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The Visitors' Book.

A Yachting Story

BY A. T. QUILLER COUCH.

Passing back through the main cabin I paused to examine one or two of the fittings—particularly a neat glass fronted bookcase, with a small sideboard below it, containing three drawers and a cellaret. The bookcase was empty and clean swept, as also were the drawers. At the bottom of the cellaret I found a couple of flags stowed—a tattered yellow quarantine signal tightly rolled into a bundle, and a red ensign neatly folded. As I lifted out the latter, there dropped from its folds and fell upon the cabin floor a book.

I picked it up—a thin quarto bound in black morocco, and rather the worse for wear. On its topside it bore the following inscription in dingy gilt letters: "Job's Hotel, Penleven. Visitors' Book. J. Job, Proprietor."

Standing there beneath the skylight, I turned its pages over, wondering vaguely how the visitor's book of a small provincial hotel had found its way into that drawer. It contained the usual assortment of conventional praise and vulgar jocosity:

"Mr. and the Hon. Mrs. Smith, of Huddersfield, cannot speak too highly of Mrs. Job's ham and eggs.—September 15th, 1881."

"After wet through after a fifteen-mile tramp along the coast; but, thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Job, was soon steaming over a comfortable fire.—John and Annie Watson, March, 1882."

Note appended by a humorist:

"Then you sat on the hob, I suppose."

There was the politely patronizing entry:

"Being accustomed to Wolverhampton, I am greatly pleased with this coast.—F. B.W."

The poetical effusion:

"Majestic spot! Say, doth the sun in Heaven
Behold aught to equal thee, wave-washed
Penleven?" etc.

Lighter verse:

"Here I came to take my ease."

(Old joke in margin by another hand: "Shall I not ache my knees at mine inn?")

"Agreeably disappointed to find no fl—
"Mrs. Job, you bread and butter—
"Is quite too utterly, utterly utter!
"J. HARPER, June 3, 1883."

The contemplative man's ejaculation:

"It is impossible on viewing these cyclopean cliffs, to repress the thought. How great is nature, how little man!"

(Notes in various hands: "So it is, old chap! Try Hudson's Extract!" and a reproof: "Shut up! can't you see he's suffering!"

The last entry was a brief one:

"J. MacGuire, Liverpool; September 2, 1889."

Twilight forced me to close the book and put it back in its place. As I did so I glanced up involuntarily towards the skylight as if I half expected to find a pair of eyes staring down on me. Yet the book contained nothing but these mere trivialities. Whatever my apprehension, I was, as J. Harper would have said, agreeably disappointed. I climbed on deck again, relocked the hatch, replaced the tarpaulins, jumped into the boat and rowed homewards. Though the tide favored me it was dark before I reached Mr. Dewy's quay door. Having with some difficulty found the frape, I made the boat fast. I groped my way across the back premises and out into the gaslit streets and so to the Ship inn, a fair dinner and a sound night's sleep.

At ten o'clock next morning I called on Messrs. Dewy and Moss. Again Mr. Dewy received me, and again he apologized for the absence of his partner, who had caught an early train to attend a wrestling match

I PICKED IT UP.

at the far end of the county. (Moss was becoming immense.) Mr. Dewy showed me the sails, gear, cushions, etc., of the Siren. Everything was in surprising condition. I told him that I meant business, and added:

"I suppose you have all the yacht's papers?"

He stroked his chin, bent his head to one side and asked: "Shall you require them?"

"Of course," I said. "The transfer must be regular. We must have her certificate of registry at the very least."

"In that case I had better write and get them from my client."

"Is she not a resident here?"

"I don't know," he said, "that I ought to tell you. But I see no harm—you are evidently, sir, a bona fide purchaser. The lady's name is Carlingford—a widow—residing at present in Bristol."

"This is annoying," said I; "but if she lives somewhere near the Temple Mead station, I might skip a train there and call on her. She herself desired no delay, and I desire it just as little. But the papers are necessary."

After some little demur, he gave me the address and we parted. At the door I turned and asked: "By the way, who was the fellow on board the Siren last night as I rowed up to her?"

He gave me a stare of genuine surprise. "A man on board? Whoever he was, he had no business there. I look after the yacht myself."

Dewy's versatility was uncanny.

I fled to the railroad station. Soon after six that evening I knocked at Mrs. Carlingford's lodgings in an unattractive street of Bedminster, that unattractive suburb. A small maid opened the door, took my card, and showed me into a small sitting-room on the ground floor. I looked about me—a round table, a horsehair couch, a walnut sideboard with glass panels, a lithograph of John Wesley being rescued from the flames of his father's rectory, a colored photograph—

As the door opened behind me and a woman entered, I jumped back almost into her arms. The colored photograph staring at me from the opposite wall above the mantel-shelf, was a portrait—a portrait of the man I had seen on board the Siren!

