



Nancy
Hanks
Lincoln
Public
Library

Lynch Law in Georgia.

BY

IDA B. WELLS=BARNETT

A Six-Weeks' Record in the Center of Southern Civilization,
As Faithfully Chronicled by the "Atlanta Journal"
and the "Atlanta Constitution."

ALSO THE FULL REPORT OF LOUIS P. LE VIN,

The Chicago Detective Sent to Investigate the Burning of
Samuel Hose, the Torture and Hanging of Elijah Strick-
land, the Colored Preacher, and the Lynching
of Nine Men for Alleged Arson.

This Pamphlet is Circulated by Chicago Colored Citizens.

2939 Princeton Avenue, Chicago.

CONSIDER THE FACTS.

During six weeks of the months of March and April just past, twelve colored men were lynched in Georgia, the reign of outlawry culminating in the torture and hanging of the colored preacher, Elijah Strickland, and the burning alive of Samuel Wilkes, alias Hose, Sunday, April 23, 1899.

The real purpose of these savage demonstrations is to teach the Negro that in the South he has no rights that the law will enforce. Samuel Hose was burned to teach the Negroes that no matter what a white man does to them, they must not resist. Hose, a servant, had killed Cranford, his employer. An example must be made. Ordinary punishment was deemed inadequate. This Negro must be burned alive. To make the burning a certainty the charge of outrage was invented, and added to the charge of murder. The daily press offered reward for the capture of Hose and then openly incited the people to burn him as soon as caught. The mob carried out the plan in every savage detail.

Of the twelve men lynched during that reign of unspeakable barbarism, only one was even charged with an assault upon a woman. Yet Southern apologists justify their savagery on the ground that Negroes are lynched only because of their crimes against women.

The Southern press champions burning men alive, and says, "Consider the facts." The colored people join issue and also say, "Consider the facts." The colored people of Chicago employed a detective to go to Georgia, and his report in this pamphlet gives the facts. We give here the details of the lynching as they were reported in the Southern papers, then follows the report of the true facts as to the cause of the lynchings, as learned by the investigation. We submit all to the sober judgment of the Nation, confident that, in this cause, as well as all others, "Truth is mighty and will prevail."

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT.

2939 Princeton Avenue, Chicago, June 20, 1899.

CHAPTER I.

NINE MEN LYNCHED ON SUSPICION.

In dealing with all vexed questions, the chief aim of every honest inquirer should be to ascertain the facts. No good purpose is subserved either by concealment on the one hand or exaggeration on the other. "The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," is the only sure foundation for just judgment.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to give the public the facts, in the belief that there is still a sense of justice in the American people, and that it will yet assert itself in condemnation of outlawry and in defense of oppressed and persecuted humanity. In this firm belief the following pages will describe the lynching of nine colored men, who were arrested near Palmetto, Georgia, about the middle of March, upon suspicion that they were implicated in the burning of the three houses in February preceding.

The nine suspects were not criminals, they were hard-working, law-abiding citizens, men of families. They had assaulted no woman, and, after the lapse of nearly a month, it could not be claimed that the fury of an insane mob made their butchery excusable. They were in the custody of the law, unarmed, chained together and helpless, awaiting their trial. They had no money to employ learned counsel to invoke the aid of technicalities to defeat justice. They were in custody of a white Sheriff, to be prosecuted by a white State's Attorney, to be tried before a white judge, and by a white jury. Surely the guilty had no chance to escape.

Still they were lynched. That the awful story of their slaughter may not be considered overdrawn, the following description is taken from the columns of the Atlanta Journal, as it was written by Royal Daniel, a staff correspondent. The story of the lynching thus told is as follows:

Palmetto, Ga., March 16.—A mob of more than 100 desperate men, armed with Winchesters and shotguns and pistols and wearing masks, rode into Palmetto at 1 o'clock this morning and shot to death four Negro prisoners, desperately wounded another and with deliberate aim fired at four others, wounding two, believing the entire nine had been killed.

The boldness of the mob and the desperateness with which the murder was contemplated and executed, has torn the little town with excitement and anxiety.

All business has been suspended, and the town is under military patrol, and every male inhabitant is armed to the teeth, in anticipation of an outbreak which is expected to-night.

Last night nine Negroes were arrested and placed in the warehouse near the depot. The Negroes were charged with the burning of the two business blocks here in February.

At 1 o'clock this morning the mob dashed into town while the people slept.

They rushed to the warehouse in which the nine Negroes were guarded by six white men.

The door was burst open and the guards were ordered to hold up their hands.

