

CHAPTER VII

Owing to my Mother's deafness we always sat in the front seat. ^{in church.} One Sunday morning when she and my Father were away, Winifred, a schoolgirl as naughty as myself, was with me. The other end of the pew being against a pillar, a little door led into it, opening into the aisle. The old gentleman who habitually inhabited the corner forgot to push home the bolt ~~on the door~~, with the consequence that when he knelt down the door opened and he shot out a considerable distance into the aisle. A piece of silk embroidery, coloured according to the Church's season and entitled a "pulpit fall" hung from the desk on which the preacher placed his notes. True to its name, it fell off one Sunday, narrowly escaping Mother's best hat.

Norman Campbell, true aristocrat that he was, treated all his people alike and might be seen, complete in his silk hat and clerical frock coat, picking up and kissing

a poor, not over-clean child, or helping to push some sketchy-looking woman's pram, full of rags and bones, up a steep hill, a sight that nowadays would bring reporters and photographers from miles away. Nor did he ever refer to his staff as "curates", but always as "colleagues".

One of his predecessors in the next parish, afterwards Canon Browne of Roehampton, used to ride down Garratt Lane, then bordered with hedges, on a coster-barrow.

At a Mission held at St. Mary's our own daughter church, we had as Chief Missioner, a Suffragan Bishop, assisted by Canon Rhodes Bristow, who was helped on his way one evening by one of the natives, with the encouraging remark, "Say, Mate, if yer wants that there bloke in the short trousers, he's gone round the corner."

One Priest, another famous Missioner, used to become exceedingly excited and bang the Bible with his fist and give violent kicks to the pulpit. No chance for forty winks when he was preaching!

In my childhood the district round St. Mary's was very rough, if not dangerous and one of our clergy had to run for his life to the church for safety when he

chivalrously interfered to protect a lady who was having a first-class fight with her spouse in the centre of the road. A few streets away my Mother was once pelted with rotten potatoes, a sure sign she was not very welcome.

The doors of some of the houses in the poorer parts of the parish when opened, frequently set free such an odour of cabbage, onions, stale tobacco, half-dried washing, inefficient sanitation and the like, that I have sometimes stood literally petrified, even forgetting my errand. One friend of my Mother's, who bravely entered one such house, sat down and promptly fainted. And she was not one of the fainting sort either.

The inhabitants of these homes were quite oblivious to their shortcomings, nor were they in the least bit reticent about their family history, their very unpleasant interiors, or revolting operations.

Said one woman to me of a child about seven or eight standing beside her:-

"Ah! Miss, he have always been delicate like. Got a awful cough! It will be the death of him one of these days. He will soon be in his box a-kicking up the daisies."

As I looked with an inward shudder at the poor,

pathetic, little fellow, I fear I remembered the tale of the woman who said to a kindly district visitor:-

"He's got a cough on him like an old empty barrel. You just cough for the lady, Jimmie!"

My confirmation was held in St. Mary's, our daughter church, by the first Bishop of Southwark, old Dr. Talbot. The tumult outside the doors was awful, and as my Mother tried to get in, the crowd was so rough and so hostile that the brass rim of the ivory-bound prayer book she carried was wrenched right off. During the service, Dr. Talbot paused once to ask the churchwardens to open the locked doors to which the mob seemed to be applying battering rams and endeavour to obtain a little quiet, as he could not ask for the gift of the Most Holy Spirit of God, with the laying on of hands, amid such noise and turmoil.

The high lights of one's life, moments of rapture, of ecstasy, of deep devotion, remain indelibly fixed in the mind, so that to this very hour I seem to be able to feel again the firm touch of the Bishop's hand on my bowed, white-veiled head and hear the words,

"Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace, that she may continue thine for ever, and daily

increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until she come unto thy everlasting kingdom. Amen."

