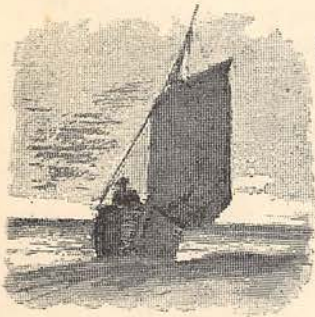


SHRIMPING.

THE METROPOLIS OF SHRIMPS.



ON a creek of the Thames, three or four miles above Southend, is a small fishing-village, which seems to have escaped being developed. Indeed, the place has a curious old-world look about it, which cannot fail to strike the most

careless visitor. Close by the waterside stands a row of genuine fishermen's cottages, their small yards forming a primitive quay. Facing these, on the other side of the narrow street, is another row curiously similar. Low, and very roughly built, for the most part of wood, though here and there a cottage of brick seems to wear a look of modern improvement, this, the main thoroughfare of Leigh, does not seem to indicate prosperity. And if we watch the leisurely way in which the trains draw into the sleepy station, which is scarcely raised above the high-water mark, and note how that idle crowd of men and women, boys and girls, dogs and fowls, throng about the railroad, or stroll to and fro over the level crossing, we can hardly realise that this is the Metropolis of Shrimps. Nor if we

ascend the steep hill, which rises abruptly on the north, are there any metropolitan features to be seen. The houses are all of much the same type, and even the inevitable builder seems to get scanty encouragement, for the few erections of brick and stucco on the hill-side are, or were when we last saw them, mostly unoccupied. But climbing up the steep and narrow pathway which leads to the top of the hill, we forget for the time being that we are in search of shrimp merchants' mansions.

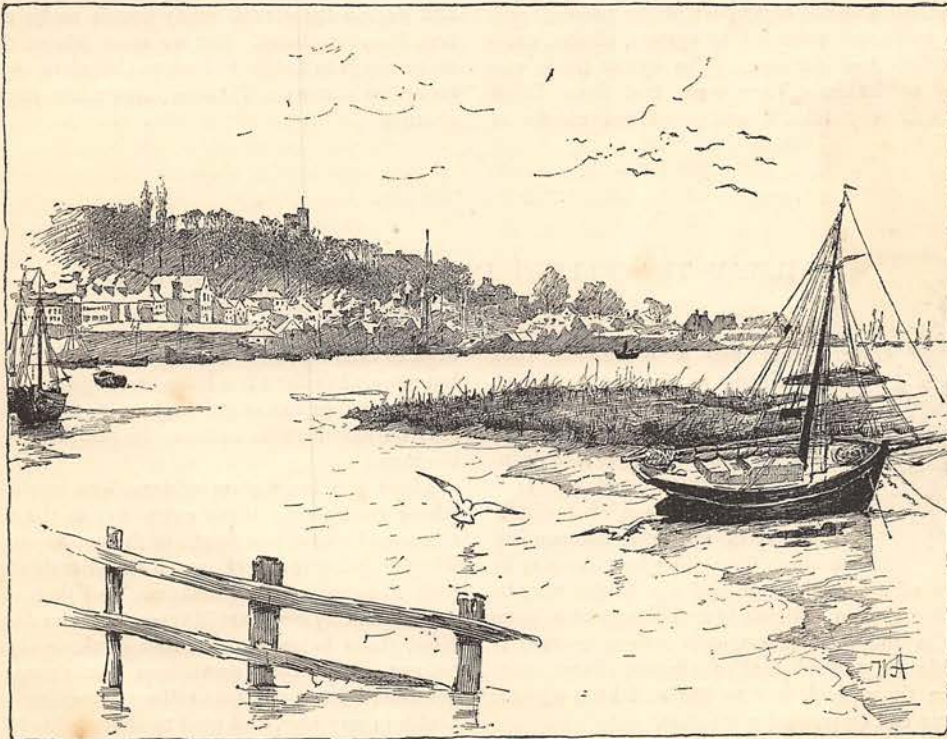
Here stands a quaint old church, and round it "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep." Looking southward we see the Thames, here a broad silver streak, and worthy of its reputation as the world's great waterway, up and down which is being perpetually borne the merchandise of both the hemispheres. And as we gaze upon the mighty river we see passing and re-passing steamers of every size, from the tiny tug to the huge ocean steamship, some homeward, some outward bound. Dotted about the river are smacks of every rig, while here and there the trim white sails of a yacht add a pleasing touch to the picture. Close in shore, too, is a fleet of some hundred fishing-boats, some at anchor, but most of them lying high and dry on the mud. At our feet lies the tiniest metropolis in the world, looking from here still more out of date. A little to the eastward are low banks of marshes, jutting

far out into the river, and intersected by innumerable creeks and swamps. Of these creeks, the innermost, Leigh Ray, stretches along past the village and saltings until it changes its name to Horseshoe Reach, which skirts Canvey Island and joins Benfleet Creek. On the other side of the river we see the Sheerness forts and the rigging of the shipping in the Medway, while, as the eye travels down the coast passing the Isle of Sheppey, we can make out Margate harbour. Down the coast to the eastward, the undulating ridges hide the view until we see Southend pier, which stretches out like a huge breakwater far into mid-stream.

