

The memoirs of a protestant, condemned to the galleys of France for his religion (1895)

The day I arrived an unfortunate slave was bastinadoed :

The Criminal is stript from the Waist upward. He is extended with his Face downward, his Arms upon one Bench, and his Legs upon the Opposite, which are held by two Slaves that stand opposite each other. The Executioner, who is generally a Turkish Slave, stands over him with a Rope in his Hand, with which he is to beat the Criminal without the least Mercy ; for if he happens to be remiss, which is seldom the case, the Sous Comite [galley sergeant] uses him as he should have used the Criminal. Thus then every Stroke is laid on with the Executioner's whole Force, so that each Blow raises a Wheal as thick as one's Thumb. Few that are condemned to suffer this Punishment, can sustain above ten or twelve Blows without fainting. This, however, does not prevent the Executioner from proceeding. He continues to lay on the miserable and seemingly lifeless Carcase, till the Number of Blows ordered by the Major are Completed. Twenty or thirty are generally inflicted for slight Offences. I have seen fifty, eighty, even an hundred ordered; but then those who are thus punished seldom recover. When the allotted Number of Stripes are given, the Surgeon Barber of the Galley rubs the Criminal's Back with Salt and Vinegar ; which, though it may prevent a Gangrene, yet renews all the Poignancy of his former Anguish.

Yet a Slave must sometimes lengthen out his Toil for Ten, Twelve ; nay, for Twenty Hours, without the smallest Intermission. On these Occasions the Comite or some of the other Mariners put into the Mouths of those Wretches a Bit of Bread steeped in Wine, to prevent Fainting through Excess of Fatigue or Hunger, while their Hands are employed upon the Oar. At such Times are heard nothing but horrid Blasphemies, loud Bursts of Despair, or Ejaculations to Heaven ; all the Slaves streaming with Blood, while their unpitying Task- Masters mix Oaths and Threats, and the smacking of Whips, to fill up this dreadful Harmony. At this Time the Captain roars to the Comite to redouble his Blows; and when any one drops from his Oar in a Swoon, which not unfrequently happens, he is whipped while any Remains of Life appear, and then thrown into the Sea without further Ceremony.

The Wounded were thrown indiscriminately into the Hold ; Petty Officers, Sailors, Soldiers, and Slaves : there was no Distinction of Places, no Bed to lie upon, nor any Succour to be had. With Respect to myself, I continued three Days in this miserable Situation : The Blood coming from my Wounds was stopped by a little Spirit of Wine ; but there was no Bandage used, nor did the Surgeon once come to examine whether I was dead or alive. In this suffocating Hole, the Wounded, who might otherwise have survived, died in great Abundance. The Heat and the Smell were intolerable, so that the slightest Sore seemed disposed to mortify; while those who had lost limbs, or received large Wounds, went off by an universal Putrefaction. In this deplorable Situation we at last arrived at Dunkirk where the Wounded were put on Shore, in order to be carried to the Marine Hospital. We were drawn up from the Hold by Pulleys, and carried to the Hospital on Men's Shoulders.