

BY Robert Abels



ROBERT ABELS

showed glowing accounts, illustrated with specimens drawn on the spot.

After touring Great Britain, the collection was brought to the United States and displayed at the Columbian Worlds Exposition in Chicago in 1893, in the Anthropological Building and remained there until 1894 when it was brought to New York and shown at Coster and Bials Music Hall on 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue after which it was stored until November of 1964 when I purchased it.

The work of cataloging and cleaning 125 years of dirt, soot from oil lamps was tedious, and with the collection came a collection of prints and engravings on the same subject dating back to 1500s.

In the early days, Germany was divided into a land ruled by noblemen and wealthy landowners. They ruled each domain, and appointed the judges and executioners, who also doubled as torturers who appointed their assistants, who helped him carry out his assignments or prepare the condemned for death.

Thief catchers or catchpoles were used to catch an escaped prisoner, it consisted of a "U" shaped iron with a spring on each side attached to a long pole, and once a mans head was encompassed by this apparatus, escape was useless. These were also used to unseat horesemen. The "Witch Catchers" were polearms with spear at top and hook on side, the superstition was that you could not touch a woman suspected of being a witch with your hands. The hook would catch on her clothing enabling the warder to bring in his prisoner.

Jailers or warders as they were called then, carried a club of wood with an iron fist shaped end, that would subdue any unruly prisoner. They also carried a short stock with chain with ball at the end similar to a morning-star which did damage to a prisoners head when hit. He also carried a hammer like mace which could crack a skull.

Prisoners were shackled in their cell, as many early prints in the large collection show such treatment. Many had to wear the "Jougs" or iron collar fastened by chain to the cellwall. Bilboes or manacles with a heavy iron bar between were also worn in confinement. The "Scavengers daughter" an iron bar with loops for the hands and feet attached, and place for head, made it most painful when all parts of the body were attached in this instrument.

Other irons were heavy iron belts with a manacle on each side, shackles attached for feet, and iron collar for the head, which made it heavy and most uncomfortable for the wearer. Many other heavy irons, such as iron collars with bells attached so as to give the warder knowledge of the prisoners moving about in his cell. The Bilboes were originally made in Bilboa, Spain and brought along on the Spanish Armada in hopes of bringing back English prisoners, and during the days of our Colonial times, the law makers ordered these manacles for use in the colonies, from Great Britain.

This is the story of torture and capital punishment dating back to the Roman Empire, the Spanish Inquisition, the tortures in our generation in Nazi Germany, in Argentina under dictator Peron, the suffering of the Algerians under the French in Africa in recent years. This is the story of the largest collection of torture and punishment instruments ever assembled They were housed in the Royal Castle of Nuremburg, famous for it's "Iron Maiden." For the past 125 years people have visited this early cultural town with its early architecture, bought souvenirs in the many shops including miniature models of the "iron maiden" as cabinet specimens. Persons viewing this collection would sign the guest register and the volume I have dates from 1858 to 1890, the year it was sold. It was displayed in the dungeon of the Castle until the Earl of Shewsbury and Talbot purchased it intact.

The collection was kept at the Castle since the abolishment of torture in Germany. It was found in the 1820 period that many victims of the torture and brutal treatment were innocent of the crime that they were accused of and confessed guilt so as to end the pain they were subjected to, ending in the death sentence.

After the purchase of the collection, the Earl of Shrewsbury exhibited the entire lot of implements in every large city, and hundreds of newspaper clippings between 1890 and 1893 stressed the unique display of these ancient instruments, and numerous magazines

Minor punishments were given out to women who terrorized their husbands, as well as being shrews, by the forced wearing of a wood collar which encompassed their head and hands, and locked with a padlock, with the guard behind her with a chain attached to the collar around her neck. For two women who fought together and were arrested, their punishment was to wear a double collar so that both of them, had their heads and hands in one collar and they would be led to the market place as an object of curiosity, and when it came to eating, each one of them had one hand freed and they were forced to eat out of the same bowl using one spoon between them, and were kept together in this collar until they made up and became friends. Some of the wood collars were in the shape of a violin, with springs with bells at the ends, so that this would attract attention to the passers by. Other collars were in the shape of an Elizabethan ruff collar with bells attached. These collars were used in Denmark, England, Switzerland as well as the German specimens in the collection.

