THE GARDEN AND THE GREAT WHEEL.

PLAY IN LONDON.

THE GARDEN.

WITH PICTURES BY JOSEPH PENNELL.

PARTLY because James Thomson happened once to sing of London as «the city of dreadful night,» its name has become a synonym for gloom. Its fogs have passed into a proverb; its people's spleen has been made a byword. And yet the sun does shine there sometimes. « . . . El Dorado plain, the golden city!» another of its poets has been known to call it on a mild October afternoon. Certainly no one labors so industriously as the Londoner to be gay. Was it not to «merry London» that the Thames brought Spenser and his «gentle birds»?

All history, too, is against the legend of this perpetual sadness. Why, in the past you cannot separate London from its gardens and pleasant playgrounds. When you look back to the old days, you see nothing but gay ladies and gallants forever walking in the Mall, as one meets them in the comedy of Congreve and in the painting of Gainsborough. From Pepys to Corinthian Tom, there was no one with the least claim to fame who did not in his turn find «Vauxhall's garden of romance» «mighty divertising.» Was it not there that Gillray and Rowlandson went for their models? Was it not there Addison carried his Sir Roger de Coverley, Fielding his Amelia, Goldsmith his Chinaman in the good company of Beau Tibbs? Was it not there that Joe Sedley drank the rack punch, without which we should never have had the story of «Vanity Fair»?—there Pendennis passed in his pride, the blushing Fanny on his arm? Was it not there—? But if I go on with the list of its heroes I shall never be done, since during little less than two hundred years everybody about town, at one time or another, crossed the river to South London and the glories and delights of Vauxhall. And it had its rivals, Ranelagh and Marylebone, where even the great Dr. Johnson was known to unbend and take his pleasure. And later came Cremorne—Cremorne, so domestically decorous by day, so riotous by night; Cremorne, where, one evening of fireworks, rockets fell with a splen-

dor that Mr. Whistler transferred to his canvas for all time, and in so doing prepared the way for the most extraordinary episode in the history of modern art.

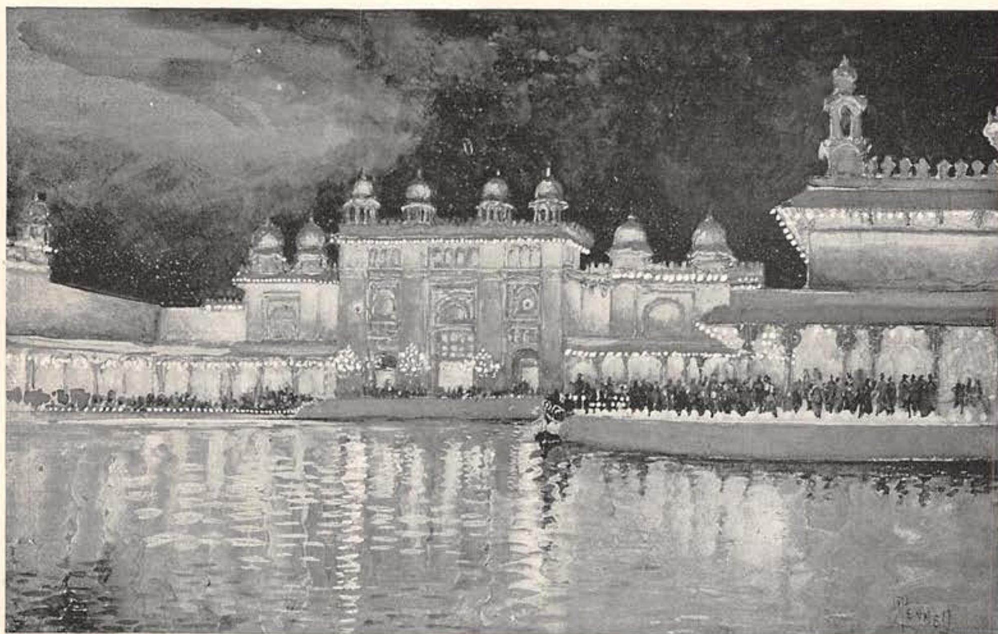
Everybody knows what the old garden was like,—Thackeray has seen to that,—with the hundred thousand lamps always lighted, the fiddlers who made ravishing melodies, the singers, the dancers, the Mme. Saquis on the slack rope ascending to the stars, the hermit in the illuminated hermitage, the dark walks so favorable to lovers, the pots of stout, the dinners and suppers—in a word, the sort of combination of café, music-hall, restaurant, and Fourth of July that nowhere else has been brought to such perfection; that to Sir Roger had seemed, long before Thackeray's day, «a kind of Mahometan paradise.» But what everybody does not know so well is that London still has its garden, called by another name, to be sure, ignored by Murray and Baedeker, and offering another program, —Mme. Saquis and hermits gone from it apparently forevermore,—but precisely the same in principle and practice.

