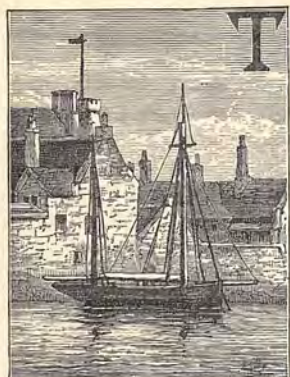


(SIGHTS AND SCENES OF THE NEW WORLD.) BY CATHERINE OWEN.



TO the foreigner residing in America long enough to watch the beginning and the end of changes, perhaps the most remarkable thing is the rapidity with which, having once decided that a certain thing is desirable, Americans set to work to attain it.

No obstacle, natural or artificial, is allowed to obstruct them, whether it be hundreds

of acres of barren rocks, without soil for a blade of grass to grow, which they mean shall bloom into the fertile loveliness of Central Park, or—like Coney Island—a flat, arid waste of sand, given up to rowdyism, which they determine shall become a gay and fashionable resort—the most attractive watering-place in the world to spend a day in.

Changes we see in every country—parks evolved from barren places, sea-side resorts from sand-banks—but usually the process is gradual, slow, and after some years the end is attained; but in America the attainment follows quickly on the resolution.

Ten years ago Coney Island was unknown to respectable New York, except as a barren, sandy waste very close to the city. One would hear vague regrets that there should be within ten miles of the city a fine beach and bathing-place of which no use was made, its wonderful facilities for sea-bathing amid the enjoyment of fresh ocean breezes being entirely given over to those who made the beach a Pandemonium.

In 1875, at the west end of the island, there was a wretched little hotel or tavern, and to this point two boats went daily from New York city; and at the termination of the Coney Island road stood another miserable hostelry. About this time an enterprising capitalist saw the possibilities of the place, and built a steam-railroad from Brooklyn to what is now known as West Brighton Beach, and erected a large restaurant and pavilion.

Six years later—in 1881—Coney Island had become the most popular watering-place in the country. There were eight railroads running to it, one line of horse-cars (tram-cars), and nine lines of steamboats, capable of transporting at least 150,000 persons to and from the beach daily, were in operation.

The beach is covered with light, cool, and gaily-painted buildings for every conceivable purpose, and during the whole summer months the sands are black with people.

Three of the hotels are among the finest of their kind in the world, and a number of the others fully equal to the best hotels at other watering-places.

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The island is now divided into four parts, known as the West End, West Brighton, Brighton Beach, and Manhattan Beach; and one soon learns that these divisions represent differences in the social scale of those who visit them.

The West End is still left much to nature. There are unattractive bathing-houses, the beach covered with refuse thrown up by the tides, and a huge wooden pavilion is used as a lurching-place.

Between West End and West Brighton are numbers of small hotels and pavilions, and then West Brighton Hotel. This forms about the centre of the beach, and here we begin to see what money and determination can do against nature.

Remember, Coney Island is but a sand-bar, into the soil of which we sink ankle-deep; and then look at this great Plaza, brilliant with parterres of flowers—masses of heliotrope, of roses, of geraniums—as beautifully kept as in Hyde Park itself, the grass green and fresh, traversed by broad wooden paths.

A fine band plays every afternoon and evening, and at this point the scene is like a huge fair-ground. At a distance from the Plaza performances of all kinds are going on—"Punch and Judy," dancing dogs, acrobats, great swings, merry-go-rounds, lecturers, vendors, jugglers, waxworks: everything that ever did go to a fair comes here, and it is to this point that the humbler pleasure-seeker, out for a rare day's holiday, brings wife, children, and lunch-basket, and regales eyes and ears, while the body is refreshed by the sharp, salt air of the Atlantic.

Here, too, is one of the great iron piers, which, built of tubular iron piles, runs a thousand feet into the sea. On it are three two-storey buildings, containing saloons, dining-rooms, and promenades. There are also 1,200 bath-rooms, and stairways leading down into the water.

Steamboats from New York land here every hour of the day and evening, and at night the whole is lighted with electric lights.

At this date there is a second iron pier, built very near the one first mentioned, and offering still larger accommodation to excursionists, and having, in addition to all the attractions of the one first built, a theatre. Both of the piers have a most excellent restaurant, and at the innumerable small tables one can partake of a French dinner while watching the bathing below.

A wide drive and promenade of half a mile brings us to Brighton Beach—a very favourite spot with the better class of visitors. The hotel here has also a profusion of flowers, grass, and terraced walks; but at this part of the beach the itinerant vendor is not seen, nor any of the noisy attractions of the West End.

The Brighton Hotel is an ornamental building, handsomely furnished, over 500 feet long, and during the day can provide meals for 20,000 people. In front of this hotel is a pavilion, in which an orchestra of sixty discourse most excellent music during the afternoon and evening.

From Brighton to Manhattan Beach is two miles and a half, and the two are connected by a so-called marine railway.

