



A DONKEY-RIDE.

LONDON AT PLAY. ON MARGATE'S SANDS.

WITH PICTURES BY JOSEPH PENNELL.



MMARGATE is London's Coney Island, its big suburb by the sea, only far enough away for a long morning's voyage in a steamboat. It is easy to forget in town how near the coast is; but already at Charing Cross, sometimes, when the tide is high, you can smell the fresh, salt air through the London smoke; in winter the white gulls haunt the bridges at Waterloo and Black-

friars; and it is just after the widening Thames has lost itself in the North Sea that Margate stretches out its pier into the water. There are plenty of other places on the same cliffs—Broadstairs and St. Leonard's and Westgate, and a dozen more; but Margate first, with Ramsgate as an alternative, is the cockney's choice. This is why some people agree with Mrs. Tuggs that it is altogether too low—"nobody there but tradesmen!" But then, without the London crowd Margate would not be—well, Margate.

If you wish, you can take a train that starts from Charing Cross or Victoria, and, after a long, rambling tour through Kent, eventually gets to Margate. But half the fun is in going by boat. The lower Thames is supposed to be entirely commercial, but from time immemorial it has been the classic stream for the Londoner's frolic. You remember Dr. Johnson taking water to Billingsgate on the night of his famous «frisk» with Topham Beauclerk; and Hogarth sailing with his four jolly companions for

Gravesend; and Elia in the «old Margate hoy,» which he was right in thinking «ill exchanged for the foppery and fresh-water niceness of the modern steam-packet»; and Boz on so many of those very youthful excursions of his; or, to come down to our own contemporaries, Ally Sloper, that delightful British «Mayeux,» and his party, dancing on deck, as Baxter shows them in one of his wonderful Sloper drawings? Besides, Margate virtually begins when you meet the crowd hurrying down through the narrow, dirty streets leading to the Old Swan Pier, and you struggle with babies and bandboxes at the ticket-office, and you rush down the long gangway, where you get wedged in so tight that you cannot move hand or foot, while a cool official keeps calling: «This wye for the *Sovering*—the *Royal Sovering*. Passengers for Southend pass on to the houter boat. Passengers for Margit and Ramsgit on the *Sovering*—the *Royal Sovering*! Show your tickets, please! Move on! This wye for Southend! This wye for Margit!» And from rival boats at the next pier come a still louder screaming and yelling. It all sounds like a page out of Dickens or Thackeray.

When you are fairly off, when you have scrambled successfully for a seat, and the Southend boat has steamed away, and the *Royal Sovereign* has whistled playfully,—as only a Margate boat can, and very much as the bad boy shrieks when he wishes to make you jump,—you gradually discover that this is the way to see the Thames. For there, at the start, is St. Paul's lifting its dome above the grimy warehouses; and you pass under London Bridge, where swarms of idlers watch you safely through, hoping all the time that you will hit the arches and go to the bottom for their pleasure; and you steam by the Tower, and between the open gates of Tower Bridge, which, once well weather-stained, will be as imposing a feature as the river can



THE WANDERING MINSTREL.

boast; and on again, between miles and miles of docks, and «plantations of ship-masts and forests of steam-chimneys»; and on every side are the boats—huge ocean steamers, little penny steamboats, red-sailed barges, big sailing-ships, puffing, smoke-belching tugs. And then, presently, it is Greenwich, with the beautiful buildings of Inigo Jones, and the memories of fish dinners eaten by yourself or in friendly books, and Rosherville, and Gravesend with its gardens, and the broad flats that make you think of Pip and his «great expectations.»

And all the while, if you know how to do the thing in style, a sandwich is in one hand and a pot of porter in the other; for everybody on the boat is eating sandwiches and drinking porter. And by everybody I mean precisely the same company you jostle in the third-class carriages of the «underground» on the day of the University boat-race, or travel with by road down to the Derby,—«the mighty London populace,» Mr. James calls it,—its «female contingent» conspicuously sharing Mrs. Boffin's inclination toward fashion, while a baby, apparently, is as necessary to a Margate outfit as an umbrella on a rainy day. Of course there are musicians on board,—«Italians from the Strand,» is Mr. Mourey's description of the Thames boat band,—gold-laced and tarnished, out of time and out at elbows, playing their poor fiddles and harps and flutes first in the bow, then in the stern, up the middle and back again, and taking up an endless collection. And as the breeze grows



"ARRY AND 'ARRIET."

