OUR ENGLISH LETTER.

English Railway Service—Visit to a Norman Church Seven Hundred Years Old—Good Roads and Green Fields

By OSCAR R. RAND

A letter composed of impressions gathered at random in leisure moments and dealing with a large variety of subjects must of necessity be somewhat rambling and illogical, and as such will be a failure if its content does not compensate for its form. I trust that in the present case the content will be of sufficient interest to outweigh defects due to arrangement and to excessive variety of subject matter.

I wish to speak first of English railways and railway service. The traveller who is making his first trip to Europe will be somewhat at a loss as to how to proceed when he is about to board a train for the first time. The car consists not in a single large room, but of a number of compartments. Each compartment is provided with seats, each of which will accommodate four persons. The seats are arranged so that one row of persons faces the other. The compartments usually take up about four fifths of the width of the car, thus reserving a small continuous passage for the conductor. On the door of each compartment, both on the exterior and interior, is painted its class, that is, whether it is first, second, or third. The cars are heated and the compartments are very comfortable. The road bed is well constructed, has a large degree of stability, and the cars run smoothly, without any rocking or jumping. I examined the track at one or two points and noticed that the rail does not rest directly on the cross-tie, but is firmly held by an iron clasp which is attached to the tie. This gives the track a greater degree of security and safety than when the rail rests directly upon the tie and is held in position merely by spikes. The locomotive, in point of outward resemblance, is quite different from what we are accustomed to see at home. But being unacquainted with the technical terms of machinery I shall not attempt a description of it. However one point of difference is that it has no cow catcher. There is no necessity for one. The land adjoining the railroad track is so fenced in that cattle cannot get on the track. Furthermore persons are not allowed to walk through the country on the railway tracks nor alongside the tracks. The law forbids the use of the railway tracks as thoroughfares, and the person violating this statute is liable to indictment and to the penalty of a fine.

English and American Railway Service Contrasted.

The man who runs the engine is called not the engineer, but the driver. Likewise the term conductor is unknown. The official who corresponds to our conductor is called the guard. Furthermore the term railway car in America gives place to the term railway carriage in England. The freight car is a rather comical looking object. To one who has been accustomed to large massive cars of 40 to 50 tons capacity, the contrast afforded by these cars is somewhat lumonous. They are very small, not more than half as large as our cars. I have wondered why this is the case. Possibly it is due to the fact that there are no long distance hauls here.

As far as appearance goes the English passenger train of freight train would make a poor showing beside the American freight or passenger train. But the railway companies here have the main requisites of an efficient transportation service. With comfort they combine speed and safety. The trains have a greater degree of safety than ours, and they make fully as good time.

A comparison of passenger rates will be interesting. There are three classes: first, second and third. The fare per mile for third class is two cents. For second class it is a little more than two cents. It is nearly four cents for first class. There is thus a much greater difference between first and second class than between second and third. Third class is quite good enough ordinarily, and I think I would be justified in saying that a majority of people travel in compartments of this class.

Names of English Money.

Not a little confusion at first to the traveller is the English system of money. The lowest denomination of coin is the farthing, but this is a rare coin. The lowest coin commonly used is the half penny or ha' penny, as it is called, which is equivalent in value with to one cent. The next in denomination is the three penny piece or thrippence, as it is termed. Then comes the six pence, which is equivalent in value to 12 cents. The shilling is supposed to be the equal in value of our quarter, but in reality it is equal to only 24 cents, so that four shillings lack four cents of making a dollar. There is the half crown (60c), the crown ($1.20), the half sovereign (approximately $2.40), and the pound or sovereign (4.86). The guinea is equal to 21 shillings. It is difficult enough for the newcomer to acquire the habit of using correctly the names of the various coins, and this difficulty is increased for the student when he finds that some of the coins have different names among students. For instance a shilling is called a "bob," and a pound is known as a "quid." The terms "tuppence" for two pence and "thrippence" for three pence are not confined to students. To illustrate how it sounds, a student remarked a few days ago that the fare from Oxford to London was five bob, thrippence, ha' penny; which would be equivalent to saying that it was $1.27. And as one walks through the business part of the city he will see on display in a store window an article with a card attached to give the price, which will appear thus: 8—6. This means eight shillings and six pence. This case is typical. One notices the absence of paper money. Gold is common in the form of half sovereign and sovereign pieces. The only thing corresponding to our paper money, so far as I know, is the bank note issued by the Bank of England. This is found in five and ten pound notes, and upward. The five pound note does not at all resemble our paper money. It looks like a certificate of some kind. It is an inch or two longer than our paper bill, and twice as wide.