Later I was to receive a heartbreaking blow, for it had been arranged I should be confirmed with Frances, my best friend, but when the time came some re-arrangement of the seating was made so that Frances was confirmed with a mutual friend and I with a girl I knew but slightly. When all was over I heard Frances say to her companion, "I am so glad I was confirmed with you."

She was the second friend who had failed me. The first, Violet, was a fellow schoolgirl, who in the manner of the tribe, assured me I was her only love. I adored her with all the doting affection of an only child, a love which set her high on a pedestal, faultless and adorable. But she left me without a word for Helen of the thick, fuzzy hair and I learnt all too soon the bitterness of unrequited love, a bitterness which a child can feel far more acutely than its elders imagine.

Norman Campbell's discipline over his junior clergy was exemplary, but they were a joyously happy family, so much so that when one of them left his celibate roof to enter the sunny pastures of Holy Matrimony, the Vicar shook his head mournfully, ever after referring to that

happily married Priest as "Poor Young".

Another of them, returning from a continental holiday, was greeted at the church gates by an improvised band of tin tea-trays, wielded by his colleagues. One morning, the Priest who was to celebrate the Holy Communion that day was having his bath when one of his colleagues locked his bedroom door, with the result he had to take the service in his pyjamas, happily completely covered by his cassock.

Norman Campbell himself was always at his happiest when among the children. On snowy days the little monkeys used to wait for him to come out of the Vicarage that they might snowball his immaculate top hat. Taking it off he got his own back on them and there was a merry fight all down St. Anne's Hill until he ran into the Schools for refuge.

In those days I attended St. Anne's Catechism, an excellent system of church education for children founded on the method practised at St. Sulpice, Paris.

Occasionally parents were invited and Mother has recollections of our "organist", a young gentleman in his twenties, who played all the "Amens" on his knees, then turned to look at my very attractive Mother. As

was right and proper, she endeavoured to keep her eyes piously shut during the prayers, but could not refrain from occasional peeps to see if the organist were still on his knees. Poor lad! He came from a queer family and rumour states that some of them chased each other round their dining-room table with a carving knife. Of course that may have been their idea of amusement, but it is the last we ²hard of them.

At Christmas we Catechism boys and girls gave a party to the little waifs and strays from the Workhouse, ourselves in party garments, our guests in humbler raiment, their faces shining with soap, excitement and a certain amount of terror, but certainly not so demure as on Sunday mornings when the poor little wretches occupied the back seats at Mattins, where they certainly were not seen nor very much heard. At our Christmas party, their hands sticky with sweets, they delighted to suspend themselves from the buttons of Mr. Bolton's Saville Row suit while that noble-hearted man gave an excellent imitation of appearing to like it.

During my very youthful days wonderful Exhibitions were held at Earls Court, not a series of boring curios laid out in rows with outsize photographs behind them,

but an "All the Fun of the Fair" Exhibition, set against a scenic background, incredibly realistic. My most vivid memory is of "Venice" so true to life with its Rialto, its gondolas and palaces, that I gasped with delighted recognition when a few years later I saw the real thing.

Rows of miniature shops, with fascinating wares from all the world over, were a special feature, at each door of which lurked its owner like a spider in a web awaiting his prey. The unwary often found themselves with long strings of beads thrown over their heads, or bright jewelled butterflies clipped on to their persons by a quick-fingered, laughing shopman from some Latin country, who chose this method to command custom. Walking down this promenade, wearing a floppy leghorn hat trimmed with cherries, I was quickly accosted as "Mees Cherreeze".

The "Topsy-Turvey" house was not far away, a dwelling in which the pointed roof stood upon the ground and the front door pointed to the sky. The household cat, happily of the stuffed variety, was poised precariously somewhere between heaven and earth.

The water chute was my chief delight, but not one

to be too lightly or too often indulged, for it cost what in those days was an exorbitant price, sixpence, the whole of six weeks' pocket money. But it was a delightful thrill, as seated in a frail craft, one slid hurriedly from a precipitous height plunging several times up and down in the water below with an accompaniment of delighted shrieks and clouds of spray. At night the illuminations, consisting very largely of myriads of varicoloured fairy lamps, were a dream of loveliness, especially where they were reflected in the lake.