brisker and the air keener, as the shores recede farther and farther, there seems to be, as in Mr. Punch's music-hall song, a call for "a drop o' something shorter"; for the little bar on deck is filled with men—and women, too: has not long practice in the public-house taught the Englishwoman how to take her drink standing like a man? Already by noon faces are redder, laughs lighter. There are races round the deck. A few figures are huddled up suggestively against the railings. There are wild shrieks

explore far enough you can find old gables and markets and assembly-rooms, and probably Baedeker or Murray would chronicle a creditable number of inhabitants. But for London people the only Margate is the beach. Nothing else counts, unless it is the pier in the evenings, or when the tide is in, or when the London boats arrive. I suppose the people do go into the town occasionally, for they must sleep somewhere, and there are not enough hotels and lodging-houses directly on the sea to hold them all. But wherever



CARRIED ASHORE.

and playful giggles. And in the midst of it children are dancing, children are sick, children are yelling, children are sleeping. And the boat stops no more, though the cliffs are dotted with little towns, until all the gay crowd that does not mean to go on to Ramsgate is emptied upon the pier at Margate, where a crowd as gay watches its arrival.

Margate is fairly big—a substantial town, in fact, not the least like the American seashore place. There is an embankment instead of the familiar board walk, blown away regularly every season by the worst storm remembered for years. There are houses and shops of brick and stone, instead of the wooden cottages and hotels that can be wheeled off at a moment's notice. Indeed, I believe if you

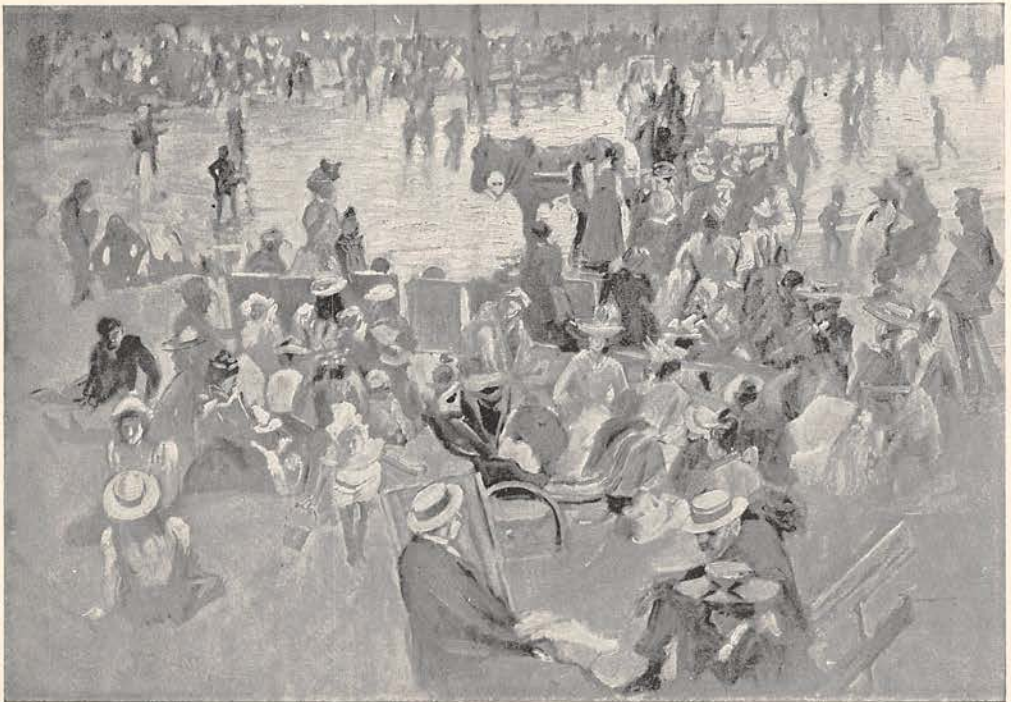
they sleep, they live on the beach. It is a very good one for the English coast, though perhaps not to be compared to the beautiful sweep of sands at Atlantic City and many another little town on the Jersey coast. However, not a square foot of it is wasted. There the London crowd squats—there is no other word for it; the same crowd, partly small tradesmen, partly swaggering clerks, partly well-to-do workmen, partly professional loafers, and largely their wives and daughters, that you see picknicking and betting on the Downs at Epsom, or scattered over the river-banks at the Henley regatta, or packed into a solid mass at the Lord Mayor's show. The only difference is in the background and the way the holiday is spent.

Oh, I love to sit a-gyizing on the boundless blue
 horizing
 When the scorching sun is blyzing down on
 sands and sea!
 And to watch the busy figgers of the happy little
 diggers,
 Or to listen to the niggers when they choose to
 come to me.