Then the mob fired two volleys into the line of trembling, wretched and pleading prisoners, and to make sure of their work, placed pistols in the dying men's faces and emptied the chambers.

Citizens who were aroused by the shooting and ran out to investigate the cause were driven to their homes at the point of guns and pistols and then the mob mounted their horses and dashed out of town, back into the woods and home again.

None of the mob was recognized, as their faces were completely concealed by masks. The men did their work orderly and coolly and exhibited a determination seldom equaled under similar circumstances.

The nine Negroes were tied with ropes and were helpless.

The guard was held at the muzzle of guns and threatened with death if a man moved.

Then the firing was deliberately done, volley by volley.

The Negroes now dead are: Tip Hudson, Bud Cotton, Ed Wynn, Henry Bingham.

Fatally shot and now dying: John Bigby.

Shot but will recover: John Jameson.

Arm broken: George Tatum.

Escaped without injury: Ison Brown, Clem Watts.

The men who were guarding the Negroes are well known and prominent citizens of Palmetto, and were sworn in only yesterday as a special guard for the night.

The commitment trial of the Negroes was set for 9 o'clock this morning.

Bud Cotton, who was killed, had confessed to the burning of the stores in Palmetto, and had implicated all the others who had been arrested.

The military having been sent by Governor Candler arrived at 10:40 o'clock this morning on a special train under command of Colonel John S. Candler.

The Negro population of Palmetto has fled from town and it is believed the Negroes are now congregating on the outskirts and will make an assault upon the town to-night.

The place is in the wildest excitement and every citizen is armed, expecting an outbreak as soon as night shall fall.

The Negroes left the town in droves early this morning, weeping and screaming and dogged and revengeful.

Business has been entirely suspended and Palmetto, formerly a peaceful agricultural village, is running riot with intense excitement and anxiety is expressed by every one.

The lives and property of citizens will be protected at any cost, and the white people, while condemning the act of lawlessness of the mob, are determined to meet any attempt the Negroes may make for revenge.

It was just past the hour of midnight. The guards were sleepy and tired of the weary watch and the little city of Palmetto was sound asleep, with nothing to disturb the midnight hour or to interrupt the crime that was about to be committed.

Without the slightest noise the mob of lynchers approached the door to the warehouse. Not a false step was made, not a dead leaf was trod upon and not even the creaking of a shoe or the clearing of a throat broke the stillness.

With a noise that shook the buildings and threw every man to his feet the big fireproof door was suddenly struck as if with the force of a battering ram.

The guards sprang to their guns and the Negroes screamed for mercy.

But there were rifles, shotguns and pistols everywhere.

The little anteroom was packed full of armed men in an instant. The men seemed to come up through the floor and through the walls, so rapidly did they fill the room. And still others poured in at the door, and when the room was filled so that not another man could enter, the door was slammed to with awful noise and force.

The Negroes were screaming at the top of their voices.

"Hands up and don't move; if you move a foot or turn your hands I will blow your damned brains out," came the stern and rigid command from a man of small, thick stature, his face wholly concealed by a mask of white cloth and holding in his hands a couple of dangerous horse pistols.

The guards threw their hands up above their heads, all except one guard, James Hendricks, who lifted only one hand, while the other firmly grasped his revolver.

"I'll blow hell out of you in a minute if you don't put that hand up," came the warning, and the hand followed the other one.

The command was then given to move, and move quick.

"You guards, move, and move quick, if you don't want to get your brains blown out," cried the low man, who was the mob's leader.

The guards were then placed in line, six of them, and marched around the room and then marched to the front of the room, near the door through which the mob had entered.

They were placed in line against the front wall of the building and ordered not to move at the cost of their lives.

They did not speak, neither did they move, and not a word was said by the guard to the mob.

The men then walked around where they could get a good look at the trembling, pleading, terror-stricken Negroes, begging for life and declaring that they were innocent.

There was a moment's pause of deliberation. The Negroes thought it meant that the assassins hesitated in their bloody deed, but the men hesitated only because they wanted deliberate action and a clear range for their bullets.

The Negroes, helpless, tied together with ropes, begged for mercy, for they saw the cold gun barrels, the angry and determined faces of the men, and they knew it meant death—instant death to them.

"Oh, God, have mercy!" cried one of the men in his agony. "Oh, give me a minute to live."

The cry for mercy and the prayer for life brought an oath from the leader and derisive laughter from the mob.

"Stand up in a line," said the man in command. "Stand up and we will see if we can't kill you out; if we can't, we'll turn out."

