

AN
ACCOUNT
OF

Governor Wall's Escape in 1784, &c.

“ The affair which occasioned the proclamation is as follows : — A day
“ previous to captain Wall's leaving his government on the coast of Africa,
“ he ordered five foldiers to receive eight hundred lashes each : the conse-
“ quences were truly melancholy, as three of the unhappy sufferers died of
“ their wounds. Mr. Wall departed from Africa the day after the punish-
“ ment, and returned to England unacquainted with the death of the men ;
“ the officers of the garrison having arrived within a few days, immediately
“ laid their complaint before the privy-council. The surgeon who attend-
“ ed, when asked why he did not stop the punishment, which he had a
“ right to do? answered, Because he feared a similar fate. — Information
“ being given on oath, before a justice, two persons were dispatched to ap-
“ prehend captain Wall, who was then at Bath, at the house of a lady,
“ where they found him, and brought him from thence to Marlborough.
“ At this place he requested liberty to send for his wife, which being grant-
“ ed, he dispatched a messenger for the lady, at whose house he had been,
“ and she overtaking them at Reading, the men were prevailed upon to
“ permit the captain and his lady to lie together, the officers sitting up in
“ an adjacent room, in which they forgot there was a window. From
“ this window the captain descended, and taking a post coach, went off.
“ The next morning the officers took the lady into custody, and brought
“ her to town, where she was immediately discharged.”

AN
IMPARTIAL ACCOUNT
OF
GOVERNOR WALL;

DESCRIBING

HIS FAMILY.—THE GREAT INTEREST MADE BY THEM TO SAVE HIS LIFE.—HIS CONDUCT DURING HIS CONFINEMENT.—HIS EXPECTATION OF A FURTHER RESPITE.—HIS ENQUIRIES CONCERNING THE FATAL MACHINE.—HIS SPEAKING TO DR. FORD, THE ORDINARY.—THE CONDUCT OF THE POPULACE WHEN HE CAME ON THE SCAFFOLD,—AND, FINALLY

HIS EXECUTION.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 1802.

THIS morning, as early as six o'clock, the populace began to assemble opposite Newgate, and by half an hour after seven the croud was prodigious; all the windows and roofs of the houses were covered with spectators. The throng continued to increase every moment, and the most marked dissatisfaction seemed to reign amongst the multitude, in consequence of their having been twice before disappointed. Every individual appeared in a state of anxious uncertainty, some asserting that the execution would take place, but far the greater number were of a different opinion. The discontent at eight o'clock became general, and the murmurs seemed to threaten a riot; but, owing to the vigilance of the City Marshall, the constables, and their attendants, aided by the London Militia, who were all on duty, the tranquillity of the neighbourhood was preserved; even when the scaffold and drop were placed ready, still the populace would not believe the execution would take place. At five minutes after eight, Mr. Wall ascended the scaffold, and was received with three distinct huzzas from the populace. He was dressed in apparel far inferior to his condition; an old light brown mixed coat and black velvet collar, pantaloons and slippers: and held a handkerchief in his hand. At the moment he came on the scaffold, his looks were fixed on the ground. On coming forward, he turned his head towards Smithfield; he did not seem to wish to speak to the populace, but took Mr. Sheriff Cox by the hand, and said to Dr. Ford, the Ordinary, "I beg that I may not be pulled by the heels." This Dr. Ford communicated to the executioner, who, in whatever manner he took it, affixed the knot on the back of the prisoner's neck. The scene then about to take place was one of the most solemn and impressive ever displayed in the history of this country. An example, never to be forgotten, of the impartiality and vigilance of our system of Criminal Law was on the point of being presented. This was enough to command the respect even of the

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the multitude, and to restrain every appearance of tumult or disorder. It is with sincere regret, therefore, that we have to mention that the populace, at the moment when the rope was put about the neck of the wretched criminal, raised a shout,—we do not mean to say of savage triumph at the death of a fellow-creature, but surely of very reprehensible exultation at the sight of so solemn an event. We are willing to believe that it was merely a spontaneous expression of their detestation of inhumanity, and their approbation of the impartial distribution of justice in the punishment of a crime at which nature revolts; but still we cannot help saying that it was contrary to the well known feeling and compassion which so eminently distinguish the British character. The conduct of the unfortunate person was in the first instance firm, discovering no symptom of extraordinary emotion. This expression of the public opinion seemed, however, to shake his fortitude, and he turned to the executioner with some agitation, and requested him without delay to finish the punishment. When the platform fell, he made a motion as if he wished to drop without a jerk. His fall was accompanied by another shout from the multitude; a much shorter time was passed in the previous ceremony than usual. He was observed to struggle longer in that situation than any such sufferer had ever been observed to do. At the expiration of eleven minutes, it was, however, found necessary to pull his legs. At the end of the usual time, being about ten minutes after nine, the body was cut down, and conveyed in a cart to the theatre of dissection on Saffron-hill, escorted by the City Marshal and his attendants.

