

he was alive till he'd money enough to keep them. So he went back to America. He wanted me to go with him, but I says, 'No, sir, 'tisn't money I want, but just the sea-faring life I've been used to, to make me happy.' However, he went, and he's made a lot of money; 'twas he sent me the money to get yonder little craft with, now that I felt inclined to settle down a bit; he wished me to come here because it is where he lived before he set sail."

Mrs. Brandleth looked up at him with startled eyes, and lips that would scarcely move.

"Where is he now?" she asked, while the colour died from May's face, and her hands nervously clasped themselves together.

"He's gone to seek his wife and tell her he's not dead. She'd had her sorrow over mourning for him when he first got back, you see, so he never let her know. He'll be over there by to-morrow or next day, I expect."

Mrs. Brandleth rose, piteously clasping the sailor's hands. "Tell me his name," she said feebly.

"Mr. Trevor, ma'am; he's a doctor——" She heard no more, but sank fainting at May's feet.

"I always felt that Alice laid his death at my door," she said, when she opened her eyes; "she'll forgive me now, and he will too, for I have taken care of you both for him."

A telegram was sent off that afternoon to tell Hugh Trevor that he would find his wife and child where years before he had left them. And then they waited with an impatience and happiness that seemed almost too much to bear, till that happy day should come when the train, which years before had seemed to little

Frank to come from some unknown world, should bring the lost one back again.

"If I had only known it all these years!" Alice said. "It would have been better to have told me."

"It was my fault, dear," Mrs. Brandleth said. "He thought you would have refused my help, perhaps, if he lived, and he could not do much for you. Tom Hardy says he has been working all these years to endow you with his earnings at last." And thus the one unkind thought vanished.

"I think I will go and meet him," Alice had said at first, meaning to go to Southampton and bring him back to Drayton; but she gave up the idea long before she received the telegram from him to say he had reached England, for Mrs. Brandleth had broken down beneath the excitement and the long years of her busy life, and was ill and failing. So when the day came at last, Alice left May—May who was almost a woman now—to take care of her grandmother, and went down through the summer fields to the little station to meet her husband.

It was late when his train came in, almost evening time, and the sun was setting when the husband and wife went hand in hand towards the house where Mrs. Brandleth and May were awaiting them. Mrs. Brandleth was watching them from the window. "The day is nearly done," she said, and a moment later she tottered forward to meet her son-in-law. "I am so thankful," she said, as she kissed his bronzed cheek.

She never saw the sun rise again; but she died knowing that when it looked next upon them she best loved, it would be to see that their only sorrow was that which her parting gave them.

## A PEEP AT BILLINGSGATE.

**I**T matters not whether the season be spring or summer, autumn or winter, whether the weather be wet or fine, precisely at five o'clock in the morning the market of Billingsgate is opened to the public, all the year round.

Very few fish vessels now come up the Thames to Billingsgate, but those that do—their freight consisting chiefly of soles and haddocks—are to be seen drawn up alongside the various wharves, between which and the market continuous strings of particularly powerful porters ply; giving themselves just time to deposit their silvery burden, and start for a fresh load. Up and down Thames Street, so far as the eye can reach, are ponderous vans from the different railway companies, laden with fish from every part of the kingdom.

Waiting for the commencement of the day's business are a goodly number of persons; but it is particularly noticeable that the rough element is, when the market first opens, conspicuous by its absence. Those persons we see before us now are fishmongers or their *employés*, and by them is secured the pick of the morning's consignment. When they have made their

bargains and gone their ways, down comes the class with which the name of Billingsgate is so intimately associated in more ways than one. As yet, Billingsgate is comparatively clean and tidy; scales, and shells, and mud have not had time to accumulate; but as the day advances, these unsavoury articles collect to a very unpleasant extent. It need scarcely be remarked that great attention is paid to the sanitary arrangements of the place, the nature of the wares requiring that cleanliness should reign supreme. At or about seven o'clock the costermongers arrive in their hundreds, and so soon as they appear on the scene the state of affairs alters materially. All is noise and hubbub; costers hoarsely shouting, empty vans trying to get through impossible places; bustle and muddle everywhere, diversified by a torrent of pure "Billingsgate" pouring from every quarter. With regard to this latter feature, the law is being put in motion to improve matters, and one individual has already been halved before the Lord Mayor for indulging in language—well, not of the choicest. It would not be advisable for a non-professional to get in the way just at this juncture; he had much better keep out of the locality,

