

with a strange sort of hysterical wail, "there seems to be a fate upon everybody belonging to you!"

I knew she was alluding to that long-ago time of the Mutiny, and I recalled with perfect distinctness how she had hugged and cried over me in the old house in Kensington, the morning the letter came from India. But what had that to do with Rolfe? I struggled to free myself from her tight embrace, and in my struggles I caught one momentary glimpse of my poor young husband. The doctor had laid his head back, for he

had become perfectly still and quiet. His face was partly turned towards me, and it was white and grey, with the mouth parted and the poor eyes half closed; and all over his clothes, and his hands, and one arm of the dimity-covered chair, ran a broad bright stream of blood, settling in little pools on the carpet at his feet. A sick shudder ran through me, my limbs suddenly relaxed, and I sank back out of Mrs. Carter's arms, happily unable to see any more.

END OF CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

AN HOUR BY SEVEN DIALS.



SEVEN DIALS has almost achieved a respectability of squalor. For so long past has its name been associated in our minds with all the worst vices of lower London life—with overcrowding, dirt, disease, drunkenness, poverty, and crime—that it seems to be entitled to a feeling of veneration on account of its extremely long service in the cause of pauperism. It is such a very hoary-headed

sinner. Most Londoners know its grimy main thoroughfare well, and country visitors shun it, or pass through it with ill-concealed trepidation. Rural clergymen steering southward from Oxford Street to the Strand find themselves wandering in its unsavoury ramifications, and then, seeking the assistance of the law—as represented on the spot, in a blue coat and a helmet—escape from the neighbourhood, and are inclined to regard themselves as somewhat of adventurers: as, indeed, they are to some extent; for "The Dials," as its population term it, contains some highly irregular characters. Ever since the reign of King William IV. it has been inhabited by the dregs of the London population—the lawless, the drunken, and the immoral.

But they are not always fighting. There has been a disposition amongst some writers on this and similar neighbourhoods to keep up an idea that the inhabitants are always tearing one another to pieces, and a treatise on Seven Dials has never been complete without its pair of viragoes, with clenched fists and streaming hair. We think the public have been rather overdosed with these illustrations of the bellicose nature of the Seven-Diallers. It cannot be denied, indeed, that they have a habit of carrying their domestic differences into the streets for settlement, and that logic is less relied on than bad language. But the police are never very far off, and, abandoned and reckless as some ladies of the

Dials may be, they do not relish a night in the police-station. Fights are, on the whole, exceptional, and arise from public-house influence, and a disinclination to confine domestic troubles to the family circle—a difficult thing when that circle is restricted to the use of one room. When persons who quarrel cannot get away from one another—cannot go and sulk in different parts of the house—it is very apt, indeed, to lead to consequences we deplore.

The chief articles of commerce dealt in by "The Dials" are ballads and birds. For the first-named it has been famous for many a long year. Here were manufactured the "last dying speeches and confessions" of all the unfortunate criminals whose names swell the annals of the Newgate Calendar. Look at this dirty little shop, with its mud-spattered window full of roughly-printed old-fashioned ballads of "The Farmer's Boy" and "The Bailiff's Daughter," topical catchpenny songs upon great lawsuits or social scandals, dismal accounts of great disasters at sea, which are readily bought and then howled dismally in the streets, as you, my London reader, have doubtless heard them, and wondered where and how the rhymes were strung together. Listen to this account of himself by one of the local poets: "The little knowledge that I have, I have picked up bit by bit, so that I hardly know how I have come by it. I certainly knew my letters before I left home, and I have got the rest off the dead walls and out of the ballads and papers I have been selling. I write most of the Newgate ballads now for the printers in 'The Dials,' and, indeed, anything that turns up. I get a shilling for a copy of verses written by the wretched culprit the night before his execution. I wrote Courvoisier's sorrowful lamentation. I called it 'A Voice from the Gaol.' I did the *Æleegy*, too, on Rush's execution; it was supposed, like the rest, to be written by the culprit himself, and was particularly penitent. I didn't write that to order, but I knew they would want a copy of verses from the culprit. A man read it over and said, 'That's the thing for the street public.' I only got a shilling for Rush. Indeed, they are all the same price, no matter how popular they may be. I wrote 'The Life of Manning,' in verse. Besides these, I have written 'The Lament of Calcraft, the Hangman, on the Decline of his Trade,' and many political songs."

Although the trade in birds hardly seems so exten-

sive as it used to be, one has only to walk through the central thoroughfare and look to the right and left, to see what a number of feathered songsters are imprisoned in this grimy neighbourhood. It is one of the remaining scandals to the metropolis that such a large trade on Sunday morning is done here. Any Sabbath day, about eleven or twelve o'clock, the streets are as full as if a fair was going on. Crowds of mechanics, costermongers, labourers, and "roughs" loiter and lounge about the pavement, while vendors of penny ices, penny tarts, penny combs, penny watch-chains, penny toys, and many other articles which that puissant coin the penny commands, endeavour to cultivate a trade in the roadway. Amongst other odd things, a brisk trade is being done in penny glasses of sarsaparilla, working men in numbers swallowing the frothy black mixture as an enterprising herbalist draws it from an engine in his shop. The bird-shops are all open and in full swing. Above the noise of footsteps and voices, the constant "click-click-click-click" of the unfortunate little prisoners of the cage is heard, as they hop unceasingly from perch to floor, and from floor to perch. "Sixpence a cock lark," cry the dealers, "ninepence a cock linnet, and a shillin' a cock goldfinch!" while pigeons, cockatoos, parrots, and poultry appeal in turn to the taste of the intending purchaser.

