

THE GAUL IN SOHO.



IT is singular to note how the influence of Soho extends to the neighbourhood around it, and to mark the points at which the foreign habits and customs of its denizens have been grafted on our English stock. Turning from a busy thoroughfare, English in every respect, you enter a quiet and subdued street, which to the unobservant pedestrian would present no particular sign of continental influence. But there is to be seen here a coffee-

house—a thorough, genuine, dirty London coffee-house—in the window of which, however, instead of the usual display of stale tea-cakes, herrings, raw chops, rashers of bacon, and china eggs, there may be noticed these articles: a sliced melon, a piece of Gruyère cheese, a Brunswick sausage, and an opened box of sardines. It is enough: we are near Soho.

A passage through a narrow court adjoining reveals a closer mingling of the foreign and native elements, for there are four or five butchers' shops doing a large trade in the conventional London "What'll-ye-buy" style, interspersed with sundry dépôts for fancy articles of foreign production which would certainly present but a poor attraction to English buyers.

"They're lava, they're real lava, sir," vehemently protests a youth in charge of one of these half-stalls, half-shops, to an elderly French gentleman with a red face and white hair, who has apparently cast doubts upon a pair of earrings he has taken in his hand from a heap on the board outside.

"My boy, I s'all not buy. You speak me they are lava, and I am able to pairceive that they are what one has called rubbiss. How much you charge for them? t'ree shillings the dozaine?"

"Three shillings a dozen! Why, I'll lay yer half-a-crown to a farden cake that you don't buy a pair of ear-rings like that anywhere else in London for ten and sixpence, and I'm only askin' yer five shillings!"

"Five shillings! Allons donc! It's very good—capital! and they have costed you fivepence! For my part, you s'all keep them all for yourself. Voilà!"

And so, with a deprecatory shake of the head, the Gaul passes on.

Coming out of the court, we enter a fair specimen of unalloyed Soho. The mixture of shops and private houses, the foreign names on the facias' and door-plates, the views of industry through the half-open ground-floor windows, such as meerscham carving, sewing-machine working, shirt and collar dressing, are all unique to the neighbourhood. This frowsy-looking

provision-shop, with its rows of sausages hanging in strings across the window and from the ceiling inside, its glass jars of mysterious peas and beans, its macaroni, olives, cheeses, oils, and all condiments necessary for those savoury French dishes which most Englishmen who have tasted them so keenly appreciate, presents a picture the like of which we should not know where to find elsewhere in London.

The restaurants alone are a study, and we fancy it would puzzle the most enterprising English caterer to provide such a bill of fare as can be obtained here at such a cheap rate. You would not think you could get a dinner of soup, fish, joint, two kinds of vegetables, dessert, and half-a-bottle of wine, with *pain à discretion*, for a shilling, but here it is to be done any day you like to walk in through these shabby restaurant doors, and take your seat at one of the little tables within.

Those who have, perhaps, the greatest claim on our sympathy are the children penned up in these hot streets, where the air is deeply impregnated with the odour of all that is old, musty, and evil-smelling. They feel, however, that they have a right to gratuitous amusement (and who would deny it to childhood?) and so, when they have wearied of the manufacture of mud pastry, and of running races, and of darting across the road in front of passing vehicles, to see how near they can approach being run over without actually experiencing that *dénouement*, they go and "take it out of" the organ-grinder, whenever that unfortunate public functionary ventures down into Soho. As soon as the familiar tones are heard, there is a general rush to the spot, and a dance of a wild and eccentric nature is soon improvised. And what dancing! Footing it fairly up and down to the music, no shirking and a stamp on the pavement at the end of every strain. Some of the little dancers perform with great inherent grace, as they sidle away down the pavement, keeping time to the music with an accuracy which many a fashionable dancing-mistress may pine for in her pupils.

The most profitable business of the neighbourhood must be that of "general dealer;" and of these there are many. The man who sells bacon and sherbet, buttons and treacle, new-laid eggs and hair-oil, is the man to command the patronage of Soho. These shops are characteristic of the place, too, for there is a general "mixed" air pervading it; and we cannot help feeling for its inhabitants on this bright Saturday afternoon—that they should be condemned to occupy their stuffy streets, instead of being away where the air smells less of garlic and old clothes than it does here. So redolent, in fact, is the atmosphere of these articles, that it seems a delightful change even to cross Oxford Street, and wander through the spacious and somewhat gloomy aristocratic squares that lie within a stone's-throw of Soho.

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