



THE THAMES SEAWARD.

STRANGE is the fact, and worthy of notice, that persons accustomed to the active occupations of life, instead of seeking in their amusements the contrast of perfect quiet and repose, would appear to devote, almost exclusively, their leisure hours to that bustle and turmoil which habit, it is to be supposed, has rendered necessary to them. Hence it is, that by far the larger number of London holiday-makers who seek their enjoyment on the river, and who form no inconsiderable portion of the whole, instead of selecting the pure atmosphere and quiet pleasures

in which it is the most rich the more nearly we approach its source, turn to the smoke and excitement which characterise its course towards the sea. It is true that there may be green fields and fresh air to be found in that direction; that Blackheath has verdant hills, and Greenwich a broad and undefiled stream; but it is questionable how far even these advantages afford an adequate compensation for the ordeal which has to be undergone in attaining them.

If, however, there be a deficiency of the purer and higher enjoyments which we derive from the communion of the spirit with the works of the Creator, the scene is abundantly wealthy in those pleasures more easily grasped, which even the least enthusiastic mind derives from a sight of the practical labours of man.

There is, perhaps, no city in the world of which the main features and characteristics can be so easily recognised, without setting foot in it, as London, from the river Thames. Wealth in its wharves, labour on its quays, busy life on its bridges, fellowship and brotherhood with all the world in its docks, are all eloquent of that universality of character which it possesses in the estimation of the world. But we are not in a conspiracy to weary our readers

with a treatise on the wealth of nations, or to rival the commercial honours of Mr. McCulloch; it is in the pleasure to be derived from the scenes referred to that our interest chiefly lies, and with that only have we now to concern ourselves. To our progenitors of a hundred years ago, who, if prompted by necessity or inclination to cross the Thames at any point west of old London-bridge, were indebted to the precarious assistance of a wherry and a waterman (a character of London life, by the way, almost as extinct as the chairman and linkboy of former days), how bewildering a sight would that broad expanse of water now present; how surprising would seem that ingenuity and enterprise which have rendered this apparently inconvenient highway a rival even to the busiest streets. General convenience, and especially facility of access from the more frequented parts of town, have rendered the pier at Hungerford-stairs the centre of that portion of London nautical life which extends to the first glimpse of the blue waters of the Channel, and it is therefore the point where our first acquaintance with it will commence. Let us take a passing glance at this busy rendezvous before we are called upon to leave it. The sun is shining over head with that tempered radiance by which it is usually characterised in the opening days of Spring: the sky is clear and blue, wearing an aspect of unmistakable promise; and the air is soft, balmy, and inspiring. The roar of the escaping steam, and the clatter of innumerable feet on the crowded platform, indicate the speedy departure of one of the larger river steamers bound for some more distant bourne than London-bridge. Excursionists for Gravesend, of whom ourselves form one; soldiers for Woolwich, pensioners for Greenwich, and idlers for Blackwall, are all rushing on board at the same moment, and paying but slight regard to the claims of precedence or politeness. Above the busy hum of the multitude may be heard the shrill voice of the call-boy, who, having taken up his position, is intently watching for the movement of the captain's hand to direct the progress of the vessel; and, after a minute's grace yielded to the entreating gestures of a lady who is seen in the distance approaching with hasty steps, the boat

moves off, and our voyage is fairly commenced. Now are the musicians endeavouring to extract harmonious sounds from a cracked violin and an asthmatic flute; now is the news-boy wriggling his way in and out, like a dog in a fair, soliciting every one to purchase a penny *Punch*, and a copy of some weekly newspaper at a reduced price, which is not much more than a fortnight old. Here a pale-faced mechanic, with his basket stored with some three times the quantity of provisions which he would have deemed necessary had he remained at home, is explaining to an even sicker-looking wife, the particular uses of the gigantic machinery which propels the boat along. There the dockyard artisan is measuring with an experienced eye the scantling, and calculating the tonnage of every steamer that passes him, and discourses with learned earnestness on the comparative advantages of breadth of beam and round sterns. Whilst every one is thus devoting his attention to that point in the scene around, which appeals most strongly to his individual tastes, let us derive what pleasure we may from the dingy localities we are so rapidly passing: in association consists their sole interest, but in that at least they are not deficient.

