Peregrinatio

Pilgrim Life in The Middle Ages

Sidney Heath

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THE word " pilgrimage" comes from the old French *pelegrinage*, Latin *peregrinatio*, and means a journey undertaken in a devotional spirit to some sacred place. The fundamental idea of the Christian pilgrimage was that the Deity exercised a benevolent influence operating through sacred *media* in some definite building or locality. Every nominal Christian of the Middle Ages yearned to make a pilgrimage to some hallowed shrine or sacred place, in much the same manner as at the present time in India, the home of pilgrimage, the pious wish of every Brahmin is to visit the holy city of Benares, and to be washed clean in the waters of the Ganges. To quote Macaulay : " In times when men were scarcely ever induced to travel by liberal curiosity, or by the pursuit of gain, it was better that the rude inhabitant of the North should visit Italy and the East as a pilgrim, than that he should never see anything but those squalid cabins and uncleared woods amidst which he was born. In times when life and female honour were exposed to daily risk from tyrants and marauders, it was better that the precinct of a shrine should be regarded with an irrational awe, than that there should be no refuge inaccessible to cruelty and licentiousness. . . . Had not such retreats been scattered here and there, among the huts of a miserable peasantry, and the castles of a ferocious aristocracy, European society would have consisted merely of beasts of burden and beasts of prey." Further, " Even the spiritual supremacy arrogated by the Pope was productive of far more good than evil."

Just as the Crusades contributed to the culture of the Middle Ages, so pilgrims did much to advance civilisation and, while they furthered the common use of letters, were not infrequently the bearers of peaceful messages between warlike nations, and before it became abused the pilgrim's badge was a sign of Christian fellowship and the revered token of international brotherhood.

During their sojourn in Palestine and the East the Crusaders, and after them the pilgrims, learned something of the conditions of Eastern life, and brought back with them, in addition to a vast number of holy relics, an appreciation for the peculiar products of that region jewels, silks, perfumes, and spices. With a brisk commerce throughout the length and breadth of the Mediterranean, the wealth of Genoa, Pisa, Florence, and Venice was founded, and the inland sea was covered with sails trafficking from the ports of Italy to those of Syria and Egypt. The necessity of transporting merchandise from the East to supply the demand thus created in the West stimulated commerce, advanced the science of navigation, and encouraged manufactures. From the Greeks the Italians learned the art of weaving silk. Arabia was made to yield her secrets for tempering and inlaying military weapons ; and Constantinople furnished the Christians with splendid specimens of her native art. Nearly all our early Christian churches owed something to the trade from the Orient that followed the romantic wars of the Crusades, and to the wonder with which the churches of Byzantium were regarded by the pilgrims of Western Europe.

It is obvious, therefore, that, in spite of the particular vices the pilgrims acquired beneath a warmer sun than that which shone upon their native lands, the effect of pilgrimages was to strengthen the intercourse with Eastern nations which the Crusades had commenced, and to

create a demand in the West for the products, arts, and industries of the East. In mediæval days the importance of a city depended far less on the number of its inhabitants, the volume of its trade, or the advantage of its climate than on the number and quality of its holy things. The richest city was that which possessed the greatest number of miracle-working relics to attract the pilgrim. In the Middle Ages pilgrimages, acting through the virtue of relics, had the same practical influence on the minds of men as have the themes of science or political economy at the present day, and it is doubtful if we shall ever appreciate to the full the profound effect produced by these pilgrimages, in the days when every idea was a belief, when legends were realities. To us, the religious memorials of the past, the desecrated shrine and the dishonoured reliquary, are merely examples of ancient art, trinkets that supply a study for the jeweller, a subject for the lecturer, and, most frequently of all, a specimen in the museum. To our forefathers these things were living forms, voices which were heard, and teachers to be obeyed. Doctrines and historical traditions which echoed and were transmitted from nation to nation, from age to age, became the natural inheritance of the devout pilgrim, and so tended to feed and nourish the mysterious spirit of intense reverence with which saintly relics and hallowed shrines were regarded by the law, the laity, and the hierarchy of mediæval days.

As an anonymous writer has said : “ In most countries hospitals were maintained at every stage for the accommodation of the pilgrim ; and chivalry in arms kept watch and ward wherever he was in danger of pagan insult or aggression. For him the Teutonic brotherhood guarded the German forests ; for him the knights of Santiago patrolled the Moorish frontier ; and for him the galleys of St. John maintained ceaseless and most gallant warfare with the merciless rovers of the Mediterranean. Kings and councils took care of his interests while engaged in these holy excursions, and hedged his household and estate from all assault. Creditors were forbidden to dun and enemies to assail, and the severest form of excommunication was denounced against his wife did she dare to contract another marriage during his absence.”

At the present day, when locomotion has been so wonderfully facilitated that the means of communication to and from the most distant parts of the world offer the traveller an almost bewildering choice of routes, we can scarcely realise what our feelings would be should we find ourselves without the transporting aids of the railway, steamship, motor-car, and other mechanically-propelled vehicles.

