

HAZING AND FAGGING.

BY THE EDITOR.

OUR university authorities sometimes have trouble to suppress, or at least to confine within reasonable limits, the customs of hazing and fagging. Even where these abuses are most rigorously punished they turn up again, and like weeds prove almost ineradicable. The truth is that even in their worst excrescences they are less virulent forms of old customs which centuries ago were observed with an almost religious punctiliousness that would have been worthy of a better purpose.

We know too little of the schools of classical antiquity and of Babylon and Egypt to say whether these venerable nuisances existed there also. The first knowledge of them dates back to the end of the Middle Ages, to the very time when universities became famous and well established organizations. Hazing in those days was called "deposition," and fagging, "pennalism." It is strange, however, that both customs were not a mere outburst of youthful impertinence but regular institutions recognized by the authorities of the university. The underlying idea in both was that the new comer to the university was an untutored, uncivilized man, who had first to be polished before he could become a regular member of the university; moreover before he would taste the sweets of a student's life he should suffer hardships. This principle is expressed in the following Latin lines:

"Hisce modis variis tentatur cruda juvenus;
In studiosorum si petat esse choro;
Ut discat rapidos animi compellere motus;
Et simul ante sciat dulcia dura pati."

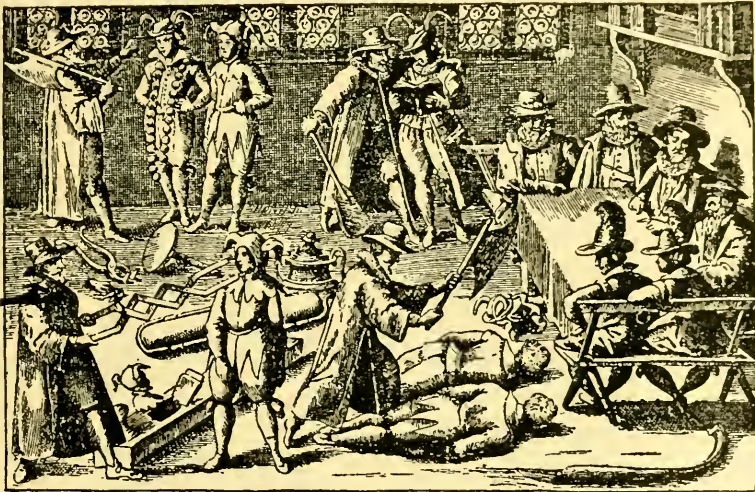
[Through these several methods our untried youth must be tested,
If of the students the ranks they would desire to join.
Readily thus they acquire command of the spirit's quick motions,
And ere they taste what is sweet, learn to endure what is hard.]

A German verse expresses a similar sentiment thus:

“Sihe wie man Studenten macht
Aus grobe Hölzlein ungeschlagt.”

[See how the students by hard knocks
Are made from crude and uncouth blocks.]

Hazing is an old French word derived from *haser*, which means “to annoy, to vex, to irritate.” A freshman was called in old French *Bec jaune*, i. e., “yellow beak” which in modern English one might call “a greenhorn,” and the French phrase was contracted into the



*Hijc modis vixit tentatur cruda iuventu:
In studioforum, si peccat esse horo:
Vt dicat rapidos animi compellere motus:
Et simul ante faciat dulcia dura pati. Sarrin. Lat.*

Sihc wie man Studenten macht.
aus grobe hölzlein ungeschlagt

COPPER ENGRAVING OF THE 17TH CENTURY.

Preserved in the Germanischen Museum at Nuremberg.¹

late Latin form *beanus* or *beanus*, the definition of which is given thus: “*Beanus est animal nesciens vitam studiosorum*,” that is to say, “a beanus is an animal unfamiliar with the life of students.”

How old the custom is to vex the *bec jaunes* appears from a decree of the *confratria Sancti Sebastiani* at Avignon in 1441 which forbids some improper practices of the deposition.

