

PEWS SHOULD BE FREE.

A FEW STORIES OF THE RENTED SEAT IN CHURCH.

An Officer Who Got His Orderly to Bring Camp Stools Along and a Sailor Who Implored a Seat—For Many Reasons Pews Should be Free.

Considerable discussion is going on just now in respect to the abolition of the system of renting church pews.

Most of the churches in the city rent their pews. The plan is followed by St. David's and St. Andrew's, Presbyterian, and by all the Methodist churches except Carmarthen. The same may be said of the Baptist churches.

It is not the intent of this article to discuss the free versus rented seat system, but to give some instances where the plan of having rented seats in the church was the cause of amusement if not ridicule.

Old Trinity church, in this city for instance, had rented pews. On one occasion a British officer in plain clothes went to the church, walked up the various aisles and vainly looked about for a seat. Seats were there in plenty but no one offered him one.

The usher was absent or asleep and the officer saw that he would have to stand during the ceremonies or take his departure.

He chose the latter but decided that he would attend that church and that he would have as independent a seat as any one. Next Sunday he appeared again, this time accompanied by an orderly who carrying two camp stools, one under each arm, followed his master up the aisle, in front of the pulpit. They placed the seats in position there and unconcernedly took their places.

When the service was over, the seats were taken up by the servant and carried back to the barracks. On the Monday following, the officer was waited on by several of the trustees of the church and was at length induced to purchase a pew.

This incident had a humorous aspect but here is another of a different nature.

One of the churches, it is not necessary to designate it particularly, had as adherents a clerk of one of the large dry goods establishments and his family, a wife and little boy. They had been constant in attendance for some years, and had occupied and paid for a pew. The father died in rather destitute circumstances, and on the Sunday following his death, the widow and orphan in their weeds of sorrow took their accustomed places in the sacred, yet rented, edifice. Judge that widow's surprise when just before the service began she was approached by one of the officials of the church and told that she and her boy would henceforth have to take a seat in the gallery. She did as she was ordered but never again entered that church.

Another case comes from a church in Fredericton, where it is the practice with a few denominations to rent their pews.

The pastor was in his place and had just entered upon his sermon when a sailor, who had deserted from a ship at St. John and had wandered there, walked in and vainly looked round for a seat. None was offered. He went out and across the street where a house was in process of erection, brought in two deal ends and placed them near the pulpit and there seated himself during the service. Was it sarcasm or charity that prompted him to place a sovereign in the plate when it was passed round?

One of the finer churches here before the fire had large square pews, some of them capable of seating twelve persons. A wealthy man had one of these pews, and his family of eight children with himself and wife filled it pretty comfortably for some years. But the boys and girls, one after the other, either died or went away, and yet the old couple held the large pew. No one was ever invited to a seat there. They paid for the whole seat and held it if they did not occupy it. Thus it continued for years; no one dared speak of the inconsistency of it as it would likely be taken as an insult and perhaps mean the loss of a good paying member of the church.

An American visitor at one of the large hotels on a Sunday morning decided to go to church. He was a member of no particular denomination and so was undecided whether to turn his steps. He noticed on the wall of the office a framed poster, which gave the location and services of a particular church. He had about determined to go to that one when a sentence at the bottom of the card took his attention and put that church out of his reach. The sentence was "Free seats at afternoon and evening services." He mused over the sentence for a few minutes and then said, "Yes, I see! seats are rented in the morning, that is as much as to say there is no room for me."

For the benefit of religion and the furtherance of Christianity seats should be free in churches. The salary of the pastors can be readily secured in some other way and with the regime of free seats all the churches will be filled and the attendance will be regular and constantly increasing. Let the matter be looked at in a fair and impartial manner, and it must readily be seen that it will be an advance in Christian work to do away with the old and out of date system.

Must not look at Human Face.

In the Wyoming Territory in the United States there is a colony of one hundred and thirty souls in the Cheyenne Reservation, who deem it mortal sin to look upon the face of any human being. Both men and women wear masks day and night, and never by any chance do they gaze upon the faces of one another. They teach

morality in the severest manner, not permitting the two sexes even to dwell in the same valley. This custom is observed in the islands of New Britain, where a man must not only not speak to his mother-in-law but it is considered sinful for the son-in-law or mother-in-law to look each other in the face. Suicide of both parties is the outcome if this rule is broken. The White and Silent Nuns, known as Bernardines, a religious sisterhood at Bayonne, in the south-west corner of France, close to the Pyrenees, founded by L'Abbe Costac, hold no converse with human beings. Within the Buddhist monasteries there are frequently ascetics who for years together have no intercourse with the outside world, but sit in constant silent meditation, receiving their food through a hole in the door. Hermits in China tear out their eyes, with the idea that by closing the two gates of love they open the gates of wisdom.

HAUNTED PLACES.

Nooks Frequented by the Poets. Bright and Harmless Shadows at Allfoxden.

If it be truth the poet sings that All houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses, it will be felt by the sympathetic heart that the haunts of noble spirits have about them a sanctifying influence so that he who visits them will see something more than common earth, and will experience a glow and exaltation of pleasure in the knowledge that

The poet's memory here Of the landscape makes a part.