The mediæval lover or diplomat, instead of availing himself of the post, regular in departure and true in arrival, was compelled to transmit his letters by a special messenger or to entrust aperson who happened to be journeying towards the place of address, to the knight returning to his own estate after a foreign war, the priest soliciting a benefice, the monk changing his monastic abode, and, above all, to the pilgrim or palmer on his way to pay his devotions at some famous shrine or holy well.

Slow and tardy indeed were the modes of communication so irregularly obtained ; for upon “ the best estafetted [1] road in Europe, the road to Rome,” three months elapsed before the pilgrim, quitting the shrine of Becket at Canterbury, could stand before the great basilica of St. Peter. The geographical knowledge of the earlier years of the Middle Ages apart from that personally acquired by travellers, consisted mainly of brief extracts from the pages of Pliny and Solinus. The terrestrial sphere, as portrayed in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, shows a circular projection, in the exact centre of which appears Jerusalem, while the Temple is depicted in the exact centre of the city. On the outermost margin is the ocean surrounding the whole domicile of mankind, and beyond the countries of Christendom nothing is shown but representations of camels and ostriches, elephants and tigers, designs that, by covering the regions unknown to the cartographer, hide his ignorance as they amuse the

spectator. The lucid idea which an Ordnance map conveys at once to us was wholly wanting, and the forms and positions of the various portions of the globe, the boundaries of the kingdoms, the localities of the great cities, and the courses of the rivers were all enveloped in vagueness and uncertainty.

For the transmission and diffusion of thought, ideas, and opinions we now depend almost entirely on the printing press ; but it is quite possible that as much was effected without its aid, for it is beginning to be admitted that the ideas imparted by means of printing obliterate each other by their numbers .

We can readily understand that when the printing press did not exist the smaller quantity of mental stimulants was more than compensated by their intensity. In the tale brought home by the knight who had won his spurs in foreign wars, and the impassioned narrative of the pilgrim recounting the glories of the shrines of Europe, there was a vivid vitality that must have carried conviction to the minds of whole masses of the population.

It is, of course, easy for us to sneer at the superstitious customs and the love of pilgrimage which played so prominent a part in the lives of our ancestors, but the sneering can be, and indeed has been, overdone. All impartial historians are agreed that there was a peculiar fitness in the mental qualities of the mediæval period, when considered as introductory to our own. Stationary, or even retrograde as the Middle Ages may appear to be with respect to some of the faculties of the intellect, others were exhibited in full and beneficial activity. To understand rightly any age or customs with a view to estimating fairly their character and influence, we must, by the force of sympathetic imagination, transport ourselves into that age, acquaint ourselves with its leading activities, and endeavour to feel and think as the people who lived under its social and religious influences must have felt and thought. It is neither wise nor just to measure the customs of a past age by the standards of our own.

As the great German writer Frederick Schlegel reminds us : " The Middle Ages are sometimes regarded as a chasm in the history of the human intellect, a void space, as it were, between the genius of antiquity and the civilisation of modern times. Art and science are, by an ingenious fiction, supposed to terminate their existence, only to start into life from chaotic nothingness after a sleep of ten centuries : this is inaccurate, nay, untrue, for the essence of ancient knowledge and culture never entirely perished, whilst much that is noblest and most excellent in the improvements of modern times was *born of medœival genius*."

At the same time, we cannot dissociate the present from the past if we would, for continuity is as inevitable in manners and customs, in psychical processes, as it is in physical facts. Thus the mediæval pilgrimage and the pointed Gothic arch are, like the saintly relic, the hallowed shrine, and the whole celestial hierarchy, our heritage and our destiny. With the advent of Christianity in England, the Holy Land and Rome naturally became points of attraction to the devout adherents of this faith, and the ancient British Christians often made pilgrimages to these places, as we learn from St. Jerome, who speaks as though the practice was liable to lead to abuse, for, says he, " it is as easy to find the way to heaven in Britain as at Jerusalem." Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land are mentioned as early as the third century, and by the fourth they were more or less common from all parts of the Roman Empire.

At the same time, we have not many records of pilgrimages made to the Holy Land by the Saxon Christians ; but Adamnan, Abbot of Iona in Beda's lifetime, wrote an account of the holy places which was taken from a description of Palestine given him by Arcwulf, a French bishop, who, having made the " grand tour" of Jerusalem, Damascus, Constantinople, and

Alexandria, was carried by a storm to the coast of Scotland, where the ship found shelter at Iona.

Adamnan's chronicle does not seem to have kindled much desire among his contemporaries to visit the Holy Land ; and, with a few notable exceptions, the Saxon pilgrimages from these islands ended at Rome, the scene of so many martyrdoms and the grave of so many saints, where one of the first to appear was Cedwella, formerly King of Wessex, who, after being well received and baptized by Pope Sergius, died within seven days afterwards, April 20, 689 A.D.