The Negroes faltered.

"Burn the devils," came a suggestion from the crowd.

"No, we'll shoot 'em like dogs," said the mob's leader.

"Stand up, every one of you and get up quick and march to the end of the room."

The Negroes slowly stood up. The mob came closer and pressed about the stacks of furniture that had been stored in the room.

The leader asked if everybody's gun was loaded and the men answered in the affirmative.

The Negroes pleaded and prayed for mercy.

They stood, trembling wretches, jerking at the long ropes that held them by the waist and about the wrists.

"Oh, give me a minute longer!" implored Bud Cotton.

"My men, are you ready?" asked the captain, still cool and composed and fearfully determined to execute the bloodiest deed that has ever stained Campbell County.

"Ready," came the unanimous response.

"One, two, three—fire!" was the command, given orderly, but hurriedly.

Every man in the room, and the number is estimated at from seventy-five to one hundred and fifty, fired point blank at the line of trembling and terror-stricken bound wretches.

The volley came as the fire from a gatling gun.

It filled the warehouse with smoke and flame and death and brought a wail of horror that chilled the helpless guard.

The volley awakened the peaceful town of Palmetto and from every house the excited citizens ran.

"Load and fire again," shouted the captain of the mob, and his voice was heard above the screaming and death cries of the wounded and dead.

The men rapidly loaded their guns, then fired at the given command.

"Now, before you leave, load and get ready for trouble," came the captain's order, and then men loaded their guns and got ready to leave the bloody room.

The guard was not relieved, however, until every man had left the building and all was safe for their hasty flight.

"I wonder if they are all dead," said one of the mob, when the order was given to leave the building.

"I reckon so," said one of the mob.

"But we had better see," said the captain coolly and assuming an air of business.

A detail of probably a half dozen men, probably a dozen and maybe more, the guard does not remember just how many, was sent forward into the blood and brains and into the twisting mass of dying men to examine if all were dead. They were given orders to finish those who were not dead.

The detail rushed forward.

The men jerked the fallen, twisting and writhing and bleeding bodies about.

The first man they reached was not dead. He was still groaning, and the breath was coming in great, quick gasps.

A pistol was placed at his breast and every chamber was emptied.

"He's dead now," laughed one of the crowd.

Other men, wounded, bleeding, moaning and begging, were caught, turned over and pistols emptied into their bodies.

But the shooting had made so much noise that the mob concluded its safety lay in flight.

The Negroes were quickly examined and with a parting shot and a volley of oaths of warning the mob left the warehouse and rushed to their horses.

The men ran from the warehouse to the little spot in the center of the town, where horses are tied by countrymen and merchants.

They mounted quickly and began their ride for life.

With a sweeping of falling and echoing hoofs the cavalrymen dashed down the principal street at breakneck speed.

Mr. Henry Beckman, who lives a few hundred yards beyond the scene of the murders, heard the firing and ran from his house to the railroad tracks.

The horsemen, using the lash and urging their horses to their highest speed, dashed into view.

"Hello," said Beckman, "what does all that firing mean?"

Beckman was answered with an oath and told to get into his hole as quickly as possible. "If you don't, we'll kill you on the spot," was the warning.

Beckman flew for life, ran through the yard and entered the house as quickly as possible.

Dr. Hal L. Johnson saw a crowd of men on foot running down the sidewalk.

He hailed them, but there was no response.

"There must have been more than one hundred men on horses," said Mr. Beckman this morning, in telling the Journal of his wild night experience with the mob.

When the mob left, the guards, who had been held against the warehouse wall at the points of guns and pistols, turned their faces toward the scene of carnage and death.

The furniture in the room had been splintered and wrecked with bullets and the contortions of the Negroes.

On the floor, near the center of the room, were two Negroes, still tied with the rope, locked in each other's embrace. Near their bodies streams of blood were dyeing red the floor and spreading out in pools.

Just beyond were two more bodies. These Negroes were dead, too.

Near the fireplace was John Bigby, twisting and writhing in his agony. Blood was spouting from a number of wounds.

Under the beds and tables and piles of furniture were other bodies, every prisoner apparently dead, except Bigby, who was fast regaining consciousness.

The guards opened the door cautiously, but there was no sign of the mob, save the echoing footfalls on the country road.

CHAPTER II.

TORTURED AND BURNED ALIVE.