An oxen yoke shaped apparatus was worn by a man and woman who had a child out of wedlock, and their punishment was to carry pails of water suspended on each end of the yoke while wearing it, to carry water up the hill to the Royal Castle for as many times as their punishment demanded.

Gamblers were punished by the wearing of a heavy stone tablet about the neck upon which were carved specimens of playing cards of that day, in the 1500s. So were fruit or field thieves who were caught, and had to stand in the market place with a heavy stone in the shape of a bearded man with a garland of fruit about his head. These were the punishments for card sharps and thieves, of a minor nature.

Iron masks, such as written about in Dumas "Man with the iron mask" was a reality, from the 1500s to the 1800s these were given out as punishment for treason, for shrews, military punishment, for perjurers, and other criminals who had to wear these during their imprisonment, others wore them on the way to execution. One in the collection of carved wood when worn enclosed the whole head, had the form of a human skull, worn by a man reprieved from execution on his way to life imprisonment. Many of the masks in the collection have donkey ears, some have horns, others have trumpets in their mouths, all are fastened about the head and padlocked for the duration of the wearing of this covering. In most cases the masks were steel. The idea being to make the prisoner look ridiculous. One mask which has an East Indian look though German devised for scolds who had to wear this elaborately carved massive two sided mask with a ugly head in front and back, with thorns on top, she would wear this padlocked carrying in her hands, a two headed snake with carved heads of wood. This was indicative of the forked tongue. Made about 1600 and was readily noticed when worn in the public square.

The Spanish Mantle or Drunkards Yoke, was a tapered barrel with hole at top, so that when the imprisoned man was placed inside this barrel with his head outside, and a grilled mask over his head, the crowds in the market place would pelt him with rotten vegetables. This object dated from the 1600s and used both in Germany as well as in England. The stocks wherein one to 4 people could be confined in a sitting position, with feet through the openings, and their hands manacled to the top. This punishment in the 1500-1600s from Germany, also used in England, and in America this was a common punishment in New England, and Colonial Williamsburg.

The Rath Haus or Town Hall, served as a restaurant, meeting rooms, hotel and in the basement were the judges chambers, the dungeon was referred to as the "Hole" or Loch, where the condemned prisoners were confined in dark cells, the prisoners awaiting trial in other cells, and the torture chamber.

The judges sat behind their bench wearing a copper half mask, with a facial expression, worn by them so that a friend or relative was brought before them for trial, they would not recognize the men who were sentencing them. Behind them was a painting of justice on the wall, with sword in her hand.

When the prisoner stood before them, he was asked to plead guilty, if he were believed as such, if he pleaded guilty then he would be sentenced to his punishment, and if it were a capital case, which included stealing, parricide, the killing of ones parent, or one of the many crimes which today would be minor, he would be sentenced to hang, after which the prisoner would plead with the judge for an easier death, the beheading sword, and when granted he would kiss the judge's hands with joy.

Hanging was a cruel death in those days as they simply tied the rope around his head, and pushed him off a box or ladder which would strangle him, and not a quick death like in late gallows.

Flagellants of knotted rope, or linked steel and wire rods were used as punishments for minor crimes such as loan sharks, poachers, immoral women and children who committed minor crimes, many were flogged out of the town. Married women who misbehaved with single men were put into a sack and drowned, while the paramour was flogged out of town. Other cruel punishments were the chairs in which the offenders were strapped, the seats and backs were covered with sharpened wood spikes, this was used in the 1500-1600 period in Germany. Also in the collection is a large cradle, about 6 feet in length, the entire surface of the inside of the cradle is covered with sharpened wooden spikes, as is the pillow for the head, which is also wood. Ducking cages were made of wood with a padlocked door in this cage was placed the baker who short weighted his customers, or other shop keepers who were cheats. The cage was lowered into the river for as many times the punishment called for, such punishments were common in England and in the American Colonies in the Colonial days.

When the prisoner pleaded not guilty to a crime, the Judge would have the torturer show the various instruments to prisoner to convince him it would be useless to plead that way, and if he then refused to plead guilty, the judge ordered him put into the torture room and placed into the various torture instruments which was so painful, that they either brought death to the prisoner or that not standing the pain any longer, he pleaded guilty.

