

CURRENT MAGAZINES

AN AMERICAN VISITOR IN LONDON.

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THREE articles rich with suggestiveness and instruction have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for August, September, and October. The writer is the Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, who from 1916 to 1920 was minister in charge of the City Temple in London—a church made famous by the ministries of Dr. Joseph Parker and Dr. R. J. Campbell. Dr. Newton went from New York on “a kind of unofficial ambassadorship of good-will from the churches of America to the churches of Britain”. His visit was “an adventure in Anglo-American friendship”. Whilst in London he kept a diary which he has now published, and in which he noted down how he was impressed by the men, women, and movements that he saw. The charm of these records is due to the author’s quickness of observation, to his deep reflectiveness, and to his outspoken candour.

He writes as an American, and much that he has to say is specially interesting to us on that account. For England is to him still “the motherland”, and his first paragraph about London is on the thrill of its antiquity and its manifold historical associations. He felt that he had come to a spot as quiet as a country village, so different from “the din of New York, or the hideous nightmare of the Chicago loop”. Writing in March 1917, he contemplated the sorely tried London of that date as “a very old city, weary with much experience, and willing to forgive much because it understands much”. “Slowly it works its ancient spell”. The land was to him one in which every field was steeped in history, and every crag was ivied with legend. As he looked on the old turrets of Uffington Castle, with the huge earth walls and ditches, he wondered whether King Alfred had fought the Danes there, and whether the men of the Stone Age had there built fortifications. When he visited Winchester he remembered that this was the city of Arthur and the Round Table, that there the *Saxon Chronicles* were written, that he was standing by the tomb of Izaak Walton. At Selborne among the chalk-pits of Hampshire in June 1918, as the distant roar

of the guns in France was sounding in his ear, he thought how on that very spot, well-nigh two hundred years before, Gilbert White had watched the Hangar grow green in May and orange and scarlet in October, and how he had published his classic *Natural History of Selborne* in the very year of the fall of the Bastille. Dr. Newton's mind is not of the type that prefers the garish light and bustle of the new to the solemn grandeurs of the old. "The age of ruins is past," said one of Disraeli's characters, "Have you seen Manchester?" This is not Dr. Newton's mood. He is rather like that rustic in Dr. Thomas Hardy's novel who thought of the country roads in Wessex as the same that once echoed to the tramp of the soldiers of Vespasian. It is most refreshing to meet with this temperament in one from a very new country. Dr. Newton's mind is steeped in memories of the past, and as he wandered through the great British capital he went back in imagination to the great figures—both historical and fictitious—which belong to its literature, to Shakespeare and Goldsmith, to Fielding and Charles Lamb and Thackeray, to Tom Jones and Nicholas Nickleby, even to Whittington and his Cat. He had not been there long until there was a raid, and a rain of bombs from the air. What impressed him specially in the scene that followed was the absence of panic, the courtesy and firmness of officials, the quiet orderliness with which ambulances sped to and fro, the calm good nature of the populace. It was to him a revelation of the determined British spirit.

A more striking surprise was in store for Dr. Newton when he visited the country house of a peer, to meet an oddly assorted group of journalists, labour leaders, socialists, radicals, and conservatives. They discussed the most controversial topics with perfect freedom, differing widely in opinions, but very hospitable to one another's views. We are assured—and, I suppose, must take it on Dr. Newton's word—that such a scene at a dinner-table in Fifth Avenue would be hard to imagine. He tells us how it made him feel that there is more freedom of thought in England than in America. The passage from his diary deserves to be reproduced:

"Liberty, in fact, means a different thing in England from what it does with us. In England it signifies the right to think, feel, and act differently from other people; with us it is the right to develop according to a standardised attitude of thought or conduct. If one deviates from that standard, he is scourged into line by the lash of opinion. We think in a kind of lock-step movement. An average American knows ten times as many people as the average Englishman, and talks ten times as much. We are gregarious; we gossip; and because everyone knows the affairs of everyone else we are afraid of one another. For that reason even in

time of peace public opinion moves with a regimented ruthlessness unknown in England, where the majority has no such arrogant tyranny as it has with us."

