his report distinctly negatives the idea that he had as yet done so), and Rœderer, having obtained the sanction of the Minister of Finance for the expense,

called upon a person of the name of Guidon, who had, it seems, the office or contract "pour la fourniture des bois de justice," to give an estimate for the construction of Louis's machine. Guidon (5th April, 1792) estimated the work at 5660 francs, and, when demonstrated with on the exorbitance of the charge, he replied "that the high charges arose from his workmen demanding enormous wages, from a prejudice against the object in view." On which Rœderer remarks, "The prejudice, indeed, exists; but I have had offers from other persons to undertake the work, provided they should not be asked to sign contracts, or in any other way have their names exposed as connected with this object." This is very remarkable, and affords a practical confirmation of Maury's apprehension, for we see that the artificers of Paris, even so far forward in the Revolution as April, 1792, shrank from any avowed connexion with the instrument which, after a few months' exercise, became the delight of the Parisian mob, and not of the mob alone, and was absolutely canonised in the philosophical rubric as *La Sainte Guillotine*—nay, it became the model of ornaments for women, and of toys for children. These were sold by permission of the police in the streets, and the toymen furnished living sparrows to be decapitated by the instruments. Just before the trial of the Queen, one of these toys was presented to her son, then a prisoner in the Temple, by the notorious Chaumette, who, within a few months, died by the object of his predilection.

In the meantime it seems that Schmidt, who had been employed by the officer at Strasburg, offered to make a machine for 960 francs; this offer was accepted, and he was put in communication with M. Louis; and Schmidt became, in fact, the inventor and constructor of the instrument that was finally adopted. This is proved incontestably, because, Schmidt's price of 960 francs having been found to be also exorbitant, "the real value not being above 305 livres, exclusive of the leather bag which was to receive the head, or 329 livres including the bag," it was resolved, in consideration that there were eighty-three instruments to be furnished, one to each department, that 500 francs (20l.) would be a liberal recompense: but it was thought fair to give M. Schmidt, "as the inventor" the preference of the new contract. And again; when Schmidt refused the contract at so low a rate, he was recommended to favour as being "*l'inventeur de la machine à décapiter*;" and when at last the order for the Departments was about to be transferred to the other contractor, Schmidt took out, or at least threatened to take out, an exclusive patent as the inventor of the machine, to the exclusion of both the Government and the contractor. (*Lettre de Rœderer à Clavière, Rev. Ret.*, p. 29.) We know not how this by-battle ended—the last letter on the subject is dated the 6th of August, 1792—but then came the 10th of August, and in the anarchy which ensued all questions of right or property—even those connected with the triumphant Guillotine herself—were confounded and lost. In all these transactions there is no mention of, nor allusion to, Guillotin; and as we have before said, the instrument was, at its first actual appearance, called the *Louison*—but this name had no success; indeed M. Louis made no pretence to the invention, and he was soon forgotten; for, by another strange fatality attending the ominous machine, M. Louis himself died within a month of the day that it was first brought into actual operation.

While all this was going on, convicts for various crimes were accumulating in the different prisons of the kingdom, and the local authorities in the Departments pressed to have their respective machines with a savage eagerness of which many of themselves had soon to repent in tears and blood. At last, on the 17th of April, 1792, after a great many delays and postponements, an actual experiment was made of Schmidt's

instrument, under the inspection of Sanson, in the great hospital of Bicêtre, on several dead bodies, which was so entirely successful that the order was issued for the execution, on Monday the 23rd, of the wretched Pelletier, whose case had led to all these proceedings, and who had been lingering under his sentence for near three months. It seems, however, that he was not executed till the 25th, as Røederer writes a letter dated that day to Lafayette, to say that, as the execution by the mode of beheading will no doubt occasion a great crowd in the Place de Greve, he begs the General will direct the gend'armes who are to attend the execution not to leave the place till the scaffold, &c., shall be removed; and we find, in a Revolutionary journal called the 'Courier Extraordinaire, par M. Duplain,' of the date of the 27th April, 1792, the following paragraph:—

"Paris.—They made yesterday the first trial of the little Louison, and cut off a head. One Pelletier—not him of the Actes des Apôtres—was the subject of the melancholy experiment. I never in my life could bear to see a man hanged; but I own I feel a still greater aversion to this species of execution. The preparations make one shudder, and increase the moral suffering; as to the physical pain, I caused a person to attend, who repeats to me that it was the matter of the twinkle of an eye. The people seemed to wish that M. Sanson had his old gallows and were inclined to say, —

Rendez-moi ma potence de bois, Rendez-moi ma potence.

The date of articles in a paper published the 27th would be the 26th, and of course the 'yesterday' of this extract would be the 25th; and we have found passages to the same effect in one or two other journals; and yet it is not absolutely certain that Pelletier was the first living body that the guillotine struck; for though he was certainly the first who suffered at Paris, there seems some doubt whether the Procureur-Général of Versailles did not anticipate Røederer by a day. We have evidence in the papers published by the 'Revue Retrospective' that one Challan, the Procureur-Général of Versailles, was exceedingly anxious for the machine, and had used every means to obtain an early specimen; and we find in the 'Journal of Perlet,' 25th April, 1792, p. 198, the following passage:—

"It is supposed that the punishment of death was yesterday [either the 23rd or 24th] inflicted at Versailles on two criminals by the new mode of decollation, and that it will be immediately employed in this capital on a journeyman butcher convicted of murder (assassinat)."

This seems almost decisive; but we still suspect that Perlet's anticipation that the two men had been executed the day before, meaning either the 23rd or 24th, was erroneous, and that the execution at Paris was the first; for on the 19th of April Røederer acquaints his impatient colleague of Versailles that, although he had bespoken him an instrument, it could not be ready for some days, and directs him not to fix the day for the first execution. It is, therefore, hardly possible that the zeal of M. Challan could have outrun Røederer by two days.

However that may be, it is clear that in the execution of Pelletier, on the 25th of April at Paris, and in several others which soon followed, the new machine performed its terrible duty with complete success, and amidst, as far as appears from the press, an almost incredible degree of public indifference. Our surprise, however, at the general silence as to so portentous an exhibition is in a slight degree modified when we recollect that at this time the instrument was not, as it afterwards became, a permanent spectacle; it was kept in store, and brought forth and fitted together for each special occasion; it was erected very early in the morning, and removed immediately after the execution, so that in fact few saw it but those who were greedy of such sights; and it challenged little more notice than the ordinary gibbets of M. Guidon "fournisseur des bois de justice."

We know, however, that on the 27th of July there was an imperfect execution, which created some public disapprobation; the swelling of the wooden grooves having prevented the proper fall of the axe. After this accident the grooves were made of metal; and we believe there never after occurred any instance of failure—we, at least, have heard of none.

And now we find the machine taking officially, universally, and irrevocably, the name of Guillotine; and a few days after the execution of Pelletier we meet it in Prudhomme's Journal of Les Revolution's de Paris (28th April, 1792), in a way that would remove all doubt, if any indeed could still exist, that long before the 10th August the Jacobins avowed their intentions of bringing the King to that species of death; two lines of

Malherbe's beautiful ode on the death of Rose Duperier, descriptive of the mortality of all mankind, being applied (alas! too prophetically) to threaten the King with his impending fate from the new machine:—

"Inscription proposée pour la Guillotine. "Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend pas nos Rois."—Rev. de Par., No. 146.

And now, just as the machine had attained its mechanical perfection, occurred that event which was to call it into full activity as a political engine, and to develop in it that aptitude for wholesale murder which was, we are satisfied, one of the main causes of the maniacal cruelty with which it was employed; facility begat use, and multitudes were sent to the other world merely because it had become so very easy to send them! Voltaire had already characterised his countrymen as a mixture of the monkey and the tiger; that the tiger predominated was sufficiently proved even before the guillotine came into operation; but without this massacre-made-easy invention the tiger would have much sooner become, if not satiated, at least wearied, with slaughter.

The Tenth of August 1792 came. We shall say no more about that fatal day than to observe, in reference to our present subject, that it affords a characteristic instance of the effrontery and falsehood by which the whole Revolution was conducted, and the most revolting exemplification of that peculiarly French proverb—*les vaincus ont toujours tort*. For while the two hostile parties—Girondists and Jacobins—that divided the Assembly were each claiming to themselves the exclusive merit of having concerted and conducted that glorious day, they for a moment suspended their mutual enmities and recriminations to create a special Tribunal to punish the Royalists as being, forsooth, the instigators and perpetrators of those very events which they zealously claimed as the result of their own patriotic councils and exertions.

