

¶Death by electrocution may be soon
changed with—

EXECUTION BY GAS

DRESSED in overalls and a blue shirt, a stocky forty-year-old prisoner is led from the death-cell. Guards conduct him to a small, newly-constructed stone cell which he has helped to build.

Inside the bleak room is a heavy chair and a two-gallon jar containing sulphuric acid and water. Above the jar, in a screen container, are ten deadly eggs of potassium cyanide—suspended by a string that stretches to the outside.

The condemned man seats himself in the chair. As guards buckle leather across wrists, ankles, thighs and chest he helps them.

"Good-bye, Bob", said the jail Governor.

"So long, Matt . . ."

"Anything I can do . . . any last request?"

"Yes, Governor," grins the man in the chair, "you might bring me a gas mask!"

The Governor smiles at this grim joke, walks through the heavy, air-tight door and bolts it shut. Outside, he joins the fifty-two spectators (including two women nurses), who are peering through heavy plate glass at the man who is about

to die. The prisoner looks toward the group, nods his head, and the Governor snips the string holding the cyanide eggs.

The pellets splash into the acid and deadly fumes, generated by chemical reaction, sweep upward. The condemned man draws a long breath and then gives a shorter gasp. His eyes close, his head falls back, and his arm and leg muscles twitch violently. Three more lungfuls of the poison and the head sags forward on his chest.

By means of a specially constructed stethoscope the prison doctor records that the prisoner's breathing stops in about two minutes. At that time the heart also stops for ten seconds and then starts again—beating slower and more irregular until at seven and a half minutes it ceases forever.

Thus R. H. White paid his debt to society.

His execution is significant because he was the first man in the United States to die in the lethal gas chamber—said to be the most painless method of killing.

Nevada was the first State to adopt capital punishment by gas. Since then, five other

States have fallen in line. Arizona and Colorado switched from hanging to gas in 1933, Wyoming in 1935 and North Carolina in 1936. And now California becomes the sixth States to adopt the "stink bomb."

Execution was once thought to be the cure-all for all types of crimes. It was applied with vigour to murderers, thieves and petty criminals alike. As late as one hundred years ago in England the following crimes were punishable by death: gypsies remaining in the kingdom for more than a month, unlawful hunting or shooting of deer, unlawful stealing of fish from ponds, defacing Westminster bridge, destroying growing trees, sending threatening letters.

In the early American colonial days there were twelve crimes punishable by death in New England. These were mostly crimes of a personal and moral nature, such as murder, treason, arson, adultery and witchcraft.

Until recent times, hanging has always been the chief method of execution in the United States.

Hanging does not produce death by strangulation — as many people erroneously believe. When the criminal drops through the trap-door of the gallows, the rope suddenly

checks his fall—breaking or dislocating the neck. However, there have been cases where the neck has not been broken and the man was slowly and painfully strangled to death. In other instances the head has been wrenched off the body!

The electric chair also requires careful preparation to be sure that death is as quick as possible. Although electrocution is said to be speedier than hanging, there is a question about its painlessness. When Ruth Snyder was executed in New York a few years ago, the black hood over her head slipped off just as the switch was pulled. Spectators reported that her face was contorted in horrible and excruciating pain.

The Lethal gas chamber is replacing hanging and the electric chair because it is quicker, more painless and there is no chance for anything to "go wrong."

The lethal gas produced by mixing potassium cyanide pellets in water and sulphuric acid is known to chemists as HCN. Southern California's citrus-growers know it as hydrocyanic acid and they use it to fumigate their orange and lemon trees against pesky scale insects. Physicians say that the drug is a quick paralyzant of the lungs and respiratory organs, and that its effect is almost immediate and painless.

Criminals who die in San Quentin's new gas chamber will probably meet death in that painless way. There will be no physical torture, only a mental

horror of being transformed in a few minutes from a healthy, living body into a corpse.—*Andy Hamilton, condensed from Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine.*

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Panoramic Viewpoints

THE order of the day is more guns, more ships, more aeroplanes, at whatever cost and by whatever means, even if we have to wipe out completely what is called civilian life.—*Benito Mussolini.*

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WE cannot for long be free unless we build a strong economic foundation for that freedom.—*Secretary Manuel Roxas.*

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BLESSED is the man who expects nothing, for he will never be disappointed.—*U. S. Senator Ashurst.*

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MEN give their souls as women give their bodies by successive well-defined stages.—*André Maurois.*

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THE British people are a nation of lions led by asses.—*H. G. Wells.*

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STRONG and bitter words indicate a weak cause.—*Victor Hugo.*

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LOVE is an ocean of emotions, entirely surrounded by expenses.—*Lord Dewar.*

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WE live on momentum. If you stop going, you are finished.—*Smedley D. Butler.*