unless he has a partiality for contact with fishy baskets, cods' tails flapping in his face, and possibly a nip on the ear from a live lobster. Truly, to such a one his friends would have good reason to exclaim with Mercutio, "How thou art fishified!" Billingsgate at this particular hour is not the place for manners, and the weakest go to the wall.

When the costermongers come, the real excitement begins. They do not purchase from the salesmen, but from a class of individuals who are styled *bummarces*—why, history sayeth not—who have already bought from the principal salesmen. The sales take place by auction, and no sooner is the lot knocked down than the money is handed out by the coster, and off he goes with his fish. These gentry are not regular customers; they are not particular whether they vend fruit or fish, and are consequently as often found at Covent Garden as at Billingsgate. It is wonderful how the news of a large haul gets about; but it does, and down come the ready-money costers "like a wolf on the fold."

At the present moment the market is being rebuilt, the new structure having been commenced in May, 1874; but this does not materially affect the carrying on of business, which is transacted partly in the old and partly in the new building.

In the olden days fish was necessarily brought to town entirely by water, or by cumbrous wagons; and owing to the perishable nature of the commodity, and the time occupied in its conveyance, the supply was exceedingly uncertain. Matters are, however, now quite altered, a regular market of sound fish being always secured by means of the railways. In the days of which we are speaking, the vessels or wagons which were fortunate enough to arrive first with their freight, were absolutely certain of a ready and profitable sale, whilst the unlucky craft or vehicle which did not succeed in reaching Billingsgate till late, had to put up with whatever price was offered. If the catch of any particular kind of fish was unusually large, more especially did the late-comers suffer.

It is a fact not generally known, that some of the English fishing vessels remain at sea for many weeks, sometimes not touching land for over a month. Notably is this the case with those attached to the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts. These vessels congregate about the fishing banks in the North Sea, and are visited nearly every day by swift steamers, which carry provisions to the fishermen, and bring away the fish they have caught. They (the steamers) then put on all speed and carry their cargoes to Yarmouth or Harwich, on rare occasions coming all the way to Billingsgate. Their object is, of course, to get the fish to market at the earliest possible moment, and the choice of ports is entirely dependent on the state of wind and tide. From Harwich and Yarmouth fish trains run every night, the contents of which are delivered at Billingsgate prior to the opening of the market.

It has no doubt struck many people besides ourselves that it is difficult to procure cheap fish at watering-places, even though the smacks come in laden with scaly spoil under our very eyes. The reason is not far to seek. The fishermen are sure of a market in

London, but were they to depend upon local demand, they would often be subject to heavy losses. A very great deal of the fish which is consumed at (say) Brighton or Hastings, has already made a journey to the metropolis, whence it has been sent back to the order of the local fishmongers.