The Legislative Assembly, indeed, at first showed some prudent apprehension of this extraordinary tribunal, and seemed inclined to limit its powers to the single question of what it called the "Crimes of the 10th of August"—but this hesitation was not to the taste of the victorious populace, and produced a supplementary insurrection, which menaced the *Manège* with the fate of the *Château*. Robespierre (who was not of this Assembly) headed a deputation of the Commune of Paris, and threatened the legislators in plain terms with the vengeance of the people if they did not institute a tribunal with, what he called, adequate powers: the inconsistent and intimidated Assembly submitted; and Vergniaud and Brissot, already cowering under the superior art and audacity of Robespierre and Danton, consented to the creation of a power that, with an impartiality worthy of its origin, sent successively to the guillotine not Royalists only, but Brissot and Vergniaud, and, in due time, Danton and Robespierre themselves.

The logic on this occasion, as well as the force, was on the side of Robespierre; for, the "10th of August" having been now adopted and canonised as a patriotic conception and triumph, the treating any of the circumstances that had brought it about as crimes would have been preposterous; and it turned out, in point of fact, that the tribunal, after it had convicted one Swiss officer, and acquitted another, no more inquired into the 10th of August than it did into the St. Barthélemy, and became eventually nothing more or less than—as the Conventional Dupin energetically called it—"the first step to the scaffold." From this moment the Guillotine became, not an instrument of justice, but the murderous weapon of political factions, of private enmities—nay, when factions and enmities had been killed off, of the wanton spontaneities of blood-drunken insanity.

The first political victims were MM. Dangremont, La Porte, and Durosai. Their fate is scarcely mentioned by the most communicative of the historians, and, by the rest, not at all; and yet must think that the first feats of this tiger-tribunal, the first steps in this ocean of blood, are matters not merely of deep tragic interest, but of some historical importance. This is not an occasion in which one can pretend to supply such deficiencies; all we can do is to indicate them, and to notice incidentally the loose and slovenly way in which the events of the Revolution are generally recorded. We have before us that very curious publication, *Liste Générale des Condamnés par le Tribunal Révolutionnaire*—an almost official list of all the sufferers by the Paris Tribunal. This list opens with the three names quoted.

"Louis David Collenot, D'Angremont, accused of enlisting [*embauchage*], executed 26th August, 1792.

"La Porte, superintendent of the civil list, convicted of complicity in counter-revolutionary conspiracies, executed 28th August.

"Durosai, editor of the *Gazette de Paris*, and of another journal called *Le Royalisme*, convicted of conspiracy, executed 29th August." Barnabé Farmian Durosai, (1745 – 25 August 1792, Paris) was an 18th-century French journalist and man of letters, both a playwright, poet, novelist, historian and essayist. Founder and

editor of a royalist newspaper in 1789, he was the first journalist to die guillotined under the [reign of Terror](#). Author of history books, literary criticism and political philosophy, he also published poems, songs, epistles, tales in verse, fables and, above all, many plays and ballets and librettos.

Dangremont was a clerk in a public office, of no weight or character, and the embauchage, on pretence of which he was executed, was the alleged employment of persons who were to distribute Royalist publications, and take the Royalist side in groups and coffee-houses, and so forth. M. La Porte was the Minister of the Civil List; and the chief allegation against him was that he had paid, out of the privy purse, for the printing and distribution of certain Royalist placards and pamphlets—a practice which Roland—whom the Assembly had forced upon the King as Minister of the Interior—had been employing against his master at the same time, and to an infinitely greater extent; but the real motive of M. La Porte's condemnation was to appease and gratify the populace by the execution of one who was officially so near the King's person, and so much in his confidence; and whose condemnation was therefore a promise and a pledge that his royal master should undergo the same fate.

Poor Durosoi was one of the few Royalist journalists, and he was therefore thought a fit victim for the new tribunal. His last hours are pathetically recorded by M. Journiac de St. Méard, in his interesting work—one of the most interesting that ever was published—'Mon Agonie de Trente-huit Heures;' but we cannot enter into such details, and we only notice these three first condemnations to show how little they had to do with what could be called the crimes of the 10th of August, and to mark the strange inaccuracies with which they have been recorded.

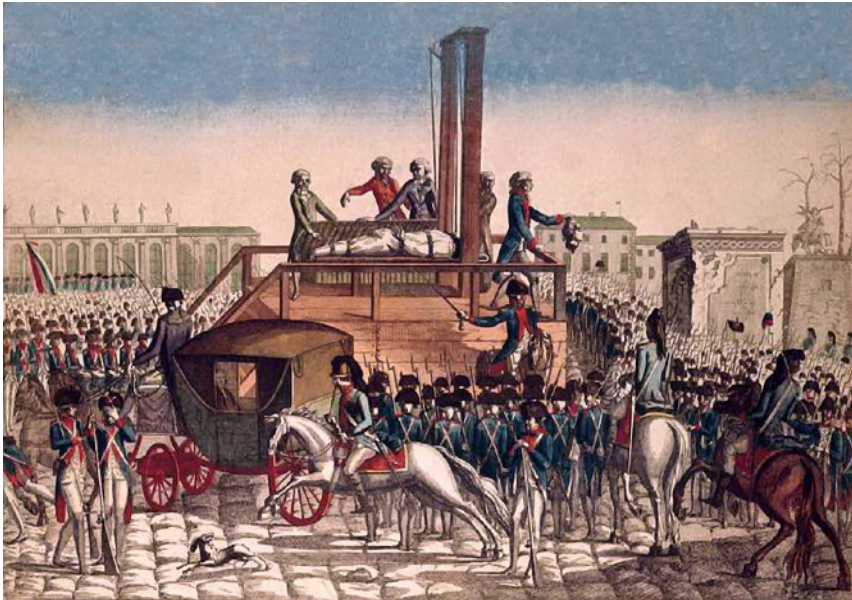
First observe that the dates of the three executions, as given in the 'Liste des Condamnes,' are all erroneous by four or five days. Dangremont suffered, not on the 26th but, on the 21st; La Porte not on the 28th, but on the 24th; and Durosoi not on the 29th, but on the 25th; and these misdates are the more remarkable, because Durosoi, in mounting the scaffold, took pride in "dying as a Royalist on St Louis's day," the 25th of August. In the *Moniteur*, which does not venture to mention the death of the first of these political victims of the guillotine till nine days after the fact (30th August), he is miscalled "Danglemont" and a second time doubly misnamed "Connot Danglemont;" and Lacretelle, in his 'Précis Chronologique,' makes the same mistake. M. du Bois states also that Durosoi's name was really De Rosoy; and we find that Peltier, who knew him well, so calls him; as does Deschiens in his 'Bibliographic des Journaux,' under the title of his Journal, 'Gazette de France;' but he was certainly condemned and executed as Durosoi, and so the name has passed into all the biographies, and into such of the histories as deign to mention such trifling details.

Amidst the gigantic horrors of those scenes, such small circumstantial mistakes may appear entitled to little regard; but they appear worthy of this passing notice as indicative of the laxity and indifference with which these legal murders were conducted, witnessed, and recorded. We find in the 'Souvenirs de Soixante-treize Ans,' by M. Verneuil, a member of the Assembly, the following passage relative to these executions, which, we think, in so great a dearth of contemporaneous information, worth quoting, particularly as the book, which seems to have been only printed in a country town (Limoges), is little known:—

"After the 10th August they had organised an extraordinary tribunal for judging the pretended conspirators of that day. The first victim was a literary man, editor of a Royalist journal: he was executed in my neighbourhood—Place du Carrousel. I was invited to go into a house hard by, whence I should see the play of the new instrument of death. I excused myself; but from the window of my own entresol I was curious to observe, as the spectators were returning, the impression that it made upon the public. It appears that in general they said, 'Mais ce n'est rien' ['Tis nothing at all], in allusion, no doubt, to the quickness of the execution. M. Guillotin does not deserve the sad honour of giving his name to this new instrument, but rather M. Louis, perpetual secretary of the Academy of Surgeons."—*Souvenirs de Soixante-treize Ans* (Limoges, 1836).

We have here to observe that Sanson, the chief executioner, and his two brothers, had been themselves sent to prison after the 10th of August, on the monstrous hypothesis that, "if the Court had succeeded on that day, the Sanson's were to have hanged the patriots." Their real offence was that they had somehow offended the patriot Gorsas, the newspaper editor before-mentioned, whose Jacobinical violence, in a few days after, procured his election into the Convention—a woeful elevation, as we shall see presently!