How difficult it is to imagine that the space now occupied by that row, almost uninterrupted, of coal-barges, should have formed appropriate havens for pleasure-boats, and homes for the swan and rarer water-fowl; that the soft green turf could ever have extended along that mass of dark mud; and that the dull and dismal streets leading down to it, so familiar to lodging-seekers from the country, which, at a bird's-eye view, look like nothing better than so many gloomy alleys, could represent the palaces and pleasaunces of the old nobility of England. Yet so it is. Buckingham, the gay; Buryleigh, the sagacious; Bacon, the wise; and Northumberland, the ambitious, here played out their several parts in the eventful drama of life; and the only vestige that remains of the magnificence that once surrounded them, is a low quaint old water-gate, half buried in rank vegetation, which formed the river entrance to old Buckingham House.

As we pass the western boundary of the city, a wide "change comes over the spirit of our dream," for the stately edifices of the Temple rise up before us—

Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers;

The mind, finding it difficult to picture them, in the earlier stages of their history, reverts less to the stern days of Hugh de Payen, or the revelries of its masques and its mummings, than to that comparatively recent time when its gardens afforded a breathing space from the turmoil of their struggling lives to the greater minds of the age. Here Johnson may have matured some of the more vigorous thoughts of his capacious mind, and revealed to Boswell the history of his early youth and struggling manhood: seldom, surely, has there been so sweet a kernel in so rough a rind! Within its precincts Goldsmith subjected himself to the anathemas of Mr. Blackstone, who was then engaged in the chambers beneath him on the fourth volume of his "Commentaries," by the distracting convivialities of his frequent social gatherings in Brick-court; but found time also in their intervals to conjure up the pure memories of his early years, and perpetuate them in his "Deserted Village." Here also opens to us the most saddening page in the history of the gentle-minded Cowper.

Whitefriars, the Alsatia, that seems to exist for us once more in the pages of Scott; Blackfriars, suggestive of monkish superstitions, and Mrs. Radcliffe; and the Iron Bridge of Southwark, pass before us, one after the other. As we approach the last, an inquiry of a lady whether she ought not to stop at the bridge for Bankside, recalls to our mind clouds of memories of Shakspeare and Burbage, Coudell and Hemming; for there stood the Globe Theatre, where they laboured, and its rival, the Fortune. There John Stubbs and the bear-baiting of olden times yielded to the refinements of the drama, and the Chevalier de Beaujeu afforded his contemporaries their first insight into the mysteries of the Parisian *cuisine*. The sight of the gigantic structure of London-bridge, looking like a great barrier to protect us in our daily life from the invasion of the mass of shipping beyond; and of the Custom House—not without memories even to the most virtuous of us, of contraband gloves and illicit eau de Cologne, warning us that the first stage of our journey is accomplished—hardly proves unwelcome. Our memory and our imagination have been somewhat severely taxed in gilding the dingy scenes as they now present themselves with something of their former glory; and we feel impatient, like our fellow-voyagers, for the objective in place of the suggestive. But here, indeed, both are combined in the Tower of London. We are strangely fascinated by its lowering gloom, and gaze at the low stone arch which overhangs the Traitors' Gate—

That gate, misnamed, through which before
Went Sidney, Russell, Raleigh, Crommer, More—

until we could imagine it stealthily opening for the reception of a victim, nay, almost identify ourselves with him, and feel the heart-sinking of despair as it closes behind him with a mournful clang. Notwithstanding this realisation of its terrors, we see its disappearance with regret, until the novel view opening upon us as we approach the Pool, engrosses our undivided attention.

We now enter in earnest upon the river life of London, a phase of its realities, almost as distinct in its individual characteristics as though it were a separate world. It has its own habits, its own language, its own pleasures, its own peculiar employments, its own guardians to watch over its peace, and its own court to redress its grievances. Instead of our attention being now diverted from it, by the more potent associations which have thus far been attached to its banks, we are arriving at a point in our journey at which the objects that we encounter on its margin possess no interest save that which they borrow from it. The surrounding buildings are but warehouses; the traffic of the narrow alleys adjacent is confined to slop clothes and ship biscuits: the public-houses