There you have it in Mr. Anstey's «idyllic» verse. Only no one can ever sit «a-gyizing» in romantic solitude. Not even in Santa Lucia in Naples have I seen people herded so close together, and living an outdoor life with such unembarrassed frankness. Rows upon rows, groups upon groups, of men and women sprawl on low steamer-chairs, open-mouthed and snoring without shame. Lovers lie in each other's arms prone upon the sand—the disconcerting spectacle 'Arry and 'Arriet always present in their hour of courtship. Family parties sit within neatly dug-out inclosures, mothers with the week's mending, fathers with their pipes. And children by the dozen, by the hundred, by the thousand, bare-legged, frocks and knickerbockers rolled well up into little bathing-drawers, are digging and paddling and building; while in a space apart, marked by a gay red flag, poor little pale-faced cripples are hobbling about in the sand, a show for the pennies of the compas-

sionate. And down into this mess of people, too stupefied by sunlight and sea air to seek amusement, come the same beloved negro minstrels who turn up at Epsom and Henley and Hammersmith, and at chance London street-corners on a Saturday afternoon. But they are ten times more gorgeous at Margate: faces shinier, coats and trousers gaudier, sashes wider, buttonhole bouquets huger, hats jauntier, some in tights, some in flannels, with bones, tambourine, and banjo all complete. And a wide space is made for them hours beforehand, and the audience collects, first a circle of children low on the sands; then circle after circle of the steamer-chairs; then people standing behind the chairs, and more people on the Embankment. For the late-comer there is no getting near enough to hear a joke or a song. And when finally the morning's heroes arrive, they bring another audience with them—men, women, and children dogging their every step through the streets, patiently waiting outside every public-house where it pleases them to stop. Talk of the success of a Patti or a Melba: it is nothing to that of the minstrels at Margate!

And down, too, on the beach come the seedy German bands, and the unblackened strolling singers, and the men with pianos



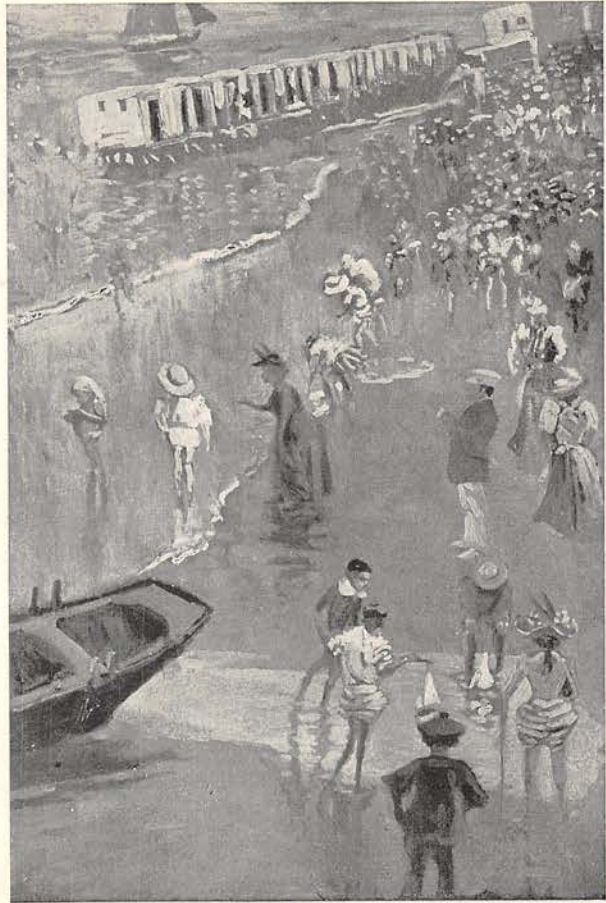
THE CROWD.

and concertinas and cornets and harmoniums, and the preachers, and the photographers. And down, too, comes the Punch-and-Judy man, but not the summer I was at Margate; for Mr. Brown, who had the monopoly, was ill,—so I learned upon inquiry,—and not another Punch of such irreproachable morals was to be found in all England. The fact is, though you would not believe it, the police have a strict eye upon the program of the beach performance.