The assistance, however, of the Sanson's was necessary to the executions; and the three brothers were brought in a hackney-coach, and in custody, from the Conciergerie to the Carrousel, for the execution of



Dangremont, and taken back again. They were again brought forth for the execution of La Porte, and again taken back; after the execution of Durosoi they were released, but they were again arrested within a few days, and were only removed from the Abbaye just before the massacre began; and then the absurdity of the pretence for which they had been sent to prison and the necessary value of their services, becoming more apparent, they were set at liberty, and in the course of the ensuing year were called upon to exercise their ministry upon their old antagonist,

Gorsas, who was the first member of the Convention sent to the scaffold.

The new Tribunal, having gratified the populace with these executions, and being at first desirous of keeping up some show of justice, ventured to acquit two or three persons, and amongst them the Marquis de Montmorin, mistaken for his cousin the Comte de Montmorin, the ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs. At this moment the elections for the Convention were about to take place, and it was determined by the Jacobin candidates—Danton, Robespierre, and Co.—to strike a blow of such terror as should put all opposition to flight, and ensure the return of their own list for the city and neighbourhood of Paris, and indeed for the rest of France—but Paris was the first object. For this purpose, the celebrated domiciliary visits of 29th and 30th August 1792, and the massacre of the prisons, were resolved on, and the supposed acquittal of M. de Montmorin, "one of the last ministers of the Tyrant" was one of the pretences employed to exasperate the people. Instead, therefore, of being set at liberty, the Marquis—still mistaken for the Comte—was sent back to prison amidst prodigious popular excitement; other inflammatory circumstances were artfully superadded, the massacres commenced, and both the MM. de Montmorin perished—the Marquis at La Force, and the Count at the Abbaye,—with many hundred others as innocent as they; and Danton, Robespierre, Marat, Egalité, Osselin the first President of the Tribunal, and their atrocious associates, were elected, without a dissentient voice, representatives of the city of Paris—all to be massacred in their turns, by their mutual animosities and the retributive justice of Heaven.

On the very days of the massacres, the Tribunal, terrified like the rest of Paris, condemned two persons who would probably have been also acquitted a day or two before. One was a Swiss officer of the name of Bachman—why singled out for trial, or for what offence, does not appear; the other a poor waggoner, who, having been sentenced to exposition (a kind of pillory) for some minor offence, had exclaimed, "Vive le Roi! —Vive M. Lafayette!—a fig for the nation!"

The massacres had for the moment deprived the tribunal of its natural aliment; and the only other political execution we find about this time is that of old Cazotte, the poet, who, at the age of seventy-four years, had been arrested on account of some private letters of his to La Porte, his old and intimate friend, found in the possession of the latter.

He had been thrown into prison, and was about to perish in the massacres of September, when he was saved by the courage and piety of his daughter, who exposed her own person to the pikes of the assassins, and actually awed and melted them into mercy; but in a few days he was again arrested, and brought before the new tribunal, which was now become more inexorable than even the mob of murderers, and on the 25th of September the Guillotine left the heroic Elizabeth Cazotte fatherless.

There are scant records of the ordinary execution of justice during the revolutionary paroxysm. One suspects there were comparatively few punishments but those of a political nature. We find that on the 14th July, an Abbé Geoffroi, ci-devant Vicaire-Général, was executed on the Place de Greve for forgery of assignats; and again, on the 27th of August, 1792, three persons, who seem to have been of a superior rank

in life, and are designated in the *Moniteur* as "Messieurs Vimal, L'Abbé Sauvade, and Guillot," were executed as accomplices in the same, or a similar forgery. These parties had been tried in the ordinary courts, before the new tribunal was created, but they had appealed, and the appeal had been decided against them, though their guilt is very doubtful; they were now executed, and it was in exhibiting one of these heads to the people that the younger Sanson fell off the scaffold and was killed. Some other executions of the same class seem also to have given employment to the guillotine.

From the time of the installation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, it seems that the Guillotine was not removed, as it at first used to be, after each execution, but was for some time kept stationary in the Carrousel; about the middle of October it appears to have been removed for one day to the Place de Greve for the execution of nine emigrants condemned by a military commission, but it was again removed on the 30th of October to the Place Louis XV., now called de la Révolution, for the execution of two of the robbers of the Garde-Meuble, which our readers know was situated on the north side of that square.

It is quite clear that the Massacres had done what the Tribunal had been intended to do, and had in truth superseded it—those whom it was meant to try had been more expeditiously murdered—and, therefore, in order that it might have something to occupy its time, the ordinary criminal business of the metropolis was, by a decree of the 11th of September, 1792, transferred to it; and it was in consequence of this decree that it tried and sent to the guillotine the robbers of the Garde-Meuble, and was busy with the trial of many minor offences, when suddenly, without notice or reason given, on the morning of the 1st of December (misdated, with the usual inaccuracy of the bulletins of these revolutionary courts, 31st of November), the tribunal found itself dissolved by a decree, of the preceding day. This sudden suppression of this formidable tribunal, the creation of which had occasioned such violent discussions, seems to have taken place without debate, and almost without notice.

It is scarcely alluded to in any of the histories, not even in that especially calling itself a 'History of the Revolutionary Tribunal,' published in 1815, in two volumes; nay, not in the periodical publications of the day; and, in fact, this tribunal of the 17th of August, 1792, has been always treated as if it and the still more celebrated Revolutionary Tribunal created 10th of March, 1793, were the same,—only that at the latter date larger powers were conferred on it. No doubt the spirit that created the two tribunals, and many of the members that composed them, were the same, but in point of fact they were wholly distinct. The suppression of the first took place in the height of the agitation preliminary to the trial of the King, and we are satisfied that it must have had some urgent and most important motive, and one probably connected with the court, though we have never seen any assigned, nor indeed inquired after—for the fact itself was, as is said, scarcely mentioned.

There are no means of solving this historical mystery, but cannot avoid noticing it to account for the total inaction of the Guillotine for near four months. Conjecture is twofold—first, that it was abolished lest some attempt should be made to employ it, instead of the Convention itself, for the trial of the King; or, secondly, that, during the deadly struggle then carrying on between the Girondins and Jacobins, each party, doubtful of the result, was afraid of leaving in the hands of its triumphant antagonists so terrible an engine as this ready-constituted and well-organized tribunal, and both therefore concurred in its abolition, almost sub silentio, while on every other subject their contention was maintained with increasing animosity.

The first advantage in this struggle was to the Jacobins—when the Girondins were terrified into voting the death of the King, contrary to their pledges, their principles, their honour, and their consciences: that base and cruel cowardice was their own death-warrant.

The next advantage was still more immediately decisive in favour of the Jacobins—it was the revival of the first Tribunal, by a decree of the 10th March, 1793, extorted from the Convention under the instant terror of wholesale assassination, and on which subsequently, under the more comprehensive title of Revolutionary Tribunal, unlimited jurisdiction and extravagant powers were conferred. Though the Girondins struggled on for a few weeks more, this blow was decisive and prophetic of their ultimate fate. Let us add that this iniquitous proceeding was carried on the motion and under the sanguinary menaces of Danton—the same Danton who a year after was led to execution, exclaiming, "This time twelve months I proposed that infamous tribunal by which we die, and for which I beg pardon of God and men."

In the midst of these contentions came the execution of the King. In the centre of the Place Louis Quinze—then called Place de la Révolution, and since Place de la Concorde—and on the spot where now stands the Luxor obelisk, there had stood a statue of Louis XV.; this statue was overthrown on the 11th of August, but

the magnificent pedestal, though a little dilapidated about the summit, remained. There has been some doubt as to the exact spot where the scaffold for the execution of the King was erected. Historians never descend to such minutiae, and painters and engravers are sometimes lax in their perspective, but we think we may say, chiefly on the authority of a fine print, "presented to the Convention" by its publisher, Helman, that the exact site of the scaffold was a few yards west of this pedestal, that is, towards the Champs Elysées, and the steps were from the westward, so that the King when he mounted the scaffold looked over the pedestal of his grandfather's statue to the centre pavilion of his own devastated palace.

