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A LOOKING-GLASS FOR LONDON.—No. XXX
LONDON EXTREMES—HYDE PARK AND RAG FAIR.



[Hyde Park—Entrance from Piccadilly.]

"THE Park," as St. James's Park was formerly most usually termed, was a very favourite resort during the latter part of the seventeenth and the greater portion of the eighteenth centuries. Kensington Gardens, on the west side of Hyde Park, began to divide attention with it, as London spread westward: but from the reign of Charles II. to that of George II. the fashionables who walked in the "Park," came, not from Grosvenor or Berkeley Squares or Portland Place, but from the Strand and Fleet Street, from Holborn, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Bow Street. Pepys's Diary abounds, as might well be expected, with notices of the Park and its neighbourhood. "No frost, snow, nor east wind," says the 'Tatler' in 1711. "can hinder a large set of people from going to the Park in February, no dust nor heat in June." Gay, in his 'Trivia,' says (1712)

"The ladies gaily dress'd the Mall adorn
With various dyes, and paint the sunny morn."

And in a "Guide to London" of 1776, it is said, "The Park is the usual place of exercise in a morning for fine gentlemen and ladies, who resort thither to see and be seen; and the Mall is one of the finest gravel walks in Europe." The Mall was constructed by Charles II. for the purpose of playing a favourite game, which was performed with a ball and a club called a mall. On one occasion, Pepys says, "Thence to St. James's, where the Duke of York was playing in the Pell Mell."

Hyde Park was also a favourite resort; but lying

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quite exterior to London, fields intervening between it and the metropolis, it was frequented by the fashionable people in their then clumsily-constructed coaches, and by the bulk of the people on foot; each class being often drawn to it by the reviews and sports of which it was frequently the scene. The fashionable district at the extreme end of Piccadilly (on the east side of Hyde Park) preserves in its name, "Mayfair," a memorial of the time when the site was a field, and annually, in the month of May, a fair, surpassing even Bartholomew fair in rough sports and rude pastimes, was held in it. Pepys, before he had attained to that grand distinction of his life, which he records with so much satisfaction, the possession of a coach, mentions bargaining with the driver of a hackney coach to "carry us to Hyde Park, there being a general muster of the King's guards, horse and foot." He also went, at another time, "to Hyde Park by coach, and saw a fine foot race three times round the Park." Towards the close of his official life he speaks of going to the park, "where was very much company, and the weather very pleasant. I carried my wife to the lodge, the first time this year, and there, in our coach, eat a cheesecake, and drank a tankard of milk." The very last entry in his Diary records a fact which would be thought, at present, rather out of character with a drive in Hyde Park in one's own coach: "Thence to the World's End, a drinking house by the park, and [there] merry, and so home late."

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Hyde Park was formerly the scene of many "frolics"—one is recorded by Malcolm: "Several frolicsome gentlemen hired a hackney coach in 1724, to which they affixed six horses; the coachman and postilion they habited as kennel-sweepers or scavengers; and they placed as many shoe-boys as could cling to the vehicle behind as footmen, with their stools on their heads, and baskets of implements by their sides. Thus equipped they drove to the Ring in Hyde Park, and there entertained the company with this species of eccentricity."

To see Hyde Park at the present day, in its full glory, we must select a fine dry Sunday in that "season,"

"Whanne that April with his shoures softe,
The droughte of March hath pierced to the rote."

At such a time the "town" is generally full; every house in every fashionable street and square is occupied; and west-end hotel-keepers are protesting, with politest asseveration, that they can accommodate no more. Passing along Oxford Street, we may remark the striking contrast which the street presents with the scene we are about to witness. Shops are all shut, and business is suspended, except the business of omnibus men, chemists, and pastrycooks. How dry and comfortable for walking is the long length of pavement, when compared with its state of almost intolerable moisture and mud in winter!

Arriving at Hyde Park about four o'clock, and entering by Cumberland Gate, we cross the carriage road, and having gained the green sward, we may either take possession of a seat, if there is room, or standing, walking, or leaning over the rail, watch the spectacle which has now commenced. The throng of carriages and horses seems to increase every minute. The stream flows in a circle—yet it is a long time before we remark again the same carriages and the same faces. How gracefully these ladies manage their palfreys! and the servants on horseback behind, by what kind of instinct is it, that, even in the crowd, they contrive to preserve the true medium distance? Look at this chariot—one amongst a hundred. The London coachmaker points, with an eye of triumph, to its general outline, and its equipments in detail, and asks if such handsome vehicles can be made anywhere out of the metropolis—the very hammercloth has been chosen with a view to complete the picture, for see how beautifully it harmonises with the colour of the vehicle, and the coachman's livery! And the horses too—noble animals!—do they not seem proudly conscious of belonging to

"people of rank,
Who have jewels, and rings, and cash in the bank?"