Through the crowd boys push and wriggle with trays of nougat or fruit or buns. And over the chorus of noises you hear the ceaseless «Hi! hi!» of the donkey-boys, and the shrieks of giddy young ladies clinging to the donkeys as they gallop full tilt along the sands, and the screams of delighted children in the little goat-carriages on the Embankment above. Away out beyond, standing in a white-and-green line, wheel-deep in the surf, are the absurd bathing-machines; and between them and the dry beach an old cart loaded with people is being continually driven backward and forward; while fat old bathing-women, as out of date as Sairey Gamp herself, wait gossiping in the water; and farther still bathers are splashing, men and women apart—as well they may be, for the costume of the men would be a scandal anywhere save in prudish England.

This is the scene presented by Margate sands every day, and every hour of the day, during the season—serenely domestic at moments, boisterously hilarious at others, especially when a big excursion is let loose upon the place. Then you have the courting that is done by blows and thumps; then you see 'Arry and 'Arriet exchanging hats; then you have horse-play bedlam; and mounted police show themselves in the near streets, and magistrates, the next morning, are officially shocked by the conduct of the «savages» from London.

It is true there is a more elegant end to the sea-front, partly for invalids whose doctors prescribe Margate air, which has the name of being the purest and most bracing in England, the number of Bath chairs prov-



THE BATHING-MACHINES.

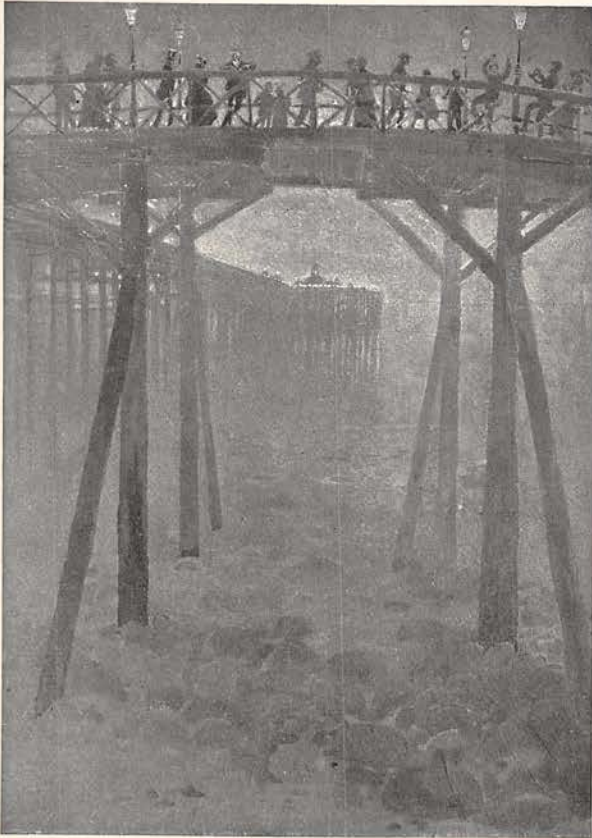
ing medical compulsion. There is no promiscuous herding here. Groups take their books and work and gossip into railed-off spaces, with a haughty assumption of the privacy that costs a penny. The very amusements are distinctly genteel: archery, lawn-tennis, and a lightning draftsman making portraits in a tent while you wait; and as the shore has risen into cliffs, bathers are discreetly screened from public gaze, and the narrow sands are as decorous as in that picture of «Pegwell Bay,» by Dyce, in the National Gallery—a picture of a shingly beach, and two or three lone figures, in the absurd costumes of the fifties, gathering shells in polite isolation.

But upon the cliff end the real Margate crowd never intrudes. Why should it? There are far better ways of enjoying itself. If you wish to give the Briton a really good time, put him in some sort of vehicle, averaging from the donkey «shay» that «knocked 'em in the old Kent road» to the brake and cornet, and

send him off driving. Where the Embankment widens into a great square above the sands, brakes and busses are always ready to start for St. Leonard's or Westgate or Pegwell Bay—above all, for Ramsgate. There's the place for a «'appy day»! The drive over is short,—about half an hour or so,—but quite long enough to need a half-way house, where everybody stops for a drink, and the conductor takes up a collection for no better

or ants had alighted upon the sands. The very air seems close, and one would as soon bathe in the Thames at London Bridge as in the sea just here. If Trouville made Flaubert long to hide himself in the Sandwich Islands or in the virgin forests of Brazil, what, what would he have felt here at Ramsgate? Yet not even in an Eastern bazaar or market could there be more dazzling color; and as for character, there is enough to set up a new Dickens or Charles Keene for life.