The burning of Samuel Hose, or, to give his right name, Samuel Wilkes, gave to the United States the distinction of having burned alive seven human beings during the past ten years. The details of this deed of unspeakable barbarism have shocked the civilized world, for it is conceded universally that no other nation on earth, civilized or savage, has put to death any human being with such atrocious cruelty as that inflicted upon Samuel Hose by the Christian white people of Georgia.

The charge is generally made that lynch law is condemned by the best white people of the South, and that lynching is the work of the lowest and lawless class. Those who seek the truth know the fact to be, that all classes are equally guilty, for what the one class does the other encourages, excuses and condones.

This was clearly shown in the burning of Hose. This awful deed was suggested, encouraged and made possible by the daily press of Atlanta, Georgia, until the burning actually occurred, and then it immediately condoned the burning by a hysterical plea to "consider the facts."

Samuel Hose killed Alfred Cranford Wednesday afternoon, April 12, 1899, in a dispute over wages due Hose. The dispatch which announced the killing of Cranford stated that Hose had assaulted Mrs. Cranford and that bloodhounds had been put on his track.

The next day the Atlanta Constitution, in glaring double headlines, predicted a lynching and suggested burning at the stake. This it repeated in the body of the dispatch in the following language:

"When Hose is caught he will either be lynched and his body riddled with bullets or he will be burned at the stake." And further in the same issue the Constitution suggests torture in these words: "There have been whisperings of burning at the stake and of torturing the fel-

low, and so great is the excitement, and so high the indignation, that this is among the possibilities.”

In the issue of the 15th, in another double-column display heading, the Constitution announces: “Negro will probably be burned,” and in the body of the dispatch burning and torture is confidently predicted in these words:

“Several modes of death have been suggested for him, but it seems to be the universal opinion that he will be burned at the stake and probably tortured before burned.”

The next day, April 16th, the double-column head still does its inflammatory work. Never a word for law and order, but daily encouragement for burning. The headlines read: “Excitement still continues intense, and it is openly declared that if Sam Hose is brought in alive he will be burned,” and in the dispatch it is said:

“The residents have shown no disposition to abandon the search in the immediate neighborhood of Palmetto; their ardor has in no degree cooled, and if Sam Hose is brought here by his captors he will be publicly burned at the stake as an example to members of his race who are said to have been causing the residents of this vicinity trouble for some time.”

On the 19th the Constitution assures the public that interest in the pursuit of Hose does not lag, and in proof of the zeal of the pursuers said:

“‘If Hose is on earth I’ll never rest easy until he’s caught and burned alive. And that’s the way all of us feel,’ said one of them last night.”

Clark Howell, editor, and W. A. Hemphill, business manager, of the Constitution, had offered through their paper a reward of five hundred dollars for the arrest of the fugitive. This reward, together with the persistent suggestion that the Negro be burned as soon as caught, make it plain as day that the purpose to burn Hose at the stake was formed by the leading citizens of Georgia. The Constitution offered the reward to capture him, and then day after day suggested and predicted that he be burned when caught. The Chicago anarchists were hanged, not because they threw the bomb, but because they incited to that act the unknown man who did throw it. Pity that the same law cannot be carried into force in Georgia!

Hose was caught Saturday night, April 23, and let the Constitution tell the story of his torture and death.

From the issue of April 24th the following account is condensed:

Newman, Ga., April 23.—(Special.)—Sam Hose, the Negro murderer of Alfred Cranford and the assailant of Cranford's wife, was burned at the stake one mile and a quarter from this place this afternoon at 2:30 o'clock. Fully 2,000 people surrounded the small sapling to which he was fastened and watched the flames eat away his flesh, saw his body mutilated by knives and witnessed the contortions of his body in his extreme agony.

Such suffering has seldom been witnessed, and through it all the Negro uttered hardly a cry. During the contortions of his body several blood vessels bursted. The spot selected was an ideal one for such an affair, and the stake was in full view of those who stood about and with unfeigned satisfaction saw the Negro meet his death and saw him tortured before the flames killed him.

A few smoldering ashes scattered about the place, a blackened stake, are all that is left to tell the story. Not even the bones of the Negro were left in the place, but were eagerly snatched by a crowd of people drawn here from all directions, who almost fought over the burning body of the man, carving it with knives and seeking souvenirs of the occurrence.

Preparations for the execution were not necessarily elaborate, and it required only a few minutes to arrange to make Sam Hose pay the penalty of his crime. To the sapling Sam Hose was tied, and he watched the cool, determined men who went about arranging to burn him.