"Who is that?" I demanded, wheeling round without ceremony.

But if I was startled, Mrs. Carlingford seemed ready to drop with fright. The little woman—she was a very small, shrinking creature, with a pallid face, and large, nervous eyes, like a hare's—put out a hand against the jamb of the door and grasped out:

"Why—why do you ask? What do you want?"

"I beg your pardon," I said; "it was merely curiosity. I thought I had seen the face somewhere."

"He was my husband."

"He is dead then?"

"Oh, why do you ask? Yes; he died abroad." She touched her widow's cap with her shaking finger, and then covered her face with her hands. "I was there—I saw it. Ah!" She drew back a sudden breath as if stabbed: "Why do you ask?" she repeated.

"I beg your pardon sincerely," I said; "it was only that the portrait reminded me—I thought—but my business here is quite different. I am come about the yacht Siren which you have advertised for sale."

She seemed more than ever inclined to run. Her voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"My agents at F—— have full instructions about the sale."

"Yes, but they tell me you have the papers. I may say that I have seen the yacht and gear and am ready to pay the price you ask for immediate possession. I said as much to Mr. Dewy. But the papers, of course—"

"Are they necessary?"

"Certainly they are. At least the certificate of registry or, failing that, some reference to the port of registry, if the transfer is to be made. I should also like

"WHO IS THAT?"

to see her warrant, if she has one, and her sail makers' certificate. Messrs. Dewy and Moss could draw up the inventory."

She still hesitated. At length she said: "I have the certificate; I will fetch it. The other papers, if she had any, have been lost or destroyed. She never had a warrant. I believe my husband belonged to no yacht club. I understand very little of these matters."

She left the room, and returned in five minutes or so with the open document in her hand.

"But," said I, looking over it, "this is a certificate of a vessel called the Wasp."

"Ah, I must explain that. I wished the boat to change her name with the new owner—her old name—it has associations—painful ones—I should not like anyone else to know her as the Wasp."

"Well," I admitted, "I can understand that. But, see here, she is entered as having one mast and carrying a cutter rig."

"She was a cutter originally. My husband had her lengthened in 1886, I think by five feet, and turned her into a yawl. It was abroad, at Malaga—"

"A curious port to choose."

"She was built, you see, as long ago as 1875. My husband used to say she was a broad boat for those days, and could be lengthened successfully and turned into quite a new-looking vessel. He gave an entirely new sheathing, too, and all her spars are new. She was not insured, and being in a foreign port, it was understood he would have her newly registered when he returned, which he fully intended. So no alterations were made in the certificate here, and, I believe, her old tonnage is still carved up somewhere inside her."

This was true enough. The figures on the certificate, 29.56, were those I had seen on the beam in the forecastle.

"My husband never lived to reach England, and when she came back to F——, though she was visited, of course, by the custom house officer and coast guard, nobody asked for certificate, and so the alterations in her were never explained. She was laid up at once in the F—— river, and there she has remained."

Certain structural peculiarities in the main cabin—scarcely noted at the time, but now remembered—served to confirm Mrs. Carlingford's plainly-told story. On my return to London that night I hunted up some back volumes of Hunt, and satisfied myself on the matter of the Wasp and her owner, William Carlingford. And, to be short, the transfer was made on a fresh survey, the check sent to Mrs. Carlingford, and the yawl Siren passed into my hands.

All being settled, I wrote to my old acquaintance, Mr. Dewy, asking him to fit the vessel out, and find me a steady skipper and crew—not without some apprehensions of hearing by return of post that Dewy and Moss were ready and willing to sign articles with me to steer and sail the yacht in their spare moments. Perhaps the idea did not occur to them. At any rate they found me a crew, and a good one; and I spent a very comfortable three months cruising along the southwestern coast, across to Scilly, from Scilly to Cork and back to Southampton, where on September 29, 1891, I laid the yacht up for the winter.

Thrice since have I applied to Messrs. Dewy and Moss for a crew, and always with satisfactory results. But I must pass over 1892 and 1893 and come to this summer; or, to be precise, to Wednesday, the 11th of July. We had left Plymouth that morning for a run westward; but the wind falling light towards noon, we found ourselves drifting, or doing little more, off the entrance of the small fishing haven of Penleven. Though I had never visited Penleven I knew on the evidence of countless picture-shows that the place was well worth seeing. Besides, had I not the assurances of the visitors' book in my cabin? It occurred to me that I would anchor for an hour or two in the entrance of the haven, and eat my lunch ashore at Mr. Job's hotel. Mr. Job would doubtless be pleased to recover his long-lost volume, and I had no more wish than right to retain it.

