



### LIFE IN THE PARKS.

UCH are the ingenious researches of modern chemists, that we may now revel in our salt-water-bath at Brixton, almost as easily as at Brighton; may drink the Saltzbrunnen in our own bed-rooms; and keep Carlsbad and Marienbad bottled up in bins in our own cellars. Delcroix will enable us to enjoy the sweet perfume of jasmine and violet all the year round; and, thanks to Farina, the fragrant herbage of Cologne has become as accessible to us as the roses of Covent-garden. Yet how readily

would we resign all these advantages to that subtle alchemist who should enable us, here in our smoky London homes, to bathe for one half hour each morning in the bracing, healthy air of the country; to drink in its pure breezes and inhale the fragrant perfume of its dewy grass. Each year seems to shut them out from us more completely, as houses upon houses "immeasurably spread seem lengthening as we go" in every direction; until green fields promise soon to be as completely out of ken to the pent-up inhabitant of the metropolis, as its streets, with all their wonders, were, some hundred years ago, to his country forefathers.

In this emergency, the few green enclosures which have been preserved from the encroachments of brick and mortar, acquire a value in our eyes to which it is to be feared their intrinsic merits give them but slender claim. They are the only refreshing spots in the great wilderness of smoke and dirt. If the trees be somewhat bare and stunted, and the grass present a somewhat arid and dusty appearance, they are trees and it is grass notwithstanding; and if the air be wanting somewhat in the pure inspiring oxygen that invigorates us in the country, it is heaven itself to the hot and smoky atmosphere of the neighbour-

ing streets. The Londoner, therefore, prizes his Parks as though they were fresh and fair as Arcadia itself.

They serve him with a hint  
That Nature lives. That sight-refreshing green  
Is still the livery she delights to wear,  
Though sickly sample of the exuberant whole.

Of all these play-grounds of the Town, Hyde Park is unquestionably the most universally attractive. It is the Royal Exchange of Fashion—Pleasure's place of business—and laboriously does she work there. It is a Social Republic, where peer meets *parvenu* in amicable equality, Brompton takes the wall of Belgravia, and Mincing-lane jostles May Fair.

C'est tout justement la Cour du Roi Petard.

If we turn our steps within its precincts late on a sunny afternoon, in the month of June, what a busy, lively, motley scene we shall find spread out before us. Round the Apsley House gates a small crowd is patiently awaiting the expiration of the twenty minutes which will procure them a glimpse of Royalty on its way home from its afternoon drive. Carriage after carriage, horseman after horseman, is passing slowly out, without, however, causing any sensible diminution in the crowds of pleasure-seekers within. The Serpentine is dotted here and there with boats, and every now and then a bar or two of "Don Pasquale" is borne to us across it, from the band in Kensington Gardens. The broad walk along its banks—the loose gravel of which ever suggests to us a sympathising fellow-feeling with the pilgrim who did not boil his peas—presents two compact streams of well-dressed, well-mannered idlers, enjoying the double gratification of seeing and being seen; whilst the drive which it borders exhibits an unbroken circle of vehicles of every description. There goes an elaborate carriage, the harness studded with crests and arms that might puzzle the Heralds' College, plastered on every panel; showy horses, showy hammercloth, showy footmen behind, showy bonnets

within, and pretence everywhere. "Stylish turn-out, that!" observes, approvingly, to a friend, a gentleman with particoloured legs and a short stick, looking like Mr. Harley in *Touchstone*, who is leaning gracefully over the rails beside us—"Stylish turn out, that!" We do not feel at liberty to controvert the position, but we are involuntarily reminded of Mr. Burchell and the "high-life and high-lived company" of Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amalia Skeggs. There passes a dark green barouche, with its fresh chintz summer lining, small crossed letters on the door-panel—the eyes must be good to detect the strawberry leaves above, though there are—and quiet, well-appointed servants and cattle. The affair is not very modern, nor very new; but the perfect congruity of every detail, and its unpretending *ensemble*, speak clearly of ascertained position and Grosvenor-square. Now, perhaps, comes the neat dog-cart, black picked out with drab, of an "Oxford man," whose delight it is "to collect the Olympic dust with his chariot-wheels"—the only collections from Olympus which, it is to be feared, he is ever likely to accomplish; the ponderous "leathern conveniency" of Dowagerhood and Upper Gloucester-place; broughams, with crimson curtains, veiling primrose bonnets; and sober, useful-looking chariots, suggestive of medical notabilities and Saville-row.

