GROTESQUE

MASK OF PUNISHMENT,

from the Castle of

NUREMBERG.
poetry; but his prose is more admirable still. Like Dryden, he is known chiefly—I may almost say exclusively—in one character. His reputation as a poet has prevented his being known, much less appreciated, as an essayist. But if "the varying verse, the full-resounding line" of Dryden, and the more artificial numbers of Cowley, were henceforth obliterated from human knowledge, both would live, and would deserve to live, in the admiration of their countrymen, for qualities in their prose writings, of a high and uniform excellence, such as the most partial critic could not claim for their poetry, though, strangely enough, the poetry, with its inequalities and its faults, has hidden from view the more perfect graces of the prose.

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**ON A GROTESQUE MASK OF PUNISHMENT OBTAINED IN THE CASTLE OF NUREMBERG.**

*By Frederick W. Fairholt, Esq., F.S.A.*

*(Read 14th December, 1854.)*

In the Museum of Antiquities, collected by my fellow Member of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Mr. Joseph Mayer, I have observed, with some curiosity, the very rare example of a scold's bridle which he possesses. Such relics of the olden time are of great rarity; and of the small number known to exist, the majority belong to places whence they cannot be disservered. In the church of Walton-on-Thames, about 20 miles from London, is one of these implements, which is said to have been presented for the use of the Parish by a neighbouring gentleman, who lost a considerable estate, through the babbling of a mischievous woman to the relative from whom he would have received it. Upon it was inscribed the date 1633, and the distich, now quite obliterated,

"Chester presents Walton with a bridle  
To curb women's tongues that talk too idle."

The punishment originated at a period when some degree of ridicule was allowed to take the place of that severity which characterized earlier forms of punishment. Like many other of our customs, it would appear to have
originated on the Continent; and I exhibit to you this evening a drawing of a somewhat similar Mask, which I purchased at Nuremberg about four months ago, and which is now in the valuable collection of the Lord Londesborough, at Grimston Park, near Tadcaster, Yorkshire. It is constructed of bands of iron, and is made to fit closely over the head, being secured at the back by a padlock. A flat piece of iron covers the mouth, and closes upon it so entirely, that if the person upon whose head it is placed attempts to speak, the voice is collected toward a small hole in the centre, ascends up the wooden nose by means of a small pipe, and ends in being expelled by a loud whistle. It is thus impossible to speak, the man attempting it but makes himself ridiculous, and to do this the more thoroughly, an ass's ears are affixed to the sides of the head, and a huge pair of spectacles over the nose; a mouth is painted over the mouthpiece, and eyebrows over the spectacles. It was probably manufactured toward the end of the sixteenth century, a time when judges began to believe that a feeling of shame might be useful in preventing petty infringements of propriety. Grotesque masks, of a somewhat similar kind, were used in Germany to punish refractory soldiers, one of which is in the Armoury at Goodrich Court, and which Sir Samuel Meyrick, who owned this collection, thought to be of the time of Henry VIII. It is constructed of wood, in imitation of the hood worn by the jesters who formed part of a noble's retinue at that period, and has a high crest with bells attached, which ring on the slightest movement of the wearer. It opens with a hinge behind, and is secured beneath the chin by a padlock. As the elevated bells supplied the place of a crest to this grotesque helmet, the representation of the wreath usually encircling the knightly one is carved below it, to make the absurdity more perfect. It is quite probable that this, and similar military grotesque punishments, originated in the continental customs of an earlier date. Lord Londesborough's collection affords another example of a skeleton mask which he also obtained from a German collection, but without the peculiarity I have pointed out in the mouthpiece of that to which I now call attention, and which I consider by far the most curious mask of the kind in existence.

I should be disposed to date the introduction of these and similar instruments of cruelty to northern Europe, to the accession of Charles V. of Spain to the throne of Germany. The period of the introduction of
the most refined cruelties into the famed old city of Nuremberg is fixed by its historians to the year 1533, and the character of the tortures then, for the first time imported, is of so startling a kind as to be adverse to the ordinary feelings of nations to whom "the most holy Inquisition" is happily unknown. During the Spanish ascendancy in Germany, Brabant, and Flanders, the vaults of their Hotels-de-Ville might rival the Spanish cells in the various implements they contained; some few of which still exist, particularly in the old German towns, such as Salzburg, Bamberg, Nuremberg, and Ratisbon, the latter having by far the most complete collection, constructed with a perfection of cruelty, and christened with jocular names; an instance of the heartless indifference to human suffering, and fiendish malignity which characterized the judicial proceedings of the middle ages.

Torture, as a means of extorting confession of crime, appears to have been slowly and sparingly adopted in England; and, to the honour of our country, was never acknowledged by the law of the land. Religious intolerance seems to have allowed it a more unquestioned scope than the ordinary tribunals admitted; and we must refer to the pages of such authors as John Foxe if we would know much of the practice in England. From a comparison of his descriptions with such others as are contained in Milleus's curious and horrible book, *Praxis Criminis Persequendi* (Paris, 1541), we may trace all these barbarities to the one source, and that the Spanish and Italian torturers; who seem to have exhausted their inventions in ingenious cruelties, which they worked into practical use with a finish and a neatness of manipulation, as if they delighted in their horrible employment.

The connection of constructive idea between the Mask from Nuremberg, and the English "Scolds' bridle" and Scottish "Brank," will be apparent, I think, to most investigators. Its disuse in both of the latter countries is comparatively modern; and it appears to have been more common and occasionally more cruel in the north than it was among ourselves. Thus the "Witch's Bridle," once preserved in the church at Forfar, was provided with a gag for the mouth made in form of a triple spur, which was capable of inflicting horrible wounds on the unhappy "witch" who attempted to speak, when led to the stake, with this upon her head. The ordinary "Brank" for a scold simply restrained her tongue; and its name
was the same as that applied to a rude substitute for a bridle. An example preserved at St. Mary's Church, St. Andrew's, is said to have been affixed to the heads of the early Scottish martyrs at the stake; another was found behind the panelling of the old house of the Earls of Moray, in the Canongate, Edinburgh.

Of the English "Scolds' Bridle," one of the earliest engraved examples is that given by Dr. Plot in his "History of Staffordshire," and which he says "being put upon the offender, by order of the magistrate, and fastened by a padlock behind, she is led round the town by an officer to her shame; nor is it removed till after the party shows, by all external signs imaginable, humiliation and amendment." Brand, in his "History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne," engravés another example, which Gardiner, in his "England's Greivance," 1655, declares he saw in use, and the iron tongue "forced the blood out" of the unfortunate woman's mouth who then wore it. Another is in the Town Hall at Worcester; one is in private hands at Leicester, once belonging to the Town Hall there. The curious inscribed one in the church at Walton-on-Thames has been already noticed. The Town Council of Lichfield also possesses one of these bridles; another is at Beaudesert, the seat of the Marquis of Anglesey; but by far the most curious example is preserved at Harnstall Ridware, in Staffordshire. It has apertures for the eyes and nose, giving the face a grotesque appearance, and towers above the head like the cap of a grenadier. In this way it connects itself with the Military Mask at Goodrich; as that, by its grotesque character, is connected with the German one I have exhibited this evening.

I have thus endeavoured to show that the principle, both of the invention and construction of these antique grotesque implements of punishment, has evidently emanated from the same source. As very rare examples of ancient manners, they are worthy the attention of all who study what are frequently termed the "good old times," and who may, by that study, learn to be thankful that they did not live in them.