Perhaps it was because I saw these Exhibitions with the unsophisticated eyes of childhood, they appeared so outstandingly beautiful and romantic, yet in all the varied, often splendid experiences of later life, the Earls Court Exhibitions still hold a very high place in my regard.

My first visit to the Crystal Palace was to see the pantomime, "Bluebeard". To my nine-year old eyes the sight of that promiscuous gentleman's harem hanging up in a cupboard by their hair was as bad as a nightmare. The famous fireworks did not receive as much appreciation as they deserved, for I never cared for them and in later years Hitler's all-night "fireworks" over my rooftop gave me

a life-long distaste for them. The only snag in the whole happy outing was that although situated a comparatively short distance from Wandsworth, both Earls Court and the Crystal Palace involved one of those wearisome cross-country journeys in which even now the outlying suburbs of London delight, so that the return home was a veritable Via Dolorosa.

One of my uncles, a clever surgeon, whose blood-curdling stories used to terrify my youthful days, loved making fireworks, and also demonstrating them at children's parties. He was kindness and hospitality personified, but even this could not warm the damp, dark garden where the fireworks shot up into the November sky or spit spitefully and uncomfortably near me upon the ground.

Schooldays were not very happy. Never being good at games, I much preferred to sit by the fire during recess in the winter, rather than run about and probably fall down in the ice-bound playground, certainly to get short of breath. My exploits at running were somewhat similar to a friend who at his Public School sports laboriously arrived at the winning post, to be asked if he were taking part in the present race or the last one.

Unfortunately it was the latter!

Dancing classes were a nightmare. Being tall for my age I was always dumped in the back row to show as little as possible.

No prizes or certificates were ever given; merit was to be our only reward and certainly cheaper. Our only Treat was the Annual Garden Party. And what a Treat! All dressed in white, whether to represent angels or virgins was never revealed, we were expected to entertain our parents - a few uncomfortable fathers in morning dress and silk hats which latter presented a continual problem as to their disposal, and mothers in their best bibs and tuckers, trying to think their own offsprings were the most beautiful and gifted of the whole collection. My naughty mother, knowing I looked like Banquo's ghost when dressed entirely in white, used to slip a rose-pink sash round my youthful waist, which rather spoilt the head-mistress's regard for her.

The high light of the party was the French master, a young and handsome gentleman with a saucy black moustache and hair to match, who used to play Hide-and-Seek with us when the parents had offered their polite "thank you for a pleasant afternoon" and gladly returned home.

At one Garden Party we searched high and low for Monsieur without success and no wonder - for he was hiding in the Head Mistress's bedroom, a sanctuary into which even the boldest of us dare not venture.

The Head Mistress, whose two sisters much objected to being called "Smarion" and "Srosamund" instead of "Miss Marion" and "Miss Rosamund", gave us a wonderful grinding in spelling for which I am much more grateful now than I was at the time. She herself was addicted to sudden sneezes and kept her pocket handkerchief somewhere inside her frock, which entailed frantic fumbling round her bosom and even down her back to retrieve it, during which process if one of us had so much as smiled I fear that unfortunate girl would have been expelled. I suffered untold torture holding back my mirth, especially as I was usually in the front row and my friend Winifred, who shared the desk for two, had a nasty habit of touching my foot with her own traitorous toe.

The Head Mistress often used to say in a lesson "Let us think aloud"! But it was she who did the thinking and also the recital thereof. It would certainly not have been expedient for us to have uttered some of our thoughts.

Shakespeare was her great delight and she used to laugh heartily at jokes which were so much Greek to us. I found it an excellent opportunity to laugh at private jokes between Winifred and myself, thereby gaining much unearned merit at my appreciation of the great "William's" masterpieces.

Being a Nonconformist her patron saints were Luther and Calvin and we heard so much about them that even to this day the mention of their names makes me want to scream.

