

tried little transparent devices to keep us in the drawing-room. What anxious apologies she made—what weak excuses she invented to account for John's absence, which, after all, surely needed no accounting for!

There were only Grace and me to whom to apologise, for Louisa was absent also.

"Adorning herself for conquest already?" I whispered to Grace, rather maliciously; and had to retract the next instant, for Louisa came in, still in her morning dress.

"I hope you have not wanted me, dear Lady Erlston? I had some letters to write, so I went in the library to do them."

"In the library? But—ish't John there?" stammered Lady Erlston.

"Yes, but we didn't interfere with each other," said Louisa, with a curious smile.

Her smiles had puzzled me all day, and never more than now. Some instinct told me that the destination and purpose of John's letter were as little a secret to her as to myself, and yet she could smile!

"It is time we were all dressing," she said, glancing at the clock. "We must not let John's fête be a failure, Lady Erlston, just because Miss Rivers has gone away. I wonder she could go when you so much wished her to stay. I think she could not have been very desirous to be here herself, or she would have insisted on staying."

"We cannot blame her for acting like the dear, good, dutiful child she is," cried Lady Erlston warmly. "I am glad she knew her duty and did it, sorely as I miss her. A good daughter makes a good——"

She broke off just in time, and then continued, a little stiffly, "If John and I do not find fault with her, I do not see that any one else need."

Lady Erlston swept out of the room, and Grace and I agreed it was time to dress, and followed; but Louisa lingered, perhaps a little hurt at the rebuke.

That, at least, was what I thought then. Afterwards—well, afterwards I remembered several little inci-

dents that did not strike me at the time, or only raised a passing wonder in my mind. I remembered that as I reached the top of the great well-staircase, I heard the library-door unclose, and leaning over the balusters I looked down into the hall. It was only dimly lighted as yet, but I had no difficulty in recognising John's tall figure. He paused a moment at the table, no doubt to lay his letter on the silver salver where the letters were always laid ready for the post, and then came slowly up-stairs, absorbed in his own thoughts. I remembered that after John had turned into the corridor where his own room lay, and I still leant over the balusters, musing pleasantly on the letter I had seen him place on the salver, some one moved out into the hall from the drawing-room. It was Louisa, and I knew then that she must have been standing by the half-open drawing-room door.

Had she been watching for John? I wondered. And if so, why did she let him pass on his way up-stairs? It seemed as if I had once more done her injustice. Apparently she had only been waiting to place her own letters on the table, and as I saw her bending over it, a great pity filled my heart. For there lay the letter that must change any doubt as to John's intentions into all but absolute certainty, and she could scarcely fail to see it. But if she saw it she gave no sign.

She came up-stairs a moment later, with a candle in her hand. The light fell full on her face, and showed it plainly. There was neither pain nor despair, nor even depression in the fair countenance. The light that showed it so plainly, showed it gay and radiant and triumphant; and I felt utterly puzzled and at fault.

All the evening she was in the gayest spirits, rallying us all on the depression we could not shake off, and appropriating John's attentions with a cleverness that amused as much as it annoyed me.

The fête was not a failure, and I was obliged to admit that it owed its success in a great measure to Louisa's exertions.

END OF CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

PAVEMENT ARTISTS.



PERHAPS, of all the mongrel callings which spring into existence in cities, and illustrate the high pressure of modern life, none is more incongruous than that of the pavement artist. We should be no more likely to look for art on the flagstones than for a fortune in the gutter; but, as it seems, there is a by no means inconsiderable class who are busily engaged in gaining a living out of each of these avocations. In London the pavement artist is a very familiar personage. He takes up his station at an early hour, generally at the same point, which is, of course, in the most conspicuous part

