

## CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

## THE THREE INNS.

IN days not so long ago, when those whose hairs are now blanched were giving their locks the lustre of what Byron styled, "incomparable oil—Macassar," there stood in an English town three houses of refreshment, such as we style restaurants, known, however, in days of yore as Inns. After the manner of the time they each bore an ecclesiastical name.

One, by centuries the oldest of the three, was the "MITRE." The next, of considerable age, was the "POPE'S HEAD." The other, a more modern affair, was the "GOWN AND CROWN." They each had, as was also the manner of the time, a sign over the main door on which was a portrait of the patron saint, with a shield bearing an heraldic device symbolic of the title of the House. The oldest had the picture of a Bishop, crowned with a mitre, the device on the shield was a crozier laid across an open Bible.

The Pope's Head House had a gorgeous portrait of which the most striking feature was the tiara, resplendent with gilding, below which were two huge keys crossed.

The third sign bore the image of a preternaturally solemn looking divine in a black gown and white bands, overshadowing whom was a huge golden crown.

Connoisseurs in pictorial art found no difficulty in tracing the source of the pictures in a gallery of old paintings in a neighbouring mansion. The Bishop's face was clearly intended to represent St. Paul as depicted in an Old Master, though some more correctly declared that the features so copied were simply those of an ideal Apostle. The head with the tiara was a portrait of the then living Pope, it was freshly painted. Indeed this sign was hardly ever dry, it was touched up and little bits added so often. About the third there was no dispute, it was a good portrait of John Calvin, dressed up as an English clergyman. The wits of the town did say that *there were subtle meanings in those three signs*—but of this we leave our readers to judge.

For long, long years, ages ago, the former house had had a monopoly of providing the citizens with good, sound, wholesome refreshment. Then a row had taken place because an Italian who had craftily got an interest in the house, was trying to run the business as if he owned it, much to the annoyance of the old customers. At last they could not stand this foreigner's interference any longer, so the Italian was turned out, and the entire management of the Mitre from kitchen to attic, again was resumed by the old native English family by whose ancestors it had been held from time immemorial.

This foreigner, who lived at Rome, at once opened a rival house across the street and put up the sign of the Pope's Head. Then, some of the customers of the old original house, took a fancy against using any of the furniture, or dishes, or ornaments, which had been used by the Italian. These had all been thoroughly cleansed, as they needed, for he was somewhat

of a dirty fellow. But No! The grumblers were so fantastic in their ideas of purity,—they got nicknamed "Puritans," that nothing would satisfy them but either having everything destroyed that the Italian had ever used, or setting up a house of their own. The utter absurdity of their wishes was so clearly seen by the more sober minded citizens that, at last, as they could not have their own way in the Mitre House, these terribly over particular people opened a place for their own set. They got the plan of the house chiefly from a foreign builder called John Calvin, though this man really did more work as a contractor for pulling down than for erecting buildings.

So in this old town, as we have said, there were established three houses of refreshment. Need for three was there none in any way, as the whole business could have been done under one roof, and every taste thoroughly satisfied, if only the different classes of customers had not been split off into parties by the old quarrels we have named.

At the Mitre, our favorite when we visit the town, there is an admirably arranged routine of dishes according to the seasons. Go there for a meal and you need no telling at what stage of the year's procession you have arrived.

Order most regular, with variety most charming is the rule at the Bishop's House. It is indeed a house of rest and refreshment. Those whose tastes are simple to severity find herein the plainest food served with as much care as the costliest. All the cooks and waiters are skilled in their calling, they know their business thoroughly and they do it with an ease and a certain air of refinement which skillful training, and love of their work alone gives. The guests are trained to social life by all dining together at one table where mutual services and the conscientious participation in one meal engenders kindness and good-will. Pleasure, so needful to brush away life's cobwebs of care, is provided by music being made to add its gentle delights to company and good feeding. The customers of the Mitre are notable for a certain air of quiet, refined dignity, produced by the healthfulness of the diet of that ancient hostelry. One great boast of the Mitre is that of hospitality. No penniless, footworn traveller had ever begged a meal at its door without being given one as good, and with service as complete, as money could buy.

The table, or tables, at the Pope's Head, are served chiefly with what Englishmen scorn as mere "foreign kick-shaws." The guests are treated somewhat like cattle, as they never are allowed to handle a single dish, or to serve one another. The waiters alone are allowed to do any service, hence the customers never learn to help each other as in the Bishop's House. The customers are made at the Pope's Head establishment so dependent upon and subservient to the waiters that they hardly dare call their souls their own. Indeed, sometimes at this place, if a waiter "gets mad," say for instance, if a dish is asked to be served with an English name, or cooked as it is at the Mitre, the guest who desires this innovation is not allowed another meal until he has begged the waiter's

pardon. This house is still run by an Italian. Its specialty is *made dishes*, in which the trimmings are more than the meat. One sarcastic guest declared that a meal at the Pope's Head was a great act of faith, for if there was any solid food, it was concealed by a mass of stuffings, sauces and flavourings! One thing keeps this house open. The Italian's taste for music is shown by providing it in forms so fascinating that the guests forget the poverty of the food, the sauciness of the waiters, and the foreign style of the service.

The Crown and Gown House is a poor affair for either meals, company, service, or music. It seems, however, to suit the low tastes of a class of persons whose whole delight is patting each other on the back, and abusing the guests of the Bishop's House—that is a standing dish which satisfies their morbid appetites! Go in at any hour and you will hear voices stridently and assertively proclaiming the abominable wickedness of those who at the Bishop's House are still using some of the furniture and ornaments and dishes that were handled by that Italian. In spite of bad cooking, bad waiting, cheerless rooms, for these people positively glory in white-wash and detest decorations and pictures, still the Gown and Crown does a fair business. This house secures a trade because in all towns there are many who have no taste, or judgment in eating, but who prefer to live amidst a little narrow set whose delight is to growl and abuse their neighbours who are so much better fed, and so much more cheerfully housed, and so much more happy and charitable at such a house as the old Mitre.

One great joy of these sour people is to accuse the Mitre of sending customers to the Pope's Head. Of course, in a free country, there is no power to prevent a man taking meals where he pleases. But it is too ridiculous to suppose a well-fed guest at the Mitre ever going to the Pope's Head for a meal except for some morbid trick of a diseased appetite. It is, however, notorious, that many young fellows, disgusted with the bad service at the "Puritan shop," as they dub the place which hangs out Mr. Calvin as a sign, have left the company they were brought up in, and gone either to the Pope's Head for the sake of the lovely music, or to the Mitre for the admirable service and varied diet. The Gown and Crown differs from the Mitre in the way its customers are seated. At the latter place they all eat like a family at one table, whereas at the "Puritan shop," there are a number of partitions boxing off the guests into small sets. There are some who go to the Mitre who have tried very hard to get boxed off in this way, but the feeling is strong against such separation. So, failing to get their private box erected at the Mitre, those of this set all sit in a group and take great pains to show that they are quite a superior class to the rest of the company—who simply laugh. These people are fond of going down to the Gown and Crown at times and joining in with those who delight in abusing the company at the old Mitre for exclusiveness. The fact being that at the Mitre, there is one room and one table for all, while those who cry out against exclusive-

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