In the time of the Reformation the deposition assumed a defi-

¹ A similar drawing is reproduced by W. Fabricius in *Die deutschen Corps*, p. 23.

nite form in Protestant universities, and Luther himself deemed it necessary to express his views on the subject with characteristic vigor. In the year 1578 Johannes Dinckel wrote a pamphlet "on the origin, instances, type and ceremonies of that rite which in the schools is commonly called Deposition." He incorporated Luther's verdict together with the illustrated poem (*carmen heroicum*) of this custom by Frederick Widebrand, from which several woodcuts are here reproduced.

Students who had been absolved from their beanism were called *absoluti*, or the absolved ones.



WOODCUT FROM WIDEBRAND'S CARMEN HEROICUM.

Published at Erfurt and Wittenberg, 1578. The inscription reads, with the usual abbreviation: "O beane beanorum."

In the deposition ceremony, the beanus was dressed in a ridiculous fashion, his skin was blackened, horns and long ears were attached to his head, and big tusks were put into his mouth. Woe to the freshman who would resent these coarse jokes, for he would at once be forced into submission by blows.

The tusks necessarily prevented the beanus from answering in plain words, the questions propounded to him, but that was taken as a sign that he grunted like a pig and was incapable of articulate speech. Thereupon the teeth were pulled out and the horns were

taken off, and both operations were performed in a manner that would be annoying and painful. As a rule they had to run against the door until the horns broke to pieces, a reminiscence of which custom is still preserved in the modern German saying *sich die Hörner ablaufen*, i. e., "to run off one's horns," which means about the same as "to sow wild oats."

In addition the freshmen were deposited on a bench or on the floor (whence the name *depositio* originated) and subjected to all kinds of maltreatments. They were anointed with ill-smelling ointments and had to drink unpleasant or even disgusting concoctions.



THE PROCESSION OF THE BEC JAUNES.

From Widebrand's *Carmen Heroicum*.

They were then polished by rude rubbings, their ears were cleaned with big spoons, their nails were cut, their heads were shaved, and big beards were painted on their faces so as to make these boys look like men.

While undergoing this treatment the freshmen had to listen to a long litany, repeat a confession of their sins after the fashion of the Church ritual, and finally they were drenched with dirty water, roughly dried and declared free of their beanism.

When these tortures were finished, they had to go to the Dean of the philosophical faculty and receive on their knees the salt of

wisdom in imitation of the Christian sacrament, while wine was poured over their heads. The ceremony was concluded with a dinner at the cost of the "deposited" freshmen.

It is interesting to observe that for a long time this deposition was considered as an official act in some universities, for in several university statutes the rule existed that no one could be matriculated or receive the Bachelor's degree unless he could produce his diploma of deposition.

The proverb says that one may become accustomed to anything as eels become accustomed to skinning, and so there were people in the good old times who did not take the ceremony of deposition



ON THE GRINDSTONE.

From Widebrand's *Carmen Heroicum*.

amiss but deemed it an inevitable destiny to which one should submit with grace. Wilhelm Fabricius² quotes a letter of a certain Schupps who wrote to his son as follows: "Thou mayest think that in universities wisdom is eaten with spoons and no foolishness can be found in any corner. But when thou arrivest, thou must become in thy first year a fool. . . . *Est quaedam sapientiae pars, cum sacculo suo insanire et sacculi moribus, quantum illibata conscientia fieri potest, morem gerere.* Allow thyself this year to be trilled and vexed in good German and in Red-Welsh. . . . *perfer et obdura. Olim meminisse juvabit.*"

² *Die deutschen Corps*, p. 35-36.

The Latin quotations read in an English translation thus: "There is a certain wisdom to be foolish with one's time, and with the customs of the time, so far as it can be done with good conscience to follow the custom. . . . bear it and endure. The time will come when remembrance will be pleasant."³

When we consider that the practice of deposition was by no means harmless and that students sometimes received lifelong injuries, we will understand that parents were much afraid of this barbarous custom, and since many evils could be averted by money, fathers had their children pass through the ceremony before they went to the university, in which case they had to apply to some well-known depositor who in consideration of the parent's generosity would let a boy undergo his trials in an easy fashion.

