

HOME PARTIES OF THE POOR.

It is much to be regretted that the poor in London and other large towns, crowded together as they often are in narrow streets and housed in miserable squalid dwellings, should be entirely cut off from the enjoyable influences of the country. We sometimes hear of town children who have never seen green fields or wild-flowers growing in hedgebanks. The horizon of these unfortunate beings is bounded by the stoned-paved streets



and the walls of the narrow alley which contains the only home they have ever known. Such a life seems almost inconceivable to those who have always possessed a home in the midst of pure country air, and it is to those who are thus situated that I propose to suggest what opportunities are given them for scattering rays of purest sunshine into the lives of poor lowly town-dwellers.

I have in my mind an ancient mansion about twelve miles from London, surrounded by a wide common, and shut off from all noise and dust by an encircling belt of trees. On one side of the house the ground stretches away into far blue distances. The outline of an old abbey can be detected on the horizon, and the red roof of a house peeps up here and there, else there is nothing to suggest the neighbourhood of a great city. The scene is an absolutely peaceful one, and the only sounds to be heard are the songs of birds and the lowing of cattle browsing knee-deep in their rich pastures. The dwellers in this mansion long to make other people happy, and in the course of the summer many hundreds of the poor toilers in London are invited to leave the noise and turmoil of their home-life and spend a long day amongst green pastures and trees.

In a large field adjoining the garden there is a mission room which will seat several hundred people. Here preparation is duly made for the expected guests, not a little care and system being required to ensure their comfort. Long tables are covered with clean white cloths, and are prettily decked with small palms, ferns, and

vases of flowers. Joints of cold meat, salads, vegetables, fruit puddings, tarts, cheese and bread are ready for the mid-day repast. When the brakes arrive the people find arrangements in a large barn, which enable them to leave their wraps, wash their hands after the dusty drive, and sit down to their meal feeling refreshed and cool. The house-servants and land-steward are ready, when grace has been said,

to lend their aid in waiting on the guests, and appetite is not found wanting, for the viands look attractive, and with abundance of lemonade for the thirsty, the meal is generally enjoyed to the full. The ladies of the family see that all are well supplied, and then they are ready to escort the whole party of perhaps a hundred or more through the pleasure-grounds. There is much to be seen that is instructive as well as enjoyable. When a fine bed of hemp-plants, twelve feet high, is pointed out, the uses of the hemp in yielding fibre for rope-making, for coarse towelling, and other fabrics is explained, and attention called to the female plants, which alone yield the hempseed so attractive to many birds. Large plants of castor-oil are sure to be noticed for their handsome

broad leaves, which, as is now supposed, are those which are mentioned as gourds in the Book of Jonah.

The word *Palmerist* is in the margin of Jonah iv. 6, and *Palma Christi* is one of the names of the castor-oil plant, the remarkably rapid growth of which, even in England, renders it likely it may be the plant referred to by the prophet.

The bright blue flowers of the flax, growing in a mixed bed of perennials, are pointed out, and the women listen with interest while it is explained that the tough fibres of its stem yield the finest linen as well as the thread which they use in their daily stitching. An oak-tree from Palestine next claims attention, its prickly holly-like foliage being very different to the English oak.

An enjoyable hour is spent in gardens and woods, and then some of the party decide to go down to the lake and enjoy some boating, others have a game of bowls or tennis, and the remainder, who may be less capable of exertion, are taken to see the conservatory, where, besides bananas, palms, and tropical flowers of many kinds, two beautiful Madagascar lemurs (a silky-haired species of monkey) are to be seen. The friendly animals delight to be petted, and hold out their little furry hands to receive the dainties offered them. A pair of tortoises are looked at with some apprehension, one woman being afraid to pass them, and asking, as she holds back her dress, "Will they fly at me?"

Even when assured of their peaceable

nature she evidently has still a lurking fear that the uncanny thing may prove dangerous, and gladly finds refuge in the drawing-room, where all the party have assembled to have a leisurely walk through the house and see the pictures and curios.

