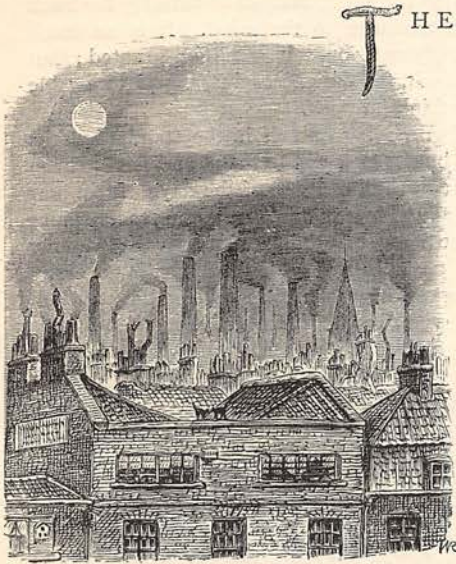


METROPOLITAN SUNDAYS.

I.—SHOREDITCH.



THE sun must shine very brilliantly if he intends to illuminate Shoreditch. There is in truth an obstinate smoke, which has its birth in the neighbourhoods of Whitechapel, of St. Luke's and of

Bishopsgate, that will by no means be readily dispersed, and lingers sullenly about in clouds, resenting the sun's interference, and making him exert himself to his utmost to brighten the prospect on this summer Sunday morning. And even then it seems questionable whether it was a kindness on his part to be so lavish with his genial rays, since he exposes thereby so much that is tawdry, and unfit to bear the searching test of strong morning light. Look at the great music-hall that shone so brilliantly last night, and seemed to its patrons an abode of luxury and splendour. The walls of green and crimson are now only roughly-painted deal boards; the arch of light that swept across the portal, shedding its lustrous beams around, is now only a row of cracked and smoke-stained little gas globes; all the gold and silver is tinsel (always excepting that which passed through the pay office); and everything that a few hours since was bright and attractive is now chilly and repulsive.

Observe, too, the eel-pie shop—which class of shop, by-the-by, never seems to contain any eel-pies. Last night it was doing a brisk trade, refreshing the denizens of Shoreditch with tripe and stewed eels, the proprietor was active and smart, the gas flared, the apples and mince-pies looked toothsome and delightful. Now the owner stands, sleepy and half dressed, at his open shop door, through which we can see his establishment looking dirty, greasy, and grewsome. We can see now how dirty the shops are generally; the smoke which might have been present last night was not visible; and altogether the conclusion cannot be avoided that Shoreditch on Sunday morning is exposed to strictures which Shoreditch on Saturday night is free from.

As for the little house with the fresh-painted front, which has been everything one can imagine in the penny show line of business, and alternates between

that and the sale of American ice-cream drinks, and which yesterday was edifying the minds of the youths of Shoreditch by a waxwork exhibition, it is now to all appearance dead to the outside world, and looks, with its parti-coloured shutters, like a little red and black mausoleum.

But if there is anything attractive about inanimate Shoreditch on this Sunday morning, what shall we say of animated Shoreditch, streaming to and fro in mixed and motley tide?—and yet this mixed assembly not extending beyond a certain low level of respectability; for the pork-butcher and the pawnbroker, if they do show themselves abroad, are the aristocracy of the neighbourhood. The bulk of the inhabitants now traversing the streets, or sauntering and lounging at corners, are not altogether at first sight attractive, but may have an interest to those who can look below the outer semblance of men, and see fellow-creatures in all of them.

The popular denizen of this populous neighbourhood is so marked and prominent, that we may study him in almost all stages of his life. Here he is a baby, goggling and screaming in his mother's arms, as she pauses at the street-corner to gossip with a friend. Poverty, dirt, and crime have done much to injure the poor woman, but they cannot efface her natural motherly instinct, as you can see by the gently dexterous way in which she handles her infant. But this is only while it appeals to her sympathies from its very helplessness. As soon as it can walk you may see it in that court on your right hand, crawling about on the flags, dirty and in rags, ripe for the fever-demon should he stalk that way. A few more years—"Bock slights Sir-r-r?"—and here he is again, under your nose, thrusting his wares obtrusively before your

notice, and attending as strictly to business as the natural disposition in him to run and romp with other children will let him. So he plays at "chuck-penny" and other strange impromptu childish games one minute, and sells or tries to sell matches the next. Ah, what a blessing children's imaginations must be to them in these