Vauxhall has vanished; Cremorne sends up no more rockets skyward to fill the night with beauty; the Crystal Palace is only for the suburb and the country cousin: but every summer Earl's Court has its exhibition—an exhibition only by courtesy, only out of deference to the present fashion of gathering our knowledge, or pretending to, while we play. One year it was called Italian, and there were macaroni and Chianti in the restaurants, and a nice new pasteboard Forum. Another year it was German, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of *Schnitzel* and *Wurst*. Then it was American, for a change, and cow-boys and Red Indians swaggered across the scene, and soda-water and maple-sugar figured on the menu. Now it happens to be Indian, with a fine Oriental flavor; but by the time this is published it will be something else, and it really matters very little. The exhibition, attributed to any nation, would be as gay. Nobody cares, save, perhaps, a few tradesmen and mummers, who smell the commercial battle from afar. It is an open secret that the semblance of a show is there merely to court avoidance; the years, in passing, have turned it into a big bazaar, but not even in this guise can it prove the chief attraction.

No; the great thing, the only thing that counts, is the garden, where one may walk under pleasant trees; where one may ape the Continental, and drink tea or coffee at little tables,—but mostly tea, in capacious pots, —to the accompaniment of thick slabs of cake; where one may be still more un-English, and eat one's dinner outdoors—not like a wild beast in a cage, as in the old «box» at Vauxhall, but in company, on a low, broad veranda, where there are side-shows more diverting than Pepys ever dreamed of; where one may loaf away the summer evening, listening to music which is at least as good as the honest Briton likes it. For the truth is, the garden furnishes just that form of amusement which Mr. Henry James has lamented was not to be found in London; and so long as it is open one need not, as he thought, «give up the idea of going to sit somewhere in the open air, to eat an ice and listen to a band of music.» Only the amusement must be shared with so big a crowd that one will have to scramble for a chair, engage a dinner-table full twelve hours beforehand,

A CAFÉ.

and struggle to get home by underground or bus as furiously as the mob fights to push into the pit of a popular theater. To provide the Englishman with a crowd, to give him the chance to use his elbows, is to convince him that he is enjoying himself. And the old garden's questionable features, its revelers, its jockeys and courtezans and gamblers,



THE LAKE.

where are they? Where are the snows of yester-year? All gone, with other times and other morals. The world of Earl's Court and Kensington has taken the exhibition under its protection, and there sits in stately splendor, a magnificent example of respectability, within an inclosure humorously called the Welcome Club, because admission is refused to all but the elect. Where the West End condescends to spend its afternoons and evenings, there, surely, every one may venture in safety by night as by day. Indeed, there is a strong domestic element about the exhibition: it is a place for the family, a playground for the decorous.

