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The Pilgrim and the Peas and Pilgrimage by Rail: Defining acceptable pilgrimage practices in nineteenth-century Britain

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ABSTRACT

In the nineteenth century, attitudes towards Catholic pilgrimage travel became increasingly critical as newspaper reporters and writers attacked pilgrims for choosing to travel in comfort, and at speed, by train. This paper argues that the reason for this change can be pinpointed to two key things: the widespread popularity of a comic verse, *The Pilgrim and the Peas*, and the 1873 English Pilgrimage by rail to Paray-le-Monial. It argues that together these two factors were instrumental in shaping modern British attitudes to how pilgrimage should, and should not, be conducted and cemented the idea that a pilgrimage should be a journey of hardship undertaken on foot.

KEYWORDS

Anti-Catholicism; pilgrimage; pilgrim and the peas; railway; travel

Introduction

In 1668, the German novelist Johann Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen published *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, a picaresque novel in which the titular hero is raised by a hermit, fights in the Thirty Years' War, visits real and imagined countries, and finally renounces the world to become a hermit.¹ It was part of a series which became the most widely read novels of their day.² In von Grimmelshausen's tale, Simplicius went on a pilgrimage to Einsiedeln in Switzerland with his friend, the soldier Ulrich Herzbruder.³ At first, Herzbruder was reluctant for the irreligious Simplicius to join him, but in the end, the two men agreed to put dried peas in their shoes so that every step would be painful, a sign that Simplicius was determined to change. Simplicius, however, admitted to the reader that he was being dishonest. He had no intention of following through on the agreement: he had only made it so Herzbruder would let him accompany him. Once the pair reached Schaffhausen in northern Switzerland, the pain of the hard peas proved too much for Simplicius, who boiled them before putting them back in his shoes. When Herzbruder realised that Simplicius had cheated him, the two men argued, and a downtrodden Simplicius was reduced to following his friend 'like one being led to the gallows' for the remainder of their pilgrimage.

The importance of this otherwise unremarkable story lies in how it influenced conceptions of how pilgrims were supposed to behave, especially in nineteenth-century

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Britain. In fact, its previous consideration in scholarship has been the realm of literary scholars, this particular passage of the novel picked over as an example of Grimmelshausen's criticism of Catholicism as a faith which valued performance over practicality,⁴ of asceticism as an act that only harms the self,⁵ or of the importance of brotherly love.⁶ What is not appreciated is the profound but now almost entirely forgotten influence it had on nineteenth-century ideas about the importance to pilgrimage not just of walking, but of enduring hardship and discomfort while doing so. The modern emphasis on physical exertion and endurance in pilgrimage has largely been considered a result of the misunderstandings about medieval pilgrimage, the valorisation of walking, or the overwhelming contemporary focus on the long-distance walking route of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. What this article demonstrates is that the modern shift and hardening of attitudes to walking pilgrimage which laid the foundation for these assumptions was rooted in a fictional tale, one that was widely employed in the course of the nineteenth century in a variety of contexts, and became a critical shorthand for opponents to the revival of Catholic pilgrimage in Britain. In particular, it was used as evidence of an alleged medieval past, a proper exemplar of pilgrimage, which never really existed. As such, it created and hardened ideas that are still influential in contemporary pilgrimage practice and scholarship.

A considerable body of recent research has focussed on the importance of what defined pilgrimage, and on the perceived centrality of walking. At times this has been to the exclusion of almost any consideration of other ways of conducting a pilgrimage. Rebecca Solnit claimed that the Santiago pilgrimage was undertaken 'entirely on foot', even though this is, and never has been, the case.⁷ More recently, Marion Bowman and Tina Shepp called attention to the 'Caminoisation' of pilgrimage, whereby the long-distance walking route to Santiago de Compostela is seen as the model for the ideal pilgrimage, and thus replicated in other places.⁸ This valorisation of walking means it has overshadowed alternatives and created the impression that this was, historically, a core requirement of pilgrimage. It has also led to ethical judgement based on how pilgrims choose to move.⁹ The British Pilgrimage Trust, for example, defines pilgrimage on its website as 'A journey with purpose on foot', and is only recently starting to consider non-walking pilgrimages on its website.¹⁰

In scholarly and popular works, there is an assumption that pilgrimage had 'ascetic purity' in the middle ages, but that was lost over time as pilgrims became modernised.¹¹ In reality, medieval pilgrims placed little emphasis on the need for pilgrims to walk *unless* they were performing an act of penance, and even then that was often more common in early medieval Europe than in the later middle ages. As Dee Dyas has recently observed, 'the current popularity of "walking pilgrimage" might well puzzle the many medieval pilgrims ... for whom travelling by foot was neither a choice nor a novelty, given its predominance in their daily experiences'.¹² For them, walking on pilgrimage might depend on wealth, convenience, health, or the distance covered, and the mode of transport was usually a means to an end, not the defining feature of the pilgrimage itself.