In the torture chamber, the torturer placed a pear like object into the mouth of the prisoner, which opened upon entry so it stifled any cries, that the other prisoners might hear. Other tortures were given to those who spoke against the ruling monarch, for which the tongue was fastened by an apparatus and torn out by the roots, this punishment was also for religious dissenters. There are many thumb screws, Spanish Gaiters, or shinbone breakers, Spanish and Venitian spiked collars, which were worn by prisoners for various crimes. Red hot pincers were applied to the bodies of prisoners, the same kind used in Roman times on the Christian Martyrs. Branding irons were used for some crimes, and there are many branding irons in this collection from different German cities, such as "N" for Nuremburg, and one has the sign of the gallows.

The ladder, a fifteen foot long instrument with a winch below, upon which a man was handcuffed and his body stretched and lighted cancles were applied under his arms. This punishment as well as the "Fearful Eliza" a stretching gallows about 14 feet high, from which a man was hung by one hand, and 50 pound stones were attached to each foot. This form of torture was illustrated in the law books of Maria Theresa of Austria in the 18th century, and the plans for making them and applying the torture explained to the men who had to perform these tortures. The apparatus and prints of all of these apparatus are well represented in the Collection. Another the Spanish Donkey a flat sharpened board on top, with a cross stand below, upon this sharpened board, was straddled the prisoner with a stone weight attached to each foot. These torture objects brought forth a fast cry of guilty, few could withstand the cruel punishment. The Spanish copper boot in which the prisoner was placed and hot oil poured in. Chain mail gloves and foot coverings were made red hot in the iron charcoal brazier and applied to foot and hands.

There are four hand axes and heavy knives for cutting off the fingers or hands, before hanging him, the latter for parricides who have killed a parent. The iron beheading chair is one that is similar to the one in the Vienna Criminal Museum. The Beheading is one of the oldest forms of execution, and age was not considered, as in the collection there is a skull of a beheaded female child murderess. Executing children was common in Germany, England and some of the other European countries until about 1835. There are 25 executioner swords, two edged blades some with engraving of the Crucifixion, others with figures of the saints, some with three holes near the end of the blade indicating the Trinity. A number of the blades have a two line verse in German, mostly in the same vein, "Telling the victim of his folly and the blade executes Gods judgement." An axe with the date 1539 is a fine example of English headsman axes. This form of execution was revived in the Hitler regime, to frighten the public and keep them in line.

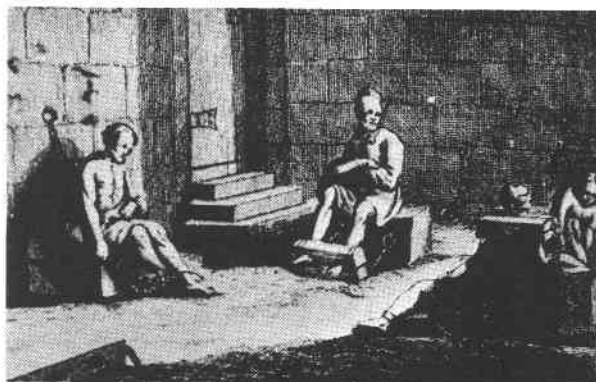
The wheel a punishment reserved for highwaymen, traitors, and murderers, was a heavy wood wheel with an iron wedge attached, the victim was laid prone, and the wheel was brought down breaking each bone, the last one over the heart finished the job. This punishment dates 1500-1800 in both Germany and England, and some were used in France up to the 18th century.

The Eiserne Jungfrau or Iron Maiden was a figure of a female constructed of iron and wood, she is shown wearing a ruff collar and the two doors open in front exposing an interior with spikes set all over. The victim was placed inside and the door closed, having the spikes pierce every part of his body. Burning at the stake was reserved for certain murderers, but most of all those suspected of being a witch. The collection has a mondragon root in form of a man, the witch used this to stick pins in as sort of a curse that people had wished on their enemies and the pins in the root would give pain to the wishers enemy. Also witches talisman, a disc with mottos inscribed, also carved figures of devils the witches prayed to, are represented in the collection. One crucifix of sorts was carried by the witch to her execution.