But from what source is this stream of private carriages fed, for not a hackney-coach or cabriolet is permitted to enter the park? "The support of each carriage," says Colonel Sykes, "including horses, servants, liveries, duty, wear and tear, costs above 250*l.* per annum." At this rate, a man with an income of 1000*l.* a-year may keep a carriage, especially if he only hires one from the coachmaker for the period during which he is in "town." But of the owners of the large majority of these carriages now circling round Hyde Park, we can affirm, from certain almost undefinable circumstances, that their annual incomes are, each of them, not much under 5000*l.*, and not a few are above 20,000*l.* Recollect, too, that at this moment, though Hyde Park appears as if it held all the private carriages that London can possibly muster, the spacious road round Regent's Park is also covered with them, and to a great extent on each side of the entrance of the Zoological Gardens there is such a throng, awaiting their owners, that a passage can scarcely be obtained. It is almost useless, without satisfactory data, to guess at what may be the

amount of wealth represented by these exterior symbols of carriages, armorial bearings, liveries, and whatever else the assessed taxes take cognizance of: one thing may be easily affirmed, that no city, since the world began, ever held in combination so many proofs of enormous wealth as London presents to the eye.

It is now upwards of five o'clock, and the throng in Hyde Park is at its height. Dukes, merchants, barristers, and bankers are all intermingled; "parliament men" on horseback—for Sunday is a "dies non" in the senate—bow to ladies whose figures and complexion make Frenchmen and Prussians talk with rapture of the "beauties of England;" tall footmen, shining in scarlet and lace, exchange knowing looks with smart diminutive "tigers" in frock coats and top-boots, who cling behind bachelor-looking cabriolets. By and by an occasional carriage may be seen to break out of the circle, and disappear by one of the gates—for the hour of dinner draws nigh. At six o'clock there is a visible declension in the numbers; and after that time the bustle dies rapidly away.

We have taken no notice of the lookers-on in the Park, who also, though they cannot parade their private carriages here, have yet come to see and be seen. Many of these, each in his particular sphere, are as happy and as comfortable as a lord. Here now is a mechanic—a "body-maker"—one of that class of workmen who earn from three to five pounds a week by making the carriages we have just been admiring. Rough though his hands be, he is dressed in superfine broad cloth that his grandfather might have envied, and his wife looks handsome in silk, the rustle of which might almost make her great-grandmother turn with astonishment in her grave. "It would be improper to measure the wealth of a society by the enjoyments of its richest members alone. Dividing the inhabitants of London and Paris into the same number of ranks with respect to the consumption of wealth, every London rank enjoys more good things than its corresponding Parisian rank. A second-rate merchant, in London, spends at least twice as much as a second-rate Parisian merchant; a third-rate London advocate, spends, perhaps, three times as much as a first-rate Parisian advocate; a fourth-rate London attorney spends six times as much as a second-rate Parisian notary; a physician in London, a surgeon, a dentist, a tradesman of whatever description, a servant from the butler to the scullion, a mechanic in whatever line, a porter or a common labourer, spends more, and, in most cases, a great deal more, than one of a corresponding rank in the Parisian scale. But this is not all. In London there are more first-rate merchants, lawyers, and tradesmen, in proportion to second-rate ones, more second-rate ones in proportion to third-rate ones, and so on, all down the scale*."

Those who have already dined may leave the whole fashionable West-end dining; and issuing from Hyde Park by the screen-gate, cross the road and enter the Green Park. It is studded by hundreds enjoying themselves in the rays of the already setting sun. Passing the new palace, we enter St. James's Park. Here, again, are hundreds, walking amongst the shrubbery, seated on chairs by the water-side, or amusing themselves with the water-fowl. The French, who have yet as many false notions of the English as we had of them thirty years ago, fancy that the Londoners are much given to shutting themselves up on Sunday; but a bird's-eye view of the parks in April and May, or a wider survey of the suburbs in summer, would quickly remove the idea.

RAG FAIR is a fit-enough anti-type of Hyde Park, for the two places lie on the east and west of London; the one is associated with ideas of wealth, fashion,

* 'England and America,' vol. i. pp. 7, 8.

grace, and beauty, and the other with whatever is most sordid, mean, and base. Yet the contemplation of the two scenes would not be worth the time spent on it, if all that we derived was amusement from the contrast. In human society there will always be "all ranks and conditions of men," as in the forest there will be trees from the oak to the bramble. Yet civilization and education will not have performed their duty to society until the moral and physical incongruities of large cities are swept away, and such places as St. Giles's and Rag Fair have no existence but in the memory of some old citizen, or on the pages of an antiquated guide-book.