Before they pass on, however, it is the habit to give each one a spray of lavender-water on face and hands, a refreshing surprise on a hot day. In the outer and inner halls are seen all kinds of stuffed birds and animals, a polished tortoise-shell from Japan, measuring three feet across, the skull of a gavial from the Ganges, and some finely executed wood-carving, which lines the staircase halls. Attention is drawn to the motto, which is in truth the key-note of the house, and has therefore a prominent position facing the hall-door—

"Christ is the Master of this house,
The Unseen Guest at every meal,
The silent Hearer of every conversation."

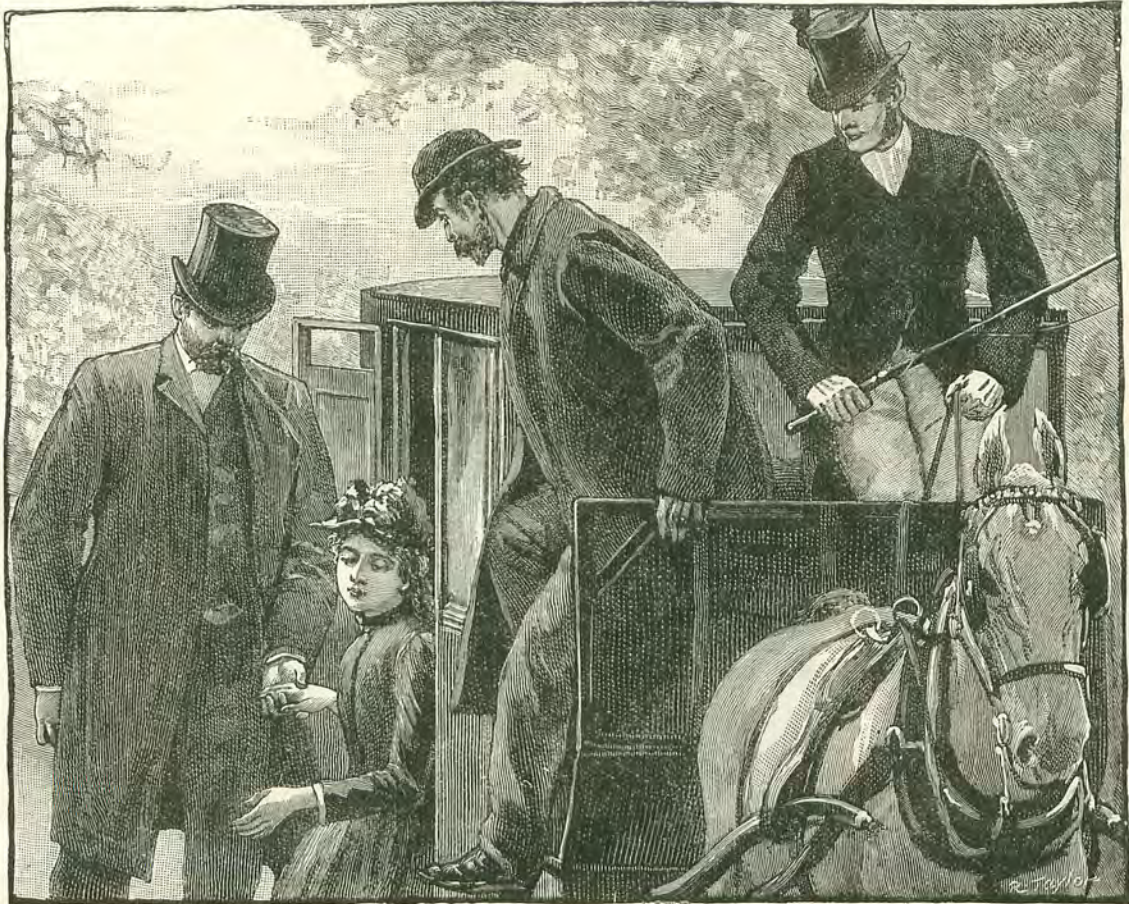
Passing through the library and dining-room the party enter the museum. A large table in the centre is covered with many interesting natural history specimens, too numerous to describe here in detail. The walls are hung with glass-fronted cases, one containing a hundred skulls of small animals and birds, and quite a long discourse might be given upon the shape and use of each kind of beak there shown; the hooked bill of the eagle and owl, formed for tearing flesh, the broad beak of the vegetable-feeding swan and goose, the sharp-pointed heron's bill, and that of the curlew and other bog-feeders very long and curved, and finished with a spongy process at the end to enable the bird to feel and secure its insect prey. All these are explained. Indian, Chinese, and American butterflies are seen in other cases, beautiful and curious shells, fossils, models of foreign fruits, and many other specimens all tending to raise the thoughts of the visitors to the Divine Creator's marvellous wisdom in fitting each animal, bird, or insect to its own special use in the economy of the world. An object-lesson case claims special attention. This is intended to aid teachers in National and other schools to keep the interest of children fixed upon the object of study by enabling them to hold in their hands whilst teaching a specimen of the object which is being explained.

