

Sketches Grave and Gay

(By PEDESTRIAN for N.Z. Tablet.)

AN EARNEST INQUIRER.

Some time ago I had a long railway journey before me, in preparation for which I reserved, on the previous evening, a seat in the First-class Smoking Carriage. I travel in the smoking compartment for two reasons, first, because I thereby deprive women and children of my company, and secondly, because I smoke. Of these two reasons, the first is quite as cogent as the second. Next morning, primed with Z30, I calmly took my place in the compartment, while "commercials" hustled about at the last moment and somehow found seats reserved for them even though no red ticket flamed above their chairs. Only three seats had been officially reserved; the others must have been reserved unofficially, at the loss of ninepence each seat to the Railway Department.

Those who dislike reading in trains could have no better travelling companions than "commercials." You cannot read, for they joke one another about orders and the taking of orders and the filling of orders. They play cards or they talk cards. The relative merits of the Refreshment rooms along the line float about amidst tobacco clouds, and "Mac's" bantering tones towards "Percy" and "Duncan" show that there is merriment as well as money in the world of commerce.

At various stations the travellers and their samples gradually withdraw themselves from the fun, and disappear into the business atmosphere of the country towns. On this journey the distracting conversation and by-play had prevented me from reading or attempting to read, much to the advantage of my eyes which must have blessed the occasion of their repose. While wiping from my spectacles the grime or dust that the two hours' journey had so delicately coated them with, I was allowed to hear a remark made by one of the remaining passengers to his companion. We were the only occupants of the carriage—three of us, all the others having by this time opened up parcels and samples in the several towns that the train had touched or grazed in its stately march.

"Yes," remarked one of the two, a man of gentlemanly appearance, "I should like to know more about it. The Romans always know the right thing to do."

At that moment the official came and marked our tickets. He had already marked them two or three times. On this occasion he spoke to the two gentlemen but unofficially, for I heard the words "Synod" and "pensions"—words which are not known to the Department unless, indeed, a concession in travelling may somehow connect itself with Synodal session and discussions. Apparently, to show that a train official discriminates against no creed, he announced to me that twenty-five minutes was (or, were) allowed, at the next stop, for refreshments. (As the Department is not an authority on English grammar, it does not state whether *was* or *were*, *is* or *are*, is the correct verb in sentence above. Hence, its representative says, "Twenty-five minutes for

refreshments at X," adroitly omitting the verb).

As soon as I sat down to dinner, I made the Sign of the Cross and said Grace. On finishing that brief prayer, I raised my head and noticed my two train companions eyeing me. My habitual attitude on such occasions is one of absolute indifference. I have sometimes remarked the semblance of an amused smile on the faces of those seated in front of me. But not so on this occasion. The man of gentlemanly appearance and his companion, who looked like a confidential secretary, gazed not as if I was introducing sectarianism into the dining room, but as if I were one of those Romans, already alluded to, who knew the right thing and did it. All this crossed through my mind, like a flash, my best attention being now needed to avoid tearing the Japanese serviette, to catch the waitress' eye with a view to despatch, to pass the salt and ask for bread in return, and, generally speaking, to exhaust the limited menu before the five minutes warning-bell produced the customary stampede among all but the seasoned travellers.

Whether the dinner was worth the coin or the coin was worth the dinner, I have no intention of discussing, but the Grace I said before meals and after meals led to a conversation afterwards which I have much pleasure in recalling. On resuming my seat in Z ear, my companions showed an interest in me. The senior gentleman, Mr. Smith, offered me a cigarette and acted on my hint to him to sit down on the seat opposite. In a tone somewhat apologetic, he said he would like to ask for some information upon a religious matter of which he had been thinking.

"I know," he said, smiling, "that you belong to the Roman Communion, for I saw you begin your meal with Grace, and cross yourself. It was this that put it into my head to ask you about a ceremony that I recently saw in Australia." Though I felt strongly inclined to tell him that it would be much better for him to consult a priest, I judged it wise to wait for his question, meanwhile hoping it would not be too hard for a layman. This thought passed through my mind while the guard was again marking our tickets.

"The ceremony I speak of," he said, "was the laying of the foundation stone of a church." I felt greatly relieved, for a reason that will appear later. "It was evidently a dignitary," he continued, "who performed the ceremony."

"A Bishop," I suggested.

"Perhaps it was," he assented. "He had a beautiful vesture."

"Vestment," said I, "which we call a cope, and he had a gold mitre on his head and the crosier in his hand."

"Precisely," said he. "So that was a Bishop. I was interested in everything, and could see nearly everything as my house is beside the grounds of the new church. My

little boy," he said with a smile, "amused me by asking who was buried under the wooden cross standing on the site. Now, what was that cross for?"

"The cross," I answered, "marks the spot on which the altar is to stand. You might have remarked that the Bishop read some prayers before moving towards the cross." He nodded assent.

"Those prayers," I resumed, "were for the blessing of the water to be used afterwards in sprinkling the cross and the stone and the foundations of the building. In the simple ceremony of blessing water, salt is first blessed and then the water is separately blessed. They are then mixed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The accompanying prayers allude to the Biblical narrative which tells of the bad waters healed by a certain prophet when he cast salt into them."

"The prophet Eliseus," said he. "Precisely," I hastened to say, though I had been prompted to give the credit of it to Elias.

"When the Bishop and the priests—I presume he had some priests with him."

"He had two clergymen, I noticed," said he. "When they came to the cross," I resumed, "the Bishop prayed to Our Saviour to put there the sign of our salvation and to keep away the destroying angel. That, as you perceive, is in allusion to the angel who destroyed those Egyptians who had not marked their doorposts with the blood of the paschal lamb."

"What a beautiful allusion," he said with deep reverence. "Are there many such incidents mentioned in your ceremonies?"

"All our ceremonies are made up of Scriptural quotations and allusions. In the very ceremony in question, reference is made to Jacob and the stone he erected, Our Lord is repeatedly spoken of as the stone rejected by the builders and afterwards made the corner-stone."

"Dear me," he almost soliloquised. "I thought you ignored the Word of God."

"On the contrary," I answered. "Several psalms bearing upon the building of the Temple by Solomon and some of the magnificent passages from the solemn dedication of it by the King himself are found in the very ceremony you are inquiring about."

I then described the blessing of the stone and immediately afterwards the blessing of the foundations. His attention was riveted upon what I was saying, until the guard came in and checked our tickets.

His curiosity to know about the deep respect we pay to the Crucifix was keener than I had suspected. He agreed with me that education through the eye—a system so highly commended by psychologists to-day and always practised by the Catholic Church—was capable of impressing adults and children more effectively than education by the ear. To tell Christians of Our Saviour's sufferings could not enable them to realise the meaning and intensity of those pains so fully as could the sight of the Crucifix. To all this he listened with rapt attention. My further remarks about the iconoclasm of the "heroes" of the Reformation who smashed statues of saints and tore to pieces holy books

W. E. Evans

TAILOR and COSTUME MAKER

IF YOU APPRECIATE BEING WELL
DRESSED LET US OUTFIT YOU.

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