

## DEGREE DAY AT CAMBRIDGE.



THE SENATE HOUSE.

THE old proverb tells us that "all things change;" and certainly the saying could have no better illustration than the state of our two ancient Universities at the present time. Both at Oxford and at Cambridge the requirements of modern times have led to the introduction of innumerable alterations, not only in the subjects taught and examined upon,

but also in the methods of teaching and examination. These alterations have been carried out, for the most part, in a silent, unobtrusive manner, but at length the time has come when their reality will certainly impress itself on the public at large.

For many years the interest of most people in Cambridge degrees has centred in those gained in the Mathematical Tripos, and for a few days in each year the Senior Wrangler has been a public character. But as we look back from the standpoint of the Degree Day of 1883, we have to realise that the Senior Wranglership is a thing of the past. The remorseless hand of change has laid its grip even on this distinctive dignity, and the latest regulations, under which the Mathematical Tripos examination of last year has been for the first time conducted, have abolished the proud title of Senior Wrangler, and reduced the list of Wranglers to a series of classes on the Oxford system.

But, after all, if the title is gone the interest of the examination remains; and it is certain that the Mathematical Degree Day at Cambridge is not likely to lose in this generation the features that have hitherto made it one of the most striking high-days of the academical year.

The ceremony of granting degrees is always fixed for the last Saturday in January, the class list being read out in the Senate House on the previous day. What a time of excitement that is! For several months the chances of well-known men have been canvassed and scrutinised by every clique in the 'Varsity. The man who is intimately acquainted with any of the best candidates revels for the time in the brilliance of reflected glory; and the question whether Jones of Trinity or Brown of John's is likely to be Senior arouses far more interest than the fate of the Government during the forthcoming session.

But "the Tripos" is over; that momentous Friday has arrived. Let us transport ourselves to the classic town, and try to realise the scene. The time is 8.45 a.m., and the list will be read in the Senate

House at 9 o'clock. Let us mingle with the crowd that is flocking through the massive gates, up the steps, and through the doors on which the list will be affixed after it has been read within.

Inside, we find ourselves on the marble pavement of a large and handsome building. In shape, the hall is oblong. Along the side walls are ranged a few fine statues; at the end of the floor is a raised dais covered with crimson cloth, but untenanted at present. All round the building runs a wide gallery, the front of which is formed of a heavy and very strong balustrade of dark carved wood. The ceiling is handsome, and the whole building has an air of solidity and dignity which is very impressive. A noticeable feature is that there are scarcely any seats visible, the whole floor is bare, and only a few forms are stacked against the walls.

The place fills rapidly, and before the appointed hour several hundreds of men are present. The gallery at the end is the only one occupied to-day, and there we find a bevy of ladies seated—mostly students of Girton College or Newnham Hall, who have come to watch the proceedings. In the centre of the ladies stand two or more of the examiners, with the lists in their hands.

The bell of St. Mary's clock begins to boom forth the strokes of nine. A sudden hush falls on every one, and as the last stroke dies away, one of the examiners calls out, in the loudest tones he can command, "Senior Wrangler"—(say)—"Smith, of John's."

In a moment the scene is changed: the pent-up feelings of the crowd break forth in vigorous cheers, the John's men are frantic with joy, and Smith's special chum rushes off at top speed to bear the tidings to his happy friend.

But there is more to come, and as soon as the cheering has ceased the voice of the examiner is heard again. "Second Wrangler, Jones, of Trinity; Third, Brown, of Pembroke," and so on through the list. The highest names receive each a cheer, and the hum of voices bursts out again as the last is read.

But the proceedings are not over. When the names have been read the scrimmage begins. The examiners and ladies in the gallery drop down some copies of the printed list to the mob below. Every man wants a list, and there are only a few, so the whole crowd surges forward, and struggles eagerly to catch the fluttering paper. Gowns are torn and caps lost or smashed in the *mêlée*, and scarcely one of the papers reaches within six feet of the ground entire. A dozen hands clutch at the frail document and it is torn in shreds. This lasts about a quarter of an hour, and then all is over. By half-past nine the Senate House is deserted, and two hours later the evening papers publish the result in the streets of London.

Last year there was, as I have said, no Senior Wrangler, but the lack of the title was merely an in-

cident; the main features of the spectacle will remain for many a day.

The excitements of Friday over, Saturday comes apace, the flight of time made more rapid by many a jovial dinner in celebration of the coming event.