It is our purpose in this paper to revive in the reader the memory which may have become dim, of places frequented by Wordsworth and his associates; and if this meets with favor we may at intervals, refer to other scenes connected with the living creations that have brought so much mingled profit and delight to the readers of choice English verse.

After their return from the continent, Wordsworth and Coleridge had much association for friendly and literary purposes, and they afterwards included in their group Southey and Charles Lloyd, a young and gifted man of brief pathetic history.

Their first rendezvous was at Bristol, a city, it has been said, which has had "the singular fortune to produce great men and never to cherish them." It produced Chatterton, and let him perish; it produced Southey, and let him go away to rear the fabric of his fame where he pleased. It was in this dingy, sluggish city, devoid of noble enterprise or appreciation that two of the greatest masters of modern poetry published their first important volume jointly,—"The Lyrical Ballads," which fell almost still-born from the press, and became the laughing-stock of the critics. Joseph Cottle, himself a writer of verse, satirised by Byron,—became their patron and publisher, as well as sympathetic friend.

But it was not at Bristol the young poets were to abide, but in the romantic solitudes of Somersetshire and Dorsetshire they were to tarry for a season to muse on nature, and frame immortal verse.

In a place called Nether Stowey lived a gentleman of estate and consequence, who was an acquaintance and admirer of Coleridge. The Wedgwood brothers, of Staffordshire, were also in the circle; and the favors and invitations of these friends drew Coleridge to Nether Stowey, where he settled as soon as he had been married to Miss Sara Fricker, a sister of Mrs. Southey. There, with Mr. Thomas Poole beside him, they could live more cheaply than at Bristol, surrounded by some of the finest scenery in Britain. Their poetry was to be based on nature rather than upon books; and no one need therefore be surprised to find Wordsworth coming, upon a like invitation to seek solitudes where his strikingly original thought could be matured, and moulded into "poetry of a new, startling and high order," and where he could enjoy the fellowship of a select and kindred circle.

Wordsworth, accordingly, took a cottage at Allfoxden, a few miles from where Coleridge lived, and nearer the British channel. No more delightful solitude could poet seek or desire. It was situated, as William Howitt describes it at the very extremity of the Quantock hills. A little more than a mile distant the channel tumbles its breakers,

And the stately ships go on In full view of those who climb the slopes these poets have described in their verse. Of this country Howitt also in his prose gives us a vivid description. "As you advance from Stowey, the Quantock hills run along at some distance on your left hand. They are of the character of downs, open and moorland on the top, and with great masses of wood here and there on their slopes. The country on your right is level, rich and well-wooded. On arriving near Allfoxden you turn abruptly to the left, and winding about through a woody lane and passing through a little hamlet, you begin to feel as if you were going quite out of the world of mankind. You are at the foot of the hills, and a little wood terminates your way. But through this wood you have to pass to find the house where Wordsworth had hidden himself. Passing into this wood at a gate, you find yourself in a most Druidical gloom. The wood is of well-grown, tall and thickly growing oak; filled still closer with hollies, which were once underwood, but which have shot up and ennobled the very oaks themselves in altitude. They are unquestionably amongst the loftiest hollies in England. Altogether the mass of wood is dense, the scene shadowy, the ground is strewn with its brown carpet of fallen leaves. As you advance, on your right hand you catch a sound of water, and pursuing it you find it issues from a deep, narrow glen or dean, which no doubt gives

the name to the place.—All fox den, or glen of all the foxes. This glen is a very poetical feature of the place, and especially attractive to a man in Wordsworth's then turn of mind, which led him to the deepest seclusion for the sake of abstraction. Tall trees sprang from its sides, and meet above; some of them have fallen across, dashed down by the wind. Wild plants grow luxuriantly below; woodhens and other creepers climb and cling from bough to bough; and the pure crystal water hurries along over its gravelly bed, beneath this mass of shade and over-hanging banks, with a merry music to the neighboring sea. "Leaving this glen, you hold on through the woods to the left, and soon emerge into a park inclosed by hills and woods, where a good country house looks out toward the sea. It is one of the most secluded, yet pleasantly secluded, houses in England. Around it sweep the hills, scattered with fine timber, before which repose a herd of deer, and before it stretches the sea at a little distance. The house is somewhat raised above the level of the valley, as to catch the charming view of the lands, woods, and outspread waters below. To the left, near the coast, is a view of St. Andrew, the seat of Sir Peregrine Ackland, pleasantly assuring you that you are not quite cut off from humanity. Below the house lies a sunny flower garden, finely disposed masses of trees; amongst them some enormous old oaks, and elms of noblest growth. There are two elms, growing close together, of remarkable size and height, beneath which a seat is placed, commanding a view of the park and sea; which used to be a very favorite tree of the poet's. Under these trees he used to sit and read and compose; and no man could have coveted a more congenial study.

