

period—the Head Chorister assumed all the powers of the Bishop of the Diocese and received all the honours and respect and obedience due to the Bishop himself, and carried out all episcopal rites in the Cathedral. It is further stated that he was entitled to all the Bishop's revenues for this period, but history does not relate whether any boy was ever successful in collecting them. I have certain doubts on that subject, but I would back some choristers I have had to have given a medieval bishop a jolly good go for it.

"Spur Money"

A further privilege of choristers was collecting "spur money" from any knight or officer who entered a Cathedral or



Royal Chapel wearing spurs. The original fee was 6/8, but in Queen Victoria's day it was raised to five guineas. The boys were told by a vergier if anyone entered wearing spurs and he would be challenged by the boys afterwards. By the way, there is one old and lasting Cathedral tradition and that is the friendly feud between vergers and choristers. However, if any outsider should interfere with the liberties of either party, they form a solid and enduring alliance against the intruder. The unfortunate knight, once challenged, had to pay up unless he knew two ways out of it. One was to challenge the youngest chorister to repeat his gamut, that is, to go through his scale. If the chorister could not do this correctly, then the fine was remitted. Again I can say from my knowledge of them, the seniors would see to it that the junior did not let them down. However, it is recorded that the Duke of Wellington once escaped the fine by this means. The other way of escape was to surrender the spurs. This old custom came to an end only about 40 years ago when some miserable creature made such a fuss that the whole thing was discontinued.

Certain local customs in various Cathedrals have their peculiar interest. In one Cathedral in a university town in England a bequest was made a long time ago which provides for each boy to be given the wing of a chicken and a glass of port wine after the morning service each day. The terms of the bequest have been slightly altered so that a piece of chicken is substituted for a wing, as it was felt that to slaughter 12 birds each day to provide 24 wings was altogether too much of a good thing.

Cathedral Humour

There is a definite type of humour and wit that is characteristic of Cathedral life. I like the story of two clergymen, one a plain-chant enthusiast and the other violently opposed to it. The

enthusiast said to the other, "My dear fellow, surely you realise that in singing the Psalms to the ancient tunes we may be singing the same melodies that David sang before Saul."

"In that case," said the other, "I don't blame Saul for throwing a spear at him."

Another story concerns a bishop in whose Cathedral the great S. S. Wesley was organist. Wesley wrote some very long anthems which were not appreciated by his bishop. After Wesley's death the bishop remarked, "I don't know where Dr. Wesley has gone, but if he continues to write such long anthems, he won't be welcome in either place."

One great change in Cathedrals has come about by the superseding of the old hand-blowing of the organ by mechanical means. The old men who used to blow the organs were a race apart and were great characters. It is related of the incomparable W. T. Best who was about to begin a recital that he announced to the congregation, "I will start the recital by playing Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A minor." The old blower put his head round the curtain and said, "Say we will play it, sir." And he would not blow until Best complied with his request.

The late Bishop of Nelson told me of a famous London organist who was staying in a village and was asked to play for the evening service. He said that he would be delighted to do so. The old blower was so excited at blowing for such a famous man that he blew with might and main, and the organ hissed, and creaked, and groaned and shook. When the sermon started the organist called a choirboy and told him to take a note to the blower, but the child had his own ideas about who was the blower in that church and he took the note to the preacher. The preacher took the note from the boy and opened it, continuing his sermon as he did so.



However, the sermon came to an abrupt end for the note read, "Here, cut it out! The people have come to hear me play, not to hear you blow."

These things lighten the way and a Cathedral staff can usually get quite a lot of fun out of life as well as attending to their more solemn and serious duties. In this changing world, life in a Cathedral is thought by some to be a backwater. It is nothing of the kind. It is a flowing stream, which may not be the broad and turbulent river of commerce, but whose headwaters are far back in the highest mountain; it flows through a pleasant and gracious countryside, and its waters are the waters of life.

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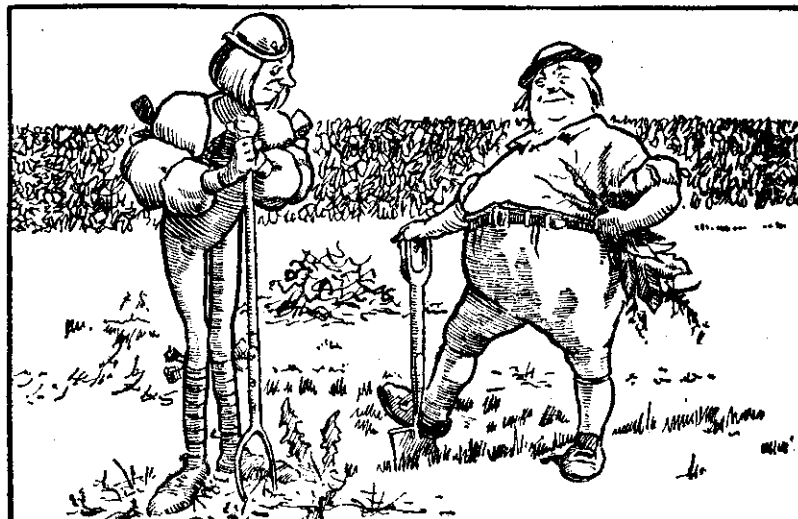
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