It is an astonishing fact, but undoubtedly true, that during the few short hours which elapse between the reading of the list and the conferring of the degrees a whole army of visitors contrive to reach Cambridge. The ceremony of Saturday does not begin till one o'clock, and by that time the Senate House is crammed with a far larger number than it contained the day before. Foremost in the scene is the crowd of men who are to be dubbed B.A. They are standing about the floor of the Senate House, each wearing his white rabbit-skin hood, and chatting decorously with his acquaintances. Beyond them is a wooden bar, and inside the bar are rows of seats. There are seated the friends of the successful candidates. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and last, but by no means least, *fiancées* of the new B.A.'s are there, to the number of perhaps 500. On the raised dais is set a stately chair with a footstool in front, and at the back a row of other chairs. Of course there are many officials flitting about, all clad in the gown and white silk hood of the M.A. degree.

But the proceedings would not be *comme il faut* if there were not present a large array of undergraduates. To the spectators these gentlemen seem to have taken leave of their senses with one consent. They pour into the Senate House during the half-hour preceding the appointed time, and the large gallery is wholly reserved for their use.

Here there are no seats, and every available space is crammed. Early comers secure the places next to the balustrade, and for a little time they can see what is going on in tolerable comfort. But fresh detachments soon arrive, and as the new-comers cannot see through those in front, the first row lean down on the top of the balustrade, the next deposit themselves on the backs of those, and two or three rows more on the top of these. Altogether, there is a living mass of perhaps 1,200 men crowding one on the top of the other, till it seems as if the railing must give way or the whole mass tumble headlong over it. Of course the spare half-hour must be whiled away, and how should a crowd of undergrads accomplish that without noise? They whistle in chorus popular tunes, they cheer each other and anybody else they happen to think of. Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, Mr. Bright, and Sir Stafford Northcote are cheered over and over again; then "the ladies in blue," "the Don with a red face," and, in fact, everybody but the Proctors.

Of course the Proctors are there, each escorted by a body-guard of two stalwart men, known as "bull-dogs," and dressed in brown cloth capes, with rows of brass buttons to make them formidable. By-and-by there is a lull in the pleasantries of the gallery, and some one says, "The Vice is coming." Then enters the Vice-Chancellor (the "Vice" he is always called), preceded by the two Esquire Bedells, each bearing a large silver

mace. As this dignified procession passes up the floor it is an opportunity too good to be lost. The whole mass of undergrads mark time with their feet, and whistle "Tommy, make room for your Uncle." Meanwhile the Vice-Chancellor bows to the Proctors, and seats himself in the big arm-chair, while the undergrads sing—

"I love it, I love it, and who shall dare  
To chide me for loving that old arm-chair?"

And now the "congregation" is legally constituted. One of the University officers reads over the names of those to be admitted to degrees. His voice is quite inaudible, and the gallery keeps up a constant fire of chaff, throwing down halfpennies in showers to persuade him to "speak up." In fact, throughout the proceedings no one hears a word of what is said except the candidates. These are now brought forward by the Praelectors, or Fathers of the different colleges. Each man takes hold of one finger of the Praelector's left hand, and so four at a time are brought up, and introduced to the Vice-Chancellor. After all have been introduced, they must come up again. This time they are not in order of their colleges, but in the order they hold in the class list. Kneeling on the footstool before the Vice-Chancellor, the candidate places the palms of his hands together, the Vice puts his own hands outside those of the suppliant, and admits him in these words—"Auctoritate mihi commissa, admitto te ad titulum Baccalauri in Artibus designati, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti," and the man rises a B.A. Of course the undergrad has something to say. A popular man is cheered to the echo, and if he has performed any athletic feat, the fact is not forgotten; he is greeted with cries of "Well rowed!" "Well run!"

As the long *queue* of white-hooded bachelors diminishes the interest seems to increase, and by-and-by it is found to culminate in the last man of the Tripos. He is known as "the Wooden Spoon," and somehow is nearly always a popular personage. While the other degrees are being conferred a string is passed round from hand to hand along the gallery, until it can be drawn tight across the hall. From this is suspended a huge wooden spoon, ornamented with bows of Cambridge blue and the arms of the college to which the recipient belongs. Gradually this is lowered amidst deafening cheers, till, just as the last of the Junior Optimes leaves the Vice-Cancellarial stool, it is dropped within his reach. The owner must be prepared to seize it quickly, and as he cuts the string and shoulders his trophy, it would be hard to say whether the first man or the last in the list gains most applause.

After this the interest is gone. A few men have to receive degrees, the results of other examinations, but the Mathematical degrees are all conferred, and within an incredibly short space of time the Senate House is empty, and for another year the great "Degree Day" is over.

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"THE VICE PUTS HIS OWN HANDS OUTSIDE THOSE OF THE SUPPLIANT . . . AND THE MAN RISES A B.A."

"DEGREE DAY AT CAMBRIDGE" (see p. 206).