First he was made to remove his clothing, and when the flames began to eat into his body it was almost nude. Before the fire was lighted his left ear was severed from his body. Then his right ear was cut away. During this proceeding he uttered not a groan. Other portions of his body were mutilated by the knives of those who gathered about him, but he was not wounded to such an extent that he was not fully conscious and could feel the excruciating pain. Oil was poured over the wood that was placed about him and this was ignited.

The scene that followed is one that never will be forgotten by those who saw it, and while Sam Hose writhed and performed contortions in his agony, many of those present turned away from the sickening sight, and others could hardly look at it. Not a sound but the crackling of the flames broke the stillness of the place, and the situation grew more sickening as it proceeded.

The stake bent under the strains of the Negro in his agony and his sufferings cannot be described, although he uttered not a sound. After his ears had been cut off he was asked about the crime, and then it was he made a full confession. At one juncture, before the flames had begun to get in their work well, the fastenings that held him to the stake broke and he fell forward partially out of the fire.

He writhed in agony and his sufferings can be imagined when it is said that several blood vessels burst during the contortions of his body. When he fell from the stake he was kicked back and the flames renewed. Then it was that the flames consumed his body and in a few minutes only a few bones and a small part of the body was all that was left of Sam Hose.

One of the most sickening sights of the day was the eagerness with which the people grabbed after souvenirs, and they almost fought over the ashes of the dead criminal. Large pieces of his flesh were carried away, and persons were seen walking through the streets carrying bones in their hands.

When all the larger bones, together with the flesh, had been carried away by the early comers, others scraped in the ashes, and for a great length of time a crowd was about the place scraping in the ashes. Not even the stake to which the Negro was tied when burned was left, but it was promptly chopped down and carried away as the largest souvenir of the burning.

CHAPTER III.

ELIJAH STRICKLAND, A COLORED PREACHER, LYNCHED.

Sunday night, April 23d, a mob seized a well-known colored preacher, Elijah Strickland, and, after savage torture, slowly strangled him to death. The following account of the lynching is taken from the Atlanta Constitution:

Palmetto, Ga., April 24.—(Special.)—The body of Lige Strickland, the negro who was implicated in the Cranford murder by Sam Hose, was found this morning swinging to the limb of a persimmon tree within a mile and a quarter of this place, as told in the Constitution extra yesterday. Before death was allowed to end the sufferings of the Negro, his ears were cut off and the small finger of his left hand was severed at the second joint. One of these trophies was in Palmetto to-day.

On the chest of the Negro was a scrap of blood-stained

paper, attached with an ordinary pin. On one side this paper contained the following:

"N. Y. Journal. We must protect our Ladies. 23—99."

The other side of the paper contained a warning to the Negroes of the neighborhood. It read as follows:

"Beware all darkies. You will be treated the same way."

Before being finally lynched, Lige Strickland was given a chance to confess to the misdeeds of which the mob supposed him to be guilty, but he protested his innocence until the end.

Three times the noose was placed around his neck and the Negro was drawn up off the ground; three times he was let down with warnings that death was in store for him should he fail to confess his complicity in the Cranford murder, and three times Strickland proclaimed his innocence, until, weary of useless torturing, the mob pulled on the rope and tied the end around the slender trunk of the persimmon tree.

Not a shot was fired by the mob. Strickland was strangled to death. He was lynched about 2:30 a. m.

The lynching of Lige Strickland was not accomplished without a desperate effort on the part of his employer to save his life. The man who pleaded for the Negro is Major W. W. Thomas, an ex-State Senator, and one of the most distinguished citizens of Coweta County.

Sunday night, about 8:30 o'clock, about fifteen men went to the plantation of Major Thomas and took Lige Strickland from the little cabin in the woods that he called home, leaving his wife and five children to wail and weep over the fate they knew was in store for the Negro. Their cries aroused Major Thomas, and that sturdy old gentleman of the antebellum type followed the lynchers in his buggy, accompanied by his son, W. M. Thomas, determined to save, if possible, the life of his plantation darky.

He overtook the lynchers with their victim at Palmetto, and then ensued the weirdest and most dramatic scene this section has ever known, with only the moonlight to show the faces of the grim, determined men.

It had for its actors the Negro, apparently unconcerned even with the noose around his neck; the old white-haired gentlemen, pleading for the life of his servant, and attempting to prove the innocence of the Negro to men who would not be convinced.

Lige Strickland was halted directly opposite the telegraph office. The noose was adjusted around his neck and the end of the rope was thrown over a tree. Strickland was told he had a chance before dying to confess his complicity in the crime. He replied:

"I have told you all I know, gentlemen. You can kill me if you wish, but I know nothing more to tell."

