

OLD TIMES.

ANOTHER OF H. D. BARROWS'S VALUABLE PAPERS.

He Recalls the Circumstances of the Murder of John Sanford—A Desperado of a Generation Ago—A Bloody Career.

H. D. Barrows, the well-known merchant, whose long residence here and retentive memory enable him to speak of the old days in Los Angeles as few can, is contributing a series of interesting reminiscences to the Santa Monica Outlook. The latest installment follows:

Some time in the year 1862 John Sanford, a brother of Capt. William Sanford, who was killed on the steamer *Ida Hancock*, and of Cyrus Sanford, of La Ballona, and Gen. Banning's first wife, was returning in a buggy from Los Angeles to his ranch, near Ft. Tejon, when he took in a stranger, a youngish man, who asked for a ride. Mr. Sanford had occasion in the course of the journey to alight, whereupon his black-hearted companion, with crafty, devilish intent, took Sanford's own pistol, which was lying in the buggy, and shot him in the back, dead. The murderer, who afterward gave his name as Charles Wilkins, coolly avowed that he killed Sanford, who, till that fatal ride, was an entire stranger to him, to see if he had money. He did not know that he had any; he took his chances, he said, and killed him to find out. He then fled, but was afterward captured in Santa Barbara and brought back here, and was finally hung by the people. In his confessions immediately after his capture he said that he was English-born and that his parents were living at Salt Lake City and were Mormons. He said he killed his first man when 17 years old, while coming to this country; that he was in the "Mountain Meadow Massacre," where he got \$5000 or \$6000, and that with that money he and others went to the State and had a spree; and that afterward he killed a man by the name of Blackburn, on the Mojave River, when he got \$3000 in money and a lot of mules.

A year or two before the Sanford murder a large number of horses had been stolen from the principal rancheros of this county—Workman, Wolfskill and others—and a party from here and San Bernardino went out through the Cajon Pass after them. Near Rock creek, the other side of the mountains, they recovered over forty horses and caught two of the thieves, who were sent to the State Prison, but the third man escaped. That third man was Wilkins, as we learned from his own confession. He also confessed that he was one of the prisoners who made a break from the State Prison some time before, and that he helped to hold Lieut.-Gov. Chellis before the cannon to save themselves from being fired upon. After his escape from prison he said he and a Mexican, who escaped at the same time, agreed to kill a drover, named Carr, and another man, near Yreka; that he killed Carr—he generally made sure of his man, he said—but the Mexican, though he fired several shots at the other, missed his man, and they did not get him. Their booty this time, he said, was about \$3000; but from Sanford he said he only got his pistol and knife and about \$20 in money. When asked if he had no compunctions of conscience for killing Sanford and others, he replied that he had not; that he thought no more of killing a man than a dog. Wilkins said he stole a pistol and a bowie-knife from the Bella Union Hotel (now the St. Charles) when he was in Los Angeles just before the killing of Sanford, and gave them to a young protégé of his by the name of Woods—one of the five persons hung shortly before this by the people under the porch of the old jail, just demolished by Chino Phillips for his big block—and told him (Woods) to go out on the road and earn his living with these weapons like a man, and not hang about the dance-houses here. Woods acted on his advice, turned highwayman here in our streets, and soon after was hanged by the vigilance committee, as above noted. I remember the event vividly. The five dangling bodies strung up under the eaves of the old jail porch, over the edge of the sidewalk, presented a ghastly sight that one does not readily forget.

Wilkins, whilst being brought here from Santa Barbara, was very anxious to learn from his captor the fate of his pupil, Woods; what he had done after he had set him up in business and started him on the road. He said Woods was only 22 years old, and agreed that he was a hardened villain for a young one. Wilkins was the sixth or seventh victim of the righteous vengeance of the outraged and exasperated people of Los Angeles within the space of a month. When he was brought from the jail for preliminary examination by a Deputy Sheriff, I remember well seeing a brother and a nephew of the murdered man run out of the old corrugated-iron building opposite, with shotguns to shoot him, but the miserable wretch skulked behind the crowds in the streets in abject fear, and hid under a bed in the adobe where the Bumiller block now is. He was finally taken back to jail, and some days later he was brought before Judge Hays, of the District Court, for trial. The courtroom was crowded to its utmost capacity. The trial, which was conducted with decorum and solemnity, lasted about an hour, the prisoner voluntarily pleading guilty in open court. When the courtroom was partially cleared, and the prisoner was ordered back to jail to await the legal period for the sentence of death to be pronounced, a rush was made into the courtroom by the excited populace. Gen. Banning I remember striding hurriedly over the raised dais just vacated by the Judge, toward the murderer, who was seized and carried off to a neighboring gateway and hung by as excited a crowd of men as it was ever my lot to see. On the way Wilkins showed the most craven terror lest some one should shoot him; and when he arrived at the place of hanging—the wide, high gateway of the old corral where "Lawyers' block" now stands—he begged them to shoot him and not hang him.

Certainly there are large evils than even irregular hangings by the people—and one of them is the state of affairs that makes such desperate remedies a necessity—a necessity to

save the very life of society. Murders and highway robberies had been common in Los Angeles, and the punishment of criminals by law seemed to have become impossible. Cut-throats and scoundrels from the upper country, and from the mines, flocked this way in their exodus from the State. It was not strange that the people were excited beyond measure by the cold-blooded murder of John Sanford, who was well known, and who had many friends and relatives among our best citizens. A double, treble, quadruple murder in the community, excited and exasperated as it had been, could not live but as a fire-brand. People, as they learned from his own confessions of his long list of crimes, could not contain themselves. The hanging over, justice done, without any quibbles, technicalities, evasions, or—escape. But swift, sure and certain, the people became calm, and all excitement soon passed away. In looking back to those days from this distance, one would say that it would have been better if Wilkins and his fellow-murderers could have been hung by law; but that it was better even that they should have been hung as they were than that they should not have been hung at all.

H. D. B.