

THE HUNGERFORD MURDERS.

EXECUTION AT READING GAOL.

At half-past ten on the night of Monday the 11th of December, two dreadful murders were committed near the town of Hungerford; at eight o'clock on the morning of the 12th of March, exactly thirteen weeks afterwards, two unhappy men were executed as being the perpetrators of this barbarous tragedy. The details of this sickening story have been repeated in our columns, and no good purpose would now be served by repeating them. As no consecutive account of the legal proceedings connected with this deplorable event has yet appeared, we append a brief summary.

On December the 12th, the day following the murder, the inquest was opened before Mr. J. Mathew, the Coroner and Constable of Hungerford; on the following Friday, December the 15th the adjourned inquest was resumed, and a verdict of "wilful murder" returned against the four prisoners—William Day, William Tidbury, Henry Tidbury, and Francis George Tidbury, who had each and all been apprehended on the morning following the murders.

The crime was next investigated by the Magistrates, before whom the accused were brought seven times, namely Tuesday December 12th, (a formal remand), Tuesday the 19th, Friday the 22nd, Saturday the 23rd, Friday the 29th, Friday, January 5th, and Friday the 12th, when all four prisoners were committed for trial at the Berks County Assizes, at Reading.

The trial at the Assizes commenced on the morning of Monday the 12th of February, and occupied that day and the following day, terminating at ten o'clock with a verdict of wilful murder against Henry Tidbury and Francis George Tidbury, the latter being recommended by the Jury to mercy. The Jury further found that William Tidbury was an accessory after the fact, but acquitted William Day. On the following morning William Day and William Tidbury were further arraigned, but no evidence being offered were discharged.

The case occupied the attention of the Coroner's Court 10½ hours; the Bench of Magistrates 27 hours; and the Court of Assize 20½ hours. On two occasions, it may be explained, when brought before the Magistrates no evidence was taken.

The last scene in this terrible drama was enacted this (Monday) morning, when the two men Henry Tidbury and Francis George Tidbury suffered the extreme penalty of the law.

The prisoners went to bed at eleven and rose about six, they slept well and ate a hearty breakfast at a quarter to seven. At a quarter past seven they attended service in the Chapel. At a quarter to eight the prisoners were pinioned in their cells, and at three minutes to eight a procession was formed and passed through the yard to the photographic room, which had been arranged for the execution. The rope was first adjusted round the neck of the younger prisoner, and the cap drawn over his face. The elder prisoner Henry Tidbury was then served in the same manner. While this was being done the chaplain said the Lord's prayer, the funeral service having been read while the procession was passing to the place of execution. The Lord's Prayer was repeated in an audible voice by Henry Tidbury, but less audibly by Francis George, who suffered from emotion. At the close the prisoners repeated Amen quite distinctly. After a pause of three quarters of a minute the silence of which was broken only by the exclamation of "Hallelujah" from one of the prisoners, the bolt was drawn and the bodies disappeared. A screen prevented the bodies being seen, but it was evident that they died, as the executioner affirmed, without a struggle. The drop was about six and a-half feet, and the arrangements of the scaffold were the same as at Newgate, and in every respect perfect. The execution was witnessed by the gaol officials, ten reporters, and only one other person. About ten minutes afterwards the reporters, as the representatives of the people, were permitted by the under Sheriff to view the bodies. They were at this time perfectly motionless. The prisoners were dressed in corduroys and short slops. The elder prisoner was very pale, but calm and collected, and stood firm and unflinching while the rope was

adjusted round the neck of his brother. Francis George stood crouching, and appeared to undergo much mental torture. At the end of the Lord's Prayer he added, "Lord have mercy upon me, Christ have mercy upon me." The proceedings outside the gaol were very quiet. At eight o'clock there were about 500 persons present and four minutes afterwards the black flag was hoisted. The general remark was, "It's all over," and the greater number immediately left.

THE CONFESSION OF HENRY TIDBURY.

This voluntary statement was made by Henry Tidbury on the 10th March, 1877.

On the 11th of December last my brother William came to my house and told me that he was going up to Mr. Piggott's along with Day, his father-in-law, to put a plug in the engine. Then we three brothers started together from home to meet Day at the turnpike-gate; but when we got to the gate Day was not there, so we went up the hill, and when we got nearly to the top of the hill my brother William hollered, "Bill," to Day, but where anyone answered or not I cannot tell, for I am rather deaf, so I did not hear anyone. Then we went on up to Mr. Piggott's farm, and when we got to the farm my brother Frank and me went on up to Mr. Piggott's border to see if we could see anything to shoot, but we did not. Then we went to Duncan's-wood and shot two pheasants and a jay. Then we came away to go home, went along the field behind Thomas Bryant's house at Picket-lot, and came out at the gate and went on down the road, and when we got down to the box the policemen ran out to us. We turned to run away. They caught hold of Frank and I went back to them. Then they caught hold of me. Then we had a struggle. He said Tidbury is that you, and I found that we could not get away. Then I shot him and he fell down. The other policeman caught hold of us. He found that we was too much for him. Then he ran away. Then my brother and me run after him and hit him with our guns, and we hit him when he was down and killed him. Then we went back, and when we got to the Mr. Drewett was staggering in the road and I hit again with my gun, but I don't know whether my brother hit or not—that he knows but Mr. Drewett said don't kill a man; but we took no notice for we was so angry. Then my brother William came down the road and my brother Francis went to him, and Francis says to me here is Bill. Then I went to him and told him what had happened, and told him not to tell anyone about it and he said he would not. Then William went back to meet Day and Francis and me went across the field to go home, but we did not make them two gaps, as people said was made. We did not get over the hedge there at all. We went along Beggar's lane along ways, and then went through a gap across the field to go home. Then after I got home I went into my brother William and Day's house, and they told me that they had seen a man lay in the road. I said let us go and see who it is, but Day said, no or else people will say that we done it, so we did not go. Then I and Francis went and hid our two guns and the powder and shot by the side of the water; then I went and hid the two pheasants in Mr. Hofland's dunghheap, then I went home again and washed myself and went to bed but I could not sleep for I was frightened so much that I did not know what to do, but I did not tell my wife that we had done that wicked deed. My brother Francis and me had a gun each, but I cannot say whether Day had his gun or not, but people says there was a cap on the gun belonging to Day, and people says the string and the tobacco-box both was Day's, but I cannot think how the tobacco-box came there against the policeman, for I had not got any box nor the string with me. The morning after the men was killed, my brother William called me up about half-past four, and told me to go into his house and tell Day if any one ask him if he saw anyone lay in the road last night he was to say no. So I went in and told him the words my brother told me. When we started away from home we had no thought of seeing them two poor men, not the least whatever, or else we would not have come that way whatever. I had forgot my brother Francis and me hid the guns before I went into William Day's house. I don't think my brother Francis would have begun rough with them if I had not begun first. After I began I told Francis to hit them; then Francis began with them, and shot his gun off towards Shorter; then Shorter ran away; we both ran after him.

(Signed) HENRY TIDBURY.

The confession of Francis George Tidbury will appear in a later edition.