The Negro's life might have been ended then but for the arrival of Major Thomas, who leaped from his buggy and asked for a hearing. He asked the crowd to give the Negro a chance for his life here on the streets of Palmetto, and Major Thomas said he would speak in his defense. A short conference resulted in acquiescence to this, and Major Thomas spoke in substance as follows:

"Gentlemen, this Negro is innocent. Hose said Lige had promised to give him \$20 to kill Cranford, and I believe Lige has not had \$20 since he has been on my place. This is a law-abiding Negro you are about to hang. He has never done any of you any harm, and now I want you to promise me that you will turn him over either to the bailiff of this town or to some one who is entitled to receipt for him, in order that he may be given a hearing on his case. I do not ask that you liberate him. Hold him and if the courts adjudge him guilty, hang him."

There were some, however, who agreed with Major Thomas, and after a discussion a vote was taken, which was supposed to mean life or death to Lige Strickland. The vote to let him live was unanimous.

Major Thomas then retired some distance and the mob was preparing to send Strickland in a wagon to Newnan when a member of the mob said:

"We have got him here, let's keep him."

This again aroused the mob and a messenger was sent to advise Major Thomas to leave Palmetto for his own good, but the old gentleman was not frightened so easily. He drew himself up and said with all the emphasis he could summon:

"I have never before been ordered to leave a town and I am not going to leave this one." And then the Major, uplifting his hand to give his words force, said to the messenger:

"Tell them that the muscles in my legs are not trained to running; tell them that I have stood the fire and heard the whistle of the minies from a thousand rifles and I am not frightened by this crowd."

Major Thomas was not molested.

Then, with the understanding that Lige Strickland was to be delivered to the jailer at Fairburn, Major Thomas saw the Negro he had pleaded for led off to his death. This occurred at about 1 o'clock this morning.

Strickland was then taken in the rear of the home of Dr. W. S. Zellars, to the persimmon tree upon which his lifeless body was left hanging.

CHAPTER IV.

REPORT OF DETECTIVE LOUIS P. LE VIN.

The colored citizens of Chicago sent a detective to Georgia, and his report shows that Samuel Hose, who was brutally tortured at Newnan, Ga., and then burned to death, never assaulted Mrs. Cranford and that he killed Alfred Cranford in self-defense.

The full text of the report is as follows:

About three weeks ago I was asked to make an impartial and thorough investigation of the lynchings which occurred near Atlanta, Ga., not long since. I left Chicago for Atlanta, and spent over a week in the investigation. The facts herein were gathered from interviews with persons I met in Griffin, Newman, Atlanta and in the vicinity of these places.

I found no difficulty in securing interviews from white people. There was no disposition on their part to conceal any part they took in the lynchings. They discussed the details of the burning of Sam Hose with the freedom which one would talk about an afternoon's divertimento in which he had very pleasantly participated.

Who was Sam Hose? His true name was Samuel Wilkes. He was born in Macon, Ga., where he lived until his father died. The family, then consisting of his mother, brother and sister, moved to Marshall, where all worked and made the reputation of hard-working, honest people. Sam studied and was soon able to read and write, and was considered a bright, capable man. His mother became an invalid, and as his brother was considered almost an imbecile, Sam was the mainstay of the family. He worked on different farms, and among the men he worked for was B. Jones, who afterward captured him and delivered him over to the mob at Newman.

Sam's mother partly recovered, and as his sister married, Sam left and went to Atlanta to better his condition. He secured work near Palmetto for a man named Alfred Cranford, and worked for him for about two years, up to the time of the tragedy. I will not call it a murder, for Samuel Wilkes killed Alfred Cranford in self-defense. The story you have read about a Negro stealing into the house and murdering the unfortunate man at his supper has no foundation in fact. Equally untrue is the charge that after murdering the husband he assaulted the wife. The reports indicated that the murderer was

a stranger, who had to be identified. The fact is he had worked for Cranford for over a year.

Was there a murder? That Wilkes killed Cranford there is no doubt, but under what circumstances can never be proven. I asked many white people of Palmetto what was the motive. They considered it a useless question. A "nigger" had killed a white man, and that was enough. Some said it was because the young "niggers" did not know their places, others that they were getting too much education, while others declared that it was all due to the influence of the Northern "niggers." W. W. Jackson, of Newman, said: "If I had my way about it I would lynch every Northern 'nigger' that comes this way. They are at the bottom of this." John Low, of Lincoln, Ala., said: "My negroes would die for me simply because I keep a strict hand on them and allow no Northern negroes to associate with them."