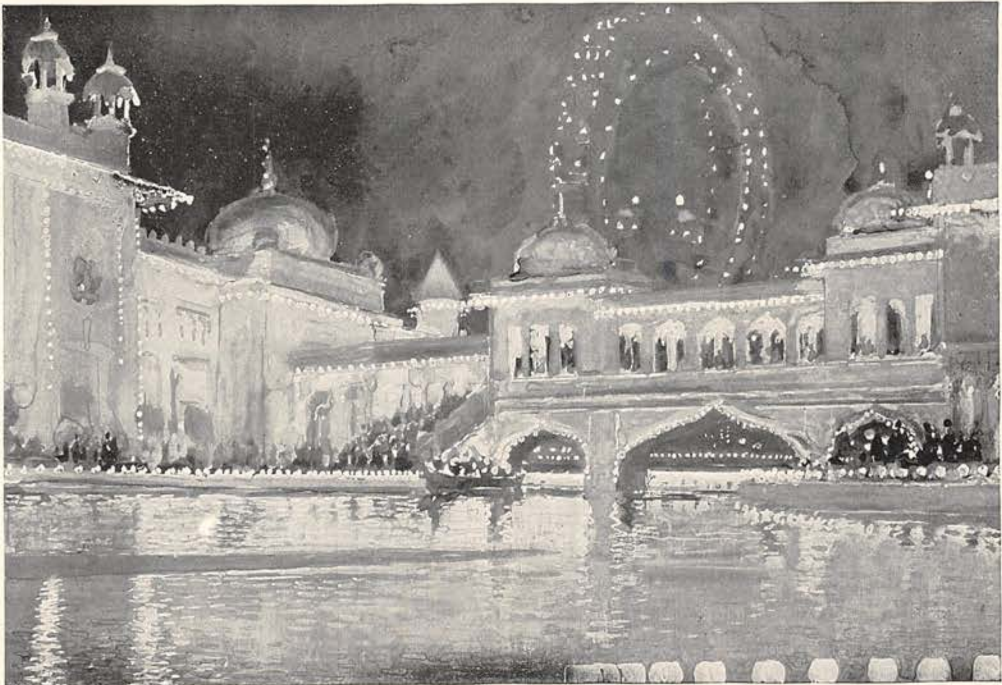
The best of it is, though perhaps no one has time to think so, the garden makes a very beautiful background for the spectacle of all London at play. The chance that decreed it should be Indian for an interval was kind—a pleasant excuse for shining white buildings and shadowy shops, for camels and elephants and jinrikishas, for color and costume,—for a fine, barbarous picturesqueness, as unexpected in the midst of Earl's Court propriety as a stray bit of the West End would be in the heart of the desert. Of course Chicago gave the hint for the first white court shutting in a fair sheet of water, though the East supplied the model for its palaces. The Oriental architecture, faithfully followed, has a light elegance, a fantastic grace, a strong element of romance; and, what is more, the exhibition is Oriental throughout, is all in keeping. Even in broad daylight, when shams cannot be concealed,—when the ladies of the harem looking through the latticed windows are palpably canvas, and the great city in the distance is as plainly built by the scene-painter,—the court is not without charm; but in the tender twilight it melts into such stuff as dreams are made of, only to be transformed at the hour when lamps are lighted into an enchanted Samarkand.

The village streets beyond have still more slender claim to novelty. Have we not had Old London, Old Antwerp, Old Hungary, and the Pleasance? Has not the game been played already a dozen times and more? But what then? If the game is pretty and well played, are we to scorn it simply because it is not new? Besides, this is not a game at all, but the thing itself. Old London was a fake; there was no help for it. The Pleasance was a jumble. But these are real Eastern streets; these are the real low white houses of the people; and the carvings and beautiful doorways that adorn them were designed and wrought many years ago under an Eastern sky. This is a real mosque, from which the muezzin calls to prayer, and which no Moslem enters without dropping his slippers at the door, as in Bombay or Benares. These are real shops, each a motive for a Decamps or a Delacroix; and within are real native weavers and potters and jewelers at work, when not