Such is the place as it was seen by a loving eye more than forty years ago. This was the poets congenial haunt in the formative period of his genius, here he dwelt when the "Lyrical Ballads" were written and published. How often must these brother poets have climbed together from this seclusion through the park-like ascent to the open hills. From summit to summit they went "in glory and in joy," leaving the sea and the coast behind them, from those high moorlands, and nourishing the feelings that issue in poetry "amid a profound, but glorious solitude." Here they rambled and their eyes rested on "fine glens with glittering streams, and here and there a lonely cottage seniling up its quiet smoke." Here Wordsworth found scene and imagery in his Ballad of "The Thorn," and these scenes Coleridge describes in his "Fears in Solitude" written at Stowey, in 1798.

A green and silent spot amid the hills, A small and silent dell: O'er all the place No singing skylark ever poised his air. The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope, Which hath a ray of sun, and a few flowers, All golden with the never blondest furze, Bathed by the mist is fresh and dewy, An arval cornfield, or the purple flax, A heart, the fountain of sweet milk at eve, The level sunshine glimmers with green light, Which all methinks would love to see.

From these charming hills, mentioned or described in several of their poems, these poets could look away on scenes as fair as eye is wont to meet. The channel glittering in the sun, the vessels with their shining sails going out to sea, or straining in from the ocean; the little island of Steepholms lying in the liquid foreground, and the Welsh hills stretching along in the back. On your right you see the whole level but rich country stretching away to Bridgewater, and on towards Bristol. And here, sometimes wandered with the more devoted and priest like poet of the two, that dear and gifted sister Dorothy, his associate in poetic rambles and poetic toils, who never shrank from his long stretches, and of whom he wrote,— She gave me eyes, she gave me ears, A heart, the fountain of sweet milk at eve, And love and hope and joy.

Here also, sometimes, Southey, and Cottle came, and poor Charles Lloyd, and that other more memorable Charles Lamb; he broke bread, and held their "lyric feasts," and left the perpetual odor of friendship and genius behind them. But their troubles came. These wandering poets excited the wonder, and the suspicion, of the prosy country-folk in their neighborhood, and in the end Wordsworth and his sister especially fell innocently into the clutches of these gossips, and were glad to escape from the ill-odor they created. Such a thing as the study of nature for the love of it or for poetical purposes, seemed then an unheard-of thing in these rural districts, and they had information on the subject they were still incredulous. What are these men here for? They are spies; they are smugglers; or else they are fools, or insane. And what does that wild, unseemly woman mean by strapping over the hills with men? The hazy! The poets were in a sulphurous cloud before they knew it, and were surrounded of multitudinous eyes as dissolute and lawless men! The upshot of it was that when the term of Wordsworth's occupancy expired he was not permitted to remain at Allfoxden House, in spite of all the intercession of his friends who were supposed to be little better than he was. Well may Howitt exclaim: "The grave and moral Wordsworth, the respectable Wedgwoods, correct Robert Southey and Coleridge, dreaming of glories and intellectualities beyond the moon, were set down as a disreputable gang!" Think you, O reader! that out of these prosaic and uncharitable suspicions of the past, the world has rolled into a clearer day.

Cottle the friend and publisher, gives a ludicrous account of the whole matter: "The wisecracks of the village [of Stowey] had, it seems, made Mr. Wordsworth the object of their serious conversation. One said, that 'he had seen him wander about by night, and look rather strangely at the moon. And then, he roamed over the hills like a partridge.' Another said, 'he had heard him mutter, as he walked, some outlandish brogue, that nobody could understand.' [No matter, if he muttered in composing the glorious lines about "Tintern Abbey" and the motions of his own soul, or the moral of the old leech-gatherer in "Resolution and Independence."] Another said, 'I think he carries on a conjuror.' Another said, you are every one of you wrong, I know what he is. We have all met with him tramping away toward the sea. Would any man in his senses take all that trouble to look at a parcel of water? I think he carries on a snugg business in the smuggling line, and, in these journeys, is on the lookout for

some wet cargo? Another very significantly said, 'I know that he has a private still in his cellar; for I once passed his house at a little better than a hundred yards distance, and I could smell the spirits as plain as an ashen faggot at Christmas.' Another said, "However that was, he is surely a despicable French Jacobin, for he is so silent and dark that nobody ever heard him say one word about politics." And thus these ignorant amuses drove from their village a greater ornament than will ever again be found amongst them. A vexatious and comic tale indeed, to be between two such fires as the gossips of Stowey and the learned, insulting, cocksure of the Edinburgh Review.

So, far away from these beautiful scenes, memorable for their sakes, the lives of these poets were led, and in another part of England they accomplished their greatest work, and acquired that fame which will endure till the words of poets are read and remembered no longer.

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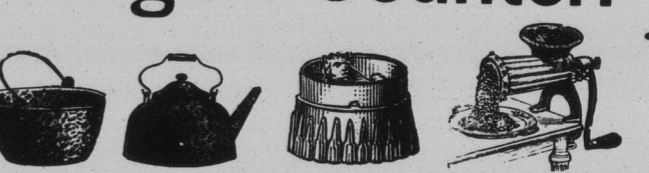
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