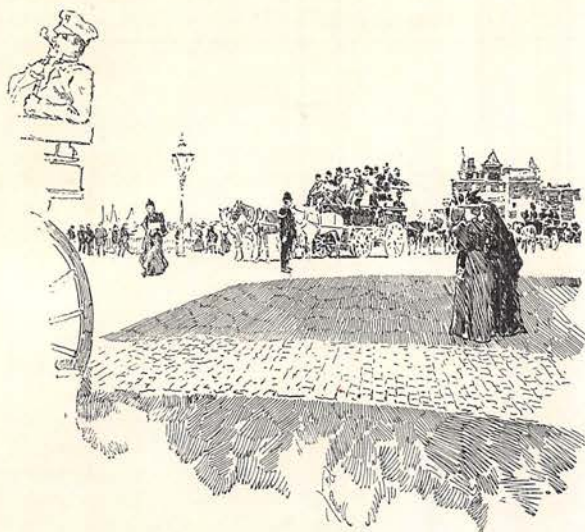
If you do not care to go to Ramsgate, there are boats in the harbor, with their «boatmen so beguiling,» and the menagerie with its beasts to be fed, and the music-hall attached, with its «stars» from London, who'd «all be in the workhouse should their antics cease to dror!»—an inducement for women and babies and nurses, who would be quite out of place in the palaces of Leicester Square, to flock to this «hall by the sea.» And there are shops full of the indispensable china «souvenirs from Margate.» And first and last and always, there are tea and shrimps! Many things may have changed. Gillray's little phaëton, with the round apron front, and its boy in jack-boots on one of the horses, has disappeared from the beach; the saucer hats and swirling crinolines of Leech are no more: but tea and shrimps are as essential elements to Margate life as the sea and the sky. You are not supposed to need or to wish anything else, and in vain you may try the little restaurants that are perched on the cliffs as delightfully as the Neapolitan cafés on the Posilipo, or those



THE PIER.

reason than that nothing can be done in Margate without a collection; the real marvel is that your landlord does not come with his hat instead of his bill! I have always wondered why Mrs. Tuggs, when she found Margate too low, went over to Ramsgate. It is really Margate all over again, but Margate exaggerated, intensified, concentrated. The beach is smaller, the people are huddled closer together, and the crowd is the same,—negroes, strolling players, donkeys, goat-carts, bathers, children, lovers, preachers, photographers, peddlers, sleepers, cockshies, and bathing-machines,—but in so dense a mass that it looks as if a swarm of human bees

others that set out their tables on balconies looking seaward. If you would dine, you must fall back upon the pompous hotel table d'hôte, which you share with the last theater company down from London. But one other thing you can order at the restaurant, to be sure—champagne. To be in the Margate fashion, you must drink it without so much as a biscuit to eat. On the pier, which is as select as the twopence charge for admission can make it, couples of those stupendously vulgar people you do not believe in when you see them on the pages of papers like «Pick-Me-Up»—indeed, you hardly believe in them when you see them in life—may be found as



THE BREAKS FOR RAMSGATE.

early as eleven in the morning pledging each other over a magnum of extra dry. And the Margate swell will bring his friends into one of the restaurants, at any hour after his evening meal of tea and shrimps, and call loudly for champagne, just to let you know that he can do the thing in style when he chooses, and pay for his bottle with the biggest lord or «dook» of them all!

I hesitate to mention beauty as another of Margate's charms, so little has it to do with the popularity of the place. But for all that, very beautiful it is; and its sands every morning and afternoon arrange themselves into a picture as brilliant and gay as you could find at Trouville or Abbazia, at Coney Island or Newport. To follow the cliffs beyond the hotels and villas is to find one's self at once in as pretty English country as Constable ever painted—a country of broad meadows and

plowed fields, of hedge-rows and stately elms, of old farm-houses and gray ruins, of cloud-swept skies and misty blue distances. Toward twilight, when the tide is coming in and the beach is deserted except by the small boy kindly giving the necessary spot of black here and there, and the occasional barge left high and dry on the sands, the lines are as lovely as those that the Venetian Lagune make at low water. As for the barges, with their half-furled sails, they are really finer than anything at Venice; while every evening there is the atmosphere for which on the Adriatic you might have to wait a year. And as dusk deepens, lines of light on the Embankment curve with the curving shore, and torches flame from the barrows of the periwinkle-men, and

the black, shadowy pier crosses the deep blue of sea and sky as fantastically and decoratively as in a color-print by Hiroshige. And, gradually, what people are pleased to call the vulgarity of Margate is lost in the beauty of night, only broken momentarily by the shriek of 'Arry sporting with 'Arriet in the «shide»!

Elizabeth Robins Pennell.



UNDER THE CLIFFS.