When he endeavoured to address the people, he turned to the left towards the Rue Royale, and, Mercier tells us, *Nouveau Tableau de Paris*, chapter 82, that he was, at a signal from Santerre—who commanded the troops and directed the execution—seized from behind by two executioners, and, in spite of his desire to be allowed to finish what he had to say, he was bound to the bascule, or balanced plank, with his face towards the Tuileries; and that, either from the hurry of this struggle, or from the bascule being fitted for a taller person, the axe fell closer to the head than was usual, and there was more mutilation than ordinary. But Mercier is very loose authority on any subject: the print and the letter of Sanson, which we have already referred to, which will be found in the Appendix, affords decisive evidence against Mercier's assertion.

We transcribe from Prudhomme, a trustworthy witness on this point, the following account of the scene that immediately followed:— "Some individuals steeped their handkerchiefs in his blood. A number of armed volunteers crowded also to dip in the blood of the despot their pikes, their bayonets, or their sabres. Several officers of the Marseillaise battalion, and others, dipped the covers of letters in this impure blood, and carried them on the points of their swords at the head of their companies, exclaiming 'This is the blood of a tyrant!' One citizen got up to the guillotine itself, and, plunging his whole arm into the blood of Capet, of which a great quantity remained, he took up handfuls of the clotted gore, and sprinkled it over the crowd below which pressed round the scaffold, each anxious to receive a drop on his forehead. 'Friends,' said this citizen, in sprinkling them, 'we were threatened that the blood of Louis should be on our heads; and so you see it is!!'" — *Révolutions de Paris*, No. 185, p. 205.

After this execution the Guillotine is no more heard of, at least as a political engine, till the 7th of April, 1793, when, under the auspices of the new Tribunal, it made its re-appearance in the Place du Carrousel, and began that series of murders which has no parallel in the annals of mankind.

It seems that from this time forward it remained in permanent readiness and exposed from one execution to another; but we find that, the Convention having resolved to transfer its sittings from the Manège to the palace of the Tuileries, a decree was passed (8th May, 1793), that, in consideration of the proximity of the Carrousel to the Hall of the Convention, the guillotine should be removed to some other place." According to the 'Liste des Gendarmnés,' twelve persons were executed on the Carrousel between the 7th of April and 8th of May, on or about which day the machine was removed to the Place de la Révolution, not to the spot where the King's scaffold had stood, but a few yards on the eastern side of the pedestal, towards the Tuileries; and there it appears to have permanently remained to the 8th of June, 1794, one year and one month, during which time it had executed 1256 persons, as the 'Liste des Condamnés' expressly says: but from this should be deducted the eleven executed in the Carrousel, and the nine at the Greve—so that the number really executed in the Place Louis XV. was 1235.

Of this vast number there is scarcely one of whom some pathetic anecdote might not be told. We shall at present only notice four illustrious women, whose story involves, in addition to the individual interest that each excites, some reference to the mode of execution.

Mademoiselle Marie Anne Charlotte de Corday d'Armands (commonly called Charlotte Corday, though she herself signed her Christian name Marie) was executed on the 17th of July, 1793: she



had (what was now become) the distinction of being executed alone.

After the execution, one of the executioners held up her lovely head by its beautiful hair, and in a fit of Maratist delirium slapped the cheeks—which, it was said, showed symptoms of sensibility, and blushed.

Charlotte's body was taken to the Hospital of Charity to prove her virginity, the Montagards accusers thinking that a woman could not have done so out of love for a man. She was declared "virgo intacto". The body was then transferred to the Madeleine Cemetery, while the skull would have been kept by Charles-Henri Sanson, given to Alexandre-Charles Rousslin Corbeau de Saint Albin, Secretary of Danton then acquired by Bonaparte's family. The Cemetery disused in 1794, the skeletal remains were transferred to the Catacombs of Paris.

One should hardly have thought it worthwhile to repeat so incredible a story, but that, having been made a prominent argument in a physiological question that was raised about 1796, whether death by the guillotine was or was not instantaneous, it became matter of inquiry, and the balance of evidence seemed to be that some unusual appearance described as a blush was distinctly visible. Here is the account given by Dr. Sue, a physician of the first eminence and authority in Paris, in whose family medical skill had been hereditary:—

"The countenance of Charlotte Corday expressed the most unequivocal marks of indignation. Look back to the facts:—the executioner held the head suspended in one hand; the face was then pale, but had no sooner received the slap which the anguinary wretch gave it than both cheeks visibly reddened. Every spectator was struck by the change of colour, and with loud murmurs cried out for vengeance on this cowardly and atrocious barbarity. It cannot be said that the redness was caused by the blow—for we all know that no blows will recall anything like colour to the cheeks of a corpse; besides, this blow was given on one cheek, and the other equally reddened."—Sue, *Opinion sur le Supplice de la Guillotine*, p. 9.

Dr. Sue, and some German physicians and surgeons after him, held that there does indubitably, remain in the brain of a decollated head some degree (un reste) of thought, and in the nerves something of sensibility; and the case of Mademoiselle de Corday was alleged as proving that doctrine. We do not believe the fact of any discoloration, nor if it were true, would it prove that the blush arose from continuous sensibility, and certainly the other opinion, that the extinction of life is instantaneous, is the more rational, and it has finally prevailed; and all that we infer from the anecdote is, that public opinion was willing to colour with its own indignation the cheeks of Mademoiselle de Corday.

Here also, on the 16th of October, 1793, fell a once beauteous head—now whitened by sorrow, not by age—and venerable for the angelic purity and patience, the royal courage and Christian submission, with which it had exchanged the most brilliant crown of the world for a crown of thorns, and that again for the crown of martyrdom. Here died the Queen—one of the noblest and the purest, and yet, if human judgments be alone weighed, the most unfortunate of women—tried in almost every possible agony of affliction—except a guilty conscience—and in that exception finding the consolation for all. She arrived at this scene of her last and greatest triumph, jolted in a common cart, and ascended the scaffold amidst the vociferations of a crowd of furies, whom we hesitate to acknowledge as of her own sex. Never in that gorgeous palace, on which she now cast a last calm look, did she appear more glorious—never was she so really admirable as she was at that supreme moment of her earthly release.

Having followed the history of Marie Antoinette with the greatest diligence and scrupulosity. Reliving those times and talked with some of her friends and some of her enemies; we have read, certainly not all, but hundreds of the libels written against her; and we have, in short, examined her life with—if we may be allowed to say so of ourselves—something of the accuracy of contemporaries, the diligence of inquirers, and the impartiality of historians, all combined; and we feel it our duty to declare, in as solemn a manner as literature admits of, our well-matured opinion that every reproach against the morals of the Queen was a gross calumny—that she was, as we have said, one of the purest of human beings. The grandeur of her mind—the courageous wisdom of her counsels (seldom adopted)—the minute and laborious, yet wide and lofty, fulfilment of all her duties, and particularly as wife and mother—and, finally, the unequalled magnanimity, and patience—the greatest of magnanimities—with which she bore such misfortunes as never woman before suffered, are matters of history—the opprobrium of which, thank God! brands the French Revolution, and never can be effaced.

Here also died, on the 10th of May 1794, Madame Elizabeth, a saint, if it be allowed to any mortal to be a saint. Not only innocent but inoffensive, she lived, in spite of her high birth, in a modest obscurity; she was



a personification of piety, of domestic love, of charity, of humility, of self-devotion. One word of her own, often repeated, but never too often, shows her character in all its grand and yet soft and mellowed lustre.

When the mob broke into the Tuileries, on the 20th of June, 1792; the royal family were momentarily dispersed by the sudden irruption. The Queen and the Dauphin, were in one part of the apartments, the King alone in another, where his heroic sister hastened to join him. The mob, who had been trained to particular hostility to the Queen, mistook Madame Elizabeth for her, and maltreated her with great grossness of language and serious menaces of violence.

One of the terrified attendants was about to endeavour to save the princess by apprizing the assassins that she was not the Queen, when, with equal magnanimity and presence of mind, Madame Elizabeth,—desiring that if anyone should be sacrificed

it might be herself,—stopped him by whispering, "Oh no, don't undeceive them" Neither Greek nor Roman story have any superior instance of self-devotion. This noble creature had been in close confinement in the Temple from the 13th of August, 1792, down to the day of her trial, seeing no one but her little niece, and watched day and night by her persecutors; yet she was doomed to die—the devil only knows why—for some imaginary and impossible conspiracy. During the long transit to the scaffold she was seen to encourage with pious gestures her fellow-sufferers, and when, on the scaffold, one of the executioners rudely tore off the covering of her neck, she turned—her own hands being tied—to another, and said, softly and sublimely, "I implore you, for the love of your mother, to cover my neck!"