Being one of the few Church girls in the school I was subject to a certain amount of petty persecution. As my friend Violet scornfully remarked,

"There is too much going down on your knees in your church. Besides, who would want to listen to a Minister with his shirt hanging out of his trousers."

Morning prayers in the Assembly Hall were rather an ordeal. The Head Mistress's idea of devotion was a passage from the Old Testament, preferably from the Book of Chronicles. She had a peculiar habit of chanting, her voice rising higher and higher up the scale, as she declaimed:

"Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, or Rehoboam, or Amaziah, and all that he did, are they not written in

the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah."

Some of the said acts being not quite comme il faut she would stop abruptly as the narrative became really interesting, give a loud cough, then say;

"Ah, now where were we? Oh, yes, verse twenty-six." Which verse was much farther down the page and adroitly missed the naughty things between, which we took particular notice to read privately.

For months each year we practised a Cantata with which to regale our parents at the Garden Party. As I could never reach any high notes it was decided I was a contralto and with my friend Winifred, was placed on that side of the room where our idea of contralto was to sing soprano an octave lower, which device was apparently never detected.

Our long-suffering parents must have found those Cantatas excruciating boredom, for there was no acting in them, or any fancy dresses, just rows of us in our white frocks, trilling indefinitely concerning flowers and birds and similar innocuous objects.

One hot summer we practised for days in the boiling sun in the playground, rehearsing a grim exhibition entitled "Flag Drill", while "Smarion", our instructress,

stood beneath a shady tree under a tasty parasol, urging us to put more life into it.

As usual, I was put in the back row, but a day or two before the Garden Party I was turned out, together with the Mayor of Wandsworth's elder daughter, as even our most conscientious efforts were said to spoil the show. The Mayor's daughter sat on a window sill and wept, but I was too proud to let my rage and humiliation dissolve into tears. My Mother had another engagement on the Garden Party day that year.

One Friday morning I sprained my ankle on the way to school close to home doing a first-class skid on a piece of orange peel. When I hobbled into the school I was sent straight home, being told I had mumps, which were in season at the moment. The following Monday was a half-term holiday and great was the surprise of the Mistress who called to enquire for me to find her patient enjoying a children's party. But I don't think my ankle has ever been the same from that two mile walk after the sprain.

Modern science explains that a pain in the toe may be caused from a germ in the throat, or a stiff knee from a rotten tooth, but a sprained ankle as one of the

symptoms of mumps has yet to be discovered.

End of term was always an ordeal for me as I had no brain for mathematics and in examinations ^{on these Subjects} was always at the tail end of the class with a few marks given me out of pity. For such subjects as Scripture, Composition, History and the like I was so unfortunate as to come out at the top, with the result that on the last day of term the Head Mistress used to rebuke me before the whole school, saying it was very wrong ~~of me~~, as during the term I had been sixth or seventh, proving, so she said, I had been lazy all the time until the examinations, when I had worked extremely hard. Alas, like the sermon in church, it was impossible to answer back and tell her I certainly had not worked any harder for the exams. But I fear her Nonconformist mind would not have believed me.

Unknowingly of course, she almost ruined my career by telling me I should never make a writer, I had too much imagination. But the clergy of St. Anne's told me otherwise and gave me every encouragement.

Schoolgirl fashions in those days did not run to uniform, only a blue and white ribbon on a sailor hat, which made me look an utter fright, especially during the time when I insisted on copying my faithless friend

Violet and wear my hair scraped tightly back from my forehead.

Sixpenny charms were much in vogue one year, tied at intervals on a cord round the neck reaching nearly to the waist, or jangling round the wrist on thin silver bangles. How the Mistresses endured their constant tinkling is a mystery to me! Some of the charms were really pretty and amazing value for the money - miniature wheel-barrows, watering-cans, locks, birds, animals, or musical instruments. A penny a week being the recognised salary for all children up to quite an advanced age, we used to save up this princely sum or any "tips" bestowed on us by generous visitors to the house, then hurry to handsome Mr. Gassett, with his magnificent moustache and kindly interest in us, who used to keep a jeweller's shop on East Hill, eventually to be shattered to pieces in the Second World War.

