# THE RUSSIAN KNOUT.

## BARBAROUS INFLICTIONS OF THE WORST TORTURES.

**Its Inhuman Use on Victims—Only Lately Abolished in the Czar's Domains—Cruel Instrument Obsolete—Politics of Enlightened Russia.**

EXPANDING civilization sheds very slowly its forms of legal cruelty. England, less than a century ago, used to hang men for trifling crimes against the sacred rights of property. Russia only just lately has abolished the use of the knout, though the father of the present Czar favored the removal of this blood-stain from Russian rule. Alexander II. invited all the governors of provinces and penal settlements to report upon their experience with the knout. Without exception they had favored its abolition. In many places it was revealed that the local police resorted to it on the slightest provocation; that they spared neither age nor sex; that delicate women and tender children were frequently maimed for life by its use. Nor was this all. Statistics were submitted which showed that within the past ten years 3,000 persons, convicted of petty offenses, had died from its effects.

The knout is first heard of in the reign of Ivan III. This was toward the close of the fifteenth century. It was an instrument even more hideous than anything now known in Russia—a whip with a handle nine inches long, and a very complex lash composed of six pieces held together by two metal rings and ending in a beak-like hook.

The edges of the lash were sharpened to a fine point. Every blow cut as with a two-edged sword. To heighten the effect, the trained executioner, by a deft and artistic motion, pulled the lash toward him while recovering, so that the cunningly devised hook brought off a long, thin strip of flesh at every blow.

The trousseau of the gentleman who was being operated upon, consisted only of a pair of drawers. He was fastened flat on his belly on an inclined frame, the hands and feet extended at full length and firmly bound to iron rings at the extremity of the frame. With a refinement of ingenuity, the head of the sufferer was often so closely confined that he could not get relief for his feelings in howling.

Not every one could handle the knout successfully. It required a nice combination of qualities, native and acquired. Having first been born, the executioner must be made. A cold and cruel spirit, an iron nerve and great strength—these were the gifts which some fairy godmother must have showered upon him in his cradle. A long apprenticeship would be necessary to develop these excellent attributes. Usually the chief executioner was some criminal who had himself been condemned to the punishment he was saved to administer.

During his moments of leisure from active employment it was his business to give instructions to pupils. A sort of lay figure was used for practice. The chief executioner instructed his apt and willing scholars in the art of dealing their blows so that the injury might be graduated according to the nature of the crime or the size of the bribe which the executioner might have surreptitiously received.

If the executioner were inclined to mercy he could inflict immediate death by making the victim dislocate his own neck. Or he could protract the agony for an hour or so by cutting into the loins.

With the original knout, a sentence of from 100 to 120 lashes was equivalent to a sentence of death. Indeed, in many cases the victim died under the operation long before the number was completed. That was a pity. The kindly Russian heart, with kindness tempered by a severe sense of justice, looked on the criminal as a cheat if he died without receiving his entire sentence. Therefore, from time to time the severity of the knout was modified until the offender could receive a sentence of 2,000 lashes.

The last knout in use—the knout which has just been abolished—was an ordinary three-thonged lash tipped with leaden balls, and known as a pletoi. It is only fair to say that since the accession of Alexander II. even this had been used only in certain penal settlements—notably in Siberia.

The horror of the present day, however, is as nothing to the horror of the past, but stories of executions by the knout in comparatively recent times are horrible enough.

Take for example the testimony of a British merchant, resident in Russia in 1856. The condemned criminal was a murderer, twenty-five years of age. He was stripped to his trousers and boots and fastened to the stake. The knout in this instance consisted of a handle a foot long, with a piece of twisted hide of similar length. To this was attached by a ring a piece of thong of almost metallic hardness, perfectly flat, about an inch broad and four or five feet long. After every seventh blow the thong was changed lest it might have lost some of its hardness by use. The executioner stood some five feet from the victim. He slowly raised the knout till it had attained the proper elevation, then he brought it down with awful force upon the middle of the culprit's back.

A keen, crimson mark nearly an inch in breadth and extending from the back to the waistband of the trousers showed where the horrid thong had bit. A scream, or rather a yell, of agony rang through the air. Every fibre of the poor wretch's body seemed in a state of violent and instantaneous contortion. Whack! whack! whack! came the blows in quick succession till the eighth had been reached. Each blow was followed by the same frightful yell and shudder. Then the chief executioner gave place to an assistant, and so one relieved the other until the tale was completed. The screams of the victim became weaker until about the fiftieth blow, when the criminal's head fell to one side and he seemed unconscious of any further pain. When all was over his back presented a hideous spectacle. It was one mangled, bloated mass of deep crimson hue. He was returned to the prison, where he died next day.