staring at the gaping crowd with that superb, impenetrable calm which the European could never hope to emulate; and these are real jinrikishas, pulled by little black, swift-footed, bare-legged coolies; real elephants and camels managed by their turbaned keepers. Who that has been in the East will not tell you how not until, in some dark, narrow bazaar, he saw the first train of camels from the desert could he realize he was actually in the land of Harun-al-Rashid? And camels, though they carry on their backs solemn British matrons, top-hatted city clerks, red-coated soldiers, and stolid English girls, still bring the East with them wherever they go. I never pass the well about which they are grouped when not lurching up and down the streets, without vague thoughts of the Bagdad and Damascus I have never seen; just as Heine could not look at the lascar sailors at the India docks without thinking of the long-necked camels and gold-covered elephants of Scheherazade's story.

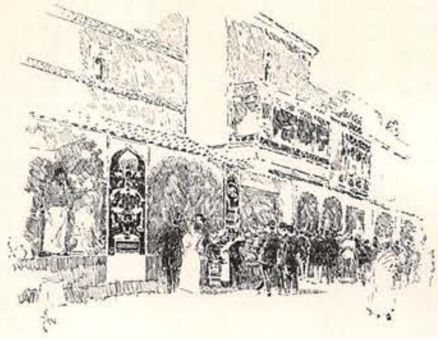
It is true that in these Eastern streets, as in my thoughts, there is a delightful confusion of countries, a fine indifference to geographical limits. Short as is each one, it runs through Burma, Ceylon, and Hindustan before ever the end is reached. At one moment you hear a charming creature in a pink turban inviting you: «Dis way to de Bombay t'eater! Snek trick! Baskit trick! Mongoose trick! Moonkey trick! Twenty-five-year-ol' moonkey performin' in de Bombay t'eater! Now commencin' in de Bombay t'eater!» The next, one of your own countrymen, with a good Yankee twang, asks you to come to hear the Chevalier and Dan Leno of Mandalay; while at his side a row of little smiling, ogling Burman dancers, with flowers in their hair, break out into discordant shrieks of «Ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay!» and a Burman giant in pasteboard grins terribly, and waves uncouth hands above their heads. Here a Hindu, as yellow as a mulatto, in irreproachable dress-suit, and with all the languor and superciliousness of the English university in his voice, welcomes you to the Temple of Nirvana; and there an English manager, his eloquence failing to do justice to the row of Cingalese dancers with chocolate skins shining from under a network of beads, lifts up a two-year-old baby who babbles, smokes a cigarette, blows the smoke through her little brown nose, and gurgles her way straight into the heart of the great British public, always susceptible to the blandishments of babies, whether on the Academy walls, a Christmas supplement, or a poster.

This is the patter that greets the Pepys or Pendennis of to-day as he saunters through



THE INNER COURT.

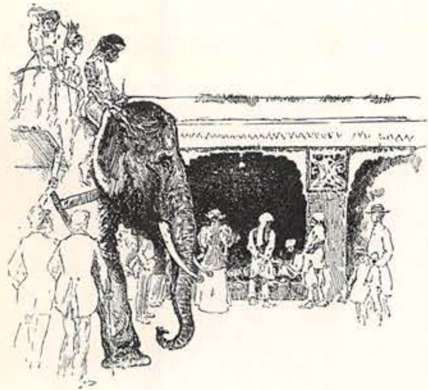
A Street.



The Bazaar.

Outside a Shop.

Indian Shops.