English as Spoken in England and America.

There is a greater difference than one would suppose in the language as spoken here and as spoken in America. We think we speak English, but the English hold that we speak American. At least that is what an English student smilingly maintained in a discussion with me. He found it difficult to reconcile our use of certain phrases and expressions and our pronunciation of certain words to what he believed to be the correct use and pronunciation of English. But on the other hand the English pronunciation and use of certain expressions seem equally strange to an American. The individual letter which gives rise to the greatest difference is the letter 'a' and this difference is strongly marked in such words as ask, laugh, last. The dropping of the 'h' in such words as horse and house is confined to the lower classes and I do not think it is universal with them. Another difference is found in the pronunciation of the word schedule, which is pronounced as if it were spelled shedule. I was introduced to several new expressions also. For instance a student will say that he is keen on football, meaning that he likes to play football. The use of the word keen is extended to such expressions as, "I am keen on Shakespeare" meaning that I take pleasure in reading Shakespeare's works. Another expression is "keeping fit," meaning keeping in good physical condition. One will also hear used with reference to a man's skill in playing a game, this expression: "He's jolly good." There are other expressions of like characters, but these are the ones I have noticed most frequently.

Good Roads in England.

As far as I have been able to observe the roads in England are very good. I hear that the roads are good over practically the whole of the country. They have the appearance of having been macadamized, but I do not know for certain just how they are constructed or out of what material. They are hard and smooth, and are well adapted to bicycles and automobiles. The experience with a road between Kilmarnock and Stewarton which prompted Robert Burns to say on reaching his destination:

"I'm now arrived, thanks to the gods!
Thro' pathways rough and muddy,
A certain sign that making roads
Is not this people's study.
And though I'm not with scripture crammed,
I'm sure the Bible says,
That heedless sinners shall be damned
Unless they mend their ways."

could have befallen him on very few if any, English roads.

Green Fields and Beautiful Lawns.

One thing which is attractive to the stranger in England is the greenness of the fields. I noticed this particularly when I went from Liverpool to Oxford early in October. There seemed to be very little land in cultivation. The view from the car window presented little but green pastures and meadows with cattle grazing in them. And in coming down from Oxford to Newquay on Monday, December 7, I noticed the same greenness of fields and scarcity of cultivation. The distance from Oxford to Newquay is over 200 miles, and yet in all this distance there appeared to be but little land in cultivation.

The most beautiful lawns I have ever seen are here in England. They are carefully looked after, and retain their greenness throughout the year. A very peculiar thing about the lawns here is that they can be transplanted or transferred in sections from one spot to another. The soil, though not very hard, seems to be somewhat sticky and adhesive, thus making it cling to the roots of the grass. One day while walking along a street in the residential portion of Oxford I saw a man putting down a lawn in a yard in exactly the same manner as a person would put a matting down on a floor. The rolls of turf were of course not as large as rolls of matting. All the man did, so far as I could see, was to place the rolls of turf closely together and then pack them down.

Absence of Wooden Houses.

One thing which the traveller looks for in vain is a wooden house. The houses are all built of brick or stone. I have not seen a wooden house since I have been in England. In coming through Cornwall on Monday I noticed several large quarries of red sand stone which were being worked to obtain stone for building purposes. I am told that the reason for dispensing with wood as building material is that brick and stone are much cheaper. The English houses have the appearance of being very comfortable and my sojourn in Newquay is confirming this impression. The varying color of the stone gives some of the houses an appearance which while odd, is rather attractive. Still one misses the fresh, cheerful look of the painted wooden house. Many of the houses here, particularly those that are old, have about them a kind of grayness which, while not producing a depressing effect, presents a cheerless aspect, especially in winter. One who has spent a few days with an English family and who has seen, even from a distance, an English country house standing in peaceful repose amid green pastures and meadows will be able to appreciate to some extent the accuracy and effectiveness of Tennyson's description of an English home.

"And one, an English home—gray twilight pour'd
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient peace."

English Rural Life.

