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THE EDITOR'S TABLE

Norfolk Day by Day

It has been said, not without reason, that the best diaries have been written by bores. The diarist sets down on paper—presumably for his own satisfaction—whatever comes into his head, and much of this must inevitably consist of trivialities. A diarist who consciously composes his diary with its publication in view all the time, is not a diarist at all, because the essence of the matter is for the writer to shut himself up in his study away from the world and to say to his diary: "Now you and I are here alone together and we can say what we like. There are no prying eyes or wakeful ears."

Perhaps in the course of time eyes do begin to pry, and the pages reveal their treasured and well-kept secrets. The two most famous of all English diaries were unknown to the world for more than a hundred years after their authors had passed away, and John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys had to wait a long time before their commentaries saw the daylight.

Often survival and ultimate publication must be matters of mere chance, except perhaps in the case of the Woodforde family, who were, it seems, such hardened diarists over two centuries that inevitably it must have happened that some of all these compilations would see daylight. Of all this family, one stands out above the rest. The Rev. James Woodforde kept his record for nearly half a century, and "The Diary of a Country Parson" is justly celebrated and has been enjoyed by many readers. Perhaps there is something in the Norfolk air, and in the atmosphere of country parsonages, that induces the faithful keeping of a diary.

At all events, it induced the Rev. B. J. Armstrong—who was already in the habit of writing up his diary—to continue the good work when, in 1850, he became vicar of East Dereham in Norfolk. Here he remained for thirty-eight years, and now his grandson, himself a Norfolk vicar, has made extracts* which give a varied picture of life seen through intelligent and observant eyes.

He is described as having "the theological outlook of an old-fashioned Tractarian," and certainly this reveals itself on every page. *Quicquid agunt homines*, however, would seem to form the "farrago" of his book. National triumphs and national calamities are duly noted, and it is interesting to read of the Crimea and the Mutiny, of the Franco-Prussian War, of the fate of General Gordon, and how East Dereham took the news. But the chief interest will be found by modern readers in the tittle-tattle of every day: the social gatherings, the local politics, the sports and games, the vagaries of the weather, the harvests and the local dinners. It is impossible to give, in a short space, more than a sample or two from this most readable book. On May 4, 1863, he had guests who had never heard a nightingale. "We sat," he says, "in the hut among the spring leaves with a full moon overhead and listened to Philomel. . . . I had the choir secreted among the trees, and at a preconcerted signal, they burst into song, the bird supplying the accompaniment. The party was delighted."

He visits London from time to time, and in 1857 was presented at the Queen's levée. "A little lady in deep mourning holds out a dimpled little hand covered with fine rings. . . . I was, on the whole, much gratified with the proceedings." He tells of his holidays, too, among them his excursion to Ireland under the guidance of "Mr. Cook of Leicester" (and how many have since travelled under those auspices!). But his peregrinations to London, Paris, Dublin and the rest of them only served to convince him that "there is no country like England, no county in it better than Norfolk, and no place in Norfolk better than East Dereham."

* A Norfolk Diary. Passages from the diary of the Rev. Benjamin J. Armstrong. Edited by Herbert B. J. Armstrong. (George G. Harrap, 12s. 6d.)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A TRAPPIST

ELECTED SILENCE. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter, 15s.)

THE American best-seller, "The Seven Storey Mountain," has now been published in England. It seems a pity that the title of so famous a book should be changed; the English one is taken from a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. In a laudatory foreword, Mr. Evelyn Waugh anticipates that the book, which enjoyed "prodigious success" in USA, may take its place among the classic records of spiritual experience. The English text is slightly abridged.

Mr. Merton was born in 1915, the son of a New Zealand artist and an American mother; the book before us is his remarkable autobiography. In simple conversational style, he describes his childhood and adolescence, part of which was spent at Oakham School, where the present headmaster of Lancing, Mr. F. C. Doherty, was then headmaster. The latter "talked Plato, and told me to read A. E. Taylor, which I did, but under compulsion, and taking no trouble to try and understand what I was reading." It was good advice; and had the boy been able to digest "The Faith of a Moralist," he might have made a truer estimate of Anglicanism than emerges in these pages. After a year at Cambridge and a visit to Rome, he emigrated to the USA, where his brief glimpse at the Episcopal Church was superficial and unsatisfactory.

While at Columbia University, Mr. Merton read Gilson's "The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy," which influenced him so greatly that within eighteen months he was brought from professed atheism to the acceptance of "the full range and possibilities of religious experience right up to the highest degree of glory." About this time, while still leading a worldly life, he attended Mass in a Roman church for the first time, and was struck by the representative character of the congregation and the recollected devotion of those whom he watched. From then onwards his reading became more and more Catholic; and strange though it may seem, he was impelled in a Catholic direction by the writings of James Joyce. At last he screwed up

courage, put himself under instruction, and was in due course conditionally baptized.

