

Muzzles for Ladies.



THE emancipation of women from the oppression of men, and from the thralldom of conventionality, being just now a favourite theme with debaters, dramatists, and dress-makers, the occasion may be an appropriate one for the purpose of recalling an article of head-gear which was frequently worn by the fair sex, throughout this country, in the "good old times."

The particular head-dress of which we are about to treat, although produced in many ingenious fashions, was never popular with the ladies; and we do not desire in these progressive and enlightened days to reintroduce such unbecoming and inconvenient wearing apparel, but to show the advance that has been made in our social life, and in the relations between the sexes since the age of the pillory and the ducking-stool, and to draw attention to a phase of the past with which many at the present day may not be familiar.

A few generations back our forefathers were wont to inflict upon women certain punishments, which sadly exhibited their lack of gallantry and propriety. Among the most curious of these punishments was that of the Brank or Scold's Bridle. This curious and cruel instrument of torture was employed by borough physicians and petty provincial tyrants for the purpose of curing women of an ailment of the tongue to which they were said to be subject.

The Brank, or Scold's Bridle, or Gossip's Bridle, as the instrument has been variously called, was in very general use in this kingdom from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, as is amply shown by the many allusions to its application which appear in corporation and municipal records; and in some counties the specimens of the implement still existing are sufficiently numerous to testify to its prevalence. In Cheshire alone no fewer than thirteen examples are extant; and Lancashire and Staffordshire each contain five or six. In Derbyshire there is but one. Others may have been used in the county, but no allusion to them is to be met with in the local records. Whether the women of the three former counties were

more violent in the use of the "unruly member," or whether the men of Derbyshire were less barbarously and cruelly inclined, there is no evidence to say.

The brank consisted of a kind of crown or framework of iron, which was locked upon the head of the delinquent. It was armed in front with a gag, plate, point or knife of the same metal, which was fitted in such a manner as to be inserted in the scold's mouth so as to prevent her moving her tongue; or, more cruel still, it was so placed that if she did move it, or attempt to speak, her tongue was cruelly lacerated, and her sufferings intensified. With this cage upon her head, and with the gag pressed and locked upon the tongue, the poor creature was paraded through the streets, led by the beadle or constable, or else she was chained to the pillory or market cross to be the object of scorn and derision, and to be subjected to all the insults and degradations that local loungers could invent.

It appears the brank was never a legalized instrument of punishment, but nevertheless it was highly popular with local magnates; and was one of the means upon which arch-tyrants of provincial towns relied to sustain their power and hold the humbler folk in subjection. By its authority was preserved and vindicated at the expense of all that was noble, seemly, and just.

The scold's bridle is frequently mentioned in literature. Gay alludes to it, and Robert Burns, in his poem on dining with the young Lord Daer, says:—

Sae far I sprackled up the brae,
I dinner'd wi' a Lord!

* * * * *

And gowing as if led wi' branks
I in the parlour hammer'd.

It is also mentioned by an early English poet in the following lines:—

But for my daughter Julian,
I would she were well bolted with a Bridle,
That leaves her work to play the clack
And lets her work stand idle;
For it serves not for she-ministers,
Farriers nor Furriers,
Cobblers nor Button-makers,
To descant on the Bible.

Fig. 1 represents the Derbyshire Brank, which is a remarkably good example.

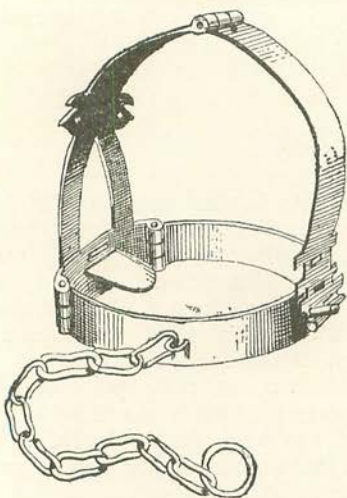


FIG. 1.

It consists of a hoop of iron hinged on either side, and fastened behind. An iron band passes over the head from back to front, where there is an opening to admit the nose of the individual whose misfortune it was to wear it. On the left side of the hoop a chain is attached, whereby the victim was led through the streets or tethered to a post or wall. On the front of the bridle are the initials "T. C." and the date 1688—the year of the Great Rebellion. Fig. 2 illustrates the manner in which the instrument was worn.

