

to have furnished a breakfast for the sharks in the morning as to be gobbled by the blacks in the afternoon. But he found that the people were not cannibals. They treated him fairly; they took him to the interior of the island, and there an execution was taking place. When he looked up and saw what was going on, he exclaimed: "Thank God, I have been cast ashore in a Christian land." He looked upon hanging as a sacrament.

I take it to be the duty of this House to deal with all matters affecting the good of the citizens of this country, especially so when the question is not a political one. It is the duty of this House to deal with fundamental questions; and I know of nothing more fundamental than human life. And I know nothing more wicked or brutal than to take life unnecessarily, even when it is done by the state. No matter how much some members may differ with me on this subject, I think I am safe in saying that every member must contemplate with abhorrence punishment by death—I think even the Minister of Justice will agree with me there. The question is, whether the abolition of capital punishment would result in benefit to the country, or whether the retention of the death penalty offers greater security to society. Capital punishment has been abolished in the conscience of the people of Canada; it has been abolished except for the very poor man who cannot procure the necessary legal talent to plead for them. As things work out in practice, we can only convict a few out of the number of murderers, and of those that are condemned, only a small percentage are executed; and these, I regret to say again, are the poor and unfortunate, who have no friends, no pull, political or otherwise, and no money to employ legal talent to defend them. It is a well-known fact that occasionally an innocent man has been hanged—that was admitted by the Minister of Justice on the last occasion when we discussed this matter. I think I am safe in saying that capital punishment is in flagrant contravention of the teachings of our Lord and Master, a usurpation of power that no customs can justify; a rebellious defiance of the good Master who came upon this earth to teach mercy, truth and forgiveness.

There was a time when every lord of any account in England had criminal jurisdiction over the people on his estate, and as evidence of his power the gibbet was

[Mr. Bickerdike.]

erected for the hanging of the men and the pond dug alongside for the drowning of the women, and the whole countryside was decorated with the rotting bodies of the unfortunate peasantry. During the period of the Hanovarian kings, deep distress came which fell with awful severity upon poor folk. A man, if he was a man at all, could steal to keep his loved ones from starving, and the so-called wise ones of that day knew of no way to cope with the evils of the time but to increase the number of offences for which capital punishment was decreed. It grew so bad that there were not less than 200 offences for which people might be hanged. One woman was hanged who tried to steal a piece of flannel in which to wrap her baby, born after the father had been seized by the press-gang—for conscription was in force at that time. The man was seized, dragged away from his home, and the baby was born after he had been taken to fight the battles of England on board a man-of-war. The poor woman undertook to steal a piece of flannel to make a covering for her baby; and she was tried, convicted and hanged. They are still hanging children in England in 1914, they hanged a school boy of eighteen years of age. After the Gordon riots children were hanged; and in 1830, at the time of the agrarian riots, no less than three hundred prisoners were sentenced to capital punishment. A relative of a friend of mine saw seven men pass her house on their way to be hanged for the stealing of one sheep—the lives of seven men for the life of one sheep. The state of the law seems to me so awful that I cannot understand how it can remain for a single day. The life work of a man like Samuel Romilly was unable to effect a change, but that change has been brought about and the hanging of men for stealing has become as obsolete as the thumbscrew, the boot and other instruments of torture. The only survival we have of these cruel punishments is hanging for murder, rape, and high treason—cruel relics of a cruel age. This is the skeleton of the former two hundred crimes, for which the penalty was hanging—and the Minister of Justice must hug that skeleton. Lord Brougham, we are told, "took the devil out of the indictment"; but he did not take the devil out of the criminal law. What justification can there be for the continuation of this brutal punishment, which brutalizes the public as well as the officials who have to carry it out?—brutalizes the public, as was recognized by the fact that