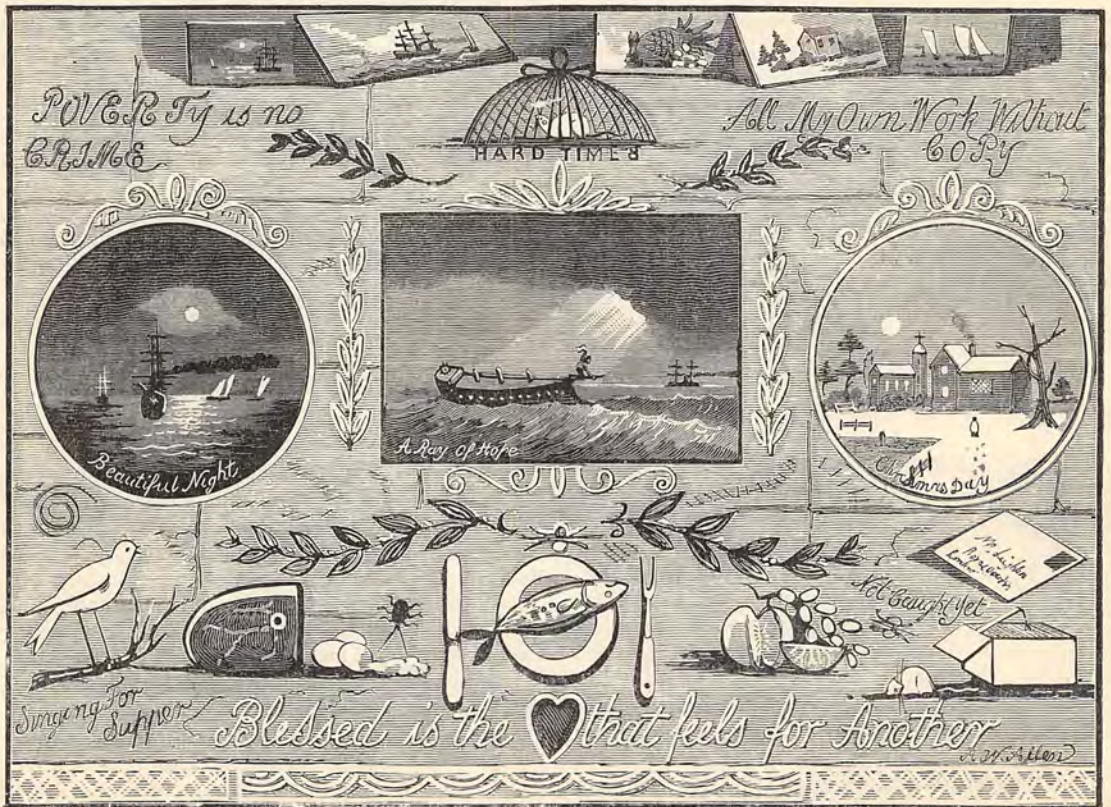
of a crowded thoroughfare, and seems to enjoy an enviable immunity from the operation of the stern edict by which the Metropolitan Police regulate the traffic on the simple but effectual system of the pop-gun. The unkempt and generally "seedy" figure crouching over those hard flagstones, in an attitude at once undignified and uncomfortable, is suggestive of anything rather than prosperity. The long row of works of art drawn in chalk on the pavement, which the next shower of rain will wash away, might not perhaps stand much chance with the Council of the Royal Academy, although they would doubtless be held to possess a very considerable amount of "artistic merit" by a British jury. The first characteristic that must strike any observer of these curious eccentricities of vagabond

genius is their singular sameness. Not only does the same artist repeat his productions, with but scanty variation, day by day, but go where one will, the same "subjects" seem by some mysterious canon to call for treatment in chalk. Thus, whether it be in Marylebone or at Westminster, we can predict beforehand many of the scenes chosen for illustration. Sea-pieces, for example, are indispensable, and these afford plenty of scope for that vivid colouring which is so effective with a pavement background. What could be more striking than a vessel becalmed by night at sea, which is here always "so darkly, deeply, beautifully blue," while a sky of ominous blackness is broken by a very full moon, which casts a long line of glittering light across the rippling waves! Again, "A Ship on Fire at Sea" is a favourite subject, while "The Morning after the Storm" presents great opportunities for effective rendering. But turning to the more homely efforts, we can discern much shrewdness in the class of objects selected. A red herring, for instance, appeals powerfully to the imagination of a hungry artisan, and often produces the desired pence from pockets not too well filled, but owned by persons who have a fellow-feeling for their hungry fellow-creatures. Again, various viands are more or less realistically depicted. A piece of salmon, a rasher of bacon, a cut orange, a bunch of grapes, a pineapple, and fruits innumerable, with, of course, a