One of the most celebrated branks is that



FIG. 2.

preserved at Walton-on-Thames, which is dated 1633, and is inscribed with the characteristic couplet:—

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

Tradition says this brank was presented to the parish of Walton by a man named Chester, because a gossiping and tattling woman prattled to a rich kinsman of his from whom he had great expectations, which caused him to lose a large and promising estate.

A very early example, made of wood, and said to be of the time of Henry VIII., was preserved in the celebrated Meyrick collection; and others of as early a period are to be found in Scotland. A particularly repellent-looking brank, called the "Witches' Bridle," and formerly preserved at Forfar, is one of the most savagely cruel implements ingenuity could devise. Fig. 3 exhibits this

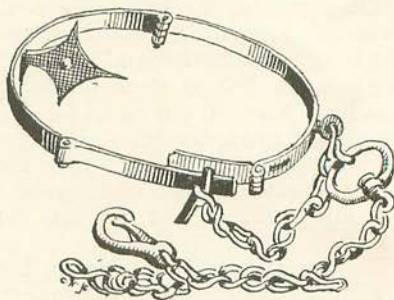


FIG. 3.

instrument. It is dated 1661, and was the bridle worn by condemned witches when led to execution. It will be seen that in this brank, instead of the usual flat tongue-plate, a sharp, three-pointed spur has been substituted on a movable band to which the leading chain was attached, so that terrible injuries could be inflicted on the tongue of the victim on the way to the stake, at the will of the person holding the chain.

As several very early examples of scolds' bridles exist in Scotland, the opinion obtains that, like the maiden or guillotine, this article of punishment

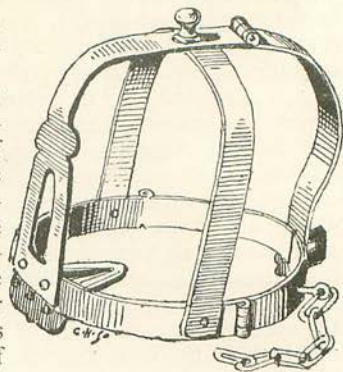


FIG. 4.



FIG. 5.

may be of Scotch origin, and then have gradually made its way southward into this country. Fig. 4 portrays a brank of a usual type, which came to light in 1848, from behind the oak panelling in the ancient house of the Earls of Moray

in Edinburgh. Fig. 5 depicts one that may be seen at Leicester. It is somewhat simple in construction, and to the back of it a chain of about a foot in length is attached.

A very curious specimen is preserved at Newcastle (Fig. 6), to which reference has been frequently made; and one of the most curious allusions to it occurs in Gardiner's

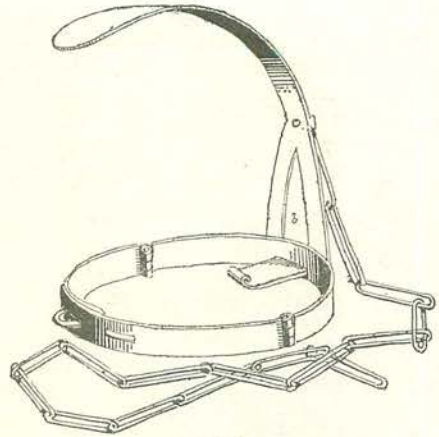


FIG. 7.

together by that eminent antiquary, Elias Ashmole, and preserved at Oxford, is a brank of the less cruel type (Fig. 7), in which the tongue-plate has been rounded at the end to

prevent the tongue from being injured. In this specimen the leading chain is fastened to the front of the instrument immediately over the nose aperture. Possibly the maker was a bit of a wag, and intended the unfortunate wearer to have the additional mortification of being "led by the nose."

Fig. 8 shows us a brank of an unusual pattern. Upon it appears an initial W, surmounted by a crown, and from this mark it



FIG. 6.