Upon the question of motive there was no answer except that which was made by Wilkes himself. The dispatches said that Wilkes confessed both to the murder and the alleged assault upon Mrs. Cranford. But neither of these reports is true. Wilkes did say that he killed Mr. Cranford, but he did not at any time admit that he assaulted Mrs. Cranford. This he denied as long as he had breath.

After the capture Wilkes told his story. He said that his trouble began with Mr. Cranford a week before. He said that he had word that his mother was much worse at home, and that he wanted to go home to visit his mother. He told Mr. Cranford and asked for some money. Cranford refused to pay Wilkes, and that provoked hard words. Cranford was known to be a man of quick temper, but nothing more occurred that day. The next day Cranford borrowed a revolver and said that if Sam started any more trouble he would kill him.

Sam, continuing his story, said that on the day Cranford was killed he (Sam) was out in the yard cutting up wood; that Cranford came out into the yard, and that he and Cranford began talking about the subject of their former trouble; that Cranford became enraged and drew his gun to shoot, and then Sam threw the ax at Cranford and ran. He knew the ax struck Cranford, but did not know Cranford had been killed by the blow for several days. At the time of the encounter in the yard, Sam said that Mrs. Cranford was in the house, and that after he threw the ax at Cranford he never saw Mrs. Cranford, for he immediately went to the woods and kept in hiding until he reached the vicinity of his mother's home, where he was captured. During all the time Sam was on the train going to the scene of the burning, Sam is said by all I

talked with to have been free from excitement or terror. He told his story in a straightforward way, said he was sorry he had killed Cranford and always denied that he had attacked Mrs. Cranford.

I did not see Mrs. Cranford. She was still suffering from the awful shock. As soon as her husband was killed she ran to the home of his father and told him that Sam had killed her husband. She did not then say that Sam had assaulted her. She was completely overcome and was soon unconscious and remained so for most of the next two days. So that at the time when the story was started that Sam had added the crime of outrage to murder, Mrs. Cranford, the only one who could have told about it, was lying either unconscious or delirious at the home of her father-in-law, G. E. Cranford.

The burning of Wilkes was fully premeditated. It was no sudden outburst of a furious, maddened mob. It was known long before Wilkes was caught that he would be burned. The Cranfords are an old, wealthy and aristocratic family, and it was intended to make an example of the Negro who killed him. What exasperation the killing lacked was supplied by the report of the alleged attack on Mrs. Cranford. And it was not the irresponsible rabble that urged the burning, for it was openly advocated by some of the leading men of Palmetto. E. D. Sharkey, Superintendent Atlanta Bagging Mills, was one of the most persistent advocates of the burning. He claimed that he saw Mrs. Cranford the day after the killing and that she told him that she was assaulted. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Cranford was unconscious at that time. He persistently told the story and urged the burning of Sam as soon as caught.

John Haas, President of the Capitol Bank, was particularly prominent in advocating the burning. People doing business at his bank, and coming from Newman and Griffin, were urged to make an example of Sam by burning him.

W. A. Hemphill, President and business manager, and Clark Howell, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, contributed more to the burning than any other men and all other forces in Georgia. Through the columns of their paper they exaggerated every detail of the killing, invented and published inflammatory descriptions of a crime that was never committed, and by glaring head lines continually suggested the burning of the man when caught. They offered a reward of \$500 blood money for the capture of the fugitive, and during all the time of the man-hunt they never made one suggestion that the law should have its course.

The Governor of the State acquiesced in the burning by refusing to prevent it. Sam Wilkes was captured at 9 o'clock

Saturday night. He was in Griffin by 9 o'clock Sunday morning. It was first proposed to burn him in Griffin, but the program was changed, and it was decided to take him to Newman to burn him. Governor Candler had ordered that Wilkes should be taken to the Fulton county jail when caught. That would have placed him in Atlanta. When Wilkes reached Griffin he was in custody of J. B. Jones, J. L. Jones, R. A. Gordon, William Matthews, P. F. Phelps, Charles Thomas and A. Rogowski. They would not take the prisoner to Atlanta, where the Governor had ordered him to be taken, but arranged to take him to Newman, where they knew a mob of six thousand were waiting to burn him. It is nearer to Atlanta from Griffin than Newman. Besides, there was no train going to Newman that Sunday morning, so the captors of Wilkes were obliged to secure a special train to take the prisoner to the place of burning. This required over two hours' time to arrange, so that the special train did not leave Griffin for Newman until 11:40 a. m.

