

## X

### ANCIENT CUSTOMS

Of the many scores of ancient customs that keep alive the memory of other days, marshalling the Middle Ages in the service of this mechanical century, I will recall only three to serve the purpose of illustration.

#### ROYAL MAUNDY

On Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter, at a ceremony in Westminster Abbey, gifts are distributed on behalf of the King to as many poor men as the King has years and to an equal number of women. The service in which the ceremony takes place begins with the reading of John XIII, 34: *Mandatum novum . . .* from which the name of Maundy Thursday is derived. It is a very old ceremony. In mediæval times the Sovereign took part and personally performed ceremonial functions that included the washing of the feet of the beggars and the distribution of clothing and food together with coins called Maundy Money—coined for the purpose and brought fresh from the mint. Today the Lord High Almoner takes the place of Sovereign; there is no washing of feet and the clothing and provisions are commuted into cash. I have read that Queen Elizabeth, on one occasion only, washed the feet of a certain number of beggars; the number was not given, but it was stated explicitly that the beggars were carefully washed beforehand by the Yeomen of the Laundry. James II was the last monarch to take part personally in the Maundy proceedings.

The ceremony as performed in 1922 was as follows. Seated in the Abbey were poor men and women to the number of 57 each, a number that represented the King's age. A procession was formed consisting of the Dean and Clergy, the Lord High Almoner and his assistants attended by Yeoman of the Guard. Among them they carried baskets of red and white purses. The lay officials from the Royal Almonry Office carried white scarves and bouquets, representing the towels and sweet herbs formerly used in the washing. These are now symbolic. There was a first distribution and a second

distribution. In the first distribution each man received £2.5s and each woman £1.15s in lieu of the clothing formerly given. At the second distribution, each person received a red purse containing £1.10s in lieu of provisions formerly given and £1 to redeem the King's gown. At the same time each person received a white purse containing in silver coins 57 pence. The coins were silver pennies, silver twopences, silver threepences and silver fourpences. They were coined as Maundy Money and came straight from the mint and the only one of these coins at present in use is the threepenny bit. Moreover in the Middle Ages coins did not have the edges milled; neither did this Maundy Money of today. The little red and white purses on their way to the recipients passed through the hands of the Secretary, the Sub-Almoner and the Lord High Almoner.

#### THE FORGE AND THE MORE

When the Danes were settled outside London, in the Parish of Saint Clement Danes during the ninth and tenth centuries, they formed an independent community and the occupiers of land paid rent in kind to the tribal chief. When the district lost its independence, the prerogatives of the Chief passed to the King. Now it happened that a certain piece of land in that parish was acquired by the Corporation of the City of London. The former Danish owner, a blacksmith by trade, used to pay an annual rent of six horseshoes and sixty one horseshoe nails. This rent continued to be paid by the City after it acquired the property and to this very day the Corporation of the City of London makes annual payment to the King of England of six horseshoes and sixty one horseshoe nails as its ground rent for that plot of land in Saint Clement Danes.

A certain piece of waste land in Shropshire called The More was formerly held by tenants of the Crown at a yearly rental defined in the lease as follows. "Two culters or knives, one of such strength as to be able to cut a stick of a cubit's length, and the other not strong enough to cut the same; the good culter to cut the stick at the first cut through the middle; which service is to be performed in the middle of the Exchequer, before the Treasurer and Barons, every year, on the morrow of St. Michael."

This parcel of land likewise became the property of the City which continued to pay annually a rent as defined in the terms of the original lease, namely two culters and two faggots.

In the oldest known form of the lease, written in Latin, it is required that one of the knives shall be good, the other very bad—*duos cultellos, unum bonum et alterum pessimum.*

On the day following Michaelmas the payments are made in the court of the Exchequer, formerly held in a chamber of Old Westminster Hall, but now at the Royal Courts of Justice. The warrants are read and the Common Cryer calls: "The tenants and occupiers of a certain tenement called The Forge in the parish of St. Clement Danes, come forth and do your service, on pain and peril that may fall thereon." Thereupon the City Solicitor lays upon the table six horseshoes, counting them one by one. He then counts out the nails in groups of ten until he has counted sixty. He then lays down the odd nail and says: "and one over." The King's Remembrancer replies: "A good number," and receives the rent. The Cryer then announces: "The Tenants and occupiers of a certain piece of waste ground in the county of Salop called The More, come forth and do your service, &c. The City Solicitor then produces two small faggots each made up of a number of twigs bound together. Laying one of these faggots on a block on the table he produces a large knife or chopper and with it chops the faggot in two. He then puts the other faggot on the block and producing another and inferior knife or cleaver he strikes the faggot, which is not cut by the stroke. The King's Remembrancer says: "Good service" and receives the knives and the faggots.

