

OCTOBER.



A VISIT TO GREENWICH HOSPITAL.

HERE is Greenwich, and here is the façade and the cupola of the Sailor's Hospital, with a semicircle of wooden hills in the background. We have left the fog behind us in London, and the evening sun looks out from the clouds as if he would say—"I am alive and in health, for all that the Londoners believe me to be ailing or *in articulo mortis*." Our boat rushes past the *Dreadnought*—we touch the shore—the engines are stopped—we are at our journey's end.

We stand on the beautiful terrace in front of the Hospital, the house in which Queen Elizabeth loved to dwell; and here at this very spot her courtiers used to take their walks. Their gold-embroidered cloaks are gone; and in their stead you see long blue brass-buttoned coats on the mutilated or decrepid bodies of old sailors. A blue coat, a white neckcloth, shoes, white stockings, and a large three-cornered hat with gold lace—that is the uniform of the Invalids, who pass the evening of their lives in this delightful place.

Greenwich Hospital presents the most beautiful architectural group of modern England. Take the most gifted architect of the world, bandage his eyes, put him on the terrace on which we stand, and then show him this splendid building, and he will at once tell you that this is and must be a royal palace. How could he ever suspect that all this splendour of columns and cupolas is destined to shelter a couple of thousand of poor, decrepid sailors! But that it does shelter them is honourable to the founders and to the English nation.

Go to Germany, inquire in the largest and most powerful states what they have done for their disabled soldiers. There is an Hotel of Invalids at Vienna; for Austria, too, has her mutilated living monuments of the Napoleonic wars and the wars against Hungary. But compare that Austrian *Invalidenhaus* with this asylum for British sailors. A low, unwholesome site; courtyards alike inaccessible to sunlight and air; cloistered corridors; bare, uncomfortable chambers; vast, chilly saloons; and a population of old soldiers stinted even in the common necessities of life. It is a great piece of good luck for such a pensioner to obtain the post of watchman in one of the Emperor's parks, where, for a few more florins per annum, he has the privilege of wagging war against dogs and ragged little boys. Go to Prussia, that military kingdom—look about in that splendid city of Berlin, and do not, for mercy's sake, refuse your penny to those old men, in shabby uniforms with medals dangling from their button-holes, who hold out their caps with one hand, while they grind old rickety organs with the other—if indeed they have two hands left! These are the veterans who made Prussia great and powerful. In return for their services, they have the inestimable privilege of begging pence from travelling Englishmen.

In those days of Corsican tribulations, England too sent her forces to the battle-fields of the Continent. England fought not only with subsidies, but with her armies and her fleets. Thus much is clearly shown, not only by history, not only by the monuments which have been erected in honour of the Duke of Wellington, but still more by the two great hospitals of Greenwich and Chelsea.

Those two hospitals, devoted to the disabled heroes of the navy and army, give incontestable proof of the grateful kindness of feeling with which the English nation honours its old soldiers. England treats her cripples as a mother would her sick and ailing children. The architectural splendours of Greenwich Hospital are by no means destined to hide poverty and misery within. The gates are open. You may walk through the refectories, the kitchens, the sitting and sleeping rooms. Wait until the "old gentlemen" sit down to their dinner:—eat a slice of their meat, smoke a pipe of their tobacco, take a pinch from their snuff-boxes, admire the irreproachable whiteness of their cravats, take a seat at their side on the green benches which stand on the smooth lawn from whence they view the Thames, its sails, masts, and flags, the cherished scenes of their early career. Talk to them. They like to fight their

battles over again in conversation, and will tell you whether they have to complain of the ingratitude of their country, and which is best (no matter how disgusted our German enthusiasts would be at the mere idea), to be paid so and so much per limb, or to starve on the general dietary of an Austrian *Invalidenhaus*, or rot in the streets of Berlin on an annual allowance which would hardly suffice to find a Greenwich pensioner in tobacco and snuff.

Forward to the green, leafy, hilly park! On the large grass-plots whole families are stretched out in picturesque groups, from the grandfather down to the grandsons and granddaughters; and along with them there are friends, country-cousins, maid-servants, and lap-dogs with a proud and supercilious air, for they know, sagacious little animals, that their owners are continually paying dog-tax for them. This is Monday, the Englishman's Sunday. There they are chatting, laughing, and even getting up and dancing, eating their cold dinners with a good appetite, and a thorough enjoyment of sunshine, air, and river-breeze; and they are all cheerful, decent, and happy, as simple-minded men and women are wont to be on a holiday and on the forest-green. And the deer, half-tame, come out of the thicket and ask for their share of the feast, and we go our way up the hill lest we disturb the children and the deer.

From the top of the hill we look down upon one of the most charming landscapes that can be imagined in the vicinity of a large capital. That ocean of houses in the distance, shifting and partly hidden in the mist; the docks, with their forests of masts; the Thames itself winding its way to the sea; green, hilly country on our side, with the white steam of a distant train curling up from the deep cuttings; and at our feet, Greenwich, with its columns, cupolas, and neat villas peeping out from among shrubberies and orchards.

We share the hill on which we stand with the famous Greenwich Observatory. Probably the building has a better appearance than it had at the time when Flamsteed, with generous self-denial, established the first sextant on this spot. But even in our days, the exterior of the building is by no means imposing. Here, then, we stand on the first meridian of England. The country's pride has, up to the present time, retained it here, while the French established their meridian at Paris. But the communistic spirit of science undermines the existence of either, and the Greenwich meridian will not, I am sure, resist the spirit of the age. It will sooner or later resign its pretensions in favour of the chosen of all nations.

The road from the Observatory to the back-gate of the Park leads through an avenue of old chestnut-trees. They are in a flourishing condition, and the chestnuts are quite as good as those of Italy and southern France. Among these trees stands the official residence of the Ranger of Greenwich-park,—a nobleman or gentleman whose duty it is, in consideration of six or eight hundred pounds per annum, to pass a few summer months in this delightful retreat, and to supply Her Majesty's table with a haunch of venison once every twelvemonth. The post is a sinecure, one of those places which every one inveighs against, and which every one would be glad to possess.

We have crossed the Park, and are on Blackheath—a sunny place, which derives its gloomy name from the gipsies who used to be encamped upon it in the "days of auld lang syne." Neat villas, covered with evergreens, surround this black heath, and a hundred roads and paths invite us to stroll on and on, through garden land and park-like domains. We resist the temptation. The sun has gone down. We return to the Thames and take a steamer to Blackwall on the opposite coast.

It is night. We "take the cars," as they say in America, and rattle on, over the houses, canals, and streets, to the City. It took us just fifteen minutes to go all the distance.*

* "Saunterings in and about London," by Max Schlesinger. Published by Ingram and Co.