

PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE by Mary Pyle-Bridges

When I look back over my life certain things always stand out. If one has been a catholic all one's life and has seen the glory of the faith, and then, especially, with Anglo-Catholicism, seen what to all intents looks like a decline, I give thanks to Almighty God that I was born in and lived through the beginning of the century and was not born in the middle of it.

I remember when I was a very small girl being sent to catechism one Sunday afternoon and on the way coming across the Salvation Army. They were singing hymns to the tunes of what would be considered the " pop " numbers of the day, banging their tambourines and blowing trumpets; I thought it all very exciting. I stopped, and for some reason I cannot remember was given a tambourine to play. Off marched the Salvation Army, and off marched Mary banging the tambourine and singing with gusto. As luck would have it we all marched into Cadogan Square and stopped right outside the family home. My mother and grandmother looked out of the window to see what all the noise was about. Lo and behold the Salvation Army - and Mary - the shock was great. The door was flung open, down came my mother like an avenging angel and dragged me indoors. Threats were uttered. " Your father will hear of this " and " Go to your room ". Oh dear I had so enjoyed playing the tambourine and still had it in my hand. It was snatched away and returned by the hand of a maid. Thus ended ,except fore a sore bottom, my only excursion into the war zone of the Salvation Army.

In 1908 I travelled with my father to the Island of Caldy. I had been ill that winter and when the spring came it was thought that the journey and stay on the island would do me a " power of good ". My brother John and sister Charlotte were all rather jealous of my trip and this gave me a chance to "preen". Those were the days when Caldy was still Anglican and the Benedictine Community had Aelred Carlyle the founder as Abbot. The full story of those days can be read in that very interesting book ABBOT EXTRAORDINARY by Peter Anson who had been a monk of the island. My father knew Abbot Cartyle and for some years he had been spiritual adviser to my father. The island was a beautiful place and very romantic. We had picnics in the bays and walks through the lanes; everywhere there were fuchsia hedges and the monks kept the place in order. In the Abbey Church all the services were in Latin and one could forget that a break had ever occurred between Rome and Canterbury. This was how my father thought and I can still remember his passing this observation. It was to be nearly fifty years before I set foot on Caldy Island again. Once more it was after I had been ill and I took my son to see it. Such changes: it was now owned by trie Roman Catholic Church. It was still a romantic place,however,the Abbey Church had been destroyed by fire and rebuilt. To me the joy had gone. I suppose things seen through the eyes of a child are never the same.

My father and I returned to London on an overnight train and I remember we were just in time to attend early mass at St.Barnabas Pimlico. Shortly after this I was away to school with my sister Charlotte to Wantage in Berkshire to St. Mary the Mother House of the Community of St.Mary the Virgin.

More another time !

Mary Pyle-Bridges.