It is not difficult for us to understand the passion for pilgrimage which soon seized upon our early Christian ancestors when the warm glow of romance began to encircle about

" Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet."

The restless spirit of their barbarian fathers seemed still to work in them, a spirit that is by no means an expended force at the present day, although directed into a different channel. The pilgrims, Crusaders, buccaneers, merchant adventurers, colonisers, and explorers of the Middle Ages have handed down to us the spirit of *wanderlust*, although the modern tourist travels by motor-car for pleasure and worldly profit, whereas his mediæval prototype journeyed afoot for the welfare of his soul. In early days, not only Cedwella, and enthusiastic youths like the two sons of St. Richard, the King of the Englishmen, but great warriors and statesmen renounced their dignities for the pilgrim's garb ; and Ina, the greatest of English kings before Alfred, was the most distinguished of the band. Pilgrimages to Rome became highly popular, and before long noble and simple, clerk and layman, men and women, caught the infection, wishing, as Beda says, " to live as pilgrims on earth that they might be welcomed by the saints when they were called away from their earthly sojourn."

The Church itself was not behind in encouraging the people to enrol themselves in one or other of the many bands of wanderers, with the result that a perpetual inducement was held out to pilgrimage and vagrancy to rise into a regular profession. In addition to many advantages to his body spiritual, the pilgrim enjoyed particular privileges of a temporal nature, with the result that proscribed criminals or hunted debtors helped to fill the ranks of devout pilgrims. If a priest, the pilgrim drew his full stipend, providing that his absence did not exceed a term of three years. If a layman, he was excused the payment of all taxes. The property of all pilgrims was secured from confiscation and injury while on pilgrimage, nor could they be arrested or cast in any civil court. Their sanctity was universally respected, for once the sacred cross was sewn upon his garment and he had received the blessing of Holy Church, the pilgrim was above all law except the ecclesiastical. He was protected by St. Peter and the Pope.

Another, and one of the greatest factors that helped to swell the ranks of pilgrims and tended to the formation of bands of penitents, was the frequency with which famine and pestilence swept over the land. First famine, then the plague would lay whole districts desolate. The people, being taught that these calamities were manifestations of Divine wrath at sinful indulgence or religious backslidings, were easily led to believe that the only remedy was to resort to penance by a course of severe asceticism, when penance became a mania and fraternities were established for its better practice.

During the whole of the mediæval period it is doubtful if the plague was ever entirely absent from this country, while every now and then, usually about every ten years, it would rage with extraordinary violence.

The insanitary condition of the towns and the dirty habits of the people were, no doubt, largely responsible. In reading any contemporary accounts regarding the personal habits of the people of this country during the Middle Ages, it is significant to notice how any allusions to personal cleanliness are conspicuous by their absence ; and even when we do happen upon such reference it is confined to the washing of the face and hands. In the reign of Edward IV. soap was provided in the King's household only for the washing of clothes, although it is possible that it was used for other purposes as well. The filth of all classes of the population, excepting perhaps the ecclesiastical, was simply indescribable, and even princes were no strangers to vermin and other accompaniments of dirt.

As late as the reign of Henry VIII., and possibly for many years later, the scullions lay naked in the kitchens, and were so filthy that in 1526 a special ordinance was passed " for the better avoydyng of corruption and of all uncleanness out of the king's house," making provision " for such scolyons as shall not goe naked or in garments of such vileness as they now doe, and have been accustomed to doe, nor lie in the nights and dayes in the kitchens or ground by the fireside."

We are told that Cardinal Wolsey, when going to Westminster Hall, held in his hand " a very fair orange," the inside of which was filled with a vinegar-soaked sponge, " against the pestilent odours of his many suitors."

Erasmus makes many references to the plague, which he states was due to the filth of the streets and houses. Of the latter we read that " the floors are commonly of clay, strewed with rushes, under which lies unmolested an ancient collection of beer, grease, fragments, bones, spittle, excrements and urine of dogs and cats, and everything that is nasty." That even such a terrible scourge as the plague had its beneficial as well as its purely harmful and destructive forces is obvious to all students of history. The epidemics that depopulated the towns and denuded the agricultural districts of labourers played a considerable part in the welfare as in the desolation of nations. Our English hedgerows, which, until the advent of the motor-car, were the pride and glory of the countryside, are memorials, or at any rate are reminders, of the plague, for they mark the change in land tenure that followed the Black Death. It was the scarcity of men that dealt the final blow to villeinage and serfdom, and so released the English agricultural labourer from slavery. As a modern writer says : " Plague helped to kill the textile industries of the eastern counties and laid the foundations of the modern prosperity of Lancashire and Yorkshire. It was largely responsible for the decline of the power and wealth of the monasteries, and thus brought nearer the Reformation. It revolutionised Church life and greatly modified Church architecture. It even facilitated the growth of English literature. Up to the time of the Black Death French was the principal language of the schools and of the wealthy. So many teachers died in the epidemic that a new race of educationists arose who insisted on giving instruction in the English tongue, and the way was thereby paved for ' Piers Plowman' and Chaucer." [2]

When we read of the loss of life due to warfare or to epidemics during the mediæval period, we must bear in mind that the total population of England was under two millions at the time of the Norman Conquest, and Professor Creasy tells us that the census showed no advance on this figure in the reign of John. It is necessary that we should keep this in mind, or we may fail to attach sufficient importance to the epidemics that carried off a few

thousands of the inhabitants, and wonder why such destruction of life should have been regarded as a national catastrophe that sent the survivors weeping to the shrines of the saints.