But where do all the little birds come from? You doubtless have met, reader, in one of your suburban walks, a couple, or perhaps a bevy, of somewhat ill-conditioned fellows clad in inconsistent garments, and carrying in their hands little square parcels, tied up in perhaps an old check pocket-handkerchief. You may have caught sight, too, of a stuffed goldfinch or linnet protruding from the pocket or parcel of one of the party. The behaviour of these persons is (unless they are very drunk or very tired) rather "rowdy," and their conversation, if you should chance unfortunately to overhear any, is anything but select. These are the merchants who supply Seven Dials with its staple article of commerce; these are the bird-catchers by whose devices the little warblers of our woods and gardens are captured and transported from freedom and their native home to captivity and St. Giles': for which we cannot help thinking the public, which keeps up the demand for these little prisoners, is in some measure responsible; for if no one bought them there would be no inducement to the populace of Seven Dials to leave their beds and sally forth on a Sunday morning to ensnare their feathered victims, and bring them to this grimy neighbourhood—fit only for human beings to breathe. But we are getting sentimental. Ahem! "Sixpence a cock lark, ninepence a cock linnet, and a shillin' a cock goldfinch!"

And this place was once a village near London—St. Giles'-in-the-Fields is its parish church called to this day. There was a time, in its very earliest days—that is, nearly 200 years ago—when Seven Dials had a decidedly respectable character, but it possessed, unfortunately, a sort of halfway house between Newgate and Tyburn Tree, and here the wretched felons condemned to public execution used to stop and be presented with a bowl of ale. This custom was the

beginning of the fall of St. Giles', for it gave the neighbourhood a stigma and a taint from which it may date the decline of its respectability. Previously, the stern Puritans of Cromwell's time had looked most strictly to the morals of the place, and inflicted fines—and got them, too, as the parish register testifies—for offences, which if paid for now in the same way, would go far to relieve the anxieties of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Look on this picture of the times:

"1641. Received of the Vintner at the Catt in Queene Street, for permitting of tippling on the Lord's Day, £1 10s.

"1645. Received of John Seagood, Constable, which he had of a Frenchman for swearing three oathes, 3s.

"1645. Received of Mrs. Thunder, by the hands of Francis Potter, for her being drunk and swearing seven oathes, 12s.

"1646. Received of four men, travelling on a fast-day, 1s.

"1646. Received of Mr. Wetherill, head-borough, which he had of one for an oathe, 3s. 4d.

"1652. Received of Mr. Huxley and Mr. Morris, who were riding out of town in sermon-time on a fast-day, 11s."

The "Vintners" nowadays, who "permit tippling on the Lord's Day," are in much less danger, we are afraid, than in 1641. Mr. John Seagood's toll of a shilling an oath if now enforced would fill the parish coffers to overflowing, while as to Mr. Wetherill's penalty of 3s. 4d. for the same peccadillo, it would necessitate the largest and most reliable security for Mr. W. as collector. And what shall we say of the two gentlemen who were caught riding out of town on a fast-day? There were no excursion-trains in those days, or what harvests of fines would have been gathered!

In spite of these vigorous efforts to reform Seven Dials, it kept its head obstinately turned in the direction of gin and squalor. The Doric column with the dial-stone, from which the district took its name, was set up in 1694, and is thus spoken of by Gay—

"Where famed St. Giles' ancient limits spread,
An inrailed column rears its lofty head,
Here to seven streets seven dials count their day,
And from each other catch the circling ray;
Here oft the peasant, with inquiring face,
Bewildered, trudges on from place to place.
He dwells on every sign with stupid gaze,
Enters the narrow alley's doubtful maze,
Tries every winding court and street in vain,
And doubles o'er his weary steps again."

A very good authority, however, declares that there never were seven dials at all, but only six, as two of the streets faced into one angle. The column kept its position about eighty years, and then there got into circulation a report that beneath its base was concealed a treasure. Great curiosity and excitement thrilled through "The Dials," and the pillar was pulled down. Whoever would have been the owner of any treasure-trove was grievously disappointed, for nothing was found; and no one seems to have had the courage or spirit to replace the column. It was afterwards taken to Weybridge Green, and surmounted with a ducal

coronet, served for a memorial to the Duchess of York.

And "The Dials" sank lower and lower in respectability. It became an assembly of the idle, the drunken, fugitives from justice, political refugees, &c., and atheism held there its headquarters as of right. It may be imagined what condition of public morality existed, when it is stated that in those days, before the existence of licensing Acts, nearly every house sold gin.

But sulky and Bohemian as Seven Dials tried to be, it could not resist the touch of nineteenth century

civilisation, and the influence of true Christian philanthropy. The Rookery, which was a mass of vile courts, alleys, and houses, has been entirely demolished, and a large set of new industrial dwellings erected in its stead—while a ragged-school, Sunday schools, and missions work profitably in the district. As we have before hinted, some of the worst features of the Sunday trading are dying out, in deference to the slow but resistless power of public opinion; and it is certain that, even for Seven Dials, there is a good time coming.

A. H.



DONALD'S ADIEU.

STOOD with Donald on the deck,
Till rang the warning bell;
Said he, "My maid, the anchor's weigh'd,
And we must bid farewell.
When I am far across the sea,
Remember this, my dear,
Swift o'er the main I'll come again,
And that within a year."

He gave to me a parting kiss—
'Tis one I treasure still;
For o'er the sea he'll come to me—
He said so, and he will!

They tell me I am foolish now
To wait upon the shore,
For he again across the main
Is coming nevermore;
They say his ship has sunk beneath
The wave, and he is dead;
But still I know 'tis false, for O
I keep the words he said!

He gave to me a parting kiss—
'Tis one I treasure still;
For o'er the sea he'll come to me—
He said so, and he will!

EDWARD OXENFORD.

