

The Domain of Woman.

TALKS BY "TERESA."

THE BREAD THAT FEEDS THE CRADLE BEHIND THE WORLD.

Canterbury! What misgiving there is in the name of the quaint old town, especially for those of the old faith, to whom it brings visions of the days long departed when the Church reigned in the hearts of English folk gentle and simple, and when some of her noblest sons stood up against tyranny, and battled for her freedom even into death.

One name stands out above all others, a name so indelibly united with that of Canterbury that the mere mention of the place instantly recalls it, and the memory of St. Thomas A'Beckett revives as the mind's eye conjures up a vision of the magnificent face wherein the martyred archbishop was cruelly done to death by the emissaries of Henry II.

A quaint old place truly; when one has left the railway station and the puffing and hissing train, one seems to have left the nineteenth century behind, and to have stepped suddenly into an old world, place where steam engines, tramcars, gas and electricity, are, or ought to be, unknown.

The gabled houses, small paved windows, narrow streets, and little lanes leading apparently nowhere in particular, the cobble stoned roads, with here and there tiny patches of grass, give a delightful sense of novelty that is only attained nowadays by the return to something old and long forgotten.

And above everything, with a strange personality of its own, which such places always seem to possess, towers the great Cathedral, the monument of the departed glory of old Catholic days, the scene of that crime the like of which was never known before or since, and that still sends a thrill of horror through ones mind, spite of the lapse of more than seven centuries.

It is not until one has advanced some distance into the town that the first glimpse is obtained of the hoary structure, and then, owing to its situation on a part of the ground that dips slightly below the town only an occasional spire or turret is visible.

Perhaps it is this fact that makes the subsequent sight of the Cathedral so inexpressibly grand and awe inspiring, bursting as it does, full upon the beholder, without any preliminary revelations of its structure. I shall never forget my feelings, when having passed through the centre of the town, and crossed a kind of square, we turned down Mercury lane, and came suddenly right out upon the Cathedral close.

We were just sufficiently far away to see the whole of the splendid church as one glance. The view was from the north-west door, through which St. Thomas so often passed, and it was with mingled feelings of awe and a sensation almost akin to sorrow that we traversed the broad close that had been trodden by the sainted martyr nearly eight hundred years before.

As we approached the Cathedral the vast grandeur of the structure impressed us more and more at every step, and though I have seen nearly all the old Abbeys and Cathedrals in the old country, not one of them impressed me as did Canterbury Cathedral.

Probably this was owing to the associations connected with the place, but I believe the fact of the sudden sight of the church, surrounded as it is by a broad open space, instead of being as so many of them are, hemmed in on all sides by buildings, had much to do with it.

But once inside the great door, with another thrill at the thought of St. Thomas' exile and return to meet death in his beloved Cathedral, and disenchantment instantly seized me. Instead of the glowing, living splendor that characterizes Catholic churches, there was nothing but the bare structure itself, no paintings adorned the walls, no carved Stations told the story of Redemption, no Crucifixion looked down with beseeching and yet pitying eyes, there was no holy water, saying mutely, "Purify thyself, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Aye, holy ground indeed! holy with the tread of Augustine, of Dunstan and of Anselm, thrice holy with the blood of the greatest martyr of the English Catholic Church, the man who in defence of her rights and privileges, defied the powers of the world and, with safety within his grasp, calmly chose duty, though it brought with it a violent death.

But there was nothing in the evidences of the cold, hard religion of Protestantism to say all this. It could not even claim as its own one of the angust names that has made Canterbury the resort of pilgrims from every land in the world.

Of course our great Cathedral has been made into a mere show place, what else can it be fit for according to

the ethics of Protestant vandalism? And so one is scarcely surprised on reaching the door of the nave to see a kind of money box on each side bearing the notice, "Visitors are requested to contribute sixpence each." An old visitor stands about it, keeping a wary eye on visitors, and woe to the one who omits to drop a tallianum into the box, he or she is not likely to penetrate much further.

It is when one approaches the high Altar that the sensation of strangeness and isolation strikes one most forcibly. It is indeed the "abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel the Prophet. Accustomed to bow the knee before the throne of the King of kings it is impossible to realize at first that He is not there.

A railing has been placed around the spot on which St. Thomas was killed, and he is eulogized in the most unflattering of fact voices, "Thomas A'Beckett was killed here."

We two appeared to be the only Catholics present, and after seriously debating the propriety of kneeling down and saying a Pater, we decided that it would be better to content ourselves with a silent prayer.