It is probably no exaggeration to describe the modern tourist, who " does" Italy in ten days or Norway in five, as a direct descendant of the mediæval pilgrim, and but for the Reformation the making of pilgrimages might have suffered no breach of historical continuity.

The old-time pilgrimage was touring and sightseeing at its best, notwithstanding many disadvantages, and there were more wonders to be witnessed between Venice and Jerusalem than the most enterprising traveller would now encounter in a voyage round the entire world. Of the thousands of pilgrims who wended their way to the smaller domestic shrines we have no records, but an English traveller in the fourteenth century has related that he saw lying in the harbour of Corunna eighty shiploads of pilgrims, of which vessels thirty were from England. At the shrine of Becket at Canterbury the annual number of pilgrims exceeded for many years the remarkable figure of two hundred thousand, and the extraordinary devotion paid to this saint appears at one time to have almost, if not quite, effaced the adoration of the Deity. At God's altar, for example, the offerings in one year totalled the meagre sum of £3 2s. 6d., while the shrine of Becket received no less than £832 12s. 3d. The year following the disproportion was still greater, for not a single penny was offered at God's altar, although St. Thomas had for his share £954 6s. 3d., representing some thousands of pounds of our present currency.

Other equally famous shrines, apart from the most famous of them all, the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, were those of the Holy Blood of Hayles ; St. Andrew, in Scotland ; St. David, in Wales ; St. Edmund, at St. Edmundsbury ; St. Patrick's Purgatory, in Ireland ; St. Ninian, in Galloway ; St. James of Compostella, in Spain ; and the Virgin's House, at Loretto, in Italy. In England the shrine of Becket, at Canterbury, and that of Our Lady of Walsingham, in Norfolk, rank easily first, both in popularity and in the numbers of pilgrims who visited them.

The English domestic shrines surpassed in point of numbers, variety, and wealth those of any other country, there being no fewer than thirty-eight of these pilgrims' Meccas in the county of Norfolk alone.

There is little reason to doubt that the organisation of bands of pilgrims for transmarine voyages developed into a regular trade, and one that may be said to have been the first great commercial speculation of mediæval days. The foundation of the wealth of Venice is traceable to the great influx of foreign pilgrims, and the same may be said of Pisa, Rheims, Corunna, Genoa, and other favoured places. Many of our old cities and towns like Canterbury and Walsingham must have derived much pecuniary benefit from the pilgrims.

When pilgrimages became the fashion almost anything, from a scolding wife to a great offence, was excuse sufficient for the making of one. A knight of old about to undertake some dangerous mission of love or war invariably prepared himself for the ordeal by making a pilgrimage, and, returning in safety, he made another one as the most approved form of thanksgiving for having been preserved from disaster or death.

So Richard I., on his escape from the Austrian dungeon, wended his way barefooted from Sandwich to the shrine of Becket, and the first act of Columbus on recrossing the Atlantic was to make a pilgrimage. Gibbon hints that Peter the Hermit became a pilgrim to escape from matrimony, and a certain Guy de Crema is said to have gone all the way to Ararat in the hope of obtaining a piece of the Ark, with which to fashion a talisman for his wife to wear against a too rapid increase of family. Louis VII. had a perfect mania for pilgrimages, for,

having got rid of a bad wife by some such promenade, he married again, and immediately set out on another from gratitude at getting a good one. These, however, were trifles, for he made a series of such pedestrian exercises through Europe, extending over a period of twenty-eight years, in order to induce the saints to provide him, as they eventually did, with a son and heir. For a pilgrimage-maker, this monarch's record would be hard to beat.

Pilgrimages could be performed by proxy, a consequence, perhaps, of the common doctrine of the mediæval Church that an individual could occasionally depute his religious duties to others without detriment to himself. Generally, however, it will be found that such pilgrimages were made only after the death of the person to whom they referred, although there are a few instances to the contrary.

Provision for these *post-obit* pilgrimages are frequently met with in the wills of the twelfth to the sixteenth century. In the earlier instances they were mostly directed to Rome or Jerusalem, but in later times, like other pilgrimages, they were more commonly made to domestic shrines.

