

TOWARDS CANTERBURY

WHILE a torrid August shrivels up the pleasant green earth, the minds of many Englishmen turn hopefully towards Canterbury. I do not mean that the whole Ecclesia Anglicana in *The Church Times* sense suddenly feels grateful, obedient, or even reverential in relation to hallowed Canterbury. I do not imagine that this Ecclesia Anglicana waits with more assurance in August than at any other time for a voice of authority to speak out of Canterbury. Nor do I refer in such general terms to the devout few Catholics of the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, who still go thither yearly, 'the hooly blisful martir for to seke,' making their pilgrimage as did their forefathers in the days of Chaucer, 'from every shiris ende of Engelonde.' If the average Englishman were heard to say something like this: 'Last year, I had to miss my first Canterbury festival since I was ten,' his hearers would more naturally assume that it was cricket rather than the blissful martyr that drew him to Canterbury with yearly regularity.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning of such an August day, when the morning sun gave promise of taking up the baking qualities of the sweltering night it came on to relieve, that I stood in the market square of Bromley, some ten or twelve miles out of London. We had made up a little party, the Lum-boroughs and I, to go down to Canterbury by motor-coach. We had been assured that, in the words of the agent, the party would be 'very select.' The Franklins and Dr. Smith had already booked seats. So at the appointed hour we took possession, noting that our fellow travellers seemed a very 'decent' crowd. However, before we started, what proved to be a feeder

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char-a-banc drew up alongside, and we were boarded by a number of people obviously from neighbouring and less prosperous suburban boroughs. The class consciousness, of which we hear so much nowadays, became evident at once. Most of the earlier passengers became very quiet and remote; the invaders in their turn, from the same kind of motive, became not just noisy, but rather assertively noisy. Thus we all, in our several ways, sought to advertise our complete self-possession.

It was only the previous night that Dr. Smith had told us that there was more sympathy existing between what is known as an English gentleman and a gentleman of Turkey, or the Punjab, or Scotland, than between an English gentleman and a fellow countryman not signed and sealed as such. I remembered I had hotly contested the statement. Consequently, as we crawled through the crowded Bromley streets, I wondered if all these apparently antagonized elements in our composition would effect any degree of fusion by the time we reached our journey's end. Happily, it did come about that we reached Canterbury, blended into a merry, contented party, and no longer elements discrete and warring. To show what a blessed thing had come to pass I must now give a rapid survey of our Canterbury pilgrims.

Following precedent, I put our knight in the front. Sir George Lumborough, K.C.B. and a dozen other things, was no carpet knight, but an old campaigner of the Indian Army, hard as nails at his job, and soft-hearted in everything else. It was a very poor and unimportant relative of his that had given me the introduction to him, and after that the old boy could not do enough for me. It is not always thus with 'poor relations' and their friends. The retired pay of General Sir George Lumborough did not make him a 'bloated capitalist' by any manner of means. He

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was an intelligent man well cast in the mould of his profession.

His son, Tony, was with him, and the old man was looking forward with pride to seeing his son turn out for Kent in the very match we were travelling to witness. Tony, with the modesty that adorns achievement, was dexterously 'leading on' Tom Bates, who had been his servant and friend since the old days with the Buffs. When it came to cricket, Tom did not have to be 'led on.' His cricket lore was wide and detailed.

Then we had a parson from a London parish, enjoying the temporary relaxation so hard earned by months of unrelieved drabness. Certainly he was an upholder of the noble game—'Christianity, my dear Sir, is founded on the laws that govern cricket, a game for Christians.' He was a poor man, though rich in charitableness. For all his threadbare coat and disgraceful trousers, he was a personable man, socialable, and, though not scholarly, exceedingly well informed. As of Chaucer's poor parson, so it could be said of this new kind of parson that 'first he wrought and afterwards he taught.' And, you know, the reason was that he knew he could spend himself in clubs and hostels, and whatnot, in the service of the under-dog, while in regard to teaching, having no certainty of doctrine or commission, he could teach only doubtfully what he frankly acknowledged to be opinions. He and his brother had passed the night with an old school-friend, Dr. Smith, a sceptic always ready to be impressed by each successive theory of most of the branches of popularized science. The Doctor, however, knew goodness when he saw it, and was too kind-hearted willingly to wound so good a man as the parson. Usually, therefore, in the inevitable arguments he restricted himself severely to the defensive, in spite

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of the splendid target presented by his opponent's unbelievable beliefs.

The parson's elder brother, Mark Ploughman, had been losing capital for years in too adventurous farming. The doctor would goad him into a state of fury by telling him that England's trouble was that there were too many people interested in farming, and not sufficient interested in simply becoming farmers.