Job's hotel was unpretending. Mrs. Job offered me ham and eggs and, as an alternative, a cut off a boiled silver side of beef, if I did not mind waiting for ten minutes or so, when her husband would be back to dinner. I said that I would wait, and added that I should be pleased to make Mr. Job's acquaintance on his return, as I had a trifling message for Him.

About ten minutes later, while studying a series of German lithographs in the coffee room, I heard a heavy footstep in the passage and a knock at the door; and Mr. Job appeared, a giant of a man, with a giant's girth and red cheeks, which he appeared to inflate as a preliminary of speech.

"Good day, Mr. Job," said I briskly. "I won't keep you from your dinner, but the fact is, I am the unwilling guardian of a trifle belonging to you." And I showed him the visitors' book.

I thought the man would have an apoplectic fit there on the spot. He rolled his eyes, dropped heavily upon a chair, and began to breathe hard and short.

"Where—where?" he gasped, and began to struggle for breath.

"Listen," I said; "for some reason or other the sight of this book distresses you, and I think you had better not try to speak for a bit. I will tell you exactly how the book came into my possession, and afterwards you can let me have your side of the story, if you choose." And I told him just what I have told the reader.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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$3.75 strong tweed overcoats for yourself; velvet collar; worth $6. Howland Bros.

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When she was a Child, she cried for Castoria.
When she became Miss, she clung to Castoria.
When she had Children, she gave them Castoria.

MISCELLANEOUS.

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Briar and meerschaum pipes in silver mountings or plain, in different shapes from $1 to $1.00, in cases, walking sticks and canes a splendid assortment, tobacco pouches, cigar and cigarette cases in pretty designs, cigar tubes in meerschaum and cherry, dog collars, pen knives, play cards and all brands of cigarette and pipe tobaccos, cigars, 10c and 25c; in fancy box suitable for presents, at 50c, 75c and $1, and heaps of beautiful pipes, which we will sell cheap to close out.

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Take heed of the rhyme,
For now is the time
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KEEPING CHRISTMAS.

Prof. Goldwin Smith on the Day. Its History and Customs.

"Christmas comes but once a year" were words familiar and dear to English childhood. They were uttered by the band of mummers who came into the halls of the gentry on Christmas Eve to exhibit their rude traditional disguises and play their uncouth antics, earning thereby the half-crowns wherewith to make themselves a merry Christmas. If you had traced the pedigree of the mummers, probably you would have found that they, like Punch, represented the actors of some mediæval mystery or morality play, now fallen in its estate since the Church of the Middle Ages with all its sacred pageantry and dramaturgy, had passed away. Punch will die only with Shakespeare, but the mummers probably by this time the policeman of a refined civilization has ordered to "move on." Besides the roughness and absurdity of the exhibition, these fooleries enacted by the lower class to amuse the upper class and draw money from them did smack somewhat of the old regime and even reminded one a little of the Saturnalia of the Roman slave. More than two centuries before, Puritanism had banished forever the Lord of Misrule, under whose reign of tipsy jollity and folly the lawyers of the Temple were once fined for having failed to perform their customary dance before the judges. The Lord of Misrule, while he lasted, was kept up in a style incredibly elaborate and expensive. He had a mimic court, with officers answering to those of the real court, and for a season ruled the realm of pleasure as absolutely as the monarch whom he counterfeited and partly supplanted ruled the State. Mr. Francis Vivian, who was Lord of Misrule or Christmas Prince in the reign of Charles I., spent £3,000, equivalent probably to $100,000 now, on the maintenance of his mock dignity, besides his allowance from the Crown. To all this the more serious and austere spirit which was then gaining ascendancy in Merrie England was fatal, and the Restoration, though it brought back the May-pole, failed to revive such laborious and thoroughly antiquated tomfoolery as the reign of the Lord of Misrule. "Our Christmas Lords of Misrule," says Prynne; "together with dancing, masques, mummeries, stage-playing, and such other Christmas disorders now in use with Christians were derived from these Roman Saturnalia and Bacchanalian festivals, which should cause all pious Christians eternally to abominate them." The words are quoted in Mr. Hervey's "Book of Christmas," where all the lore concerning the Lord of Misrule will be found. Prynne is right in connecting the reign of Misrule, morally at least, with the Saturnalia: it was not only a vast "spree," but, like the Saturnalia, a temporary relief from the rigidities of social arrangements and a sort of social safety-valve at the same time. Another festival which used to be celebrated in England when I was a boy, and which had a strong and most pathetic tinge of the Saturnalia, was the festival of the chimney sweeps on the first of May. Those hapless boys, mostly parish apprentices, and the lowest and most miserable slaves of civilization, had that one privileged day of merriment and feasting in the year. They used to dance on the lawn round "Jack in the green," clattering their brushes and wooden shovels, after which they were regaled by the charitable with beef and plum pudding. Happily that caste of misery and degradation has now ceased to exist. If the mummers have departed, I hope the "Waits" have not departed with them. Their music was hardly an equivalent, especially in the rural parishes, for the song of the angelic choir heralding the nativity, which I suppose it professed to reproduce. But its sound in the dead of the night made a strong impression, half awful, half pleasant, on the ear of childhood.