The case contains a varied collection of metals, stones, woods, minerals, bones, in fact a specimen of almost anything that can be obtained and hung up in the available space; and round the sides are small brown-holland bags containing various kinds of seeds and grains.

In the adjoining case are small specimens of all obtainable drugs used to make medicines, such as the various barks that form quinine, Turkey rhubarb-root, castor-oil seeds, aloes, colocynth, etc. Some specimens of the beetles used to make blisters, the cochineal insects, sometimes needed for colouring purposes, various gums and seeds. All these are examined, and many and surprising are often the questions asked about the different specimens and their uses.

The chief object of the visit to this museum is, however, to afford an opportunity of speaking upon the collection of Palestine curios which occupies one end of the large table.

When all the party are conveniently placed for hearing and seeing, one of the ladies is in the habit of giving a little informal address upon the manners and customs of people in the East, in such a manner as to show their bearing upon many passages in the Bible, which without such knowledge are not easily understood. Holding up a bunch of carob-beans or "locusts," as they are often called,



A BLIND GIRL'S HOLIDAY.

she will explain that they were probably the food of St. John the Baptist, also that they were the "husks that the swine did eat" in the parable of the Prodigal Son, being still much used for feeding cattle at home and abroad. The seeds within the pods are all about the same size, and were formerly used as weights by the jeweller, hence we get the term carat corrupted from carob.

A murex-shell gives an opportunity of speaking of Lydia, the seller of purple, who obtained the dye from the creature living in the shell, and having dyed a pound weight of wool would be able to obtain thirty pounds for it when offered to the Roman merchants who traded at Philippi.

This shell and a model of the roll of the Jewish Law both give good openings for introducing the gospel message, since, when our Saviour preached in the Synagogue at Capernaum, and spoke the glad tidings of salvation to the people of His "own city," He must

have found the verse in Is. lxi. in a similar roll, so different from the modern Bible we are accustomed to use. A real "alabaster box," from Jerusalem always excites interest, its long vase-like form being so different from our idea of a box. An hour soon slips away in such pleasant occupation, and though many declare they could "stay all night to listen," yet, tea-time having arrived, the ladies only stop to read the text of the museum, "The merciful and gracious Lord hath so done His marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance." And then they lead the way to the mission-room, where tea and bread-and-butter, cake and tarts are ready for the hungry guests. Afterwards all meet on the lawn for hymn-singing and short helpful addresses, suited to the kind of party it may happen to be, whether a mother's meeting, or a Bible class of girls, factory workers, or aged poor of both sexes. After a simple earnest prayer that all may be blessed and helped by

the day's refreshment, a bouquet of flowers and a little booklet are given to each person, and in the cool of the evening they return to town, to remember for many a day this pleasant break in their monotonous lives of toil in the great city.

I am often led to wonder that such parties as I have described are not more frequently given; the pleasure they afford to the givers is indescribable, the gratitude expressed is out of all proportion to the benefit rendered; each little act is thought so kind and made so much of that one is apt to feel ashamed that more has not been done in the past in thus trying to make others happy.

The scale upon which we can receive the poor to our homes matters little, but all can do something to brighten the lives of those who live around them, and if this paper leads some readers to think "What can I do to make the world happier for my living in it?" its end will have been attained. E. B.