Here too, on the 9th November, 1793, between the deaths of the Queen and Madame Elizabeth was sent to the scaffold, by her own former friends and favourites, Marie Phlipon, Madame Roland, a woman of humble birth with great ambition, narrow education with a great love of literature, strong passions with a cold temper, and possessing above all that dangerous species of talent which decides summarily and plausibly on the events of the moment, without having either the patience or the power to inquire whence they spring and whither they are tending. Her Memoirs, written in prison, in the subdued and conciliatory tone of adversity, and with the great charm of an easy yet forcible style, have recommended her to general sympathy, and to the enthusiastic admiration of all who partake her revolutionary opinions.

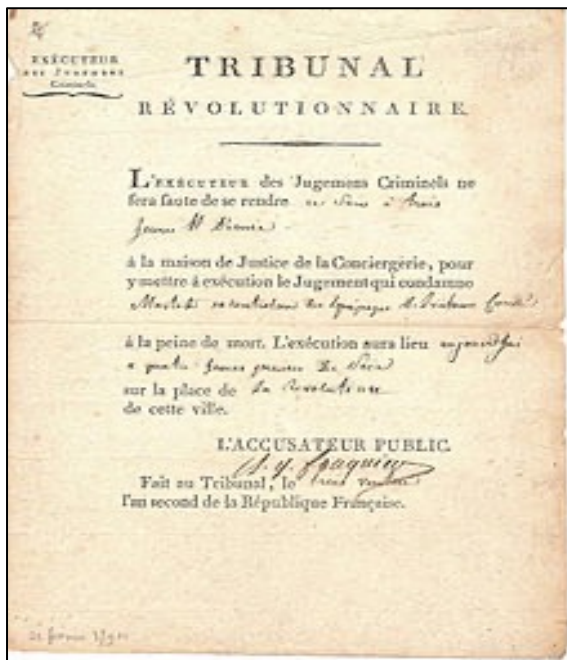


Those who wish to think with unmixed admiration of Madame Roland must take her up where she left the world—at the guichet of the Conciergerie. Her former political life—full of animosity, faction, intolerance, bad faith, and even cruelty—will engage little favour; and, as happens in so many other cases in the history of the Revolution, we should cease to pity Madame Roland if we remembered that she suffered only what she had been during her reign—for she too had reigned—not reluctant to inflict on others.

She died with great resolution, in company with a M. la Marche, who did not show so much firmness. It was a favour to be allowed to die first, in order to be spared the terrible spectacle of the death of others, and this favour—denied to Madame Elizabeth—was offered to Madame Roland, but she thought her companion needed it more than herself, and begged him to precede her; and when the executioner objected, she said with a smile, "You won't refuse the last request of a lady?" and La Marche was executed first.

It was some time, though we do not know exactly the day, between the executions of Charlotte Corday and the Queen, that a huge plaster statue of Liberty—grotesque by its disproportion, and hideous from its distortion—was erected on the pedestal of the overthrown statue of Louis XV., in front of which the new scaffold stood. In a print of the execution of Mlle. de Corday there is no statue on the pedestal; but it was there, if we may credit Helman's print, when the Queen was immolated, and to it Madame Roland, with something of characteristic pedantry, is said to have addressed her celebrated apostrophe, "O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" Crimes enough—crimes enormous—had been committed in the name of liberty ever since the 14th of July, 1789, and many abominable ones during the ministry and with, at

least, the connivance of Madame Roland and her husband, but it was not till she was herself sent to prison and brought to the scaffold that they struck her so forcibly. When we find Danton "begging pardon"—on the scaffold—"of God and man for the institution; of the Revolutionary Tribunal," and Madame Roland—also on the scaffold—lamenting "the crimes committed in the name of liberty" we acknowledge the sincerity, but cannot but feel a kind of revulsion and indignation at the selfishness, of their tardy and unavailing repentance.



Abstaining from any details of the thousands of murders committed by the Guillotine at that time, but one fact will enable readers to understand something of its horrors. It was proved on the trial of Fouquier-Tinville that 160 persons, of all ages, sexes, and ranks, were tried and executed on a charge of conspiracy, not merely false, but absurd, visionary, and impossible:—forty-five of these persons, who were utterly unknown to each other, were tried and condemned within twenty minutes, and executed in the same evening in almost as short a space!

These executions were for many months the amusement—the spectacle of the people, one could safely say the populace, of Paris; but, as we before stated, chairs were stationed round the instrument, where women, in a station of life to be able to pay for that amusement, used to hire seats, and sit, and chat, and work (whence they were called les tricoteuses de la Guillotine), while waiting for the tragedy which they looked at as a farce.

**Act of death sentence signed by Fouquier Tinville,
public prosecutor to the committee of public safety during the French**

Revolution

Found in the Revue Retrospective, a curious letter incidentally descriptive of this elegant scene of Parisian amusement:—

"The Procureur Général Rœderer to Citizen Guidon.

"13th May, 1793,

"I enclose, Citizen, the copy of a letter from Citizen Chaumette, solicitor to the Commune of Paris, by which you will perceive that complaints are made that, after these public executions, the blood of the criminals remains in pools upon the place, that dogs come to drink it, and that crowds of men feed their eyes with this spectacle, which naturally instigates their hearts to ferocity and blood.

"I request you, therefore, to take the earliest and most convenient measures to remove from the eyes of men a sight so afflicting to humanity." You will observe the tender regret—not that all this blood was shed, but—that it was not wiped up; and they will be startled when they recollect that at the date of this letter not above a dozen persons had been yet executed here, but that within one year the blood of a thousand victims had saturated the same small spot of ground.

In one of the foolish modern-antique processions of the Convention, the whole cortege was delayed and thrown into confusion because the cattle that were drawing some of their theatrical machines could neither be induced nor forced to traverse this blood-tainted place.

This Chaumette was one of the most impious and sanguinary of the whole tribe, and we could almost believe that he envied the dogs the blood they drank. He it was that bullied the wretched idiot Gobel, Revolutionary Archbishop of Paris, to come to the bar of the Convention to abjure Christianity, and proclaim himself an impostor, at the head of a procession in which asses were insultingly decorated with the sacred emblems of religion. Chaumette himself it was who introduced to the Convention a prostitute in the character of the Goddess of Reason. Robespierre sent this whole clique to the Guillotine, and on the 13th of April, 1794, Chaumette's own blood flowed to increase the horrors of which he had complained.

The Guillotine remained in permanence in the Place de la Révolution till the 8th of June, 1794, when the inhabitants of the streets through which these batches (*fournées*) as they were called, of sufferers used to pass, became at last tired of that agreeable sight, and solicited its removal. This would probably have been not much regarded; but there was a more potent motive. Robespierre seems at this time to have adopted a new policy, and to have formed some design of founding a dictatorial authority in his own person on the basis of religion and morals. On the 7th June he made his famous report acknowledging "l'Être Suprême" and appointing the 20th June for the great fete in the garden of the Tuileries, which was to celebrate this recognition. Of this fête Robespierre was to be the Pontifex Maximus and it can hardly be doubted that it was to remove the odious machine from the immediate scene of his glorification that it was—the day after the decree and ten days before the fête—removed to the Place St. Antoine, in front of the ruins of the Bastille; but that a day might not be lost, it was removed on a Decadi, the republican Sabbath. It stood, however, but five days in the Place St. Antoine, for the shopkeepers even of that patriotic quarter did not like their new neighbour; and so, after having in these five days executed ninety-six persons, it was removed still further to the Barrière du Trône, or, as it was called in the absurd nomenclature of the day, Barrière Renversée.

There it stood from the 9th of June to the fall of Robespierre, 9th Thermidor (27th July, 1794). So say all the authorities; but an incident in the trial of Fouquier-Tinville seems to prove that, in the early part of July at least, the scaffold stood in the Place de la Révolution, and that the instrument was dismantled every evening. A lady, the Marquise de Feuquières, was to be tried on the 1st of July: the whole evidence against her was a document which had been placed under the seals of the law at her country-house, near Versailles, and Fouquier sent off the night before a special messenger to bring it up; the messenger was delayed by the local authorities, and could not get back to Paris till half-past four on the evening of the 1st, when, "on arriving at the Place de la Révolution, he found the executioner dismantling the engine, and was informed that the Marquise de Feuquières had been guillotined an hour before"—having been tried and condemned without a tittle of any kind of evidence; and this fact, attested by his own messenger, Fouquier could not deny—though we cannot reconcile it with the other evidence as to the locality of the guillotine at that particular period. In all the lists des Condamnés Madame de Feuquières and twenty-three other persons are stated to have suffered on the 1st of July at the Barrière du Trône.