A pious dame whose will is given in an old " History of Norfolk" provided for a pilgrim to visit, after her death, no fewer than eight different shrines in that county. In the will of Lady Cecily Gerbridge, dated 1418, ten marks are bequeathed for a pilgrim to visit Rome, and Bishop Gardiner of Norwich left twenty marks for a like purpose. In some cases the executors of a will were directed to give certain sums of money to all pilgrims who were willing to undertake an assigned pilgrimage for the deceased.

The performance of religious duties and penances by proxy was, no doubt, largely resorted to by many members of the community. There is a popular story to the effect that a certain man had followed his wife to confession, and when she retired behind the altar to receive corporal discipline, he cried to spare her, for she was very tender, and he would take the punishment in her place ; whereupon, as he bowed himself to the rod, she cried, " Strike hard, father, for I am a great sinner !"

There is little reason to doubt that when pilgrimage became the fashion the scrip and staff were as frequently assumed for the purpose of committing new sins as for the performance of penance for old ones. The holy well in its secluded and leafy bower, the hallowed shrine in the dimly-lighted cathedral, were excellent places of assignation, to reach which a pilgrimage formed a convenient and a plausible excuse. What proportion such impious pilgrims bore to their more devout companions we have few means of ascertaining, but we have considerable evidence that in quite early days the monkish custodians of shrine and relic were much perturbed by this abuse of pilgrimage, and they have not failed to record the fate that overtook the transgressors.

> " PERPAVCÆ ENIM SVNT CIVITATES IN LONGOBARDIA, VEL IN FRANCIA AVT IN GALLIA, IN QVA NON SIT ADVLTERA VEL MERETRIX GENERIS ANGLORVM, QVOD SCANDALUM EST TVRPITVDO TOTIVS ECCLESIÆ."

So wrote a continental bishop of the period, and we have every reason to believe that the conduct of the dames of other lands were just as bad, if not rather worse, as the example of Eleanor, the divorced wife of Louis VII., goes to show.

It was in vain that the more pious fathers of the Church preached and wrote against the abuse of pilgrimage. Their pleadings fell on deaf ears, their eloquence was in vain, and

availed but little to stem the growth of the many abuses. Pilgrimages had, in common parlance, come to stay, and to many folk going on pilgrimage was

> " A nostrum famous, in old popish times,
> For purifying souls that stunk with crimes ;
> A sort of apostolic salt,
> That popish parsons for its power exalt,
> For keeping souls of sinners sweet,
> Just as our kitchen salt keeps meat."

" Jerusalem," wrote St. Jerome, " is now made a place of resort from all parts of the world, and there such a throng of pilgrims of both sexes that all temptation, which you might in some degree avoid elsewhere, is here collected together."

A few years after the death of Beda, Winfrid, an English missionary in Germany, wrote to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Durham, to say that there " was great need to check the practice of pilgrimages, for many, both men and women, only go abroad for the purpose of living licentiously, without the restraint they would find at home, or are tempted by the vices of the cities in France and Lombardy to fall from the paths of virtue." According to the testimony of Winfrid there were few cities on the way to Rome where such persons were not to be met with, and the historian Gibbon tells us that " the roads were covered with multitudes of either sex, and of every rank, who professed their contempt of life so soon as they should have kissed the tomb of their Redeemer. Princes and prelates abandoned the care of their dominions, and the members of these pious caravans were a prelude to the armies which marched in the ensuing age under the banner of the cross."

During the eleventh century in particular the belief in the merit and even the obligation in the sight of God of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem were as firmly impressed on the mind of every nominal Christian, whatever his rank or station, as are the necessity and advantage of a pilgrimage to the Kaaba of Mecca in the creed of the followers of Mohammed at the present day.

Each year saw the number of pilgrims augment, and all persons were strictly enjoined to hold a pilgrim in great respect and veneration, as an especial favourite of the Almighty, inasmuch as he had been admitted by Him to the glorious privilege of visiting the sacred places, and had retained, it was thought, a portion of their sanctity.

In all pilgrimages of real devotion the practice of walking was common, and it was usual for the pilgrim to make his journey barefoot. It was thus that Richard I. made his journey from Sandwich to Canterbury. In one of the Paston letters, dated 1471, the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk are mentioned as making a pilgrimage together in this manner from Framlingham to Walsingham. Henry VIII., in one of his numerous pilgrimages to Walsingham, walked barefoot from Barsham, a distance of three miles, and Henrietta Maria's pilgrimages from St. James's to Tyburn were similarly performed.

The returning Crusaders brought into this country from Palestine a large number of relics, to some of which we owe the founding of such shrines as that of the True Blood, at Hayles Abbey, in Gloucestershire, in which the sacred material had been imported by the Crusaders.