Sunday and Christmas are now pretty much in the same position as institutions which have lost or are fast losing their old theological basis, but rest securely on a basis of another kind. It is impossible to insist on the obligation of keeping the Jewish Sabbath, the day on which the Creator rested after the six days' work of Creation, especially as we do not keep it, our Sunday being the first day of the week and not the seventh. But the Sabbath has glided into the Day of Rest, of spiritual rest for those who are spiritually minded, of rest at all events for all, and of Sabbath stillness after the noise and bustle of the week. The French Revolutionists, when they undertook to make new heavens and a new earth on the principles of Reason and Rousseau, substituted the tenth day for the seventh found it would not do. Sunday has ceased to be an article of law, but it remains an article of human nature. So it is with Christmas. Christians in the Middle Ages thought that they were keeping the actual birthday of the Saviour, as they thought when they went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that they saw the identical spots where the scenes of His Passion had been enacted and the Sepulchre in which He had been laid. We know that the day of Christ's birth is totally uncertain. Clement of Alexandria, a Father of the second century, speaks of those who affected to assign the days as "over curious" and his confession of ignorance is decisive. All attempts to settle the point by reference to historical landmarks, to ecclesiastical tradition, or to the Shepherd's Calendar are vain. Probably the time of the winter solstice, the birthday of the Sun, was fixed on for the nativity of the Sun of Righteousness. The old Latin hymns seem almost to admit as much by coupling the coming of the Saviour with the return of light. Not only the day of Christ's birth but the year is uncertain, and the French Revolutionists had that fact upon their side, when proceeding to regenerate chronology as well as society, they substituted for the Christian era that of the enthronement of Reason, personified by a prostitute, on the altar of Notre Dame. Nevertheless, we let this article of the mediæval calendar stand, and still on the traditional day celebrate the birth of Christianity and of all that Christianity has brought with it to society, to the home, and to the heart. Even those who in this critical and sceptical age have ceased to be Christians in name may celebrate the festival of humanity. For they can hardly deny that it was with Christianity that the sense of a common humanity and the brotherhood of man, with all its duties and charities, and with the civilization which is grounded on it, came into the world. A Greek philosopher might point out the close fellowship which united mankind; but that same philosopher pronounced slavery an ordinance of nature, and when he spoke of mankind probably thought only of the free. That there were no hospitals or almshouses before Christ may not be strictly true; but it is certain that there was nothing in ancient civilization like the vast system of Christian charities. The Comtist religion of Humanity, though it presents itself as a new creation, is, as has been often and fully said, nothing but Roman Catholic Christianity, with a new set of saints, sacraments and festivals. Those who cannot keep Christmas Day as the holiday of a revealed religion may keep it as the holiday and the annual renewal of human brotherhood, social beneficence, and family affection.

Suppose some vestiges and relics of heathenism do mingle with our mode of keeping the Christian feast; suppose the Yule log does represent the sacred fire of pagan superstition and remind us of the scene in a Scandanavian hall, where our rugged progenitors quaffed their mead and sung their rude drinking songs amidst the trophies of wild tribal war. Suppose the mistletoe is the mystical plant of the Druid, though it is difficult to see how the connection can be traced between Druidism and kissing. All this only widens the circle of historic association and makes the festival in a larger sense human. Even the most orthodox among us have by this time pretty well discarded the narrow theology, uncountenanced by any rational construction of the Gospel, which puts the heathen out of the pale of salvation and consigns them to the power of evil for not having heard a word which was never preached to them or believed in miraculous events which had not then taken place. We recognize the debt which the civilization of which we are the heirs owes to its earliest and rudest founders. We recognize the debt which Christian Ethics owe to Socrates, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus. We scout the monkish morality which consigns virtuous pagans, with one or two arbitrary exceptions, to eternal torments. We have enlarged the bounds of Christendom to the full compass of the designation "Son of Man."