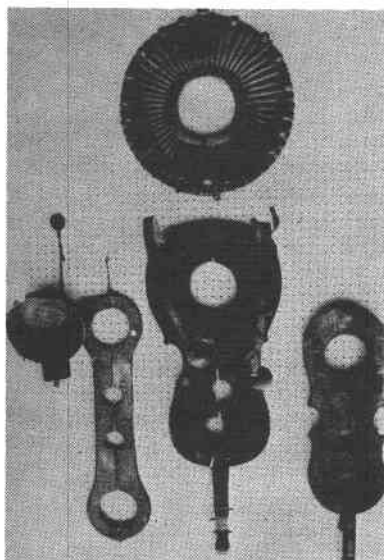
This collection is one that makes one think that living in this age is so much more pleasant than in the days of weapons that seem so unreal that it terrifies you to think such cruelties ever existed.



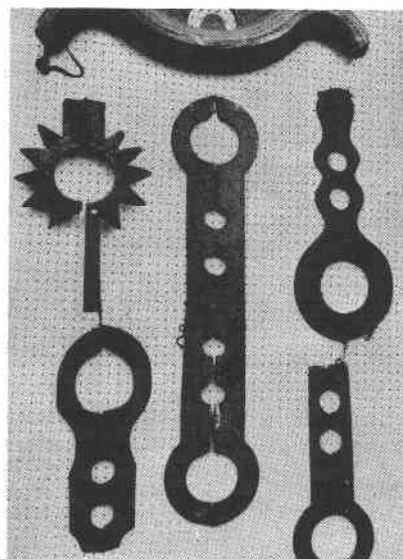
PRINT OF OLD "RATH HAUS" OR TOWN HALL WHICH HOUSED THE JUDGES AND TORTURE CHAMBER, DATED 1600



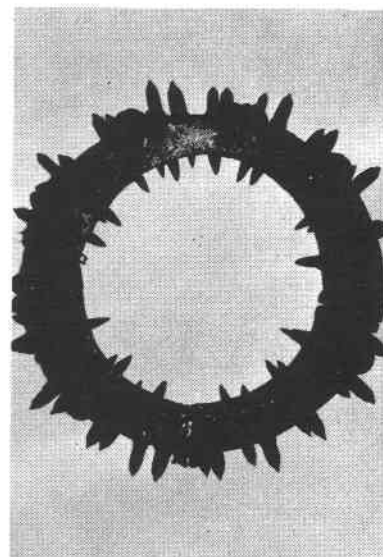
17TH CENTURY PRINT OF PRISONERS IN IRONS CONFINED IN CELL



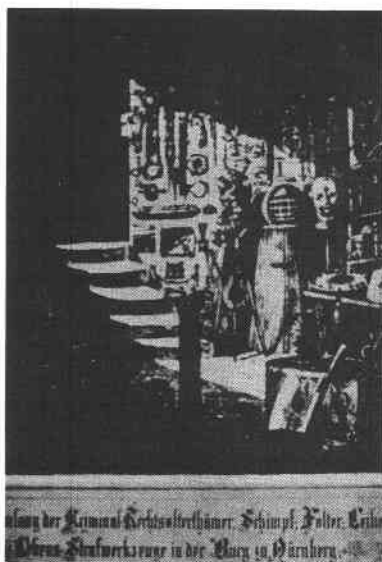
THREE "SCOLDS" COLLARS, ONE VIOLIN SHAPED WITH BELLS, ONE PLAIN VIOLIN SHAPED AND ONE DOUBLE FOR TWO WOMEN WITH WOODEN BOWL AND SPOON TO SERVE THEM. BOTTOM: CARVED COLLAR IN FORM OF RUFF WITH BELLS.