The papal assertion that relics possessed the power of self -reproduction was inevitable in the days when churches were so many and genuine relics so few, especially as bishops were

threatened with deprivation of office should they dare to consecrate churches void of relics. Calvin, in his interesting little black-letter volume, printed in 1561, declares, with excusable exaggeration, that the portions of the true cross shown in the European churches were enough to load a large ship. The relics purporting to be those of our Lord's Passion the holy blood, the seamless garment, fragments of the crown of thorns were almost as numerous, as indeed were the relics of the Virgin. Her shift was shown at Aix-la-Chapelle, her combs at Rome and Besangon, and her wedding ring at Perugia. The most popular relic, however, of the Virgin was her milk, such as that exhibited in England at Walsingham, and in many churches on the Continent.

The multiplicity of holy relics was not free from certain disadvantages, notwithstanding that their exhibitors could plead to sceptical and well-travelled pilgrims the papal decree that *all* holy relics had the Divine gift of self -multiplication. There is an old story told of a visitor making a tour of the various French shrines in the early years of the sixteenth century, to the effect that when shown the skull of John the Baptist at a certain monastery, the pilgrim remarked that the skull of the same saint had been exhibited to him only the day before at another abbey. " Maybe," the monkish custodian is said to have replied, " that was the skull of John the Baptist when a young man, whereas this in our possession is his skull after he was fully advanced in years and wisdom."

A full list of the relics still treasured in the continental churches would be indeed a surprising document.

With regard to the present-day attitude of the Church of Rome towards such relics, and the miracles performed by their aid, the words of the late Cardinal Newman may be quoted as authoritative, unquestioned, and canonical :—

" Certainly," he wrote, " the Catholic Church, from east to west, from north to south, is, according to our conceptions, hung with miracles. The store of relics is inexhaustible, they are multiplied through all lands, and each particle of each has in it at least a dormant—perhaps an energetic—virtue of supernatural operation. At Rome there is the true cross, the crib of Bethlehem, and the chair of St. Peter, portions of the crown of thorns are kept at Paris, the holy coat is shown at Trèves, the winding sheet at Turin. At Monza the iron crown is formed out of a nail of the cross, and another nail is claimed for the Duomo of Milan, and pieces of Our Lady's habit are to be seen in the Escurial. The Agnus Dei, blessed medals, the scapular, the cord of St. Francis, all are the media of Divine manifestations of grace. Crucifixes have bowed the head to the suppliant, and Madonnas have bent their eye upon assembled crowds. St. Januarius's blood liquefies periodically at Naples, and St. Winifred's Well is the scene of wonders in an unbelieving country. Women are marked with sacred stigvnata, blood has flowed on Fridays from their five wounds, and their heads are crowned with a circle of lacerations. Relics are for ever touching the sick, the diseased, the wounded, sometimes with no result at all, at other times with marked and undeniable efficacy. Who has not heard of the abundant favours gained by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and of the marvellous consequences which have attended the invocation of St. Anthony of Padua ? These phenomena are sometimes reported of saints in their lifetime as well as after death, especially if they were evangelists or martyrs. The wild beasts crouched before their victims in the Roman amphitheatre, the axe-man was unable to sever St. Cecilia's head from her body, and St. Peter elicited a spring of water for his jailer's baptism in the Mamertine. St. Francis Xavier turned salt-water into fresh for five hundred travellers, St. Raymond was transported over the sea on his cloak, St. Andrew shone brilliantly in the dark, St. Scholastica gained by her prayers a pouring rain, St. Paul was fed by ravens, and St. Frances saw her guardian angel. I need not continue the catalogue. It is agreed on both sides ; the two parties

join issue over a fact ; that fact is, the claim of miracles on the part of the Catholic Church ; it is the Protestants' charge, and it is our glory."

Faith-healing is, of course, as old as the hills, for before there was religion there was magic, and wherever there was magic faith-healing was largely practised.

In writing of the so-called miracles of healing which have taken place at numberless shrines and holy wells, and which have been inscribed on papal bulls by the thousand, one must speak with caution. No one in his senses now believes that an application of the reputed blood of Becket mixed with water will reset a fractured pelvis, or that a twisted limb can be straightened by dipping it into the waters of a holy well. At the same time we must remember that the Mediæval Period was an age of infinite faith, and therefore one of immense possibilities with regard to the relief, if not the cure, of diseases which may be, to a certain extent, controlled by the mind. That many of the reputed miracles of the Middle Ages were not genuine, and were feigned to bring fame to some particular shrine, is certain. The great mass of pilgrims had minds which, though constrained by faith, the most biassed lover of the mediæval system could not call scientific, so that the mere exercise of walking from shrine to shrine, coupled with a plain, wholesome diet, effected many cures of minor ailments, which were hailed by the monks as cases of miraculous healing.

It is the fashion to-day to regard the mediæval miracle with scepticism. Yet the fact remains that remarkable cures, bearing much similarity to the old-time miracle, are effected at the present day.

