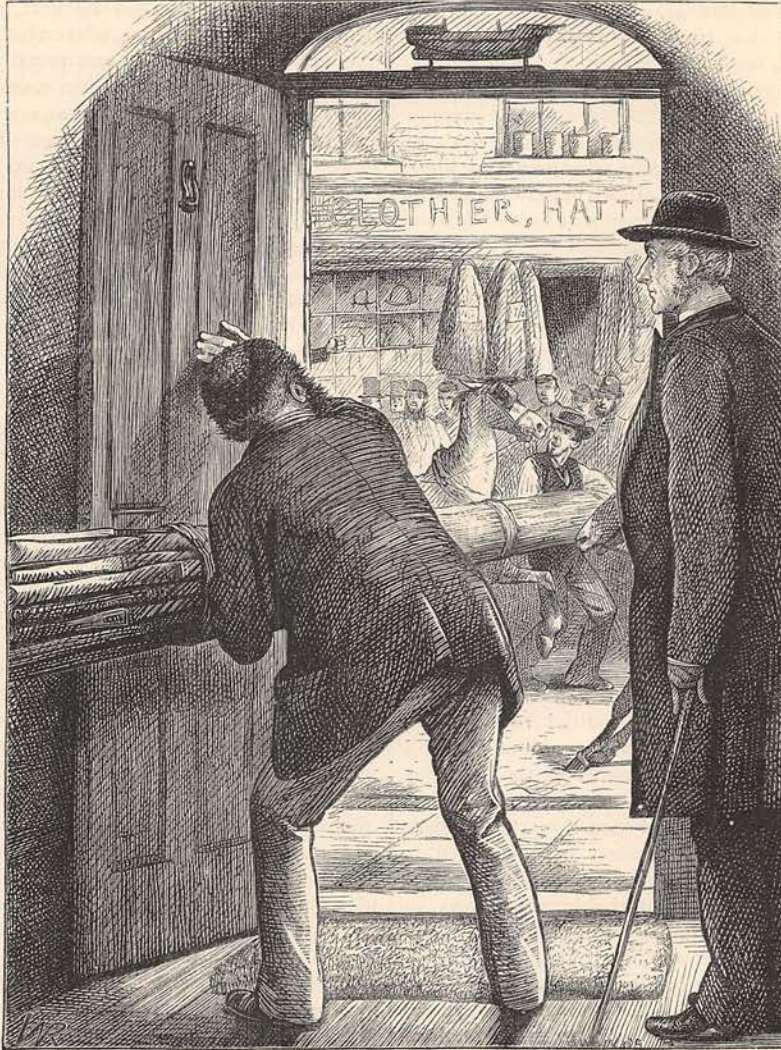


MY BAMBOOS, AND WHAT THEY COST ME.

I HAVE just been much exercised with some bamboos; I don't mean in a gymnastic sense, but in respect to the procuring and carriage of a parcel I saw. The business came about thus: I am the parson of a parish containing some famous docks, which re-

observed that they had joints. Looking more closely I perceived that they were not ordinary poles, but bamboos. Such monsters I had never seen. So I knocked at the front door of my neighbour, and asked whether they were for sale, and if so, what they cost.



"THEY STUCK OUT ACROSS THE STREET AND STOPPED THE TRAFFIC" (p. 21).

ceive great ships from all parts of the world. They discharge their cargoes within five minutes' walk of my door, and I can see their tall masts from my study window, as they move slowly to their station by the quays, after long voyages from the other side of the globe. Now, the house next door but one to mine has a yard at its back reaching to my premises, and lately I noticed that a number of poles, some thirty feet long, had been set against its wall. There was nothing special in this; but one day, idly glancing at them, I

"Sixpence a-piece, sir," said he. On this I went into the yard and, ascertaining that many of them were quite sound and unbroken, made a bargain with him for three dozen picked ones, and stipulated that I should pay one penny extra for each if he washed them, for they were very sticky.