In the forty-nine days in which it is said to have stood at the Barrière du Trône it despatched 1270 persons of both sexes, and of all ages and ranks, and it became necessary to build a kind of sanguiduct, to carry off the streams of blood; and on the very last day, when the tyrant had already fallen, and that the smallest interruption would have sufficed to have stopped the fatal procession, forty-nine persons passed almost unguarded through the stupified streets to the place of execution. And here we have the last occasion to mention Sanson; and it is to his credit, as indeed all the personal details related of him seem to be. On the 9th Thermidor there was, about half-past three in the afternoon, just as this last batch of victims was about to leave the Conciergerie, a considerable commotion in the town, caused by the revolt against Robespierre. At that moment Fouquier, on his way to dine with a neighbour, passed through the court where the prisoners were ascending the fatal carts. Sanson, whose duty it was to conduct the prisoners to execution, ventured to stop the Accusateur Public, to represent to him that there were some rumours of a commotion, and to suggest whether it would not be prudent to postpone the execution till at least the next morning. Fouquier roughly replied that the law must take its course. He went to dinner, and the forty-nine victims went to the scaffold, whither in due time he followed them!

The next day the Guillotine was removed back to the scene of its longest triumphs—the Place de la Révolution—where on the 28th of July it avenged humanity on Robespierre and twenty-one of his followers; on the next day sixty-nine, and on the day after thirteen more of his associates fell, amongst whom were most of the judges, juries, and officers of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and a majority of the Commune of Paris—greater monsters, if possible, than the members of the Tribunal. Here indeed the trite quotation—

"Neque enim lex aequior ulla - Quam necis artifices arte perire sua,"— may be applied with incomparable propriety.

Of the operations of the Guillotine in the Departments during the Parisian Reign of Terror there is but scanty information. We only know that in most of the great towns it was in permanent activity, and that in some remarkable instances, as at Avignon, Nantes, and Lyons, its operations were found too slow for "the

vengeance of the people" and were assisted by the wholesale massacres of fusillades and noyades. At Nantes, and some other places, the Conventional Proconsuls carried M. de Clermont Tonnère's principle to the extreme extent of ostentatiously inviting the Executioner to dinner.

For some months after the fall of Robespierre the Parisian Guillotine was, though not permanently, yet actively, employed against his immediate followers; and, subsequently, against the tail (as it was called) of his faction, who attempted to revive the Reign of Terror; but we have no distinct details of these proceedings; the numbers, though great, were insignificant in comparison with the former massacres, and no one, we believe, suffered who did not amply deserve it—Fouquier-Tinville himself and the remainder of his colleagues, the judges and jury of the tribunal, included. His and their trial is the most extraordinary document that the whole revolution has produced, and develops a series of turpitudes and horrors such as no imagination could conceive. But that does not belong to our present subject, and we must hasten to conclude.

Under the Directory, the Consulate, and the Empire, we do not find that any immoderate use was made of the Guillotine;—the very name had become intolerably odious, and the ruling powers were reluctant to use it even on legitimate occasions. During the Restoration it was rarely employed, and never, as far as we recollect, for any political crime. When occasion for its use occurred it was brought forth and erected in the Place de Grève, and removed immediately after the execution; and we ourselves can bear witness—though we could not bring ourselves to see it—that one of these tragedies, which occurred while we happened to be in Paris, appeared to throw a kind of gloom and uneasiness over the whole city, that contrasted very strongly and very favourably with our recollection of the events of twenty years before.

His career ended with the fall of Robespierre at the start of the Thermidorian Reaction. Although he was briefly kept as the new government's prosecutor, even helping in the arrest of Robespierre, Louis de Saint-Just, and Georges Couthon, and being confirmed by Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac and the Convention on 28 July 1794, he was arrested after being denounced by Louis-Marie Stanislas Fréron.

Imprisoned on 1 August, he was brought to trial in front of the Convention. His defence was that he had only obeyed the decrees of the Committee of Public Safety and the Convention:

It is not I who ought to be facing the tribunal, but the chiefs whose orders I have executed. I had only acted in the spirit of the laws passed by a Convention invested with all powers. Through the absence of its members [on trial], I find myself the head of a [political] conspiracy I have never been aware of. Here I am facing slander, facing a people always eager to find others responsible.

After a trial lasting forty-one days, he was sentenced to death and guillotined on 7 May 1795, together with 15 former functionaries of the Revolutionary Tribunal, who were sentenced as his accomplices.

After the accession of Louis Philippe, for whom the Guillotine must have been an object of the most painful contemplation, sentences of death were also very rare, and certainly never executed where there was any possible room for mercy. The executions, too, when forced upon him, took place at early hours and in remote and uncertain places; and every humane art was used to cover the operations of the fatal instrument with a modest veil, not only from motives of general decency and humanity, but also, no doubt, from national pride and personal sensibility. What Frenchman would not wish that the name and memory of the Guillotine could be blotted from the history of mankind?

"The word Guillotine" says the author of *'Les Fastes de l'Anarchie,'* "should be effaced from the language." But the revolutionary horrors which France is naturally so anxious to forget, it the more behoves us and the rest of Europe to remember and meditate. Such massacres as we have been describing will probably never be repeated; they will, no doubt, stand un-paralleled in the future, as they do in the former annals of the world; but they should never be forgotten as an example of the incalculable excesses of popular insanity.

Former King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette were executed at the guillotine in 1793. Towards the end of the Terror in 1794, revolutionary leaders such as Georges Danton, Saint-Just and Maximilian Robespierre were sent to the guillotine. Most of the time, executions in Paris were carried out in the Place de la Revolution (former Place Louis XV and current Place de la Concorde); the guillotine stood in the corner near the Hôtel Crillon where the statue of Brest can be found today. The machine was moved several times, to the Place de la Nation, the Place de la Bastille but returned especially for the execution of the king and for Robespierre. For a time, executions by guillotine were a popular form of entertainment that attracted great crowds of spectators, with vendors selling programs listing the names of the condemned. But more

than popular entertainment alone, during the Reign of Terror, the guillotine symbolized revolutionary ideals: equality in death equivalent to equality before the law, open and demonstrable revolutionary justice, and the destruction of privilege under the Ancient Régime which included separate forms of execution for the nobility. As such, the guillotine was considered a positive force for progress by the Parisian sans-culottes, the popular public face of lower-class patriotic radicalism in the French Revolution.

Retirement

Public guillotining in Lons-le-Saunier, 1897.

After the French Revolution, executions began again in the city centre. On 4 February 1832, the guillotine was moved behind the church of Saint Jacques, just before being moved again, to the Grande Roquette prison, on 29 November 1851.

On 6 August 1909, the guillotine was used on the junction of the Boulevard Arago and the Rue de la Santé, behind the La Santé Prison.



The last public guillotining in France was of Eugen Weidmann, who was convicted of six murders. He was beheaded on 17 June 1939 outside the prison Saint-Pierre, rue Georges Clemenceau 5 at Versailles, which is now the Palais de Justice.

A number of problems with that execution (inappropriate behaviour by spectators, incorrect assembly of the apparatus, and the fact that it was secretly filmed) caused the French government to order that future executions be conducted in private in the prison courtyard.

The guillotine remained the official method of execution in France until the death penalty was abolished in 1981. The final three guillotinations in France before its abolition were those of child-murderers Christian Ranucci (on 28 July 1976) in Marseille, Jérôme Carrein (on 23 June 1977) in Douai and torturer-murderer Hamida Djandoubi (on 10 September 1977) in Marseille.

In the late 1840s the Tussaud brothers Joseph and Francis, gathering relics for Madame Tussauds wax museum, visited the aged Henry-Clément Sanson, grandson of the executioner Charles Henri Sanson, from whom they obtained parts, the knife and lunette, of one of the original guillotines used during the Reign of Terror. The executioner had "pawned his guillotine, and got into woeful trouble for alleged trafficking in municipal property".

Other Countries

A number of countries, primarily in Europe, continued to employ this method of execution into the 19th and 20th centuries.

In Antwerp (Belgium), the last person to be beheaded was Francis Kol. Convicted of robbery and murder, he received his punishment on 8 May 1856. During the period from 19 March 1798, until 30 March 1856, there were 19 beheadings in Antwerp.

In Switzerland it was used for the last time by the canton of Obwalden in the execution of murderer Hans Vollenweider in 1940.