It is in vain that the Puritan has tried to dislodge the Papistical, Prelatical and heathen Christmas by substituting for it Thanksgiving day. His failure is almost as signal as that of the Jacobins in their attempt to substitute the birthday of their Republic for the birthday of Christendom. A holy day of any kind is always popular, and it is very right and meet that we should express pious gratitude for the ingathering of the harvest. But who, except the heirs of the Puritans, cares very much about Thanksgiving Day. With what tender and hallowed associations is its name encircled? Who particularly wishes on that day to gather all whom he loves around him, or calls up with special fondness the image of those whom he has lost? To see a man cutting his Christmas dinner alone at the club makes one shudder. Would the sight of a man eating his Thanksgiving dinner alone give one the same shock? Perhaps one who is not a New Englander or a Puritan underrates the intensity of New England and Puritan feeling. But Mrs. Beecher Stowe is a New Englander, and she shows us in her Poganne how, when the burst of anti-Anglican feeling connected with the Revolution was over, Christmas, with its little church pageantries and its genial memories, stole back to its place in the hearts of all but the most austerely Puritanical portion of the people. The children even of the Puritan minister cannot keep away. One thing is certain, Thanksgiving can never, like Christmas, be a feast of mankind or of Christendom, since the time of harvest will always differ in different parts of the world. Christmas, it is true, we are apt to associate with winter, with snow,' and with the storms which rage out of doors endear by contrast the bright fire and the happy circle within. But it may be kept, and is kept, at once in England, in America, in Australia and Hindostan. If the supporters of Thanksgiving Day fling any stones at Christmas on account of its association with a sacred season of the heathen, the stones may be flung back; for nothing is more certain than that the heathen were in the habit of offering the first fruits to their gods.

The custom of giving presents at Christmas and the New Year certainly cannot be acquitted of heathen association; it is too clear that etrennes is derived from strenæ. An ancient ecclesiastical writer consequently denounces the custom as "diabolical," the religion of the heathen and everything pertaining to it being supposed to be the direct work of the devil. The youthful recipients of the strenæ will be inclined to retort the malediction. In ancient times, as in modern, the gifts were accompanied with good wishes for the coming year. The practice is too natural to call for any learned explanation. With us it has developed into a round of visits on New Year's Day, of the formality of which society seems to be growing a little weary, so that the custom is likely to fall into disuse. We shall have reason to be sorry for its departure if it has served, as I have heard people say that it has, to terminate, without the awkwardness of a formal reconciliation, any misunderstanding or coolness that may have arisen during the past year. The end of the old year coming with the birthday of the religion of charity is a good time for writing off from the ledger of the memory all the evil debts of unkindness and opening a new book of mutual goodwill.

Nowhere is the spirit of Christmas, as it now is, of Christmas as a feast of goodwill and affection, apart from anything ecclesiastical, better embodied than in Dickens' Christmas Carol. Though on a small scale, the Christmas Carol is perhaps the most perfect work of Dickens' genius. To say that it ought to be read in churches would be profane; but much is read in churches that is not so good and certainly far less effective. By the social geniality of his writings, the author of the Christmas Carol and the creator of such characters as the "Brothers Cheeryble" — one more than sermons and dissertations to — the heart of society from being poisoned by Communistic agitators. Labor Reformers who preach class hatred, and all the purveyors of malignity with whose vemon the world abounds; and while we laugh or cry over his novels, we hardly recognize the debt which we owe him on this account. The description in "Pickwick" of the keeping of Christmas Day at Mr. Wardle's, though full of fun is not in quite so wholesome a strain as the Carol. There is too much whisky in it, as indeed there is generally in the writings of Dickens, who was in a perpetual state of revolt against the rule of the hypocritical fanaticism which he has pilloried in Stiggers, and sometimes gives his enemy the advantage of running into excess. We may feast and be merry without excess. Christ himself opens His mission and performs His first miracle at a marriage feast. Great changes appear to be impending, and the day may come, as the Comtists think, when man will be so refined and intellectual that he will regard taking food as an ignominious necessity of his material nature, and will retire to eat in secret. But so long as the glow of physical enjoyment retains its connection with the glow of feeling, the least sel— physical delights will be — dinner, and the — stern in feed — the healt — abo—

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