

IN QUEER PLACES; AND WHAT I SAW THERE.

THE GOLDEN BALL OF ST. PAUL'S.



It is a feat to be remembered, the climbing to the top of St. Paul's Cathedral on a hot day in June. Having, however, reached the Golden Ball and cross which proudly crown the summit of Wren's noble building, and having taken a first glance at the novel scene stretching for miles beneath, one soon finds reason to be thankful that one dared the toilsome ascent. I never ascended an Alp, so that the pleasures and pains of mountaineering are unknown to me; but for the present I am quite satisfied to limit my experience in climbing to the journey up St. Paul's; and so is the friend who accompanied me.

At starting, the ascent is so gradual, owing to the broad shallow steps, that you begin to fear the adventure will prove to be somewhat tame. We, at all events, had scarcely expected so much ease and comfort at first, though we should have liked a little more before the finish. Doubtless this convenient arrangement was made to suit the dignitaries of the cathedral, who are compelled to mount a certain distance in order to obtain access to the library. Pursuing the even tenor of our upward way, we at length, having passed 260 steps, reach the "whispering gallery," which runs right round the grand dome. This gallery is so named, not because one must speak in whispers, but because whatever is spoken in whispers is audible at the other side; so that it is easy to understand the confusion of the lady when she learned that a confidential remark which she made to a friend was heard by amused visitors. Probably there is quite as much of fiction as of fact in the anecdotes that are told of this gallery, which may, it is said, be robbed of all its terrors by the simple expedient of speaking in the ordinary tone of conversation.

Climbing about 120 steps or so farther, we find ourselves at the outer golden gallery, where we obtain a welcome cooling from the refreshing breezes, and also a foretaste of the magnificent panorama of "famous London town" and the surrounding country, which, however, we prefer to study in detail from the inner gallery, still higher up. "Excelsior!" is, therefore, our motto, and we bravely resume the ascent, which has now become much more difficult. The stairs have narrowed considerably, and the steps are deeper, so that we realise, for the first time, the serious business of our undertaking. Toiling onwards up spiral staircases which seem to totter under our weight (but do not), a queer feel-

ing steals over us as we view the gulf on either side. By a stretch of the imagination—lively, we admit—this gulf grows into a yawning chasm, and the iron stairs into the perilous path winding along its brink. But while our imagination thus riots in wild dreams of precipices and chamois and avalanches, we have succeeded in climbing some 180 more steps, and are at length landed at the base of the graceful "lantern," which surmounts the dome, and which is surrounded by the gallery of gold that arrests the eye of admiring wayfarers three hundred feet below.

Resting ourselves in a niche which may have been intended to accommodate the graven image of some patron saint, we leisurely survey the glorious scene. There seems no end to London. It spreads itself out in sober solid style to all quarters of the globe. Though the sun has cast a haze over the middle distance, which prevents us from catching those glimpses of Surrey and Essex hills which we know are to be had on a bright, clear day, the view of the vast city is perhaps the gainer. The freshly-blowing wind has carried away the smoke, and the miles of streets and houses lie basking lazily in the sun, red brick buildings and grey church-towers blending finely in the scene. Westwards stretches the broad sweep of the Thames Embankment, and the river itself winds serpent-like towards Richmond, seeking for those sylvan beauties which are denied us here. An occasional barge with spreading sail enables us in a fashion to follow the course of the river. On all hands the huge railway-stations rise up prominently; and though in the north we fail to sight the heights of Highgate, the enormous mass of St. Pancras Station is strikingly noticeable. Southward in the distance looms the Crystal Palace, while down east we trace the "Pool," with its immense quantity of shipping, and its restless stir of steamers and smaller craft. Coming nearer to St. Paul's, buildings which we have seen many times and oft come well into view. The ancient Guildhall; the famous Christ's Hospital or Blue-coat School; Bow steeple (whose bells defined the limits of cockneydom), and other church-towers from the cunning hand of Sir Christopher, on the summit of whose masterpiece we are now standing; the Monument, with its gilt head; the Parliament Houses; the bridges; the Royal Palace of Justice; and countless other buildings, can readily be identified, amongst which may be recognised the great pile of La Belle Sauvage Works—the busy home of LITTLE FOLKS Magazine.