It is surprising we were allowed to wear these "charms", for it was not thought the correct thing for a girl much under seventeen or eighteen to wear jewellery, and a dainty little silver ring my godfather gave me, which he had picked up in Jersey, was only allowed to make its appearance on very special occasions, together with a

pretty silver bird brooch which my Mother gave me after my Confirmation *And a gold cross and chain presented by my Father for the same event.*

Poor Uncle Godfather - that visit to the Channel Islands was nearly the end of him, for he was so ill one of his brothers stayed all night beside him for fear he should jump, or fall overboard. A compassionate lady on the deck said she would never forget him as long as she lived. This could scarcely have been a case of love at first sight, for nothing could be less romantic than acute mal de mer. Another relative, journeying to Antwerp in a terrible storm, feared greatly the ship would go down, but long before the Belgian coast appeared on the horizon his great fear was that it would not go down. But he lived to tell the tale. I fear the Caudwells are not a seafaring folk. Only one of them ventured on a short spell as a sailor, but by the time he had brought back one or two gruesome stuffed alligators he decided that "East, West - home's best."

My Mother's standard of truthfulness was so high that to "tell a story" was a sin of the deepest dye, so that the occasion when a schoolfellow's paintbox fell out of its locker behind me and its manifold contents dropped out singly, great was my inward fury when the

Mistress conducting the class refused to believe my word when I truthfully declared I had nothing to do with it. I took a dislike to paintboxes from that very day.

We had a craze for pencil-boxes about that time and the girl whose box had several stories which slid out in various directions, completely fitted with an innumerable array of pencils, pens and indiarubbers was the millionaire of her class and treated with becoming reverence. My boxes never reached a higher elevation than the first floor, which provided me with a distinctly inferiority complex.

A terrified boy used to arrive in the playground each day during recess from a cake shop close to the school with a tray of buns and cakes. Those with very affluent purses spent as much as twopence on a rich and indigestible pastry - the rest spent a modest halfpenny on a large and tasty bun stuffed with currants and very sticky on top. One day the boy's feminine customers upset his tray, with the result we were all summoned before the Headmistress for a severe reprimand. Mercifully I had been plentifully supplied with refreshment from home that day, so had not been near the young

gentleman, who was always entitled the BOY, in very big capital letters.

With all due respect, none of my schoolfellows seem to have been very exciting. Minita, a half-Spanish girl, was the only boarder and was possessed of gay rolling eyes and a number of outlandish Christian names which used up a considerable amount of the alphabet. Vera was always dressed in white, literally from top to toe, very off-white in the winter. She lived on the West Side of Wandsworth Common, beneath the shade of the magnificent row of chestnut trees, known as the Twelve Apostles, which still lift their lovely creamy candles of blossom every springtime. Dorothy resided in Spencer Park and drove a tiny carriage, with two delectable Shetland ponies, complete with tossing manes and luxuriant tails. Her front garden was a mass of luxuriant and expensive flowers, like a rainbow resting on the ground. In the autumn every plant was pulled up, entirely fresh ones appearing the following year.

Mildred, May, Elsie and Ida lived near me and were blessed with magnificent curling hair worn loose to their waists, each a different shade, so that seen together they looked like an advertisement for a brand of shampoo powder.

Irene, the first of the name, after myself, was much disgruntled to find me already in possession, which was only equalled by my annoyance at her arrival. Quite recently we won a large jar of sweets at a raffle in a bazaar which I opened in her parish. We shared them very amicably - in fact I had the lion's share, as she generously gave me the stoppered bottle in which they were contained.