knife and fork, appeal forcibly to the imagination and the sympathies of those for whom landscape possesses no charm. Indeed, so varied is the selection that the taste must be exacting indeed that does not here find something to please.

But the observant passer-by will notice that these rough pictures are of very unequal merit. Here, for instance, may be seen one that clearly indicates a practised and educated hand. The perspective, if not faultless, will pass muster. The rules of foreground, background, and middle distance are fairly well observed. The colouring, if a little loud, is not without a certain merit. Side by side with it, however, is a mere daub, which many a future artist who is still in the nursery could beat. In fact, it is often very apparent that two handicraftsmen have been at work. There is, indeed, little doubt that this calling is pursued on a much more extensive scale than is generally supposed. The "artist" of the joint-stock company is, of course, easily able to visit several points in the course of a few hours, leaving each in charge of an assistant or apprentice, who generally fills in the background, and does such supplementary pieces as he can.

Such a conclusion, of course, does away with much of the romance which clings to the pavement artist. But if you come to think of it, it is at first sight not a little curious that the class should exist at all. It is incredible that any educated man should ever descend to



FAC-SIMILE REPRODUCTIONS OF PAVEMENT SKETCHES.



THE ARTIST AND HIS GALLERY.

such a depth in the social scale ; and for ourselves, we can safely assert that we have never had any reason to believe that the ostensible pavement artists of London were the victims of fortune. They are for the most part illiterate and uneducated, and are socially only a few degrees removed from the hawker class. Possibly some of them would achieve a position of independence, if not fame, but for the accident of birth, and they are a standing protest against the want which exists of technical education. Granted opportunity, many of them might do very well in some of those callings which require a sort of second-rate artistic ability, if they were not capable of higher things.

There seems, however, to be considerable misapprehension as to the profits of this and similar callings. It is not a little difficult to arrive at the true facts in this particular, but we have reason to believe that from five to ten shillings a day is not a high average at which to put the takings of a street gallery in fine weather. Doubtless the amount fluctuates ; but it will generally be noticed that these men choose localities frequented by working men, and this is a wise discretion. The British workman is the most generous of men, and it is seldom that he will not find a spare "copper" or two to bestow upon those who cater for his amusement or appeal to his ready sympathy. Occasionally, too, and perhaps not unfrequently, a small windfall, in the shape

of a shilling carelessly thrown upon the pavement by a well-to-do passer-by, swells the day's earnings. Of course, in bad weather the artist has to seek other means of making a living. Thus, as he will himself tell you, he sometimes has a sale for pictures on card ; and here his artisan clients are good customers. Not too critical in their taste, many of them are greatly attracted by the rich and gaudy colouring of one of these chalk drawings, and will gladly give a few shillings for a copy on card to hang up at home. Not the least amusing feature of this branch of the trade is that payment for these productions is based, not on the subject treated, but on the size. The usual charge for "an arrangement" in red, green, and blue, 3 ft. by 1½ ft., for instance, is two shillings and sixpence.

This occupation is arduous and irksome enough to enlist some sympathy for those who follow it. It is, at the same time, to be regretted that a calling of such a mendicant nature should be encouraged. Whether these men are engaged by others, who do not appear, or solicit alms on their own account is no great matter. But so far as they are concerned, it is hard to believe that if they were prepared to join the mighty army of regular toilers they could not earn a livelihood. As it is, they serve no useful or beneficent purpose, and it is to be feared that they receive a large amount of practical sympathy that might be better bestowed.