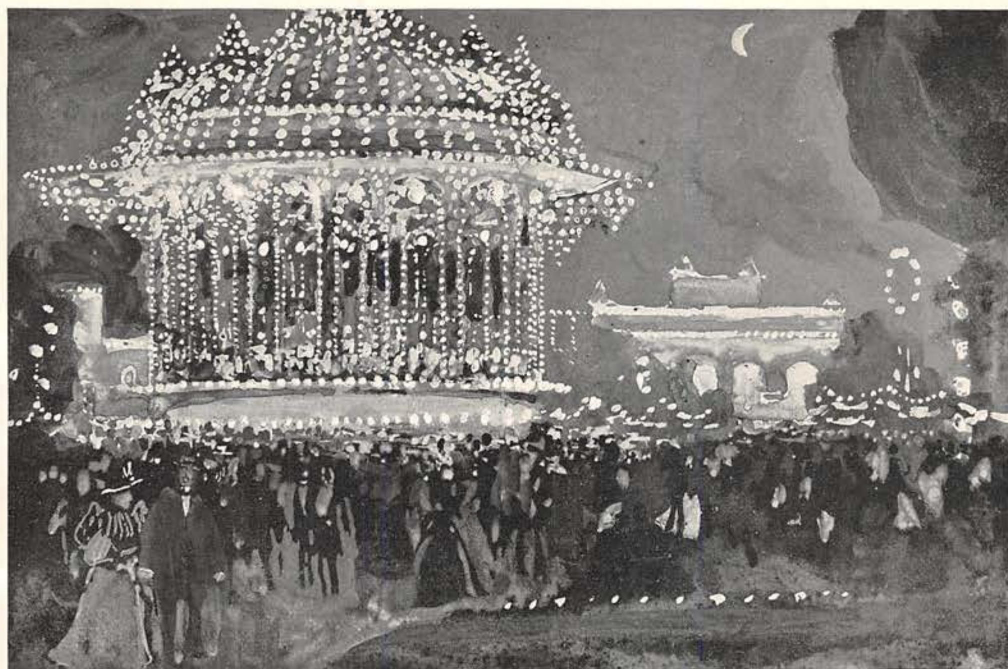


The Passing Elephant.

By the Burmese Theater.

A Camel-ride.

Riding in a Jinrikisha.



THE BAND-STAND.

the garden. And so there is patter to listen to, so there is something to stare at. Burman dancers, flower-crowned and smiling, answer as well as any «Faustinetta, fair and showy, warbling an air from Arsinoë.» A Hindu in pink turban proves as irresistible as the «jockey in the Yellow Coat, that has a Farm-Yard in his Throat.» For no spectacle of itself alone would bring him here, though so many are provided, though the theater offers a performance as gorgeous as our old friends the Kiralfys can make it; but always, in the end as in the beginning, it is the garden that delights him—the garden turned by time into as sacred a national institution for the Englishman as his beer and his chop. And when, in the gathering dusk, the transformation scene begins, pleasure is complete; for you might as well have a circus without a clown as the garden without an illumination. Even Dr. Johnson rebelled and incited to riot when, at Marylebone, a prudent management would have put off the fireworks on a wet night! Call the garden Vauxhall, or Cremorne, or Earl's Court Exhibition, and it must still depend for its chief triumph upon the last feature in the day's program. This it is which draws Kensington and Earl's Court, just as the first blaze of a burning house collects the idlers of a town. But indeed I do not know where an illumination is better ordered, with at once greater splendor and greater restraint. There is no tawdriness of color, no vulgarity of excess, no scattering of effects. Chance may have led to the simplicity of the scheme, but there is no doubt that harmony is the result. The simpler lights give beauty to the long lines and sweeping curves of paths that are commonplace enough by day. They transfigure every shabby band-stand into a pavilion or pagoda of glowing gold; they make that wonderful fairy-land of the first white court; and they hang in the air, a mystic circle of burning stars, where the great wheel slowly turns, a beacon of fire for all the garden to see.

It is in front of this enchanted picture that the Londoner spends his summer evenings. When one first comes to his town, and walks down the Strand or up Piccadilly in the dim gas-light, one may sigh for the brilliant boulevards of Paris; but one has only to know where to go to learn that London can be as gay in its garden.

Elizabeth Robins Pennell.