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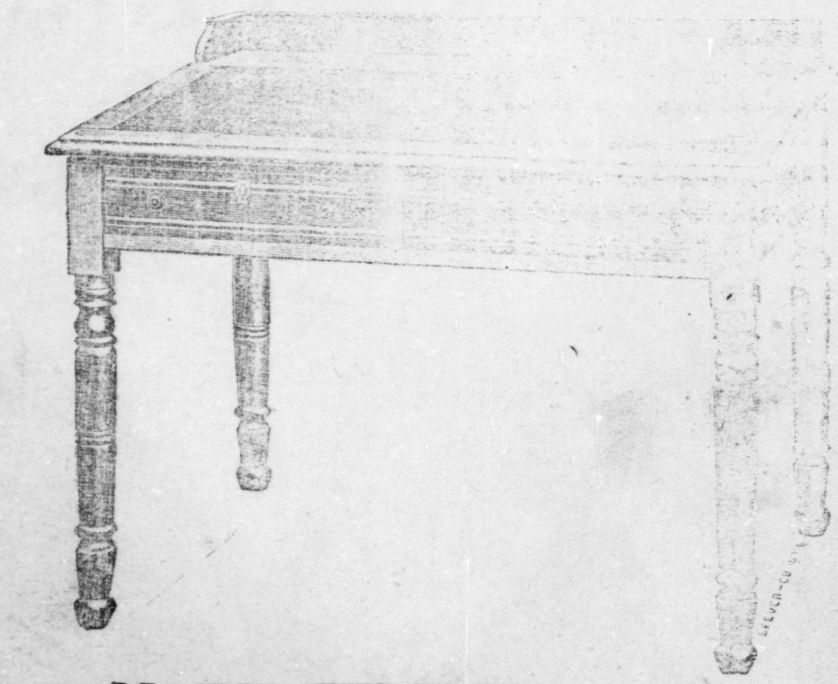

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Abominable

DES NEGRES FONT BRULER UNE MERE ET SES CINQ ENFANTS

LA PEINE DU TALION

Un des coupables avoue le crime et la population l'attache à un poteau et le brûle vif

La petite ville de Sainte Anne, située à 20 milles de Canton, Mississipi, a été le théâtre d'une horrible exécution sommaire ayant pour point de départ un crime abominable. Un nègre nommé Joe Leflore, arrêté par les agents du shérif, a avoué qu'avec deux autres nègres il avait attaché Mme Gambrell et ses quatre enfants sur le plancher de la maison, avait inondé le plancher de pétrole, et y avait mis le feu, de sorte que les cinq infortunés ont été brûlés vifs. On avait pensé d'abord que l'incendie dans lequel la famille Gambrell avait péri était le résultat d'un accident. Mais un examen des lieux a bientôt démontré sans doute possible qu'un crime avait été commis, et le shérif a assermenté des agents qui se sont mis à battre le pays dans toutes les directions. Avant leur départ de Sainte Anne, on avait constaté la disparition de Joe Leflore, un nègre habitant près de la maison Gambrell et qui avait joui jusqu'alors d'une bonne réputation.

Le lendemain [illegible] un groupe d'agents l'a trouvé à quelques milles de la ville et l'a arrêté. Leflore a [illegible] ses [illegible] d'abord il [illegible] rien du crime; mais au bout de quelque temps il a perdu son assurance et il a fini par avouer sa culpabilité, en dénonçant deux autres nègres, les frères Bob et Andrew Smith, comme [illegible] et a dit qu'il n'espérait pas qu'on lui [illegible] grâce. Leflore a été ramené à Sainte-Anne; sur l'emplacement où s'élevait la maison Gambrell avant l'incendie, on l'a attaché à un poteau, un bûcher a été dressé autour de lui et on l'a brûlé vif.

Pendant les [illegible] de personnes qui ont assisté à son supplice, il ne s'en est pas trouvé une pour lui envoyer une balle dans le cœur et mettre fin à ses souffrances. Pendant l'exécution de Leflore, Andrew Smith a été [illegible] à s'échapper [illegible] qu'il sera [illegible] ce qui ne [illegible] tarder, il aura sans aucun doute le même sort que son complice.

Quant à Bob Smith, il avait été attaché à un autre poteau et allait être également brûlé vif, quand on a découvert qu'il lui serait peut être possible de prouver son innocence et on lui a fait grâce provisoirement.

Le Baptême sur l'Echafaud

Le missionnaire qui se dévoue à une vie de privations et de fatigues pour le salut de ses frères n'attend pas sa récompense sur la terre; mais n'a-t-il pas quelquefois de touchantes consolations dans l'exercice de son saint ministère? On en jugera par le récit suivant, dont nous pouvons garantir l'authenticité:

Le P. Birmingham a sa résidence au village de Barnwell, diocèse de Charleston, Caroline du Sud; mais il dessert, en outre, huit stations, situées à de grandes distances les unes des autres, et il les visite mensuellement.

