

EXECUTION

AND

AWFUL CONFESSION

OF

EDWARD ROBERTSON,

AND

MATTHEW M'QUEEN,

WHO WERE

EXECUTED AT SYDNEY,

*For the Murder of Three of their
Companions.*



EDINBURGH:

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EXTRACTED FROM THE

From the contents of Van Dieman's Land Papers, recetved on Saturday, we copy the following paragraph:—

On Friday last, Edward Robertson and Matthew M'Queen, convicted of absconding from the penal settlement of Macquarrie Harbour, were executed.

From the Hobart Town Courier of Feb. 13, we extract the following statement, which Robertson himself had given, and which was publicly read in the press room, by his own desire, whilst the executioner was pinnioning his arms, and adjusting the rope:—That he was now 28 years of age, and had been sentenced to death for robbing in Scotland, under aggravated circumstances, at the early

age of 18. He had more than once endeavoured to rob his own mother; and his horrible conduct was the means of breaking his father's heart, and hurrying him to the grave. He was confined in Guilford gaol; and had, altogether, spent more years in gaols than at liberty. On his transportation to this colony, he had scarcely landed in Hobart Town when he commenced robberies. He was at last apprehended for an outrage which he committed at Sandy Bay, tried, and transported to Macquarrie Harbour.

We have already stated that the party of runaways from Macquarrie Harbour, consisted originally of five men, viz.—Richard Hutchinson, commonly called Up-and-down Dick, a tall man, who had, at one time, a large flock of sheep, and a herd of cattle, at Berk-hut plains, between the Clyde and Shannon, near the spot where Culny Park now is, the estate of Captain Clark; of an old man named Coventry, about 60 years of age; Patrick Fagan, a boy of a most depraved character, aged about 18 years; and the two malefactors, Robertson and M'Queen, who suffered on the gallows on Friday. These men happened to be at one of the out-stations of Macquarrie Harbour, and were in charge of one man, a constable.

This constable, Robertson declared, had shown him many personal kindnesses, and refused nothing in his power; nevertheless, on their departure, he joined with his four companions in robbing him of every article he had, not leaving him even a loaf of bread to subsist on, though he was without a morsel, and three days must have elapsed before he could obtain any more from the main settlement; and Robertson had, besides, at various times, tried to be accessory to his death, by letting a tree fall upon him without giving him notice, or by other mean, for no other earthly reason than because he was a constable, and the unwilling or passive instrument of flogging the men; and he, therefore, hated him. One would have thought that these five men, thus embarked in a most perilous journey, would have been knit together in one interest for their mutual safety and protection. They viewed each other with the most murderous feeling, jealous of the possession of the only axe which they carried amongst them, lest one should drive it into the head of the other; for that was the mode of slaughter upon on another, while the wretched victim was asleep. The demon of evil had possession, and walked in the midst of them. Every principle—every feeling of

humanity was dead amongst them. Robertson called himself a Protestant, and M, Queen, Roman Catholic—that is, they had sprung from parents professing these persuasions; but, as for themselves, they had neither of the least spark of religion; they knew no more what it was than the earth on which they trod. They walked in each other's company, the one carrying his luckless body for the support of the other wherever it might be convenient for him to sacrifice him for the heal. Five times worse than the wretched horde of Abyssinians, who cut the flesh, as they travel, from the back of the living beast.

As soon as the provisions which they had contrived to carry with them were exhausted, the other four agreed among themselves to kill Hutchinson, and to eat his body for support; and they drew lots among them who should be the one to drive the fatal axe into his head. The lot fell on Robertson, who carried it into execution. They cut the body into pieces, and carried it with them, with the exception of the hands, feet, and intestines. They ate heartily of it, as Robertson expressed it. It lasted them some days; and when it was nearly all consumed, a general alarm seized the whole party. The greatest jealousy prevailed about carrying the axe, and

scarce one amongst them dared to shut eyes or doze for a moment, for fear of be sacrificed unawares. Under these dreadful circumstances, Robertson and Fagan made a sort of agreement between them, that while one slept the other should watch, alternately. "We were always alarmed. The next man who was murdered was Coventry, the old man who he was cutting wood one night, and Robertson and I agreed, in the mean time, to kill him together. M'Queen and Fagan wanted to draw lots to see again who should kill him, but I said no, for I had already killed my man, and they ought to do it between them, that they might be in the same trouble as me. Fagan struck him the first blow. He saw him coming and called out for mercy: he struck him on the head, just above the eye, but did not kill him. Myself and M'Queen finished him off and cut him in pieces. We ate greedily of the flesh, never sparing it, just as if we expected to meet with a whole bullock next day. I used to carry the axe by day, and lay it under me at night. I thought I was safe, forgetting that they had knives and tom-cors. Before we had ate all Coventry's flesh M'Queen started up, one night, looking horribly, and bade me come with him to get some snares to catch a kangaroo. We lit Fagan by the fire, and when we had got

out 200 yards he asked me to sit down. He had the axe upon my shoulder, and I was afraid he wanted to kill me, for he was stronger than I. So I threw the axe aside, as far from him as I could, for fear he would try to snatch it—that I should reach before him if he did. But he wanted me to kill Fagan, that he might not be evidence against us. I would not agree to it, saying, I could not trust my life in his hands, and we turned to the fire.

“On our return, Fagan was lying by the fire warming himself. I threw down the axe; and he looked up and said, ‘Have you set any snares down, Ned?’ I said, ‘No; there are snares enough, if you did but know.’ I sat beside him. M’Queen was beyond me: he was on my right, and Fagan on my left. I was wishing to tell Fagan what had passed, but could not, as M’Queen was sitting with the axe close by looking at us. I lay down, and was in a doze, when I heard Fagan scream out. I leaped on my feet, in a dreadful fright, and saw Fagan lying on his back, with a dreadful cut in the head, and the blood pouring from it. M’Queen was standing over him, with the axe in his hand. I said, ‘You murdering scoundrel, you b—y dog! what have you done?’ He said, ‘This will save our lives;’ and

struck him another blow on the head with the axe. Fagan only groaned after the scream. M. Queen then cut his throat with a razor through the windpipe. We then stripped off his clothes, and cut the body in pieces and roasted it. We roasted it all at once, upon all occasions, as it was lighter to carry, and would keep longer. About four days after that, we gave ourselves up at Macguire Marsh, a hut belonging to Mr Nicholas, at the junction of the Shannon and the Ouse or Big River. Two days before, we heard some dogs that had caught a kangaroo, and threw away the remainder of Fagan's body. I wish this to be made public after my death.

“ EDWARD ROBERTSON.”