

OUR SOCIETY.

OBSOLETE PUNISHMENT.—PENALTIES OF THE NATIONS.

The English criminal code has not always been the lenient thing it now is. A man was formerly sentenced to death or to transportation for life for an offence for which he would now be let off with a month's hard labor—for such an offence as stealing forty shillings belonging to his master, stealing from a shop door, stealing apples from an orchard, or the like. In Halifax, in the sixteenth century, when Harrison wrote his Description of England, there was a law peculiar to the place, under which a man was executed by a kind of guillotine for a theft of thirteen pence half-penny or upward. It is the same Harrison who tells us that Henry VIII. hanged 72,000 "rogues and vagabonds" during his thirty-eight years' reign, and that in his own time the number of these unfortunates suspended *per coll*, averaged annually from three hundred to four hundred. Coin sweaters were boiled in lead or hot water, or, if women, were burned; and a brutal murderer was first of all half-hanged, then had his bowels taken out before his eyes and afterward drawn and quartered. Besides the severe criminal code, half the atrocities of which have been designally passed over, there were a number of punishments of a more or less humiliating character for petty offences—such, for instances, as night walking, for which frightful lapsus a chaplain was once sent to the Tun, a round prison on Cornhill; for selling goods after curfew had rung; for being a "common scold," and for scandal mongering and lying—for which the Liber Albus tells us, a man was once adjudged imprisonment for a year, and a day of the pillory, once a quarter for three hours, with a wet stone tied around his neck. The curious instruments devised for quenching the ardor of hot-tempered shrews were numerous. One was the brank—a sugarloaf shaped cap, made of iron hooping, with a cross at the top, and a flat piece, also of iron, projecting inward for laying upon the offender's tongue, so that it could not wag, and her head should not move. The brank was padlocked behind, and the woman led through the streets by an officer of the town, probably a beadle, until she began to show "all external sign imaginable of humiliation and amendment." Equally efficacious was the whirlingig, a large circular cap turning upon a pivot. It was put on the heads of trifling offenders of all kinds, and not brawling women alone, and was set awirling with great rapidity, "so that the delinquent soon became extremely sick," and was very glad to be released and taken home. The most unworthy, however, of all the instruments designed for the correction of Eves' offending daughters was the ducking stool, known as the tumbrel and the trebuchet. A post, across which was a transverse beam turning on a swivel and with a chair at one end, was set on the edge of a pond. Into the chair the woman was chained, turned toward the water—a muddy or filthy pond was usually chosen for the purpose when available—and ducked half a dozen times; or, if the water inflamed her instead of acting as a damper, she was let down times innumerable until she was exhausted and wellnigh drowned. In Liverpool, it was not formally abolished until 1776, but it was falling into desuetude more than thirty years before, when such an exhibition at Kingston-on-Thames was so novel that it would draw nearly three thousand spectators to the scene. There is a good deal of humor in another of these queer obsolete punishments—the drunkard's cloak, with the invention of which the magistrates of Newcastle-on-Tyne during Cromwell's protectorate are credited. It consisted of a large cask with the bottom taken out and a hole in the top and one on each side for the toper's head and arms, and equipped in this great coat he was led through the streets until the looked for signs of contrition appeared and he promised to give up drinking sack. Torture on a great scale went out with Felton, the assassin of Buckingham, but torture on a small scale continued to

be practiced on military offenders down to the eighteenth century. The form most frequently resorted to was that known as the wooden horse, the riding of which was the punishment accorded for petty thefts and insubordination.

The wooden horse was made of planks nailed together so as to form a sharp ridge or angle about eight or nine feet long. This ridge represented the back of the horse, and was supported by four posts or legs about five feet high, placed on a stand made movable by truckles. To complete the resemblance with the noblest animal in creation, a head and tail were added. When a soldier was sentenced to ride the horse, he was placed on the brute's back, with his hands tied behind him, and frequently enough, in order to increase the pain, muskets were fastened to his legs to weigh them down, or, as was jocularly said, "to prevent the fiery untamed barebacked steed from kicking him off." The gantelope, or gauntlet, was another military and naval punishment for theft. A man had to run the gauntlet of a long file of his fellow soldiers, each provided with a switch, and to prevent the sinner going too rapidly and to see that no man impelled by motives of friendliness or kindness failed to strike hard, a sergeant walked backward, facing the said sinner, with a halberd pointed at the latter's breast. After a lengthy experiment this was found to be inconvenient and degrading; so recourse was had to another method—a variety of the same species of torture. The offender was tied to four halberds, three in a triangle and a fourth across. The regiment or company then filed off, the cat-o'-nine-tails was placed in the hands of the first man, who gave the culprit a lash and passed on, handing the cat to the second, who gave a lash, and so the game went merrily on.

DALHOUSIE NOTES.

Professor Seth leaves here in about three weeks time for Germany, where he intends to spend the summer. He has the best wishes of all the students.

Some months ago it was suggested that a Students' Scientific and Philosophical Society be formed. The idea became popular; and at a late meeting the organization of such a society was decided upon. Officers were elected for one year, with Mr. K. G. T. Webster '92, of Yarmouth, as President.

This is certainly a move in the right direction: the advantage of such a society promise to be very great. Its work is to consist in the preparation and discussion of original papers on various subjects; an exercise which will afford capital training in the line of originality and independent thought.

They say the word "plugger" does not appear in Webster's Unabridged: but Exams. begin next week, and not a few of the students have a tolerably fair idea of what it means.

The results of the Law Exams. were announced a short time ago. Thirteen will take their L. L. B. this year, of whom six are Halifaxians.

The present graduating class in Arts numbers twenty-seven, and is the largest in the history of Dalhousie. Convocation is set down for the 23rd April—"a day that shall live, etc.," says a certain Senior.

BREVES.

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