This hotel is nearly 700 feet long, and three and four storeys in height, and very handsomely furnished. The lower floors and piazzas are entirely given up to the daily visitors; the upper ones are reserved for those who make a longer stay. Four thousand can dine at one time in this house.

One feature of all these hotels is that excellent accommodation is provided, without charge, for those families who bring their own lunch.

A large, airy pavilion, open to the sea, with parquet floor, neat tables, chairs, and abundant ice-water, cost nothing. Here the more frugal can unpack their baskets comfortably, and sit and eat the sandwiches, fried chicken or fried oysters, pickles, jelly-cake, and biscuit (rolls), which form the usual contents of an American lunch-basket.

Waiters are in attendance, and of them can be ordered any additional dish or dishes—tea, coffee, or beer—that may be required. Some parties bring only part of the lunch—the bread, butter, pickles, and cake—and order the sea-food for which the place is famous—soft-shell crab, clam, chowder, broiled fish, &c.

But such ordering is not usual or expected in return for the use of the pavilion. The hotel proprietors probably find their interest in the fact that the trim grounds and terraces—which, forming part of the beach, are open to all—are absolutely free from litter. No *débris* of a peripatetic luncheon—shells of hard eggs, empty bottles, orange-peel, or pieces of paper—strew the sand, or the miles of planked space that surround every hotel.

Coney Island is gayest at night: it is then that the parched and weary New York business man quits his office, and takes the boat to this sea-girt island—dines, listens to the music, and, if he wishes, can be back in the city by nine o'clock.

Thousands of clerks go to the island as the families who have been spending the day return, and the bathing goes on by electric light till midnight.

Its convenient proximity to the city, the fact that there is everything to make it as easy to spend an evening by the sea-shore as to walk in the park, make it an inestimable boon to those whom business compels to remain in the city through the hot months.

Although I have been able to give a few particulars of this remarkable watering-place, I have not been able to convey an idea of the aspect of it—its wealth of colour—by day; for flowers, fountains, and the bunting that streams from every tower of every hotel and pavilion, make a bright picture, over which the sun shines brightly (if we are fortunate), and the blue sea sparkles.

At night, however, the scene is more gay. It is a sort of Ranelagh-by-the-Sea. Handsome dressing is the rule, and the fact that every foot of terrace is kept as clean as a ball-room enables ladies to wear their delicate clothing with as little damage as in a drawing-room, and they vie with each other in the beauty of their costume. This applies principally, of course, to

those who spend some time on the island, which, although its greatest value is to those who would get the sea-air in no other way, it has become very much the fashion to do. It is easy for business men to send wife and family to a spot where they can so easily join them in the evening, and every year it is becoming more and more common to do this.

At night, then, a surging crowd of gaily-dressed people pervades the place; thousands are seated at the little tables, taking ices or other refreshments, while the concerts go on, Levy or Arbuckle playing, perhaps, a cornet solo, and Gilmore (the Jullien of America) leading the band; for the music provided is the finest attainable, great rivalry existing on this point between the fashionable hotels.

The electric light beams over all, but thousands of coloured lights are everywhere. The iron piers are lighted with crimson-globed lights, which gleam redly over the sea. Most of the buildings are outlined with coloured lights, and at nine, from two or three points, there are very fine fireworks; with music and gaiety, and laughter, and fragrance of flowers everywhere.

Looking at this night scene, where money is spent lavishly, where the multitude seem given up to the enjoyment of the hour, in which every sense is gratified—for, besides the eye and ear and palate, the air is filled with sweet odours—one forgets that one is in prosaic, money-making America; for, as a rule, Americans, as their English cousins are said to do, take their pleasures sadly—the *atmosphere* of gaiety is usually lacking.

Coney Island is an exception to all this. No Parisian or Italian fête has more colour or *abandon* than is to be found here at all times in the season.

One of the gay pavilions on the beach is a pretty temporary home for strayed children. In the immense crowds such cases occur daily. The lost child is taken by one of the beach police, or other Good Samaritan, to the cool and pretty building, where it is amused and entertained till claimed. There is no rushing about in all directions, searching weary hours in the broiling sun by terrified guardians, to find at last a tearful, frightened child at a police-station, as at the London Crystal Palace or Hyde Park on fête days, or as would be the case elsewhere in America. If the child is missed, the mother goes direct to the place to which she knows it has been, or will be, taken.

Another convenience is a "lost and found" bureau, where articles found or lost can be taken or claimed; and it speaks well for American honesty that the "finds" are in no mean proportion to the "lost."

The season lasts only so long as the warm weather, and the close of it varies according to the late or early autumn; but the day the fiat has gone forth that the chill days have come, presto!—the whole scene changes like the "baseless fabric of a dream." Down comes the bunting, up go the gay awnings; hotels are dismantled, vehicles of every kind disappear, kiosques and every movable thing are taken away, and within a week or so nothing remains but gaunt, empty buildings with closed shutters, the deserted piers, and closed bathing-houses, to tell of what has been.