Even more frightful are the accounts of the punishment known as running the gauntlet, which was practiced until a comparatively recent period in the Russian army. One cannot help but shuddering at reading the accounts of eye-witnesses to these hideous proceedings.

## DEATH OF THE BIRDS.

**The Fearful Effect of the February Cold Snap in the South.**

The readers of "Our Boys and Girls" have been told of the great damage done to the orange-groves and the fig trees of the south by the cold "snap" of last February, but there is another loss that we who live there have suffered, about which very little has been said. The severe weather not only killed our trees but the thousands of bright-plumed birds that have heretofore enlivened our forests and groves with their beautiful coats and their sweet songs.

The bluebird, that harbinger of the early spring, did not give us his merry greeting this year. His bright blue jacket and brown-red breast were missed by everybody. Seven little blue forms, dried and decayed, were found in one old post on our place, where the poor creatures had fled in vain for shelter.

The blue jay still struts about with his usual dignity, but only here and there, showing that his tribe has suffered fearful losses. The peculiarly sad note of the turtle-dove this year seems to mourn for the death of all her family.

The effects upon the several tribes of the oriole seem to be the most curious. They evidently look upon man as the worker of all the evil they have suffered. Formerly it was an easy matter to find their swinging nests near to almost any country house, and they appeared not to be afraid of men. Now they have hidden their nests far out in the forests and they are shy even of the breeze as it rocks the cradle of their young. Even the few humming birds that are left will not come to suck the pot plant as was once their daily habit. The woodpecker, though only a summer visitor, is spending his vacation at other resorts this season. His lazy call and his constant drumming upon some dead tree, so common in summer before, are conspicuously absent this year. But the fell destroyer was no respecter of persons or rank; the royal family succumbed as well as the peasantry. The mocking-bird, the queen of the bird race by virtue of her genius and inheritance, is almost destroyed, except along the Mexican Gulf. A hundred miles back it is hard to find one. The gum-tree and its berries, which have been held as her home and her feeding ground as far back as bird history runs, is now the feeding ground of her commonest subjects, the sap-sucker and the yellow-hammer. I have heard but two singers this year within a scope where in former years I have heard 200.

In losing a crop of oranges, figs and vegetables, we lose dollars and a few luxuries whose place may be supplied by the other sweets. The trees will grow again after a few years, but it will be many years before our groves and foresis are full of birds again.

G. W. H.

**A Commonplace Life.**

The trouble is with you, my dear girl, that you count little things as of no worth. Where we have one great renunciation to make we have a thousand little ones, and life, which you are inclined to call commonplace, is not so, for every day can be made rich in beautiful deeds. God, who is just, is merciful, and when temptation comes to you, even if you fail, He remembers that you tried to do what was right, and so is tender in His thought of you. There is not one of us who achieves, even for one day, what we long to. But, my dear, we can always try for it. We can be ready for the trouble that is before us and equip ourselves by prayer and good thoughts so that we can meet it bravely, and, possibly, overcome it. Of course, that is what we wish to do, and yet if we are not strong enough, if we fall by the wayside, we must get up and try again, and keep on trying. That, in itself, will give us strength. And as the years go on and youth belongs to the past, it will always, because of this trying, be easier to do that which is right and merit "that peace which passeth all understanding."

**A Blunt Man.**

An intensely reserved man, Hoen is not at all fond of talking of himself or of his works. At a dinner some time ago the wife of a well-known artist, being seated beside him, insisted on conducting the conversation in that end and finally ascertained at length that his "Hodja Dabler" was an impossible woman. "But, madam," he answered, "I drew her from the life." "Yes, Herr Doktor, but I am a woman, I should know. I say again, it is impossible that such a woman should exist." This was too much for Herr Doktor. Like a flash he turned on her. "Idiot" he exclaimed, which was naturally the [illegible] of conversation.

## MRS. GLADSTONE AS A FAIRY.

**A Pretty Story About the English Statesman's Amiable Wife.**

A pretty story of Mr and Mrs. Gladstone's kindness to a young woman is thus reported by a lady correspondent of the Liverpool Echo: The young woman was the daughter of a music teacher, who, many years ago, was engaged to teach Mr. Gladstone's children. This young woman was anxious to enter the musical profession. In some way, says the correspondent, she became known to Mrs. Gladstone—perhaps through her daughters, the young girl's fellow pupils—and that lady, hearing her sing, showed her recognition of the ability she displayed in many ways, especfolly by inviting her to their house that others might hear and admire her also.