One wonders how the diarist's countrymen will like to be told that "England is in many ways more democratic than America". It will add to their astonishment to find such a remark in a passage about the British Throne and Royal Family. We read that Americans owing to their republican prejudice do not understand what English Kingship means. Dr. Newton speaks with scorn of an American preacher who told a City Temple audience that the King was a sort of "animated flag". His residence in London for four years taught him the foolishness of those who think that the Throne is occupied by a figurehead, not realizing that its occupant is rather a mystic symbol. "The Royal Family is really an exaltation of the Home, which is ever the centre of British patriotism. Nowhere is the home more sacred and tender. This sentiment finds incarnation in the Royal Family, in whom the Home rises above party and is untouched by the gusts of passion." Thus Dr. Newton thinks that no descriptive phrase could be more apt, more remote from a barren formula, more expressive of genuine English feeling than "Their Gracious Majesties". Like so many observers everywhere else, he looks for the maintenance of this tradition in the winsome figure of the Prince of Wales. "At a time when thrones are falling, the British King moves freely among his people, everywhere honoured and beloved—and all who know the worth of this Empire to civilization rejoice and give thanks".

Dr. Newton has a good deal to say about notable British preachers, writers, actors, leaders in the press and in the political arena. His compliments are significant, just because his critical sense was never lulled to sleep. He listened, for example, to Dr. J. H. Jowett at Westminster Chapel, admiring the music of that great preacher's voice, the charm of the elocution, the power to illustrate, the subtle fastidiousness of the style. The sermons, he thought, derived much of their force from the fact that the audience was never called upon—as by so many preachers—to consider more than one central idea in each address, but that this was turned over and over again with consummate mastery of exposition until like a gem it revealed all its facets. It was a joy to the American listener to watch Dr. Jowett thus operating upon the minds in his congregation, and he felt that for a convinced Christian audience the appeal was most impressive. What he missed was a *social* message. There was little for "the typical man of modern mind, caught in the currents and alive to the agitations of the day". But, Dr. Newton adds

in his own charitable spirit, "we must not expect everything from any one servant of God, and the painter is needed as well as the prophet".

The preacher who fascinated him most was not Dr. Jowett, but Dr. John Hutton of Glasgow. The enemy of mankind upon which Dr. Hutton waged ceaseless war was *cynicism*, the temper which would subtly lower the lights of the soul and slay its ideals. "Such preaching! He searches like a surgeon, and heals like a physician. Seldom, if ever, have I had anyone walk right into my heart with a lighted candle in his hand as he did, and look into the dark corners. As a guide to those who are walking in the middle years of life, where bafflements of faith are many and moral pitfalls are deep, there is no one like Hutton; no one near him". Dr. Newton's criticism here reminds us of the words of Froude about John Henry Newman as he preached to undergraduates from the pulpit of St. Mary's, Oxford: "He seemed to be addressing the most secret consciousness of each of us—as the eyes of a portrait appear to look at every person in a room . . . It was like the springing of a fountain out of the rock. The hearts of men vibrate in answer to one another like the strings of musical instruments."

In an interesting passage Dr. Newton tells of one Sunday when he listened to an American preacher in the morning, a Scotsman in the afternoon, and an Englishman in the evening. The first of these was "topical and oratorical", the second "expository and analytical," the third "polished and persuasive". A Scottish friend explained to Dr. Newton the same day that no Englishman can really preach, for all he can do is either to read an essay or to talk nonsense, and neither of these performances is preaching. At least any village congregation in Scotland would "resent" it! But if Dr. Newton expected a compliment for *American* preachers he was disappointed by his Caledonian friend. He asked point-blank for an opinion on this matter, but all he could extract was a quotation in verse, delivered with a twinkle of the eye:

Do not grudge

To pick treasures out of an earthen pot.

The worst speaks something good: if all want sense

God takes a text, and preacheth patience.

There are strokes of wit, too, in these diaries, some of them insinuated in the dexterous form of quotations from what someone else has said, but which one may suspect to be not far from Dr. Newton's own judgment. He seems specially critical of the Church of England, telling us how Miss Maude Royden admirably de-

cribed the Establishment as just "the Conservative Party at prayer", and how he heard from someone else that preaching in the English Church is "really worse than necessary"! Apparently the critic thought that it had to be bad, but that it need not be *so* bad.