My neighbour was a ship-cleaner—*i.e.*, he scraped ships arriving with a coat of weeds and what not, from a long voyage. A large ship had come in with a cargo of China sugar. This was so heavy that when

the ship was freighted down to her load-line, there was still a considerable space left above the cargo. Some light articles were stowed in, including a quantity of mats and cut bamboos, which are used in the manufacture of brushes or brooms. The captain or one of the officers, however, wishing to make a present of them to some friend in England, had laid on the sugar a parcel of whole-lengthed bamboos. On the arrival of the ship he found, I was told, that his friend had died or gone away. So my ship-cleaning neighbour came into possession of the parcel, and trundled them off on a truck. He had ever so much difficulty in getting them into his yard, as they had to be introduced by the front door, and were necessarily inconvenient when they stuck out across the street and stopped the traffic during the process of storing them. However they were set up in his back yard at last, and I bought three dozen of them for the purpose of sending them down into the country some hundred miles off. But how to get them there was the rub. They did not weigh very much, and so I arranged for Mr. Ship-cleaner to take them on a hand-truck to a neighbouring goods station, for transit to the East of England. After their tiresome extraction from the front door, we got them on the truck and sent them off, properly labelled. Presently he returned in dismay, threaded his house with them once more, and came in to tell me that the railway people would not carry them unless I paid £2 16s. 8d. for the exclusive use of two whole trucks. They were too long to lie on one, and the presentation of the parcel seemed to have bothered the railway people considerably.

"I told them," said the ship-cleaner, whom I will call Mr. S—, "that they belonged to the rector, but they said they didn't care if they were sent by the Prince of Wales."

As I found that no one truck would carry parcels more than eighteen feet long, and we could not think of clipping our precious bamboos, they were deposited in the yard again, and I began to realise more clearly than ever how the value of many things depends upon their carriage. It is transportation that makes cost.

Mr. S— and I exchanged protests that we would not be beaten, especially as he had been so loyal as publicly to express his concern in the interest of the rector.

The next notion was that, when I went into the country, I might take them myself as "personal luggage," the extra weight not being much, and count them as Gargantuan or Brobdignag walking-sticks. I calculated that they could lie on the top of a passenger carriage. But this happy thought came to nothing, and Mr. S— again sat in my study and scratched his head.

By the way, this reminds me of an example of the reverse method in which the Chinese conduct business. The native country of the bamboos suggested this remembrance. When a Chinaman distinguishes himself so much as to deserve the recognition of public rank, his *ancestors* are ennobled. He does not so much found a family of title—for some of them

might not do credit to their rank—as become the vehicle of paying honour where honour is due. Those who produced him have the posthumous glory. He is fond of reversing Western methods. When he writes his name he puts what corresponds to the Christian name last instead of first.

To return to my bamboos. Mr. S— scratched his head. What was to be done? "I'll tell you," said I. "Go along the river-edge and see if you cannot find some barge sailing to Ipswich. We will get them down so far, at any rate." Mr. S— brightened up and replied that surely, now he thought of it, there were barges that went there with dung, and that the bamboos would lie on the top of the load "beautiful." Then he touched his hat and started off full of confidence.

Presently, on returning home after some parish work, I found a card in my entrance, belonging to the South Devon Shipping Company. They, of all unlikely people, had relations with Ipswich from London, and Mr. S— had scented them out, and left their business card at my house.

One thing or another hindered me for a few days, and then Mr. S— presented himself with the announcement that a barge was going to sail that evening for Ipswich from the Wapping entrance of the docks, that the captain was on board, and that, moreover, he had told him the story of the bamboos. So Mr. S— and I hurried off to the barge *Mabel*, then being loaded, happily with casks, under a huge iron gallows with an iron halter. The bamboos were drawn out once more, to the hindrance of the street traffic—the business was becoming quite a parochial affair—and after being trundled down on a hand-truck, laid on the casks. I could not find how much the carriage of them would cost, but being told that the charge was fixed, and would be very "reasonable," paid one-and-sixpence for wharfage dues, and consigned my bamboos to the deep, with a label directed to myself at my Suffolk home, and stating that when convenient the parcel was to be forwarded, also per barge—for I resented the thought of being let in for costly railway trucks after all—to Stowmarket. I knew that there was a river there, though I was not sure whether in these days of land-steam it was still open for water-traffic. However, I assumed it, and packed my purchase off. Mr. S— called the next morning, and said the *Mabel* had sailed—it was vile weather—and that is all I know of the bamboos at present.

A week or more has passed, and I have received a post-card from Stowmarket, saying that three dozen of bamboos directed to me have arrived per barge; no bill or invoice has arrived.