"DIRTY AND IN RAGS."

grimy, sooty London streets of ours! How many little weeping eyes have had their tears dried up, how many little aching feet have leaped with delight, at the happy thought from some seething

young brain, "Let's be railway porters!" Oh, the ecstasy of being engine-driver, and the fun with the fractious youngster who has booked for "France" and will insist on getting out at "Mile End," it being quite well known to those who have charge of the train that France is only two stations off. Play, little ragged ones, play—in peace, we may hope; for I believe Mr. Policeman himself would have his stout official heart softened (or if not his official one, that unofficial one he carries somewhere about him, I will be bound) if he stopped, heard the scream of "Ten minutes for refreshments," and saw the tattered little girl personating the guard of the train give a nibble of apple-peeling to each passenger in succession, and hand over the balance to the station-master, to be kept until the train comes that way again.

Would that these games of innocence could last our popular inhabitant longer; but as a few more years roll on, there he is, grown older, and pitted now possibly with small-pox, or blinking with ophthalmia, in this group of boys at the street-corner, aping their elders, and executing a very decent street-corner lounge, considering their years. Their talk might shock you to hear, and you would find periodicals in their breast-pockets which it might shock you to read; but there are few to guide them, and none to check them. Our civilisation has forced them rather early into the cares of a toilsome life. They all have places at from five to ten shillings a week, and there are probably none who work less than eleven hours a day.

And now at the corner of this court we can find our friend again, about fifteen, let us say, and smoking his penny pipe, poor lad, with a *déjà* air. Since last we saw him he has made but a poor job of growing up towards man's estate. It is rather difficult working, you see, to grow strong and healthy under such circumstances, as we can see if we go down this street and take the first turning on the right: not a pleasant court, where the filth oozes out from between the flagstones, and lies in puddles on the uneven ground; where the houses, with their windows stuffed up with rag and pieces of board, stand with their little black doors open all day long, revealing the stained ceiling and worn stair within. And what a smell of dirt and poverty! What dismal thoughts, too, are suggested by those narrow dark archways leading out of the court we are in! Are there dwellings there? No doubt of it. Then they must be worse than these? No doubt of it.

So that upon the whole we cannot blame our young friend as he stands there, lounging in the sunlight, that he has failed to increase very much in health and stature latterly. Let us walk a little further on, and we shall meet him, I dare say, arrived at the dignity

of his manhood. Here he comes with three or four companions, slouching along the pavement, bandying coarse jests and exclamations. Being Sunday, he has on a curly-brimmed hat and a flashy "fogle" round his throat, but there is a deal of the rough in him for all that. What does he do? Well, he may be a costermonger, odd jobber, "on the streets," or worse. He would probably resent inquiries as to his pursuits. The neglect of his boyhood has allowed, no doubt, much that is bad to grow up



AT THE STREET-CORNER.

in him, which it would be difficult to eradicate now, although he has been shot at by many philanthropists of different descriptions. Working Men's Clubs, perhaps, have reached the nearest to him and his colleagues, but they have not spread deep enough down amongst the poorer classes; and besides, they are in their infancy yet. There is, however, one national institution which does not fail to attract him, and which Shoreditch does not fail to provide him. His home may be squalid, the streets may be chilly, but the gin-palace will find luxury and warmth enough for his simple wants. There may he drink his "four-arf" and porter in view of resplendent mirrors and expensive fittings. There he shall find active and clean barmen and barmaids ready to attend to his wants with promptitude. Small wonder then that as one o'clock approaches (and the Legislature, cherishing a pleasant fiction that he has been attending public worship, is now about to throw open the public-house doors to him), he is found loitering about those hospitable entrances, anxious to beguile away an hour in the delights of a "drop o' beer."

Surely there must be something to mend in all this, something not eminently satisfactory in these characteristics of our inhabitant. The hard-working City Missionaries have done a great work already, but it is a work of time and patience, and withal much self-denial.



THE GIN-PALACE AND ITS GUESTS.