It may, perhaps, be interesting to point out the localities from which the different kinds of fish arrive. From Yarmouth the supply consists almost entirely of herrings, and the quantity sent up is perfectly astounding. On some occasions, nearly one hundred tons have been dispatched in a single night. From the north of England, and Scotland, salmon is the staple commodity. The South-Western line brings mackerel, and pikchards come in large numbers from Cornwall. The fresh-water fish pour in from all parts, and are mostly purchased by Jews, who cook and sell them after their peculiar style. The delicate whitebait is captured, during certain seasons of the year, in the Thames, between Blackwall and Woolwich, and in a part of the river where the water is particularly dirty. Lobsters arrive in large quantities from Norway, and the Shetland and Channel Isles. So many as fifty thousand have been known to reach the market in one day; but whatever the supply, the demand is always equal to it. These fish are edible at the age of one year and a half, and are supposed to be in their prime when three years old. Oysters—precious bivalves!—come from all parts, the 4th of August being known in the trade as "Oyster Day"—*i.e.*, the day on which the oyster season commences. The public, however, do not wait for August. Oysters in June and July will suit them just as well. Sprats, humble but tasty sprats, are caught in vast quantities off most parts of the English coast, and also in the Firth of Forth, and come into season on the 9th of November—Lord Mayor's Day. Whether his lordship has a dish of these fish at his inaugural banquet, is a matter of doubt to many minds. Our impression is that he has not. The larger kind of eels come from Holland, being well taken care of in water-tanks. Cod is also brought alive to this country, receiving the *coup de grâce* on its arrival. Soles, plaice, brill, haddock, skate, dabs, turbot, and most of the "bottom" fish, are taken off Denmark and Holland. Costermongers have a wonderful partiality for haddock, of which they purchase very large quantities, curing and drying the fish, and selling it in the poorer neighbourhoods of London. This is the more curious as dried haddock is a somewhat expensive luxury if purchased at a first-class fishmonger's; perhaps, however, the costers possess the secret of preparing it in some cheap manner. Flat fish find ready customers in the Jews, who fry them in oil and sell them to those who appreciate such delicacies. In several of the narrow lanes adjacent to Billingsgate are "boiling houses," where the crabs and lobsters are sacrificed, and made to acquire that beautiful red which many people imagine is their natural colour. The lobster goes into the boiling water alive—a piece of unnecessary cruelty to be strongly deprecated; but the more sensitive crab is, first of all, dispatched by the skilful application of a needle. The claws and

legs would fly off as if by magic, were this not done.

Some of the wealthiest men in the City are fish salesmen. Some deal in one description of fish only, whilst others deal in all. The salesman knows perfectly well, by the aid of the telegraph, what sort of supply the morning will bring forth, and is therefore able to make his arrangements beforehand. To this fact, also, a great deal of his prosperity may be referred. There are no less than 800 regular fishmongers in London, and as they all have to make their purchases

barrel; ditto, salt, 1,600,000, averaging 5 lbs. each; haddocks, 2,470,000, at 2 lbs. each; ditto, smoked, 65,000 barrels, 300 to a barrel; soles, 97,520,000, at  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. each; mackerel, 23,620,000, at 1 lb. each; herrings, 250,000 barrels, at 150 each; ditto, red, 100,000 barrels, at 500 each; ditto, bloaters, 265,000 baskets, at 150 each; eels, 9,000,000, at 6 to a lb.; whiting, 17,920,000, at 6 oz. each; plaice, 36,600,000, at 1 lb. each; turbot, 800,000, at 7 lbs. each; brill and mullet, 1,220,000, at 3 lbs. each; oysters, 500,000,000, at 400 to a peck; crabs, 600,000; lobsters, 1,200,000;



MACKEREL FISHING OFF THE COAST OF CORNWALL.

through salesmen, and those purchases nearly every day in the week, it will readily be seen that the salesman's business is one in which there is always plenty to do.

It is impossible to do more than guess at the daily or yearly quantity of fish brought to this market, and for many reasons, the principal being that there are no customs' duties or excise on fish caught on our coasts, and consequently no record is kept of the numbers taken. In a carefully-written article which appeared some years since in the *Quarterly Review*, the writer quoted the opinion of a Billingsgate authority, who estimated the yearly supply as follows:—Salmon, 29,000 boxes, 7 in a box; cod, alive, 400,000, averaging 10 lbs. each; ditto, barrelled, 15,000 barrels, 50 to a

prawns, 12 tons, at 120 to a lb.; shrimps, 192,295 gallons, at 320 to a pint.

It will be seen that the smaller descriptions of shell-fish are not included in these astounding figures, but we may mention that mussels, cockles, and periwinkles are estimated at thousands of millions! It is supposed that between two and three million pounds sterling change hands for fish in a single year.

As we have already mentioned, the scene we have attempted to describe may be witnessed any morning in the year—Sundays of course excepted; and the lovers of the noisy, the fishy, and the picturesque, will therefore do well to get up betimes some fine day and take a peep at Billingsgate for themselves.

EDWARD OXENFORD.