Meanwhile the news of the capture of Wilkes was known all over Georgia. It was known in Atlanta in the early morning that the prisoner would not be brought to Atlanta, but that he would be taken to Newman to be burned. As soon as this was settled, a special train was engaged as an excursion train, to take people to the burning. It was soon filled by the criers, who cried out, "Special train to Newman! All aboard for the burning!" After this special moved out, another was made up to accommodate the late comers and those who were at church. In this way more than two thousand citizens of Atlanta were taken to the burning, while the Governor, with all the power of the State at his command, allowed all preparations for the burning to be made during ten hours of daylight, and did not turn his hand to prevent it.

I do not need to give the details of the burning. I mention only one fact, and that is the disappointment which the crowd felt when it could not make Wilkes beg for mercy. During all the time of his torture he never uttered one cry. They cut off both ears, skinned his face, cut off his fingers, gashed his legs, cut open his stomach and pulled out his entrails, then when his contortions broke the iron chain, they pushed his burning body back into the fire. But through it all Wilkes never once uttered a cry or beg for mercy. Only once in a particularly fiendish torture did he speak, then he simply groaned, "Oh, Lord Jesus."

Among the prominent men at the burning, and whose identity was disclosed to me, are William Pinton, Clair Owens and William Potts, of Palmetto; W. W. Jackson and H. W. Jack-

son, of Newman; Peter Howson and T. Vaughn, of the same place; John Hazlett, Pierre St. Clair and Thomas Lightfoot, of Griffin. B. J. Williams, ticket agent at Griffin, made up the special Central Georgia Railroad train and advertised the burning at Griffin, while B. F. Wyly and George Smith, of Atlanta, made up two special Atlanta and West Point Railroad trains. All of these gentlemen of eminent respectability could give the authorities valuable information about the burning if called upon.

While Wilkes was being burned the colored people fled terror-stricken to the woods, for none knew where the fury would strike. I talked with many colored people, but all will understand why I can give no names.

The torture and hanging of the colored preacher is everywhere acknowledged to have been without a shadow of reason or excuse. I did not talk with one white man who believed that Strickland had anything to do with Wilkes. I could not find any person who heard Wilkes mention Strickland's name. I talked with men who heard Wilkes tell his story, but all agreed that he said he killed Cranford because Cranford was about to kill him, and that he did not mention Strickland's name. He did not mention it when he was being tortured because he did not speak to anybody. I could not find anybody who could tell me how the story started that Strickland hired Wilkes to kill Cranford.

On the other hand, I saw many who knew Strickland, and all spoke of him in the highest terms. I went to see Mr. Thomas, and he said that Strickland had been about his family for years, and that he never knew a more reliable and worthy man among the colored people. He said that he was always advising the colored people to live right, keep good friends with the white people and earn their respect. He said he was nearly sixty years old and had not had five dollars at one time in a year. He defended the poor old man against the mob for a long time, and the mob finally agreed to put him in jail for a trial, but as soon as they had Strickland in their control they proceeded to lynch him.

The torture of the innocent colored preacher was only a little less than that of Wilkes. His fingers and ears were cut off, and the mob inflicted other tortures that cannot even be suggested. He was strung up three times and let down each time so he could confess. But he died protesting his innocence. He left a wife and five children, all of whom are still on Colonel Thomas' premises.

I spent some time in trying to find the facts about the shooting of the five colored men at Palmetto a few days before

Cranford was killed. But no one seemed to be able to tell who accused the men, and as they were not given a trial, there was no way to get at any of the facts. It seems that one or two barns or houses had been burned, and it was reported that the Negroes were setting fire to the buildings. Nine colored men were arrested on suspicion. They were not men of bad character, but quite the reverse. They were intelligent, hard-working men, and all declared they could easily prove their innocence. They were taken to a warehouse to be kept until their trial next day. That night, about 12 o'clock, an armed mob marched to the place and fired three volleys into the line of chained prisoners. They then went away thinking all were dead. All the prisoners were shot. Of these five died. Nothing was done about the killing of these men, but their families were afterward ordered to leave the place, and all have left. Five widows and seventeen fatherless children, all driven from home, constitute one result of the lynching. I saw no one who thought much about the matter. The Negroes were dead, and while they did not know whether they were guilty or not, it was plain that nothing could be done about it. And so the matter ended. With these facts I made my way home, thoroughly convinced that a Negro's life is a very cheap thing in Georgia.

LOUIS P. LE VIN.



Nancy
Hanks
Lincoln
Public
Library