TOP: OXEN YOKE FOR HUMAN PUNISHMENT BELOW: FOUR WOODEN "SCOLDS" COLLARS WITH OPENINGS FOR HANDS AND NECK AND ONE DOUBLE COLLAR FOR TWO WOMEN. PERIOD 1500 - 1600



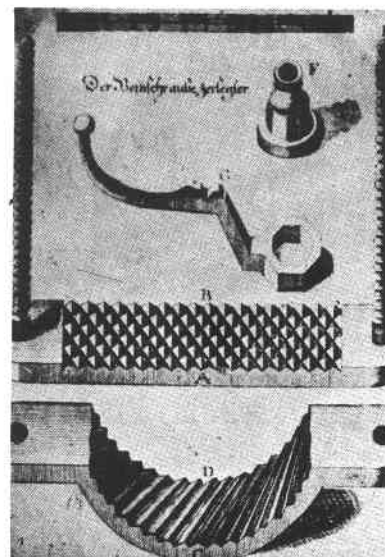
"THE VENITIAN COLLAR" MADE WITH IRON SPIKES INSIDE AND OUT. IRRITATING ON A HOT DAY. ALSO USED IN GERMANY ABOUT 1500



OLD PRINT SHOWING COLLECTION IN THE ROYAL CASTLE IN THE 1850s.



OLD PRINT OF PRISONER IN CELL CARRYING HIS IRON MASK



A "DO IT YOURSELF" PLANS FOR A "SHIN BREAKER" FROM THE LAW BOOKS OF MARIA THERESA OF AUSTRIA, - 1700

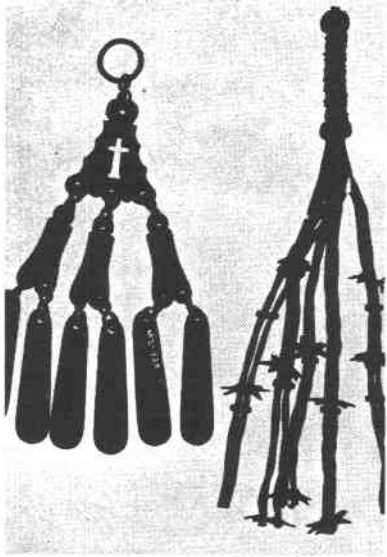




IRON MASKS WHICH WERE PADLOCKED ON PRISONERS HEADS CONVICTED OF TREASON AND OTHER CRIMES.



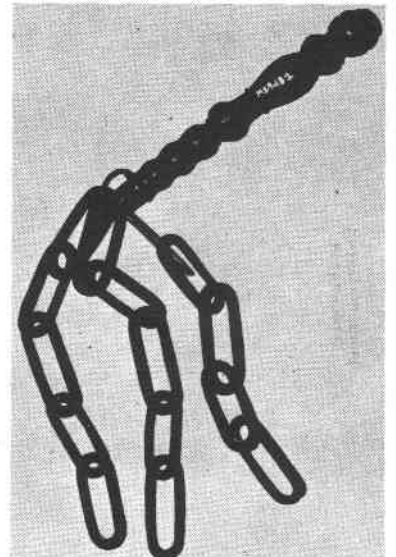
CARVED MASK OF STONE WORN BY FRUIT AND VEGETABLE THIEVES AS PUNISHMENT



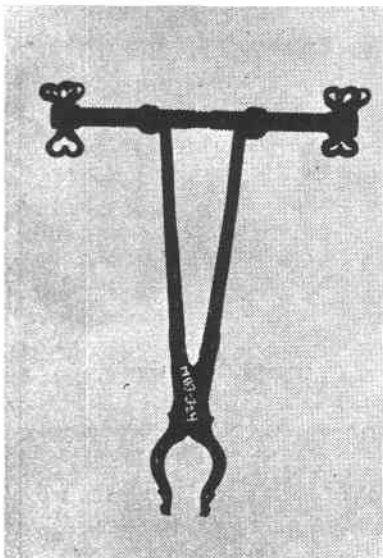
WHIPS OR SCOURAGES, ONE ON LEFT HAS SIX SHARP STEEL CUTTING EDGES OTHER HAS FIVE POINTED STAR SHAPED STEEL BARBS. - 1500



FINE CARVED WOOD POLYCHROMED FRONT AND BACK MASK OF A HEAD WITH HORNS WORN BY WOMEN FOR BEING SHREWS. WHILE WEARING MASK SHE CARRIED A TWO HEADED SNAKE WHICH INDICATED "THE FORKED TONGUE." GERMAN PERIOD 1600



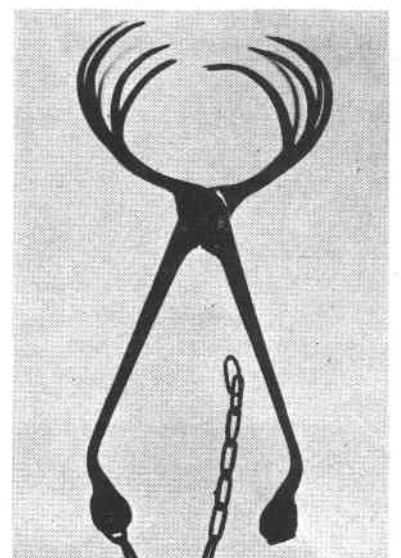
Iron Whip with Sharp Linked Blades. Period 1500.