Indeed, a substantial body of historical evidence shows that pilgrimage has always been conducted by other means. The twelfth-century guide to the Camino de Santiago, *the* modern model for walking pilgrimage, recommended the route in stages which could be travelled on horseback.¹³ Several of the late-medieval pilgrim accounts, like those of Felix Fabri (1483–84) and Canon Pietro Casola (1494), describe sailing to Jerusalem from

Venice, waiting days for mules, donkeys, or horses to take them overland to the Holy City.¹⁴ Many pilgrims rode even for the most penitential journeys, walking only the last mile or so as a sign of penance as Henry II of England (*d.* 1189) did when he went to Canterbury to atone for the murder of Thomas Becket, though that may well have been as much about their social status as any expectation over pilgrim behaviour.¹⁵ Even in the centuries following the Reformation in Britain, when pilgrimage was supposed to be suppressed but in fact continued, pilgrimage on foot was not a requirement.

It is against this background that changing attitudes to pilgrims and pilgrimage travel in nineteenth-century Britain must be set. Interestingly, though there is a wealth of scholarship on both pilgrimage, and a growing body of work on nineteenth-century criticism of pilgrimage in Britain in particular, none of these works mention the story of the pilgrim with peas in his shoes, let alone recognise its influence on modern attitudes to pilgrim travel. Katherine Grenier (2015) noted that Victorian pilgrims were viewed with far less respect than their medieval forbears because of the ease with which they travelled,¹⁶ while the criticism levelled at later nineteenth-century pilgrims, primarily in the British press, has been analysed by Romero Samper (2020) who argued that modern pilgrims were criticised for their ‘lack of spiritual content’ in being too comfortable, and that ‘they very often concealed political rather than religious motives’.¹⁷ Yet neither explored the cultural roots of these assumptions found in fictional writing.

The decision to focus on the anecdote of the pilgrim and his peas arose, in part, out of serendipity. The tale was referred to in texts I was researching in relation to St Winefride’s Well for a longer study, and then in background research for a collaborative project on religious travel which was stimulated by interest in the Paray le Monial pilgrimage of 1873. The assumption in those texts was that this was a tale readers knew, and that it was explicitly about historical pilgrimage practices. From there I traced references to the story across a range of sources, using a mixture of digital searching and traditional research methods, concentrating on the accounts of pilgrimage I had collated for other projects. Aware of the issue of the potential selectivity of searching digitised newspapers and periodicals in this way,¹⁸ I also looked for references to modes and experiences of pilgrim travel, and attitudes to both of these things, across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Across both digitised and physical texts, it was still evident that the story of the pilgrim and his peas was the only repeatedly referred-to anecdote when it came to discussing the comforts and discomforts of travel, as well as the other themes mentioned in this article

The pilgrim and the peas: A true story?

Grimmelshausen’s original novel contained dozens of adventurous diversions, but the passage on the pilgrimage to Eidseln was the only one to become divorced from the text and take on a life of its own. Though the novel itself appeared in several editions and was widely read in Europe, no English version appeared until the twentieth century.¹⁹ Instead, the story of the pilgrimage and the argument over the peas was well known in Britain long before then because in the late 1780s, it was rendered into verse by Peter Pindar (the pseudonym of the satirist Dr John Wolcot (c.1738–1819), where it was subtitled ‘A True Story’.²⁰ Wolcot had apparently heard the tale from his grandmother, who referred to it when complaining about the irritating crumbs in her deathbed.²¹ The

poem was published in collections and anthologies like *The Social Magazine*, *The Beauty of English Poetry*, and *Elegant Extracts*, popular works which were widely read. In 1807 it was printed as part of a series of humorous ballads, now accompanied by an illustration by the caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson (1757–1827) that showed the pea-shod pilgrim doubled over in agony.²² In Pindar's rendering, the pilgrimage destination was moved from Einsiedeln to Loreto in Italy, the site of the Holy House (later again, it shifted to Jerusalem), and the pilgrimage was no longer voluntary but an 'order' imposed on two sinners by the Church.²³