The rule which made deposition obligatory was revoked only in the beginning of the 18th century, and yet even when officially abolished it continued in force. There was only this difference that it became less virulent, and finally the freshmen were let off easily by paying a fine or by a verbal recapitulation of the ancient methods of deposition, which was made impressive by an inspection of the old instruments of torture used on this occasion in former times. Later on even the deposition fee was abolished, and then when freshmen were persecuted, it was done in secrecy.

Another custom which belongs to this class of barbaric traditions is fagging, which was based on the same idea that a new comer is unworthy of equal rights with other academic citizens and that he has to pass through a period of trial. During this time he has to serve his seniors, give up to them his own possessions, money or food which he might receive from home, and sometimes even his clothes.

A freshman in the old German universities was called *pennalis*, viz., a man who comes fresh from the *penna* and still belongs there. *Penna* literally means "pen," but was a general name for any preparatory school. The *pennalis* was called a fool, a feix or fex, which latter word was changed to *Fuchs* or fox. Having passed through two semesters trial they were then admitted as full-fledged members to the community of students called *bursa*, so called with this Latin form, originally meaning purse, because certain expenses were defrayed from a common fund. The term *bursa* was also applied to the house in which a number of students lived, and finally changed

³ The last two quotations have come down to us indirectly from Homer's *Odyssey*, the former (*Od.* XX, 18) as quoted by Ovid (*Ars Am.* II, 178 and *Tristia* V, 11, 7), the latter (*Od.* XII, 212) as quoted by Virgil (*Æn.* I, 203).

into the word *Bursch*, meaning a young man who is a member of a *bursa*.

The freshman or *Fuchs* at the German university when joining a fraternity of any kind is still subjected to a number of vexations but they are harmless jokes in comparison to the barbarities of past ages.

Hazing and fagging are customs that are not infrequently observed in American universities, but they may be of a spontaneous growth. We neither affirm nor deny an historical connection. It would be difficult to come to a definite conclusion, for one thing is sure that such customs and abuses originate naturally and sometimes independently in different parts of the globe.

We know that the fraternities and religious institutions even among the savages have their periods of trial, and novices are always subjected to different tests of their fitness to become fully privileged members of the society to whom they apply for admittance. The Indian secret societies are in many respects not much different from the Mediæval students' societies, only the methods are different according to the state of the different degrees of culture. Among the Pythagoreans they were more dignified than among the American Indians, and the Mediæval university institutions are decidedly nearer the savage state than to the schools of ancient Greece.

Similar trials had to be undergone by the neophytes of the Greek mysteries at Eleusis as well as in other places.

It is natural that the older members of a community are not inclined to admit the younger ones at once to all the privileges of their own state, and so we find also in the Roman Empire a discrimination made between the *Majores* of the schools of rhetoricians and the younger ones who were called the *Eversores*.⁴ Similar arrangements are also found in the juridical schools of Emperor Justinianus, and the beginning of the Mediæval university life the nucleus of which appeared to have been the juridical schools of Bologna in Italy may have followed in this special practice the ancient Roman tradition.

It is a matter of common observance that the new comer wherever he may appear has first to pass through a critical period in which he will be exposed to all kinds of provocations, slander and maltreatments, until he becomes acclimatized and is looked upon as

⁴The word *evortor* (from *evertere*) means "one who overthrows, a destroyer"; in late Latin "a good-for-nothing"; and finally in university slang, the name of contempt for a freshman. The existence of the term does not prove, but after all suggests the prevalence of fagging.

a member of the society which he has joined. Such a condition is so natural that even the dogs of Constantinople adhere to it.

It is well known that the dogs of the capital of the Turkish Empire live in communities of about 15 or 20 in number, and every such coterie of dogs consider themselves masters of a certain territory. A new comer who tries to partake of the benefits of their domain, of the shelter and food which may be found there, is first attacked most savagely, and it is not uncommon that a dog dies of his wounds, but if he survives and recovers from this ordeal of hazing, he is recognized by the others as a member of their group and is henceforth allowed to share in all the privileges of the canine community which he has joined.