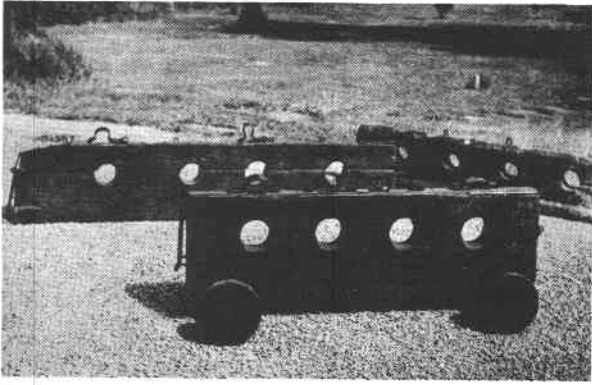
Pincers for grabbing young before tearing it out German 1400-1500



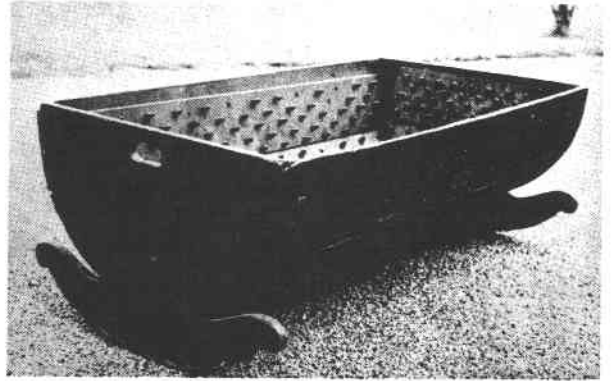
TOP: PIERCED LADLE FOR POURING HOT OIL. BELOW: ROMAN MARTYR "PINCHING TONGS" USED RED HOT. OTHER ITEMS; BRANDING IRONS, HOT LEAD LADLE, CHAIN MAIL MITTEN AND SOCK USED HOT. BOTTOM; COPPER BOOT USED HEATED TO HOLD HOT OIL FOR EMERSON OF FOOT AND BRAZIER FOR HEATING BRANDING IRONS.



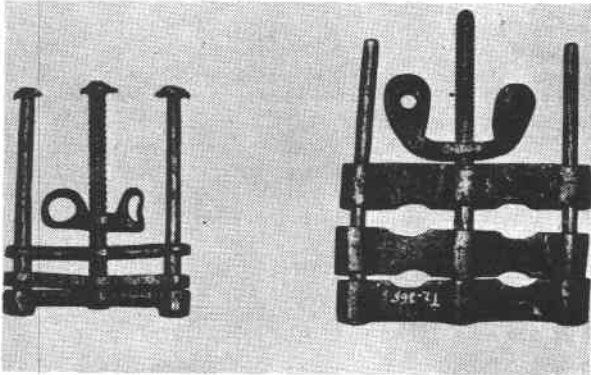
"THE SPIDER," Skin Tearing Pincers used on Women to mutilate their breasts. German 1400-1500.



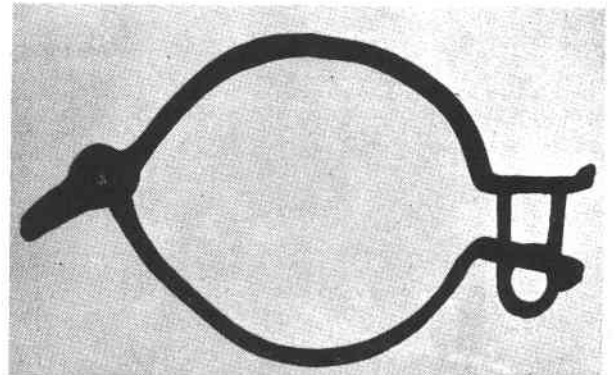
THREE WOODEN STOCKS, ONE ON WHEELS FOR TAKING FROM TOWN TO TOWN. PERIOD 1500 to 1600