I have mentioned the Franklins. Dominic, the youngest, held that estate of theirs Canterbury way. It had been a matter of great satisfaction to all the Franklin connection when he had been appointed Deputy Lieutenant of the County. He was in the old tradition of hospitality to guest, and charity to dependant—charity, mind, not philanthropic promotion of efficiency! His elder brother, Adrian, a Benedictine monk, was accompanying him, together with a Franklin cousin, who was a Franciscan. The latter had been giving a retreat to some nuns in a London convent, and the Benedictine's superiors had willingly given the necessary permission which made this reunion possible.

All three were going to meet several old friends during and after the cricket. They were at first a group apart, absorbed in their common interests, matters far removed from cricket, greatly as all three loved the game. Later it became clear that the two religious could take and tell a joke with the best. They both confessed to an aching love for sport, horses, dogs, guns, and the rest, which remained rooted in them, despite their zeal for the work to which they had dedicated their lives.

An interesting traveller was with us in the person of Henry Moke Miller, the wheat king, who was very anxious to see if there were anything in this Canterbury. He had heard about a Cathedral in Canterbury, and was a little anxious to know for how much he

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could buy it. He was interested in 'uplift,' and at the suggestion, of a friend, a person whose plus-fours were checked almost to a tartan turn, was travelling down by motor coach for the sake of the experience, accompanied by this same friend. The friend was a hard-bitten north country manufacturer with a voice of a broad-casting bluebottle, the conversational approach of a local preacher, and with a soul, in his own estimation, spotless as a lily. He often prefaced his remarks at Board meetings and in sober conversation with the self quotation: 'As I was saying in our Brotherhood.'

Nor was the law unrepresented. Huggermugheim, at one time leader of the Bar in the Samoan Islands, was coming down with Mrs. Bath. A dried-up little man, Huggermugheim had an unaccountable friendship with this lady, whose love of mischief had brought him into this queer galley of a glorified char-a-banc. In 1887 he had taken leave of the courts to lead the first Samoan cricket eleven to visit the mother country; but, if you remember, the venture had fallen to the ground after the first test match, owing to his inflated sense of dignity. The lady who was playing her tricks on so dignified a little man was the night-club queen, known to all readers of the snappy little gossip pages as the Wife of Bath. She was travelling down to rejoice in her son, who was to lead the side against the men of Kent. He was a good fellow, who really owed everything to the versatility of his mother. In common with many members on the female side of the theatrical profession, she would refer to that ready testimonial of subsequent respectability, her convent education. She was very young-looking, and smiled wistfully, as one needing protection against the wicked world.

There was even an Oxford undergraduate with us, complete with classic stoop and grey flannel trousers

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—a really nice young man of no unfathomable depths. When the boy in him was in the ascendant, his modest reserve was for all to see. When convinced that he really was a man, uproar reigned—absolutely. His somewhat untidy clothes somehow showed that the 'Varsities are for the athlete, and are not altogether the masculine 'debutant' process for sweet young male things. He knew none of us, but I think he must have lived somewhere near, because the shop people who joined us seemed happy to be acquainted with him. He was charming to them with the easy grace of complete assurance.

There were five of these tradesmen, solid and prosperous, probably Rotarians and members of the local Chamber of Commerce. This little group was fortunate in a way, because Mr. Cook and his friend, Manciple, tagged on to it. Cook owned the nearest approach to a decent grill in the South-eastern suburbs. A jovial fellow with a roving eye, he was inclined to slap his friends on the back. With him he had an ingenious portmanteau arrangement with glass, china, and cutlery on one side, and champagne, together with good things to eat, securely stowed on the other. His laugh as he showed this to the five tradesmen was hearty and infectious. A good companion was Mr. Cook. And so was his friend, Mr. Manciple, the assistant steward at one of the Metropolitan poor-law institutions. Manciple had some knowledge of wines, acquired, his enemies said, from experience with samples sent by hopeful contractors. Anyway, he was another good companion. Not so, however, Oswald Reeve, who, belonging to the Cook-Manciple group, could not manage to tag on properly to the jolly tradesman combine. Reeve had, until the new Act, been Clerk to the Guardians—thus he knew Manciple—and his occupation had made him sad and generally silent. Perhaps the Guardians were to blame for the

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difficulty in making Reeve hearty. Or it may be that he simply was an East Anglian.

A solitary pilgrim was a sea captain engaged in the coasting trade, who had an extraordinary fervour for cricket. From his speech it could be guessed that Devon was his county. He had rather a piratical appearance, for which a thrusting red beard and a ferocious moustache were largely responsible. It took him a good two minutes to tell a person who had trod on his toes in the effort to secure a seat, exactly what could be said of the whole tribe of men with toe-treading proclivities. The unfortunate who brought this on himself was a waggish fellow, who constantly referred to himself as 'Sammy.' He appeared to be some kind of usher in the law courts, and, beginning with his 'Oyez, Oyez,' now and then treated us engagingly enough to some mock legal language.