Such a statement requires proof, which is furnished by a paper on " Modern Miracles of Healing," which was read only last year (1910) before the North Wales Branch of the British Medical Association, when several of the medical men present bore testimony to certain cases of healing at St. Winifred's Well being of undoubted authenticity, an extraordinary testimony to the power of faith-healing in this eminently scientific age, and one which helps us to realise that many of the mediæval miracles were, in a sense, quite genuine.

And what were the sentiments, one may ask, which animated these countless hordes of pilgrims knights, nobles, kings, ladies, priests, clerks, gentles, and yeomen and urged them to undertake so frequently such long and perilous journeys ? The majority of such wayfarers, in the earlier days at any rate, may be regarded as devout and pious persons who honestly believed in the efficacy of their arduous pilgrimage.

To quote Mr. J. J. Jusserand [3] : " Arrived at the end of the journey, all prayed ; prayed with fervour in the humblest posture. The soul was filled with religious emotion when from the end of the majestic alley formed by the coloured twilight of the nave, the heart divined, rather than the eye saw, the mysterious object of veneration for which such a distance had been traversed at the cost of such a fatigue. Though the practical man galloped up to bargain with the saint for the favour of God, though the emissary sent to make offering in the name of his master might keep a dry and clear eye, tears coursed down the cheeks of the poor and simple in heart. He tasted fully of the pious emotion he had come to seek, the peace of heaven descended into his bosom, and he went away consoled. Such was the happy lot of simple, devout souls."

It is doubtful if a more charming description has ever been penned of the devout and genuine pilgrim than that quoted above ; but there were others, in the later days especially, who were merely pleasure-seekers or holiday-makers, accompanied by a considerable number of adventurers, minstrels, dancers, and camp followers, living on the credulity or

bounty of their wealthier fellow-travellers. Each may have had his quiet and devotional moment before the hallowed relic, as, the world forgetting, he confessed his sins or sought the intercession of the Blessed Virgin .

At the same time, it would be ridiculous to affirm that all who went on pilgrimage during the Middle Ages were actuated by devotional motives, or concerned their minds very much about the spiritual benefits to be derived from their journey. J. R. Green tells us that restless workmen made use of pilgrimages when seeking a new situation, and a statute of Richard II. attempted to put a stop to the practice. Thus we find that a small band of devout pilgrims would be joined by those to whom a pilgrimage was but a pretext for some other objective ; the merchant taking his goods to a distant town, the artisan in search of work, would, in many cases, join one of the numerous bands of pilgrims who were journeying in the desired direction.

We have a curious picture of the manner in which certain of our home-pilgrimages were prosecuted in the early years of the fifteenth century, when William Thorpe was tried for heresy by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1407. Thorpe had been accused by Archbishop Arundel of having asserted that " those men and women who go on pilgrimages to Canterbury, to Beverley, to Walsingham, and to other such places, are accursed and made foolish, spending their goods in waste. Such persons as these spend much money and time in seeking out and visiting the bones or images of this or that saint, do that which is in direct disobedience to the commands of God, inasmuch as they waste their goods partly upon inn-keepers, many of whom are women of profligate conduct, partly upon rich priests, who have already more than they need."

" Ungracious lousel !" replied the Archbishop, " thou favourest no more truth than a hound. Since, at the road at the north door at London, at our Lady at Walsingham, and many other divers places in England, are many great and praisable miracles done, should not the images of such holy saints and places be more worshipped than other places and images where no such miracles are done ?"

With the increase of shrines all over the country, it was inevitable that pilgrimages should tend to become mere pleasure parties, in which the spirit of real devotion and austerity was conspicuous by its absence. A troop of pilgrims was never wanting in the elements of humour, and so mixed a company was bound to afford an opportunity for fun and frolic. So much was this the case that as early as the days of Charlemagne we find the pilgrim's badges denounced as the insignia of imposture and deceit. We have many contemporary records to show that, as they trudged or cantered along the highways and byways, they relieved the tedium of the journey with songs, legends, and stirring tales of adventure, while the notes of flutes, bagpipes, and other musical instruments gave an additional gaiety to the scene. The popular songs of the day were certainly broadly humorous, if not something rather worse, for, as Sir Thomas More observed, " there be cathedral churches into which the country come with procession, and the women following the cross with many an unwomanly song."

Another passage from one of the early State trials may be quoted. The dialogue occurs between a disciple of Wycliffe, *temp.* Henry IV., and Arch-bishop Arundel of Canterbury. " Also, sir," says the disciple, " I know well that when divers men and women will go after their owne wills, and finding out a pilgrimage, they will order to have with them both men and women that can sing wanton songs : and some other pilgrims will have with them bag-pipes, so that every towne they come through, what with the noise of their singing and the sound of their piping, and with the jangling of their Canterbury bells, and with the barking out of dogs after them, that they make more noise than if the king came that waye, with all

his clarions and minstrells. And if these men and women be a month in their pilgrimage, many of them shall be half a year after great jinglers, tale-tellers, and liars."