Yet there is a deep appreciation for the finer aspects of English worship. Mr. Newton thinks that in intellectual average and in moral passion there is little difference between the churches on both sides of the Atlantic, the chief contrast lying in this—that the American preacher is bent on applying religion to the affairs of the moment, while the English preacher dwells upon the fundamentals of faith. It is a matter of differing *emphasis*. In the reverential tone of an English service the American critic sees much from which his own countrymen may learn. The informality of an American church now seems to him overdone; he feels the beauty of the ancient ritual, the sense of awe, of quiet, of yearning prayer. "The Englishman goes to church as to a house of ancient mystery, to forget the turmoil of the world, to be refreshed in spirit, to regain the great backgrounds of life against which to see the problems of the morrow".

The visitor from overseas met Mr. G. K. Chesterton, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. George Bernard Shaw. Of the first he remarks how singular it was to have the "Dogma of Beer" presented almost like an article of faith, for Mr. Chesterton is no friend of the prohibitionists. His head looked larger than any human head has a right to be. But he seemed a man of rich humanity, of robust common sense, of "uproarious faith in God," a real tonic—like Dickens in an earlier time—to England in her dark days of trial. Particularly neat is the characterizing of Mr. Chesterton's use of words: "He leads words into the arena, first in single file, then four abreast, then in regiments, and the feats they perform are hair-raising. If he talks in paradoxes, it is for the same reason that more solemn people talk in platitudes—he cannot help it." Mr. Wells he found in conversation much the same as in writing,—vivid, interrogatory, a stimulant to thought,—but while he is "all aglow with his discovery of God" (as shown in the book *God the Invisible King*) Dr. Newton would prefer that he had not been in such haste to rush into print about it! Mr. Shaw, on the other hand, was utterly unlike all that his books suggest to a stranger. "He is almost old-maidish, not only shy and embarrassed off the platform, but awkward, blushing like a schoolgirl when you meet him. He is gentle, modest, full of quick wisdom, but suggesting lavender and China tea served in dainty old-world cups." This bears out Mr. Shaw's well-known view that the "G. B. S." whom he has invented and made popular is in the last degree unlike himself.

These are just a few gleanings from a series of papers that should be widely read. They contain, indeed, a good deal that will make some readers angry. Dr. Newton is vehement about British sluggishness in combatting the drink traffic, especially about the silence of the churches on that matter. He was appalled at the sight which is, he tells us, common in London, of a row of baby-carts at the door of a saloon where the mothers are "guzzling beer" inside. He complains of the unscrupulous methods adopted by a section of the press, when truth—equally with food—was "rationed", and public confidence in the reliability of news was badly shaken. He is immensely impressed by the leaders of English Labour, declares that he will never be satisfied until Lord Robert Cecil becomes Premier, and is very sharply critical of Mr. Lloyd-George. For ex-President Wilson Dr. Newton's admiration knows no bounds, and he has many bitter things to say about the British General Election in 1918—the "khaki election" as he calls it—when Sir George Younger, the master-brewer of the kingdom, organised and wirepulled the campaign. "The Prime Minister gets what he wants, but at the sacrifice of the noblest tradition in British history". At a breakfast in 10 Downing Street, where Mr. Lloyd-George addressed a group of Free Church ministers, Dr. Newton was almost for the moment won to faith in him, for the "Little Welsh Wizard" wielded a wand at whose power the American could only look on in wonder and fear. There was a hint of cunning, he says, in the candour, but "he talked like a man in a cage, telling us how he was unable to do many things he would like to do. As he spoke, one realised the enormous difficulties of a man in his place,—the pull and tug of diverse interests—his incredible burdens, and the vast issues with which he must deal. No wonder time has powdered his hair almost white, and cut deep lines in his face." But, in Dr. Newton's view, the appeal of the 1918 election was to the most sinister and reactionary forces in England. For the enlightenment of Americans he explains that the defeat of Mr. Asquith and the return of Mr. Bottomley would find a parallel in the defeat of Elihu Root and the return of William Randolph Hearst! He entered in his diary at the time; "Two things are as plain as if they were written on the wall. First, the President is defeated before he sails; and second, if the war is won, the peace is lost." He predicted that the exasperated feelings of Labour would show themselves in a strong demand for "Direct Action."

