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NOBLES PROTESTS INNOCENCE WITH HIS LAST BREATH

Columbus County Man Whom W. B. Keziah Said Was Guilty Electrocut

TWO WOMEN WITNESSES AND MANY MEN PRESENT

Protesting his innocence with his last conscious breath, and protesting against the current with his physical body, Daniel Milton Nobles died in the execution chamber of the state prison Tuesday morning, says the Raleigh News & Observer. He was in the grip of the current three minutes and 48 seconds.

So intense and prolonged was the voltage required to kill the shrinking, scared little figure that crouched within the straps that livid flames broke out from the electrode strapped on his leg, and ran around the knees, lapping at the ripped open trouser leg, and another leaped out from under the chin strap and curled up over the ears. The warden hastily checked the current and the flame died.

82 Witness Death Eighty men and two women, students from the State College Summer School looked on within the little chamber. Outside a crowd of more than a hundred people unable to gain entrance into the house of death, waited and watched eagerly at the windows. Some of them climbed the walls and peered down through the windows over the heads of those who stood in a dense semi-circle around the chair where Nobles was struggling unconsciously against death.

Mercifully consciousness was snapped out of the man before the attendants stepped back from strapping him in the chair, and the deadly bolt was shot home. His muttered scriptures died on his lips, and his body slumped against the straps. His breathing was imperceptible. The attending physician remarked in an undertone that he had lost consciousness as he turned away from the chair and gave the signal for death.

Smile Vanishes The sickly smile that played uncertainly over his face as he came through the door vanished as he sat down in the chair. His fingers sought the end of the arm of the chair and felt their way back. He glanced down with a faint show of interest as the electrode was strapped against his leg. There was a moment's delay as the attendants reached for the helmet and the breast straps.

"You can say whatever you want to say now—you haven't much time," Rev. S. J. Betts reminded him.

"Well, I hope I'll meet you all up yonder," he began uncertainly. "I have made peace with the good blessed Lord, and I know my time has come. I am innocent"—his voice trailed off into a long drawn sigh. Still the chin-straps were not in place. There was a little delay with the buckles that fasten the leather across the breast. "I am ready to go and I have made peace with the good blessed Lord," he repeated and was silent.

Mr. Betts Protest The heavy leather that fits across the chin was put in place and the buckles fastened. His lips were tightly compressed between them, and his face almost entirely hidden, except his nose, which was left free for the few final inhalations and exhalations

of breath. Nobles breathed faintly through the lips, and with perceptible effort.

"You are making it too tight," interposed Rev. Mr. Betts. In the grim silence of the room the words came almost with a shock of a pistol shot, sounding perhaps louder than they were. Sensation vibrated through the densely packed semi-circle, and stood over the chair looking directly into the face of the preacher, and pointing to a spot a little distance away.

Busbee's Retort

"Will you stand over there please," he said quietly. Mr. Betts moved over and said nothing more. The helmet was placed, and the wires attached. Water ran down out of the helmet, covering the face of the shrinking, motionless figure. The water was iced, but he gave no sign of consciousness when it touched him. The warden examined all trappings and stepped back into the antechamber and took hold of the switch.

Until that point the crowd had divided its interest between the two young women over beside the door, and the figure in the chair. There was a subdued speculation as to whether the two women would be able to stand the scene. Commotion ensued when a soldier wearing a sergeant's stripes, who had accompanied the party of young women, asked to be let out. A third woman who had come in with him, also wanted to get out.

Women Unconcerned

The names of the women were not disclosed. Both looked very young and not at all within the statutory age limits invoked by Warden Busbee before he closed the doors. He told everyone under 21 to get out. One of the women had bobbed hair and appeared not more than 17 years of age. The other, somewhat older, and hard-visaged. The younger turned away and did not watch the spectacle of death, but the older chewed her gum, smiled, and talked with her companion. Both are teachers in the public schools of the state.

Packed into the little room so densely that it was impossible to raise the arms out of the mass, the throng generated a terrific heat. The windows were raised, but little air could enter the place. Numbers of the throng there was straining but nobody collapsed. At the back of the throng there was straining and pushing among the spectators whose vision was entirely cut off from the center of the room where Nobles had already drifted to the unconscious threshold of death.

Bolt Shot Home

Suddenly the body was jerked taut and erect. The muscles in the neck, chest, and the bare legs were knotted. The veins were swelled until it seemed that they would burst. The flesh reddened under the intense heat of the high voltage raging through the body, but whitening where the knotted muscles were stretched against the skin. The heat crackled in the helmet, and a mist rose above the chair.

Seventy-one seconds the power moved through him and slacked off, but only for a brief interval while the body slumped down again deep into the straps. Then it jerked erect again, the knots came back in the muscles, the veins stood out livid against the lighter glow of the flesh for twenty seconds. The hum of the current grew fainter, and the body slowly sank back into the chair.