At last the music teacher proposed giving a concert, at which his best pupils were to perform. Of course, Miss —— was among them, and very much excited she felt at the prospect of making her debut before the very select audience which was secured for the performance, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, of course, conspicuous among its members. She was not afraid of the ordeal, being modestly confident of her ability to pass it with credit to herself and master, but she was a woman, and a very young and rather pretty one, and it so damped her anticipations of coming triumph to look at her old shabby evening dress, the only one she possessed, and think of appearing in it before the brilliant audience among her well dressed fellow pupils. In vain did her mother remind her of the admiration her superior singing would excite; she felt that a new evening gown, smart and pretty, would effect far more wonderful results than any effort of her own, and so, in rather a disconsolate mood, she practiced away and waited the eventful hour.

One day, to her surprise, she received an invitation to dine with the Gladstones on the evening of the concert and drive with them to the hall. Very gladly she accepted it, and thought how good it was of them to let her make her debut, as it were, under their wing, besides saving her the expense of a cab. So, though still in rueful contemplation of her toilet, she felt a little better, and in due time arrived at the hospitable door. There she was shown into a bedroom, and smilingly told that whatever she found laid out for her was for her use as she saw fit. Surely the days of fairy god mothers are not over, for on the bed, spread out in dazzling whiteness, reposed a marvel of muslin, ribbon and lace, a charming evening gown, fresh from the modiste, and simple and pure as any "sweet girl graduate" might wish to wear at her first appearance in public. There was no doubt about it, it was really for her—this thoughtfully arranged gift of the kind lady, whose motherly heart had silently understood what the feelings of the girl under the circumstances would be.

So, very happily and gratefully, the pretty gift was donned, and the blushing recipient hastened down to join the family whose venerated head was quite as much interested in the little surprise as any one else concerned.

**The Value of Trees.**

How many farmers and others, too, whose places are destitute of fruit and shade trees. Again, how many rented places are devoid of trees of all kinds. Has the land-owner ever stopped to consider that a small orchard, a few yard trees around every tenement house will greatly enhance the value, attract and hold a better class of tenants, make life more enjoyable and that too at practically no cost? We tell you there is a great deal of selfishness when we look abroad and see how stingy and selfish many are with their tenants, and oftentimes perchance some good farmer rents his farm and moves away and is so selfish as to reserve all, yes, all the fruit produced, denying even this to his tenant. Land-owners owe their tenants and the public generally, a duty by planting at least a moderate quantity of trees. This is a wise public policy.—Ornamental Tree Growing.

**Joy in Worship.**

The Hebrew worship, we are apt to think, was awe-inspiring and therefore gloomy; but it had, nevertheless, large room for gladness. The magnificent collection of Psalms which have come down to us give token that the element of joy predominated in the worship of their assemblies. To this day we can find no better expression of exultant emotion than those songs supply. We do not think we are wrong in asserting that the tone of public worship today is quite below that of the Hebrews, and certainly below that of the early Christians in gladness. In our hymns and liturgies we use their words; but it is seldom that in the worship of a modern congregation one is conscious of the exultant note of joy.

**Valid Objection.**

Once upon a time a Fox, who enjoyed a great reputation as a humorist, met a Boar Hound. "Do you know," he asked, "why I have no use for you?" "No," replied the Boar Hound, preparing to laugh. "Because," observed the other, "if there is anything that makes me tired it is a living pig chewer."—Detroit Tribune.

**Chances of Death in Battle.**

At the battle of Solferino, according to M. Cassendi's carefully deducted calculations, a comparison of the number of shots fired on the Austrian side with the number killed and wounded on the part of the enemy shows that 700 bullets were expended for every man wounded and 4,200 for each man killed! The average weight of the ball used was thirty grains, therefore it must have taken at least 126 kilograms, or 227 pounds of lead for every man put out of the way. Yet Solferino has gone into history as a most important and bloody engagement.

Bogert, in the light of the above, was not far from right when he quaintly said: "War is awful, but the sound of it is awfuler."


**Like a Venomous Serpent**

Hidden in the grass, malaria but waits our approach, to spring at and fasten its fangs upon us. There is, however, a certain antidote to its venom which renders it powerless for evil. Hostetter's Stomach Bitters is this acknowledged and world-famed specific, and it is, besides this, a thorough curative for rheumatism, dyspepsia, liver complaint, constipation, la grippe and nervousness. In convalescence and age it is very serviceable.


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Mr. Newedd—How is that, my love? Nothing in the house to eat? I gave you money this morning. Mrs. Newedd—Yes, I know; but I ran across the most exquisitely charming London dinner gong — awfully fashionable, you know—and I couldn't resist the temptation to buy it. "But what shall we do for dinner?" "We can listen to the gong."—New York Weekly.


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"No, ma'am. I used to live in the suburbs, and in running for a train on an early spring morning I caught my foot in the mud and left it thhre."—Judge.

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Assistant—Why?

Editor—He has raised a family of thirteen children.—Truth.


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