To our right is the very beau-ideal of country recatories, nestled in trees, and clustering round the church stand a group of pleasant houses, some old, some new, but all substantial and pleasant to look upon. One of these is peculiarly attractive. Low and with deep bow-windows, the masses of ivy which hang over the porch and climb up to the roof are a picturesque proof that this is part of the old village, and indeed, unless tradition speaks falsely, possesses a history. For many years it had the reputation of being haunted, but, as the story runs, during some alterations a female skeleton was found in the cellar, and the remains being buried in consecrated ground, the ghost was seen no more. It is, however, necessary nowadays that we should say that we only give the story for what it is worth, without in any way vouching for it as one worthy of the attention of the Psychological Society. But charming as this situation is—and in summer it would be difficult to

find one possessing a rarer combination of charms—the winter storms here rage roughly. The great gale of January, 1881, indeed, blew in the east window of the church. This is a reproduction of an earlier window, and has “three cusped ogee lights with reticulated flowing tracery.” It was filled in with stained-glass representing the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. John standing in the foreground. The style is that of the later masters. Only a few months ago the window was again blown in. Of the church itself we can say little here. Of the Late Perpendicular period, and built of Kentish ragstone, it is in many ways an interesting structure. The square stone tower, about eighty feet high, contrasts strongly with the nave and chancel (which has lately been enlarged), and the tiled roof, while a quaint and spacious red-brick porch of the Tudor style, is an obvious addition to the earlier building. The nave opens into the chancel by “a wide arch of two reveals with hollow chamfered edges,” but this is not ancient. The same must be said of the four pointed arches which separate the north aisle from the nave. The chancel, lately restored and enlarged, is the oldest part of the church, and probably dates from the reign of Edward III. A double-light window on the south side is filled in with stained-glass pictures of Faith and Hope; but these are of no great allegorical or artistic value.

But we must now leave the church, and retracing our steps to the village, go in search of shrimps. The whole population, about 1,700, is chiefly engaged in



LEIGH.

shrimping, and their prosperity varies with the season and the weather. Fishing is chiefly carried on with small trawls, and besides shrimps, which are sometimes taken in immense quantities, dabs, plaice, and even soles are caught. The "take" of shrimps varies within wide limits, a boat sometimes taking a hundred gallons in a single day or night, but forty gallons is considered a good haul, and, of course, very often the work is not even remunerative. But the market price of shrimps at Billingsgate is, if possible, of more importance to the Leigh fishermen than the amount of the take, and this will be believed when we add that it fluctuates between four shillings as a maximum and one shilling as a minimum price per gallon. The shrimps are boiled on board boat and then picked over, the brown fetching a much higher price than the red. They are sent up to London at night by goods trains, and sometimes the freight amounts to as much as 2,000 gallons. The Leigh shrimping fleet now consists of about a hundred boats, which are mostly small.

The fishery is a very ancient one, and probably existed in British times. In Roman times there was certainly a colony here, and when a cliff fell some years since, a large number of Roman coins were found. The place was of sufficient importance to be mentioned in "Domesday Book," and it was of some account as a nursery of sailors in the reign of Edward II. But we must pass over its history.

In the seventeenth century it was of some importance as the only port between Gravesend and Harwich. The fishery of Leigh Ray has passed through some curious transformations. Thus, during the eighteenth and the early part of the present century the trade was confined to oysters, whelks, mussels, winkles, and shrimps. The oyster trade was long very profitable. They were laid from Leigh Marsh to Canvey Island, and consisted chiefly of

the deep-sea species, which were brought from Jersey and Cancale Bay. So rich were the beds that in 1724 they were the occasion of an invasion of the men of Sheppey and the Kentish coast, which is known in history as "the Kentish Armada." The poachers carried off some thousand bushels of oysters. The Leigh fishermen were evidently very peaceably disposed men, for they actually resorted to law for a remedy, and the trespassers were tried at the Brentwood assizes, the jury assessing the damages at £2,000. The fishery extended from Leigh Ray all round Canvey Island. Since 1855, in which year about 468 tons of oysters were sent off to London, as against about thirty tons of shrimps, winkles, and mussels, ostriculture has steadily declined here, and in 1864, 705 tons of shrimps and mussels were despatched, and only 34 tons of oysters. Since then the trade in oysters and whelks has been altogether abandoned.

The shrimp trade fluctuates greatly according to the weather. In a stormy season the take is very small, and when too fine the men are often out for days without earning enough to pay expenses. Windy, but not "dirty," weather is the best, and, as we have already pointed out, sometimes a single boat will make £20 in a day, but that is an exceptional sum. Perhaps £5 to £10 may be taken as the average earnings per boat in favourable weather. The fishermen are hardy and honest sailors, and Leigh has for centuries sent numbers of men to the navy and mercantile marine.

In many ways this little village possesses a charm of its own. Inland there are numerous beautiful walks, and during the season many people make excursions here from Southend. But we must advise those who make a trip to Leigh to look to the state of the tide, for at low water the Thames loses more than half its charms.

RAILWAY TRAVELLING IN COMFORT AND SAFETY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



SOME years ago a discussion took place, chiefly in the medical journals, as to the effects of railway travelling on the health. At this date I do not remember the conclusions generally arrived at. It is little matter, for even if I did, I should form my own independent opinion. Travelling by train may be productive of much pleasure, and the health may be benefited by it when judiciously and comfortably gone about. On the other hand, our railway system is accountable for a good deal of chronic illness, quite apart from those accidents to life and limb against which there can be no real protection.

It certainly is not my intention, however, in this paper to put forward railway travel as a new cure, or

even to recommend it as a curative agent of any kind, but merely to offer a few hints and suggestions, coupled with a word or two of good advice and warning, which may be found useful to those in health as well as to the invalid.

There is a large class of travellers in this country whose duties take them every day to the City, or to cities, and whose homes are in the country or suburbs. They spend, in point of fact, a considerable portion of their lives in railway carriages; and there are many others, notably commercial travellers, who do the same. Now, those belonging to either of these classes may be excused if they sometimes ask themselves the question, "Does constant railway travelling injure the health in any way, and tend to shorten life?"

The answer to this would, I think, be: "It all depends on how one travels." I happen to have