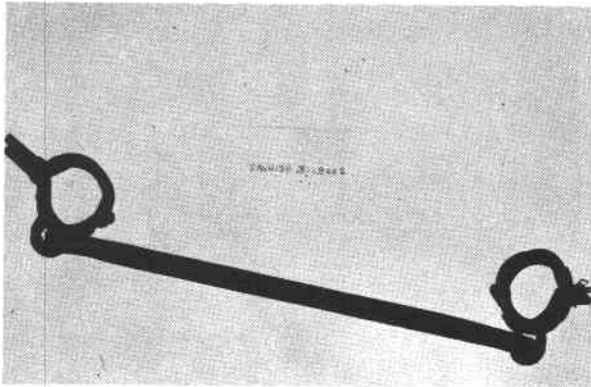
A "CRADLE FOR TOUGH BABIES." NOTE THE SHARP WOODDED SPIKES INSIDE AND COMFORTABLE SOFT SPIKED PILLOW



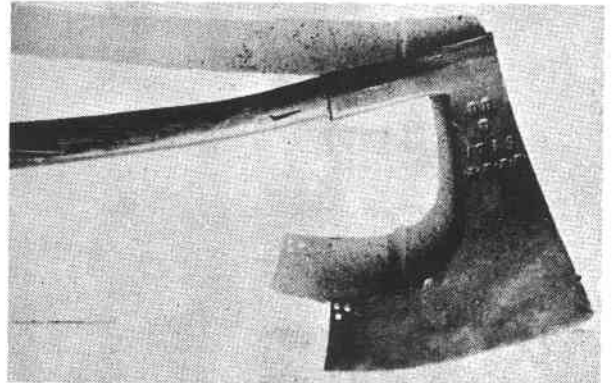
LEFT: SINGLE THUMB SCREW. RIGHT: DOUBLE THUMB SCREW. STOPPED SUCKING OF THUMBS.



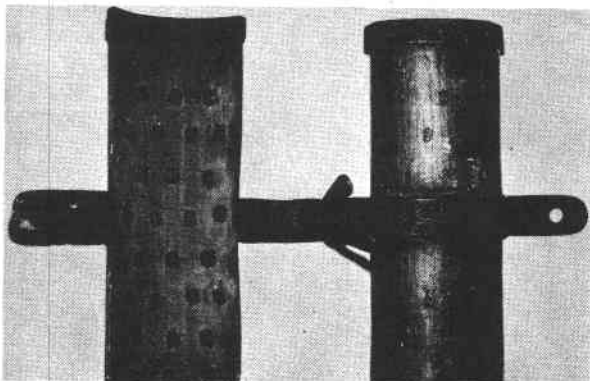
THE "JOUGS" OR IRON COLLAR WITH PLACE FOR CHAIN TO ATTACH TO CELL WALL, PERIOD 1580



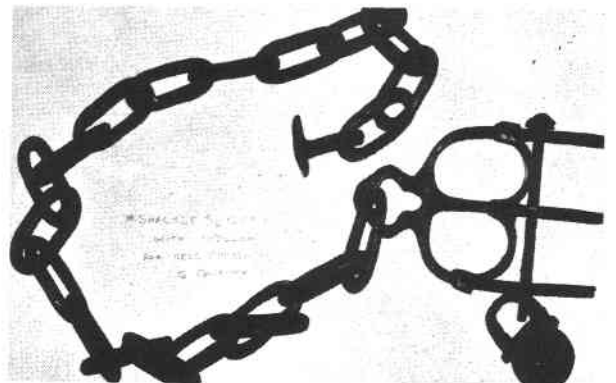
"SPANISH BILBOES," MANACLES WITH HEAVY IRON BAR BETWEEN. PERIOD 1500



ENGLISH EXECUTIONER'S AXE DATED 1539 WITH THREE HOLES IN END OF BLADE INDICATING THE TRINITY



A SPECIMEN OF THE SPANISH BOOT USED TO BREAK SHINS.