During the time of his confinement, previous to trial, he occupied the apartment which was formerly the residence of Mr. Ridgway, the bookseller. His wife lived with him for the last fortnight; she is a very accomplished woman, about his own age: although he was allowed two hours a day, from twelve to two, to walk in the yard, he did not once embrace this indulgence, and, during his whole confinement, never went out of his room, except into the lobby to consult with his Counsel. He lived well, and was at times very facetious, easy in his manners, and pleasant in conversation; but during the night he frequently sat up in his bed and sang psalms, overheard by his fellow prisoners. He had not many visitors; his only attendant was a prisoner, who was appointed for that purpose by the turnkey. After trial he did not return to his old apartment, but was conducted into a cell; he was so far favoured as not to have irons put on, but a person was employed as a guard to watch him during the night to prevent his doing violence to himself. His bed was brought to him in the cell, on which he threw himself in an agony of mind, saying, it was his intention not to rise until they called him on the fatal morning. The Sheriffs were particularly pointed and precise in their orders, with respect to confining him to the usual diet of bread and water preparatory to the awful event. This order was scrupulously fulfilled.

The prisoner, during a part of the night, slept, owing to fatigue and perturbation of mind. The next morning his wife applied, but was refused admittance without an order from one of the Sheriffs. She applied to Mr. Sheriff Cox, who attended her to the prison. From the time of the first respite, until twelve o'clock on Wednesday night, he did not cease to entertain hopes of his safety.

At eleven o'clock on Wednesday night Mr. Kirby went into the prisoner's cell with the man who was appointed to sit up with him. He inquired

quired if any news had arrived? he was told none. Mr. Sheriff Cox, who called upon him frequently before trial, about this time visited him in his cell. He expected a respite till twelve o'clock,—none then arriving, after the lapse of near an hour he inquired particularly whether the machine, in being brought out of the press-yard, would make a great noise, and enquired at what time? The attendant, being unwilling to discompose his mind, pretended to be ignorant of those matters. He fell asleep between four and five o'clock, and did not hear the noise of the fatal machine, which was brought out at five o'clock, although it shook the whole prison: but about twenty minutes after a mail-coach going by, he started, and said, "Is not that the fatal scaffold? The same person answered, no, observing it was the mail, and he might hear the horn blow with it. He did not go to sleep again; he asked many other questions, and enquired whether, being a tall man, he could not avoid the jerk in the falling of the scaffold, although it was done, he apprehended, to dislocate the neck of the sufferer, and put him sooner out of pain. He never had been off the bed, but to go to the water-closet, since condemnation.

The crowd, though prodigious, was said to be not so great as that which attended the execution of Adamson and Wilkinson for forgery, about three years ago; but the public indignation has never been so high since the death of Mrs. Brownrigg.

It appears when Mr. Wall came over from France, finding some of the witnesses still living, who he thought might have been dead, he had views of going again abroad; and from a conversation he had with a friend in his room, it appeared he had consulted the Attorney-General, and one of the Secretaries of State, upon the propriety of so doing; they advised him to stand the event of a trial.

The late Captain Armstrong was his private Agent, as well as Agent to the African Corps, of which Mr. Wall was Commandant. Mr. Wall was only Lieutenant-Governor of Sena-Gambia, but acted as Chief, the first appointment being vacant. It was an office he held but a short time, not more than two years. His emoluments were very considerable, as, besides his military appointments, he was Superintendent of Trade to the Colony.

His family were originally Roman Catholics, but of course he conformed to the Protestant Church, or he could not have held his commissions. He has a son in a respectable line of life; but he thought it prudent since his misfortune to say little concerning his family or relatives. Whilst abroad he went by another name.

The interest made to save Governor Wall is well known. The whole of Wednesday his case occupied the attention of the great Law-Officers; the Judges met at the Chancellor's in the afternoon. The conference lasted upwards of three hours.