"England's Grievance Discovered, in Relation to the Coal Trade," printed in 1655, where, on page 110, it states that John Willis, of Ipswich, when in Newcastle, saw a woman named Ann Bidlestone led through the streets by an officer of the corporation, wearing a brank upon her head, the tongue-piece so forced into her mouth as to cause it to bleed. He adds, "This is the punishment which the magistrates do inflict upon chiding and scolding women." John Willis also affirms that he has seen drunkards punished by being driven through the streets of the same town inclosed in a beer barrel, as depicted on the right of Fig. 6. This uncomfortable vestment was known as the "New-fashioned Cloak."

Among the many curious objects brought

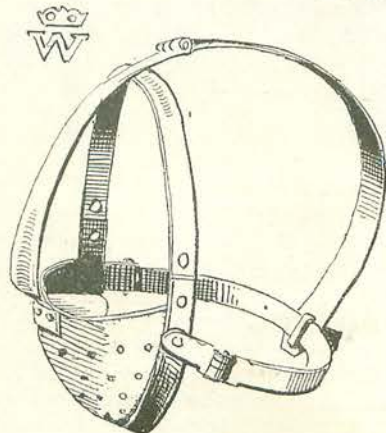


FIG. 8.

is conjectured that the implement belongs to the reign of William III. In this example the front vertical band has been shaped to fit the nose, and beneath is a perforated and rounded iron plate, made so as to incase the jaw and prevent the mouth from opening. The bridle preserved at Doddington Park, in

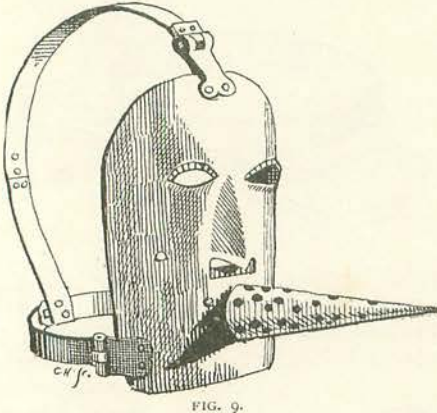


FIG. 9.

Lincolnshire (Fig. 9), was evidently intended to bring down as much ridicule as possible upon the head of the unfortunate wearer. It is in the form of a mask with holes for the eyes, and a protruding piece to fit the

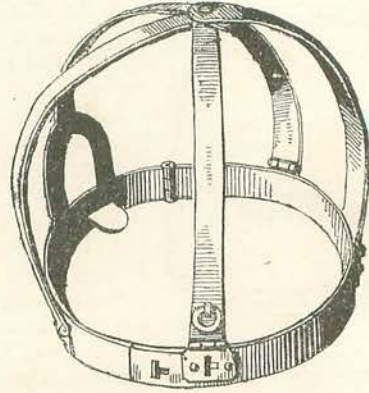


FIG. 11.

front a mask-like plate with apertures for the eyes and nose. The head of the victim was inserted by means of an iron door at the back of the instrument.

The brank illustrated in Fig. 11 calls for but little comment. It is preserved at Lichfield, and consists of one single base hoop, from which spring five upright bands, which are bent over and fastened together at the top. One of these latter bands is formed with an opening for the nose, and beneath the opening is a plain iron tongue-plate.

A different construction is to be found in the Morpeth Brank, which is depicted in Fig. 12.

In this variant we have simply a horizontal hoop and one band, which passes over the head from back to front. The nose aperture and tongue-plate are similar to those in the Lichfield Brank. A reference to the two views in the diagram will show the method of closing the instrument over the scold's head. The application of

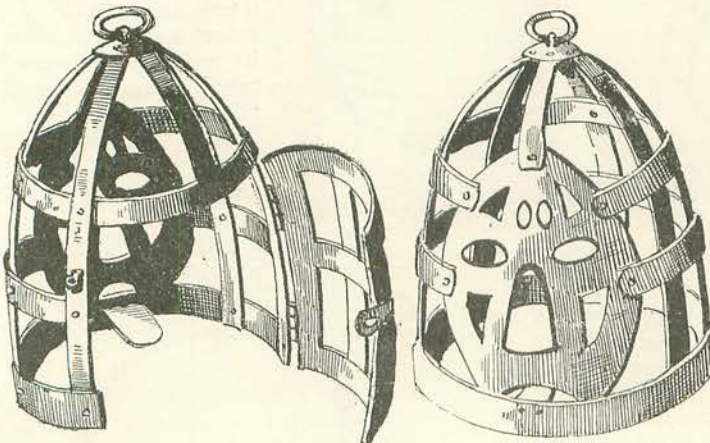


FIG. 10.

nose. There is also a long perforated funnel-shaped piece projecting from the spot covering the mouth, suggesting the terribly long tongue the culprit must possess.