Winifred lived in Huguenot Mansions just opposite the old cemetery of that name, which in 1874 had been put decently in order with a comment in the local paper "It is to be hoped when the ground is put into proper repair that the churchwardens will take care that horses, etc. are not allowed to wander over the graves of the departed."

In 1911 the Borough Council erected a Memorial bearing the inscription, "Here rest many Huguenots who on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, left their native land for conscience sake and found in Wandsworth freedom to worship God after their manner. They established important industries and added to the credit and prosperity of the town of their adoption." It would be interesting to know how much of this inscription is read or understood by the present Wandsworthians who

wait at the bus stop on the other side of the low wall.

Winifred and her mother were of that charming, effervescent disposition which is always ready and willing to undertake anything, only to send a graceful excuse for doing it by the very next post. Any minor ailments were never considered of sufficient urgency to call in the doctor - they merely crossed the road to the greengrocer at the opposite corner, bought some apples or a cauliflower and asked his advice. Some of their chief friends were a young Priest and his wife belonging to the neighbouring parish. He had great gifts of oratory and used actually to pack his large church to overflowing for his Women's Afternoon Services, at which he and the congregation wept happily together. After he left Wandsworth I did not see him for many years until one day at a lunch party he was my opposite neighbour. He arranged to ring me up a few days later to spend a day with himself and his wife, but the ring never came. He died suddenly before he could send it.

Winifred and I were "bosom friends" and many a time arrived home late from school through loitering about deep in schoolgirl giggles and chatter. One old gentleman we often met we named "Toffee" from the colour

of his suit. Two coats of different colours emerged with varying lengths from beneath the top one which was the shade of pale almond rock.

Winifred's mother told me her daughter was "true as steel" and would be a lifelong friend. If this were correct, then I fear her lifetime must have been short, for I heard no more of her after the family moved suddenly to Inverness.

Years afterwards I met a very delightful Russian lady who lived in an adjoining flat. Although it was only the second, and proved to be the last time I ever saw her, she insisted on presenting me with a packet of suet, it being a time when such a commodity was practically unheard of in this dear land of ours. I made a pudding with it next day, but unhappily it was like the manna which the disobedient Israelites kept for the Sabbath Day and the odour thereof travelled a quite considerable distance. But even this did not lessen the value of the entente cordiale gift.

From time to time flowers from our gardens were taken by us and presented to the Headmistress before Morning Prayers. She looked extremely startled when I offered a huge bunch of sweet smelling may, evidently having

been brought up in the tradition it was unlucky, rather than that it symbolises the merry month of Mary, Queen of Saints.

Two terrible fires occurred in my early days - the burning of the great paper mill in Garratt Lane and the complete destruction of Arding & Hobbs, the large store at Clapham Junction, a mile away from my home. So sudden and awful was the latter that within about ten minutes the great tower had crashed down into the building.

The store was crammed with Christmas shoppers and it was a miracle that all reached the street in safety without a hair of their heads being singed. Only on an upper floor came stark and dreadful tragedy where some of the assistants were trapped. One of their number, a man most appropriately named "Noble", saved several of the girls and gave his own life in the act. So fierce were the flames that the next day turkeys could be seen hanging in a provision shop on the opposite side of the road roasted on their hooks. There were no motor fire engines in those days, only the brave, handsome horses. As they stood calm and proud in that terrific heat amid the smoke and crackling of the flames the firemen continually poured buckets of water over them to prevent

blisters forming on their glossy coats.

When my Mother was a boarder at a Select Establishment for Young Ladies at Abingdon, she used to buy needles and cotton at a tiny shop in that pretty old-fashioned town. She may have been served by a young apprentice who was there at the time, but it was nearly half a century before she knew that young apprentice had become the founder and owner of the store named after him - Arding & Hobbs.

Mother and I saw Mr. Arding when his life work had crashed in blackened ruins, a horrid mass of twisted girders, charred wood and unrecognisable fragments. He was a brave, but broken man, struggling magnificently, and successfully to maintain his business. He showed us the great safe which had fallen from the tower through the various floors, lying buried amid smouldering fragments for a whole week. The interior of the safe was unharmed, the papers only slightly discoloured, but the parchment deeds were a mass of undistinguishable pulp.