Mrs. Wall, we believe, is sister to Lord Seaforth, and niece to the Marquis of Stafford, and Earl of Galloway one of the Lords of the Bedchamber. All these interests and others were exerted with the utmost vigour to save Mr. Wall, and the petitions presented to the King were numerous, as well as from powerful quarters; but His Majesty, with great firmness, resisted every application, and insisted that justice should take its course. The King has been prevailed on to grant some very unpopular pardons during his reign. In this instance he has ordered a popular execution. It is impossible persons in the upper circles

circles of life can believe that the Indignation and rage of the lower classes extended to the length they did. They contrasted Governor Wall's case with the sufferings of the Mutineers; every one who has a son or a brother in the army or navy became a partizan against Governor Wall, fearing that such Governors might, if he escaped, put their relatives to death with impunity. The cry was, **THE POOR GUILTY SUFFER; THE RICH GUILTY ESCAPE.** This subject has engaged more of the public attention than any other, even than the Definitive Treaty. Under these circumstances the King acted wisely in enforcing the sentence.

However, lamentable the unhappy fate of Governor Wall, its coincidence with that of the unhappy seamen, who have recently suffered at Portsmouth, is fortunate for the character of the nation and its government. It will bear testimony to Europe, and to the world, that, whatever inroads may have been made on British freedom, English justice still retains its original purity, and is still equally and impartially administered to the Peer and to the Peasant, making no distinction between the private and his commander, but punishing, protecting, and avenging all alike.

It will be a consolation to such of the British seamen as may be dejected and cast down by the melancholy, though just end of so many of their comrades, to find that no flimsy charge, no groundless imputation, no pretended mutiny, either imagined at the moment, or afterwards trumped up, as occasion may require, will be admitted as a justification of severities, causelessly and inhumanly inflicted. When they see the death of a simple Serjeant, without family, or friends, in a country whence the report of his wrongs might possibly have never reached home, now made the subject of a State Prosecution, conducted by the two principal criminal officers of the crown, with the assistance of a number of other highly respectable counsel, and the attendance of every witness, in the smallest degree necessary, collected with all the anxiety, that could have been bestowed on the case at the commencement of the prosecution in 1784, by the Widow and Orphan Children of the deceased, (if such he had, and they were rich enough to afford the expense), will they not rejoice to see that punishments are not for them alone, and that the proudest of those who rule them cannot tyrannise over them with impunity? It is natural to the ignorance of low situation to suppose that suffering is confined to its own class. In some countries this is unfortunately too much the fact. In ours, great crimes are rare in the higher ranks of society; but in the few instances that have occurred, the equality of justice has been enforced in a manner that gives every Peasant in the land reason to thank **HEAVEN**, that he was born in such a country.

The circumstances of the conviction and punishment of Mr. Wall are extremely striking. His withdrawing himself from justice in 1784; his voluntary return and surrender in the confidence of escaping; and the presence of every witness who could have originally appeared against him, or who was enabled to contradict those brought forward in his defence; will be, to superstitious minds, a strong confirmation of the belief, that Heaven interposes in a peculiar manner in the detection and punishment of murder. As a public example, there is nothing to diminish its effect. It is free from all those errors which might have infected a trial had under the immediate influence of popular odium, arising from
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the recency of the fact. In a period of eighteen years, the malice (if any there was) of the individuals who instituted the prosecution must have subsided, and they must now be governed by truth alone. Public horror and public animosity had abated. The Ministers of the present day are free from those passions arising from representations made directly to them of the fact, or from the universal cry of indignation against the man, which might, in some degree, have actuated those of 1784.

There is none of that headlong and over-ardent zeal for justice, ill understood, such as governed the trials of Lally, Byng, and Hastings, and have often led to determinations afterwards lamented and condemned when it was too late. Mr Wall was unquestionably not sacrificed to private faction, to popular fury, nor to ministerial cabal. The statement of the Attorney-General was a mixture of candour, moderation and energy; perfectly consonant to the idea of SHAKESPEARE,

“ Nothing extenuate, or set down aught in malice,”

It was a plain narrative of facts, without any other comment than the opinion of the law how far they were criminal. Never did a Jury go into a box with less of prejudice, or of any matter extraneous to the cause, that could be supposed to have an improper influence on their decision, never was the whole of the proceedings listened to with more attention, never was evidence summed up more accurately by a Judge, law stated more distinctly, or facts put to the Jury more fairly and properly. — The Verdict of the Jury was unquestionably just. The Law has done the rest.

We shall not expatiate upon the crime, after an event which washes away all crimes, and suffers only the bare record to remain for the instruction of futurity. The fact will live in our History, as a monument of national justice, and as a warning to those who are entrusted with great powers, in places remote from control and superintendence, to use those powers with justice and moderation; and our seamen will reflect with satisfaction, that, while the Judge-Advocate of the Admiralty is prosecuting disobedience and breach of discipline at Portsmouth; the Attorney-General of the King, is obtaining justice against cruelty and abuse of power in London.

THE END.

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To which is added, an Account of the Execution.

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