The stethoscope found the heart still fluttering against the breast, and after pouring a quart of water over the helmet and the leg electrode, the warden again shot the current home. Again the body rose up against the straps, and as the hand on the bolt moved it back and forth gently, increasing and diminishing the power, the body swayed with it, rising up and settling back as though the man were living and struggling to be freed of the fettering leather.

Sixty seconds more of that and still the stethoscope found life in the heart that was dying unwillingly. Again the body was jerked upward against the leathers and the full power of the current poured into it. The helmet crackled like a hickory fire. Smoke arose from the chin strap, and an instant later a little tongue of flame licked out and upward toward the ears.

Flesh Blazes Up

For a few seconds the current was slacked and the flame was withdrawn under the straps. The current roared again, and this time the flame, with a nauseous odor of burning flesh came out from under the straps around the calf of the leg. The smoke shot up toward the ceiling, with the flame following it until it almost caught the cloth of the trousers leg folded back above the knees. The warden saw and shut off the current. This time the stethoscope found no life. Daniel Milton Nobles was dead.

Instantly an attendant had opened the door. The warden directed the crowd to disperse, but they went slowly. They were packed in too tight to be moved quickly, and many wanted to see the body unstrapped from the chair. The burns on the leg were more severe than the marks left on his shaven skull. He was burned slightly about the face, but on the whole he looked little deadlier than when he leaned back in the chair five minutes before. The body was turning a dull blue and had become quite cold.

Women Giggle

The two women school teachers were the first to get out of the chamber. They giggled over something that somebody said to them as they passed through the door, and were gone from the enclosure before the most of the crowd had made its way into the open air again. The hearse had backed up to the door, and two men were waiting with a long basket to remove the body. Ten minutes later the grounds were quiet again after the killing of the convicted man killer.

Sixty days ago the same hearse

was waiting before the death house to cart away the same freight that it carried yesterday, but 31 minutes before his appointed hour Nobles was given a respite at the hands of the Governor until he might look more fully into the circumstances of the case. Having looked, the Governor declined to interfere further and Nobles died with the same story in his mouth that had moved the Governor two months ago.

Death has claimed many manlier victims than it had for its own yesterday, but none who stuck more closely to their story than did Nobles when he came down the corridor that at last had no turning. Many expected him to break down at the last minute and cry out for mercy. There was an expectant hush when his spiritual adviser prompted him to some last utterance yesterday morning as he waited to be harnessed to the chair.

But over and over again was his same old story, his same old plea of innocence, played against the odds of overwhelming evidence that it was his hand that struck down Henry Nobles, his first cousin, last September. Circumstantial and direct evidence that he did the killing, enough of it to convince a judge and jury and the Governor himself that he was guilty was in the scales beside his claim of innocence.

Few have believed him. Against him is a long court record, with road sentences for having cruelly assaulted his wife and children, carrying a concealed weapon, an assault with a deadly weapon, and finally the murder of his cousin, who was the chief prosecuting witness on the charge of assault with a deadly weapon. Besides three formal convictions, the community in which he has lived has convicted him of many other minor crimes.

But yesterday he was taken back to the remote township in Columbus county to be buried among the people who turned their backs upon him in his last extremity, and there will be none to weep above his grave but his faithful wife, who has suffered much at his hands, and the five children who are orphaned by the penalty the state required of their father.

Re-Admitted to Church

Two months ago, on the eve of the day set for his execution, Nobles was informed in a letter from the board of deacons of the church from which he had been expelled years before, that the congregation had refused to reinstate him in membership, and bluntly told him that unless he confessed the crime for which he was convicted, that they could do nothing but pray for him.

Despite came to save him from immediate death, and in the interim the congregation relented, and yesterday he died in the full fellowship of the church, and by sundown today he will be buried under the scrubby oaks in the churchyard not far from the spot where his cousin, whom he was convicted of killing, was buried ten months ago.

Too Much for Soldier

The experience of the brawny young soldier was in keeping with others who have been through all the horror that war can pour over a man, and then quail before the spectacle of a man strapped limb by limb into a wooden chair and the life banded out of him. The young soldier was 27 months overseas with the Ninth Infantry of the second division, and there is little of the war that he does not know.

On one day he saw his brother blasted to bits by a German shell. On many days he saw his regiment cut to pieces under the most disagreeable conditions. The day after his brother was killed he himself was smashed by machine gun fire. He ought to be injured to horror, but the thing that was done in the death chamber was too much for him.

His unwillingness to witness death as it was done in the death chamber yesterday puzzled many, amused some, and deeply impressed others who know of his record as a soldier. In deep contrast was the attitude of the two young women, one of them in particular who smiled and chewed her gum and giggled occasionally.

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