The guillotine was also introduced into Greece in 1834, along with the firing squad, as a method of execution. It was last used in Greece in 1913.

In Sweden, where beheading became the mandatory method of execution in 1866, the guillotine replaced manual beheading in 1903 and it was used only once, in the execution of murderer Alfred Ander in 1910 at Långholmen Prison, Stockholm. He was also the last person to be executed in Sweden before capital punishment was abolished in that country in 1921. Swedish child killer Hilda Nilsson was scheduled to be executed by guillotine in 1917. She evaded that fate when her death sentence was commuted to life in prison. She hanged herself in prison before the commutation was communicated to her.

Living heads

The question of consciousness following decapitation remained a topic of discussion during the guillotine's use.

The following report was written by Dr. Beaurieux, who observed the head of executed prisoner Henri Languille, on 28 June 1905:

Here, then, is what I was able to note immediately after the decapitation: the eyelids and lips of the guillotined man worked in irregularly rhythmic contractions for about five or six seconds.

This phenomenon has been remarked by all those finding themselves in the same conditions as myself for observing what happens after the severing of the neck ...

I waited for several seconds. The spasmodic movements ceased.

It was then that I called in a strong, sharp voice: "Languille!" I saw the eyelids slowly lift up, without any spasmodic contractions – I insist advisedly on this peculiarity – but with an even movement, quite distinct and normal, such as happens in everyday life, with people awakened or torn from their thoughts.

Next Languille's eyes very definitely fixed themselves on mine and the pupils focused themselves. I was not, then, dealing with the sort of vague dull look without any expression, that can be observed any day in dying people to whom one speaks: I was dealing with undeniably living eyes which were looking at me. After several seconds, the eyelids closed again.

It was at that point that I called out again and, once more, without any spasm, slowly, the eyelids lifted and undeniably living eyes fixed themselves on mine with perhaps even more penetration than the first time. Then there was a further closing of the eyelids, but now less complete. I attempted the effect of a third call; there was no further movement – and the eyes took on the glazed look which they have in the dead.



In South Vietnam, after the Diệm regime enacted the 10/59 Decree in 1959, mobile special military courts were dispatched to the countryside in order to intimidate the rural population and they used guillotines which had belonged to the former French colonial power in order to carry out death sentences on the spot. One such guillotine is still on show at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City.

The only recorded use of the guillotine in North America took place on the French island of St. Pierre in 1889, of Basque-born assassin Carlos Zuzuarregui, with a guillotine brought in from Guadeloupe. In the Caribbean, it was used more routinely in Guadeloupe and Martinique, the last time in Fort-de-France in 1965.

In 1996 in the US, Georgia State Representative Doug Teper unsuccessfully sponsored a bill to replace that state's electric chair with the guillotine.

In Germany, where the guillotine is known as the Fallbeil ("falling axe"), it was used in various German states from the 19th century onwards,[citation needed] becoming the preferred method of execution in

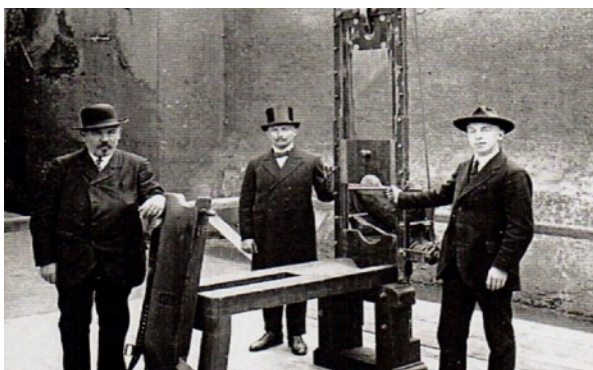
Napoleonic times in many parts of Germany. The guillotine and the firing squad were the legal methods of execution during the era of the German Empire (1871–1918) and the Weimar Republic (1919–1933).

The original German guillotines resembled the French Berger 1872 model, but they eventually evolved into more specialized machines largely built of metal with a much heavier blade enabling shorter uprights to be used. Accompanied by a more efficient blade recovery system and the eventual removal of the tilting board (or bascule) this allowed a quicker turn-around time between executions, those deemed likely to struggle were backed up from behind a curtain in order to shield their view of the device. Additionally, the blade was covered by a metal screen in order to hide it from sight.

The guillotine was used in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945 to execute 16,500 prisoners, including 10,000 executions between 1944 and 1945 alone. One of these Nazi executions was that of Sophie Scholl, who was convicted of high treason after distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets at the University of Munich with her brother Hans, and other members of the German student resistance group, the White Rose. The guillotine was used for the last time in West Germany in 1949 (in the execution of Richard Schuh) and it was last used in East Germany in 1966 (in the execution of Horst Fischer). The guillotine was used in East Germany by the Stasi between 1950 and 1966 for secret executions.



This machine of death was used by the Nazi's during the Second World War. The machine was believed to have beheaded around 16,000 people, men and women alike, during their twelve years in power.



During Imperial and Weimar Republic eras until 1933 there were 36 executions carried out in Plötzensee, all for murder and all by beheading with an axe according to the old German Strafgesetzbuch penal code. After the Nazi Machtergreifung, the prison housed both regular criminals and political prisoners. Plötzensee was one of eleven selected central execution sites established in 1936 throughout Germany by the order of Adolf Hitler and Reich Minister of Justice Franz Gürtner.

Each was operated by a full-time executioner carrying out the rising numbers of death sentences, especially after the penal law was again tightened in World War II. By a 1943 agreement with the OKW they became also responsible for the execution of Wehrmacht members according to German military law. The convicts were beheaded by a stationary guillotine (Fallbeil), from 1942 also by hanging. During the Nazi regime, an official record of 2,891 people convicted by the Berlin Kammergericht, the notorious "People's Court" under Roland Freisler and several Sondergerichte were executed in Plötzensee, initially with an axe in the prison's courtyard.

On February 27, 1933, arsonists burned the Reichstag building, home of the German Parliament, to the ground. Adolf Hitler had been sworn in as Chancellor of Germany just one month earlier but did not yet have absolute power. The fire paved the way for his total control.



Roland Freisler (centre) gives the Nazi salute while standing inside a Berlin courtroom. 1944.

The day after the fire, Hitler used the destruction as a pretext to pass the Reichstag Fire Decree, which gave him emergency powers and suspended most civil liberties. Five so-called communist conspirators were arrested for arson and put on trial. However, the Nazis' evidence was weak and only one of the five was found guilty and sentenced to death, with the rest acquitted.

Hitler was furious with this outcome and on April 24, 1934, he decreed that the "People's Court" would replace trial courts in political cases, including treason. Only loyal Nazis could be judges and treason would be defined as any form of opposition to National Socialism.

This court was instrumental in securing the Nazi stranglehold over Germany — and it was under the rule of Hitler's cruellest judge, Roland Freisler.

At the time that the "People's Court" was created, Roland Freisler was the State Secretary of the Reich Ministry of Justice. He was the man who petitioned for the People's Court to become the Supreme Court of Nazi Germany and for it to adopt National Socialist concepts of law.

He believed that trials should be swift, judgments should be final, and punishments should be carried out within 24 hours of conviction. In 1942, when Roland Freisler became the President of the People's Court and under his tenure, he enacted these ideas with the utmost severity.



Freisler presided over his kangaroo court as judge, jury, and executioner for the Nazi central command (not long after participating in the Wannsee Conference where the Nazis planned the Holocaust). The court was like a production line with dead defendants the end result.

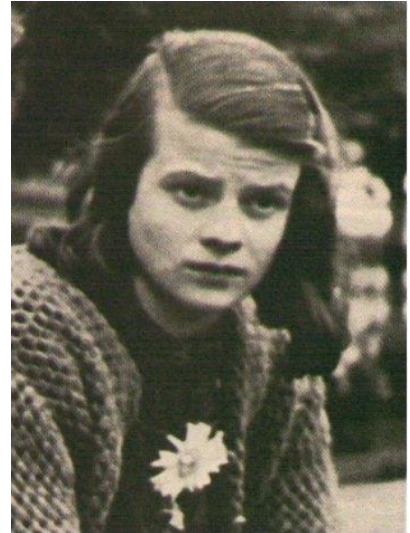
Years earlier while in the Soviet Union, Freisler had watched Andrei Vyshinsky, the chief prosecutor of the Soviet purge trials. Influenced by Vyshinsky's techniques, Freisler combined his legal acumen with sadistic verbal abuse and humiliation techniques to turn his courtroom into a house of farcical proceedings that rivalled any of Vyshinsky's show trials.