Le vendredi, 19 mai dernier, le missionnaire se rendait à Abbeville, l'une de ses stations, lorsque au milieu de la campagne il fut frappé d'un spectacle étrange.

Devant lui, une centaine de chevaux sellés et bridés étaient attachés à des arbres, mais sans cavaliers. Autour de l'un un certain nombre de voitures de fermiers, tout attelées, longeaient le chemin, sans qu'aucun être humain parût à distance. Qu'est ce que cela voulait dire? Que pouvaient être devenus les occupants de ces chariots abandonnés?

Est-ce que par hasard il y aurait une élection? Mais les hurrahs de la foule indiqueraient l'exercice de ce droit constitutionnel. Et aucun bruit ne se faisait entendre.

Après avoir gravi une colline le mot de l'énigme devait lui être donné. Sur le versant opposé était assemblée une multitude d'hommes et de femmes, et au fond de la vallée se dressait un échafaud. On allait procéder à l'exécution d'un esclave noir, condamné pour meurtre.

Une idée vint aussitôt au prêtre, c'est que le malheureux n'avait pas été baptisé. Stimulé par cette pensée, il presse l'allure de son cheval, et arrive au moment où le shérif, seul avec le condamné sur la bascule fatale, [illegible] de la lecture de la sentence. Le prêtre demande la permission d'entretenir quelques instants le pauvre nègre; et, sur l'autorisation pleine de charité du shérif, le dialogue suivant s'engage sur le seuil de l'éternité:

—Appartenez-vous à aucune église?

—Non, répondit le meurtrier.

—Avez-vous jamais été baptisé?

—Non, que je sache.

—Savez-vous donc, reprend le prêtre, que Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ est mort pour les pécheurs et qu'il pardonna au voleur repentant sur la croix. Vous allez [illegible] paraître devant lui; si vous le voulez, je vous baptiserai.

—Je le veux bien, répond le nègre.

—[illegible] que vous détestiez sincèrement vos péchés, si vous voulez être digne de recevoir le baptême.

—Je les déteste du fond du cœur [illegible] et un torrent de larmes inonde son visage.

Le prêtre reprend alors au P. Birmingham que le nègre a [illegible] aussitôt a[illegible] [illegible] qu'il est livré [illegible] à la [illegible] a été condamné sur son [illegible] agenouillé.

—Mettez-vous à genoux, dit le missionnaire au pénitent qui porte déjà le nœud fatal au cou, et répétez après moi l'acte de contrition.

Le nègre prononça alors l'acte de contrition à haute voix; le prêtre versa l'eau purificatrice sur son front; le bonnet noir est abattu sur le visage du supplicié pour en cacher les contorsions, et la trappe disparaît sous les pieds du nouveau chrétien, qui est lancé dans l'éternité en répétant: "O Jésus, ayez pitié de moi!"

La foule, venue de plusieurs lieues pour satisfaire une curiosité cruelle, était saisie de surprise et de respect, et la plupart des assistants, quoique protestants ou infidèles, ont vu dans la réunion des circonstances un arrangement providentiel.

En se rendant au lieu du supplice, le nègre s'était enquis si aucun ministre n'était présent, ou si personne ne voulait venir prier avec lui. Nul n'avait répondu à ce désir suprême du mourant, et c'est à ce moment que le v[illegible] ministre de l'Eglise de Dieu [illegible] apparut pour lui ouvrir les portes du ciel.

O puissance étonnante de la prière auprès de Celui qui a dit: "Demandez et vous recevrez; frappez et il vous sera ouvert!"

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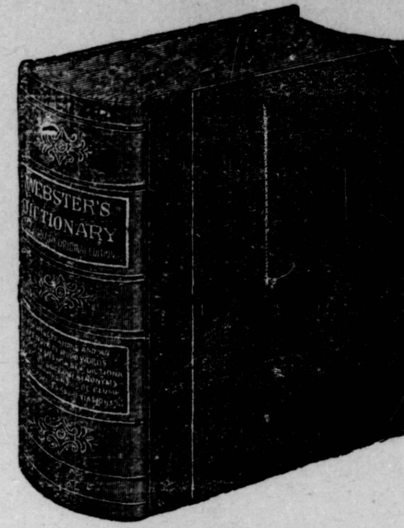

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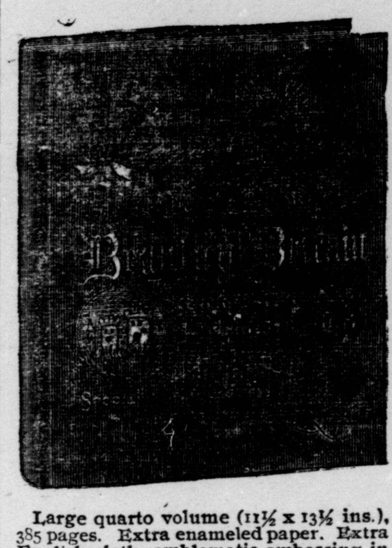

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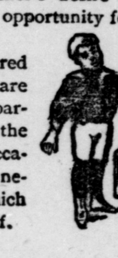

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