My father, being solicitor to the Borough of Battersea, in which borough Arding & Hobbs is situated, was present at the enquiry as to the cause of the fire, but like so many similar incidents, it was never satisfactorily solved.

One theory was that the windows being decorated with quantities of cotton wool to represent snow, an assistant reached for an umbrella required by a customer and smashed an electric bulb and that was distinctly that!!

Clapham Junction close by, through which it is said a train a minute passes day and night, was originally a small station opened in 1846 and gave rise to the old story of the distracted lady who enquired from a porter farther down the line, "Does this train clap at Stopham Junction?"

My father remembered as a boy when the "Falcon", a public house conveniently situated outside the Junction and opposite Arding & Hobbs, was a quaint old inn facing a brook, with a yard in the foreground containing a tree and a horse-trough. A well-known sketch of the period by Nixon, entitled "Undertakers regaling themselves at Death's door" is not so grim as it sounds, as it merely referred to the name of the innkeeper - Mr. Robert Death.

Much of the prosperity in that district belonged to the Bolingbroke family, of which the most celebrated was Henry St. John, who had far from a bed of roses as Prime Minister to Queen Anne. He was buried in the crypt of Battersea Parish Church, close by the river.

The churchwardens' records of that parish are of much interest. In 1580 - 83 is an entry of Fines collected owing to "Absence from Divine Service". If these fines were still inflicted some churches would quickly acquire a millionaire's banking account.

In 1602 the sum of fourpence was expended on a new "ower glass", which hints at the prodigious length of the sermon.

Included in a gift of a gentleman named Thomas Phetyplece were "the longe ladder, the great Iron Hooke" with its two ropes and the twelve "bucketts". Evidently this was the parochial fire equipment, kept at the church as being the most convenient spot. The great "Iron Hooke" was attached to a long pole and used for gripping the ridge pole of a house and tearing down the blazing thatch which in many instances formed the roof.

In 1760 a notice appeared that "stray dogs be shot and dead ones drove ashore (from the river)" to be buried at the cost of the churchwardens.

Those who brought their departed relatives or friends for burial in the churchyard were evidently treated sympathetically. Ancient practice placed the body on the bier, shrouded but uncoffined. Should a family on

occasion be too poor to provide the requisite shroud the churchwardens produced one for the sum of 1/6 from the "Church Expenses Fund". At one time these obliging gentlemen lent an empty coffin in which at the lych gate the shrouded body was placed and thence carried to the graveside, where it was taken out for burial and the coffin returned to storage for the next unhappy occasion. In 1649 the Battersea records mention, "Payd for a Coffing to be remaining to the parishe for poore people. 2/6."

In 1875 that zealous parish Priest, Canon Erskine, Clarke, came to Battersea, where he erected a large number of churches and is rumoured to have lamented that whenever he built one the Devil set up a chapel opposite.

Canon Clarke made some horrid discoveries in the crypt of his church, which was redolent with odour, but certainly not that of sanctity. One of his curates wrote years later, "there were three hundred coffins in faded trappings stacked in the crypt and people used to tip the old caretaker woman - whose description of her duties to the Vicar was, 'Please, Sir, I keeps the people out of the seats' - to walk them around the narrow alleys between the coffins. From time to time a coffin

burst and the church was redolent of deceased citizen." One cannot but feel that the living citizens were blessed with most efficient guardian angels and cast-iron throats that they did not succumb to diphtheria or some other evil-minded germ.

Canon Erskine Clarke hurriedly put an end to all this, obtaining an Order in Council for a rearrangement of the poor bodies so that they were soon all neatly laid away in the aisles of the crypt beneath a nice hefty foot of solid concrete.

The crypt having thus been made healthy and comfortable it served for "the assembling of the female candidates for Confirmation."