In this popular verse rendition of the story, Pindar's pilgrims travel at different speeds, one swiftly, the other limping along. When the slower pilgrim catches up with his companion, his faster friend hails him:

'How now!' the light-toed whitewashed pilgrim broke;
 'You lazy lubber-'
 'Odds curse it!' cried t'other, 'tis no joke-
 My feet, once hard as any rock,
 Are now as soft as blubber'.
 'How is't that you can like a greyhound go,
 Merry, as if that naught had happen'd, burn ye!
 'Why', cry'd the other, grinning, 'you must know,
 That just before I ventur'd on my journey,
 To walk a little more at ease,
 I took the liberty to boil my peas'.²⁴

This verse became so well known in nineteenth-century Britain that it influenced popular perceptions of how 'proper' pilgrims should travel. As a result, avoiding the hardships of the pilgrimage journey was, as it was for Simplicius, simply cheating.

Criticism of pilgrimage practices was not, however, how Pindar's verse was first understood. Early nineteenth-century interpretations of it were that it was a humorous anecdote, but as the century progressed, and the number, scale, and visibility of Catholic pilgrimages in and from Britain increased, the story was cemented as a historical and truthful one. This interpretation fit with widespread ideas at the time about Catholic pilgrimage practices, which were seen as lax, overly comfortable, irreligious, and largely touristic. As this article will demonstrate, that was especially the case after the 1873 English pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial when criticism of pilgrims and the utilisation of this story to mock them peaked. Although attitudes became more moderate after the turn of the twentieth century, ultimately the long-term impact of Pindar's verse was that it contributed to popular ideas about what defined a pilgrim, and how a pilgrim should travel, which persisted.²⁵

Pindar's verse retelling of Grimmelshausen's story was republished several times in Britain. It reached a wide audience through print, and because it was regularly used in public recitations and speaking competitions.²⁶ It also morphed over time so that the pilgrim who boiled the peas was cheating on a penance imposed by a 'ghostly confessor', or used to critique members of the religious orders, a monk depicted as the man who boiled his peas while his secular companion did not. It took on an absurdly comedic form in humorous collections and inexpensive pamphlets, was alluded to on playing cards, and

developed into a satirical epigram on the king's printer Henry Hills and his protestations of faith when he, 'the sly sinner/Resolved to stand upon his dinner' by boiling his peas.²⁷ The story was also divorced from its original setting of a continental pilgrimage and reported as a tale about Muslim pilgrims to Mecca²⁸; used as a comparison for the pain of breaking-in new dance shoes²⁹; employed in a love letter from Lord Byron to Annabella Milbank in 1814 to describe his emotional pain³⁰; used to complain about the state of unpaved footpaths in Liverpool³¹; and compared to Benjamin Disraeli's attempt to ease his situation during a spirited election debate on the principles of Free Trade.³² So widely known was this story as a shorthand for suffering, and the easing of that suffering, that it was apparently a tale every nineteenth-century schoolboy knew.³³

Though these varying interpretations and uses of Pindar's verse show how malleable the story was, it was still usually referred to in print in the context of pilgrimage. In references made in the first half of the nineteenth century, the focus on, and valorisation of, a walking pilgrimage which appeared in the second half of the century was absent. Consequently, the view of how pilgrims travelled was more accepting of variety and innovation, and attitudes were also more generous towards what constituted hardship and penance. In 'Advice to Pilgrims' written in 1830, for example, it was understood that what was penance for one might not be penance for another, and vice versa:

Some pilgrims, it is true, have facilities for *pea-boiling* which others have not, and the peas which are put into the shoes of different persons are sometimes of different kinds, and require different degrees of boiling.³⁴