A vivid experience shortly followed. In the Jesuit church on 16th Street, New York, the author tells us: "I fixed my eyes on the monstrance, on the white Host. And then it suddenly became clear to me that my whole life was at a crisis. . . . the question faced me: 'Do you really want to be a priest? . . . I knew now who it was that I was looking at, and I said: 'Yes. . . . with all my heart. . . . make me a priest.'" The break with the world was a hard conflict, yet the author dares to claim that by grace he was for months a stranger to sin. He freed himself from all the habits and luxuries which many regard as necessities. "My mouth was at last clean of the yellow, parching salt of nicotine, and I had rinsed my eyes of the grey slops of the movies. . . . I had thrown away the books that soiled my heart." Gradually, too, he developed a social conscience. "The brothels of Harlem and its dope rings are the mirror of the polite divorces and adulteries of Park Avenue; they are God's commentary on the whole of our society."

Mr. Merton, after passing through phases of discouragement and perplexity, found his vocation with the Trappists at Gethsemane: his objective account of the monastery from within is surprising and valuable. The Trappists are much more active than is sometimes realized; their conversation is by signs. The author "liked the way they kidded one another in sign language"; and here, as elsewhere, "the people who gaze up at our Lady's statue with glistening eyes are very often the ones with the worst tempers."

The author is now known as Father Louis. From this book it would appear that his Catholicism, still young, tends to be over-emotional and in minor ways superstitious. To give alms to a beggar is "an easy way of wiping out sins." The Little Flower is in some respects even greater than St. Teresa of Avila. There are several impassioned addresses to our Lady. It is doubtful whether this moving book will have quite the vogue in England which it has had in the United States.

A NORTHERN PRIMATE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN SHARP, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

By A. Tindal Hart. (Church Historical Society: SPCK, 21s.)

THE story of how Mr. Hart, after an untiring search, finally succeeded in locating Archbishop Sharp's entire correspondence and other private papers, unknown to the Historical Manuscripts Commission, at a country house in Gloucestershire, has, as Professor Norman Sykes remarks in his foreword, "the properties of a detective romance"; but nobody would ever guess it from the author's pages. Mr. Hart's Life of Archbishop Sharp is a companion portrait to Dr. Edward Carpenter's Life of Archbishop Tenison, also recently published by the Church Historical Society. Taken together, these two scholarly biographies throw much valuable light on the religious and political events of the period 1689—1715, the testing-time of Revolution principles in Church and State.

John Sharp came of Yorkshire stock. He was educated at Bradford Grammar School and at Christ's College, Cambridge. Ordained deacon and priest on the same day, August 12, 1667, in St. Margaret's, Westminster, he became domestic chaplain to Sir Heneage Finch, who, as Lord Chancellor, advanced him, in 1674, to the important rectory of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. Here he made his mark, conducting himself with courage and resolution throughout the politico-religious crisis of the reign of James II. He was rewarded with the deanery of Canterbury, from which he was very soon translated, in 1691, to the Archbishopric of York.

His friends included Archbishop Tillotson and the Earl of Nottingham (his former patron), and his policy in Church matters combined the liberalism of the former with the staunch Anglicanism of the latter. But when Tenison succeeded Tillotson at Lambeth, Sharp became more clearly the leader of the High Church party, and Queen Anne looked to him as her chief ecclesiastical adviser. Indeed from 1710 until Sharp's death in February, 1714, York rather than Canterbury dominated the Church of England, and the relations between Bishopthorpe and Lambeth were a little strained. It is noteworthy that Sharp regarded himself as the champion of the distressed and disestablished Episcopal Church of Scotland.

He disliked and discouraged the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, but he was an ardent supporter of SPCK and SPG.

As Archbishop of York, he was a just, liberal and wise ruler of his diocese and province. He took his ordinations very seriously and held them with exemplary regularity, admonishing the candidates to preach "good sense and strong, plain arguments" on Sunday and "every day by their life and conversation." Mr. Hart is himself a country parson, and the chapters which he devotes to Sharp's archiepiscopal administration and to his relations with his clergy are among the most valuable and illuminating in the book. His piety was eminently practical. He was Archbishop of York for twenty-two years, longer than any of his predecessors since the Reformation; and Mr. Sharp's informative and scholarly biography is a worthy memorial of his life and work.

AN IRISH NAVY

CLAY UNDER COVER. By Thomas Skelton. (Victor Gollancz, 12s 6d.)

HERE is a volume containing the idle thoughts of a by no means idle fellow. Mr. Skelton, the author, worked for a year as a navy, spending most of his days and a great part of many of his nights "at the bottom of a hole," laying the foundations of a new factory near Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland. Somehow in between times when he was not working—and there seem to have been very few times when he was not working, or when he was not sleeping—he wrote this book. It is a pleasant, readable, inconsequential book, full of homely portraits of the author's friends; navies, tramps, tinkers, farmers, wayfarers of all sorts from the Six Counties, interspersed with his memories and meditations covering a wide field. He makes the reader realize how ferociously exhausting is a navy's job, and what a cheery philosophical crowd is an Irish navy gang. But many pages are devoted to what the author feels and thinks and notices in the world around him, and he ranges from reminiscences of his war service in the deserts of the Middle East to speculations about fairies and ghosts. He has an observant eye and a questing spirit, and, though he is in places too discursive and his book is somewhat overloaded, he has produced a piece of work which will give pleasure to his readers.