It is a long walk from Hyde Park to Rag Fair. If we leave the park by Grosvenor Gate, passing through Grosvenor Street, crossing Bond Street and Regent Street, and through some of the narrow streets on the east side of the latter, we shall arrive at the "Seven Dials." Gay says, in his 'Trivia'—

"Where famed St. Giles's ancient limits spread,
An inrail'd column rears its lofty head;
Here to seven streets seven dials count the day,
And from each other catch the circling ray:
Here oft the peasant, with inquiring face,
Bewilder'd, trudges on from place to place."

The "inrailed column" with its seven dials has been removed, but the seven streets still open into the place where it stood, and perplex the stranger by their maze-like appearance. A filthy, gin-drinking, and obnoxious-looking neighbourhood it is; fit companion for the purlieus of St. Giles's, but an unseemly contrast to the not very distant magnificence of the West-end. Monmouth Street, that ancient storehouse of old clothes and old shoes, is in the immediate neighbourhood of the Seven Dials. If St. Martin's Lane, which runs up from Charing Cross, were extended, it would be carried right through the Seven Dials; it is a pity but that projects often talked about could be carried into execution, and that the nests of the Seven Dials and St. Giles's were ploughed up to make way for broad, spacious streets.

Getting into Drury Lane, and going down to the Strand, we may look at Holywell Street. Holywell Street is a narrow lane, like a slice taken off the Strand. The old clothesmen, who are its chief occupants, are really a respectable-looking generation, compared with the residents in the same line of Field Lane and Rag Fair. But they are a troublesome generation, and have a keen eye to recommend their wares to gentlemen whose clothes have seen service. Sir Walter Scott thought it a high compliment to his appearance that they did not attack him in his passage through their domains. *Passing through Fleet Street, ascending Ludgate Hill, proceeding along Cheapside, and then striking off towards the Tower, we arrive at Rosemary Lane.*

Rosemary Lane! how did such a filthy place get so fragrant an appellation? It must have been when it had "a hedge row of elm trees on each side, with bridges and easy stiles to pass over into the fields, very convenient for the citizens to walk, shoot, or otherwise recreate themselves." Rosemary Lane, *alias* Rag Fair, strikes off from the end of the Minories, not far from the Tower and the Royal Mint. The continuation of the lane, which runs through the heart of Whitechapel, is called Cable Street and Back Lane.

It is the lower portion of Rosemary Lane, from the Minories upwards, that is known all over the world as Rag Fair. Yet Rag Fair is not immortal; its glory, like that of many other things of the olden time, waxes dim. It was otherwise when gentlemen wore huge wigs, gold and silver-laced suits, "blue or scarlet silk stockings, with gold or silver clocks; lace neckcloths; square-toed, short-quartered shoes, with high red heels, and small buckles; very long and formally-curved

perukes, black riding-wigs, bag-wigs, and nightcap-wigs; small three-cornered hats, laced with gold or silver galloon, and sometimes trimmed with feathers;" and, to crown all, the never-failing sword dangling at the heels. Then many a faded dandy of his day, whose credit with the tailor was broken up, and many a poor coxcomb of pretension, trying to ape his superiors in externals, were fain to sneak to Monmouth Street, which was a refuge for the broken-down, but not for the destitute. Even at a more recent period, when "cloth became the general material for the coat, and velvet, silk, satin, and embroidery, were reserved for court dresses, or waistcoats and breeches only*," the dearness of cloth made Rag Fair a very great convenience to people of limited means. But now, thanks to machinery, and to that taste which has produced such a simplicity in male attire, nobody but the very poorest need resort to Rag Fair.

And what is Rag Fair? A collection of old clothes' shops, on each side of a dirty narrow street, with tables and baskets set up on the edge of the pavement, where almost everything second-hand is sold—old coats, old shirts, old handkerchiefs, and old hats; old shoes that have been familiar with the cobbler's hand; old Tuscan and Dunstable straw bonnets that have been bathed in brimstone smoke again and again; old silk hats with the nap stripped off, and their glossy black turned into a "whity-brown." But though wearing apparel is the staple article of commerce, there is but little objection, in this great mart, to deal in anything by which a penny may be made. Crockery of all kinds; pots and pans; you can get a second-hand dinner dish, or an old pair of bellows. Not a rag is lost with the Rag Fair merchants—scarcely an old rusty nail allowed to go astray. Walk up the lane, and mark the keen glancing eyes on the look-out for a customer, and how instinctively they detect him! If you wish to have nothing to say to the "merchants," show no halting irresolution, or one, with gentle coaxing violence, may clap you up in his den, and it will go hard if you escape without buying something. Yet keen "Whitechapel sharps" though they are, they will not insult you if you give the slightest indication of a determination not to be insulted; you may even make a bargain in Rag Fair, if you can, and know how. The place is unquestionably a great convenience to that numerous class whose wages are very low, and whose capacity or ambition does not range very high. It was amusing to us the other day, to hear an Irishwoman, the mistress of a table covered with old shoes, saying, in a very bland and really kind manner, to a barefooted visitor of her stall—"Sure, you may try on a pair, and if they don't fit you, there is no harim—you need'nt buy them!"