Then there was a serious-looking square of people sitting in twos together. The most important in hierarchal order was a gentle adjutant of the Salvation Army, arrayed *cap à pie* to struggle musically when the time came, at the cricket ground gates for the souls of those within. Nun-like, she had an *aide-de-camp* with her in the austere shape of a younger woman of the 'Army.' Both seemed kind and both had the marks of being appallingly efficient women. To minister to them and protect them was one of the men soldiers of the 'Army' with his cornet in a neat wooden case.

Somewhat incongruous as a neighbour to the Salvation Army man was a mealy-mouthed, pimply person. He was a colporteur for some politico-rationalist society, for the sale of whose dishonest wares his glib, pseudo-scientific mode of speech was well suited. With a smirk he could tell any poor woman how the race is to be improved. He had the usual scientific marketplace phrases of the quack (Eugenics makes the world safe for our children by sterilizing as many potential

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parents as need be—Safety First—No danger—a glorious future—the dawn of the glory of man—Man his own God—no danger—no loss of appetite—no diminution of enjoyment—no danger—think of the throughbreds of the future—You don't know how it's done?—Got a radio, haven't you?—What do they say—No danger—What about some of these books?—Greatest living scientists, Hæckel, Gibbon, Wells, Keith, Stopes, nearly all of them doctors—). Not a nice man to know, but still a man—Chaucer's Pardoner modernized to the life! Science, poor, honest, sincere, helping Science, also has its superstitious, unworthy appendages. This appendage had almost at the beginning to be sat on by the united might of Tony Lumborough, the Benedictine and the Salvation Army man, while Sammy shouted his 'Oyez, Oyez,' and the Salvationist adjutant seized her protector's cornet from its case and blew a fanfare, loud enough to smother the blasphemies before they reached the innocent ears of the Wife of Bath.

This occurrence brought us all to our feet, and the expression of public opinion against the indiscriminate discussion of such topics knit together our varied company. Some did not hold sound views on the principles; but by a strange relic of moral tradition even these honestly condemned the indiscriminate proposition of moral and social anarchy. General agreement made for friendliness. The spirit of isolation was exchanged for that of guarded comradeship.

Another incident on the road also made for unity. Our driver—a very decent man he was, too—drew up beside a carter flogging an overburdened horse, and with a hatred of cruelty, let loose upon the bull-necked perpetrator of it, a torrent of cockney sarcasm not un-mixed with profanity. The carter, nothing loth, replied in similar strain, but was howled down by our

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concerted execration. The love of animals, which the English are accused of having to an exaggerated extent caused this popular outcry, and a discussion that was quite general emerged from the encounter. Stupid but well-meaning reference was made by some to the Spaniards and their bull fights. 'Give me good old England every time,' from Sammy; and 'Think of the poor dear bulls,' from the Wife of Bath; and 'What about the horses, madam?' from the General. The lady companion of the Salvationist adjutant thought horse-racing was cruel. The Franklins advanced in a body to disagree. Mr. Cook, as a man of the world, had a preference for the dogs. The parson thought the horse was a noble animal, and the dog a trusty friend. The sea captain preferred the cat with its inscrutable air of dignity. On his voyages he had seen some extraordinary cats, of mammoth size too, one of which had saved his life. Then as we drove through the garden of England many things caused a cry of delight to escape the lips: a picturesque village, a church, a windmill, an old oast house, somebody's garden, the remains of an ivied wall, an ancient bridge, a coaching inn, a well-kept cricket ground, the road dappled with irregular patches of light as the sun pierced dark overhanging trees, a sudden panoramic glimpse caught in *ictu oculi* as we swept past a gap on a wooded hill—sights never before noticed, perhaps not seen before, yet somehow familiar, almost in remembrance.

The one who first felt the emotion of any of this beauty had to act quickly if he would share it. An ejaculation was an intimation for all who cared. No one hesitated to make any remark that came to him. Those seated in front would turn half round to speak to the general body behind. Views about the preference for holidays in England were aired from every quarter. Or perhaps there would be some cross talk, a number speaking about the scenery, or the post-war

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beer, while others might be trying to settle definitely the relative merits of favourite cricketers.

For a time the shadow of the war, never very far away from this generation, crept upon us. Someone was reminded of an episode, some incident within personal experience, some sad twisted joke.

A tale or two was told in a few words. Surprisingly enough, the best of all war stories was told by our adjutant of the Salvation Army. Anyway, the time passed pleasantly, and we reached Canterbury in peace and understanding. All the same, I look back wistfully on the happier journey left on record by Geoffrey Chaucer.

JOHN PREEDY.

AGNOSTICISM

THESE, stricken, hold the winding-sheet of
Christ :
The still, straight body and the noble head
They bind about with linen bands, to lie
In myrrh and aloes on a stony bed.

These are the mourners at the burial,
Who know the stopped heart, the departed breath :
The hands that tend His body in the tomb,
The hearts that hold Him in the sleep of death.

ELIZABETH BELLOC.