

Tragedy in Morgan County—A Prisoner Lynched

Yesterday we copied an article from the Warsaw Democrat, stating that a man named James Ray had poisoned a spring in Morgan county, by which thirteen or fourteen children were poisoned. The citizens of the county were looking for the villain, for the purpose of hanging him. The details of the affair is thus given in a letter from Morgan County to the Jefferson Inquirer:

MORGAN COUNTY, Tuesday, July 9, '56

"About the 2d of this month, the spring belonging to the Prairie District of Morgan county, was found to be poisoned, or at least the people imagined so, with a just cause, I suspect.

"There were at this time thirteen or fourteen children and the teacher who, after partaking of the water were taken very sick. The spring was analyzed and found to contain arsenic, at least the doctors in that neighborhood thought so. A man by the name of James Ray, who had about a week before perjured himself in the court of Morgan, and his word was proved to pass for nothing by thirteen or fourteen neighbors, and who swore that he would be revenged on the whole neighborhood and who, to make the evidence more strong against him, had taken his children away from school a day or two before, was taken up upon suspicion, but there not being sufficient evidence against him, was told that if he would leave the county within five days, escorted by a guard to the limits of the county, and the State as soon as possible, he might go. He was taken to a house and a guard put over him, but owing to treachery or negligence he was allowed to escape. He then went to Hickory county, and several persons pursued him and took him upon the 6th of July to that county, when they brought him back and determined to hang him.

This morning, runners were started before day-break to announce the intelligence. I went up to the schoolhouse which was his prison, when I arrived I found the crowd assembled around a rock on the summit of which was a Minister of the Gospel, named Mr. Green, addressing the mob. After a few remarks he called the immediate neighbors around him, to the number of seventeen or eighteen, who had children at the school, to decide on the person's fate. They consulted together for a few moments, when he (Mr. Green) announced that they had decided that the prisoner should die in one hour a brief time to be summoned before an offended God and to eternity.

There was no excitement, no noise—all was quiet and orderly. The prisoner, who was very calm, spent most of the hour given him in prayer and looked at the clock only twice to see how rapidly the time flew by, and gave no other signs of uneasiness, and was as cool as possible. At the end of the hour, he was taken out and got upon horse-back himself, when he was escorted to the gallows, which was a limb that had been fixed but a few moments before. He then declared that a paper, headed "James Ray's Confession," should be read aloud before and after his death. Mr. Green, who took a prominent part in it, as he had two children who were expected to die every moment from the effects of the poisoned water, read it aloud, but it was only a repetition of his views of innocence. The prisoner was then given thirty minutes to speak, and commenced:

Gentlemen and honorable citizens of Morgan county and State of Missouri—I come not to plead for mercy. I am an innocent man; I do not come before you with a darkened forehead or a downcast eye, I come determined to die brave, and I shall die without a tear in my eye. Gentlemen, take care of my poor wife and children, and see that they have plenty to eat and to wear."

He looked up at the limb and not a muscle of his face quivered, he only spoke twenty minutes, and had ten minutes more, he asked to pray during that time and said "I will not keep you long, gentlemen, and if I am a minute or two over my time, I hope you will excuse me."

He then got upon the bench, and remarked that he thought that the rope was too short, as he wanted to fall farther, that he might die easy, as he had seen persons before die hard when they did not have fall enough. The rope was fixed around his neck, and he tied the handkerchief over his face himself, and called all of his friends to tell them good by, he kissed one or two of them, and said "I am innocent," when the bench was pulled from under him but the rope, not being fast right, he had to be lifted up again until the rope was properly adjusted, when he died in about five minutes. There was about 20 or 30 persons present, and no one said a word in his favor.