We are longing all this time to know something of the names and histories of the *dramatis personæ* before us, in which, unhappily, our own personal acquaintance with the *beau monde* affords us but little aid. Fortunately, our friend in the bi-coloured continuations, who is just ahead of us, conveying an agreeable impression of recent cigars, appears to know everybody; and the unobtrusive tone in which he conveys his information to his less erudite neighbour, appears to relieve us from any fear of indiscretion in availing ourselves of his universal knowledge. He points out eminent peers, and knows how much a-year they have to spend, independently of mortgages; distinguished turf men, and their losses on the last Derby; M.P.s whom he has met, and guardsmen with whom he is in the habit of messing. In regard to the ladies, too, he appears equally well informed, and imparts much useful and even confidential information respecting them—their residences, the fortunes and prospects of those who have any, and the domestic troubles of others. We are bewildered by the universality of his knowledge, which we can only account for by supposing him to be either a Lord in Waiting or the Wandering Jew; Alexis, or Mr. Inspector Pearce on special duty in the costume of aristocracy.

It is getting late as we cross the Serpentine-bridge, but Rotten-row is still full, and its various occupants are enjoying its advantages more or less characteristically, as the case may be—gravely, like the old gentleman on the gray cob, who is taking it medicinally; industriously, like the middle-aged lady, who is trotting down twelve stone into eight-and-a-half; carefully, like the horse-doctor, who is exercising one of his patients; or, recklessly, like the worthy who owes his mount to a too-confiding friend. Now, a youthful *débutante* is making her first essay in public, under the protection of an ancient groom, who watches her as tenderly as though he were her father himself, for whom, indeed, he may, some thirty years ago, have performed a similar service; now an ardent cavalier is rendering himself an object of interest to the park-keepers by pressing his trot into a gallop; there canters a belle, well appointed, well mounted, testing the mettle of a party of young-gentlemen satellites, each of whom probably finds the others somewhat in the way. It is to be seen at a glance that there is blood in the rider as well as in the horse: she rides—as she dances, doubtless, or plays, or does anything—gracefully, easily, as a matter of course, confident in herself and careless of display. There is a marked distinction between her and the amazon in black velvet who follows. The latter rides admirably, it is true; sits her horse, sixteen hands high, with a good deal of blood, as though it were her natural seat; she needs no aid from groom or cavalier, and has neither; but as she passes, at a half canter, a doubt rises in our mind whether a lady may not ride even too well, or seem to do so—whether Beauty should be quite so intimately associated in our minds with the Beast; in short, whether there is not about her rather too much of the air of "*Venus en bottes*." There our young friend, Mr. Foker—who could mistake him?—apparelled in sumptuous raiment, is trotting off the effects of last night's supper-party; and our still older acquaintance, Mr. Titmouse, his glass in his eye, is walking a dubious-looking quadruped slowly and sedately along, for she is but the acquaintance of an hour, with whom he is apprehensive of taking liberties. As the evening draws on, the drive gradually thins, and we begin to wend our way homewards. We hail an omnibus, and, as we are entering, what is our astonishment to behold our *arbitrè elegantiarum* of the Park, the confidant of the Peerage, the *enfant gâté* of the female aristocracy of his country; who, having exchanged his *paille* gloves for Berlin, is contentedly smoking a cigar on the knife-board. He gets down at Albert-cottages, and we see him no more.

If Hyde Park be the most popular, St. James's is unquestionably the most exclusive. It belongs to that inner circle of the great Maelstrom which is free from the changes and eddies which disturb its outer revolutions. It is not fashionable, for it is above fashion. Every carriage that crosses it must possess some claim which mere rank or even money cannot purchase, ere it can pass the well-protected portals of the Horse Guards; and the very park-keeper who retails ginger-beer to the nursemaids, has held Cabinet Ministers in his arms at the cradle. Venice-like, it is a very region of palaces: there is Buckingham House, with its innumerable windows, looking like a vast cotton-mill in a holiday dress; St. James's, with its heavy red brick turrets and dull quadrangles, full of memories of Horace Walpole, oval-backed chairs, convex mirrors, and Miss Burney. There is Whitehall, but little changed from the day when be-ringed beauties and be-ribboned beaux took boat at its stairs, amidst the water-lilies of the Thames; for excursions to the suburban ruralities of Fox Hall. On the site of those