Wearing a scarlet red robe and standing underneath massive scarlet red swastika banners, Roland Freisler would open each day in court with a Nazi salute before carrying out cruel "justice" that involved long, raving speeches and extended verbal humiliation of defendants. He would think nothing of not only condemning defendants but stripping them of their dignity — sometimes literally. For instance, he sent the high-ranking Nazis who nearly succeeded in killing Hitler during the July 20 plot to the gallows naked.

Whether high-ranking Nazis or not, Freisler spared no one from his aggressive vitriol and humiliation. "You are crying!" he yelled at one defendant who began to weep in court, "What do you want to tell us with the tears in your eyes?" Freisler soon sentenced that man to be hung with a thin rope so that he would, per Hitler's orders, suffer a slow death. Indeed, after Freisler defendants had been humiliated and abused, they were almost certainly sent to their deaths. In fact, 90 percent of cases before the People's Court resulted in the death penalty or life imprisonment. Between 1942 and 1945, the figure that reached its zenith with 5,000 Germans sent to their death under Freisler's leadership. Freisler even passed a law that would allow him to send juveniles to their deaths.

In February 1943, for example, Freisler sentenced Sophie Scholl, Hans Scholl, and the ringleaders of the White Rose youth movement to death simply for distributing anti-war leaflets at Munich University. The trial was over within an hour and all three were sent to the guillotine just six hours after their arrest. Sophie was the first of her comrades to be sentenced to death—which took place merely three hours after being found guilty by stout Nazi judge, Roland Freisler.

Sophie shared a cell with her brother and Christoph Probst, both members of the White Rose movement. According to one account, Sophie was said to have walked proudly to her death and she was to have said: 'How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?'



Within an hour, Hans Scholl and Christoph Probst met their fate the same way. It has been reported that Hans shouted 'Long live freedom!' as he made his way to the chamber. It is rarely mentioned that when the Nazis first came into power, they were cautious about using the death penalty. In the beginning, they did not wield much power and they feared an uprising if they were to execute their own people.

The only Roland Freisler trial that remains more infamous than the Scholl proceedings is the prosecution of the July 20 plot conspirators. Hitler had reportedly seen Freisler in action and specially requested that he be the man to preside over the activists trial. The trial began on August 7, 1944. The accused were unable to consult their lawyers, who were not even allowed to sit near their clients. Freisler constantly yelled at the defendants, interrupting any attempts they made to address the court.

To add to the shame, Freisler gave them oversized clothing, denied them belts so their trousers kept slipping, then berated them for it. "You dirty old man," he said to one defendant, "why do you keep fiddling with your trousers?"

From 1937 the convicts were beheaded with a guillotine brought from Bruchsal Prison and installed in a backyard work shed, a ground-level brick building near the prison walls, to where the victims had to walk from a nearby cell block. In 1942, a beam was assembled in the same room, serving as gallows for up to eight victims at one time. The bereaved were obliged to pay a fee of 1.5 Reichsmarks for each day the detainee had spent in prison plus an extra execution charge of 300 Reichsmarks.

Executions of opponents of the Nazi regime

Peter Buchholz; "OMGUS MILITARY TRIBUNAL - CASE THREE OMT-III-W-56 / Witness Peter Buchholz, former prison chaplain at the Berlin-Plötzensee Prison, who described prison conditions there. He stated that there were people executed there during his time for whom stay of execution papers were in processing, perhaps even reprieve action."



About half of those executed were Germans, most of whom were sentenced to death for acts of resistance against the Nazi regime, among them members of the Red Orchestra, the 20 July plot and the Kreisau Circle.

Some 677 executed prisoners were from Czechoslovakia, among them many members of the Czech resistance to Nazi occupation from 1938-39 onwards.

253 death sentences were carried out against Poles, and 245 against French citizens. These people included both the members of resistance organizations and people who were deported to Germany for forced labour. About 300 were women.

After execution, their bodies were released to Hermann Stieve, an anatomist at the medical college of what is now Humboldt University of Berlin. He and his students or assistants dissected them for research purposes. Stieve was especially interested in the effects of stress on the menstrual cycle, and wrote 230 papers based on this research, among them one that demonstrated that the rhythm method was not an effective method of

preventing conception.

After an RAF air raid in the night of 3 September 1943 irreparably damaged the guillotine and destroyed large parts of the prison buildings, State Secretary Curt Rothenberger in the Reich Ministry of Justice via telephone ordered the immediate execution of the Plötzensee condemned. About 250 people—six of them "erroneously"—waiting in rows of eight were hanged during the so-called Plötzensee Bloody Nights from 7 to 12 September. The last execution was carried out on 20 April 1945. The remaining inmates were liberated by the Red Army in the course of the Battle of Berlin five days later.

The use of the guillotine came into modern light when it was discovered in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich. It is believed that the machine was responsible for the beheading of 21-year-old Sophie Scholl on February 22, 1943. She was convicted of being a leading member of the White Rose movement. The movement was a group who peacefully resisted the regime and wrote anti-Nazi pamphlets. The group distributed the pamphlets to university students in Munich.

At the Plötzensee Prison, only 45 people were sentenced to death between 1933 and 1936. That figure would be dwarfed in later years. In the beginning of the Nazi regime, Hitler was concerned by the idea of judicial execution varied throughout the nation. There was the guillotine, hanging, shooting, and perhaps most gruesome, an axe. Hitler established a standard means of execution in order to put "miscreant citizens to death;" as reported by the Daily Mail. In the beginning, Hitler was reluctant to use the guillotine, as it evoked the feel of the French Reign of Terror. He much preferred the use of concentration camps.

'At least we have not set up a guillotine,' Hitler said in a news-paper interview at the end of 1933. 'Even the worst elements have only needed to have been separated from the nation.' In the span of 8 and a half years, approximately 16,500 people were killed by the use of the machine. Although it is believed that beheadings are a painless way to die, there is anecdotal evidence that the brain retains some functions inside the severed head for at least 90 seconds after the blow.

Nonetheless, one Nazi doctor claimed that a trip to the "dentist was worse than the guillotine," because the nerve endings were severed and the brain would not feel any pain. Those who were killed came from all walks of life — and all age groups. The youngest to be beheaded was Helmuth Hubener, who was just 17 when he was guillotined for distributing anti-war leaflets around Hamburg. After he had been sentenced to death, Helmuth said to the judges: 'Now I must die, even though I have committed no crime. So now it's my turn, but your turn will come.'

The sentencing of a child to death appalled many. Even members of the Gestapo appealed for clemency. However, at 8.13 on the evening of October 27, 1942, Helmuth was beheaded. For executioners such as Sophie Scholl's killer Johann Reichhart, the Nazi boom in the use of the guillotine made them wealthy. Those who dropped the blade were paid 3,000 Reichsmarks per year — and received a 65 Reichsmark bonus per execution. Reichhart made enough to buy a villa in an affluent Munich suburb.

Cruelly, the Nazis even charged the families of those they had imprisoned and beheaded. For every day that a prisoner was held, a fee of 1.50 Reichsmarks was charged. The executions cost 300 Reichsmarks. Even the 12 pfennig cost of posting the invoice was demanded back by the Nazi state.



Willi Graf

On October 12, 1943, another member of the White Rose sat in his prison cell waiting for the guillotine. His name was Willi Graf, and he had acted as a recruiter for the group. He wrote to his family that morning. 'On this day I'm leaving this life and entering eternity,' he wrote. 'What hurts me most of all is that I am causing such pain to those of you who go on living.' They had no idea that Willi had been beheaded and found out the truth only when a letter they sent to him was returned, stamped with the bald word 'Deceased'.

His own letter reached the Graf family a few days later. It is likely that Willi met his fate on the same guillotine as Sophie Scholl. In fact, several hundred — perhaps more than 1,000 — died on this piece of macabre machinery. Today, the Germans are divided as to what to do with the instrument of death and misery unearthed from the Munich museum's basement.

Some think the guillotine should form the centrepiece of a new exhibition about those who resisted the Nazis. Franz Josef Muller, on the other hand, the last surviving member of the White Rose, feels that it should stay locked away. 'No, this should not go on display,' the 89-year-old Muller says. 'No entertainment must be made of their violent deaths. The memory of Sophie and Hans is deep within me. I think of them every day.'



Fallbeil: The Teutonic Guillotine

Compiled by Norman Bambridge
Basildon Borough Heritage Society
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