At the time of our visit they were making excavations in the crypt with the object of discovering any remains of the supposed original foundations; and these excavations led to a remarkable discovery, an account of which I have just been reading.

This discovery is none other than the supposed remains of St. Thomas A'Beckett.

In 1539 the Shrine was destroyed by the arch tyrant Henry VIII, who ordered the remains of the Saint to be burnt and cast to the winds. Up to the present, this order is believed to have been carried out in its entirety, but the discovery of the remains before alluded to evidently interested in haste at about the spot where the Archbishop's body was originally buried, before its removal to the famous shrine, casts a reasonable doubt upon the matter, and leads to the enquiry whether, after all the persons responsible for the carrying out of Henry's sacrilegious order, might have substituted something else to be burnt in place of the real relics and restored the latter to the original grave.

Such a supposition is by no means improbable when one considers that in the reign of Henry VIII England was not so Protestant as she subsequently became in succeeding reigns, and it is quite reasonable to suppose that the old Catholic leaven was still strong enough to prevent the commission of such a shocking crime, which was practically only one degree less than the very murder itself.

The remains were found in a stone box evidently made to do duty in some hasty emergency. The bones are described as those of a tall powerful man, there were the marks of the indentation of some sharp weapon upon the skull just above the left eye, the very spot upon which the sword of Fishburne struck the Archbishop down.

The features showed that the owner had possessed a large mouth of very determined character; a forehead somewhat low, but remarkably broad and with prominent temples; features familiar to anybody who has seen authentic portraits of A'Beckett.

The remains were evidently been hurriedly but carefully placed in the stone box, which was not shaped like an ordinary coffin, and must have been used in an emergency.

I, for one, have scarcely any doubt that the remains are those of the martyred Archbishop, preserved from sacrilege by the hand of God. I think that the correct explanation is to be found in the hypothesis that the myriads of Henry VIII, or at least some of them had consciousness sufficiently alive to the utter futility of the commission of the atrocity they were about to perpetrate in burning the bones of one whom Catholics as they were at heart, they could not but recognize as a saint, and therefore as a kind of savior to their troubled minds, they determined upon the expedient of burying their real remains and burning something else, perhaps the empty coffin in their stead.

Perhaps England may yet see another shrine of St. Thomas A'Beckett at Canterbury, with the relics restored to their rightful place. Nothing is impossible with God.

St. Thomas of Canterbury, pray for us.

In a small crypt chapel beneath the Cathedral is the French Huguenot Church. The first thing we saw upon entering was a large glass case standing near the door, containing among other things several replicas of the medals alleged to have been struck at Rome to commemorate the massacre of St. Bartholomew. While we were examining this case, a young man evidently in charge of the church, approached us, and began a voluble explanation of the massacre, winding up with a triumphant exposition of the iniquity of the "Pope of Rome," adducing as a proof the alleged medal, struck, as he repeatedly asserted to commemorate the rejoicings at the summary disposal of so many French Protestants. I calmly replied that I had heard that story several times before and did not believe a word of it, whereupon he said that it was quite true and there was the medal to prove it.

I pointed out that the medal itself was no proof, since anybody might have had it struck, and that, even supposing it had been issued by the Pope a order it merely commemorated, not the massacre, which, when he heard the truth, the Pope strongly condemned, but an entirely false version of the affair, wherein the King of France was supposed to have escaped a dangerous conspiracy against his life and throne, only after much fighting and slaughter. But of course, nothing would convince our positive friend, he indignantly regarded us as a couple of infidels, and it never seemed to occur to him that possibly our version of the story, might after all be the true one. Such is religious prejudice, it says every feeling of magnanimity and justice, from the minds of those unfortunate enough to come under its influence.

When we emerged from the crypt chapel, my companion, who had waxed very indignant burst out with "the idea of a Pope doing such a thing!" and forthwith launched out into a tirade against the British Government for allowing the libel to be perpetuated right under the very Church in which St. Thomas died in defence of the See of Peter against a tyrannical king.

My readers must not forget the House of Providence picnic on the 24th; there is still time to make some articles for the different stalls. Candy, cakes, tea, sugar, &c., are equally acceptable for the refreshment booth. Offers of assistance are always welcome. Those of you who work hard and have very little time, can at least spare an hour or two in the evening to visit the grounds; plenty of fun will be going on. Come with the crowds. TERESA.

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