At Hamstall Ridware, in Staffordshire, a brank is to be seen which in appearance resembles a lantern. Two views of it are given in Fig. 10, one showing the brank open, the other closed. It consists of a number of iron bands crossing one another, having in

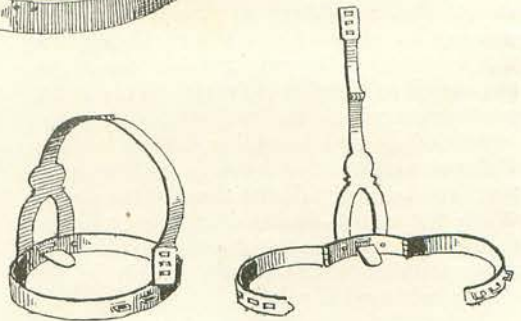


FIG. 12.

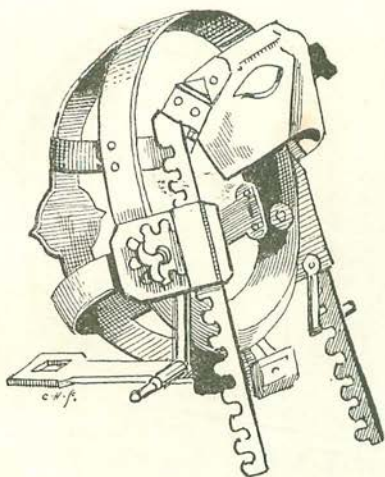


FIG. 13.

the Morpeth Bridle as a punishment is recorded as follows: "Dec. 3, 1741. Elizabeth, wife of George Holborn, was punished with the Branks for two hours at the Market Cross, Morpeth, by order of Mr. Thomas Gait and Mr. George Nicholls, then Bailiffs, for scandalous and opprobrious language to several persons in town, as well as to said Bailiffs."

At Ludlow a remarkable instrument of torture, allied to the brank family, is preserved, and it is of a most elaborate and intricate construction, as a glance at Fig.

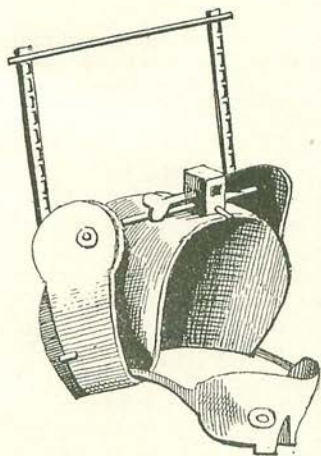


FIG. 14.

13 will show. It is a much more solid and serious affair than any we have hitherto seen, and from its massive appearance it gives the idea that it may have been invented for stronger jaws than those of weak woman.

An instrument which may also be grouped with the branks is to be found at Worcester, Fig. 14, and in form resembles a helmet. When in use the head was inserted in the helmet portion, and by an arrangement of

cogs and the perforated rods at the back, the mask in front was raised, so as to completely obscure the upper part of the face. The victim could then be buffeted without knowing who her tormentors were. In the Worcester Corporation accounts the following entry occurs: "1658. Paid for mending the bridle for bridling of scoulds, and two cords for the same, js. ijd."

The last time the scold's bridle was publicly used in this country was at Congle-



PRESENT DAY.

ton, in Cheshire, in 1824, but, in the words of an eminent statesman, "many things have happened since then"; and it would create no small sensation if at the present time we were to meet a *fin-de-siècle* lady, as in our concluding illustration, led through the streets by a burly policeman, wearing one of these uncouth implements, because, forsooth, she had ventured to raise her voice in defence of her rights, or had spoken too plainly to an overbearing and tyrannical husband.