The interval has produced some more information, fresh to me at least, about bamboos. I wrote to a kindly clergyman at Ipswich, telling him I had sent forth my purchase, and asking him, in his walks, to be so good as to see whether it had stuck fast there. He replied, saying that the huge fagot had gone on; telling me at the same time that he had grown bamboos twelve or fourteen feet long in his own garden, and

that they had presented quite an Eastern appearance. In my response I begged for the name of the species, and find that it is the *Arundo donax*. The next thing will be to get some seed, if I can, and have a small plantation of my own.

Since writing the above I have run down for two days to my country home, which is about ten miles from Stowmarket, in the East of England. Of course I sent a cart for the bamboos. They came all safe, and my man brought me the bill for their carriage—3s. The railway people wanted £2 16s. 8d. for depositing them at a station a few miles from the spot to which they were taken by barge. Verily, water-way is cheaper than iron-way. I wonder how many non-commercial people, who send cumbrous parcels and what not to places accessible by sea, have found out the contrast between the charges by ship and rail. Trains run very fast, and we mostly believe without question that they are the best vehicles for all packages. But if any of my readers want to transmit lumbering ones to a spot touched by water, I would advise them to see whether a barge cannot be found sailing there. They will have to wait a little longer for their goods, that is all. None of my bamboos were broken, though they had to be shifted from one vessel to another.

As to the uses of bamboos in England, I have already said that their fibre is worked up in some brooms and brushes; but the cane itself, I am told, makes the best garden stakes possible. It is not only light and strong, but the end stuck in the ground does not rot for a very long time. It looks well, too, and would make excellent fencing round young trees. I shall get a parcel more from Mr. S.—for this purpose. They would look best, I fancy, if intertwined with cane; such, I mean, as boys are sometimes most acquainted with. I went yesterday to a wholesale dealer in this article, and was surprised to find how very cheap it was. A hundredweight—enough to equip all the pedagogues in Great Britain for centuries—costs only about 30s. If the cane is well soaked in water it can be tied into knots without breaking. Woven in with bamboo, it would make a cheap strong fence, that would last for years and years. I shall certainly try this in the country.

I wonder that bamboo is not more used for the spars of small sailing boats in our waters. I have one at home, and shall replace its heavy deal mast, sprit, and boom with bamboo. Then a boy could carry the whole apparatus down to the boat with ease; and besides being one's self saved from the chance of an ugly bang from the boom when the wind is fresh, I am told by a sailor with whom I have been talking about the use of

the bamboo in Chinese vessels, that a small mast made of it will need no stays, but bend like a whip rather than break. He has kindly offered to fit me up a set of sails with bamboo spars, which I can tuck all together under my arm, and yet will suit a boat which carries half a dozen persons easily, and be "shipped" or "unshipped" in a minute.

As to the uses to which the bamboo is put in the countries where it grows plentifully, we all have an idea that it is very largely employed. But it was not till I had looked out the word "Bamboo" in two or three books of reference that I realised how all-important an item it is in tropical countries, especially in China and Japan. Let me save my readers the trouble of research, and tell them that bamboos sometimes grow to the height of 100 feet. This discovery rather damped my triumph in getting a few 30 feet in length. But I was somewhat reassured by the initial statement, on good authority, that the "*Bamboo (Bambusa)* is a genus of grasses, of which most of the species attain to a great size, many of them being 20 or 30 feet, some 70 or 100 in height." I expect that these last are very exceptional. Fancy two canes reaching nearly to the top of the monument! It is difficult to say to what purposes the bamboo is not applied. The seeds of some species are consumed as rice, or employed in the making of a sort of beer. The tops of others are boiled and eaten as asparagus. Bamboo is not only used in building houses and bridges, and for furniture, but being hollow, and yet divided by strong partitions at its joints, it forms water-vessels of various sorts. Its leaves, moreover, are used for thatch, and the Chinese plait hats of them. It makes, as we know, walking-sticks and fishing-rods. And if it is the instrument for the bastinado, it also promotes a more agreeable sensation in forming the stem of a pipe. It is indeed so useful in such manifold ways that surprise has been expressed at its not being grown artificially, so as to render districts productive which are now little else than deserts, in climates like those of Arabia, the north of Africa, and Australia—for it is often found in arid spots which would otherwise be destitute of vegetation. Bamboos are easy to raise, light to carry, very strong, and extremely durable; and there is no reason why in these days of water-carriage they should not be far more extensively used in all countries. Though they do not grow in damp places, when cut they resist and survive wet well, the stems being remarkably silicious—in other words, coated with flint. Indeed the stem of one kind is so hard that it strikes fire when struck with iron.

HARRY JONES, M.A.