To this somewhat severe accusation the Archbishop replied that " Pilgrims have with them singers and also pipers, that when one of them which goeth bare-foote striketh his toe upon a stone, and maketh it to bleed, it is well done that he and his fellows begin then a song, or else take out of his bosome a bagpipe, to drive away with such mirthe the hurte of his fellow. For with such solace the travaile and wearinesse of pilgrims is lightly and merrily brought forth."

There were, however, more serious charges brought against the pilgrims and their followers than the foregoing. In Sir Thomas More's " Dyalogue on the Adoracion of Images" the interlocutor observes that " the most part [of pilgrims] that cometh, cometh for no devotion at all, but only for good company to babble thitherward, and drinke dronke there, and then dance and reel homeward."

According to Chaucer the pilgrims of whom he has given us so vivid an account in the " Canterbury Tales" were little more than a merry band of revellers, all decked out in their gayest garments, and exhibiting no sign of their austere profession in either appearance, behaviour, or spirit.

> " Every man in his wise made herty chere,
> Telling his fellows of sportes and of cheer,
> And of mirthes that fallen by the waye,
> As custom is of pilgrims, and hath been many a daye."

However hard they may have prayed at the end of their journey, they appear, during Chaucer's time at any rate, to have given themselves up to enjoyment on the way, and when they raised their eyes to heaven it will generally be found that they did so in order to take aim at it with the end of a bottle.

It is not difficult to understand why the " Wife of Bath," who, besides doing many of the lesser tours, had been three times to Jerusalem, longed to go on more journeys, and why the knight Geoffroi de la Tour Landry, in the treatise [4] he wrote on morals and behaviour for the use of his daughters, warned them against pilgrimages as against the plague. At the same time, these remarks must be taken as more applicable to the customary, fashionable, and regular pilgrimages than to those undertaken spontaneously by individuals or small bands of penitents from some strong religious impulse or motive, and how different the early Christian was from the " Canterbury" pilgrim the " Canterbury Tales" unfold.

There is a general impression that the custom of making pilgrimages had fallen into abeyance, had, in fact, died of inanition, long before the Reformation swept shrine and relic to the winds. Such was possibly the case with the smaller domestic shrines, for long before the close of the fifteenth century pilgrimage had ceased to be an important factor in the religious life of the country. At the same time, we know that Henry VIII. himself made more than one pilgrimage and gave the customary gifts to several shrines ; and the little black-letter volume entitled " Informacion for Pylgrymes unto the Holy Land," printed by Wynkyn de Worde about 1498, ran through three editions. The beautiful Pilgrims' Inn at Glastonbury was erected about 1475 to accommodate those visiting the holy places of St. Joseph of Arimathea and the relics of St. Dunstan ; and although the daily resort to shrines for devotional purposes had practically ceased, the Jubilees of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the last one being kept in 1520, were attended by such vast crowds of people that special provisions were made for their accommodation. In 1533 Hugh Latimer wrote to his friend Master Morice, from his

rectory of West Kineton (Kington West), in Wiltshire, saying : “ I dwell within a mile of the Fossway, and you would wonder to see how many they come by flocks out of the West Country to many images to our Lady of Worcester, &c., but chiefly to the Blood of Hayles, which they believe to be the very blood of Christ, and that the sight of it puts them in a state of salvation.”

Spring was the favourite season for English pilgrimages to domestic shrines, particularly in the days when the delights of a holiday trip were tempered with the sense of performing a religious duty. As these latter-day pilgrims started on their journey well provided with money, and clad in rich garments, they were worth plundering. Country roads were unsafe for solitary or small bodies of pilgrims who could not afford the luxury of an escort of armed servants ; so for mutual convenience and protection, for safety and better entertainment on the way, they formed themselves into companies of sufficient strength to defend themselves if attacked on the ill-kept highways that led to Hayles, to Walsingham, or to Canterbury.

For better or worse the days of devotional pilgrimages in this country are over, except for the Roman Catholics, and on every side the Pilgrims’ Ways are strewn with the wreckage of mediævalism. No longer does Chaucer's merry cavalcade ride forth in the fresh spring morning, a motley company

> “ From every shire’s end
> Of England, to Canterbury they wend
> The holy blissful martyr for to seek,
> That them hath helpen when that they were sick.”

Yea, verily, the days of devotional pilgrimages are over, and as they have no equivalent in our land it is imagination alone that will awaken the thought that they once played an important part in the social and religious life of our ancestors.

No longer does the wooden Christus hanging on the oaken rood-tree bend the head to the penitent suppliant ; and vanished utterly from our Protestant churches is the bejewelled and glistening Mary and her little company of angels. Long still and gone are all these things, and only the reverence of a reverie remains.

[1] Guarded by military couriers.
[2] Daily Mail, February 15, 1911.
[3] “ English Wayfaring Life,” J. J. Jusserand (T. Fisher Unwin).
[4] Harleian MSS., No. 1,764. Printed under the title of “ The Knight of the Tower,” by Caxton, in 1484.

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