He notes, too, that the same period was marked by a change in British sentiment towards the Americans. At an earlier time Dr. Newton had found the urging of good relations between the two

countries as superfluous as an address to Mrs. Pankhurst in favour of women's suffrage. But at the time of the election his mail at the City Temple became almost unreadable. A report of "every naughty word" said by Americans was sent to him, with the offensive phrases underlined. And there was a burst of similar naughty words in reply. "To read the London papers now," he writes, "one would think that America, and not Germany, had been the enemy of England during the war. Every kind of gibe, slur, and sneer is used to poison the public mind against America." But he adds that the attack on Mr. Wilson in the English press was mild in comparison with the campaign of "poison-gas" that was started in his own country. Mr. Bottomley's magazine, *John Bull*, was among the chief offenders. But this passing mood of international hatred Dr. Newton is quite ready to discount. Again and again he returns to the noble features of character which the English people displayed, and of which the best Americans will always be appreciative. The account of Armistice night in London that he has given us in his diary is most vivid and moving. "Down on the Embankment I saw two old men, walking arm-in-arm, one blind, the other half-blind, and both in rags. One played an old battered hand-organ, and the other sang in a cracked voice. They swayed to and fro, keeping time to the hymn 'Our God, our help in ages past'. So it was from end to end of London. The gray old city seemed like a cathedral, its streets aisles, its throngs worshippers." The two peoples, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, are in their critic's view so much akin in the great fundamental things that they cannot stand permanently apart. But he feels that the time of complete mutual understanding is not yet.

True to his mission, he devoted much thought to the great project of furthering this friendship. Dr. Newton speaks with a severity which no Englishman would risk about the meaner types of American who have in the past given an unworthy notion of his country abroad,—“the tourist, the globe-trotter, the unspeakable fop, and the newly rich who spread their vulgarity all over Europe”. He thinks it lamentable that different nations should persist in contrasting what is best in one land with what is worst in another. Of Americans and Englishmen he tells us that “both are thin-skinned, but their skins are thick and thin in different spots, and it takes time and tact to learn the spots.” Hence arise trivial causes of annoyance, Americans mistaking English reticence for indifference or snobbery, the English feeling irritated at American fooleries about the diminutive locomotives they find, about the danger of turning round on an island lest they fall into the sea, and about how “Eng-

land having failed, it is up to America to do the trick". We need, he thinks, on both sides a sense of humour. "Neither understands the jokes of the other, regarding them as insults". Would that Englishmen and Americans could understand each other as quickly and completely as Americans and Scotsmen! Dr. Newton hopes much from the type of his own countrymen that the war has brought to Great Britain, and whom—once they have become well-known—the English have grown to appreciate. He quotes how a Cockney restaurant keeper in the Strand characterized the American soldiers, expressing astonishment at the questions one of them asked about London:

"Funny the way they looks at London, though. Mad about it, y' know. I bin in London yers an' yers, and it don't worry me. Wants to know where that bloke put 'is cloak down in the mud for some Queen, and 'ow many Generals is buried in Westminster Abbey. 'Ow should I know? I live in Camden Town. I got a business t' attend to. Likable boys, though. 'Ere's to 'em."

This kind of frank and vigorous writing is much required. Some will object that Dr. Newton should have been more reticent, that a man may confide a good deal to his diary which he should not publish to the world, and that an American who has been so well treated in England should bear in mind that even the kindest of hosts are sensitive to criticism by a foreigner. Perhaps the best reply to this reproach is that Americans could with at least as much justice find fault with one of their own countrymen who lived four years abroad and came back to tell them how much finer are some of the ways of a distant land, and even how much America is surpassed elsewhere in some of the points on which she chiefly prides herself. When Mr. Bertrand Russell's book was suppressed in England as being pro-German he protested that it had been suppressed in Austria as being pro-British, and if the statement was true it was undoubtedly relevant. But all this mood of sensitiveness, of nerves on edge for national pride, of angry resentment against candid discussion, is among the things that all friends of the Anglo-American entente must endeavour to restrain. No doubt Dr. Newton, like all who have formed judgments of a place by a short residence, is often in error. The present summary of part of what he has said makes no pretence of weighing its worth in detail, but just sets it forth as provocative to thought. Here is the way in which a foreign observer has been affected by what he saw in England, and we shall do well to think it over. Let us trust that his errors—if he has committed them—do not extend as much to his radiant admiration as to his sometimes quite sharp rebukes. There is at least no doubt about his good-will.

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