Rural England constitutes a very attractive side of English life and the traveller who does not take a long walk or ride in the country will miss many beautiful scenes. And any adequate idea of English life must take into account rural, as well as urban, England. If one takes a walk out into the country, sees green meadows in which cattle are quietly grazing, comes to a country house of gray stone peacefully reposing on the brink of a gentle hill, passes on and at length reaches a village, observes the few old stone houses, notices the weather-beaten old church and the ancient churchyard he has formed by the time he is ready to retrace his steps, an impression which if expressed will probably be, "old and settled." And I believe that this environment, wrapped up in history and tradition, is reflected in English life and character. There seems to be a certain steadiness and poise about English life. The great energy and enterprise which make things "move" in America do not appear in so marked a degree here. Things move but they move more slowly.

The Old Norman Church at Iffly.

According to Cecil Rhodes one of the most potent factors in the building of English character has been the village church. However this may be, thee village church forms an interesting study as a connecting link with the past. One afternoon in October I walked out to Iffly, a small village about two miles from Oxford. The village contains only a few houses, all of which appear to be very old. But the main interest in the village centers about the church and churchyard. It is an old Norman church and was built about 1175. It occupies a central position in a plot of about one and one quarter acres, which composes the church yard. The church is about 50 or 55 feet long and 21 feet wide. The two sides of the roof move sharply up from the eaves and meet in a point. Midway the roof is a square tower which rises to a height of about ten feet. The windows are after the Norman style. The surface of the walls on the exterior is worn and somewhat darkened by time. The interior is quite interesting. At one end is the sanctuary, after which is the choir, and then follow the benches for the congregation. There is only one aisle, this being in the center of the church with the benches on either side. Very close to the wall on the right side and midway between the choir and the benches, is the pulpit. The pulpit is a small platform about a foot above the level of the floor, and it offers room for only one person. With the exception of a small opening reserved for the entrance and exit of the vicar, the platform is surrounded by a railing about four feet high, upon which is a rest for the Bible. Near the opposite end of the church from the sanctuary, and standing in the center of the aisle, is a marble font. The floor of the choir is about eight inches higher than that reserved for benches, and the floor of the sanctuary is about eight inches higher than that of the choir. The walls of the church contain many memorial tablets, on some of which the dates of death run back several hundred years. The surrounding churchyard is thickly dotted with graves, over which grows with some degree of luxuriance a heavy carpet of green grass. Most of the graves have tombstones, a few of which are comparatively recent. Others are old and worn, and the inscriptions on them can be made out with difficulty. Still others are almost blackened, and even the grooves of the letters of the inscriptions are worn away, so long have they been standing. In one part of the churchyard is an old stone cross, and near the cross is an ancient yew tree whose spreading branches cover a number of the graves. As one stands in this church yard at sunset on a clear afternoon and surveys the old graves with their worn tombstones he repeats almost unconsciously the familiar lines

"Beneath those raugged elms, that yew tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

And if, considering the probable conditions under which the occupants of these graves lived and died—their lowly birth, their lack of opportunities, and their uneventful lives—he gives free rein to his fancy he will agree with Gray that

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

And if, for a moment, he turns his eyes from the graves and looks up at the old walls of the church, and realizes that it has been used as a place of worship for more than seven hundred years he cannot help feeling a kind of reverence. And as he reflects that while other structures have arisen and disappeared, while institutions have come into existence and passed out, while material power has flourished and waned, while generations of men have lived and died, this old village church has survived and from its hallowed walls has emanated and continues to emanate an influence for good, he feels inclined to agree with Cecil Rhodes that the village church has been a potent factor in the building of English character.

Newquay in Cornwall.

I am spending the Christmas vacation in Cornwall, a county in the southwestern part of England. Just now I am at Newquay on the north coast. Although a small town, Newquay is growing in popularity and importance as a watering place. Its chief attractions are its bracing atmosphere, its great cliffs pierced by wave-hewn caverns, and its wide beaches with their vast sands, and its beautiful sunsets. In addition to this Newquay forms a very convenient point for visiting numerous places of historic and scenic interest. The north coast of Cornwall is in most places a wild and rugged coast and presents to the tourist some striking scenery. In several places the tall cliffs and the dashing of the waves against a rocky shore line form a most attractive picture. One point in particular is worthy of mention. At the extremity of a headland which juts out into the sea is a chaos of rocks of various sizes and shapes, against which during a high wind the waves hurl themselves with tremendous power. And the immense volumes of spray and foam created by this fearful impact and the roar resulting from it, form a scene and produce an effect at once beautiful and grand. It may be said in conclusion that the tourist who is in search of wholesome, bracing air and fine coast scenery will be likely to cease his quest when he has come to Newquay.

Newquay, Cornwall, Dec. 11, 1908.

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