princely mansions to the north stood the palace and gardens of Carlton House. There George "le Débonnaire" held court and revel; there Cannon fired his reverend jests; and Alvanley had audience meet for his most finished coxcombries; there Walter Scott, as he tells us, "Hip, hip, hurraed! with the rest," at the Regent's toast of The Unknown Author of "Waverley;" and Mr. Brummell benefited his race by his first conceptions of the valuable capacities of starch. Age of war without, and a most revolution within—of faction in the senate and vice in the palace—of pudding neckcloths and Cossack trousers. Of all its revelry and all its wit, of all its intrigue and all its scandal, no vestige now remains, save a name, to tell of its whereabouts; and the passer-by, if he stays his steps at all, stops, like Defoe on the site of the pest-pit, to thank God for a purer atmosphere and healthier times. Yet here still rules the Court of St. James. Whatever influence St. George may have exercised in the times when his name was a trumpet-sound to merrie England, certain it is that now he is of the past: save in connexion with a fashionable marriage or a light sovereign, we know him no more. St. James is now Britannia's patron saint; and it is with his name that she is associated with every quarter of the globe. That row of buildings at the eastern end of St. James's Park—some old, some modern, some ugly, some attractive—are the great laboratories of the country—the *ateliers nationaux* of England—the workshops where are continually turning the innumerable wheels that keep in orderly motion the great machine of the State. From them the servants of its Crown watch with unsleeping eye the workings of home influences and foreign intrigue, and govern dependencies upon which the sun never sets. From that dull archway her captains keep unremitting ward over her safety; and from yon heavy building adjacent has thundered the cannon which protect her shores.

The past has here abundant associations, as well as the present. Along the broad pathway to the north, on a gloomy morning in January, between rows of frowning faces, a King without a throne, a Monarch with less power than the meanest beggar in his realm, was setting forth on his last walk from St. James's Palace, to expiate in his own person the vices of a worn-out system; and exchange an earthly crown for the "crown incorruptible" on the scaffold in front of the palace that had been the home of his pride. On the very same path—so short a time afterwards as in the perspective of time to be hardly perceptible—his son might have been seen awakening the obsequious smiles of surrounding bystanders, while exchanging *mauvaises plaisanteries* with a mistress, and gambling away as lightly as he came by them the spoils of Dunkirk. Poetry, too, here has its memories: along the Birdcage-walk, on the south side of the Park, the "blind man eloquent" has—how often!—stepped out from his garden in Petty France, to muse on the Paradise he described so well.

"Patrols of horse and foot are stationed from Sadler's Wells gate along the New-road to Tottenham-court turnpike, between the hours of eight and eleven, for the protection of the nobility and gentry." Such was the satisfactory announcement which saluted the eyes of the patrons of the drama, in the play-bills of Sadler's Wells Theatre, in June, 1783. Tottenham-court turnpike was evidently, at that time, the N.W. boundary of metropolitan civilisation, the *ultima thule*, in that direction, of London fashionable life. If the hedgerows and country lanes beyond it, contained, by chance, any rustic varieties of Thespis, they were apparently such only as might fairly be left to take care of themselves, humble suburbans, for whose safety the dramatic authorities felt in no way called upon to make provision.

How difficult it is, in June, 1853, as we cross that very New-road, from Portland-place to the enclosures of the Regent's Park, to realise in the well-kept gardens and minarets of Sussex-place, and the walks "strictly preserved" of the Inner Circle, the narrow roads and dark lanes where, but seventy years ago, the only safeguard of the benighted traveller against the highwayman and the footpad was in the fleetness of his horse or the strength of his arm.

The Regent's Park, it must be admitted, possesses nothing of the *prestige* which attaches to its rivals. It has no associations with the past like St. James's, for its birth is within the memory of most of us; it can raise no claim to fashion, like Hyde Park, for, save on the day of a *fête* at the Botanical Gardens, Belgravia knows not of its existence. But its life, nevertheless, is not without characteristics of its own. Though surrounded by the mansions of the higher middle classes, they seem to have but few sympathies with it. It is by prescriptive custom the park of the people. Here on a fine Sunday (the "life" of the Regent's Park is essentially a Sabbath one), how many a happy group shall we find of our brethren and sisters of the workshop and the show-room. They are chiefly from the extreme ends of town, for their main object has been to get, on this their infrequent holiday, as far away as possible from the familiar objects of their everyday existence. Here are artisans from Clerkenwell and Whitechapel, searching, baby in arm and dinner in hand, for a green spot where to enjoy the luxury of their Sunday newspaper in the pure fresh air their daily life has made so precious to them. Again, specimens of mortality, half-man, half-boy, in parties, for they are always gregarious, reciprocating wondrous legends of pet terriers and much-prized meerschams; neatly-dressed damsels, and swains to them appertaining in evening costume and white waistcoats, wending their weary, but contented way to "the green delights" of Hampstead Heath. What projects are in course of formation, could we but know them, what acquaintanceships are being established, and what pleasant recollections are being stored up for future times in that broad walk, and the green pastures to the left. Bright, indeed, might be the memory of that day to us all, whether idlers in Hyde Park or dreamers in St. James's, which should enable us to extract enjoyment from the simple elements which are sufficient to constitute happiness to many a Sunday holiday-maker in the Regent's Park!