In the final decades of the century, the 'pea-boiling' usually appeared in conjunction with complaints about the comforts of travelling by rail (especially by wealthier pilgrims), but in the middle of the century, railway pilgrimage was more likely to be met with curiosity or surprise, or awareness of the simple practicality of using trains, than with criticism. Even then, commentary on the use of the railway for pilgrimage was largely confined to the overseas journeys of Christians, perhaps because of the relative paucity of notable pilgrimage within Britain at the time, or of Hindu pilgrims in India, or more broadly of British travellers overseas.³⁵ In his account of the 1853 French pilgrimage to Jerusalem by rail and steam, a reporter in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* exclaimed 'Pilgrimages and railways! – Strange conjunction!'³⁶ Ten years later, another French pilgrimage, this time from Paris to Cherbourg, was 'noticeable' because the pilgrims were travelling by rail, but it was a comment made from curious observation rather than disapproval.³⁷ For many of these writers, travel by steamer or railway might take away from the 'romance' of pilgrimage, but otherwise, the 'spirit' of the pilgrimage was the same. So argued the *Catholic Church Work* in 1869, whose author's primary concern was over destination, not the journey or mode of transport.³⁸ The same year, a reporter in the *Leeds Mercury* on preparations for a number of English pilgrimages, was able to hope that the pilgrims would actually be persuaded to 'boil his peas . . . [so that] his pilgrimage may be easy and pleasant' on the grounds that this would be beneficial to health, but this toleration was short-lived and the use of the story was soon being used to criticise.³⁹

The argument that 'boiling one's peas' was simply common sense was thus not uncommon in the two decades after 1850. In 1859 *Blackwood's Magazine* described it as an example of 'the philosophy of life'.⁴⁰ When the Rev. J. Erskine Clarke gave a public lecture in Derby the same year, he referred to the pilgrim and the peas as an example of

a sensible attitude to take to life's problems, or in this case, 'peas political, peas social, peas domestic, and peas personal'.⁴¹ In fact, the pilgrim who did *not* boil his peas was not seen as an exemplar of the perfect pilgrim, but 'the man who insists on being ill-used', essentially a form of virtue-signalling.⁴² Boiling peas was just common sense, of working for one's own success.⁴³ The practicality of the pilgrim who boiled his peas actually chimed well with modern Catholicism, as Catholics were keen to employ new technologies and methods to promulgate the faith and allow more people to engage in large-scale religious activities like pilgrimages, guild trips, and processions. A repeated line of defence against criticism was that the introduction of a degree of comfort did nothing to undermine the core purpose of the pilgrimage, or the commitment of the pilgrims. 'It is the shallowest of all shallow objections', complained William Dawson in *Church Work* in 1873, 'to assert they cannot be sincere because Mr Cook [the travel agent] boiled their peas'.⁴⁴

Others made the case that modern pilgrimage was not nearly as comfortable as critics would have people believe. A year before the pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, the *London Daily News* wrote in defence of railway pilgrimage, and the dangers it posed to both body and soul:

Even in these days a pilgrimage is fraught with danger. The railway companies step in, as it were, to boil the peas of the pilgrims shoes; but the pilgrims are subjected to grave crisis beyond that of blistered soles. There are ignorant and unbelieving men about, who scoff, and jeer, and sometimes buffet.⁴⁵

In contrast to almost all other writers in September 1873, a contributor to the conservative *Morning Post* suggested the example of the pilgrim and his peas was a 'precedent' for modern pilgrimage travel,⁴⁶ in that pilgrims had always tried to make their journeys comfortable if possible.

Railways and pilgrimage

While attitudes to the varying method of pilgrim travel remained reasonably tolerant and open until the end of the 1860s, in the following decade there was a marked change in the language used by writers, reporters and commentators, with all bar the Catholic press becoming critical of pilgrimages which used modern forms of transport. This was clearly seen in the shift in the way they referred to the story of the pilgrim and the peas. Several underlying reasons lay behind this development, many of which had been an issue for several decades but which came to the fore at this time.

The first was the rise in anti-Catholicism and fear of 'papal aggression' in the aftermath of the restoration of the hierarchy of England and Wales in 1850.⁴⁷ Concern over the prominence of Catholics in Britain had been growing since Emancipation in 1829, but the recreation of Catholic bishops and bishoprics fuelled anxieties that the freedoms given to Catholics were, in the words of Lord Winchelsea, 'but stepping-stone[s] towards the undermining of all the valued institutions of our country'.⁴⁸

Exacerbating this fear was the general rise of large-scale pilgrimages within and from Britain: these received considerable coverage in the local and national press and, because of the involvement of leading figures like the duke of Norfolk, were harder to dismiss as the activity of poor and predominantly immigrant-Irish Catholics who settled in the

wake of the Irish Famine of the later 1840s. It was not uncommon for these pilgrimages to be met with protests, or for people to submit letters of outrage to the papers about what they saw as idolatrous activity.⁴⁹