The cabs and other vehicles, far down in the distance, look like dolls' coaches, and the people in the streets seem little bigger than pigmies; and to them, if we are visible at all, doubtless we, too, perched aloft appear just as pigmy-like. Time presses, however, and we must leave this rare and remarkable scene, as interesting and, in its way, as beautiful as the loveliest woodland landscape that attracts its thousands of tourists. But before quitting the "lantern," I ought to mention in passing the curious sort of peep-show which it contains. Kneeling on a cushion on the floor, and looking through a grating over a large hole, one sees far below, as in a kind of dream, the visitors walking about on the floor of the cathedral, and who, it will be imagined, remind one of the Lilliputians of our old friend Gulliver.

Only fifty-six more steps, making altogether 560 steps from the marble pavement beneath, and we arrive at the Golden Ball. This part of our journey demands the utmost care, and I am fully prepared to corroborate the guide-book, which naively asserts that our goal "is reached with some difficulty, especially by ladies." The fifty-six steps in question are composed of three wooden ladders, very upright, and at least one of which has but a single banister, the other consisting of a rope. Here you will find yourself within some cross iron-work, and when you have managed to climb this, you will be able to look into the dark jaws of the Golden Ball. This immense ornament is six feet in diameter, and two and a half tons in weight. It will hold, so I have heard, four, or even more, people; but nobody who has ascended thus far need run the risk of climbing into it. On the top of the ball stands the famous glittering cross, which weighs one ton and a half, and is thirty feet high. Of "queer" places it would be hard to discover one better befitting this

epithet than the Golden Ball of St. Paul's, and its approach. The access is so dark, and the ladders so steep, that great care is needed to avoid making a false step. These things make timid folk more timid, and cause even the stouter-hearted to be unusually cautious.

In due course the return journey is resumed, and though going downward is much easier than climbing up, we are not displeased to find ourselves once more safe and sound on *terra firma*.

An interesting circumstance connected with our subject may be briefly noted before laying aside the pen. For several years, according to Mr. Harting, a pair of peregrine falcons frequented the top of St. Paul's, where, it was supposed, they had built their nest. They found their prey in the tame birds with which the metropolis abounds, one having been seen to strike down a pigeon, after sailing hawk-like in circles over the houses.

The annals of the Cathedral also tell how, while measuring the dome-top for a drawing, the gentleman so engaged happened to lose his footing. He was saved from a horrible death by his foot catching against a projecting lump of lead. One of his assistants fortunately noticed him, and was able to rescue him from his awful position.

But here our chronicle must end. Having in a measure realised the vast extent of London, and knowing something of the venerable history and commercial enterprise of the chief city of the world, one is tempted to apply to her grandeur the fine words from Wren's tomb—"Si monumentum requiris circumspecte"; and I may be permitted to translate these words thus freely—

"If you seek for a monument of London's greatness, go to the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, and look around you."
JAMES A. MANSON.

CAUGHT BY THE TIDE.

UNCONSCIOUS of the danger near,
Heedless of parents' warning,
The children played beside the sea
One summer morning.

Unseen, unheard, the tide crept in,
Across the rocks and shingle,
Just like a friend that with old friends
Loves well to mingle.

And when at last the children saw
The billows onward speeding,
It was too late: the sea had crept
Round them unheeding.

Shut in between the cliff and tide,
All chance of safety vanished,
The children climbed from rock to rock,
Though hope was banished.

But what is this? a boat! a boat!
And strong hands gladly waving,
And soon the father clasps each child,
Their young lives saving.

A lesson this for boy and girl
That sank too deep for scorning;
And now, when urged to wrong, they think
Of that sad morning.