I have heard it suggested once and only once that had the Great War ended in defeat all of this ancient panoply of custom and precedent and ceremony would have been swept away in the throes of revolution. I think there was a crooked bolshevistic wish behind that sinister suggestion. It is not worth while to consider the idea, but if anyone wants to know my opinion, it is that even in that event as in the actual event, London would have kept faith with the past and continued to pay its debts.

#### BEATING THE BOUNDS

I have already told how among the Livery Companies are some that own large properties in the CITY, inherited from time immemorial. In order to preserve their title to these properties and stimulate their memories, they turn out once every year in solemn procession and beat the bounds. The example that came under my obser-

In the oldest known form of the lease, written in Latin, it is required that one of the knives shall be good, the other very bad—*duos cultellos, unum bonum et alterum pessimum.*

On the day following Michaelmas the payments are made in the court of the Exchequer, formerly held in a chamber of Old Westminster Hall, but now at the Royal Courts of Justice. The warrants are read and the Common Cryer calls: "The tenants and occupiers of a certain tenement called The Forge in the parish of St. Clement Danes, come forth and do your service, on pain and peril that may fall thereon." Thereupon the City Solicitor lays upon the table six horseshoes, counting them one by one. He then counts out the nails in groups of ten until he has counted sixty. He then lays down the odd nail and says: "and one over." The King's Remembrancer replies: "A good number," and receives the rent. The Cryer then announces: "The Tenants and occupiers of a certain piece of waste ground in the county of Salop called The More, come forth and do your service, &c. The City Solicitor then produces two small faggots each made up of a number of twigs bound together. Laying one of these faggots on a block on the table he produces a large knife or chopper and with it chops the faggot in two. He then puts the other faggot on the block and producing another and inferior knife or cleaver he strikes the faggot, which is not cut by the stroke. The King's Remembrancer says: "Good service" and receives the knives and the faggots.

I have heard it suggested once and only once that had the Great War ended in defeat all of this ancient panoply of custom and precedent and ceremony would have been swept away in the throes of revolution. I think there was a crooked bolshevistic wish behind that sinister suggestion. It is not worth while to consider the idea, but if anyone wants to know my opinion, it is that even in that event as in the actual event, London would have kept faith with the past and continued to pay its debts.

#### BEATING THE BOUNDS

I have already told how among the Livery Companies are some that own large properties in the CITY, inherited from time immemorial. In order to preserve their title to these properties and stimulate their memories, they turn out once every year in solemn procession and beat the bounds. The example that came under my obser-

vation in 1921 was the Vintners Company. Four servants of the Liverymen wearing white linen jackets and silk hats and carrying brooms, accompanied by some of the Liverymen in full livery, made the circuit of the Company's properties while the four servants beat the pavements with their brooms.

Others in London besides the Livery Companies keep up this very old custom. The Warders of the Tower also beat the bounds, making the circuit of the Tower precincts once a year while the beefeaters strike the boundaries with their pikes. That mysterious and misty shadow called The Court Leet with View of Frankpledge of the Manor and Liberty of the Savoy continues to beat the bounds of the Manor. The Court is so old that even the moss flourishes with deference to custom and the boundaries of the Manor have been ages ago intersected by the lines of more modern buildings, but once every year the jury of the Court, led by the Beadle, ancient staff in hand, makes the rounds and although one of the landmarks is in the middle of a church, another on the stage of a theatre and another within the Temple, the procession suffers no interruption. Thus they serve notice to the world and cherish in their own memories from generation to generation, a vivid definition of their own preserves.

I have a particular fancy for that old custom of Beating the Bounds. To my mind it is a symbol of the CITY'S history. It explains that lapse of two centuries in the Saxon Chronicles. It explains why no relics of the Danes are found within the CITY. It explains why William the Conqueror, after taking a look at the walls went quietly away to think it over. Saxon, Dane, Norman and Zeppelin found London beating the bounds. No one knows how long this world will last,—but of one thing we may be sure, the Londoners will go on playing the game till the last syllable of recorded time and the Day of Doom will find them in full livery beating the bounds.