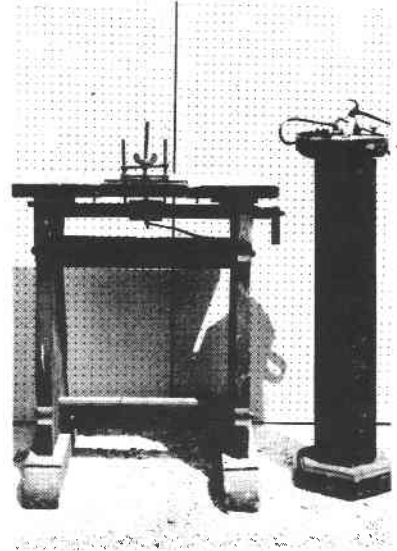
ADJUSTABLE HANDCUFFS WITH PADLOCK AND CHAIN, GERMAN 1600



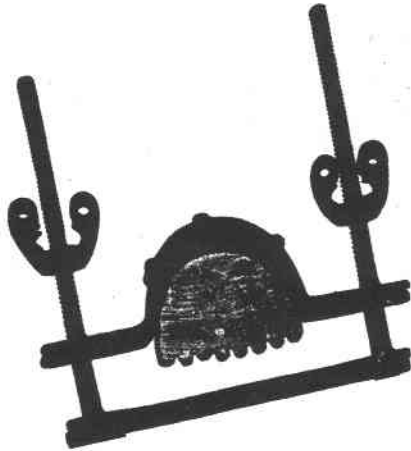
NOT A BARBER CHAIR, A GERMAN "BEHEADING CHAIR," THE VICTIM SITS WITH HEAD OVER THE BACK . . . LOP-O. MADE OF IRON 1500-1600



THE FAMOUS "IRON MAIDEN" WHICH SURROUNDS THE PRISONER AND INSIDE IS STUDED WITH SPIKES.



LEFT: TABLE WITH THUMB SCREWS AND VIBRATOR TO INCREASE PAIN. RIGHT: THUMB PRESSER ON STAND. GERMAN 1500-1600



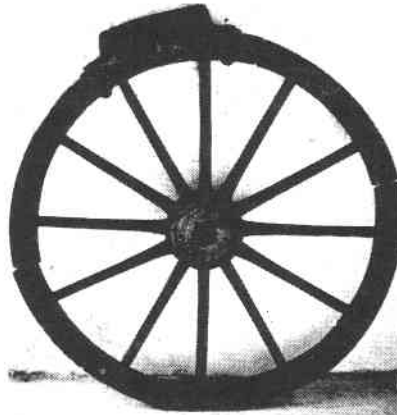
"SPANISH SHIN BREAKER," TIGHTENING DOWN THE BLOCK OF WOOD BROKE THE SHIN. 1600



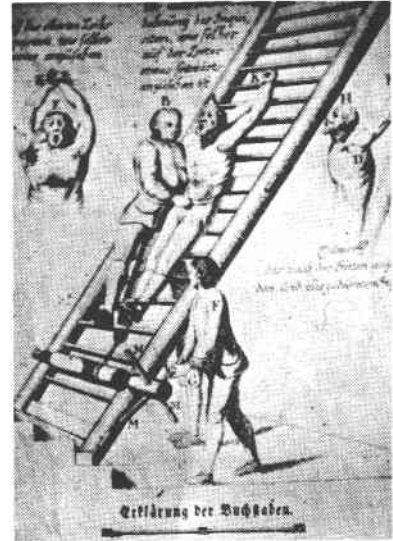
LEFT: SPANISH "WRIST BREAKER" TYPE OF THUMB SCREW WITH TOOTHED WOODEN BLOCK AND SPIKED BAND, ADJUSTED BY KEY. RIGHT: GINGLE HANDCUFF FOR TWO WRISTS.



"BREAKING ON THE WHEEL", A FORM OF EXECUTION ABOUT 1750. FROM AN OLD PRINT.



EXECUTION OR BREAKING WHEEL . . . ROLLED OVER PRONE PRISONERS THE IRON WEDGE BROKE THEIR BONES OR KILLED THEM.



A "STRETCHING LADDER" FROM MARIA THERESA'S LAW BOOK. MARIA MUST HAVE BEEN A NICE GAL.