Rag Fair was formerly the "Stock Exchange" of the gatherers of second-hand goods; there were regular exchange hours, and "business" was done quite in a business way. This is still the case to a considerable extent. That numerous body who traverse lanes, alleys, streets, and suburban districts, and barter crockery for old clothes, carry their collections to Rag Fair. There is also a large place, where hundreds of straw bonnets of every hue, suspended by strings, oscillate like pendulums—this is dignified by the name of the "East London Bazaar."

The "slop-dealers" of Whitechapel carried on an extensive trade during the war, when the Thames was crowded with ships, and money was scattered about by the sailors in their reckless way. The "slop-dealers" boarded vessels as they arrived, bargained with the men and petty officers, carried off their old clothes, and supplied them with what was at least new to them. Trade is still carried on in the same way, but not in the same

* See 'History of British Costume,' Library of Entertaining Knowledge.

stirring spirit that it was—the sailors, too, frequently step ashore to make their own bargains.

Nowhere but in London can a man furnish his house or his person at so cheap or so dear a rate; nowhere else do articles of furniture or dress undergo such strange mutations, or, if able to speak with a man's voice, could tell such wonderful eventful histories. The pier-glass which in Brook Street or Grosvenor Square has often revealed, in silent but eloquent language, the charms of a beauty to herself, may come at last, its frame re-gilt, to decorate the parlour of a greengrocer in Goodman's Fields. The suit which has been paraded in Bond Street or Regent Street, hangs now in Holywell Street or Rag Fair, and passengers are asked, "will ye buy? will ye buy?" The hat which has covered the head of a duke, may now adorn a porter's brows on Sunday. An economical man, not very fastidious, may furnish his house, from kitchen to drawing-room, without paying a visit to an upholsterer.

But we have not yet mentioned "marine stores," those extraordinary dens, which abound in the east of London, as spacious show-rooms and magnificent-looking furniture shops do in the west. Externally, they are the most repulsive-looking places in the trading line a man can enter. They are hung round with fragments of old rusty iron, and other matters, which one would think, at first sight, not worth picking off the street; yet some of these places have large premises filled with valuable property. In Colquhoun's time great complaint was made of these "marine stores," as being repositories of stolen goods. To what extent the charge is applicable in the present day, it does not become us to say. Not very long ago, one of the Thames police magistrates, in adjudicating on a case, expressed an emphatic wish that one-half of the marine store dealers "were hanged." It is doubtless to these places that the stolen pewter-pots of the publicans are carried,

and that the lead stripped from the roofs of houses, or pilfered brass and iron, are here converted into cash. But it would be wrong to stigmatize a whole body; there can hardly be a doubt but that some of the marine store dealers carry on a legitimate although a heterogeneous traffic.

We may finish with a few obvious remarks. How different would the sensations be of two visitors of London, if the one arrived, for the first time, by the great "western road," on a Sunday evening in the "season," looked in upon Hyde Park on his way, and took up his lodgings in Dover Street or Piccadilly; the other landing below the Tower on a wet, disagreeable day, carrying his own portmanteau, in spite of the importunities of porters, stumbling on Rosemary Lane in his way, and glad to take up a lodging in a public house on Tower Hill or in the Minories! Fancy them meeting in the Strand to compare notes! "Saw ye ever a more magnificent city?" might the one exclaim; "enormous, wealthy, amazing: the world is concentrated here, and its choicest glories are to be seen in Hyde Park." "Hold your tongue," might the other grumble; "the one-half of the world does not know—not even comprehend—how the other half lives; and it is clear, from your language, that you have not seen Rag Fair."

Taking London as a whole, the words of our great dramatic poet, with a slight substitution, may be justly applied to it:—

"How rich, how poor, how abject, how august,
How complicate, how wonderful, is London."

We have endeavoured to trace a few of the out-door characteristics of this great metropolis. If this class of characteristics is almost exhaustless, how wide is the range of those peculiarities which are contained in the quarter of a million of dwellings of which London is composed! It is for the moralist to analyze and arrange these; ours has been a humbler task.



[Rag Fair.]

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DURING the present year Gutenberg, printing was erected native city August, and days, a fest upon the o auguration In the volu Magazine' p. 422), we history of th of Mayence. the honour o the inventio If the opinio expressed i yence were sive, abund been since h show that G all the hono ceived, and i fected, an a duced the n upon the des It is unnee peat these p festival of M many hund assembled, f Europe, to inventor of pretensions v although m patriots of C were present. of Gutenber den (of whic engraving), v an universal ism. Neve of a vast m a more eleva never were th lect celebr fervour. Th enberg, who ty the grati was opened ions of pop as have bee greet the car Vol. VI.