Also significant as an underlying factor, though not overly prominent in the pilgrimage reports which inform this article, was the rapid growth of the railways, and the concern and even fear that caused among sections of the population. Railways were seen as dangerous not just because of the speed of travel, but the perceived moral laxity of those who travelled on them. For the Victorians, Ralph Harrington claimed that the railways:

were also associated with pollution, destruction, disaster and danger, threatening and destabilisation and corruption of the social order, the vulgarization of culture, the despoilation of rural beauty, the violence, destruction and terror of the accident.⁵⁰

Such sentiments were at odds with the perception of pilgrimage. More broadly, criticism of the use of railways reflected wider Victorian concern over their use and a reaction against widespread industrialisation which had led to a harkening back to a golden age of simplicity. In the 1860s these worries were focussed on the idea of 'railway shock', the impact of the mechanical agitation caused by the movement of trains on the body.⁵¹ There was fear over the very speed of travel which was thought to have negative mental and physiological effects on passengers,⁵² and the disconnect between pilgrim and countryside which was part of a more general concern over the 'death of nature' in this period.⁵³ They were considered a particular moral risk for women,⁵⁴ an issue which was heightened in the 1890s when fears about nerves, nervousness, and the impact of railway travel on them peaked.⁵⁵

Another contributory factor was the growing belief that the pilgrim and the peas was a factual story describing a genuine medieval experience. 'Proper' pilgrims, critics claimed, chose to put hard peas in their shoes in imitation of these medieval forbears. The humour and satire of the original story was lost in the face of growing animosity towards mass pilgrimage as the press sought to mock the performance of Catholic pilgrims by claiming that it was in some way lacking the spiritual and physical rigour of medieval times. The belief that the story was a true one was emphasised by the decision of one reporter in the *Lancaster Gazette* to seek out proof for the veracity of Pindar's tale. In 1870, he claimed that he had discovered a Catholic printer who knew pilgrims that had walked with peas in their shoes. He believed Savoyards in particular undertook the practice, though at least he conceded that it was considered that a pilgrim who did boil their peas was wise to do so, rather than some sort of cheat.⁵⁶ In the space of a decade, the story then developed from being based on continental truth, to originating with the 'Canterbury pilgrims of old' and that 'Chaucer's pilgrim' was the pea boiler.⁵⁷ These were ideas that stuck.

It is against this background that the most important factor in shifting attitudes to pilgrim travel, and the one which saw the most obvious shift in tone in references to the pilgrim and the peas in print, took place. This was the English pilgrimage to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Paray-le-Monial, central France, held from 2–7 September 1873. It was intended to mark the bicentenary of St Marguerite Alacocque, the woman who had the vision of the Sacred Heart at Paray-le-Monial in the late seventeenth century. It was also a show of solidarity with co-religionists in France and Belgium who had recently

organised their own pilgrimages there, and a way to bring the Catholic community in Britain together.⁵⁸ The pilgrimage itself received considerable coverage in British newspapers because it was led by the country's highest-ranking secular Catholic, the duke of Norfolk. Moreover, the size of the pilgrimage was worthy of note. The organisational contribution of the tour operator Mr Cook, whose expertise played a role in several of the large-scale pilgrimages from and within Britain at this time, helped increase numbers. Finally, one newspaper dispatched a special correspondent to accompany the pilgrims who reported on it in fine detail, leaving the paper's readers with a vivid picture of the experiences endured, or perhaps enjoyed, by the pilgrims.⁵⁹

When news of the planned English pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial was first circulated the month before its departure, there was at first gentle mocking of the idea that the different classes of train tickets available to pilgrims were equitable to the degree of pea-boiling the pilgrims would endure.⁶⁰ The *Pall Mall Gazette* just found it 'decidedly funny' and 'ludicrous' that lofty religious sentiment was set alongside the pilgrimage committee's plans for 'comfort and economy'.⁶¹ However, as information about the plans for the organisation of the route by ship (across the Channel) and rail became more widespread, so too did criticism of the chosen method of travel. In the 6th September edition of *Punch*, a striking cartoon depicted a pilgrim in a tattered robe, staff in hand, addressing a gentleman in a check suit, nonchalantly lighting a cigar as he waited on a French railway platform. Below, the caption relayed their fictional conversation:

Ancient Pilgrim: 'Ah, fair sir, all is changed since *my* time! No peas in your shoes now – no toil – no robbery – no danger – everything made easy; in fact, quite a pleasant "excursion"'.
 Modern Pilgrim: 'No robbery? – No danger? Does it occur to you, my venerable friend, that *our* "pilgrimages" are made *by rail*?⁶²

Just after the pilgrims' departure, a writer for the *Liverpool Mercury* complained about the fact that the pilgrims were going by train:

Time was when it was made a matter of suffering and hardship as an expiation for sin. These pilgrims in first-class carriages, with Mr Cook to arrange for their sumptuous entertainment at each stage of the journey remind one of nothing so much as of the penitent who was ordered to walk to the shrine of Our Lady of Loretto with peas in his shoes, and who, before setting out, took the precaution to boil his peas.⁶³

A similar criticism appeared in *The Graphic* the following year after another large-scale pilgrimage, this time to Pontigny Abbey in Burgundy:

In the olden time, long before the days of Stephenson or Macadam, a pilgrimage was a toilsome and wearysome [sic] undertaking, even to such as were not ordered to travel with unboiled peas in their shoes . . . Your modern pilgrim jumps into a hansom, drives down to Charing Cross, shows his Cook's ticket on the platform, buys the last number of *Punch*, with which to beguile the intervals of devotion, and is forthwith whirled away in a first-class carriage towards the shrine he is about to visit.⁶⁴

This appeared in another year of considerable anti-Catholic aggravation, in part as William Gladstone's leaflet attacking the Catholic Church's recent declaration of papal infallibility effectively called for people to take a greater stand against the rise of Catholicism.⁶⁵ Together these factors meant that the more often references to pilgrims who were boiling their peas appeared, the more commonly it was employed as an implicit

criticism of modern Catholic practices. Indeed, it was repeated widely in the local and national press whenever large-scale pilgrimages took place, such as those to Lourdes (1883),⁶⁶ and St Winefride's Well (1894) in Wales.⁶⁷ The mockery and outright derision were intended to show Catholics were false in their faith, but it also reflected wider fears about the growing visibility and large-scale movement of Catholics around the country, and beyond it. The fear this engendered was voiced by the Scottish Methodist the Rev Wylie in 1886, when he told a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance at Ryde on the Isle of Wight that the recent railway pilgrimages were, in effect, a ready-made Catholic army like the crusaders of the middle ages.⁶⁸

This change in attitudes before and after the 1873 pilgrimage was also seen in the two nineteenth-century editions of Erasmus' sixteenth-century *Pilgrimage to Saint Mary of Walsingham and Saint Thomas of Canterbury* printed in 1849 and 1875. The first was published the year before the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales, at a time when Erasmus' work was 'an interesting account' of an old practice, a work that was about a historical curiosity which was barely practised in modern Britain. In the preface to the second edition printed two years after the English pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial, the new editor noted the changes which had occurred between the two editions:

At the time of its first publication *Pilgrimage*, at least in England, was a thing of the past, and was regarded by the translator as a matter of pure antiquarian interest. We have since witnessed a revival of the practice, and, though the modern pilgrim no longer goes afoot, but travels in special trains with Cook's tourist tickets, the fact is a somewhat remarkable one, and restores a point of interest to the words of Erasmus, which seemed to have faded from them by the lapse of centuries.⁶⁹

Between 1849 and 1875, the nature and prominence of Catholic pilgrimage in and from Britain increased dramatically. This change mirrored perfectly the claim made in 1874 in the pages of the inexpensive *Tinsley's Magazine* in response to recent pilgrimages: 'Into the broad question of whether pilgrimages are or are not an anachronism in these days . . . That has been practically settled by the two expeditions to Paray-le-Monial and Pontigny passing into the category of *faits accomplis*'.⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, articles in Catholic publications went on the defensive in the face of these criticisms. Reporting on the Paray-le-Monial pilgrimage, the *Catholic Progress* claimed that 'As an overt act of faith the railway pilgrimage is every bit as efficacious as the toilsome progression of former times, which is rarely compatible with the requirements of our present social system'.⁷¹ In an account of a convert's pilgrimage to Rome in 1893 *The Catholic World* asked:

Were there any substitutes in this modern pilgrimage for the peas in the shoes of old? Yes, decidedly. It might be supposed that Messrs. Cook & Co., the tourist agents who managed the practical details of the railway travel, would have followed an ancient device and would have boiled our peas for us. But they did not quite succeed in doing so. With the very best of management and organization, five or six hundred people could scarcely travel together in one company, even in these days, without there being quite enough to try the temper and endurance.⁷²

The Tablet, England's Catholic weekly, defended pilgrims who used modern methods to travel by highlighting the hardships they endured and their devotion. English pilgrims to Bruges in 1903 travelled part of the way in carriages, though it was pointed out by

Monsignor Vaughan that 'if they had no peas in their boots, they at least had the cobblestones of Bruges to walk upon',⁷³ while another writing in 1925 pointed out that what some pilgrims lacked in the way of peas they made up for in 'recollection and fervour'.⁷⁴ Even the non-Catholic press was inclined to be sympathetic. Once the harshest of the criticisms about the comparative comforts of modern pilgrimage had lessened in the first decades of the twentieth century, one writer in the *Manchester Courier* of early 1914 felt able to note that 'the fact that even boiled peas must have been unpleasant is overlooked'.⁷⁵

Conclusion

It was not until the 1930s that attitudes to how Catholics conducted their pilgrimages came full circle, as the prominence of railway pilgrimages (and the criticism they sparked) was replaced by an increasing emphasis on walking pilgrims in Catholic and non-Catholic writing. In the spring of 1932, *The Tablet* declared:

[the] new 'hiking' pilgrim, with scrip and staff, is a newer and commendable figure of our time; for he is more literally in line with his remote forbears in the faith.⁷⁶

This development was no doubt due to the new confidence in Catholic pilgrimage in the decades after the First World War, which saw the establishment, revival, or creation of dozens of pilgrimage shrines and routes in England, Scotland, and Wales. At the same time, the Catholic press changed tac in the way it described pilgrimage practice, focussing on activities that could be claimed as continuations of historical precedents, particularly if they could be considered medieval. This period also witnessed the frequent utilisation of pilgrimage language for Anglican activities such as the fund-raising Cathedral Pilgrimage of 1934, activities which blurred the lines between Catholic and non-Catholic practices and were deemed acceptable enough to be endorsed by the Anglican Church and the Crown.⁷⁷ The Catholic press no longer felt the need to defend how the faithful conducted pilgrimages, and the press no longer attacked Catholic pilgrimage with the same force so the story of the pilgrim and the peas appeared less often. Moreover, criticisms of non-walking pilgrimage in general were increasingly about class and less about faith, whether those criticisms appeared in the Catholic or non-Catholic press. Those who had the inclination, not to mention the leisure time and financing, to walk for days or weeks on pilgrimage were elevated above those who opted to travel by train. Their choice was cheaper and faster, but also probably the only option open to those whose pilgrimages were constrained by the lack of holiday entitlement and money to pay for more than what was, in many ways, a simple day trip.⁷⁸

The shift in the use of the story of the pilgrim and the peas over the course of the nineteenth century reflected growing concern over the triumphalist revival of Catholicism in Britain which was made public and visible by the large pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial held in 1873. In response, by disassociating Catholic pilgrims of the time from their medieval forbears, anti-Catholics were also forcing a break with the past which Catholics themselves were trying to emphasise and rebuild by restoring medieval cult centres, pushing for the canonisation of Reformation martyrs, and utilising medieval styles in visual displays of faith like church-building and decoration. They regularly harked back to medieval the era when Britain was Catholic. Their

opponents wanted the Catholic past to stay where it was. When pilgrimage was historical, a remnant of the middle ages, a humorous tale like the pilgrim and the peas was just that, and how people chose to go on pilgrimage was little more than a matter of curiosity. By the last three decades of the nineteenth century, pilgrimages had once again become a very visible expression of faith which Catholics themselves were now free to practice in public. It was fear over what this meant for the Anglican faith which led to attacks on pilgrimage, and with it a twisting of the pilgrim and the peas to fit a narrative of the corrupt and worldly nature of Catholic faith. In response, pilgrims were mocked using a well-known and popular but misunderstood story that was so widely known it could be used as a short-hand. In their defence, Catholics pointed out that it was a story about sense, and that their journeys were indeed difficult enough without resorting to dried legumes. Between them, they cemented an attitude to pilgrimage and the need to walk, rather than ride, which endured to influence (mis)conceptions of pilgrimage throughout the twentieth century.

Notes

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