are sacred to the Vernons and Benbows of former days; the air is redolent of pitch and twice-laid cordage; and the appearance of society around it is decidedly amphibious. Forests of shipping, of every size, of every class, of every clime, packed side by side, in orderly rows, seem to bar our progress at every turn; and our captain, who has hitherto partially entrusted our safety to the discretion of the helmsman, now watches himself with cautious eye the numerous and varied obstructions. Collier brigs, with their double masts and square sails; billy-boys—half-ship, half barge—laden with grain from the north; schuyts and galliots from Holland, heavy looking, but safe, like the people who own them; schooners laden with oranges and dried fruit, from Spain; bacon from Ireland; and whisky from the Land of Cakes; passenger steamers, black-funnelled, going out, laden with holiday-makers, for Boulogne or Ostend; and mighty vessels, triple-masted, long looked for by many an anxious heart, coming in laden with the freights of the Indies. In a word, evidences of enterprise from every quarter of the globe encounter us as we wind our tortuous way through the outworks of our modern Tyre. That long mass of dull brick buildings, which the union-jack on the flag-staff denotes to be national property, slumbersome-looking enough now, is all that remains of the once famous dockyard of Deptford. In the days when Woolwich was but a small fishing village, and before the broom of De Ruyter had swept the seas up to Gravesend, Deptford was the great workshop of the rising naval marine of Great Britain. From its capacious sheds first issued the fleet with which Howard vanquished the Armada, and Drake started on the voyage round the world, to which he was to owe the nobler portion of his fame. In its immediate vicinity stood the mansion and far-famed gardens of Sayes Court—home of the gentle and courtly Evelyn, that model of the true English gentleman of the olden school. There he exchanged grave counsel with Jeremy Taylor, listened to the melodious verses of Cowley, and to the gossip (not always dignified) of Pepys.

As we advance we seem to see something in the river of communion with the salt-water of the Channel, though still remote; vessels become more rare, or, perhaps, from the increased breadth of the stream, are less noticeable; we are leaving behind us the thick and smoky atmosphere of the City, and emerging into the purer air of its seaward banks. During the period we have been thus devoting to the contemplation of passing objects, we have been necessarily somewhat deficient in attention to the proceedings of our fellow-voyagers. As, however, we approach Greenwich, where we shall, in all probability, lose a considerable number of our companions, we are aroused to the more practical features of the scene by an appeal from the violin, for our contribution towards the expenses of the popular airs wherewith he has at intervals been disturbing our contemplations since we left Hungerford. We bestow our mite with philosophical resignation, not the less contentedly upon his assurance that the concert is over, and turn for five minutes' amusement to the little world around us. Fathers of families are becoming weary of confinement; their children, as a principle, are growing decidedly fractious; and there is a general feeling of satisfaction when the call-boy gives directions to "Ease her!" at Greenwich pier.

It is strange how completely the more romantic associations attached to a place may be marred by one vulgar idea connected with its name. To those who have never seen Greenwich, with its beautiful park, its ancient timber, and its stately edifices; the first thought that presents itself is of Greenwich fair, as the type of all that is gross and demoralizing. But let them visit its noble institutions, wander in its time-honoured walks, gather up the memories that cling around every rood of ground, and every stone of its stately palace, and their prejudice will be for ever conquered.

Here stood one of the most popular residences of the Kings of England, during the reigns of the Sovereigns of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties; and such might it have continued had not Queen Mary II. devoted it to the nobler destination of affording "relief and support to seamen serving on board the ships belonging to the Navy Royal, who shall be incapable of further service at sea." Of the objects of interest to be met with here, Nelson's hat and silk stockings; the window from which King Charles did not escape; portraits of admirals, from Howard to Jervis, in all the incongruous glories of breast plates and full bottomed wigs; and views of our victories from Southwold Bay to St. Vincent, time is wanting us to describe. We have disembogued that portion of our freight, whose pilgrimage has an especial view to these relics; and are once again on our way with those whose aim may be a glance at the wonderful labours of Woolwich Dockyard, or the semi-marine attractions of Grave-end. After a glimpse, as we pass the former place, of its ships in course of construction, looking on *terra firma* like gigantic castles; of the gangs of convicts at work on the glaring stone quays; and of the building beyond where is perpetually maturing some new feature in the science of warfare; we pursue our way onwards, until the battlements, but little suggestive of battle, of the small tower of Rosherville gardens, and the union-jack on the pier a little further on, give welcome token that our journey is drawing to a close. Gravesend, from its proximity to the sea and its facility of access from London, has acquired, of late years, something akin to the dignity of a watering-place, and occupies a sort of intermediate position between the mere holiday rarities of Greenwich and the pretentious marine reputation of Margate. Here, in consequence, may be found all the ordinary resources for passing time peculiar to those localities which are dependent for their prosperity upon such inducements in the way of enjoyment as they may be able to offer in the shape of baths, bazaars, dances, donkey-rides, and *al fresco* concerts. Rosherville, with its manifold attractions to the mere pleasure-seeker; Spring-head, with its water-cresses; Southfleet Church, with its hieroglyphical inscriptions; Windmill-hill and its view; Gads-hill, and its recollections—all present their several attractions, to meet the varied tastes of the voyagers to Gravesend.